

# The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Spring 2026

[www.oneidalakeassociation.org](http://www.oneidalakeassociation.org)

## DEC, OLA, and Cornell University Collaborate on Understanding Bass Dynamics

By Matt Snyder, OLA Past President

Many of the Oneida Lake Association's 2,100 members, including several OLA directors, are avid black bass anglers who enjoy Oneida Lake's smallmouth fishing. Competitive and recreational bass anglers alike are represented, and they frequently and vigorously voice their opinions to their Association. In recent years, many anglers have expressed worry for the future of smallmouth bass populations. At the same time, annual reporting by Cornell University's Biological Field Station at Shackelton Point has pointed to reduced catch of young-of-the-year bass in the Field Station's trawl net sampling over the past decade.

### OLA Concerns About the Smallmouth Bass Population

As multiple stakeholders have shared these concerns about smallmouth bass with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), DEC has been proactive in pushing for a better understanding of smallmouth population dynamics. This article is written to provide a deeper dive into what's going on with Oneida Lake's smallmouth bass, and what scientists and fisheries managers are doing to help.

OLA notes that the discussion among Oneida Lake bass anglers has tended to focus on three, potentially related issues: the impacts of regulations that legalize catch-and-release black bass angling during the late May-early June period when male smallmouth bass guard their nests;

the impacts of invasive round gobies when angler-caught smallmouths are taken away from these nests; and observations of decreasing abundance of small (under 10 inches length), young, angler-caught bass.

None of these topics are new news. However, angler worries about bass populations increased during the fishing seasons of 2023, 2024, and 2025, when anglers reported catching very few small smallmouths. These concerns were shared across a wide range of angler demographics, from tournament boaters to dock casters. Among all angler types, the shared concerns can be summarized as: "Larger bass seem abundant, but if we're not seeing smaller bass, does that mean the population might crash in the future?"

Concurrently with the change in angler sentiment, the Cornell publication, "Fisheries and Limnology of Oneida Lake, 1960-2024," reported a decrease in young-of-the-year bass caught in trawl nets placed by the Field Station since 2015, compared to the time period prior to 2015. Cornell data also showed generally increasing walleye and perch populations during the preceding decade, trends which historically have coincided with decreasing smallmouth bass populations.

It is OLA's perspective that the responsible scientists and fisheries managers



have heard—and definitely share—the high value that anglers place on Oneida Lake's smallmouth fishery. The research and management teams have collected and closely studied voluminous data, and they have worked hard to monitor and manage smallmouths. The good news is that based on all available evidence, the population does not appear to be headed for a crash. Furthermore, everyone involved plans to continue collaborating to protect Oneida Lake's bass fishing for future generations.

As the foremost observer and watchdog representing Oneida Lake anglers, OLA has viewed any potential for a smallmouth population decline with caution. After many months of deliberation and due diligence, the Board even considered making a public call for bass anglers to practice voluntary restraint from targeting smallmouths during the portion of the catch-and-release season from May 15-June 15.

*(Continued on page 3)*

# President's Message

The OLA is enjoying its 81st anniversary this year, 81 years of stewarding Oneida Lake, guiding our lake through the many challenges of time. The OLA meets these challenges by listening to you, our members, and doing what is best for our lake. Many times this means engaging with our elected officials to help us get the job done. The strong voice of our many members has allowed the OLA to help Protect and Preserve Oneida Lake for all to enjoy.



I thank you for your continued support and invite you to attend our Annual Membership Meeting on Wednesday April 29. The meeting will be held at Millard Hawk Elementary School in Central Square. Doors will open at 6pm, and the meeting starts at 7pm. Please come and visit the many exhibitors and listen to the informative presentations to learn what's new concerning our lake.

This month will end my term as president. It has been an honor to have served as your president. I would like to thank the Board of Directors for their tireless dedication and support during the past year!

I hope to see you on April 29. Let's all continue to Preserve and Protect Oneida Lake for future generations to enjoy!

Lance Vella  
President, Oneida Lake Association

It is an honor to follow Lance's dedicated leadership and serve as your incoming President of the Oneida Lake Association. I wholeheartedly share the OLA's commitment to protecting Oneida Lake's fisheries, wildlife, and natural resources now and for years to come. As President, I will focus on strengthening and diversifying our membership, engaging and educating stakeholders, and expanding our fundraising efforts.



