



Cayuga Lake Watershed Network

Protecting a Vital Resource



2004 Annual Report



Message from the Chair

This year the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network continues to make community involvement the key to our success. With the help of members and community volunteers we have conducted numerous programs, forums and conservation efforts that promote stewardship of watershed resources. The Watershed Network is helping residents, municipalities and institutions understand the role each of us play in protecting the ecological health, economic vitality and the overall beauty of the watershed.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network is a grassroots organization formed in 1998 by citizens, public service agencies, area businesses, local landowners, farmers and municipal officials concerned about the future of Cayuga Lake and the surrounding watershed area.

The organization was created to foster a collaborative and inclusive approach to addressing watershed issues across political boundaries. Since its inception, we have worked to support thriving and prosperous communities through maintaining and improving the ecological health and beauty of the watershed.

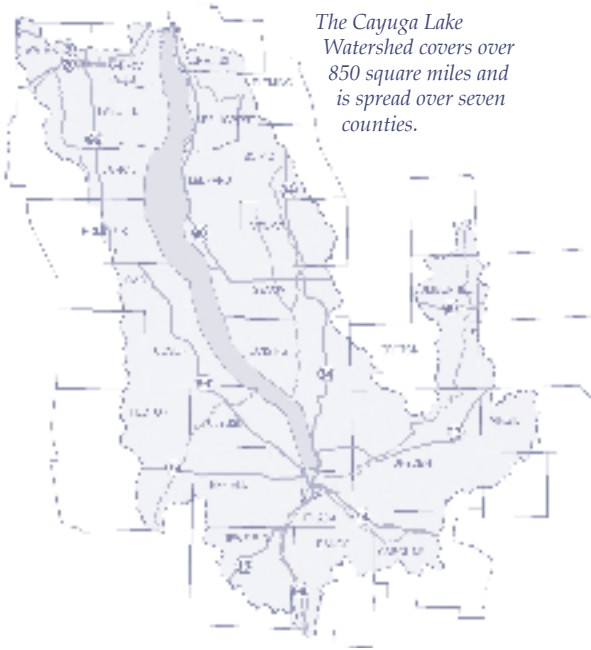
I encourage you to join the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network in these endeavors by being a member, attending future events and programs, initiating or funding specific projects, volunteering, or participating in action to protect or enhance the watershed.

Sincerely,

Janet E. Hawkes
Chairperson, Board of Directors

The largest of the Finger Lakes watersheds, the Cayuga Lake watershed covers 864 square miles. It is part of a larger system known as the Oswego River Basin. This basin carries water from seven of the Finger Lakes, plus other streams and lakes as they drain north into Lake Ontario, one of the five Great Lakes. Together, the Great Lakes contain one-fifth of all the world's available fresh water. The health of our watershed is part of what determines the health of this vast and precious fresh water resource.

The Oswego River Basins lacks the coordination found in our neighboring watershed to the south, the Susquehanna, which drains southerly into the Chesapeake Bay. To help fill this gap, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network seeks out partners to address regional issues such as the management of lake levels and the spread of invasive plants.



The Cayuga Lake Watershed covers over 850 square miles and is spread over seven counties.

Protecting the Watershed

An osprey plunges to catch a shimmering trout. A chorus of peepers rises from the marsh. Delicate wildflowers open beside a tumbling cascade. A child quenches her thirst with water from the family well. Each of these is a small piece of the splendor of this watershed that ranges from pristine fens to dense forests to open pastureland. In the center is Cayuga Lake. Its waters shelter sturgeon, feed migrating birds and provide pleasure through swimming, boating, fishing and endlessly changing views. Our rich water resources contribute not only to our quality of life but also to the area's economy by drawing businesses and people to the area, attracting tourists, and supplying abundant water to support agriculture. We all depend on our water resources. Surely they are worth protecting

for our use and for the sake of future generations.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network works to preserve and protect our natural resources through diverse programs. The following is only a small sample of the programming that engages individuals, families, businesses and municipalities in being good stewards of this watershed. Much of our work is done in partnership with Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, municipal and county staff, local businesses and county Water Quality Coordinating Committees, among others. Without these partners, the following accomplishments could not have been fully realized.

