

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Fall 2020

www.oneidalakeassociation.org

“Eye” Catching Population Prompts Regulation Review

by John Harmon, OLA Vice-President

Although many of our members have spent considerable time boating, sailing, and fishing the lake, not many of us can claim that we have traversed its entire length. After all, it would take over an hour at a moderate cruising speed to get from the Beach to the bridge. (Yet lake historian, Jack Henke, tells me that he has documentation of at least two brave souls who have swum the lake from end to end!)

Keeping this distance in mind helps us to place into context recent developments reported by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. In January 2020, the Department announced that Oneida Lake now has one million adult walleyes in its waters. We have not enjoyed such a record number of walleyes since the mid-1980s. We can attribute this increase to careful management practices by the DEC, scientific input from the Cornell Field Station, diligent breeding and stocking from the DEC Hatchery in Constantia, and careful stewardship by the Oneida Lake Association, as well as individuals in the angling community.

So how do we visualize one million walleyes? If we use the current minimum length to keep a walleye (15 inches) and we multiply that by a million, we get 237 miles! If each of these walleyes was lined up nose to tail, that would (approximately) equal a round trip from the Beach to Brewerton and back—five times!

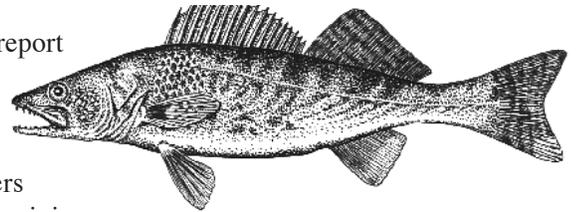
Such a robust walleye population is certainly important to the long-term health of the fishery, to the many recreational anglers, and to the hundreds of businesses that surround the lake.

Raise the limit?

A few months following the report of this recent milestone, DEC put out a survey, explaining that they were considering raising the daily limit from three keepers to five (maintaining the 15-inch minimum). Although their initial reasoning for considering an increase was based on scientific data, DEC also wanted to gauge angler sentiment for possible support of this change. They developed a brief online survey consisting of three questions. At DEC’s request, OLA helped distribute the survey via our website, e-newsletter, and social media accounts.

One question on the survey asked anglers if they supported the change, while the other two questions helped provide demographic data, asking if the respondent was an Oneida Lake angler and if he or she had fished the lake recently. Overwhelming, (85%) the respondents reported that they were indeed Oneida anglers and that they had recently fished the lake. This data reduced the possibility that the results were skewed by non-fisherman. In the recently published report of this survey, DEC wrote that the “responses to this survey indicates that the results are representative of anglers who have experience fishing Oneida Lake or those who may be interested in fishing the lake in the future.”

The key question, of course, is the one that asked: “How do you feel about increasing the daily limit of walleye from 3 fish per day to 5 fish per day in Oneida Lake?” The department posted the survey on their DEC newsletter for nearly two



weeks (June 26 to July 8) and received a total of 2,256 responses. In their report of the results, DEC also specifically mentioned the OLA and its efforts, stating that “The survey was also made available to Oneida Lake Association members via a link on their website.” According to the report, over 62% of respondents either supported or strongly supported increasing the limit to 5 per day. (For a look at the complete report, go to www.dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/tb1510.pdf.)

The closing paragraph of the report indicates the biologist’s recommendation, based on scientific data, as well as the results of the survey: “Appropriate management of the Oneida Lake walleye fishery relies on biological information and knowledge of angler desires and opinions. The abundant walleye population, projections that it will be sustained for at the least the next several years, and potential risks to the forage base, including yellow perch, indicate that an increase in harvest is now warranted. Increasing the possession limit is the management option most likely to accomplish this, and survey respondents were generally supportive of this potential change. Therefore, an increase in the Oneida Lake walleye daily limit from 3/day to 5/day is recommended.” The report goes on to cite scientific literature by renowned Oneida

(Continued on page 3)

President's Message

The past six plus months have been a very difficult and scary time for everyone, including members of the Oneida Lake Association. There have been so much uncertainty and fears with the COVID-19 pandemic at the top of everyone's list. As I am writing this message, it is Friday, September 11, 2020, the 19th anniversary of the devastating events that took place on USA soil in 2001. That, too, was another very difficult time for everyone, one which will never be forgotten. Whenever times get tough, we still need to find ways to cope and move forward safely and have hope for the future.

