

# Tompkins County Water Resources Council

## 2025 Annual Report



### Executive Summary

The Tompkins County Water Resources Council (WRC) had a productive and impactful year in 2025, with significant achievements in watershed protection, public education, and interagency collaboration. Key accomplishments included:

- Issuing four letters of comment and advocacy to state and federal agencies on issues including the Cayuga Salt Mine brine disposal permit, EPA 303(d) list additions, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) draft phosphorus guidance values, and the Council on Environmental Quality's role under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- Hosting six expert presentations on critical water resource topics, including onsite wastewater systems, drinking water source protection, Cayuga Lake dynamics, agricultural and environmental management, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation, and PFAS research.
- Conducting an educational tour of the Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility to deepen members' understanding of local water infrastructure.

- Developing and distributing a two-page factsheet on the Cayuga Lake TMDL for Phosphorus, created in collaboration with the New York Water Resources Institute and shared with municipalities across the county.
- Hosting a municipal training site visit at a completed stream restoration project along the west branch of Cayuga Inlet, attended by staff from four municipalities and multiple agencies.
- Continuing to distribute the [Clean Boating on Cayuga Lake map](#) to promote responsible recreational use and protect lake health.
- Facilitating collaboration among municipalities, Cornell University, state agencies, and local watershed organizations to implement water protection measures across jurisdictional boundaries.

The Council continued to serve as the county's primary forum for water resource management discussion, bringing together diverse stakeholders to address shared challenges. This report details the activities and accomplishments of the WRC and its committees throughout 2025.

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## Introduction

The Tompkins County Water Resources Council (WRC) serves as an advisory board to the County Legislature on matters related to water resources management and planning. The WRC's mission is to identify problems, propose priorities, and facilitate coordination of activities to protect the county's water resources. Additionally, it serves as a public forum where local communities and stakeholders can discuss water resource concerns while fostering collaboration among local governments, public and private institutions, agencies, and organizations throughout the county.

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## 2025 Presentations

The WRC regularly invites guest speakers to present on water-related topics. In 2025, presentations included:

- **An Introduction to the Design, Function, and Oversight of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems in Tompkins County**  
– *Doug Barnes, TC Whole Health*
- **Drinking Water Source Protection Plan (DWSP2) Implementation – Buildout Analysis in Six Mile Creek Corridor**  
– *Roxy Johnston, City of Ithaca*

- **Cayuga Lake, Rocking, Rolling, Stirring, and Mixing**  
– *Todd Cowen, DeFrees Hydraulics Lab, Cornell University*
  - **AEM and Beyond (Agricultural and Environment Management)**  
– *Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District Staff*
  - **Permanent Protection of Best Management Practices to Help Reach TMDL Goals**  
– *Lydia Brinkley, Upper Susquehanna Coalition*
  - **Overview of Background Levels for Sediment Associated PFAs in the Great Lakes**  
– *Brett Hayhurst, U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center*
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### **Member Education: Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility Tour**

In April, WRC members and guests toured the Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility with senior operator Ed Gottlieb leading the visit. The facility, operated jointly by the City of Ithaca, Town of Ithaca, and Town of Dryden, processes wastewater from a large portion of the county before discharging treated effluent to Cayuga Inlet. During the tour, members observed the facility's primary and secondary treatment processes, including screening, settling, biological treatment, and disinfection. The group also learned about the facility's biosolids management practices and ongoing efforts to meet evolving regulatory standards for nutrient removal. The visit provided WRC members with valuable firsthand knowledge of the infrastructure underpinning our area's water quality and public health.





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## 2025 WRC Committees

Every January, the WRC reviews existing committees and forms new ones to guide its efforts for the year and accomplish actions outlined in the Water Quality Strategy. In 2025, the following committees were active:

### Cayuga Lake Monitoring Partnership Committee

**Members:** *Doug Barnes, Brett Hayhurst, Roxy Johnston, Darby Kiley, Liz Kreitinger, Jon Negley, Eileen O'Connor, Elaine Quaroni, Stephanie Redmond, Grascen Shidemantle, Tom Vawter, as well as representatives from Cornell University and local watershed organizations*

The Monitoring Partnership addressed a broad range of water quality and regulatory topics throughout 2025. The committee reviewed information about biosolids, including the proposed state moratorium on land spreading, and explored potential hurdles to its implementation. The committee will continue to track this topic and may provide comments on proposed legislation to address implementation challenges.

PFAS — (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly called "forever chemicals") — was another major focus area. Member Brett Hayhurst presented ongoing research into PFAS in the Great Lakes, and the committee will continue receiving updates on this topic while tracking proposed drinking water and wastewater legislation. The committee also discussed NYSDEC's new wetlands regulations, examining hurdles in implementation and the overall assessment of their effectiveness.

