

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Spring 2002

Fish and Wildlife Service Issues Draft EIS On Cormorants

by Jack Henke

It's finally here.

Last winter, the United States Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency that sets regulations governing migratory birds, published its long-awaited draft Environmental Impact Statement regarding double-crested cormorants.

The EIS listed six possible cormorant management "alternatives." Each of the six was a different method for controlling the troublesome birds. The EIS contained detailed analyses of every method. The alternatives ranged from a "no action" proposal, that continued present policies, to a "regulated hunting" system that allowed cormorant seasons and bag limits to be established. The Fish and Wildlife Service's "proposed action" was an alternative that would "establish a new depredation order to address public resource conflicts."

What does this mean?

This plan allows states to apply for permits to regulate their cormorant populations. According to the EIS, double-crested cormorants could be controlled "to protect biological resources such as fish, wildlife, plants, and other wild species on public lands and waters." Previously, states were not allowed this degree of latitude. States and the Service would work together to implement methods of cormorant control.

Oneida Lake and its cormorant-ravaged walleye and yellow perch numbers easily fit within these guidelines. Fish are a defined "biological resource" and our lake's decimated populations certainly need protection, and rebuilding. Ample scientific documentation exists to back this point. Under the alternative's regu-

lations, New York's Department of Environmental Conservation would be able to obtain the necessary Federal authorization to address the long-festering problems that double-crested cormorants have created.

However, the issue isn't settled yet. The EIS contained a proposed, not a final, alternative for dealing with the cormorant situation. The Fish and Wildlife Service just concluded a series of hearings where the public had the opportunity to comment about cormorants and the EIS. Several OLA directors spoke at a Service hearing in Syracuse last February (see the related article on page 3). The Service is well aware of our positions, and the reasoning that supports them.

Many of you wrote letters to Congressmen Walsh, Boehlert, and McHugh, in which you voiced support for strong controls. Your letters made a difference and the OLA appreciates your concern. Congressmen Walsh and McHugh have been very supportive of cormorant population reductions, and they have expressed these views to the Service. We praise these Congressmen for advocating positions that enhance and protect Oneida Lake.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's committee that has responsibility for writing the double-crested cormorant EIS has reviewed all input received during the public comment period. The committee



Double-crested cormorants peer at the desolate Wantry Island landscape. Cormorants have ruined much of the vegetation on Oneida Lake's small islands.

is now working to write a "rule" that may incorporate some of that input into a final preferred alternative. This rule should be finished by summer.

A draft of the rule will be sent to the parts of the country that it impacts. Another "comment period" will follow, in which additional input may be gathered. The committee may modify the proposed rule after this final review.

The resulting document will be the official Fish and Wildlife Service policy regarding double-crested cormorants.

President's Message

Your OLA's Board of Directors has been very active representing you in several key issues that affect our lake. Here's a brief overview of our work.

Water Chestnuts - Proposals to cut the budget of the Oswego County Soil and Water Conservation Department alarmed the OLA. This Department operates the weed harvester that removes water chestnuts from Oneida Lake. We attended meetings, spoke with county officials, and submitted written comments about this issue. Our input contributed to the county's decision not to cut the budget. The strong voice of the OLA's large membership made a difference. Bill Schriever, our spokesman, did an excellent job.

Lake Water Levels - We believe that Oneida Lake's fall "draw down" is detrimental to the lake's ecology. Also, we feel that lowering the lake level in the fall and winter does little to prevent major spring flooding. Scientific reasoning backs our point. We also think that many lake users are negatively impacted by early draw downs.

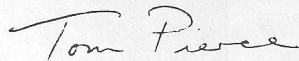
The Thruway Authority, which controls the Barge Canal, announced last summer that the 2001 draw down would begin one month earlier than usual. The OLA wrote to the DEC Commissioner and requested that an Environmental Impact Study be done before any changes occurred. We believe that this action contributed to the decision not to change the draw down date.

Cormorants - OLA members wrote letters supporting cormorant control. Thank you for doing this. Your input influences government policy. An article on page 3 describes our action on this issue.

Congressman Walsh - Dr. Edward Mills, Kurt Snyder, and I met with Congressman James Walsh to discuss the cormorant problem, other invasive species in the lake, and the water level issue. Congressman Walsh was extremely supportive and empathetic to our concerns. We are fortunate to have him represent us.

Dr. Mills and Mr. Snyder articulated the OLA's positions effectively at that meeting. Your President did the best thing he could - he kept his mouth shut.

I hope that the walleyes don't give you that treatment this year! I'll see you on the lake.



