

Preface

Roaring waterfalls, beautiful and extensive tracks of open space and rural landscapes, deep gorges with unique rock formations, inspiring views of Cayuga Lake with water so clean it can be used as a drinking source and for recreational activities such as swimming, fishing and sailing. These are only a few of the striking images that people envision when asked what they want our watershed to be like in 20 years. The high quality of life in the region, in part due to its rural landscapes, open space, streams, gorges and Cayuga Lake, is precisely why many people call the Cayuga Lake watershed home. Isn't this something worth protecting for our enjoyment and the sake of future generations?

Change in our watershed can come very quickly. An excellent example is the swift establishment of the Village of Lansing. Only 30 years ago the Village of Lansing didn't exist! Fed by an increasing population and a growing economy, land use changes in the watershed happen both incrementally and quickly. Thirty years ago the grape industry didn't exist around Cayuga Lake. Today wineries are a major tourist attraction providing economic growth and stability to the Finger Lakes region. Like other agricultural practices in the region, cultivation of grapes requires careful management of the land to minimize leaching of fertilizers and pesticides into groundwater, streams, and the lake. Another recent and quite obvious ecological change that has occurred in Cayuga Lake is the introduction of zebra mussels, which were completely foreign to the lake 30 years ago! These are only a few examples of how the Cayuga Lake watershed has changed in a short time. Change is a fact of life and the watershed is prone to ecological, economic and social change, which we can choose to either shape and direct or just leave to chance. Accommodating economic and population growth while mitigating its negative environmental impacts on the watershed is critical to the economic vitality and environmental health of the Cayuga Lake watershed. We can enhance the economic vitality of the region while protecting the environment by working together for that common goal.

With this purpose in mind and inspired by community groups, interested citizens, regional planning boards and the creation of the Intermunicipal Organization (IO), development of a collaborative management plan and planning process for the Cayuga Lake watershed began almost four years ago. Today, the IO is a voluntary partnership of 31 villages, towns, cities and counties in the watershed working together to develop a Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan (RPP).

The main purpose of the RPP is to serve as a working guide for the public, elected officials, farmers, the business community, environmentalists and others to manage Cayuga Lake's valuable water resources. It is important to realize that the RPP only provides a framework and that the work achieved in these past four years marks only the beginning of the process. Many challenges remain. Stakeholder interests must sustain their involvement and invite additional stakeholder interests to participate in the dialogue. Neighborhoods and municipal representation must be secured as the process shifts from collectively developing a vision for the watershed to implementing a watershed plan. Strategies that address public concerns, expressed by the public in various forums, need

to be put to action. These will not and cannot happen overnight nor will every municipality see the benefits of implementation at the same time. Implementation of the plan will occur on a project-by-project basis, focused on the prioritized water quality threats and issues identified in the RPP. What is the bottom line for this plan to work? Cooperation between municipalities and active citizen participation maintained throughout the planning and implementation processes are the critical components for the success of the RPP.