



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

September 15th, 2020, 10:00am – Director’s Summary

- HABs reporting

As of September 11th, 2020 at 10am, according to NYHABs, the NYSDEC’s Harmful Algal Bloom reporting system, there were 16 HABs reports for Owasco Lake more than two weeks old, but reported this year, and 18 HAB reports within the last two weeks. Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) were reported for a second time this year at Camp-Y Owasco, on August 6th. The beach was subsequently temporarily closed by the Cayuga County Department of Health. As a reminder the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) recommends lakeshore residents and lake users know it, report it, and avoid it!

- Watershed Rules and Regulations

The current phase on the Watershed Rules and Regulations revision project is a final review via a joint meeting by City of Auburn and Town of Owasco before the updated regulatory document can be finalized and delivered to NYS agencies for their review and consideration for approval. The City and Town plan to hold the joint public meeting as soon as it can be arranged, and the Cayuga County Planning Department has been leading scheduling that effort.

- Watershed Inspection and Protection Division

The Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD) remains very active in the field identifying both land and water perturbations that are in need of restoration measures, as well as recent land use improvements and restoration projects to be recognized. The OLWIPD is developing an agenda and meeting schedule for forthcoming partner meetings that host and garner advisement from the NYSDEC and Watershed Inspection Committee advisors. Future meetings will be held more routinely (i.e., twice yearly) than previously to maintain accountability and timeliness for the completion of action items, as well as the mutual commitment to watershed protection efforts. Broadly, the NYSDEC Region 7 is responsible for regulatory enforcement of permitted facilities within the Owasco Lake Watershed, and the OWIPD acts as a local enforcement arm according to local watershed rules and regulations.

- Signage

The Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council's OLWIPD is working closely with the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) to rollout a variety of signage projects in the near term. The organizations are cost-sharing 'lake friendly living signs' and 'no dumping-drains to lake' storm drain medallions to be placed in Villages Groton and Moravia and the Hamlet of Locke. The OLWIPD has inventoried storm drains throughout the watershed to prioritize those to receive medallions and has communicated with municipal/highway officials for approvals for installations; most of the storm drain medallions will be installed with the assistance of volunteers in partnership with both OWLA and local Boy Scouts Troop 11. In support of our collaborative 'lake-friendly living' initiative, OWLA plans to distribute "lake friendly living" themed literature to the public in watershed as soon as possible.

- OLWMC Lake Friendly Living Pledge-

The OLWMC Lake Friendly Living Pledge is now fully fledged and operational on the OLWMC website- We ask watershed residents make a difference throughout the watershed by taking the pledge to advance a variety of land and water stewardship practices. This pledge opportunity aligns with a standard style 'Lake Friendly Living' logo used along with consistent messaging growing throughout the Finger Lakes Region. Those who take the pledge, and are interested in helping promote this messaging through signage, are being delivered 'lake friendly living' lawn signage. This initiative was spotlighted in the OLWIPD's August monthly editorial in Auburn pub featured on August 29, 2020. Our September feature article will continue to follow a series of recognition articles that have been used to spotlight restoration work, as well as land and water stewardship advancements, observed throughout the watershed.

The pledge:

I know my choices can affect water quality for Owasco Lake. I pledge to incorporate 'Lake Friendly Living' practices to reduce my impacts on Owasco Lake. I will adopt these practices that help reduce pollutants and minimize runoff into Owasco Lake:

(1) I pledge to refrain from using excessive lawn fertilizers and chemicals to help prevent Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).

(2) I will only use limited phosphorus-free fertilizers (as governed by NYS law), applied properly.

(3) I will maintain my septic system.

(4) I will reduce hazardous wastes and dispose of them properly.

(5) I will dispose of prescription drugs properly; I will not flush them.

(6) I will maintain my vehicles, water-crafts, and other recreational vehicles to reduce fluid leaks as well as the spread of aquatic invasive species.

(7) I will use water wisely.

(8) I will not dispose of leaf litter or lawn clippings in waterways or ditches.

(9) I will strive to work towards practicing recommended Best Management Practices (BMPs) for land use activities within the Owasco Lake Watershed.

- Tributary Level Sensors Installation Project

OLWMC partners are moving forward with the installation of tributary level sensors throughout the watershed. The partnering group, Hyfi, is finalizing securing permits and deployment schedules. They have permission to deploy sensors with Cayuga County Highway Department at five sites, the Town of Groton at 1 site, and at several locations within the Owasco Flats. Hyfi, while continuing to pursue permission for installation at three sites in Sempronius, Town of Owasco, and Tompkins County, has reached out to NYSDOT Region 3's permit specialist. NYSDOT 3 has offered Hyfi a list of questions and concerns to address as well as an initial permit application. They are currently reviewing their requirements and drafting responses to their inquiries; NYSDOT has indicated the need for a separate permit app for each of the 10 sites. The level sensors are in the final stages of testing, and the deployment team is eager to begin installations. We are looking forward to beginning deployment as early as late September.

