

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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The Importance of Wild Spaces
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For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Dewey Beach's Sunset Park in Delaware could literally fit inside Jamestown Audubon's auditorium and was full of life on a recent visit by the writer - since the wildlife had no where else to go. Let's do all we can to protect and preserve the wild places that still remain along the shores of Chautauqua Lake.

Sunset Park. It was a beautiful place with wild grasses overlooking the bay. An osprey was nesting on a platform and a large numbers of birds were hunting for crabs and shrimp. If that doesn't sound like Chautauqua Lake, that's because it's not. Sunset Park is in Delaware; where I was just on vacation. The park was listed as an important rest stop for birds, which was easy to believe with all the birds there, as well as providing much needed habitat for local animals. Hidden inside the park

was also what may be the fate of Chautauqua Lake.

Sunset Park was, as far as parks are concerned, the size of a postage stamp. It consisted of a tiny beach, a gazebo, a dinky dock and some native grasses. It was the size of a large meeting room that was 50 feet or so long and half as wide. It was filled with life. Migrating birds were on the shore, gulls soared overhead, an osprey nested on a platform above and crabs skittered across the shallows.

Most of the rest of the shore was developed with houses and condos and expensive restaurants.

The wildlife, at least the kind that didn't drink beer, had few places left. So few places were left that a tiny park took on big importance.

Chautauqua Lake has been slowly heading in that direction for the last few decades. Land was developed and big houses and condos and restaurants built. Tourists are

attracted and catered to and they come back year after year to boat and fish and, frankly, there is nothing wrong with that. We need the revenue and I love sharing the lake with others.

But we need to make sure that there are some wild spaces left as well. The few bits of wild shore that are left provide valuable areas for fish to breed, birds to nest and tourists to gawk at. Time and time again I hear people rave about Chautauqua Lake's Outlet as being one of the wildest places they have boated on. They come back to boat there again and again because of that wild beauty. I go back there again and again for the same reason. I live in this area because I love the wildness of it. I love to roam local trails and canoe wild streams. These are some of the perks of the area.

The last remaining bits of shoreline are slowly being developed. The last wild places on the lake are being bought up. At this rate, most of the lake will someday be wall to wall people and the wildlife will be crowded out.

I dread someday finding a tiny park called Sunset Park, the size of a postage stamp, somewhere along the lake where it tries to accommodate the wildlife that 50 years ago had most of the lake to use. The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy has been working for years to preserve some of the wild spots around the lake. They have helped preserve muskellunge breeding habitat, parts of the Outlet and more. Every year they work to preserve a tiny bit of the wildness that once surrounded most of the lake.

If you are interested in seeing what the conservancy has done for the lake and what you can do to help, visit their website at www.chautauquawatershed.org

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake's shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its 2008 annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake's most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join for 2008!