Water has always been central to my life. Growing up on the shores of Owasco Lake and Cayuga Lake instilled in me a desire to study, understand, and protect our lakes. I earned a BS, MS, and PhD in Natural Resources from Cornell University, and spent eight years as an intern, summer employee, and graduate student at the Cornell Biological Field Station in Bridgeport — most recently researching the impacts of climate change and invasive mussels on the physical, chemical, and biological dynamics of Oneida Lake.

I now call Cleveland home, just a short distance from Oneida Lake. I enjoy all the lake has to offer and look forward to working alongside our incredible Board, membership, and community to preserve Oneida Lake. Please don't hesitate to contact me at [president@onedalakeassociation.org](mailto:president@onedalakeassociation.org) with your questions, concerns, or ideas.

Amy Hetherington, PhD  
OLA Board Director

## 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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### OLA Mission

The Mission of the Oneida Lake Association is to protect the fisheries, wildlife, and natural resources of Oneida Lake by promoting science-based conservation and management through education and outreach, in partnership with our members and local communities.

## Bass Dynamics

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### High Level Discussions with DEC and Cornell

However, after further meetings with DEC and Cornell, and especially after recent, focused discussions with DEC about the agency's regulations and research priorities, the OLA has determined that the best plan of action is to help educate anglers and advance the conversation about how bass are studied and managed in the lake. This path forward was supported by a resolution of the OLA Board of Directors, with a unanimous vote in favor by all the directors present at the Board's February 2026 meeting.

OLA's plan was informed in part by a summit on the topic that took place in February 2026. DEC Bureau of Fisheries Chief Steve Hurst convened this high-level meeting of DEC fisheries leaders and four past presidents of the OLA for the purpose of collaboratively reviewing anglers' concerns and providing insight into DEC's smallmouth management agenda. The major takeaway for all the meeting's participants was that just because not all data indicators are positive, that doesn't mean that smallmouth populations are headed for collapse.

In his presentation, Hurst reminded everyone that it is DEC's job to manage fisheries in a fashion that provides for protection of the resource while also affording as much opportunity as possible to the angling public. He stated, "Although we are concerned that some indicators are pointing in a negative direction, others remain stable or even positive. We currently lack a smoking gun that points to a potential population decline, and we feel that reducing angling opportunity based on current measures is unwarranted. That being said, we continue to not only scrutinize the data but to listen to the observations of anglers in our study of the smallmouth fishery."

OLA President, Lance Vella, added, "Chief Hurst brought together OLA leadership with DEC's Warmwater Unit

Leader, Inland Fisheries Unit Leader, and Region 6 and Region 7 Fisheries Managers. They have all been hard at work on this question about bass populations, together with Cornell. Anglers should be heartened to know that the DEC takes the health of the Oneida Lake bass fishery very seriously, and that the DEC team is constantly seeking the best possible scientific evidence to drive management decisions."

For example, DEC in 2025 launched a new, major initiative to measure angler effort during bass tournaments statewide. The Department plans to expand and refine its data collection and reporting efforts in 2026 and, going forward, to use this information to support its management priorities and decisions.

DEC also closely monitors angler-reported catch rates for smallmouths. In February, Hurst and his senior staff presented data showing that Oneida Lake catch rates continue to remain above historical averages, and that these rates are better than most lakes in the state. Additionally, says Hurst, "While there is no doubt that the removal of bass from the nest during the spawn can impact production at an individual level due to goby predation, we are unsure if it has any population-level impact, especially given the low targeted effort that Oneida Lake anglers direct towards bass in the spring. Our job right now is to continue to be vigilant regarding our surveying and to work with our partners at Cornell to explore new sampling methodologies to improve our understanding of smallmouth bass population dynamics in Oneida."

### Data Driven Conclusions

Illustrating the point that not many anglers target smallmouths immediately after they spawn in Oneida Lake, DEC's tournament registry data shows that only two tournaments were reported on Oneida Lake in 2025 during the pre-June 15 open season. Each of those tournaments had 12 or fewer boats. Cornell's most recent

creel survey shows that only 9% of the lake's total bass angling effort occurs prior to June 15. Logically, at such low levels of effort, factors other than angling and regulations have more profound impacts on bass populations. Moreover, while smaller bass may not seem abundant, larger smallmouth are routinely caught at rates greater than observed on most other lakes and greater than Oneida Lake's historical averages.