For everyone who lives on or close to Oneida Lake, how fortunate that we were able to tap into all the positive recreation and leisure opportunities on our lake and tributaries. Participation in our favorite activities lets us escape from our worries and concerns for a while. We had safe social distancing, wearing our masks, plenty of fresh air and sunshine, plus a lot of hungry walleyes. Time on the lake was therapeutic and helped to provide many smiling faces. Who needs Disney World when you have Oneida Lake, one of the best playgrounds and safe havens in Central New York? We really are lucky!

As you know, we were unable to safely hold our OLA 75th Annual Anniversary Meeting or our Annual OLA Networking Meeting this year. This really was disappointing as we had great programs planned for both special events. Our entire Board of Directors stepped up as a super team as we kept moving forward in a time when we really needed to. We had very important conference calls with DEC Fisheries. We held our first ever OLA Zoom Board Meetings, as well as two in-person meetings, practicing social distancing. We also had a very special (safe) presentation honoring Dr. John Forney as our 2020 OLA Conservationist of The Year. He is also the only person to receive this prestigious award twice. Also Dr. Forney was recently inducted into the New York State Outdoorsmen Hall of Fame (see page 7). Also, we welcomed a new member on our Board of Directors, Bill Lints of Oneida County. I have personally known Bill for the past 37 years, and I have high expectations for him as a board member.

I thank all of our OLA members for staying the course as our membership has surpassed the 2,000 mark for the first time in years despite the Covid-19 pandemic. On the heels of a great summer of walleye fishing on Oneida Lake, this fall should also be very good, so get your waders and favorite stick baits ready. Once there is safe ice, the good fishing should continue. Please think about practicing selective harvest, keeping only the fish you plan on eating. You really do not have to keep a daily limit of walleye for it to be a successful outing, and the same can be said about yellow perch. Always think safety first, and try to bring those young anglers along with you so they can enjoy the positive outdoor experiences.

Please make sure you exercise your right to vote on Election Day as this might be the most important election in the history of our country. Remember it's always a good time to sign up a new OLA member. It's only \$8. And for current OLA members, if you are not receiving our electronic newsletters, please send the OLA your e-mail address. You will receive our newsletters, as well as other up-to-the minute mailings. If you still want to receive a hard copy of our OLA Bulletins that can happen. We will not give your e-mail address out to anyone!

William A. Girvan

Bill Girvan, President OLA

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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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To submit questions or comments about *The Bulletin*, contact editor John Harmon at jpharmon1@gmail.com

Walleye

(Continued from page 1)

researchers such as Dr. Randy Jackson and Dr. Lars Rudstam.

DEC perspective

DEC Fisheries staff members, notably Bureau Chief Steve Hurst, have regularly communicated with the OLA Board of Directors throughout the process using a combination of phone calls, Zoom meetings, and e-mails. In a recent meeting with Hurst, he reiterated the detailed process of exploring a change in regulations. In addition to carefully studying the data provided by Cornell researchers, the DEC also wanted “to entertain angler sentiment,” hence the survey they conducted. “We work for the anglers,” Hurst assured us. Combining the ecological data with the results of the survey, DEC published its report and its recommendation. From there the decision-making process continues to migrate upstream to the DEC Commissioner, executive branch review, and another round of public comment. Hurst cautioned us that any possible change in the regulations would be a lengthy and thoughtful process.

(Readers should note that currently this change in the daily limit is only a recommendation. There has been no change in the regulations at this time. In fact, if a change were made, it would occur in May 2021 at the earliest. So in the meantime, it's one, two, or three!)

Hurst also assured us that the Department is bound by the State Administrative Procedures Act (SAPA) to include a review process as an evaluation step. In other words, any recommendation to change the daily limit will come with an evaluation step to monitor the effects of the change. Using subsequent scientific data, as well as creel surveys, DEC could always roll back the limit in order to protect the fishery, if the walleye population should decrease to a concerning threshold.

How did we get to one million walleyes?

Dr. Randy Jackson and Tony Van DeValk, researchers from Cornell University, recently attended (socially distant) a meeting of the Board of Directors of the OLA in order to provide commentary on the science behind the walleye population in Oneida Lake. Both researchers have had extensive experiences tracking the Oneida fishery.