Thomas Pierce
President - Oneida Lake Association

Nominating Petitions

Under the OLA bylaws, members may nominate officers and directors. A petition, that is to be signed by at least fifty (50) OLA members in good standing, must state the name of a member or members the petitioners wish to nominate as officer or director. The petition must be served on any present OLA officer no later than three (3) days before the Annual Meeting. It will be mandatory that the names on any such petition be placed on the OLA Nominating Committee list with the persons nominated by the committee, all in alphabetical order, for election at the Annual Meeting.

The OLA Secretary will make the membership list available for inspection by an OLA active member on request.

The slate of officers nominated for 2002 reads: President - Thomas Pierce, Vice Presidents - Bill Schriever, Kurt Snyder, and Charles Engel, Secretary - Thomas Giufre, Assistant Secretary - Robert Gang, and Treasurer - Edward Olmstead.

The Directors nominated for terms beginning this year are Arnold Armani, Richard Colesante, Edward L. Mills, Carl Preske, and Scott Shupe.

The Oneida Lake Association Inc.

Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., 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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Vice President Charles Engel, Jr.
Vice President William Schriever
Vice President Kurt Snyder
Secretary Thomas Giufre
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**Enjoy safe boating -
observe the
"rules of the road"**

OLA Directors Speak at EIS Hearing

Association Directors Kurt Snyder, Tony Buffa, Thomas Pierce, and Jack Henke spoke at the Fish and Wildlife Service's hearing on the proposed EIS, held on February 13 in Syracuse. They spoke to represent you - the OLA membership - and their message was clear. Director Snyder read the following statement, that was quoted by the *Post-Standard*.

"On behalf of the Oneida Lake Association, I wish to thank the Fish and Wildlife Service for addressing the severe problems that predation by double-crested cormorants have created on Oneida Lake, and throughout the country. Responsive government is requisite to an effective democracy and the Ser-

vice has demonstrated, in its handling of this issue, a timely, refreshing sensitivity to New York's articulated needs.

The Service's recommendation of "Alternative D - the Public Resource Depredation Order" merits praise. The Board of Directors of the OLA believes that this alternative reflects federalism at its best and shows that agencies of our National Government recognize that individual states face unique environmental problems. States can correct the problems created by double-crested cormorant predation through Alternative D. Our Association applauds this Alternative's selection.

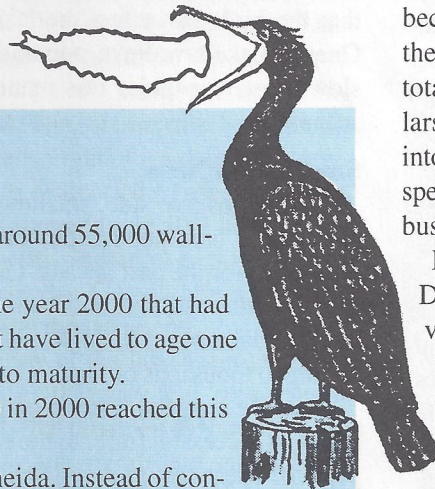
Double-crested cormorants have created a legacy of environmental and

economic destruction at Oneida Lake. Cornell University researchers have documented the loss of millions of walleyes and yellow perch to cormorant predation during the 1990's. These losses coincided directly with a drop in the quality of the lake's fishing.

Fishing has long provided a significant source of revenue for the Oneida Lake region. Marinas, boat liveries, bait and tackle stores, motels, cottage rentals, convenience stores, and restaurants benefit tremendously from anglers' spending. All lakeside businesses suffer when fishing declines. Research conducted by the OLA revealed that, during the 1990's, a mere 13 marinas lost nearly 500 boat dockings because disgruntled fishermen removed their vessels from the lake. These losses totaled over a quarter of a million dollars. This figure, of course, does not take into account the ripple effect that anglers' spending would have engendered in other businesses in the Oneida Lake area.

Formerly billed by New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation as the state's 'walleye capital,' Oneida Lake once attracted hundreds of out-of-state anglers every year. These fishermen have, to a great extent, abandoned Oneida. For example, the Cicero Lions' Club Walleye Derby has witnessed the number of participating anglers from Pennsylvania drop from over 200 to around 70 during the past decade. The total number of derby entrants has declined by over 2000, a figure that reflects fishing quality.

We know that anglers will return once walleye and perch fishing improves. Oneida Lake has always been popular among sports persons. It can regain this status. Reducing the lake's double-crested cormorant population will contribute mightily toward rebuilding our fish stocks and reestablishing Oneida Lake as the pristine, superior anglers' magnet it once was."



