Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

September 16, 2025- Director's Summary

Watershed Rules and Regulations

Project Review:

- The Watershed Rules and Regulations (WRR) Workgroup was a state-local partnership consisting of representatives from five New York State agencies, as well as members of a technical local workgroup representing the Owasco Lake Watershed, including members from: Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC); Town of Owasco; City of Auburn; and Cayuga County. The Workgroup was formed in response to the submission of proposed revisions to the 1984 Watershed Rules and Regulations (Part 104.1- City of Auburn and Town of Owasco) to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) in December 2020. NYSDOH project updates are posted on the OLWMC's website (https://www.olwmc.org/projects).

  The NYSDOH has indicated that it does not have the authority from the legislature to create nutrient management regulations for the Owasco Lake watershed. Specifically, the NYSDOH indicated that when the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program was established, nutrient management on farms became the sole responsibility of the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM).

  The City of Auburn, Town of Owasco, and Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) filed an Article 78 petition with NYS, seeking to clarify whether the NYSDOH has the right to regulate nutrient management practices under updated Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations. Article 78 is a petition that challenges the actions of administrative agencies and other government bodies. The lawsuit contends that the laws cited do not firmly establish that the NYSDAM's authority concerning nutrient management supersedes the NYSDOH's responsibility to promulgate regulations for the protection of public health.

  On July 22, 2024, the New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Water Supply Protection notified the City of Auburn and Town of Owasco that the Department does not intend to move forward with amendments to 10 NYCRR Part 104.1 City of Auburn and Town of Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations. According to their letter, "following internal evaluation of the existing regulations, the Department determined that amendments are not necessary to ensure potable water quality for the foreseeable future."

  The City of Auburn, the Town of Owasco, and OWLA filed a new lawsuit on November 22, 2024 to help ensure that NYS Department of Health fulfills its duties for protecting NYS

watersheds. The new Article 78 lawsuit responds to the NYS Department of Health's recent decision that new rules and regulations are not necessary to protect Owasco Lake drinking water, wherein New York State failed to provide data or information to support its decision to terminate the rulemaking process. The new Article 78 petition, initially filed in the Cayuga County Supreme Court and now moved to Albany, challenges the Department's decision to deny the City of Auburn and Town of Owasco's request to regulate the Owasco Lake watershed for the expressed purpose of protecting Owasco Lake's water quality. Under NYS Public Health Law, the NYS Department of Health is responsible to support the advancement of watershed rules and regulations for the protection of water supplies. A request for an oral hearing of the Article 78 petitions was made for mid-May, 2025. The January 27, 2025 Porceng article linked here, references the Owasco Lake Green Amendment as it pertains to Owasco Lake WRR litigation with the NYSDOH.

In response to the NYSDOH's request for dismissal of the initial Article 78 complaint brought by the Owasco Lake drinking water purveyors and OWLA, the Court found NYSDOH's determination that it lacks legal authority to promulgate watershed rules and regulations to control agricultural nutrient pollution is an error of law, and was made arbitrarily and capriciously. Therefore, the lawsuit remains in place for adjudication under the court of law.

  - The water purveyors won case #2, challenging NYSDOH's July 2024 denial of their rulemaking request concerning updating Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations. The court circulated its decision (provided with the July 2025 OLWMC board meeting documents) on July 3, 2025.

- Partnering agencies, including the Cayuga County Planning and Health Departments and the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNYRPDB) are collaborating with OLWMC staff to produce a more refined and easier to interpret regulatory watershed map.

Project Update:

- Over the summer of 2025, OLWMC staff worked with the NYS Legislative Bill Drafting Commission to amend NYS Public Health Law, in relation to enacting the 'Drinking Water Protection Act' and improving the process of updating WRR with NYS agency requirements and time limits.

Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach Projects Updates

- On 9/12/2025, OLWMC staff presented at the CNY NYSFOLA conference regarding Cayuga County Department of Health's Septic System Inspection program statistics within the watershed, as well as their successes with leveraging the NYS septic system replacement program.
- Five farms in Cayuga County were recently honored for their commitment to environmentally responsible agriculture. The farms received the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Farm Awards during a luncheon held on Aug. 14, hosted by the Cayuga County Soil & Water Conservation District. According to a news release from the district, the awards are a central part of an annual event that celebrates local farmers who are leading efforts in

sustainable agricultural practices. The AEM program is a voluntary, statewide initiative designed to help farmers evaluate environmental risks, establish goals, and implement conservation measures. In regions like Cayuga County, this includes protecting soil health, ensuring nutrients remain available for crops, and preserving the quality of nearby streams, rivers, and lakes.

