



December 2023

Christmas Tree Recycling – Cayuga County Trade-A-Tree Program

By Valerie Horning, Cayuga County SWCD

Cayuga Recycles, a program of the Cayuga County Planning Department, in conjunction with the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cayuga County, is sponsoring the annual “Trade-A-Tree” program in Cayuga County. Bring in your “used” (real) Christmas tree after the holidays, and we will give you a certificate for a tree seedling to be picked up in the spring! Old trees will be chipped into mulch to be used on county projects, rather than taking up space in landfills. A Fraser Fir seedling will be given out to anyone who redeems their certificate on May 10, 2024 at the Annual Conservation District Spring Tree & Shrub Sale.

Trees must be free of decorations, tinsel, wraps or any other foreign objects. Trees will be accepted at the Natural Resource Center, 7413 County House Road, Auburn, NY during the following hours:

December 26-29, 2023 from 8 AM – 3:30 PM.

January 2-5, 2024 from 8 AM – 3:30 PM.

January 8-12, 2024 from 8 AM – 3:30 PM

January 16-19, 2024 from 8 AM – 3:30 PM

For more information, please visit our website at www.cayugaswcd.org or call the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District at (315)252-4171, ext. 4, or stop by our office located on County House Road in Sennett. We are available Monday - Friday from 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM.



Cayuga County Solid Waste Management Report

By Evan Tuthill, Planner, Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development

This past October, the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development and partners, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cayuga County and Cayuga County Soil and Water, organized two waste collection events for Cayuga County residents. The first event was held on October 7th, 2023 and targeted household electronics. Despite the wet weather, about 500 people from across the county participated in the event. We were able to collect and recycle over 49,000 pounds of electronic equipment. The second event was held on October 21st, 2023 and targeted household hazardous wastes. About 300 county residents drove through the event to drop off their hazardous materials. During this event, we collected over 36,000 pounds of hazardous waste including over 15,000 pounds of old paints. By collecting and properly recycling or disposing of these materials at the two events, we have ensured that about 85,000 pounds of both hazardous and electronic waste will not end up in the landfill or on the side of the road. If disposed of improperly, these materials could create negative impacts on local natural resources such as our water. We are extremely appreciative of the continued support and interest from Cayuga County residents in helping us properly manage waste. Looking ahead to 2024, we will continue these programs with an electronic waste collection in the spring and fall and a household hazardous waste collection in the fall (dates TBD).

The Skaneateles Lake Association Has It Covered

Invasive Plant Control Program Continues to Protect Lake



Aerial view of the Milfoil Control boat and divers placing milfoil mats in the lake.

Since 2007, the Skaneateles Lake Association (SLA) has been at the forefront in battling the spread of Eurasian Watermilfoil (Milfoil) in Skaneateles Lake. Milfoil is a non-native invasive species that forms thick mats in shallow areas of a lake, quickly growing and spreading, killing off native aquatic plants that fish and other underwater species rely on for food and shelter.

“We are noticing more research showing how milfoil threatens the diversity and abundance of native plants as well as the ecological balance of lakes,” said SLA Executive Director Frank Moses. “We’re also finding that it can adversely affect recreational opportunities and property values, adding to the need for a successful program.”

The Skaneateles Lake Association established the Milfoil Control program that has reduced the species’ coverage on Skaneateles Lake to a level now requiring “maintenance” control. The program consists of a lake survey each fall to locate and document large growth patches of milfoil, and then the following spring, Aquatic Invasives, Inc., is hired to “cover” those patches with breathable mats constructed from geotextile material.

SLA’s Dr. Robert Werner Research and Education Boat (“The Bob”) surveys the lake waters using sonar and visual verification to locate milfoil growth. Large growth patches are then mapped and analyzed. “The matting sites for the following year are prioritized by area size with highest ranking going to the largest patches with density of 70% or more,” said Dr. Bill Dean, SLA Board Member and Research Boat Designer. “Other factors such as lake depth, slope and stability of lake bottom and boat launch activity help determine matting locations as well.”



