



Onondaga County Legislature

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Chairman

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE MINUTES – OCTOBER 22, 2024 JULIE ABBOTT, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Kelly, Mr. Romeo

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ms. Cody, Mr. Brown

ALSO ATTENDING: Chairman Burtis, Mr. Bush; also see attached list

Chair Abbott called the meeting to order at 1:40 p.m. and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

- 1. OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT:** Elizabeth Bough Martin, Director
 - a. INFORMATIONAL: Update on Initiatives**

CLIMATE ACTION {Consists of greenhouse gases, electric vehicles (EV), etc.}

- Kicking off Greenhouse Gas Initiative Update on October 28, 2024
 - Consulting with Barton and Loguidice
 - ~10 years ago the county goals were 25% reduction in 25 years
 - The update will show where the county is meeting goals and what needs to be changed
 - Working on Bronze Certification for Climate Smart Communities from NYS
 - The update will provide points towards certification
 - The program is designed to think about the operation from procurement to energy
 - Looking to expand availability of EV's
 - NYSERDA is sending a contract for grant money to add EV ports in county parks

Questions/Comments from the Committee

- Is the Bronze Certification required by the state or is there an incentive?
 - There is an incentive
- How many EV ports did the county receive grant money for?
 - The only grant the Office of Environment is aware of is the NYSERDA match grant for 56 ports

WATER QUALITY

- Working with several partners to protect and improve the waters throughout Onondaga County
 - Current physical projects exist at:
 - Jamesville Reservoir
 - Skaneateles Lake
 - Oneida Lake
 - Otisco Lake

OTISCO LAKE

Otisco Lake Management Project

This year, the Otisco Lake Preservation Association began work on a management project to clear the vast quantities of nuisance aquatic vegetation from their lake. Onondaga County is assisting them to achieve their goal. This assistance has allowed them to purchase the following to cut, pull and remove the invasive aquatic plants from the lake, which is a drinking water source for the Onondaga County Water Authority.

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------|
| ▪ Equipment | ▪ Labor operations |
| ▪ Supplies | ▪ Services |
| ▪ Fuel | |

YEAR ONE OF THREE

2024 is year one of a three-year project. This year harvesting lasted throughout the summer and was considered largely successful. Invasive aquatic plants were removed from the lake including curly pondweed, milfoil, etc. which would have stagnated in the lake.

VISIBLE RESULTS

This summer's work has resulted in a visually noticeable reduction in weeds on the surface of the lake. Though pockets remain, most of the areas with the densest concentration of vegetation have been cleared. This has opened up the surface of the lake to transportation and recreation again and has increased the water quality for the fish, birds, mammals, and people who depend on it.



BEFORE HARVESTING



AFTER HARVESTING



- Otisco Lake Preservation Association (OLPA) is volunteer run
- County is working to help OLPA become self-sufficient to go after their own projects and grant money
- The nuisance invasive species that are mucking up the water is a nutrient and sediment loading problem
 - With the right technical assistance, the county can put them in the right direction
 - State is putting money into sediment loading
 - Working with CNY Regional Planning and Development Board on 9E plans for a solution

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Soil & Water Conservation District is doing a lot of upstream work that has not been maintained
- Trout do not spawn because nothing can go upstream
- Anoxic zones do not allow fish to survive in lake

WATER CHESTNUT MANAGEMENT

Seneca River Water Chestnut Management

Water Chestnuts on the Seneca River continues to be a challenge addressed by Onondaga County. Highlights:

- 2024 – 184 acres (3.9 million pounds) removed by Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District (Smaller figure compared to previous year due to program starting earlier in the year (smaller plants = less volume)
- 2023 – 160 acres (13.8 million pounds) removed
- 2022 – Nearly 5 million pounds (4,990,565 pounds) removed
- 2016-2021 – 147,230 pounds removed

CHALLENGES STILL FACED

- Starting too late in the season to harvest plants before they become pollinated and release their seeds
- Large islands (mats) of water chestnut upriver being dislodged due to heavy storm activity and blown downstream or physically cuts and pushed downstream

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Continue to start earlier in the season before chestnuts start to mature and break off to take root in the soil
- Work more closely in collaboration with neighboring counties and partners, especially those upstream of Onondaga County



- Would like to take another look at the water chestnut plan to try and make it more impactful
 - Pulling water chestnuts prevents the seeds from growing
 - Seeds are the real problem; can sit in the sediment for 12-15 years

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Is the Canal Corporation taking any role since they are an authority that could do something upstream?
- It is not ok to be good downstream stewards when other municipalities are not
 - It is not that the Canal Corporation does not want to be a partner
 - Feels like the scope of what they are authorized does not expand into that
 - Canal Corporation bought a Harvester for the DEC
- The DEC would be an authority with more governing power, do they have any jurisdiction?
 - The PRISM Group (out of Hobart William Smith) seems to have the most influence