1. Sierzenga Farms, located within the Owasco Lake watershed, grows a range of cash crops. The farm has been a consistent participant in the Cayuga County AEM program, actively working to implement best management practices such as cover cropping and soil health systems. Since the mid-1990s, Sierzenga Farms has regularly attended community meetings and workshops, offering valuable insights to local watershed groups.
2. Finger Lakes Nut Farm, also situated within the Owasco Lake watershed, spans about 15 acres and features a variety of trees, including 1,200 chestnut trees, 600 hazelnut bushes, and several heartnut trees, all planted within a fenced enclosure. Building on the success of its initial small planting, the farm has expanded its chestnut production while adopting best management practices. These practices include planting cover crops to prevent erosion, improve water infiltration, and enhance carbon sequestration. Now in its eighth year, Finger Lakes Nut Farm is a proud member of the New York Nut Growers of America, an active participant in the Cayuga County AEM program and the NYS Grown & Certified Program, and a founding member of the New York Tree Crops Alliance.

- On the evening of September 16, 2025 at Emerson Park, Partners for Healthy Watersheds invites community members to join local dairy farmers and industry professionals for an evening of fostering transparency and understanding about the best management practices used on farms.
- OLWMC staff are working with a Cornell University graduate student and Senior Media Relations Specialist on a farmer recognition initiative, which will act as his capstone.
- The OLWMC staff article published in Auburnpub, poised for publication on September 18, 2025, features the OLWMC's recent Venice Preserve land acquisition.

Nine Element Watershed Plan (9EP)

Project Review:

- Cayuga County received a New York State Department of State grant to implement a high priority recommendation from the 2016 Owasco Lake Watershed Management and Waterfront Revitalization Plan, which was to incorporate the EPA Nine Key Elements. This project was led by the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development and the consultant on the project was Ecologic, LLC. The Owasco Lake Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus Reduction (9EP) was approved by the New York State Department of State and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/owasco9e.pdf). This Clean Water Plan advances

efforts to restore and protect the water quality of Owasco Lake and its watershed. The collaborative effort identified focused strategies to help ensure the lake water supply, aquatic habitat, and recreational uses are protected. The development of the plan focused on understanding and managing phosphorus and sediment inputs from the Owasco Lake watershed to provide for recommendations to drive watershed protection and remediation projects. In 2024, Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) scenarios were modeled for a 20% reduction in phosphorus loading to the lake to simulate the effects of expanded nutrient management Planning Tier 3 or equivalent, restricted applications of fertilizer and manure in areas that abut streams, and the implementation of cover crops. A MEANSS approach was used to estimate relocating septic systems within 100 feet of surface waters.

- The OLWMC is providing a coordination role for future projects and programming, according to the recommendations of the 9EP.
- The OLWMC's 9E Project Coordination Committee (via Resolution 03-2022 at its November 15, 2022 public board meeting) prioritizes, coordinates, and facilitates project and programming implementation based on the recommendations of the 9EP. Partnering agencies and organizations convene on a semi-monthly basis to advance 9EP goals. As part of the group's 2023 work plan, the Committee developed a phased approach towards preparing project proposals and fundraising for watershed streams inventorying and engineering planning in 2024 to direct streambank stabilization projects between 2024-2025, for funding tributary monitoring between 2024-2025, and for developing an Owasco Lake Watershed Agriculture Program (OLWAP) similar to what was created for the Skaneateles Lake watershed.
- The following grant proposal was submitted and funded in response to NYS grant program solicitations in the summer of 2023, and targets the highest phosphorus contributing landscape/acre within the Owasco Lake Watershed, as documented in the 9EP:
    1. The City of Auburn submitted a NYS non-point non-agricultural planning grant proposal to assess stream corridors including for Sucker and Veness Brooks, as well as other small tributaries within the prioritized Owasco Lake HUC 12 subwatershed at the northern end of the lake.
        a. The City of Auburn's NYS non-point non-agricultural planning grant proposal was awarded $75,000.
        b. The Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT), a member of the 9E Coordination Committee, will help leverage synergies between their recently NYS-awarded $1,240,000 for Land Acquisition to Protect Owasco Lake, which targets protections of the Sucker Brook wetland, and the City of Auburn's NYS-awarded $75,000 for stream corridor assessments in the Owasco Lake HUC12 subwatershed, which includes Sucker Brook. Restored streambanks and wetland corridors are ranking criteria for FLLT while targeting land acquisitions to create protected preserves and easements.
        c. The City of Auburn developed its grant contract with NYS. The city selected an engineering firm for its Owasco Lake HUC 12 stream corridor assessments. This advancement was spotlighted in a Citizen article published on March 22, 2025.

d. The 9E committee is considering replicating this project for priority subwatersheds, understanding that stream corridor assessments will provide a pathway for funding related streambank stabilization projects.

