



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael F. Nozzolio

## Protecting Our Lakes: The Finger Lakes Institute

MICHAEL F. NOZZOLIO December 30, 2009

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENT**



Five years ago, the President of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Mark Gearan and I worked hard to create a research and educational center where a concerted effort could be made to promote, protect and preserve the Finger Lakes and their expansive and sensitive watersheds.

We were inspired with a simple vision: to establish an institute that would provide our region's policy makers, educators, residents, and students with the tools that would allow us

to protect New York's priceless natural resources known as the Finger Lakes.

With the hard work and devotion of countless individuals, we have proudly established the Finger Lakes Institute which is at the cutting edge of environmental research and among the Nation's leaders in the creative use of renewable energy. This initiative is a vision I first had as a graduate student at Cornell University studying resource economics. Now I feel privileged to have been able to secure the State funding that laid the foundation for the Finger Lakes Institute and to offer my support for the staff of dedicated researchers. The Finger Lakes Institute has become the preeminent center for research and a clearinghouse of crucial data on our region. More importantly, the Institute inspires and cultivates true action and change.

The Finger Lakes Institute helps coordinate the efforts of local governments, lakeshore property owners, organizations, grassroots watershed protection groups, and other regional environmental research centers in protecting the ecology of the Finger Lakes and overseeing development along the lakes.

In recognition of the need for collaborative efforts to protect the Finger Lakes and promote tourism, I have been a strong supporter of establishing relationships between the Finger Lakes Institute and other regional environmental research centers such as the Center of Excellence in Environmental Systems at Syracuse University as well as with area tourism agencies to effectively market the appeal of the Finger Lakes Region.

The Finger Lakes Institute has simply become an invaluable asset to our region. When we faced serious concerns with the quality and health of Owasco Lake, the Finger Lakes Institute was there to provide their full support with state of the art technologies and research methods that showed us the way to make significant improvements in the condition of the Lake. Armed with the knowledge that the Finger Lakes Institute provided,

we were able to work with our local governments to implement a sound environmental plan. In just a few years, we have seen tremendous progress in Owasco and we owe our debt and gratitude to the dedicated team of researchers at the Finger Lakes Institute.

The Finger Lakes Institute has been ready and willing to provide this kind of support time and time again. Whether it is studying the impact of non-native zebra mussels on our waters, initiating their latest study on the quality of our area's lakes, or recently providing the means for comprehensive weed removal on Cayuga Lake, the Institute has been able to supply the knowledge and resources so that we can apply prudent environmental practices to our region.

In recent weeks, concerns have been raised regarding drilling of natural gas reserves right here in our region. While the harvesting of this natural resource could greatly benefit our region, the risks are widely uncertain and could pose some potentially complicated environmental risks. Extraction of the Marcellus natural gas reserves would require the use of "hydrofracking" fluids, which contain a mixture of otherwise dangerous chemicals. Once again, I have asked the Finger Lakes Institute to provide an analysis of the possible environmental risks and to carefully research and study the mining process so that our lakes and their watersheds remain intact and free of dangerous pollutants.

The Finger Lakes Institute has also distinguished itself as the only organization in New York State to be granted the Energy Star Award, which recognizes their dedication to the use of green technologies. The Institute's commitment to sustainable energy has become the envy of our region, revolutionizing the way we look at becoming green. From their use of state-of-the-art solar technology to the harnessing of geothermal energy, the Institute's approach is the wave of the future for New York State and our Nation. The technology that the Finger Lakes Institute is using today is what will drive the economy of tomorrow and the initiative that the Institute has shown is certainly admirable.

Our Finger Lakes and the ecosystems that they support are fragile. We must continue to clean up our lakes, promote the gift that is the natural beauty of our region and continue to blaze new trails in environmental research. I am confident that the Finger Lakes Institute will be there to support our efforts and I look forward to continuing our partnership to ensure that our Lakes receive the protection that they need and deserve.