

Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association, Inc.

LAKEWATCH

WINTER, 2009

"Seneca Lake is a critical resource for the region and should be protected now if water quality threats exist, because once stressed or perturbed, it will take a generation or more to restore the lake back to its less stressed state."

*Dr. John Halfman,
Finger Lakes Institute*

SLPWA Is Revitalized!

Chairman's Message from Richard Ahola

Seneca Lake needs us! It contains 4.2 trillion gallons of quality drinking water, more than half of the total volume of water in all 11 Finger Lakes. However, the quality of Seneca Lake continues to deteriorate due to the attack of pollutants and invasive species. Nutrients, including nitrates and phosphates, feed millfoil algae and, indirectly, zebra and quagga mussels. The lake, according to Professor John Halfman and his students, responds slowly to these threats and needs to be protected from further deterioration (see sidebar).

Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association is an important grassroots organization which promotes research and education about the lake and its watershed. It monitors activities which affect the lake such as development, mining, gas drilling, agriculture and water use. SLPWA is and will be inter-acting with the Finger Lakes Institute and SLAP-5 (Seneca Lake Area Partners in 5 counties).

Special thanks need to go to Professor John Halfman of Hobart William Smith and Director Marion Balyszak of the Finger Lakes Institute in supporting the re-organization of Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association. The facilities of the Finger Lakes Institute serve as home for our meetings and Ms. Balyszak's support has been invaluable in assisting in the revitalization of our organization.

Also, I thank the re-organizing committee which intends to hand the reins of Seneca Lake Pure Waters to a Board of Directors elected at our annual meeting in August, 2009. The officers of the re-organizing committee include Treasurer Phillip Cianciotto and Secretary Mary Anne Kowalski. Look for our website to be up and running very soon. I believe that Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association is a key to protecting Seneca Lake and all those who enjoy one of the most unique lakes in the country.

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SLPWA's History is Impressive!

Since its beginnings in 1991, SLPWA has been active in several initiatives. Examples are:

- Founder, in July, 1996, Seneca Lake Area Partners in Five Counties (SLAP-5), a collaborative working group for Seneca Lake Watershed Management
- Chair/Coordination of the SLAP-5, 2000-2007
- Onsite Wastewater Management Recommendations for Seneca Lake Watershed, 2004
- Green Industry in the Seneca Lake Watershed, 2004
- Voting Member: Water Quality Coordinating Committees of Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca and Yates counties
- Sponsored Outreach Programs for elected municipal officials, municipal personnel, and watershed agencies pertaining to Onsite Wastewater Management, Phase II Stormwater Management and Water Quality in the Seneca Lake Watershed
- Participant in Schuyler County Earth Day Festival
- Sponsored workshops on Home*S*Syst Program: Assessing Household Environmental Risks
- Funded Water Quality Assessment of Keuka Outlet

Environmental Impact of Horizontal Drilling for Natural Gas

by Richard Ahola

Natural gas drilling using high volume hydraulic fracturing of horizontal wells in deep rock layers such as Marcellus, Utica Shale and other low permeability formations in NYS has caused the NYS Dept of Environmental Conservation to ask for public review and comment. At the core of the environmental concern is the large use of water (millions of gallons per well) and the use of toxic agents which have the potential for water pollution.

Although there is a Generic Environmental Impact Statement covering gas and oil drilling in NYS, the state has determined that a supplement to the generic statement should address issues related to the large volume of water needed to hydrofracture the shale to release the gas.

The DEC action will result in regulations expected to be promulgated in the summer of 2009.

Although gas drilling is currently exempt from federal regulations under the Safe Drinking Water Act, NY congressman Morris Hinchey has co-authored a bill (HR7231) which would enable the US EPA to protect drinking water from pollution due to gas drilling activities.

The state and federal regulatory effects are in anticipation of a large demand for gas drilling permits.

Advocacy groups, including the Sierra Club, support the extraction of natural gas only if there can be reasonable guarantees of our community and ecological health.

“Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association will be monitoring these developments and providing information to the public consistent with its mission to protect Seneca Lake and its watershed.”

Coming Soon!

www.senecalake.org

Read more about Dr. Halfman's report on Seneca Lake at:

<http://people.hws.edu/halfman/Data/2007%20Seneca%20Report.pdf>

Hazardous Spill Reporting

by Phil Cianciotto

Do you know who to call to report a hazardous spill or other environmental issue within the Seneca Lake Watershed?

The NYS Department of Conservation has provided us with the following contact numbers.

The 24 hour hotline for reporting spills statewide is [1-800-457-7362](tel:1-800-457-7362).

The day time number to report spills in the Seneca Lake watershed is [518-226-5433](tel:518-226-5433)/[585-226-5436](tel:585-226-5436) for the Region 8 Spill Response office. After normal business hours (after 4:45 p.m.), spills can be reported to the DEC through a dispatch service operated by the Hornell Fire Dept. by calling [607-324-4504](tel:607-324-4504).

Information about the DEC programs can be found on the internet at www.dec.ny.gov.

