



## Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

Director's Summary, March-May Project Updates

May 19, 2020 10:00am Board Meeting

- The Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD) has remained operational for watershed surveillance activities while safely navigating social distancing mandates.
  - The OLWIPD water quality monitoring sonde is now fully assembled and calibrated, and its use for supporting a data-driven approach to watershed surveillance will become commonplace. Water quality monitoring data will now commonly be collected and reviewed for tributary locations near adjacent watershed disturbances and will be compared with State standards to advance the OLWIPD's ability to gain support from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and improve enforcement overall. The OLWIPD is working towards completing internal Standard Operating Procedures for using the sonde.
  - The OLWIPD is administering garbage bags to the watershed residents who have been helpful with roadside litter cleanup and continues to work towards the adoption of road sections through the NYS Adopt a Highway Program.
  - The OLWIPD annual Watershed Inspection Report was printed and administered to watershed municipal offices for further distribution
- On April 21, 2020 Twin Birch Dairy Farm was honored with a U.S. Dairy Sustainability Award under the Outstanding Dairy Sustainability Award category for environmental stewardship in the Finger Lakes region. The farm is positioned mostly within the Skaneateles watershed with some acreage along Dutch Hollow Creek in the Owasco Lake Watershed. Leaders from the farm have been actively partnering on the Watershed Rules and regulations revision process as well as nutrient fate and transport research. The OLWMC is grateful to this CAFO's engagement and congratulates Twin Birch on its commitment to sustainable farming practices.
- The OLWMC and Cayuga County Planning are supporting work with Mr. Brandon Wong on the implementation of a fully funded one-year pilot project, using automated tributaries level measurements to estimate flows that should help accommodate improved nutrient loading estimates from sub-watersheds. The number of sensors poised to be installed can offer a wide spatial scale for estimating relative differences in tributaries flows. Nonpoint source phosphorus loading to the lake is driven primarily by hydrologic conditions, especially during large rain events, and those locations with greater flows and potential for loading are noteworthy targets for water retention and infiltration practices. The project group has

identified priority areas for improved coverage and has listed candidate attachment locations for the sensors. The next phase of this project, led by the OLWPD, is visiting and inventorying (with pictures) the candidate sites to develop a final sites list and communicating installation details with highway departments for permission and/or support for attaching the small sensors to bridges and culverts. (Equipment Brochure is included with the distribution of May meeting documents).

- Watershed Rules and Regulations Revision Project Steering Committee and Working Group meetings were held March 3<sup>rd</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup>. The group included the legal team from the City of Auburn, and collectively finalized revisions on the regulatory document. The next phase will be City of Auburn and Town of Owasco final review before the document will be finalized and delivered to NYS departments for review.
  - The watershed community is going through a potential paradigm shift with new requirements for farm planning under revisions to watershed regulations that have the potential for approval in the near term. The development of Certified Nutrient Management Plans may be limited by the number of local professionals credentialed to offer services. A communal farm planning strategy is attractive, offering the benefits of both collaboration and efficiency. The Bradford County Conservation District (BCCD), PA has been successful with communal farm nutrient planning efforts. I continue to approach this District to discuss both successes and challenges associated with communal planning forums, guidance on the needs of program development, as well as to request a representative from the BCCD team to present with us.
- The OLWMC was not funded with the competitive GLRC Small Grants award for its recent proposal for utilizing new sonde and drone technologies for connective corridor monitoring in the Town of Owasco.
- The OLWMC has yet to receive a response from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation regarding a potential award for the Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program project proposal submitted earlier this year.
- The OLWMC submitted an application for the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA's) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) for funding the OLWMC's payroll expenses. The SBA loan program helps small businesses keep their workforce employed during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Although OLWMC funding through local government remains strong, it was a prerogative to seek out this potentially important funding resource. The loan has been accepted into the SBA's PPP, was approved, and is now fully funded. For a limited time period, associated funds dedicated to funding the OLWMC payroll over the course of an eight-week timeframe will be ultimately forgiven.
- A funding proposal for Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) education, intended to help reduce the continued spread of AIS within Owasco Lake, was submitted through the Finger Lake Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM). The OLWMC is requesting funding for portable AIS signage that will offer flexibility for its usage at events and lake

access locations. There exists signage at Emerson Park, but lake-wide boat launches and access locations coverage is lacking. Improved coverage with signage at all lake access locations prioritizes public awareness and education on prevention measures for reducing the spread of invasive species that have been shown to utterly transform the lake condition and drive harmful algal blooms (HABs).

