

It Takes a Network to Protect a Watershed

Network News

CAYUGA LAKE WATERSHED

WINTER/SPRING 2026

Spring comes with quiet contemplation to the shores of Cayuga Lake. Take time to enjoy the changing seasons, willows greening, birds returning, and all the beauty our lake provides.

MUHAMMAD ARIF

Guided Community Paddle & Aquatic Plant Exploration | Embrace the Lake Cleanups | Film Screening of *Plastic People* | Meet Sarah Eckel, CLWN's first-ever Director of Community Engagement | First Friends of Cayuga Lake Restoration Project Complete! | Proposed Datacenter and the future of the Lansing Cayuga Power Plant site | CLWN Membership: Renew/Join! | Watershed Wonders Photo Challenge | Hemlock Woolly Adelgid is not a death sentence for hemlock trees, if action is taken! | Good news and bad news about the invasive water chestnut | Cayuga Lake's New Clean Water Plan: Understanding the TMDL | CLWN's 2025 Annual Celebration & Meeting/ The David Morehouse Award | Investing in the Future of our Lake and Watershed

Paddle to Protect participants pause to regroup and take in the late summer scenery of Cayuga Lake.

Guided Community Paddle & Aquatic Plant Exploration Myers Park, Lansing

Last September 10, the Network, in partnership with local paddle sport guide and rental company Paddle-N-More, hosted a free educational community paddle event at the Town of Lansing's Myers Park, to build awareness about native and invasive plants in our lake, as well as Clean Drain Dry boating practices that help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS).

ON hand were NYS DEC Region 7 AIS Manager Emily Timkey-Benzinger, and Catherine Farrel, the Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager from Finger Lakes PRISM. Once the group of around 19 people was launched on the lake, the two experts provided information and identification as plants were pulled in via rake-tosses. This hands-on paddle event gave people a way to discover biodiversity in Cayuga Lake while also learning how to sample, identify, and document invasive plants.

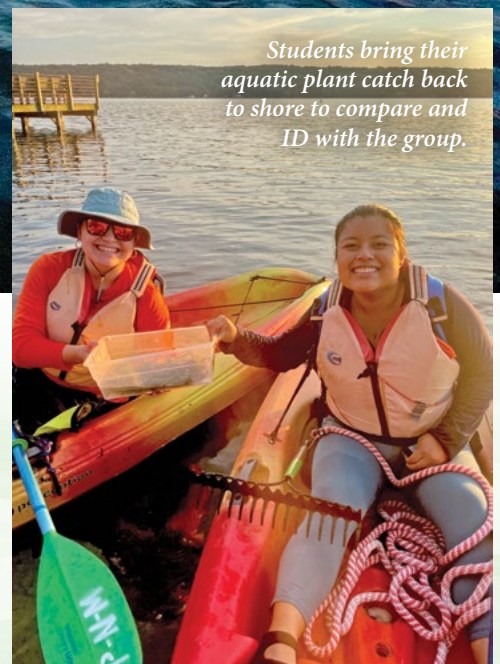
"Exploring Cayuga Lake by kayak is an incredible way to connect with our local waters," said Liz Kreitinger, Network Steward. "At the same time, we are here to equip people with knowledge and simple actions they can take to protect the lake, like using the new Boat Cleaning Station at Myers Park to stop the spread of invasive species!"

This highly popular program quickly filled to capacity, and the 19 community members ranged from students to retirees. Cost and equipment were free. Thank you to Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District and NYS DEC for funding this program and to Paddle-N-More for the use of kayaks, paddles, and life jackets.

Learn more about Paddle-N-More at paddlenmore.com

Learn more about the Town of Lansing's parks, trails and fields at lansingrec.com/parksrec/page/parks-trails-and-fields

Learn more about Clean Drain Dry best boating practices at cleandraindry.org



Students bring their aquatic plant catch back to shore to compare and ID with the group.

PHOTOS LIZ KREITINGER



Casey Carr and Susan Austern experience the joy of getting to know their local pondweeds!

EMBRACE THE LAKE CLEANUPS

Are you ready to help?

By participating in litter cleanups, you are caring for the health of your watershed. It's GOOD FOR... THE ENVIRONMENT and YOUR COMMUNITY.

Join a group's cleanup—or organize your own!

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network has been collaborating with community groups to keep our waterways clean since 2009. From March to May churches, Scout troops, community groups and families organize clean-up events, to clean up roadsides and waterways and keep trash out of the lake. We provide trash bags, gloves, and grabbers. And remember, roadside ditches and drainages are waterways, too!

Go here for photos of recent cleanups and information on organizing your own: www.cayugalake.org/volunteer/embrace-the-lake/ and/or contact steward@cayugalake.org

Spring 2025 and 2026 have both been wet and wild, making it a challenge to schedule events and to get people outdoors to pick up trash. Nonetheless, over 20 groups got to work! Thank you for being active stewards of our watershed!

Three cheers for ZWI, Paddle-n-More, and their tenacious Trash Paddlers for another impressive (and technically challenging) cleanup!



CLWN Steward Kreitinger is ready to help unload the paddlers' first trash haul.



ZWI volunteers filled their kayaks to the brim with waste from Cayuga Inlet.

PHOTOS RICH MATTINGLY



Film Screening of *Plastic People* & steps you can take

“The hidden crisis of microplastics”

ON July 22, 2025, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network participated in a community conversation on plastic pollution following a free public screening of the award-winning documentary *Plastic People – The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics* at Cinemapolis. The event was hosted by Zero Waste Ithaca, and CLWN’s Steward Liz Kreitinger joined the post-film panel to highlight how plastic debris is impacting Cayuga Lake and its tributaries. The panel also featured Chris W. Burger of the Sierra Club’s National Zero Waste Committee and Hilary Flint of the Marcellus Awareness Community in Pennsylvania, offering broader insights into policy and frontline environmental justice. The evening underscored the urgent need to address plastic pollution at both the watershed and systemic levels.

Here is Liz’s reflection: “While watching the film, I was struck by how widespread and insidious plastic pollution has become in our environment and in our bodies. Even those who are relatively informed on the issue will come away with a new perspective.

