

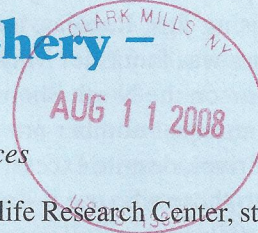
The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Summer 2008

www.oneidalakeassociation.org

Oneida Lake's Walleye and Perch Fi\$hery – A Vital Economic Engine

by Martin Lowney – New York State Director, USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services



More than \$122 million and 3,000 jobs lost. According to a new U.S. Department of Agriculture study, that's a conservative estimate of how much damage the double-crested cormorant has inflicted on the communities surrounding Oneida Lake. On the other side of the ledger, the same USDA research shows that for every dollar spent on cormorant harassment since 1998, as much as \$48.37 has been returned to the local economy—saving as many as 5,000 jobs.

Oneida Lake fishing is much more than recreation. For area businesses and their employees, it's a vital part of the economy. Now, thanks to USDA economist Dr. Stephanie Shwiff, we can precisely measure the impact of anglers' spending habits,

see how the proliferation of cormorants has hurt local businesses, and gauge the benefits of cormorant harassment.

Many Oneida Lake anglers saw the lake's famous walleye and yellow perch fisheries fade during the 1990s and early 2000s. At the same time, the number of fishing licenses purchased in the four surrounding counties (Oswego, Oneida, Onondaga, and Madison) fell severely. While many people noted a great fishery's decay, some forward thinkers asked, "How are our communities and jobs affected if fewer anglers fish Oneida Lake?"

Anglers are eager spenders who play a crucial role in the local economy. When there are fewer fish to pursue, the likely result is less spending. Research has shown that an expanding double-crested cormorant population devastated Oneida Lake's walleye and yellow perch populations. At the peak of past fall migrations, seven tons of Oneida Lake fish were becoming bird food during many autumn weeks. As declining fish populations contributed to bad fishing, anglers and their spending declined. This resulted in substantial losses of jobs and revenue in the four-county area bordering the lake.

Dr. Shwiff, an economist for USDA—Wildlife Services'

National Wildlife Research Center, studies the dollars-and-cents impact of wildlife. She recently analyzed and documented the effects of cormorants' predation and presented her findings at the Oneida Lake Association's annual meeting on April 30, 2008.

Dr. Shwiff began by measuring the drop in non-resident fishing license sales in Oneida, Oswego, Onondaga, and Madison Counties from 1990-1998, immediately following the decline of Oneida Lake's walleye population. She combined these findings with economic models for spending on lodging, food, fuel, bait and other necessities. As non-resident anglers chose to fish other lakes instead of Oneida, the region experienced sub-

stantial losses of revenue and jobs; Shwiff's work showed us exactly how much.

Dr. Shwiff expressed her findings as a range: if only fifteen percent of non-resident anglers skipped their trips to Oneida because of cormorants, this cost the four-county area \$122,372,000 and 3,284 jobs; if fifty percent of non-resident anglers stayed away from Oneida, the damage totaled \$538,918,000 and 12,862 jobs.

Economists prefer conservative economic models to allow for other factors that may affect their analyses. This is why Shwiff's economic model for Oneida Lake only includes activities of non-resident anglers. Further, as people come to Central New York to fish not only Oneida, but also Lake Ontario and other lakes, Dr. Shwiff made the realistic assumption that between fifteen and fifty percent of all out-of-state anglers who bought a fishing license here also contributed to the Oneida Lake economy.

Other reasons Dr. Shwiff considered only non-resident anglers are that their numbers are easy to count, and their spending creates a big "bang" for the local economy,

(continued on page 5)

Oneida Lake fishing is much more than recreation. For area businesses and their employees, it's a vital part of the economy.

President's Message

As I begin the second year of my term as president of the OLA, I can happily report positive events about Oneida Lake and the association.

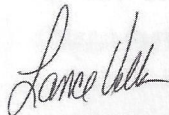
Since the publication of the spring *Bulletin*, we learned that our lake's healthy walleye population has produced great fishing. Anglers have caught many limits from shore and boats, using jigs, Rapalas, and lead line techniques. In addition, June's bass season opener was fantastic! May the good fishing continue.

