

Lake Onota Guardian

A periodic publication dedicated to the preservation of Lake Onota, Pittsfield, MA
Winter 2012

On the inside:
McGrath says.....Pg. 3
A Lookback to 2010.....Pg. 4
Whom to call.....Pg. 5
Monitors help, but.....Pgs. 6-7
Seen by the editor....Pgs. 8-9
LOPA contributions...Pg. 10
President's letter.....Pg. 11
Signs of the times.....Pg. 12

Girls Club plans to sell shore lots

By Lew Cuyler

As the year 2011 draws to a close, the Pittsfield Girls Club, that for many years has operated Camps Stevenson and Witawentin on the northwest shore of Lake Onota with access from Churchill Street, has embarked on plans to sell five lakeshore building lots just north of the developed camp property which it owns.

Papers on file at the Pittsfield Conservation Commission office, which must issue a permit for the development, describe a total development of 53 acres with the five lots ranging from six to 10 acres.

A road to the proposed development already exists with access from Churchill Road. The road is deemed adequate to serve the development but will have to be widened in spots, information in the application reveals. There is an existing bridge over Parker Brook which is considered adequate to handle traffic to the development.

(continued on page two)



Outline shows area for five lots to be sold by Pittsfield Girls Club.

Bianchi favors Burbank Park master plan... but city must find money to make it happen

By Lew Cuyler

Daniel Bianchi, the new mayor of Pittsfield, told The Guardian that he is fully aware of the fragility the two lakes within the city's borders and will initiate steps to insure their future health, as well as that of Burbank Park.

He said he will begin by organizing a conference of city leaders in the spring to discuss the future care of Lake Onota and the park, both within the city's borders, and Pontoosuc Lake, situated partly in Pittsfield and partly in Lanesboro.

Specifically, he said, the city must identify the financial resources to pay for a professional master plan for Burbank Park as well as for Onota.

"The problem has always been money," he said. "Such planning puts pressure on our budget....In the old days,



Mayor Bianchi

we could ask GE, and if the project warranted, the money would be there....We all know that those days are over."

A start on developing a master plan, he said, could begin at a gathering of the city's civic and political leaders.

"The city's identity has changed," he said. "No longer are we a community dominated by

GE. There is an increasing realization that Pittsfield has something else to offer...an environment of quality with recreational and educational resources and also one that is in scale with people's aspirations."

He noted that crime, traffic and pollution have made living conditions difficult for many families who dwell in larger urban areas and they therefore seek a location that

(continued on page three)



The eroding east bank of Lake Onota between city beach and the public boat launch was stabilized this past December with plantings of shrubs and careful placement of layers of brush. Work also included installation of three wooden stairways to the water's edge to prevent trampling down the banks, that, in turn, caused the erosion. The project cost was approximately \$80,000, funded through a combination of money from the city budget and a grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection. The work was performed in December by Sumco Eco-Contracting of Salem, MA. Photo is looking south from a spot near the city beach.

Girls Club plans sale of lots

(continued from page one)

The plans, submitted to the Pittsfield Conservation Commission this fall, represent the first lake front housing development in recent years. The remaining major undeveloped shorefront property around the lake, owned by Hillcrest Hospital, is at its south end with a shore on Salisbury Cove.

The Girl's Club plans call for selective tree cutting on the mostly wooded property land; lots that will vary in size from six to 10 acres. There will be pathways from the houses to the docks at the waterfront; scenic views of the lake will be preserved; and the developed parts of each parcel will not exceed 50 percent of the land involved.

Kelly Marion, the chief executive officer of the Girls Club, told The Guardian that the club had decided to sell the lots because it wanted to pay off the balance of a mortgage that underwrote the \$4.1 million cost incurred during the renovation of the Girls Club building on East Street. That balance, she said, is approximately \$877,000.

"We want to pay it down so we can get on with other projects," she said. The Girls Club currently has 3,400 members and the 88 acre camp which has operated since the 1920s has an enrollment each summer of about 100 campers who range in age from 5 to 17. The camp operates from July 4 to the end of August.

McGrath says boat ramp monitors prevented Zebra Mussel threat in 2011

James McGrath, the City of Pittsfield's Harbormaster (whose formal title Park, Open Space and Natural Resource Program Manager) said he was very pleased with the performance of the five monitors who checked boats launching at Lakes Onota and Pontoosuc this summer to make sure that they were not carrying Zebra Mussels on their hulls that would infect the city's two lakes.



Jim McGrath
Pittsfield Harbormaster

"We found no evidence of Zebra Mussels being brought in on visiting power boats during the boating season," he told *The Guardian* during a late October interview.

