FALL 2026

LAKE WATCH

THE NEWSLETTER OF SENECA LAKE PURE WATERS ASSOCIATION



IN THIS ISSUE

Watching the Lake Together: HABs, Cladophora, and changing lake conditions
Conservation in Action: Seneca County Soil & Water projects protecting the lake
Beyond the Classroom: Three HWS interns experience lake stewardship firsthand
Rooted Here: Famous Brands and the Guild family's legacy
And more!!

Cover image courtesy of Sophie Riskie



A Summer in Review: **Watching the Lake Together**

By Bill Roege, Pure Waters President

At our recent annual meeting, someone approached me about the lack of weeds at the Watkins Glen marina. I hadn't asked about aquatic plants, but his observation echoed what other people who live and work around Seneca Lake have been telling me for the past two summers: places they know well seem to have noticeably less vegetation. Conversations like that raise important questions. How widespread are the changes? Are they temporary? What might explain them? People who know a stretch of shoreline well can help us recognize when something is changing, and their observations can help shape the questions Pure Waters pursues with our research partners. That connection between local knowledge and organized monitoring runs through our volunteer programs—and we need more people to take part.

Watching for HABs

Through October 14, our HAB monitoring program recorded 68 confirmed bloom reports across 16 days—a middle-of-the-road year so far. This summer, approximately 75 volunteers covered 53 shoreline zones and submitted 373 reports.

Those reports provide an important record of what is happening around the lake, and "no bloom" reports matter, too. They tell us someone checked a particular shoreline and did not observe a bloom. Without that information, silence could mean either clear water or nobody looking.

Community members outside the volunteer program also send us photographs of suspected blooms. If you're already keeping an eye on the water, consider becoming a regular shoreline survey volunteer. Our volunteer count has declined from more than 100 two years ago, and we especially need additional coverage along the southern half of the lake.

A Closer Look at Cladophora

HABs aren't the only thing people are noticing near the shore. Cladophora is a filamentous green alga that can wash ashore and produce an unpleasant odor as it decays.



A few years ago, residents sent us photographs of deposits many inches deep and complained about the smell. We are now in year two of our Cladophora reporting program, and participating observers have generally reported lighter accumulations than those described in earlier shoreline accounts. Most reports, however, have come from the northwest shore, so we need observations from more areas to understand whether similar patterns are occurring elsewhere.

These reports complement our nearshore research with the Finger Lakes Institute. Volunteers collect weekly summer water samples and observations at six northern-basin locations while researchers investigate nutrient conditions near shore and possible relationships with Cladophora and HABs. The more shoreline we can consistently observe, the clearer that picture can become.

What About the Missing Weeds?

Cladophora and the submerged aquatic plants commonly called "weeds" are different, but people around Seneca Lake have reported seeing less of both. Nearshore volunteers have noticed fewer plants in the water and washing up on shore, while students surveying vegetation for the project last year found few plants in the areas they visited. Together with what residents have been telling us, these observations are worth investigating—but they don't yet establish whether there has been a lakewide change or what might be causing it.

More consistent aquatic plant surveys could help answer some of those questions. Finger Lakes PRISM coordinates surveys that identify aquatic plants and look for invasive species, and Pure Waters hopes to recruit more participants as opportunities become available. The person who stopped me at the annual meeting may have simply been commenting on something he noticed at the marina, but observations like his can be the beginning of a much bigger question.

We Need More Eyes on the Lake

Whether volunteers are looking for HABs, documenting Cladophora, identifying aquatic plants, or collecting water samples, the common thread is people consistently returning to places they know, recording what they see, and sharing it. That includes our long-running Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP), along with other water quality monitoring opportunities. We're always looking for interested volunteers and can help find an opportunity that's a good fit.

You don't need to be a scientist to contribute. Maybe you walk the same shoreline every morning, fish the same cove, paddle regularly, or simply know what the water outside your home usually looks like. Those observations have value. The more people we have watching different parts of Seneca Lake, the better chance we have of recognizing changes, asking the right questions, and building the information needed to understand them.

If you already watch the lake, becoming a volunteer helps turn what you see into knowledge we can share. Visit our website and click the Volunteer button to tell us what interests you, and we'll help you find the right way to contribute.



Clute Park: Native Plant Garden



What started as a native planting project at Clute Park in Watkins Glen has grown into a hands-on example of how lake-friendly landscaping can make a difference. Led by Pure Waters' Lake Friendly Living Committee, volunteers planted native plants and shrubs around the park, helping improve areas designed to capture and filter stormwater before it reaches Seneca Lake.