The proposed data center in the Town of Lansing received considerable attention. The committee reviewed general information about potential impacts on water resources, energy use, and local communities, as well as project-specific information provided by the developer. The Monitoring Partnership and several other watershed stakeholders reached a consensus that comments would be premature until a full site plan is submitted to the Town of Lansing. The committee will continue to monitor this project.

The committee also discussed possible opportunities to implement Drinking Water Source Protection Plan projects that could support Cornell University's Phosphorus Offset Program. Throughout the year, the Monitoring Partnership continued to provide a venue for engaging with local watershed organizations and resource managers to exchange information about their work and upcoming events. Regular participants include the Cayuga County Planning Department, Community Science Institute, Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, Cayuga Lake Environmental Action Now, Cornell University, and the following Tompkins County departments and advisory boards: the Environmental Management Council, the Planning and Sustainability Department, and the Whole Health Department. Several other entities participate on a less regular basis.

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### Drinking Water Protection Committee

**Members:** *Doug Barnes, Shawn Bossard, Cynthia Brock, Liz Cameron, Roxy Johnston, Darby Kiley, Patrick King, Rebecca Minas, Andrew Murphy, Jon Negley, Eileen O'Connor, Steve Riddle, Becky Sims*

The Drinking Water Protection Committee includes representatives from the Tompkins County Whole Health Department and the three surface water public drinking water utilities: Bolton Point, Cornell University, and the City of Ithaca. All three utilities have developed Drinking Water Source Protection Plans (DWSP2), and committee meetings provide a forum to share information as the utilities transition from plan development to implementation. Other agencies and WRC members are also represented.

In support of the City of Ithaca's DWSP2, the City continues to provide up to \$12,500 annually to the TC Soil & Water Conservation District through an intergovernmental agreement to advance source water protection project implementation in the Six Mile Creek watershed. Building on this work, the TC Planning and Sustainability Department completed initial surveys and map reviews for a \$75,000 NYSDEC Non-Agriculture Nonpoint Source Planning grant funding a comprehensive stream assessment of Six Mile Creek. Winter weather delayed field sampling, and an extension was granted; work will be completed in 2026. Results from this assessment will guide in-stream project priorities for years to come.

The TC Planning and Sustainability Department was also awarded a second planning grant to complete a comprehensive stream assessment of Fall Creek, with work scheduled to begin in 2026. Throughout the year, committee members continued to share updates and look for ways to leverage the DWSP2s and other state-recognized plans and permits to further advance source water protection across the county.

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### Education & Outreach Committee

**Members:** *Annie Bastoni, Shawn Bossard, Darby Kiley, Liz Kreitinger, Lynn Leopold*

The Education & Outreach Committee's signature accomplishment in 2025 was the development of [a two-page factsheet](#) providing municipal officials and staff with essential information about the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Phosphorus in Cayuga Lake, released by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in September 2024 ([https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/tmdl\\_phos\\_cayuga.pdf](https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/tmdl_phos_cayuga.pdf)). The factsheet offers practical suggestions and best management practices that municipalities, farmers, and residents can implement to protect and improve water quality, along with agency contacts for additional information and resources. The committee collaborated with staff from the New York Water Resources Institute to design the factsheet. In early 2026, WRC members presented it at a Tompkins County Council of Governments meeting, posted it to the WRC webpage, and distributed it to municipalities across the county. This was a great team effort that involved contributors well beyond the committee itself.

Beginning in the spring, committee members also continued to distribute the [Clean Boating on Cayuga Lake map](#). This resource provides helpful information for boaters—including dining options, restroom facilities, boat repair services, and fuel locations—as well as educational content on invasive species, harmful algal blooms (HABs), and environmentally responsible boat maintenance.

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### Executive Committee

**Members:** *Cynthia Brock, Frank Proto, Liz Cameron, Kristen Hychka, Darby Kiley*

The WRC issues letters of comment and advocacy to local, state, and federal agencies. These letters are drafted by WRC members or committees and then approved by the entire Council. In cases where a timely response is needed and deadlines do not align with the WRC's regular meeting schedule, the WRC chair and executive committee are empowered to approve and submit letters on the WRC's behalf.

