



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

December 16, 2025- Director's Summary

Watershed Rules and Regulations

Project Review:

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

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

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

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

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

watersheds. The new Article 78 lawsuit responds to the NYS Department of Health's recent decision that new rules and regulations are not necessary to protect Owasco Lake drinking water, wherein New York State failed to provide data or information to support its decision to terminate the rulemaking process. The new Article 78 petition, initially filed in the Cayuga County Supreme Court and 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.
- 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

- The OLWMC and OWLA co-tabled again this year at the Cayuga Community College Craft Fair, promoting watershed conservation education and outreach initiatives.
- Camp Casowasco plans to reopen the camp and has engaged with OLWMC staff regarding future watershed education and conservation projects there. They plan to begin hosting guests there again, as early as April 1, 2026.

Nine Element Watershed Plan (9EP)

Project Review:

- Cayuga County received a New York State Department of State grant to implement a high priority recommendation from the 2016 Owasco Lake Watershed Management and Waterfront Revitalization Plan, which was to incorporate the EPA Nine Key Elements. This project was led by the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development and the

consultant on the project was Ecologic, LLC. The Owasco Lake Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus Reduction (9EP) was approved by the New York State Department of State and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/owasco9e.pdf). This Clean Water Plan advances efforts to restore and protect the water quality of Owasco Lake and its watershed. The collaborative effort identified focused strategies to help ensure the lake water supply, aquatic habitat, and recreational uses are protected. The development of the plan focused on understanding and managing phosphorus and sediment inputs from the Owasco Lake watershed to provide for recommendations to drive watershed protection and remediation projects. In 2024, Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) scenarios were modeled for a 20% reduction in phosphorus loading to the lake to simulate the effects of expanded nutrient management Planning Tier 3 or equivalent, restricted applications of fertilizer and manure in areas that abut streams, and the implementation of cover crops. A MEANSS approach was used to estimate relocating septic systems within 100 feet of surface waters.

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

- c. The City of Auburn developed its grant contract with NYS. The city selected an engineering firm for its Owasco Lake HUC 12 stream corridor assessments. This advancement was spotlighted in a Citizen article published on March 22, 2025.
 - d. The 9E committee is considering replicating this project for priority subwatersheds, understanding that stream corridor assessments will provide a pathway for funding related streambank stabilization projects.
- The 9E Coordination Committee is supporting capacity building for local organizations to provide the programming necessary for the watershed agricultural industry to advance best management practice (BMP) implementation at the rate recommended by the NYS approved 9EP. The Committee composed and submitted a proposal for NYS to fund the development of a focused OLWAP that would leverage the existing tiered Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program. Committee members met with NYS Officials on January 25, 2024 to discuss official sponsorship of the proposed program under the NYS 2024 budget.
 - \$500,000 was included within the Senate one house budget for the 9E Coordination Committee’s proposed OLWAP.
 - Ultimately, the OLWAP was not funded within the 2024 NYS budget.
- The Committee updated the 9E Plan’s implementation checklist to track the status of associated programming and projects implementation and developed a 2022-2025 progress report to feature the 9EP projects and programs that have been advanced thus far.
- During the March 26, 2025 9E Coordination Committee meeting, the group engaged with Ducks Unlimited (DU). DU was awarded a \$252,436 grant to restore a wetland in the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area near the Town of Moravia. The project will provide habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, help mitigate flood impacts downstream and improve water quality.
- The 9E Coordination Committee finalized its 2022-2025 progress report. The progress report is posting on the OLWMC website: <https://www.olwmc.org/>

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

Projects Review:

- The Cayuga County Planning Department developed its 2025 lake and watershed monitoring and implementation priorities in the context of annual Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA) funding. As in 2024, they’ve included monitoring, data management, and implementation projects for Owasco Lake and its watershed. FOLLOWPA funds in 2025 are being used for:
 - 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
 - CSLAP for OWLA, Duck Lake Association and Lake Como Association
 - OWLA Tributary Sampling Program

interpretation (which is where the large spatial coverage is important). The project also offered the opportunity for sampling volunteers to visit their local tributaries and gain more information about water quality. Project reports will provide information on how to get involved with water stewardship groups (e.g., OWLA).

