



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council
March 19, 2024, 10:00-11:30 AM –Minutes

Meeting of the Directors

Owasco – Ed Wagner, **Cayuga County** – Aileen McNabb -Coleman, **City of Auburn** – Ginny Kent
Niles – Joan Jayne, **Locke** – Thane Benson, **Scipio** – Nancy Hart, **Fleming** – Karen VanLiew,
Town of Moravia – Terry Palmer, **Village of Moravia** – TBD (Chris Fulton Supervisor),
Village of Groton – Theodore Skibinski, **Summerhill** – Charlie Ripley, **Sennett** – Tom Blair,
Dryden – Anne Clark
Executive Director- Adam Effler

Presiding: Dr. Adam Effler: Welcome to Nancy Hart, Director from Scipio.

- A. Board of Directors – Roll call: City of Auburn-Ginny Kent, Niles-Joan Jayne, Scipio-Nancy Hart, Fleming-Karen VanLiew, Town of Moravia-Terry Palmer, Dryden-Anne Clark (online) Ex Officio attendees: John West (online), Ann Robson, Tony Prestigiaco, Frank Clarke, Joseph Decker, Abigail Hai, Lisa Cleckner (online), Ani Fish, Michelle Wunderlich, Carol Sutkus.
- B. Approval of the Agenda: Motion to approve made by Ginny Kent seconded by Joan Jayne. Unanimous vote, motion carried.
- C. Approval of Minutes from the February 20, 2024, Board Meeting: Motion to approve made by Ginny Kent seconded by Joan Jayne. Unanimous vote, motion carried.
- D. Public to be Heard: None heard.
- E. Director’s Summary – Adam Effler (distributed for review prior to meeting), An audio and video of this presentation may be accessed at <https://www.olwmc.org/news>

Watershed Rules and Regulations

Project Review:

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 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.

NYS Tributary Legislation Project Review

Project Review:

On November 17, 2023, the NYS Senate Bill (S1725A), which would have added Class C streams to the list of protected streams, was vetoed by Governor Hochul.

Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach Projects Update

The OLWMC's staff feature article published with the Citizen on March 8, 2024 spotlighted Sunnyside Farms' strides in conservation agriculture. OLWMC staff will continue spotlighting watershed protection efforts, including residents and programs making positive strides in watershed protection.

OLWMC staff are developing the 2023 annual report, which highlights both statistics and outcomes concerning watershed inspections, as well as OLWMC driven projects. Plan to distribute throughout localities.

Nine Element Watershed Plan (9EP)

Project Review:

- The following grant proposals were submitted in response to NYS grant program solicitations in the summer of 2023, and target 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.
2. The Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District submitted two proposals in response to the first round of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Finger Lakes Watershed Grants Program. Their proposals targeted advancing stream corridor assessments of Dutch Hollow and Sucker Brooks.
3. In further response to the Watershed Grants Program solicitation, the OLWMC submitted a funding request to place 2024-2025 watershed tributary sampling, analysis, and results display under management of Community Science Institute (CSI) located in Ithaca.

- The 9E Coordination Committee is focused on 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 finalized its proposal for NYS to fund the development of a focused

OLWAP that would leverage the existing tiered 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. The 9E Coordination Committee plans to continue holding monthly meetings in 2024 to drive implementation of the 9EP with the next meeting scheduled for February 28, 2024.

Project Update:

- \$500,000 was included within the Senate one house budget for the 9E Coordination Committee's proposed OLWAP. The program baseline funding, yet to gain full approval within the greater NYS budget, would be used to get the program underway while the Committee continues to seek additional funding for sustaining the program over the long term.

- The City of Auburn’s NYS non-point non-agricultural planning grant proposal was awarded funding at \$75,000.

