

OP-ED STATEMENT Environmental Protection, Going Forward

Hilary Lambert CLWN Steward/Executive Director

While we strive to "avoid politics" in these pages, an existential threat to our mission and our watershed has been building in Washington D.C. since January 2017. This op-ed piece reflects the opinions only of Steward Hilary Lambert. It is science and fact-based.

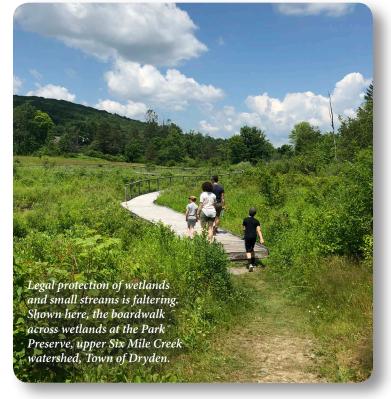
Election Day 2020, our country's iconic federal environmental protection laws were poised on the edge of a precipice, set to plummet to their destruction in the name of loosening regulatory burdens that get in the way of business development. From January 2017 to present, the US Environmental Protection Agency under President Donald Trump's direction has made many pro-business regulatory changes. Central to the Network's water-protection concerns is the weakening of the Clean Water Act, discussed below.

The incoming administration has at least four years to stop this slide. President-elect Joe Biden's team will use a "wholegovernment approach," focused around climate change action, to rebuild protective laws and regulations, reports Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico (Coral Davenport and Lisa Friedman, "Biden takes a whole-government approach to fight climate change." *The New York Times* 11/18/2020).

Federal environmental laws & regulations under threat

A recent New York Times article lists the reversal of 100 environmental rules from 2017 to present, mostly within US EPA and the Department of Interior. Water protection cutbacks include:

- "Scaled back pollution protections for certain tributaries and wetlands that were regulated under the Clean Water Act by the Obama administration.
- Revoked a rule that prevented coal companies from dumping mining debris into local streams.
- Weakened a rule that aimed to limit toxic discharge from power plants into public waterways.
- Weakened a portion of the Clean Water Act to make it easier



for federal agencies to issue permits for federal projects over state objections if the projects don't meet local water quality standards, including for pipelines and other fossil fuel facilities.

- Extended the lifespan of unlined holding ponds for coal ash waste from power plants
- Allowed certain unlined coal ash holding areas to continue operating, though they were previously deemed unsafe.
- Withdrew a proposed rule requiring groundwater protections for certain uranium mines.
- Proposed doubling the time allowed for utilities to remove lead pipes from water systems with high levels of lead (in progress).
- Proposed a regulation limiting the scope of an Obama-era rule under which companies had to prove that large deposits of recycled coal ash would not harm the environment (in progress)."

Water quality is also impacted by rollbacks in other regulatory areas, including air pollution and emissions; drilling and extraction; infrastructure and planning; animals; and toxic substances and safety. For example, infrastructure changes include:

• "[US EPA] weakened the National Environmental Policy Act, one of the country's most significant environmental laws, in order to expedite the approval of public infrastructure projects, such as roads, pipelines and telecommunications networks. The new rules shorten the time frame for completing environmental studies, limit the types of projects subject to review, and no longer require federal agencies to account for a project's cumulative effects on the environment, such as climate change."

The authors conclude, "All told, the Trump administration's environmental rollbacks could significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade and lead to thousands of extra deaths from poor air quality each year, according to energy and legal analysts." View the entire list here: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html (Nadja Popovitch et al 2020, "The Trump Administration Is Reversing More Than 100 Environmental Rules. Here's the Full List." *The New York Times* 11/10/2020).

Weakening of the Clean Water Act

An October 2020 article focuses specifically on 2017-20 changes made to the Clean Water Act, which turned 48 in mid-October. Author Jeff Peterson (retired policy advisor, US EPA) reports, "For most of the past 48 years, the Clean Water Act produced dramatic improvements in the quality of our nation's rivers, lakes and coastal waters. But problems persist: In 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that 46 percent of rivers and streams were in poor condition, contaminated with pollutants. That was also true of 21 percent of lakes and 14 percent of coastal waters."

