

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Summer 2009

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Congress Commits to Cormorant Program Funding Elected Reps Speak Up for the OLA

by Matt Snyder

The Oneida Lake Association and its valued partners have worked for years to protect the lake's fish and economy from double-crested cormorants. The threat level soared this summer as federal budgets almost overlooked New York's crucial, cost-effective cormorant management program. Thanks to the wisdom and hard work of our elected officials and partner organizations, it appears at press time that the program will continue.

Double-crested cormorants created a huge problem for Oneida Lake's fishing and economy in the 1990s by devastating the lake's walleye and perch populations. Ours is a unique lake where more than eighty percent of angling effort targets these two fish. The USDA/APHIS Wildlife Services' Cormorant Harassment Program minimized these birds' predation and sparked as much as \$47 million in local economic benefits since the program started in 2004. Fish populations increased, marinas and bait shops bustled, and more than a thousand jobs were restored because of USDA's efforts.

When the OLA board of directors learned that draft legislation for the 2009-10 federal budget excluded funding for Wildlife Services operations in New York, they considered it one of the most serious threats to the lake in the OLA's 64-year history. Absent this funding, the program would end in October 2009. Cormorant populations would boom, decimating Oneida's rich walleye and perch fisheries. Our lake's great fishing and that angling's vital economic impacts would be lost.

The OLA did not stand alone in recognizing this serious problem. A broad

coalition of elected officials and organizations took decisive action to save the Wildlife Services program. New York Senators and Assemblymen, including Darrel Aubertine, Bill Magee, David Townsend, and David Valesky, raised their voices loudly and clearly in support. Congressmen Michael Arcuri, Dan Maffei, and John McHugh, and Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Charles Schumer were invited to the cause. DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis played a crucial role by expressing his agency's vigorous support for the Wildlife Services' effort. The OLA applauds these persons' endorsement of sound conservation practice.

Other supportive organizations included the Onondaga County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Cornell University's Cattle Health Assurance Program, Trout Unlimited, Lake Champlain International, Inc., and the New York Farm Bureau, plus numerous aquaculture/agriculture groups. This broad coalition of stakeholders demonstrated the program's wide, effective reach.

In the face of overwhelming program support and media coverage, representatives from New York, Virginia, and Arkansas (three states affected by proposed budget cuts) met with USDA budget managers in early July. The parties committed to restore funding for Wildlife Services' operations in the next version of the federal budget, and the USDA committed to



making these important programs a priority. By late summer, we will know if they have honored these commitments.

The OLA hopes the USDA will keep its promise for a long time to come, enabling Wildlife Services' experts to maintain first-rate protection for Oneida Lake's recovering fisheries. If this happens, Central New York will continue to reap the benefits of a thriving angling economy. At best, USDA and its sister agencies may someday broaden their cormorant management to regional and flyway-wide approaches, generating the best "bang" for taxpayer bucks and further reducing the numbers of these birds that use Oneida Lake.

At this writing, the program's future looks bright - a success story that never could have been written without YOU - the 3,500+ members of the OLA. We don't pay lobbyists, we don't rent offices on K Street in D.C., and we don't use TV crews, glitzy ad campaigns, or celebrity endorsements. However, we speak with a strong, grassroots voice that comes from a large regional membership. We are proud of a sixty-four year track record of caring for Oneida Lake, and we have an evolving tradition of uniting partner organizations and supportive elected officials.

YOU are the tie that binds these factors to protect Oneida Lake and its unique fishing, economic benefits and all. Nice job, OLA members.

President's Message

In June, with his Batman fishing pole, my son caught his first fish from our lake. This summer, hundreds more youngsters (and grown-ups) are having once-in-a-lifetime experiences with their first Oneida Lake fish.

But I have to wonder: Are anglers nearing extinction? Not if you, the members of the Oneida Lake Association, have anything to say about it! Whether our Oneida Lake roots span generations or we're newcomers who've embraced the lake's lifestyle, OLA members are linked by a proud tradition in which any old-time or neophyte angler has an excellent chance to catch dinner.