"This is the third year of monitors and the level of boater awareness of the Zebra Mussel threat has increased from year to year," he said.

The city of Pittsfield, he said, hired five monitors for Onota and Pontoosuc lakes. Under his supervision, he said, "they worked seven days a week from the end of March until Labor Day; following Labor Day they worked Thursdays through Sundays until the end of October."

Their pay was \$9.50 per hour, and they worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays.

Boaters, he said, were required to sign affidavits asserting that their boats were mussel free and to allow their boats to be inspected.

He estimated that the monitors, who were primarily college students, dealt with 6,400 boats for a total payout of \$20,025...so it came out as a cost of about \$3.25 per boat."

The program, he said, "has resulted in a lot of education...it has raised the levels of awareness...this was its third year and each year it has improved."

From May to October, he said, approximately 6,400 boats launched at the two city lakes, 4,000 of them at Onota and the balance at Pontoosuc.

About 97 percent of the boat visitors at Onota were from Massachusetts, he said, and at Pontoosuc the percentage from the state

was about 95.

"The number of out of state boaters was fewer than we had expected," he said, adding that he suspected the ebbing national economy had produced a dampening effect on the out-of-state boat visitations.

"Boaters were cooperative," he said, "and there were no real incidents although some boaters were less than thrilled that they had to delay their launches because of the monitoring program."

As for other statistics, he reported:

-- There were 29 fishing derbies at both lakes; 19 at Onota, 10 at Pontoosuc;

-- Seven percent of the launches were associated with fishing derbies;

-- City beach attendance averaged 1,000 per week; life guards were on duty all seven days of the week during the summer months; there were no serious incidents of injury of misbehavior.

Bianchi favors Burbank Park master plan...

(continued from page one)

offers a better quality of life. Increasingly, they can do so because of modern communications. Pittsfield, he acknowledged, has also had its share of urban problems; however, its smaller size and favorable scale of life makes them easier to manage.

"The city is changing its identity," he said. "Pittsfield's day in the sun is coming, particularly because of the development of modern communications that make it much easier to do business from the more remote areas."

He emphasized that city government has the responsibility to preserve and improve the environment through care of resources, including schools, roads and parks and taking steps to encourage the growth of job producing businesses.

"We are re-inventing ourselves following the loss of a major employer," he said. "Under previous mayoral administrations, we have made a good start.

I intend to continue to build on that foundation."

A resident of Loumar Drive on the city's west side, the mayor-elect said that he and his family have been regular visitors to Burbank Park and Lake Onota. Accordingly, he said, he is well aware of the lake's fragile nature and the need for a Burbank Park master plan.

Again, he emphasized that "the city has many competing needs but only limited financial resources to meet them... That is why we should meet to share ideas and identify resources to pay for improvement and upkeep of Lake Onota and Burbank Park."

Praising LOPA's stewardship for the lake, he said he is "certainly aware that such work must continue. My hope is that working in concert with LOPA and others, we can insure the future quality of Burbank Park and the health of the two lakes. A master plan for Burbank Park and Lake Onota would start the process."

A lookback to 2010

By Lew Cuyler

The year 2011 has ended... but not the Zebra Mussel issue. The following is a quick digest of statements made during 2010. Readers should judge whether progress happened in 2011

BOB RACE, LOPA president

Remarks: 4/7/10

--The final recommendations of the state's Zebra Mussel Task Force are extremely disappointing...What is missing... (are) the concrete steps necessary to significantly reduce the probability of ZMs being introduced into our highly vulnerable lakes by transient boaters...

--Boat washing should have been the starting point for deliberation on how to avoid the spread of Zebra Mussels. But it wasn't...I suggest that the real answer is lack of political will...As a result we now will have to rely on the self-certification process which we know will be less than one hundred percent effective...

-- My second big concern is Laurel Lake. The failure to recommend mandatory decontamination of any vessel coming out of Laurel Lake is a glaring mistake...

-- A third significant omission concerns the apparent unwillingness to address the need for a single point management focus within state government to deal with the sometimes overlapping and inconsistent responsibilities of various state agencies relative to Zebra Mussels...

-- In summary, the Zebra Mussel Task Force has failed to provide the plan that would have a high probability of preventing the spread of Zebra Mussels in western Massachusetts...

LEW CUYLER, Editor, The Lake Onota Guardian, LOPA board member...Remarks at Zebra Mussel public hearing 4/7/10:

-- I am profoundly disappointed at the Zebra Mussel Task Force report because it fails to take the strong measures that are necessary to prevent an infestation of Zebra Mussels into Pittsfield lakes.

