

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network Summertime 2020

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Many people have been noting that nature's annual seasonal rounds have continued, regardless of our human problems. As our human cacophony has died down, some have wondered if nature is emerging, edging outward. Here's my recent experience: When I went outside to walk my dog at 5:30 a.m., a deer was sleeping in the front yard on the recently-mown grass, halfway between my bedroom window and Hanshaw Road. She woke up, stared at us, and ambled slowly across the empty road to the fields.

There's a redwing blackbird just down the road who daily divebombs me, my dog, and the neighbors, I suppose for getting too close to the family nest. It is probable that a bobcat visited the backyard in April (falling off a white pine branch with a yowl), terrifying my cats. The mallard ducks situated at the next door pond wandered freely and talkatively around my yard, unafraid of my household. I have heard of many other such close encounters, since shortly after the pandemic began and people-pressure retreated.

Is it us, or is it them? In any case, we should treasure our deeper immersion in the out-of-doors during these interesting, tragic, and strange times.

Many people have gone to the lake to paddle, walk, and swim, are hiking along creeks and to waterfalls for solace and release. Families and friends sheltered at lakeside cottages outside the usual summer season, to be together and avoid pandemic dangers.

We do not yet know what changes the summer and fall of 2020 will bring for society, our country, and for us personally, but we do know that the changing seasons are beautiful and that our lake, lands and waters are loved and valued. And that Black Lives Matter.

Watershed-protective work continues this summer

Most of the Network's annual water-protective activities are continuing during 2020, some of them adjusted to keep participants safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were unable to host our usual spring community conference at Cayuga Lake's north end; but we are supporting numerous research and volunteer monitoring efforts around the lake. There's many things we can do to protect water quality and enjoy the outdoors, while staying safe.

Stormwater Sampling: The results of this new project may someday point the way for reduction of runoff that contributes to Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs). Bill Ebert, chair of our Water Quality Committee, reports that the Stormwater Sampling team has done one round of base flow sampling at the mouths of eight creeks around the lake. These are, in Seneca County (west shore): Sheldrake Creek, Johnsons Creek, Burroughs Creek, Williamson Creek, Canoga Creek, Canoga Creek (North); and in Cayuga County (east shore) Yawger Creek (North), Yawger Creek (South), and Great Gully. Trained early this spring by staff from Upstate Freshwater

Institute (see photo), the samplers are ready to collect water quality samples during big rain events, which often wash larger quantities of excess nutrients (phosphorus, nitrogen) down creeks and into the lake. This special focus project builds on years of data collected under the guidance of Ithaca's Community Science Institute. Learn more about this project at our website at [Resources>Water Quality Committee](#).

CSLAP: The Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) is a volunteer lake monitoring and education program that is managed by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYS Federation of Lake Associations. CSLAP was established in 1985 to, among other goals, begin collecting water quality data about New York State lakes, using trained volunteers. Coverage of Cayuga Lake by this program has varied over the years, but from 2017-2019 DEC paid for water quality sampling at five points down the length of the lake. The Network took over payment of lab fees for three of these sites for 2020, so that regular data collection could continue. We'll share results of this long-term look at the state of Cayuga Lake in an article later this year.

Out on the lake this summer, if you see a motor boat bobbing while two people take water samples, they may be our CSLAP volunteers in action. They are James and John Murphy (sampling at a site in the shallow north end), Bill Ebert and Tom Casella (sampling mid-lake near Burroughs Creek), Doug and Linda Dixon (sampling near Long Point State Park), Sarah and Peter Gould (sampling mid-lake near Taughannock Creek), and Bill Foster, Shellie Blackler, Marina Howarth of the *Teal* crew (aka DiscoverCayuga Lake), (mid-lake in shallow water near the Merrill Family Sailing Center). See accompanying photos. This project takes a lot of time and commitment. You can learn more about CSLAP at DEC's page: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/81576.html>

Look for other Network-sponsored and supported volunteer-led projects in this issue of *Network News*. There's plenty to do, so please – go outdoors!