Peterson delineates CWA rollbacks since 2017 that threaten further progress and the gains made to date. These include budget cuts that would reduce US EPA's overall budget by 27% for fiscal 2021, and reduce federal program funding for sewage treatment plants by 32%. Enforcement of clean water regulations is essential to success, but a study found a 70% reduction in prosecutions of clean water violations 2017-20.

Major revisions to the Clean Water Act, made final in June 2020, eliminate protections for small streams and wetlands, which provide drinking water for an estimated 117 million Americans, including many thousands in the Cayuga Lake watershed. In the past, state agencies have been able to protect their waters via stricter rules than those of US EPA, but recent rulemaking cut back on state control over federal water pollution permits. Reversing Obama-era progress in regulating coal fired power plants, timelines were extended for compliance, and exemptions provided for aging plants. Coal ash waste disposal sites, such as the several in Lansing adjacent to the defunct Cayuga power plant, are to receive extended compliance deadlines and weakened waste disposal standards. (Jeff Peterson, "Crystal clean water? Not if Trump can help it." The Hill, October 18, 2020 https://thehill.

com/opinion/energy-environment/521589-crystal-clean-water-not-if-trump-can-help-it)

What will happen now?

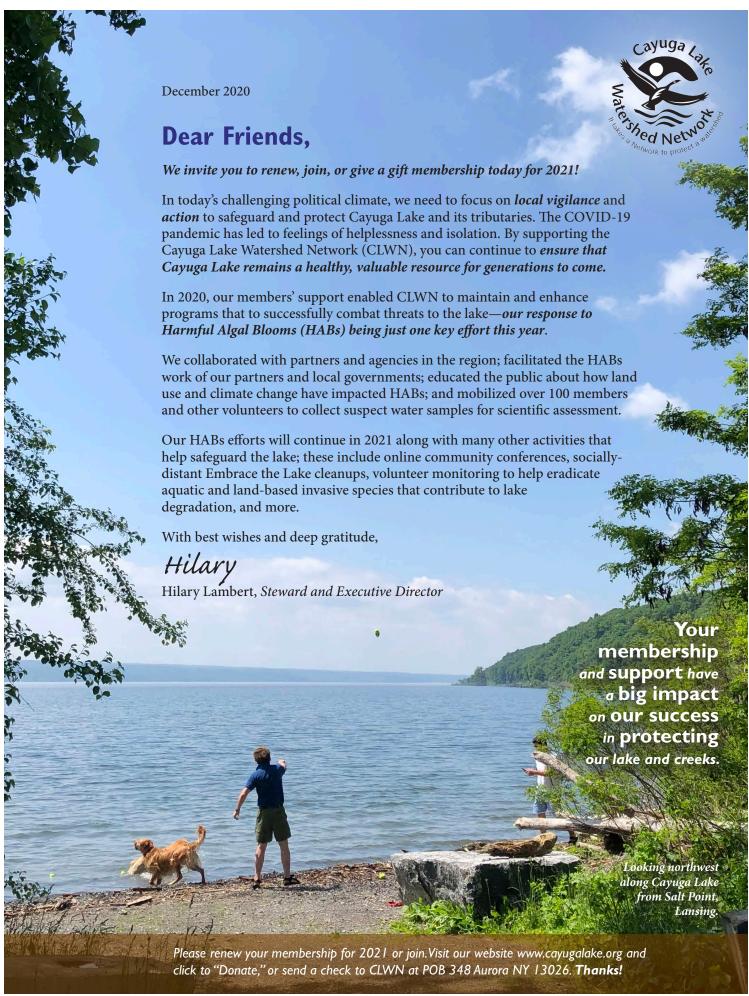
Unfortunately, it is anticipated that clarification of which waters are covered by the Clean Water Act will not be completed during the next four years. "Developers are "rushing under this more lenient approach to wetlands and waters so they can get everything confirmed and move on with their projects, sometimes without getting a permit," said Ellen Gilinsky, an independent consultant who served as the EPA's associate deputy assistant administrator for water under the Obama administration." (Bobby Magill, "Federal water rule expected to stay murky through Biden term (2)," November 20, 2020 Bloomberg Law Environment and Energy Report. https://news. bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/federal-waterrule-expected-to-stay-murky-through-biden-term). Magill concludes that while many hope that revising this restrictive rule to include more of the USA's waters will be high on the Biden agenda, final decisions will take place well into the future via the US Congress, not the courts.