FLEA Gets Involved With Seneca Lake Water Level Problems

by Donna Scott, President, Finger Lakes Ecology Association, DLS9@cornell.edu

Finger Lakes Ecology Association (FLEA) concerns itself with Cayuga and Seneca Lakes' water level issues. FLEA members, Tom Goodall and Donna Scott, helped bring attention to low water levels of Seneca Lake this past season (2008) after residents and businesses reported that the Seneca Falls Power Corporation (SFPC) hydroelectric plants were drawing too much water from the lake and people could not get boats out of hoists or marinas.

SFPC is required by its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) contract to maintain Seneca Lake within 0.1 foot of target elevations of 446 feet Barge Canal Datum (BCD) during summer and at 445.0 feet BCD during winter. Except for brief times of heavy rainfall, the lake water level was near or below 446 feet most the summer and fall of 2008 (NYS Canal Corporation graph: <http://www.nyscanals.gov/faq/oswego/netdata/seneca-levels.pdf>).

Scott, Goodall, and 27 others attended a meeting September 11, 2008 in Montour Falls. Also attending were representatives from NYS Senator George Winner's and US Congressman Randy Kuhl's offices, who promised to address the matter. One representative and others noted that FERC has fined the SFPC for violations, but SFPC still does not comply. Scott told the group that while FLEA has no power over SFPC, association membership would be a way for people to act together. Nine people joined FLEA, and some are actively working on this challenge.

Both Goodall and Scott wrote letters to FERC in Washington, DC and New York City, as well as to several New York and US government representatives. Scott also wrote letters to FERC in 2006 and 2007. FERC sends Scott copies of its letters to SFPC which indicate that SFPC has often not complied with water level and other requirements.

Scott also received a copy of a letter to FERC from the US Fish and Wildlife Service noting other contract violations: "...this failure to continue funding the USGS gage continues the SFPC's record of failing to comply with, or delaying implementation of, environmentally-related license requirements. Compliance with the Seneca Lake rule curve has still not been resolved, and local citizens and Congressmen have been registering complaints with the NYS DEC and the FERC. In addition, the Seneca Falls fish passage facility has still not been constructed after 10 years of deliberations, nor has effectiveness testing of fish passage facilities taken place at Waterloo or Seneca Falls."

An October 31, 2008 *Finger Lakes Times* article, "Lake levels under review", by David Shaw reported that SFPC manager, Scott Goodwin, blamed much of SFPC's non-compliance on Canal locks and "on demand" boat service. Shaw quoted Goodwin: "Every time the locks in Seneca Falls cycle through a boat – and they'll do it for a single rowboat or canoe – five million gallons of water are involved. We have no choice," A Canal Corporation employee said this reasoning was quite inaccurate, and the use of water during lock operations is inconsequential. This person also noted that 2008 had small amounts of precipitation and little prior winter snow, making it more difficult to keep the large lakes' levels at the higher limits of their rule curves. Water discharge by SFPC exacerbates this difficulty.

This troublesome issue may be ongoing, since the SFPC's FERC contract runs until 2037. The Finger Lakes Ecology Association continues to be involved and will keep its members informed. For those who would like to learn more about the larger regional watershed, see: *Managing The Water Resources Of The Oswego River Basin In New York* at: <http://ny.water.usgs.gov/pubs/fs/fs18099/fs180-99.pdf>.

A Call For Entries: New Logo!

Win one hundred dollars (\$100) by providing SLPWA with a new logo. This contest is open to all Seneca Lake area students and residents. Create an original logo design representing the virtues of Seneca Lake that need to be protected and/or the purpose of SLPWA as you see it. Design should be one color and should be able to reduce to 3/4" in size. Design submitted need not be more than 6" in size. Entries should be postmarked no later than February 28 and mailed to:

Linda Hiestand, SLPWA Logo Coordinator
PO Box 247

Geneva, NY 14456 or email: lhiestand@rochester.rr.com

Include name, address and phone number, and email (optional) with your entry.

All non winning entries will be returned only if a SASE is accompanying the artwork.



HELP US HELP OUR LAKE!

Please return this form with your contribution. Remember your contribution is tax deductible and you will be doing your part to protect Seneca Lake, a valuable and precious resource to all of us! THANK YOU!

SLPWA's Mission...

...is to promote the understanding, preservation and improvement of the water quality, natural habitat and general environmental conditions of Seneca Lake and its watershed by sponsoring or undertaking scientific research, by collecting, preserving, publishing and disseminating information concerning Seneca Lake and its watershed and by encouraging and supporting the enforcement of laws and regulations and patterns of development and technology aimed at preserving and enhancing the water quality of the lake.

Name _____ Organization _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip+4 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please choose your level of support:

____ INDIVIDUAL (1 yr \$30, 2 yr \$54)

____ FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD (1 yr \$45, 2 yr \$80)

____ SENECA SUPPORTER (1 yr \$75, 2 yr \$135)

____ SMALL BUSINESS (1 yr \$100, 2 yr \$180)

____ PERSONAL PATRON (1 yr \$150, 2 yr \$270)

____ SPECIAL RATE (SENIOR/STUDENT) \$25

____ OTHER GIFT

Make checks payable to:

Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association, Inc.

Mail to:

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PO Box 247
Geneva, NY 14456

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