SLA Lake Ecology Co-Chair Dr. Bill Dean, Board President Dr. Paul Torrisi, and SLA Board VP Dr. Buzz Roberts surveying Skaneateles Lake for Milfoil and other invasive water plants.

Between May 15 and October 18, 2023, over 322 mats (sized ~12’ by 60’) were placed in Skaneateles Lake making up close to 6 acres of coverage.

The 2023 Milfoil Control Program Report can be read online at <https://skaneateleslake.org/covered>.

SLA’s overall commitment in preventing and addressing invasive species through Milfoil Control, the Boat Launch Steward Program, and Hemlock Tree Protection represents more than a \$300K annual investment for Skaneateles Lake and its watershed. This work could not be possible without donations from SLA members, the SLA Legacy Fund, public funding, and other donations.

Protecting Skaneateles Lake depends on watershed-wide collaboration and a personal commitment from everyone who loves the lake. Please visit www.skaneateleslake.org for more information on all of their lake protection programs.

Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (CWIO) Project Requests

By Liz Thomas, Chair CWIO

If you are a municipality or organization that does work in the Cayuga Lake Watershed, CWIO is looking for water quality projects ideas that need either grant funding or assistance to implement.

Do you...

- Have ideas for water quality projects that would benefit the Cayuga Lake watershed?
- Have flooding or stormwater problems in your municipality?
- Need help on a water quality protection project?
- Need assistance to find funding?

If your municipality or organization has water quality project ideas that either need grant funding or assistance to implement, please submit the idea using the project submission form. Visit <https://cwio.org/projects/>.

CWIO provides assistance to projects that have been submitted and ranked as important to the Cayuga Lake watershed. CWIO can help connect municipalities to the resources they need to implement water protective measures.

Project ideas can vary widely. Some examples:

- Sediment and erosion reduction, flood and stormwater issues, hazard mitigation, stream bank stabilization, retention ponds, wetlands restoration, ditch management improvements, etc.
- Engineering and design— many projects require design or engineering work prior to applying for the funding to do the actual in-ground work.
- Planning – develop plans such as Local Waterfront Revitalization Plans (LWRP), Drinking Water Source Protection Plans (DWSP2), Comprehensive Plans, Resource Inventories, etc.
- Training and Education – demonstrations, workshops, or educational materials relating to improved water quality protections targeting groups such as Planners and Planning Boards, Highway Departments, Stormwater Managers, Elected Officials, etc.
- Data – to identify water quality problem areas such as mapping, water quality indicators, etc.
- Or projects that fall outside the box – collaborations, developing Best Management Practices, or other tools that would be useful to municipalities and protective of water quality.

New CWIO Watershed Manager

By Isaac Walker, CWIO Watershed Manager

Hello everyone! My name is Isaac Walker, and I am the new CWIO Watershed Manager. I have a degree in Environmental Science with a minor in Watershed Management from Mansfield University. I come from Susquehanna County, PA, specifically Dimock, where I grew up on a small livestock farm. As I like to say, I enjoy the “typical environmental science things”, hunting, fishing, hiking, and more recently I’ve discovered a passion for kayaking. Maybe more interestingly I also play the banjo and I like to work on

old tractors, especially Farmalls (hopefully there are no John Deere fans here!). I'm excited to be starting this new role and to meet you all! If you would like to get in touch with me, feel free to email at iwalker@hws.edu.

Preparing for a Watershed-Friendly Winter

By Abigail Hai, Watershed Inspector

(Published in the Auburn Citizen, November 17, 2023)

With the cold weather approaching, many watershed residents are moving towards stabilizing ongoing and dormant construction projects to conserve topsoil and protect the water quality of Owasco Lake over the winter months. Those involved in activities that cause land disturbance between November 15th and April 1st are encouraged to install temporary, site-specific, enhanced controls to protect ditches and off-site water resources from soil migration. Regardless of the extent of ongoing soil or ground disturbing activities during the winter season, all bare and exposed soils must be stabilized to protect watershed-borne runoff from impacting the water quality of adjacent waterways and Owasco Lake. Following the winter season, snowmelt and spring rain events increase watershed drainage and water flows that enhance erosion and runoff risks. Watershed-friendly approaches can include, but are not limited to, mulching, or the installation of matting, stone, or rolled erosion control products. In addition to these proactive practices, seeding of bare soil with mulch can be an effective means for site stabilization and can reduce water quality impacts from snowmelt in the spring. Furthermore, preparing a snow management plan for storage and control can aid in soil protection and the reduction of water quality impacts.