Each year, though Embrace the Lake events, we work with volunteer groups to remove plastic pollution before it reaches the lake. When we do this, we see the visible end of a broken system of overproduction and single-use disposability. The film is a strong reminder that our local efforts matter deeply, and that we are so overdue for bigger change.”

For many people, when we think about how vast the challenge of plastics is, it can be overwhelming! Focus on small steps you can take to build habits and a culture of waste reduction and reuse.

Here are 3 steps you can take to combat the global plastic problem every day, right here in our watershed:

- **Skip the Takeout Extras:** When ordering food, say “no utensils, napkins, or extra condiments” in the notes or on the phone. Most takeout comes with a pile of single-use plastic utensils that go straight in the trash. Being intentional about skipping them cuts waste and signals to businesses that customers care.
- **Replace One Disposable Product with a Long-Term Reusable:** This month, choose one high-use item such as plastic baggies or bottled water, and swap it for a reusable version you’ll commit to using daily. Repeat!
- **Launch a “Ditch the Disposables” Campaign at Your School or Workplace:** Start small by surveying where single-use plastics are most common (e.g., water bottles, utensils, coffee pods), then propose a specific, visible change like eliminating plastic cutlery or offering reusable water stations, and rally support.
- **Join (or Start) a Local Litter Cleanup:** Volunteer with CLWN’s *Embrace the Lake* program or host your own cleanup with friends or neighbors. Removing plastic waste from ditches and shorelines before it enters the lake protects water quality and brings visibility to the problem while building community and connections.

Learn more about *Plastic People* and watch the trailer here:

<https://plasticpeopledoc.com/>



Meet Sarah Eckel, CLWN’s first-ever Director of Community Engagement!

Sarah Eckel joined our team in November 2025 and brings 20 years of experience in non-profit strategic communications, coalition building, environmental policy, and development to her new role with us. She has led outreach programs for environmental and human services nonprofits at both regional and statewide levels in New York and Texas. At CLWN, Sarah is already hard at work on program implementation, strengthening member and partner connections, and expanding the Network’s capacity to advance watershed protection. We are thrilled to add her to the team and welcome her and her family to our watershed. When Sarah isn’t working, she enjoys spending time with her family in the watershed and testing the limits of how many house plants she can fit on her shelves.



Sarah Eckel attended the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition event in Washington D.C on behalf of CLWN in March, working with local, state and regional advocates to establish Great Lakes Watershed restoration and protection as a national conservation priority. Sarah says, “It was an honor to represent the interests of Cayuga Lake and the Finger Lakes region, which are critical headwaters to Lake Ontario, and educate our representatives on the importance of federal support for local watershed work!”

First Friends of Cayuga Lake Restoration Project Complete!

Shelter Valley project marks major milestone for watershed giving initiative

Liz Kreitinger CLWN Steward

CLWN's Steward joins Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation staff Angel Hinickle and Megan Kirby to visit the project site.

To stabilize the creek, large stone and toe wood (the base of fallen trees) were used to improve the flow of water and protect the banks and creek bed from further erosion.

This winter, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network reached an important milestone: the completion of the first water quality improvement project funded through our new initiative, Friends of Cayuga Lake.

Created in 2025, Friends of Cayuga Lake is a focused watershed initiative designed to accelerate high-impact projects that reduce sediment and nutrient pollution to Cayuga Lake. For our staff and volunteer team, this moment represents proof that a community-driven watershed giving initiative can translate directly into on-the-ground impact for our creeks and lake, and we are just getting started!

Restoring Stability to a Stressed Stream

In partnership with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, we supported the final phase of streambank stabilization and restoration work along the West Branch of the Cayuga Inlet in Shelter Valley. This work wrapped up in late December and early January, completing the transformation of a severely eroding stream reach that had been sending over 2,000 tons of sediment annually downstream toward Cayuga Lake.

This stretch of stream had become increasingly unstable, especially during high-flow storm events. A leadership gift from Cayuga Lake Watershed Network members, along with funds from the landowner, provided the local

match needed to leverage over three times that amount in New York State Environmental Protection Fund dollars through the DEC's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) Program.

Together, the project team was able to:

- Regrade and stabilize failing streambanks
- Install toe-wood and rock structures to prevent further undercutting
- Establish native vegetation to anchor soils and strengthen habitat

The result is a stream reach that is now more resilient to intense rainfall and better equipped to reduce sediment and phosphorus pollution downstream.

A Model for What's Possible

Friends of Cayuga Lake is envisioned as a long-term effort to catalyze many more high-impact projects by building philanthropic support for watershed protection.

This year, we demonstrated how local investments by watershed neighbors can leverage state and federal dollars to deliver real results. In this case, the project reduced sediment loading, strengthened the creek's resilience to extreme weather, and helped protect

cold-water trout habitat.

We look forward to hosting a site visit later this year for members and supporters interested in seeing the completed project firsthand!

Help Launch Our Next Project

Many water quality projects in our watershed are technically designed and eligible for state funding, but they often stall due to local match gaps or a lack of flexible dollars. Friends of Cayuga Lake helps close those gaps.


Shelter Valley is the first completed project through this initiative. Additional high-priority projects have already been identified, but need support.

We are actively seeking leadership-level gifts of \$5,000 and above to help move projects forward in Tompkins, Seneca, and Cayuga counties. To learn more or explore a leadership commitment, contact CLWN Steward Liz Kreitinger at steward@cayugalake.org or 315-367-4805 ext. 0.

Proposed Datacenter and the future of the Lansing Cayuga Power Plant site

LIZ KREITINGER

Liz Kreitinger CLWN Steward
Hilary Lambert CLWN Water Writer



View of decommissioned coal-fired Cayuga Power Plant on the east shore of Cayuga Lake, Town of Lansing NY. The proposed TeraWulf data/crypto center would be sited on the slopes above the old plant.

Local residents and neighboring lakeshore municipalities have wondered what would happen to the old Cayuga Power Plant site in the Town of Lansing, 16 miles north of Ithaca, on Cayuga Lake's east shore. The coal-fired plant, with its 42-acre coal combustion residue (CCR) landfill, opened in 1955 and was shuttered in 2019. What might its next use be? Numerous ideas have been floated. Additionally, there are long-term concerns about unmitigated environmental impacts to Cayuga Lake from the original power plant, partially unlined landfill, and from several informal local coal waste dumps.

