

Network News



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Boaters Face New Rules at South End of the Lake

By Mary Shelley

The Tompkins County Water Resource Council (WRC), a body that makes recommendations to the Tompkins County Legislature on water issues, took two years to reach consensus on how to balance the concerns of different recreational users on the Tompkins County portion of Cayuga Lake. Use of motorized boats (motorboats and personal watercraft) can conflict with quieter near-shore users —swimmers, canoers, kayakers, anglers, lakeside residents, anchored or drifting boats, and wildlife.

The initial concern about petrochemical pollution caused by older two cycle marine engines was tempered based on water quality data from the Bolton Point water system and on continuing improvements to marine engines. It was determined that the most effective approach to reduce gasoline pollution would be to lobby at the state level for more stringent standards on all marine engines sold within New York State. Consequently, the final WRC document focused primarily on recreational safety issues and noise mitigation.

The primary recommendation of the WRC document is the establishment of a 500-foot slow speed buffer zone along the shore. New York State Navigation Law S46-A allows municipalities or counties to create vessel regulation zones up to 1500 feet out from their shores should this benefit the safety or well being of the people.

One reason for a 500-foot buffer zone is to create a safe zone for more vulnerable users of the lake (swimmers, canoes, kayakers), much the way there is a shoulder along the side of a highway. A second reason to reduce speed near shore is to reduce turbulence and wave action that can damage the shoreline and disrupt aquatic habitat. The third reason for this buffer zone is noise mitigation. Noise stood out as a primary cause of conflict among different users of the lake. Generally, lower boat speeds close to shore result in lower engine revolutions per minute (RPMs) and less engine noise. Pushing



Dave Weimann boats across the lake for his daily commute to work at Sheldrake Point Winery.

WATERSHED STEWARD'S MESSAGE

One Watershed, Many Interests

By Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward



The sound of peepers, delicate wildflowers, and the songbirds that arrive each spring are reminders that this watershed is home to assorted flora and fauna as well as humans. Whether it is the needs of different species or differing needs of human users, the Network seeks to nurture efforts that balance competing needs.

As an example, the clean up at Salt Point will improve that peninsula as an oasis for both people and birds. New boating rules are a compromise that tries to balance the interests of various lake users — boaters, shoreline property owners, and wildlife.

One area of focus for the Network this year is our

diverse fisheries. As a reminder of how other species depend on good water quality, sometimes even more than humans, we'll be including in each of this year's newsletters facts or articles about fish as a reminder of the responsibility we have to all watershed users.

Just as a change in seasons heightens our awareness, so can travel to a new area. I delight in hearing stories from Network members who keep in mind their understanding of watersheds as they travel. Long-time Cayuga Lake Watershed resident Christian Boissonnas shares his insights about a far away river. If you travel as the weather warms you may find that your growing understanding of this watershed enhances your appreciation for competing uses other areas face or you may return with a richer understanding of home. 🐦

THE NETWORK AT WORK

While there are many organizations concerned about water issues, the Network is the only grassroots, community-based organization with a broad interest in the entire watershed and the lake. In an area this large (see map on page 4) we can be quite busy without you necessarily hearing about an event in your own area. Therefore, we use this column to highlight a few of our recent activities. In addition, because we have completed our fifth year as a vital and respected organization, we have created a progress report that showcases key accomplishments from our founding in 1998 through 2003. It is available at www.cayugalake.org. If you would like to be mailed a copy, please add a note when you send in your membership or call the Network office.

So far this year, we have continued established programs and ventured into new areas. "How Well Is Your Water," our successful series for rural residents funded by the Tompkins County Health Department, was a good reminder to homeowners of the importance of annually testing their drinking water. In one community, 25% of the well samples showed bacteria contamination, which indicates a potential health threat. Branching out to a new audience we partnered with Cooperative Extension to offer

a similar program "Providing Safe Drinking Water" to rural businesses and community centers that also need information on keeping drinking water safe.

On a larger scale, we co-sponsored a seminar for professionals in the western Finger Lakes region concerned with managing lake levels, a topic featured in our winter newsletter. Notes from that meeting are available on our website, as is information about our on-going work in the Six Mile Creek watershed. A creative partnership there is coordinating multiple stream restoration efforts. New state laws aimed at keeping soil from washing off construction sites will better protect streams. As a member of the Stormwater Working Group, we helped host a program for municipal officials, engineers and contractors on their roles in new stormwater laws that affect construction.