From my vantage point on the North Shore, I can see lots of boats. Many have fishermen in them, but an equal number are filled with people just enjoying the lake. That this activity thrives, despite excessive gas prices, demonstrates how important Oneida Lake is to those who use it – and to Central New York's economy. Martin Lowney's lead article in this *Bulletin* underscores that point. Our lake is an amazing, invaluable resource.

The primary goal of the Oneida Lake Association is to protect and enhance the lake and its environs. Your board of directors has been diligent in this regard, and will continue their dedicated service. These directors are OLA members who understand the issues that are important to you and to the lake's environmental integrity. Always feel free to contact them with your concerns. Our website provides an easy method for communication – www.oneidalakeassociation.org!

By the way, a new feature on our web site gives the OLA's position statement on aquatic weeds. Other statements will follow. I urge you to read and comment about these positions.

Enjoy Oneida Lake as much as possible in this glorious season. Have a great and safe summer.



Lance Vella
President - OLA

The Oneida Lake Association Inc.

Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., so that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the Association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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Ripberger Honored by OLA

by Matt Snyder

On May 12, Robert "Bob" Ripberger announced his retirement as an OLA director. Your board hopes that you'll join us in a standing ovation for his longtime, meritorious service.

Bob has been a leader and mentor to generations of OLA directors from the earliest days of the Association, and he remains a deeply committed advocate for the anglers, hunters, and environment of Oneida Lake and the Central New York community.

Those of you who attended our April meeting enjoyed the unique pleasure of seeing Bob and his wife, June, recognized with a special conservationist award for their decades of tireless commitment to the lake. The OLA is proud to join other groups, including the New York State Conservation Council and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in honoring Bob. We were especially grateful to have this chance to thank June; her support and patience have

been crucial to both Bob and the many organizations he enriched.

Bob's expertise and dedication will be difficult to replace, but thanks to leadership like his, the OLA board is ready for future challenges. We have experienced a long tradition of success with Bob by our side. Now, we hope that he will take pride in what we accomplish in the years to come, guided by the noble example he established.

NECROLOGY

Charles J. Engel, Jr.

The Oneida Lake Association notes, with deep regret, the passing of longtime director Charles "Charlie" Engel, who left this world for a better place on April 27, 2008.

Born and raised in Syracuse, Charlie was graduated with honors from Lemoyne College and earned summa cum laude distinction from the Syracuse University College of Law in 1957. He practiced law in Syracuse for over half a century. He and his wife Joan raised nine children and were the proud grandparents of seventeen.

Charlie Engel was a pioneering Central New York outdoorsman whose arctic fishing expeditions into northern Quebec in the 1960s and Baffin Island in the

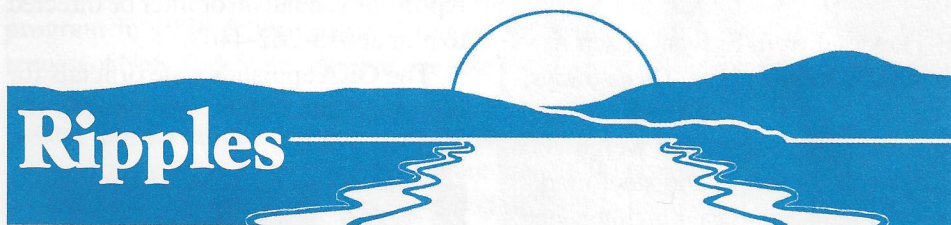
1970s paved the way for future generations of daring anglers. On Oneida Lake, Charlie relished smallmouth bass fishing and perfected the technique of dragging a weighted bucket along the bottom to stir bait and create a bass feeding frenzy. His hours on Oneida, especially those shared with family and friends, became treasured memories.

Charlie Engel was a tremendous director for the Oneida Lake Association, dedicated to every effort at promoting the lake's preservation and enhancement. In the mid 1990s, the association was involved in law enforcement issues regarding multiple uses of the lake, including hunting, fishing, boating and snowmobiling. Charlie's energy and insight always helped our board maintain a balance between those diverse oppor-

tunities and the peaceful, safe enjoyment of the lake. His efforts were invaluable in guiding the OLA in its dealings with elected officials and law enforcement agencies.

