

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Spring 2025

www.oneidalakeassociation.org

It's a Lake!

By OLA Vice President John Harmon

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 decided 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 outdoorsman. For example, one of the challenges for the huge Micron project has been how this sprawling complex impacts areas already designated as a wetland. Such designation comes with a huge host of regulatory impacts.

What is a wetland?

DEC has abandoned the use of these maps, thereby providing 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 as an area “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. It is a lake!

As of January 1, 2025, DEC retains the right 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 could be identified as a wetland, and,

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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. However, 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. [See page 4 for the text of this letter].

President's Message

Thank you, OLA members, for your support during my term as President. This will be my final President's message after taking up the Presidency from John Harmon, our 2024 Conservationist of the Year who set all kinds of records for the most productive term in our Association's history. I look forward to passing the gavel to President-elect Lance Vella, who will serve as 2025-26 President starting this May.

Lance, who is himself a Conservationist awardee, is a Past President who has been a great mentor and friend to me throughout my time on the Oneida Lake Association Board of Directors. I look forward to continuing as a Board member after the transition, to support Lance to the fullest in continuing the vital mission of our OLA.

Many of you know Lance from his decades running a successful family business on the North Shore, and anyone that knows him knows his deep commitment to conserving Oneida Lake for the benefit of all people. The good works he does in our community are too numerous to list here, and he most often works behind the scenes, avoiding the limelight. So when given the opportunity to illuminate his good works, I want to make sure that every OLA member knows just how much Lance's fellow Directors appreciate his wisdom and energy.

Lance, we have confidence in you, and we are here to help. Our OLA members and our lake are in good hands with Lance!

I am also honored to note the contributions of OLA Officers Bob Walczyk and Amy Lee Hetherington. Amy will start the 2025-26 term as Second Vice President-elect, and Bob will continue as Treasurer. On any Board, especially one that has been around since 1945 and is comprised entirely of volunteers, having a fresh set of eyes on priorities and

challenges is as important as institutional memory. With Bob and Amy stepping up into leadership roles, we can be confident that OLA has engaged, energetic leadership for many years to come.

The entire Board is rallying around Lance, Bob, and Amy, to ensure our continued success as a conservation organization. Please join in and be in touch to let them know how we can do even better work for you!

I now ask that we turn our attention to a more somber subject. Every OLA Board of Directors meeting starts with a "health and welfare" update from the Board, reflecting that we as Directors care deeply about one another and each other's families.

Sometimes the news is good—births, graduations, weddings, the latest fishing report—and sometimes it is not so good. This spring, we have had two pieces of difficult news that may be known to some readers. I have been asked to share with the broader OLA membership that Director Greg Keener and Director Tony Buffa have both been diagnosed with cancer, and both are going through the special hell of cancer treatment.

Fortunately, both men are strong fighters, with good humor; they have family and friends around them to help; they have great medical teams in their corner; and they have the full, prayerful support of their sisters and brothers on the OLA Board of Directors.

In my 20+ years as a Director, I've seen several fellow directors be afflicted by cancer. My own father, Kurt Snyder, was among them, and he's in remission and still going strong as an OLA director. The fight against cancer is extraordinarily difficult, but it affirms the power of prayer and teamwork to help people.

Selfishly, as OLA President, I get to use the Bulletin's bully pulpit to look after the people I care about. So I'll share that I care very much about Tony and Greg. They are mentors and friends to me and to everyone on our Board, and they are well loved in our community. If you can, I hope you will turn up the volume on prayers for both. I have faith that they will be better off for it.

In closing, an invitation: **Please join us for the OLA annual membership meeting, set for Wednesday, April 23, at Millard Hawk Elementary School in Central Square.** This year's theme is "The Power of Science," and we'll be focused on how, through scientific expertise, we can keep our lake protected.

Our lake is doing great right now! Walleyes and perch are growing and being caught in abundance, access for boaters and ice anglers is available and enjoyed, and the ecosystem as a whole is providing benefits for the many thousands of people who live on and visit our lake. But the price of that enjoyment is constant vigilance, including the constant study of our lake by Cornell, DEC, Sea Grant, and the other entities entrusted with its care. We'll celebrate that work at the meeting, and share engaging, interesting news of the lake's health and well-being. Look for more details on Page 5 of this *Bulletin*, and we hope to see you on the 23rd of April.

