

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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The Outlet
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For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Chautauqua Lake's Outlet includes this fine stretch of shoreline wetland protected by the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy. Bald eagle and osprey now frequent the Outlet, due, in part, to the stewardship efforts of the Conservancy.

One of the Chautauqua Watershed's most wonderful places is the transition zone between Chautauqua Lake and the Chadakoin River, known to most simply as "the Outlet."

The Outlet is the only way that water flows out of Chautauqua Lake. It carries an amazing 90 billion gallons of lake water right through the middle of Jamestown every

year. In fact, the main reason a settlement – called The Rapids before it became known as Jamestown – came to be here was because of this moving water, which early settlers soon used to turn the wheels of industry. When steam, then electricity, replaced water as a power source, Jamestown turned its back on the Chadakoin and made it a moving cesspool. The wetlands surrounding its upper reaches – the Outlet – became a dump for junk cars, appliances, household garbage, fly ash from burning coal, and toxic chemicals of all kinds. "Out of sight, out of mind."

Today this kind of dumping is illegal. You can still find the rusty carcasses of half-buried refrigerators, and soil tests mark the presence of illegally dumped waste oil. But time has healed many of these wounds and the Outlet shows promise as the asset that nature intended.

The Outlet still serves as the City of Jamestown's flood insurance. Hundreds of acres of silver maple swamp surround the Outlet's main channel. The swamp is a sponge that soaks up and gradually releases water that otherwise might race catastrophically through Brooklyn Square.

The Outlet has become habitat and safe haven for a diverse community of living things. Canoeists and kayakers out for a quiet evening can have close encounters with mink and beaver. They can glide past a great blue heron catching and swallowing a fish. In late summer they can round a bend and gape in wonder at cardinal flower, glowing like embers in the evening sunlight. In spring they can count rafts of migrating waterfowl – loons, mergansers, scaup, goldeneye, bufflehead – by the hundreds.

Most amazing of all are the ospreys and bald eagles. Their presence in the Outlet is a testament to people learning from their mistakes. Likely neither of these magnificent birds of prey would be in the area at all had DDT not been banned in the early 1970's. From fewer than 500 breeding pairs of bald eagles in the lower 48 states in 1963 to nearly 10,000 breeding pairs today, the bald eagle is a conservation success story. We can thank Roger Tory Peterson and others who investigated and spoke out in time about why the eagles, ospreys and other birds of prey were disappearing. Peterson would be delighted at their resurgence and return to their former haunts.

I think it's wonderful that right here in the City of Jamestown I can paddle beneath a tree and see a bald eagle perched in its branches, staring down at me. Let's do everything we can to welcome the eagle and osprey back to the Outlet.

The CWC is a member-supported, local grassroots 501(c)(3) tax exempt watershed education, pollution prevention and land trust organization. It seeks your support and participation to conserve Chautauqua Lake's most important endangered shore lands and implement yards and grounds practices which reduce and minimize nutrient and sediment inputs to our waterways, which fuel nuisance plant and algae growth. Membership donations can be made by calling 664-2166.