Under the leadership of Karen Welch, the project expanded to include three retention basins surrounding the playground. Karen helped plan the garden, select native species, coordinate purchasing and planting, and organize dozens of volunteers. Pure Waters also worked with Village staff on ongoing care and the development of interpretive signage, turning the garden into a place where thousands of park visitors can see lake-friendly practices in action.

"It's an educational opportunity for everybody that's here to learn about native plants and why we should plant them,"

—Karen Welch, Pure Waters Volunteer



Protecting Hemlocks: Fall Treatment Expands

This fall, Pure Waters expanded hemlock woolly adelgid treatment and survey efforts along the east side of Seneca Lake. Work is planned at Sawmill Creek, Excelsior Glen, and Breakneck Creek, where approximately **930 hemlock trees** have been identified for potential treatment. Sawmill Creek is a priority, with some trees requiring two different treatments to help protect them from this invasive pest.

Survey work began along Rock Stream, where mapping has identified two large properties with significant hemlock stands. Once landowner permissions are in place, Pure Waters' Hemlock Hunters will team up with technicians to survey the area and identify future treatment needs.



Protecting Seneca Lake Starts on Land

How local conservation projects are making a difference for water quality across the watershed.

Protecting Seneca Lake doesn't begin at the shoreline. It starts miles away, on the farms, vineyards, and hillsides that make up our watershed. We recently connected with Erin Peruzzini, District Manager of the Seneca County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), to learn more about the conservation work happening throughout the watershed and how local partnerships are helping protect Seneca Lake.

Established in 1940, the Seneca County SWCD works alongside farmers, landowners, and municipalities to address erosion, manage stormwater, and reduce pollution. Its team of five district technicians provides hands-on assistance, from planning and surveying to engineering designs and project installation. Two projects in the Town of Lodi offer a closer look at how these efforts benefit both local landowners and Seneca Lake.

For decades, erosion has been a persistent problem at a vineyard in South Lodi. Heavy rain sent water rushing down steep slopes, carrying valuable topsoil and sediment toward Seneca Lake. The vineyard owner had relied on a temporary catchment basin to collect sediment, but after major storms, this meant repeatedly removing accumulated soil and reseeding damaged areas.

Working with the landowner, the Seneca County SWCD developed a more permanent solution. The completed system includes six small earthen berms, six catch basins, and underground drainage pipes designed to capture and redirect stormwater before it washes away vulnerable soil. Permanent vegetation will also help stabilize the hillside.

These improvements are estimated to prevent **57 pounds of phosphorus, 132 pounds of nitrogen, and 57 tons of soil** from entering Seneca Lake each year.

At a small family beef farm elsewhere in Lodi, the conservation challenge looked quite different. With more than 30 cattle, managing muddy winter conditions and manure presented an ongoing concern for both the farm and local water quality.







Photos: South Lodi Vineyard Erosion Control Project (top photo). Bottom photos show the site before and after construction, followed by a post-project inspection tour (left to right).

With assistance from the Seneca County SWCD, the family completed an agricultural waste treatment system in December 2025. Rather than constructing an outdoor barnyard, the family chose to use an existing barn to house and feed cattle during the winter. Manure and bedding are now collected and moved to a concrete pad, where the material is turned into nutrient-rich compost.

The completed project also includes a vegetated treatment area that helps filter runoff and allows plants to absorb nutrients. Together, these improvements provide a more manageable system for the farm and are estimated to prevent **25 pounds of phosphorus and 51 pounds of nitrogen** from entering Seneca Lake annually.

Projects like these require more than good intentions. Landowners bring firsthand knowledge of their properties, while the Seneca County SWCD provides technical expertise and funding partners help turn plans into reality.

Through our Sediment, Nutrient, and Pollution Reduction (SNPR) program, Pure Waters provides funding that helps cover matching costs to State and Federal grant programs, making conservation improvements more accessible to local landowners. This support is especially important as rising material costs and shortages of experienced engineers and contractors continue to challenge conservation efforts. According to Peruzzini, some project costs have grown to roughly double their original estimates, making financial partnerships more valuable than ever.

Help fund more projects like these! Scan the QR code to support Pure Waters' SNPR program and protect Seneca Lake.

"The health of Seneca Lake is determined long before water reaches its shoreline, originating miles inland across the fields, forests, and residential neighborhoods that make up our shared watershed," said Erin Peruzzini.