Many thanks,



Matt Snyder
OLA President, 2024-25

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therefore, it would be subject to all of the rules and regulations regarding wetlands.

On page 1 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 officials such as Al Stirpe, Marianne Buttenschon, Joe Griffo, and Brian Miller. You will see that in our statement that we supported NYS Senate Bill 9799 [Now S3656]. 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.**

Our Action Plans based on this Position

The New York State Assembly also had a parallel bill that exempted lakes from the wetlands designation. Unfortunately, that bill has now expired because it was not acted upon during the 2024 legislative session. That means that this bill must be resurrected in order to re-introduce it to the Assembly and the Senate. The pathway to this passage of this bill is further complicated by the retirement of the Assemblyman from the Chautauqua Lake region who originally introduced the bill. The OLA is now actively engaged in encouraging that Assemblyman's successor to reintroduce A4692. The parallel bill in the Senate (S3656) has been reintroduced by Senator Borello, also from the Chautauqua Lake region. On an encouraging note, Senator Joe Griffo, from nearby Rome, New York, co-sponsored the original Senate bill. We are also working with Senator Griffo to enlist his continued support.

In fact, OLA President Matt Snyder and Vice-president John Harmon recently met with Senator Griffo to discuss this issue. We are grateful that, once again, Senator Griffo will support the bill that exempts lakes over 150 acres from these wetlands designations. Senator Griffo

agreed to seek support for this bill so that it makes its way through the legislature. In fact, Senator Griffo also asked us to provide some talking points and some questions related to the wetlands issue. As the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the Minority Assistant Leader, Griffo will be a member of the task force that will interview the newly appointed Commissioner of the DEC. He wants to be able to question her about the OLA's concerns.

Keep in mind that the OLA is not the only lake organization engaged in this battle. Our neighbors to the east, the Cazenovia Lake Association, is also heavily involved. Like our organization, the CLA also wrote a strongly worded position paper against the wetlands designation. They have also sent letters similar to ours to elected officials. In fact, OLA Vice-president John Harmon and CLA President David Miller have exchanged numerous emails, phone calls, and even face-to-face meetings to discuss ways that we can work together. We hope to engage the folks from the Chautauqua Lake region, as well. This western connection will be a bit more complicated because there are several lake associations surrounding Chautauqua Lake, each with a slightly different agenda. Nevertheless, they are all against the designation of lakes as wetlands.

DEC's interactive maps

One of the elements of these new wetlands designations is the interactive map that DEC has placed on its website. OLA members can review this map closely to investigate how their property might be impacted. Rather than post the exceedingly long URL, we recommend that interested members navigate to the DEC website, and search for the "Environmental Resource Mapper." There you will find links to the wetlands maps.

Commentary from NYS Residents

Prior to the actual enactment of the change in wetlands designation, the DEC called for public input. They received



OLA President Matt Snyder and Vice-president John Harmon meet with State Senator Joe Griffo (left).

over 4,900 comments from the public, as well as from civic organizations such as the OLA! DEC's response to the many objections to the proposal was certainly disheartening and disappointing. For example, many citizens voiced concerns about the regulation of areas within navigable lakes. Many comments also requested a delay of two to five years for these changes to go into effect. Although the concerns were strongly worded and thoroughly explained, DEC simply responded by stating: "The changes go into effect 1/1/2025." In other words, there was complete disregard for the expressed concerns.

When commentators objected to specific language in the regulations, DEC once again relied on the simplest possible response by re-stating the regulation itself. The DEC also employed the strategy of blaming the legislature for these changes. For example, many of the public comments "expressed concern that lakes with submergent aquatic vegetation that were previously unregulated under Article 24 will be regulated under the new statutory and regulatory provisions. Many comments expressed concern that

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To submit questions or comments about *The Bulletin*, contact editor John Harmon at jpharmon1@gmail.com



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expanded wetlands protections will impact their efforts to manage invasive species, while others requested that DEC exempt navigable lakes in these regulations.” DEC responded by stating: “Since 1975 submergent wetlands have been listed as one of the wetland types eligible for regulation under the Freshwater Wetlands Act. However, many submergent wetlands were not regulated only because they were inaccurately depicted on regulatory maps. In 2025, the statutory requirement requiring all regulated wetlands to be mapped will be repealed and many areas in navigable lakes will be regulated.” This response signals their intent to regulate lake as wetlands.

