



Fall 2022

Issue No. 198



Erosion control mulch and box culvert by YCC- Photo by Jim Skinner

TLEA Plans a Watershed Survey for 2023

At the August board meeting the TLEA directors voted to proceed with a watershed survey update of Thompson Lake, with the subsequent development of a Watershed Protection Plan, which will allow us to access federal 319 Grant monies to help finance erosion control projects. Previous watershed surveys of Thompson were performed in 1994, 1999 and between 2008- 2010. The last survey of 2008-10 was performed in segments: the western section (south Otisfield) in 2008, the southern section (Casco and Poland) in 2009, and the northern section in 2010 (north Otisfield, Oxford and Norway). A Watershed Protection Plan was developed in four phases, the last of which took place in in 2014-16, addressing erosion sites in Poland and Casco. 12 major sites of non-point source pollution (NPS) in the watershed were mediated, resulting in an estimated reduction of 27 tons of sediment dumping into the lake!

This project also partially funded our Youth Conservation Corp which addressed 45 NPS sites around the lake. In addition, the project created a NPS Site Tracker for the entire watershed and provided technical assistance recommendations for landowners of 30 water quality impact sites. Overall, \$152,000 was raised for these projects, \$88,000 of which were from 319 Grants, which is a program created by the Clean Water Act of 1972. The rest came from matching local funds, including in kind services. This was just for Phase 4 of the Watershed Protection Plan.

Thompson Lake has been categorized as a “threatened” lake by the DEP, because of our relatively low flushing rate, high existing water quality, and the amount of development in the watershed. With an updated watershed survey, we will be eligible for further funding through the 319 Grant program for at least 10 more years, starting in 2024. This will allow us to plan for erosion control projects in the future, which will become increasingly important as the effects of climate change warm our waters and cause more algae growth and oxygen depletion. All who enjoy Thompson and value the unique nature of Maine lakes will benefit from this program.

TLEA has created a 319 Grant Steering Committee to oversee this project. The committee includes representatives from the Maine DEP, the local Soil and Water Conservation District Managers and other town representatives. We hope to work with local landowners and town managers to develop and fund erosion control projects. We will also communicate with the membership and landowners regarding

our plans and how they can benefit the lake. Most importantly, we will provide and coordinate volunteers for the watershed survey.

We need your help. The Watershed Survey will take place on May 19- 20, and one day in the fall of 2023. Volunteers will need to attend a 2-hour Zoom course on how to do property inspections prior to the survey. We will meet as a group and inspections will be done with Technical Leaders, who will supervise and instruct us on how to assess properties and enter the data. TLEA will inform all property owners of the survey and they will have an opportunity to opt out. This is an excellent way for you to give back to the lake and help ensure it will be a valuable resource for years to come. The experience should be informative, productive, and enjoyable, as we work together and have some fun on the side. ***If you are interested in becoming a watershed survey volunteer, contact us mmtlea@gmail.com or call 207 539-4535.*** Let's do this for the lake!!

YCC- It's back!

We are proud to say that our Youth Conservation Corp (YCC) was back in operation this past summer. The program was on a 2-year hiatus because of Covid-19 concerns and staffing issues. The newly revived, 3 person YCC crew was led by Chris Stoechner, an educator at the Oxford Hills High School. The program has now been in place for 19 years, it was first created using a 319 Grant.

The crew completed 10 erosion control projects for property owners around Thompson Lake. Two projects were down in Casco, Otisfield and Oxford respectively, and 4 were done in Poland. YCC provides the planning and the labor for these projects, the landowners pay for the materials, a \$75/hour labor fee, and agree to maintain the project for five years.

The projects included the building of box culverts, installing razor bars, laying down erosion control mulch and stone, planting vegetation and creating berms. The crew received lots of positive feedback from property owners regarding their work.

Much credit for this successful season should go to Chris Stoechner and our TLEA Director Jim Skinner, as they attended the required training and logged in many hours managing the projects. The Steering Committee for this revival consisted of Jim Skinner, Marcia Matuska and Kathy Cain. Thanks to all! Those interested in YCC services should contact Jim Skinner at FJAMESSKINNER4@gmail.com.

LakeSmart

Ron Armontrout, our director of the LakeSmart program reports that in 2022 the team performed 20 waterfront property evaluations. LakeSmart is an educational and outreach program that recognizes lakefront homeowners who manage their land to protect water quality. The program is free, non-regulatory, and voluntary. Participating homeowners receive individualized suggestions on keeping pollutants from stormwater out of lake waters. LakeSmart is now teaming with our YCC program to offer homeowners a convenient way to resolve their pollution issues. Many thanks to the LakeSmart assessment team: Marcia Matuska, Kathy Cain, Hobart Hardej, Candace Nelson, Ken Mendelson and Jade Doyle. Property owners interested in LakeSmart should contact Ron Armontrout at director.tlea@gmail.com.

Oxford Dam

In mid to late October, Thompson Lake levels rose to some of the highest in recent memory. This was due to a combination of heavy rainstorms, reduced usage of the center gate because of the absence of a fish screen and clogging of the screens with leaves at the east and west gates. James Pellerin of the Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife reports that they hope to replace the center gate fish screen once they receive the funding for this. James presented a very detailed report to the town with recommendations on data collection and water level management in January of this year. Oxford town manager Adam Garland reports that the town has reviewed this report and is working on more pre-emptive responses to forecasted rain events. Adam admits that they are on a learning curve, but states that the town is doing its best to keep the water at the appropriate levels.

