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## Oneida Lake is Wetland?? Really?

For the past few months, the Board of Directors for the OLA has wrestled with an issue of significant concern. The NYS Department of Conservation is planning to change the way that they identify and designate wetlands. In the past, DEC used a set of maps to indicate areas that they identified as wetlands. These maps provided guidance for developers, as well as homeowners and recreational users. For example, the huge Micron project has been in the news recently as this sprawling complex impacts areas already designated as a wetland. Such designation comes with a huge host of regulatory impacts.

DEC wants to abandon the use of these maps, allowing them much more flexibility and leeway regarding what they consider a wetland. Common sense, and plenty of science, tells us that wetlands have certain features. Most definitions tell us that wetlands consist of marshes, swamps, and saturated land. The EPA defines a wetland "areas where water covers the soil, or is present either at or near the surface of the soil all year or for varying periods of time during the year, including during the growing season." Clearly, Oneida Lake does not resemble this definition.

**Now the NYS DEC plans to designate all lakes as wetlands!** And that includes a 100 foot buffer adjacent to any wetland. That means, if you own property within 100 feet of the lake, or one of its tributaries, your property is in a wetland, and, therefore, it is subject to all of the rules and regulations regarding wetlands.

Below you will see the position statement that the Board of Directors developed regarding this issue. We have also sent letters of concern to the Commissioner of the DEC, as well as to elected official such as Al Stirpe, John Mannion, Maryanne Buttenschon, Joe Griffo, and Brian Miller. You will see that in our statement that **we support NYS Senate Bill 9799**. This common-sense bill exempts lakes over 150 acres from this regulation. We encourage you to contact your local officials to voice your

opinion, as well.

## **Oneida Lake Association position regarding the DEC proposal to designate lakes as wetlands**

The Oneida Lake Association understands and supports the many benefits that wetlands provide to our precious natural resources. We recognize and support the need to protect aquatic vegetation, as well as the abundant wildlife that depend on wetlands for a safe and protective habitat.

**Oneida Lake is a navigable lake, not a wetland.** The current regulation package for Oneida Lake and its surrounding wetlands has done a good job of preserving our local ecosystem. The current regulations include Article 15 of New York State Environmental Conservation Law, the Clean Water Act, and other state and federal regulations that govern how people may interact with Oneida Lake and its surrounding wetlands. These regulations already do the job they are intended to do, to the benefit of the lake and everyone who lives near or uses it.

The Oneida Lake Association Board of Directors expressed concern that this new proposal overreaches the current regulations. Classifying the lake as a wetland is counterintuitive. This proposal could place hundreds of homes under strict DEC regulation. It is also potentially very costly for lakeside property owners who may want to make routine property improvements or conduct maintenance on their shoreline or within the proposed 100-foot buffer zone. OLA is already hearing from members whose planned, permitted projects, such as erosion control and replacing existing pilings, are being held up in anticipation of the new regulation coming into effect.

The specifics of the DEC proposal show the agency's intent to abandon its current regulatory maps and layer Article 24 permitting requirements on top of the current Article 15 rules, and to greatly expand the regulatory footprint of the agency to both the shoreline and the vast majority of the open waters of the lake. This will affect at least a 100-foot-wide swath of land around all 60-plus miles of Oneida Lake shoreline, at significant cost as landowners face increased permitting hurdles and a long list of activities that the DEC has already indicated it will decline to permit—including many activities that have long proven to be compatible with conservation in the Oneida Lake watershed.

Because of our concerns, we have reached out to Interim Commissioner Sean Mahar to ask that the agency withdraw this regulation, and we have reached out to lake-region elected officials to ask them to support the Senate Bill 9799 (co-sponsored by Senator Joe Griffo) to exempt navigable waterways over 150 acres, such as Oneida Lake, from the regulation.

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## **Water Chestnut Weed Pulls**

It was a successful summer season pulling water chestnuts for the Oneida

Lake Association. Three weed pulls took place during the month of July on Metzger's Pond in Constantia; at Johnnie's Pier 31 in Canastota and at Long Point/Old Man's Bay in Cicero. OLA coordinated these weed pulls in cooperation with the Oswego, Onondaga, and Oneida Soil & Water Conservation Districts. We are so grateful for the assistance of these agencies! We had special participation from the Herkimer County Soil & Water Conservation staff at the Canastota weed pull, and participation from Senate Candidate Caleb Slater at the Long Point event. By the end of the pulling season, at the above mentioned locations, **a total of 9,000 pounds of water chestnuts** were pulled that involved over 30 hardworking people.