"Cornell's longitudinal study of Oneida Lake fisheries is one of the strongest in the world of fisheries science. Their data show that today's Oneida Lake anglers are doing better than the average reported since 1960," says Vella. "Even with some wild cards, like the arrival of gobies, Oneida Lake remains one of the state's most popular bass fishing destinations. OLA credits this to good management, including the role that anglers can play in conservation by choosing to not target smallmouth bass on their beds in springtime."

In the February discussion, DEC informed OLA of plans to further study angler effort during the period prior to June 15. DEC also proposed to task its fisheries biologists to attend some registered tournaments, both during the pre-season and regular season, to gain more information about how fish are targeted, caught, and handled during those events. As the tournament registry regulation produced more years' worth of data, the information will be combined with reports from Cornell and other sources to inform potential DEC decisions about Oneida Lake and other bodies of water across New York State.

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**To submit questions or comments about *The Bulletin*, contact editor John Harmon at [jpharmon1@gmail.com](mailto:jpharmon1@gmail.com)**



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## Bass Dynamics

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One of the topics discussed at the summit was the fact that no entity charged with protecting Oneida Lake has a comprehensive answer for why some of the fishery's indicators seem to be on the move. For example, it remains a bit of a mystery why smaller smallmouth seemed to be so hard to come by during recent years.

However, as Hurst reminded the group, "Historically, in years when Oneida Lake walleye and perch have been doing very well, we have seen black bass populations move in the opposite direction. It has gone the other way around for walleye and perch when bass populations have been at their peaks." While neither Cornell nor DEC point to a direct cause-and-effect relationship for these correlations, "We are allocating resources to understand bass dynamics, while still managing Oneida Lake primarily as a walleye and perch lake," says Hurst. That approach is well supported by Cornell's creel surveys, which report that more than 80 percent of Oneida Lake's angler effort is for either walleye or perch. This effort

has held steady over the 65+ year duration of Cornell's study. So, even as the lake has more frequently made published lists of top smallmouth angling destinations, Oneida Lake has proven over the decades to be capable of supporting great walleye, perch, and bass fishing through good fisheries management and ethical angler behaviors.

## Moving Forward

Not resting on their laurels, Cornell and DEC are in regular communication over the best way to study Oneida Lake's fisheries in the future. DEC routinely serves on search committees for the Field Station's open research and faculty positions. Through New York State's research contract with Cornell, DEC directly funds and sets goals for fisheries science on Oneida Lake. This public-private partnership, born in the middle of the last century and supported since its inception by OLA, continues to position Oneida Lake as one of the best-studied and best-managed lakes in the recreational angling world. There are still some factors that DEC, Cornell, and OLA would like to understand better. For example, it is established that gobies eat bass fry when male bass

are taken off post-spawn nests by anglers. But what that fact means to bass populations on Oneida Lake is still unknown. "If gobies meant no recruitment of bass, we would have run out of adult smallmouths on this lake by now, which we have not," says Hurst. "Truthfully, we only have so many resources to put into fish sampling, and we want to prioritize those with respect to the multiple fisheries on Oneida Lake and how anglers enjoy them," he added.

And so, as OLA continues its inquiries into fisheries issues, we also support the management priorities of DEC. The February meeting, and especially the work that informed it, are reminders that DEC's work is based on the best available evidence and a commitment to protecting Oneida Lake's valuable sport fisheries over multiple generations. Like its counterparts in the Department and at Cornell, OLA will remain vigilant for future issues of concern for all Oneida Lake sport fisheries. We encourage our members to continue to bring these questions to our attention. If you fish, you are on the front line of Oneida Lake fisheries management!

