



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

February 21, 2023- Director's Summary

Watershed Rules and Regulations

Project Review:

The Watershed Rules and Regulations (WRR) Workgroup is 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>)

Project Update:

The following details were provided within NYSDOH's project update report (2.21.2023 Monthly Owasco WRR Update for OLWMC final) delivered to the OLWMC Board of Directors, Ex Officio Partners, and engaged members of the public prior to the February 21, 2023 OLWMC public board meeting:

General Update:

The Department continues to engage with State partners and has convened multiple meetings amongst State legal teams. NYSDOH is compiling this feedback on the proposed regulations, which will be combined with feedback received during the technical workgroup meetings. We appreciate the time, attention and patience of all partners involved. NYSDOH will schedule a meeting to reconnect with the State-Local workgroup and the local legal teams soon. A tentative timeline is provided below.

Revised Meeting Schedule:

Additional State Agency Legal Meetings	February/March 2023
Follow up with State-Local workgroup & local legal	March 2023

NYS Tributary Legislation Project Review

Project Review:

An OLWMC endorsed, NYS environmental conservation bill ([A6652/S4162](#)) would protect up to 41,000 miles of New York streams. Class "C" waterways, which are regularly used by people for boating, fishing, and other activities. The new law would offer permit-based protections that are currently provided to waterways with higher classifications. The new law would require the need for permit for certain stream access and project(s) scenarios. On May 24, 2022 the bill passed the Senate and was returned to the Assembly. The bill passed both NYS houses. On December 2, 2022, bill A6652 was delivered to Governor Kathy Hochul and was subsequently vetoed.

Project Update:

S4162 was reintroduced in the 2023 legislative session under a new print number: S1725. A request was made to alter the bill to create an exemption for NYS Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) from having permitting requirements for their work in Class C streams. There has been general opposition to the bill by NYS SWCDs based on the potential for stream restoration project delays due to new permitting requirements for Class C streams. The ultimate goal of the stream protection bill is to protect stream corridors from disturbance, not to complicate the work of SWCDs. Furthermore, the reduction in permitting requirements for conservation groups would help alleviate some of the NYSDEC budgetary/staffing concerns that the Governor indicated as part of her opposition to the bill.

Municipal Codes and Ordinances

Project Review:

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.

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 into the Plan. 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. This collaborative effort identified focused strategies to 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 that will drive watershed protection and remediation projects. The OLWMC will provide a coordination role for future projects and programming according to the recommendations of the 9EP.

The OLWMC's 9EP Project Coordination Committee (via Resolution 03-2022 at its November 15, 2022 public board meeting) will prioritize, coordinate, and facilitate project and programming implementation based on the recommendations of the 9EP. Subsequently, request letters for Committee participation by the OLWMC's Ex Officio partners were delivered and partner commitments were made.

Project Update:

The first 9EP Coordination Committee meeting was held January 24, 2023. The next meeting will be held on March 2, 2023 tracking a new monthly schedule following Cayuga County Water Quality Management Agency meetings. A live tabular spreadsheet was developed for the group to track projects completed, underway, and proposed in the context of the recommendations of the 9EP.

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) have convened 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. Project consultants provided recommendations to Auburn City Council on July 14, 2022. The DWSP2 committee reviewed and edited the draft plan. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and NYSDOH are also reviewing the plan and will provide comments. Barring any changes based on agency feedback, the plan can be finalized. At that point, Auburn City Council will be asked to endorse the plan and name the implementation team. During the last meeting, the committee discussed implementation steps and expressed support desired from consultants and NYSDOH to help maintain momentum.
- The Town of Owasco's application for the DWSP2 was received and reviewed by NYS agencies. A program award to the Town of Owasco from NYS would piggyback on the City of Auburn's plan and extend resources to target continued and more detailed planning, facilitated by the NYS-funded consultants, to coordinate and propose specific projects. The proposed projects and programming would represent the broad recommendations of the overall watershed-based plan.

