# The Oneida Lake Bulletin

www.oneidalakeassociation.org

### Can Atlantic Salmon Make a Comeback in New York?

By Eugene Carey, et al.

Fall 2017

Nobody knows for sure but a group of dedicated sportsmen would like to find out. The Fish Creek Atlantic Salmon Club has been stocking Atlantic salmon in area streams since 1997. Since then over one million salmon fry have been successfully raised from eggs by the club and stocked in the Fish Creek watershed. On May 27, 2017 club members stocked some 35,000 Atlantic salmon that members had raised from eggs.

#### **Historical Record**

Historically, land-locked Atlantic salmon abounded in the area prior to the early 1800's. Professor Dwight Webster from Cornell University wrote a paper, referencing the abundance of Atlantic salmon in Central New York.

Another early account is found in the Van der Kemp Papers and pertains to the year 1792

"Both Salmon Rivers, emptying into Lake Ontario... and the Fish-creek in Oneyda lake are in the spring and fall [full] of Salmon. You may form of this assertion, a pretty accurate opinion after I have informed you, that one Oneyda Indian took with his Spear 45 Salmons within an hour; another in the presence of Captain Simonds 65 during one night, and another 80" (Van Der Kemp, 1880:64).

Atlantic salmon used to run up the Oswego River each year into Onondaga Creek, the Seneca and Oneida Rivers as well as Oneida, Cayuga and Seneca Lakes. Each year members of the Oneida Nation would gather for a ritualized salmon feast at the junction of the East and West Branch of Fish Creek. They would trap and harvest thousands of Atlantic salmon in weirs. The salmon would be dried and smoked on racks for their winter sustenance.

Native Americans had a fishing village called Kuh-na-ta-ha located where the village of Phoenix is now according to Father Le Moyne. The name meant "Place of Tall Pines." Another Native American fishing village (T'kah-koongoon-da-nah-yea) was located at Caughdenoy. A 1794 map shows an Indian fishing village near the confluence of the Fish Creek's east and west branches.

Sadly, dams built in the Oswego and Seneca Rivers stopped the annual salmon migration upstream from Lake Ontario. Several times in the early 1800's deputations of the Oneida Nation travelled to Albany to complain about the decline of Lake Ontario's salmon runs caused by dam building.

Again from Webster's article:

"Salmon frequented this lake [Cayuga] the latter end of August and continued until cold weather. Last year [1809, since the erection of Baldwin's mill dam across the Seneca River, they did not appear until October, and then not in the usual number. Some have always continued over the winter, and are caught by openings in the ice, with a hook and a bait of pork or white worm" (p 162).

Atlantic salmon vanished from Lake Ontario shortly after 1850 according to Webster.



Atlantic salmon caught on Oneida Lake in North Bay.

#### How we got started

How is it that a small group of volunteers came together in an attempt to do something that large governmental agencies with large budgets have failed to do, namely to restore Atlantic salmon to their native waters? It is a romantic undertaking with significant obstacles to success. The numbers of salmon fry we place in the water each year are inadequate for a self-sustaining population considering the hazards that they face. Living in a stream is a dangerous place and there are significant habitat barriers to restoration and a sustainable population of the species. On the other hand, many fisheries throughout the State would face collapse without human intervention so the Club sees its work as a positive force in restoration and education of the general public.

(Continued on page 3)

### **President's Message**

#### To the OLA Membership,

As a fisherman, it has been my privilege to be a member of the OLA for as long as I can remember. This Association has been the advocate for Oneida Lake since 1945. I have been in, on, and around our lake for all of those years, and as I said to you at the May 2017 Annual Meeting, I am honored to be your President.

I want to thank Immediate Past President Scott Shupe for his mentorship these past few years and I am sure glad that he will be continuing to serve as a Vice President on our Board of Directors. Scott is the person who introduced us to the OLA Newsletter, ENews, that keep you up-to-date with Oneida Lake happenings between the *Bulletins*. If you are not receiving those, be sure that we have an accurate email address for you.