Dr. Jackson began by explaining the remarkable milestone of one million adult walleyes. Using a process known as Mark-Recapture, Cornell estimates the population of walleyes every three years. The researchers calculate a mortality rate for the walleyes based on changes in abundance between the two most recent Mark-Recapture estimates. They then use this calculated mortality rate combined with estimates of recruitment of new fish into the fishery to project walleye abundance for years leading up to the next Mark-Recapture estimate. During the next round of Recapture, the projected mortality rate is re-adjusted, and used for future projections. This process is common to many sciences. For example, that is how meteorologists predict the weather, or how economists predict the stock market. They look back to make informed projections about the future. And as these projections become reality, they start the process once again.

Just like weather predictions, however, ecology predictions include uncertainty because the researchers are using samples that have inherent variability. They can't possibly count every fish! For the years between the 2013 and 2016 Mark-Recapture estimates, the researchers estimated a mortality rate of 20% (This rate fluctuates over time, due largely to changes in harvest). They discovered later that the actual mortality rate in the years after 2016 was closer to 12% due to reduced harvest in the years after round gobies established in the lake. The lower mortality is one factor that brought the population estimate to one million adult walleyes.

Jackson went on to explain that a variety of factors influence the mortality rate. For example, another factor is the introduction of gobies into the lake in 2016. These fish provided an abundant food source for the hungry walleyes. There was also a large class of three-year old fish from 2014 entering the population prior to the 2016 estimate. Jackson summarized by saying, “We had more fish coming in and less fish coming out.”

The OLA Board then questioned the researchers about the concerns that many OLA members share.

What if there is unusually high walleye harvest this year?

The researchers explained that a harvest rate of 50% is extremely rare, but possible. The last time this rate occurred was 1958-59, and that was when the walleye limit was 15 per day.

How much would a five fish limit affect the harvest?

Jackson stated that based on their creel surveys, only about 25% of anglers actually achieve the three fish limit. There is no reason to believe that anglers who were previously not reaching the three fish limit would start catching five fish limits. Van DeValk added, however, that an increased limit could attract more anglers, thereby increasing the harvest, even if those folks are catching only two or three fish. They added that increasing the limit might add 40 thousand fish to the harvest, a small percentage of the population of one million.

OLA Director Rip Colesante, former Director of the Oneida Fish Hatchery asked directly: **“How confident are you that only 25% catch the current limit?”**

Jackson replied that they have eight years of creel survey data on which they rely. He did admit that much of their data comes from boat launch surveys, which do not reflect the dock-to-dock fishermen who live on the lake. With a smile,

(Continued on page 4)

Walleye

(Continued from page 3)

Jackson stated, “I suspect that they are better at catching fish.”

How would an increase in the limit affect other species in the fishery?

Van DeValk emphasized that “The predator-prey balance is important.” Walleye populations and perch populations exert forces upon each other. “It’s a concern,” Jackson stated, about the possible suppression of the perch population. One million walleyes means that there are many mouths to feed. The good news, however, is that “Walleyes have a diverse suite of available food.” Gobies continue to play a role in the balance, as well as this year’s unusual abundance of mayflies. But they noted that the current adult walleye population is high relative to the yellow perch population based on data from the 1970s and 1980s when the predator-prey relationship between the two species was felt to be in balance. This could lead to suppression of yellow perch recruitment.

Comments from the membership

The DEC survey is useful in that it provides categorical data regarding angler sentiment for or against raising the walleye limit. Once the results were released, the OLA thought it would be even more useful to drill into the data to find out the thought process behind the simple For/Against choices. We then decided to put out our own request for input through a Constant Contact mailing. We asked OLA members to tell us why they chose the way they did and to explain their thinking behind their decision. (*Reminder: Make sure that we have a good email address for you so that you can become part of these future conversations!*) We were not trying to replicate the DEC survey. Rather, we wanted rich data that would inform us about why anglers lined up for or against the limit change.

We had a strong turnout of over

sixty responses. Interestingly, our data shows that while the DEC survey indicated slightly over 60% approval for the change, our survey indicated about 54% against the change. More importantly, our respondents often supplied some very thoughtful reasons for their position. Representing the slight majority who were against the raising the limit, one OLA member wrote: “I feel the lake is now become extremely over pressured with fisherman. Whether it is local or out of state tournaments as well as more and more people finding out about Oneida from the internet or social media, the lake in my opinion has become overcrowded.

