



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

April 18, 2023- Director's Summary

Watershed Rules and Regulations

Project Review:

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

Project Update:

The project Workgroup will convene on May 2, 2023 to continue discussing the community consensus updated WRR. The following details were provided within NYSDOH's project update report (4.18.23 Monthly Owasco WRR Update for OLWMC) delivered to the OLWMC Board of Directors, Ex Officio Partners, and engaged members of the public prior to the April 18, 2023 OLWMC public board meeting:

General Update:

NYSDOH convened weekly interagency agency meetings to review the proposed regulations, compile feedback and discuss watershed-wide strategies to help meet water quality goals. NYSDOH's Division of Legal affairs completed its review of the proposed watershed rules & regulations and coordinated reviews with legal staff from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and NYS Agriculture & Markets. State staff are looking forward to gathering in-person on May 2 with the technical committee.

Tentative Schedule:

Additional State Agency Legal Meetings	April 2023
Legal meeting with City of Auburn	April 2023
Follow up with State-Local workgroup	May 2, 2023
Make final revisions to regulations	Sept 2023
Begin State Amendment Process	Oct 2023

NYS Tributary Legislation Project Review

Project Review:

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

S4162 was reintroduced in the 2023 legislative session under a new print number: S1725. There has been general opposition to the bill by NYS Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) based on the potential for stream restoration project delays due to new permitting requirements for Class C streams.

The NYS Senate, at the insistence of Environment Chairman Pete Harckham, has included protections for Class C streams in their budget. Governor Hochul vetoed regulating class C streams in December, 2022 with a veto memo arguing the bill belonged in the budget with monetary resources for implementation. The version included in the Senate's "one-house" budget modifies the bill to exempt Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) from permitting requirements, if they have an MOU with the NYSDEC outlining appropriate stream protection measures. The ultimate goal of the stream protection bill is to protect stream corridors from disturbance, not to complicate the work of SWCDs. Furthermore, the reduction in permitting requirements for SWCDs would help alleviate some of the NYSDEC budgetary/staffing concerns that the Governor indicated as part of her opposition to the bill. Importantly, the bill now includes \$1 million in implementation funds to cover staff hires to implement.

Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach Projects Updates

- The annual Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division Annual Report for 2022 is nearly complete. The report will be printed in the form of a brochure and delivered to municipal offices for further public distribution. A digital version of the report will be made available to municipalities that wish to feature the report on their website. Staff will provide an associated update to Auburn City Council on May 11, 2023.
- OLWMC staff have provided for new visibility of the OLWMC's 'Clean, Drain, Dry' portable boat stewardship billboard, which is now positioned at a Cayuga County owned pull-off along Route 38. The billboard will be relocated at the Emerson Park Boat launch over the summer.
- Published feature articles with the Citizen newspaper continue to target recognition of watershed residents making strides in watershed protection. The OLWMC's feature article with the Citizen for April features lakeshore residents using proper erosion controls on construction projects. The May article will feature collaborative efforts towards ditch remediation along Ensenore Road.

- The Owasco Lake watershed’s 2023 Lake Friendly Living (LFL) event will be a raingarden expansion project held at Emerson Park on May 20, 2023 from 10AM-2PM. Volunteers are encouraged to participate. Wegmans Food Markets will sponsor the cost of lunch for volunteers at the event. LFL Coalition partners are assisting with the preparation of event flyers for the rain garden event as well as other action events that will be held across the Finger Lakes Region. A request was made for a NYS legislative resolution to commemorate the LFL Coalition again in 2023.

Nine Element Watershed Plan (9EP)

Project Review:

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

The Owasco Lake Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus Reduction (9EP) was approved by the New York State Department of State and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/owasco9e.pdf). This Clean Water Plan advances efforts to restore and protect the water quality of Owasco Lake and its watershed. This collaborative effort identified focused strategies to ensure the lake water supply, aquatic habitat, and recreational uses are protected.

The development of the plan focused on understanding and managing phosphorus and sediment inputs from the Owasco Lake watershed to provide for recommendations that will drive watershed protection and remediation projects. The OLWMC will provide a coordination role for future projects and programming according to the recommendations of the 9EP.

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

Project Update:

The Owasco Lake 9E watershed plan Coordination Committee, charged with coordinating and funding implementation of the 9EP, discussed its 2023 work plan at its most recent March 30, 2023 meeting. The Committee will continue to convene on a monthly basis with the next meeting scheduled for April 27, 2023.

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

Project Review:

- The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will be paring down its funding of the Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) in the Finger Lakes Region by nearly half. They will cover the costs of between four and eight samples this year and expect to cover four samples in future program years. Local lake stewards will be responsible for covering the costs and sampling for any additional samples.
- Owasco Lake and watershed monitoring partners prepared a comprehensive monitoring budget that includes costs for 1) a new Owasco Lake monitoring role by the Finger Lakes Institute, Hobart William Smith Colleges, 2) laboratory analysis for watershed tributary samples collected by the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA), 3) continued funding of the USGS gauge station along the Inlet, 4) continuation of the Citizen's Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) and 5) the continuation of Hyfi level sensor use for monitoring water levels within the Owasco Flats constructed retention basins. The Cayuga County Planning Department submitted elements of the program budget to the NYSDEC for approval as part of their 2023 Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA) budget.

