



THE 'SHED SHEET

Fall / Winter 2024

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

Following the Beauty of our Lakes Downstream

(by Twan Leenders)

Residents and visitors to our area are well aware of the many recreational opportunities that our lakes offer. Lake Erie, Chautauqua, Findley, Bear, and the Cassadaga Lakes each receive their share of boaters, fisherpeople, swimmers, and paddlers. However, Chautauqua County has much more to offer when it comes to on-water recreation, and the Conservancy has been working hard for the past two years to make our county's major waterways safe and enjoyable for recreational use again – while also working to make these waterways better able to drain snowmelt and stormwater without causing excess erosion. This increased hydrological resilience is important in the face of a changing climate and the increased storm intensity we all have been experiencing lately. Clearly our lakes do not exist in a vacuum in our landscape. Water enters into them through a variety of tributaries that originate in our watersheds, while on the downstream end of each lake, there generally is a sizeable outlet to drain them.



Findley Lake feeds French Creek, which is known nationally as a biodiversity hotspot. It is the most biologically diverse aquatic system in the Northeastern U.S. and contains five times more species than an average New York stream, including rare fish and endangered mussels that are found hardly anywhere else!

Chautauqua Lake becomes a linear waterbody in the City of Jamestown, and it's called the Chadakoin River from that point on. It joins Cassadaga Creek just north of Falconer and adds Chautauqua Lake's water to the drainage coming out of both Bear Lake and the Cassadaga Lakes. *(cont. page 7)*

Aquatic Invasive Species: so much to still learn, so little time to do so

(by Twan Leenders)



As the temperatures drop, the leaves around us are taking on their lovely fall colors. It's easy to note the transitions that are taking place in the wooded portions of our landscape, but similar seasonal changes are happening below the surface of our lakes too.

Submerged aquatic vegetation responds to differences in day length and temperature just as much as terrestrial plants do. By now, we're all familiar with the species that have been in our lakes for a long time – those that are native to the area as well as the few non-native invasives (e.g. Eurasian water milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed). However, the biggest wildcard at the moment concerns the recently arrived new aquatic invasives, such as water chestnut, brittle naiad, and starry stonewort. These species are relatively new to our region, and our experience with them in Chautauqua Lake is still limited to only a few growing seasons. The challenge posed by these rapidly spreading colonizers is that we need to simultaneously learn how they respond to our local conditions while also curtailing their spread before they become county-wide, systemic problems. As we approach the end of the 2024 growing season, it seemed that an update on our observations and activities would be informative. *(cont. page 5)*



CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and nationally accredited land trust working to preserve and enhance the quality, scenic beauty, and ecological health of the lands and waters of the Chautauqua region for our community.

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Message from the Executive Director

Fall is in full swing! The air has turned crisp, and the leaves are flying. Before our minds all turn toward the upcoming holidays, I want to take a moment to pause and reflect on the beauty of fall in our region and the precious resources we strive to protect. At the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, we understand that protecting our land goes hand in hand with protecting the quality of our water and our way of life. Our forests, wetlands, and open spaces serve as natural filters, safeguarding local streams, rivers, and lakes from pollutants. By conserving these critical landscapes, we ensure that future generations will have access to clean drinking water, vibrant wildlife habitats, and healthy ecosystems.



Executive Director
Whitney Gleason

In addition to ensuring cleaner, healthier air to breathe and water to drink, land trusts like the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy are playing a critical role in combating climate change by protecting and preserving natural landscapes that sequester carbon and act as buffers against extreme weather events like those experienced in the Southeast this fall. As our hearts go out to all the families and friends impacted by those storm events, we are also thinking about how we can better protect those living and working right here in the Chautauqua Region from future weather events. By conserving forests, wetlands, and grasslands we are storing carbon, reducing flooding, preventing soil erosion, and building ecosystem resilience.

But we can't do this work alone. As we head into the final months of the year, we need your help to continue working toward our mission. Your support is what allows us to protect more land, restore wetlands, and maintain the health of the watersheds that are essential to our region's future.

