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Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance, Inc.

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Figure 1. The Chautauqua Harbor Hotel will once again host the County's Chautauqua Lake Symposium on Saturday, March 21.

Lake Symposium Will Focus on Action

By Jay Young

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**NOTE: Following this article's publication in The Post-Journal the day's speakers were updated to include the Chautauqua Lake Association, Chautauqua Lake Partnership, and Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy.*

Saturday's Chautauqua Lake Symposium will offer the public a first-hand opportunity to hear how lake science will translate into action in 2026.

County Executive PJ Wendel will lead off the event at 9 a.m. at the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel in Celoron, and presenters are expected to include GEI Consultants, The Jefferson Project, North Carolina State University, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (speakers subject to change). While each of these groups play different roles, they are all invested in the 'science towards solutions' approach we talk so much about on lake topics.

Since early 2025 AJ Reyes of GEI has served as the Alliance's independent lake consultant. Reyes has worked closely with the Alliance Board and our local lake service providers to assess the programs,

data, and funding currently in place. GEI's year-end assessment included a number of priority recommendations that are now under way in 2026.

One example is Reyes and his team working to consolidate all of the starry stonewort management going on at the lake. While we have made a lot of progress on the species since it became a big problem four years ago, there is room to increase efficiency and coordination by bringing many different parties under one umbrella. This will allow the group to assess how well different management tools are working, try new approaches, and learn from outside experts. GEI's new scope of work for this year also includes new analysis of plant data to address key information gaps, and helping management programs better adapt to difficult conditions like those seen in the South Basin last year.

Representatives from The Jefferson Project will be on hand to present updates from their research program, and how that information is being put to work. Speaking recently to the County Legislature, Dr. Allison Hrycik outlined how the program's comprehensive water quality and ecosystem modeling has answered key questions about lake dynamics, and in time may be used to forecast harmful algal blooms. The team is also using data to locate potential nutrient removal projects aimed at reducing HABs.

Dr. Rob Richardson and his team at North Carolina State University are continuing their work with the Chautauqua Lake Partnership to monitor the lake's diverse plant communities, and help inform management decisions. Richardson has been closely involved with updating the CLP's 5-year management plan, and the annual NC State plant surveys yield important actionable information for those managing the lake.

Working alongside all of these groups is the NYSDEC, which will be on hand Saturday to discuss lake developments. Already its staff have worked with local stakeholders on new ways to address the heavy South Basin plant growth seen last summer. New York State is also working closely with The Jefferson Project, and has been busy working on the lake's internal nutrient loading problem. With new nutrient data and goals, we can better address the nutrient inputs that are a main driver of plant and algae growth.

In addition to sharing a common interest in the health and usability of the lake, the groups speaking on Saturday also have a commitment to action. The work in motion for 2026 shows that 'science towards solutions' is not just a mantra, it is the reality for a broad and talented team focused on Chautauqua Lake.

Thank you to the office of the County Executive and the Harbor Hotel for hosting, and to all of the day's presenters. The event is free and open to the public and will be livestreamed on the County's YouTube page. To RSVP visit chautauquacountyny.gov/chqlake.

