

Caring for Our Lakes, Wetlands, and the Life Within

5th Annual CNY Regional NYSFOLA Conference to Advance Lake and Watershed Stewardship

On **Friday, September 12, 2025**, the **New York State Federation of Lake Associations (NYSFOLA)** hosted its **5th Annual Central New York Regional Conference** at **Dwyer Memorial Park** in **Preble, NY**. The Little York Pavilion has become a favorite venue for this event, and after three successful years there, this year's conference was truly exceptional.

The full day gathering brought together lake association volunteers, environmental professionals, researchers, and folks interested in clean water, to share knowledge and strategies for protecting New York's freshwater systems.

Highlights from the Day

The conference featured remarkable speakers and informative, interactive sessions that focused on the science, policy, and stewardship of our lakes and watersheds.

Dr. Andrew Brainard, Director of the **Upstate Freshwater Institute**, opened with an insightful presentation on **aquatic plant ecology**, offering a new perspective on the role of macrophytes in lake health.

Olivia Green and **Catherine Gibson** of The Nature Conservancy expanded the discussion to wetlands, underscoring their vital importance to watersheds — and the planet.

Tom Hughes, biologist for NYS Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation, and friend of the Kettle Lakes shared an engaging look at wildlife within watershed ecosystems and their interconnected roles.

Moving into other dimensions of stewardship, **Dr. Douglas Merrill** (Finger Lakes Regional Watershed Alliance) and **Ken Belfer** (Mohegan Lake Improvement District) provided a legislative and regulatory briefing, while Nicole White of Little Bear Environmental Consultants offered practical guidance on the new wetlands permit process.

The afternoon focused on septic system management, with **Megan Webster** (Ontario County SWCD) leading a technical presentation followed by a lively panel discussion featuring **Adam Effler** (Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council) and **Eric Buck, P.E.**, a septic design engineer.

Hands-On Learning and Collaboration

Throughout the day, participants engaged directly with experts:

Dr. Gregory Boyer (Professor Emeritus, SUNY ESF) led hands-on **water sample analyses** using microscopes and field tools, helping attendees identify algae and microscopic organisms from their own lakes.

Educational displays showcased **invasive species identification**, and more than **a dozen exhibitors**—nonprofits, agencies, and regional partners—shared valuable resources for lake managers and volunteers.

The event concluded with a **raffle** and a **guided boat tour** of Little York Lake, allowing attendees to experience firsthand the ecosystem they work so hard to protect.

About the Event

This annual conference is a celebration of the people and partnerships that protect our lakes bringing together a diverse group of experts and community members who are committed to safeguarding the waters that sustain us.

This year's conference was presented by **NYSFOLA** in collaboration with the **Kettle Lakes Association**, **Madison County Lakes**, and the **Skaneateles Lake Association**. Together, these organizations continue to foster education, advocacy, and stewardship across the state's lake and watershed communities.



Opening – Tarki Heath



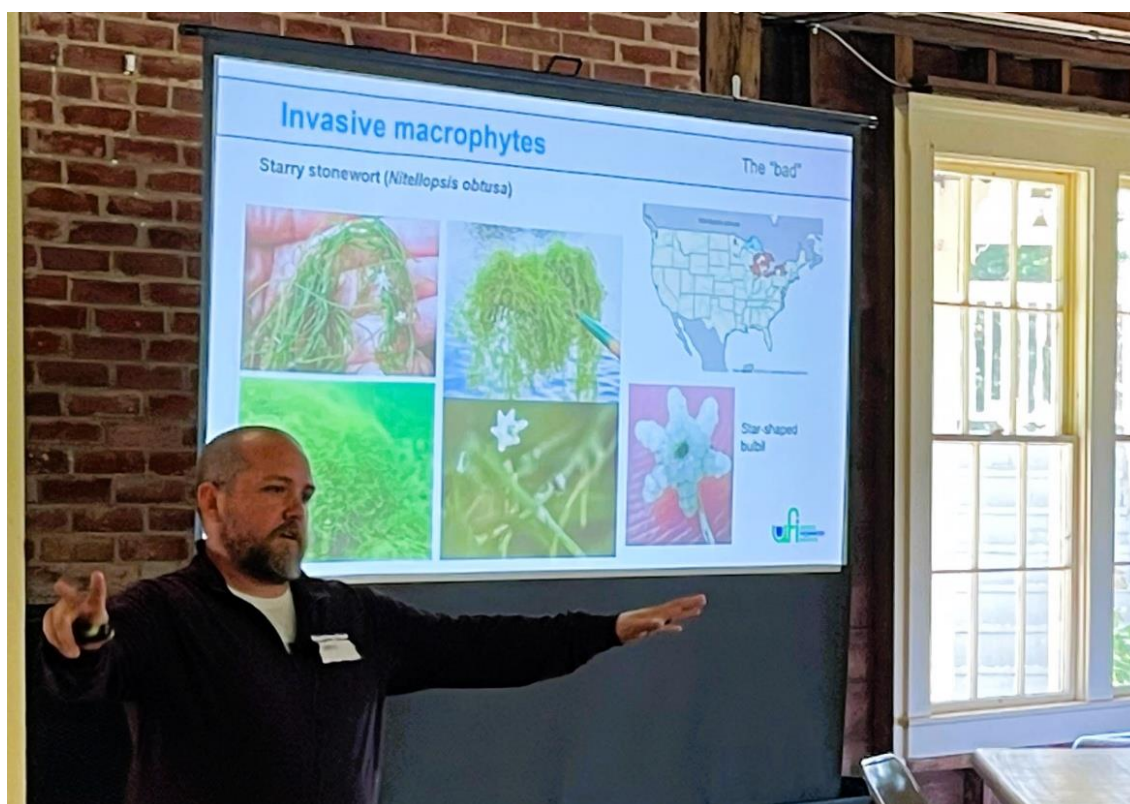
Doug Merrill



Upper Susquehanna Coalition tree give-away



Olivia Green and Catherine Gibson – The Nature Conservancy



Andrew Brainard – Upstate Freshwater Institute



Celeste Amaral (Organizer) and Finger Lakes Prism



Dr. Greg Boyer – Water sampling for cyanotoxins



Nicole White – Little Bear Environmental Consulting



Macrophyte Identification – Little Bear Environmental



Tom Hughes – NYS OPRHP



Little York Lake Pavilion