Other articles in this Network News tout the results of additional collaborative efforts such as the new electronic resource, Protecting the Cayuga Lake Watershed, and the posting of water monitoring information on our website. As part of our core mission to be a network and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of protecting the watershed, we are continuing to build relationships with diverse interests and offer programs with local partners. 🐦

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Cayuga Lake: “Couldn’t Be Nicer”

Adapted from CSLAP Annual Report

New York State contains over 7000 lakes, ponds and reservoirs, many of which are natural and recreational treasures. Each year, citizens help the Department of Environmental Conservation gather information on nearly 200 of those lakes through the Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP). Volunteers with the Network joined



To measure water transparency a black and white Secchi disk is lowered into the lake until it is no longer visible.

the program in 2002, and helped throughout the summer with bi-monthly collecting deep-water samples off Farley’s Point in Union Springs, the Village of Aurora, Taughannock Falls State Park and southern Ulysses (3 miles from the south end of the lake). Their data show continuation of generally high water quality.

It takes water 10-12 years to cycle through the lake meaning that

changes – for good or bad – are slow to become visible. Having data that spans over many years will be useful in gaining a greater understanding of the lake and the effectiveness of the management activities in the watershed.

Phosphorus levels in the lake, a nutrient that regulates plant growth, consistently fall within state guidelines. Phosphorus is a concern because increases lead to more algae and decreased water transparency. Surprisingly, Cayuga Lake didn’t display the seasonal pattern of many other lakes where nutrient levels and algae populations peak as the summer waters warm. In 2003, productivity peaks (high nutrient and algae levels, low water clarity) appeared at different times at each sampling site. Deepwater nutrient levels, taken at about 100 feet, are slightly higher than levels at the lake surface, although the extreme depth of the lake (maximum depth 435 feet) precludes collecting samples of the bottom waters. While nutrient levels in the lake did not vary significantly over the course of the sampling season (June thru October), water quality conditions may be very different earlier in the year due to spring runoff and in the fall due to lake turnover.

In addition to taking water samples, which are sent to a certified lab for analysis, the volunteers record field observations. One of these observations is the recreational suitability of Cayuga Lake, which in both 2002 and 2003 CSLAP volunteers frequently rated as ranging from “could not be nicer” to “excellent”. Not surprisingly, it was the weather that resulted in lower ratings — not changes in water quality. At the sampling locations, the lake was most often described as “crystal clear” in the southern basin ranging to “slight algal greenness” in the north.

Remember though, all the sampling points are in deep waters, and conditions may be very different near shore.

Other parameters included in the CSLAP sampling — nitrate nitrogen, true color, pH, specific conductance, and chlorophyll a — are in line with other recently collected data, showing what are probably normal variations. Reports based on data from 2002 and 2003 written by staff at NYS Department of Environmental Conservation are on our website www.cayugalake.org, or available by contacting the Network office at 607-532-4104. 🐦

Looking for data on the Cayuga Lake watershed?

The Network has just made it easier to find!

Even though the water resources in the Cayuga Lake Watershed have been studied extensively, information about these efforts frequently is not easily accessible. Consequently, we created for our website, www.cayugalake.org, a database that allows visitors to obtain contact and summary information for monitoring conducted in the watershed. Ordered initially by the organization that gives leadership to the monitoring effort, the database can be re-ordered. Select from the primary type of monitoring (physical, chemical or biological) or the general location (lake, tributary, wetlands, etc.). Please contact us if you know of additional current or historical monitoring data.

Network Welcomes New Educator



Ruthanna Hawkins joined the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, in the position of Watershed Educator, during the month of March. Eager to get her feet wet, she has enthusiastically jumped in, excited to help with all the interesting plans and programs on this year's agenda. Ruthanna joins the Network after completing two Master Degrees in Syracuse; one in Water Resource Management from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and a second degree in Public Administration from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Administration.

Her interest in the environment was encouraged as she

was growing up in the Hudson River Valley area where she attended Marist College, majoring in environmental science and economics. Ruthanna's volunteer work with the Wappinger Creek Watershed Committee honed her interest in the management of water resources and in helping the public to understand the importance of protecting our watersheds. After working with a small environmental consulting company specializing in Geographic Information Systems, Ruthanna decided to venture west of the Catskill Mountains to explore the Finger Lake Region. Please give Ruthanna a warm welcome when you have the opportunity to meet her. 🐾



Members Keep Network Strong



During National Water Week (May 2-8) we will kick off our membership effort for the upcoming membership year that runs from July 2004 to June 2005. You can help by using the envelope inserted in this newsletter to join or renew now.

