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New York State Releases Final Water Quality Plan for Seneca and Keuka Lakes

'Seneca-Keuka Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus' Outlines Science- and Community-Based Program to Restore and Protect Two Treasured Finger Lakes

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos and New York State Department of State (DOS) Secretary of State Robert Rodriguez today announced the joint agency approval of the Seneca-Keuka Watershed Nine Element Plan to reduce phosphorus pollution. Excess phosphorus can trigger harmful algal blooms (HABs) that can impair water quality and opportunities for recreation. This collaborative planning effort identified focused strategies, programs, and projects to enhance the lakes' water supplies, aquatic habitats, and recreational uses.

"The Seneca-Keuka Watershed Nine Element Plan represents a grassroots effort led by Finger Lake watershed communities to actively restore these prized waters," **said Commissioner Seggos**. "DEC commends the science, vision, coordination, and hard work that went into developing the Seneca-Keuka Watershed Nine Element Plan, and will continue to support our many partners in the plan's implementation."

"Protecting the Seneca-Keuka watershed from harmful algal blooms, flooding and impacts to water quality is a priority for the Department of State," **said Secretary of State Robert J. Rodriguez**. This 9 element plan to protect the watershed is a living breathing document that will be used for years to come and is a result of what can happen when the agencies and communities come together in the process."

Seneca and Keuka lakes experience [HABs](#) associated with excessive amounts of phosphorus - a key nutrient for plant and algae growth. The primary sources of phosphorus are polluted runoff and in-lake nutrient cycling from bottom sediments. Higher temperatures and increased storm intensity associated with climate change increases phosphorus pollution and exacerbates phosphorus-induced water quality impairments. Keuka Lake watershed is an integral part of the Seneca Lake watershed, and stakeholders in both areas worked together to produce a fully integrated plan. DEC and DOS experts guided and approved the plan, which is consistent with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's framework for watershed-based plans consisting of [nine key elements](#) (leaves DEC's website) for waterbody protection and stakeholder engagement.

The watershed plan aims to reduce phosphorus input to the lakes through the implementation of short- and long-term projects. Strategic planning and commitments were coordinated by the Seneca Watershed

Intermunicipal Organization, Keuka Watershed Improvement Cooperative, Seneca Pure Waters Association, Keuka Lake Association, Finger Lakes Institute at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Yates County Soil and Water Conservation District, Ontario County Planning Department, and project consultants Ecologic LLC, Anchor QEA and Cornell University. Now that the community established a Nine Element Plan, it can build upon existing efforts to address pollutant sources and utilize state and federal grants to implement the plan. The [final approved plan \(PDF\)](#) is posted on [DEC's Clean Water Plan webpage](#).

Geneva City Manager, Ms. Amie M. Hendrix said, "The release of the plan gives the city of Geneva and our federal, state, and local partners a path forward to continue to combat phosphorus pollution in our waterways. The Finger Lakes and the ecosystem they create provides so much to our community and protecting Seneca Lake is crucial to maintaining our uniquely urban city. Thank you to all parties who worked to adopt this plan, now let's continue this great work in implementing these solutions."

The Seneca-Keuka Watershed Nine Element Plan was funded by the State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and administered through DOS' Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. Among the [many environmental victories in the 2022-23 State Budget](#) (leaves DEC's website), Governor Hochul increased the EPF from \$300 to \$400 million, the highest-ever level of funding in the program's history. The EPF provides funding for critical environmental programs and projects such as land acquisition, farmland protection, invasive species prevention and eradication, enhanced recreational access, water quality improvement, climate change resilience, and environmental justice, to ensure all New Yorkers benefit from sustained ecosystem services, such as drinking water, swimming, and fishing.

The 'Seneca-Keuka Lake Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus' is a prime example of New York's continued, nation-leading efforts to protect water resources by assisting communities in their plans to reduce the harmful effects of sediment and nutrient pollution. The plan announced today builds upon actions the State has already taken to reduce phosphorus and the frequency of HABs, which are a persistent challenge in the Finger Lakes and waterbodies statewide. To date, New York has awarded more than \$327 million in grants for projects designed to reduce the frequency of algal blooms by targeting phosphorus and nitrogen pollution, factors that trigger algae blooms and HABs. New York's nation-leading actions to prevent and mitigate these potentially toxic blooms include investing in infrastructure upgrades and new technology. To [learn more about HABs](#), visit the DEC website.

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