Several comments also asked for a commonsense approach that balanced wetland protection with economic development. The DEC responded by stating “Our plan does that.” Clearly it does not!

Other comments expressed concern about the potential economic impacts on navigable lakes with submergent wetlands. Specifically, they were concerned about the potential for decreased property values. The DEC responded by stating: “The Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS), Job Impact Statement (JIS), Rural Area Flexibility Analysis (RAFA), and Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for Small Business and Local Governments (RFA) provide DEC’s analysis of potential economic impacts. DEC’s economic analysis focused on the impacts from the regulations.” This alphabet soup of agencies provides little reassurance.

A vast majority of commentators voiced their concerns that these regulations are not suitable for a lake. And the proposed rules will add unnecessary regulation where rules already exist. They will increase regulatory burden and cost on businesses and residents.

In summary, the DEC relied heavily on the continued use of just a few canned responses, such as “This request is beyond the scope of the rule making” and

[perhaps worst of all] “This response has been noted.”

You can view the entire 25-page list of concerns **and DEC responses at:**
https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-12/wetlands_apc_pt664.pdf

OLA Director Rip Colesante has been working on the North Shore with local government officials. Their focus is on the impact that a wetlands designation could have on property values. Since this designation comes with a host of regulations, requirements, and prohibited uses, private property no longer becomes

private. What impact would that have on property values? And if the property value drops, so could the assessed value. Lower assessed values will result in lower tax revenues. The local governments surrounding the lake could end up absorbing a huge financial burden.

The OLA Board of Directors will continue to work on this issue. We hope that you will join us in this challenge by contacting your local elected officials, your neighbors, and your friends, helping them to understand the consequences of this governmental overreach.

Our Letter to the DEC Commissioner

Dear Interim Commissioner Mahar,

The Oneida Lake Association (OLA) is a 2,100-member, non-profit conservation organization chartered in 1946 to protect Oneida Lake. We are writing to express strong opposition to the State’s proposed regulation change, which would reclassify Oneida Lake as a wetland subject to Article 24 of the Environmental Conservation Law.

Of course, OLA steadfastly supports the conservation of wetlands in the Oneida Lake watershed. We further recognize the importance of protecting native submerged aquatic vegetation. We believe that regulations that are already in place do enough to protect these resources. We caution that granting DEC additional regulatory authority and erroneously classifying lakes as wetlands will have unnecessary, negative consequences for lakeside property owners and communities.

Freshwater lakes in New York State are already protected by Article 15, Title 5 of the Environmental Conservation Law. Article 15 mandates “preservation, protection and enhancement of the present and potential values of the water resources” through regulations that are “reasonably consistent with the state’s social and economic development.” Oneida Lake and its surrounding wetlands are also protected by federal regulations administered by the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other agencies.

Historically, the above-mentioned regulations have sufficiently protected Oneida Lake’s ecosystem and economy. DEC’s proposal to impose new Article 24 requirements on all lakeside properties strikes us as redundant and overreaching. The proposed regulations will directly impact any waterfront owner conducting improvements or maintenance on their private property. This threatens acute economic harm to not just the 60 miles of Oneida Lake shoreline, but to the entire Central New York economy.

As the largest lake entirely inside New York State, Oneida Lake is a vital economic engine. The proposed regulations threaten to diminish the utility of private property for many longstanding recreational and residential uses, which have proven to be compatible with conservation. The DEC’s proposed regulation is likely to suppress real property values, which will impact tax base available to support local school districts and municipalities.

The DEC has tried to mollify the public’s concerns by stating that “ordinary use” will be exempt from its proposed regulation, but OLA members cannot rely on that vague and unclear assurance. Therefore, OLA urges DEC to withdraw the proposed regulation from consideration or modify it so that it exempts Oneida Lake. Furthermore, we will be working with our elected representatives to support Senate Bill 9799 and Assembly Bill 10653. These companion bills are common-sense legislation, exempting navigable waters larger than 150 acres from DEC’s classification as a wetland.

