



# Onondaga County Legislature

**JAMIE McNAMARA**  
Clerk

**JAMES J. ROWLEY**  
Chairman

**TAMMY BARBER**  
Deputy Clerk

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## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE MINUTES – JULY 18, 2023 JULIE ABBOTT, CHAIR

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Cody, Mr. Garland  
**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Ms. Kuhn, Mr. McCarron  
**ALSO PRESENT:** Mr. Kinne, see attached list

Chair Abbott called the meeting to order at 1:48 p.m. *The minutes of the previous meeting had been distributed, and there were no objections to waiving the reading. There were no corrections to the minutes, and the minutes were approved.*

### **1. ONONDAGA COUNTY RESOURCE RECOVERY AGENCY:**

- a. Confirming Appointment and Reappointment to the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency (Popps, Bianchetti)**

*A motion was made by Ms. Cody, seconded by Mr. Garland, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

### **2. OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT:** Briana Kilkenny, Policy Analyst; Diane Corsaro, Administrative Officer in Financial Operations

- a. Authorizing the Office of the Environment to Apply for New York State Climate Smart Communities Grant Funding and Authorizing the County Executive to Enter into Contracts to Implement this Resolution**

- Applying for Climate Smart grant to update Climate Action Plan and Onondaga County Greenhouse Gas Inventory
- Seeking \$200k with a 50% match

#### **Question from the committee:**

- If funds are received, how long would it take to update the Plan?
  - Approximately one year

*A motion was made by Mr. Garland, seconded by Ms. Cody, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

### **3. OTISCO LAKE PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION:** Jon Bristol, Board Member; Tim Creamer, President **a. INFORMATIONAL**

Comments from Chair Abbott:

- Some refer to Otisco Lake as the “forgotten lake”
- Invasive species are bad; weeds are out of control
- Otisco Lake does not qualify for grant access because it is a filtered drinking water source
- Skaneateles Lake can receive grant access because it is an unfiltered drinking water source

# Addressing the Weed Problem

Save Otisco

## Topics

- Community impact
- The problem/challenges
- Research & Knowledge
- Committee
- What can be done/solutions
- Partnerships
- Getting involved
- Awareness

## We love Otisco Lake



- Otisco Lake is one of the Finger Lakes; beginning to generate more attention, seeing new homes and camps built



**Dumpster Day!!**

**My Great  
great  
Grandmother  
bought our  
camp here**

We love Otisco Lake

*I remember when we  
could run and jump  
off our dock ...*

*I am 1<sup>st</sup> generation*

*Our Kids are 5<sup>th</sup> generation on  
the lake*

*My parents bought this place  
and now it ours to take care of.*

*Our Grandparents are  
buried in the Otisco  
Cemetery*

*I am 2<sup>th</sup>  
generation*

*I am 3<sup>rd</sup> generation on  
Otisco*

- Residents are multi-generational

Our roots here are deeper than the weeds...



## We have a problem

- An ongoing issue- Getting worse
- Previous efforts have been made
- OLPA and Diving into options
- Lessons learned
- Leadership



Save Otisco

- Otisco Lake Preservation Association (OLPA) was created to preserve the health and future of the lake
  - Have not been able to keep up with emerging weed invasive species
- Focusing on leadership and how to get more organized to deal with the problem

### Comment of Chair Abbott:

- Focusing on the background of above photo
  - People need to pull their boats to dock because they cannot get them in otherwise
  - Water is stagnant in those areas