- Waterchestnut consortium meetings stopped after COVID
- Currently in conversations with Soil & Water about getting the consortium meetings back on track
- Hopefully NYS will realize the scope of the problem on the barge canal

DEER AND TICK

- Communicating with the municipalities that participate in the Deer and Tick program
- Receiving the last invoices and closing up prior season and preparing for 2025
- Now that there is proper staff, the Deer and Tick program will go smoothly
- County funds the culling program (up to a certain percentage) to ensure deer population is managed
 - The volunteer program is being carried out in municipalities that choose to participate
 - City of Syracuse uses snipers
 - Camillus uses bow hunters
- Managing deer population preserves natural habitats

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Besides culling and bow, what other deer management programs are there in the county?
 - Not aware of any other programs in the county
 - Other communities have different approaches, but do not know enough to talk about in detail
 - The county can look into other programs as this program moves forward
- Is it correct that there is supposed to be a significant number removed in order to have a marginal impact?
 - Getting what they can with the number of days and funding allocated
 - There is no recent study that states to reduce the population by a certain amount
 - Not enough hunters to meet the number of DEC permits to manage deer

TREE CANOPY

Urban Tree Canopy Assessment

In 2024, the Office of the Environment contracted with Davey Resource Group to conduct an Urban Tree Canopy Assessment in the Towns of Cicero, Clay, Lysander, and Van Buren. This project will act as a pilot project and may be expanded to other Towns in the County in the future.

The data generated by this tool will give valuable insight into how the tree canopy has been influenced in the past and how to minimize loss going forward. It will also:

- Establish a baseline for canopy cover in each Town
- Analyze percentage of canopy cover lost since 2012 and identify where that has occurred
- Monitor and measure canopy health going forward
- Identify best locations in each Town for tree planting initiatives
- Identify “No Planting Zones” where tree planting should be prohibited due to other factors



This tool will help prioritize locations where canopy cover should be protected and/or trees restored. It will also allow the Towns to draft their own Forest Management Plans for the purposes of:

- Guarding against future canopy loss
- Coordinating efforts to replace lost trees
- Contributing to energy saving
- Reducing the impact of warm weather events

CURRENTLY

The Office of the Environment is in the process of working with the contractor to analyze tree canopy loss and expect the analysis and deliverables to be ready in early 2025. We are preparing by

- Making plans to protect and restore tree canopy based on the data that will be generated in the assessment
- Seeking funding in the form of grant programs and planting organizations
- Reaching out and meeting with the Towns to keep them informed of next steps



WORKING WITH TOWNS

We are also working with the Towns to ensure that this will be a useful tool for them and to solicit their input to identify parcels where planting might conflict with their plans for economic development, recreational facilities, Main Street revitalization, etc.

- Emerald Ash Borer has dramatically changed the tree canopy of the county
 - Season for ash tress has come to end this week
- Davey Resource Group will deliver a priority planting plan
 - Will meet with 4 towns to ensure planting plans do not conflict
 - Need to think about what types of trees will replace the tree canopy in viewshed

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Is the Emerald Ash Borer program complete?
 - There is another funding group through Soil & Water
- Are they still injecting some trees?
 - Yes, try to hold on to them as long possible
 - There is no new tree that is not susceptible
- How long before the program will be expanded?
 - Will receive results from the consultant in January
 - If results are useful, will be back to the Legislature
- There are scientific studies about the benefits of trees on mental/respiratory health, crime reduction, etc.
- Looking forward the deliverables
 - Emerald Ash Borer has done damage over many years
 - This product will help towns go after grants for tree planting
- Has the city done something similar?
 - Yes, county provided the consultant with the city's goals to have something comparable
- Are there more Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB's) than before?
 - Quantitatively there are more because people are calling them in
 - The heat, sediment and nutrients fertilizes and feeds them
- Is there is another pot of state money for the Finger Lakes region?
 - \$44M

- Cayuga County Soil & Water will be dealing with the money and hope it gets spent in this region
 - Helpful that county partners with Cayuga County Soil & Water
- If blooms pop up, the water cannot be boiled to make it safe; it is toxic

A motion was made by Dr. Kelly, seconded by Mr. Romeo to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tammy Barber

TAMMY BARBER, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE

DATE: OCTOBER 22, 2024

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
<i>Elizabeth Bough Martin</i>	<i>Environment</i>
<i>Kyle Cody</i>	<i>Environment</i>
<i>Joe Krateschi</i>	<i>Legal Counsel</i>
<i>Nancy Lowery</i>	<i>CE</i>
<i>Mary Beth Primo</i>	<i>CE</i>
<i>Jim Beebe</i>	<i>Leg.</i>
<i>John DeSantis</i>	<i>Leg.</i>