This has been an unusual season on Oneida Lake. I witnessed some very heavy rain cells while fishing this summer. You couldn't see a boat next to you for 10-15 minutes! Former OLA President Ed Mills called those storms, "Rain Bombs"! Such copious amounts of water with wind can cause considerable watershed runoff of nutrients and sedimentation that flow into the lake. Then we get a month like this October with summer-like weather, very little rain and lake surface temperatures still at 69 degrees. No wonder the fish are confused?

The OLA Board is presently discussing how to get: greater cormorant management; sedimentation and erosion controls (along the tributaries); more invasive species removal (i.e. water chestnut); and especially greater volunteer support from members and partner agencies. We are considering doing a future workshop, similar to the March 25 *Nuisance Goose Workshop*, on algae and nutrients as they are tied to sedimentation.

We are also looking forward to receiving, in the near future, an update on the cormorant-goby diet study report from New York State and Cornell University. When the analysis is complete, we will forward that information to you via OLA ENews.

You may have noticed that starting in last year's *Bulletins*, OLA has been featuring each of the seven Water Rescue Fire Departments that serve Oneida Lake. This *Bulletin* is the fourth issue that does that, with the spotlight on Constantia FD. When we finish with the last Fire Department, we will do the same with the Law Enforcement agencies that patrol the lake. When you see the complete public safety picture, I believe that you will agree with me, that Oneida Lake is a safe place for family recreation.

One of the challenges ahead for OLA is the issue of an inevitable dues increase. Looking at the Revenue and Expenditures data on page 7, you can understand that since the last increase in 2003, from \$3 to \$5, the time has come to address this need. Both the Board's Membership and Financial Committees have been tasked to study what would be the appropriate annual dues increase for keeping our Association solvent.

I thank you for your continued OLA membership and support which helps us "protect and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its surrounding ecosystem"! Sincerely,

Warren Darby

Warren Darby President www.OneidaLakeAssociation.org president@oneidalakeassociation.org

#### **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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#### Salmon

#### (Continued from page 1)

During the early summer in 1997 an article appeared in the local paper, The Post Standard about a few people forming a club dedicated to re-introducing Atlantic salmon to the Fish Creek watershed. It was a romantic idea that somehow a few people could change history. Atlantic salmon fry were purchased and placed in various parts Fish Creek. During August 1997 one of the sites was electroshocked by DEC biologists and salmon were found alive and growing well. The Post Standard article also caught the attention of Margaret Murphy, who was a candidate doing her field work for a Ph.D. in fishery science.

Club members eagerly volunteered to help Margaret in any way possible. For the next few years members would help out with the field work including stocking and then later in the year electro-shocking sites to determine survival of salmon. Margaret also performed an over-winter study by electro-shocking a few salmon, placing them in boxes anchored to the stream bottom. The boxes were checked periodically during the winter to determine winter survival and they did well.

#### **Continuing Stocking**

When Margaret's field work was complete the club decided to continue to stock Atlantic salmon. It was fun working as amateur biologists and besides it was a noble effort. Collectively, we solved problems as we went along. Various people had ideas about how to



Atlantic salmon fry being stocked by Lloyd Nortrup.

proceed. Allen Fannin knew a woman whose family operated a fish hatchery in the Catskills. She would hatch eggs for us if we supplied a tank. Bruce Montoya knew of a stainless steel tank that was being surplused by the U.S. Air Force at Griffiss Air Force Base. We applied for it and took possession. The tank needed to be modified and Paul Miller knew someone who knew how to work stainless steel and who might do the modifications for free. A source of eyed Atlantic salmon eggs was found where the club could buy salmon eggs at four cents apiece, a price that holds to this day.

For the next few years the club would order the eggs from a hatchery in Maine, have them shipped to Lew Beach in the Catskills where Lisa Shaver would take care of them for the club. When it was time to stock the salmon, the necessary stocking permit was obtained from DEC. During June when the fry were about an inch and a half long, members of the club would travel to Lew Beach, package the fish for travel and drive back to a meeting place in Taberg where other members would be waiting to stock the salmon.

#### **Building the first hatchery**

In 2004 it was time to build our own hatchery. Tom Tkachuk, a member of the club owned property on the East Branch of Fish Creek and there was a spring on the property that ran all year. Tom was interested in having a hatchery on his property and allowed the club to perform an experiment to see if the water quality from the spring was good enough. The experiment was a success and during the winter of 2005-6 club members built a small building to house the tank. A second tank was built for the club and added to the hatchery. The water supply to the hatchery was gravity fed so we did not have to worry about electrical power.

