

Otsego County Aquatic Invasives Rapid Response Team
Final Report
Otsego County Conservation Association
December 15, 2023

Formation of the OCAIRR Team

Upon receipt of CRISP contract, OCCA began working to hire members of the OCAIRR team. The process was completed by late July, and the team began work on July 28 with a water chestnut pull at Larchwood Lake in Laurens. This was an especially successful day, with the team of four supplemented by OCCA Program Director, Jeff O’Handley; Invasive Species Intern, Nick Zamelis; CRISP’s AIS Strike Team; and Larchwood Lake Board Member, Manny Pelligra. During the course of about six hours, several hundred pounds of water chestnut were removed and deposited on Mr. Pelligra’s property, safely above the waterline.

The OCAIRR team worked steadily through August and into early September. Primary work areas included the yellow floating heart site in South Worcester, Clarke Pond in Springfield, Silver Lake in New Berlin, Goodyear Lake in Milford, and Summit Lake in Springfield. These were all productive sessions, removing large amounts of yellow floating heart, water chestnut, and European frog-bit from these water bodies. Participation of OCAIRR members varied based on work schedules and personal commitments.

Seven team members were hired to the OCAIRR team. As expected, there was some attrition: one person never worked at all; one dropped for personal reasons after just one session; a third had repeated medical issues and only worked two days. Though the season was much shorter than desired or anticipated (July 28 through September 8), there is no doubt that it was successful in terms of its impact on AIS populations:

1. OCAIRR team members participated in ten events from July 28-September 8 (11 scheduled; one cancelled due to weather);
2. Treated approximately slightly more than 30 acres;
3. Removed thousands of pounds of AIS. The actual amount was not properly recorded, as sheer volume and transportation issues forced us to dispose of material on site, so we were unable to weigh it;
4. Treated five water bodies (Goodyear, Silver, Larchwood lakes; Clarke Pond; Tennyson Pond)
5. Controlled two Tier 2 species (European frog-bit, yellow floating heart). Yellow floating heart currently has no known populations in Otsego County and to date has only been found in one other location within CRISP

OCAIRR also faced some challenges this year, which included the following:

1. The program got off to a late start, which held up the recruiting and hiring process. This may have also contributed to some extent to the attrition that took place in team members;
2. Scheduling. In an effort to accommodate team members who were also employed elsewhere, we employed something of an “on the fly” approach to scheduling work days. This tended to

exacerbate the problem, however, as there is almost no way to get seven people with different schedules in the same place at the same time.

3. Communication. In this world of instant communication, it can be surprisingly hard to get hold of people. Some prefer one method over another and respond well to texts but not to emails, and vice versa. Compounding the problem is the geography of Otsego County and its infrastructure, which can put people out of communication for long stretches at a time.
4. Inconsistent participation. This is almost certainly a side effect of points two and three in particular, but is likely also indicative of another reality: that people who have full- or near full-time jobs will find it difficult to take on more, even if they want the money or experience. There are only so many hours in a day and so many days in a week to run errands, keep appointments, etc., if a person already has a full-time job.

Despite the challenges listed above, OCCA feels that this is a very worthwhile program. The OCAIRR team can serve as a vital support to the CRISP AIS Strike Team; their presence at public events can bolster volunteer participation; they will be able to be deployed on short notice to new, high priority populations or locations; and will be able to access properties and locations that the general public will not get. OCCA is seeking funding to extend the program into next year and will address the challenges by getting an earlier start, establishing a schedule well in advance, and by setting up more consistent methods of communication. With these changes we believe the program will run more efficiently and will be even more effective at controlling AIS in our region.