Now that is also a good thing for our lake and community, however it also can be a negative because more and more fish are being taken out. I have zero problem with anglers keeping their daily limit of three. However, with SO MANY people fishing Oneida now, raising the limit to five is concerning. I even think the yellow perch limit should be 25 rather than 50 but that’s an argument for another day.”

OLA member Jim Doolittle writes: “I was in favor of a limit increase initially. I did fish Oneida Lake this summer and found many young (short) walleyes while fishing. I would like to change my position from a five per day limit to a four per day or to remain the current limits. My opinion has changed from the apparent increase in fishing pressure this summer and expected increased pressure this upcoming ice fishing season. The walleye population could easily be decreased in a very short period of time. I do not see much law enforcement on the lake for limit or size requirements. Unless there is an increase in possession enforcement, I believe no more than one fish per daily possession increase should be added until future population studies are conducted.”

And, finally, George Kener weighs in: “I believe that many anglers are taking way over their three fish limit. Ice fishing for example. The crowds on nice winter days is unbelievable. Family groups constitute a large slice of these groups. With

the new electronics available, and using the “kitchen sink” lure, huge catches are common. An angler with his wife and two or three children is not going to stop fishing when he has three walleyes. I’ve seen fisherman catch three walleyes, head to their camp and in 20 minutes be back fishing. Raising the limit to five will increase the catch far more than what is planned.”

Readers will quickly see the overall theme of the negative responses. Nearly all of the respondents against the change report two main concerns: Increased fishing pressure and anglers’ perception that too many other anglers keep more than their limit. The OLA Board of Directors reminds anglers that law enforcement cannot do the job on their own. We encourage anglers who witness people taking more than the legal limit to report these violations. The DEC tip line is 844-DEC-ECOS (844-332-3267).

A sizable group of respondents told us why they were in favor of raising the limit. For example, Gary Will writes, “First and foremost the info I received indicated the population of walleye is very high, higher than it’s been in a number of years. I believe DEC biologist indicated the species is in great shape. Second, it matters not if we’re talking walleye and perch or wolves and deer (moose). Predator populations follow prey populations. It would be nice if walleyes were always at a high, but nature doesn’t react that way. Thus, we need to take advantage of the highs and conserve on the lows. I hope the biologists and the anglers win.” Many of those who remain in favor of the change, such as Jim Paoletti, simply stated: “I support whatever the Cornell experts recommend. If they say raise the limit, then raise the limit.”

Will Armani writes: “When the pike numbers go down, we settle for a lower limit. When the numbers go up, we should raise the limit, especially if the biologists are in agreement. In any event, catching 5 legal fish is still pretty difficult.”

(Continued on page 5)

Walleye

(Continued from page 4)

And Bob Wirts sums up the thinking of many supporters by stating: “I am a believer of following the science. If the biologists along with other professionals at both Cornell and DEC concur, then I would leave that decision up to the people charged with managing the fishery. I have fished Lake Oneida every year since 1968 and have experienced the ‘fat’ years and the ‘lean’ years as far as Walleye fishing is concerned, and I thoroughly enjoyed the fishing regardless of my catch.”

Interestingly, the vast majority of supporters tells us to “trust the scientists.” Not a single person who supported the change said that they did so because they wanted to keep more fish! To this point, OLA reminds readers that Oneida Lake is one of the best-studied walleye fisheries in the world—and that while mortality rates and other parameters may be adjusted from time to time, all available data point to a healthy population of adult walleyes. New York State has just renewed its long-standing contract with Cornell University to continue the Oneida Lake fishery study for an additional four years, which will continue to give us a good gauge of the health of the fishery, and DEC remains committed to its hatchery, cormorant management, and other programs that support healthy fish populations.

We also had a handful of respondents who offered hybrid alternatives. For example, we had a few folks recommend slot limits. Some argued for a limit of three, with one additional fish over 20 inches. Others said either three or five is fine, but no one should keep a fish over 22 inches. DEC Fisheries staff have clearly indicated to OLA that such slot limits are not part of the plan.

Conclusion

The process of considering more liberal regulations is a collaborative effort between DEC, Cornell, OLA, and every Oneida Lake angler who has taken the

time to participate. We applaud everyone who has contributed to the scientifically sound, thoughtful approach to this potential change.