There's still much work to do and we look forward to resuming hand pulling water chestnuts in July of 2025. Please let us know if you see an area of water chestnut growth that needs attention. If so, please contact Patricia Cerro-Reehil at [pcr@reehil.com](mailto:pcr@reehil.com).

We thank Director Cerro-Reehil for her terrific work leading these weed pulls.





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## DEC Spotlight Freshwater Drum

Scientific Name: *Aplodinotus grunniens*

Nicknames: Sheepshead, croaker, grunt, lake drum

Current State Record: 36 lbs. 0 oz., Oneida Lake, Oneida County, 6/16/17

Identification: Blunt snout with humpback appearance. Their dorsal (top) fin runs almost the length of its body and has a deep notch between the spiny and soft sections of the fin. Ranges in color from bright silver to a coppery brown depending on water conditions in their habitat.

How to Fish: Freshwater drum are usually found at the bottom of medium to large rivers and lakes, primarily foraging for mussels and other mollusks, as well as crayfish, insects, and minnows. They're often caught when anglers are targeting other species. Natural bait such as cut bait, crayfish, or nightcrawlers are most effective, but artificial lures such as spinners, jigs,

and crank baits will also work. Try vertical jigging or bouncing/jerking a lure or bait off the bottom. Once hooked, they put up a good fight!

**Safe Handling:** Try holding a freshwater drum upright near its gills or gill plate and near the base of its caudal (tail) fin. Avoid sticking your fingers in their mouth as they have molar-like teeth that extend to their throat that are used for crushing shells. If a hook is set deep, cut the line and release the fish.

**Fun fact:** Male drum produce a grunting, croaking, or rumbling sound by vibrating their swim bladder—hence where they get their name.



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## Youth Fishing Derby Reminder

**The OLA First Annual OLA Youth Fishing Derby is still live!**

**Entry deadline is December 31, 2024**

Eligibility:

Up to 15 yrs old

Must be child or grand child of OLA Member

## Rules

1. Fish must be caught on Oneida Lake east of Route 81 Bridge and tributaries up to first impossible barrier
2. Fish must be caught during the regular season for each species.
3. The longest fish in the following categories will receive a trophy and fishing prize package: walleye, yellow perch, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, pickerel, non-gamefish (carp, drum, catfish, etc..)

Entries must submit the following information to [president@oneidalakeassociation.org](mailto:president@oneidalakeassociation.org) :

- One photo of the fish with the child and one with the fish on a ruler with the length clearly visible
- Date of catch, length of catch, species.
- Name and age of child, name of OLA member.
- Entries must be submitted by an adult 18 years or older.
- All Entries must be received by December 31, 2024.

**Check our website and Facebook page for updates.**



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## DEC Summer Update on Walleye Fishing in Oneida Lake

Walleye fishing was strong this summer on Oneida Lake. In June and July,

anglers caught walleye at the highest rate for all trips and the second highest rate for targeted trips since at least 2012. Only 2019 produced a higher targeted walleye catch rate, and that was the year when the population was estimated to be about 1 million fish. The exceptional walleye fishing on Oneida Lake is expected to continue into the fall. Plan your trip today!



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**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.**

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**Pay your dues, and HELP PROTECT ONEIDA LAKE!!!!**

**\$8 annually**

**Recruit your neighbors and friends TO JOIN US!**

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Memorials and contributions to our program are most welcome.

OLA is a 501(c)4 organization serving and protecting the Oneida Lake environment.



## OLA Website

OLA is a 501(c)(4) not-for-profit organization.

The Oneida Lake Association is a member of the New York State Conservation Council <http://www.nyscc.com/> and the New York State Federation of Lake Associations <http://www.nysfola.org/>.

Please remember to obey all laws, rules, regulations, and codes of ethics as they pertain to boating, fishing, hunting, and the management of Oneida Lake and its tributaries.

Report environmental violations.

**1-844-DEC-ECOS (1-844-332-3267)**

*Edited by John Harmon*

*Send us your notes and articles for use in future ENews!*

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