## We have a Problem...

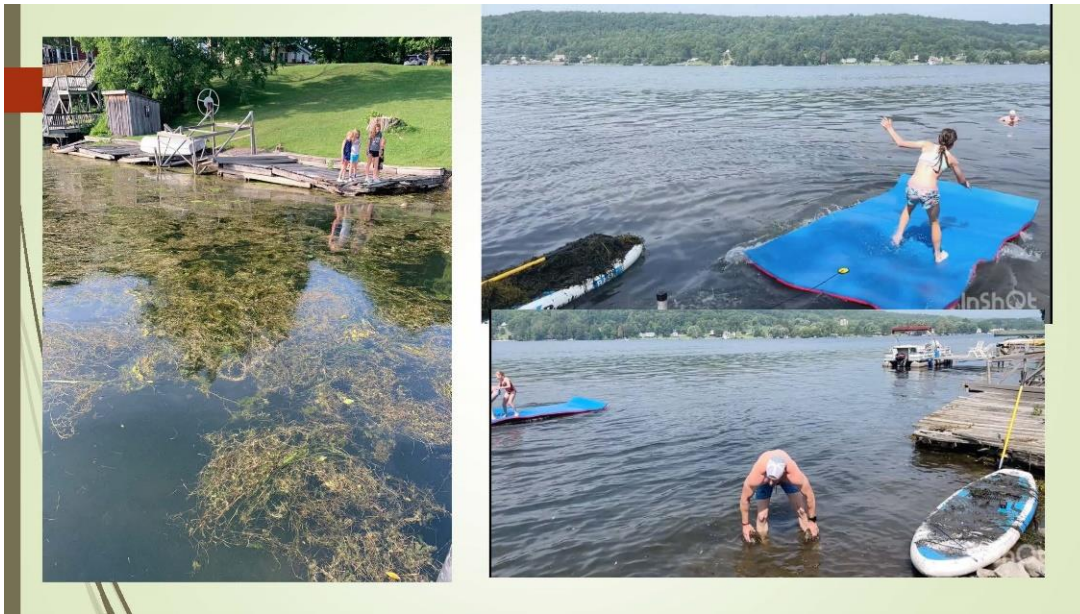


- Photos show a typical day of what a properties looks like
- There are 4 or 5 different species of seaweed; ~ one foot thick; can go 40-50 feet past dock
- Pitch fork needed to remove; each load picked up can weigh 30-50 pounds
- Not safe for swimming or healthy for the lake
- Problem exists throughout the lake; most evident on north end

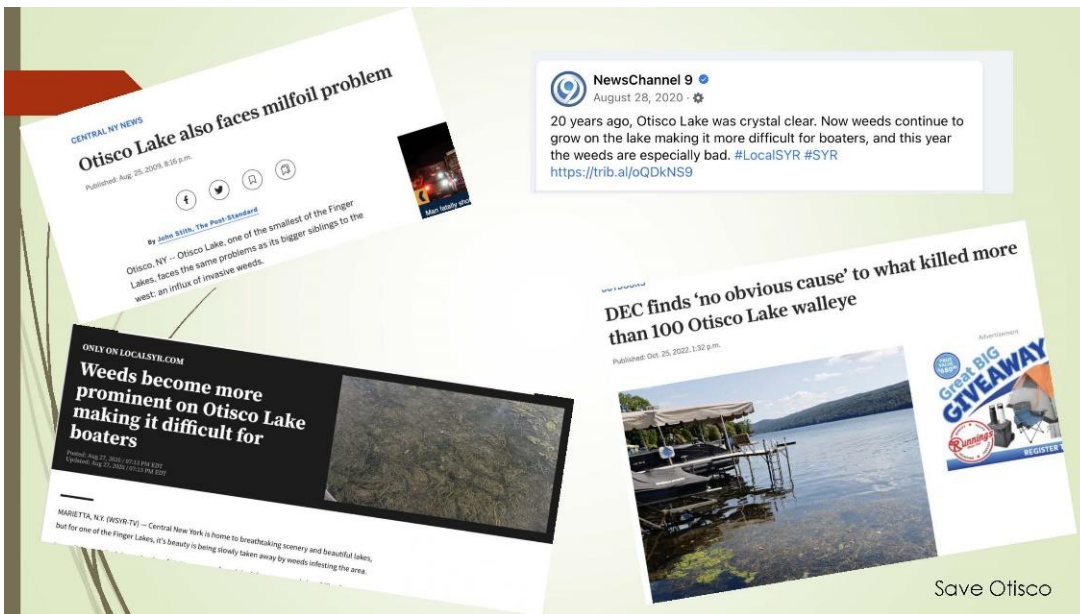
## We have a problem....



- Homeowner spends day pulling weeds so children can swim
- Removes 12-50 paddleboard loads per day; offloads on to property
  - Need to dry out after offload and then be picked up and hauled away



- Pulling muck and weeds



- Articles on history of lake show the problem has not happened over night
  - Top left dated 2009

**Comment from Chair Abbott:**

- At one point, hopeful to have a fishing platform at one of the County Parks near the lake
  - Turned out to be an anoxic zone; fish could not live there
- Can physically see it getting worse

## Overgrowth

### WE NEED a Solution

OTISCO LAKE is a true gem that attracts visitors and locals alike with its picturesque beauty and recreational opportunities. However, the lake is currently facing a pressing issue: **weed overgrowth**.