Whatever the outcome of the current regulatory review, the OLA Board is committed to continue to partner with others to promote angler opportunity and

protect game fish populations. We expect careful monitoring and support of game fish populations in the years to come to ensure that fisheries remain viable. And we encourage every angler to fish responsibly, stay within the legal limit, and support law enforcement in their work to prevent overharvest.

OLA Pushes for Better Cormorant Control Rules

Since the mid 1980s, Oneida Lake anglers have seen numerous factors significantly reduce populations of free-swimming game fish, especially perch and walleyes. Some of these factors can be controlled through human intervention; some cannot.

Cormorants have been one of the most important factors, consuming millions of young fish. The fish-gobbling birds are certainly controllable through human intervention—BUT—only if responsible agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation have the willpower, manpower, and budget to do the job effectively.

There’s no question of DEC’s commitment to cormorant management, but, the federal government has wavered in the extent to which it permits state agencies to do responsible local management. In the Oneida Lake Association’s efforts to control the controllables, our Board of Directors has remained very active in pushing the federal government to make rules that enhance and sustain New York State’s capabilities.

We are concerned that the most recent proposed rulemaking by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may severely hamper management efforts, with a “Potential Take Limit” set by the feds that would create an artificially low, rigid ceiling for the number of cormorants that can be culled by states. In July, after thoughtful consideration and conversation, the OLA Board of Directors unanimously passed a resolution authorizing OLA President Bill Girvan to publicly comment on this issue and urge the Service to take a more adaptive approach.

Our message read in part:

OLA’s position is that cormorant management must prioritize the following conservation goals: protecting free-swimming game fish populations from cormorant predation; and protecting habitat used by other species from the harmful effects of cormorant defecation.

The draft rule is well-intentioned—BUT—it does not go far enough to meet conservation goals or address cormorant overpopulation. The Potential Take Limit is a major flaw. OLA contends that the Potential Take Limit is a stagnant strategy that will:

- 1. Sustain cormorant populations at too high a level;*
- 2. Create scenarios in which cormorant taking in some parts of the United States will preclude cormorant taking in other regions; and*
- 3. Deprive wildlife managers of the flexibility needed to respond to rapid overgrowth of cormorant populations.*

By unanimous vote, OLA’s Board of Directors has approved a resolution opposing the Potential Take Limit and urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to pursue a more adaptive strategy. OLA requests that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service abandon or amend the Potential Take Limit analysis, and include analysis of cormorant sustainability at lower overall sub-population (Atlantic, Interior, Pacific, etc.) levels.

(Continued on page 9)

Scott Shupe Retires from OLA Board of Directors

Serving as a Director of the Oneida Lake Association is about both leadership and stewardship. Too often, people mistake leadership for the presentation of “big ideas” or the management of workers with a set of rules to follow. Most of us recognize, however, that great leaders share ideas, lead through inspiration, and work directly alongside those in the field. The OLA has been so very fortunate to have such leadership through the participation of Scott Shupe on the Board of Directors.

Scott recently decided to step down as a Director, serving from 2000-2019, leaving behind a remarkable string of achievements. His accomplishments include:

- Inaugurating and developing our monthly e-news bulletins. For the first time ever we were able to reach our membership in a timely way.
- Serving as President of the organization
- Initiating the well-attended Nuisance Geese Workshop (2017)
- Developing the theme for several of our Annual Meetings
- Starting OLA’s participation in volunteer water-chestnut pulls
- Pushing the DEC for the construction of the Cove Road Boat Access
- Organizing Invasive Species Conference (2007)
- Working with local educators to develop lesson plan modules that teachers can use in their classrooms
- Co-founding the NY Chapter of Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership,
- Writing over 125 professional and avocational papers

This list is but a sampling of Scott’s many achievements.

Many of these initiatives live on to this day. For example, OLA conducted two highly successful waterchestnut pulls this summer, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Although no single person could duplicate Scott’s thoroughness on the electronic newsletters, two Directors have stepped up to continue this vital service. Some Directors have quipped that it took two volunteers to produce about half the material that Scott did on a regular basis!

Current OLA President, Bill Girvan stated that Scott’s “level of commitment as President of the OLA was off the charts, and under his leadership our OLA Board of Directors got involved in more items of concern to make our members more focused on the big picture of Oneida Lake so that future generations can continue to enjoy this great treasure.” Many of the Directors agree that Scott has been a terrific role model, demonstrating the work that must be done behind the scenes in order to accomplish our goals.

