

NYSFOLA: Lake Associations Organized for Action and Education

Nancy Mueller and Holly Waterfield

The call of a loon, the sound of waves lapping on a shoreline, a canoe trip through the Adirondacks, or the tug of a bass or walleye on a freshly cast line – these are the reasons why people in New York are drawn to over 7,500 lakes around the state. New Yorkers are passionate about their lakes, so it's not surprising that the first lake association in the nation, the Lake George Association, was formed here in 1885. Since that time, hundreds of other lake associations have formed across the state. They range in size and scope from fully staffed incorporations with large annual budgets, which are actively engaged in lake management issues, to small clubs whose main mission may be to host an annual picnic or boat parade. What they have in common are people committed to their lakes, who are willing to volunteer their time and effort to ensure that the enjoyment of their lake is passed on to future generations.

Beginnings

Early on, most lake associations in New York focused their attention on local issues – lake level, zoning, development pressure, and taxes. There was some concern about water quality, especially in regions impacted by acid rain or urbanization, but things were generally “good” if you asked a lakefront property owner in most parts of the state. By the 1980s, concerns over water quality and Eurasian watermilfoil provided the impetus for a group of lake associations to push for a statewide coalition. Within a year, the New York State Federation of Lake Associations, Inc. (NYSFOLA) was established with a mission “to protect the water resources of New York State by assisting local organizations and individuals through public dialogue, education, information exchange and

collaborative efforts” and a primary goal of encouraging New York lawmakers to establish a volunteer lake monitoring program similar to those in Vermont, Maine, Michigan, and Illinois. Those efforts were successful, and in 1985 the New York State Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) was established as a cooperative program between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and NYSFOLA (Figure 1). The program was successful, and in 1988 the state Environmental Conservation Law was amended (ECL 17-0305) to mandate CSLAP and provide a full-time coordinator at NYSDEC.

It can easily be argued that NYSFOLA and CSLAP have matured side-by-side. Nearly 2,000 volunteers

have participated in the program since it began, and over 100,000 hours have been spent collecting 20,000+ samples from 235 lakes around the state. The information collected by dedicated volunteers has become the state's primary lake water quality dataset and has recently expanded to include harmful algal bloom monitoring. More importantly, CSLAP



Figure 1. New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation's CSLAP Coordinator Scott Kishbaugh trains a new CSLAP volunteer on Java Lake. Photo: Robert Thill.

volunteers typically become more invested in their lake's water quality. They want to know more about lake management issues and become involved in decision making that impacts water quality. They ask the questions: Why are there more weeds? What do we do to stop these algae blooms? What do the CSLAP data tell us? NYSFOLA is here to provide the answers and move them toward a solution.

Activities

The mission of NYSFOLA is to educate and assist lake associations with their local efforts. Through its newsletter, *Waterworks*, website: www.nysfola.org, an annual conference, and its network of CSLAP volunteers, NYSFOLA assists lake associations with everything from organizational issues, such as by-laws and insurance matters, to navigating the complex state regulatory framework, to the host of lake management issues encountered by communities across the state. NYSFOLA and NYS DEC have collaborated on two volumes of *Diet for a Small Lake: A New Yorker's Guide to Lake and Watershed Management*. This book has been the cornerstone for local lake management planning around the state, and thousands of copies have been sold (Figure 2).

As a result, lake associations in New York are increasingly engaged in lake and

watershed planning, on-site wastewater treatment, phosphorus reduction, aeration, and invasive species management. They hire consultants, prepare permit applications, report harmful algal blooms, and submit aquatic plant samples. All of this is being accomplished as the mechanisms for funding lake management in New York are changing. State and federal funding have diminished over the last decade, and lake associations have been forced to take on more of the financial burden of lake management. Many have formed separate tax districts or foundations to serve as the fund raising "arm" of their association.

A University Partnership

The State University of New York College at Oneonta's (SUNY Oneonta) M.S. in Lake Management provides a low-cost alternative for lake associations to start the process of comprehensive lake management. Responding to the need for well-rounded whole-lake managers, the program strives to train a new generation of lake managers with the ability to assess lake ecosystems and the communities that revolve around them, and present sound approaches to mitigate acute problems in the short-term as well as plan for long-term management of the ecosystem. Lake

associations with an interest in long-range planning benefit from an economical option that yields a comprehensive lake management plan for the future.

NYSFOLA has partnered with the SUNY Oneonta program to spread the word, connect the program with interested lake associations, and provide scholarship funds for graduate students. In a nutshell, a lake association commits to a two-year scholarship for a graduate student in the program; funding for two students per year is matched by the NYSFOLA Scholarship Program, with an additional match from the Scriven Foundation, a private foundation in the Oneonta-Cooperstown area. Students enrolled in the program each choose a lake and/or lake association on which to focus their efforts; the result of their two years of Master's Thesis research includes, among other components, a comprehensive management plan for that lake and watershed (Figure 3).