-- Lakes are not disposable objects. If either or both Pittsfield lakes die because of a Zebra Mussel infestation there would be no way for them to recover. They could be dead lakes, supporting no life, lost forever.

-- Clearly the state needs to undertake a much more aggressive posture to prevent the scourge of Zebra Mussels.

...and Laureyns proposes automated boat wash

By Lew Cuyler

Dick Laureyns, former LOPA vice president, has developed a plan to prevent a Zebra Mussel infection of Lake Onota and at the same time eliminate most labor costs associated with various other ideas for lake access control that have surfaced since the crisis began in July.

Laureyns, who is on the lake almost daily either in a rowing shell or a pontoon boat, said his plan relies on automation.

He said his premise is that boat-washing with scalding water is widely considered the most effective defense against an infestation of Zebra Mussels. His plan depends on the use of a boat washing station located within a short distance of the lake.

The key to his plan is the city's control of the access to the road into Burbank Park. The road leads to the public boat access, which is under state control, and the adjoining parking lot.

He described how it would work to *The Guardian*.

1. The city would require any boat entering Lake Onota to have been washed at a boat wash station. The city would make it mandatory to allow boat parking only in designated areas adjacent to the public boat ramp. Violations would result in fines.

2. To exercise control, the city would install an automated entry gate at the portion of the access from Valentine Road that leads to the boat ramp. The gate would be equipped with a programmable magnetic strip reader, a computer and a screen, a web camera, a speaker and microphone and an optional credit card reader. The gate will provide round-the-clock access to the parking area and the public boat ramp

just beyond the gate and around a curve.

3. The boat will have been washed at an authorized boat-washing station. After washing an attendant at the station will issue the magnetic card which will then be used to operate the access gate to the parking lot.

4. During the entry process a web cam will take a photo of the boat trailer's registration number. The transaction, including the registration plate photo, will be recorded into a report to be collected twice a day by a city employee.

5. The user card will be renewed for another 24 hour period at no charge with a return visit to the boat washing station.

6. The remote control software will allow designated city employees to use computer screens to monitor boat traffic to and from the launch site 24 hours a day. That means, he said, that the web cam can be connected to any computer in City Hall or the Police Station allowing city personnel to react quickly to any concerns.

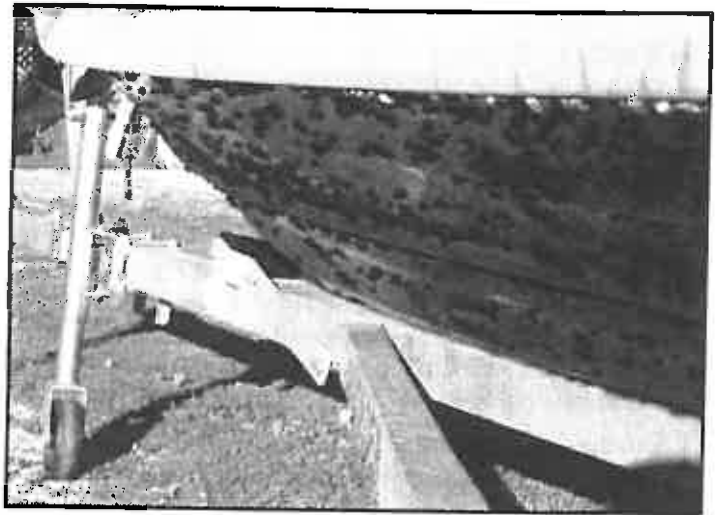
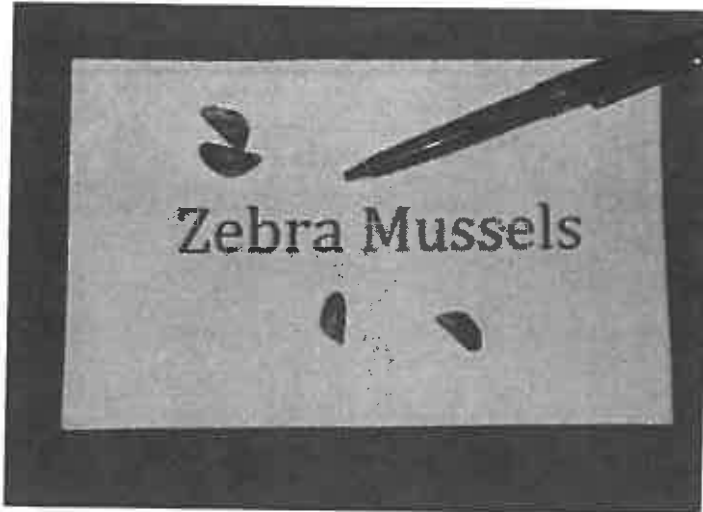
7. The plan calls for substantial fines for non-compliance with its provisions.