Director Patricia Cerro-Reehil remarked that “Scott is passionate about the lake and its mission! From meeting with elected officials, to staffing sportsman shows, to pulling water chestnuts, he was a tremendously involved member. His dedication and



Director Shupe pulling invasive species out of the lake.

leadership has helped to give OLA much deserved recognition. Hats off to Scott!”

OLA Vice-president John Harmon sums up Scott’s tenure in one word—Tireless!

Scott himself reflected on his time with as an OLA Director: “With family roots on this lake going back over a century, I am well aware of the need for and actions of the OLA to protect the lake’s ecosystem (as it changes) and the interests of all its users. I’m happy to have been a part, and to have worked with some great people. I want to focus on family, travel, hobbies, and a bucket list of items unfulfilled.”

We wish Scott all the best in his busy retirement!



Scott at the OLA booth.

Dr. John Forney Receives OLA's Conservationist of the Year Award

By OLA Director Matt Snyder

The Oneida Lake Association has honored outstanding fisheries scientist John Forney, Ph.D., Director Emeritus of the Cornell University Biological Field Station at Shackelton Point, as its 2020 Conservationist of the Year. Dr. Forney was selected to receive the honor because throughout his career, he has gone above and beyond in his commitment to excellent and impactful research that helps Oneida Lake, its fish populations, and its anglers. The 2020 honor is doubly special because it is bestowed in commemoration of the 75th anniversary year of the OLA, and because it makes Forney the rarest of the rare: a two-time recipient of OLA's premier honor for conservation achievements.

Forney's leadership in Oneida Lake fisheries management is in its seventh decade, and his scholarly achievements and direction of the Shackelton Field Station's research agenda have led directly to the success of Oneida Lake's fish hatchery, fisheries programs, and efforts to preserve and promote our lake as one of New York State's vital waterways for angling and recreation. Dr. Forney has worked on Oneida Lake since 1956, when Cornell appointed him as founding director of the Shackleton Field Station.

At a socially-distanced lakeside ceremony held on Aug. 7, OLA presented Dr. Forney with the commemorative 75th Anniversary award, marked by a custom plaque depicting Oneida Lake. On hand were OLA directors and past Presidents; current and past Shackleton staff including Director Emeritus Ed Mills, Ph.D. and Senior Research Associate Randy Jackson, Ph.D., as well as members of the Forney family. OLA had originally planned to honor Forney at its April general membership meeting, the Directors made other arrangements when COVID-19 forced that meeting to be postponed. The August ceremony was marked by sunny skies, a bald eagle

flyover, and legions of walleyes swimming offshore.

In his remarks, OLA President Bill Girvan recounted a story of how decades ago, he met Dr. Forney at a fishing educator training "like a young angler eager to talk to the legend," and as a result became inspired to get involved in Oneida Lake conservation. Many attendees at the award ceremony shared similar personal stories about how Dr. Forney's passion for Oneida Lake led them to make life-long commitments to conservation.

"Dr. Forney's research and leadership of Shackelton Point have made Oneida Lake one of the best studied and best managed lakes in the world," said President Girvan. "His career-long achievements in science and fisheries management have made him a role model for multiple generations of conservationists, and his work will continue to pay dividends for lake enthusiasts and anglers today and tomorrow."

For decades, fisheries management on Oneida Lake has been guided by Cornell's long-term ecosystem study of Oneida Lake, which was begun by Dr. Forney in 1956 and continues today thanks to research funding provided through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. In 2020, Oneida Lake's walleye population topped one million adult fish, and this year's fishing has been the best in recent memory. Girvan pointed to these outcomes as evidence of Forney's unparalleled impact on Oneida Lake.

