



## Chautauqua Current No. 46

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*Figure 1. Pictured above, County Executive PJ Wendel speaks at the signing ceremony for the Chautauqua Lake Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study. At left are Colonel Nicholas Melin of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Congressman Nick Langworthy. Not pictured is County Legislature Chairman Pierre Chagnon.*

### **Years of Work, Research Brought Army Corps to Chautauqua Lake**

*By Jay Young*

*Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance*

After years and years of hard work, Chautauqua Lake has an official new partner —the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The long-awaited collaboration was made a reality following a signing ceremony in Mayville in early October. That event was attended by many of those we have to thank for helping bring the Corps into the fold of local lake and watershed improvement.

Formally titled the ‘Chautauqua Lake Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study’, the Corps has embarked on a three-year, \$3 million project to help tackle key issues like nutrient loading, sedimentation, harmful algal blooms, excess plant growth, and invasive species. On hand to outline the work that is to come were Colonel Nicholas Melin, Commander of the Pittsburgh District of the Corps, Congressman Nick Langworthy, County Executive PJ Wendel, Legislature Chairman Pierre Chagnon, and County Watershed Coordinator Dave McCoy. In early June Dr. Marion Divers, a Community Planner in the Planning and Environmental Branch of the Pittsburgh District, gave a presentation at the county’s lake symposium explaining how the Corps plans to approach the work.

There are thousands of freshwater lakes with issues just like those we face on Chautauqua, which begs the question, why us? Why would the Corps choose to work on Chautauqua Lake? The answer is partly twofold, and involves both people and data. The local community is fortunate to have representatives whose advocacy made this partnership possible. All the way back in 2017, Chagnon and McCoy joined other local representatives on a trip to Washington to lobby for this feasibility study, as well as federal support for related water projects. The study was approved by Congress a year later via the Water Resources Development Act, but funding still needed to be secured for the work. The \$500,000 needed to get the ball rolling was made possible by Congressman Langworthy's work on the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations bills, in partnership with Senator Chuck Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. Financial commitments from the county also had to be finalized. All along the way there have been a series of conversations, meetings, and discussions by dedicated local stakeholders who want to see the lake thrive long into the future. The efforts of those individuals have made this partnership a reality.

Data is another main reason for this project. We often hear the refrain of "just another study, just another study", which is understandable in some situations. However, those studies and the research that has been done locally are a big part of the reason the Army Corps is in the game. Dr. Divers and Col. Melin have both touted Chautauqua Lake as 'data-rich'. Environmental studies include a total maximum daily load document, lakewide plant surveys, a watershed management plan, a macrophyte management strategy, and much more. Since 2020 The Jefferson Project in collaboration with other researchers has been conducting an in-depth research program on lake and harmful algal bloom dynamics. All of these pieces form a large data archive that many other lakes simply do not have. They are valuable resources that can be put to use by the Army Corps, following a science-towards-solutions approach. There are of course data gaps that will need to be filled in, but Chautauqua Lake has a strong foundation of data that has laid the groundwork for progress.

The reason that so many people have worked so long to bring the Army Corps to our lakeshore is simple —horsepower. The Corps has unparalleled environmental engineering capabilities and experience. They have a history of working at scales much larger than anything we have yet seen here on Chautauqua Lake. They have the horsepower to put our foundation of data to work, for the benefit of the lake and all its users. The Alliance thanks everyone who has helped make this opportunity a reality, and is excited for the future.