Laureyns has also proposed an alternate plan that would require staffing and attendant costs.

Under this plan the city would install kiosks at the two entries to the park that would be staffed by attendants who would check all boats to insure they had been washed. The boaters would use the same station and similar certifications as in the more automated plan. Boat registrations would be recorded and collected.



Dick Laureyns



The Zebra Mussel - even smaller than a dime - ingests it's watery environment for survival, taking out all food and leaving clear sterile water, thus totally destroying the watery environment so important to fish and plant life. In short, infestations can make lakes sterile.

NOTES:

**NEXT BOARD MEETING - APRIL 25, 2012
at 7:15 p.m., Room 203 City Hall.**

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER!

**Don't procrastinate... Send in your
2012 dues now if you haven't done so.**

Whom to Call on Lake Issues

LOPA Executive Committee

President: Bob Race, 443-1681 ~ rwracerone@aol.com
Vice President: Bob Quattrochi, 443-2554 ~ petesrkq@hotmail.com
Treasurer: Gail Light, 445-7566 ~ glight@armoredsolutions.com
Clerk: Dorothy Mara, 447-9867 ~ Mw1mara@verizon.net
Recording Secretary, Joe Cancilla, 445-8996 ~ jcancillajr@nycap.rr.com

LOPA Area Representative Directors

Tor Court: Marshall Raser, 443-2732 ~ mraser@nycap.rr.com
Westwood: Bob Quattrochi, 443-2554 ~ petesrkq@hotmail.com
West Street: Walt Pickwell, 442-2746 ~ bpickwell@aol.com
Blythwood Drive: Mark Selkowitz, 442-3462 ~ mselkowitz@truenorthfs.com
Pecks Road: Tom Dailey 442-1724 ~ onotaboat@nycap.rr.com
Thomas Island: Jim Ditello, 499-0122 ~ jditello@berkshire.rr.com
Lakeway/Bakers Island: Jeff Rose, 442-1126 ~ jrose@cbrose.com

LOPA At-Large Directors

Lew Cuyler, 442-4482 ~ BerkSculling@aol.com
Jack O'Brien, 443-3136 ~ audjacobrien@aol.com
Ron Smith, 499-4339 ~ rsmith212111@yahoo.com

City of Pittsfield

Mayor Daniel Bianchi, 499-9321
Harbormaster: Jim McGrath, 499-9344
Conservation Agent: Caleb Mitchell, 499-9359
Councilor: Anthony Simonelli, 442-2191
Councilor: John Krol, 464-7539

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Senator Benjamin Downing, 442-4008
Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, 499-5961
Fish & Wildlife: Andrew Madden, 684-1646
Dana Ohman, Aquatic Biologist, 684-1646

Monitors have reduced invasive species threat

By Lewis C. Cuyler

As the boating season on Lake Onota ended this fall the deepening controversy over controlling access to the lake as a way to ward off the Zebra Mussel threat which could sterilize Onota's waters remained unresolved with no real solution in sight.

On one side were lake advocates, many of them members of LOPA – the Lake Onota Protective Association – who want to see enforcement measures that would insure that only boats that are certified as clean would be allowed to enter the lake by means of the public boat ramp.

On the other side are the legions of fish and game enthusiasts who for many years have enjoyed the state's guarantee of 24 hour access to all lakes and ponds via the public boat access ramps it has built using public funds.

As members of LOPA, as well as many other lake users realize, various forms of invasive species – both plant and organisms such as Zebra Mussels -- have threatened the health of Onota and many other lakes in Massachusetts, and indeed in the northeast. The threats to Lake Onota have particularly come from Eurasian Milfoil, an invasive and cloying plant, and, in the last two years, an infestation of Zebra Mussels, small organisms that ingest and clean water making it sterile and thus unable to sustain plant and fish life.

Through concerted efforts in the past few years that have involved LOPA, the City of Pittsfield, and various state environmental departments, the milfoil situation has been brought under control. The result is that for the past few seasons Lake Onota has been largely free of the pesky weed.

The Zebra Mussel threat is much less obvious because the tiny organisms attach themselves to the hulls of boats and thus are much less obvious.

The people who are most concerned about the lake's health generally agree that the solution to keeping the lake free of Zebra Mussels is to insure that only clean boats can enter the lake because the cleaning process removes the mussels.

The rub comes in the question of enforcement. How can entities, such as the City of Pittsfield which owns the lake, or the state which built and controls the public boat launch, control access and thus insure that only boats that are clean and thus free of Zebra Mussels can enter the lake? The problem becomes more complicated because the state paid for the public boat launch and that state law mandates that the boat launch facility is available to the public 24 hours a day.