Editorial

Numbers tell the tragic story.

Last year double-crested cormorants consumed around 55,000 walleyes that were age one and older.

The birds eliminated over 60,000 walleyes in the year 2000 that had reached these ages. Biologists say that walleyes that have lived to age one and beyond have an excellent chance of surviving to maturity.

Fifty-five thousand walleyes in 2001 and 60,000 in 2000 reached this "magic age."

But these 115,000 walleyes disappeared from Oneida. Instead of contributing to the lake's beautiful, productive ecosystem, these fish became food for double-crested cormorants.

We could print more, equally disturbing statistics, numbers from the 1990's that document the consumption of millions of Oneida Lake's prized fish by these exotic birds. The numbers show very clearly what's been occurring.

Is there any doubt why walleye year classes have been poor? Can there be any question where the fish that have survived the lake's food web's gauntlet have been going? Of course not. Cornell biologists have written that the lake's zooplankton and invertebrate production is more than adequate to sustain a walleye population resurgence.

But walleye numbers will never rebound while cormorants gorge.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has written an excellent draft Environmental Impact Statement in which it recognized the cormorant problem, and created a way to correct it. This method will be revised into a final "rule." Hopefully, the rule will prove tougher and even more effective than its draft version.

We praise the Service for its actions, thus far. Oneida Lake has suffered, and suffered greatly, from cormorant depredation, for more than a decade.

Effective controls cannot come soon enough.

Change in Oneida Lake - A Biological Analysis

by Edward L. Mills and Lars G. Rudstam

Oneida Lake, one of the finest aquatic resources on the New York landscape, provides exceptional recreational opportunities. The lake's water quality has greatly improved since the 1970's, primarily because the amount of phosphorus flowing into the lake from its watershed has been reduced by half. The massive algal blooms and oxygen-depleted conditions that were common in the late 1950's are rare on Oneida today.

We must now become more vigilant at reducing soil losses from tributary streams and correcting specific pollution sources in the watershed. Proper management practices, that include maintaining enough phosphorus to support the lake's great fishery, must remain a high priority in order to insure a healthy ecosystem with high water quality.

The Walleye and Perch Decline

Oneida Lake remains in what we scientists call a state of "biological stress." Walleyed pike and yellow perch populations hover at historic low points. These popular fish species are experiencing high mortality in their early and mid-life stages. Walleye larvae, in the first fall of their life, and walleyes and perch from ages one to three, are simply not surviving in significant numbers.

Why? The cause for high mortality of both walleyes and perch older than age one is predation by double-crested cormorants. Cormorants are fish-eating birds that opportunistically feed on the most abundant prey. Sadly for Oneida, these happen to be the lake's anglers' favorite game fish.

The second reason for the decline in walleye numbers occurs during the first year of the fish's lives. We suspect that prolonged clear water conditions, brought about by zebra mussels' filtering of algae, has made young walleyes vulnerable to predation, particularly in June and July. Larger fish can easily see and prey upon young walleyes, whereas during past years when algal blooms covered the lake every summer, murky water gave cover to

the small fish.

Over 50% of Oneida Lake's walleyes are more than seven years old. This is a troubling statistic and leads to our labeling the population as being under "biological stress." A walleye population dominated by older adults and exhibiting poor recruitment ("recruitment" refers to the number of fish born each year that reach maturity) is of the utmost concern.

We must do whatever is possible to increase our lake's walleye population. Currently, anglers may keep three walleyes per day and the fish must measure 18 inches. Cormorant harassment continues every summer, decreasing the number of days that the birds can affect the lake's fish. Oneida Lake's walleye population will slowly recover under this management scenario.

Some Good News

On the positive side, smallmouth and largemouth bass populations have been increasing for the past decade. Growth of young smallmouth bass has been outstanding. The lake provides high quality bass fishing to thousands of anglers each year.

The lake sturgeon restoration program has been successful (refer to the article on page 5). These fast-growing fish are consuming a wide range of bottom-dwelling creatures, including zebra mussels.

New Species Invade Oneida

To properly evaluate the state of our lake, we must consider "biological pollutants." These include new, exotic organisms.

Zebra mussels have infested Oneida Lake for over a decade and have caused dramatic ecological changes. Some people

associate clear water with a healthy ecosystem. The persistence of high water clarity in Oneida Lake, however, is unnatural for fish like walleyes, that thrive in turbid conditions.