OLA’s 2,100 members eagerly await your response to our request, and we hope that the State of New York will recognize that the prudent, limited regulations already in place have promoted healthy lake environments and economies across our region.

Warm regards,

Matthew Snyder
President
Oneida Lake Association, Inc.

ANNUAL MEETING

Millard Hawk Elementary School, Central Square

April 23 - 6 pm

Join OLA to celebrate “The Power of Science” at our annual meeting!

On Wednesday, April 23, the Oneida Lake Association will host its annual, in-person membership meeting. The meeting will start at 7 p.m. with the doors open at 6 p.m., at Millard Hawk Elementary School in Central Square. The meeting is free and open to the public. OLA memberships and door prizes will be available.

For this year’s annual meeting, the OLA Board of Directors has chosen the theme of “The Power of Science!” This choice reflects Oneida Lake’s stature as one of the best-studied natural resources in the world, thanks to decades of effort by Cornell University, the Department of Environmental Conservation, New York Sea Grant, and many other partners in conservation. In recognition, the Oneida Lake Association was awarded the American Fisheries Society’s 2024 President’s Award, which will be celebrated at the membership meeting.

In keeping with OLA tradition, this year’s meeting will feature exhibitors and booths on display in the atrium of Millard Hawk Elementary. The meeting itself will start at 7 p.m. sharp, with a welcome and flag salute. There will be a brief business meeting, including elections of OLA Directors, followed by presentations and Q and A with the audience.

Highlighted topics will include the annual report on walleye stocking on Oneida Lake; an update from Cornell on the health of the lake’s sport fisheries; and a presentation from Sea Grant on their scientific and educational good works in the watershed. The full agenda will be announced at oneidalakeassociation.org in the weeks leading up to April 23.

At the tail end of the meeting, OLA President Matthew Snyder will present the 79th annual honoree of the **Conservationist of the Year Award**, to the person who best exemplifies the Association’s conservation mission. The evening will conclude with drawings for door prizes including Oneida Lake-specific tackle and watercraft provided by supporters of the OLA.

We look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting and celebrating the continued strength of OLA in supporting science-based conservation on Oneida Lake!

OLA Notice of Elections

During the Annual Meeting, OLA will conduct its regularly scheduled elections of members of the Board of Directors. In accord with the bylaws of the Association and New York State not-for-profit law, the OLA hereby notifies its members in good standing of their eligibility to vote. The vote will be conducted by show of hands.

Standing for re-election to the Board, for terms ending April 30, 2028, is the following slate of Directors: Patricia Cerro-Reehil, Warren Darby, John Harmon, Michael Scanlon, Kurt Snyder, Matthew Snyder, and Lance Vella.

Bass Tournaments and the Oneida Lake Fishery

By John Harmon, OLA Vice President

Faithful readers of the *OLA Bulletin* will recall last fall's extensive article regarding the DEC's introduction of a required registration permit for Bass Tournaments in New York, State. The OLA has lobbied DEC for several years to begin a process to gather data on the scope and breadth of Bass Tournaments in the state. Although we suspect that the recent explosion in the number of tournaments on Oneida Lake has resulted in a decrease in the quality of the bass fishery, neither we, the DEC, or even the Cornell Field Station has enough evidence to make a scientific connection. To their credit, DEC launched a permitting system that is designed to gather the kinds of data that we all need in order to begin to understand the effects of tournaments, if any, on bass populations in Oneida Lake.

The permitting process went live in September 2024. Essentially, it requires that any bass tournament in New York State waters (over ten participants) must have an approved permit. The permit process itself is quite streamlined. Organizers fill out an on-line application at least 45 days in advance, and DEC typically approves the application well before the event. The process also includes a required report form following the event itself. Both the application and the subsequent reports are designed to give DEC the information we need to make informed decisions regarding the bass populations.

I recently asked Steve Hurst, Chief of the Bureau of Fisheries for the DEC, to give us an update on the early stages of the permitting process. His reply appears below:

Black Bass Fishing Tournament Permitting and Reporting System Update

In September 2024, DEC Bureau of Fisheries implemented a new Black Bass Fishing Tournament Permitting and Reporting System to obtain much needed information on the extent of black bass (largemouth bass and smallmouth bass) tournament activity throughout the state. A tournament permit is now required for conducting bass tournaments with 10 or more participants.

