



**Oneida Lake Association**  
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Greetings!

I hope that you have a great end to your summer, for the weather has been great! Let's hope that the fall perch and pike bite is good as the late turns over. Don't be too anxious for the cold weather, for lots of us holdouts still have boats and docks to pull.

Whatever you do, please be careful. For the many new members and those new to the lake, please watch the weather carefully as hurricane season can bring rapid changes to the lake, frequently in a matter of minutes.



### **2016 Waterfowl Season on Oneida Lake - a tradition continues**

An early season for 'non-migratory' Canada geese runs from September 1-25. The regular Northeast Zone first split season starts a half hour before sunrise Saturday October 8 and closes at sunset October 29. The second half runs November 5 - December 11.

Like fishing, this heritage is a great one to continue with your friends, children and grandchildren. Several CNY waterfowling organizations exist to learn more. Licensing starts with a hunter safety course. While only a couple of true 'duck shacks' may remain on the lake, hundreds of today's year-round homes started as summer fishing and fall hunting cabins. Gone are the November days of rafts of hundreds of thousands 'bluebills and cans', but days of coffee-comradarie sustain many gents and ladies nuts enough to sit in the wind and rain, watching ice build on dekes, and birds fly by out of range.

For those not well versed in the ethics and legality of waterfowling, the following activities are authorized by the NYS Environmental Conservation Law:

- It is lawful for waterfowl hunters, while hunting waterfowl, to discharge their

firearms from 1/2 hour before sunrise until sunset (unless they are within the jurisdictional boundaries of a municipality, which, by local law, specifically prohibits the discharge of a firearm).

- It is lawful for waterfowl hunters to discharge a shotgun over water within 500 feet of a dwelling, public structure, or person, as long as that dwelling, structure, or person is not in the line of discharge.
- It is lawful for waterfowl hunters to hunt waterfowl from below the mean high watermark, unless the bottom is privately owned, and posted with a warning of trespass. Most bay and harbor bottoms are within the public domain, providing for public access.
- Any person who interferes with the lawful taking of wildlife may be prosecuted pursuant to the Environmental Conservation Law Section 11-110.

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## KUDOS

### Another attack on water

**chestnut.** In response to last month's call for assistance, the OLA Board thanks Roy Widrig of Onondaga County Cornell Cooperative Extension and Kathryn Des Jardin of the Finger Lakes PRISM at Hobart and William Smith Colleges for bringing teams to Lewis Point August 23-24. Assisting a lone OLA member, the crews harvested about 14 full canoe loads of weeds. Unfortunately, the plants were 'ripe' and many nuts fell to the bottom. Each nut is capable of producing a dozen plants next year, each containing scores of seeds. Area residents, especially those at the campground, are urged to pull emerging weeds next July, and for several years into the future. Doing so will diminish or eliminate this infestation. One member-neighbor has done so, and maintains a nice lakefront environment for all of us.

These teams, folks from Oswego County Soil and Water District, and helpers from the Oneida Lake Diehards Group also returned to Big Bay to manage the infestation on the west end. Next year we hope that OLA members actively participate to curtail the spread of this noxious alien weed.



**NYSDEC** is accepting Public Comments through October 7, 2016 on **proposed changes to freshwater fishing regulations**. Many of the proposed changes are the result of an effort to consolidate regulations and eliminate special regulations that are no longer warranted or have become outdated. Follow this link to the [full text of the proposed regulations](#).

Note that several walleye changes elsewhere in the state reflect on challenges faced by the team at the Oneida Lake Fish Culture Station.

# Managed Ecosystem and Its Fishery, L. Rudstam et alia, 2016, AFS)



Walleye are a digestion-limited predator. My college student is struggling with a statistics course.

The biomass size of plankton is reflected in rates of yellow perch predation. Say 'what?'

If your student is an angler, and wants to understand the importance of statistical number crunching in relating reams of tediously accumulated data sets, point him to the middle of the book. Maybe his sister can help him better absorb the significance of sunburns and callouses with patient nights in the computer lab.

The folks at Cornell have painstakingly accumulated world-renown metrics, analyses, and established conclusions that influence fisheries and regulations. The past relationships are indeed history, for the migration of invasive species and habitat changes intimate a future that can only be evaluated and understood by application of statistics. Translating numbers into lay language remains a challenge. Take a look.

Chapter 18 reviews the long term trends in the lake's fish community consequent to the zebra mussel invasion. It concludes that although there has not been a dramatic change in the fish community structure associated with the zebra/quagga mussels, the pelagic fishes like walleye and perch have decreased in abundance, while the benthic and littoral fishes (suckers, bass, pumpkinseed) were stable to higher than before 1991-2. Although the mussels are a known factor in the change, the decrease in perch and walleye may be due, in part, to other factors such as double-crested cormorant (DCC) predation. Chapter 19 evaluates this bird's influence. The Cornell work on

Collectively the management program represents a whole lake manipulation of a top predator that allowed Cornell's researchers to evaluate the conjectures about the impact of cormorants on walleye and yellow perch. Based on science and citizen task force recommendations NYSDEC instituted an adaptive management program that

- targeted a limit of a maximum of 100 DCC on the lake at any time,
- allowed weekly egg oiling using food grade corn oil to addle the eggs,
- nest removal, and
- non-lethal harassment using boats, pyrotechnics, and a variety of foils/flags/disruptors to 'scare' the birds away from nesting islands and tree roosts. Later agencies were allowed to shoot some birds. (Gut analysis is critical science to prove what birds are eating by prey size, species, distribution, numbers, and relative populations.)

