



**Executive Board of
Directors:
Michael Riordan,
President
Michael Zaccaro,
Vice-President
George Haddad,
Treasurer
Alan Righi, Clerk**

December 27, 2019

Re: No Drawdown of Lake Onota

To Whom it May Concern:

You might be aware that the normal 3' drawdown of Onota Lake did not occur this year. You might also think that not drawing down the lake potentially exposes lakeside property owners to shoreline damage from ice.

The City of Pittsfield is responsible for managing Onota Lake. Jim McGrath, the City's Park, Open Space, and Natural Resource Program Manager, warned about the possibility of no drawdown at the annual meeting of the Lake Onota Preservation Association (LOPA) in October. His explanation was that the City prioritized completion of the Mill Street dam removal project. You may have seen some details about the project reported by the Berkshire Eagle, e.g. <https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/rainy-weather-stalls-mill-street-dam-removal,589845>. The issue is that substantial water draining from Onota Lake would interfere with the project work site unless a coffer dam and bypass pipes with sufficient capacity were in place. Unfortunately, the installed bypass system turned out to be inadequate for our rainy October weather, and the City decided to delay the normal October 15 start date for the Onota Lake drawdown.

Since mid-October, the City and its contractors experienced further problems and setbacks on the dam removal project, e.g. the initial bypass system had to be redesigned. Such difficulties, as well as a priority given to the drawdown of Pontoosuc Lake, prevented any significant cumulative drawdown of Onota Lake through November. Still, hope remained that a modest drawdown of Onota Lake would be possible in December if only the weather would cooperate. But new problems soon emerged. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) began questioning aspects of the Pontoosuc Lake drawdown, and, by extension, plans for the Onota Lake drawdown. In response to this oversight by DEP, Jim McGrath on December 13 announced the drawdown of Onota Lake would cease until further notice. Bob Race and I met with City officials on December 16, and we received assurances that City is seeking to clarify matters with DEP.

In case you have concerns about this turn of events and the choices made by the City, I suggest you express those concerns to James Conant, Chairman of the Pittsfield Conservation Commission. In the spring, after the ice has melted, LOPA intends to survey abutters of Onota Lake about ice damage to the shoreline, and to communicate the results of that survey to City officials and to LOPA members.

Sincerely,

Mike Riordan, LOPA President

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