Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

September 15, 2026- 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 moved to Albany, challenged 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.

  - 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. The NYSDOH is now required to move forward with the process to update Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations.

- Partnering agencies, including the Cayuga County Planning and Health Departments and the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNYRPDB) collaborated with OLWMC staff to produce a more refined and easier to interpret regulatory watershed map. The criteria are the same; the updated regulatory map uses the same USGS National Hydrologic Data set, as the original map. The dataset was updated on June 22, 2020. The updated map will be available through the OLWMC and OLWIPD websites, and staff are working with Cayuga County to make the map more accessible through their online real property resources.
- 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.

Project Update:

An updated regulatory map concerning rules and regulations for the Owasco Lake watershed is complete. A version of the map is available on the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division website here: https://www.owascoinspection.org/watershed-maps.

The protected watercourse information is also available as a GIS layer through the Cayuga County Planning Department's Environmental Cartography Online (ECO) mapping application at: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a17b3d2deae448759ca018103668eb8b.

Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach Projects

Project Updates:

- The August 21, 2026 OLWMC staff article in the Citizen newspaper, featured 'The effects of residential herbicide, pesticide use.' The upcoming feature article spotlights the updated watershed protected streams map.
- Partnering organizations are planning trails enhancement and reconstruction of a dismantled educational kiosk at a West Lake Road pull-off near the southwest end of Owasco Lake. Project funders are supportive of the project, and project partners plan to meet onsite in the near future to develop a scope of work.
- The Cayuga County Planning Department will be giving a 'StormwaterSmart' Workshop on October 10, 2026 from 10 AM to 11:30 AM in the Island Shelter on Deauville Island at Emerson Park, 6914 E Lake Rd, Auburn, NY 13021.

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 stream corridor 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 stream corridor 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.
- Ducks Unlimited was awarded a $252,436 grant to restore a wetland in the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area near the Town of Moravia. The project is intended provide habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, help mitigate flood impacts downstream and improve water quality.
- The Committee updated the 9E Plan's implementation checklist to track the status of associated programming and projects implementation and developed a 2022-2025 progress report to feature the 9EP projects and programs that have been advanced thus far.

- The 9E Coordination Committee's 2022-2025 progress report is posted on the OLWMC website: https://www.olwmc.org/

Project Update:

- The Owasco 9E (Plan) Coordination Committee is focused on developing stream corridor projects based on recommendations from a recent assessment project for Sucker and Veness Brooks. A subgroup recently convened with a local farmer to discuss associated project recommendations for a targeted reach along their property. The next 9E committee meeting is planned for September 23, 2026.

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

Projects Review:

- The Cayuga County Planning Department developed its 2026 lake and watershed monitoring and implementation priorities in the context of annual Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FLLOWPA) funding. FLLOWPA is a line item in the NYS Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) providing funding year after year. As in 2025, they've included monitoring, data management, and implementation projects for Owasco Lake and its watershed. The following is the 2026 FLLOWPA Work Plan, recently provided by the CC Planning Department:
    - The installation and implementation of BMPs by CCSWCD
    - O&M for the USGS Owasco Inlet Gage
        - 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
    - OWLA Tributary Sampling Program
        - The Cayuga County Planning Department prepared a draft Data Usability Assessment Report (DUAR) and Final Report for the 2025 Owasco Lake Tributary Monitoring Program. The DUAR is approved by the NYSDEC, and the project data and report can be shared among project partners for data analysis and interpretation.
            - Owasco Watershed Data Portal
            - Public outreach and education on invasive species and water quality
            - Stormwater Education Program
            - Aquatic vegetation harvesting
            - Supplies to make AIS boxes for Little Sodus Bay
            - O&M of the boat cleaning station at Emerson Park
            - Support for the septic system inspection program

    - The resolution to fund the Finger Lakes Institute's Owasco Lake monitoring buoy and the update to the data portal was approved by the Cayuga County Legislature in February, 2026.

- On Friday, March 27, 2026 the PFAS-in-foam research project, endorsed by the OLWMC and funded by the Water Resources Institute, was presented by scientists from Binghamton University and Global Aquatic Research LLC.
- On April 13, 2026 the OLWMC hosted an Owasco Lake tributary monitoring program training with the Cayuga County Planning Department and OWLA.

