



## Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

February 16th, 2021, 10:00am – Director’s Summary

### 1. HABs reporting

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) reporting provided by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) for 2020 ended in the last week of October, 2020. According to NYHABs, the NYSDEC’s HAB reporting system, the system’s web link will be unavailable until the 2021 monitoring season begins in May.

### 2. Regulations

- Watershed Rules and Regulations

- After a robust 3-year public process, and final review and approval of the updated Watershed Rules and Regulations via a joint meeting by City of Auburn and Town of Owasco, the regulatory document carried without further review and was delivered to NYS agencies for their review and consideration for approval and adoption. Tompkins County Water Resource Board approved the resolution to endorse the updated WRR transmittal via the county legislature. A great many additional letters of support are being written by local business owners, real estate agencies, and water consumers and delivered to the governor’s office as well as NYS representatives.
- The OLWMC and its partners have arranged several meetings with NYS politicians, including Senators Mannion and Oberacher, and Assemblyman Lemondes, to answer any questions related to updated watershed regulations that are now under review for approval by the New York State Department of Health. Senator Helming has been in contact with the NYSDEC and NYS Agriculture and Markets regarding her support of the revised watershed rules and regulations.

- NYS Level Regulations

- Senator Karckham and Assemblyman Englebright are likely to revisit and bring the Class C tributary protection bill to the NYS Senate and Assembly, respectively. The original version of the bill passed both groups in 2020, but was not signed into law.

- New Municipal-level Regulations Revisited

In September, 2020 OLWMC Directors were provided prepared sediment and erosion control ordinance regulation documents intended to advance stability controls for construction and development activities within their municipality. The intent of these regulations is to protect downstream water quality by reducing land disturbances during construction through the requirement for the implementation of preventive measures. Directors were requested to bring these documents to their municipalities to initiate the discussion and public process for the adoption of new ordinances for their respective municipalities. Feedback from municipal level discussions for adopting new sediment and erosion control ordinances is welcomed.

### 3. Watershed Inspection and Protection Division

- NYSDEC Partnership

The Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD) remains active in the field identifying both land and water perturbations that are in need of restoration measures, as well as recent land use improvements and restoration projects to be recognized. The OLWIPD, NYDEC Region 7, Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) and Cayuga County Department of Health (DOH) staff will be meeting more frequently. These partnering groups now plan to hold twice-annual regulatory meetings. The January 21<sup>st</sup> meeting offered insights into the need for improved communication between watershed municipal planning boards and the OLWIPD. The next meeting is expected to be scheduled for late June or so to compliment the new routine of winter and early summer meetings to ensure good communications and coordination. Broadly, NYSDEC Region 7 is responsible for regulatory enforcement of permitted facilities within the Owasco Lake Watershed including large-scale residential development activities, and the OLWIPD acts as a local enforcement arm according to local watershed rules and regulations.

- Education and Outreach

- The OLWIPD is working on developing watershed information packets for new landowners. These new homeowner packets will include a new resident guidance packet with a 5-page summary of the existing watershed rules and regulations, a brochure to promote better understanding of stormwater, and a magnet with pertinent watershed contact numbers. These outreach materials are planned for distribution to watershed residents in a variety of ways.

- Behavioral Science Training and Recognition Efforts

- OLWMC staff and partners continue to work with the Australian behavioral science consultant Evidn to learn how to best promote voluntary improvements in land use practices by watershed residents. Evidn has been finalizing revisions to provide a new session for watershed leaders, to build upon their strengths to better engage with the watershed community.
- OLWMC staff have scheduled their semi-monthly watershed recognition articles with the Citizen for 2021.

