

Network News



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All Aboard! Floating Classroom Cruises Cayuga Lake

By Niamh O'Leary, Wells College

The weather couldn't have been better for the maiden voyage of Cayuga Lake's new traveling shipboard classroom, known to many as the "Floating Classroom". On an unusually warm, sunny afternoon in late April the *Haendel* set out from Long Point State Park with twelve Wells College students on board. Thanks to the availability of the *Haendel* and the expertise of its captain, Dennis Montgomery, the students gained first-hand experience in assessing water quality in the depths of Cayuga Lake. Since then other local students have had the opportunity to get on the



lake and further their knowledge of water monitoring techniques and understanding of watershed concepts. During June, high-school seniors from the BOCES New Visions program enjoyed their *Haendel* experience. Many of them will be joining their teacher, Mark Johnson; for limnology studies at Woods Hole this summer. Boynton Middle School teacher Erica George also took advantage of this new opportunity with 21 members of the school's Environmental Science Club.

The launching of Cayuga Lake's Floating Classroom is the result of efforts by a local Floating Classroom Committee, which was put together in spring 2002 by members of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (IO). The Floating Classroom Committee currently includes representatives from the IO's Education, Public Participation and Outreach Committee, Cayuga Wooden Boatworks, Wells College, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and TST BOCES. Dennis Montgomery of Cayuga Wooden Boatworks has

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6th Annual Lakefest

Join Us for Music, Food, Boat Rides & Fun!
Learn About Your Watershed!

August 24, Cayuga Lake State Park

"Celebrate Cayuga Lake!" (More Inside)

WATERSHED STEWARD'S MESSAGE

Its All a Matter of Perspective



By Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward

Opinions on the quality of our water resources are as diverse as the population of our watershed. Ask a few people, and you might think they live in different states—but the truth is more nearly that they live in different states of mind. Diverse perspectives are desirable in a watershed, just as they are in a community. Respect for and attention to each point of view is the best way to ensure sound decision-making, and a true understanding of the state of the natural landscape in which we live.

In this edition of the Network News, we present a range of perspectives on the health and quality of our resources. These are the efforts and ideas not only of professional researchers, students, and teachers, but of personally involved residents from all walks of life. Our watershed is a source of pride and a critical factor in the high quality of life we enjoy. I urge you to contact the Network Office if you would like to find out more about opportunities to get to know your watershed on a first-hand basis. The perspective you gain will make a difference 🐾

Getting the "big picture" is a necessity for successful watershed protection.



THE NETWORK AT WORK

Collaboration Brings New Experiences

By Bill Foster, Watershed Educator

Working for an organization that focuses on collaboration has its perks, and the variety of experiences I've been able to enjoy in the past few months has certainly made that evident. Already this summer, I have spent two fantastic days on the lake with students participating in the Floating Classroom project, and have teamed with Board member Connie Tallcot in discussing watershed opportunities with Lions Club members in Union Springs. I would also like to make special note of the Network's good fortune to have been able to host Mr. Ngwe



With help from "Ernie the Invertebrate", Board member Tony Ganzon and Bill Foster explored the impacts of water pollution with 400 students at the 36th Annual Seneca County Conservation Field Day on May 28. Network staff and volunteers provide education and fun every year at similar events—and we're always looking for more opportunities.

Sint, who comes to us from Myanmar by way of the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program at Cornell. Mr. Sint recently spent six weeks with the Network assisting in forest inventories along Six Mile Creek, and helping us move our grant-writing program into high gear. As we shared our experiences in the field, it became clear that, while the social and environmental challenges faced by residents of Myanmar villages in managing their resources seem to be on a completely different scale from those we face in the Finger Lakes, the underlying solutions

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A Healthy Watershed? It Depends on Your View...

By Bill Foster, Watershed Educator

Summer is the season when our attentions turn to the cool waters of Cayuga Lake, our sparkling waterfalls, and the peaceful wooded gorges that provide respite from the heat of the day. We revel in the availability and beauty of our water resources, here in the Finger Lakes region. We depend on them as communities, and for many of us, they are a part of daily life—but what do we know about our lake, or our stream systems? If these resources are important to you, take a moment to consider what you know about them, and what you might want to learn.

During 2002 volunteers participating in the Citizens' Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) began collecting water quality samples from four locations on Cayuga Lake. The results indicate that Cayuga Lake is a fairly clean, high quality, body of water. On the other hand, many lakeshore homeowners and recreational users have a different impression. *"Each day, our oars hit pieces of garbage. The drainage from roads [provides] almost a constant stream of murky brown water"*, according to Alex Wolverton, an Ithaca High School rower. Lending weight to this view is the fact that portions of the lake are classified as impaired, on the basis of sediment

and nutrient impacts, and intermittent beach closures.