Whether it's contributing to our annual fund, joining our new endowment campaign, or simply sharing our mission with others, every gift makes a meaningful impact. Together, we can safeguard these precious natural resources for all who depend on them – now and for generations to come.

This fall, please consider making a tax-deductible donation and joining us in protecting the land and water that nourish us all. I can't thank you enough for your continued support and dedication to our work.

Warmest regards,

Continued Love for LakeScapes!

(by Carol Markham)

The Conservancy's LakeScapes Program has been on the road again – spreading watershed-friendly guidance and knowledge to nearly 800 Chautauqua County homeowners since 2020! Not only are we helping create critical wildlife habitat and beautiful backyards, but we are also teaching homeowners how their yards can better absorb and filter runoff and improve water quality in our lakes and drinking water.

It's difficult to admit sometimes that people are a major cause of our local lakes' health problems. With so many people living, moving, and building in Chautauqua County and its watersheds, nonpoint source pollution (that is, runoff from streets, farms, construction sites, and our own yards) has become an increasing problem. Contaminants from every home and community – sediments, sewage, manure, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and motor oil – are all carried into our lakes from storm drains and local streams and waterways.

We cannot forget that our yards are a part of a vast interconnected ecosystem, and everything we do on them affects our local lakes, waterways, and drinking water. Please contact the Conservancy (carol@chautauquawatershed.org) and find out how a few simple changes in your own yard can make a huge difference to the water quality and health of our watersheds! So, what small simple yard care change can we make this November?



As autumn turns to winter, you may have noticed some of your neighbors chose not to remove the fallen leaves from their yards and gardens. The basic idea behind “leave the leaves” is self-explanatory when it comes to fall garden cleanup, but why is it important and why are people doing it?



We've been conditioned to tidy up our gardens in preparation for winter – one of our human habits ingrained in us as we think about our own winter “hibernation.” But these beautiful, colorful, floating tree parts actually serve a greater purpose. Leaves supply critical winter habitat for native pollinators and other local invertebrates such as butterflies, beetles, bees, and moths. Some examples include:

Great Spangled Fritillary (left), which hatch in September/October, shelter in leaf litter until May, appearing alongside violets, their essential food source.

Woolly Bear or Isabella Tiger Moth (left middle), with its unmistakable long, thick orange-brown bristles overwinter in the woolly bear stage, freezing and going dormant, then thawing in the spring and feeding again. They are thought to have the longest life of any moth or butterfly, living upwards of 10 years!



Luna Moth (right), or American moon moth, only lives for about a week after leaving the cocoon in the spring and is a favorite snack for bats!

Swallowtails (left bottom), which love to snack on parsley and dill, spend the winter as a chrysalis, and emerge in the spring as a gorgeous butterfly.



In addition to supplying habitat for native species, fallen leaves are a cost-effective (free!) mulch that will help control weeds and absorb moisture, thereby hydrating your gardens, minimizing soil erosion, and supplying essential nutrients for plants. Who knew that our beautiful fall leaves could be so valuable? Let's think differently about how we manage our fall clean-up and leave our leaves alone!





QCDs and RMDs Decoded: Making the Most of Your Retirement Funds

One of the most impactful ways that you can help your favorite nonprofits this fall is by giving through your individual retirement account (IRA) using a qualified charitable distribution, or QCD. Thanks to changes in tax law, it's no longer beneficial for many to itemize their charitable deductions. Yet after reaching age 73, federal law mandates that you make a required minimum distribution (RMD) each year. Failing to do so triggers a lofty 25% tax penalty, while receiving the distribution counts as income and is then taxable. That's where QCDs come in - QCDs can be a tool to make meaningful contributions, avoid the 25% penalty, and reduce your taxable income.

To help me better understand this gift giving tool and shed some light on the alphabet soup of IRAs, QCDs, and RMDs, I sat down with Dave Switala, who has been working in the financial services profession for over 35 years, earning designations of Chartered Life Underwriter and Chartered Financial Consultant.

Q: Thanks so much for helping me better understand how QCDs can help our supporters make their gifts go even further. In your professional opinion, what are the benefits of an IRA gift?

