



**Oneida Lake Association**  
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Greetings!

Members and Friends, Summer is almost here! Your Board of Directors hopes that you and your friends have a safe, enjoyable season on our great lake. Please stay alert, not only for navigation hazards and other users, but also of issues having the potential to change your level of enjoyment afloat. We face regulatory changes (read your NYSDEC fishing and hunting syllabuses carefully, monitor Albany's representation, and keep others informed. Use our Facebook page to post constructive material.

Part of 'others' is bringing in new membership. Our numbers have declined in the last decade. We need you to enlist those whom you know live on or use the lake who are not members to join us. The Board is aware of some significant changes pending, and can speak in Albany and Washington with greater confidence if our membership grows.

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## Join Oneida Lake Association

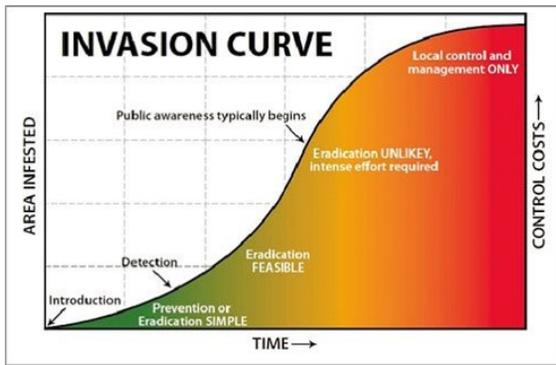
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Visit our website, search on the link to PayPal - it is that easy!

Be sure to tell us if you want the Bulletin sent to you by US Mail, or by email. The latter ensures that we can keep the dues at but \$5 for a few more years.

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## ANNUAL MEETINGSUMMARY



About 250 CNY members turned out for the April 27 meeting in Cicero and to view displays by several donors of door prizes. Again Emcee Captain Tony Buffa ran a tight ship. Director Bruce Shantz indicated our membership is – so far – stable at about 2,500. The election slate introduced by former President Rip Colesante resulted in the 2019 class of Directors to consist of Patricia Cerro-Reehil, Warren Darby, Thomas Guifre, Kurt Snyder, Matt Snyder, and Lance Vella. Gregory Keener joins the class of 2018. Matt Snyder steps down as a VP, while Bill Girvan steps up. Congratulations to all.

**NYSDEC Speaker Bill Evans** gave the 2016 hatchery report. Nets were deployed March 29 and pulled 9 days later. The target for walleye eggs was down 50 million to its lowest level in 50 years, reflecting reduced stocking program needs elsewhere in the state. 277 million eggs were targeted, and 284 million were collected. The crew collected 18,407 fish, of which 2,564 were males. Cornell's team clipped about 20,000 fins on walleye over 14". Put in McDonald incubating jars holding about 450,000 eggs each, this year the 'eye-up' rate was only about 61% versus the normal 80%. This will result in a 19% stocking reduction outside Oneida Lake (we still get our full measure of about 365,000 fry).

Bill reported that the hatchery has a newly installed \$240,000 drum filter on its water intake and \$125,000 of new boilers in its heating system.

**Dr. Randy Jackson of Cornell** gave the tradition 'state of the lake' message for those anticipating the May 7 walleye opener. Adult walleye numbers are essentially the same as seen since 2005, about 20 age 4+ fish per hectare. Anglers can expect to again have catch rates of about 0.2-0.4 fish per hour of effort, considered a 'good' metric down only slightly from the 1980's, when there were about twice the number of fish in the lake. There are about 425,000 walleye, and recruitment seems about equal to the annual catch of about 60,000 adults. Walleye numbers appear to have stabilized since cormorant management/harassment practices were initiated. White perch remain relatively high in numbers similar to what we have seen since 2009. Yellow perch densities are also relatively stable at numbers about half of their pre-cormorant and pre-zebra mussel levels. Annually fluctuating smallmouth densities appear to still be rising somewhat as the lake continues to adjust to its 'new' conditions. Sight-feeding pickerel continue to proliferate in response to clear water, especially in the weedy west end shallows.

Cornell researchers ask that anyone seeing or hearing reports of sturgeon spawning this spring to report those stream locations to the team at Shackleton Point. It is important to remember that early season anglers who hook a sturgeon should quickly cut the line. Playing and exhausting a hen sturgeon could prevent her from spawning that year.