It is expected that an early executive order by the new President will be to require that every federal agency, department and program prepare to address climate change, a reboot of the policy initiated under President Obama. These programs were new then; have been largely gutted over the past four years; and will have to be rebuilt.

Among several people under consideration as the next US EPA administrator is Mary D. Nichols, presently California's climate and clean air regulator. Rules developed in that state for climate change were the model for President Obama's federal climate policies, rolled back under the Trump administration. According to Nichols, "It's going to be important to quickly reverse and stop a very large number of actions that were done by the Trump administration, and then to restore the agency's scientific basis for its work."

Xavier Bercerra, presently California's attorney general, has been announced as Biden's pick to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. He spearheaded over 50 lawsuits against the Trump administration's environmental cuts and rollbacks, and has this to say about the outgoing president's environmental legacy: "I don't think much of what he has done will stick, because much of what he has done hasn't taken hold legally. I believe his legacy will be very short and his tenure will be considered the nadir for environmental policy in the history of this country" (Coral Davenport and Lisa Friedman, "Biden takes a whole-government approach to fight climate change." *The New York Times* 11/18/2020).

With so much to accomplish quickly, it may be a while before the restoration of water quality protections under the Clean Water Act is tackled by the incoming government. To some extent, it will be our job—that of the Network, our members, our communities, and thousands of sister organizations nationwide—to remain vigilant, working together to demand and implement higher standards for clean water restoration and protection.



We Zoomed our fall '20 community conference

Jenn Tufano Grillo CLWN Programs & Members Staff

early October the Network staff is usually found bustling around contacting potential venues for our Fall south-end focused conference. In this unusual year, instead, we were updating our Zoom account and practicing use of the mute button!

Over 120 people registered for our two virtual, online sessions which were recorded for online viewing. All presentations can be found on our YouTube page here: https://tinyurl.com/CLWNYouTube, and via links at our website home page.

Harmful Algal Blooms on Cayuga Lake in 2020

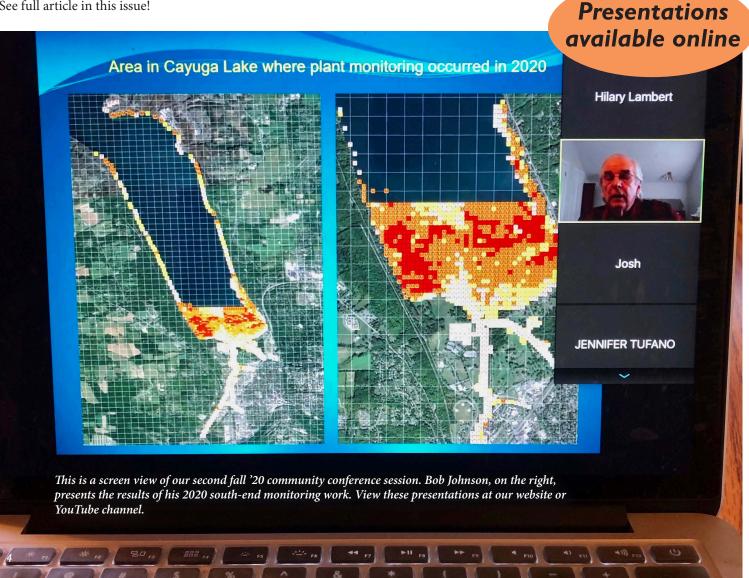
For the October 24 mini-conference, Nathaniel Launer of the Community Science Institute presented results from the 2020 Cayuga Lake Harmful Algal Blooms Monitoring Program. Ruth Richardson of Cornell University presented about the development of rapid tools to be used in screening water samples for elevated HABs indicators.

