Newsletter of

The Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc.

For all those who have a stake in the Lake Summer 2012

Moving Ahead with Prevention

by Buzz Roberts

Skaneateles Lake has long benefited from being one of the highest lakes in the Finger Lakes with the smallest watershed. As a result, we enjoy impressively clear water. This, coupled with a charming village at the north end and picturesque, forested high hills to the south, make this an attractive body of water. This beauty also brings unintended consequences.

On any summer weekend, over 100 boats per day will enter the lake via the state launch on 41A and the Town of Skaneateles boat launch. In the past, Zebra Mussels and Eurasian Milfoil have been introduced into the lake from weedy hitchhikers and bilge water from these boats and trailers. Now Hydrilla and Asian Clams, both prolific invaders, are potential threats.

Rachael DeWitt inspects a boat for invasive species before it is launched into Skaneateles Lake.

The SLA has started a monitoring program at each of these launch sites. Our invasive monitoring stewards inspect boats and trailers entering the lake and record data. They also educate fishermen and boaters to empty their bilges, live wells or bait buckets on leaving a body of water and, when entering the lake, to have a clean and dry boat and trailer.

Our steward's captain has been Rachel Dewitt with a team consisting of: Elyce Buell, Brennan Buell, David DuBois, Olivia Hamlin, Matthew Payne, Amanda Shoenfeld, Ellis VanSlyke, and Matt Wolford. Through their concerted efforts, we hope to reduce the risk of additional invasive species gaining a foothold in Skaneateles Lake.

Similar programs are being undertaken throughout the state. It will take a well educated and responsible boating community to ensure that our Finger Lakes are not overrun by these foreign invaders.

Message from the President

Since the reorganization of the Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc. last year I have been pleased with many things. The broader based membership with nominal annual dues (along with a few larger donations) has helped to continue the Milfoil Control Project. A stewardship program has been initiated this summer at the Town of Skaneateles launch in Mandana and the D.E.C. State launch to educate boaters and fishermen how to prevent introducing new invasive species, in addition to reintroducing existing species such as zebra mussels and milfoil.

With your continued support we hope to be able to expand this effort and include other towns and sites around the lake. Species such as hydrilla, Asian clams, water chestnut and others have been identified in nearby bodies of water and could be introduced to Skaneateles Lake quite easily without stewardship on our part and government control and regulation.

It's the latter that I feel will ultimately be required to keep the invasive species population at a manageable level. Otherwise, the quality of the water could decline. Filtration and possibly other measures might be required to maintain the lake as a water source for the city of Syracuse, village of Skaneateles, and other municipalities.

The Lake Association needs to continue to work with governmental and municipal officials to determine how to be more proactive, providing *full time stewards at launch sites,* inspecting boats prior to entering the lake and possibly providing convenient "cleaning stations."

However we need more of a mandate from the majority of concerned citizens to be effective. Annual membership in SLA has continued to grow, now approaching 500, but wouldn't it "ring a louder bell" if it was in the thousands?

Please encourage friends and neighbors to join SLA so we have a more forceful collective voice in achieving our goals!

Paul F. Torrisi

Milfoil Control in Skaneateles Lake

by Robert G. Werner

Sometimes Lady Luck can be your friend. In the case of Skaneateles Lake that is certainly true. When the glaciers receded from this region one of the wonderful attributes left behind for Skaneateles Lake was a relatively small watershed in relation to its volume. With a small watershed and a relatively large amount of water diluting the runoff it is a lot easier for the lake to stay clean. This has led to clear water, low productivity and oligotrophic conditions.

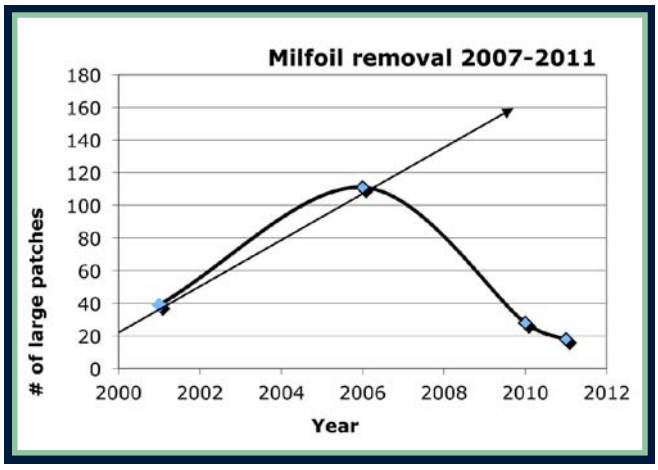
It may also have an additional benefit, particularly for controlling invasive plants that may enter the lake such as Eurasian watermilfoil or *Hydrilla*. The argument goes something like this: Low productivity results in slower growth of plants and a reduced likelihood of establishment due to lower nutrient levels and less bottom sediment in the near shore area. This morphological advantage may help explain why the Skaneateles Lake Association has had some success in its effort to get milfoil under control.