In the near future, zebra mussels will encourage the establishment of a new invader - the round goby. These fish are already in Lake Ontario and in the western part of the Erie-Barge Canal. When gobies arrive in Oneida, they will consume zebra mussels and become very abundant. Gobies will provide bass with a food source. Only time will tell whether young gobies will be an important part of walleyes' diet.

Outbreaks of fish and bird "die-offs" may accompany gobies. Scientists have identified Type E botulism in birds and fish in Lake Erie and suspect a link between low oxygen, zebra mussels, gobies, and the bacteria responsible for this virus.

The water chestnut thrives in a small area of Oneida Lake's western basin. This plant's thick, jungled growth has the potential to become a major impediment to lake recreation. New sightings of water chestnuts should be reported to the authorities. Efforts to remove the plants have started and must be continued.

In Summary

As we enter a new millennium, the changing state of Oneida Lake creates uncertainty. What will the new, unwanted "pest organisms" do to the lake? What will happen to the walleye and perch populations? We are only now beginning to grasp the effects of zebra mussels and the water clarity they've brought to the Oneida food web.

New organisms and developments loom on the horizon. We are witnessing biological changes that will alter the course of Oneida Lake's ecological history. Organizations like the Oneida Lake Association must remain vigilant and work to protect the lake's ecological heritage.

Edward Mills and Lars Rudstam are biologists with the Cornell Field Station.

What Cormorants Took From Oneida Lake in 2001

355,000 Walleyes

2,000,000 Yellow Perch

Source - Cornell Field Station

Update - Sturgeon!

by James R. Jackson

Sturgeons are one of the oldest groups of freshwater fish that survive today. The fossil record contains sturgeons' imprints that date back 200 million years! There are 24 species of this fish, distributed throughout the northern hemisphere. Thanks to the efforts of New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation, visitors to Oneida Lake might be lucky enough to encounter one of these species - the lake sturgeon.

Lakes Erie and Ontario, and the St. Lawrence River, supported early sturgeon fisheries in our state. Lake sturgeons were common up to the early 20th century, but commercial fishing eventually decimated their numbers. Newspaper accounts and local lore confirm that these fish thrived in the Oswego River system. "Sturgeon stories" document the fish's presence in both Cayuga and Oneida Lakes. We read one account of a 104 pound specimen that was netted at Brewerton in 1856!

New York's lake sturgeon fisheries were officially closed in 1976 and the fish was classified as "threatened" in 1983. The DEC ranked lake sturgeons as a priority species for restoration in the early 1990's. Richard Colesante and Mark Babenzien, of Constantia's Oneida Fish Cultural Station, were presented the challenge of developing techniques for raising young sturgeons. They were more than up to the task.

Colesante and Babenzien started working on the sturgeon project in 1993. Using eggs collected from spawning sturgeons in the St. Lawrence River, these men and their staff nurtured well over 35,000 fingerling and larger fish. Around 6,500 sturgeons have been stocked into Oneida Lake. Cayuga Lake and other waters in the Lake Ontario watershed also received fish.

We reported in the Summer of 2000 *Bulletin* that the sturgeon restoration program's initial progress was excellent. Good news continues today. Sturgeons have regularly appeared in the Cornell

Field Station's fish survey catches. We have been using nets that are specifically designed to catch sturgeons and, through this research, we've learned more about their status in Oneida Lake. The highest sturgeon concentrations are found on shoals and along drop-offs. We can't estimate the size of Oneida's sturgeon population, but we know that survival from all stocking years has been fantastic.

Lake sturgeons from the initial stocking in 1995 had reached lengths over three feet and weights exceeding 20 pounds by the summer of 2001! Oneida's sturgeons are growing almost 6 inches a year, faster than any other population that we've researched. This includes the famed Lake Winnebago sturgeons in Wisconsin.

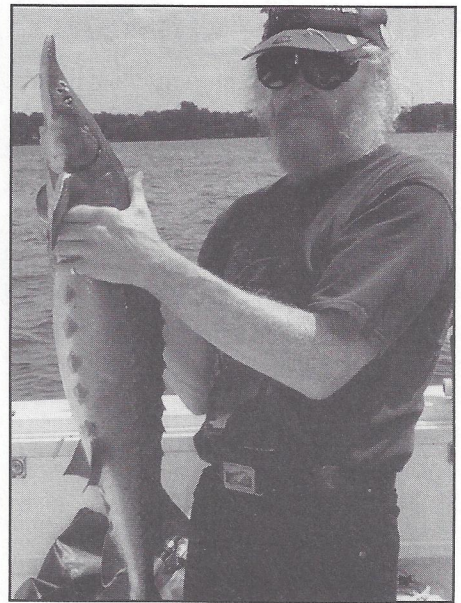
Oneida Lake's sturgeons are eating very well. The relationship between the length and weight of a fish is used by biologists to evaluate the fish's condition. Oneida's sturgeons are 10% heavier than fish from any similar lake in the country. This shows that Oneida offers an excellent feeding environment.