As of February 14, 2025, 607 permits have been issued. Permits have been issued to tournament directors in 10 different states, with the majority in New York (81.5%), Pennsylvania (11.5%) and New Jersey (2.6%).

Most permitted tournaments are for motorized boats (87.1%), with the remainder for kayak (7.6%) and multiple types of boats (5.3%). Permits have been issued for tournaments on 91 different waterbodies. There are nine waterbodies with more than 20 permitted tournaments. They include Onondaga Lake (43),

Oneida Lake (37), Lake Champlain (37), Conesus Lake (37), Cayuga Lake (27), Keuka Lake (27), Honeoye Lake (26), and Otisco Lake (24). Within 45 days of each event, tournament directors are required to submit results through an online form on DEC's website. The information obtained through the permitting and reporting system will help us better understand and manage our black bass fisheries.

For more information on the Black Bass Tournament Permitting and Reporting System, including a map of waterbodies with permitted tournaments, navigate to the DEC website. Search for Bass Tournament Permits, then click on Upcoming Tournaments.

Bureau Chief Hurst also informed me that DEC will provide a detailed year-end summary in January 2026.

What do Tournament Directors Think?

I thought that it was important to find out how this permitting system looks from the perspective of an active bass fishing organization. Dave Smith, the



Tournament Director for the Salt City Bassmasters spoke extensively on his experience with the permitting program. Smith began by stating that the application process is "not too hard." It only takes a few minutes to apply, and the DEC approval comes back fairly soon. Smith also stated that DEC Bureau Chief Steve Hurst has been personally very helpful during the process.

The real issue, Smith explained, is the mandatory report following the tournament. Although the heart of this program is the collection of informative data by the DEC, reporting these data takes far longer than filling out the original application. For example, the report asks tournament organizers to provide data in a number of categories. Questions include: How many smallmouth bass over 4 pounds? How many largemouth bass over 5 pounds? These questions seem straightforward, providing worthwhile data available for statewide study and comparisons. But in practice, Smith explained, such questions become a burden. During a tournament, participants present a "bag" of five fish at the weigh in. The entire bag is weighed collectively. To weigh each fish separately would take five times as long! A tournament of fifty boats would present a huge problem. Not only does this create a lot more work, "five times as long" for the organizers also means that the fish are out of the water five times as long! Such a practice is counterproductive if the goal is to keep fish alive and well. In fact, Smith explained that tournaments penalize anglers if any fish in their bag is dead. Therefore, one of the

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Bass Tournaments

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important goals for the participants is to keep the fish alive and return them to the lake.

On the other hand, Smith understands the significance of presenting good data to the DEC. “If we see a lunker in these bags, we do take it out and weight it. We try to do the best that we can.” Smith explained, however, that this may not be the case for every tournament organizer. “DEC has to understand that they are not going to get the exact info that they want.” Despite the issues, Smith estimates that he stays at the weigh-in site at least a couple of hours after the event, cleaning up the required paperwork. Other questions from the report include: How many

anglers caught their limit? What is the average number of fish that were dead in a bag?

Fizzing?

My conversation with Smith then turned to “fizzing.” More and more anglers, especially those in tournaments, are now turning to the controversial practice of fizzing. During these tournaments, fish that are hooked in deeper waters are quickly brought to the surface by the anglers. One result is that the swim bladder of these bass becomes overinflated. Once released, these fish cannot return to the deeper, colder water that they need to survive. In order to solve this issue, anglers then use a small needle to puncture the swim bladder releasing the excess air, with the goal that the fish can now swim back to the deeper water. While many anglers utilize this technique believing that it reduces fish mortality, clearly the practice has its controversies. Questions include:

- Are the anglers trained in this process?
- Are they doing it correctly?
- Is the needle the right size?
- Is the needle sterile?
- Does the wound heal properly?
- Does fizzing actually work?

The OLA, the DEC, and even the Cornell Field Station do not have the answers to these questions. In fact, the OLA will call upon DEC to begin researching this practice.