The newest redevelopment proposal, announced in mid-August 2025, is part of the global boom to build facilities to support power and computing capacity demands in the burgeoning cryptocurrency and A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) industries. These very large (20 thousand to one million square feet) warehouse-type structures can be found on the outskirts of most US cities today. This building boom is accelerating, perhaps unsustainably. Impacts on local communities, economies, quality of life, and natural resources are profound and unfolding.

In the Lansing situation, TeraWulf Inc., known for investment in bitcoin and data center facilities, proposes redevelopment of 183 acres on the lakeshore at the old Cayuga Power Plant/Cayuga AES property. Just above the lakeshore, massive buildings, battery arrays, and a proposed solar installation, would house and power computers ceaselessly running for A.I. uses. Information varies by source regarding daily lake water use, from none to significant quantities (see below). Power use estimates are enormous. According to TeraWulf, the proposed data center would use a maximum of 400 megawatts. This is equivalent to the power used by 350,000 homes. The present energy consumption of Tompkins County as a whole is 87 megawatts annually (*Ithaca Times*, 10/5/25).

Water source, use confusion

There is confusion over the potential demand for water for this proposed facility. Initially, the Town of Lansing and the public were told that this facility would use no water for its operations, instead using a "closed loop" system that requires little or no

new water once it starts up. It was also announced that while some water would be used, it would not be from Cayuga Lake—that is, not via the lake water intake installed years earlier when this site was a coal-fired powerplant. Instead, water for operations would come from Bolton Point—the 5-municipality water plant that gets its water from—Cayuga Lake.

In January 2026, a resolution passed by the Tompkins County Legislature indicated concern over the water source and amount to be used for this project. The resolution asked that state regulators reject a water withdrawal permit renewal by Cayuga Operating Company LLC, which used lake water for the coal-fired power plant, and instead require TeraWulf and partners to apply for a new permit. In a brief response, NYS DEC stated that a new permit process would be required "if there are any changes to facility operations that result in changes to the wastewater discharge, water withdrawal system, or use of withdrawn water." (*Ithaca Voice*, 2/3/26)

Unanswered questions and lack of clarity remain about water usage by this facility. How much would be used per day from the lake intake, or via Bolton Point? Would a closed-loop system be installed, with minimal new water demands?

Future prospects and concerns

In New York State as of March 2026, there are presently 133 data centers, mostly clustered around New York City and Buffalo. The Finger Lakes region currently has six. Several communities statewide are dealing with proposed data centers, are considering moratoria. In the neighboring Town of Dryden, an outright ban was passed in February on structures for data center and cryptocurrency use—the first such ban in the state. Other Tompkins County municipalities are considering similar actions.

Let's not lose sight of unmitigated pollution from the Cayuga Power Plant

Since last October, the Network, along with many concerned others, have submitted comments to Lansing and to state agencies, focused on the need to mitigate the current site before

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Your support helps. Protect what connects us.

CLWN Membership: Renew/Join!

Wondering if your Network membership is up to date?

Thinking that you'd like to join?

What does it mean to be a member of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network?

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network is a leader and connector, strengthening watershed stewardship and empowering communities to protect Cayuga Lake. By joining, you help us grow these connections. Your membership strengthens our ability to speak out on behalf of clean water, a healthy lake and watershed, and to protect human and natural systems.

Regular members Bill & Gail Shaw:

"We continue to support and appreciate all that this small NFP organization does to protect our lake and promote good practices to preserve it for the next generation and beyond."

Business members Bill and Penney Mapes Cook:

"At Aurora Ridge Dairy we are happy to support CLWN's efforts to protect the watershed and Cayuga Lake. All of us, both farmers and residents benefit from careful stewardship of the land. At ARD we work hard to prevent runoff and loss of topsoil and nutrients from the fields by planting cover crops, strip cropping, developing sod waterways and carefully timing operations like tillage, planting, spreading manure, harvesting and of course supporting the important efforts of CLWN."

Please join or renew!

Check your membership status by contacting Sarah, sarah@cayugalake.org

Join/Renew online at our website cayugalake.org:

Get Involved > Become a member.

Get Involved > Become a Business/Organization member.

Mail check to CLWN at POB 1033 Trumansburg NY 14886.

Thank you!

With best wishes and deep gratitude,

Liz Kreitinger
Steward and Executive Director
Cayuga Lake Watershed Network

Join over 500 members that make this work possible!

Osprey (\$500+)

Sharp-eyed and soaring above, your gift leads us toward a more sustainable future.



Lake Sturgeon (\$250)

Deep and enduring, your commitment supports resilience for generations to come.



Blue Heron (\$100)

Steadfast and observant, your gift helps us stand watch over our shores, ready to act.



Brook Trout (\$50)

A keystone species seeking clean water, your support keeps us swimming forward.

Spotted Salamander (\$25)

Like the salamander, your support brings ground-up strength to our ecosystem!



Business/Organization Membership Levels

Platinum (\$1000+)



Silver (\$250)



Gold (\$500)



Bronze (\$100)



Watershed Wonders Photo Challenge

Congratulations to Our Winners!

We're thrilled to recognize the winners of our 2025 Watershed Wonders Photo Challenge. We received over 80 beautiful submissions which capture the stunning beauty and vibrant life of the Cayuga Lake watershed. Members of CLWN's Board of Directors and attendees at the Cayuga Lake Watershed Internship Program's end-of-summer event voted for their favorites, and the winners were:

Lens on the Landscape: Harry Durgin—"Peaceful Morning at Taughannock Beach"

Showcase the sweep of our watershed's landscapes. From mist-shrouded mornings across fields and forest, sun-lit shorelines, rolling hills, and our majestic waterfalls, capture the grand vistas that define Cayuga's land and waters.