Project Update:

- The biweekly Owasco Lake tributary monitoring program was conducted on August 24, 2026, with collaboration between Cayuga County Planning, OWLA, OLWMC, and SUNY ESF.
    - SUNY ESF students have been assisting partnering professors with the development of infographics to depict water quality trends for parameters measured under the tributary monitoring program.
- SUNY ESF will be getting underway with their Sampling For Healthy Aquatic Resources with Community Support (SHARCS) program that supports student training for analyzing water quality parameters and community engagement on water quality research.

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 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.

- A Drinking Water Source Protection Plan (DWSP2, clean water plan) consultant for the City of Auburn and Town of Owasco plans to advance protection initiatives based on the recommendations of the water purveyors' respective clean water plans.
    - The consultant is requesting NYS funding to support the drinking water purveyors' initiative to develop a model ordinance for adoption by watershed municipalities.
- The 9E Coordination Committee has integrated its involvement with DWSP2 implementation efforts.

Municipal Codes, Ordinances and Projects

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.
    - The OLWMC continues to promote erosion and sediment control ordinance adoption for watershed municipalities.
- The OLWMC provided a letter of support for the Village of Moravia's Engineering Planning Grant for a preliminary infiltration and inflow study concerning their sewer system.
    - The Village needs a comprehensive study of its sewer system's inflow and infiltration (I&I). I&I into the system during wet weather events negatively impacts the Village's ability to efficiently process wastewater at the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP), a concern noted in recent April 2026 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) inspection reports. This excessive I&I contributes to potential overflows in the collection system and the WWTP; increased energy and maintenance associated with treating the added flows; a decrease in excess capacity of the WWTP; the need for oversized equipment and facilities to treat the added flows; and added labor and attention before, during, and after these wet weather events occur. If funded, an Engineering Report will be developed to identify and prioritize a range of engineering solutions to address the I&I concerns apparent throughout the sewer collection system. These solutions will protect the significant investment that the Village and the state have made in updating the WWTP and ensure that the system can properly and effectively serve residents and local institutions.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Programming:

Project Review:

- The following New York Harmful Algal Bloom System (NYHABS) link is available to support NYS HABs monitoring efforts, and archived data is also available: on.ny.gov/nyhabs

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.
- The construction of the kiosk and boot brush station took place in October, 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.
- 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.
- Over the Fall of 2025, stewardship activities continued at the Fillmore Nature Preserve, whereby new stewards have continued to maintain and clear trails under contract. Hunting permissions, stewardship and indemnification contracts were prepared and signed by three individuals for the 2025 hunting season.

<u>Venice Preserve Review:</u>

- 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/
- 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 posted the perimeter of the property with TNC's assistance.
- TNC's $10,000 stewardship grant was delivered to the OLWMC. This grant is a new budgetary line item and will be used to cover project costs, including property closing, boundary signage and liability insurance.
- Venice Nature Preserve closing documents (e.g., title, deed recording, etc.) were finalized and filed at the OLWIPD office.
- Two stewardship hunting agreement contracts have been signed by neighboring landowners, both college students focused on environmental studies.

Venice Preserve Update:

Venice Preserve contracted stewards are planning to build and install approximately 3–4 wood duck boxes in and around the pond area. They have observed several mating pairs of wood ducks that they believe may be resident birds, along with larger numbers of wood ducks moving in and out of the property during migration.

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 has worked 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 focuses on conservation and stewardship efforts to protect Owasco Lake. The proposed program grant has provided 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.
- In 2025, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and TNC 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.
- Camp Casowasco has officially announced its closure. The FLLT is exploring ways to conserve the landmark property and buildings.