Certainly, both impressions of Cayuga Lake cannot be true... or can they? To understand these seemingly inconsistent opinions, one must consider that CSLAP monitoring points are all located well out from the shore of the lake, in deep, clear water. On the other hand, for people observing the lake from the shore, where water is shallow enough for weed growth, and under more immediate influence from nearby tributaries, the view is much different. The water and habitat in these two portions of the same lake tell the stories of two quite different systems, which is far from unusual. In fact, any observation of such a complex system as a watershed is reflective of a specific point of view.

Finding a way to assemble these many perspectives into a truly complete picture is the focus of a major new Cayuga Lake Watershed Network effort. Is the lake healthy, or are portions of the lake in trouble? What about our streams and river corridors? Working with partners throughout the Finger Lakes, the Network will host a conference of researchers and regulators this fall, to discuss just what type of data they have at their



Floating Classroom student Jessica Smith prepares to collect water samples. The Lake is getting clearer due to zebra mussel populations. According to M/V Haendel captain Dennis Montgomery, the lake is good, but not great!

disposal, and how it might start to truly shed light on the situation. Watershed Steward Sharon Anderson notes, *"The most important aspect is coordination. Where are the gaps? How can we make data usable for Cayuga Lake and all of the Finger Lakes?"*

Until the Network can share its findings, the best way for watershed residents to realize the value of our waterbodies is to get out and experience them individually. As you become familiar with the waterway near your home—perhaps walking your stream and comparing information with your neighbors—

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The recreational suitability of Cayuga Lake...

...was mostly favorable in 2002, ranging from "could not be nicer" (southern basin) to "excellent" for most uses (northern basin). This assessment was mostly consistent with the measured water quality conditions in the lake.

—"CSLAP Interpretive Summary for Cayuga Lake"; NYDEC, February 2003. The full report is available on the Network Website.

NETWORK MEMBERS

Keeping Family Traditions Alive

By Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward

From the 4th of July to the end of the month Bill Shuster will be carrying on the family tradition of cutting flag. The flag, commonly called cattail (*Typha spp.*), is harvested from the lakeshore to make a comfortable and durable chair seat. With the help of his brother Peter Shuster, who serves on the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network Board of Directors, Bill carries on this annual practice that started when his grandfather lived on the same Seneca Falls farm.

Like his father before him, Bill sets off in a small boat to get to the shallow north section of the lake where multiple passageways twist and turn before reaching the open water. In years gone by, the elder Shuster was a master flag cutter, standing in the shallow waters, using a very sharp flag knife to rhythmically and rapidly cut flag. Not wanting to be spoken to or interrupted he would fill up the boat with loads of heavy, wet flag to be taken to up to the farm. The flag stalks were then tied to poles and dried in the sun. Nowadays, the sons dry their flag inside to preserve a soft green color prized by the specialty craft suppliers. The quantities they sell now are modest compared to the railroad carloads sold to the Frantz Flag Company a century ago.

Early-harvest flag is soft and pliable, while the late harvest flag is tough and strong. Bill will again take out his boat and flag knife in September when the flag has grown to 10 feet tall. The bottom 2 feet of this late growth, referred to as the butt end, is prized for caulking between the boards in the head (top and bottom portions) of wine flasks and whiskey barrels. The flag will may last even longer than the 100-year life of the tough, white oak boards. Flag from the north end of Cayuga Lake and the area that is now Montezuma Wildlife Refuge produced some of the best cooperage flag in the world. Peter says the reason is simple, “the bigger the butts, the better they like it.”

As a life-long resident, Peter has noticed changes in the lake and its flag production. In 1972, Hurricane Agnes ripped through central New York and tore out a large mat of flag. More recently the pretty but harmful purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) has been trying to push out the native flag. Nutrient reduction efforts at

the Seneca Falls Waste Water Treatment Plant, intended to help clean up the lake, have also had an impact. Excess nutrients, while not good for the overall, long-term health of the lake, acted as fertilizer for the flag, producing bumper crops. The previously high phosphorus levels in sewage effluent also fertilized algae and weeds, however, and success in reducing this nutrient source has meant a less murky lake. Until the last couple years, the Shusters had never seen the fabled sandy lake bottom that is once again noticeable in places their elders claimed it once existed. Another change Peter notices is

the disappearance of muskrats. Once very visible among the flag, upon which they depend for food and lodge-building materials, they are no longer seen. Peter guesses they may be unable to survive the low winter water levels.

