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NYS DEC Announces \$600,000 to Study and Implement Safeguards to Owasco Lake and a Focused Team to Address Finger Lakes' Water Quality

New Finger Lakes Water Hub to Study Algal Blooms in Owasco Lake, Statewide Water Issues and Pollution Reduction Projects

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today announced the establishment of the 'Finger Lakes Water Hub,' a multi-region watershed team to address Finger Lakes water quality issues, as well as a \$600,000 initiative with Cayuga Community College and others to study algal blooms and undertake pollution reduction projects in the Owasco Lake watershed, funded with support from the New York State Senate. These actions, in close cooperation with the NYS Departments of Health and Agriculture & Markets, further the efforts of the Governor's Water Quality Rapid Response Team, launched in February to address water quality issues statewide and develop new policies, programs, and technologies to ensure clean water for all New Yorkers.

"It is critical that New York study what is causing algal blooms in Owasco Lake and continue to take action to reduce pollution in order to safeguard water quality in the Finger Lakes and across New York State," DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said. "Dozens of New York lakes, as well as waterbodies nationwide, are plagued with harmful algal blooms. As we continue the strong efforts of the Governor's Water Quality Rapid Response Team, the work of the Finger Lakes Water Hub and the State's investments to study algal blooms will be valuable resources in helping New Yorkers understand and mitigate this emerging issue."

DOH Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said, "The Department of Health responded immediately when harmful algal blooms were found in Owasco Lake by ensuring the public was notified, testing the water for contamination at Wadsworth Center and working with local officials to mitigate the situation as quickly as possible. The research and implementation supported by this new funding will result in a long term plan to prevent these issues. DOH and DEC will continue to work together to better understand these types of

problems in our continued efforts to ensure clean and safe drinking water for all New Yorkers."

Overseen by DEC, the Finger Lakes Water Hub is comprised of scientists and policy makers who will leverage the State's ongoing efforts to safeguard water quality with the expertise of research partners such as the Finger Lakes Institute at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the Upstate Freshwater Institute.

There are several types of algal blooms with varying levels of toxicity, including Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB). Based on the water chemistry and low phosphorus in Owasco Lake, scientists did not anticipate the frequency or severity of recent blooms. The research study and associated pollution reduction projects, funded with \$600,000 from New York State, will help scientists understand the factors contributing to algal blooms and look at the frequency and extent of HABs in Owasco Lake. The recently announced projects are part of a series of initiatives undertaken by local partners, DEC and the Department of Agriculture & Markets to protect Owasco Lake water quality. The new research project is being undertaken in partnership with Cayuga County, the Upstate Freshwater Institute, Owasco Lake Watershed Association, and others.

The project includes:

- Funding to Cayuga County Soil and Water District to implement phosphorous reduction practices including agricultural and stormwater projects
- Funding to monitor Owasco Lake and its tributaries to determine sources of contaminant loading
- Funding for HAB sample analysis and food web monitoring
- Funding for open water monitoring buoy deployment and maintenance
- Funding for continued septic sampling

Senator James L. Seward said, "Owasco Lake provides drinking water to 50,000 residents. Additionally, it is the central feature of the local landscape and economy. We need to ensure its viability and vitality today and for generations to come. I was proud to work with Senator DeFrancisco to secure funding for this crucial project and applaud the DEC and DOH for their attentiveness to Owasco Lake."

Senator John A. DeFrancisco said, "This vital funding to improve the water quality in Owasco Lake reaffirms our strong commitment to protect this important natural resource. I was pleased to move this initiative forward and to work with the Senate team from Cayuga County to help secure this funding. I commend the DEC and DOH for facilitating these remediation efforts, which will help preserve the lake and safeguard our public drinking water."

The investments announced today to safeguard water quality are in addition to the more than \$7.5 million already being spent by the State to address and improve water quality in the Owasco Lake watershed through the Water Quality Improvement Project Program and the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Grants. These programs provide New York State Environmental Protection Funds to municipalities and farmers in the Owasco Lake watershed to improve wastewater treatment facilities, stop erosion along roadsides and streambanks, and improve farm efficiencies.

Most algae are harmless and an important part of the food web. Certain types of algae can grow quickly and form algal blooms that cover large portions of a lake. However, some species of algae produce toxins harmful to people and animals. Blooms of algae species that produce, or have the potential to produce, toxins are referred to as harmful algal blooms or HAB. These blooms most often occur in nutrient-rich waters, particularly during hot, calm weather. Visit the [Harmful Algal Blooms \(HABs\)](#) web page on DEC's website to learn more about HAB and New York's efforts to address this threat to water quality.

New York's Finger Lakes Region is a 9,000-square mile area home to 11 lakes. From East to West, the Finger Lakes are: Otisco, Skaneateles, Owasco, Cayuga, Seneca, Keuka, Canandaigua, Honeoye, Canadice, Hemlock, and Conesus.