Statewide entities, such as the organized groups of fish and game enthusiasts who belong to well financed organizations, insist that the lakes and ponds in Massachusetts should be open to everyone on a 24 hour basis.



At left, public boat access to Lake Onota

They are backed up by a state law, originally passed in 1870, that insures that the public has access to all lakes in Massachusetts. George Darey of Lenox and Stockbridge, a longtime advocate for the state's fish and game enthusiasts, told *The Guardian* that the law passed because of concern that wealthy landowners were buying up all lakefront properties in the state and, if that trend continued, access to the lakes for fishing and recreation would be denied to the majority of the population without the means to buy lakefront property.

Subsequently a number of fish and game organizations and lake betterment organizations such as LOPA were created. Darey himself, now in his 80s, has been a major active participant in various statewide organizations concerned with preserving fish and game resources and making them available to the public.

Massachusetts state officials, through the years, have

.....But gate needed for 24 hour protection



At right, fishing pier

been responsive to the fish and game community, fully aware that the money received from fishing and hunting licenses constitutes a important part of the state's finances and goes a long way to insure the health of lakes and forests in the Commonwealth. Following the law, one of the state's key stipulations in building the access is that it would be open to boaters 24 hours, day and night.

Access to the boat launch is via a road into Burbank Park with access from an entrance off of Valentine Road.

The history of that road and regulations for its use, however, remains somewhat murky. For a number of years the City of Pittsfield maintained a gate at its Valentine Road entrance which the city police closed at night and then reopened early in the morning to allow access to the park. Sometime in the 1990s vandals destroyed the gate. The city repaired the gate, but a few months later the gate was again vandalized. It has never been fixed since and various city officials in the interim

have maintained that they cannot do so because the state, which paid for the boat launch, has mandated its 24 hour access as required by state law.

In the past few years, the threat to the lake from invasive species or plants has resulted in public attention and remedial action. Through a joint effort between the City of Pittsfield and the Lake Onota Preservation Association, LOPA, milfoil was generally cleaned up. For the past three years and during that same period the city has hired boat ramp monitors to inspect boats to make sure they are clean before entering the lake.

James McGrath, the city's Parks Department director, has been in charge of organizing the monitors for the past three years. In an interview this fall he said that each year the monitoring system has improved. The monitors inspect boats and examine certificates issued by a boat washing station on West Street that assert that the boat entering the lake is clean and thus free of Zebra Mussels. The monitors also provide information to boaters about the Zebra Mussel threat.

While many officials believe the effort has been successful, and that to date, the threat of Zebra Mussel infestation has been averted, the fact remains that the monitors are not on duty on a 24 hour basis and the boaters use the lake in the late evening and early morning hours before and after the monitors are on duty.

Most agree that the monitors have been a positive force in keeping the lake free of infestation. However, it is also known that it only takes one infected boat launched late in the day or early in the morning when no monitors are on duty, to infect the lake.

The conclusion, therefore becomes obvious. Effective overall control to insure boats are clean before they enter the lake can only be achieved if access to the boat launch is closed during the night and early morning hours. Since state law mandates 24 hour public access to lakes, that cannot happen.

"So....Yes, it's a problem that we have yet to work out," McGrath conceded during a late fall interview with The Guardian.

Perhaps a solution will be found in 2012. One would be to close the Valentine Road gate to Burbank Park during the nighttime hours but allow access by boaters who had magnetic cards testifying to the fact that their boats had been cleaned by a boat wash station and therefore did not constitute a threat of infection.

To date, anyway, such a solution has not been considered, at least publicly. Possibly in 2012, as the threat to lakes commands more attention, it will be.

As seen by the editor...

24 hour boat wash, automatic gate at

By Lewis C. Cuyler

With the exception of a one-year absence when I accepted a job in Amherst, I have lived in Berkshire County since 1958, making my living as a newspaperman, who, until retirement, was employed fulltime by The North Adams Transcript and The Berkshire Eagle. Between those two jobs, for eight years, I was a freelance writer and photographer. At various times I have lived in Adams, North Adams and Williamstown; since 1989 my wife and I have lived in Pittsfield.

My career has exposed me to the changes in the county as its economic foundation went from GE in Pittsfield, still a presence but substantially smaller, to the now defunct Berkshire Hathaway in Adams and Sprague Electric in North Adams. Hundreds of jobs were lost in the process; some were gradually replaced, thanks to the emergence of much smaller entrepreneurial enterprises. Some were created in response to an emerging culture that focused sharply on arts related initiatives that fit so well into the county's environment of lakes and mountains.