Owasco Lake Watershed Inspectors frequently inspect residential and commercial projects and properties throughout the winter for erosion and sediment control practices and proper placement. As the local regulatory authority responsible for monitoring threats to water quality, the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division (OLWIPD) is well-equipped to address all areas of ground disturbances and runoff that could pose a threat to water quality throughout the drainage basin of Owasco Lake. The OLWIPD has recently encountered sites under development that utilize sediment and erosion controls to safeguard the Owasco Lake watershed from pollutant discharge. In many cases, construction projects are conscientiously put on hiatus until spring, allowing for more time and diligence concerning the preparation of erosion and sediment controls. Watershed residents can reduce the potential for watershed violations and elevate on-site protections by providing reviewed and approved site-specific erosion and sediment control plans.

In addition to ongoing winter construction stabilization efforts, the OLWIPD has observed that watershed producers are diligently managing bare soil, post-harvest, through cover cropping. The use of cover crops promotes nutrient retention, increased soil health, weed reduction, and erosion control. Cover crops reduce soil loss by improving soil structure through crop root structure, increasing infiltration, and also providing velocity control for rain-driven sheet flow over the soil surface. Progressive management strategies protect the Owasco Lake watershed from possible erosion, benefit soil health by providing a strong foundation for soils awaiting future production and improve habitat for local wildlife and biodiversity throughout the landscape.

Preparing for a watershed-friendly winter can be challenging. However, the OLWIPD recognizes the efforts that local landowners and producers have made to protect the Owasco Lake watershed from erosion, runoff, and related sediment transport. These individuals serve as an example to all who seek to maintain watershed health during construction and production activities. It is incumbent upon the watershed community to conserve water quality and soil health. Conservation practices such as erosion and sediment control planning and cover cropping are meaningful steps towards protecting Owasco Lake for recreation, drinking water, and fishing. Homeowners that are in need of recommendations or detailed assistance are encouraged to reach out to the OLWIPD or their county Soil and Water Conservation District.



Photo Caption: Owasco Lake in the winter. Ally Berry, OWLIPD

CNY Waterways Association Community Meeting Overview By Carl P. Wiezalis, Vice President, CNY Waterways Association

The CNY Waterways Association sponsored a community meeting held at The Reef Restaurant at Jack's Reef, Memphis, New York, on September 9, 2023. The meeting was hosted by Jay Meyer, Proprietor of the restaurant. The purpose of the meeting was to gather regional citizens and Waterways members to engage with elected and appointed officers of County and State offices with interests and responsibilities for environmental health and water quality.

CNY Waterways Association is a decades-old not -for-profit association dedicated to the protection and improvement of all water-related issues in the Oswego River Basin. This Basin includes all of the streams, lakes and rivers collectively draining a land mass equal to the State of Connecticut. This catchment area extends from Canandaigua to the west, Rome to the east, the southern footprint of the Finger Lakes, and the northern deposition of ALL these waters into Lake Ontario. The Basin is commonly segmented organizationally and politically, but functionally this Basin is a contiguously connected system of water bodies which cannot be separated from one another. CNY Waterways Association seeks to organize strategic organizations across our Basin to better advance communications and actions of all public and private stakeholders.

Three critical water-related issues that have challenged the taxpayers and elected officials of our Central New York region are flooding and climate change, invasive aquatic species, and harmful (toxic) algal blooms (HABs). These three concerns were the motivations for this community meeting. All persons living within the catchment area of the Oswego River Basin must be concerned about the existential threats presented to people, property, businesses, and the environment, from these natural and unnatural threats which demand mitigation.