Protecting Seneca Lake isn't just the responsibility of farmers and landowners. From reducing lawn fertilizer use to planting native vegetation and maintaining septic systems, we all have a role to play. Whether through large-scale conservation projects or small changes in our own backyards, every effort helps protect Seneca Lake for generations to come.





Photos (top to bottom): Before and after the South Seneca Agricultural Waste Treatment System project.

Curiosity in Action

From a painted trout to a water sample, hands-on learning helps local students connect with Seneca Lake and discover how to care for it.



IN THE LAB

Putting Lake Science to Work

In July, nearly 50 students in Geneva High School's Early College High School Summer Scholars Program explored water quality monitoring and watershed stewardship.



IN THE FIELD

Everyone Can Be a Lake Steward

In May, Seneca County sixth graders learned how citizen science helps us understand and protect Seneca Lake at the 4-H Outdoor Education Field Day.



AT THE LIBRARY

What Makes a Home for a Trout?

In August, children at Geneva Public Library built habitats and painted trout while learning what fish need to thrive and how healthy streams connect to Seneca Lake.

Beyond the Classroom

Three HWS students found a different kind of education along the shores of Seneca Lake.



For students at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS), Seneca Lake is hard to miss. It's the view from campus, a place to swim, run or watch the sunrise, and part of what makes Geneva feel like home. And for three HWS students, the lake also became a classroom.

Through their work with Pure Waters as interns, Bek Lopez, Andrew Hanna and Mia Nixon got a closer look at what it takes to protect the lake just beyond their campus. Along the way, they learned about invasive species, water quality, nonprofit work and the community behind it.



Bek Lopez
Geoscience Major, Class of 2028

Bek's connection to Pure Waters began with a desire to become more involved in Geneva. Through HWS and its Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning, she discovered volunteer opportunities with Pure Waters and quickly found a community of people committed to protecting the lake. During her time with the organization, Bek contributed to newsletter content, assisted with Summer Soirée sponsorships, and collaborated with board members on various projects. These experiences allowed her to explore her interests while seeing firsthand the planning, fundraising, organizing, and advocacy involved in nonprofit work.

"There is so much effort and planning that goes into nonprofit organizations like Seneca Pure Waters. It's astounding how much work has to be done to fundraise, organize events, and advocate in the community."- Bek Lopez

Community

Andrew Hanna

Business Management & Entrepreneurship Major, Sociology Minor, Class of 2027

Growing up in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Andrew was surrounded by national parks and a strong emphasis on environmental responsibility. When he arrived at HWS, he fell in love with Seneca Lake and became curious about how it was managed and protected. During his time with Pure Waters, Andrew assisted with website updates and membership email campaigns while learning about challenges like harmful algal blooms and invasive species. These experiences gave him a closer look at nonprofit operations and how environmental advocacy connects with the needs of local communities, businesses, and other stakeholders who depend on Seneca Lake.

"Protecting Seneca Lake takes so many more people and hours than I knew before, and it's been amazing to see that work firsthand."- Andrew Hanna

Andrew swam, biked and ran alongside Seneca during the Musselman 70.3



Mia Nixon

Sociology and Writing & Rhetoric major, Public Policy Minor, Class of 2028

Originally from Culver City, Los Angeles, Mia came to HWS and realized after her first year that she wanted to become more involved on campus and in the surrounding community. Through Pure Waters, she gained hands-on experience with administrative work and social media while learning about the environmental challenges facing Seneca Lake. As a Sociology and Writing and Rhetoric major with an interest in public policy, Mia developed a greater understanding of invasive species and how lake protection connects to the needs of surrounding communities. The experience strengthened her connection to Geneva and showed her how environmental issues extend beyond the shoreline.

"My favorite part of working with Pure Waters has been learning new things about the lake and being more informed."- Mia Nixon



Mia's favorite Seneca Lake memory is going to the HWS dock with her mom and jumping off together.

AND SENECA LAKE IS BETTER FOR IT.

Honorees recognized at this year's Annual Meeting, from left: Karen Welch; Sonia Rose, representing the Rose Family Foundation; and Jody Tyler. ↓

Sometimes making a difference for Seneca Lake starts with a small idea. Other times, it's years of showing up, lending a hand, or supporting the work happening behind the scenes. At this year's Annual Meeting, we celebrated three honorees whose contributions have made a lasting impact.

For **Karen Welch**, it started with a native planting project at Clute Park in Watkins Glen. Under her leadership, that idea grew into a demonstration garden spanning three retention basins around the park's playground. Karen chose plants, coordinated volunteers, worked with Village staff on long-term care, and helped develop signage so visitors can learn why native plants and lake-friendly landscaping matter. Her efforts to see the project through were honored with the Mary Rose Memorial Volunteer of the Year Award.