Tournament Organizer Logan Bishop stated: “Fizzing works.” Because the OLA makes decisions based on evidence, I pressed him, “How do you know it works?” One bit of evidence he provided was that tournaments on the St. Lawrence River consistently result in fish brought up from the deeper, colder water. These fish often bear the marks of previous fizzing, sometimes with two or three scars. Bishop reasoned that these fish have clearly survived the experience. He also



explained that the practice is far more common with smallmouth bass. “Smallies” tend to lurk in the deeper colder water, while largemouth bass can sustain themselves in shallower warm water, with less inflation of the swim bladder when they are brought to the surface.

“How prevalent is this practice?” I asked Bishop. He stated that in the late summer, when water temperatures are at their highest, they might be pulling up fish from 30 or 40 feet. He said that 90% of the fish they bring to the surface will get fizzed. “Is that true of Oneida Lake, as well?” I asked. “Yes, Bishop responded. Your OLA Directors will continue to look into this practice before we make any recommendations.

In the meantime, we look forward to working with DEC as they gather important data on the effect of bass tournaments on the fisheries of Oneida Lake.

The Oneida Lake Association, Inc.

Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., so that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

Officers

President.....Matt Snyder
Vice PresidentJohn Harmon
Vice PresidentWilliam Girvan
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Board of Directors

Terms Expiring April 30, 2025

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Warren Darby Kurt Snyder
John Harmon Matthew Snyder
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Terms Expiring April 30, 2026

William Alexander Rowland Hrywnak
Ryan Asmus Dr. Edward Mills
Mike Barretta George Reck
Amy Hetherington Bruce Schantz

Terms Expiring April 30, 2027

Anthony Buffa William Girvan
Richard Colesante Greg Keener
Robert Cote Bob Walczyk

OLA Mission

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.

Youth Fishing Contest

By OLA Directors John Harmon and Bill Girvan

One of the favorite activities of the OLA Board is to support and celebrate the accomplishments of our youth, both on and off the water. This past year, former OLA Director Matt Kazmierski reinstituted the Youth Fishing Contest. We thank Director Bill Girvan for picking up this role in Matt's absence.

This year we awarded trophies to two of our contestants. 11-year-old **Connor Searfoss** won for the walleye division. He reeled in a 23 ½ inch beauty fishing with his grandfather, OLA member Roger Widay. Connor said that he knew it was going to be a big fish by the way it fought. "It didn't give up," said, Connor, "but neither did I." Once it got to the boat, Grandfather Roger scooped it up with the net.

Ezra Aleksic, now 8 years old, captured a trophy by winning in three different categories. He pulled in a pickerel, a chubby Rock Bass, and a beauty of a Smallmouth! Ezra caught all of these fish from one of his favorite fishing spots—the end of his dock! The Smallie was especially tricky because the wily fish kept trying to circle under the family boat hoist. Ezra is the son of OLA member Ilija Aleksic.

We congratulate these youngsters for their accomplishments. We also have a special thank you to their family members taking them fishing.

For all you OLA members, can you recall those early fishing trips when you were just a youngster and what a thrill it was to catch your first few fish and that first bigger fish you caught with your family members cheering you on with congratulations? Those were very special memorable moments for all of you.

In 2025 our OLA Board of Directors are encouraging our Membership to try your best to bring your young children

or grandchildren fishing and pass your knowledge and passion of fishing to them as a mentor safely from shore, from your dock, or out in your boat. After all, you can't catch them on the couch. Our goal in 2025 is to have an increase of fish entries in our OLA Youth Fishing Contest. Please read our few simple rules:

- OLA 2025 Youth Fishing Contest is open to all anglers aged 15 and younger whose parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles are OLA Members. The Contest will start on May 1, 2025, with the exception of Smallmouth and Largemouth entries which start on June 15, in order to protect of our adult Bass during the spawning period. Our contest will run until November 30, 2025. All fish should be caught in Oneida Lake or its tributaries.
- Species eligible of (legal lengths) include Gamefish: Walleye, Chain Pickerel, Northern Pike, Smallmouth Bass, and Largemouth Bass.
- Panfish: Yellow Perch, Sunfish, Bluegill, Bullhead, Crappie & White Perch.
- Those Other Fish: Carp, Catfish, and Drum

Entries will go by length only. Please take a picture of the entry on a ruler or measuring board. Include a picture of the young angler holding his or her catch.

Check our OLA website for more entry details.