Club members would travel to the hatchery every day on a rotating basis from January to June and take care of the fish and the tanks. Raising salmon to the fry stage by the club proved very successful. The club obtained a hatchery permit and a stocking permit and in 2006 stocked Atlantic salmon fry for the first time that had been raised entirely by the club.

#### **Building the second hatchery**

During 2009 the club decided to investigate other locations for the hatchery closer to where most of the members lived to minimize concerns about winter travel over back roads. Tom Schneider contacted Mr. Greg Harden, who owned the McConnellsville Furniture factory to gain permission to place a tank in the sluiceway of the dam located there. Permission was granted and the experimental hatching showed that hatching eggs and raising them to the fry stage in the West Branch of Fish Creek was viable.

Later, the club went back to the management to determine whether they would be interested in building a hatchery for the club. Several options were discussed but building in the flood plain turned out to be not viable. It was then suggested that if a roof was placed over the open part of the sluiceway that it might serve as a hatchery. The management agreed. The club had plans drawn up and Harden went ahead and built the roof. The club subsequently moved the tanks from Annsville to the McConnellsville location. By this time we had three tanks. By January 2011 the hatchery was up and running and on July 2, Atlantic salmon fry were stocked for the first time from the McConnellsville hatchery.

#### **Solving problems**

Running any kind of enterprise always results in having problems and a hatchery is not any different but somehow, the club has been able to resolve all of our problems.

The club had just set up the hatchery

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#### Salmon -

(Continued from page 3)

in McConnellsville in January 2011 when the water in the tanks and pipes froze due frigid temperatures. The club got everything thawed out and went ahead and sealed off the open end of the sluiceway. That solved the problem. Water contains a lot more heat than ice and the latent heat in water flowing through the hatchery was enough to keep the tanks clear of ice without adding a mechanical heat source. We had to do something about possible flooding of the hatchery. Arley Morey came up with the idea of vertical pipes attached to the sides of the tanks that allowed the tanks to rise up as the water level increased during the Spring runoff. Then we suspected that our salmon eggs were being handled roughly by the transportation service so starting in 2012 Club members began travelling overnight to the hatchery in Maine to bring back the eggs by car.

The club started with the use of trays in the fish tanks and the question arose: would incubators cut down on mortality? The Adirondack State Fish Hatchery had some old excess incubators that they donated to the club. Could we use them? We did not have enough head to place the incubators in the sluiceway so Jim Lawler contacted Harden to see if they had a space for an incubator. It turned out that they indeed did have a place and were willing to allow us to use it. The space had power, running water and a drain. By January 2014 the club had the incubator up and running to accept salmon eggs. After the eggs hatch they are called alevin and have yolk sacs still attached. When the yolk sacs are used up and the salmon start to be able to swim, they are transferred to the tanks from the incubators.

During 2016 the club suffered the loss of all of the fish in the incubator due to a pipe being clogged by silt. With no fish to stock the club called various hatcheries to determine whether there were any excess salmon fry to be had. Luckily,



Camden Middle School stocking fish in the Mad River.

the Adirondack State Fish Hatchery and the Dwight Eisenhower National Fish Hatchery in Chittenden, Vermont had excess Atlantic salmon fry that they could give to the club. Arrangements were made and members traveled to the respective hatcheries to transport the fish. It has been amazing that the club has received such support from the public and from other institutions and agencies. Despite obstacles, there has always been and continues to be widespread support for the Fish Creek salmon project.

#### Working with students

During 2013 the club began to collaborate with Trout Unlimited's "Trout in the Classroom" program. Together with Trout Unlimited, the club bought the tanks, chillers and filters and installed two systems at the Camden Middle School. Trout Unlimited supplied brook trout eggs while the club supplied Atlantic salmon eggs. The project was successful and on June 4, 2014 brook trout and Atlantic salmon were released into the Mad River by over 100 students, assisted by members of the club. Club members also collected invertebrates from the stream to show the students the diversity of life that supports fish population. The students especially liked stone fly nymphs and crayfish. Working with the students has become one of the club's annual traditions. It emphasizes native species, care for the environment and a healthy ecosystem.