- The OLWMC’s early February recognition article, published with the Citizen on February 12, 2021, spotlighted the advancement of the Hyfi tributary level sensors within the Owasco Lake Watershed.
  - The Finger Lakes Regional LFL committee is coordinating a spring water week public event to increase public awareness about the various watershed concerns and corrective actions taking place across the FL region.
- Signage
  - The (OLWMC) is working closely with the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) to rollout a variety of signage projects in the near term. The purpose of these signage projects is to increase awareness and promote conservation practices to better protect the lake. These organizations are cost-sharing ‘no dumping-drains to lake’ storm drain medallions and ‘lake friendly living’ signs.
    - The Village of Moravia and Town of Sennett both recently approved of the installation of signage, according to the Council’s Lake Friendly Living program. All of the watershed municipalities that have resolved to take the pledge via a resolution, have agreed to attach LFL signage to existing municipal signage to help advance that pledge program. Drew Snell of the OLWIPD is collaborating with municipal highway departments’ staff to identify and map suitable installation locations. Lake Friendly Living is an awareness campaign that piggybacks on a regional LFL effort throughout the entire Finger Lakes Region. Vivian Cunningham, OLWMC Director and representative for the town of Scipio, brought the resolution to the town board on Wednesday, February 10th.
    - We continue to work towards gaining permissions and/or required permits for the advancement of tributary identification and LFL signage throughout the watershed.
  - The OLWMC, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the City of Auburn are discussing developing common source water protection signage for lands acquired by both TNC and the City.

#### OLWMC Lake Friendly Living Pledge

The OLWMC Lake Friendly Living Pledge is fully fledged and operational on the OLWMC website- We ask watershed residents make a difference throughout the watershed by taking the pledge to advance a variety of land and water stewardship practices. This pledge opportunity aligns with a standard design ‘Lake Friendly Living’ logo and consistent messaging used throughout the Finger Lakes Region. Those who take the pledge, and are interested in helping promote this messaging through signage, are being delivered ‘Lake Friendly Living’ lawn signs. We requested the City of Auburn and watershed towns and villages resolve to endorse and take the pledge on behalf of their municipalities. Template resolutions were provided to all OLWMC represented municipalities to support that effort. To date, resolutions to endorse and/or take the LFL pledge from the City of Auburn, the Towns of Fleming, Moravia, Sennett and Owasco, and the Village of Moravia, as well as the Cayuga County Water Quality Management Agency, have

all demonstrated public support for that program. Their resolutions are posted on the OLWMC website. Municipal highway superintendents are collaborating with OLWIPD staff for the attachment of program signage.

The pledge:

*I know my choices can affect water quality for Owasco Lake. I pledge to incorporate 'Lake Friendly Living' practices to reduce my impacts on Owasco Lake. I will adopt these practices that help reduce pollutants and minimize runoff into Owasco Lake:*

*(1) I pledge to refrain from using excessive lawn fertilizers and chemicals to help prevent Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).*

*(2) I will only use limited phosphorus-free fertilizers (as governed by NYS law), applied properly.*

*(3) I will maintain my septic system.*

*(4) I will reduce hazardous wastes and dispose of them properly.*

*(5) I will dispose of prescription drugs properly; I will not flush them.*

*(6) I will maintain my vehicles, water-crafts, and other recreational vehicles to reduce fluid leaks as well as the spread of aquatic invasive species.*

*(7) I will use water wisely.*

*(8) I will not dispose of leaf litter or lawn clippings in waterways or ditches.*

*(9) I will strive to work towards practicing recommended Best Management Practices (BMPs) for land use activities within the Owasco Lake Watershed.*

#### 4. Tributary Level Sensors Installation Project

The OLWMC and its partners are installing tributary level sensors throughout the watershed. These sensors will be useful for monitoring storm surges and may be useful for future model calibrations for lake loading estimates. They present a relatively inexpensive, and temporally and spatially robust, alternative to USGS gauge stations. The partnering group, Hyfi, is finalizing securing permits for remaining installation locations. For the case of New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) sites, the NYSDOT has indicated the need for a separate permit app for each site and required the OLWMC increase insurance coverage to meet the needs of these permits. Progress on the installation of watershed tributary level sensors in partnership with Hyfi, included onsite training at locations in the Owasco Flats; on November 12, 2020, the initial sensors were installed. Subsequently, a formal subcontract was signed for the OLWMC to conduct the remaining installations. The grant subcontract is generating new revenue for the OLWMC. Six tributary sensors have been installed within the watershed thus far; five were installed along the inlet and within the Owasco Flats, and one was installed along Veness Brook. They are all currently reporting data and have captured recent storm event activity. A great many level sensor installations are expected throughout the Owasco Lake Watershed. Initial data outputs from the

sensors are provided in the form of graphical time series showing level changes over time and will be made publicly available.

