

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network Strategic Plan 2021-2024

Approved by the CLWN Board of Directors, October 13, 2020

Introduction

Strategic planning is an important process for all nonprofit organizations to undertake. In 2020 the Board of Directors and staff of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network took the time to analyze our current environment, identify opportunities, and envision the future. The purpose of this strategic planning iteration has been to develop a two to three year blueprint for the future of our organization, and to help guide the allocation of resources in order to achieve our goals. Strategic planning is part of the best practice planning continuum – our annual work plans, budget and fundraising plan should all be informed by and flow from our strategic plan.

Project Summary

In the spring, summer, and fall of 2020, River Network staff facilitated a strategic planning process that engaged the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network (CLWN) Board of Directors, staff, and stakeholders in determining the future direction of our organization. Over the course of several months, the planning process involved a situational analysis, 2-3 hour board retreats, and subgroup work which resulted in the development of the following strategic plan.

The situational analysis included staff interviews, a board member survey, and stakeholder interviews. During the board retreats, board and staff reviewed and discussed the analysis data, identified critical issues and opportunities, developed strategic goals, and discussed plan implementation.

The plan is organized into both programmatic and organizational *Goals* and *Strategies*. *Tactics* for each *Strategy* provide specific actions. Specific persons will be assigned as Responsible for these actions, with a Timeline and Measures of Success. These deliberate steps will help us achieve our *Goals*. Not all *Goals* will be tackled simultaneously, as indicated by the Board's October 13, 2020 Resolution (below). The plan will be revisited annually.

Who We Are

Since its founding in 1998, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network ('Network') has served as the only community-based, non-profit membership organization focused on the health and welfare of the entire lake and its subwatersheds. Our diverse membership reflects the concerns of businesses, local governments, agricultural interests, local organizations, and individuals living and working throughout the 870 square mile, six county watershed in the Finger Lakes region of central New York State. Three of these counties (Cayuga, Seneca and Cortland) have shoreline directly on the lake; three (Schuyler, Tioga, Cortland) connect the land, its human residents, and natural communities with the lake via the 37 major creeks and myriad smaller waterbodies that drain to Cayuga Lake.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network recognizes that only by working in partnership with others can we address the challenges facing the lake. From the start we have been committed to serving as the hub of a science-based network of individuals and groups, and our partners are a crucial part of who we are. Thus, the core of who we are is anchored by values of partnership, community representation and engagement, advocacy for the natural world, and science-based accuracy.

Mission: The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network supports healthy, vibrant, and sustainable communities by identifying threats to the watershed and advocating for solutions.

Vision: We envision a future where the healthy, clean lake, creeks, and tributaries of the Cayuga Lake Watershed enhance the quality of life for our communities, businesses, and local industries; where citizens are active and engaged in building a resilient response to climate change and other threats to the watershed; where communities enjoy access to the lake and its tributaries as part of their daily lives, and where the Network and its programs play an integral role in achieving these outcomes.

History of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network

In 1996 New York State's legislature passed the Clean Water, Clean Air Bond Act, authorizing 30 years of funding for environmental projects. Shortly thereafter, a group of long-time Cayuga Lake watershed residents met to discuss creating a watershed-oriented organization aimed at protecting Cayuga Lake through the Bond Act and other funding. Over the years there had been many individual group efforts aimed at lake preservation, but there never previously had been an organization with a focus on the entire watershed.

In 1997 the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network was unofficially born and by mid-year a steering committee began meeting monthly, chaired by James C. White, retired Cornell professor. At that time, the Steering Committee determined the new organization would:

- Focus efforts on the entire watershed.
- Establish a Board of Directors with equal representation from the watershed.
- Develop a membership base who will advocate for the sustainability of the watershed.
- Serve as an informed, collaborative advocate.

The organization was officially established in 1998.

Recent History and Achievements

In recent years, the Network's Board and staff have worked to confront and tackle the challenges facing our lake, creeks and communities, both human and natural. We worked with many people and dozens of community groups to get a fracking ban passed for New York State, protecting groundwater and surface water (2009-14). We updated the Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration & Protection Plan (2015-17). We created a sustained lake-wide education campaign about the invasive aquatic species Hydrilla (2011-present). We are building partnerships to address the impacts of climate change to the watershed. Also, through a concerted fundraising and communication effort, we have seen a membership rise; our partners have increased in number and diversity, and we have been able to reach a wider audience.