Nature's Patterns: Frank Muller—"Sun Star"

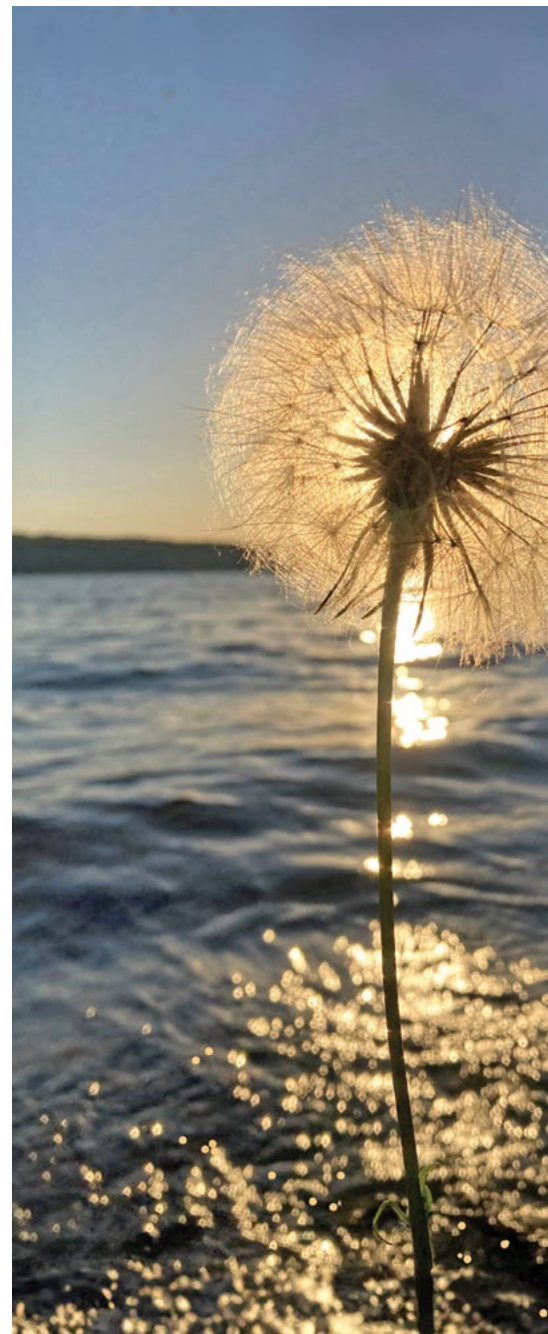
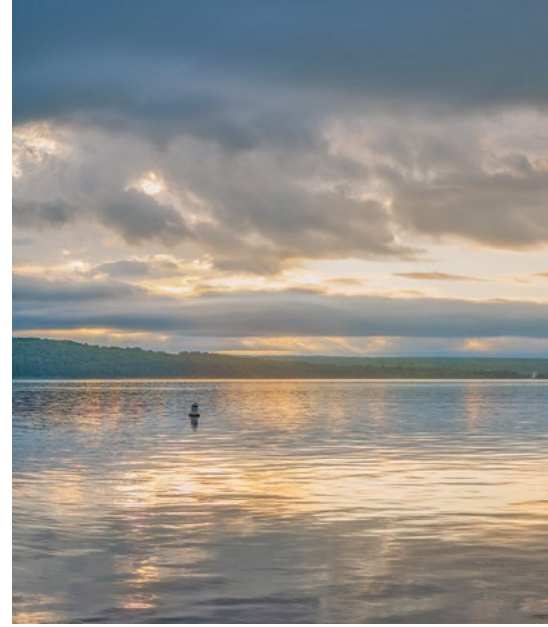
Reveal the hidden textures and details of plants, rocks, ripples, and more. Slow down and capture the unseen water droplets on a cattail blade, shapes of shale, or the intricate bark patterns of a shoreline tree.

Fauna in Focus: Muhammad Arif—"Striking Egret"

Get up close with the critters that call our watershed home. Feathered osprey mid-dive, a painted turtle basking on a log, or the tiniest frog hidden in the reeds. Bring our wildlife into crystal-clear view.

Our Watershed, Our Home: Moritz Kranzlein—"Fishing at the Falls"

Capture the joy of people connecting with our lake and creeks, such as families kayaking at sunset, friends diving off a dock, or volunteers cleaning up waterways.





A heartfelt **thank you** to everyone who entered, for helping us celebrate the beauty of Cayuga Lake and its watershed. The kickoff of our 2026 challenge will be announced in June!

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid is not a death sentence for hemlock trees, if action is taken!

With 2025 Hemlock biocontrol update from DEC

Hilary Lambert CLWN Water Writer

Many Network members and supporters may recall the local reactions of dismay, even grief, to the news that Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*) had been found in New York State in 2008 and was spreading into the Cayuga Lake watershed. Thanks to the pioneering public outreach work of Dr. Mark Whitmore, Forest Entomologist at Cornell University, many of us were soon taking HWA workshops, identifying its presence on private and public lands, and learning ways to protect our hemlock trees from this West Coast invasive species.

How is HWA harmful?

This aphid-like insect shows up as tiny white cottony balls on the underside of a hemlock tree's needles and branches, especially visible during our winter months. Over several years' time—if untreated—HWA kills the tree.

Why is the loss of hemlock trees a concern?

Hemlock trees (*Tsuga canadensis*) hold steep shale gorge slopes in place and shade creek and stream waters, keeping them cool for woodland aquatic species. When hemlocks die, erosion increases and water quality is degraded. Also, of course, hemlock trees are a graceful and beautiful presence in the landscape. Native to the Pacific Northwest, HWA has been very destructive across the Eastern states as well as in the South, defoliating large areas of Tennessee's Smoky Mountains, moving north into the Delaware Water Gap, and beyond.

Thanks to the efforts of many volunteers, venerable hemlocks are still thriving in targeted public areas in our state parks, in private backyards, and along the Cayuga lakeshore, where trees have been protected by injecting insecticide treatments into the trunks.



Finger Lakes PRISM staffer Lindsey Balman introduces participants to HWA on trees during our winter workshop at the Cayuga Nature Center.

PHOTOS: LIZ KRETINGER



White, cottony masses line the underside of this hemlock branch—these are hemlock woolly adelgids, tiny invasive insects that appear like flecks of snow or bits of wool attached at the base of each needle.

Today, Mark Whitmore is Director of the New York State Hemlock Initiative and Senior Extension Associate, Natural Resources and the Environment, Cornell University. The statewide Hemlock Initiative has been established to support research into methods for effectively protecting hemlock trees from the scourge of HWA.