Algal Bloom at Middle Range Pond

As an example of how real the threat of algae growth is to Maine lakes, Middle Range Pond in nearby Poland experienced an algal bloom this past August. This was detected when the Secchi disc readings at the lake went from the 6 + meter range to 4.3, and the residents noticed a green hue to the lake. Limnologist Scott Williams reports that this pond which has a history of above average water quality is affected by climate change, warming waters and reduced ice cover. Fortunately, the Secchi disc readings have improved, and the bloom wasn't severe. However, the warning signs are here; we need to keep working towards protecting our watersheds and preventing erosion.

Report on Milfoil Removal 2022

Milfoil Crew chief Alex Bernardy reports they had another successful season removing the variable leaf milfoil colonies that remain in the lake. Much of their efforts were concentrated on the Pine Point and Oxford dam areas. Most of the large colonies of milfoil there have been removed, so they concentrated on locating and pulling the smaller pockets of plants and regrowth which remain. He estimated that they removed 85-90 % of the milfoil that was present at the beginning of the season.

The crew also surveyed the Thompson Lake Marina into Bass Cove, Edwards cove and the islands; Otisfield, Hancock and Serenity Coves, the Oxford Landing boat launch, as well as Megquier and Black Island for signs of regrowth in August. They report there were no significant areas of new colonies or regrowth. The goal for the future will be to continue to monitor the lake for signs of regrowth in the reclaimed areas of the lake.

Courtesy Boat Inspection

Once again, Marcia Matuska organized and managed our Courtesy Boat Inspectors for the lake this past season. The four public boat launches of Thompson Lake Marina, Pismo Beach, Robinson's Marina, and the Landing in Oxford were monitored. Overall, 1251 inspections were done, and 7 plants were removed, all from boats leaving the lake, and they were not considered invasive. Statewide, CBI inspections removed 75,800 plants from watercraft. 105 were considered invasive. Thank you, Marcia, for your work on this.

Membership

Bill Booth, our membership director, reports that currently we have 503 active members of TLEA. *If you have not renewed your membership, please do by the end of the year.* We cannot continue our work to protect the lake without the support of the membership.

50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act

Prior to 1972, Maine rivers and lakes were often used as the effluent for by-products of mills and local industries. In municipalities, runoff from storms would often include sewage and other contaminants. Our rivers were often foul smelling and foamy, fisheries were almost non-existent, and local residents avoided any contact with the water. Only one-third of the nation's waters were considered safe for swimming and fishing.

We have come a long way from that, and much credit is due to the late Senator from Maine, Edmund Muskie, who grew up along the Androscoggin River in Rumford. The senator worked long and hard to get this legislation through Congress, where it eventually had strong bipartisan support. Today discharge from mills and factories has been dramatically reduced and our waters are much cleaner. Our rivers and lakes are sources of enjoyment and a major part of our economy. We have much to be thankful for Senator Muskie and those who saw a better future.

Perkins Farm

(Submitted by Candace Nelson, TLEA Board Member)

Crowning Dean's Hill on King St. in Oxford sits Perkins farm, an expanse of 200+ acres that has been in the same family for over 150 years. You know the place; coming from Poland, heading north up the hill, the barn roof appears first, its cupola outlined against the sky. Behind it, in the distance are the White Mountains, visible for a split second as one drives past the farmhouse. From the west side of Thompson Lake, the white house and weathered barn rises atop the hill, above the maple and oak trees, visible for miles.

Harrison Gray Otis Perkins, known as Otis (1838 – 1930), grew up in Oxford, not far from the farm he eventually developed. In 1861, at age 23, he joined the Union Army's 5th Maine Volunteers to fight in the Civil War. Returning as a wounded veteran, Otis Perkins built the graceful home that we see today in 1867-68. There, he developed a dairy farm, raised pigs and chickens, cut ice from the lake and planted an apple orchard across the road.

Otis's son, Merle (1879 – 1965), gradually took over the farm in the early 1900s, while his parents continued to live there. He married Olive Marcotte in 1905 and between 1910 and 1931, she bore eleven children: nine survived, six girls and three boys. It was, Ina recalls, a 'wonderful' life, but a hard one. Because two of the three brothers left to join the military as teenagers, the sisters did most of the work, tending to the animals and managing the huge job of haying by hand. Yet, in winter, the Perkins kids found time to go sledding down King St. (where only a handful of cars passed each day) and skated on Frog Pond. In the summer their father made ice cream every Sunday and they swam in the lake, Sarah reports, 'all the time'. But following Olive's rule for the start of the swimming season, the children had to wait until the snow was gone from the top of Mt. Washington, which they carefully monitored from their kitchen window.

Small in stature (under five feet) but large in personality, Olive Perkins came to the farm in 1905 as a 17-year-old bride and died there in 1983, at age 95. She was

reportedly the best meteorologist around, able to read the changing skies over the mountains and Thompson Lake. She could roll out pie crusts seemingly in seconds; five pies a day was her norm. She never wore pants and never drove a car.

The Perkins farm hasn't been a working farm since the 1950s, although to this day, the family still has the fields hayed and manages its forests. None of Otis's grandchildren chose to be active farmers but two of them, sisters Dorothy and Sarah, had salaried jobs and were able to sustain the house, barn and land. Dorothy was the chief operator for New England Telephone Company in Norway for 16 years, while Sarah, the youngest of the 3rd generation on the Perkins farm, worked at the post office in Oxford for 30 years, several of them as postmaster. The farm has been home to Sarah, now in her 90s, for her entire life. She makes sure it is pristine.

Author's note: This summary of the Perkins farm was told to me by sisters Sarah Perkins, Ina Brown and Ina's daughter, Jerry Wax. I am grateful to them for the time they gave me and the memories they shared.



Perkin's farm, side view, in Oxford. Photo by Candace Nelson

Visit our website at:
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