The Rose Family Foundation has made its mark in a different way, by giving Pure Waters the resources to ask bigger questions and take on bigger projects. Since 2023, the Foundation has provided $187,600 to support work ranging from PFAS and neonicotinoid monitoring to stream and nearshore nutrient research. Its support has also helped launch and grow the Seneca Lake Watershed Hemlock Initiative, including the treatment of hundreds of threatened hemlocks. That commitment to science and stewardship was recognized with the Friend of Seneca Founders Award.

Then there are the people who simply keep showing up, year after year. For more than a decade, **Jody Tyler** has been one of those people. She has helped behind the scenes, built relationships with local businesses, raised funds, and brought people together through events like the Summer Soirée and auction. Her years of dedication to Pure Waters and the community around it were celebrated with the Rich Adams Memorial President's Award.







5 New Voices, One Shared Lake.

Meet the newest members of the Pure Waters Board and the experience they're bringing to Seneca Lake.

Protecting a lake as large and complex as Seneca takes all kinds of perspectives. Science matters. So do strong organizations, engaged communities, good partnerships, and people willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved.

Anne Jardine, executive leader and business consultant:
After a career in executive leadership, strategic planning, and business consulting, Anne is bringing that experience closer to home. A full-time Romulus resident and longtime Pure Waters member, she is especially interested in helping Pure Waters build greater awareness in the business community and develop long-term corporate partnerships.





Mark Mathias, chemical engineer and water quality advocate:
Mark brings a PhD in Chemical Engineering and years of technical experience to the Board, along with a deep familiarity with Pure Waters. A member for eight years, he is particularly interested in water quality, growing the SNPR Program, and helping turn the Seneca Lake 9E Watershed Plan into action.



Mark Palmieri, community and business leader:
Mark has spent years working at the intersection of community, business, and local decision-making. His experience includes serving on the Geneva Town Board and leading the Geneva Business Improvement District. Now living in Penn Yan, he brings a strong background in leadership, analysis, planning, and community engagement to the Board.

Kelly J. Smith, environmental scientist and educator:
As an Associate Professor of Environmental Science at Elmira College, Kelly brings a scientist's perspective and a passion for education. Her background spans marine and restoration ecology, freshwater science, environmental assessment, and grant development, experience she hopes to use to strengthen Pure Waters' water quality and education efforts.



Annie St. Clair, HR and organizational development leader:
Annie brings decades of experience in human resources, organizational development, talent strategy, and consulting. A full-time Himrod resident, she also brings nonprofit board experience and expertise that can help strengthen the organization to fulfill Pure Waters' mission.



**Portrait illustrations created in Canva.*

Seneca Lake Summer Soirée

It might have been a couple of months ago, but we're still thinking about the 2026 Summer Soirée! With a packed house, great food, drinks, dancing, and even better company, it was a fun evening at West & Lake, all in celebration of the lake we love!

Thanks to our generous event & wine sponsors:

- Alsworth Capital Management, LLC
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- C.S. Burrall & Son, Inc.
- Specco's Chocolates
- del Lago Resort & Casino
- Ben & Jerry's
- Dailey Electric, Inc.
- Damiani Wine Cellars
- Daggett's Garage
- Montezuma Winery
- Either Oar
- Fox Run Vineyards
- Idol Ridge Winery
- Seneca Lake Wine Trail

The bidding was competitive at this year's virtual auction! With 76 items up for grabs, 158 participants placed an impressive 405 bids, helping raise $10,171.21 for Pure Waters! Crowd favorites included a sail aboard the True Love, a Boundary Breaks Vineyard experience, a Kemmeter Riesling collection, a fishing charter with Roy's Boys, and lake-inspired artwork by Brian Palmieri.









PURE BREW WEEK

The Seneca Lake Order of Brewers (SLOBs) were at it again this year, brewing PURE Pils in support of Seneca Lake! One of the coolest things about this year's beer, brewed at Big aLICe Brewing in Geneva, was that all the agricultural ingredients came from right here in the Seneca Lake watershed. Barley was grown at Poormon Farms in Seneca Falls and malted by Murmuration Malts in Bloomfield, while hops came from Pedersen Farms and Cornell AgriTech's hop breeding program, both in Geneva. And of course, there's the water that makes it all possible!

Maybe you enjoyed a PURE Pils at a local brewery, restaurant, or winery, or maybe you picked some up at Wegmans. Wherever you had one, thank you for supporting PURE Brew Week and helping protect Seneca Lake!