Aquatic Weeds

Views and images of the lake would seem barren without plants. Yet too many or the wrong kind of plants can cause problems. Some of the plants that threaten the health of the lake are non-native invasive plants. One invader, water chestnut, is well established in nearby Seneca River. We are determined to keep this aggressive plant from taking hold. It can form dense floating mats that out compete native species, destroy fish and wildlife habitat, and disrupt recreational use of the lake

In 2004, free-floating water chestnuts were found twice in Cayuga Lake. Both times a boater who had been trained to identify water chestnuts removed them. This example demonstrates why our first line of defense is increasing awareness among lake users of exotic invaders. We are spreading the word through displays at

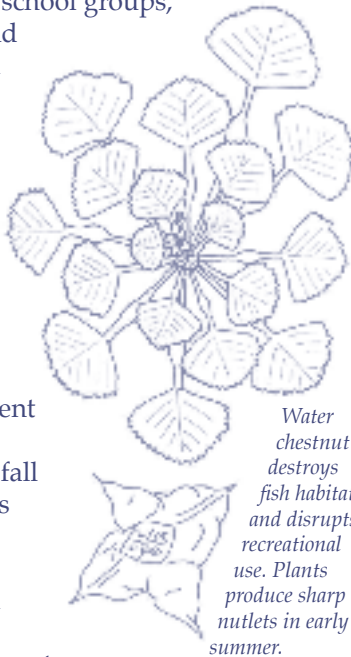
Earth Day, Water Week, the opening of the Bass Pro Shop in Auburn, and in speaking engagements to school groups, service clubs, and the Cayuga Bird Club among others.

Lakeshore property owners are concerned about excessive weeds, be they native or exotic. Weed management techniques were highlighted last fall at our Neighbors Around Cayuga Lake Watershed Conference, and staff responded to numerous requests for help with aquatic weeds management and identification.

In-lake techniques such as benthic barriers can be very effective, but long-term solutions call for reducing the nutrients that feed aquatic plants and decreasing the arrival of fresh sediment. Information on reducing phosphorus, a key nutrient that fuels aquatic plant growth, was covered in lawn care programs, frequently appeared in *Network News* articles, and is featured on our website, www.cayugalake.org.

Stream Protection

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan identified sediment



Water chestnut destroys fish habitat and disrupts recreational use. Plants produce sharp nutlets in early summer.

Drawing: University of Florida.

as one of the top concerns because it is both a direct pollutant and a vehicle that carries to the lake and its tributaries other pollutants such as pesticides, nutrients and heavy metals. Vegetation along stream banks is critical for filtering out those contaminants before they enter the water. The woody roots of trees and shrubs reduce erosion and the resulting sediment while their branches provide shade and woody debris that improve fish habitat. In addition to providing education on these benefits, annually we distribute 1500 shrub willows for planting along trout streams.

This year we additionally engaged volunteers in planting larger trees along Six Mile Creek, which is used for drinking water. Stabilizing the bank and reducing erosion helps improve the quality of the drinking water and reduces the filtration costs. To ensure coordination of the multiple restoration efforts along the creek—which involve local, state and federal entities—we formed a group known as the Six Mile Creek Partnership, hosted meetings and developed a website.



Tree planting at Six Mile Creek.

Photo credit: Holly Payne.

Visible litter can be a hazard to wildlife and humans, as well as an eye sore. During annual cleanups, 2000 pounds of litter was removed from Fall Creek and 1000 pounds from where Salmon Creek joins the lakeshore at Salt Point.



Photo credit: Bill Hecht.

Sediment plumes from Yawger and other creeks cloud the lake after large storms.

Both streams and the lake suffer when rains and snow melt wash the less visible bits of oil, pet wastes and chemicals into aquatic environments. We provided training to developers, engineers and municipal officials on new stormwater regulations aimed at reducing polluted runoff. We educated pet owners about picking up after their dogs, and jointly with Cooperative Extension established pet waste stations in Union Springs and the Village of Cayuga.

Safe Drinking Water

Every resident can make the link between protecting water quality and protecting their own drinking water. By increasing understanding of drinking water protection, human and environmental health risks can be reduced. Through our popular well education programs hundreds of people had their well water tested for bacteria and nitrates—something we encourage all those with private wells to do annually. In one community, twenty-five percent of the wells tested had bacterial contamination,

an indicator of serious health risks. These residents received the assistance needed to ensure safe drinking water. In addition, participants increased their understanding of their role in preventing groundwater contamination, showed greater

knowledge of the environmental and human health risks associated with pollutants, and stated they would act to reduce the risk of accidental contamination of groundwater.

