

# Skaneateles Lake Watershed Wave Reviews

Winter 2025 Edition

Visit the Skaneateles Lake website for resources and tips on how to protect the water quality of Skaneateles Lake  
[www.skanelakeinfo.org](http://www.skanelakeinfo.org)

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*Brought to you by the City of Syracuse Department of Water  
Ben Walsh, Mayor*

The Skaneateles Watershed Education Program works to protect the water quality of Skaneateles Lake, a treasured resource that serves as the primary drinking water source for Skaneateles and the City of Syracuse. The City of Syracuse has funded this program since its inception in 1996.

## Septic Systems Outreach to Protect Water Quality By: Camille Marcotte, Cornell Cooperative Extension Onondaga County



Averil Davis presents at the Septic System Program on 8/21/25

Almost 2,000 homes in the Skaneateles Lake watershed use septic systems to collect and treat wastewater, and most of these homes have septic systems older than 30 years. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends property owners start planning to upgrade septic systems that are 25 to 30 years old, since they are likely approaching their useful lifespan.

When individual septic systems fail, they can cause nutrients, like phosphorus, to enter Skaneateles Lake. Phosphorus that comes from septic systems is mostly a type called soluble

reactive phosphorus, which can easily be used by plants and algae. Too much phosphorus can lead to excessive algae growth and even cause harmful algae blooms. While Skaneateles Lake has very low phosphorus amounts, everyone in the watershed plays a role in protecting the lake's water quality. For example, in 2024 eighteen violations caused by failing septic systems were reported by the City of Syracuse, which conducts annual inspections of septic systems in the watershed.

In the spring, almost 900 Skaneateles Lake watershed property owners received a letter written by the City of Syracuse and mailed by Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Onondaga County about their septic system. This letter was mailed to residents with records that showed their septic system was likely older than 30 years. If replacement or modification was not an option at this time, property owners were encouraged to have a septic system evaluation performed by a licensed design professional. Also included with the letter was CCE Onondaga County's "Homeowners Guide to Septic System Management" brochure. The brochure provides information on how septic systems work, the different components of septic systems, why septic systems fail, and more.

An educational program providing additional information following the letter mailed earlier this year offered resources to homeowners who may be interested in doing an inspection, maintenance, and/or a septic system replacement. On Thursday, August 21st at The Creamery in Skaneateles, thirty-five attendees learned about septic system basics, including maintenance, the NYS Septic System Replacement Fund and local resources to help with septic systems, and new septic system technologies for property owners interested in replacing and upgrading their septic systems.

This educational series was organized by CCE Onondaga's Skaneateles Lake Education Program. Funding for CCE programming in the Skaneateles Watershed is provided by the City of Syracuse. Other partners involved in the program include the Skaneateles Historical Society (venue), the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (presenter), the NY Onsite Wastewater Treatment Training Network (presenter), and the Onondaga County Department of Environmental Health (presenter).

**Cornell Cooperative Extension**  
Onondaga County



## The Skaneateles Lake Association Celebrates John Menapace

By: Frank Moses, Executive Director, Skaneateles Lake Association

One of Skaneateles Lake's fiercest protectors retired from the Skaneateles Lake Association's (SLA) Milfoil Control Program. Since its inception in 2006, John Menapace, a long-time Skaneateles resident, and his company Aquatic Invasives, Inc., have successfully run the SLA's milfoil control program. Every summer since 2012, Menapace and his team covered roughly six acres of milfoil growing along the lake's shore. Over 14 years, a total of more than 108 acres of milfoil was successfully killed.

While Eurasian Watermilfoil was first detected in 1974, it did not become a concern until the late 1990s, when boaters and swimmers started noticing large patches near the Skaneateles Sailing Club and the Village of Skaneateles jetty. A full-lake survey conducted in 2001 found 39 large patches of milfoil, but when that survey was repeated in 2006, the number had nearly tripled to 111 patches.



John Menapace in 2006 with a pile of Eurasian Watermilfoil. Photo credit: SLA

This explosive growth rate led to the establishment of the SLA that same year. The late Dr. Robert Werner, a preeminent limnologist from SUNY ESF, led the new non-profit's efforts to mitigate milfoil's spread. Werner partnered with Menapace and his company to devise a strategy to remove this invasive from the lake.

Starting in the summer of 2006, after the SLA surveyed the lake and identified the largest patches of milfoil, Menapace and the divers "harvested" the weed by hand. They discarded the milfoil into large, 40-lb, repurposed onion bags. At its peak, there were nearly 30 divers harvesting milfoil from the lake bottom, which resulted in 100 bags being removed each day.

Not satisfied with the rate of removal, Menapace began investigating the efficacy of laying benthic mats over the patches of milfoil, which would kill the plant by depriving it of sunlight. Due to limited options at the time, Menapace decided to design and fabricate his own mat.

He cut heavy-duty polyester fabric into pieces measuring between 40 and 50 feet by 12 feet. He then designed and built a special, 14-foot-wide sewing machine to sew in pockets every six feet, in which he could insert steel cable to weigh the mats down on the lake's bottom. He made 325 of these mats by hand. This design was so successful that the same mats are still used today. This summer, just like every summer for the past 14 years, John and his team successfully placed and removed these mats, killing off another 6.3 acres of milfoil.

He also designed and built a custom mat roller, which is attached to the boat, to retrieve the mats from the lake bottom. The diving team lowers this hydraulically powered mechanism into the water to roll up the mats, which are then raised to the surface, detached and tied up for pick up later in the season.

When asked what made him the proudest about his 20-year tenure, Menapace revealed his true character, saying he hadn't really thought about it. He said, "It was a job that just had to be done. So, we did it. Simple as that."

