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LAKE WORK RAMPS UP FOR MEMORIAL DAY



Figure 1. Pictured above is a Chautauqua Lake Association barge filled with debris removed from the lake during early-season cleanup. Photo by Mike LaTone.

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Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance

With Memorial Day comes the unofficial start of summer and a welcome return of activity to Chautauqua Lake. As waters have continued to warm over the past month, docks and boats have begun to dot shorelines again as lakeside businesses and residents prepare for sunny weather. Each year is unique for the lake and its watershed, but there are a few points worth recalling during these first weeks of the recreation season.

Post-winter debris from logs and large branches is always a concern when it comes to boating during the spring and early summer. As in years past, the Chautauqua Lake Association has begun its 2023 maintenance season by clearing dangerous debris from the lake. This early work is key to making sure that boaters have a safe and damage-free start to the year. The Town of Chautauqua Mobitrac program has also jumped into action early to help clear debris from a local marina, and will soon expand

operations lakewide working jointly with the CLA. On the topic of safety, Chautauqua County Sherriff Jim Quattrone recently issued a reminder to the public that now is a good time to brush up on your boater safety rules, and that boater safety courses will be held on June 10 at the Turner Community Center and June 17 at The Lawson Center. All motor boat operators born after January 1, 1983 are required to have a boater safety certificate in 2023. For more information about boater safety courses, visit the New York State Parks website.

Along with recreational boaters, plant management programs also returned to the water in advance of Memorial Day. Early-season mechanical and chemical plant management programs, led respectively by the CLA and Chautauqua Lake Partnership, tend to focus on reducing the impacts of curly-leaf pondweed. This invasive species gets a fast start on competitors due to its early growing season, and typically dies back around late June or early July. Early reports indicate that pondweed has gotten off to a fast start in 2023, and management programs are currently underway. A more detailed breakdown of this species can be found in the May 2022 *Chautauqua Current* at chautauquaalliance.org/the-chautauqua-current/.

Some have also observed that the lake is showing good water clarity so far, a positive for those who like to get on the water early. “The clarity of Chautauqua Lake’s waters has been exceptional this year,” said County Watershed Coordinator Dave McCoy. “Our efforts to improve wastewater collection and treatment and control nutrient runoff are beginning to pay dividends, especially in the North Basin of Chautauqua Lake. I’ve heard people say that they can see down ten feet or more in some places.” Alliance Project Manager Taylor West has observed similar conditions. “In the North Basin I had about nine feet of visibility in mid-May, which I have not seen in years past,” said West. “Water clarity was also very good in the South Basin around that time.” Despite the mild winter with little snowpack and a recent lack of rain, the lake’s water level is also in good condition for the start of the season. Recent levels are sitting just above the historic median, and last year’s readings, per the United States Geological Survey.

While it remains to be seen how our mild winter might affect plant and algae growth as the season progresses, warmer temperatures can allow residents and visitors to start enjoying the lake earlier. “Certainly climate change is a global concern, but the warmer temperatures we are seeing here in Western New York are expanding recreational opportunities on our lakes and waterways,” McCoy said. “People are coming to the lake before Memorial Day and staying well past Labor Day – and that is a good thing for Chautauqua County.” These expanded shoulder seasons also present great opportunities to enjoy the lake during less busy times of the year.

There continue to be a lot of developments when it comes to the lake and watershed, and we at the Alliance look forward to sharing updates with you this summer. Those interested in learning about some of this work can attend the Chautauqua Lake Conference, which will be hosted by Chautauqua Institution on June 17. Alliance member organizations all play important complementary roles in helping to prepare the lake and watershed for enjoyment by all. They perform critical work each year spanning aquatic plant management, shoreline cleanup, dam operation, research and monitoring, invasive species, public outreach, watershed management, tourism, and much more. We thank our members for all that they do and the funders who make it possible. The Alliance wishes everyone a happy and safe Memorial Day.