**IMPACT OF WEEDS**

>> **Economy:** Excessive weeds can deter tourists and visitors, leading to a decline in economic growth.

>> **Property Values:** Weed overgrowth reduces property values which impacts the entire community.

>> **Environment:** Weeds disrupt the delicate

**weeds reduce property value by 25%**

**21 billion gallons of water impacted by weeds**

The collaborative efforts of the OOLA, the DEC, NYS Government, Local Government, and Otisco Lake Preservation Association are essential for combating weed overgrowth in Otisco Lake.

With **funding and support**, we could combat weeds with:

**Mechanical Harvesting:** Utilize specialized equipment for mechanical harvesting to physically remove weeds from the lake.

**Herbicide Treatments:** Deploy targeted herbicide treatments following stringent regulations and best practices. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation



- It is not uncommon to see weeds and growth in a lake; the problem is overgrowth
  - Otisco is beyond anything that is healthy or manageable
  - Bottom left photo has 1 dead fish; bottom right has 3 dead fish
- Weeds begin to decay when they start floating, resulting in pungent odor
  - Odor is worse when fish get caught in the weeds and start to decay as well
  - Decay creates muck at the bottom
    - Currently 6-12 inches of muck on the north end of lake

#### **Comment of Chair Abbott:**

- NYS installed a public boat launch
  - Boats come from other lakes and bring different weeds with them
  - Otisco is a sport fishing lake that can generate tourism and sales tax dollars

#### **Additional comments from OLPA:**

- Primary issue is stagnation which creates overgrowth and illness
- Still waters create harmful algal blooms; wild life becomes compromised
- Mission Statement of OLPA: “Preservation of Otisco Lake Now and for Future Generations”
- Need to protect and preserve the quality of the water
- 18 million gallons of water come out of the lake each day to provide water to 340,000 people
- Otisco Lake and Lake Ontario are the primary water sources in Onondaga County
  - Downtown Syracuse is provided by Skaneateles; remainder of county is provided by Otisco

## No easy solution

### **Invasive Species Advisory**

Otisco Lake contains the following harmful invasive species:



**Water Chestnut-**  
Forms dense floating mats,  
seeds have four sharp spines.



**Eurasian watermilfoil-**  
12-21 pairs of leaflets, forms  
dense mats.



**Curly-Leaf Pondweed-**  
Submersed aquatic, usually first  
plant up, dies back mid-summer.



**Starry Stonewort-**  
Algae, not a true plant, forms  
dense mats on bottom.

Save Otisco

- Water chestnut, Eurasian Watermilfoil, Curly-Leaf Pondweed are the most prevalent
- Per DEC website, Otisco Lake has been classified as stressed based on nutrients in lake
- Toxins are constantly feeding weeds

## Addressing the weed issue

### **SAVE OTISCO**



- A team has been put together to save the lake
- Dryer months cause the weeds to grow higher as water gets lower
- Another month from now will be 30% worse than pictured



## Addressing the weed issue

- OLPA's sub committee formed 2023
- Purpose – to Save Otisco lake with manageable solutions
- Eliminate misunderstanding, confusion, and bad information
- Education and Communication critical. Know the facts
- Were coming to you....



Save Otisco

- OLPA formed in 2010; Tim Creamer involved as President
- Trying to work with community through education, communication, and research

## Short term and long term considerations....

Mia Lang Baltimore MD



Save Otisco

## Taking Action...

- Matting Barge
  - Suctioning Barge
  - Potential Purchase of 24ft barge (OLPA)
  - Harvester- 2-3 days early in the season.
- 
- Ecco (Roller)Harvester "Otisco Lake Weed Removal LLC" 2022- 6 homeowners

+ Very effective and reduces decaying muck from weeds in the lake  
 - Can be expensive and needs constant attention – exhausting efforts

- Working on 24 foot barge with matting and suctioning option
- Harvester cuts weeds; community does not like harvester
- Harvester covers 30 lakes in NYS

#### Question from the committee:

- What is the concern with the harvester?
  - Reseeding; cutting can result in repopulation
  - Boats are compounding the issue; props cutting weeds; seeds are growing more weeds