Responding to the loss of major industrial employers, the Berkshire leaders embarked on recovery initiatives that focused on emphasizing an environment that offered a "quality of life" ...a concept made much more possible to advertise, thanks to the enormous technological advancements in communications and computers. Those advancements, it should be noted, contributed mightily to offsetting the county's geographic isolation at the western end of the Commonwealth.

As their major industrial economic underpinnings began to disappear in the last 50 years, the cities of North Adams and Pittsfield, and the town of Adams, re-invented themselves. In recent years all three have undertaken major efforts to change their identities from factory towns to places that welcome families seeking escape from congested and crime-ridden urban areas. All have embarked on initiatives that encourage culture, family life and business environments that encourage entrepreneurial ideas to become realities. Pittsfield is especially blessed in this regard with its two lakes, Onota, which is entirely within the city's borders, and Pontoosuc which it shares with Lanesboro.

Unfortunately, however, both lakes in Pittsfield, as well as others in the county, are under attack by such invasive species as milfoil – a weed whose presence inspired an enormous effort to suppress – and, more recently, the potential attack from Zebra Mussels, small fresh water mollusks, each less than one inch in size, that grow in clusters and ingest water, sucking out the nutrients.

The mussels and/or their larvae attach themselves to the hulls of boats, many of them used for recreation. Such boats routinely travel via trailer from lake to lake. If an infected boat should launch in a clean lake, such as Onota, and if the Zebra Mussels then separate themselves from its hull, the mussels ingest the water to sustain themselves. In doing so, they filter the water, making it clear but sterile.

The process robs the water of the nutrients essential for the growth of plants and fish.

In essence, then, Zebra Mussels kill lakes.

Thanks in great measure to LOPA's advocacy, much has been accomplished in recent years to preserve Lake Onota's health. Two years ago, however, clusters of Zebra Mussels were discovered in Laurel Lake in Lee and in the Housatonic River, both popular spots for small and large boat enthusiasts, who, inevitably will visit Lake Onota – possibly with Zebra Mussels on their hulls.

In the meantime, battle lines are joined. On one side are communities and lake organizations such as LOPA that seek regulations to insure that only boats with certified clean hulls can enter the lakes within their borders. On the other side are the legions of boat owners who enjoy the freedom of travel to various lakes for fishing, water skiing and other recreational opportunities that the Berkshire lakes, and other state waters, including rivers, offer.

Many of these boat owners, commonly known as sportsmen and women, belong to powerful statewide organizations that have access to legislators who, along with the state, benefit from the financial resources that various boat and fishing licenses provide as well as individual contributions to their political aspirations.

To its credit, the City of Pittsfield, with partial financial support from the state, has taken steps to protect its two lakes through hiring daytime lake monitors at the launching ramps to inspect boat hulls to insure they are clean.

By most – but not all -- accounts, the program has been successful...that is, when the monitors are on duty.

However, to date, state and local officials concerned with the Lake Onota and its sister bodies of water, have not acknowledged that the big gap in the system is that the monitors are only present during 12 hours of the 24 hour period.

Yet, at least at Lake Onota and Lake Pontoosuc and many other threatened lakes with boat ramps, state authorities require 24 hour per day and seven day boat access to the ramps which the state financed. That leaves Onota and other lakes unprotected during the evening, nighttime and early morning hours, thus potentially allowing entry and launch of boats contaminated with Zebra Mussels and/or their larvae on or in their hulls.

What steps, then, should the city take to protect Lake Onota on a 24 hour basis?

First, as noted, Pittsfield is re-inventing itself as a place where small business can flourish; where neighborhoods are safe; housing is upgraded; and educational resources – the public schools and Berkshire Community College – continue to improve their offerings. The city has also invested heavily in rescuing its downtown that is now well along in a new life that includes entrepreneurial shops and theatrical and cultural offerings, as well as an improved streetscape with benches, flowers and trees as well as

launch area keys to Lake Onota health

appropriate signage and street lighting. In short much has been done in the past few years to change the face of Pittsfield, so that it can follow the mantra, "To Attract, Be Attractive." The city simply cannot afford the black marks that would come because it lost its principal recreational lake to an infestation of Zebra Mussels.

It thus appears obvious that a functioning gate to Burbank Park, which would control nighttime access, is a key to the solution. At one time such a gate existed. However, several years ago, vandals destroyed the gate and it was never replaced, possibly because of the state's requirement for 24 hour access to the boat launch.

The answer to protecting the lake is certainly to continue the system of monitors during the daylight hours. During the nighttime hours the city should close the gate to Burbank Park.