Harvesting flag is a very small part of the Shuster Farm operation, which includes wheat, oats, soybeans, strawberries and a few dairy cows. All of these rely on clean water, used for irrigation to keep the strawberries juicy and the other

crops producing optimally. The Shusters have adopted many practices to keep agricultural chemicals from draining into the lake. To keep the soil in the fields where it belongs, 100,000 feet of tile drainage quickly removes excess rainwater without allowing the soil to erode. The farm is still a family operation, Peter’s granddaughter is helping on the farm while home from college and his 4-year old great grandson is coming to live with them to benefit from rural farm life. 🐾



Dried flag leaves are soaked, twisted together and woven into a rush seat that looks quite different than a common caned chair. In one day, an experienced person can produce an attractive chair seat that has a soft springiness that lasts for years.



Peter Shuster provides a glimpse into the cattail, or flag, mats growing in the shallows of the northern end of Cayuga Lake.

Thanks to Peter and Bill Shuster for providing the information for this article—the first of a series that will help you get acquainted with the people that make up the Network.

Water Week, 2003— Its All About Good Taste!

By Roxy Johnston

Results from Tompkins County's 10th annual Drinking Water Taste Test are in! This year's contest drew the most participants ever, with eight municipal water systems from Tompkins County vying for first place, and 370 people casting their votes. The City of Ithaca took the prize for 2003, with 75 votes. They will go on to compete in an upcoming Regional State Water Taste Test. The Taste Test was part of a National Drinking Water Week celebration, which was co-hosted by the Tompkins County Health Department and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network.

While it is clear that watershed residents take their drinking water seriously, the celebration also featured information booths by many other organizations at Center Ithaca and the Ithaca Farmer's Market on May 9th and 10th respectively, and a month-long display at the Pyramid Mall. Related events included invasive plant removal around the City of Ithaca Reservoir by Friends of Six Mile Creek, and a stream bank restoration project at the Ithaca Farmers' Market by the Black Locust Initiative with technical and field assistance from the Network.

To kick off water week, 45 volunteers who removed 2400 pounds of trash from Fall Creek and its banks. Working from its source at Lake Como to its mouth at Stewart Park, were citizens and members of the Fall Creek Watershed Committee, the Fall Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Community Fly Fisher, Cornell Roots and Shoots, Tompkins and Cortland Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NYSEG, and the Lake Como Association. Target, Tops and Wegmans donated supplies, and the Town of Dryden and the City of Ithaca helped immensely by hauling away the stove, TV, mattress, tires, cans, bottles and other litter the volunteers collected. 🐾



Volunteers discuss drinking water source protection with passersby at the Ithaca Farmers' Market

Collaboration Brings New Experiences

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have much in common. Each circumstance requires that people first must have an opportunity to make a decent living, and second must have information to help understand their role as stewards of the land and water upon which they depend. The Network's involvement in this internship program proved to be an eye-opening experience. Our thanks to Sint, and we hope it was as valuable for him as it was for us.

As always, our volunteers have been hard at work spreading the watershed message. This spring saw Network members put forth their annually impressive effort in support of important events such as Water Week and the Tompkins County Environmental Appreciation Days. Our Watershed Steward has also been busy, of course, introducing Enfield planners and residents to computer-based mapping and planning tools being made available through Cornell's LEAPE program, and working with local 4-H clubs and Girl Scouts to initiate storm drain stenciling projects throughout Tompkins County. Sharon also attended the New York State Association of Lake Managers conference on behalf of the Network.

We also want to extend a warm welcome to our new intern, Kate Wadach, who will be working on the Network's collaborative stormwater initiative this summer. On a final note, we want to recognize Christian Boissonnas, Network member and volunteer extraordinaire, for applying his considerable expertise in organizing the Network office and acting as defacto computer network administrator. Christian, the Network would not exist without people like YOU. 🐾



ANNOUNCEMENTS . . .

New York Enacts New Rules Affecting Personal Watercraft

On May 28, the New York State Environmental Board approved regulations adopting California's emission standards and labeling requirements for personal watercraft. The new regulations are designed to improve air and water quality by reducing hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide emissions from new personal watercraft. The revised regulations will be phased in with the 2006 model year, and would require new watercraft engines to produce successively lower emissions over the course of several years. For more information, see DEC's website, www.dec.state.ny.us.

