



Chautauqua Current No. 40

Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance, Inc.

June 10, 2024



Figure 1. Chautauqua County Executive PJ Wendel delivers opening remarks at the Chautauqua Lake Symposium at the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel. Photo by Jay Young.

'STRENGTH IN UNITY'

LAKE SYMPOSIUM DRAWS CROWD TO HARBOR HOTEL

By Jay Young

Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance

CELORON—Over 100 people had the opportunity to enjoy the hospitality and facilities of the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel last week, as Chautauqua County hosted its first Chautauqua Lake Symposium on June 2.

The event was made possible by the leadership of County Executive PJ Wendel, who worked alongside his staff to bring together a range of presenters from across research, regulation, and government to discuss a common cause. “How many people here have dreams and memories of Chautauqua Lake and what you have started here?” Wendel asked those in attendance. “Thank you, show your hands, be proud, because this body of water is what we are here to protect.” Following the day’s speeches there was an extended question-and-answer period closing out the event, where public questions on a number of different topics were addressed.

A full recording of the symposium is now available on the County’s website and YouTube page, and we encourage anyone interested in more details to view that video. Much of the public interest in the day’s discussions focused on the state’s new wetland regulations and potential impacts to Chautauqua Lake. The morning began with presentations by Department of Environmental Conservation Region 9 Director Julie Barrett O’Neill and Assistant Regional Director Chad Staniszewski. After giving some background on how the new regulations are expected to be implemented, both O’Neill and Staniszewski fielded questions from the audience about how the new legislation will affect lake

activities, plant management, lakeside property owners, permitting, and many other considerations. “Key points for Chautauqua Lake,” Staniszewski said. “It is a lake, we all understand that it’s a lake, and our intent is to have it remain a lake.”

During the course of the day both representatives emphasized that DEC is tasked with implementing the wetlands law amendment signed in 2022, and is not a lawmaking body itself. Lending context to how the process works were the day’s governmental representatives. These speakers included Governor Kathy Hochul’s WNY Regional Director Bonnie Lockwood, State Senator George Borrello, and Assemblyman Andrew Goodell. Borrello explained that this issue has come to the forefront on many other lakes across the state, and expressed his desire to continue pursuing the topic in Albany. “I believe that we need to provide the right tools, and the right direction and guidance to the DEC to ensure that navigable waterways like Chautauqua Lake are always kept protected and usable, and protecting the investments that each and every one of us have,” Borrello said. “That’s most important.”

Presenters taking to the stage mid-morning shifted focus to lake research, with Dr. Allison Hrycik and Dr. Harry Kolar of The Jefferson Project leading off with updates from their program. Hrycik and Kolar explained how their work has been expanded and refined since starting on Chautauqua Lake in 2020. Major steps are being taken this year with the addition of six tributary monitoring stations that will be used to help answer questions about the nutrients flowing into the lake and how they affect lake dynamics and harmful algal blooms. Shifting the topic to plant surveying and management, Lt. Col. Paul Lord of SUNY Oneonta and Dr. Rob Richardson of North Carolina State University spoke about the results of their multi-year plant monitoring programs. In addition to discussing how they track and map the growth of invasive and native species, both Lord and Richardson took the opportunity to talk about trends of plant growth over time as well as possible relationships to plant management efforts.

Fittingly, the day concluded with a presentation by a new key player in this wide field of lake and watershed work—the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Dr. Marion Divers is a Community Planner in the Planning and Environmental Branch of the Pittsburgh District, and delivered a brief history of the Army Corps’ work before discussing the upcoming feasibility study that is being conducted for the lake. “We have heard previous to me today about the aquatic ecosystem threats that are happening here,” Divers said, citing issues like excess sedimentation, excess nutrients, invasive species, climate change, and harmful algal blooms. The Army Corps study will consider ways to address these problems, and involve working with local stakeholders to develop solutions. The approximately three-year process will begin with a 90-day scoping phase, followed by the evaluation of alternatives and their feasibility, culminating in a final report.

Divers noted that Chautauqua Lake is well positioned as a “data-rich” case because of the significant research and environmental study that has already been conducted here. We have decades of work and many to thank for this. Nonetheless, gaps in our understanding and obstacles to practical solutions still exist, as many of the day’s presenters acknowledged. Chief among them are questions about the lake’s internal loading of nutrients and harmful algal blooms, and what can be done to address them. By continuing to bring groups like these together they can apply their varied skillsets and experiences to identify common ground on how we can move forward to address these challenges.

The Alliance thanks everyone who helped make this event possible, including Chautauqua County, the Harbor Hotel, the day’s presenters and their colleagues, and all those in attendance.