We also took this opportunity to announce that Nate Launer is the recipient of CLWN's first James C. White Memorial Prize. See full article in this issue!

Hydrilla on Cayuga Lake & watching for it across the Finger Lakes in 2020

The November 4 community conference session was all about hydrilla! Michael Greer, Regional Technical Specialist for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Buffalo District, provided his 2020 report on Aurora and Ithaca projects on Cayuga Lake. Robert Johnson of Racine-Johnson Aquatic Ecologists presented on the 2020 hydrilla monitoring on the south end of Cayuga Lake. Finally, Kathryn (Des Jardin) Monacelli, Hydrilla Project Manager, Finger Lakes Institute at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, shared an update on her team's 2020 hydrilla work on Cayuga Lake and the wider Finger Lakes region.

We are grateful to all our presenters for taking the time to share their impressive and important programming and research results. Members of the audience were able to ask questions during and after the presentations, all now available online. We did, however, miss the in-person human interactions and plentiful refreshments!



The Network's 2021 Strategic Plan

Hilary Lambert CLWN Steward/Executive Director

trategic 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. Our previous strategic plan has needed updating for several years.

In the spring, summer, and fall of 2020, staff from the national organization River Network facilitated a strategic planning process that engaged the Network's 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 our strategic plan, which we will launch in January 2021. All of this work was carried out online, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The plan is organized into both programmatic and organizational *Goals*. Success in reaching a *Goal* is based on several *Strategies*, and *Tactics* provide specific actions for each *Strategy*. During the Board's October 13 meeting, it was decided that not all five Goals would be tackled simultaneously next year. At present, the Board and staff are meeting to map out the 2021 Tactics for Goals 1, 4 and 5. Specific persons and groups will be assigned as Responsible for these actions, with a Timeline and Measures of Success. The plan as a whole will be revisited annually, and Goals 2 and 3 are in our work plan for 2022.

Members of the CLWN Board feel strongly that climate change impacts to our watershed and to the Finger Lakes region need to be central to our work going forward. We also recognize 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.

Following are the five Goals developed during our 2020 strategic planning process. Goals 1, 4 and 5 will be our focus for

implementation during 2021. We provide their Strategies here, and are continuing to finalize Tactics—the actions that we will carry out during 2021 with our partners, members and watershed communities. Goals 2 and 3 will be developed and implemented during 2022. The full 2021 CLWN Strategic Plan will be shared online at our website early in the New Year.

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.
- Strategy 3: We are developing a climate justice strategy.

GOAL #2: Educate youth and adults on detrimental impacts to water quality and encourage implementation of best management practices. This goal will be fully developed and implemented in 2022.

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. This goal will be fully developed and implemented in 2022.

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.

The James C. White Memorial Prize

Established 2019; first awarded 2020

Dr. James C. White (1916-2018), a longtime lakeshore resident and lover of the Lake, was the founding Chair of the CLWN in 1997-98. After his death on October 2, 2018, his family and friends designated the Network as one of two principal recipients of memorial donations in his honor.

representative of the family and friends, Elizabeth Thorndike, herself a pioneering official of the CLWN, coordinated the establishment a memorial fund or endowment intended to serve as a perpetual memorial for Dr. White by supporting an annual recognition of someone who has made notable contributions to the efforts of the Network to preserve and enhance Cayuga Lake, with a possible emphasis on younger individuals.

Following is an excerpt from our new Strategic Plan, illustrating the important role Jim White played in helping the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network get started.

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.