Flooding and Climate Change

As a result of outcries from our community relative to uncontrollable flooding in our area, NYS Governor Kathy Hochul activated a Flood Mitigation Taskforce charged with the investigation of chronic flooding in the Oswego River Basin. That Taskforce, under the leadership of the NYS Canal Corporation, worked for a year preparing a report on the flooding issues, and that report was delivered to the Governor's Office on July 2, 2023. This complete report, along with an executive summary, may be found on the website of the CNY Waterways Association.

Instrumental in the activation of this Taskforce were Senator John Mannion, of the 50th Senatorial District, Kenneth Bush, County Legislative District 13, and Senator Rachel May of the 48th Senatorial District. Without the support of these legislators, this Taskforce and the resulting report to the Governor would never have been completed.

Two representatives of the Canal Corporation provided a synopsis of the Taskforce Report to the attendees at the CNY Waterways community meeting: Joell Murney-Karsten, Manager of Government and Community Relations for the Canal Corporation, and Kenneth Kemp, a Canal Corporation Engineer.

Afterwards Senator Mannion discussed his commitment to improve the chronic problems with flooding in our area, and the other legislators present offered helpful suggestions for subsequent political action by our group.

The NYS Canal Corporation will remain the State Agency in charge of supporting and advancing the foundational research necessary to develop concrete plans for corrective action of our flooding issues.

Invasive Species Management

The second major issue on the minds of the fifty or so attendees at the meeting was invasive species management. While there have been many invasive plants infecting the waterways of Central New York, "water chestnuts" have literally grown to dominate all other species currently affecting water quality in our rivers and lakes. Millions of pounds of these invading water plants are choking out our navigation channels, prohibiting boating and swimming, and killing animals that get caught in the entangling mats. Vacation properties are rendered useless, and manual removal is impossible because of scope and scale of the invaders. The heaviest infestations have been in Cross Lake and the Seneca and Oswego Rivers.

The chief agencies engaged in the direct assault on these invading chestnuts have been the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. These Districts do the work, but the funding of their work comes from grants and government appropriations. Senator Mannion, Assemblyman Ken Bush, and Senator Rachel May.

The Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District, under the management of Mark Burger, has worked long and hard over the last several years to remove millions of pounds of these chestnuts

harvested by hand pulling and by cutting with a specialized harvesting machines. These harvesters are custom built power boats which cut and remove the chestnut plants and deliver the piles of plants to the shore, where they are loaded into trucks and deposited on farmers' fields in the area. The farmers plow these chestnuts into the soil, where they actually act like fertilizer. All of this work is expensive and labor-intensive. Mark Berger has partnered with private contractors and County Legislators to address these ever-increasing problems. Chestnuts have a 12-year life cycle, where their "seeds" may remain dormant for years before germinating in the mud of lakes and rivers.

Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District Director, Doug Kierst, has been very active with chestnut mitigation in Cayuga County. Cayuga County has contracted with Onondaga County to bring their harvesters to Onondaga County to help with the removal of these chestnuts. Mark Burger described the partnership with Cayuga County in the efforts to get ahead of the explosive growth of chestnuts. Joe Chairvolotti, Director of Soil and Water Conservation District for Oswego County offered a report to the assembly on their chestnut removal efforts.

Being downstream, chestnut plants escaping Cayuga and Onondaga Counties end up in the Oswego River before dumping into Lake Ontario! Joe described the various techniques used in his county in the war on water chestnuts. Most recently Oswego County had used herbicides to kill the chestnut plants before the seeds (nutlets) are formed. At first these pesticides were applied by boats, then air boats, with reasonable success. Most recently, Oswego County has been using specialized drones to apply the herbicide in a very controlled fashion. Mr. Chairvolotti is very encouraged by the success that they have enjoyed in recent years. He is available to other towns and counties which may wish to benefit from his experiences.