Charlie was a key author in last year's revision of the OLA's bylaws, working long hours at this important task. He served as counsel for every legal question that the association's board considered. His presence provided wisdom and equanimity at board meetings. His friendship and delightful, dignified manner were enjoyed and appreciated by all. Anyone fortunate enough to know Charlie was the better person for it.

Charlie Engel served Oneida Lake and the Oneida Lake Association with distinction. Our lake is a securer place because of his efforts.



Want to be an OLA director? Send a resume to Box 3536, Syracuse, NY, 13220. The association seeks a diversity of experience, as well as a love for the lake, in candidates.

Support Oneida Lake conservation – Join the OLA!

Boaters beware – dangerous weed growth ahead! As of early July, aquatic vegetation in Upper South Bay (the lake's East End) intensified to the point where masses of weeds hindered navigation for several hundred yards offshore. Be careful when boating near any shore this summer.

Practice safe boating – Obey the rules of the road!

We say this a lot because it's important – keep white perch! These members of the striped bass family are delicious, easy to catch, and fight with vigor. Moreover, white perch numbers have overtaken yellow perch and walleye populations. These fish need to be harvested.

Report poachers – Protect our game fish populations!

An oil barge was observed crossing Oneida Lake in early June. Is this the first of many? Boat transportation is the cheapest way to move petroleum. The OLA hopes that oil companies' economic moves are accompanied by appropriate safety measures.

Support Oneida Lake conservation – Join the OLA!

The North Shore of Oneida Lake Chapter of Ducks Unlimited is holding its annual dinner/auction on September 19 at 6 P.M. at the Greenview Country Club in West Monroe. Contact Greg Keener at 623-9661 for details.

Practice safe boating – Obey the rules of the road!

Cornell's researchers have released some intriguing statistics. The average amount of days the lake has been ice-covered per decade has dropped from 108 in the 1970s to 94 in the 80s, 93 in the 90s, and 81 in the 2000s. Nineteenth century diaries reveal that the lake's ice cap regularly endured for over 120 days. Is this evidence of global warming? We don't know for sure, but numbers like these, combined with other observations, makes one stop...and think.

Oneida Lake Photo History Quiz



This picture was taken around 1900 at one of our lake's famous bays. Study the background. Which bay fills the scene?

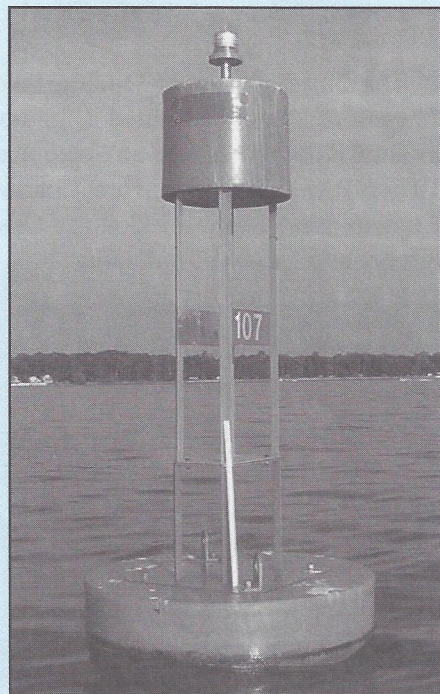
Canal Corporation Revamps Lake's Buoys

New York State Canal Corporation personnel installed new buoys this year to mark Oneida Lake's channel. These buoys replaced the cone-shaped floats whose small size brought criticism from many lake users (re: editorial, spring Bulletin).

Six taller buoys (re: photo of Buoy 107) extend from Sylvan Beach harbor to Buoy 117, two miles west of Messenger's Shoals (113). These buoys, constructed from foam, stretch ten feet above the water, and weigh 700 pounds, one-tenth of the steel markers they replaced. Easier maintenance made these buoys more attractive to the Canal Corporation. The markers are connected to 9,600-pound anchor weights by steel chains.

Shorter buoys temporarily punctuate the channel from 119 westward to Brewerton. These structures, which rise only five feet above water, will be replaced by taller buoys like the ones that guide boaters in Oneida's eastern basin now. The Canal Corporation has not released a timetable for finishing this task.