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

2023 Projects Review:

- Cayuga County’s comprehensive monitoring budget for 2023 included, but was not limited to, 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 and water quality monitoring project partners adhered to a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) that reflects monitoring logistics for the 2023 field season.
- The Cayuga County Planning Department has completed, and had approved, its data usability report for the tributary monitoring data collected by OWLA for 2023. Those data are now available for use to calibrate the 9EP SWAT or otherwise.
- Owasco Lake *in situ* water quality monitoring (buoy) data is available online here: <https://www.olwmc.org/news>

Project Update:

The Cayuga County Planning Department is developing 2024 lake and watershed monitoring and implementation priorities in the context of annual Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA) funding. There overall 2024 workplan, approved by the NYSDEC, described monitoring the tributaries in the Owasco Lake Watershed to collect data that can be used for updating the 9EP SWAT for Owasco Lake. Two of the SWAT sampling sites are also being used to collect baseline data for the OLWMC’s “Owasco Lake Watershed Critical Streams Restoration Project” funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program. The Department is preparing a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) accordingly.

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 local group awaits final plan approval from NYSDEC and NYSDOH to move forward on plan implementation and associated project(s) proposal(s) development. 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.
- The Town of Owasco received consultant support through NYS to develop its DWSP2. The sixth Town of Owasco DWSP2 group meeting held on October 12, 2023 hosted a final review and discussion among local partners involved in development of the proposed plan. The consultants

involved in the project have finalized and delivered the plan to NYS agencies for their review and approval.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Programming Review:

A summary of HABs reported during 2023 is available in the archive section of the Harmful Algal Blooms webpage.

Programming Update

Funding for HABs monitoring, to provide for strategic science and data collection, was included within the 2024 NYS one-house budget.

Land Holdings

Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Review:

Project Update:

Cornell's Design Connect program team held a field trip at the Fillmore Nature Preserve on February 28 and again on March 16, 2024 to continue to assess the conditions and locations of the existing trail network and gather information for mapping and marking trails. Their team will conduct draft mockups of color schemes and themes of potential trail signage. They will present the project to the OLWMC Board of Directors during the April 16, 2024 Board Meeting.

Other Potential OLWMC Acquisitions Review:

- 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:
 - 1.72-acre parcel in Venice, dense wetland
 - 2.100-acre parcel in Groton, mixed farmland
- On October 4, 2023, OLWMC staff and Board Chair, Ed Wagner, visited the Groton parcel to evaluate the property and prompt discussions about the OLWMC taking ownership of the property at some point in the future.

TNC will present these acquisitions to the OLWMC Board for ownership and stewardship consideration.

Additional Partner Land Acquisitions Updates:

- 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 FLLT, in its recent testimony to the Joint Legislative Committee on Environmental Conservation, explained that New York land trusts are currently holding over 100,000 acres of land that was acquired upon the request of the state, with a market value of over \$150 million. This backlog is largely due to two issues:

1. The lack of adequate staffing at the Real Property Bureau and the Office of General

Counsel at DEC and within the Real Property Bureau at the Office of the Attorney General;

2. NYS's current approach to property title review involves a higher standard than is typical in the private sector and does not include the acceptance of title insurance to resolve title issues.

Projects and Funding

Tributary Assessment and Identification Project (TAIP)

Project Review:

The Tributary Adoption and Identification Pilot Project (TAIPP) “pilot” project involved the installation of tributary signage in the northern portion of the watershed and effectively engaged the public for tributary protection and education. The OLWMC expanded this initiative with additional tributary signage installed within the Town of Moravia, Village of Moravia, and Town of Locke. The purpose of this collaborative project is to increase public awareness of watershed watercourses and provide easily accessible contact information for members of the public to engage with the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division to communicate watershed concerns. Consistent with existing signage, new signage includes 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. The Cayuga County Planning Department designed the accompanying watershed map, in-kind. The grant funding requested covered the material costs of the project; the SW Metcalf Foundation granted the OLWMC \$4,100. TAIP signage was designed and produced, and project materials were purchased and delivered. The Cayuga County Highway Department, in-kind, spearheaded the installation of the tributary identification signage during the month of November, 2023.