- Funding Programs and Related Projects

1. We have completed and submitted the initial phase of the loan forgiveness application for the Payroll/Paycheck Protection Program Loan.
2. The OLWMC is planning to go after Regional Conservation Partners Program funding category of Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) funding through United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). We will likely propose to make whole certain NYS conservation funding categories to continue advancing capacity for restoration and water quality protection efforts within the watershed.
3. \$4950 was awarded to the OLWMC for the purchase of a Portaboard© trailer associated with a proposal for Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) education submitted through the Finger Lake Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) and intended to help reduce the continued spread of AIS within Owasco Lake. The Portaboard© offers portable AIS signage and 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 adversely affect the lake and drive harmful algal blooms (HABs). The Portaboard© designs were recently finalized and printed, and the billboard delivered. The billboards are currently positioned outside of the Parks and Trails Office along East Lake Road and across from Emerson Park.

- Hemlock Hunters-

Members of OWLA, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) and other partners are working collaboratively with the OLWMC to coordinate Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) mitigation to help protect Hemlock trees within the Owasco Lake Watershed. We recognize the first step to

ultimately advance this initiative through biocontrol (e.g., beetles, top down approach) or insecticide (bottom up approach) will require Hemlock tree and HWA inventories. Our group was field-trained August 12th by CCE's 'Hemlock Hunters' and has been enrolled with the Cornell University Hemlock Initiative and its Hemlock Hunters organization. The Owasco Hemlock Hunters Team will take on the important task of surveying, as completely as time, energy, land owner permission, and weather permit, the health of Hemlocks in the ravines of the Owasco Lake Watershed. Inventorying of the HWA is led by OWLA and will start with a focus on ravine areas in the southwest Owasco Lake Watershed.

- Evidn Presentation

The OLWMC and the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) are working closely in partnership with Evidn, a behavioral science consulting firm contracted with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). On the evening of September 2, 2020, OWLA and the OLWMC welcomed a presentation by Evidn. Founded in Brisbane, Australia, Evidn specializes in the application of behavioral science to create evidence-based solutions for delivering behavioral change at scale; especially in the context of sustainability and agro-environmental challenges. We are looking to their expertise as we continue to effectuate change through the advancement of BMPs and land and water stewardship.

1. Evidn's flagship project was the Cane Changer project, one of Australia's largest environmental behavior change initiatives working to improve water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef. The project contributed to a 440% increase in the uptake of best management practices among sugar cane farmers along the coast of Queensland.
2. Evidn is beginning to work with farmers in the Owasco Lake Watershed in consultation with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Their 'Our Owasco' project is working to increase the percentage of farmland in the Owasco Watershed implementing soil health best management practices (BMP). Adopting soil health BMPs can benefit the profitability and productivity of farms by reducing inputs, building crop resilience to weather extremes, and improving overall crop health. Building healthy soils can also produce significant positive environmental outcomes including less erosion and runoff, improved downstream water quality, and sequestration of carbon. Evidn has shown that advancements in land and water stewardship practices, especially when requesting for voluntary action, necessitates removing barriers to behavioral change, striving towards inclusiveness in directing initiatives and related discussions, and ensuring those making positive strides are recognized. Collaboratively, the group hopes to leverage guidance in marketing, and behavior science to more broadly engage with the public to better promote improved land use/soil health practices watershed-wide. For example, Evidn strongly supports the OLWMC's new 'lake friendly living' pledge program at olwmc.org as well as recognition articles that are written and published on a monthly basis.

New York State Tributary Regulations

- NY Assembly Bill: A08349 passed in the NYS Assembly earlier this year, has gone through committee, and the bill passed the NYS Senate (NY Senate Bill: S05612) on July 21st. It was returned to, and passed with, the Assembly. Finally, the Governor will have to sign it for it to become law. We are watching the progress of this bill closely and have been strong advocates of the process through engagement with local and regional government representatives. With this bill signed into law, the OLWMC will have achieved the tributary permitting protections originally sought through petitioning for watershed tributary reclassification, but instead gained through regulatory protections advanced at the state level. Once signed into law, widespread Class C watershed streams will require the same protections (through project permitting) as streams with higher classifications.

Land Acquisition Support

- The OLWMC will evaluate lands targeted for acquisition by with TNC for land holding opportunities (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). The OLWMC, TNC, and the City of Auburn are developing common source water protection signage for lands acquired by both TNC and the City. Additionally, the OLWMC maintains support to TNC for a feasibility study for replacing septic systems in Indian Cove on the east shore Owasco Lake.

Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District Implementation Updates

- Cayuga County' Soil and Water Conservation District is planning to present to the OLWMC on 2019 and 2020 project outcomes to-date as well as project outlooks for the future. This presentation will be planned for a forthcoming physical OLWMC meeting setting, perhaps as early as October 20th, 2020.

Buy-In

- Sennett will take up approval for joining the OLWMC at their September board meeting and budget for 2021.
- 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 Venice, Sempronius, Groton, and Genoa; I continue to encourage the Board of Directors to reach out to representatives from these towns to elicit municipality buy-in.

Summary written by Adam Effler, September 2020