



2023 Annual Report

Tompkins County Water Resources Council

121 E. Court Street, Ithaca NY 14850

<http://tcgov.co/wrc>

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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 Council's mission is to identify problems, propose priorities, and facilitate coordination of activities to protect the County's water resources. Additionally, it provides a public forum for local communities and stakeholders to discuss their water resources concerns while fostering collaboration among local governments, public and private institutions, agencies, and organizations throughout the County.

2023 Presentations

The WRC regularly invites guest speakers to present on water-related topics. In 2023, presentations included:

- **Proposal to Monitor and Provide Long-term Groundwater Level and Water Quality Data for Aquifer Systems to Tompkins County** – *Stephanie Redmond and Bill Kappel*
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services: An Incentive-based Approach** – *Jenna DeRario, Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County*
- **The State Revolving Funds and Funding Opportunities for Water Infrastructure Projects** – *Nicholas Demitraszek, NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation*
- **Grant Opportunities Used to Help Homeowners Replace Aging and Failing Septic Systems** – *Douglas Barnes, TC Environmental Health Division*
- **PFAS and Biochar** – *Johannes Lehmann, Cornell University*
- **Owasco Lake Watershed Rules & Regulations Process and Current Status** – *Eileen O'Connor, retired Cayuga County environmental health director*

2023 WRC Committees

Every January, the WRC reviews existing committees and forms new ones to guide its efforts for the year and accomplish actions of the Water Quality Strategy. In 2023, the following committees were active:

Education & Outreach Committee

The Education & Outreach Committee took the initiative to update the [Clean Boating on Cayuga Lake map](#).¹ This map includes helpful information for boaters, such as dining options, restroom facilities, boat repair services, fuel locations, and more. The committee was informed that funding was available and pushed the project to the front burner. Members meticulously ground-truthed the map's accuracy, ensuring all necessary updates were made. The finalized map has been printed and is available for the upcoming boating season, showcasing the committee's commendable dedication and hard work.

Executive Committee

The WRC chairperson and Executive Committee act on behalf of the WRC in issuing 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 Executive Committee is empowered to approve and submit letters on the WRC's behalf.

Throughout 2023, the WRC chairperson and Executive Committee delivered several letters:

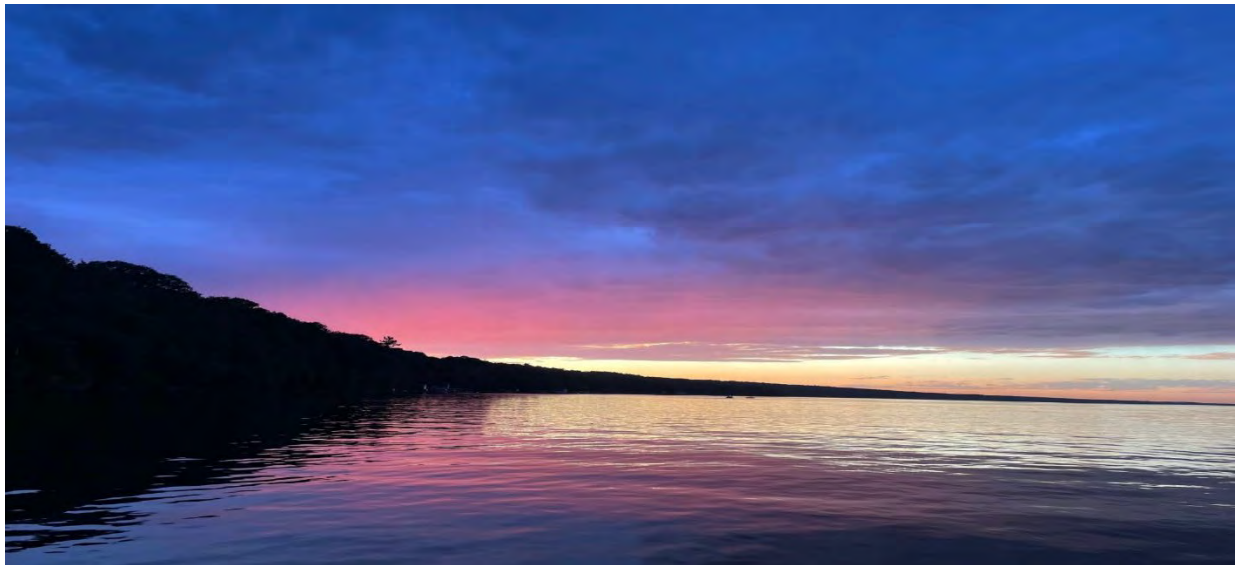
April: The WRC wrote Commissioner Basil Seggos of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) requesting engagement by both the NYS DEC and the U.S. EPA Region 2 office with Cayuga Lake watershed partners regarding the status of a Clean Water Plan for Cayuga Lake. This outreach initiative was done in coordination with the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, and other stakeholders. In 2021, the WRC submitted extensive feedback on the draft Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Total Phosphorus in Cayuga Lake. In 2022, the WRC also commented on proposed changes to the draft 2020-2022 Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters. One of the changes proposed by the NYS DEC included the de-listing of the southern end of Cayuga Lake as impaired by sediment, which was of particular concern to the WRC as it relates to the draft TMDL. In May, NYS DEC Division of Water responded to the WRC's letter stating that the "TMDL is anticipated to be finalized this summer." However, summer has come and gone and there is still no final TMDL as of this writing.