Grant Projects, Programs, Funding and Opportunities

Grants and Programs Review:

- New York State announced more than $25.5 million in grants to support 29 water quality and climate resiliency projects in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC's) Region 7. The Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District was awarded the following:
    - $448,000 through WQIP to work with local municipal partners to complete hydroseeding to stabilize road ditches. The program will reduce erosion and improve water quality throughout Cayuga County.
    - $285,200 through WQIP to purchase live edge plow blades, weather sensors, and truck-mounted brine spreaders to reduce excess road salt application county-wide, protecting the water quality of drinking water supplies including Owasco Lake.
- NYS Round 30 Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program Project grants were awarded. Associated projects are intended to support the New York State Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program by funding the implementation of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect natural resources while maintaining the economic viability of New York State's diverse agricultural community.
    - $720,898 was awarded to the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District to work with 11 farms in the Cayuga Lake Watershed (EPF). This project will:
        - Plant 6,385 acres of cover crops and implement 25 acres of wood mulching over 5 years to increase soil water retention through an increase of organic matter and carbon supply and slow the potential for soil erosion and surface runoff into waterways.
        - Prevent an estimated 28,000 tons of soil from entering Owasco Lake, Cayuga Lake, and Seneca River Watersheds.
    - $812,520 was awarded to the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District to work with two farms in the Owasco Lake Watershed (EPF). This project will:
        - Capture and contain nutrient-rich silage leachate flows from bunk silos
        - Implement practices to effectively manage silage leachate and reduce nutrient loading
        - Reuse collected silage leachate for irrigation on pasture fields and establish riparian forest buffers
- OLWMC staff are participating on the Forest Expansion Network Steering Committee, supporting TNC's efforts towards advancing a state-wide reforestation initiative to plant 25 million trees by 2033. The Forest Expansion Network Steering Committee envisions a strategic and effective forest establishment movement in New York state that helps to maximize social and environmental benefits by meeting a range of goals. To help build this movement, the committee will further envision a well-coordinated, adequately supported, and inclusive alliance of partners and leaders that work together to address regional and statewide forest establishment needs at every stage, from funding identification to maintenance. The committee believes that collaboration and coordination will accelerate forest establishment in NYS, elevate a collective voice, and enable more people,

communities, and organizations to benefit from nature-based solutions. 2026 goals include developing a broad and inclusive suite of forest establishment leaders to share views and design collaboration-based strategies in NYS that:

  - Strengthen practitioner capacities to implement forest establishment projects, programs, and initiatives
  - Identify and address barriers to accelerating forest establishment, in all phases, from funding identification to sourcing trees, to ongoing maintenance and monitoring, to landowner outreach.
  - Outline a path for connecting on-the-ground efforts to statewide policies and plans.
- The OLWMC has made required 2026 updates to maintain pre-qualification status within the NYS Statewide Financial System vendor portal in preparedness for future grant proposal(s) submissions.

<u>NFWF SOGL Project Review:</u>

- 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.
- 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 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. 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.
- 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 finalized the list of the species prepared for the willow plantings.
- 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 signed.
- Project partners for the Owasco Inlet streambank stabilization project have finalized final permitting requirements with NYSDEC and US Army Corps of Engineers. The project is listed under the NYSDEC webpage here: https://dec.ny.gov/news/environmental-notice-bulletin/2026-05-27/completed-application/town-of-locke-owasco-lake-watershed-critical-streams-restoration-project
- Under permit requirements, the OLWMC published the project in the local newspaper for public response.

NFWF SOGL Project Update:

The Owasco Inlet streambank stabilization project is underway with implementation by the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District. The district is currently stabilizing one bank for the first construction site, Site 5B.

OWLA Grant Update:

The Owasco Watershed Lake Association funded the OLWMC's new Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (aka, drone), which is used for monitoring watershed conditions and other prospective projects.

Proposed Projects Review:

- The OLWMC provided a 2026 support letter for a proposal being submitted to NFWF Conservation Partners Program by Pollinator Partnership (P2), titled *"Expanding Soil Health and Pollinator Conservation Technical Assistance in the Great Lakes Basin of New York State".*

    - This proposal seeks to increase landowner and producer outreach, engagement, and implementation of Farm Bill programs to help accelerate adoption of conservation practices that promote soil health and support the habitat needs of pollinators and other wildlife in New Yorks's Great Lakes Basin. The proposal envisions that Pollinator Partnership (P2) will provide support to staff for workshops, talks, outreach events, or field days located within the Owasco Lake Watershed where producers could learn more about pollinators and soil health principles. The plan includes informational media about various pollinator-beneficial agricultural practices and potentially other resources to use at such events (e.g., handouts, pamphlets, presentations, etc.), and OLWMC staff would provide feedback in reviewing the resources to ensure they meet the needs of a diverse partner network. Generally, the aim is to provide staff time, resources, and expertise to assist with achieving education and outreach goals, which in turn advances engagement with producers