Our study of the lake's sturgeons' diets indicates that they feed primarily on organisms that thrive on the bottom, most commonly amphipods and snails. Interestingly, we have discovered that larger sturgeons (over 28 inches) appear to enjoy zebra mussels.

Oneida's sturgeons are still too young to spawn. We hope that Fish Creek and the lake's other tributaries provide good reproductive habitat for these fish when they mature.

The DEC and the Cultural Station's staff can rightfully brag about the success, thus far, of Oneida Lake's sturgeon restoration program. Soon, sturgeons will be the largest fish in the lake. Don't be surprised if you start hearing stories about the return of the mysterious Sylvan Beach sea serpent!

The Field Station biologists will continue to collect data about these magnificent fish. Your cooperation can help us.



Ken Clark proudly holds an Oneida Lake sturgeon that he caught near Shackelton Shoals, using a bucktail jig. The sturgeon was, of course, released unharmed. Photo courtesy of Ray Brown Charters.

If you catch a sturgeon, please do the following:

1 - Handle the fish with great care. If the sturgeon swallowed the hook, cut the line. Remember, these are "threatened" fish and must be returned to the water as soon as possible.

We exercise similar respect for sturgeons at the Field Station. We fish our nets for only short periods to minimize the stress that the fish experience.

2 - Note where you caught the fish. If possible, measure its length.

3 - Check for tags. Many of Oneida's sturgeons have small, yellow, numbered tags at the base of the fin on their back. Record the number, but do not remove the tag.

4 - Please call the Field Station to report the tag. Our number is 315-633-9243. We may be able to tell you about the fish's travels and its growth after tagging occurred.

5 - Spread the word about sturgeons to other anglers. It's important that everyone help restore these unique, beautiful fish.

James R. Jackson is a biologist at the Cornell Field Station.

Offshore - Onshore

As fishing and boating seasons approach, remember a cardinal principle - observe the rules of the road. Safety comes first. Please remind all your friends about this critical point.

The Fort Brewerton Blockhouse Museum is open from May 15 through September, Fridays and Sundays from 1-5 p.m., and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. The Museum, located on Route 11 just north of the Oneida River Bridge, presents marvelous exhibits about Oneida Lake's history. It also sponsors monthly history-oriented programs, from April to November, on the 3rd Monday evening of each month, at 7 o'clock. There is no admission.

A new research facility is now under construction at Cornell's Shackelton Point Field Station. The building will include laboratories and walk-in environmental chambers. Biologists plan to use the structure to investigate environmental problems associated with Oneida Lake and the Great Lakes.

North Country Books, of Utica, will soon reissue a paperback edition of *Oneida Lake - Place Names and History*, a book that traces the origin of the names of every point, shoal, bay, and community around the lake. It will be available in bookstores, and in lake area businesses.

Attention bikers, walkers, and joggers! Both the Oneida Shores County Park,

Brewerton, and the Verona Beach State Park have nifty trails to explore. The part of Verona Beach lying east of Route 13 boasts marked pathways that web their way through a beautiful wetland where waterfowl and deer abound.

Starting Memorial Day week, the Sylvan - Verona Beach Resort Association will be sponsoring "Classic Car Cruise Night," every Thursday evening, in the village's lake-front parking lot. If you enjoy vintage American autos, this is the place to be.

Don't forget that walleyes have to measure 18 inches to be "keepers" and that the limit is 3 fish per person per day. Let's continue to do our part to rebuild the population of Oneida Lake's premier fish.

In the Bulletin - 35 Years Ago

We thought you might be interested in this account of an unusual scientific investigation on Oneida Lake, that occurred in 1967.

Post Cards Aid Study of Lake Currents

by John Forney

Orange-colored post cards, sealed in plastic envelopes, made their first appearance in Oneida Lake last summer. A printed request on the cards asked the finder to record where and when the card was found, and to mail the card to Cornell. These drifting post cards supplied information on water movements and how they affect survival and distribution of young fish. Knowledge of water currents will also help in planning for future pollution and algae control.

