



In the mid-19th century, beaches, resorts, and amusement parks surrounded Onondaga Lake. People came from as far away as New York City to enjoy swimming and fishing in its clear, clean waters. Onondaga Lake fish were served at restaurants around New York State.

By the mid-20th century, the impacts of a growing city and major industrial activity had taken their toll on the lake. By 1940, swimming was prohibited due to high bacterial counts and turbidity resulting from

combined sewer overflows, municipal wastewater, and watershed runoff. Cliffs of industrial waste lined the shoreline and contaminated sediments covered much of the lake bottom. The resorts had disappeared, and boaters dodged floating litter and mats of algae. By the 1970s, fishing was banned, and Onondaga Lake was considered one of the most polluted lakes in the nation.

Today, there is much cause for hope. In the past decade, we have made great strides in reducing pollution from municipal sources. The hazardous waste concerns are being addressed across the basin, with particular focus on the highly contaminated sites that were a part of the old Allied Chemical properties now owned by Honeywell.

Much progress has come about through the Onondaga Lake Amended Consent Judgment (ACJ), brokered by Governor Pataki in 1997 and signed in 1998. The ACJ is the result of a joint effort by New York State, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and Onondaga County in concert with the Atlantic States Legal Foundation. It specifies projects to be undertaken by the county to reduce levels of phosphorus, ammonia, bacteria, and floatables entering the lake from Onondaga County's wastewater treatment plant and combined sewer overflows. The reduction levels were based on total maximum daily load assessments for ammonia and phosphorus developed by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and approved by the USEPA.

In the 1990s, the Metropolitan Syracuse Sewage Treatment Plant, known as Metro, was the source of over half the phosphorus and 90 percent of the ammonia entering the lake. With the start-up of the new biological aerated filtration system, the plant reduced its discharge of these pollutants and met the final ammonia-reduction goals in 2004—eight years ahead of schedule. The recently completed phosphorus treatment system is on line and meeting the ACJ stage 2 reduction requirements, an effective reduction of 80 percent over preconstruction discharges. These state-of-the-art technologies make Metro one of the most advanced wastewater treatment plants in the country.

The lake is already showing signs of recovery. The in-lake ammonia levels have fallen, and the ecological balance of water column microorganisms has improved. Further progress is expected as a result of several projects that are under way to reduce nonpoint source pollutant loadings from agricultural operations, stream and road-bank erosion, and urban runoff.

The total cost of the projects called for under the ACJ is \$380 million, which is shared by Onondaga County, the USEPA, the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers, and New York State. To date, the state has provided approximately \$90 million toward the ACJ construction projects.

In addition to the ACJ projects, DEC has proposed a clean-up plan for dredging and capping contaminated sediments on the lake bottom, which would be implemented in cooperation with Honeywell. A Record of Decision, which presents the remedial action plan for the disposal site, is expected to be out for public comment this summer.

DEC continues to actively participate in these efforts through its membership in the Onondaga Lake Partnership (OLP). The partnership's other executive members include the state Attorney General's Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, USEPA, City of Syracuse, and Onondaga County. These agencies, in conjunction with over 20 other groups that comprise the OLP committees, work together to ensure a holistic approach to rehabilitation of the lake and its watershed. It is only through these efforts and the integration of habitat, water quality, and hazardous waste initiatives that the long-term changes will occur to bring Onondaga Lake back to the tremendous recreational, economic, and natural resource that it was 150 years ago.

We are on the verge of an incredible success story. I would like to thank everyone involved in this project, from our ACJ partner agencies—Onondaga County, the USEPA, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—to citizen groups who work with us, to DEC personnel, to the dedicated plant operators at Metro. As the many current and planned projects come to fruition, I envision a healthy fishery and a swimmable Onondaga Lake that is a benefit to all. Through the hard work and commitment of everyone involved, Onondaga Lake can once again take its rightful place as a jewel of central New York.

—Sandra L. Allen

Director of the NYSDEC Division of Water

Drinking Water. Pour Over the Facts.

The fact is, there's more to your tap water than filling your glass. A short, new report from your water supplier will tell you where your water comes from and what's in it. Look for the report, and read it. It will fill you full of facts.

Drinking Water. Know What's in It for You.

Call your water supplier or
the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at
1-800-426-4791.

Or visit www.epa.gov/safewater.