The following is a 2025 update from NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) about the increasing effectiveness of both the *Laricobius nigrinus* beetles and the *Leucotaraxia argenticollis* silver fly—both

feed exclusively on HWA. Of course, HWA remains a problem and continues to spread. These beetles and flies are a longer-term solution. We need to continue present forms of monitoring and protection for the foreseeable future.

Silver Fly Establishment in New York Advances Hemlock Conservation

Reprinted from *Forests, Plants, and Land Conservation News*

NYS DEC October 17, 2025

In summer 2025, DEC and Cornell University's New York State Hemlock Initiative (NYSHI) confirmed the first establishment of *Leucotaraxis argenticollis*, a type of silver fly, in New York State. These silver flies are released to help control hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), an invasive insect that attacks and kills hemlock trees. The silver fly population was confirmed in Bath, NY, marking an important step forward in HWA control and hemlock conservation.

With the support of DEC, the U.S. Forest Service, and many other partners, NYSHI has been releasing insects that prey on HWA across the state for nearly two decades. NYSHI began releasing *Laricobius nigrinus* beetles in 2008, and silver flies in 2015. Both insects are from the northwest U.S., where HWA is a native forest pest. Since these insects feed exclusively on HWA, they are safe and effective tools for keeping HWA populations in check. So far, the *Laricobius nigrinus* beetles have been thriving, with established populations at 18 release sites and documented long-distance dispersal in the Finger Lakes, Lower Hudson, and Catskills regions. The success of the *Laricobius nigrinus* beetles suggests that silver flies may also be able to take hold and contribute to long-term biological control.

Silver flies may be the key to an effective biological control strategy for HWA because their feeding habits complement those of the *Laricobius nigrinus* beetles. HWA has two generations per year. *Laricobius nigrinus* feeds only on the first generation, while silver flies feed on both generations. The combined effect of the beetles and silver flies may suppress HWA populations enough to help hemlock trees survive.

In the past year, NYSHI has released over 45,000 insects that prey on HWA in New York, an effort that builds on years of investment in science-driven conservation. NYSHI will continue to work with partners to monitor for *Laricobius nigrinus* beetle and silver fly establishment across the state, building a biological control community to preserve New York's hemlock forests for generations to come.

Learn more about HWA, this ongoing research, hemlock protection options, and how you can help, at the New York State Hemlock Initiative (NYSHI) website: blogs.cornell.edu/nyshemlockinitiative/home/our-team/

Learn more about Mark Whitmore's tireless work, from this statement accompanying his selection as 2016 Conservationist of the Year by the Finger Lakes Land Trust: flt.org/mark-whitmore-named-conservationist-of-the-year/

Learn more about the Network's long-term commitment to hemlock protection from HWA, via numerous 2009-20 issues of the Network News:

- P. 8: cayugalake.org/wp-content/uploads/2009_i2.pdf
- Pp. 1, 12: cayugalake.org/wp-content/uploads/clwn_nn_i3-4_2013.pdf
- Pp. 2, 12: cayugalake.org/wp-content/uploads/clwn_nn_i1_2014.pdf

Proposed Datacenter and the future of the Lansing Cayuga Power Plant site

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launching any new projects here. These may be read in full at our Where We Stand webpage. Our main points:

There is significant public concern around the power plant and the impacts of its previous use on the lake and surrounding communities. Additionally, as noted in the draft SPDES permit, there has not been a technical review of the site since 2010, and its use has shifted dramatically. ... The watershed communities around Cayuga Lake continue to be concerned about the legacy of toxic pollution into the lake from the Cayuga Power Plant.

(11/24/25 comment letter)

In our 1/9/26 public comment to NYS DEC, the Network focused on past unresolved issues, and on not allowing a new project to ride on the coattails of earlier permits:

- What are the known environmental impacts of the former coal-fired power plant and how is that impacting Cayuga Lake and its watershed?
- How are the proposed limits for stormwater contamination in line with DEC's work to address the long-term environmental contamination associated with this site?
- What actions is DEC taking, inside and outside of this process, to work to address the residual contamination and remediation of this site?
- The Cayuga Power Plant has been closed for more than five years, how do the permit limits align with the current site use? What is the current site use?
- Why are some outfalls being removed from the monitoring program?
- Can the DEC clarify how these permits would be used for a new data center, or would the site owners be required to obtain new permits for the new use?
- Would the existing permits be used in the interim?

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network is working with its Board, membership, Issues Committee, and other organizations to track the Lansing datacenter issue and possible watershed impacts, which will surely include new twists and turns before any final decision is made.

What will not change is that it is critically important not to lose sight of the existing infrastructure and how the management of the site, the coal ash landfill, and its legacy continue to impact Cayuga Lake.

Comments submitted by CLWN in 2025-26:
cayugalake.org > About > Where we stand

Media sources & Timeline of events: *Ithaca Times*, *Ithaca Voice*, *Rochester Beacon*, and *Tompkins Weekly*, January-March 2026. cayugalake.org/datacenter

Good news and bad news about the invasive water chestnut *(No, not the kind on Chinese restaurant menus!)*

Hilary Lambert CLWN Water Writer

Michelle Henry Water Chestnut Coordinator, City of Ithaca Water Plant

Each summer, Michelle Henry surveys the Ithaca Reservoir for the presence of the invasive aquatic species water chestnut, *Trapa natans*. As Water Chestnut Coordinator for the City of Ithaca Water Plant, she has been doing this annually for most of a decade. The goal is the reduction and elimination of this pesky plant from Ithaca Reservoir, the city's water supply. The reservoir is upstream of downtown Ithaca on Six Mile Creek, and is closed to recreational water use.

Why is this plant a problem? Introduced from Europe to a Harvard University botanical garden in the 1870s, it has spread widely, north into Canada and south along the Eastern Seaboard. It is also found in California. Here are some of the reasons why it is unwelcome:

“The plant can form nearly impenetrable floating mats of vegetation. These mats create a hazard for boaters and other water recreators. The density of the mats can severely limit light penetration into the water and reduce or eliminate the growth of native aquatic plants beneath the canopy. The reduced plant growth combined with the decomposition of the water chestnut plants which die back each year can result in reduced levels of dissolved oxygen in the water, impact other aquatic organisms, and potentially lead to fish kills. The rapid and abundant growth of water chestnut can also out-compete both submerged and emergent native aquatic vegetation.”