Over 1500 cards were released and 379 of these were returned. By plotting where cards were released and recovered, and knowing the direction of surface winds, a picture of currents in Oneida Lake was pieced together. As expected, the prevailing west-northwest winds across the lake set up surface currents, which flowed in a generally east-southeast direction. Velocity of surface currents increased as wind velocity increased. Average velocity of the water was about 3% of the wind velocity and, at times, current speed approached 1 mile per hour.

More cards will be released this spring, at the same time young walleyes are stocked in the lake. The response of the public in returning cards last year was gratifying and your continued cooperation is needed.

John Forney is a pioneering biologist of the Cornell Field Station.

Necrology

Angelo "Julie" Angeloro (1915 - 2002)

The Oneida Lake Association notes, with deep regret, the passing of Angelo "Julie" Angeloro, a member of the Association's Board of Directors and Advisory Board for over forty years.

As a boy in Syracuse, Julie Angeloro worked with his father in the wholesale produce trade at the Regional Market. During the 1920's he established a successful entertainment business, which he sold in the mid-1940's.

Julie purchased the W.O. Zischang Company, a hunting and fishing supplies store on Syracuse's North Salina Street, in 1945. Under his guidance, Zischangs became a leader in the wholesale sporting goods market. The company held the exclusive distributorship for Remington products within this region. Julie operated Zischangs through the 1980's and, even in retirement, kept his company open part-time.

An original member of the Oneida Lake Association and a dedicated conservationist, Julie served his lake and its people well. His warm, friendly personality graced the OLA's booth at countless sports' shows. He was the chairman of the "Take A Youngster Fishing" Contest for many years and was dedicated to sharing Oneida Lake's fishing joys with future generations. Julie's son, George Angeloro, has been a member of the OLA Board of Directors for over two decades.

Julie Angeloro's life embodied dedication to the principles inherent in preserving Oneida Lake, and courtesy and kindness to all who were fortunate enough to know him.

We will miss him.

News From the Hatchery

by Richard Colesante and Mark Babenzien

Wow - has this ever been a strange winter! Oneida Lake's central portion didn't freeze, an amazing event that will go down in the record books. Hopefully, this unusual phenomenon will not have a negative effect on our ability to collect walleye eggs. We are anticipating an early spring and expect to be setting nets towards the end of March. However, we realize that conditions change and we will be closely monitoring the situation.

At this writing (March 1), we have 70,000 walleyes from last year in this hatchery and 30,000 at our facility in South Otselic. These fish were held over the winter to protect them from predation and will be stocked in the spring, when food will be available in the lake. The fish are now 5.5 inches long. We've fed minnows to the ones housed in our building. All 100,000 will be stocked, via boats, in Oneida Lake during March.

Walleye fingerling and yearling stocking for our lake was negotiated between the Oneida Lake Association and the DEC. This is an attempt to bolster the lake's sagging walleye population. Stocked fingerlings and yearlings will be monitored by Cornell to determine their survival rates.

We plan to collect about 300 million walleye eggs during the upcoming production season. Seventy five percent of the fry raised from these eggs will be stocked into Oneida Lake. In addition, we will raise between 200 and 300 thousand advanced fall fingerlings, also known as yearlings. Fry from the Oneida Hatchery will be supplied to the South Otselic and Chautauqua State Hatcheries. These fish will be reared to fingerling size in ponds.

We also plan to raise sturgeon and paddlefish. New York State classifies these species as being "endangered" or "threatened." This is our third year for rearing

paddlefish and our goal is 500. They are stocked in the Kinzua Reservoir, near Jamestown. Paddlefish grow faster than any other hatchery fish. They add up to an inch to their length every week during the summer. We hope to produce 5000 lake sturgeon fingerlings, from six to ten inches each. These will be stocked in several bodies of water, including Oneida Lake.

The Oneida Hatchery can be an exciting place to visit. We are open from 8 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., every day, from late March until September. We always have at least three species of fish to see - walleyes, sturgeon, and paddlefish.

Call the hatchery to determine optimum visitation times. Our number is 315-623-7311.

Richard Colesante is the Director of the Oneida Fish Cultural Station and Mark Babenzien is the hatchery's manager.

The OLA Fishing Corner

Lowering the Bar

by Captain Tony Buffa

Oneida Lake, once deemed "the land of milk and honey" by walleye anglers, has suffered biological assaults from two exotic species - zebra mussels and double-crested cormorants. Cormorants ate millions of immature walleyes throughout the 1990's and, consequently, decimated the number of potential adult fish in our lake. Walleye year classes, that usually numbered in the hundreds of thousands, were replaced by token increases of 30 to 50 thousand fish annually.

