

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Holiday Gift for The Finger Lakes: \$300,000 grant to improve Honeoye Lake's water quality

Funding from New York State's Water Quality Improvement Projects Grant Program will jump-start green infrastructure project

Honeoye, N.Y. — The Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy and Honeoye Lake Watershed Task Force are celebrating an exciting gift for the Finger Lakes region—a \$300,000 grant that will jump start a unique wetland and floodplain restoration project that will improve Honeoye Lake's water quality. The grant, supplemented by private donations, will fund a project that will filter out nutrients before they reach the lake, helping to solve a critical problem that is exacerbated by major storm events.

“The District is very grateful for this grant award,” said P.J. Emerick, Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District Senior District Manager. “We are looking forward to working with our conservation partners on this important effort to enhance water quality and provide unique habitat for plants and animals.

2015 was a record year for outbreaks of toxic blue-green algae in New York’s waters. To date, experts have placed a record 139 water bodies—including four Finger Lakes—on the state’s blue-green algae alert page. Of all the Finger Lakes, Honeoye is particularly at risk due to its shallow depth and large watershed relative to the size of the lake.

The economy of the Honeoye Lake community is driven by seasonal residents and tourists who give a large boost to retail and service businesses during summer months. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, 25% to 100% of increases in business activity can be attributed to seasonal residents and tourism. If residents and tourists choose not to return because of beach closures and blue-green algae blooms, the community will suffer.

“The good news is nature can help solve this problem and keep our environment and economy healthy,” said Stevie Adams, The Nature Conservancy’s freshwater specialist in Central and Western New York. “By restoring a natural stream channel, we can reconnect a portion of the stream to its floodplain. The floodplain can then do what it does best: filter out nutrients and sediments from the water and keep them from entering Honeoye Lake.” A recent study indicated that the project would remove 24-37% of the total amount of phosphorus entering Honeoye Lake from surface flows.

Blue-green algae are a symptom of too many nutrients, especially phosphorus. Those nutrients are a result of run-off from farms and lawns as well as effluent from septic systems and wastewater. Honeoye Inlet, the stream at the south end of the lake, is the greatest single contributor of nutrients to the lake. By restoring a portion of the Inlet that runs through New York State’s Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area at the south end of the lake, more of the stream will be reconnected to wetlands that keep it healthy.

“Healthy fresh water systems are critical habitat for wildlife, a key component of people’s quality of life in the Finger Lakes region and a major driver of New York’s economy,” said Terry Gronwall, chairman of the Honeoye Lake Watershed Task Force. “I can’t imagine a better holiday gift for this lake and the communities that depend on it.”

“I was proud to go to bat for this important project in the Regional Economic Development Council process and I’m very pleased that it is going forward,” said Senator Rich Funke (R-C-I, Fairport). “Projects like this prove that what’s good for the economy and the environment are not

mutually exclusive. This grant will protect the health of Honeoye Lake while also supporting and expanding local tourism. It's a true win-win."

The Nature Conservancy is now raising \$50,000 as a match requirement from New York State as well as additional funds for the project's implementation phase. To make a gift, please contact Jan Miller at jan_miller@tnc.org or (585) 546-8030 x7928.

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