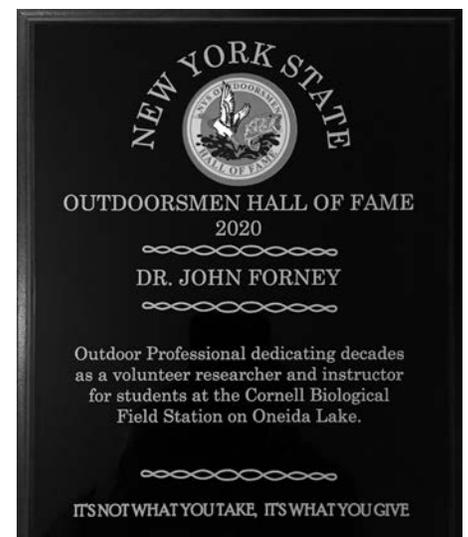
"Dr. Forney's wisdom was key to the success of DEC's Constantia hatchery, and he gave us our understanding of Oneida Lake's food web and the impacts of invasive species," said Girvan. "Under his leadership, Shackelton improved Oneida Lake's water bird habitat, re-established our lake's sturgeon population, gave us data that provided the push for cormorant management to protect game



Dr. Forney receives plaque from OLA Director Dr. Ed Mills.

fish, and so many other success stories."

The Conservationist of the Year award is OLA's highest honor for people involved in protecting these resources, but it is far from the only honor Forney has received in his illustrious career. A member of multiple fisheries managers' and biologists' halls of fame, he is also a 2020 inductee into the New York State Outdoorsmen Hall of Fame. The OLA Board of Directors voted unanimously to nominate Dr. Forney for the latter honor. In his letter accompanying OLA's nomination of Forney to the NYSOHOF, Givan wrote, "Dr. John Forney is recognized, not only in New York but all over the world, as one of the top fishery scientists and brilliant researchers who have dedicated their careers to revolutionize the way we understand and manage walleye populations."



The Oneida Lake Business Profile

The Oneida Lake Business Profile is a regular feature in the Oneida Lake Bulletin to showcase businesses that serve Oneida Lake Association members. For this issue, Bulletin staff interviewed the owner of Oneida Lake Marina, Ron Renslow and his wife Chrissy Renslow.

What does your business do, and whom do you serve?

Oneida Lake Marina is a full-service marina catering to Oneida Lake powerboaters and sailors. It is the home port to hundreds of anglers and pleasure boaters. We are a family-owned business, and we try very hard to help Oneida Lake families enjoy our marina and the lake as much as we do.

What is your main connection to Oneida Lake?

We are located right on the southeast corner of Oneida Lake. The vast majority of our customers do most of their boating on Oneida Lake, taking advantage of everything from its prime sailing opportunities to its great fishing to its great powerboating.

How much of your business is related to Oneida Lake?

The vast majority of Oneida Lake Marina's sales, service, and dockage businesses are driven by boaters on Oneida Lake.

What product or service do you provide that is of interest to Oneida Lake users?

Oneida Lake Marina is a full-service marina, offering everything the Oneida Lake boater may need. We have dockage for seasonal use, as well as shrink-wrapping, storage, and service. Our ship's store is well stocked with new and used items appropriate for the wide range of boats and activities on Oneida Lake.

We sell new Tahoe pontoon boats (we are New York State's #1 Tahoe dealer for more than 10 years running!) and Yamaha and Honda outboards. Our customers

choose from a wide selection of new and used boats, trailers, and personal watercraft plus a full range of new boat parts and rigging accessories. After the sale, they take advantage of our full-service shop with two full-time, certified repair technicians.

The facility offers everything a day-tripper, weekend boater, or seasonal boater needs: A travel lift, launch ramp, gin pole for stepping sailboat masts, outdoor picnic areas, and a remodeled clubhouse with full restroom and shower facilities and a kitchenette.

Tell us briefly about the history of your business.

Ron Renslow: I was born and raised in a little town just north of Albany. I spent most of my boating youth on Lake George and Lake Champlain. In 1980 I moved away from the area and traveled for the next 23 years in heavy construction. During that time, I always boated and returned to New York for almost every vacation to spend time with my family usually boating and fishing.

In January of 2003, I heard about Oneida Lake Marina, came back to see it, and fell in love with South Bay. On July 4, 2003, I arrived as its new owner. For the past 17 years, it has become a "Labor of Love" to be here. I met my wife Chrissy here, who is a native to the area, and she has changed my life in a wonderful way.

Oneida Lake Marina LLC

Address: 3713 New York Route 31
Canastota, NY 13032
2 miles southwest of Verona Beach

Phone: 315-4697-4867

Email: oneidalakemarina@aol.com

Online: www.oneidalakemarina.com

Founded: Conception - early 1940s

Current owner - July 4, 2003

Number of Employees: 6+

Founders/Proprietors: Ron Renslow



Are you seeing any changes, trends, or issues on Oneida Lake?

