



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

November 19, 2019, 10:00am – Director’s Summary

Nearly 40 suspicious algal blooms (HABs) observations were documented by the HABs surveillance program this year. This is a reduction from last year, yet it is important to consider the surveillance program is not a hard science, and program data are based on feedback from volunteers who may miss a visual observation of a bloom when they were unavailable to make observations. The program gives the public a general sense of the temporal occurrences of blooms, yet I remain eager to see how the program will advance to provide improved near-real time spacial information as part of an early warning system.

Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD)

- On Monday, September 30th, Watershed Deputy Inspector, Ms. Kaitlyn Shanahan, started working for the OLWIPD, following our recruitment initiative to increase coverage for watershed inspections and to help meet the needs of the potential rollout of new Watershed Rules and Regulations. She has been actively engaging with the community, shadowing watershed Lead Inspector, Andrew Snell, during field surveillance, and has participated in a number of training activities. Kaitlyn and I presented at the Owasco Watershed Lake Association’s (OWLA’s) public meeting on November 6th, allowing Kaitlyn the opportunity to introduce herself to the group, and allowing me to introduce the OLWMC more broadly, discuss initiatives, and provide feedback. We then co-presented again at the Auburn City Council meeting on November 14th, allowing Kaitlyn the opportunity to introduce herself to City representatives and allowing me to update the City on recent OLWMC initiatives and review the OLWMC’s proposed budget for 2020. The City of Auburn increased their government grant funding contribution to the OLWMC by 25% for the 2020 calendar year that matches our fiscal year. This increased contribution will vastly cover the costs of the Deputy Inspector position. Over the long term, Kaitlyn plans to develop watershed science curriculum for presentations at schools throughout the watershed. Further, she will be assisting OWLA with the ‘Be Watershed Aware Campaign.’ The campaign will be used to disseminate the Watershed Rules and Regulations to the public. I would like the OLWMC to form an associated committee (i.e., the ‘Be Watershed Aware’ committee) that would allow for the committee, with outreach leadership from OWLA and now Kaitlyn, to meet independently and report back to the

OLWMC with updates, requests for guidance and funding needs for outreach programs. Outreach activities can start now, disseminating the current WRR. Target audiences can include local government, planning and zoning, and highway departments. Upcoming training for Kaitlyn will include a 4-hour erosion and sediment control class through CCSWCD and septic inspection training through CCDOH. We look forward to Kaitlyn's enthusiasm and willingness to engage with the community.

- The OLWIPD, with the help of our partners, generated watershed maps for distribution to our directors and/or their associated municipality highway and zoning departments. The Division is committed to working closely with town/village code, zoning and highway personnel to ensure a collaborative approach to improve compliance with watershed rules and regulations.
- The OLWIPD is looking to design, fund, and create 'Watershed Steward' signage for watershed residents voluntarily making steps to improve land use practices that support the reduction of non-point source pollution to watershed tributaries and to the lake.
- The OLWIPD is collaborating with watershed Soil and Water Conservation Districts to help outfit the Division's early response trailer with short term stream bank stabilization and erosion control materials in order to allow Watershed Inspectors with training in erosion and sediment control the ability to temporarily assist watershed residents experiencing soil loss from storm water runoff. The trailer was initially purchased with grant funding by the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD). The OLWMC is reimbursing the CCSWCD for the cost to the trailer to be added back into the associated grant for use on future conservation and implementation projects.
- Lastly, we have created Formal Company Identification for OLWIPD staff through Cayuga Community College's services to be worn during watershed surveillance activities.

Our 2019 Summer intern, Ally Berry, presented her mycelium based phosphorus removal project outcomes as part of her capstone at ESF. Although her representative data for mycelium nutrient uptake was not telling, her presentation was excellent and she remains passionate about working towards a mycelium-based solution.

Cayuga County staff have completed summarizing and collating the public responses received regarding the draft Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations discussed at the public meetings held in May, 2019. The working group prepared a summary document intended to organize and present the public feedback and provide detailed responses. It will be paired with a revised draft of the proposed Watershed Rules and Regulations that incorporates changes for consideration by the Steering Committee and the External Workgroup. Cayuga County staff will be reaching out to representatives of Tompkins and Onondaga Counties to ensure their feedback is considered in both the summary document and revised draft. A follow-up meeting with the Steering Committee and External Workgroup partners will be scheduled to review the comments and responses and present the revised draft. Following the Steering Committee and External Workgroup partner meetings, Cayuga County staff will share comments and responses publicly on the project website, and will provide the summary document and revised final draft to the Town of Owasco and City of Auburn elected representatives for their consideration. Subsequently, the documents will be shared with state agencies for approval.

The NYSDEC Finger Lakes Hub and OWLA coordinated HAB surveillance for Owasco Lake this year. OWLA's Bill Philips, HABs surveillance coordinator for Owasco Lake for 2019, has agreed to attend a December 2 regional debriefing with surveillance coordinators from Otisco and Skaneateles Lakes to share feedback from as many HABs surveillance volunteers as possible. The overarching purpose of the meeting will be to identify common challenges and/or recommendations. In collaboration, the group expects to improve HABs surveillance activities for 2020.