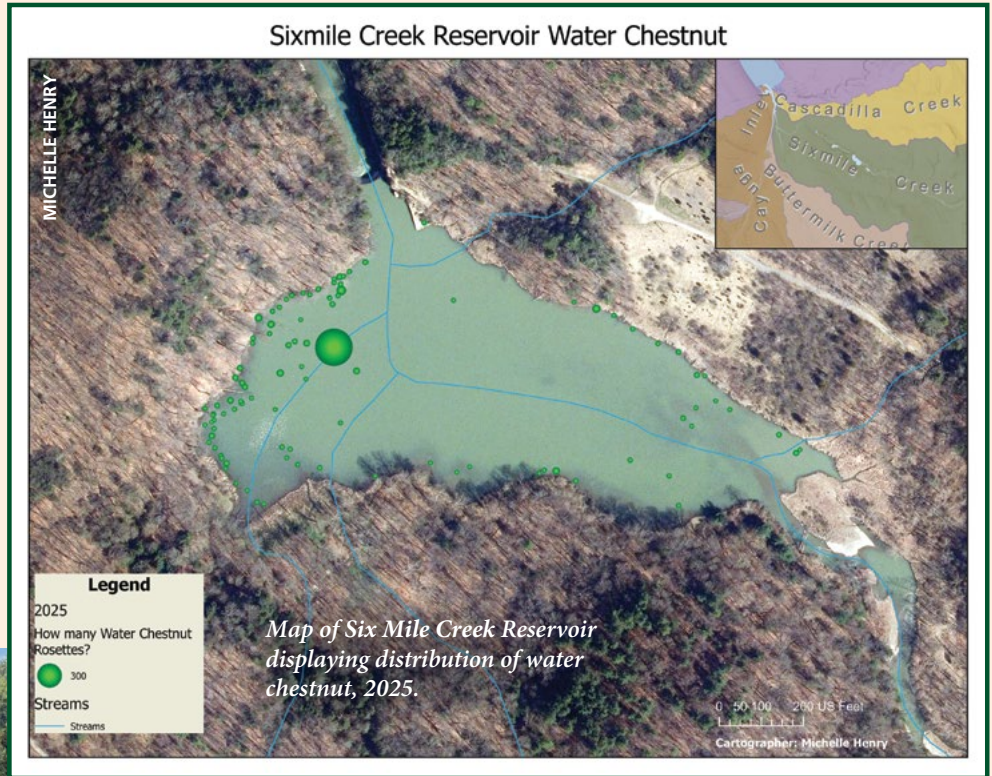
—Learn more online at NYS DEC's invasive species pages: nys.info/species/water-chestnut/

Three surveys spread out over the growing season from late June to September confirmed Michelle's good news that water chestnut appears to be greatly reduced in 2025: there were zero observations during all surveys of Ithaca Reservoir. This is



Volunteer Wade Simmons (foreground) and Michelle Henry

LIZ KREITINGER



Sixmile Creek Reservoir Water Chestnut

Map of Six Mile Creek Reservoir displaying distribution of water chestnut, 2025.

thanks to the many years of annual monitoring and hand removal by Michelle and her tough team of chestnut-pullers.

However, further exploration downstream led to Michelle's bad news: she found abundant water chestnut in the lake impounded by Second Dam, in Ithaca's Six Mile Creek Natural Area. In other words, plants and nuts had floated downstream along Six Mile Creek from the reservoir to the Second Dam area.

This discovery prompted three late summer chestnut-pull expeditions to reduce the problem. The second trek, in mid-September, involved six sturdy volunteers, including CLWN's Steward Liz Kreitinger, two canoes, two kayaks, plastic bags, and a utility sled. The plants were removed for disposal to a site where they cannot spread.

Roxy Johnston, City of Ithaca Watersheds Coordinator and head of the lab at the water plant, reported afterward:

“Hello weed warriors! Thank you, Michelle, for your coordination and dedication. Thank you to all of you who helped with the removal work. The total weight of the bagged plants was 1147 lbs. That's impressive!”

Since then, Michelle has conducted downstream surveys at the Mulholland Preserve, and from Gateway Commons to Cherry Street. Both were clear except for one lone floating nut behind the low head dam at Second Dam. Members of the long-established Six Mile Creek water monitoring group will be on the lookout.

Water chestnut elsewhere in the Cayuga Lake watershed & beyond

One area of *T. natans* has been identified at the south end of Cayuga Lake. In 2024 while the Finger Lakes PRISM staff were sampling in the Ithaca Inlet at Allan Treman Marine Park, one of their technicians located multiple patches of water chestnut. This was the first time the Finger Lakes PRISM had observed water chestnut in the Ithaca inlet, but according to the database iMapInvasives Network,

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Cayuga Lake's New Clean Water Plan: Understanding the TMDL

Liz Kreitinger CLWN Steward

You may have heard that New York State recently finalized a long-awaited clean water plan for Cayuga Lake known as "the phosphorus TMDL." The plan outlines the reductions in nutrient pollution needed to improve water quality and reduce the risk of harmful algal blooms.

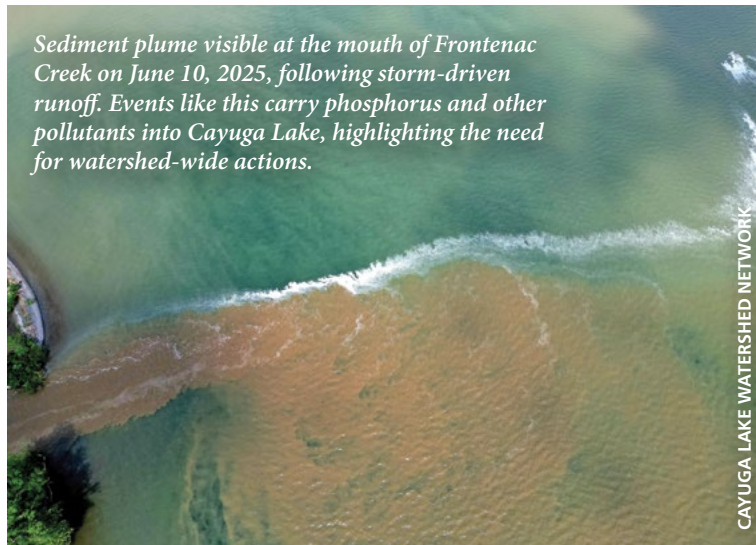
Addressing these challenges will take many partners working together across the watershed. Local governments, farmers, conservation groups, and residents are all part of the solution. Water quality projects supported through the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network's Friends of Cayuga Lake initiative are one way we are contributing to this broader watershed effort. Below is a brief overview of what the TMDL is and how it guides action across the watershed.