- The Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) is working in close partnership with the OLWMC on a Community Grant application offered through the New York State Pollution Prevention Institute. The grant proposal will request funding for the planning and coordination of a watershed education campaign that will include the development of outreach mechanisms for, and hosting of, four community events to be held throughout the watershed. This project is intended to fund professional marketing support to jumpstart the greater 'Be Owasco Lake Watershed Aware' campaign; it will include the provision of public education on current and proposed watershed rules and regulations, guidelines for land/water stewardship, and opportunities for attendees to pledge 'lake friendly' land use practices to be provided 'lake-friendly' lawn signage. Collecting attendee contact information can also help grow the watershed community contact base for forthcoming public events.
  - RFPs and project scope documents were delivered to several local advertising firms in preparation for development of the project proposal
  - Endorsement letters for this project proposal were received from Senator Pam Helming, Assemblyman Gary Finch
  - Letters of commitment for this project proposal were received from Ed Wagner, on behalf of the Town of Owasco, Andrew Snell, on behalf of the OLWIPD, Eileen O'Connor, on behalf of the Cayuga County Department of Environmental Health, Julie Lockhart on behalf of OWLA, and Olivia Green, on behalf of The Nature Conservancy.
  
- The OLWMC is targeting the Great Lakes Research Initiative's (GLRI's) Great Lake Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program for grant funding nonpoint source phosphorus pollution control projects within the watershed. The Council administered two proposal submissions for the GLRI Sediment and Nutrient Reduction grant proposal request, with both Crystal Creek and ESSRE consultants having helped develop project narratives. Cayuga County has worked closely with the OLWMC and ESSRE on project designs, proposing enhancing nutrient removal features for the constructed retention basins located in the flats. When awarded funding, the OLWMC will supplement its budget with the proposal- budgeted costs of project administration while project consultants have costs built in for equipment operations and project implementation. For now, this strategy acts as a 'win-win' for supporting the OLWMC's mission, and for engineering consultants interested in piloting new P-removal technologies.
  - In collaboration with Crystal Creek Organics, and with the assistance of the OLWIPD employees, 'Requests for Information' letters were delivered to manure phosphorus removal technology vendors as a preliminary fielding of information in preparation for a potential related NYS Combined Funding Application announcement this summer.

- The development of a grants projects ranking system will become more important as the OLWMC grows capacity to administer new NYS and EPA funding to Owasco Lake Watershed municipalities for specific projects.
- I have been communicating with Cayuga Lake Watershed Partners and Cayuga County Planning on yet another GLRI request for proposal through the US Forest Service. We are considering a multiple watershed approach for tree planting project initiatives in an attempt to improve our standing for a potential grant award through this program. The group is considering targeting public planting events on public lands (and the Owasco Flats might be a target) and residential free tree planting programs.
- The passing of Assembly bill A08349/S05612 would effectively offer permitting protections for common Owasco Watershed Class C streams without the need for an approval of the OLWMC's petition to reclassify those streams watershed-wide (a section of the draft bill is distributed with this month's meeting documents for review). Having approached Senator Seward and Assemblyman Finch to advocate for offers of support for the bill to go in front of the NYS Senate, I was informed on February 27th this bill advanced for a third reading in the NYS Senate. Once reviewed and brought to the Senate floor for a vote and passed, it will again return to the Assembly floor where it will have Assemblyman Finch's full support. I also received an email response from NY Senator Pam Helming offering gratitude and praise for the OLWMC's commitment to improving Owasco Lake water quality through the advancement of watershed protections. Senator Helming committed to considering the OLWMC's support for the bill when she places her vote. Nevertheless, we continue to gather letters of support for the tributary reclassification petition, are watching the progress of the bill closely, and will plan to continue with its submission. On April 20, 2020 OWLA provided a support letter for the tributary reclassification petition.
- The OLWMC continues to work closely with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to evaluate lands targeted for acquisition (according to OLWMC Member's approved resolution 01-2020, the OLWMC resolved to hold real property to protect land and watershed features that support the protection of water quality). Further, the Council is offering support to TNC for a feasibility study for replacing septic systems in Indian Cove on the east shore Owasco Lake. TNC is planning a poll, administered throughout the Finger Lakes, to gain a better understanding of the public perception of water quality within the Finger Lakes region.
- NYSDEC Finger Lakes Hub's Anthony Prestigiacoimo will give a detailed presentation in Spring 2020 on advancements of the program NYHABs.gov online notification system for harmful algae blooms. His presentation will act as a training for our constituents, partners, and the community to use their cellular devices to indicate the dates, locations, and statuses of suspicious HABs.
- Cayuga County' Soil and Water Conservation District is planning to present to the OLWMC on 2019 project outcomes and project outlooks for 2020 at the next physical Council meeting, perhaps as early as June 16th.

- In support for the NYSDEC's 'Look for Zero' campaign to encourage the use of phosphorus free fertilizers, please visit the OLWMC website projects section (<https://www.olwmc.org/projects>) to 'take the vow' to agree to stop the use of lawn fertilizers in the interest of preventing harmful algal blooms.
- 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 municipality buy-in.

Summary prepared by Adam Effler, May 2020