However, to comply with state requirements for 24-hour boat access, the city could institute a system that allows boaters to open the gate to park by using a magnetic swipe card that would be issued from a boat wash facility. Possession of the card would testify that their boat hulls had been washed and thus free of Zebra Mussels.

The technology exists for such protection. Without it, Lake Onota, a prime resource for Pittsfield, remains unprotected for half of the 24 hour period.

State officials should take notice. LOPA – as well as city officials including its new mayor -- should become advocates for an electronic gate during the monitors' off duty hours. Together, the city and the state, working in concert with LOPA, should take the steps to insure 24 hour protection for Lake Onota.

YET...

...NEEDED EVEN MORE ARE STEPS TO INSURE LONG-RANGE PROTECTION FOR BOTH LAKES...

The City of Pittsfield must face the fact that such plants and organisms as Milfoil and Zebra Mussels are just the tip of the iceberg.

For instance, I heard a report in November of the discovery of Asian clams in a Vermont lake. I don't know anything about them but my informant told me that they, too, can kill lakes.

In the short run I stand by my recommendations for an electronic gate at Burbank Park to insure that boats launched at night when monitors are absent have been washed and are therefore free of invasive species that could kill the lake. Such an installation could certainly be accomplished before the next boating season.

However, the city and the state must also commit to a much longer range solution: the installation of a boat wash facilities at both lakes: Onota and Pontoosuc.

Both are much too precious – and fragile – public resources to take half way measures. The idea for boat washes at both launching areas could not be instituted before next year's

boating season. However, planning should start; financial resources to make them happen should be identified.

The alternative is simply unthinkable. The loss of Lakes Onota and Pontoosuc because of inattention or halfway measures from state and local officials would constitute an enormous setback for Pittsfield's reputation and economic well-being.

During the past several years Pittsfield has made substantial progress in developing a new identity. The city cannot go back. It cannot become known for losing its lakes.

Accordingly, it cannot settle for halfway measures. Keeping both lakes healthy is vital to Pittsfield's goal to stay alive, to grow, to secure a successful future. A boat wash at the Onota launching area would be an essential start.

But it would only be a beginning.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Regretfully, this is the final issue of the Lake Onota Guardian under my editorship. For the past several years I have thoroughly enjoyed developing this publication; however, I regret to report that in my elder years I find it increasingly difficult to keep up with the demands of publishing. Bob Race and I have been seeking my replacement. I will happily guide my successor, and perhaps even contribute an occasional story. In the meantime, I am very grateful for all of the support and fellowship I have enjoyed in developing this publication.

Finally, many thanks to LOPA for the opportunity, the freedom and the privilege of developing The Guardian as the annual wrap-up of LOPA stewardship for our beloved Lake Onota.

LEW CUYLER

Sanginetti to succeed Cuyler as Guardian Editor

Michael Sanginetti, a resident of Thomas Island who was a founding member of LOPA back in the 1980s, and subsequently its first president, will succeed Lewis C. Cuyler as editor of The Lake Onota Guardian this year.

Cuyler, who has been editor for the past several years, told LOPA President Robert W. Race late last year that he could not continue the editorship for reasons related to his health. Cuyler and his wife, Harriet, have been LOPA members since the early 1990s and Cuyler has been a board member for the past several years. In 1999 he and his wife were instrumental in rescuing the city-owned former lifeguard and swimming area building at Burbank Park that had become dilapidated and converting it into a boathouse for BRASS, the not for profit Berkshire Rowing and Sculling Society, which they had started a few years earlier at the Stockbridge Bowl.

Cuyler is the retired business editor for The Berkshire Eagle. Sanginetti is the former community development director for the city of Pittsfield and has held various sales positions in aerospace and technology enterprises.

LOPA contributions to preserving Onota Lake

LOPA'S Board of Directors and dedicated volunteers have been very effective in assisting the City of Pittsfield on many important lake management matters such as the following:

Zebra Mussels: Starting prior to their discovery in Laurel Lake, LOPA has been at the forefront of the effort to keep them out of Onota Lake. This past summer there was a combination of city-paid, state-paid and volunteer monitors at the public boat ramp 12 hours per day, seven days per week, during the boating season.

Weed Control: After several years of experimentation, LOPA and the City have evolved an invasive species control plan, consisting of a normal (three foot) lake draw-down each year, with a deep (5 ½ foot) drawdown every third year, augmented by yearly spot herbicide spot treatments as needed. This program is successfully controlling Eurasian Water Milfoil and Curly-Leafed Pondweed...the two major weed problems in past years.