SOGL Project:

SOGL Project Update:

In February 2024 CCSWCD delivered mailers to the landowners who have adjacent properties along our targeted reach of the Owasco Inlet, and CCSWCD has gained approval from four out of five thus far. If possible, CCSWCD plans to have site seven surveyed, permitted and designed by August 1, 2024 with the goal of having construction underway this year. CCSWCD and EA Engineering are coordinating to schedule a site visit and initial survey as early as Wednesday, March 20, 2024. Lastly, EA Engineering has completed drafts of the NEPA, ESA, and NHPA compliance forms and has submitted them to the NFWF.

Invasive Species Job Opportunities:

The Finger Lakes Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) and Finger Lakes Institute (FLI) have announced the 2024 recruitment process launched this past week for regional watercraft inspection stewards and aquatic invasive species technicians. There will be employment opportunities for both aquatic and terrestrial stewards. Please find PRISM watercraft steward job opportunities here: <https://www.hws.edu/offices/hr/employment/summer.aspx>

Pertinent Federal and NYS Programming and Grant Opportunities:

- a. NYSDEC released new Environmental Bond Act Draft Eligibility Guidelines for the

Climate Smart Communities Grant Program. Find more information online:

<https://www.ny.gov/programs/clean-water-clean-air-and-green-jobs-environmental-bond-act>

b. Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program is Accepting Proposals: The Great Lakes Commission has issued a request for proposals for the 2024 Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program. For over 30 years, this program has enabled partners in the Great Lakes basin implement projects to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment entering the Great Lakes. This includes over \$2 million awarded to entities in New York State between 2016 and 2022. Through the program, nonfederal units of government, Indigenous Nations, and incorporated nonprofit organizations are eligible to receive grants for up to \$300,000, supporting work over a period of up to four years. Applicants are invited to submit proposals for activities associated with one of the following project types: agricultural nonpoint, or shoreline and streambanks. Applications are due at **5:00 pm ET on April 29, 2024**.

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.

- F. Board of Directors/Municipality Representatives Feedback: Dr. Effler reiterated that he is available to assist communities with grant writing for environmental funding such as ‘climate smart communities’ applications.
- G. Treasurer’s Audit and Finance Report. February 2024 Financials Approval – Joan Jayne. Joan reported that as of February 29, 2024 Total current assets were \$332,301.03 and Total Liabilities and Equity \$397,724.03 Motion to approve made by Ginny Kent and seconded by Nancy Hart. Unanimous vote, motion carried.
 - i. Working on proforma for budgeting forecast for the next few years. An annual financial audit has been requested.
 - ii. Plan to renew the \$100,000 CD for one year at 5% interest.
- H. Lake Level Report – John West- getting close to the expected lake level for this time of year at 712.5. Keeping close eye on weather.
- I. NYSDEC FL Hub Update- Tony Prestigiacomio- no update available but Dr. Effler works with the Hub to maintain good communication and working relationships.
- J. The Nature Conservancy Update – Olivia Green-unavailable
- K. Owasco Watershed Lake Association Update – Carol Sutkus, president -elect of OLWA reported the Brower scientific symposium was a success. April 3,2024 volunteers going into Auburn School district to educate children on being good stewards of the lake. Monthly BOD meeting on zoom but are hoping to go back to in-person meetings throughout watershed. May meeting will be at restaurant at Cascade. June 26, 2024 ‘Business after 5’ at the Yacht club will host an OLWA meeting.
- L. Cornell Cooperative Extension Update – no update available.
- M. Watershed Inspection Monthly Report –Joseph Decker. An audio and video of this presentation may be accessed at <https://www.olwmc.org/news>
- N. Communications: At the April Director’s Meeting Cornell Design Connect will report on their project at the Filmore nature preserve. July 17-18, 2024 at Patterson Farms will be the Manure Expo. Cayuga Co has the second largest number of cows in NYS.

O. Issues of Concern: None expressed.

P. Next Meeting is scheduled for April 16, 2024, at 10 AM.

Q. Adjourn. Motion to approve made by Joan Jayne seconded by Nancy Hart. Unanimous vote, motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:06 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Vivian Cunningham