THIRTEEN SIGNIFICANT STEPS IN THE
ONEIDA LAKE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

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CRITICAL STEPS IN THE ONEIDA LAKE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS
Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNY RPDB)

Each watershed has different characteristics that make it unique. Land use, population trends, geology, and topography are just a few of the features that will influence the "personality" of the lake community. So when it comes to developing a watershed management plan, there is no approved methodology or template that can easily be applied. The following table summarizes the steps that were taken during the Oneida Lake Watershed Management Planning process and includes some of the lessons learned along the way. This was not a linear process, as many of the tasks are continuous and occurred simultaneously.

STEPS	DESCRIPTION	WHAT ELSE THERE IS TO KNOW	LESSONS LEARNED WITH THE ONEIDA LAKE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN
1. Identify your core group	Select several agency and/or citizen leaders to serve as your core group.	This group should be able to provide a regional perspective and can lead you in the right direction when key decisions need to be made. Meet with them once a month for communication updates.	The 8-member Executive Committee was our core group. It was made up of agency leaders and research scientists from regional groups such as the SWCC, NYS DEC, regional planning boards, and the lake association. This group was essential in the early stages of the management plan. It was eventually phased out when the citizen-based Watershed Advisory Council was formed several years later. The Council, made up of municipal reps and stakeholders, was formed in order to ensure that the watershed management plan remained a local-level initiative.
2. Categorize and document your resources	Record the mailing address, e-mail address, and professional title of one or more key contacts in all the agencies and organizations in the watershed.	Remember to include the non-profit groups at the national, statewide, and local levels. Ask your core group to contribute to this process. Update your e-mail contact lists on a regular basis to boost program efficiency.	Updating e-mail addresses and mailing lists is very time consuming so establishing agency partnerships may be worthwhile. CNY RPDB maintains a list of agencies and organizations, but we often rely on Cooperative Extension for their address list of homeowners.

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2. Categorize and document your resources (cont.)	In addition to agencies and organizations, record the names and addresses of key individuals, such as board members on the local lake association.	These are the community leaders. You will need them on your team as your progress through the management planning process.	When all was said and done, we found it was critical to keep the lines of communication open. CNY RPDB often served as the connecting link between organizations and across political boundaries. These links were important in getting multiple groups to come to the table to collaborate on projects with mutual benefits.
	Record the names and addresses of municipal representatives.	This is an important step. You will need local level support as you progress and the municipal representatives will be important allies.

Remember to update your contact lists after each local election. | This has been a weak link for the Oneida Lake Watershed Management Plan. We should have started the communication process earlier. Now we're faced with a lot of catching up. |
3. Develop a website	This will be an important and very effective form of communication.	It's easy to forget about website maintenance, especially when you have a heavy workload. But if you make the effort, these updates will cut down on time for responding to questions about your management plan.	Reports, calendar events, and program descriptions – they all get added to the Oneida Lake website.
4. Collect existing and new information on the environmental setting and economic influences; identify data gaps	Present this information in a State of the Lake and Watershed (SOLW) report and distribute copies to watershed groups, libraries, and municipalities.	Make sure to add this report to the website. When people contact you for information, just refer them to the web!	We maintained good ties with many watershed agencies. Most of them contributed data to the SOLW report and edited the draft.
5. Compile GIS maps	Many groups have GIS capability but mapping scales can vary dramatically among organizations. Information on soils, slope, land use, etc. needs to be generated and presented using the same GIS base map.	Maps can be a good outreach tool. Enlarge an attractive map of the watershed with streams and lakes, and municipal borders. Mount it on foam core and use it when presentations are made. GIS mapping can be a difficult task so be sure to select a qualified GIS Coordinator who knows the ropes and can speak the language.	We had to start from scratch with our GIS mapping and it was quite costly but worth the effort. The CNY RPDB eventually hired a GIS specialist who now develops specialized maps for watershed municipalities.