## Help Us Grow Phase Two: Join CNY Land Trust for the Next Tree Planting Day – April 18, 2026

By: Devon Dunbar, Development Manager, Central New York Land Trust

The Central New York Land Trust has completed Phase One of a major reforestation effort at the former O'Neill Family Farm – now a permanently protected Preserve within the Skaneateles Lake watershed. Thanks to state grants, private support, and a dedicated community, 1,500 native tree saplings were planted this spring on the sloped fields of the O'Neill Preserve. This long-term project aims to protect drinking water and restore native ecosystems. As a bonus, it creates hands-on conservation opportunities for residents. *(continued on next page)*



(tree planting continued...)

The 144-acre preserve was acquired in 2023 through the New York State Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP), which is funded by the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). While reforestation wasn't required for this grant, CNY Land Trust secured additional funding through the Regenerate NY program, with matching support from The Nature Conservancy.

This past April, volunteers planted Red Oak, Sugar Maple, White Oak, Shagbark Hickory, and American Elm to stabilize the hillside and support watershed health. More than 80 volunteers braved the rain and mud to make Phase One a success, supported by local partners including the Skaneateles Lake Association, Skaneateles Chamber of Commerce, and Valentine's Pizza.



O'Neill Preserve Planting. Photo credit: Central New York Land Trust

Phase Two begins April 18, 2026, and this year we're building an even bigger community effort. CNY Land Trust is inviting up to 40 partner organizations – businesses, schools, clubs, faith groups, and community teams – to each bring five volunteers for a fun, hands-on day planting trees at the O'Neill Preserve. It's a meaningful way to support local conservation while spending a spring day outside together.

Individuals and families are also strongly encouraged to sign up – no experience needed. Register at <https://bit.ly/4a5k3HR> or email [volunteer@cnylandtrust.org](mailto:volunteer@cnylandtrust.org).

Join us as we continue reforesting this hillside for a healthier Skaneateles Lake and a more resilient Central New York.

## Congressman Mannion Facilitates SAM Grant For Spill Cleanup Equipment

By: Eric Jensen, Resource Conservation Specialist, Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District



SweeperVac. Photo credit: Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District

The Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District worked with former NYS Senator, now Congressman, Mannion's office to apply for NYS State and Municipal Facilities Program (SAM) funding to purchase a tow behind Sweeper Vacuum trailer and a storage shed. We started the application process in June 2022 and installed the shed in October 2025 and are scheduled to receive the trailer unit in November. This equipment will meet local needs and will allow the district to mitigate/cleanup farm fertilizer spills on paved roads across the county in a timely manner, as part of our agricultural spill response program.

The trailer unit is designed to be towed to the site with a pickup truck. The gasoline-powered vacuum unit can clean up any dry fertilizer on paved surfaces as it is pulled over the area.

The spilled pellets can be brought to the farm and utilized there while local water quality is protected from potential nutrient pollution.

The unit has trailer lights as well as a safety beacon. A garage style shed is in place to store the trailer unit while not in use to protect it from the weather and always be ready to respond to an emergency. The District is thankful to SAM grant funding and Congressman Mannions' office for this opportunity to come into reality.

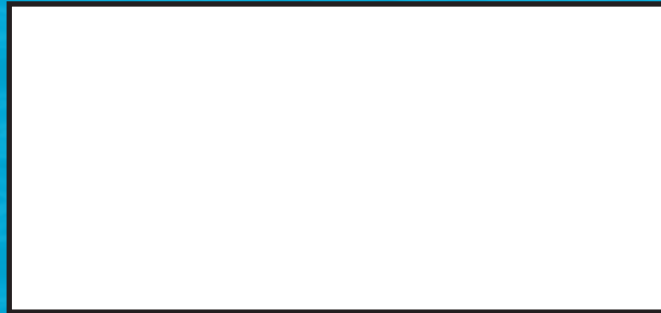
For more information, contact the Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District office location at 6680 Onondaga Lake Parkway, Liverpool at (315) 457-0325.



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# Skaneateles Lake Wave Reviews

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## Stay connected!

Join our Water Quality List-serve to receive digital WAVE Reviews, event announcements, and more. Skaneateles Watershed Residents and those looking to protect water quality in their community are encouraged to join.

List serve accessible through this direct link <http://eepurl.com/bQ22XP> or by visiting our website at [www.cceonondaga.org](http://www.cceonondaga.org) and searching for our 'Skaneateles Lake' landing page.

Don't forget to check out the new Skaneateles Lake Watershed website at [www.skanelakeinfo.org](http://www.skanelakeinfo.org)

## Important Contacts for the Skaneateles Watershed

Cayuga County Health Department 315-253-1405  
Cayuga County Soil & Water Conservation District 315-252-4171  
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County 315-424-9485  
Cortland County Health Department 607-753-5036  
Cortland County Soil & Water Conservation District 607-756-5991  
NYS DEC Region 7 Environmental Permits (Onondaga & Cayuga) 315-426-7438  
NYS DEC Region 7 Environmental Permits Sub-office (Cortland) 607-753-3095  
NYS DEC Spill Prevention and Response 800-457-7362  
NYS DEC Region 7 Water & Wastewater (Stormwater, Dam Safety, Flood Control) 315-426-7500  
Onondaga County Health Department 315-435-3252  
Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District 315-457-0325  
Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program 315-457-0325  
Syracuse Water Department (Skaneateles) 315-448-8366

This newsletter was created by Camille Marcotte of Cornell Cooperative Extension Onondaga County and Rich Abbott, City of Syracuse Water Department.

### Skaneateles Lake Watershed Education Program

Funding for Cornell Cooperative Extension programming in the Skaneateles Lake Watershed is provided by the City of Syracuse Department of Water.

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