- The 9E Coordination Committee is supporting capacity building for local organizations to provide the programming necessary for the watershed agricultural industry to advance best management practice (BMP) implementation at the rate recommended by the NYS approved 9EP. The Committee composed and submitted a proposal for NYS to fund the development of a focused OLWAP that would leverage the existing tiered Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program. Committee members met with NYS Officials on January 25, 2024 to discuss official sponsorship of the proposed program under the NYS 2024 budget.
    - $500,000 was included within the Senate one house budget for the 9E Coordination Committee's proposed OLWAP.
        - Ultimately, the OLWAP was not funded within the 2024 NYS budget.
- The Committee updated the 9E Plan's implementation checklist to track the status of associated programming and projects implementation.
- The 9E Coordination Committee is developing a 2022-2025 progress report to feature the 9EP projects and programs that have been advanced thus far.
- During the March 26, 2025 9E Coordination Committee meeting, the group engaged with Ducks Unlimited (DU). DU was awarded a $252,436 grant to restore a wetland in the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area near the Town of Moravia. The project will provide habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, help mitigate flood impacts downstream and improve water quality.

Project Update:

- The 9E Coordination Committee is making progress towards finalizing its 2022-2025 progress report, which now includes watershed best BMP statistics from CCSWCD. There are plans to include Tompkins County SWCD statistics as well.
- The next 9E Coordination Committee meeting will be held on September 24, 2025.

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

Projects Review:

- The Cayuga County Planning Department developed its 2025 lake and watershed monitoring and implementation priorities in the context of annual Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FLLOWPA) funding. As in 2024, they've included monitoring, data management, and implementation projects for Owasco Lake and its watershed. FLLOWPA funds in 2025 are being used for:
    - The installation and implementation of BMPs by CCSWCD
    - O&M for the USGS Owasco Inlet Gage
    - CSLAP for OWLA, Duck Lake Association and Lake Como Association
    - OWLA Tributary Sampling Program
    - Owasco Watershed Data Portal

    - Public outreach and education on invasive species and water quality
    - Aquatic vegetation harvesting
    - O&M of the boat cleaning station at Emerson Park
    - Support for the septic system inspection program
- The Cayuga County Planning Department finalized the data usability assessment report (DUAR) and 2024 tributary monitoring project report, which have been approved by the NYSDEC.
- The water quality monitoring buoy is deployed on Owasco Lake for 2025.
- Doctorate Assistant Professors from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) provided processing and analyses in-kind for both tributary and lake data collected from recent years.
    - Two of the 2024 tributary sampling sites that were used to collect baseline data for the OLWMC's "Owasco Lake Watershed Critical Streams Restoration Project" (funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program) are being sampled again in 2025 during project construction.
    - Associated topics of discussion have included the want to fund and install tributary flow monitoring sensors that track flow to generate nutrient proxy loading, as well as small weather stations to better constrain how localized storms drive nutrient inputs. The proposal would include the delivery of real-time data to the internet, as part of a long-term strategy for early warning capabilities for HAB-likely conditions.
- There have been growing concerns and community outreach regarding lake foam that collects on and near the shoreline. Global Aquatic Research (GAR) plans to sample Owasco Lake foam this year and perform specialized laboratory analysis for emerging lake contaminants, Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).
    - GAR included Owasco, Seneca, Keuka, and Skaneateles Lakes within their Water Resources Institute (WRI) grant submission. They would sample in 2025, whereby one sampling trip to each lake is proposed, and GAR would quantify PFAS concentrations and a few water quality parameters in foam, the surface microlayer, and lake water. The overarching purpose is to understand how PFAS partitions between these phases, which impacts both monitoring and routes of exposure. This will also establish a baseline that partners can build on in future work. A secondary project feature proposed would be to implement in Owasco Lake the foam reporting tool that was developed with the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association (Canandaigua Lake Foam Survey). This will involve coordinating with and training citizen scientists to use the tool. After sampling and data collection is complete, a stakeholders meeting would be scheduled in Fall/Winter 2025-2026, and representatives from all four lakes (as well as Canandaigua Lake) would be included. The team would use this meeting to consider the impact of the project on management strategies, public outreach, and next steps. The OLWMC provided a letter of support for the collaborative grant proposal.
    - The OLWMC endorsed proposal, *Characterization of PFAS in foam forming on the Finger Lakes,* was selected for funding by the Water Resources Institute (WRI). GAR developed and expanded the 'foam reporting tool' in the spring of 2025 with the purpose of compiling more information about the prevalence and timing of foam formation on the Finger Lakes.