The criteria for the annual "James C. White Memorial Prize" are:

- Nominees should be individuals or entities who, in the spirit
 of Dr. White, have made outstanding contributions to the
 efforts of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network to preserve and
 enhance the watershed.
- Nominees should reside in the watershed, either seasonally or year-round.
- It is preferred but not necessary that nominees be representative of the younger generation of volunteers, Network members or community members.
- Board members, Network staff members and members of the Network's award committee shall not be eligible for



Nate Launer (center) working with volunteers in the HABs Harriers program, Wells College, June 2019.

nomination while they are actively serving in one of these capacities.

• The prize is announced and conferred at one of the two annual conferences organized by the CLWN.

Nathaniel Launer: Recipient of the 2020 James C. White Memorial Prize

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network is proud to announce that Nathaniel "Nate" Launer is the first recipient of our newlyestablished James C. White Memorial Prize.

Probably most of the people reading these words know how deeply Nate deserves this recognition. His formal job title at the Community Science Institute in Ithaca gives us a hint of the breadth of his involvement in the life and health of Cayuga Lake:

Outreach Coordinator & Cayuga Lake Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring Program Coordinator

As CSI's Outreach Coordinator, Nate works with the many volunteer water sampling groups around Cayuga Lake and in neighboring watersheds, coordinating seasonal sampling events, doing trainings, reporting to the groups on results, pulling results together for year-end reporting. He works closely with CSI's executive director Steve Penningroth and the lab's stellar staff.

As the Cayuga Lake Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring Program Coordinator, Nate has built on the pioneering program begun by Claire Weston in 2018, enabling almost 100 trained volunteers in 2020 to monitor for, sample and report on Harmful Algal Blooms along over 50% of the lake's shoreline. Nate and the lab team oversee rapid analysis and reporting to the public of HABs toxicity results, via their interactive online map.

They work with the area's health departments, state and local parks, and state agencies to quickly provide the public with much-needed, accurate information about the growing problem of Harmful Algal Blooms. During the height of the HABs season, Nate and the CSI team are constantly on the move

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Protecting water quality in a changing climate

During this astonishing year, the Network has benefited from the emergence of two paired programs for watershed residents, designed to provide information pathways to area residents who want to better protect our water resources, on the lake and across the watershed. Wherever you live!

Lakeside Living in a Changing Climate

A handbook (in print and online) researched and produced by Board member John F. Abel and Summer Intern Abbey Yatsko.

The realization that climate change affects nearly all aspects of both the health of Cayuga Lake and the quality of lakeside living has been the impetus for this handbook. Its intent is to bring together the informational resources that a lakeshore homeowner might need not only for day-to-day living but also for home and landscaping improvements that preserve the lake while also responding to climate change.

Users of this handbook are invited to note how easy it is to get started to be both climate-minded and lake-friendly. The handbook is organized into three main opportunities for action by lakeshore residents, and each main action can be initiated with a simple step as follows:

- Reduce carbon emissions at home—a simple starting step is to obtain a free home energy audit for your residence.
- Mitigate climate change effects at home—a simple starting step is to join the Lake Friendly Living program and perform a self-assessment of your todate lake-friendly living habits.
- Take lake-friendly actions as an engaged resident in the watershed—a simple starting step is to join the

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and become an active volunteer or member of local and regional environmental organizations.

More details and a rich plenitude of hyperlinks to informational resources are within the handbook that one can download at our website under the Resources heading.

Lake Friendly Living

- Board members Ed and Nancy Currier & staff Jenn Tufano Grillo have helped tie us into this Finger Lakes-wide, free program.
- Do not need to live water-front to participate!
- Other Finger Lake groups have much higher participation! We need to catch up.
- Please go to our web page to sign the pledge, or contact us. Get involved!

 What happens around your home matters downstream. As one of the residents who use Cayuga Lake as a primary water source or for recreation, you can make a difference in the water quality of the lake. The Cayuga Lake watershed encompasses approximately 785 square miles where storm water runoff moves into the lake and impacts its water quality. Residential properties generate part of that runoff.