"Seneca Lake is our shared home and it's the largest ingredient in all our beers, so it's very important that we protect the lake."

— Derek Edinger, President of SLOBs











Around the Lake Happenings

From top to bottom, left to right: Streamflow sampling around the watershed; Friends of Castle Creek Festival; WAVE stream monitoring at Keuka Outlet; Seneca Monster Regatta, where Pure Waters provided volunteer support; and an SNPR project tour highlighting local partnerships that help reduce runoff and protect Seneca Lake.

Rooted Here

Famous Brands, Family & Seneca Lake

For more than four decades, Famous Brands has been a staple in Watkins Glen. For the Guild family, it's more than a business—it's a family legacy, a deep connection to this community, and a commitment to protecting the place they've called home for generations.



Jim Guild outside one of the original Famous Brands signs in Watkins Glen, circa 1985.

A Dream That Started Small

Jim Guild's roots in retail began just a few miles from Watkins Glen, working for his uncle at Guild Brothers clothing store in Montour Falls. The experience gave him the foundation—and eventually the confidence—to venture out on his own. In September 1983, Jim and his wife, Becky, opened Famous Brands in a small, 1,000-square-foot storefront.

"Our success began in the first week," Jim remembers. What started small didn't stay that way for long. Today, Famous Brands spans 25,000 square feet, offering quality clothing and footwear from well-known brands at discounted prices. And there's one feature you probably won't find at another clothing store: a Ben & Jerry's scoop shop inside.

Three Generations and Counting

More than 40 years after Jim and Becky opened the doors, Famous Brands remains owned and operated by the Guild family. Today, three generations work in the store—something Jim calls "a dream come true."

"Our family has lived in this area for many generations and we can't imagine living anywhere else," Jim says.

That deep connection to the community is part of what has made Famous Brands more than just a store. It's a family business rooted in the people, places and traditions that make Watkins Glen home.



> *"The health of the lake is integral to the health of the community as a whole. To protect the lake is to make an investment in the future of our community and future generations. That's something we're very committed to."*
>
> *JIM GUILD*

Jamie, Jim, and Erin Guild. Jamie (pictured left), who passed away in 2024, was an important part of the Famous Brands family and also ran the family's Ben & Jerry's shop.

A Destination for Everyone

Watkins Glen has changed quite a bit since Famous Brands first opened its doors. Jim remembers a time when the area felt more like a hidden gem. Today, visitors come from near and far for Seneca Lake, wineries, racing, outdoor recreation and everything in between.

Through all that growth, though, something important has remained. "Now that we're no longer a hidden gem, we see far more visitors than we used to, but the village has retained its quaint small-town charm."

Seneca Lake: Good for Business, Good for Community

For Famous Brands, being part of Watkins Glen also means recognizing just how closely the health and vitality of local businesses are connected to Seneca Lake. The lake draws people to the region year after year, and those visitors support restaurants, wineries, shops, lodging and countless other local businesses along the way.

"We local businesses have the good fortune of piggybacking off of the foot traffic of visitors coming to experience the beauty of our area," Jim says.

"It is very much a symbiotic relationship." That connection is one reason Famous Brands has been such a generous supporter of Pure Waters. For Jim, supporting organizations already working to protect the lake is simply part of being a local business.

"Raising awareness is so important, and supporting organizations that are already putting in the work is the best way to do our part."

A Special Place, for Generations

Seneca Lake is personal, too. Jim's in-laws purchased a cottage on the lake in the 1940s, and it has remained in the family ever since. Four generations have now spent their summers there—a place Jim simply calls "magical."

It's a connection that brings everything full circle: protecting Seneca Lake means preserving the places and traditions that make this community home for generations to come.

Want to stop in? Famous Brands is open year-round at 412 N. Franklin St. in Watkins Glen, NY. Learn more and shop online at famousbrandsoutlet.com.

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Stay connected!

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Seneca Lake **PURE WATERS** Association

In Memory / In Honor

We are grateful for those who choose to honor loved ones through support of Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association. Their legacy helps protect the lake and our community.

Craig Talmage
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Denotes 'In Memory Of' gifts.

Protecting Seneca Lake, One Stream at a Time

Thank You to Our Recent Adopt-A-Stream Donors

Mary OConnell, Keuka Outlet
Robert Krizanek, Perry Point Creek

This holiday season, give the gift of cleaner water! Adopt a stream in honor of someone you love.

https://senecalake.org/adopt-a-stream/