A: Well Whitney, a charitable gift from your IRA can go further toward helping CWC achieve its mission in our community, while benefitting the donor because it isn't considered taxable income and can count toward their RMD starting at age 73.

Q: What requirements are there for making this type of gift?

A: You need to be 70 1/2 or older at the time of the gift, and you can contribute up to \$105,000 each calendar year. Distributions must be made by your IRA custodian directly to the Watershed Conservancy, without the funds ever being withdrawn by you. It's recommended that you initiate your gift by mid-November so that it arrives before December 31st so that it counts toward this tax year.

Q: That sounds like a win-win for our donors! What steps do donors need to take to actually make an IRA gift?

A: They should start by contacting their custodian and requesting an IRA qualified distribution to be made to the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy using your tax ID, which is 16-1389010. Depending on the institution, they may even be able to complete the QCD request online. Then their custodian will transfer the gift directly to the organization using the following information:

- The check should be made out to the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, Inc.
- Have the custodian be sure to identify the donor by their full name and address so that the Conservancy can thank them.
- Have checks mailed to Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, PO Box 45, Lakewood, NY 14750.

Thank you so much for your time, Dave, and for helping our donors and me better understand this wonderful win-win charitable gift opportunity!

Wine on the Trail

(by Bethany O'Hagan)

One of our greatest attributes as a nationally accredited land trust isn't just all the good work we are doing to help save our natural spaces and protect our abundance of fresh water. It is also all of our nature trails open to the public from dawn to dusk! As a fun way to try and raise awareness of all the beautiful trails that Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy has to offer, Wine on the Trail was created to incorporate a way to get people out into nature. One day every month, Land Specialist Bethany O'Hagan and Conservationist Carol Markham meet at one of our nature preserves around the county and lead the public on our hiking trails. You are encouraged to bring your own to-go glass of wine, beer, or whatever drink you prefer! With surprise guest speakers, Halloween costumes, and overall good times, come out and join us for Wine on the Trail. Even if all you bring is water – which many do – it is still a good time meeting new people and getting out into nature. We plan on keeping this going well into the winter, with hot toddies on the trail with some snowshoeing. Subscribe to our emails or follow us on social media to stay informed of our upcoming Wine on the Trail dates!



Aquatic Invasive Species (continued)

Invasive water chestnut occurs in isolated water bodies throughout the County. This summer, as part of our annual Aquatic Invasive Species surveys (where we look for outbreaks of this and other harmful invasives and organize appropriate rapid responses where possible), our staff and volunteers, as well as staff from the Chautauqua Lake Watershed Management Alliance, removed some 250 water chestnut plants from the outlet again this year – in time to prevent them from dropping their seeds. This approach, where we visit known sites and manually remove the plants to stop them from reproducing, has been effective for several years now. The longevity of their seeds (potentially viable up to 15 years), however, means that we need to keep our vigilance up and our efforts ongoing. We also removed all invasive water chestnut plants from a pond at Maplehurst Golf Course.

Brittle naiad is a mystery. It has been detected in Chautauqua Lake for some time but has not created any nuisance growth problems thus far. In September 2023, a sizeable area of dense brittle naiad growth suddenly appeared in the Celoron area, but it died back shortly after. Our 2024 surveys did not reveal a similar growth pattern, and we continue to detect it in low levels only. However, it clearly has the potential to suddenly become a problem for the ecology and economy of the Lake.

Starry stonewort is a serious concern. It's been detected in Chautauqua Lake for some time but generally in low density and without signs that it might spread out of control. This changed in 2022 when our crews detected it growing in a dense monoculture in Ashville Bay and near Prendergast Point. Careful and close monitoring of these two populations continues, while we also keep a close watch on other locations where this alga has not exploded.