Cayuga Lake supports a diverse ecosystem and serves as a drinking water source for over 100,000 people. The lake is also an essential recreational resource and supports tourism, fishing, and boating activities. However, its water quality has been under pressure due to various sources of pollution, including agricultural runoff, stormwater, wastewater treatment plant discharges, and urban development. These activities contribute nutrients such as phosphorus to the lake, which can degrade water quality, especially when conditions lead to the growth of harmful algal blooms (HABs).

On September 9th, 2024, 22 years after the Cayuga Lake Southern End segment was listed on the NYSDEC Clean Water Act 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies and 3 years since the public comment period closed, the NYS DEC finalized the Cayuga Lake Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Phosphorus, a plan created to restore the water quality of the southern end of the lake. This plan was developed in response to increasing levels of pollutants, particularly phosphorus, which have been identified as a contributor to algal blooms and other water quality issues in the lake. The TMDL is intended to provide a science-based plan to address these issues by determining the maximum amount of a pollutant, in this case phosphorus, that the lake can receive while still meeting NYS water quality standards.

Development of the TMDL Plan

The need for a TMDL plan for Cayuga Lake arose from its inclusion in the NYS DEC's 303(d) list of impaired waters in 2002. This list identifies water bodies that do not meet quality standards for their intended uses, including drinking water sources, activities like swimming and boating, fishing, and shellfishing. The primary concern for the south end of Cayuga Lake was phosphorus pollution, which can fuel the growth of algae and cyanobacteria and threaten drinking water supplies. Algae and cyanobacteria blooms can also lead to low oxygen levels in the water, fish kills, and HABs that can release toxins harmful to



Sediment plume visible at the mouth of Frontenac Creek on June 10, 2025, following storm-driven runoff. Events like this carry phosphorus and other pollutants into Cayuga Lake, highlighting the need for watershed-wide actions.

human and animal health.

The Cayuga Lake TMDL plan aims to establish phosphorus reduction targets for the lake's watershed. The NYS DEC developed our lake's TMDL by analyzing data from water quality monitoring programs, computer models, and scientific studies. These analyses helped determine the amount of phosphorus the lake can receive while still meeting water quality standards, essentially establishing a watershed

"pollution budget." **Overall, the TMDL recommends a 30% reduction in phosphorus loading across the watershed to meet water quality targets.** Most of the phosphorus comes from diffuse sources spread across the landscape, including runoff from cultivated crops (65%), hay/pasture (18%), forests/wetlands (5%), developed land (2%), and septic systems (<1%). By comparison, wastewater treatment plants and other permitted discharges contribute a much smaller share, accounting for about 9% of the total phosphorus entering the lake.

Reducing this pollution will require a range of actions, including improved agricultural practices, erosion control, reducing fertilizer runoff from lawns and developed areas, forestry stewardship, and repair or replacement of substandard and failing septic systems.

Dear Reader: Please keep in mind that while septic systems overall are estimated to be contributing a relatively small proportion of phosphorus to our lake relative to other non-point sources at the watershed scale, individual failing systems or high-density septic areas can still have an outsized negative impact on nearby waters!

Implementation and Challenges

Putting the Cayuga Lake TMDL into action requires collaboration among a wide array of stakeholders, including local governments, farmers, environmental groups, and residents. Funding for these efforts often comes from federal and

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CLWN's 2025 Annual Celebration & Meeting

A beautiful summer evening at Treleven Wines

On August 21, beautiful evening weather beckoned members and friends of the Network to gather at Treleven Wines in King Ferry, for our annual celebration and members meeting. We loved connecting with current and prospective members, celebrating our shared commitment to protecting the Cayuga Lake Watershed, and looking toward the future. A special thank you to Treleven Wines for generously donating the use of their beautiful venue, and to our members for your support. Our 2026 date will be announced online soon, stay tuned!

Around the open-air stone patio, over one hundred people enjoyed information displays presented by the Network, including Lake Friendly Living, before gravitating to nearby tables for a lively social hour while enjoying Treleven's distinguished wines. Conversations flowed with the wine as friends, colleagues, and neighbors from around Cayuga Lake got caught up with one another.

The evening's program moved to a summary of the state of the Network, presented by Keith Batman, Chair of the Network's Board of Directors. Keith was followed by Liz Kreitinger, the Network's Steward/Executive Director, who informed the audience about recent achievements and future plans, focusing on a stabilized financial situation and upcoming plans and partnerships.

Liz announced the four winning images from the 2025 Watershed Wonders photo challenge. Please see the separate article about the images and their creators, and the challenge of selecting these four from the over 80 beautiful entries.

It was also Liz's great privilege to honor John Abel with the Network's 2025 David Morehouse Award. Thank you, John, for your twelve years of service

to the Network, stemming from your decades of devotion to the lake and watershed. See the separate article for more information about John Abel, and about the David Morehouse Award.

A delicious buffet supper was provided by the Network, prepared by Treleven. A big thank you to all the folks who attended. Please help us continue to build the Network as an organization that can be effective in facing the challenges ahead for our communities, lake, and watershed.

Board Chair Keith Batman shares updates and welcomes attendees at the Annual Meeting.



A full room of community members gathered at our Annual Meeting.



Good news and bad news about the invasive water chestnut *continued from page 12*

there were observations by the USGS in 2015. In the 2024 response, joined by staff from the Tompkins Co. Soil & Water Conservation District and DEC, the PRISM staff collectively pulled and disposed of 175 lbs of water chestnut from Cayuga Inlet. These teams continue to monitor and check the nearby shoreline for new patches. None has been found to date.