    - As part of the WRI grant, GAR will be visiting four lakes to take additional samples: Keuka, Skaneateles, Seneca, and Owasco. They will only sample from each lake once, and will take samples from the surface, surface microlayer (top 1mm of the water column), and foam if it is observed. The goal is to look at how PFAS partition between these phases, which is believed to play a large role in their fate and transport in the lake. In Canandaigua, GAR developed a foam reporting tool that volunteers have been using since 2019 to submit foam sightings, which has been useful in helping them to determine the different stages of foam formation/fate, its seasonality, and the correct time to sample. Lake associations and volunteers are poised to use this foam reporting tool to assist with identification and sampling efforts in 2025; GAR expanded this tool for use on the other four lakes, including Owasco. GAR is looking to collect email addresses of volunteers to report in September 2025 when foam is spotted on Owasco Lake, and when they are likely to collect foam and water samples for testing.
- The Cayuga County Planning Department's Owasco Lake Tributary Sampling Project Quality Assurance Project Plan was approved by the NYSDEC under NYS FLLOWPA funding guidelines.
    - Tributary sampling program review and training, hosted by CC Planning Department and OLWMC staff, was held on April 14, 2025.
- SUNY ESF supplemented support for the Owasco Lake tributary monitoring program. They collected and ran alkalinity samples and estimated instantaneous discharges at sampling locations.
- A storm event based tributary monitoring run was conducted on May 8, 2025 to attempt to capture constituent concentrations under high flow conditions.
- The FLLOWPA plan for 2026 is due in mid-July, 2025.
- Partners form SUNY ESF are composing a proposal for the Healthy Waters Center of Excellence. They propose to sample a large geographic region in Central New York (~500 samples over the area) with citizen volunteers all at one time and on the same day (planning for October 4th if the proposal is funded). They've suggested that OWLA volunteers might participate as external partners, as a way to supplement the tributary sampling. Ideally, one volunteer per tributary would sample targeted streams, either at public accesses or on their own property. Parameters wouldn't be regulatory grade but would include conductivity, alkalinity, TSS, microbial and phytoplankton communities, microplastic abundance, nutrients, and other geochemical analytes (Ca, Mg, etc.), which are proposed to give a broad snapshot of how the watersheds are looking. This proposal would go into the education/outreach track which has a funding cap of $30k over 1 year. The primary project objective is to train students on water quality analyses, including running the instrumentation and the data compilation and interpretation (which is where the large spatial coverage is important). The project also offers the opportunity for sampling volunteers to visit their local tributaries and gain more information about water quality. Project reports would provide information on how to get involved with water stewardship groups (e.g., OWLA).

<u>Project Update:</u>

- Global Aquatic Research announced the launch of a new 'Foam Reporting Tool' designed to help track and monitor the presence of lake foam across the Finger Lakes region. The user-friendly online survey allows residents, visitors, and local organizations to report sightings of

foam on the lakes quickly and easily. The aim of collecting real-time data is to better understand the causes, patterns, and potential environmental impacts of foam formation in our waterways. The information is also critical to help successfully time sampling visits to individual lakes.
    - The online tool can be accessed through the Global Aquatic Research website, Finger Lakes - Global Aquatic Research. For more detailed instructions, first click on the "browser" option to open the tool then click the link at the top.
- SUNY ESF is running a water sampling event to gain a snapshot of water chemistry in the region, spanning the Finger Lakes to Mohawk Valley to Lake Ontario. They are looking for volunteers to sample on Saturday October 4th. More information can be found here: https://atninokawa.wixsite.com/website/sharcs. Aaron Ninokawa is happy to answer questions at atninoka@esf.edu
- The USGS gauge station at the Owasco Inlet was maintained and retrofitted with a camera. The data and imagery can be found here: https://apps.usgs.gov/hivis/camera/NY_Owasco_Inlet_below_Aurora_Street_at_Moravia_Downstream

NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2)

Project Review:

- Consultants for the City of Auburn's NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2) worked with City of Auburn water resource managers and partners to identify potential sources of Owasco Lake water quality contamination and provide recommendations for resource protection. The DWSP2 committee reviewed and edited the draft plan. A refined draft of the City of Auburn's DWSP2 was delivered from the contracted consultant to the City of Auburn and circulated among the project committee. The City of Auburn approved of the plan. The local group awaits final plan approval from NYSDEC and NYSDOH to move forward on plan implementation and associated project(s) proposal(s) development. The Town of Owasco received consultant support through NYS to develop its DWSP2. The consultants involved in the project finalized and delivered the Town's plan to NYS agencies for their review and approval. The local group awaits final plan approval from NYSDEC and NYSDOH to move forward on plan implementation and associated project(s) proposal(s) development.
    - Based on NYS's decision to terminate amendments to 10 NYCRR Part 104.1 City of Auburn and Town of Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations, the amendments being a recommendation included within the draft City of Auburn DWSP2, that feature was removed from the plan, allowing the plan to move forward to completion. The project Community Advisory Group last met with project consultants on August 14, 2024 to review final details of the draft plan.
    - At the tail end of 2024, the project Community Advisory Group made additional changes to the City of Auburn's DWSP2 for transmittal to, and approval by, NYS. Among other changes, the group is included the Owasco Lake Watershed Agricultural Program concept within the proposed plan for the prospect of NYS funding the farmer-driven program in coming years.

