

Seneca-Keuka Watershed Partnership announces progress in watershed plan



Seneca and Keuka Lakes contain more than 50 percent of the water of the 11 Finger Lakes, so protecting and promoting their water quality is important for the role they play in the background of our lives, and as local and regional economic drivers.

WHAT: A Nine-Element plan will be the subject of three more public presentations

WHEN: Oct. 7, 2021: 10 a.m. at Yates County Office Building, 417 Liberty St., Penn Yan: Overview of draft recommendations

WHEN: Feb. 3, 2022: 10 a.m. at Watkins Glen Community Center, 155 S. Clute Park Dr., Watkins Glen: Review of the completed draft plan

WHEN: April 25, 2022: 6 p.m. at Yates County Office Building, 417 Liberty St., Penn Yan: Unveiling the final State-approved plan

SENECA-KEUKA LAKES — Wherever you live, work, or play, you are in a watershed, and how you spend your day can have an impact on all life within that watershed.

A watershed is a land area where water naturally drains to one point. Rainfall and snowmelt flow into streams, creeks, rivers, and lakes; and eventually into oceans. The boundaries of a watershed are defined by the land features that direct where the water flows.

How you care for your lawn; direct the flow of water pumped from your basement; maintain your septic system; fertilize your crops; dispose of animal waste; or surface your driveway or hardscape could make a difference for thousands of people who draw their drinking water from your watershed.

Seneca-Keuka Watershed

Seneca and Keuka Lakes contain more than 50 percent of the water of the 11 Finger Lakes, so protecting and promoting their water quality is important for the role they play in the background of our lives, and as local and regional economic drivers.

The two lakes are connected by the only natural waterway between two Finger Lakes

— the Keuka Outlet, historically known as Minnesetah River. Because of this, they form a large watershed that spans from the Town of Italy in western Yates County to the Town of Hector in eastern Schuyler County, and from the Town of Horseheads in Chemung County to the Town of Geneva in Ontario County.



Photo Credit: Gwen Chamberlain

Every residence, farm, road, school, hospital, service station, park, forest, winery, brewery, distillery, and open space in parts of Yates, Ontario, Steuben, Seneca, Schuyler, and Chemung Counties are part of the watershed.

And everything that happens on those properties happens to this watershed.

That's why a group of professionals, elected officials, and concerned citizens have been working for more than four years to develop a plan for ways to protect the precious water that is the basis of life here.

9E Plan

That plan is called a Nine Element (9E) Plan. It is built on a 1996 Keuka Lake Watershed Management Plan Guide and 2015 Seneca Lake Watershed Management Plan.

A timeline of the plan's development follows:

2017: Groups from Seneca and Keuka Lake begin discussions to form the Seneca-Keuka Watershed Partnership, consulting with local, state, and federal elected officials, representatives of Finger Lakes Institute, and others.

2018: The newly formed group received a grant from the New York State Department of State (DOS), which allowed contracting with consultants like EcoLogic to carry out the scientific modeling requirements along with Keuka Watershed Improvement Cooperative and other subcontractors.

2019: In April, the 5-year DOS 9E grant timeline began, and the partnership, working with EcoLogic LLC, began working to establish the 9E plan.

The 9E framework is designed to answer four questions for successful water resource management:

What are the current conditions?

What are the trends?

Where are we trying to get to?

How do we get to where we want to be?

Public participation

An important component of the plan is public participation, and four public outreach meetings are part of the process. The first meeting, held in 2019, focused on the scope, purpose, and schedule of the project, and sought public input on concerns and priorities.

The second meeting, scheduled for 10 a.m. Oct. 7 at the Yates County Office Building in Penn Yan with a virtual Zoom option available (visit senecawatershedio.wordpress.com/9e/), will focus on draft recommendations. This meeting will include several opportunities for the public to provide feedback and pose questions.

The third meeting, scheduled for 10 a.m. Feb. 3, 2022 at the Watkins Glen Community Center, will include a review of the completed draft document and offers a final opportunity for public input.



The final meeting, planned for 6 p.m. April 25, 2022 in the Yates County Office Building auditorium will be the unveiling of the State approved 9E plan, and will include a discussion of recommendations and projects.

The project is sponsored with funding provided by the New York State Department of State under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund. Additional funding is provided by Seneca Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association, Keuka Watershed Improvement Cooperative, Keuka Lake Association, The Finger Lakes Institute at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Seneca County, Schuyler County, Ontario County, Yates County, Steuben County, and Corning Inc.

The Seneca-Keuka Watershed Partnership Executive Committee includes Mark Venuti (Seneca Watershed Intermunicipal Organization), Dan Corbett (Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association), Steve Butchko (Keuka Watershed Improvement Cooperative), and Mark Morris (Keuka Lake Association) with advisors Lisa Cleckner (Finger Lakes Institute), Ian Smith (Seneca Lake Watershed Steward), Colby Petersen (Keuka Watershed Manager) and Administrator Betsy Landre (Ontario County Planning Department). For more information about the Seneca-Keuka Watershed Partnership contact Ian Smith at 315-78-4559 or ismith@hws.edu, or Colby Petersen at 315-536-5188 or colby@ycsoilwater.com.