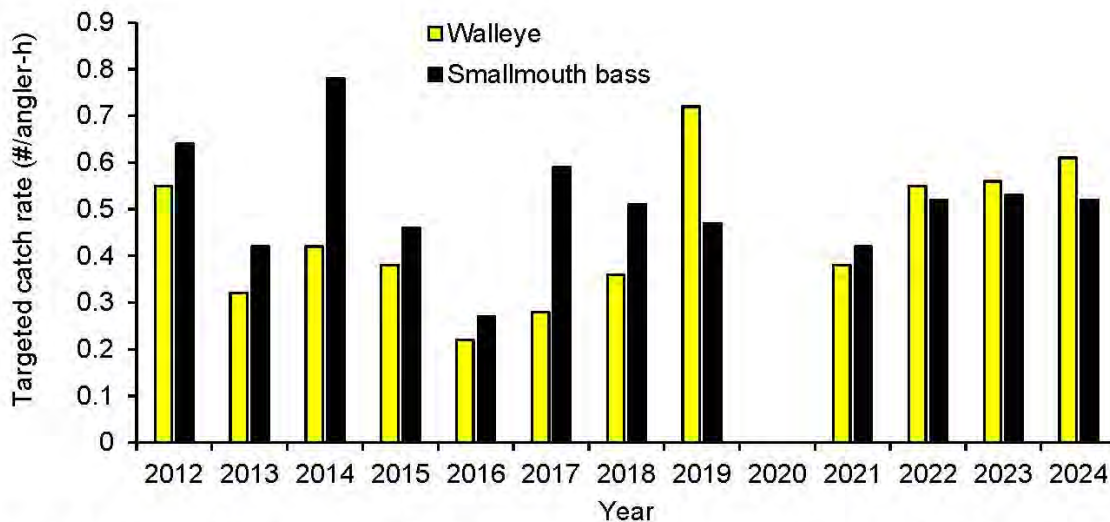


Figure 32. Targeted angler catch rates for walleye and smallmouth bass for Oneida Lake since 2012. No angler data was collected in 2020.

"The Fishery and Limnology of Oneida Lake, 2023," published by Cornell University.

# ANNUAL MEETING 2026

Millard Hawk Elementary School - 74 School Drive, Central Square

Wed., April 29 - 6 pm

## Honoring the Legacy of Capt. Tony Buffa

The Oneida Lake Association Board of Directors once again announces our in-person, annual Membership Meeting. The meeting is open to all members of the public, with OLA memberships available.

Please join us at 6 p.m. to sign up or renew your membership, enter prize drawings, and see the many exhibits of interest to Oneida Lake aficionados!

The meeting will start at 7 p.m. with the customary welcome and business meeting, including the salute to the flag, treasurer's report, membership report, President's report, and elections.

A special focus of this year's meeting will be activities and announcements in remembrance of Capt. Tony Buffa, a 50-year member of the OLA Board of Directors and winner of the Association's 2025 Conservationist of the Year Award.

## Scheduled and Invited Speakers

Following the brief business meeting, the featured speaker on this year's schedule is Ben Walsh, Director of the New York State Canal Corporation. Walsh, previously the Mayor of the City of Syracuse, is a lifelong outdoor enthusiast who has enjoyed Oneida Lake dating back to his youth. He will introduce himself as Director and provide an overview of Canals, which is a vital steward of Oneida Lake water resources and infrastructure.

Other scheduled presentations includes:

- An update on DEC's Oneida Lake Fish Cultural Station activities for 2026
- The "State of the Lake" update from Cornell Biological Field Station at Shackelton Point
- Remarks from the DEC Bureau of Fisheries on fisheries management priorities
- A "Cuffs and Collars" update by Region 7 Environmental Conservation Officers
- A progress report from the Town of Cicero on evolving waterfront revitalization priorities from Brewerton to Chittenango Creek

Following guest speakers, OLA will set aside time for interactive Q and A with the audience. The Board will then present its annual Conservationist of the Year Award, to an individual whose record of achievements have made a deep, positive impact on conservation of the lake. At the end of the meeting, OLA will host drawings for door prizes provided by local outdoor retailers and exhibitors.

***Please join us Wednesday, April 29 and thank you for your support of OLA!***

## OLA Notice of Elections

Notice of Elections: In accordance with the Association's bylaws, all OLA members in good standing who attend the annual meeting in person will be eligible to vote in Board of Directors elections. Elections will be conducted by voice vote during the business meeting.

The slate of Directors standing for re-election this year, for terms beginning May 1, 2026 and expiring April 30, 2029, by recommendation of the Board's Nominating Committee and with the unanimous support of the full Board of Directors, are William Alexander, Ryan Asmus, Michael Barretta, Amy Hetherington, Rowland Hrywnak, Dr. Edward Mills, George Reck, and Bruce Schantz.

## Oneida Lake Lure Makers Part 2: Contemporary Craftsmen By Jack Henke

Oneida Lake's anglers can easily access the products of lure makers who carry on the traditions established by the tackle artisans of old. The quality and variety of lures produced by contemporary craftsmen would undoubtedly impress their predecessors.

