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The Finger Lakes*

*By: J. William Gavett  
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The Finger Lakes is the designation of a set of lakes located in the northern Appalachian Plateau of New York State. There are various interpretations of which lakes truly belong to the set. An inclusive set is the following, starting at the western end of the "hand" and ending at the eastern end: Silver, Conesus, Hemlock, Canadice, Honeoye, Canandaigua, Keuka, Seneca, Cayuta, Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles, Otisco, Onondaga, Fayetteville Green and Oneida. Those underlined are considered to be "major" lakes, the remainder being "minor".

Generally these lakes are a magnificent resource particularly for recreation, with the exception of Onondaga which has the distinction of being one of the most severely polluted bodies of water in the United States. Besides their obvious use for swimming and boating, some of the lakes provide the best lake trout and bass fishing in the northeast United States. Seneca Lake is world famous for its rainbow and lake trout fishing. Hemlock and Canadice serve as part of Rochester's water supply and are also open for fishing.

It is the purpose of this paper to introduce the major finger lake pollution issues. Moreover, it is the intent of the Water Pollution Sub-Committee to keep the R.C.S.I. membership informed about future changes in these issues as well as to report direct R.C.S.I. contributions to the advancement of antipollution measures in the Finger Lakes. Previously (October 1968) R.C.S.I. issued a bulletin on pollution in Conesus Lake.

In a 1968 report, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration points out localized areas of pollution.\* In Geneva (Seneca) and Ithaca (Cayuga) localized pollution has forced the closing of public swimming areas bordering these cities. Over-fertilization is becoming a problem especially in Seneca and Cayuga among the major lakes, and Honeoye and Conesus in the minor group. Various of the lakes' outlets (Owasco, Skaneateles, Seneca and Cayuga) are seriously polluted by industrial wastes. An FWPCA report providing more detail on these lakes will be published soon.

Around several of the lakes, citizens groups have formed because of concern over a variety of environmental problems. R.C.S.I. will maintain liaison with some of these groups in order to share information regarding current needs and developments in pollution abatement. Organizations already contacted include:

(a) Citizen's Committee to Save Cayuga Lake. This group is leading a fight to prevent the thermal and radioactive pollution of this lake by a proposed nuclear power plant on the east shore. A booklet describing the problem and

\*FWPCA "Water Pollution Problems and Improvement Needs - Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River Basins", June 1968.

written by a group of Cornell scientists is enclosed with this report. This organization urges those interested in this problem to write to the following elected representatives. They would like these representatives to talk to the Atomic Energy Commission and the New York State Departments of Conservation and Health and convince them that Bell Station must be constructed with safeguards that will prevent any thermal or radioactive pollution of Cayuga Lake. Note that they are not opposing the construction of the plant.

Senator Charles E. Goodell  
U.S. Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nelson A. Rockefeller, Governor  
Executive Chamber  
Albany, New York 12224

Congressman Howard W. Robison  
House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Earl W. Brydges  
President pro tempore  
Senate Chamber  
Albany, New York 12224

Congressman Samuel S. Stratton  
House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Perry B. Duryea, Speaker  
Assembly Chamber  
Albany, New York 12224

This is an important issue related to the larger finger lakes which provide large amounts of cold hypolimnion water in the summer months.

(b) Seneca Lake Waterways Assoc. Inc. This group has existed since 1964 and has 1500 members. It has guided the development of a watershed regulation program consisting of a uniform code for some 23 towns around the lake and for controlling cottage sewage discharge into the lake. This has been a difficult and ambitious undertaking and is now successfully working in three of the four counties bordering the lake. The current problem of most concern to this group is the increase in the rate of weed growth around the edges of the lake. There is some concern over brine discharges into the lake by the salt mining industry at the southern end. The FWPCA (1968) reports concentrated sources of pollution from the primarily treated Geneva municipal sewage and from the Keuka Lake outlet which discharges into Seneca Lake at Dresden, on the west shore. Sources of pollution in the Keuka Lake outlet are not identified.

(c) Keuka Lake Shore Property Owners, Inc. This group (1000 members) has successfully obtained uniform watershed standards for Keuka Lake. Its waters now contain very low concentrations of inorganic nitrogen and soluble phosphates in comparison to other larger finger lakes. Recent association news letters indicate a concern with pesticide pollution and with a declining quality of lake trout fishing (no intent to relate the two problems).

(d) Canandaigua Lake Area Assoc. This group is interested in all matters of conservation and pollution pertaining to the indicated lake. They are currently trying to evaluate the impact of the possible commercialization of land adjacent to Seneca Point. Bristol Mountain Inc. plans to construct residential quarters for 400 families with restaurant, golf club, and on a narrow lake frontage of 2600 square feet.

Members of the R.C.S.I. who would like to become involved in Finger Lake's issues are urged to contact this writer (College of Business Administration, University of Rochester, 275-4201).