Anglers, discouraged by poor fishing and distraught with the status quo, besieged both state and federal agencies, demanding checks on the cormorant population. Scientific, political, and philosophical constraints allowed these birds to exercise a virtual reign of terror over New York's

most valuable walleye fishery.

The state of affairs concerning this issue must change. I have reason to believe that it will. The recent draft Environmental Impact Statement, released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding cormorant control, recommended regional autonomy in formulating and implementing management plans for these birds.

Cormorants are the number one predator on yellow perch and walleyes in Oneida Lake. Once the Fish and Wildlife Service finalizes its cormorant policies, we must act quickly and effectively to eliminate any further predation from these birds. Whatever the means necessary - eradication or increased harassment - so be it.

I have not given up on Oneida Lake simply because walleye fishing has become more challenging. Perhaps we should all lower the bar of expectation. We can no longer expect "limit catches" on every

excursion. Think about it - isn't it the journey, not the destination, that's important here? Assuming that the adult walleye population is 1/3 of its long-term average, and that their distribution through the lake reflects that, then we should be satisfied with one or two keepers per outing. There are other fish to catch, too. And there's the experience of being on the water and enjoying Oneida's beautiful natural setting. Give up fishing this lake? Never.

So sharpen your hooks, cast your jigs, drift your night crawlers, and troll your favorite stick baits, just as you have in the past. Don't fall prey to inflated expectations and deny yourself the opportunity to enjoy a sport fishery that we all must support and protect.

Tony Buffa is a fishing guide on Oneida Lake and Lake Ontario, and an OLA Director.

To Rest, To Relax, To Rent a Camp

by Jack Henke

The OLA's web site gets a lot of visitors and a common question they ask is, "How do we go about renting an Oneida Lake waterfront camp?"

The Bulletin investigated the question and found a variety of sources of information. To simplify the matter, we've divided the lake into several areas and, after each area's title, we'll discuss contacts that may help prospective vacationers.

Good luck to all!

The East Shore

Upper South Bay, Sylvan - Verona Beach, North Bay

You can find listings under headings like "camps for rent," "summer rentals," or just "rentals" in papers that cover this area. These include the *Oneida Daily Dispatch*, the *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, the *Canastota Bee-Journal*, local *Pennysavers*, and the *Camden Times - Sylvan Beach Journal*. The last paper is probably your best bet. You should look early in the season - from April to June - because rentals can be scarce and they book quickly.

Longley-Jones Real Estate handles rentals within this area and they get new listings each year. Call Gretchen Loomis at 315-762-4032 for details.

We recommend driving around any of the areas in which you want to vacation. Some East End property owners post "For Rent" signs by their places or along Route 13. Lake Shore Road in Verona Beach, Park Avenue in Sylvan Beach, and Edgewater Drive in North Bay are excellent highways for "camp cruisin'."

The West End

Brewerton, West Monroe, and Cicero

The *Scotsman Press*, based in Syracuse, runs a "vacation rentals" section in the warm season. You'll also find a few



Ah...the good life, indeed. An Oneida Lake vacation cottage, nestled in the woods at Sylvan Beach, around 1900.

rentals listed in the classified pages of the *Post-Standard* and in the *Oswego Palladium*.

The Brewerton Chamber of Commerce gets a few camp listings and posts them on its web site. You can access this at www.oneidalakechamber.com.

It's tougher to follow the lake shore in this area, but the challenging drive may reward you. Get a map of Oswego or Onondaga County and go exploring. You may find your dream rental.

The North Shore Cleveland, Constantia, Bernhards Bay

Again, a drive may yield good results. Route 49 parallels the lake shore and you'll see signs advertising rentals.

When you're motoring around, stop at local diners and restaurants. Ask the employees what properties might be available. This tip applies to any area of the lake.

Vella's Markets, in Constantia and Cleveland, have community bulletin boards where rentals are often posted. It pays to check each store.

The *North Shore Citizens Outlet* and

the *Camden Times - Beach Journal* cover these communities. Check the rentals sections in those papers.

Kirchner's Fishing Kamp, located east of Cleveland, has several cottages for rent. Bill and Nancy Kirchner are longtime OLA supporters and advertisers in the *Bulletin*. Their facility is highlighted on page 10.

The South Shore Bridgeport and Lakeport

The *Madison County Times*, the *Post-Standard*, and *Oneida Dispatch* all have listings. Not many listings, however. Your best bet within this area is the drive. Much of the lake shore is accessible through Route 31 but, in Bridgeport, you'll have to leave the main highway. Take North Road to the lake and explore the area.