The 100 bird target remains in 2016, along with an allowance for no more than 20 nests on the lake, but with no eggs successfully hatching. In 2011 Federal funding was lost in NYS and NYSDEC assumed the responsibility under its depredation permit. That 5-year permit was renewed, and NYSDEC has repeatedly affirmed to OLA that the state will continue to use all legal means at its disposal to achieve the target.

However, as reported earlier in Newsletter #5, the current depredation permit activities have been curtailed by court order. Animal rights organizations have learned to tie government up not with substantive science, but by presenting administrative hurdles that have little to do with the fundamental basis of an issue for which NEPA allows action. In this case the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) alleged that the US Fish and Wildlife Service did not sufficiently research and document its permit renewal process. Permitting is but a fraction of the agencies' mission. However, challenges divert the agencies' administrative resources and cause

cormorant predation beginning at the end of the last century was instrumental in Federal permitting of harassment and DCC population controls across the nation. Many earlier studies of cormorant-fish interactions were criticized because the fishery data was either less than comprehensive or was misinterpreted. Cornell's research legacy on Oneida Lake once again proved superior to most studies.

There is no record of DCC nesting on Oneida Lake prior to 1984. As the cormorant population on Oneida Lake became increasingly conspicuous, public concern began to grow regarding the potential for detrimental impacts to sport fishing and island habitats that supported other birds. By the mid-1990's, it became evident that cormorant had begun to exceed public wildlife acceptance capacity in the region and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) developed management objectives for the control of both resident and migrant cormorant populations on Oneida Lake.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) conducted a lengthy national review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. This process resulted in the lawful issuance of Depredation Permits for DCC population management.

An annual management program was implemented in 1998 that included limited nest removal in spring and summer and lakewide harassment during the fall migrant period. Between 2004 and 2009, all cormorant nesting on the lake was prevented and harassment was expanded to the majority of the open-water season. These years of the control program were supported through a direct appropriation from the Federal government to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – Wildlife Services (APHIS-WS). Starting in 2010, harassment was again limited to the fall migrant period only, and nesting continued to be prevented. Responding to a decline in numbers, in 2001 the walleye harvest limit was reduced by number and fish length. Birds were tracked by radio collars.

delays in not just depredation, but all other substantive permitting obligations, thus adversely affecting demonstrable economics and environmental programs across the nation.

Ironically, we will not know anytime soon if the prior comprehensive lake management programs, including DCC walleye-perch-bass-goby diet analysis, are effective. Historically 8-88% of the fall diet samples contained yellow perch and walleye. Relative proportions of the cormorant diet on these game species was moderated if gizzard shad, white perch, emerald shiner, or freshwater drum abundance were timed with the DCC migrant period in any given year.

Cornell's work shows that the decline in DCC consumption of Oneida Lake's gamefish led to a decrease in sub-adult period mortality.

So when members sight large numbers of cormorants on the lake this month and next, but see little evidence of effective management, it is not that the NYSDEC is unresponsive. At this time the activists influencing the court appear not to be the conservationists. We must await the judicial process outcome; hopefully it will be known in time for the agencies to renew effective programs in spring 2017 – with all the necessary tools in their tool box.



plants, snails, fishes, worms, and parasites along with photos and descriptions of their respective origins and effects on the environment and economy. Get a copy for your household, for even the kids can read this one. The unfortunate message is that a few Americans have for centuries been importing 'interesting' specimens. Escaping flower gardens, water gardens, commercial fish farms, bait buckets, and aquariums, their proliferation now costs America Billions of dollars each year.

Agencies that could have inexpensively been tasked with prevention are now overwhelmed dealing with management. Good intentions can be dangerous. Well-meaning agencies, for different reasons, once allowed or promoted many species other than black locust, Norway maple, and tumbleweed. For example, grass and bighead carp were advanced for water quality management in fish ponds. And USFWS in the late 1980's promoted fish passage at hydroelectric facilities in the Mohawk River for blueback herring. Theorizing that overfishing in the Atlantic could be mitigated and compensated by increasing the forage fishes' spawning in the northeastern coastal drainages. By 1995 that effort put this coastal fish in Lake Ontario via the NYS Barge Canal. But Dewitt Clinton undoubtedly never thought that the Erie Canal – transporting Europeans westward – would open the frontier to today's pests. And who knew that the earthworms coming from Europe in potted plants would transform American forest soils? We want it all. But 'it' comes with a price. Even the book is an international challenge. While published by Adventure Publications of Minnesota, it is printed in China. Quite likely the paper came from hemlock of the Northeast's forests or pulp from Alaskan spruce – manufactured in Asia. We rely on a global economy. International movement of goods is essential. That invaders will also move with us - is inevitable. The book speculates on which are coming next.

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Donate

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The Oneida Lake Association is a member of the New York State Conservation Council <http://www.nyscc.com/> and the New York State Federation of Lake Associations <http://www.nysfola.org/>.

**Report environmental violations.** Please remember to obey all laws, rules, regulations, and codes of ethics as they pertain to boating, fishing, hunting, and management of Oneida Lake and its drainage basin. Be civil. **1-844-DEC-ECOS(1-844-332-3267)**



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