Additionally, we are working with partners and public agencies in response to the rise in Harmful Algal Blooms (aka HABs; 2017-present). The Network, with partner the Community Science Institute (CSI), helped develop a HABs monitoring program where trained volunteers check over 50% of the lake's shoreline and carry samples to CSI's lab. CSI's interactive map of lab results and weekly newsletters provide a lifeline for locals to know where HABs are, for protection and safe lake enjoyment. Work toward a longer term solution will be integrated into our Climate Change initiatives.

In 2020, Board leadership focused our efforts to educate and encourage action by homeowners, businesses, industry, and visitors to lessen and prevent nutrient loading into our waterways. These initiatives include:

- Water quality monitoring at the mouths of nine creeks during stormwater events to better document the contributions from excess nutrients (<https://www.cayugalake.org/resources/water-resource-committee/>).
- Lake Friendly Living program for waterside residents to reduce runoff (<https://www.cayugalake.org/lake-friendly-living/>).

- Lakeside Living in a Changing Climate, a handbook for waterside dwellers with integrated, climate change-focused information about renewable energy, septic systems, nutrient runoff controls, and more, with links to programs and guidelines (<https://www.cayugalake.org/resources/lakeside-living-and-climate-change/>).

CLWN Board of Directors Adopts Strategic Plan, October 13, 2020

On Oct. 13, 2020 at the CLWN Board of Directors meeting, the following resolution was presented, discussed and adopted:

Resolved: The CLWN Board adopts the Mission Statement, Vision Statement and five Programmatic Goals as written in the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network DRAFT Strategic Plan 2021-2024, with early action given to the Organizational Goals #4 and #5 and the highest environmental priority, given to the Programmatic Goal #1, Climate Change.

The motion was made by John Abel and seconded by Neil Schwartzbach. All Board Members present, representing a quorum, voted for adoption.

Respectfully submitted, Louise Mudrak, CLWN Secretary

Goals and Strategies

I. Programmatic Goals and Strategies

Goal #1: Monitor the impacts of climate change on the watershed and lead the effort to engage the community and organize mitigation efforts.

Strategy 1: Climate Change: Establish CLWN as the **leading** organization that raises awareness about the impacts of climate change to the watershed.

Strategy 2: Investigate and report on the potential impacts to the watershed related to climate change and advocate for actions to address them.

Goal #2: Educate youth and adults on detrimental impacts to water quality and encourage implementation of best management practices.

Strategy 1: Watershed Stewardship: Empower private landowners, recreational users, and visitors to take action and make informed decisions about care of the lake and watershed.

Strategy 2: Nutrient Pollution: Investigate the role of the Network in increasing agricultural best management practices.

Goal #3: Serve as a leader and connector to help community members, conservation partners, businesses, and local governments work collaboratively to understand best management practices, address and prioritize threats, and pursue joint projects to improve the health of the lake and watershed.

Strategy 1: Regularly convene stakeholders and provide opportunities for improving collaboration and communication.

Strategy 2: Encourage implementation of the Cayuga Lake Restoration and Protection Plan across the jurisdictions within the watershed.

Strategy 3: Identify opportunities to collaborate with regional higher education institutions.

II. Organizational Goals and Strategies

Goal # 4: Strengthen the Network by focusing on organizational development to ensure efficiency, accountability, engagement and growth.

Strategy 1: Recruit and engage a high performing Board of Directors through clear expectations, annual work plans, ongoing board training, and regular evaluation.

Strategy 2: Review and update committees to strengthen the work of the Network

Strategy 3: Create both Board and Staff succession and recruitment plans that will diversify Board membership, broaden the range of experience and expertise, and ensure continuity of leadership.

Goal # 5: Raise awareness of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network through strong communications, fundraising, partnerships, and community outreach to ensure the organization has the resources necessary to carry out its mission.

Strategy 1: Articulate and amplify the mission and work of the Network through a communications plan.

Strategy 2: Increase and diversify funding sources and build the capacity of the organization across board and staff to raise the resources needed to implement the work.

Strategy 3: Develop and maintain the financial capacity and human resources necessary to accomplish our mission.