These lure makers share several traits. They are good listeners who value feedback from anglers. They are innovators who constantly look for ways to improve their products. They test every lure before marketing. They dedicate countless hours to their craft. They enjoy their jobs and care about angler success. Brian Hammond, owner of BHammer Tackle, echoed the last point: "I love what I do. My greatest reward comes from talking with fishermen who've caught the limit of 'eyes' when they used my lures."

Interviews with Mike Yarema, Jeff Tornabene, Josh Chenel, Carl Kapfer, Brian Hammond, and Bill Alexander yielded information for this article.

### Mike Yarema: i1Baits

In 2015, Mike Yarema was fed up with store-bought tackle. Head paint chipped and tails broke apart on the jigs he purchased. Inconsistent vibrations and inferior hooks reduced his blades' effectiveness. The Syracuse Police Department Captain resolved to build better lures.

Making jig heads was no problem; Mike experimented with them in the 1990s and intensified his work in the early 2000s. Blades were another matter. Initially, Yarema tinkered with commercially purchased blades. He painted them with bait-imitating colors and altered the lures' bodies to increase vibrations. When companies kept tweaking blade shapes, Mike purchased custom molds to produce his own. i1Bait's genesis had arrived.

Yarema makes bucktail jigs, blades, trolling weights (1-6 oz.), casting weights, and bottom bouncers. All of his products are "tournament tested, walleye approved." Mike personally tests every i1 pattern. His designs are influenced by input from other charter captains, tournament pros, fishing partners, and customers.

Among i1Bait's popular items are the "Joker Hair Jig" (pictured) and



Mike Yarema's "Joker Hair Jig"

bucktail jigs with integrated stingers. The latter lures feature treble hooks hidden in tails and connected to the jig's head by 14-20 lb. test mono line. When it comes to colors, Mike smiles when saying, "Any color is effective as long as it is purple/black, with a red collar and flash in the tail." Seriously, that jig is but one of his many all-star items. With regard to his "Bad Boy" brand blades, he recommends using gold and perch varieties in spring, white and silver in fall, and black or another dark, solid color in early morning.

You can order Mike's tackle online at [i1Baits.com](http://i1Baits.com). The most direct way to purchase his lures is to stop by his shop at 281 County Route 12, Phoenix, where a stock of more than 4,000 blades greets customers. He recommends that patrons call first (315-575-1743). Custom orders are available, with no minimum number. Near the lake, the i1Bait line is sold at Mike's Oneida Lake Bait Shop (Brewerton) and Mickey's Live Bait and Tackle (North Syracuse).

### Jeff Tornabene and Josh Chenel: Lakeside Outfitters

In 2015, school chums Jeff Tornabene and Josh Chenel decided that they could make far better tackle than what was commercially available. They started tying jigs and soon graduated to blades and hardbaits. Three years later, Jeff and fellow Canastota Scott Masucci opened Lakeside Outfitters at 3279 Route 31, just east of Flo's Diner in Upper South Bay. Josh joined the team in 2020. The trio serves customers at the store almost every day of the year.



Jeff Tornabene's "Mack Attack" pattern

Lakeside offers a full line of fishing tackle and related gear for every season. Jeff is the primary lure maker, while Josh handles jig production. The store's "Rotjaw" brand includes jigs, blades, ice fishing lures, jigging raps, harnesses, stickbaits, and jerkbaits. As Jeff says: "We make it all."

One of the shop's all-star patterns is "Mack Attack," a shiny greenish base punctuated by red/black spots (pictured). Like other popular styles, the Mack Attack can be purchased in blades, jigging raps, and ice jigs. Lakeside's black/gold jigging rap is one of many Rotjaw products with proven track records. Regarding new lures' appearances, Jeff experiments with styles drawn from a lengthy list and values anglers' suggestions. He also considers local lure making history.

“Lure popularity comes full circle at times,” Jeff observes. “If fish haven’t seen something in years and it worked once, it may work again.” Lakeside’s staff tests every lure.

The Rotjaw line is available at the store (315-633-6030). Hours vary slightly per season and are posted online. Custom orders are available, with a minimum quantity of twelve.

### **Carl Kapfer: Mad River Sports & Fish Lure Tape**

Seeking a career change, Carl Kapfer retired from hospital administration, earned his MBA at Syracuse University and, in 1988, established “Mad River Sports,” a tackle/custom-made fishing rods company in his Canastota home. In 2010, he moved closer to the lake – on Snell Road, across from Flo’s Diner in the Town of Lenox.