- SUNY ESF provided the October 4, 2025 water sampling event to gain a snapshot of water chemistry in the region, spanning the Finger Lakes to Mohawk Valley to Lake Ontario. Thirty Samples were collected from Owasco Lake tributaries. ESF students will analyze total alkalinity, total suspended solids, algal counts, calcium, some nutrients (nitrate, phosphate, sulfate). Additionally, a few samples will characterize microbiology.
- The water quality monitoring buoy was deployed on Owasco Lake for 2025.
 - On September 19, 2025, the Owasco Lake water quality monitoring buoy was pulled from the lake early this year, due to vandalism.
- The Cayuga County Planning Department finalized the data usability assessment report (DUAR) and 2024 tributary monitoring project report, which have been approved by the NYSDEC.
- There have been growing concerns and community outreach regarding lake foam that collects on and near the shoreline. Global Aquatic Research (GAR) plans to sample Owasco Lake foam this year and perform specialized laboratory analysis for emerging lake contaminants, Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).
 - GAR included Owasco, Seneca, Keuka, and Skaneateles Lakes within their Water Resources Institute (WRI) grant submission. They sampled in 2025, whereby one sampling trip to each lake was proposed, and GAR would quantify PFAS concentrations and a few water quality parameters in foam, the surface microlayer, and lake water. The overarching purpose is to understand how PFAS partitions between these phases, which impacts both monitoring and routes of exposure. This will also establish a baseline that partners can build on in future work. A secondary project feature proposed would be to implement in Owasco Lake the foam reporting tool that was developed with the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association ([Canandaigua Lake Foam Survey](#)). This will involve coordinating with and training citizen scientists to use the tool. After sampling and data collection is complete, a stakeholders meeting would be scheduled in Fall/Winter 2025-2026, and representatives from all four lakes (as well as Canandaigua Lake) would be included. The team would use this meeting to consider the impact of the project on management strategies, public outreach, and next steps. The OLWMC provided a letter of support for the collaborative grant proposal.
 - The OLWMC endorsed proposal, *Characterization of PFAS in foam forming on the Finger Lakes*, was selected for funding by the Water Resources Institute (WRI). GAR developed and expanded the ‘foam reporting tool’ in the spring of 2025 with the purpose of compiling more information about the prevalence and timing of foam formation on the Finger Lakes.
 - As part of the WRI grant, GAR sampled four lakes: Keuka, Skaneateles, Seneca, and Owasco, collecting samples from the surface, surface microlayer (top 1mm of the water column), and foam where it was observed. The goal was to look at how PFAS partition between these phases, which is believed to play a large role in their fate and transport in the lakes. In Canandaigua, GAR developed a foam reporting tool that volunteers

have been using since 2019 to submit foam sightings, which has been useful in helping them to determine the different stages of foam formation/fate, its seasonality, and the correct time to sample. Lake associations and volunteers used this foam reporting tool to assist with identification and sampling efforts in 2025; GAR expanded this tool for use on the other four lakes, including Owasco.

- GAR launched a '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.
- The FLOWPA plan for 2026 was submitted mid-July, 2025.
- The Cayuga County Planning Department prepared a draft Data Usability Assessment Report (DUAR) and Final Report for the 2025 Owasco Lake Tributary Monitoring Program. Once the DUAR is approved by the NYSDEC, the project data and report can be shared among project partners for data analysis and interpretation.

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.

Municipal Codes and Ordinances

Project Review:

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

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Programming:

Project Review:

- The New York Harmful Algal Bloom System (NYHABS) link is available to support NYS HABs monitoring efforts. The NYS program url: on.ny.gov/nyhabs
- A new research initiative at SUNY ESF, supported by a \$2 million donation from Sam and Carol Nappi, aims to better understand cause of algal blooms in Skaneateles Lake. This work, led by Dr. Stephen Shaw, Chair of the Environmental Resources Engineering Department, will study both harmful and non-toxic blooms that affect water quality, recreation, and public health in the region. The project will use tools like satellite imaging for daily monitoring, nutrient tracking, and predictive modeling to assess bloom risks. By working with local partners—including government agencies and community organizations—the research team hopes to develop practical strategies to protect lake health across the Finger Lakes; lakes in Cayuga County and beyond, could apply these findings to improve drinking water quality and support recreation using data-driven approaches.
- The 2025 HABs reporting and notification season has ended. The New York Harmful Algal Bloom System (NYHABS) link will be unavailable until the 2026 season begins in May.

