



February 18, 2021

Upper Saranac Watershed Management Plan

Zoom Meeting notes

**Participants:** 103 people registered for the public meeting, held on Zoom; 56 people participated.

**Meeting Goals:** (1) familiarize the public with the USL watershed and the planning process, (2) present the results of the 2020 Upper Saranac Lake public survey, (3) provide opportunities for the public to contribute ideas toward the future management of the watershed

### Overview:

- Project team provided an overview of the planning process, introduced the planning team including the Advisory Committee. <https://youtu.be/dakAUNIr0aM>
- Project team provided an overview of the Upper Saranac watershed geography and the issues of concern, and provided a summary of the public survey results. <https://youtu.be/dakAUNIr0aM>

**Breakout Groups:** Eight breakout groups were formed and were asked to discuss the assets/resources most at risk in the watershed, taken from the public survey, (ranked) NATIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS, AESTHETIC ENJOYMENT, CLEAN DRINKING WATER, NATURAL SHORELINE, CHARACTER OF THE LAKE, QUALITY OF FISHING, RECREATIONAL ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES, PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY.

Breakout group instructions:

- For each USL asset, discuss what specifically is at risk and what is threatening the asset
- What opportunities do we have to minimize the risks to these assets – activities, behaviors, management practices, communication.

**Breakout Group Discussion Notes: These notes capture people's ideas and perspectives and will be thoroughly reviewed before included in the plan's goals and recommendations**

### Native Plants and Animals

- Shoreline cutting restrictions/regulations are at the town level, and it can be a challenge to get the same regulations passed in both towns.
- There is likely impact to the loons with the increased amount of boat traffic and an increase in the number of new boaters who may not know all the safety rules.
- In the past, the lake association had tried to increase the quality of shoreline owner's buffers through a program focused on adding pollinator habitat, but it had limited success.

- Participants notes that there appears to be an increase in the number of larger boats and jet skis on the lake, and wondered if this could be limited somehow.
- The group discussed that more regulations/restrictions would need more enforcement, but that is a challenge. What might be more effective is more education about the native plants and animals, and the best management practices for protecting them. The lake association has an info packet for new homeowners that covers some of this. There is also a lot of info on the website. This has been good at educating long-term residents, but how to educate the short-term residents?

### Aesthetic Enjoyment

- Construction of cell towers disrupting shoreline view not a threat now, but worried that they could be in the future
- Over development of shoreline - lights from increased development impacting shoreline view at night and ability to enjoy stars- threatens the “forever wild” feel
- Jet ski wakes are affecting shoreline, noise threatens peace and serenity
- Specific concern that diesel engines used by some camps are bad for USL water quality, communicating to boat owners to replace these engines
- Specific concern about increasing number of people camping illegally
- More enforcement of speeding rules (and other safe boating practices) by DEC, however educating about rules may be better, people may not know they are breaking rules or what good boating etiquette is
- Education materials at boat launches about best boating practices/ courtesy, especially since access points are limited- effective signage or education materials could go a long way. (ie no wake zones, not speeding close to shore, right of way rules.)

### Natural Shorelines:

- Education on increased wakes and how it affects natural shorelines.
- Education about the natural shoreline and why it is important and what people can do to protect natural shoreline.
- Water temperature has increased in the north basin, and have also noticed more algae.
- Any way to limit jet ski’s? Difficult because the lake falls within two townships, both of which would have to adopt regulations.

### Character of the Lake:

- Loss of commercial opportunities for social interaction (History – Saranac Inn Hotel, Wawbeek Restaurant, Wenonah Lodge) - Replaced with mega single family homes was seen as a negative for the overall character of the lake.
- There was discussion about the importance of maintaining proper habitat and resources to insure longevity of a healthy wildlife population (loons, etc...). The group felt the wildlife populations were doing well and associated that with better water quality.