Members are the heart of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network. Your support allows us to continue our work of teaching school youth, cleaning up streams, forging collaborations among diverse groups, supporting municipal officials, and bringing you timely information.

All this is in the interest of preserving the environmental health and quality of life in the area that we love. The watershed is more than the lake itself, jewel that it is. It is also the tiny streams, changeable creeks and the ground water that quenches the thirst of so many. 🐾

The Cayuga Lake watershed covers nearly 800 square miles and is spread over seven counties.

Boaters Face New Rules

continued from page 1

high-speed traffic further away from shore results in more quiet for those recreating close to shore.

“As I travel around the watershed, I hear complaints about high performance boats referred to as ‘cigarette boats.’ They can create excessive noise when the exhaust system is altered in an attempt to increase speed,” notes Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward. Although the WRC subcommittee that drafted the document discussed this concern, currently no better solution was found than enforcement of New York State Navigation Law S-44 that prohibits alteration of mufflers in such a way that they violate permissible noise levels.

In Tompkins County the WRC recommendations are being considered at the municipal level. Lansing passed an ordinance in August 2003, reserving 250 feet from shore as the slow-speed buffer zone. A 250-foot zone addresses safety, but not noise and turbulence concerns. In March 2004 the Town of Ithaca passed legislation similar to Lansing’s but increased the slow-speed zone to 500 feet from shore. The City of Ithaca and the Town of Ulysses are currently considering the issue. Officials from the shoreline municipalities are working together to reach agreement on the width of buffer zones, realizing that similar laws will facilitate countywide enforcement. If the municipalities do not come up with similar legislation, the Tompkins County Legislature may get involved.

If you would like a copy of the Tompkins County WRC recommendations contact the Tompkins County Planning Department at 607-274-5560. 🐦



The Water Resources Council generally meets...

the third Monday of each month from 4:15 –6:00 p.m. at the Ithaca-Tompkins Transit Center. The other counties in the watershed have similar committees, though they may have different names such as the Water Quality Management Agency in Cayuga County and the Water Quality Coordinating Committee in Seneca County. At all of these meetings, the public is welcome.

BOATERS, What You Can Do:

- When out on the water, operate with good will and consideration of others.
- Go slow close to shore. Operate at high speed only in the middle of the lake. Traveling 10 mph straight out, it takes only 20 seconds to get 500 feet offshore.
- If waterskiing, tubing or on a personal watercraft, do not circle in the same area thus annoying people on shore. Spread your activities, and therefore noise, out over a wider area of the lake.
- Service your engine annually. If you smell gas and see oil floating on the water behind your boat, don't ignore it.
- Consider buying a new engine. Older two-cycle engines can discard up to 30% of their fuel uncombusted into the water. Newer marine engines (two cycle fuel injected and four stroke) run cleaner, quieter, and save you money on gas.
- Don't sell your old engine to someone else for reuse on the lake, dispose of it properly. Consider it your donation to the lake.
- If you are concerned, get involved. Remember the passage of any law requires the involvement and support of its citizens. Legislators will not pass a law unless it has voter support. That means letters and emails to representatives, speaking at municipal meetings, petitions in support of stronger regulation, talking to your neighbors.

Announcements . . .

National Drinking Water Week Celebrations... May 2-8

🦋 National Water Week 2004 is here! **Drinking Water Week** is a national event to promote awareness of our water resources, and encourage everyone to become involved in protecting one of our precious natural resources: water. The Network is excited to co-sponsor several events in the watershed that celebrate and honor this important week.



To kick off this celebratory week, the annual **Fall Creek Clean Up** has been planned for **Saturday May 1, 9 to 11:30am**. Last year, 42 volunteers from eight local community groups collected 2200 pounds of trash, which was hauled to the transfer stations by the City of Ithaca and Town of Dryden. For more information contact Phil Koons at pkoons2000@yahoo.com.

On **Saturday May 8, 10am to 12pm** there is another planned celebration of Water Week: The **Salt Point Cleanup** and invasive plant pull. This is an event co-sponsored by the Wells College Greens and the Network. Those who would like to participate should meet at the Department of Environmental Conservation land on the north side of the mouth of Salmon Creek, accessed off Myers Road. Youth under age 16 are welcome but must be accompanied by an adult. For more information contact Sharon Anderson at the Network, (607) 532-4104.