Land Holdings

Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Review:

- Fillmore Nature Preserve is a 161-acre property that is critical for protecting water quality in Owasco Lake, which provides drinking water to more than 70% of Cayuga County. A study by The Nature Conservancy ranked the property within the top 10 parcels in the Owasco Lake watershed with the greatest impact on water quality. The land includes diverse forests and approximately 40 acres of freshwater wetlands. It is located near the birthplace of President Millard Fillmore and Fillmore Glen State Park.

- The OLWMC closed on the property transfer from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on January 10, 2023, and established the Fillmore Nature Preserve. Fillmore Nature Preserve property boundary signage was installed by OLWMC staff with the help of TNC on March 8, 2023. The associated field trip accommodated the first annual property inspection to meet the OLWMC's annual property inspection commitment.
- On May 22, 2023, student conservation work at the Fillmore Nature Preserve was one of the activities included as part of Moravia High School 'Moravia Gives Back Day.' Students collected litter along the roadway adjacent to the preserve, pulled invasive species, and identified species to inform a conservation database. Moravia High School students were the first to assess biodiversity at the preserve.
- \$9,117 was approved by the Fred L. Emerson Foundation for the OLWMC, specifically towards implementing the *Fillmore Nature Preserve- Conservation Education Kiosk, Access Lot, and Trail Network* project, as detailed in the OLWMC's project proposal dated September 14, 2023. The grant proposal was funded to create a public access lot and educational kiosk at the nature preserve.
 - The gravel lot provides public access to the land preserve for respectful use of its trails for hiking. The Towns of Moravia and Summerhill hauled gravel to build the public access lot. The Town of Owasco provided labor in-kind for creating the public access lot. The Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) committed \$500 of compost and wildflower seed for the creation of a perennial pollinator wildflower garden adjacent to the lot; the event acted as an OLWMC/OWLA collaborative Lake Friendly Living public event that was held May 25, 2024. The kiosk provides educational information about the land preserve concerning its purpose.
- The OLWMC applied for, and received, program support for the creation and posting of trails within the Fillmore Nature Preserve; a Cornell University program called Design Connect accepted a request for mapping and identifying trails. They offered two project managers who acted as primary project managers along with a team of 5-10 students.
 - Cornell's Design Connect program team held a field trip at the Fillmore Nature Preserve on February 28, 2024 and again on March 16, 2024, to assess the conditions and locations of the existing trail network and gather information for mapping and marking trails. Their team conducted draft mock-ups of color schemes and themes of potential trail signage, and designed panels for the educational kiosk.
 - Cornell's Design Connect worked with the OLWMC on trail map and educational kiosk panel revisions.
- The OLWMC responded to an offer for project support by the Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) and proposed for a plant inventory, including for both terrestrial invasive and sensitive native species, at the Fillmore Nature Preserve. The proposal included a request for plant pictures and blurbs for inclusion on the educational kiosk.
 - The Finger Lakes Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) Crew Assistance Program (CAP) accepted the OLWMC proposal to work on a Fillmore Nature Preserve project this summer. From July 8-10, 2024 PRISM conducted the proposed 'species of interest' inventory at the Fillmore Nature Preserve, focusing on the identification of invasives species that exist there.
 - With the help of CC Planning for the submission of an additional application through PRISM, the OLWMC applied for a 'boot brush station' that was installed with the

educational kiosk to support visitor education and efforts to reduce the spread of invasive species.

