



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

February 15, 2022, 10:00am – Director’s Summary

Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD) Updates

- The OLWIPD of the OLWMC remains active in the field, keeping a keen eye on winter construction site stabilization needs and providing support to watershed residents, as requested.
- We are thrilled to welcome Jillian Aluisio, our new Watershed Inspector for the OLWIPD. She started working for the OLWIPD on January 31st, 2022 and will be reporting directly to Lead Watershed Inspector, Ally Berry. Her onboarding needs are vastly complete, and she’s hit the ground running, providing assistance with field surveillance, equipment preparation, and problem solving. We look forward to Jillian’s continued assistance, as well as increased coverage for OLWIPD watershed surveillance.

Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach

- The OLWMC’s staff February recognition article with the Citizen newspaper spotlighted strategies for road salt conservation and truck calibration by municipal highway departments.
- Staff are preparing the OLWIPD/OLWMC combined 2021 annual report, as well as a presentation to the CoA. Consistent with previous years, the annual report will be prepared in the form of an informational brochure to be shared for physical distribution by watershed municipal offices.

Lake Friendly Living

Project Review: Lake Friendly Living (LFL) is a growing Finger Lakes regional initiative that encourages the adoption of recommended conservation and best management practices by residents; the initiative targets reducing nonpoint sources of lake pollution. The achieved goal of the LFL awareness week in 2021 was to educate and engage Finger Lakes watershed residents, local governments, and businesses to adopt lake friendly practices to help protect and preserve the Finger Lakes for sustainable water quality, recreational use, and tourism. The webinars covered topics such as ‘at home’ best practices, climate change, citizen science, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, native planting, and vineyard sustainable practices.

Project Updates:

1. The LFL Coalition of the Finger Lakes is underway with planning and preparation for its spring 2022 awareness webinar series that will focus on the intersection of water quality protection and climate smart programming. Information about the 2022 LFL webinar series will be forthcoming.
2. This year, the group has facilitated onboarding Conesus and Keuka Lake watershed organizations, as new members to help advance the common Finger Lakes Region messaging campaign.
3. The OLWMC and Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) are working towards finalizing the installation of LFL signage on existing Tributary Adoption and Identification Pilot Program (TAIPP) sign posts throughout the watershed.

Hyfi Watercourse Level Sensors

Project Review:

OLWMC staff have installed, and maintain, 15 watercourse level sensors throughout the watershed, targeting locations that align with modeling sites for the Nine Key Element (9E) watershed plan's Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) model. The sensors are used for guiding flood and asset management, as well as for flow monitoring. With project support from OLWMC staff, OWLA's 2021 sediment and nutrient sampling program aligned with sensor locations. A project goal was to provide invaluable constituent loading information for continued calibration of the SWAT model using level (and thereby estimated discharge) information, as well as suspended solids and nutrient concentration data. OWLA completed the fall sampling program and associated project data was shared with the Cayuga County Planning Department for continued calibration of the SWAT model.

Hyfi has completed their development of correlation and regression analysis for the relationships between the watercourse level sensors and conventional USGS stream gauging. A highly significant relationship between long-term data sets helps make the case for continued use and funding of the more spatially robust watershed watercourse level sensors.

Project Updates:

1. On February 2, 2022, OLWMC staff modified the Hyfi watercourse level sensor at Dutch Hollow Brook by swapping the sensor and elongating the structural arm supporting the new sensor. The objective of that work was to prevent perceived bridge deck signal interference at that location.
2. We were informed that there may be an opportunity to install additional sensors at priority locations within the watershed.

Watershed Partner Collaboration- Project Updates

- The OLWMC awaits guidance and project funding opportunities from NYS based on the completion and approval of Cayuga County's Nine Element (9E) Watershed Plan for Owasco Lake.

- The OLWMC offers partnership and support for the City of Auburn’s NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2). The working group is identifying objectives and considering calculating 9E Watershed Plan project cost estimates to prepare for associated grant proposals. We look forward to relevant data outcomes that will support forthcoming grants and projects implementation. The next group meeting for this planning project is scheduled for February 17, 2022.
- The OLWMC continues to work towards a transfer of ownership of a ~160-acre priority parcel in Sempronius from The Nature Conservancy to the OLWMC that will advance the council’s position as a land conservation steward within the watershed.
- OLWMC staff are coordinating with the State University of New York Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) on a collaborative willow planting project at the OLWMC’s nursery in the Town of Owasco with the intent that the nursery will act as a long-term source of willow canes for the installation of future riparian buffers within the watershed. This project may also host an opportunity for a student undergraduate internship and/or capstone project.
- The OWLA-coordinated, and OLWMC-sponsored, annual Bob Brower Scientific Symposium will be held remotely via Zoom Saturday, March 19th 2022. The symposium will spotlight the following presenters and topics:
 1. John Halfman, PhD – Status of Owasco Lake
 2. Dan Kelting, PhD – Salinization of Adirondack Waters by Road Salt: A Statewide Issue
 3. Toneya McIntosh and Dr John Pickering – Our Owasco: Using Behavioral Science to Protect Owasco Lake
 4. Seth Jensen – Lake Water Level Management – Owasco Lake
 5. Carri Marschner – Hemlock Management in the Owasco Lake Watershed: Short and Long Term Solutions

NYS Regional Partnership, Related Projects Status, and Responses to Public Comment Periods

- On January 31, 2022, local watershed partners convened with Region 7 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) for our semi-annual meeting. Meeting topics included, but were not limited to, local and state regulatory synergies, progress on collaborative watershed and lake planning projects, flood management, and outlooks for watershed and lake monitoring for the 2022 field season.
- We understand that the NYS committee charged with reviewing community consensus Owasco Lake watershed rules and regulations is nearly complete with their process, and the NYSDOH will transmit their response and recommendations in the near term.
- The City of Auburn City Council and Cayuga Water Quality Management Agency resolved to request the NYSDEC position Owasco Lake on the 303(d) list as threatened. Separately, OWLA and the OLWMC prepared and submitted commensurate response letters during the comment period.