In addition, The Tompkins County Division of Environmental Health and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network are hosting a **National Water Week** Celebration in Tompkins County. Events will include the 11th annual water taste test, games, hands-on displays and much, much more. Events take place on **Friday May 7, 10am to 4pm** at the Pyramid Mall and on **Saturday May 8, 9am to 2pm** at the Ithaca Farmer's Market. For more information, call the Tompkins County Health Department at (607) 274-6688.

New Interactive CD Soon to be Available

🦋 The Network has exciting news! We will be releasing a fantastic new resource that is useful for everyone in the watershed. A project team, along with the Network, has created an interactive CD-ROM, **PROTECTING THE CAYUGA LAKE WATERSHED**, which is filled with information about both the Cayuga Lake watershed and the concepts behind watershed management planning. **PROTECTING THE CAYUGA LAKE WATERSHED** covers topics consisting of a broad overview of watershed

principles and processes; detailed review of the *Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan*; and the CD encourages further exploration of watershed assessment and planning techniques that are available via the Internet and other published materials. People who can benefit from this CD include residents and visitors to the watershed, stream stewardship groups, municipal officials and planners, and students of all ages.

A watershed is a living system that is formed by nature, and also shaped by the people who use its resources. We encourage everyone to keep our watershed in mind, for as a natural part of this system we all have an important role to play. Welcome To Your Watershed!

PROTECTING THE CAYUGA LAKE WATERSHED is free to Network members and available to all others for the cost of shipping and handling.

Mark Your Calendar for Lakefest

🦋 The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network will hold its annual Lakefest Sunday, August 22nd, 12:00pm - 4:00pm at Myers Park, Lansing, Pavilion D. Please join us for a free picnic, generously provided by Wells College, and music by Classic Folk. Puppeteer Tom Knight will follow with songs and skits that thrill children and adults and the recipient of the 2004 David Morehouse Award will be announced. Throughout the day will be activities and displays from local organizations and 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.



Myers Park is off Route 34B; look for a turn towards the lake opposite the Lansing schools. Signs for Lakefest will guide you to the park and pavilion D. The park charges a \$2 admission fee per car for people who are not residents of Lansing.

We hope you will invite your friends to join you for a great afternoon on the beautiful shores of Cayuga Lake. If you would like to volunteer to help that day, please contact us at: manager@cayugalake.org or (607) 532-4104.

The Fox River in Northern Illinois

By Christian M. Boissonnas

It is early one cool spring morning. Spots of gold at the top of the dark trees announce the emerging sun. Leaves rustle gently in the breeze. Below me the river rests, steaming in the cool air, quietly flowing to the distant Mississippi. An explosion of dandelions, ankle-deep now, carpets the lush grass. I stand at the center of my new watershed, to which I moved after forty-one years spent within two miles of Cayuga Lake. I am now on the west bank of the Fox River, forty miles west of Chicago.

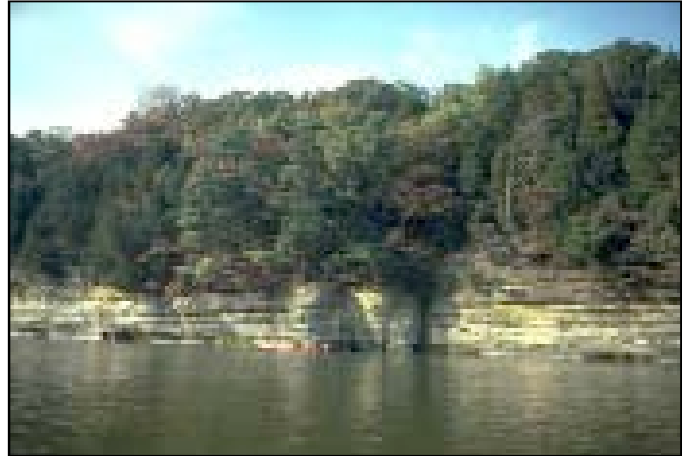
Its watershed includes over four hundred lakes in the north, agricultural lands in the west, and the eastern portion of Kane County, the fourth most populous county in Illinois. The stream goes through marshes, between bluffs, in cities, and traverses a flood plain before emptying in the Illinois River, all in the space of about one hundred thirty miles.