Project Update:

A refined draft of the City of Auburn's DWSP2 was recently delivered from the contracted consultant to the City of Auburn and circulated among the project committee. The local group awaits final plan approval from NYSDOH and NYSDOH to move forward on plan implementation and associated project(s)proposal(s) development.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Reporting

Project Review:

- Regarding HABs, the NYSDEC encourages the community to “know it, report it, and avoid it.”
- Consistent with previous year, in 2022, the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) led the volunteer HABs surveillance program for Owasco Lake.
- Generally, year over year, observations of HABs are increasing throughout the eastern Finger Lakes Region. Importantly, associated cyanotoxin levels in Owasco Lake’s raw water have been elevated this year from previous years.
- HABs season has ended for 2022, and the NYSDEC’s NYHABS notification page is no longer available for reference. The NYSDEC’s HABs Archive Page is available for reference. During 2022, 198 waterbodies statewide were listed with "Confirmed HABs" NYHABS. Over 1,600 HAB reports were collected by NYSDEC and its partners, and of these, over 1,000 met DEC criteria for a Confirmed HAB. The reports ranged from a single observation to widespread blooms that were persistent throughout the season. HABs may occur on waterbodies throughout the year, although fewer blooms occur as water and air temperatures decrease.

Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach Projects Update

Project Review:

- Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) awareness (and mitigation) project partners decide to provide for new visibility of the OLWMC’s ‘Clean, Drain, Dry’ portable billboard currently positioned at the Emerson Park boat launch. In 2023, staff are planning to target improved visibility at the south end of the watershed by positioning the billboard on a Cayuga County owned pull-off along Route 38. The billboard was relocated from the Emerson Park Boat launch back to its winter location adjacent to the Cayuga County Parks and Trails building.
- The Town of Dryden Conservation Board is considering its recommendation to the Dryden Town Board for the Town to resolve to take the Lake Friendly Living (LFL) Pledge.

Project Update:

- The OLWMC’s February staff feature article with the Citizen newspaper provides an Owasco Lake status update, including findings from Dr. John Halfman’s 2022 annual report.
 - OLWMC staff have committed to monthly feature articles with the Citizen in 2023. Consistent with previous years, articles will target recognition of watershed residents making strides in watershed protection.

Land Holdings

OLWMC Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Review:

- OLWMC closed on the property transfer of the Fillmore Nature Preserve from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on January 10, 2023.

OLWMC Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Update:

- Property signage will be installed with the help of TNC. The associated field trip, scheduled for March 3, 2023, will also accommodate to first annual property inspection, offering an opportunity for insights and recommendations on effective property inspection protocols to meet the OLWMC's annual property inspection commitment.

Consideration of Future Land Holding

- TNC has expressed interest in having the OLWMC own and steward two additional properties poised for acquisition and preservation within the Owasco Lake watershed. These include:
 - 100-acre parcel in Locke, mixed farmland
 - 72-acre parcel in Venice, dense wetland

Partner Projects Review:

- At year-end in 2022, the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) accepted the donation of a conservation easement on 160 acres of farmland from the Post family in the Owasco Lake watershed. The easement provides for the expansion of existing stream buffers. FLLT staff and volunteers will plant native trees and shrubs in these areas later this year.
- FLLT partnered with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to restore several acres of wetlands on a parcel currently owned by the Land Trust that will be transferred to NYSDEC for inclusion in the state's Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area.

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

Project Review:

- The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will be paring down its funding of the Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) in the Finger Lakes Region by nearly half. They will cover the costs of between four and eight samples this year and expect to cover four samples in future program years. Local lake stewards will be responsible for covering the costs and sampling for any additional samples.

Project Update:

- Owasco Lake and watershed monitoring partners prepared a comprehensive monitoring budget that includes costs for 1) a new Owasco Lake monitoring role by the Finger Lakes Institute, Hobart William Smith Colleges, 2) laboratory analysis for watershed tributary samples collected by the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA), 3) continued funding of the USGS gauge station along the Inlet, 4) continuation of the Citizen's Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) and 5) the continuation of Hyfi level sensor use for monitoring water levels within the Owasco Flats constructed retention basins. The Cayuga County Planning Department submitted elements of the program budget to the NYSDEC for approval as part of their 2023 Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA) budget.

Hyfi Watercourse Level Sensors

Project Review:

- OLWMC staff currently maintain 16 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 level monitoring. Hyfi 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 datasets supports the continued use and funding of the more spatially robust watershed sensors.
- OWLA's 2022 sediment and nutrient sampling program, which has elements of both routine and storm event sampling, aligns with watercourse level sensor locations. The project can provide invaluable lake loading information for continued calibration of the SWAT model.
- The two-year pilot project grant period is complete.
- The NYSDEC does not endorse the future use of the level sensors and the development of rating curves to generate tributary flow estimates to be used for future SWAT model calibration. A funding request was made to maintain level sensors within the Owasco Flats, and the remaining sensors are likely to be decommissioned.