Proposed Projects Update:

The OLWMC wrote a letter of support for the proposed project submitted by Dr. Richard W. Smith at SUNY Brockport, "The role of P and N containing organic matter in fueling Microcystis blooms in the Finger Lakes." The project proposal is in response to the NYSDEC HABs Research Grant Program. The OLWMC would play an active role in conducting this project, having agreed to use the $5,000 budgeted for the OLWMC as a contractual service for 125 hours of salaried staff time to support this project. Furthermore, the OLWMC would provide an additional amount of staff hours (125 hours) at no additional cost to the project for a match in the amount of $5,000. Staff time would be used to coordinate and train volunteers to sample tributaries in 2027 and 2028. The OLWMC has previously trained volunteers to collect samples for NYS certified water quality analysis of nutrients and solids, as part of an annual Owasco Lake tributaries monitoring program. That program has included monitoring of Dutch Hollow Brook, which will be a target of further investigation under this HABs research project. Additionally, OLWMC staff and volunteers would play a critical role in monitoring and servicing autonomous data collection equipment such as thermistors and data loggers.

Relevant NYS Programming Review:

- 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.

    - The new delineated wetlands and associated regulations were voided. The specific rules that took effect on January 1, 2025—which expanded the DEC's authority to unmapped wetlands and changed classification criteria—are currently invalid. Justice Richard Platkin ruled the NYSDEC failed to comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). The court found the agency did not take a "hard look" at the environmental and land-use impacts of the new rules themselves. The DEC has 30 days from the April 10 notice of entry to file an appeal. If an appeal is filed, an automatic stay would likely allow the DEC to continue enforcing the 2025 regulations while the case proceeds. The ruling creates immediate uncertainty for developers and property owners regarding active permit applications and project planning. By operation of law, the regulatory framework has technically reverted to the rules in place before the 2025 changes. The underlying 2022 Freshwater Wetlands Act amendments passed by the State Legislature were not struck down and remain in effect.

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 over $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. 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 Review:

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. A hearing was held on May 21, 2025, Chaired by Peter Harckham Chair Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, Co-sponsor Senator Rachel May.

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.

The Open Water Data Act (A5254/1211), was vetoed by the Governor on December 19, 2026. The veto simply stated fiscal considerations. Given the environmental importance of this bill, which was passed with a unanimous bipartisan vote in both houses, Assemblymember Anna Kelles and Senator Rachel May, will be prioritizing re-passage of the bill in the 2026 session.

- Currently, NYS inter-agency data is scattered or inaccessible, which weakens the ability to make sound decisions that protect public health, environmental integrity, and economic resilience. This legislation directs key state agencies, including the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Department of Health, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York State Canal Corporation, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, and the Public Service Commission, to collaborate to align New York's water data systems. The bill establishes shared standards, creates a single publicly accessible data platform, incorporates citizen science, coordinates with broader data efforts, and requires a needs assessment to identify critical data and funding gaps for effective long-term water management.

A revised version of the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (A.1749A/ S.1464A) is underway, and lawmakers are working to get it passed before the end of session. This legislation develops a packaging reduction and recycling infrastructure program and shifts the financial burden of managing packaging waste from taxpayers to the producers of packaging, while reducing the amount of packaging and plastic waste produced in New York State by 30%.

A11560 is a comprehensive bill that would establish New York's first statewide regulatory framework for the development of large-scale (hyperscale) data centers. On June 4, 2026, the NY

legislature passed the one-year data center moratorium in NY. Federal representatives Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Sanders introduced legislation that would enact a national AI data center moratorium and allow communities to protect themselves and the environment.

Rather than addressing a single issue, the legislation creates an integrated approach to managing the industry's impacts on energy, water, infrastructure, the environment, public health, ratepayers, workers, taxpayers, and host communities. The bill builds on several previously introduced bills. Rather than simply combining these proposals, A11560 refines, expands, and integrates them into a unified regulatory framework while introducing additional labor and oversight provisions. Overall, A11560 establishes New York's first comprehensive framework for evaluating and regulating hyperscale data center development, helping ensure future projects protect the state's electric grid, water resources, environment, workers, ratepayers, taxpayers, and host communities while providing policymakers with the information needed to make informed decisions as the industry continues to grow.