The lake's future prospects, however, are clouded by recent concerns - 1) one-size-fits-all regulations, 2) dwindling access, 3) invasive species, 4) boorish behavior, and 5) problems for programs that protect the lake. These issues threaten our children's rich Oneida Lake heritage.

Fortunately, our membership gives the Oneida Lake Association the strength and direction to make a difference. Your board of directors exists to help YOU preserve this uniquely valuable tradition for Oneida's next generation of environmental stewards. YOU are the reason Congressmen and Senators listen when OLA leaders ask them to protect the lake's future. YOU are the reason we serve.

These are not easy times for the lake, but your membership makes a huge difference. There are plenty more ways you can help. You can spread the word about the OLA. You can contact us to share your ideas or explore joining the board. Even better, you can take a first-timer fishing. If you don't fish, introduce someone to the lake area's hunting, boating, hiking, or other fulfilling activities. Whatever you do, help your guest understand the uniqueness of the lake and its traditions.

As the new president of the OLA, I have big shoes to fill. My goal is to help shepherd the lake through these times in ways that live up to your expectations - and to help ensure that there are always "first fish" and a chance to catch them.

I welcome and appreciate your input. Keep the good ideas coming our way!
Have a great summer.



Matthew Snyder
President - OLA



The Oneida Lake Association Inc.

Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., so that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the Association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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Mickey's Cleans Up

Mickey's Bait and Tackle in Cicero, a 50+ year-old fishermen's haven and a long-time OLA supporter, was the site of a June 30 fire. At press time, proprietors Al, Bill, and Fran Daher are on track to reopen the store.

The North Syracuse Fire Department quickly responded and salvaged the building, though it requires repair and cleaning. Meanwhile, the brothers are setting up a trailer on-site to serve as temporary headquarters.

The OLA wishes Mickey's owners the very best. Small businesses like theirs have contributed mightily to Oneida Lake anglers' success and are a vital cog in Central New York's economy.

Oneida Lake Angling Rates High in DEC Survey

In a recent Post-Standard article by Glenn Coin, Oneida Lake's economic value was spotlighted by DEC surveys of the number of "angler days" annually spent fishing the lake. Inspired by a walleye resurgence, anglers invested about 786,000 days fishing Oneida in 2007, a notable increase from the 573,000 days of 1996, a year that saw unchecked cormorant predation. Only Lake Ontario's totals exceeded Oneida's in the state. That much fishing time translates to significant job-creating spending.

Coin compiles the Post-Standard's "Oneida Lake Life Blog" (<http://blog.syracuse.com/oneida-lake/>), a fascinating, informative collection of news articles and related reader comments. The blog addresses vital lake issues and contains some beautiful photos.

EDITORIAL

Bad Behavior Threatens to Close Three Mile Bay WMA

As if cormorants and zebra mussels aren't enough, Three Mile Bay Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is under attack by another invasive species - slob partiers. While plenty of hunters, anglers, boaters and other visitors enjoy the site legitimately, there are a few individuals who arrive by boat and car and thumb their nose at WMA rules and basic decency. They abuse drugs and alcohol, litter, drive and boat recklessly, engage in lewd acts, and damage the natural landscape and personal property. Worst of all, they harass and threaten other users and neighbors of the WMA.

Throughout history, the woods and waters of the Three Mile Bay area have been a sporting paradise. The bay was home to a vibrant private duck hunting camp as early as 1917. In the early 1970s,

the owners deeded land to New York State to use as a Wildlife Management Area. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) managed the site for a range of traditional uses - extending privileges such as waterfowling, pheasant and deer hunting, trapping, and fishing. The site's public boat launch (a rarity on the North Shore) provided access for anglers, kayakers, birdwatchers, and other legitimate users. Three Mile Bay would be an ideal site for outdoor family fun if not for the illicit behavior that goes unchecked.

Lately, it seems that these poorly behaved guests are trying to make life miserable for many people living near the WMA and for all other legitimate users. They may have succeeded - with the unwitting help of the Department of Environmental Conservation. As winter

fell on 2008, the DEC erected a massive concrete-and-steel gate to eliminate road access to the area. A second gate arose this spring. Both gates have been closed and locked since Memorial Day weekend, effectively precluding legitimate sporting access by land and eliminating a valuable public boat launch.

