



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

September 17, 2019, 10:00am – Director’s Summary

As a reminder the Advanced Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Monitoring Buoy data for Seneca, Skaneateles & Owasco Lakes can be found on, and downloaded from, the US Geological Service website. (<https://ny.water.usgs.gov/maps/habs/>). The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Finger Lakes Hub and the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) are continuing to coordinate HAB surveillance for Owasco Lake this year. An online fillable form that tracks the exact location of the HABs can be found at: on.ny.gov/nyhabs. As of Friday September 13th, there were 14 suspicious HABs reported for Owasco Lake within the previous two weeks.

Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division

- Subsequent to last month’s Board of Directors approval of the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division’s (OLWIPDs) procedures, having secured required insurances, and having completed his training and testing requirements to become a certified drone operator and licensed pilot, Watershed Inspector, Andrew Snell, is now fully positioned to use drone surveillance as a part of monthly inspection activities. The advancement of program development for the division is ongoing. Ms. Kaitlyn Shanahan accepted the council’s job offer to become a Deputy Inspector with the watershed inspection division. We look forward to Kaitlyn’s enthusiasm and willingness to engage with the community on watershed issues for the sake of improved land use activities that support the protection of water quality. We are coordinating opportunities for Kaitlyn to introduce herself at both OLWMC and Auburn City Council meetings.
- On September 5th, the OLWIPD worked with municipal employees at the Village of Moravia on the visual inspection and clean out of some of the Village’s storm sewer systems.
- On September 12th, Watershed Inspector, Andrew Snell, attended a septic system inspection training hosted by the Onsite Training Network that addressed inspection methods for newer septic system designs with more advanced monitoring systems.
- Further, Mr. Snell has been working closely with Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) on addressing potential flooding issues at a construction site along Firelane 20 in the Town of Niles. Funding for this project is through CCSWCD with support from the OWLA.

On September 9th, the Cayuga County Department of Health (CCDOH) reached out to project partners to provide an update on the Watershed Rules and Regulations project. Over the course of the summer, Cayuga County staff have summarized and collated 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 is preparing 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 partners. 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. The estimated completion of this process is by the end of October, at which point 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.

OLWMC partners from Cornell's Pro-Dairy program are successfully administering guidance and financial support to an Owasco Watershed farmer eligible for funding through their Dairy Acceleration Program. The farmer is working with a private farm planner to update the farm's certified nutrient management plan (CNMP). Once the farmer's application is received and reviewed, the funds will be awarded.

Technologies for Phosphorus (P) removal for both septic and 'edge of farm field' locations using nanoparticle adsorption media are continuing to be evaluated for their use for nutrient reduction within the Owasco Lake Watershed. Capturing P within the Owasco Lake Watershed may not only support the reduction of this algal growth limiting nutrient for the benefit of the lake, but may also create an economic incentive for the capture and resale of a nutrient that's monetary value is likely to grow as its supply diminishes. Although nanoparticle adsorptive media technologies for P removal are becoming more common and are considered acceptable, the potential rollout of an associated pilot project within the Owasco Lake Watershed may be accompanied by the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process that would offer a platform for public engagement on the project. ESSRE, a consulting firm that has approached me with a proposed P-adsorptive media product, will present at our upcoming October OLWMC meeting on the details of the company's product and a course of action for the potential product implementation within the Owasco Lake Watershed.

We have completed our required registration submissions to the NYS Grants Gateway portal following financial audit results and tax documents approval by the council Board of Directors at our August meeting. When this administrative process is complete, we will be positioned to compose proposals for state grant funding opportunities for nonprofit organizations.

The OLWMC submitted a registration with the NYS Office of General Services (OGS) for state contract pricing on future equipment purchases and awaits the results of its eligibility to make such purchases at a reduced cost.

A proposal to the Emerson Foundation was submitted with a request for financial support to meet the costs of equipment procurement for the OLWIPD. This potential partnership with the foundation would support opportunities to build capacity for the Inspection Division.

On September 5th:

- A severe HABs outbreak occurred on Owasco Lake.
- The Cayuga County Highway Department improved ditches at the bottom of Oakhill Road in the Village of Moravia, providing assistance with flooding controls for the flood-prone area within the Village.
- Council Chair, Ed Wagner, and I met with Senator James Seward to share the Council's ongoing initiatives and to gauge the Senator's support. The Senator has previously supported funding initiatives for work along Dutch Hollow in the Town of Niles. He continues to offer his assistance in watershed protection and conservation efforts, through letters of support for future project funding as well as potential statutory assistance (i.e., when our efforts may require changes in law).