Buoy 107 at Sylvan Beach – an example of the new buoys that will mark Oneida Lake's channel.



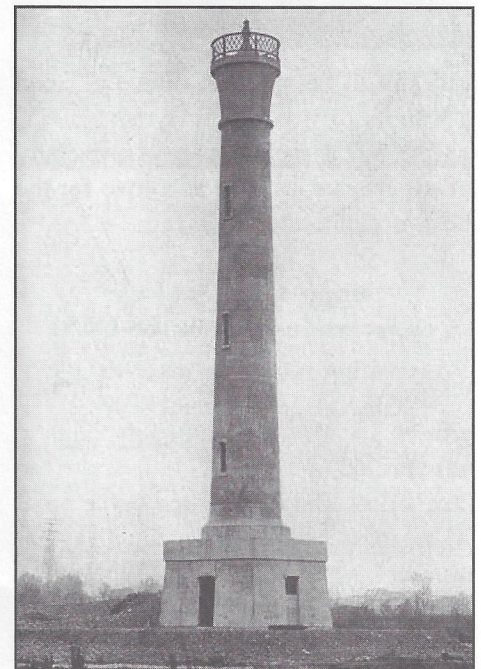
Frenchman's Island Open to the Public

Good news greeted Oneida Lake fans when Gordon Betts, manager of the Verona Beach State Park, announced last month that public access to Frenchman's Island has been restored.

Working through Betts and his staff, the NYS Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Department administers Frenchman's. The island's trails have been upgraded, but the rest of Frenchman's remains wild. This is fortunate because the island contains a rare sampling of the Oneida Lake region's wilderness environment. Great maple, oak, and beech trees thrive. Clinging vines web throughout the trees, creating a deciduous rain forest scene. It's a magnificent display of one of the lake region's bygone worlds. Wisdom might advise that the island remain this way.

Manager Betts requests that any reports of vandalism or litter be directed to him at 315-762-4463.

The OLA applauds state officials for returning this unique resource to the people.



The Frenchman's Island lighthouse resembles this beacon, located on the canal at Brewerton.

Answer to History Quiz – Lower South Bay

Oneida Lake's Walleye and Perch Fi\$hery

(continued from page 1)

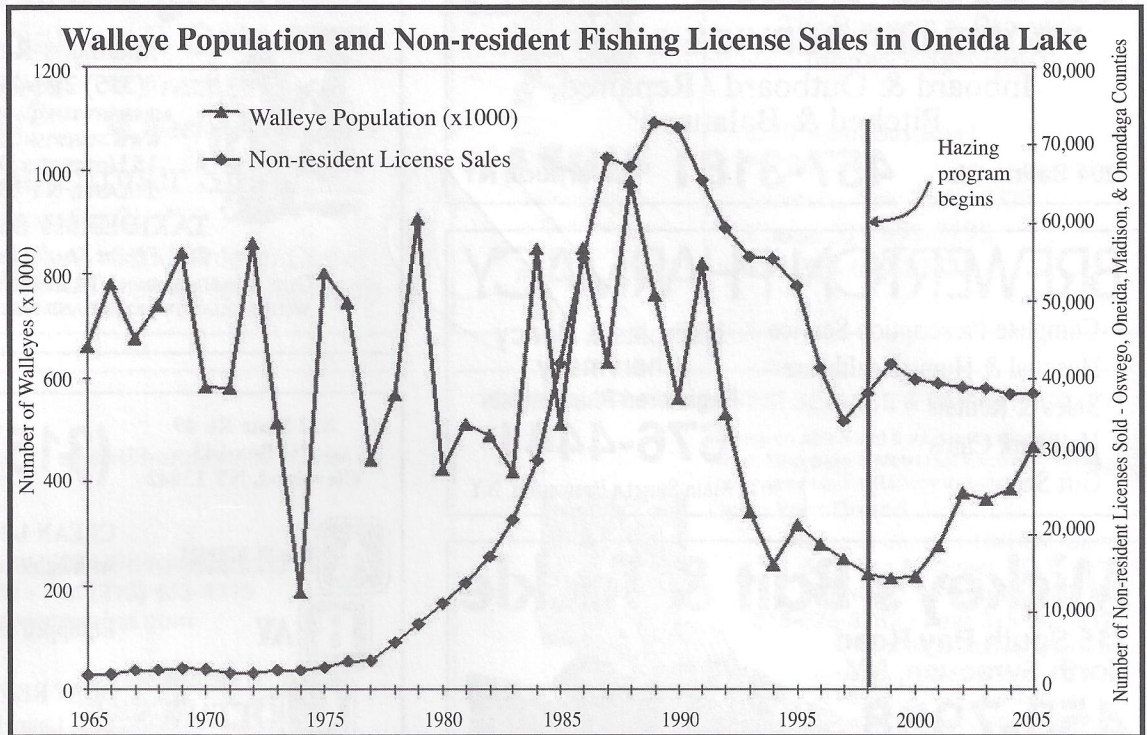
bringing in wealth that was generated elsewhere. Obviously, thousands of Oswego, Oneida, Onondaga, and Madison County residents fish Oneida Lake, too. They buy their bait, gas, and food locally. It's easy to see that the impact of all anglers on the region's revenue and jobs is tremendous, and that conditions hurting fishing harm the economy as well.