The club decided in 2013 to reach out to the College of Environmental Science

and Forestry. The club would provide salmon fry and manpower to help anyone doing research on Atlantic salmon. Justin DiRado and Chris Powers soon took the club's offer and spent two years doing the field work for their Master of Science degrees. Their work identified a Fish Creek tributary that had many benefits for the Club's work and identified a strain of landlocked Atlantic salmon that might be more resilient in the face of climate change.

#### Summary

Each year for the last twenty years, the club has placed Atlantic salmon into the Fish Creek watershed. Due to the state's requirement for testing for disease, the capacity of the club's hatchery is about 50,000 salmon fry because the salmon have to stay longer in the tanks for testing and they outgrow current hatchery capacity. The club currently has four tanks for fry and two incubators for eggs.

The club usually receives salmon eggs in January and members, on a rotating basis make a daily visit to the hatchery until late June or early July. That takes a lot of dedication and commitment. After being tested for disease, the Atlantic salmon fry are stocked in various tributaries to Fish Creek.

The club usually stocks about 35,000 salmon fry each year. The club has developed a relationship with state and federal-run hatcheries and if they have excess fish, the club will rent a large truck to transport the fish to Taberg for

### **OLA Honors Stang With Conservationist of the Year Award**

The Oneida Lake Association honored Doug Stang, assistant director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, as its 2017 OLA Conservationist of the Year. Conservationist of the Year is OLA's highest honor for people who protect Oneida Lake, and Stang was recognized for his 3-decade-plus effort to help Oneida Lake's fisheries and natural resources.

"It's safe to say Doug cares as much as we do about Oneida Lake," said OLA Past President Scott Shupe. "Throughout his career in Region 7 and in Albany, he has always gone way above and beyond for Oneida Lake."

The award was presented at OLA's 72nd annual membership meeting, which was May 3 in Cicero. By accepting the

honor, Stang entered the equivalent of the Hall of Fame for Oneida Lake conservation. Previous honorees have included Rep. Jim Walsh, past Oneida Lake Fish Cultural Station Director Mark Babenzien, and Cornell Shackleton Station Director Emeritus John Forney.

Stang's contributions to Oneida Lake have been diverse and deeply felt, including his advocacy for sportsmen in fisheries management and his support for angler and boater access. One of Stang's most important achievements was to lead the development of New York State's cormorant management plan, which still guides local, state, and federal efforts to hold the invasive species at bay even as funding and tactics have shifted over the past 20 years.



#### Salmon —

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stocking. The Ed Weed Fish Cultural Station in Vermont has been very generous to the club in the past with not only excess fish but with much needed advice.

The club receives its financial support entirely through donations, membership fees and raffles. Recent collaboration with Spey Nation, an advocacy group for two handed fly rod fishing, has bolstered financial support for the club's work. Each year the club applies for the proper permits from the state to import eggs, operate a hatchery and to stock fish in the Fish Creek watershed. The club receives untold amount of support from the public, for which members are very grateful. The club enjoys warm encouragement from landowners who grant access to the creek. Every landowner approached has granted access. No one has ever refused.

So in the final analysis, is the club successful and what's in the club's future? Yes, a few Atlantic salmon make it to adulthood but is that a meaningful measure of success? Atlantics have been caught in Oneida Lake by ice fishermen and boaters. Large Atlantics have been caught in Fish Creek. The club has retrieved some of those fish and by analyzing the ear bones we can determine where the fish has spent its life. The work done by the club has shown that Atlantic salmon can and do mature in Oneida Lake but we may never see the numbers of salmon that once swam in area waters. If the club has increased the awareness of the public to the importance of a healthy environment and the idea that Atlantic salmon should be in the Oswego River watershed, then that may be enough to call the club's effort a success. What the future holds for the club and Atlantic salmon, are big unknowns. Most scientists believe that climate change is causing harmful variations in precipitation and higher temperatures that could adversely impact a cold water species that has developed since the last ice age. Atlantic salmon have evolved in a certain temperature range beyond which they cannot survive. The big question is: will climate change warm up the streams too much for cold water species?