- In December 2024, on behalf of the Town of Lansing, OLWMC staff reviewed and provided feedback regarding the Southern Cayuga Lake Intermunicipal Water Commission's draft DWSP2 for Bolton Point, leveraging experience with developing both the City of Auburn's and Town of Owasco's DWSP2s. Staff engaged with the Commission on January 23, 2025 to discuss suggestions that were made.

Municipal Codes and Ordinances

Project Review:

- Proposed erosion and sediment control ordinances concerning new construction activities were prepared for OLWMC directing municipalities for their independent board review and consideration for adoption.
    - The Village of Moravia adopted the Sediment and Erosion Control Plan, and associated Appendix E, prepared and proposed by the OLWMC for advancing municipal control requirements for new construction activities.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Programming:

Project Review:

- In 2024, HABs have been observed statewide, with many reports generated within the Finger Lakes Region. Climate change, nutrient pollution, and invasive species are considered important drivers for HABs development. Regional advocates, watershed organizations, and municipalities call for stricter regulations and enforcement of nutrient pollution entering the Finger Lakes. Governor Kathy Hochul recently committed an investment of 42 million dollars to the newly formed Eastern Finger Lakes Coalition of Districts to enhance Finger Lakes water quality. The funds are intended to help farmers manage stormwater runoff and associated nutrient pollution.
- NYSDEC's Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) 2024 Notification Season Summary (in their words):
  During 2024, 218 waterbodies statewide were listed as "Confirmed HABs" on the NY HAB System (NYHABS). Over 2,100 HAB reports were submitted to DEC and confirmed by staff. The reports ranged from a single observation to widespread blooms that were persistent throughout the season. A summary of HABs reported during 2024 is available in the archive section of the Harmful Algal Blooms webpage. Historical HABs data reported to the DEC dating back to 2012 is provided on Open NY, which gives public access to digital data (Search the "Data NY" portal for "Harmful Algal Blooms"). One can view historical water quality monitoring data, including HABs information, at the Division of Water's DOW Monitoring Portal. Both Open NY and the Monitoring Portal will be updated with 2024 HABs data over the coming months.
- The New York Harmful Algal Bloom System (NYHABS) link is now available to support NYS HABs monitoring efforts. The NYS program url: on.ny.gov/nyhabs
- The DEC's virtual HABs surveillance training was offered to volunteers on May 29, 2025.
- A new research initiative at SUNY ESF, supported by a $2 million donation from Sam and Carol Nappi, aims to better understand cause of algal blooms in Skaneateles Lake. This work, led by Dr. Stephen Shaw, Chair of the Environmental Resources Engineering Department, will study both harmful and non-toxic blooms that affect water quality, recreation, and public health

in the region. The project will use tools like satellite imaging for daily monitoring, nutrient tracking, and predictive modeling to assess bloom risks. By working with local partners—including government agencies and community organizations—the research team hopes to develop practical strategies to protect lake health across the Finger Lakes; lakes in Cayuga County and beyond, could apply these findings to improve drinking water quality and support recreation using data-driven approaches.

Project Update:

- As of September 14, 2025, 37 HABs have been reported on Owasco Lake for 2025, 23 of which are current. The remainder were archived.

Land Holdings

Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Review:

- Fillmore Nature Preserve is a 161-acre property that is critical for protecting water quality in Owasco Lake, which provides drinking water to more than 70% of Cayuga County. A study by The Nature Conservancy ranked the property within the top 10 parcels in the Owasco Lake watershed with the greatest impact on water quality. The land includes diverse forests and approximately 40 acres of freshwater wetlands. It is located near the birthplace of President Millard Fillmore and Fillmore Glen State Park.
- The OLWMC closed on the property transfer from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on January 10, 2023, and established the Fillmore Nature Preserve. Fillmore Nature Preserve property boundary signage was installed by OLWMC staff with the help of TNC on March 8, 2023. The associated field trip accommodated the first annual property inspection to meet the OLWMC's annual property inspection commitment.
- On May 22, 2023, student conservation work at the Fillmore Nature Preserve was one of the activities included as part of Moravia High School 'Moravia Gives Back Day.' Students collected litter along the roadway adjacent to the preserve, pulled invasive species, and identified species to inform a conservation database. Moravia High School students were the first to assess biodiversity at the preserve.
- $9,117 was approved by the Fred L. Emerson Foundation for the OLWMC, specifically towards implementing the *Fillmore Nature Preserve- Conservation Education Kiosk, Access Lot, and Trail Network* project, as detailed in the OLWMC's project proposal dated September 14, 2023. The grant proposal was funded to create a public access lot and educational kiosk at the nature preserve.
    - The gravel lot provides public access to the land preserve for respectful use of its trails for hiking. The Towns of Moravia and Summerhill hauled gravel to build the public access lot. The Town of Owasco provided labor in-kind for creating the public access lot. The Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) committed $500 of compost and wildflower seed for the creation of a perennial pollinator wildflower garden adjacent to the lot; the event acted as an OLWMC/OWLA collaborative Lake Friendly Living public event that was held May 25, 2024. The kiosk provides educational information about the land preserve concerning its purpose.
- The OLWMC applied for, and received, program support for the creation and posting of trails within the Fillmore Nature Preserve; a Cornell University program called Design Connect