In addition, we are working with partner organizations and municipalities to develop novel management strategies, as most of the traditional eradication/control methods (mechanical harvesting or chemical control) are ineffective and may even have adverse effects. In 2023, the NYSDEC issued a permit to us for a pilot removal effort in Ashville Bay using Mobitracs. Large volumes of starry stonewort were removed from a 1.5-acre project area in time before it was able to drop its bulbils (reproductive structures). Our 2024 surveys showed that starry stonewort started growing earlier than in previous years. The project area that was cleared last fall started out with beautiful native aquatic vegetation, but as the season progressed, it grew back into the area from neighboring patches that were not removed during the pilot. Near Prendergast Point where we were unable to remove any stonewort in 2023, this alga grew even more dense and expanded its footprint beyond where it was found last year. We are currently awaiting permits to hopefully repeat and expand the Mobitrac removal experiment into both sites next year.

Management of these new invasives is challenging and leaves all of us with many questions and, unfortunately, little time to find answers.



Swinging “Fore” Healthy Lakes & Watersheds

Our annual Charity Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Chautauqua Golf Club was held on June 24th this year, with more than 100 professional and amateur golfers hitting the links. This year’s winning team was WNY PGA Pro Anthony Schrio (Glen Oak Golf Course) and amateur golfers Fred Pellerito, Dan Cheney, and BJ Monacelli.

Thank you to everyone who sponsored, played in, and volunteered for the event to help us raise almost \$28,000 (net) to further our work to preserve and enhance the health and vitality of our area’s lands and waters. Special thanks go out to Chautauqua Golf Club pros Kirk Stauffer and Troy Moss for hosting and organizing this great event and to Snug Harbor Marine, who was this year’s presenting event sponsor, and to Gary and Colleen Reeve, who were this year’s hosting member sponsor.

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4th Annual Sailing Rallye A Success

On June 22nd, we held our fourth annual Chautauqua Lake Sailing Rallye, which raised more than \$8,000 (net) for our conservation programs. The event also included a photo contest and trivia challenge with several prize giveaways! Many thanks go out to our 30 registrants who participated and took to the water in support of our mission and to the following sponsors, supporters, and organizers who helped make the day a success:



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Beauty of our Lakes Downstream (continued)

About 9.5 miles downstream from there, Cassadaga Creek meets Conewango Creek, which enters from Cattaraugus County near the town of Kennedy, and flows south into Pennsylvania near Route 62, to eventually meet the Allegheny River in Warren. In all, the County's major waterways (Cassadaga and Conewango Creeks) provide over 50 miles of recreational potential, all with great opportunities for fishing and nature enjoyment from a kayak, canoe, or paddleboard.



The Marden E. Cobb Waterway Trail consists of a series of launches and lean-to's that once provided the infrastructure to activate these major waterways, but long-term lack of maintenance and the added challenge of Emerald Ash Borer-caused tree die-offs created log jams, navigational hazards, and obstructions to healthy flow in our rivers. Since the fall of 2023, the Conservancy has been working to make these waterways safer through American Rescue Plan Act funding allocated to us from the County. We are slowly working our way through the systems, mapping various challenges, prioritizing log removals that pose imminent hazards to the safety of boaters and those with potential to divert the flow of a creek and cause property damage because of flooding or bank erosion. This summer, we were able to clear almost 20 miles of Cassadaga Creek, and more than 11 miles of the lower Conewango Creek was opened up in 2023.

When you're enjoying your next leisurely paddle down one of these beautiful waterways, I promise that you will forget, at times, that you are still in Chautauqua County when you follow the beauty of our lakes downstream.



**CHAUTAUQUA
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Did You Know?

<p>Wetlands Protect and Improve Water Quality</p> <p>Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs</p>	<p>Average Monthly Snowfall in Jamestown</p> <p>20"</p> <p>Dec - March</p>	<p>7.8 Chadakoin River miles-long</p> <p>Flows entirely in Chautauqua County</p>
<p>1,500,000 gallons of drinking water in Jamestown's Buffalo Street Reservoir Built in 1925</p>	<p>25 Million Trees 3 Billion lbs Pumpkins</p> <p>Sold Every Year Keep them out of the landfill</p>	<p>December 21st Winter Solstice</p>

The 'Shed Sheet newsletter is compiled and edited by Jill Eklund, Director of Communications.