¹https://tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/committees/WRC/documents/cayuga_lake-boating-map-brochure-2023-web.pdf

June: The WRC provided NYS DEC with comments on the State Solid Waste Management Plan. While supporting the transition to a circular economy, the WRC requested the suspension of all biosolids applications until they can be tested and determined to be free of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination. The WRC further supported the establishment of PFAS monitoring protocols, emphasizing the need for robust state-supported financial and administrative measures to avoid placing undue burdens on taxpayers and small treatment plant operators.

July: The Council submitted a letter of support in favor of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network’s request for funding through the Finger Lakes Watershed Grants Program. This funding would enable the development of an interactive map for the Cayuga Lake watershed, similar to the EcoHealth Report Cards developed by the University of Maryland, utilizing existing water quality data.² The funding proposal was not ultimately successful, but interest in pursuing this project continues.

October: The WRC sent a letter to Governor Hochul expressing concerns about the future of the Cayuga salt mine operated by Cargill in Lansing. The letter highlighted the lack of a publicly available Environmental Impact Statement for the mine and requested information relevant to the mine's future, emphasizing the need for public input and commentary.



Cayuga Lake at sunset. Photo courtesy of Darby Kiley.

Cayuga Lake Monitoring Partnership Committee

The Cayuga Lake Monitoring Partnership Committee continued its dedicated efforts to protect and improve the water quality of Cayuga Lake. Here’s a summary of key committee accomplishments from the past year:

² <https://www.umces.edu/sites/default/files/Ecosystem%20health%20report%20cards.pdf>

Advocated for the completion of the Cayuga Lake TMDL. The committee engaged directly with Finger Lakes Hub staff and drafted a letter for the WRC to send to state officials to press for the TMDL’s finalization.

Secured funding for an important water quality modeling project. The committee received a grant from the Park Foundation for Cornell Professor Emeritus Dave Bouldin’s carbon, calcium, and nutrient model for Cayuga Lake. This work is in progress and will provide valuable insights.

Explored strategies for phosphorous reduction. The committee discussed opportunities for using Community Science Institute data to identify priority spots for phosphorus reduction projects in Tompkins County and for using volunteer data more broadly with Finger Lakes Hub staff.

Reviewed and responded to proposed regulations. The committee carefully reviewed the state’s response to the draft Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations, subsequently drafting a letter for the WRC’s consideration (approved in January 2024). The letter expressed deep concern that the state’s revisions diminish protections for Owasco Lake and the residents who rely on it as a drinking water resource.