Brian Borchik, Mayor of Phoenix, on the river in Oswego County, described the great relationship that his town enjoys with the Soil and Water Conservation District. Mayor Borchik believes that the close working relationship between the town and Soil and Water District is significant to their success to date.

Harmful (Toxic) Algal Blooms (HABs)

The third water-related concern articulated by community members was HABs. Reoccurring development of blue-green algae "blooms" in our lakes and rivers in recent years have become a growing concern for property owners and consumers of drinking water originating in "drinking water lakes" in Central New York. Some of these algae can produce one or more toxins which can make citizens ill or kill pets, like dogs and other mammals. This threat has prompted water-providing agencies to evaluate alternative sources of drinking water should toxic substances contaminate our water supply. Much research is being conducted by Federal, State, and local agencies to determine possible mitigation methodologies for all toxic substances in our water supply.

The CNY Waterways Association invites your assistance as we continue our efforts to protect your health, happiness, property, and economy from anything and everything that might threaten the quality of our water in our State and Nation. Please consider joining our not-for-profit Association as a very small investment in a growing problem.

Remember that a major reason that Micron is attracted to Central New York is the volume of clean water for its manufacturing processes. Other than oxygen, there is nothing more important than H₂O!

Introduction to Three Land Conservation Tools: Conservation Easements, Purchase of Development Rights, and Transfer of Development Rights

By Ryan Staychock, Environmental/Natural Resources Educator for Cayuga, Schuyler, & Seneca CCE

Land conservation is important for many different reasons. Goals associated with land conservation can include watershed protection, the protection of agriculture lands, maintaining rural character, habitat protection, or increasing opportunities for public recreation. There are different strategies associated with the goal of conserving land.

Traditionally, local governments can apply regulatory measures to conserve land. For example, municipalities can manage development in their jurisdictions by adopting planning and zoning laws. Another traditional measure, different from flexing regulatory authority, is acquisition by outright purchase of lands. Local governments can purchase on the open market and own the land outright and assume the responsibilities associated with being a landowner. For example, municipalities have purchased land to establish parks and playgrounds, construct municipal buildings like town halls and highway department barns. Municipalities can purchase land outright and choose to implement policies that do not allow for the development of the land, hence conserving it into perpetuity.

Regulatory controls and outright purchasing of land can be challenging for local governments. In the background of all government actions (or inactions) are Article 78 Proceedings. These are lawsuits that challenge New York State and local governments. They can be filed against judges, tribunals, planning boards, zoning boards, and other entities whose existence has statutory authority. In my experience serving on a planning board, I witnessed the deflation of community enthusiasm to conserve land due to the fear associated with lawsuits- they can cause negative publicity and be costly regardless of which side of the final verdict you will fall. However, land conservation is within the rights of people, organizations, and government. For example, President Theodore Roosevelt protected about 230 million acres of land; The Nature Conservancy has protected 125 million acres of land; and the Town of Clarence, NY has protected over 1400 acres using a combination of tools including Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and acquisition by 'outright purchase.' According to the Land Trust Alliance, New York State land trust organizations have protected at least 1.9 million acres.

One tool in the tool box for conservation of landscapes is a conservation easement. According to the Center for Land Use Education housed at the University of Wisconsin Steven's Point, "a conservation easement is an incentive-based legal agreement voluntarily placed on a piece of property to restrict the development, management or use of the land in order to protect a resource or to allow the public use of private land as in the case of a trail or water access." One misconception is assuming the landowner cannot manage their land (such as farming the land or conducting forestry activities on the land) if the parcel of land is placed into conservation easement. It is not true that in all situations that people cannot actively manage land once it is placed in conservation easement. Conservation easements are agreements between two or more parties and being so, the agreements can include many different uses of the land and even involve some development of the land. However, if agreements go "too far" beyond the intention of a conservation easement there is potential that any deal can fail, so there is certainly a "willing buyer/willing seller" process that is sensitive to details, and important for the success of establishing a conservation easement. The rights associated with the land can be sold or donated by the landowner. The National Conservation Easement Database lists the following as benefits of conservation easements:

1. Conservation easements can be an effective tool to protect land, often at lower cost to land trusts and public agencies.
2. A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency where the landowner retains many private property rights.
3. If donated, conservation easements may provide valuable tax benefits to landowners.
4. Conservation easements keep land in private ownership and continue to provide economic benefits to the area.
5. Conservation easements do not automatically make properties open to the public.