**Dr. Christopher Pennuto of Buffalo State** supplemented our knowledge of the round goby. In his presentation "Patterns in round goby invasions, the Great Lakes experience, and thoughts on ecosystem responses" he showed a video of gobies feeding on the Lake Ontario bottom. Young gobies feed largely on insects, snails and

small invertebrates, while larger ones focus on zebra and quagga mussels. Attacking an mussel cluster these fish twist and rip much like an alligator or crocodile! Commenting on this footage, he indicated that goby densities approach 46,000 per hectare, peaking about 6-7 years after they are first noticed. Numbers will drop for a couple of years, then peak again, then fall to some as-yet unknown stable number. His important message was that **THE BEST AND LEAST COSTLY WAY TO MANAGE ANY INVASIVE SPECIES IS TO PREVENT IT IN THE FIRST PLACE; ONCE INTRODUCED, INVASIVE SPECIES LIKE GOBIE CANNOT BE ERADICATED.**

He predicts that gobies in streams will alter stream habitats more than in lakes. Stream chemistry, temperature, clarity, and riparian characteristics will change. While gobies in streams may have but one brood annually (maybe 4-6 in-lakes!) Their population will continue to grow for 10+ years after arrival. This pest will eat the shredding insects, (resulting in more leaf litter- less decomposition, changed nutrients) and the snails (that scrape & graze on algae, resulting in more slime). Gobies will adversely affect darter populations. In lakes it is unlikely that gobies will eat enough zebra/quagga mussels to change water clarity. One bright statistic suggests that 75% of the smallmouth bass diet is gobies. Some Erie and Ontario results suggest that larger walleye and burbot diets will shift to gobies.

**NYSDEC's Region 7 Fisheries manager David Lemon** reported on the cormorant harassment program. 2015 spring numbers were a bit lower than prior year averages, but fall numbers were higher, peaking at about 750 per day in mid-September and early October, well above the 100-bird target (attained only in June). 179 birds were culled between May and September. Diets from 153 of these indicate gizzard shad (51%), yellow perch (13%), emerald shiner (16%), and round goby (12%) with but 22 walleye identified.

Boaters may see harassment activities in mid-April – July one day per week (½ day count, ½ day hazing) provided numbers stay at or near the target population level of 100 cormorants on the lake. Then for August – September three days per week (Monday/Wednesday/Friday). Counts are to be conducted Monday mornings and hazing to occur the remainder of the week. And in October, counts only, one day per week. **HOWEVER, DAVE REPORTED THAT NYSDEC EFFORTS COULD BE CURTAILED BY A COURT ORDER – SEE ISSUE OF CONCERN BELOW!**

In closing Dave indicated that the state has acquired basically all the former Niagara Mohawk lands along the Salmon River, enabling it to start performing bank stabilization, trail, and habitat improvements. Fishing regulations changes for 2017 will be announced in late August for public review and comment. Finger Lakes anglers may be interested in diary summaries for the 2015 fishing season that are available at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html>.

#### **Audience Q&A Summary - a few we could recall.**

- Will gobies lead to toxin and botulism concerns in Oneida? While outbreaks in the Great Lakes have occurred, it appears that botulism is kindled by anoxic conditions in the deeper water. Zebra mussels are eaten by gobies, and birds eat the infected gobies. Significant anoxic bottom conditions are unlikely in shallow, relatively toxin free Oneida Lake, so the quagga mussels are unlikely to concentrate harmful mercury or bacteria. Therefore it is unlikely that gobies will present a consumption hazard.
- It has been documented that bass taken off nests enable gobies and sunfish predation on bass eggs and fry. Region 6 therefore does not allow year-round bass angling. Are there now any plans to stop early bass fishing in Oneida Lake since gobies are a new threat to bass beds? At this time NYSDEC has no lake specific science to make regulatory changes. Oneida Lake remains open to year-round catch-and-release bass fishing.
- Possible Sylvan Beach breakwall reconstruction? With the decline in commercial barge canal traffic, Federal and state agencies – notably the US Army Corps of Engineers and NYS Canal Corporation are not funded by their respective legislatures to spend money in either rehabilitation or removal of the eastern pier area. Brewerton repairs were warranted by a western recreational moorage need that is not evident in the east. OLA supports

enhanced angler access and removal of the portions of the breakwall that represent safety hazards.

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**Recognition for Service on the Board – Outgoing Board Members were recognized for their dedicated service to our organization, Colonel Robert Gang, Judge Parker Stone, Judge Thérèse Wiley-Dancks, and William Shriever also a former OLA President.**

**Conservationist of the Year** Former President Matthew Snyder artfully introduced honored Frank Flack as its 2016 Conservationist of the Year. Flack, who is the Fishery Manager in DEC Region 6, was presented the award for his leadership and hands-on work to protect Oneida Lake's fisheries. (Pictures) Flack stands out as a NYSDEC staffer who is unfailingly aware, responsive, and supportive in addressing Oneida Lake fishery issues. He has made a long-standing personal and professional commitment to Oneida Lake which is reflected in several programs and initiatives currently underway. In all his work with OLA, Frank's approach has been to focus on real-world experiences in the field, rather than philosophical debates far removed from the reality of sportsmen and fish. Frank has been a strong proponent of angler access and continues to do diligent, creative work in a partnership to open up a new boat launch at the east end of the lake. He has been a chief proponent of bass in his region and he has fought the sometimes difficult challenges that face that fishery. Frank's hands-on leadership and collaboration with other DEC regions and departments have been hallmarks of the important cormorant counts and harassment activity. Said Snyder, *"Frank has been so good to the lake for so long that it's hard to cover all that he has done. Frank has set a standard for excellence in fisheries biology, he has always stood on the side of protecting the resource, and has always done the best to align protecting the resource with what sportsmen want."*

**Baseball cap found** – a member attending the Annual Meeting left a presumably important cap on the chair. If you made a special trip to Spearfish SD, and want your cap back, please contact [president@oneidalakeassociation.org](mailto:president@oneidalakeassociation.org).