accepted a request for mapping and identifying trails. They offered two project managers who acted as primary project managers along with a team of 5-10 students.
    - Cornell's Design Connect program team held a field trip at the Fillmore Nature Preserve on February 28, 2024 and again on March 16, 2024, to assess the conditions and locations of the existing trail network and gather information for mapping and marking trails. Their team conducted draft mock-ups of color schemes and themes of potential trail signage, and designed panels for the educational kiosk.
    - Cornell's Design Connect worked with the OLWMC on trail map and educational kiosk panel revisions.
- The OLWMC responded to an offer for project support by the Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) and proposed for a plant inventory, including for both terrestrial invasive and sensitive native species, at the Fillmore Nature Preserve. The proposal included a request for plant pictures and blurbs for inclusion on the educational kiosk.
    - The Finger Lakes Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) Crew Assistance Program (CAP) accepted the OLWMC proposal to work on a Fillmore Nature Preserve project this summer. From July 8-10, 2024 PRISM conducted the proposed 'species of interest' inventory at the Fillmore Nature Preserve, focusing on the identification of invasives species that exist there.
    - With the help of CC Planning for the submission of an additional application through PRISM, the OLWMC applied for a 'boot brush station' that was installed with the educational kiosk to support visitor education and efforts to reduce the spread of invasive species.
- As recorded in the meeting minutes from its August 8, 2024 board meeting, the Town of Owasco formally committed to a mutual aid agreement for assisting with property maintenance, when available, at the preserve.
    - During the weeks of August 5, 2024 and August 12, 2024, Town and OLWMC staff collaborated on clearing trees from the trail networks there.
- On September 25, 2024, the perennial garden installed around the perimeter of the public access lot was overseeded to improve establishment and limit the competition of nuisance weeds. Preserve signage was also installed.
- Construction of the kiosk and boot brush station took place, starting October 15 and was completed on October 17, 2024.
- The Emerson Foundation grant final report was submitted on October 21, 2024.
- The Fillmore Nature Preserve grand opening was held November 7, 2024 with promotional support provided by CC Chamber of Commerce, CC Water Quality Management Agency (WQMA), and the Citizen Newspaper.
- The 2024 Annual Property Inspection Report for the Fillmore Nature Preserve is now complete.
- TNC, NYSDEC, and OLWMC staff convened at the Fillmore Nature Preserve on April 9, 2025 for an opportunity to showcase the preserve to the NYSDEC, as a successful grant implementation towards land preservation and stewardship.
- On May 19, 2025, staff partnered with the CC Planning Department to host Moravia High School students for 'Moravia Gives Back Day,' whereby students learned about terrestrial invasive species and assisted with trail maintenance activities.

Venice Property Acquisition Review:

- During its March 18, 2025 meeting, according to Resolution 01-2025, the OLWMC agreed to accept from TNC the transfer of a 72-acre parcel in Venice for the purposes of ownership and long-term stewardship.
    - The Galbato Law Firm supported the property closing, having tracked down the original abstract to summarize the title's history.
    - The 99-megawatt Agricola wind project in Scipio and Venice, by Liberty Renewables, is adjacent to the Venice property the OLWMC plans to acquire. More info is available here https://www.liberty-renewables.com/projects/agricola-wind/

Venice Property Acquisition Update:

- The OLWMC closed on the Venice property acquisition on July 23, 2025. A property tax exemption was filed with the Town of Venice. Staff and project partners have developed property boundary signage and are scheduling posting the perimeter of the property with TNC's assistance.
- TNC's $10,000 stewardship grant was delivered, and the associated check was deposited into the OLWMC checking account. This grant is a new budgetary line item and will be used to cover project costs, including property closing, boundary signage and liability insurance.