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6. Launch an education program	Education is a key objective for any watershed management plan. Determine which groups you want to reach and then develop your message and education program accordingly. Newsletters, websites, conferences, lectures, workshops, watershed tours, press releases – they're all important and should continue throughout the management planning process.	Start your education program now and don't stop. It's critical that your key decision-makers are well informed so that they can make wise management decisions. You will need to fall back to square one with your education goals after the local elections when you have a new set of municipal officials on board.	The CNY RPDB developed a working partnership with Cooperative Extension to reach our education objectives. The Cornell Biological Field Station, Project Watershed, and New York Sea Grant are also now involved. CNY RPDB maintains a constant educational focus for the Watershed Advisory Council and guest speakers present at the monthly meetings.
7. Initiate a water quality monitoring program	Make sure you put the science behind the speculation. Provide scientific documentation for pollutant loading and establish the guidelines to establish long-term trends. Develop a comprehensive program that is consistent with respect to laboratory analyses, sampling methodology and frequency, and data interpretation.	Local colleges and universities can be a valuable source of information but be careful when relying on college students for long-term monitoring. Their priorities may not coincide with yours (especially during vacations) and the scientific validity of lab analyses done by college students may not hold up when challenged in a court of law. Avoid conflict by working with a single laboratory for all data analysis and a single limnologist for all data interpretation and report preparation.	CNY RPDB worked with County SWCDs, Planning Departments, and Health Departments for a comprehensive sampling program on Oneida Lake tributaries. This partnership turned out to be a winning team. The four-county tributary sampling teams were trained at the same time, using the same methodology. All of the tributary analyses were done at a local, state-certified laboratory. The results presented in the final report were used to prioritize stream segments and in the selection of restoration plans.
8. Identify the priority issues of concern	Distribute homeowner user surveys and rely on input from Water Quality Coordinating Committees (WQCC) and lake associations	Many issues will be identified when you distribute a user survey. The trick is to narrow your focus on the ones that impact the entire watershed instead of getting overwhelmed by the small localized issues. Make sure you can justify the prioritization process.	In addition to surveys and the WQCC feedback, we gathered valuable information from breakout sessions at a watershed conference. Eight priority "issues of concern" (erosion, flooding, declining fisheries, etc.) were eventually selected. The word "problem" was not used, since the public impressions varied quite substantially.

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9. Develop recommendations for the primary issues of concern	Use your resources wisely. Gather input from the technical "experts" by scheduling meetings to explore, compile, and analyze the facts.	Compile your findings and recommendations in a final report. Distribute the draft report for public review and schedule meetings to allow for public comments. Distribute the final report to agencies, organizations, municipalities, key political contacts and libraries.	CNY RPDB partnered with Cooperative Extension to organize "Working Groups" that developed the recommendations for the eight priority issues. The Watershed Advisory Council was the catalyst that double-checked and eventually endorsed the recommendations. The Advisory Council brought a sense of legitimacy to the process.
10. Record and publicize your success	Document your accomplishments and keep the public (especially municipal officials and potential funding sources) well informed.	Bring the press in on this process. Try to get one reporter to "adopt" the project and keep him/her well informed along the way.	Good publicity was especially important when it came to "selling" the recommendations to homeowners, lake users, and grant funding institutions.
11. Maintain an ongoing grant writing program	Keep the dollars flowing by "selling" your accomplishments to funding institutions. Do your research and keep on top of grant opportunities and submittal deadlines.	Funding institutions tend to support evidence of regional partnerships. Maximize your grant writing success by clearly defining your goals and updating them on a regular basis.	Our success has been based on maintaining open lines of communication and fostering watershed-wide collaborations. This has improved our efficiency in accomplishing tasks without duplicating the efforts of other groups.
12. Implement the recommendations	Start slow and select high priority projects based on funding availability.	Focus on visible projects that have a definitive end-point. The public will want to see results	The Education and Agriculture programs were selected as two of our priority issues because they had already developed momentum and were anticipated to result in a positive public perception.
13. Evaluate your accomplishments and update your recommendations on an annual basis	Once the management plan is written, you will need to keep a Program Coordinator to keep the momentum going.	Be persistent, be patient, and focus on success.	The Watershed Coordinator is now in charge of grant writing, program implementation, and regional coordination.