

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' 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 (co-sponsored by Senator Joe Griffo) that exempts navigable waterways over 150 acres, such as Oneida Lake, from the regulation.