For more information see the club's website at www.fishcreeksalmon.org



The stocking volunteers on Fish Creek.

Oneida Lake Bulletin – Your Environmental Voice for Seventy Years

### **Oneida Lake Association Meets at Arrowhead Lodge**

#### By John Harmon

The Oneida Lake Association (OLA) was founded in 1945 to protect, restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its surrounding ecosystem.

On Aug. 7, the Oneida Lake Association blended picnic and policy by hosting a meeting at Arrowhead Lodge at Oneida Shores County Park. Nearly 80 people, including members of law enforcement, the DEC and state, county and town legislators, such as State Sens. John DeFrancisco and Dave Valesky, Oswego County Legislator Roy Reehil and Cicero Town Supervisor Mark Venesky, were in attendance. Cornell, ESF, USDA Wildlife Services, the state fish hatchery and many other conservation-minded organizations were also represented.

This meeting provided an opportunity to network and discuss many topics related to the health and welfare of Oneida Lake. The first half of the meeting included an outdoor barbecue, providing attendees an opportunity to network and brainstorm ideas on ways to share in a commitment to preserving and enhancing the lake's environmental and commercial health. One of the highlights of this event was a fly-in by Air 1, the helicopter from the Onondaga Sheriff's Department. The Brewerton Fire District also brought their rescue boats for close inspection.

The meeting then transitioned to the spacious lodge, where OLA President Warren Darby addressed the attendees. He and OLA Board Member Matt Snyder presented slides on the work and history of the OLA. A representative from the Brewerton Fire Department spoke about the

dramatic rescue of four teenagers who were adrift on a jetski through most of the night of July 2. Deep diver Tim Caza then closed out the program with astonishing images of shipwrecks he has uncovered at Oneida Lake's bottom, including the only Durham boat ever discovered in



OLA Board members and other lake advocates network at Arrowhead

New York state.

If you share an interest in Oneida Lake and its surrounding, consider joining the OLA. Visit us at oneidalakeassociation. org.

Reprinted from: Eaglenewsonline.com www.eaglenewsonline.com/news/2017/08/22/oneida-lake-association-meets-at-arrowhead-lodge

### The Lakeside Guide to Autumn Yard Work

Courtesy of the CNY Regional Planning and Development Board

As the seasons change, the choices you make about yard maintenance can have direct implications for Oneida Lake and the surrounding ecosystem, as well as for your property. To help, the CNY Regional Planning and Development Board and CNY Stormwater Coalition have prepared the following tips for homeowners:

- Don't leave leaf piles uncovered. Leaves can blow into drains and storm sewers, contributing to flooding or creating water quality problems.
- Don't burn. It's illegal to burn leaves anywhere in New York State.
- Consider mulching or shredding leaves instead of raking and removing. Shredding leaves reduces decomposition time, helps retain soil moisture, and

returns organic matter and nutrients to the soil, helping the vigor and appearance of lawns. Up to <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" of shredded leaves can be left in place without harming your lawn.

- Prep your garden, trees, and bushes. Removing tomato, squash and bean plants from your garden and composting them, while leaving root crops in the ground with a heavy layer of mulch, makes the best use of your garden. Removing all weeds and broken/ diseased branches and plants now will help your plants thrive next spring.
- Protect plants and trees. Covering perennials with mulch, leaves, or straw; staking young trees; and wrapping taller evergreens in burlap helps

protect your plants from animals and weather. Removing fallen fruit from the area will help reduce the chance of deer and other pests munching on your yard.

 Compost leaves. Many municipalities offer roadside pickup or central sites for composting leaves, or you can compost them in your own bin and add the compost to your garden in the spring. Or just leave the leaves! Whole leaves can be left over wooded areas, yard edges, and gardens at depths of up to three inches, as long as the mulch layer doesn't touch tree trunks or shrub bases. The leaf layer creates habitat for overwintering species and helps increase soil fertility.

