



## Chautauqua Current No. 56

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*Figure 1. AJ Reyes of GEI Consultants tours the lower South Basin of Chautauqua Lake in 2025.*

### **New Consultant, Board, Leads Alliance Forward**

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We want Chautauqua Lake to be as healthy and usable as possible. The ‘we’ in that sentence refers to a lot of different folks who view the problems facing the lake differently.

It refers to the Alliance, CLA, CLP, CWC, DEC, lakeside municipalities, Chautauqua Institution, the County, homeowners, boaters, lakeside businesses, anglers, kayakers, researchers, etc. etc. It’s no small wonder that cooperation and collaboration towards solutions is a challenge.

Fortunately the ‘we’ now also refers to the team at GEI Consultants, and project lead AJ Reyes. Reyes is a Certified Lake Manager who works on lakes all across New York and beyond, and for the last eight months he and his team have been tasked by the Alliance with helping the collective ‘we’ better understand and manage our lake.

In addition to reviewing much of our lake’s scientific data, one of GEI’s main jobs has been to engage local stakeholders and learn the ropes of what’s going on with the lake, both in terms of the environment and lake users. They have met with CLA about the lake’s harvesting program, CLP about its

herbicide treatments, CWC about their invasive species and watershed work, and DEC about permitting and regulation. They have also spent time on the water, to see what the lake's plants and algae look like, and to view firsthand our lake's features and management in action. They have used this information to advise the Alliance Board during the year, assisting the funding and management planning process for 2026.

Between the new role being played by GEI, and the upcoming expansion of the Alliance Board early next year, real steps are being taken toward new management approaches. As Reyes has made his rounds speaking with many of our stakeholders, new dialogue has begun and opportunities to work together on new projects are already taking shape.

For example, much of the South Basin was choked out by a native plant *Elodea* in the summer of 2025. The area was unusable in places, it was a safety hazard for boaters and sheriff's patrols, it was unpleasant to look at and smell, and it hurt lakeside businesses. It is clear that a more robust strategy is needed for management to improve navigation and public safety.

Now, thanks to the work of many, new plans are taking shape. One way to potentially address this type of issue could be to create a network of navigation channels, established in the spring and maintained during the recreational season. An approach like this could potentially use both mechanical and chemical techniques to address plant growth. If approved by the DEC and implemented, it would involve the work and participation of multiple Alliance members including CLP, CWC, CLA, and the Town of Chautauqua Mobitracs.

Navigation channels are certainly not a novel idea in lake management, but the concepts being considered by Reyes and Glenn Sullivan, seasoned lake consultant to the CLP, could represent a big shift in how we balance navigational and ecological needs. Many details would still need to be addressed to implement a plan like this, including permitting, determining the size and location of the channels, channel marking, and timing.

Early and open communication is often key to implementing any new approach for a shared resource like the lake. Already this fall groups have been meeting collectively with DEC officials to discuss how a navigation management plan might be permitted to improve public safety and mobility in Burtis Bay and beyond. That is encouraging. Also encouraging, the DEC appears supportive of seeing how increased collaboration among our lake groups can benefit navigation, safety, usability, and local businesses.

GEI is also developing other recommendations to help address the lake's challenges, from invasive species to data collection. By year's end our Board will have a suite of action items to consider, aimed at improving how we collectively manage and monitor the lake for years to come. Some of these may be examples drawn from other lakes, and some may be unique to Chautauqua. As Reyes has routinely said, "Every lake is different." Some may be near-term actions, and others may take time to achieve. But most importantly, they will be objective recommendations from an outside professional. New ideas paired with good cooperation will go a long way for Chautauqua Lake.