



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

June 18, 2019 – Director's Summary

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD) are finalizing a survey for residents in Indian Cove as part of a Cayuga County Department of Health (CCDOH) funded septic upgrade project, following draft input from the CCDOH. A state funding initiative through the health department supports funding septic system upgrades. The department continues to promote the program and currently has a waiting list. We understand additional money will be coming, and when that arrives we can continue with our outreach strategy.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Finger Lakes Hub and the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) are coordinating HAB surveillance for Owasco Lake in 2019. Julie Lockhart, the new OWLA president, is taking the lead on volunteer efforts for the HABs program. The surveillance program uses an online platform that is interactive and updated daily with an online fillable form that tracks the exact location of the temporally and spatially discrete blooms. The website is: on.ny.gov/nyhabs. The NYS Department of Health (DOH) informs local DOHs for help advancing the alert initiative. The CCDOH now provides an explanation and hyperlink to the HAB surveillance system as part of its internal website and outreach initiatives.

Aquatic invasive species signs, provided through a grant obtained by the Finger Lakes Regional Watershed Alliance, have been installed by the OLWIPD at numerous boat access locations surrounding the lake.

We are reviewing quotes for datasonde stream monitoring equipment to be used by the OLWIPD and watershed partners that will allow for objective and quantitative assessments of watercourse water quality. This equipment will be important to support pollutant identification governed by the watershed rules and regulations.

Watershed Inspector, Andrew Snell, is actively working through his training requirements to be a certified drone operator and a licensed pilot. Cayuga Community College, Cornell University, and NYSDEC all offer drone policy information available for us to create policy. We are drafting internal drone procedures and policies specific to our watershed surveillance activities. We believe the drone will be an important tool for effective and comprehensive watershed inspections.

The Watershed Inspection Committee is discussing position requirements and expectations for an upcoming deputy inspector position for the OLWIPD. The committee is currently drafting the position description to be posted for recruitment in the near future.

The Town of Owasco made a shared services agreement with vacuum truck cleanouts for Village of Moravia. The flood prone village remains a target for enhancing watershed resiliency. Cayuga County Public Works announced its willingness to collaborate with Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWD) to implement flood mitigation projects on Oakhill Road, fulfilling the match requirement for the grant funded projects CCSWD already has under its prevue.

Local steel mill, Nucor, has presented the possibility of using its refinery waste product, slag, for phosphorus (P) uptake from agricultural runoff. Several research projects have indicated the success of using slag for P-absorption and removal, yet there are potential concerns with residual metals and pH effects. Slag has a beneficial use determination (BUD), regulated by the NYSDEC, and is typically used for fill material for building roads. We may consider approaching the NYSDEC to allow for a pilot project using slag for P remediation. USDA grants for farmers have supported similar pilot projects elsewhere.

Members of the OLWMC, OLWIPD, Cayuga County Health and Planning Departments, and NYSDEC met on May 29th to discuss a number of issues where our watershed partners are seeking state level support and guidance. Disqualifying the statements of a few unqualified individuals, the NYSDEC provided a thorough report on the conditions at the Village of Moravia wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) that confirmed the facility meets the standards and specifications of NYS. The City of Auburn has offered to give support for industrial pre-treatment programming for the village that streamlines regulations for industry discharges to the WWTF.

We are petitioning for state-level tributary watershed regulatory protections through reclassification of tributaries watershed-wide. A draft watershed-wide stream reclassification petition was shared with personnel from NYSDEC Region 7. A meeting is scheduled for June 19th to discuss the petition and allow the department to provide feedback before its submission to the Albany office.

Many of the administrative needs are in place on the NYS grants portal to allow for the OLWMC to independently propose projects for grant funding at the state level. As part of this process, we were made aware of the need for a financial audit. Scheduling for this required audit is underway.

The NYSDEC provided its link to the website containing the Advanced HABs Monitoring Buoy data for Seneca, Skaneateles & Owasco Lakes. The program offers great transparency and all data are available for downloading. <https://ny.water.usgs.gov/maps/habs/>

We are working to introduce Owasco Lake Watershed small dairy farms to the Dairy Acceleration Program (DAP) through Cornell's ProDairy Program. The initiative is to allow eligible farmers who do not have a nutrient management plan or who have an outdated plan to take advantage of DAP funds to get one. On June 14th, outreach roles were discussed among Cornell program representatives, Cornell Cooperative Extension, CCSWCD, and the OLWMC.

We are looking for creative opportunities to better position ourselves for funding to more adequately protect and restore the condition of the Owasco Lake Watershed for the ultimate benefit of a safe and clean drinking and recreational water resource. I am scheduling a meeting with Senator Seward, seeking accreditation with NYS as an agency or authority that would be eligible for more direct lines of funding to support our important work. Further, this status would help us with recruitment to grow the OLWIPD to allow it to conduct more robust watershed inspections, using the Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations as guidelines. We will also discuss the Senator's willingness to support a bill to increase boater and angler registration fees to be directly administered to watershed steward programs state-wide. Currently, the Owasco Lake drinking water purveyors, the City of Auburn and the Town of Owasco, generate most of the funding to support work conducted by the Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council, but perhaps recreational water users should also incur some of these costs.