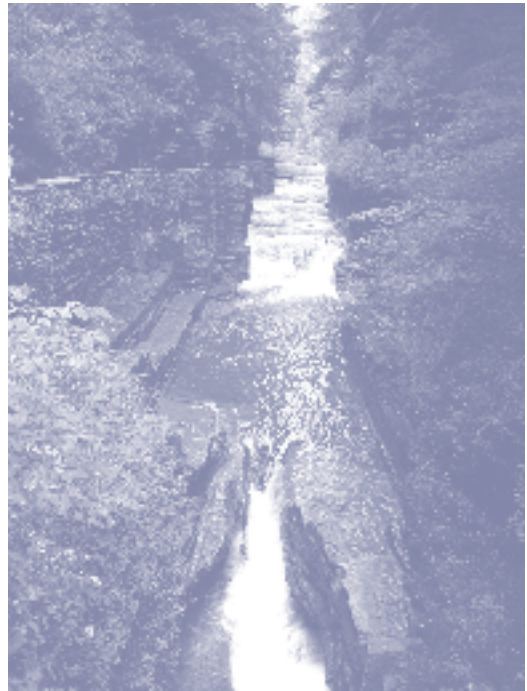


Photo credit: Susan Powell.



Youth Education

Most of the nearly 300 youth aboard the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom have no other access to being on the lake. These students measured water clarity, scooped up plankton samples and probed the water's depth. Working with the Intermunicipal Organization, Wells College, classroom teachers and others, the Watershed Network supports the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom, which allows youth a rich lake-based learning experience.

Teachers use our popular, newly revised *Issues In the Cayuga Lake Watershed* and the newly released *Protecting the Cayuga Lake Watershed* CD-ROM in their classes. One school group even requested these to share with students in England during their class trip. Teachers also access our growing collection of lesson plans on wetlands, stream life, the watershed management, and invasion ecology.

Several schools engaged their classes in

the Annual Essay Contest. Open to middle school aged youth through adults, the theme "How the Cayuga Lake Watershed Affects My Life" drew nearly 200 youth entries.

Close to five hundred sixth grade students in Seneca County received hands-on lessons on nonpoint source pollution as part of a conservation field day program. Staff also met with classes to talk about careers, watersheds and the complexity of the Seneca Meadows landfill. Today's youth—tomorrow's leaders—are also reached through activities we bring to family events such as Earth Day, Water Week, Farm City Days, and Lakefest.

Neighbors Around Cayuga Lake

Our fall conference gave participants a chance to learn about the treasure we have in and around Cayuga Lake and a chance to meet their "neighbors"—others who care deeply for this area.

After an opening session where participants voiced their thoughts and concerns about the watershed, a smorgasbord of nine sessions was offered. Anglers gained tips from a fly fishing expert and insights from a charter boat captain. Homeowners discovered how to have a green lawn without harming nearby waters. Shoreline property owners learned the many benefits of aquatic plants and ways to cope with an over abundance of weeds. The internal water dynamics of lakes were explored and one session discussed the possibility of a management plan for the Cayuga-Seneca Canal. The Canal area was also highlighted with programs on the Seneca Meadows Landfill, the Canal Waterfront Revitalization Plan, and the Erie Canal National Heritage

Corridor. This lively afternoon brought together people from the north and south ends, from the lake shore and the uplands to learn about and share their appreciation for this watershed.

Looking Ahead

In 2005 you can look forward to our popular annual events such as shoreline cleanups, Lakefest and the Essay Contest, as well as new efforts. We are planning a fall forum to celebrate the rich fisheries, plus expanding web-based information on fish, stream protection, farming and other facets of the watershed. More trees will be planted to stabilize soil and provide wildlife habitat. Contractors and town officials will be offered information on how they can ensure the water flowing in our creeks and to the lake has less pollution from stormwater runoff. We are training more people to combat the spread of water chestnut that threatens fishing and boating. And we will stay watchful of other invasive weeds that must be stopped before they colonize Cayuga Lake.

Water quality monitoring has uncovered some high bacteria counts at the south end of the lake. We have begun researching



Photo credit: Sharon Anderson.

Fertile soils in the northern portion of the watershed support diverse agriculture.

this and will report back to you on the possible causes and cures. This will form the first stage of looking comprehensively at available data and devising a monitoring plan. We will continue our lake study and resume cataloging the many entities monitoring water quality.