In 2025, the WRC issued four letters:

**January:** The WRC expressed concern to NYSDEC Region 7 over Cargill's permit application to renew and modify its Mined Land Reclamation Permit for the Cayuga Salt Mine in Lansing, which includes disposing up to 360 million gallons of wastewater (brine) into the S3 zone of the mine beneath Cayuga Lake over 15 years. The WRC concluded the NYSDEC's Negative Declaration under the State Environmental Quality Review Act was premature without all materials relevant to the application and Environmental Impact Statement disclosure made available to the public and without a public hearing held. In its decades of operation and expansion, no publicly available environmental assessment of the Cayuga Salt Mine has been conducted.

**February:** The WRC provided comments to EPA Region 2 Water Division on the EPA's addition of 96 Waterbody/Pollutant Combinations to the New York 2020–2022 303(d) list. The WRC offered four recommendations: (1) recognizing that most phosphorus loading entering Cayuga Lake during storm events is bound to sediment particles, the WRC supports EPA's requirement that NYSDEC develop guidance values for silt/sediment; (2) encouraging investment of state resources to better define the causes of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) and develop strategies to address them; (3) supporting additional analysis of algae and weed growth; and (4) requesting development of a statewide comprehensive list of waterbodies in various categories in the 303(d) spreadsheet.

**March (1):** The WRC submitted detailed comments on the NYSDEC Draft Guidance Values to Advance New York State's Regulation of Phosphorus.

**March (2):** The WRC provided comments to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)—the body within the Executive Office of the President responsible for ensuring federal agencies meet their obligations under NEPA. The WRC requested that the Trump Administration recognize the role and services provided by the CEQ and reinstate Executive Order 11991, which grants the CEQ its standing in implementing NEPA through the Code of Federal Regulations. The WRC further requested the adoption of improved processes, uniform application across federal agencies, and clear definition of authority for future regulatory amendments.

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## Membership & Nominating Committee

**Members:** *Jon Negley, Holly Payne, Elaine Quaroni*

The Membership & Nominating Committee works alongside County staff to manage the recruitment and appointment process for WRC positions, which includes 21 voting representatives and a number of non-voting associates. This cycle, the committee focused on the reappointment process, working to retain existing members and support continuity in WRC operations. The committee also prepared and presented officer nominations as part of its annual responsibilities.

## Municipal Training Committee

**Members:** *Annie Bastoni, Kristen Hychka, Darby Kiley, Angel Hinickle*

In 2025, the Municipal Training Committee hosted one training—a site visit to the Shelter Valley restoration project—with seven attendees from four municipalities and the County. The committee also assisted the Education & Outreach Committee in developing the Cayuga Lake TMDL factsheet.

### **Training: Shelter Valley Site Visit**

This training was led by Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff—Angel Hinickle, Andy Stadler, and Megan Kirby—along with Mike Jura, a stream technician from Tioga County SWCD, on Wednesday, November 19, 2025. Serving as a follow-up to the prior year's Stressed Out Streams training for highway staff, the site visit took place at a recently completed stream restoration project along the west branch of Cayuga Inlet. A variety of in-stream structures were installed at the site, along with riprap and stacked rock in locations involving infrastructure. Floodplain connectivity was restored along sections of the channel where feasible.

Participants walked the length of the 2,000-foot stream section and engaged in discussion about the problems identified, the interventions employed, and how the project has performed one year after construction. Attendees included staff from four towns—Dryden, Ithaca, Lansing, and Ulysses—as well as representatives from the Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability and NYS Parks.



## 2025 WRC Members

### Leadership

Chair Cynthia Brock, Recreation

First Vice Chair Frank Proto, At-Large

Second Vice Chair Liz Cameron, Co. Environmental Health

### Voting Representatives

Annie Bastoni, At-Large

Shawn Bossard, Agriculture

Amanda Champion, County Government

Brett Hayhurst, At-Large

Kristen Hychka, Municipal Government

Darby Kiley, Co. Planning & Sustainability Dept.

Liz Kreitinger, Watershed Organization

Andrew Murphy, At-Large

Jon Negley, Soil & Water Conservation District

Eileen O'Connor, Environment

Holly Payne, At-Large

Elaine Quaroni, Municipal Government

Stephanie Redmond, At-Large

Steve Riddle, Water Purveyor

Graham Savio, Cooperative Extension

Becky Sims, Municipal Government

### Associates (non-voting)

Douglas Barnes

Roxy Johnston

Patrick King

Lynn Leopold

Rebecca Minas

Elaine Quaroni

Grascen Shidemantle

Tom Vawter

Linda Wagenet

### A Bit More About the WRC

The public is welcome to attend WRC meetings. Tompkins County residents can also apply to become voting members or associate members. For agendas and meeting minutes, please visit the [WRC website](#).

For more information or to get involved, please contact the Planning & Sustainability Department, which handles administrative needs for the WRC.