

To the Chautauqua County Legislature
Wednesday, July 23, 2025
Second Privilege of the Floor - Wetlands

FINAL

Good evening.

Hello. I am Jim Wehrfritz from the Town of Ellery, President of the Chautauqua Lake Property Owners Association, the CLPOA. I appreciate your attention.

The CLPOA held “Wetlands” Public Meeting #11 on July 5. Eighty participated. Attendees ask questions at our meetings and, in most cases, get answers. We cannot answer some, like what County government is doing about the new wetlands regulations and poor Lake conditions or who is in charge of the Lake. We wish you all were there.

Our next “Wetlands” Public Meeting #12 will be at the Bemus Point Golf Club and Tap House on Monday, September 1, Labor Day, 9:30 – 11:00 am. We especially invite our Lakeside Legislators Chagnon, Gustafson, Penhollow, Proctor, and Vanstrom.

The July 4th weekend was an “Absolute Nightmare” on Chautauqua Lake for Burtis Bay, Sherman Bay, Ellicott and Fluvanna residents and as broadcast to all of western New York. More broadcasts followed from the newly DEC-designated wetlands, an impenetrable weed-choked Lake. These weeds are now protected and more growth is encouraged by the regulations. Other than pointing fingers, but not at the DEC, or staying silent, the County and most municipalities are “missing in action”.

The DEC had designated no in-Lake wetlands before weed management organizations began planning. Then, and only then, did the DEC designate those areas planned for weed management as wetlands and require

permits. You heard right, those areas weren't wetlands until after these organizations told the DEC where they had to work. Only then did those Lake areas become wetlands! Our State Senator and County Executive are mistaken when they say the regulations did not contribute to the "Absolute Nightmare" in the South Basin. That's just not the case.

The same individuals continue to blame Lake organization infighting for Lake problems. But these are only symptoms of root causes and distraction. The real problems are decades of ineffective local Lake management and inattention by our State. The DEC's mission is to conserve, improve, and protect our Lake, not arbitrarily designate parts of our Lake a swamp to hide their negligence. Low value "Swamp Front Property" is replacing high value "Lake Front Property" on your watch.

No One is Managing Chautauqua Lake. The Chautauqua Lake and Watershed Management Alliance, the Alliance, a County agency pretending to be a 501c3 non-profit, operates in secret with no direct input from taxpayers while it doles out millions in foundation, State, and County funding to its members. The Alliance is an expensive well-meaning but failed experiment which cannot be repaired. It has no authority to manage the Lake and has failed to improve conditions after twelve years and millions of dollars.

There Is No Chautauqua Lake Management Plan. The Alliance funded development of the "Long-Term Management Plan for Submerged Aquatic Vegetation at Chautauqua Lake" completed in June 2024. But the Alliance refused to adopt this Plan, changed its name to "Strategy", and put it on the shelf with 50-60 Chautauqua Lake "studies". Then they changed the title of the "Lake Manager" they planned to hire to "Lake Consultant" acknowledging their lack of authority. Looks like "smoke and mirrors".

What Is The Solution? The solution, a “Centralized Lake Authority”, is simple in concept but requires real County and municipality leadership. Such was attempted in 2004 and reintroduced by County Executive Borrello in 2019. The 2004 attempt failed when the Town of Chautauqua opted out. The 2019 effort failed when a new County Executive was appointed.

As a distributor of County and State taxpayer and other funds, the “Authority”, a completely new organization, would consist of only Town Supervisors, Village Mayors, and County Legislators with districts on Chautauqua Lake and it would operate transparently.

I’ve heard some of you have said that the State won’t allow a Centralized Lake Authority for our Lake. I don’t believe that. But, even if true and given that the State itself will not manage the Lake, you must challenge the State on such a ridiculous position. You may even have to consider litigation.

“Take another shot of courage” as The Eagles suggested in a song, take on a real worthwhile challenge, and join those of us volunteers leading the fight. Consider your legacy relative to your Lake and County, a legacy that is currently an “Absolute Nightmare” when it comes to Chautauqua Lake.

Thank you.