Generally speaking, you'll find more rentals (and motel and commercial cottage facilities) at the East and West Ends of the lake. Finding the right place for your family's needs may prove to be an adventure and challenge, but an Oneida Lake vacation's rewards make the efforts worthwhile.

Again, good luck!

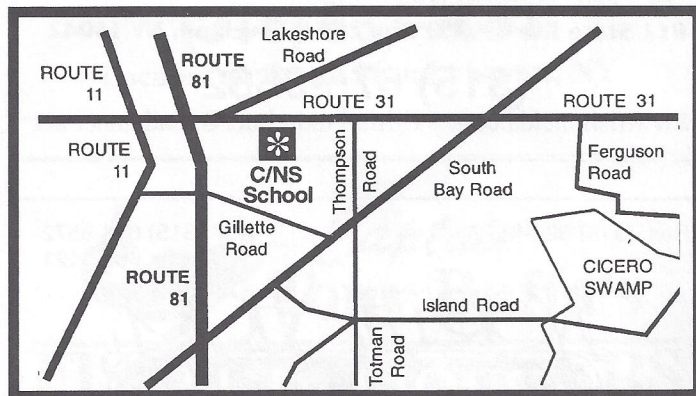
Annual Meeting at Cicero-North Syracuse High School - April 24, 2002

by Tony Buffa

The OLA will hold its annual meeting at the Cicero-North Syracuse High School auditorium on Wednesday, April 24. Doors open at 6 p.m. We encourage early attendance so that you can enjoy our numerous exhibits.

You can register for the Cicero Lions' Club's Walleye Derby at the meeting. Bonus money prizes for derby winners who are OLA members will be given - for the 11th straight year! Association membership renewals and new sign-ups begin at 6:15. You don't have to belong to the OLA, however, to attend the meeting.

This year's event will begin with a short business session at 7 p.m. Our meeting's theme is "Oneida Lake - On The Mend." Officials from the DEC and Cornell's Shackleton Point Field Station will update topics such as our fishery's status, spawning data from the hatchery, and the cormorant harassment program's results.



Directions to C-NS High School Route 31, Cicero

From the Thruway

Take the Thruway to Route 81. Take Route 81 north to the Cicero exit. Turn right onto Route 31. The school is about 1/2 mile away on the right.

From the East

Simply get to Route 31. Follow it west. The high school will be on the left just before you enter Cicero village.

From the West

Get to Route 31, to Cicero village, continue east under Route 81's overpass, and the high school will be on the right, about 1/2 mile away.

A special presentation about biological "invaders" in our lake will provide the opportunity for education about exotic organisms and fish. The topic of pond fingerling stocking will also be addressed. This is a "must" meeting for all who are interested in Oneida Lake's future.

The Association will award its prestigious "Conservationist of the Year" citation at the meeting. This award goes to an outstanding supporter of local conservation.

The meeting will close with distribution of door prizes and drawings for three Lowrance Global Map GPS units. One winner will be chosen from our membership at large and other two will be selected from people at the meeting.

We encourage you to join us for an evening of information and OLA solidarity. Please mark your calendars - Wednesday, April 24, 6:00 p.m. - OLA at CNS!

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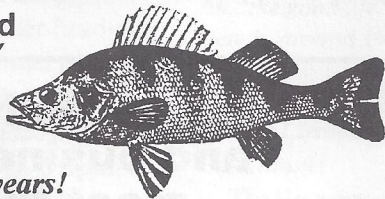
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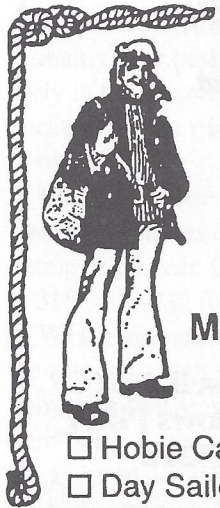
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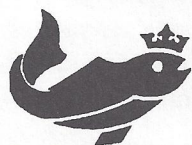
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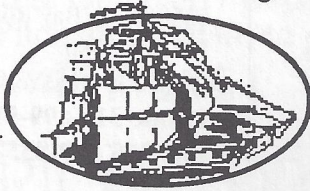
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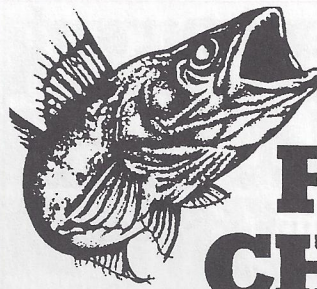
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