Agriculture is the single largest land use, and often forms the economic and social base for rural communities. Soon to be unveiled is a new “Lake-Friendly Farm” program that recognizes farms that practice good land stewardship. And we will continue to support the Joint Agricultural Committee that serves both the Watershed Network and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization. The Joint Agricultural Committee gives voice to concerns that individual farms cannot solve such as lack of recycling options for

farm plastics and the need for regional composting processing facilities that would move nutrients out of the watershed.

Financial Report

2004 was busy, productive and growth oriented, as we raised the money necessary to provide more services to the watershed. During the last five years of operation, 1999-2004, we had revenue (and expenditures) exceeding half a million dollars.

Complementing the generous grant from the Park Foundation have been a variety of other grants, contracts and donations. These have come from private and public entities at the local, regional, state and national levels. Other financial support continues from steady alliances with some of the area's large employers, businesses (both large and small), farms and individual contributors.

Membership is a further key to our financial strength and outreach throughout the watershed. Member dues continue to generate a significant portion of our annual revenue.

Our net assets at end of year 2004 were just over \$85,000, including a cash reserve of over \$32,000. In 2004, we established a new fund with several thousand dollars reserved for future opportunities.

Volunteers

Volunteers greatly extend the reach of staff. Their efforts are all valued—whether volunteering for one day planting trees, serving as a summer intern, or for a term on the Board of Directors. They teach youth,

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors is composed of 15 members. Four Directors are selected from each of the three counties with lakeshore properties (Cayuga, Seneca and Tompkins). Up to three other At Large Directors may reside anywhere in the watershed.

Chair

- Janet Hawkes, Tompkins County

Vice Chair

- John Mawdsley, Tompkins County
- Julie Patterson, Cayuga County
- Keith Tidball, Seneca County

Secretary

- Jim Delia, Seneca County

Treasurer

- William Shaw, Seneca County

Directors

- Brian Boerman, At-Large
- Gary Catt, Seneca County
- Tony Ganzon, Seneca County
- James Hanson, Tompkins County
- Mary Seitz, Cayuga County
- Tad Palmer, Tompkins County
- Connie Tallcot, Cayuga County

help in the office, provide technical advice and much, much more. Our most sincere thanks.

Volunteer Committees

To help accomplish its mission, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network has an active team of volunteer committees:

- **Community Outreach** hosts special programs such as Lakefest and conducts public events such as Neighbors Around Cayuga Lake.
- **Public Relations** supports the organization through promotion, public relations and communications including an expanding website and our award winning newsletter, *Network News*.
- **Membership** recruits new members and develops ways for all to participate.
- **Issues** serves as an information

Hocutt Receives 2004 David Morehouse Memorial Award

Gene Hocutt, retired Director of the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, was honored for his years of leadership and environmental stewardship in this watershed. In addition to his work in the Refuge, he helped found the Finger Lakes Ecology Association. Hocutt mobilized local citizens and agencies with permitting and regulatory power to expand the marshland at the Refuge, ensure protective guidelines for the Seneca Meadows Landfill operation and optimize lake level management.



clearinghouse on current watershed issues, prioritizing their importance and initiating Watershed Network action.

- **Finance** oversees finances, develops the annual budget and pursues funding opportunities.

Staff

- Sharon Anderson,
Watershed Steward/Executive Director
- Diane Emmons,
Office Manager
- Ruthanna Hawkins,
Watershed Educator
- Holly Payne,
Assistant to the Steward

The Watershed Network protects and improves our water resources through providing information, forging partnerships, and inspiring stewardship by those who live, work and play here. In 2005 the Watershed Network is focusing on:

- Celebrating healthy fisheries and encouraging responsible fishing
- Supporting environmentally and economically sustainable agriculture
- Reducing pollution in storm water run-off
- Examining the lake as an impaired water body



Photo credit: Sharon Anderson

Visit our website,
www.cayugalake.org, to

learn more about the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and how you can protect our water resources. Find facts about the lake and fisheries, volunteer opportunities, printable copies of our publications such as *Issues in the Cayuga Lake Watershed*, resources for teachers, watershed-friendly tips, current lake conditions, information on fighting water chestnut, and much, much more.

Become a member (through our website or by contacting our office at 607-532-4104) and you'll receive our award winning quarterly newsletter, *Cayuga Lake Watershed Network News*.

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network

P.O. Box 303

Interlaken, NY 14847

Phone: (607) 532-4104

Fax: (607) 532-4108

steward@cayugalake.org • www.cayugalake.org

