

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
April 26, 2009

A Winter Post-Mortem
By Mark Baldwin
For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



This satellite photo taken March 4, 2009 shows ice covering almost the entire surface of Lake Erie. Also notice on the right-hand side of the photo, ice-covered Chautauqua Lake and snow covering most of the Chautauqua Watershed. (Photo from NOAA National Weather Service Office, Buffalo, NY.)

Inhabitants of the Chautauqua Watershed seem to have a love-hate relationship with winter. We shake our heads and roll our eyes when we discuss the most recent storm or snowfall totals to date, but for many of us there is a certain pride too.

This winter was no exception. Snow mantled the high ridges of the Chautauqua Watershed early in the season, half a foot by the end of October. In November the snow got so deep it kept deer hunters out of the woods. Hunters reported seeing wild turkeys, usually keenly aware of human approach, conserving energy to the point of almost seeming tame due to deep snow covering food supplies. From November 15th to the 22nd it snowed every day, piling up to the point of collapsing area barn roofs and killing cows. By the end of November we had received 42 inches at the southern end of the watershed,

probably much more at the northern end. By December 11 we totaled 62 inches, compared to 25 inches for the date in 2007.

On December 19 a note-worthy weather event occurred: a six-inch snowfall with an additional accumulation of two to three inches of sleet and freezing rain to top it off. Shoveling that stuff was a work-out. Atmospheric instability continued through the weekend, with another eight-inch snow dump and sub-zero wind-chills closing schools on December 22. That brought the Jamestown-area total to an incredible seven feet before Christmas.

Quoting from my field journal for January 27: "Below-normal temperatures and above-normal precipitation have prevailed throughout most of this winter. 10 degrees this morning, high of 20 degrees predicted, about 10 degrees below normal for this time of year. More snow predicted; est. 150 inches snow so far this winter. Ice has sealed off Lake Erie, so no more lake-effect, at least for now."

By March 7 winter seemed to have abated. Except for filthy piles in parking lots, Jamestown was snow-free. I planned a hike on the Eastside Overland Trail between Gerry and Sinclairville on a drizzly but mild afternoon in the 40's, hoping to find some woodland pools and bare ground for walking. Was I surprised to find two to three feet of snow in the woods, with drifts up to my waist! The going was slow – sometimes I sank in up to my thighs – and hard rain changed my walk in the woods into a forced march that I chalked up to experience.

Now that we're a full month into official spring, we note we're still not "out of the woods" yet. Last week several inches of fresh snowfall covered still-bare trees and flattened crocuses. As I write this, strong winds gusting to 30 mph are ushering in a storm with snow predicted this week. Oh well. I guess I'm proud of our weather anyway.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit, public benefit corporation supported primarily by membership donations. Its mission is to preserve, and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its annual membership campaign is currently underway. For more information or to support these efforts, please call 664-2166 or go to www.chautauquawatershed.org.