Grants and Programs

- **GLRI Conservation Kick Project**

Project Review: In partnership, the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) assisted a watershed farm land owner to finalize their application for the installation of a water and sediment control basin (WASCOB). The project will be funded, in part, by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Conservation Kick Program. The City of Auburn invested the required cost share for the grant award to be administered through the OLWMC, demonstrating the city's commitment towards supporting conservation advancements for local agriculture. *17,258 'water quality credits' will be generated by the practice installation. This reflects an estimated 17,721 pounds of nitrogen and 1,262.5 pounds of total phosphorus reductions over the course of the project period.* Based on the Great Lakes Commission's upfront analysis, and relative to all other Conservation Kick projects planned across the Great Lakes Basin, the CCSWCD/OLWMC project will result in the greatest nutrient reduction outcomes.

Project Update: Project partners continue to finalize contract details for the GLC Conservation Kick program.

- **Partnership with Crystal Creek Organics**

Project Update: On February 4th, the OLWMC offered its endorsement of a small grant proposal composed by Crystal Creek Organics to continue testing efficiencies, nutrient removals, and byproducts from its manure phosphorus removal technology. Crystal Creek Organics' operation, positioned at Spruce Haven Farms within the Owasco Lake watershed, has processed nearly 500,000 gallons of manure over the last several years.

- **NRCS RCPP**

Project Update: The OLWMC will plan to submit a revised project proposal through the Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program (NRCS RCPP). We are retooling last year's NRCS RCPP proposal, according to review comments, to request federal funding intended to help build upon the CCSWCDs' exemplary work towards conservation farm planning and BMP implementation within the Owasco Lake watershed. The proposed project would help build local capacity for certified farm planning within the watershed, a prospect intended to increase efficiencies for local agriculture to benefit both farmers and watershed conservation.

DEC Grant Solicitations for Review and Consideration

- **Community Forest Conservation Grant Program**

- Municipality eligible: DEC announces a new Community Forest Conservation Grant Program. \$1 million in grant funds will be available to municipalities for forest land acquisition to establish community forests. The grant program's goal is to assist communities in the conservation of local forests to create opportunities for public access, help protect natural areas from development, and encourage sustainable management of forested lands. Applicants will be able to request \$50,000 to \$300,000 and must provide a 10 percent cash match of the grant amount requested. This is a reimbursement grant and costs eligible for reimbursement will

include, but are not limited to, purchase price, appraisal, survey, title search, tax service, recording fees, and attorney fees. Properties to be acquired must be 10 or more contiguous acres in size, have forests on at least 75 percent of the acreage, be accessible to the public, and provide public benefits such as recreation opportunities, flood mitigation, wildlife habitat, clean water, and forest products. Applications are due **2 p.m. on Wednesday, April 13, 2022**. The application and additional information are available on the department's website at: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/124345.html>

- Soil and Water Conservation District Eligible: Two grant opportunities (Climate Resilient Farming and Agricultural Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program) are now available to help farmers protect soil and water quality. The state's county soil and water conservation districts can apply on behalf of farmers for this competitive grant program.
 - \$21 million will be provided through Climate Resilient Farming (CRF) Grant Program & Agricultural Non-Point Source Abatement and Control (Ag Nonpoint) Program. Applications due March 28 and May 2. Governor's State of the State proposes increases in funding for CRF & Ag Nonpoint programs in this year's executive budget.
 - Agricultural Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program. In addition to the Climate Resilient Farming Grant Program funding, an additional \$13 million is available to support agricultural water quality conservation projects across the state through round 28 of the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program. The state's county soil and water conservation districts can apply on behalf of farmers for this competitive grant program, which is also funded through the New York State Environmental Protection Fund.

Project proposals are due at 4:30 p.m. May 2. The application and additional information are available on the department's website at: <https://agriculture.ny.gov/funding-opportunities>

Buy-In

- The OLWMC continues to encourage participation and directorship 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, Genoa, Dryden, Skaneateles, and Lansing; we continue to encourage the Board of Directors to reach out to representatives from these towns to elicit municipality interest. Over the course of the last month, all remaining municipalities were prompted with a request call, and directorship request letters, template resolutions, and relevant maps were subsequently delivered. The Town of Genoa tabled the topic discussion at their February 9th meeting. The Town of Dryden posed a resolution to join at their February 10, 2022 board meeting. Our request for directorship by the Town of Venice was made via a presentation and subsequent discussion at their February 10, 2022 board meeting.

HABs

- The NYHABS link will be unavailable until the 2022 monitoring season begins in May 2022. We look forward to an update on HABs report training by the NYSDEC to ensure partners and volunteers properly identify and report HABs occurrences in 2022.

Prepared by Adam Effler, February 11, 2022