*Carl Kapfer’s stickbaits*

Carl credits Richard “Red” Devan, longtime operator of South Bay Bait & Tackle, on Upper South Bay, for jump-starting his lure making career. After Red urged him to manufacture bucktail jigs, Kapfer became one of the shop’s major suppliers. The late, legendary Oneida Lake Charter Captain Tony Buffa also influenced Carl. “Tony taught me about the physics and optics of lures,” recalled Kapfer. “He stressed that movement and reflections are vital design considerations and told me to research and think about what fish see in varying light conditions.”

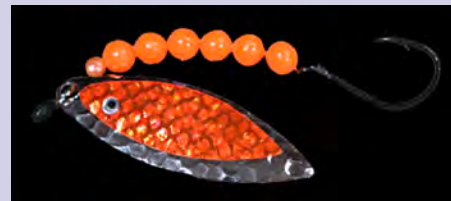
Mad River Sports offers a full line of blades, jiggling raps, stick and jerk baits, bottom bouncers, and underspins,

in addition to rods. Scott D’Agata, Don Berti, and Don Therre (Carl’s “pro staff”) test new varieties. Among Kapfer’s proven producers are his “Ultra Shad Bladebait” (1/2, 5/8 oz.) and his black/purple bucktail jigs, with red tinsel intertwined (1/2, 5/8 oz.)

You can purchase his products online at [oneidalakefishingtackle.com](http://oneidalakefishingtackle.com) or eBay (Mad River Custom Tackle). In addition, Bucks & Bolts (Route 49, North Bay) and App’s Landing (Cleveland) carry his lures. Anglers wishing to visit Carl’s store on Snell Road should call first 315-697-9768. Custom orders are available.

### **Brian Hammond: BHammer Tackle**

When Brian Hammond fished spinner/worm combos in Oneida’s waters during the 1990s, the rigs he purchased from tackle dealers didn’t perform to expectations. Consequently, the Cicero resident started making his own. In the early 2000s, the proprietors of Mickey’s Bait Shop (North Syracuse) heard about Hammond’s spinners and asked Brian if they could sell a few. Orders were small, but Mickey’s interest encouraged the novice lure maker. From this humble beginning, BHammer Tackle was born in 2020.



*Brian Hammond’s “Hammer”*

Today, “The Hammer,” as Brian’s spinner rigs are known, is arguably the most popular lure of its kind on Oneida Lake. Today’s Hammers reflect years of refinement; Brian continues to experiment with the size, weight, color and number of beads, and the length of leaders. “Every lure is hand-crafted from American-made parts, exclusively,” he notes.

Hammond makes two types of spinners: BHammer Casting (18” leader, #4 willow blade, #1 octopus hook) and BHammer Trolling (no leader, crane swivels). Captain Tony Buffa praised the casting variety, especially its purple version: “Brian, your spinners do not discriminate. My clients catch a lot of walleyes with them.”

Brian and his sons, Christopher and Brian, test Hammers every time they fish the lake. Currently, BHammer Tackle offers fifteen varieties of the famous spinner. According to Brian, the hottest colors are orange (pictured), chartreuse and, of course, Captain Tony’s preferred purple.

The Hammer can be purchased through the [BHammertackle.com](http://BHammertackle.com) online store, where next day shipping is guaranteed. These lures are also sold at Mike’s Oneida Lake Bait shop (Brewerton), App’s Landing (Cleveland), Mickey’s (North Syracuse), and Lakeside Outfitters (Upper South Bay).

### **Bill Alexander: Made To Order Tackle**

After earning his driver’s license, OLA Director/lure maker Bill Alexander spent hours fishing on the concrete banks that line Sylvan Beach’s harbor. There, he met “Russ,” a dedicated pier angler who always fished under the Route 13 bridge (only knowing a person’s given name is common practice here). The fact that Russ tied bucktail jigs, and caught plenty of walleyes and bass with them, impressed Alexander. Even more important, the older gentleman shared details about the jig-making process. Armed with the “how to,” Bill purchased supplies, tools, and started tying. The rest is history.

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# Diet Analysis of Juvenile Yellow Perch in Oneida Lake

By Giovanni Selvaggio

Yellow perch play an important role in maintaining ecosystem balance. They also provide food and sport for people near Oneida Lake. The diet of these yellow perch consists of a multitude of zooplankton, such as copepods, daphnids, rotifers, and sometimes even insects, depending on the perch gape size. Oneida is a large, shallow lake inhabited by a wide variety of popular game fish, including walleye, yellow perch, white perch, smallmouth bass, and largemouth bass. Due to its connection to Lake Ontario and the Hudson River, its susceptibility to invasive species has been majorly apparent, such as the introduction of the predatory zooplankton *Bythotrephes*, also known as

the spiny water flea.