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#### **EDUCATION AND OUTREACH.**

OLA's Greg Keener and Scott Shupe volunteered May 12 to assist the North Syracuse School District and NYS Sea Grant's associates host a lake-centric Science Day fieldtrip for about 250 5th grade students at Oneida Shores Park.

One of OLA-BOD's visions is to facilitate development of a series of modules lake area school districts can use to 'tell the story' of how the lake area geomorphology, history, ecosystem, and economy relate to school STEM curricula. We hope to enlist area colleges and a diverse group of professionals and avocational interests in discussing and implementing means to get children involved with outdoor, 'wet' interests. If you have ideas or an interest in how to target junior and senior high schoolers, contact the OLA.



## ISSUE OF CONCERN

Members attending the Annual Meeting learned that the invaluable harassment program for the double crested cormorants (DCC) again in jeopardy.

OLA and its partners have been advocating, studying, lobbying, and managing a program for nearly 30 years. Appearing in escalating numbers in the late 1980's, contemporaneously with the arrival of the zebra mussel, DCC helped change the character of the Oneida Lake fishery. Together these two species caused reduction of walleye limits.

Ironically an animal rights group - Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) - argues now in court that the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Department of Agriculture and other agencies failed to take "a hard look" in studying the impacts and alternatives to use of the federal depredation permit that allows and enables NYSDEC to provide meaningful DCC management.

NYSDEC's target for Oneida Lake is to allow no more than 100 adults on the lake, and to preclude successful nesting of DCC. The well-vetted NYSDEC harassment program toolbox under the permit includes chasing birds, oiling eggs, and limited shooting of birds. This program, run for a few years by USDA-Wildlife Services, could be gutted by the PEER-incited injunction.

As Dave Lemon of NYSDEC stated at the Annual Meeting, harassed birds react faster and with more 'when they see flock members splash'. Shooting a few really entices the greater number to move off the lake. Lethal measures are proven, effective management tools. NYSDEC shoots only about 160-180 of the thousands of birds that migrate across Oneida Lake. Their diet information is essential biological science. Some lethal methods will be used in 2016, pending an anticipated October decision.

Angler walleye bags have been relatively stable and about equal to adult recruitment numbers for the last decade. However, this number is about 1/3 the pre-cormorant/mussel long term population. Even with goby to feed on, perch and walleye are likely to remain a component of the DCC diet. This predator-prey relationship has been studied intensely since 1957. Is the work of Cornell's Shackleton Shoals Biologic Research Station not "a hard look"?

Diminishing sportfish populations is likely to have economic impact. USDA (Dr. Stephanie A. Shwiff, et alia) did a 2009 study that indicated the CNY regional economy could take a hit if DCC are not effectively managed each year. In a 2015 update for this Oneida Lake region treatise ([http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2715&context=icwdm\\_usdanwrc](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2715&context=icwdm_usdanwrc)), the researchers believe that estimated that the potential economic loss was on average \$5 million to \$66 million annually, as well as 66 to 929 job-years in the region annually over a 20-year period (1990 to 2009). The OLA infers that these angler-related numbers attributed to Oneida Lake – not to mention the Great Lakes – are certainly "significant". PEER's procedural callout that

an Environmental Impact Study – rather than a less rigorous yet conclusive Environmental Assessment – does not apparently consider past efforts either “a hard look” or findings “significant”.

The Board of Directors is studying the March 30, 2016 court decision that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in authorizing approval for “lethal removal” of cormorants in 24 states east of the Mississippi without current data or adequate scientific analysis. Oneida Lake cormorant numbers have fallen from the thousands to the hundreds since management began, enabling some measure of stability in our fishery. OLA pledges to support agencies striving to comply with NEPA and related treaties for the effective, balanced, and rational management of protected fish and wildlife.

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**Remember to stay alert for NYSDEC Part 576 implementation statewide.**

Don't get a ticket when launching or pulling your watercraft and/or floating docks! Do your part. Become educated and learn to identify invasive vegetation. Visit <http://www.oneidalakeassociation.org>, look to “Publications, Articles on Oneida Lake” and then “Bob Johnson's PlantID Field Guide”. Any, should a Launch Steward approach you this summer, please courteously listen to their message.

**Call for volunteers** Calendar a day in your kayak and help us pull water chestnut Friday July 29 (rain day is Saturday 30th). If you can volunteer from 0830-11 am please contact a director. We could use one or two open boats tow kayaks a mile or so to the creek mouth and to collect the harvest.



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