

Honeoye Valley Association
Position on Aquatic Vegetation Harvesting

The Aquatic Vegetation Harvesting Program (AVHP) was established nearly 25 years ago in response to complaints from lake users about excessive weeds that impacted recreational use of the lake. Since 2005, two mechanical harvesters have been used.

There are two complementary groups serving the Honeoye Lake watershed. The Honeoye Valley Association is a not-for-profit volunteer organization that works in a variety of ways to protect and preserve the environmental quality of the Honeoye Lake watershed. The Honeoye Lake Watershed Task Force is an organization dedicated to monitoring lake conditions and conduct activities designed to improve water quality. Its members include town supervisors or their appointed representatives from all towns in the watershed.

The Honeoye Lake Watershed Task Force established a committee to develop a plan (published in 2008) to manage aquatic plants. The committee consisted of Canadice and Richmond residents and town board members, lake consultants and the NYS DEC. A public hearing was also held to hear comments and gather suggestions from all interested parties. The final Honeoye Lake Macrophyte Management Plan (HLMMP) was approved by the NYS DEC and adopted by the towns. It is available on the Ontario County Planning Department website: <http://www.co.ontario.ny.us/planning/>

Good lake management requires the use of sound scientific analyses based on established water quality principles to determine the most cost effective, environmentally friendly, and legally permitted management techniques. The HLMMP considered all known techniques of aquatic vegetation control including mechanical, chemical, and biological approaches as well as the “no management” option. Each technique was evaluated based on effectiveness, longevity, cost, acceptability to all lake users, and the ability to obtain the necessary regulatory permits. Vegetation harvesting emerged as the best technique to manage nuisance growth in Honeoye Lake.

The towns of Richmond and Canadice jointly contribute \$35,000 annually to meet program costs. Another \$25,000 in New York State funds administered through Ontario County, brings the annual budget to \$60,000. The program has a seasonal staff of three people and also covers the cost of operation and maintenance for two harvesters, a shore conveyor and a dump truck. Funds are budgeted for summer 2011.

Some have suggested that the program be suspended for 2011 to repair equipment, or wait a year to “see what happens”. Your HVA Board feels strongly and unanimously that this is the wrong course to take. Harvesting has been demonstrated to:

- Enhance lake use for swimming, boating and water skiing by repeatedly removing aquatic plant growth near the water surface while allowing growth near the lake bottom for all of the values that growth provides in a healthy lake ecosystem (fish habitat, oxygen production, nutrient absorption, etc.)
- Remove hundreds of tons of vegetation from the lake each year that would have otherwise remained, decayed and fertilized future “crops” of aquatic plants,
- Reduce the total mass of vegetation growing in 3 to 6 foot depth zone since its inception,

- Reduce shoreline turbidity by keeping aquatic plant root systems intact and holding the bottom substrate in place, and to
- Enhance the fishery by providing additional weed edges where game species feed.

In addition to these proven results since the programs inception, another documented change in the aquatic vegetation of Honeoye Lake has been a tremendous reduction in Eurasian water milfoil, an invasive species that can impact preferred native plant species through its rapid growth up through the water and then spread across the water surface.

The HVA Board believes our efforts should be on maintaining and eventually replacing harvesting equipment to make the program even more effective and efficient. New harvesters are faster and better at picking up aquatic plants. New harvesters allow fewer plant fragments to escape. We need to continue to manage our lake using policies based on scientific data. Successful programs such as vegetation harvesting need to be continued, while new efforts move forward for additional improvements in our lake. While we had a very difficult year for algae (warmest and wettest summer in many decades), aquatic vegetation harvesting was not the cause. We do not want to go back to the “no management option” that could result in excessive growth of nuisance vegetation next year, making many lake activities nearly impossible.