This invasive zooplankton, first found in Lake Ontario in 1982, has now spread to Oneida Lake through waterways, ballast waters, and contaminated fishing equipment. *Bythotrephes* (spiny water flea) was first documented in Oneida Lake in August 2019 and has been found in the stomachs of many yellow perch. It has accommodated in this new environment, directly affecting the food



Precise weight measurements.

web system, devouring mass amounts of daphnids, which juvenile yellow perch thrive on for proper nutrition and development. As its name implies, the spiny water flea has a spine to defend itself against smaller fish, which have a limited gape size, deterring them from eating the *By-*

*thotrephes*, unlike much larger fish with a larger gape size. Research shows that smaller fish that pursue *Bythotrephes* as a food source have small holes in their stomach due to the spine that is not easily digestible, deterring future consumption, ultimately leading to an aversive behavior. Therefore, these zooplankton are expected to negatively affect juvenile yellow perch growth in Oneida Lake, as seen in the evidence in Minnesota lakes where juvenile yellow perch grew less when *Bythotrephes* was present compared to lakes without it.

As a research student at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, I conducted an experiment to examine juvenile yellow perch diets to document their place in the food chain and how the food web filled with invasive species will ultimately affect their populations over time.

The juvenile yellow perch collected for this project came from the trawl survey done in Oneida Lake on September 8th, 2025, by the Cornell Biological Field Station at Shackelton Point. For my experiment, 111 yellow perch were measured and weighed to calculate Fulton's K, along with 45 stomachs, which were dissected for diet contents. (Fulton's K is the fisheries' health index that measures the physical condition of

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## Lure Makers Part 2

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Bill Alexander's "Xstended Life" plastics

Alexander fishes bass tournaments. Made To Order Tackle (MTO) was started around 1982 to supply competition anglers with quality lures. Bill also ties walleye jigs with deer tail and chenille skirting (1/8, 3/8 oz.) His "Sand Flea" jig (created for bottom dragging) and "Mutant Flea" (deer tail plus rubber skirting, for buoyancy near bottom) are popular varieties. The lure maker says that black, natural brown, and olive green have been proven to be the best colors. Alexander and his fishing friends test every lure.

Bill and his former partner, the late Paul Williams, pioneered

Xstended Life Baits, a brand of plastic lures that survive multiple strikes and retain their action. Surprisingly, Alexander's urologist was a vital influencer in these lures' development. After listening to Bill's concern about plastic overload in the environment, the physician/fisherman suggested that molding hernia mesh with plastic might yield a winning combo. Experiments proved the doctor right. Today, MTO offers Xstended Life "Apex Worms" (resembling Senkos), "Craws" (crawfish imitations), "Predators" (drop shot rigs with leech-shaped plastics), and "Neds" (3 1/2" soft plastics). Northeast Bass Fishing featured the Xstended Life baits on Youtube ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc2kRzML2xA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc2kRzML2xA)).

To order from MTO Tackle, call Bill (315-520-9820) and leave your email. He'll send photos of lures, plus prices. You can also purchase Alexander's products at the "Man Cave" in the Eclectic Chick, Oneida (the former Philipson's building).

## Diet Analysis Yellow Perch

(Continued from page 8)

a fish based on its weight and length). Juvenile yellow perch continued to consume high numbers of native zooplankton, particularly copepods and daphnids, despite the presence of *Bythotrephes*. Length and weight of perch increase proportionally, indicating that individuals maintained good overall body condition as they grew. This finding suggests that juvenile yellow perch stayed in good health and were not negatively affected by consuming spiny water fleas.