Major provisions include:

2. Temporary permitting pause: Establishes a one-year pause on DEC permits for new data centers with a projected peak electric demand of 20 megawatts or more while the state evaluates the industry's cumulative impacts and develops long-term regulations. Existing facilities, permit renewals, modifications, and projects already under construction are exempt.
3. Statewide environmental impact study**:** Requires DEC to conduct New York's first comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impacts of large data centers, including electricity demand, grid reliability, water use, wastewater, greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, electronic waste, land use, public health, environmental justice, public subsidies, and infrastructure needs. The study must include public hearings and recommendations for future legislation and regulations.
4. Public participation and clean energy requirements: Requires public hearings before permitting large data centers, public disclosure of key project impacts and financial incentives, statewide energy-efficiency standards, increasing renewable electricity use to at least 90% by 2040 for facilities of 5 megawatts or more, and encourages on-site renewable generation and waste heat recovery.
5. Ratepayer protections: Creates a separate utility customer class for large data centers and requires these facilities—not residential and other utility customers—to pay for the electric, gas, water, and wastewater infrastructure needed to serve them. The bill also authorizes financial guarantees to protect utilities and ratepayers if projects are delayed or abandoned.
6. Host-community benefits: Requires new large data centers and major expansions to invest in community priorities such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, broadband, drinking water infrastructure, pollution reduction, and other locally identified needs through a public planning process, with annual independent audits to ensure commitments are fulfilled.
7. Labor and workforce standards: Requires prevailing wages for construction, participation in registered apprenticeship programs where available, prevailing wage protections for

certain operations and maintenance workers, and the use of domestically produced iron and steel, subject to existing legal exceptions.

NYS Leachate Rulemaking Review:

July 1, 2026, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) published the rulemaking *Treatment and Disposal of Landfill Leachate* (6 NYCRR Parts 360 and 363) in the New York State Register- the agency has announced proposed rules that would make New York the first state in the nation to require treatment of environmental contaminants in leachate at landfills. Leachate is a liquid that forms as water moves through waste at landfills before it is released to the environment. The proposal would strengthen protections for drinking water and reduce long-term risks to public health and the environment. The OLWMC is a member of the New York River Watch Leachate Loophole Coalition and initially signed on to a joint letter requesting that DEC provide a 90-day public comment period upon release of the rule. Then again, signed on to an updated coalition letter requesting an additional 30-day extension to ensure a full and fair review period. The NYSDEC refused the extension request. Remaining concerns have to do with whether the leachate will be treated effectively. Currently, wastewater treatment facilities (WWTFs) are allowed to accept leachate for treatment, and while conventional WWTFs are designed to treat human waste, more advanced treatment may be required to remove leachate contaminants. Written public comments were accepted by DEC through September 9, 2026.

NYS Leachate Rulemaking Update:

The OLWMC, as a letter signatory, joined New York River Watch and Riverkeeper, along with organizations and community groups from across New York State, in calling on the NYSDEC to strengthen its proposed regulations and adopt comprehensive, enforceable protections for human health and the environment. For decades, hundreds of millions of gallons of toxic landfill leachate have been sent to sewage treatment plants across NYS—most without pretreatment—before being discharged into NYS waterways. NYSDEC's proposed regulations are an important first step, yet they are limited in scope. The letter urges NYSDEC to strengthen the proposed regulations by: requiring pretreatment for all landfills collecting leachate, including inactive facilities; requiring treatment of PFAS and other contaminants to the most protective applicable standards; ensuring treatment technologies keep pace with the best available science; preventing toxic contaminants from being transferred from leachate into other waste streams; establishing strong financial, reporting, monitoring, and permit requirements; and ensuring that polluters—not local communities and taxpayers—bear the cost of managing toxic leachate.

Sign-on Letter Update:

The OLWMC signed a public comment letter to the EPA regarding their failure to include microplastics monitoring requirements under the proposed Sixth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR 6 or the Proposed Rule).

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.

Summary Prepared by Adam Effler, September 10, 2026