



# Lake George Park Commission

Bruce E. Young  
Chairman

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December 16, 2020

Dr. Carol Collins  
Assembly Point Water Quality Committee  
35 Knox Road  
Lake George, NY 12845

*RE: Letter to Governor Cuomo Regarding a Septic Inspection Program on Lake George*

Dr. Collins,

I am responding at the request of the Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo, to the letter recently received regarding the idea for septic system inspections on Lake George. Thank you for taking the time to send this correspondence regarding the protection of Lake George water quality, which is of paramount concern to all of us.

As you noted, Lake George experienced its first documented Harmful Algae Bloom (HAB) in November of this year. Governor Cuomo is committed to addressing HAB's in our waterbodies statewide, and Lake George was one of twelve NY waterbodies to have a comprehensive Harmful Algae Bloom Action Plan developed. This guiding document provides baseline conditions on Lake George and sets forth a framework to help prevent and mitigate such an event on the lake.

Following the November 7<sup>th</sup> HAB confirmation, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation was on-site immediately working with local partners to assess the situation and begin to determine its root cause(s). Thanks go to the Lake George Association for their quick action to alert the Department and the Commission. Water sampling and compilation of existing lake parameters was immediately commenced, and work continues to assess this important issue.

To keep the community informed and involved, on Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, the NYS DEC hosted a public WebEx informational session on the Lake George HAB concern. DEC's scientists noted that work is currently underway to help determine the factors which led to the recent event. No specific cause has thus far been identified as the primary factor, although it is noted that the calmness of the water over the period of several days was likely a key reason in the bloom surfacing. This was noted also by Dr. Rick Relyea, Director of the Jefferson Project on Lake George, during a presentation to the Lake George Park Commission on Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Relyea noted that significant scientific effort and financial resources are being put forth as part of the Jefferson Project to better understand the bloom and its causes. The NYS DEC and Jefferson Project team are collaborating regularly on this issue, and we hope for a clearer understanding in the next several months.

Your letter discusses the urgent need for a septic inspection program to protect the water quality of Lake George. Wastewater management systems around Lake George are noted as Priority 1 projects in Chapter 13.3 of the Lake George HAB plan. Several of the priority actions noted in the Plan have had substantial action taken on them, including significant NYS investments in the Village of Lake George and Town of Bolton wastewater treatment plants, and improving conveyance infrastructure within those systems. As you note, the HAB plan includes an action item regarding near-shore septic system inspections and the idea of a 50% cost-share with individual homeowners. The mechanisms and funding source need further review to be effective in

the long term; this review is a priority of the Commission and the State of New York as defined in the Plan.

There has been consideration and activity from local municipalities and Warren County regarding septic inspections upon real estate transfer. This is a good step in the right direction, and we hope this continues and expands to all municipalities within the Lake George Park. The broader idea of mandatory septic inspections on a larger scale within the watershed merits a more detailed understanding of the impacts that septic systems are having on Lake George, ensuring that any recommendations are backed by the best available science and are programmatically and fiscally viable.

The Commission is currently working to implement two new regulatory initiatives; stormwater management updates and new stream corridor protections. These proposed actions have been broadly discussed over the past three years in our communities around Lake George, and have resulted in overwhelming support for these initiatives. We would propose a similar track for any key onsite wastewater initiatives. The first step is to fully understand the extent of the issue, identify the scientific basis for such actions, and begin a broader public discussion. As of yet, there is no modern, comprehensive lake-wide study of the link between septic systems and impaired water quality on Lake George. While localized studies show correlations between algae growth and near-shore systems, this cannot be extrapolated lake-wide at this stage.

In the pending update to the Lake George HAB plan, it is the intention of the Commission to include a comprehensive onsite wastewater system review, as an effort to explore and document potential links between these systems and degradation of Lake George water quality. This will follow up on the Commission's 2001 Stearns and Wheler/Ecologic study which looked broadly at the lake's phosphorus budget and anthropogenic impacts.

Again, thank you for your ongoing efforts and work to help protect Lake George. It is through the combined determination of all of our communities, citizens and environmental entities that we achieve our best outcomes on critical issues facing Lake George now and in the future.

Most Sincere Regards,



Dave Wick  
Executive Director

Cc: Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo  
Bruce Young, Chairman, LGPC  
Basil Seggos, Commissioner, NYS DEC  
Elizabeth Little, NYS Senator  
Dan Stec, NYS Senator-Elect  
Matt Simpson, NYS Assemblyman-Elect  
Supervisors, Lake George Park Municipalities  
Robert Blais, Mayor, Village of Lake George