### 24 ft Barge



Save Otisco

- Barge requires a lot of maintenance and needs Dive Master

### Inexpensive Options

- Underwater Fans
- Personal Raking
- Community Lake weed pulls- Events

+ does offer some relief problem will persist

Save Otisco

- 5 horse power underwater fan will oscillate and potentially push items away; does not work well
- Personal raking brings weeds up to shore; many end up back in the lake
- Looking to get barges donated where 50-100 people can help do pulls

## Ongoing research and education

- Dye's
- Grassfed carp
- HydroRaking
- Dredging
- NYS approved Drinking Water Safe Herbicides
- Divers- barges/pulling
- Floating weed removal

Save Otisco

- These are main initiatives used by communities

### Matting

The bottom half is where a LakeMat Pro sat.

Get rids of weeds    Creates a firm bottom    Build a beach

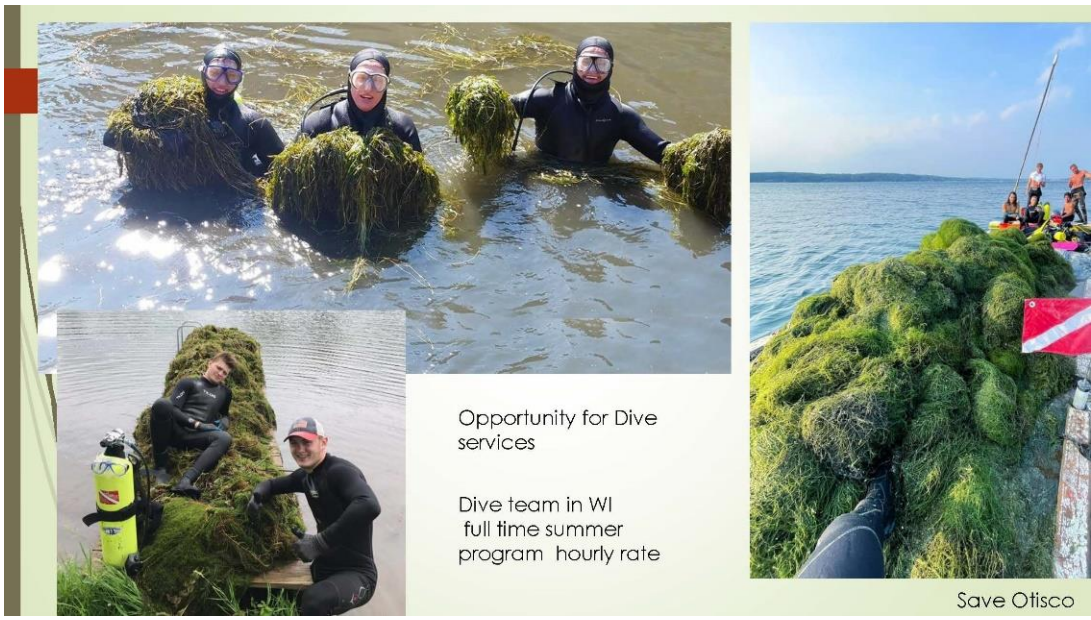
- Left side shows what matting can do
  - Otisco experimented with 1 acre mat placed on the northern end of lake
  - The challenge is that there is so much muck that mat floated to the top
  - The mat has been cut up into 160 pieces and provided to the community
  - A mat may work better in the southern end of lake where it is rockier

**Question from Committee:**

- Could slits be put in mat so oxygen could escape?
  - Suggestion is to walk on mat to dissipate gas



- Photos show Maryland lake with weeds similar to Otisco



- Wisconsin divers hand pull 3 properties per day, making their lakes usable again
- Saranac Lake developed a pulling program in 3 years
  - Property owners can call lake management to pull weeds
- Otisco is worse than other areas



- The lake pictured above will eventually get worse if not treated
- Herbicides are not favorable to many agencies due to concerns with liabilities
  - NYS has deemed several herbicides as drinking water safe
  - Skaneateles and Cayuga lake have a herbicide
  - Both drinking water sources in NYC have herbicide
- There are solutions, some are very effective depending on where they are applied