Programs, Funding, and Related Opportunities

Opportunities Review:

Distribution of NYS 2022 Environmental Bond Act funding is still being developed. Most likely, the details will be hashed out, refined, and ultimately implemented through the NYS budget. General project goals can be found here: https://cleanwaterandjobs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Bond-Act-funding-by-program_final.pdf

Opportunities Updates:

1. The Sustain Our Great Lakes Program announced the 2023 Request for Proposals.

Their solicitation (in their words) is italicized below:

The Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program is soliciting proposals to benefit fish, wildlife, habitat and water quality in the Great Lakes basin. The program will award up to \$18.7 million in grants in 2023 to improve and enhance: 1) stream, riparian and coastal habitats to benefit species; 2) water quality in the Great Lakes and its tributaries.

In 2023, grant funding will be awarded in six categories:

- *Habitat Restoration to Conserve Species and Improve Water Quality*
- *Green Stormwater Infrastructure in Great Lakes Communities*
- *Expand Green Stormwater Infrastructure in Great Lakes Communities*
- *Invasive Species Control to Protect and Enhance Restored Habitat*
- *Conservation Practices and Regenerative Agriculture on Working Lands*

Project Update:

The OLWMC submitted a SOGL 2023 project pre-proposal that targets funding stream restoration and improvement projects along stream reaches of the Owasco Inlet in the southern municipalities of Moravia and Locke. Prior surveys and monitoring by Cayuga County have identified several locations of streambank erosion and flooding along the proposed reaches. This proposed project serves to address streambank erosion in two main tributaries that encompass 60 percent of the acreage of the lake's watershed and are responsible for approximately 40 percent of phosphorus loading into the lake.

- Total Amount Requested: \$299,640.00
- Matching Contributions Proposed: \$100,360.00

2. The Tributary Assessment and Identification Pilot Project (TAIPP) “pilot” project, which led to the installation of tributary signage in the northern portion of the watershed, provided a starting point to engage the public in tributary protection and education. OLWMC staff plan to expand this initiative, and propose that additional tributary signage be placed within the Town of Moravia, Village of Moravia, and Hamlet of Locke. Consistent with existing signage, new signage will include the name of the sub watershed/tributary flowing at a specific road crossing, as well as “quick response” (QR) scan codes that will link smartphone users to a database with specific biological, physical, and geographical information about each tributary. Emergency contact information will also be included for the public to report noticeable water quality issues at the location. Municipal resolutions and engagement with the NYS Department of Transportation and Cayuga County Highway Department will be required to move the project forward.

3. The DEC deliver their annual solicitation for the ‘Buffer in a Bag’ program. To qualify, landowners must have property in New York State with at least 50 feet bordering a stream, river, or lake, and provide photos or a map of the planting location. Qualifying private and public landowners may apply for a free bag of 25 tree and shrub seedlings for planting near streams, rivers, or lakes to help stabilize banks, protect water quality, combat climate change, and improve wildlife habitat. Visit NYSDEC's website for more information about the Buffer in a Bag application process and requirements. Applications are due by 3 p.m. on April 7, 2023. Contact <mailto:treesfortribs@dec.ny.gov> with questions.

Municipal Funding Opportunities Review

1. The NYSDEC Municipal Zero-emission Vehicle (ZEV) Rebate Program has awarded \$567,500 from the Environmental Protection Fund to municipalities for the purchase or lease of electric light- and medium-duty fleet vehicles. The Municipal ZEV Rebate Program continues to support municipal efforts to mitigate further climate change. Since it began in 2016, the ZEV Rebate Program has awarded over \$1.5 million (including this round) towards the purchase or lease of 114 plug-in hybrid vehicles and 182 all-electric vehicles.
2. Governor Hochul recently announced the new Green Purchasing Communities Program that helps local governments to ensure that the products they are purchasing have a lower environmental impact. Local governments that participate will receive recognition for their commitment to purchasing green products and services through the Climate Smart Communities program. Learn more here: <https://ogs.ny.gov/green-purchasing-communities>

Municipality Buy-In

Project 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, Skaneateles, and Lansing.

Project Update: OLWMC Director, the Village of Groton, is considering appointing a new representative on the Board to support better involvement with our initiatives.

Prepared by Adam Effler, February 17, 2023