There may be a better solution.

In March, after our members expressed concern about the DEC's gates and their impact on legitimate access, OLA officers met with Region 7 Director Ken Lynch, Capt. Woody Erickson, and other DEC administrators. We expressed support for the DEC efforts to reduce wanton partying. We also asked the DEC to avoid ruining legitimate access.

In particular, we asked the DEC to consider options including an increased presence by Conservation Officers; scheduling officers' visits to coincide with peak party times; better partnerships with other law enforcement agencies; and new regulations prohibiting alcohol on-site (thereby making it easier for law enforcement to break up parties).

The DEC's response thus far has been a locked gate - followed by a second locked gate. The bay and beach remain accessible to water-borne partiers, while legitimate watercraft launching has become next to impossible and other appropriate forms of recreation have become extremely difficult.

To their credit, DEC officials asked to hear from concerned WMA users. OLA members who feel they have been affected by changes at the WMA should call the DEC's Syracuse office at (315) 426-7400, or they may contact state and local elected officials.

OLA leaders have talked with legitimate users and neighbors, and we are actively engaged with Lynch and our elected partners to seek effective solutions. The OLA board of directors believes that the most important goal is to reduce partiers' impact on Three Mile Bay's neighbors and natural habitat - and we hope that the DEC is vigilant enough to do so without ruining legitimate access.

August Fun 'Round the Lake

Looking for some unique amusement opportunities by Oneida's shore this month? You don't have to travel far.

A classic car show highlights August's programming at the Fort Brewerton Blockhouse Museum, on Route 11 by the Oneida River Bridge. The show runs from one to five o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday, August 12. The museum is open every Saturday from ten to four. Its exhibits, which depict several eras in Oneida Lake history, are fascinating and you can't beat the admission - it's free!

Cleveland Historical Society showcases its headquarters in the gorgeous gothic revival St. James Episcopal Church on North Street with a free ice cream social on Sunday, August 23, from one to three. The society maintains several historical displays in the structure and its adjoining parish house.

You can enjoy the fullest schedule of August events at Sylvan Beach. Every Tuesday night is a "bikes at the Beach" evening where motorcycle fans can view some amazing machines parked, free of charge, along Main Street. Wednesday evenings witness a "Country Music Showcase," with different bands performing in the village park's bandstand. Classic car aficionados flock to the village's lake-front parking lot on Thursday evenings; often, a hundred or more vintage vehicles glisten there. "Canal Fest" occurs during August 8 and 9. Check out the tours of old Barge Canal vessels - the tugs *Urger* and *Governor Roosevelt* are often tied to the village's concrete piers. The venerable tugs are beautifully maintained.

Whatever your pleasure around the lake this summer, the OLA wishes you a great - and safe - outing!

Amy Samuels Named “Conservationist of the Year”

At its annual meeting in April, the Oneida Lake Association took great pleasure in naming Amy Samuels “Conservationist of the Year.”

Amy, a Natural Resources’ Team Leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County, has been a guiding force behind the crusade to eliminate invasive plants such as water chestnuts from Oneida Lake and its tributaries. She has organized numerous “chestnut pulling events” that attracted hundreds of volunteers and many sportspersons’ organizations united in the goal of ridding the lake of this bothersome weed. Amy has spoken to a myriad of groups throughout the lake region, flooded the media with press releases, and spearheaded poster and school campaigns in an effort to educate the public about the threats unchecked

chestnut growths pose. Her tireless efforts, often in conjunction with the OLA, have reduced chestnut beds to negligible sizes and earned her this prestigious conservation award.

A native of the Bronx, Amy received her bachelor’s degree from Cornell in 1987, a Masters in Science Education from Syracuse in 1997, and a Masters in Plant Ecology from SUNY-ESF in 2002. At Cooperative Extension, she leads a team of educators who offer programs in urban forestry, water resources, and youth and the environment. In addition, she works on water resources education programs for Oneida and other local lakes.