**Comment from Chair Abbott:**

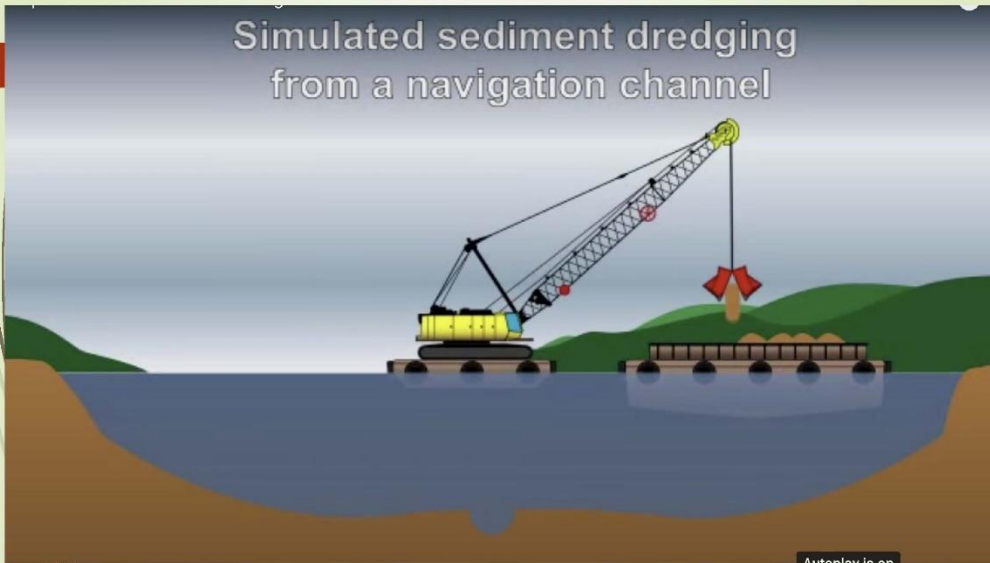
- Have to go through DEC to complete a pesticide application
- Skaneateles has earthTek (copper) on hand in case of emergency
  - Kills on contact
  - Need to have in order to keep waiver to not filter water

**Additional comments from OLPA:**

- It is a matter of preserving the health of the lake
- Otisco will need to take several initiatives



- Example of what a hydro rake looks like; barge is scooping out muck



Community events, Grass-fed carp, and Aquatic fans



Save Otisco

## Pond Blue Dye for Lakes and Fisheries

### Control algae and aquatic weeds in lakes and fisheries

Non-toxic, eco-friendly Pond Blue dye for lakes will control algae and aquatic weeds that often cause serious problems, interfering with fishing, boating, swimming, and irrigation. The extremely dense growths of filamentous algae and submerged weeds that also cause serious problems to fish, as a result of night time oxygen depletion, will also be controlled.



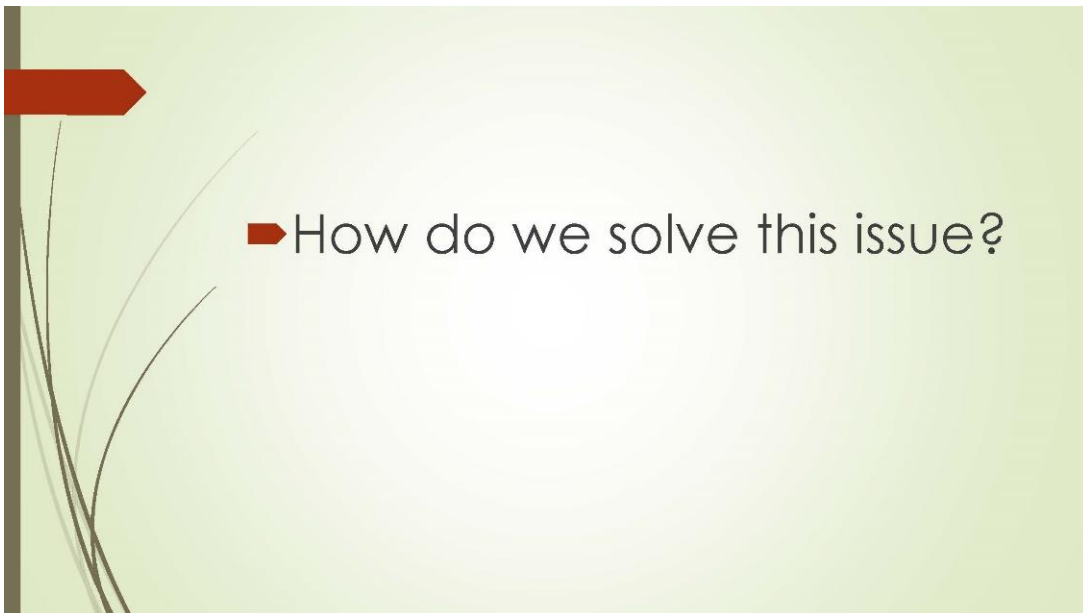
Using blue dye for lakes is economical, using less effort

Pond Blue dye for lakes replaces the need for manual algae prevention which is very labour intensive and not always practical.