Project Update:

- The Cayuga County Planning Department and Owasco Lake and watershed water quality monitoring partners are finalizing a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) for submittal to the NYSDEC that will reflect monitoring logistics for the 2023 field season.

NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2)

Project Review:

- Consultants for the City of Auburn's NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2) have convened with City of Auburn water resource managers and partners to identify potential sources of Owasco Lake water quality contamination and provide recommendations for resource protection. Project consultants provided recommendations to Auburn City Council on July 14, 2022. The DWSP2 committee reviewed and edited the draft plan. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and NYSDOH are also reviewing the plan and will provide comments. Barring any changes based on agency feedback, the plan can be finalized. At that point, Auburn City Council will be asked to endorse the plan and name the implementation team. During the last meeting, the committee discussed implementation steps and expressed support desired from consultants and NYSDEC/NYSDOH to help maintain momentum.
- The Town of Owasco's application for the DWSP2 was received and reviewed by NYS agencies. A program award to the Town of Owasco from NYS would piggyback on the City of Auburn's plan and extend resources to target continued and more detailed planning, facilitated by the NYS-funded consultants, to coordinate and propose specific projects. The

proposed projects and programming would represent the broad recommendations of the overall watershed-based plan.

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

Municipal Codes and Ordinances

Project Review:

The Village of Moravia adopted the Sediment and Erosion Control Plan, and associated Appendix E, prepared and proposed by the OLWMC for advancing municipal control requirements for new construction activities.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Reporting

Project Review:

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

Land Holdings

Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Review:

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

Opportunities:

- TNC has expressed interest in having the OLWMC own and steward two additional properties poised for acquisition and preservation within the Owasco Lake watershed. These include:

- 100-acre parcel in Locke, mixed farmland
- 72-acre parcel in Venice, dense wetland

Hyfi Watercourse Level Sensors Project Review:

- OLWMC staff currently maintain 16 watercourse level sensors throughout the watershed, targeting locations that align with modeling sites for the Nine Key Element (9E) watershed plan's Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) model. The sensors are used for guiding flood and asset management, as well as for level monitoring. Hyfi completed their development of correlation and regression analysis for the relationships between the watercourse level sensors and conventional USGS stream gauging. A highly significant relationship between long-term datasets supports the continued use and funding of the more spatially robust watershed sensors.
- OWLA's 2022 sediment and nutrient sampling program, which has elements of both routine and storm event sampling, aligns with watercourse level sensor locations. The project can provide invaluable lake loading information for continued calibration of the SWAT model.
- The two-year pilot project grant period is complete.
- The NYSDEC does not support the future use of the level sensors and the development of rating curves to generate tributary flow estimates to be used for future SWAT model calibration. A funding request was made to maintain level sensors within the Owasco Flats, and the remaining sensors are likely to be decommissioned.
- OLWMC staff will uninstall and return Hyfi tributary level sensors except for funded sensors positioned within the Owasco Flats.

Programs, Funding, and Related Opportunities

SOGL

Project Review:

The OLWMC submitted a Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) 2023 project pre-proposal that targets funding stream restoration and improvement projects along stream reaches of the Owasco Inlet in the southern municipalities of Moravia and Locke. Prior surveys and monitoring by Cayuga County have identified several locations of streambank erosion and flooding along the proposed reaches. This proposed project serves to address streambank erosion in two main tributaries that encompass 60 percent of the acreage of the lake's watershed and are responsible for approximately 40 percent of phosphorus loading into the lake. This proposed project is in conjunction with the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District, with project monitoring that ties into tributary monitoring plans by the Owasco Watershed Lake Association.

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

Project Update:

A Sustain Our Great Lakes funding proposal is being developed in partnership with Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) and EA Consulting, targeting stream restoration along the Owasco Inlet. Based on a successful pre-proposal we were invited to submit a full project proposal.

The CCSWCD is collecting photos of potential project sites between Booth Hill Road and Cat Path Road in the Town of Locke. Landowners in that reach along the Owasco Inlet have expressed concern about severe streambank erosion in those areas.

TAIP

Project Review:

The Tributary Assessment and Identification Pilot Project (TAIPP) “pilot” project, which led to the installation of tributary signage in the northern portion of the watershed, provided a starting point to engage the public for tributary protection and education. OLWMC staff plan to expand this initiative, and propose that additional tributary signage be placed within the Town of Moravia, Village of Moravia, and Town of Locke. Consistent with existing signage, new signage will include the name of the sub watershed/tributary flowing at a specific road crossing, as well as “quick response” (QR) scan codes that will link smartphone users to the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division’s project webpage. Emergency contact information will also be included for the public to report observed water quality issues at the location. Municipal resolutions and engagement with the NYS Department of Transportation and Cayuga County Highway Department are underway. OLWMC staff are finalizing planning and approvals for the expansion of tributary identification signage in the southern portion of the Owasco Lake watershed.

Municipality Buy-In

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

Prepared by Adam Effler, April 14, 2023