



## Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council

September 16, 2025, 10:00-11:30 AM Memorial City Hall, Auburn, NY

### Meeting of the Directors

**Owasco** – Ed Wagner, **Cayuga County** – Aileen McNabb -Coleman, **City of Auburn** – Ginny Kent

**Niles** – Joan Jayne, **Locke** – Thane Benson, **Scipio** – Nancy Hart, **Fleming** – Karen VanLiew,

**Town of Moravia** – Terry Palmer, **Village of Moravia** –Chris Fulton,

**Village of Groton** – Theodore Skibinski, **Summerhill** – Charlie Ripley, **Sennett** – Tom Blair,

**Dryden** – Anne Clark, **Lansing** – Joseph Wetmore

**Executive Director**- Adam Effler

- A. Board of Directors – Roll call: Owasco-Ed Wagner, Cayuga County-Aileen McNabb-Coleman, City of Auburn-Ginny Kent, Niles-Joan Jayne, Scipio-Nancy Hart, Fleming-Karen VanLiew, Lansing-Joseph Wetmore, Town of Moravia-Terry Palmer. Ex-officio attendees: Gabriel Yurdon (online), John West (online).
- B. Motion to approve the agenda made by Ginny Kent, seconded by Ed Wagner, motion was unanimously approved. Motion carried.
- C. Approval of Minutes from July 15, 2025, Board Meeting as distributed via email. Motion to approve minutes made by Nancy Hart, seconded by Ed Wagner, motion unanimously approved. Motion carried.
- D. Public to be Heard: None Heard
- E. Director's Summary – Adam Effler (distributed for review prior to meeting) an audio/visual of Dr. Effler's comments can be accessed at <https://www.olwmc.org/news>  
Watershed Rules and Regulations

#### 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 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

#### Update:

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 4<sup>th</sup>. More information can be found here:

<https://atninokawa.wixsite.com/website/sharcs>. Aaron Ninokawa is happy to answer questions at [atninoka@esf.edu](mailto: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](https://apps.usgs.gov/hivis/camera/NY_Owasco_Inlet_below_Aurora_Street_at_Moravia_Downstream)

#### NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2)

No new updates

#### Municipal Codes and Ordinances

No new updates

#### Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Programming:

##### 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:

No new updates

##### 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 (The Nature Conservancy) 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 will 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 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 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.

- F. Board of Directors/Municipality Representatives Feedback: Joan Jayne discussed concerns about a farm and its's nutrient management with potential negative lake effects. Ed Wagner stated the farm is a CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation) that is following established regulations. Dr. Effler discussed set back requirements for nutrient management as required by NYS Ag & Markets for CAFOs.

Dr. Effler presented slides on OLWMC projects (please visit <https://www.olwmc.org/news> to view this update).

- G. Hunting property permissions – Dr. Effler reported that under NYS law if we allow paid hunting on our properties, we lose the protection from liability for accidents although not under our private insurance. Ed Wagner suggested an option to allow hunting for select individual(s) in exchange for property stewardship. The area needs stewardship in the form of keeping trails mowed and open and fallen trees and branches off the trails. The Directors discussed the issue of adequate liability versus keeping trails maintained. Directors requested more information on extent of private insurance liability coverage.
- H. Treasurer's Audit and Finance Report
  - i. July 2025 Financials Approval – Joan Jayne reported as of July 31, 2025: Total Current Assets: \$276,064.76; Total Liability and Equity: \$330,828.74.

- ii. August 2025 Financials Approval – Joan Jayne reported as of August 31, 2025: Total Current Assets: 500,708.67; Total Liability and Equity: \$534,806.44.
  - iii. Motion to approve July 2025 Financials made by Ginny Kent, seconded by Nancy Hart, unanimously approved motion carried. Motion to approve August 2025 Financials made by Ginny Kent, seconded by Aileen McNabb-Coleman, unanimously approved motion carried.
  - iv. Dr. Effler and Ed Wagner discussed Two CD's currently maturing which are not included in financial statements. We have 4 CDs now with one maturing every 3 months to maximize our interest income without compromising our cash flow.
  - I. Lake Level Report – John West reported the lake level at 711.73 ft elevation, maintaining a lower level due to evaporation and lack of rain.
  - J. NYSDEC FL Hub Update – Gabriel Yurdon. Update of DEC Hub information can be accessed at <https://www.olwmc.org/news>
  - K. Owasco Watershed Lake Association Update – Carol Sutkus reported tomorrow night at Springside Inn, OWLA is hosting an in-person meeting for public (8 PM). A buffet dinner is available at Springside from 5-8 PM. Carol announced a new project to clean up drums of cooking oil in conjunction with OLWMC. Funding has been secured for the project. OWLA is continuing to look for funding for special projects.
  - L. Cornell Cooperative Extension Update – Unavailable
  - M. Watershed Inspection Monthly Report – Jesse Lloyd. Audio/visual of inspection report can be accessed at: <https://www.olwmc.org/news> Jesse discussed his availability to assist lakeshore owners with HABS reporting
  - N. Communications: Finger Lakes-Global Aquatic Research will present at the Oct 21, 2025, OLWMC meeting on lake foam. Condolences to the Town of Fleming on the death of Don Oltz who was a previous Director of OLWMC.
- Ginny Kent toured a biodigester out on County House Road. This was built on a farm designed to process agricultural waste but is also geared to process household waste for biogas. It has subsequently been purchased by a commercial company
- Nancy Hart announced the salt shed in Scipio is complete. The finances for the facility have been awarded but not yet received. Nancy shared photos of the shed.
- O. Issues of Concern: None heard
  - P. Next Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday October 21, 2025.
  - Q. Motion to adjourn made by Ed Wagner and seconded by Nancy Hart at 11:26 AM. Vote was unanimous. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 11:27 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Vivian Cunningham