Stayed informed on the Phosphorus Offset Program. The committee received regular updates on Cornell University’s Phosphorus Offset Program, remaining current with developments.

Fostered collaboration among watershed stakeholders. The committee provided a monthly venue to engage 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 Tompkins County’s Environmental Management Council, Planning & Sustainability Department, and Whole Health Department.

Membership & Nominating Committee

The Membership & Nominating Committee plays a key role in shaping the Council, by recruiting and nominating new members. The Council itself is composed of 21 voting members, alongside non-voting ex officio members from relevant federal or state agencies, and associate members with committee-level voting rights. Recent accomplishments of the committee include successfully adding several new members to the Council, largely due to the valuable input and recruitment efforts of County planner Darby Kiley. Moreover, the committee presented the 2024 slate of officers to the Council for nomination.

Municipal Training Committee

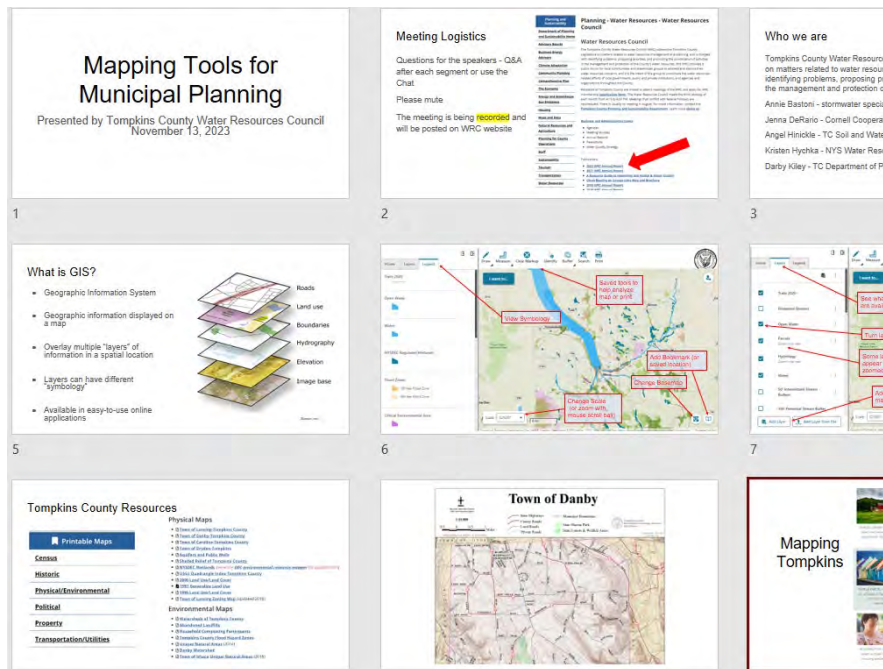
In 2023, the committee assisted in hosting two training sessions:

Municipal Good Housekeeping: This module was offered as part of the Broome-Tioga Stormwater Coalition’s stormwater winter training sessions. John Dunkle, expert stormwater engineer, led the online class in March. A partner organization covered the training fee, and the county provided a viewing space at the Public Works Facility, so municipalities could attend for free.

Eleven people participated from five municipalities (City of Ithaca, Town of Dryden, Village of Lansing, Village of Cayuga Heights, Town of Ithaca) and the Soil & Water Conservation District.

Online Planning Tools for Municipalities: Committee members Darby Kiley and Kristen Hychka hosted this webinar, which served as the committee’s primary training initiative for the year, on the evening of Nov. 13. During the session, they demonstrated various mapping tools and resources available online to help municipal boards understand land uses and environmental resources. Participants were introduced to various county, state, federal, and other resources and were guided on how to navigate them effectively. Additionally, committee members prepared a [comprehensive guide](#) to the webinar, providing a succinct overview of navigating online spatial tools

and a list of online resources, links, uses, and highlights.³ Twenty-three individuals registered for the session, with 12 attendees representing planning and zoning boards from six municipalities (Town of Danby, Town of Dryden, Village of Freeville, Town of Ithaca, and Village of Trumansburg). Furthermore, an abbreviated version of the presentation was delivered to the WRC at the December meeting.



