



Chautauqua Current No. 59

Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance, Inc.

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Figure 1. Pictured above, sailboats off the shore of Hartley Park in Lakewood are readied for the coming season. Photo by Jay Young.

Alliance Consultant Working Closely With Lake Orgs

By Jay Young

Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance

Heading into the 2026 season the Alliance and its member organizations will be working closely alongside the experienced team at GEI Consultants in order to benefit Chautauqua Lake and its users.

Project lead AJ Reyes recently addressed the public at the County Executive's Lake Symposium in March on the firm's initial work last year, which included getting to know the lake, its wealth of data, and the service providers that maintain it. Now, with a refined scope of work for 2026, GEI has already begun assisting them as they gear up for another season.

High on the priority list for Reyes is helping develop a more adaptive overall management strategy with in-lake service providers: the Chautauqua Lake Association (working with Town of Chautauqua Mobitracs), Chautauqua Lake Partnership, and Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy. These groups also shared updates with the public at the County Symposium, and have hit the water in recent

weeks. Now that GEI has established relationships with each of these organizations and gathered background knowledge about their various programs, more integration and adaptation are the next steps.

Throughout the winter and spring GEI has been closely involved in conversations covering the strategies and techniques that are used to address our main issues like excess plant growth and usability. In particular, these meetings have focused on the harsh Burtis Bay conditions we saw last year. New approaches are planned for 2026, and our local organizations are in close communication with each other, along with DEC officials. This improved framework of communication will be put to use as lake conditions develop over the next several months.

As in 2025 Reyes will be visiting Chautauqua Lake at key points of the season to assess lake conditions. Members of CLA, CLP, CWC, and the Alliance will also be in contact with GEI on a regular basis throughout the summer to relay information about how the lake is doing both ecologically and in terms of usability. Reyes will be helping keep tabs on the results of in-lake management programs including the CLA's harvesting and cleanup, Mobitrac near-shore work, CLP's herbicide applications, and CWC's invasive species work.

New for this year, GEI will play an expanded role in the management of starry stonewort. The Alliance Board has prioritized the creation of a technical advisory group (TAG) in order to continue removal of this invasive algae, assess past work, and plan for the future. The role planned for GEI includes the creation of a starry stonewort strategy, coordinating management, incorporating outside academic input, and collecting new data to help understand how this algae reproduces and spreads. Building on efforts led by Twan Leenders of the CWC, Reyes will help bring together the actions of all those involved to help us better understand our specific starry stonewort problem and the best course of action.

GEI will continue to serve as an advisor to the Alliance Board throughout the year on a range of issues, including funding decisions and scientific analysis. Reyes will provide recommendations in real time, and comprehensively at the end of the year, which will support more informed decisions about what to do for the lake and watershed. GEI's scope of work also includes tasks related to public communication of data, and dialoging with lake researchers.

This progress has been made possible thanks to the dedicated work of our newly expanded Alliance Board, willingness of our Members to work together, and continued generosity of our local funders. For those interested in learning more, a recording of the March Lake Symposium can be found on the County's YouTube page and on the County Executive's webpage. The Alliance will host its annual May Member meeting at 4:30 PM on Thursday, May 14 at the Lawson Center at 73 Lakeside Drive in Bemus Point. The public is welcome to attend.