The OLA congratulates Amy on her achievements and continued leadership in this vital ecological effort.



Amy Samuels displays her quarry - an Oneida Lake water chestnut.

Cooperative Extension’s Efforts in the Oneida Lake Watershed

by Amy Samuels

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) continues to offer the Adopt-a-Shoreline program in the Oneida Lake Watershed. Under this program, participants adopt a section of shoreline and monitor it for problem plants such as water chestnuts and European frogbit. About half of the lake’s shore has been adopted and local angling organizations

are among those working hard to keep the weeds at bay. Our “A” team of volunteers needs a few more good folks such as Marv and Joanne Reed who have faithfully organized their neighbors for the past five years to pull water chestnuts on the west side of the lake, virtually eliminating the plant. Other effective volunteers include Tom Pierce, Scott Shupe, Joanne Getchonis, and Mark Babenzien, who contribute their monitoring reports annually.

This year, CCE is working with the Shackelton Point Field Station and the Finger Lakes Institute on a project to manage European frogbit. Researchers will evaluate three different control methods. Recently, the research team built experimental plots to determine the impact of shading and

hand-pulling management techniques on frogbit. In addition, an experiment with snail predation was conducted. To report frogbit or water chestnuts’ infestations, please contact Cooperative Extension at 424-9485. Please note the photo of frogbit on this page.

As part of an initiative to promote stewardship of Oneida Lake, Cooperative Extension and the Field Station are collaborating to start an Oneida Lake watershed “youth corps.” This group begins during a seven-week summer program for high school students in 2010. The program focuses on environmental service projects in the Oneida Lake watershed, as well as youth-led projects and related field trips. Young people interested in interviewing to be part of the program’s youth advisory council should contact Amy Samuels at 424-9485 - extension 233.



The invasive European frogbit - another potential Oneida Lake problem.

Update: Sylvan Beach Projects

According to a member of the Sylvan Beach Village Board, a significant beach restoration project begins this fall. After the state lowers Oneida Lake's level, crews will haul sand to the beach from the Barge Canal dredging piles along Cove Road in the Town of Verona. The new beach's width should exceed one hundred yards and the beach will stretch from the public bathhouse to around 18th Avenue. The village has obtained all the requisite environmental permits.

No progress, however, has occurred in efforts to restore the fabled Sylvan Beach fishing pier. Village officials have sought economic stimulus funding, but have yet to discover a viable source. This is unfortunate, since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has developed a comprehensive engineering/architectural plan for rebuilding the pier. A restored pier would attract thousands of sportspeople and tourists, create jobs, and give the Sylvan Beach area a notable economic boost.

That's a big one! Twelve-year old Mitchell Holsan, of Shavertown, Pennsylvania, landed this 20 lb.+ sturgeon off Sylvan Beach in July, 2008. Mitchell was accompanied by his grandfather, Ted Shone, and Ted's son, Thomas (left).

Oneida Lake History on the Web

Here's a cure for some rainy day summer blahs, an all-too-common affliction this season. Check out the lake's on-line historical sites. At www.fortbrewerton.org, you can discover fascinating reading about that village's past, old Fort Brewerton, and the Oliver Stevens blockhouse. Key "History of Glass Manufacturing, Cleveland, Oswego County, NY" into your search box and you'll access a great article about that once vital North Shore industry. Typing "Oneida Lake History" into the same box will uncover a variety of other sources on the topic, including quick access to the OLA website's historical articles.



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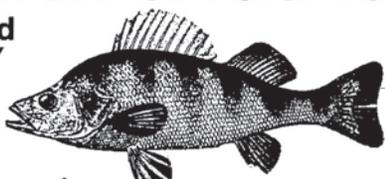
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Sturgeon in Oneida Lake and nearby waters may be tagged. Biologists at Cornell University and NYSDEC need your help to track these fish. Yellow tags may be attached at the base of the dorsal fin. If you catch a tagged sturgeon, please write down the number on the tag and length of fish, release the fish immediately, and call Cornell University at (315) 633-9243 or contact NYSDEC at (315) 785-2262 as soon as possible.



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