This placid river meanders quietly, not in a hurry. Its water spills gently over fifteen dams that were built in the 1800s to provide power for mills. In the pools upstream from the dams fishermen wade waist-deep in the middle of the river. This is a peaceful scene, unremarkable in its ordinariness, if you can abstract the noise from the traffic that permeates the air. However I find the Fox River anything but ordinary.



Photo courtesy of the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership (<http://www.foxriverecosystem.org>)

Until just after World War II, fishermen on the Fox harvested mussels for the pearl button industry in Illinois. I do not know why its shells sold for close to \$125 a ton when those from other rivers sold for \$50, but I can only think that the Fox must have been special in some way. From Dundee (IL, not NY), the shells traveled downriver to Meredosia, a town on the Illinois River west of Springfield where button blanks were cut. The blanks were then sent to finishing plants in Muscatine, Iowa, the heart of the button industry. Today, a very different industry thrives on the Fox River.



Bluffs along the river are a favorite canoe destination.

Photo courtesy of the Prairie Rivers Network, Champaign, IL (<http://prairierivers.org>)

On this cool morning, as I stand on the bluff overlooking the river, I look north. I cannot see it from where I am, but a few miles from me, attached to the east shore in Elgin, is a floating casino, the Grand Victoria. It is a big paddle wheeler without paddles, engine or rudder, but with four smokestacks. It is huge. At four hundred feet long and one hundred feet wide it is almost half as wide as the river that it dwarfs. It doesn't go anywhere. It can't, being three times as high as the two bridges between which it sits. Fifteen miles downstream another riverboat casino huddles among the tall buildings in downtown Aurora.

The challenge, as always, is to allow multiple competing uses without hurting the river, and I would give up some of the peace in summer more willingly if I knew for sure that this were so.

Pearl buttons and the casino are but two uses that this peaceful and often beautiful river has been enduring. Others (development, fishing, jet skis, catching wastewater effluents) exist in many other watersheds. I have not seen the river in summer yet, and I know that it will be less peaceful. The tourism and recreation industries will exercise their rights to use the river. The challenge, as always, is to allow multiple competing uses without hurting the river, and I would give up some of the peace in summer more willingly if I knew for sure that this were so. 🐾

Nominations Sought for David Morehouse Award

Dave Morehouse exemplified dedication and action. Throughout his life he worked to protect this lake that he loved. A pioneer and visionary, Dave became actively involved in protecting the Finger Lakes long before doing so was popular. Each year his contributions are remembered via the David Morehouse Award, sponsored by the Network and the Cayuga Lake Intermunicipal Organization. This annual memorial award recognizes others who are making a difference to protect our magnificent water resources. Many individuals, businesses, teachers, agricultural producers and community groups are doing wonderful things to preserve and protect our environment. We want to hear from you! Let us know of efforts that make a difference by submitting a nomination that is no more than two pages and explains how the nominee meets the first three criteria listed below. The Dave Morehouse Award recipient will be announced at

Lakefest, August 22 at Myers Park, Lansing.

Award Criteria

- Demonstrated commitment to the watershed over time (minimum 5 yrs)
- Active role in restoration and protection of the water resources in the watershed
- Leadership in an endeavor that has lasting effect
- It is not necessary for the nominee to live in the watershed
- Nominations are open to individuals, groups and businesses



Dave's lifetime of stewardship is remembered with an annual award.

Nominations are due to the Network office on July 15, 2004. Electronic submissions preferred. Send to manager@cayugalake.org or Morehouse Award, P.O. Box 303, Interlaken, NY 14847. 🐦

Clean Water Needed for Trout & People

Adapted from NYS DEC

Throughout their long common history, trout and people have had a very mixed relationship. People have long appreciated their beauty, fighting abilities, and delicious taste.

While much effort has been expended at rearing and keeping trout healthy, few other fish have suffered as much from human activity. Even the most adaptable trout cannot survive much human interference with its environment. All trout require cool, clean water and it is very easy for human activity to eliminate this condition. The Network is hard at work helping people to understand the importance of clean water for all who depend upon it. 🐦

AS OF MAY 2004...

the sale of lead sinkers weighing 0.5 ounces or less will be banned in New York State. Waterbirds can die from lead poisoning as a result of ingesting lead fishing sinkers that they have mistaken for food.

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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- 🐦 Education
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