I was informed from the Office of the State Comptroller's Authorities Budget Office (ABO), based on their review of our new webpage and posted organizational resolution documents, the OLWMC is now considered a Local Authority. The online portal registration and documentation requirements associated with this new designation has and will continue to add new administrative work for our operations. All detailed financial and budgetary information is now required to be made publicly available on our webpage. Beyond the administrative hurdle presented by the Local Authority designation, it is my understanding this can be a first step towards legislation that could help the Council build organization capacity through registration with the State retirement system and/or the ability to levy taxes. I met with Jeanine Wilson, director of the Cayuga County Water and Sewer Authority, for insight on navigating the online portal for documents upload to meet new requirements as Local Authority and to discuss CCWSA's pathway to the State Retirement System for employees. As a next step, I plan to contact the Cayuga County Planning Department's lawyer to discuss any potential opportunities for growth related to the new designation.

The OLWMC's CHAR500 IRS form submission was returned due to a lack of registration through Charities.gov. Following registration with Charities.gov, I was informed the OLWMC is considered Exempt as a traditional charity and I received feedback and approval of the required CHAR410 form. The CHAR500 can now be resubmitted to the IRS.

The OLWMC was approved for a company credit card that will be used for future purchases. Building credit for the OLWMC is an avenue for improved financial standing for the organization.

The Watershed Inspection Committee that oversees the interpretation of watershed rules and regulations violations and related enforcement activities now has representation by a local farmer, Greg Rejman, and he will offer important insight to advance regulatory efforts. Greg is a leader for the Partnership for a Healthy Watershed, a farmer-based advocacy group that strives for improved farm planning and best management practices that support efficiencies for local farmers and the reduction of farm sourced water pollution.

With our required registration with NYS Grant Gateway complete, we are now positioned to compose proposals for state grant funding opportunities for nonprofit organizations that align with watershed restoration projects of interest.

- OWLA and I are discussing how we can best collaborate on grant proposals for future projects.

- On October 3rd the NYS Department of Conservation (NYSDEC) announced they are accepting applications for Urban Forestry Grants. Following the announcement for a request for proposals (RFP), I sought out potential partnerships for a watershed forestry project and associated proposal. I met with Dr. Walt Aikman, a local forester and educator who is currently assisting the Town of Owasco with the Town's completion of its 'Tree City USA' state credential that increases the Town's eligibility for related program funding. Although, it was agreed we are not currently prepared to go after this Urban Forestry Grant, we identified our partnership and expect to be well-positioned to go after future RFPs within the urban forestry category. I encourage our other watershed municipality representatives to work through the 'Tree City USA' credential to prepare them for future funding initiatives where that credential is important.
- An Environmental Protection Agency grant titled 'Approaches to Reduce Nutrient Loading for HAB management' is due December 10th. The request for proposal aligns very well with pilot project concepts discussed with private consultants Crystal Creek Organics and ESSRE that use new technologies for advanced phosphorus removal from watershed sources. Generally, the OLWMC might not currently have the administrative needs in place to meet the deadline for this (very competitive) grant. Nevertheless, it was agreed consultants will take the opportunity to compose grant narratives, and I will edit and upload required documents. I am eager to continue to work towards positioning the Council administratively so we are better prepared for future grant opportunities. Further, we will continue to look for grant support that can reduce the financial impact of new Watershed Rules and Regulations on small farmers that operate on small margins.

The 9 Element (9E) Plan is expected to be completed by August 2020. The 9E plan is considered a quantitative framework to help guide project effectiveness based on predictions for associated nutrient loading (i.e., reductions). Importantly, the completion of the Federal and State recognized 9E process is expected to be a pathway for future project funding. Moreover, the completion of the 9E plan will be an important qualifier for future grant funding.

A proposal to the Emerson Foundation was submitted with a request for financial support to meet the costs of equipment procurement for the OLWIPD, and I am pleased to share the Foundation generously funded the OLWMC \$8,200 to cover the costs of a water quality monitoring sonde. The sonde will allow watershed inspectors to collect tributary water quality data that will help them identify problem areas within the watershed. The sonde will be equipped to measure levels of turbidity, dissolved oxygen, pH, and conductivity in lake tributaries. Exceedances above NYS standards for some of these parameters can assist the OLWIPD with gaining state level regulatory support.

I was informed by the NYSDEC on October 28th our watershed tributary reclassification petition for promoting Class C streams to a classification that would require state permits for near stream construction activities can and will not be expedited. Moreover, the process is expected to take seven to ten years or more. Acknowledging we were unable to affect change in the current system, the NYSDEC is providing archived petitions for reference, and I will submit a revised petition with letters of support. Regardless of the lack of near term advancements by NYC to better

regulate construction activities adjacent to watershed tributaries, there are state water quality standards that must be met, and we hope the OLWIPD can help state regulators identify problem areas where standards are exceeded.

The OLWMC continues to look forward to buy-in from the remaining towns within the watershed that have yet to join to help direct project initiatives. They include the Towns of Sempronius, Groton, Venice, Genoa, and Sennett, and I continue to encourage the Board of Directors to reach out to representatives from these towns to elicit their buy-in.