~ Bill Girvan, Chairman
OLA Board Member &
Youth Fishing Educator

Photos one and two:
Conner Searfoss

Photos three and four:
Ezra Aleksic



Oneida County Sheriff's Marine Patrol

By Sergeant Jay Sorrentino

The Oneida County Sheriff's Office Marine Patrol was started in 1960, with the first vessel being a 1959 Cadillac 14' aluminum boat with an 11 hp Mercury, which is still in working order. Over the years, the unit has evolved into 15 members who have been trained in boat handling, seamanship, accident investigations, and surface water rescues.

The Sheriff's Office is always exploring ways to better train its Marine Patrol Unit. We are currently working on getting NASBLA training this spring for BOAT crewmember and Boat operator search and rescue training through the USCG and swift water training through the NYS Office of Fire Prevention and Control. Members also instruct the NYS Boater Safety course, which, beginning in 2025, everyone who operates a boat in New York State will have to possess. The unit currently has two US Merchant Marine licensed Master Captains.

The Marine Patrol actively patrols Oneida, Delta, Hinckley, White, Otter, Kayuta, Little Long Lakes, and over 30

miles of the NYS Erie Canal that traverses Oneida County. The Marine Patrol Unit also supports the Sheriff's Office Underwater Search and Recovery Team by providing safety vessels for divers underwater, transport to locations, communications with divers in the water, and relaying equipment. The Marine Patrol also cross-trains with the agency drone and K9 Units to ensure the public's safety on the county's waterways.

The current fleet consists of four vessels and two personal watercraft. Our 25' Parker enclosed cabin with twin Yamaha 200s features a Garmin Radar, a multifunctional display, and a forward-looking infrared camera (FLIR), with First aid, AED and rescue equipment on board.

We also operate a 24-foot McKee Craft Center console with twin Yamaha 150s and a 22-foot McKee Craft Center Console with a Mercury 225 SeaPro. Both are fitted with Garmin radars, multi-function displays, and first aid and rescue equipment. Rounding out the fleet is a



19' Boston Whaler Center Console with a Mercury 150, Garmin multifunctional display, first aid, and rescue equipment on board. This vessel is used with the Underwater Search and Rescue Team and features a dive door and ladder to aid the divers in exiting the water. Its smaller size enables it to be deployed on all the bodies of water in the county.

Even the Sea-doo Fish Pro 155 PWC features Garmin multifunctional display, First Aid, and rescue equipment. The Sea-doo GTX PWC is equipped with First aid and rescue equipment.

Since the unit began, they have assisted 1000s of boaters, investigated 100s of boating accidents, and conducted 100s of searches for missing people and evidence.

New York Sea Grant

Stacy Furgal is a Great Lakes Fisheries and Ecosystem Health Specialist with New York Sea Grant, which is a statewide network of integrated research, education and extension services promoting coastal community economic vitality, environmental sustainability and citizen awareness about the State's marine and Great Lakes resources. She has partnered on several projects with the Cornell Biological Field Station (CBFS), including mentoring students with a focus on lake sturgeon and science communication, hosting Women's Learn to Fish events, and topics related to Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), aquatic invasive species, and food webs.

She works closely with anglers, charter captains, and coastal communities to

share topics in new and engaging ways. She grew up in Williamstown, NY and learned to appreciate nature at a young age, fishing with her dad all over Central and Northern NY. Other staff members on the NYSG Great Lakes team work on areas related to training educators, coastal resiliency, water quality, coastal processes, and recreation and tourism.

Currently, the 2025 application period for New York's Great Lakes Basin Small Grants Program is now open! NYSG is accepting proposals for up for projects that advance the Great Lakes Action Agenda and align with a locally supported community plan to address environmental challenges in New York's Great Lakes basin. More information can be found in the 2025 Request for Proposals

(RFP) outlines all eligibility requirements, funding priorities, and submission guidelines, found here: <https://seagrant.sunysb.edu/funding/pdfs/glminigrants25/GLMiniGrantsProject25-26-RFP.pdf>



Stacy Furgal (right) with Cornell Undergrad Kristal Dixon



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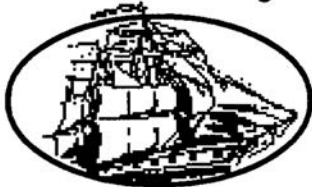
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