Along the lake's northwest shore, there are known populations of water chestnut between Canoga Marsh and Cayuga Lake State Park; also in Finger Lakes National

Forest ponds, and downstream of the lake in the Seneca River. Around a decade ago, a large and spreading mat of water chestnut was uprooted along Cayuga Lake in Seneca County, thanks to the Seneca County Soil & Water District and Finger Lakes Institute.

These infestations are dense and challenging to manage and navigate. Water chestnut grows in widespread mats to cover the water surface, and plants are anchored to the bottom by thick stems. The plants die back each winter, but not before producing a crop of seeds encased in sharp spiny cases,

that germinate the following spring. The seeds hook onto birds for better spreading.

Water chestnut is well-established in other parts of the Finger Lakes, including Keuka Lake, in inlets and bays on Lake Ontario, and in Lake Champlain. As with many invasive aquatic plants, water chestnut is far less expensive to deal with early, BEFORE it becomes widely established. Experience across the region shows that even proactive, early-response strategies are challenging and require sustained effort and resources.

Congratulations to John Abel

Recipient of the 2025 David Morehouse Award

It is with great pleasure that we presented the 2025 David Morehouse Award to Dr. John F. Abel in recognition of his extraordinary service to the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network (CLWN) and his leadership in promoting sustainable, climate-resilient living for Cayuga Lake shoreline and watershed residents.

John served on the CLWN Board for 12 years, including a long tenure as Treasurer, where he transformed our financial management system and ushered the organization into a new era of fiscal stability. His dedication to sound governance and transparency has ensured that CLWN is well-positioned to thrive and respond effectively to the challenges facing Cayuga Lake and its watershed. John took a leadership role during the challenging days of the COVID pandemic, ensuring that we received emergency federal funding. He was also a cornerstone of guidance for the critically important processes of updating our Strategic Plan and Bylaws.

In addition to his service with CLWN, John has been a leader in the West Shore Neighborhood Association. In these roles, he spearheaded the creation of *Lakeside Living in a Changing Climate*: a pioneering handbook that equips lakeside and watershed homeowners with the tools they need for everyday living and also for making home and landscaping choices that safeguard Cayuga Lake while preparing for the realities of climate change. This guide has become a valuable resource for community members who want to be active stewards of the lake. It can be read and downloaded at our website under the Resources heading.

Through his leadership with CLWN and the Community Science Institute, John also served many years as a dedicated HABS Harrier volunteer and founding “Quadrant Leader” for the southwest shore for Cayuga Lake’s Harmful Algal Bloom

Monitoring Program. John was also a big supporter of hydrilla research and prevention. He participated regularly in Ithaca Hydrilla Task Force meetings, checked for it along the southwest lake shoreline and in the water from his kayak, and kept the West Shore Neighborhood Association apprised of the situation.

John’s vision and leadership reflect a deep understanding of the Cayuga Lake watershed including its ecology, its communities, and the economic realities that shape local action. As CLWN’s former Executive Director, Dr. Hilary Lambert recalls, working alongside John meant striving to meet his high standards for professionalizing, streamlining, and strengthening the

Network so that it could fulfill its role as a regional leader in watershed protection. John’s intelligent, thorough, and forward-thinking approach has left a lasting imprint on our organization. Via his commitment to organizational stewardship, community leadership, and climate resilience, John has strengthened CLWN, elevated public awareness, and has made a lasting positive impact on our watershed.

Please go to our website cayugalake.org to learn more about David Morehouse’s life, this award, and others who have been honored over the years: [About > Where we Stand > Awards Given](#).



Cayuga Lake’s New Clean Water Plan: Understanding the TMDL *continued from page 13*

state grants, as well as local grassroots fundraising initiatives. However, there are challenges to achieving the phosphorus reduction goals. Non-point source pollution, particularly from agriculture, is harder to control than point sources, making community engagement and people actively choosing to adopt better practices critical. Success will depend on people working together across the watershed.

One important aspect of the TMDL is that while it establishes watershed-wide phosphorus reduction targets and general recommendations on actions, it does not lay out a detailed implementation plan. Instead, turning these targets into action will require more leadership and collaboration at the local level.

In the Cayuga Lake watershed, this coordination effort

is being led by our partners at the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (CWIO), who work closely with municipalities and agencies to advance projects and strategies that reduce nutrient pollution.

On December 11, 2024, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization co-hosted a Community Conference session featuring presentations and a panel discussion on our watershed’s nutrient pollution challenges, the new TMDL, and ongoing water quality work. Presentation slides are available on our website under Resources > Conference Presentations. We’ll continue to share updates as the implementation progresses!

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Our Mission...

*To advocate for the health
of Cayuga Lake and its
watershed in a changing world.*

Our Vision...

*A network of individuals,
institutions, and communities
united in protecting our
region's water resources for
people and nature.*

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network

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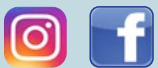
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INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF OUR LAKE AND WATERSHED

Lake Steward Circle donors help establish the Cayuga Lake Watershed Fund

Thanks to the generosity and vision of members of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network's Lake Steward Circle, a new long-term fund dedicated to protecting Cayuga Lake and its watershed has been established.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Fund, held at the Central New York Community Foundation, will help strengthen the long-term stability of the Watershed Network and support opportunities that advance watershed protection. As the fund grows over time, it will provide flexible resources for emerging needs, special initiatives, and strategic projects that benefit the lake and the communities that depend on it.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Fund is an enduring example of what we can accomplish as a watershed community. It creates a way for our community to invest in the long-term health of our lake and watershed, alongside ongoing support for programs today.

"This fund is a legacy of commitment to clean water, healthy watersheds, and a thriving lake for all of us—from salamanders to snow geese, from perch to people! We are all part of this legacy of stewardship," said CLWN Steward Liz Kreitinger.

Those who wish to be part of growing this fund can contribute directly through the CNY Community Foundation or include it in long-term giving plans. By building this resource, our community is investing in the capacity to care for our lake and watershed for generations to come.

*View looking west
from Cayuga's
southern shores.*

**Be a part of the legacy for Cayuga Lake by donating at:
cnycf.org/funds/cayuga-lake**

LEO LOUIS