



Project News

Winter 2002

Watershed Communities Speak Out at Oneida Lake Task Force Conference

Approximately 70 municipal representatives and other key decision-makers with an interest in water resources attended another successful Oneida Lake Watershed Task Force Conference in November. The morning session was filled with presenters sharing their “lessons learned” from other lake communities and was followed by a delicious buffet lunch. Much of the afternoon was devoted to breakout groups with people divided in six watershed sub-regions to discuss local issues.



The watershed community is very fortunate that we are not faced with major problems from point-source pollution. The Oneida Lake and Watershed Management Plan, therefore, is designed to protect what we have. This involves gathering information about the natural environment and cultural resources and then evaluating alternatives for the protection and improvement of our treasured water resources. An initial step in this process is to identify the local issues. With such a large watershed that extends throughout portions of six counties, the issues of concern are very diverse depending on the proximity to Oneida Lake.

One of the topics addressed by each of the conference discussion groups was the identification of land use and related water resource activities that are considered to be important local issues of concern. The responses from the conference participants are summarized below. A municipal survey is also being distributed to mayors and supervisors throughout the watershed in order to compile a comprehensive summary.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE NORTHERN UPLANDS REGION

Increased use of ATVs and snowmobiles (unregulated, not monitored); inappropriate timbering (forestry Best Management Practices not applied); exotic species; public access; erosion and stream habitat changes; seasonal flooding; agriculture (Best Management Practices not applied, decrease in dairy farming); decrease in wildlife habitat; increased development; and landfill issues.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE NORTH SHORE REGION

Lake issues: cormorant control; declining fisheries; exotic species; public access; and the impact of septic effluent on Lake water quality. Development issues: density of waterfront development; increased commercial development; lack of local controls on new development; stormwater management; flooding and Oneida Lake water level controls; lack of comprehensive planning; and old infrastructure and retrofitting.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE EASTERN REGION

Relationship of the Fish Creek Basin to the Eastern Region and the current efforts (primarily by the Tug Hill Commission) to protect this watershed (this is especially significant to the City of Rome that draws its water from the Fish Creek basin); maintaining boater access to the Fish Creek corridor; accumulation of sediment in downstream areas that blocks access to upstream areas; maintaining or improving current

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The Watershed Advisory Council Takes Shape

A Watershed Advisory Council is being formed that will include all municipal and stakeholder representatives in the Oneida Lake watershed. The Council will eventually be asked to take a leading role in the development of the Lake and Watershed Management Plan and is being created to ensure that these efforts are directed as a local-level initiative.

In order to deal efficiently with the large number of municipalities in the watershed, the area has been divided into six regions. While all municipalities will be invited to take part on the Council, the primary decision-making body will be the Watershed Advisory Council's Board of Directors. The Board will include one representative from each of the six regions, in addition to five County and eight stakeholder representatives. Suggestions for specific individuals to serve as representatives on this Board are currently being discussed at meetings throughout the watershed.

Watershed Communities

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property values; localized flooding that results from the generally low elevation and high groundwater in the Oneida Lake Plain; runoff of road salt and sand resulting in negative impacts to water quality.

Issues of concern relating specifically to the Sylvan Beach (lake shore) area: the importance of tourism to Sylvan Beach's livelihood and the recognition that the quality of the water and watershed has a direct relationship to many issues of concern including: impacts to the swimming beach and seasonal flooding impacts on homes and businesses.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE SOUTH SHORE REGION