- As recorded in the meeting minutes from its August 8, 2024 board meeting, the Town of Owasco formally committed to a mutual aid agreement for assisting with property maintenance, when available, at the preserve.
 - During the weeks of August 5, 2024 and August 12, 2024, Town and OLWMC staff collaborated on clearing trees from the trail networks there.
- On September 25, 2024, the perennial garden installed around the perimeter of the public access lot was overseeded to improve establishment and limit the competition of nuisance weeds. Preserve signage was also installed.
- Construction of the kiosk and boot brush station took place, starting October 15 and was completed on October 17, 2024.
- The Emerson Foundation grant final report was submitted on October 21, 2024.
- The Fillmore Nature Preserve grand opening was held November 7, 2024 with promotional support provided by CC Chamber of Commerce, CC Water Quality Management Agency (WQMA), and the Citizen Newspaper.
- The 2024 Annual Property Inspection Report for the Fillmore Nature Preserve is now complete.
- TNC, NYSDEC, and OLWMC staff convened at the Fillmore Nature Preserve on April 9, 2025 for an opportunity to showcase the preserve to the NYSDEC, as a successful grant implementation towards land preservation and stewardship.
- On May 19, 2025, staff partnered with the CC Planning Department to host Moravia High School students for ‘Moravia Gives Back Day,’ whereby students learned about terrestrial invasive species and assisted with trail maintenance activities.
- Over the Fall of 2025, stewardship activities have 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.

Venice Property Acquisition Review:

- During its March 18, 2025 meeting, according to Resolution 01-2025, the OLWMC agreed to accept from TNC the transfer of a 72-acre parcel in Venice for the purposes of ownership and long-term stewardship.
 - The Galbato Law Firm supported the property closing, having tracked down the original abstract to summarize the title’s history.
 - The 99-megawatt Agricola wind project in Scipio and Venice, by Liberty Renewables, is adjacent to the Venice property the OLWMC plans to acquire. More info is available here <https://www.liberty-renewables.com/projects/agricola-wind/>
- The OLWMC closed on the Venice property acquisition on July 23, 2025. A property tax exemption was filed with the Town of Venice. Staff and project partners have developed property boundary signage and are scheduling posting the perimeter of the property with TNC’s assistance.

- TNC's \$10,000 stewardship grant was delivered, and the associated check was deposited into the OLWMC checking account. This grant is a new budgetary line item and will be used to cover project costs, including property closing, boundary signage and liability insurance.
- Boundary posting signage was designed and produced.

Venice Property Acquisition Update:

OLWMC staff have completed boundary signage posting at the Venice Nature Preserve and have made introductions with an adjacent property steward.

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.

Grant Projects and Funding

Grant Proposal Update:

The OLWMC is collaborating among partners to develop a grant proposal under Cornell's Water Resources Institute's recent RFP with SUNY ESF spearheading the proposal submission. We're proposing integration of real-time sensor arrays with the Owasco Watershed Lake Association's volunteer monitoring program. By pairing continuous sensor data with the existing monitoring program, this project will allow us to better respond to storm events while strengthening the scientific foundation for watershed management. Pairing discharge and constituent concentration data will allow project partners to calculate both nutrient and solids loads to Owasco Lake from prominent tributaries. Constituent loading information will be useful for updating the Soil and Water Assessment Tool that is used for spatially prioritizing recommendations within the Owasco

Lake Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus Reduction. Recommendations within this clean water plan inform watershed management decisions and implementation projects.

NFWF SOGL Project Review:

- A National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) funding proposal was developed in partnership with CCSWCD and EA Engineering, targeting streambank stabilization along the Owasco Inlet. Proposed project partners also included the Cayuga County Planning Department, the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA), and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Based on a successful pre-proposal the OLWMC submitted a full project proposal for Owasco Inlet streambank restoration project sites between Booth Hill Road and Cat Path Road in the Town of Locke. Landowners who reside along the targeted reaches have expressed concern about severe streambank erosion in those areas.
 - Total Amount Requested: \$299,640.00
 - Matching Contributions Proposed: \$100,360.00
- The OLWMC was awarded \$457,839.92 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program for the *Owasco Lake Watershed Critical Streams Restoration Project*.
- In February, 2024 CCSWCD delivered mailers to the landowners who have adjacent properties along our targeted reach of the Owasco Inlet.
- EA Engineering and CCSWCD conducted a March 25, 2024 field trip to record baseline conditions, channel types, and to evaluate parcel access. CCSWCD and EA staff spoke with adjacent landowners and discussed survey needs for project modeling and design.
- EA Engineering held a field visit on April 9, 2024 (Task 2) when they collected site data, conducted a drone flyover, and identified plant/aquatic species as observed. The project team identified a laboratory to run project soil samples.
- EA Engineering, navigated the environmental permitting process and design, in preparation for project implementation during the 2025 field season. They completed drafts of the NEPA, ESA, and NHPA compliance forms and submitted them to the NFWF.
- EA Engineering developed a computer-aided design (CAD) model for the project. Additionally, they started utilizing a hydrologic model to estimate flow conditions that will inform their project designs. The one-dimensional model utilizes geometry and flow inputs (i.e., using historic USGS gauge data) and will output velocities and water surface elevations. This information is helping the engineering firm recommend materials and placements to the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD), which is contracted for project implementation.
- The project team met on August 9, 2024 to review preliminary design recommendations. EA Engineering screened the stabilization alternatives for Sites 1-6. Each site has stationed cross-sections where the channel velocities and shear stresses were calculated for the 2-year and 100-year flow events.
- Of the alternatives where the permissible shear stress/velocity is within an acceptable range, CCSWCD informed the designers of which bioengineering alternatives they would like EA Engineering to focus on incorporating into the design. In response, CCSWCD shared a variety