Screenshot from training

Regional Watershed Coordination Committee

The Regional Watershed Coordination Committee, a collaboration of WRC and regional partners, engaged in discussions focusing on issues relevant across multiple watersheds (Cayuga, Owasco, Seneca lakes), including how to access funding for regional approaches to Clean Water Plan

³https://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/committees/WRC/documents/wrc_map_planning_resources_2023.pdf

implementation. The group plans to reconvene to review the draft Finger Lakes Action Agenda and discuss educational initiatives and the implementation of the Cayuga Lake TMDL, neither of which was released by the end of 2023.



Six Mile Creek. Photo courtesy of Roxanna Johnston.

Watershed Rules & Regulations Committee

The Watershed Rules and Regulations Committee includes representatives from the Tompkins County Whole Health Department, the three surface water public drinking water utilities (Bolton Point, Cornell University, and the City of Ithaca), and other WRC members. All three utilities have either developed or are pursuing a Drinking Water Source Protection Plan (DWSP2).

Discussions of watershed rules and regulations resumed in earnest after the state released its response to the draft Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations in August. Both the Watershed Rules & Regulations and Monitoring Partnership committees met jointly to develop a letter for WRC consideration (see details under the Monitoring Partnership).

Committee meetings provide a forum for information sharing as the utilities move through the DWSP2 process.

Bolton Point took a proactive measure by purchasing a property around their intake to enhance source and infrastructure protection, later contracting with consultants Barton & Loguidice to develop their DWSP2. Cornell University continues to progress with developing their DWSP2.

The City of Ithaca's DWSP2 plan, adopted in late 2022, was presented to the Town of Dryden's Conservation Board in 2023. Additional implementation actions include the following:

- The Great Lakes Basin Small Grants Program awarded the city \$47,500 for a build-out analysis along the Six Mile Creek corridor. This analysis will guide future development

to minimize negative water quality impacts.

- Review of watershed municipal solar (or related) laws and near completion of a model solar law for municipalities to bolster water resource protections (roll-out planned for 2024).
- NYS DEC awarded Tompkins County a \$75,000 Non-Agricultural Nonpoint Source Planning grant for comprehensive stream assessment to guide future best management practices/stream work in the watershed.
- Sampling for EPA’s fifth Unregulated Monitoring Contaminant Rule program started and will continue through 2024, with a focus on 29 PFAS and lithium.
- Information sharing on PFAS monitoring in general and discussion of pending changes to the U. S. EPA’s Lead and Copper Rule and its impacts on water utilities.

2023 WRC Members

Leadership

Chair Cynthia Brock, Municipal Government

First Vice Chair Frank Proto, At-large

Second Vice Chair Liz Cameron, Co. Environmental Health

Voting Representatives

Annie Bastoni, At-large

Shawn Bossard, Agriculture

Susan Currie, County Government

Jenna DeRario, Cornell Cooperative Extension

Kristen Hychka, Municipal Government

Darby Kiley, Co. Planning & Sustainability Dept.

Patrick King, Business & Industry

Liz Kreitinger, Watershed Organization

Jon Negley, Soil & Water Conservation District

Holly Payne, At-large

Brian Rahm, Environment

Stephanie Redmond, At-large

Steve Riddle, Water Purveyor

Linda Wagenet, At-large

David Wolfe, Environmental Management Council

Associates (non-voting)

Douglas Barnes

Roxy Johnston

Lynn Leopold

Rebecca Minas

Elaine Quaroni

Grascen Shidemantle

Tom Vawter

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](#).