The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) land conservation tool seems popular and better understood in the Finger Lakes region, maybe due to the active role the NYS Department of Agriculture has taken to implement this program in the region. As the name implies, the basis of the PDR is a financial payment (incentive) to a landowner to permanently protect land while retaining private ownership and management. A PDR is recorded as a conservation easement on the title for the property. There are slight differences between the PDR and conservation easement programs, and sometimes the similarities of the programs can cause confusion. Taxes are a big difference between the programs, notably paying tax on any sales of the development rights (PDR), or reaping tax benefits if donating the rights (conservation easement). If an estate is subject to taxation, a conservation easement may help to reduce the value of an estate. Public access in the form of hiking, mountain biking, or horseback riding is more aligned with a conservation easement compared to a PDR.

Some communities may want to conserve some landscapes (such as farms, open spaces, forests, important habitat) and simultaneously encourage development in strategic areas (such as downtowns, high density residential areas). For example, a community may want to protect important agricultural lands in the outlying rural areas and stimulate investment and development in their downtown center. Such a community could utilize a program called the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). The TDR program has a “market” approach to conservation. It converts the purchased development rights into a commodity that can be used to leverage flexibility or relief from existing standards. The program requires careful planning before the program can start. The concept is based on establishing “sending districts” (areas to be conserved) and “receiving districts” (areas where flexibility and relief from existing development rules would be permitted). Landowners in sending districts could be compensated for their development rights (similar to a PDR). This transaction is one of the early steps in the process, however, because the commodity (the value of the development rights, which can be viewed as “credits”) can then be used inside of designated receiving zones. Here is a hypothetical example: a developer can buy the development rights from Farmer Joe, who owns farmland in the sending zone, and in return the developer gets X amount of credits that can be applied to a project they are constructing in Downtown, which is part of the receiving zone. The X credits applied in this specific municipality affords the developer to encroach on setbacks X feet and build one extra floor higher. (Please note this is a hypothetical scenario to explain how the program can play out.) The devil is in the details, hence there is a lot of pre-planning for this program. Municipalities need to create a market for the sending and receiving zones that make sense economically. Leadership needs to quantify how many “units” of commodity are available to purchase from the sending zones, and then determine how many “units” of commodity are necessary for relief or flexibility to the underlying rules and regulations inside of the “receiving” zones.

There are a lot of details associated with TDR programs, but in my opinion, it is worth consideration because it is another tool for municipalities to conserve important lands in watersheds.

There are other tools in the land conservation toolbox including planning and design tools such as conservation subdivisions and planned unit developments. Another regulatory tool is a conservation overlay district which could add standards to existing underlying zoning.

In this article for the Cayuga County WQMA, I wanted to focus on conservation easements, purchase of development rights, and the transfer of development rights. There are many ways to conserve land in Cayuga County as one strategy to manage water quality. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information about land conservation. Happy New Year to you and yours.

Cayuga County WQMA

For more information about the Cayuga County Water Quality Management Agency, check out our website at www.cayugacountywater.org.

The Cayuga County WQMA is also on social media. For up-to-date information on water quality issues and events, please either friend us on Facebook at: <https://facebook.com/CayugaCoWQMA> or follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/CayugaCoWQMA>. The Cayuga County WQMA YouTube channel is <https://www.youtube.com/@CayugaCountyWQMA>.

The Cayuga County WQMA is looking for story ideas for its webpage and its newsletter. If you have something you would like to share, please email us at wqma@cayugacounty.us.



T: 315.253.1276 | 160 Genesee St., 5th Fl. | Auburn, New York | 13021
cayugacountywater.org