## 5. Funding Programs, OLWMC Budget, and Finances

- In partnership with the City of Auburn, we are considering leveraging the Great Lakes Commission's (GLC) Conservation Kick program that would offer a small pool of funding for producer-lead watershed conservation projects. Cayuga County Planning has been supportive with the provision of GIS raster data for the GLC priorities analysis.
- The CCSWCD, OLWMC, and City of Auburn are working with NYS Senator Mannion of the 50<sup>th</sup> District (that governs the city) to identify ways the 50<sup>th</sup> district can help with Owasco Lake protection and restoration needs. We are proposing that an additional weed harvester would offer a multifaceted approach that could offer benefits to in lake nutrient removal, the removal of nuisance vegetation for lakeshore owners, and could be a shared tool among local lakes' SWCDs with jurisdiction.
- Cayuga County staff, legislative representatives, and leaders from the Finger Lakes Land Trust are working with the OLWMC to discuss the possibility of funding riparian buffer easements through existing Natural Resource Conservation Service funding programs. Further the NYS Conservation Program recently announced Conservation Partnership Program Grants that might fund such an initiative.
- The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Soil and Nutrient Reduction Program (GLRISNRP) category will be funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in 2021, and the OLWMC will once again plan to submit a nutrient reduction proposal under that category.
- The OLWMC submitted a proposal for a Regional Conservation Partners Program (RCPP) grant to obtain Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) funding through United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2018 Farm Bill. This proposal, in partnership with the CCSWCD and OWLA, requests federal dollars to advance watershed farm planning. The overarching goal is to better fund the CCSWCD's well-established AEM framework for credentialed conservation farm planning. The project is poised to advance the capacity of project partners to implement critical conservation practices within the watershed, reduce the burden on local producers associated with new regulatory requirements, and help protect Owasco Lake. Senator Schumer's and Congressman Katko's offices have prepared letters of endorsement for this project to share directly with their contacts at NRCS.

## 6. Hemlock Trees and the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

Members of OWLA, staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), and other partners are working collaboratively with the OLWMC to coordinate Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) inventorying to be better positioned for insect mitigation funding to help protect Hemlock trees within the Owasco Lake Watershed. Inventorying of the HWA is led by OWLA and started with a focus on ravine areas in the southwest Owasco Lake Watershed. The first onsite survey was held Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, and many additional surveys have followed. OWLA and the

OLWMC will partner on submitting an insect mitigation funding proposal under the appropriate program funding.

#### 7. Spring willow planting

The OLWMC and OWLA are planning a community willow planting project along a watershed riparian corridor in the spring, 2021. The riparian buffer installation will occur along Veness Brook. Both groups will continue to develop the logistics for coordinating this effort over the next couple of months.

#### 8. Support for the CLWIO

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (CLWIO), like the OLWMC, is designed to bring municipalities together within the watershed to preserve and protect our waters. The CLWIO is reviewing its organizational structure. This review is being conducted to gain insight on how the CLWIO can best achieve its goals. The CLWIO is working with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to help with the organizational review. Part of this work involves talking to stakeholders in the watershed. The CLWIO is conducting an interview program to gain insights and recommendations to advance the effectiveness of their organization. OLWMC is offering guidance based on its experience with the IO structure.

#### 9. Future OLWMC Meetings

For the upcoming March 16<sup>th</sup> monthly OLWMC, Brandon Wong of Hyfi will present on the new watershed level sensor technology. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, Dan Welch and Ron Kuck of CCE plan to offer an update presentation on CCE's land management programming, outreach, and education initiatives that help advance the protection of the watershed and Owasco Lake water resources. Their ability to communicate with producers and track status and needs may prove tremendously helpful for both communication and directing CCSWCD for farming planning, and possibly for identifying farms that might be interested in easements opportunities as part of a new farm plan or according to updated WRR requirements for the installation of riparian buffers along stream corridors.

#### 10. Buy-In

- The OLWMC continues to look forward to buy-in 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, and Genoa; we continue to encourage the Board of Directors to reach out to representatives from these towns to elicit municipality buy-in.

**Summary Prepared by Adam Effler, February 12, 2021**