Three faculty members and two staff members, all CLMs, at the college's Biological Field Station provide continuous guidance and mentoring of students as they assess the current state of the lake and research historical conditions, survey the lakeside and watershed residents' concerns and goals

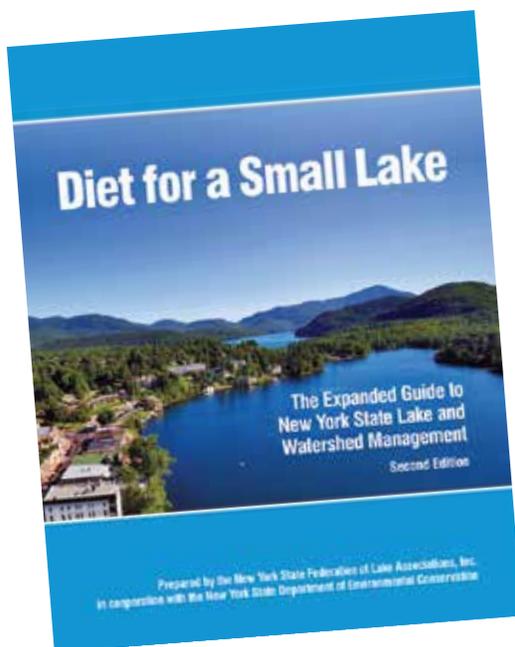


Figure 2. This NYSFOLA-produced book has aided many lakes throughout New York State.

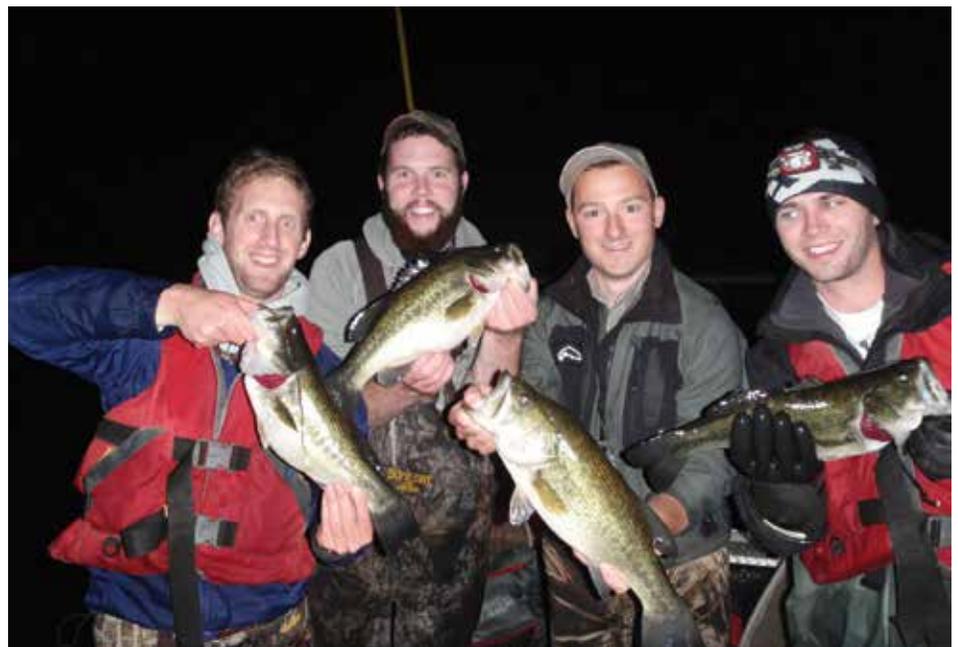


Figure 3. SUNY Oneonta and SUNY Cobleskill students assess the fish community of Goodyear Lake, NY, via electrofishing survey in October 2013. The survey is part of a whole-lake assessment that will be used to develop a comprehensive lake management plan for Goodyear Lake and its watershed through the work of a student in SUNY Oneonta's M.S. in Lake Management program. Photo: Bill Harman.

for the lake, provide information for public education on key issues, and develop a range of solutions that both mitigate acute problems in the short-term and address issues more broad in scale with long-range lake and watershed planning. Drafting and adopting a lake management plan is a critical step and can be a means by which to obtain funding for management activities, but it is just the first step in establishing a productive working group that can move forward to implement the plan's recommendations.

Other Partnerships

In addition to protecting their "own" lakes, New York lake associations are increasingly working together to solve local or regional issues hence the formation of the Madison County Federation of Lake Associations, which encompasses a group of small recreational lakes originally created to feed the Erie Canal system, or the Finger Lakes Watershed Protection Alliance, focusing on the unique needs of the Finger Lakes region. They are also looking to NYSFOLA to take the lead on statewide issues. Currently, NYSFOLA is working with other environmental groups across the state in an effort to pass invasive species transport legislation. It will take lake associations large and small, from every corner of the state, to get Albany's attention. The leadership role falls to NYSFOLA, but it is the active engagement of lake associations and their most passionate members that will get the legislation through the Assembly and Senate.

As the role of lake associations has changed over time, NYSFOLA's role has grown to meet the demands. There is a greater emphasis on a statewide voice for lakes and an increasing demand for more lakes to be included in CSLAP. NYSFOLA provides the tools to ensure that lake associations, their managers and members continue to provide for the health of New York's lakes. Would you like to learn more? Join us at the NALMS International Symposium in 2015 in Saratoga Springs, NY.

Nancy Mueller has served as the manager of the New York State Federation of Lake Associations since 2000 after serving for many years on the Board of Directors. She is the assistant program

coordinator for the NY Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program and serves on the NYS DEC Water Management Advisory Council's Harmful Algal Bloom Subcommittee. She is involved in a wide range of lake management issues and activities and is currently serving as chair of the NALMS 2015 International Symposium Host Committee.



Holly Waterfield, CLM, has been a research support specialist with the Biological Field Station

of the State University of New York College at Oneonta since 2007, where she conducts lake monitoring, fisheries assessments, and is a mentor for students in the MS in Lake Management Program.



She is active in the local county water quality coordinating committee, has been on the NALMS Board of Directors (Region 2 Director), and is currently serving on the NALMS 2015 International Symposium Host Committee. 🇺🇸

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