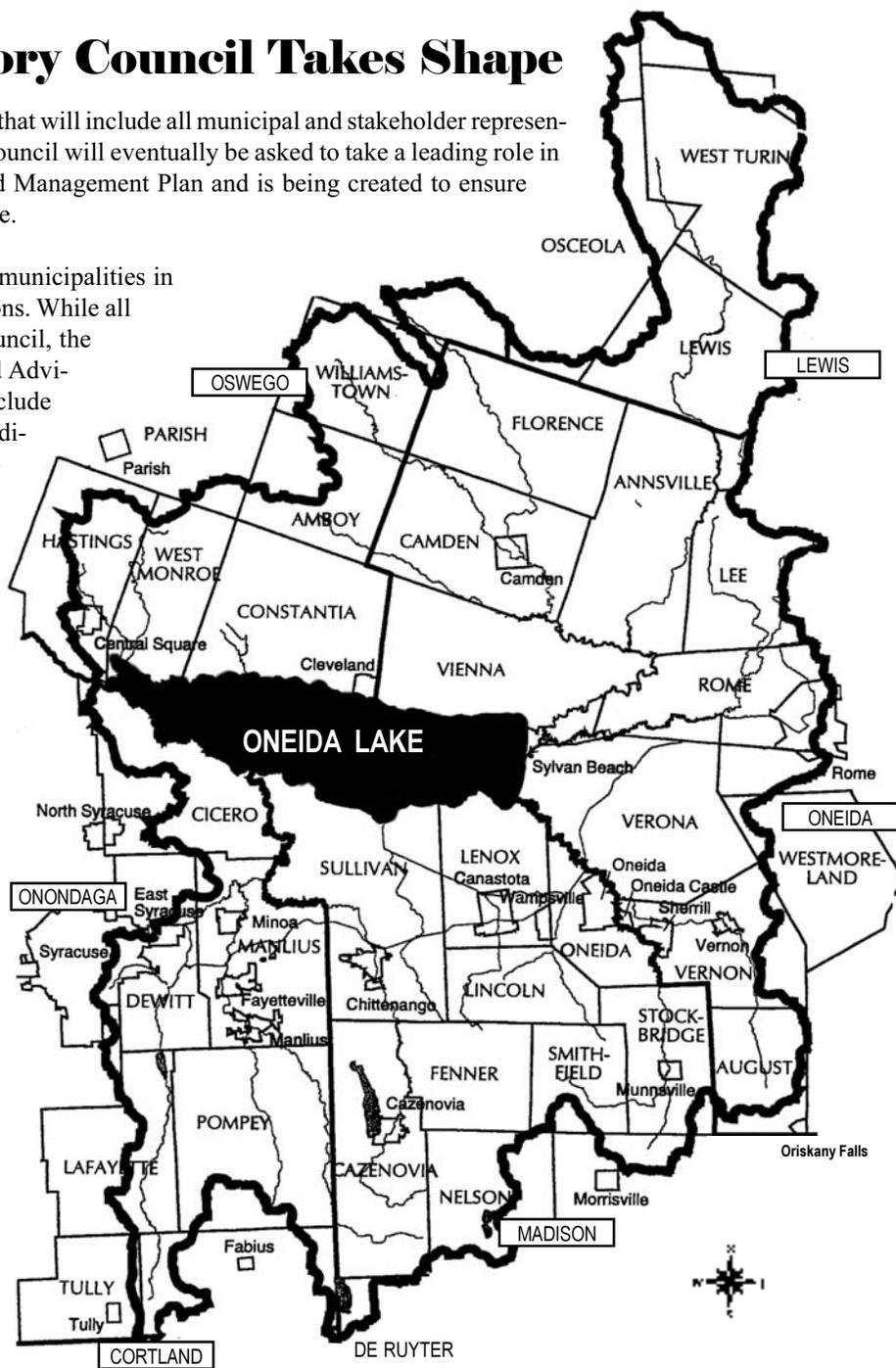
Stormwater runoff; siltation and sedimentation in the lake and streams; wetlands (preservation, reclamation, restoration); water level control and the impacts on flooding, erosion, ecological issues, boating, and tourism; on-site septic (especially in Lakeport and Bridgeport); fisheries and wildlife protection; Oneida Indian Nation sovereignty claim; and alternative drinking water supplies.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS REGION

Regional sewer system and failing onsite sewer systems; flooding in the lower Oneida Creek region; Tar Creek cleanup (coal tar); Oneida Indian Nations (negotiations with sewer and water projects in land claim area); lack of coordination among Codes Enforcement Officers; development around recreational areas; open space protection; protection of the family farm; and soil erosion.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE BUTTERNUT and LIMESTONE CREEKS REGION

Flooding in relation to lake level control and land development; sediment deposition from agriculture, new construction, and highways; floodplain protection / development in flood plains and on marginal land; cluster development; agricultural planning; open space protection; public access along creeks; fisheries management; fisheries decline; weed growth; and exotic species.



Oneida Lake Native Shoreline Restoration

By Scott Ingmire, Madison County Planning Department

During the Fall of 2001, the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board awarded grant funding to the Madison County Planning Department for a plan to improve water quality in the Oneida Lake watershed. The following article provides a description of this proposal.