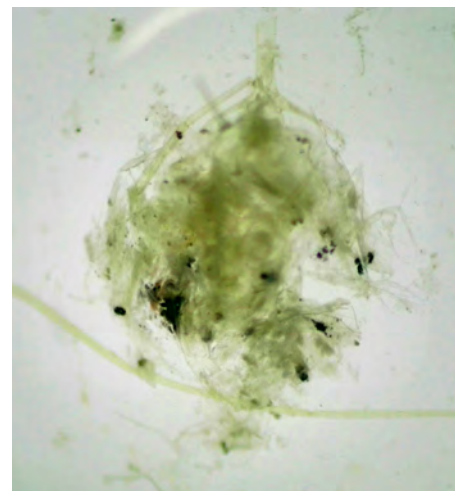
In this study, *Bythotrephes* consumption showed no relationship with Fulton's K or fish length, indicating that perch of various sizes are capable of successfully incorporating *Bythotrephes* into their diet. Even though it is expected that smaller perch should not eat *Bythotrephes* due to limited gape size, prior research has shown that a 27 mm (~ 1 inch+) perch consumed *Bythotrephes* with none of its intestines perforated. This implies that yellow perch of all sizes can consume

*Bythotrephes*. If juvenile yellow perch of smaller and larger sizes can consume spiny water fleas, then we would expect that they have become adapted to eating them, along with no negative effects on their overall growth rate.

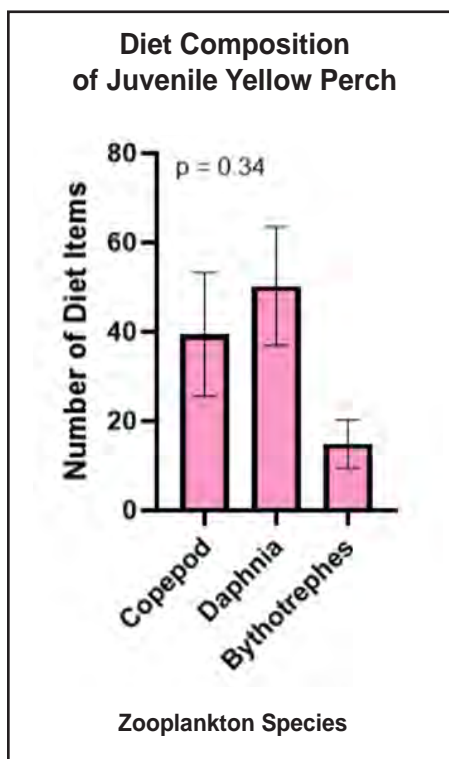
Moving from *Bythotrophes*, we now turn to copepods, small aquatic crustaceans that form the base of the food chain by consuming plant and animal plankton. In my research, I observed a correlation between copepod consumption and Fulton's K; larger individuals generally consumed more copepods. This could reflect better swimming capabilities and larger gape size in larger fish, allowing them to catch more agile copepods. However, I did not observe a relationship between copepod consumption and perch length, likely because copepods are small, so perch of all sizes can consume them.

Following copepods, daphnids, also known as water fleas, are small transparent aquatic crustaceans that sit at the bottom of the food chain and filter feed on algae and organic debris. I observed no relationship between daphnid consumption and Fulton's K. Daphnids are relatively easier to capture, so they could be more available to perch of all sizes. However, daphnid consumption increased with perch length, which could be explained by the fact that larger perch with larger gape sizes are able to consume daphnids in abundance.

Yellow Perch are an extremely adaptable fish inhabiting Oneida Lake, surviving food web dynamic shifts such as the influx of double-crested cormorants to eating invasive species like the round goby and *Bythotrephes* that pose threats to their population numbers. They are still consuming the most nutritious native zooplankton available (daphnids and copepods) in large numbers

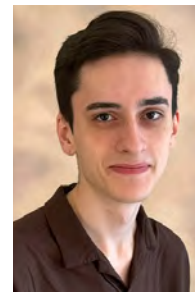


*Daphnids entangled in multiple Bythotrephes spines found in the juvenile yellow perch stomach.*



despite the invasive *Bythotrephes*. But will yellow perch remain adaptable in the coming years as invasive species continue to spread, or will they crack under the pressure? We must continue to monitor yellow perch populations to predict future ecological changes that could influence their growth, survival, and their role in an ever-changing food web. This continued observation will ensure that yellow perch remain abundant in Oneida Lake, preserving a beloved family tradition where future generations can continue to fish for both game and sport for years to come.

*Giovanni Selvaggio holds a B.S. in Zoology from SUNY Oswego and currently works as a conservation educator at the Staten Island Zoo while seeking further internship opportunities to expand his knowledge on wildlife biology/conservation.*





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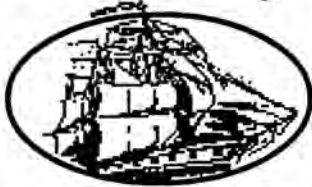
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