On September 6th, OWLA hosted a meeting among watershed partners to address integrating plans and action items for the Owasco Lake Watershed. The meeting group received updates on the 9 Element (9E) Watershed Plan and was informed the final elements of that plan are contingent on watershed and lake models that are near completion. The 9E Plan is considered a quantitative framework with the 'effectiveness' of watershed project outcomes guided by predictions for associated reductions in nutrient loading. Further, as a state-supported framework, the completion of 9E Plan won't only offer project guidance, but will also support directing state funding for our future watershed projects. It was decided at this meeting, while OWLA will continue to play an important role in fundraising, the council was identified as the lead organization to coordinate the work of all partnering groups to guide strategic project funding and associated project implementation efforts related to the outcomes of the 9E plan. The deadline for completion of the 9E plan is August, 2020. In the meantime, the OLWMC will continue to position itself for independent grant funding and will continue support nutrient loading reduction strategies throughout the watershed.

On September 9th, representatives from OWLA, City of Auburn, Cayuga County Parks, Cayuga County Planning, and the OLWMC gathered at the sluiceway intake near the Outlet on the north end of the lake to brainstorm solutions to restrictions in flow due to sand settling within the sluiceway pipe. Bruce Natalie and Andrew Snell plan to work together to obtain quotes for the cost of cleaning out the structure, and the group is considering a front-end (i.e., near shoreline) settling basin to reduce future sand accumulation within the pipe and to make for easier long term maintenance of the structure.

The council 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 encourage the board of directors to reach out to representatives from these towns to elicit their buy-in.

We are petitioning for state-level tributary watershed-wide regulatory protections, leveraging Article 15 of the Clean Water Act to require permits for streamside construction activities for tributaries with certain classifications. Currently, many of our tributaries fall below the classification level that requires a state permit for construction, and many of these watercourses are being clear cut. We continue to await guidance from NYSDEC Region 7 on feedback from NYSDEC Commissioner Seggos regarding the potential for expediting what is typically an extensive and lengthy reclassification process.

As quoted from CNBC.com on September 12, 2019, “The Trump administration on Thursday announced a legal repeal of a major Obama-era clean water regulation that limited the amount of pollution and chemicals in the nation’s rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands... The Environmental Protection Agency proposed replacing the 2015 water rule in December after an executive order from the President, who has criticized the regulations for curbing the rights of farmers, real estate developers and landowners. The new rule limits the number of waterways the federal government can protect from pollution, including ditches, storm water control facilities and groundwater systems. It would also limit the government’s oversight to larger bodies of water. Environmental groups condemned the move, claiming that loosening restrictions will substantially harm the country’s sources of safe drinking water. The repeal could take effect in just a few weeks.”

To be clear, the water quality regulations within the CWA the Trump administration is attempting to repeal are regulations the OLWMC seeks to advance that could further support water quality protection efforts within the Owasco Lake Watershed, ultimately for the protection of the lake. For example, as mentioned previously, we are currently working on gaining better protections for our currently unregulated class C streams through tributary reclassification.

The council continues to advocate for the value of sound scientific research and objective reasoning to guide initiatives to protect Owasco Lake, as a lifeline to the community. There remains a misconception related to the long term financial impacts on the farming community due to regulations for land use activities and nutrient management practices. In recent years, state mandated, regulatory requirements for large farms, namely Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), have required the implementation of soil science to identify nutrient application rates and practices that are both efficient and safe for the environment. The short term government objective was to advance the protection of watershed water quality from non-point source pollution. The long term effect was not only a step towards the improvement of water quality for adjacent watercourses, but also a significant monetary savings for regulated farmers, all while maintaining the ultimate outcome of maximized crop yields. Fertilizers are growing more and more expensive, and farmers currently using the scientific based 'mass balance' approach to reduce fertilizer usage are saving a great deal of money. Advancements for environmental protection for water quality are shifting from being solely regulatory-driven to becoming market-driven phenomena. Further, regulations necessitate the involvement of planners and scientists, creating a pathway for jobs creation. The concept that environmental regulations only hinder economic growth is clearly misguided.