Team members:

The following members participated in a minimum of one event:

Jordan Scott	Will Kuss
Jessica Burns	Matt Vlietstra
Zoe Meyer	

OCAIRR Activities:

Date	Location	Target	Notes
July 28	Larchwood Lake	Water chestnut	
August 1	Tennyson Pond	Yellow floating heart	
August 5	Goodyear Lake	Water chestnut	(also public event)
August 8	Tennyson Pond	Yellow floating heart	Cancelled/weather
August 11	Tennyson Pond	Yellow floating heart	
August 15	Tennyson Pond	Yellow floating heart	
August 19	Silver Lake	Water chestnut, frog-bit	(also public event)
August 23	Tennyson Pond	Yellow floating heart	
August 25	Goodyear Lake	Water chestnut	
August 29	Clarke Pond	Frog-bit	
September 8	Summit Lake	Frog-bit	

Volunteer and community programs

Throughout the summer, OCCA held volunteer events at OCCA offered volunteer events on the following dates and locations:

Goodyear Lake, June 4, 24 (cancelled), July 7, 8, August 5

Silver Lake, June 10, July 29, August 19

Clarke Pond, July 14

Volunteers have the potential to contribute greatly to any invasive species control program, and OCCA is not exception. During the 2024 AIS field season, nine events were offered as open participation to the community, with one date cancelled due to poor weather. Twenty-one unique volunteers participated in these events this year, and their efforts were significant in removing several hundred pounds of invasive plant material. In addition to the value of the work they contribute directly, volunteers are also valuable because they become informed about and aware of invasive species as a whole. Further, they become potential ambassadors to friends and family, and will often adopt and promote practices such as proper cleaning and decontamination of personal watercraft, gear, etc.

As much as we appreciate our volunteers this year, there is no doubt that volunteer participation is disappointing. Furthermore, the numbers reflect a downward trend that began before the pandemic. Our assessment is that the following items have contributed to this decline:

1. "The crisis is over." Water chestnut has been an issue in Goodyear Lake for close to twenty years. Community volunteers were initially very invested in removing the plant from the lake, but as *Trapa* numbers reduced over the years, some of the urgency went away. People respond well to a crisis, but it can be hard to maintain attention over the long haul. We saw this as well at Clarke Pond, where our first pull in 2018 saw a number of volunteers from the lake association and community while it has been very difficult to get volunteers for that site since.
2. Marketing/promotion. Program promotion has been inconsistent and not timely. Press releases need to be sent sufficiently in advance for potential volunteers to plan to attend. Promotion needs to occur across all available platforms and media lists must be updated and maintained. More targeted outreach to specialized groups (scouts, Rotary groups, etc.) and partner organizations needs to occur, and we need to be mindful that our potential volunteers are not just from Cooperstown or Oneonta.

OCCA is currently addressing the second issue by unifying our marketing and promotion efforts under a single staff member, and setting up protocols and procedures for marketing, including timelines, formats, etc. This should result in a more consistent and timely flow of information out to the public, which should result in greater participation. We are also looking at ways to increase volunteer retention, including awards, recognitions, trainings, etc.

OCCA would like to express our thanks to the Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership for their support of this program, both with funding and the participation of CRISP's AIS Strike Team. We look forward to continuing our partnership with CRISP on this and other projects.

Volunteers:

NAME	email	Dates
Quinn Amos	Minor – no email	8/19
Emily Fairbairn	Fairbae188@gmail.com	7/14*
Sue Hayen	Sue.hayen@gmail.com	6/10
Steve Herrman	Not given	8/5
Sandy Howes	Not given	6/10
Mary Keefe	Mkeefe914@gmai.com	7/14*
Kari Minissale	Minik965@oneonta.edu	8/23*
Jendy Murphy	Jendymurphy@gmail.com	8/5
Betsy O'Brien	Obrienb52@gmail.com	8/5
Christopher Ogden	Cogden713@gmail.com	7/8*
Autumn Owens	Autumnowens@gmail.com	8/19
Manny Pelligra	Mannypelligra@yahoo.com	7/28**
Lauren Perry		7/8
Aileen Pier	dwightwingmui@yahoo.com	7/8
Dwight Pier	Dwightwingmui@yahoo.com	7/8
Tim Pokorny	Peacorn99@yahoo.com	8/19
Mariana Pokorny	Minor-email not given	8/19
Ruth Schaeffer	rwschaeff88@yahoo.com	6/4, 8/5
Adam Tracey	Adam.tracey@lifelikes.com	8/19
Doug Zamelis	Dzamelis@windstream.net	7/17***
Ruiyu Zhang	Zhanr78@oneonta.edu	7/8