Locally, Tompkins County's Water Resource Council is continuing to explore options for managing the environmental and aesthetic impacts of personal watercraft usage. The Network also would like to alert readers to the availability of excellent training opportunities, registration information, and tips on boating etiquette available through the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, at www.nys-parks.com/boats, or from the Regional Office, (607) 387-7041, Ext. 3. 🐾

Emergency Planning Tools Available to Help Farms Protect Water Quality

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network staff, working with Extension Agents and Conservation Districts, conducted a series of workshops for farmers and emergency responders in Cayuga and Seneca Counties in April. A workbook and planning guide to assist farm operators in anticipating and preparing for a variety of emergency events was presented to participants. Advanced on-farm planning, and communication between farms and emergency responders, can greatly improve the efficiency of response actions. The result is a safer environment for farm families and employees, and less potential for spilled manure, fertilizers or pesticides to enter streams, lakes and underwater sources of drinking water. Planning guides are available through the Network Office, and through Cooperative Extension Offices in Cayuga and Seneca Counties. 🐾

Stormwater Resource Fair

July 26th, 2003, from 9-3pm.

320 W. State St. Ithaca

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, the Cayuga Lake Intermunicipal Organization, the Tompkins County Water Resources Council and the Stormwater Working Group announce an event that will serve as an opportunity for local officials, organizations, and members of the community to share and present ideas on stormwater management planning; permits and county services; model ordinances. Presentations will be followed by a discussion exploring opportunities for collaboration among municipalities. Lunch will be provided along with exhibits showcasing what local agencies can offer in support of stormwater management. For more information, contact the Network Office, or Kathy Wilsea, at (607) 274-5560. 🐾

Hearing Set For Intermunicipal Sewer Plan

Residents of Tompkins County will have a chance to learn more about efforts planned and underway to reduce phosphorus loading and other impacts from municipal and private sewage treatment systems at 7:00 pm, July 31, at the Ithaca area Ramada Inn. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared for a project that would link sewerage between Dryden, Ithaca, Lansing and Cayuga Heights to facilitate more effective treatment before wastewater is discharged to Cayuga Lake. The EIS will be available for public review and comment through August 11 at town offices, libraries, and at, www.cityofithaca.org.

The proposed linkage of these systems will facilitate an expansion of new public sewer lines to many locations along the both shores of Cayuga Lake. Coupled with process upgrades already planned for the Cayuga Heights and Ithaca Area wastewater treatment plants, this event signals an important milestone for ensuring the quality of our water resources for future generations: communities working across borders to address needs. We urge our readers to take time and stay informed as this important process unfolds. 🐾

A Healthy Watershed? It Depends on Your View... *continued from page 3*

your understanding of where water is coming from, where it is going, and how well the system in working will surprise you. In our Spring 2003 edition, George Patte wrote of his experiences with the Fall Creek Watershed Committee,

noting that, "this is exciting work for a group of volunteers." Indeed, it is important work that will affect the future of our watershed. Critical decisions on water quality, development and water usage are being made every day, based on

the inconsistent, incomplete information presently available. If we can create better data that tells a more complete story, and ensure an informed public to participate in those decisions, we will all be better served. 🐾

Winners Chosen for 3rd Annual Essay Contest

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network's Annual Essay Contest winners have been selected. Our judges struggled to select the winning essays among approximately 100 high-caliber entries, addressing this year's topic, "Why is Water so Special?" Winners received cash prizes totaling \$560, donated by ITT Industries/Goulds Pumps of Seneca Falls and Auburn. The contest challenges youth and adults to think about their

Why is Water so Special?

By Renee DeYoung

What are some of the things central New York is known for? We have Waterloo, the "birthplace of Memorial Day"; the city of Auburn which is known for its countless crows; and of course the small yet famous town of Seneca Falls with the Woman's Rights Hall of Fame building. If, however, you were to look at a geographic map, none of these things would jump out at you. No, to look at a map you would have to agree that the most notable aspect of this portion of the nation is our beautiful lakes, more specifically the Finger Lakes... To truly understand why this watershed is so important we need to go back to some of those common sense facts we learned in junior high. For starters, we know that people will settle in places that offer not only the things they need, but also the setting and environment they want. According to several studies, two of the most substantial factors that play a role in where people choose to live are clean water and air. In fact, the idea of being able to live on the waterfront appeals to people so much that those properties on the edge of a clean body of water have a real estate value about 28% higher than that of similar properties located elsewhere... 🐾



Renee DeYoung recently completed 12th grade at Finger Lakes Christian School, Seneca Falls, NY.

role as stewards of the Cayuga Lake Watershed. Look for an announcement of the theme of our 2004 contest in January. We hope to read your entries!