Maintain Safe Boating Conditions: In addition to yearly placement of obstruction buoys warning of hazards to navigation, LOPA volunteers completed a study of the lake's "carrying capacity" of motorboats based on established industry standards. This, in turn, led to Pittsfield's Harbormaster issuing regulations regarding boat dock densities.

Maintain Water Quality: LOPA's Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program has now accumulated over a decade's worth of valuable data enabling the City to make educated lake management decisions.

Master Plan for Burbank Park: In addition to contributing to the City's Open Space and Recreation Master Plan of the past few years, a LOPA volunteer has taken the lead in generating a Mission Statement for a Burbank Park Master Plan that the new City administration can build on.

Grants for Improvements to the Lake: Over the past decade, LOPA has collaborated with the City and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission in obtaining and implementing over \$600,000 in grants for the lake, the latest of which doubled the lake's dam outlet capacity and is currently funding stabilization of the Burbank Park shoreline.

Citizen Education: LOPA publishes a newsletter at least once a year for its members and the public documenting what is happening to and around the lake and also providing interesting history about the lake.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER***LOPA needs younger leaders to carry on campaign to insure lake's health continues******To all lovers of Onota Lake:***

I've lived on Onota Lake either fulltime or seasonally for the better part of four decades since moving to Pittsfield after a three year Navy stint. I've seen some good times and some bad times for the lake. But it is my assessment that the lake is in as good or better shape today than any other time during that period. This didn't happen just by accident or good luck. It has come about primarily due to long term, mostly consistent, dedicated commitment by elected and appointed city officials over the last 25 years, aided and abetted by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the Lake Onota Preservation Association volunteers.

On Page 10 we print a brief synopsis of some of LOPA's contributions over the past decade which was sent out recently with our membership renewal request letter which many of you have probably already received. Over this period, the City, BRPC and LOPA together have taken the necessary actions to preserve the lake we have today. I'm stressing this situation because it is critical that LOPA maintain the momentum in support of our incoming new city administration to continue to deal effectively with the issues confronting Onota Lake. We know and are dealing sixth some of them (Eurasian watermilfoil, Water Chestnuts, Zebra Mussels, etc.) but there will undoubtedly be additional challenges in the coming years.

As you may recall, last year in this space I asked for help in a "visioning process" to help

prepare LOPA for the next decade. The response was, in a word, underwhelming. Since I believe many people really do care about preserving the lake, I could only conclude that the lack of input suggested that no big changes were needed in LOPA's approach to carrying out its mission. This conclusion has been called into question by a disappointing turn-out at our annual meeting in October at which the four directors whose terms were expiring, were re-elected with no other candidates offered or available.

At the board meeting that immediately followed, the sitting officers comprising the Executive Committee were re-elected for two year terms, again with no other candidates surfacing, and with most, if not all, of the officers now looking forward to being replaced after long and faithful service.

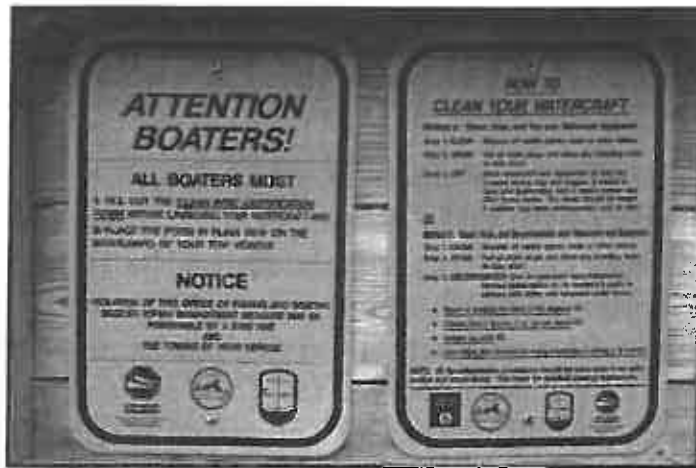
This situation leaves us with the continuing challenge of finding the "new blood" necessary to carry on the excellent work LOPA has been doing. If you feel you have something to offer (and almost everybody does) and are willing to commit a few hours a year to help preserve Onota Lake please step forward and volunteer. You can call me at 413-443-1681 or email me at rwracerone@aol.com to discuss how you may be able to help.

I'd like to end this letter with profuse thanks to the selfless volunteers who have performed LOPA work this past year and a profound wish to all for a prosperous and Happy New Year.

ROBERT W. RACE, President

2011: *Signs of the times*

Lake Onota
Preservation Association Inc.
PO Box 2884
Pittsfield, MA 01202



Winter 2012: Empty beach...



...but geese are on watch