Save Otisco

- Dye not effective in a lake the size of Otisco



- Striving for partnership to help solve the issue



- Doing research and looking at what needs to happen on the lake; exhausting every effort possible



## Community meetings

- Amber beach
- Olanco
- Cemetery
- Abend Point
- Burma
- Fitzgerald
- Etc-



Lets row in the same direction....



- Ongoing community meetings for the purpose of making sure all are paddling in the same direction
- Many viewpoints; starting goal is education and awareness

## Community meeting Amber Beach Sign your area up for a session



- ~ 900 homes on the lake



- 60 community members signed up to support initiative
- Otisco Lake is not like Skaneateles Lake in relation to monetary value and financial support

## Save Otisco

- Website and Facebook (OLPA) SAVE OTISCO pages -TBD
- Emails, updates, and surveys (membership). What's important to you...
- Save Otisco News Letter/ flyer
- Request for services or consultation
- Developing sub committees ( fundraising, marketing, research, partnerships etc)

- 2 lakes “fully” in Onondaga County: Otisco and Onondaga
  - Otisco Lake is main drinking source for Onondaga County
- Toxins in water from phosphates, nitrates, ammonia are growing
  - Milfoil creates phosphates as it breaks down, which cycles the problem
  - Creates base for muck and growth
- Zebra mussels make water clearer; perfect formula for more growth
- Having difficult time renting Airbnb's on lake due to problem
- Based on research done, Otisco is the only Finger Lake that does not have a formal weed management plan supported by the county
- Critical to put issue at top of list and figure out ways to deal with this issue
  - Will lose water quality
  - Will see more oddities with die off and oxidation levels
  - At risk of losing the lake and drinking water if solution not found in the near future


## Next steps

- Community Meetings
- Surveys
- Proposed solutions
- Defined process'
- Building the team

## Get involved and be part of the solution

- Call, text, or email

[jonbristol9@mac.com](mailto:jonbristol9@mac.com)  
315-380-0737



The graphic features the text 'We need YOU!' in white on a blue background, with 'YOU!' in white on a red background. A cartoon hand is pointing towards the text.

**Question/Comments from the committee:**

- Is there an estimate on how long it will take before it affects the drinking water?
  - Will be worse within 10 years; will be compromised in 20 years
  - According to OCWA studies, water quality is adequate
  - North end of lake is a major issue
  
- In government, buy-in and organization is needed to create a partnership
- Lake Associations with Skaneateles, Owasco, Otisco are very different but organized; volunteer based, need resources
- Appreciate efforts of OLPA because it allows the county to show partnership
- Can tap into SUNY ESF college students who are willing to do research projects
- DEC previously shut down weed pulling project because pullers were not trained
  - Have water chestnut pulls every year; currently down to a scant areas
  - Key is to continue education and be more active
  - Stagnation is concerning over the next 10 years
  - Intake for OCWA is in the north end of lake where issues are
  
- What kind of funding is OLPA looking for?
  - Receive funding from Department of Health and support from Soil and Water
  - Looking to broaden county involvement for dredging, stream run off, and involvement controlling weeds
  - Need to get a better idea of potential costs (ie: dredging, divers coming in, etc.)
    - If not dealt with, will cost millions
    - Lake filtration systems \$50M - \$100M initiatives
  
- Has there been any thought to creating a market for fertilizer from the weeds that are pulled?
  - Local farmers use water chestnuts and weeds for fertilizer
  - There is a cost of getting from A to B
  - Weeds are 90-95% water and turn to dust over time

***A motion was made by Ms. Cody, seconded by Mr. Garland, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



TAMMY BARBER, Deputy Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE  
DATE: JULY 18, 2023

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Diane Corsaro	FinOps
Jan Bristol	OLPA (Otisco Lake)
Tim Creaner	OLPA/Otisco Lake Preservation Assn.
Briana Kilkenny	office of Environment.
Ben Yaus	law
Darcie Lesniak	log