In this and our upcoming fall issue, we will feature excerpts from each of the winning categories. The complete essays are available via the electronic version of the Network News and at the Network Website. We urge you to take a look.

Why is Water so Special?

By Laura McLachlan

Cayuga Lake watershed not only supplies citizens and others with jobs, it also attracts many people with its diversity like bird watching, windsurfing, boating, swimming, and canoeing. It also brings scholars to Cornell University and Ithaca College in Ithaca and Wells College in Aurora. There are many activities to do in the water, for example diving, kayaking, jet skiing, or going fishing. The wineries on both sides of the lake combine enjoyment and the relaxation of sightseeing. All of these activities depend on good unpolluted water quality. When most people think of water pollution they think of a pipe from a factory discharging contaminants for a clearly perceptible source of pollution. Non-point sources are things like runoffs from construction sites, fields, parking lots, and roads. Non-point pollution is harder to pinpoint and control than specific sources of direct contamination. Runoff from eroded soil ends up in the lakes as silt, which not only fills lakes with murky sediments that harm fish and other water life, but also washes down the nutrients that fertilize the overgrowth of algae and weed in lakes. Although Cayuga Lake has fair water quality there are still some concerns... 🐾



Laura McLachlan recently completed 6th grade at A.J. Smith School, Aurora, NY.

Floating Classroom Cruises *continued from page 1*

played a pivotal role; he owns and captains the 43 foot, 32 passenger, coastguard-certified *Haendel*.

The launching of the *Haendel* was an important milestone for the Floating Classroom Committee, which plans on expanding the program to provide more of the region's students and educators with opportunities to experience the *Haendel*. Strategies for assisting the participants with technical needs and providing curricular frameworks are also being developed. Evidence from similar Floating Classroom programs elsewhere suggests that the *Haendel* will shortly play an important role in enhancing watershed education for

local students of all ages. The curricular possibilities are endless; many aspects of watershed study including history, geology, ecology, and conservation will be enhanced by the perspective offered aboard the *Haendel*.

Would you like to learn about opportunities on the *Haendel* for your school group or organization? Ideas and expertise in fund raising, education, and public relations are also needed. To get involved, E-mail Karin Harjes at kmharjes@hotmail.com or visit the project web site at www.cayugawatershed.org 🐾

Mark Your Calendar for Lakefest – August 24th!

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network will hold its annual Lakefest at Cayuga Lake State Park, near Seneca Falls, on Sunday afternoon, August 24th. Join us for a free picnic (generously provided by Wells College), presentations from local environmental groups and entertainment for the whole family. There is also a swimming beach at the park. The Network's annual meeting, during which new members of the board of directors are elected, will take place during the event.

Featured entertainment includes the delightful Classic Folk music group, the zany puppets of Tom Knight, and rides on the Haendel, our new floating classroom on Cayuga Lake!

Cayuga Lake State Park is located off Lower Lake Rd. in Seneca Falls. You will find Lower Lake Rd. on the lake side of Route 89 just 3 miles south of Seneca Falls. Lakefest will be held in Shelter #2 in the park—look for our signs.

We hope you will invite your friends to join you for a great afternoon in beautiful Cayuga Lake State Park. The Park charges a \$7 admission fee per car, so consider carpooling, or taking a boat trip up the lake. Contact the Network for ride information. Similarly, if you would like to volunteer to help, to perform, or to participate in any way, please contact Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward at steward@cayugalake.org or (607) 532-4104. 🐦



Phil Koons, of the Fall Creek Committee, explores the life of a stream with future watershed steward. Lakefest 2002.

6TH ANNUAL LAKEFEST

August 24 — Cayuga Lake State Park

| | |
|------------|--|
| 12:00-1:30 | Picnic & Music by Classic Folk |
| 2:00-2:45 | Puppeteer Tom Knight |
| 2:45-3:00 | Dave Morehouse Award Ceremony |
| | Treats by Seneca County Dairy Princess |
| 3:00-4:00 | Watershed Network Annual Meeting |
| 12:00-4:00 | Swimming, Boat Rides, & Displays. |

The Mission... The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network seeks to protect and improve the ecological health, economic vitality and overall beauty of the watershed through education, communication and leadership.



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