We have watched the area and boating industry slowly change from large motorized fiberglass cruisers and sailboats to pontoon boats of all shapes and sizes. It appears the future in fresh-water boating lies in aluminum boats and newly designed outboard motors. We have continued to grow and adapt to this changing industry and hope to be here for many, many more years.

OLA extends its thanks to the Renslows and Oneida Lake Marina for participating in the Oneida Lake Business Profile. Do you have an idea for a business to feature? Let us know by e-mailing snyder.matthew.r@gmail.com.

2020 Oneida Lake Walleye Angling: Can It Get Any Better?

by Captain Tony Buffa

Whether you fish competitively, contemplatively, compassionately or even complacently, from my perspective it has been one of the best walleye bites Oneida Lake has provided in recent years. From late ice through spring and summer, anglers of all persuasions (trollers, jiggers, drifters, casters) have, on a trip-to-trip basis, managed limit catches and a volume of undersized “eyes,” making the future very promising for years to come. Add to this, an anticipated spectacular fall bite and you have what stacks up to be one of the largest angler harvests the lake has ever experienced.

With the current adult walleye estimated population (15 inches and up) pushing well over a million and a cohort of recruits aged 3 and 4, likewise with robust population numbers, it appears that Lady O can sustain the present level of angler pressure and catch rates.

This is the year we can thank the Round Goby. From early observations the usual influx of Gizzard Shad appears to be miniscule compared to the long term fall average due to the draining of large portions of the barge canal and the Mohawk for lock repairs. In the absence of shad for food, the eyes and perch will still have plenty of gobies to eat.

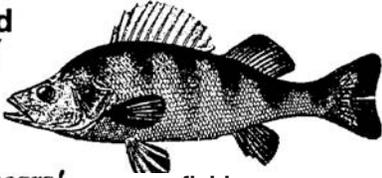
Most notable about this year’s angler success was the sustainability of the walleye bite through August and September. Generally, by August, jigging with blade baits plays second fiddle to trolling and worm harness fishing. Not so for 2020, a year totally disrupted by the Coronavirus and Covid-19. At least walleye angling on Oneida provided a temporary safe recreational experience from the daily stress affiliated with the Pandemic.

Even now as I pen this article, the September trolling bite has not diminished one bit since the beginning of the open water season. Soon we will have an ambient lake temperature dipping into the low 50s, and it will be game-on for perch and walleye jiggers. The canal fishing at Sylvan Beach will yield daily and nightly catches. Walleyes will enter their fall binge feeding mode and become easy targets for shore bound and boat anglers alike.

So if I may, I am going to finish with this. The great Yogi Berra would say “If it gets any better, it can’t.”

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Cormorant Control Rules

(Continued from page 5)

This will permit state and federal agencies to collaborate on adaptive management strategies for cormorants.

Since cormorants first overpopulated our area, constant management has been necessary to keep them from damaging other valuable resources. Oneida Lake has been harmed by limitations placed on cormorant management, such as the loss of federal funding for management in 2009 and more recently the legal challenge to the Service’s 2003 EIS. Some management efforts have continued, including a non-lethal volunteer hazing effort, but these have not been enough to keep up with cormorants’ adaptive behaviors.

When management doesn’t adapt, cormorant populations grow fast and Oneida Lake’s other species suffer the consequences. For example, consider the results of cormorant management’s abatement since 2016. In our area, in a relatively short period of time, the cormorant population which nests to our north in the Eastern Basin of Lake Ontario has become increasingly harmful to Oneida Lake’s fish and wildlife habitat since 2016.

OLA has previously commented on this rulemaking, urging the Service to complete its EIS and rule, maximize the cormorant management efforts it permits, and delegate management authority to the states.

We do not believe that the draft rule goes far enough, and we are strongly opposed to the Potential Take Limit model which arguably sustains cormorant populations at unacceptable levels. We urge the Service to choose a more adaptive approach.

The Service has not yet responded to public comments on its latest proposed rule. We urge OLA members to read our complete comment online (<https://beta.regulations.gov/comment/FWS-HQ-MB-2019-0103-2116>) and to be prepared to reach out to the Service and to elected officials to support reasonable, effective cormorant management. Watch our Website and e-newsletter for updates!

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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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