



FOCUS 2024

For a thriving Lake Champlain Basin

New York Citizens Advisory Committee on Lake Champlain Management

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The Lake Champlain Basin

Who We Are

The New York Citizens Advisory Committee (NYCAC) on Lake Champlain Management is a voice of the New York public on Lake Champlain Basin issues. The NYCAC serves as a forum to discuss lake issues, advance understanding, and explore opportunities to improve water quality and enhance the Lake Champlain Basin's resources. Working closely with communities and like-minded organizations in the region, including the Lake Champlain Basin Program, Champlain Watershed Improvement Coalition of New York, Boquet River Association, Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Network, the Vermont and Quebec Citizens Advisory Committees, and others, the NYCAC supports two-way communication between communities and scientists, decision makers, and local governments in the Lake Champlain Basin.

The Lake Champlain Basin boasts abundant natural and cultural treasures. With the 35th anniversary of the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Network in 2024 and the upcoming 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2026, it is an important time to reflect on the region's rich history, unique environment, and long-term stewardship of working lands. Residents and visitors alike enjoy diverse recreational activities, from boating and fishing to admiring scenic views. Preserving clean water and robust ecosystems is vital for thriving communities. FOCUS 2024 highlights the NYCAC's priority concerns and recommendations to sustain Lake Champlain's environmental, economic, and cultural benefits in light of a changing climate.

Assess, Mitigate, and Eliminate Chemical Contaminants

Chemical contaminants pose risks to human health and the environment. Chloride pollution in the Lake Champlain Basin region negatively impacts infrastructure, drinking water, and wildlife. Reducing the application of road salt by following de-icing and winter road management best practices reduces chloride pollution and cumulative costs, particularly as winter rain events increase. Proactive assessment and mitigation are crucial for ensuring a safe and sustainable environment.

FOCUS Resources on:

- *Implementation of Road Salt Reduction Task Force Report Recommendations*
- *Assessment of contaminant pollution, including PFAS and pesticides, to inform mitigation strategies*

Invest in Critical Water Infrastructure for Resilience

Upgrading and maintaining critical water infrastructure is essential to reach clean water goals and support thriving communities in the region. Failing infrastructure can adversely affect public health, tourism and recreation, wildlife, and the economy. Through its flood forecasting and warning systems, the USGS Stream Gage Network provides lifesaving data and documents climate change impacts. The limited monitoring capacity on New York streams puts people and property at risk. Maintenance and expansion of the Stream Gage Network, combined with green infrastructure initiatives and utilizing green infrastructure and natural resources, like wetlands, enhances resilience and mitigate climate change risks.

FOCUS Resources on:

- *Upgrading and maintaining wastewater treatment facilities, sewer, and septic systems*
- *Supporting public implementation of septic maintenance and best practices*
- *Maintaining and expanding the USGS Stream Gage Network*
- *Implementing green infrastructure*

Support Habitat Protection and Connectivity

Wetland degradation, development of floodplains, roads, dams, removal of hedgerows and riparian growth result in loss of habitat, impact wildlife and fish movement, threaten ecological diversity, reduce resilience to storms, increasing damages to property and infrastructure. Restoring aquatic organism passage through dam removals and right-sizing of culverts restores native species habitat, reduces habitat fragmentation, reduces erosion and nutrient loading, and enhances community flood resilience and climate change adaptation.

FOCUS Resources on:

- *Protecting and restoring wetlands and floodplains*
- *Restoring connectivity via dam removals and right-sizing of culverts*
- *Implementing education and outreach on the value of wetlands, floodplains, and connected habitats*

Reduce Phosphorus Loading

Non-point source run-off from agricultural, urban, and developed lands, roads/ditches, and eroding stream banks, along with point source discharges from wastewater treatment plants add nutrients to the lake. Excess nutrients degrade water quality and aquatic habitats, cause harmful algae blooms, impact water supplies, and affect recreation. Addressing phosphorus loading from both nonpoint and point sources is vital to restoring and protecting Lake Champlain's health.

FOCUS Resources on:

- *Implementing best management practices in all nonpoint source categories*
- *Optimizing best treatment technology at wastewater treatment plants*
- *Utilizing education and outreach to modify public behaviors related to phosphorus loading*

Prevent the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species

Aquatic invasive species pose a significant threat to Lake Champlain's ecological integrity and economic vitality. Once introduced, these species are challenging and costly to manage, negatively impacting native ecosystems, water quality, and various economic sectors. Climate change can exacerbate the impact of invasive species. With 51 known invasive species in Lake Champlain, New York State must allocate resources to prevent further introductions and manage existing threats.

FOCUS Resources on:

- *Implementing a physical separation barrier in the Champlain Canal*
- *Improving invasive species education and outreach by the Canal Corporation.*
- *Sustaining an aggressive water chestnut harvesting program and sea lamprey control program*
- *Expanding boat launch steward and boat wash programs*