### **Did you Miss the Annual Meeting?**

At its Annual Meeting in May, the OLA Board of Directors presented the following accomplishments to members:

- Successfully held Nuisance Goose Workshop March 25, 2017 100 attendees
- Published Spring and Fall Bulletins, reducing print expenses via more email
- Dues remain \$5, although Board will be discussing a change
- Increased content at OLA website, adding Q&A, research, and historical papers
- Facebook and website enhancements
- In May assisted NSSD 5th grade environmental outing at Oneida Shores
- Asked DEC to dredge Godfrey Point, based on reported problems in 2016
- Trash cleanup at Route 81 interchange and angler walkway
- Successful and productive networking meeting with 75 government representatives
- July and August Water Chestnut harvests, now at TWO locations
- Sent letters of support to elected officials on matters important to OLA
- Filled all board vacancies
- Jan-March attended 3 sports shows



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### Thank you to all of the Fire Departments that serve Oneida Lake!

### **Featuring: The Constantia Fire Department**

The Constantia Fire District purchased the rescue boat known as 8WR1 in 2008. Built by Brunswick Commercial and Government Products (BCGP), headquartered in Edgewater Florida, the 27-foot Boston Whaler 'Vigilant' is powered by twin 275HP Mercury four stroke outboards.

The outboards can be controlled independently, making the fairly large craft easy to maneuver. Two, one-hundredgallon fuel tanks provides the vessel with the endurance required to sustain extended rescue and/or recovery operations. It is also equipped with a state of the art Raymarine GPS and radar navigation system that not only provides important topographical information on a 17 inch color display, but it also provides critical GPS plotting and navigation. The highly precise radar affords the craft the ability to navigate the lake on the darkest of nights in an expeditious manner without fear of running into other boaters or objects.

The vessel is equipped with a tow bar and 100 feet of tow rope. It is more than capable of towing most vessels with very little difficulty. The rescue boat is equipped with a 6-foot wide dive door on the port side to facilitate divers, as well as, rescue and recovery operations. With the dive door removed, the floor of the boat is level with the water line, making ingress and egress much less dramatic.

Although the craft has all of the necessary plumbing to equip it with a fire pump, due to cost and likelihood of use, the installation of the fire pump itself was not done. We do have the ability to load a portable pump for firefighting activities, if required. In lieu of a fire pump, we carry several



Constantia's 27' Boston Whaler "Vigilant."

fire extinguishers which we have found to be suitable in most situations and carry all necessary medical equipment on board to support our Basic Life Support mission. This equipment, along with the expertise of almost a dozen Emergency Medical Technicians, we have the ability to sustain life until a higher level of care can be achieved.

Plenty of floor space aft of the island style pilot house, allows our crew to provide care to up to four patients simultaneously.

In addition, the department has a 19-foot aluminum Sea Nymph that it utilizes for shallow water operations on Oneida Lake, as well as inland bodies of water. This vessel is maintained on its trailer to allow for rapid deployment when and where needed.

#### Water Rescue Fire Departments That Serve Oneida Lake

We are fortunate to have seven Water Rescue Fire Departments that serve Oneida Lake. They are:

Brewerton Fire Department Bridgeport Fire Department Cleveland Fire Department Constantia Fire Department South Bay Fire Department Sylvan Beach Fire Department West Monroe Fire Department

### Happy 200th Anniversary to the Erie Canal!

As we celebrate the bicentennial of the Erie Canal, it is important to remember how vital Oneida Lake was to its conception and development.

For more information, contact: http://eriecanal.org

### The Oneida Lake Association Moves Into the 21st Century

As you many have noticed, on your membership application, you have the option to get the Bulletins electronically instead of being mailed. This saves the organization in printing, postage and mailing costs! To communicate more routinely we started an e-newsletter that is emailed out periodically. We have noticed however, that many of you don't "open" the file to read the newsletter sent from Constant Contact – Please be sure this email doesn't land in your Spam folder! We want to communicate with you, our members, easily and efficiently – email is a great way to do that!

~ Thank you!

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### **Volunteers Wanted!**

Your Oneida Lake Association's outreach program involves staffing exhibition booths at regional sport shows. Directors' commitments occasionally conflict with scheduling, leaving difficult gaps in coverage. We invite all association members to volunteer to fill these gaps. Working these shows creates a unique opportunity to promote the OLA and share great fellowship with scores of dedicated, fascinating outdoorspersons.

Any interested members should contact the board through our website - *www.oneidalakeassociation.org.* 



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