Milfoil has been reported from the lake as far back as 1974, but It wasn't until the late 1990's when a large patch developed at the Skaneateles Sailing Club that people became concerned. In 2001 the Skaneateles Lake Association surveyed the entire near shore zone of the lake between the 6'-15' contour intervals to determine how far it had spread. The survey was conducted in late summer when we could clearly identify patches of milfoil as they grew toward the surface. In the 2001 survey we found 39 large patches. The survey was repeated in 2006 and 111 patches were found, nearly a 3-fold increase in 5 years. The alarm was sounded and the Skaneateles Lake Association working with town officials began a program of milfoil control.

Since the lake is the primary water source for the City of Syracuse we were not able to use herbicides to treat the lake, instead we sought alternative solutions. We consulted with people at Upper Saranac Lake and Lake George and initially developed a hand-pulling approach to milfoil removal.

This worked pretty well, but was slow and difficult. We later moved to the use of specially constructed benthic mats. Rolls of twelve-foot wide geotextile material was purchased and John Menapace of Aquatic Invasives designed an apparatus, the heart of which was an industrial sewing machine, to create a slender tube across the mat at 6 ft. intervals. He inserted 12' pieces of used guardrail cabling into the tubes as weight to hold the mat down. He eventually constructed enough matting to cover 5 acres of lake bottom. The rolls of matting were carried to the site on a large pontoon boat and lowered underwater to divers on site where they then rolled the matting out just as you would a carpet. This process was repeated until the patch was completely covered. The divers worked their way around the lake matting each significant patch they found. The matting was left in place for a minimum of 8 weeks and then it was rolled up and removed near the end of the summer. Where the mats had been removed the bottom was completely clear, no weeds of any sort. In many of the sites native aquatic vegetation is now returning replacing the milfoil.

To date we estimate that we have removed some 45 acres of milfoil from Skaneateles Lake. If we had let it go in 2006 and done nothing and if the milfoil had continued to grow as it did from 2001 to 2006 we could have expected some 180 patches by 2011 (see graph). As a result of this control effort we have only 18 large patches left to deal with this summer. Since milfoil primarily reproduces by fragmentation the reduction in biomass should lead to a significant reduction in reproductive potential.



There are several reasons for the current success of our milfoil effort. One is the aforementioned small watershed resulting in less silt and nutrients entering the lake and the resultant slow growth and spread of milfoil. The second was the "nip it in the bud" principle where we were able to get the control program underway early in the expansion of milfoil, well before it became widely established. The third, and most important, was the generous support of the local community. We have been able to raise sufficient funds to gain control of milfoil. At this point we are in the maintenance phase of the plan which means that we are now surveying the lake to identify any remaining patches and sending boats and dive crews out to mat them when they appear. The plan is to pay for most of this through membership dues in the Skaneateles Lake Association. More information including some interesting video can be seen at our web site: http://www.SkaneatelesLake.org/milfoil/index.php.

We think we have it under control, but you know Mother Nature, expect the unexpected.

Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc.
P. O. Box 862
Skaneateles, NY 13152

SKANEATELES LAKE ASSOCIATION
CLEAR LAKE. PURE WATER.

ASK DR. BOB

Dear Dr. Bob,

This Spring we found a bunch of dead fish on the shoreline or in the water close to shore. What was going on? Was something poisoning them? Do I have to be concerned about drinking water from the lake when I see groups of dead fish?

Sincerely,
Curious and Concerned

Dear Curious and Concerned;

Actually what you saw was the end result of a viral infection called viral hemorrhagic septicemia or VHS for short. VHS has been known for some time as a disease in fish farms and hatcheries where fish live in crowded conditions and infections are easily transferred from one fish to another. In the wild, VHS is less common. It is thought that VHS was introduced into the Great Lakes region in 2003. First reported in Conesus Lake several years later, and, about 3 years ago it was verified as being present in Skaneateles Lake. It is transmitted from one fish to the next by contact with body fluids and by predation on infected fish. Stress is also a factor in making fish susceptible to VHS. Outbreaks occur in the spring when the lake's temperature is 48 to 54 F, the optimal temperature for the virus. Since this is also a stressful time for fish as they are coming out of a long cold winter and entering a demanding spawning season they are quite susceptible to the disease. In Skaneateles Lake smallmouth bass, rock bass, sunfish and perch are most affected. There is no known cure for the disease in natural populations of fish. Over time you would expect that the fish would develop some resistance to the disease. From what we see in Skaneateles Lake it looks as though it is a relatively mild outbreak and most fish populations will survive it. The only concern might be species of fish with small populations such as the lake whitefish and cisco who might have trouble recovering from the diseases effects.

Sincerely,
Dr. Bob

Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc. Membership Registration Form

Name _____ E-mail Address_____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____
(Enter winter contact information below, if different.)

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

❑ Family: $100 ❑ Individual: $50 ❑ Other: $_____

❑ Milfoil Boat Sponsor & Membership: $1,000 ❑ Milfoil Boat Co-sponsor & Membership: $250

Please make checks for your membership dues and any donations payable to the **Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc.**
Mail your membership registration and check to: Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc., P. O. Box 862, Skaneateles, NY 13152
You may also join SLA, pay your dues, and make donations at: www.SkaneatelesLake.org