In an era of ever-increasing biological pollution, lakeshore development, urban sprawl, and shoreline erosion, natural lacustrine and riparian shoreline habitats face numerous threats. This is especially true on lakes with highly developed shorelines such as Oneida Lake. On Oneida Lake, expansive riparian corridors and lacustrine wetlands have in many cases been replaced by well-manicured lawns. As the once rich riparian habitat was eliminated, notable changes occurred including decreased wildlife habitat, a lack of shoreline erosion control, limited nutrient buffering capacity (in fact nutrient loads are often substantially increased due to fertilizer use and septic runoff) and a severing of the important ecotonal transition between upland habitat and the near-shore aquatic macrophyte and limnetic habitats. Elimination of this important shoreline habitat has led to significant and documented loss of shoreline habitat corridors, increases in non-native plant and animal species, declines in amphibian populations, changes in breeding bird and mammal populations, and an overall decrease in habitat diversity and heterogeneity. Generalist species such as purple loosestrife, Phragmites,

boxelder, mallards, Canadian geese, and English sparrows often thrive in such altered non-native homogeneous shorelines. In addition to habitat problems, removal of riparian vegetation also leads to a decrease in the buffering of land based nutrient inputs, both natural and anthropogenic. Nutrient transport and loading is often exacerbated by the addition of fertilizers to lawns and by septic system runoff. No less important are the increases in shoreline erosion (often the greatest concern of shoreline property owners) that result from riparian vegetation removal.

In some areas of the country, shoreline development is restricted through stringent land use regulations. Although sometimes effective, these regulatory efforts often result in strong opposition from landowners. In addition, these regulations are designed to mitigate future impacts, not the restoration of past conditions. Suggestions of how to improve ones shoreline habitat are fairly common, however funding to implement such changes is often lacking.

With these issues in mind, the Oneida Lake Native Shoreline Restoration Incentive grant proposal was designed to provide

financial incentive and technical assistance to landowners interested in restoring some or all of their shoreline to a heterogeneous native plant community, thereby improving offshore and in-lake habitat, increasing nutrient buffering capacity, slowing or preventing shoreline erosion, and improving the aesthetic quality of the property. This project will specifically target the year-round residents with lakeshore parcels in Madison County. The work will serve as models to seek funding and to promote further shoreline restoration efforts throughout the watershed. Qualified landowners will be contacted and a local information session will be held to present the idea as well as generate local support. As this is a pilot demonstration project, only two landowners will be selected to have their shorelines restored. Once the two sites are selected, landscape plans will be drawn up, native plant lists and vendors will be determined and construction will begin in the Spring 2002. It is hoped that this initial effort will expand interest in shoreline restoration throughout the Oneida Lake watershed and will lead to other funding opportunities to support these efforts.

Funding is Available for Watershed Improvement Projects

The Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNY RPDB) is looking for good ideas of ways to restore and protect waterbodies in the Oneida Lake watershed and is coordinating the distribution of \$67,100 in grant funds in cooperation with watershed partners.

Funding is available to support the design and implementation of projects to reduce non-point source pollution from non-agricultural areas in the Oneida Lake watershed, and/or to implement restoration projects at problem areas where sedimentation has impacted fisheries habitat and recreational opportunities.

All project proposals require agency sponsorship and should be submitted to a County Water Quality Coordinating Committee (WQCC) by February 7, 2002. Each WQCC will then prioritize the projects from within its County, and will send its recommendations to the Task Force Executive Committee. Executive Committee members will review the proposals from each of the five counties and will recommend one or more projects for grant funding. The CNY RPDB will make the final decision based on these recommendations.

For a list of proposal guidelines, contact Anne Saltman of the CNY RPDB at (315) 422-8276.



Municipal Opinions Help to Define Local Water Resource Issues

The CNY Regional Planning and Development Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County, and the Herkimer Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program are working together to distribute surveys to all Oneida Lake watershed municipalities in January. The survey will provide an opportunity for municipalities to formally identify and prioritize local water resource issues of concern. As the Oneida Lake and Watershed Management Plan is developed, restoration and maintenance goals will be produced for high priority areas to ensure the long-term protection of our local lakes and streams. Please contact your municipal representatives to check on the status of the survey. Your involvement will help to ensure that development of the Management Plan is a local initiative.

Agriculture Takes a Leading Priority in the Oneida Lake Watershed

Lewis, Madison, Oswego, Oneida, and Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) have agreed to move forward with a coordinated approach to serving agricultural needs in the Oneida Lake watershed. With potential funding for agricultural nonpoint initiatives made possible by the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board, these counties are submitting a proposal to hire a Regional Agricultural Watershed Resource Specialist for a two-year period.



The Agricultural Specialist, along with the five SWCDs, will assist in the development of a regional Agricultural Advisory Committee, will plan and conduct education and outreach programs in cooperation with other agricultural partners, will continue to promote the implementation of the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) initiative, will prioritize agricultural nonpoint concerns in the watershed, and will collect pertinent agricultural data for the forthcoming State of the Lake and Watershed report. For more information, contact your respective Soil & Water Conservation District offices.



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