Potential OLWMC Acquisitions Review:

- TNC has expressed interest in having the OLWMC own an additional property poised for long term stewardship and preservation within the Owasco Lake watershed, a 100-acre mixed farmland parcel in the Town of Groton. TNC will present the remaining acquisition opportunity to the OLWMC Board of Directors.

Partner Land Acquisitions/Targets Review:

- Under 2023 Round 19 of the Water Quality Improvement Projects (WQIP) Grant, the Fingers Lakes Land Trust, Inc. (FLLT) received $1,240,000 for Land Acquisition to Protect Owasco Lake. FLLT will work with landowners and partners in the Owasco Lake watershed to permanently protect approximately 500 acres through direct acquisition and the use of perpetual conservation easements. The program will focus on conservation and stewardship efforts to protect Owasco Lake. The proposed program grant will provide FLLT an opportunity to create a new nature preserve on the Sucker Brook wetland, one the largest remaining natural wetlands in the region and conserve additional lands throughout the Owasco Lake Watershed.
- The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and The Nature Conservancy announced the State's addition of 92 acres to Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in the town of Moravia, Cayuga County. The acquisition more than doubles the size of the WMA and offers new and enhanced public recreation opportunities.

Organizational Bylaws Review:

The OLWMC Members are underway with reviewing the final draft for proposed updated OLWMC bylaws. A board resolution for bylaws adoption with be crafted when the final draft is in order.

Grant Projects and Funding

2022 Great Lake Commission (GLC) Conservation Kick Project Update

The OLWMC received documentation of the continued presence of farm conservation practices installed by the CCSWCD and funded by the OLWMC through the Great Lakes Commission's Conservation Kick program and the City of Auburn.

NFWF SOGL Project Review:

- A National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) funding proposal was developed in partnership with CCSWCD and EA Engineering, targeting streambank stabilization along the Owasco Inlet. Proposed project partners also included the Cayuga County Planning Department, the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA), and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Based on a successful pre-proposal the OLWMC submitted a full project proposal for Owasco Inlet streambank restoration project sites between Booth Hill Road and Cat Path Road in the Town of Locke. Landowners who reside along the targeted reaches have expressed concern about severe streambank erosion in those areas.
    - Total Amount Requested: $299,640.00
    - Matching Contributions Proposed: $100,360.00
- The OLWMC was awarded $457,839.92 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program for the *Owasco Lake Watershed Critical Streams Restoration Project*.
- In February, 2024 CCSWCD delivered mailers to the landowners who have adjacent properties along our targeted reach of the Owasco Inlet.
- EA Engineering and CCSWCD conducted a March 25, 2024 field trip to record baseline conditions, channel types, and to evaluate parcel access. CCSWCD and EA staff spoke with adjacent landowners and discussed survey needs for project modeling and design.
- EA Engineering held a field visit on April 9, 2024 (Task 2) when they collected site data, conducted a drone flyover, and identified plant/aquatic species as observed. The project team identified a laboratory to run project soil samples.
- EA Engineering, navigated the environmental permitting process and design, in preparation for project implementation during the 2025 field season. They completed drafts of the NEPA, ESA, and NHPA compliance forms and submitted them to the NFWF.
- EA Engineering developed a computer-aided design (CAD) model for the project. Additionally, they started utilizing a hydrologic model to estimate flow conditions that will inform their project designs. The one-dimensional model utilizes geometry and flow inputs (i.e., using historic USGS gauge data) and will output velocities and water surface elevations. This information is helping the engineering firm recommend materials and placements to the

Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD), which is contracted for project implementation.

- The project team met on August 9, 2024 to review preliminary design recommendations. EA Engineering screened the stabilization alternatives for Sites 1-6. Each site has stationed cross-sections where the channel velocities and shear stresses were calculated for the 2-year and 100-year flow events.
- Of the alternatives where the permissible shear stress/velocity is within an acceptable range, CCSWCD informed the designers of which bioengineering alternatives they would like EA Engineering to focus on incorporating into the design. In response, CCSWCD shared a variety of nature-based stabilization techniques that they recommend and are comfortable using for streambank stabilization projects.
- The project team received regulatory approvals from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to submit for project reimbursements and, ultimately, get underway with construction.
- An additional project update report was submitted, as required, to the NFWF on November 11, 2024.
- EA Engineering developed the required NYSDEC and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) project permit application package, which includes the Nationwide Permit 13, 27 and 401 water quality certifications.
- The existing conditions and 60% design set is complete and was submitted to CCSWCD and OLWMC staff in December of 2024 for review. Designers adapted to site-specific constraints.
- The project team was on track to start to implement the streambank restoration project in the summer of 2025, following construction permitting restrictions due to trout spawning in the spring. The OLWMC requested a grant extension from the originally proposed deadline of fall 2025, to a new deadline of fall 2026. The extension is necessary for project completion due to project schedule delays associated with NYS agency permitting. The OLWMC's request for a grant extension was approved, allowing the project team to complete remaining implementation features in the 2026 calendar year.
- Based on the NYSDEC and USACE Jurisdictional Agreement/Framework (JAF) for reviewing the project permit application package, the NYSDEC questioned onsite knotweed management/ procedures and are requiring CCSWCD photos of the sites in their current conditions to satisfy the NYSDEC reviewer comments. Project partners have finalized the list of the species prepared for the willow plantings. The willow cuttings that SUNY ESF will be providing will be from the families of **Salix eriocephala** (native to North America and **Salix purpurea**, considered naturalized, being introduced to North America primarily for basket weaving, but has become a natural complement to many of our Northern ecosystems). Also, a few **Salix caprea hybrid** (North American hybrid pussy willow variety, male sterile, so no seeds produced) will be used. These are individual family members (or crosses such as a S. erio X S. erio). Some purpurea varieties may produce pollen, but are generally not known to pollinate under field conditions. This limits any spreading in the environment to vegetative. Many NYS watersheds have existing S. erio, and S. pur members present, as well as S. Caprea (pussy willows) and S. cinerea (gray willow) (also "naturalized" in our ecosystems).