Join our Lake Friendly Living program and adopt Lake Friendly Living practices! The program is simple and Lakeside Living in a Changing Climate

Capture runoff in a beautiful way, by growing native flowers on the shoreline. Lake Friendly Living & Lakeside Living in a Changing Climate!



focuses on three key ways to help protect Cayuga Lake.

Minimize Runoff Eliminate Pollutants Capture & Infiltrate Runoff

Lake Friendly Livings' pledge card and program booklet are being revised for spring 2021, thanks to the Seneca County Soil and Water Conservation District office!

Sign up and take the pledge, and check out Smart Steps for Clean Water, under the Resources heading at www. cayugalake.org.

The James C. White Memorial Prize continued from page 6

to respond to HABs reports and make sure that someone is there quickly to take a sample and get it to the lab.

In addition to this remarkable lakewide presence, Nate is generous to others. On very short notice he provides the Network with top quality reports and updates for our quarterly newsletters and our seasonal HABs Updates. During the HABs season, he sends out weekly reports to the HABs Harriers on the state of the lake. When we ask if he can show up and take part in a community event on short notice, he always says yes, and always does an amazing job. We look forward to the beautiful year-end reports that he helps prepare for CSI.

Often teaming with Steve Penningroth, Nate has made numerous public presentations on what CSI's longitudinal, painstakingly collected, creek and lake data reveal about the quality of water in our creeks and lake. Nate and CSI are building new partnerships around the lake, with local residents in towns and in rural communities.

We'll stop there for now, because we know Nate is just getting started. Thank you Nate, for all you have done for all of us, and our beloved lake and creeks, in the past few years. You deeply deserve the first James C. White Memorial Prize.

The mission...

The Cayuga Lake
Watershed Network
identifies key threats
to Cayuga Lake
and its watershed,
and it advocates
for solutions that
support a healthy
environment and
vibrant, sustainable
communities.



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Current Resident

** Educate

** Advocate

** Protect

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The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network thanks Leigh Dezelan of Dezelan Dezign and Pioneer Printing of Lodi for newsletter production excellence.







Upcoming Events

Check our website www.cayugalake.org & Facebook page for the latest!

Embrace the Lake! Start planning now for a community cleanup in the spring.

When snow is on the ground, roadside and lakeside trash piles up. All is revealed when the snow melts! With a bit of careful thought, a community cleanup can be done in a socially-distanced, safe way. We provide bags, gloves, and beautiful posters. We can help you locate a good collecting spot, and in many cases can contact your local highway department to pick up the trash bags afterwards. We also have loaner trash grabbers, helmets and reflective vests. Contact steward@cayugalake.org if interested. Great for Scout groups, churches and neighborhoods.

For our new Climate Change focus, we are seeking presentations to offer you this winter via Zoom. Watch for these—one hour long, with one to two speakers and time for discussion. We'll announce these via our listsery, Facebook and Instagram. Free, with advance registration required.

Check out our **YouTube** channel to watch beautiful shows about **Six Mile Creek** and a day and night

around Cayuga Lake. These video/musical compilations are by local artist Frank Muller. There's informational short videos available too, at https://tinyurl.com/CLWNYouTube.

For March 2021, the Lake Friendly
Living program will be announcing a
series of celebratory water events to take
place across the Finger Lakes. We'll offer
Cayuga Lake presentations, and you can view
the other lakes' events online as well. Meanwhile,
go to the LFL pages at our website and take the
pledge. We'll send you a yard sign and window
sticker, and you can begin planning small and
large landscaping changes to better protect creek

Our **community partners** remain active during the winter:

and lake water quality.

DiscoverCayuga Lake and the Community Science Institute have great websites, and share lake and creeks-focused events, presentations and photos on Facebook and Instagram. Start here: https://www.discovercayugalake.org/ and http://www.communityscience.org/.