- There was a concern over the increase in the number of users; user conflicts with bigger boats, faster boats and bigger wakes in the watershed. There was concern over the impact of the proposed expansion of the Upper Saranac Lake Marina on Lower Fish Creek. The sentiment was that USL doesn't want to be another Lake George.
- The group felt it was important to maintain a good balance among user groups for diverse recreational opportunities (waterskiing, canoeing, swimming, stand-up paddle boarding, etc..) and aesthetic enjoyment.
- Education and outreach to address the above concerns was the consensus for successful implementation of the management plan.
- Increased funding and infrastructure could help- if people are camping in places where it's not allowed, could creating more sites or being more explicit and clear about regulations help – acknowledged that this requires funding.
- This group recognized the difficulty of preserving personal aesthetic, something that is so personal and specific, in a way that doesn't impinge on enjoyment of others.

#### Quality of Fishing

- Fishing quality was highly regarded and thought to be doing well, lake trout, bass, and pike were said to be prevalent, seemly healthy, and doing well/better than the past
- Concerns included the introduction of non-native baitfish into USL and the surrounding waterbodies within the watershed.
  - One of the healthiest smelt (native baitfish) populations in our region is found on USL, some would like to see it stay that way.
  - The most popular way to ice fish is with the use of live baitfish, commonly purchased from a local distributor. Are these bait species a risk? Can we restrict the access of non-native baitfish species?
  - Another concern is fishing tournaments especially regarding introduction of invasive species as anglers are in different lakes and different states on a weekly basis. Extremely high-risk watercrafts.
  - Can we work with tournament officials to mandate decontaminations?
  - Discussion around tournament anglers perceived attitudes and behaviors.
- Are there opportunities to restrict or limit the amount and types of tournaments on the lake? Permitting of local vs nonlocal fisherman tournaments. Are all tournaments that happen on the lake permitted through the state (as they are supposed to be).

#### Recreational Assets and Opportunities

- The watershed has seen a huge increase in visitors (campers and boaters).
- There is interest of keeping access available, but want to make sure it remains in as good of condition, recognizing that there are few public access points, which may be targeted opportunities for recreation users
- It is not clear how well visitors are informed about preventing invasive species and following Leave No Trace principles

- There was concern not just over numbers but behaviors such as – boaters going too fast, harassing loons either inadvertently or purposely, human safety and user conflict - danger related to not seeing people swimming or getting too close to paddleboards, Jet skis have increased tremendously which bring noise impacts and user conflicts; other noise impacts; speed of motorboats that go close to shore and close to docks; overuse at campsites, and campsite footprints are increasing/creeping ever larger
- Education is needed but that is not enough alone.
- Take a look at enforcement – DEC ECO's and Forest Rangers patrols, targeted enforcement, rules and regs, limits of use
- Important to partner with short term rental owners, local municipalities and NYS DEC

### Other Issues and Opportunities

#### Education:

- A list of people for new owners to contact when property changes hand.
- Packets of information about current rules and regulations for all property owners and new property owners.
- Better signage (Less is more, but higher quality)
- Franklin county LDC has destination development grants, can get a grant for anything that helps develop a destination. Get a grant to do research and education around informing people about their impacts.

#### Carrying Capacity:

- What is the carrying capacity of the lake? APA discussions on Lake Flower marina involved discussion of carrying capacity. How would it be determined?
- Another element of carrying capacity even more difficult: aesthetic carrying capacity, particularly the lake/shoreline interface -- how should land use be determined.
- Potential of overuse is very important -start with educating people on carrying capacity and why it's important. What are the effects of resource overuse?

#### Terrestrial:

- The plan should also focus on terrestrial issues. The longterm effects of climate change are possibly more likely to come from the non-water parts of the watershed than the water itself.

### Public Health and Safety Discussion:

- Concern about safety on the lake with all the new boaters.
- Concern with status of septic systems on the lake. The Town of Inlet has a septic system inspection requirement at sale. Could the towns have a similar requirement?
- The Town of Santa Clara has good records of the septic system updates around the lake if anyone wants to see them.

### Drinking water:

- Harmful algal blooms are a risk
- Clean drinking water is a significant concern as is the health of the lake in general.

- Should residents focus on the height/depth of the lake as the main factor affecting their season?
- There is great concern about road salt/ well groundwater drinking water contamination
- There is concern about impact of septic leaching on USL and other lakes' water quality