- The site implementation/stabilization order for construction is as follows: 5B Site first, then Site 6. The project team will start with those two sites to ensure the best use of the willow available. CCSWCD will communicate with the NYS Department of Transportation regarding site access off of Rt 38 to sites 4 and 5A. Landowner Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for sites access have been drafted, but finalized design elements are required before those MOUs can be signed.

NFWF SOGL Project Update:

- Due to the NYSDEC's latency regarding project permitting, implementation of the OLWMC's Owasco Inlet streambank stabilization project will get underway during the permit window and construction season of 2026.

Relevant NYS Programming:

Newly Delineated Wetlands within the Owasco Lake Watershed Review:
NYSDEC released the new wetland data on January 13, 2025. The regulations implement new statutory requirements under the State's Freshwater Wetlands Act that will safeguard an estimated one million additional acres of wetland habitat. There are 11,910.59 acres (18.6 sq miles) of new delineated wetlands within the Owasco Lake watershed. Combined with the pre-existing National Wetlands Inventory data, there are 13,261.22 acres (20.7 sq miles) of wetlands in the Owasco Lake watershed.

Owasco Lake Impairment Listing Review:

The week of January 13, 2025, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notified the NYSDEC that it is now required to designate Owasco Lake as an impaired water body due to HABs. Read more here: https://www.epa.gov/tmdl/epas-addition-96-waterbodypollutant-combinations-new-york-2020-2022-303d-list

Proposed Ambient Water Quality Guidance Values for Phosphorus Review:

The OLWMC was a signatory on a joint response to the public comment period for the NYSDEC's proposed ambient water quality guidance values for phosphorus. The response requested that NYS take a more aggressive approach towards reducing guidance values for NYS lakes by creating a framework for developing phosphorus standards.

Municipal Projects and Funding Opportunities Review:

- The Village of Moravia has bonded another $15.5 million for the renovation of its wastewater treatment plant, and the cost of the project is now approximately double previous estimates. The Village has a 20-year 0% loan from the state Environmental Facilities Corporation. Approximately $14.2 million will be paid by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision; most of the water treated by the plant comes from Cayuga Correctional Facility. The project is poised to receive another $5.3 million in grants through the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Development Innovation Lab and

the NYSDEC's Water Quality Improvement Project Program. The project's deadline is November 2026. While wastewater treatment is a necessity for any municipality, Davis said that in Moravia it's even more important because the village is located in the Owasco Lake watershed. The NYSDEC believes the improvements will reduce nutrient loading to the Owasco Inlet, which contributes approximately 50% of all the water that discharges into the lake.

NYS Relevant Bills Update:

Harmful algal bloom monitoring and prevention act (S8356/A8867): Reintroduced under the 2025 legislative session, under new print, NYS Senate bill S1833 Enacts the 'Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring and Prevention Act.'

On June 10, 2025 Senate Bill S1833, which enacts the "harmful algal bloom monitoring and prevention act," was been passed by the New York State Senate, delivered to the NYS Assembly, and referred to the Environmental Conservation Committee.

Drinking Water Protection Act (A9069): Enacts the drinking water protection act, relating to the adoption and enforcement of watershed rules and regulations for the purpose of protecting water quality. The purpose of the bill is to strengthen protections for public drinking water supplies by modernizing the framework for watershed rules and regulations, ensuring timely updates, and equipping the NYS Department of Health and water suppliers with clearer tools for prevention, enforcement, and accountability.

Municipality Buy-In Review: 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, and Skaneateles.

Prepared by Adam Effler, September 15, 2025