Fortunately, Dr. Shwiff has confirmed that there is a cost-effective solution. The Wildlife Services arm of USDA started its cormorant harassment program in 1998 at the request of New York State Department of Environ-

mental Conservation; this has reduced the peak number of cormorants feeding on the lake from more than 2,000 per day to around 100. The program was expanded in 2003 to include spring and summer harassment, with the goal of limiting the number of cormorants on the lake to 100 at all times. The resultant drop in cormorants has helped the lake's walleye population and out-of-state anglers are returning to Oneida Lake. This has infused from \$47,974,000 to \$170,893,000 into the four-county area and saved 1,446 to 5,014 jobs!

The Wildlife Services' cormorant harassment program gives taxpayers an enviable "bang for their buck." For every dollar spent on the program, our region receives between \$13.58 and \$48.37 in angling revenue. That's a tremendous cost-benefit ratio and positive economics in anybody's book. Funding for the program initially came from the State of New York, then from the federal government. Dr. Shwiff's research illustrates how these tax dollars have been invested wisely to save an important native fishery.

The bottom line is easy to see: Several years ago, a few progressive thinkers in Central New York, led by the Oneida Lake Association's Board of Directors, viewed the lake's walleye and yellow perch fishing as an economic engine. As objective analyses show, these conservationists were right.



The cormorant hazing program's results clearly appear in this graph. Walleye numbers and license sales fell steeply during the 1990s as the birds became abundant. After the hazing program began, cormorant numbers dropped, the lake's walleye population rebounded, and non-resident license sales stabilized.

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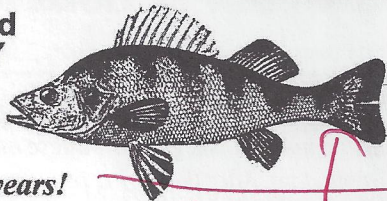
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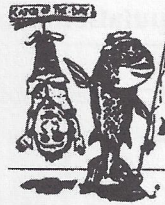
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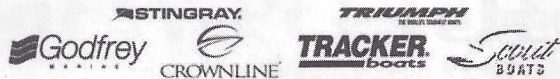
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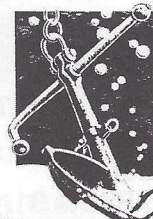
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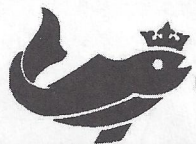
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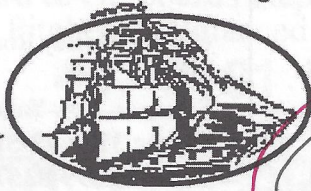
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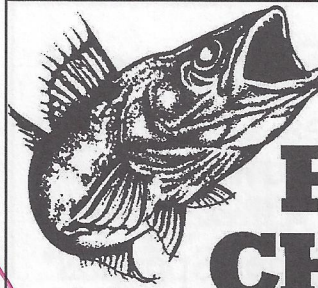
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