of nature-based stabilization techniques that they recommend and are comfortable using for streambank stabilization projects.

- The project team received regulatory approvals from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to submit for project reimbursements and, ultimately, get underway with construction.
- An additional project update report was submitted, as required, to the NFWF on November 11, 2024.
- EA Engineering developed the required NYSDEC and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) project permit application package, which includes the Nationwide Permit 13, 27 and 401 water quality certifications.
- The existing conditions and 60% design set is complete and was submitted to CCSWCD and OLWMC staff in December of 2024 for review. Designers adapted to site-specific constraints.
- The project team was on track to start to implement the streambank restoration project in the summer of 2025, following construction permitting restrictions due to trout spawning in the spring. The OLWMC requested a grant extension from the originally proposed deadline of fall 2025, to a new deadline of fall 2026. The extension is necessary for project completion due to project schedule delays associated with NYS agency permitting. The OLWMC's request for a grant extension was approved, allowing the project team to complete remaining implementation features in the 2026 calendar year.
- Based on the NYSDEC and USACE Jurisdictional Agreement/Framework (JAF) for reviewing the project permit application package, the NYSDEC questioned onsite knotweed management/ procedures and are requiring CCSWCD photos of the sites in their current conditions to satisfy the NYSDEC reviewer comments. Project partners have finalized the list of the species prepared for the willow plantings. The willow cuttings that SUNY ESF will be providing will be from the families of **Salix eriocephala** (native to North America and **Salix purpurea**, considered naturalized, being introduced to North America primarily for basket weaving, but has become a natural complement to many of our Northern ecosystems). Also, a few **Salix caprea hybrid** (North American hybrid pussy willow variety, male sterile, so no seeds produced) will be used. These are individual family members (or crosses such as a *S. erio* X *S. erio*). Some *purpurea* varieties may produce pollen, but are generally not known to pollinate under field conditions. This limits any spreading in the environment to vegetative. Many NYS watersheds have existing *S. erio*, and *S. pur* members present, as well as *S. Caprea* (pussy willows) and *S. cinerea* (gray willow) (also "naturalized" in our ecosystems).
- The site implementation/stabilization order for construction is as follows: 5B Site first, then Site 6. The project team will start with those two sites to ensure the best use of the willow available. CCSWCD will communicate with the NYS Department of Transportation regarding site access off of Rt 38 to sites 4 and 5A. Landowner Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for sites access have been drafted, but finalized design elements are required before those MOUs can be signed.
- 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.

NFWF SOGL Project Update:

The OLWMC's Owasco Inlet streambank stabilization project will be implemented by the CCSWCD next year. Ninety-five percent design drawing that reflect permitting requirements for NYSDEC and the Army Corps of Engineers were submitted to those agencies on December 8, 2025 for their review.

Relevant NYS Programming Review:

- The OLWMC has made required updates to maintain pre-qualification status within the NYS Statewide Financial System vendor portal in preparedness for future grant proposal(s) submissions.
- 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

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 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 been passed by the New York State Senate, delivered to the NYS Assembly, and referred to the Environmental Conservation Committee.

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

Municipality Buy-In Review: The OLWMC continues to encourage participation and directorship from the remaining towns within the watershed that have yet to join to help direct project initiatives. They include the Towns of Venice, Sempronius, Groton, Genoa, and Skaneateles.

Prepared by Adam Effler, December 13, 2025