

## **OTSEGO LAKE ASSOCIATION STRONGLY OPPOSES NYS DOT'S RIP RAP DESIGN ALTERNATIVE**

The Otsego Lake Association, dedicated to preserving and protecting Otsego Lake, **STRONGLY OPPOSES** the New York State Department of Transportation's (DOT) proposed design alternative of using heavy crushed stone rip rap to stabilize the lakeside embankments of State Highway 80 - commonly known as Route 80 or the West Lake Road - which runs along the westerly side of Otsego Lake. There has been much publicity recently about lakeside property ownership and three camps being taken without just compensation by DOT in the area just northerly of Five Mile Point. However, our opposition is about the significant environmental damage that has occurred in areas of Otsego Lake near Three Mile Point, and will continue to occur in other areas, if DOT's method of heavy crushed stone rip rap is allowed to move forward. In simple terms, DOT's proposed plan of additional heavy crushed stone rip rap is just a "bad idea".

We need your help now to stop this environmentally damaging alternative!

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There is no question that numerous lakeside embankments along Route 80 need stabilization due to recent unusually heavy rainfall events such as the intense storm in June of 2006 plus Tropical Storms Lee and Irene. These heavy rainfalls have further weakened the substructure of Route 80 and its embankments which were already weakened by two other major factors: (1) the DOT has failed to properly maintain the existing storm water drainage system of ditches, catch basins, culverts which allows the storm water to "sheet drain" across and/or under the highway pavement and (2) the State Police and County Sheriff have failed to properly enforce the posted speed limit of 40 MPH which allows the large heavily weighted trucks to speed along Route 80 and "pound" the highway pavement and substructure. It is a well-known civil engineering fact that "water and weight are two of a highway's worst enemies".

The DOT has used heavy crushed stone rip rap at several locations north and south of Three Mile Point to help stabilize the failed or weakened embankments but their method has not worked for the most part. One area in particular continues to "settle" and DOT's solution is to add more asphalt pavement on top of earlier asphalt pavement! It is common now for local traffic to detour around this constantly depressed asphalt pavement area. The DOT's current plan for the area north of Five Mile Point, under PIN #916637 (DOT's project numbering system), calls for the removal of 3 camps and then installation of approximately 150 linear feet of heavy crushed stone rip rap along Route 80 and extending out into the lake on a 1:2 slope [for every 1 foot drop in vertical elevation, the rip rap extends out horizontally 2 feet (i.e., 10 feet of vertical rip rap means 20 feet of horizontal rip rap)]. It is reported that the rip rap in this case would extend about 40 feet out into the lake! The heavy crushed stone rip rap is too large and porous to prevent road sand, salt, and silt from washing into the lake. The DOT and others have suggested that the rip rap in the lake will enhance lake trout spawning habitat but, in fact, these areas will be covered by sand and silt in short time. In addition, these areas "just look awful" from the lake!

Otsego Lake, made famous centuries ago by the famed author James Fenimore Cooper, is located entirely within the Glimmerglass Historic District. Therefore, it is important to maintain the historic aspects of Otsego Lake including how the lake and shoreline look, especially to the thousands of tourists who visit Cooperstown each year. Otsego Lake is a prime tourist magnet and a boom to the local economy. James Fenimore Cooper would be horrified if he saw what these existing heavy crushed stone rip rap embankments look like today!

The Otsego Lake Association, in cooperation with the Cooperstown Lake and Valley Garden Club, funded and helped construct two so-called buffer strip gardens on the lake - one at the south end at the Cooperstown lakefront park and one at the north end at the Springfield Park - to demonstrate how effective proper natural plantings and vegetation can be to reduce the amount of storm water runoff and sediment into the lake. The Cooperstown lakefront park buffer strip

garden was so successful, cutting edge, and forward thinking that it won a national contest sponsored by the Garden Club of America including a cash prize of \$25,000 which was used to enhance the project. As a result of this particular buffer strip garden, other garden clubs around the United States have begun using this same method in their communities to help protect their lakes.

### **DESIGN ALTERNATIVES**

The Otsego Lake Association would like the DOT to seriously re-evaluate, and then implement, one of several other design alternatives to solve the embankment stabilization problems. The DOT installed a concrete retaining wall just northerly of Five Mile Point after the severe rain storm in June of 2006 caused the northbound traffic lane and embankment to settle substantially and fail. The Otsego County Highway Department (OCHD) used the so-called soil nailing method to stabilize two embankments on the East Lake Road (it runs along the easterly side the lake) after Tropical Storms Lee and Irene caused a massive embankment failure at the north end of the lake and substantially weakened another area at the south end of the lake. This method was also used by the DOT in 2013 in the Portlandville area along State Highway 28 between Cooperstown and Oneonta. The OCHD has also used steel sheet piling to stabilize embankments along the East Lake Road. Another alternative is a structural earth wall with a landscaping stone face. All four of these design alternatives would work well along Route 80 and would be much less visible from the lake and would be much more environmentally sound.

### **STORM WATER DRAINAGE AND TRUCK TRAFFIC**

None of the design alternatives mentioned above, or even the heavy crushed stone rip rap, will totally solve the embankment stabilization problems along Route 80 unless the DOT properly maintains the existing storm water drainage system of ditches, catch basins, and culverts by keeping them cleaned out and working as designed.

In addition, the State Police and/or County Sheriff need to strictly enforce the posted speed limit of 40 MPH to keep the heavily weighted truck traffic from further damaging the highway and the embankments. The idea solution would be for the DOT to reduce the weight limit allowed on Route 80 although it has been reported that they cannot do this for some legal or Federal funding reason.

### **SUMMARY**

If the DOT continues to use the heavy crushed stone rip rap method to stabilize the various embankments along Route 80, the future health and aesthetics of Otsego Lake will be lost forever. As the saying goes, “once the shoreline is gone, it is gone forever”. Please help OLA to preserve and protect Otsego Lake by re-evaluating and then implementing one of the design alternatives mentioned above. Otsego Lake - truly a local treasure!

Respectfully Submitted,

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
OTSEGO LAKE ASSOCIATION

Mickie Richtsmeier  
President

September 29, 2014

“OLADOTSept2014” File