

## **NGOs Discuss Algal Bloom Communications**

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**COOPERSTOWN**

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Otsego 2000, Otsego Land Trust and the Otsego County Conservation Association convened a stakeholders meeting on Tuesday, May 9 to coordinate a response to harmful algal blooms. More than 30 people attended, including environmental scientists and representatives from municipalities, non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, and county agencies. The conference was facilitated by Dr. Gina L. Keel, professor of political science at SUNY Oneonta. Attendees had extensive table discussions on messaging content and media, and shared their activities and findings. The group reached a consensus on the need for a unified, large-scale media strategy to notify local residents and visitors about HAB safety and mitigation.

The SUNY Oneonta Biological Field Station presented water testing proposals and a summary of current testing protocols. Oneonta Associate Professor and limnologist Kiyoko Yokota spoke briefly on the state of new HAB research.

“Algal blooms are just a symptom of a much larger imbalance in the lake’s ecosystem,” Dr. Yokota said. “There is no magic bullet to fix this. No chemical or mechanical cleanup solution is available, although many companies are starting to sell products they claim will work. It’s dishonest; they’ll report that their products cleaned up a bloom, but they don’t tell you it was on a one-acre reservoir.”

Other group members indicated that it could take many years to return Otsego, Canadarago, Goodyear and Arnold lakes to ecological stability.

The organizations resolved to form a combined strategy for public safety and environmental messaging, research, and mitigation. Attendees were asked to leave a few notes on their organizations’ involvement with the HAB problem. These notes will be used to delegate tasks, eliminate redundancy and facilitate cooperation between more than a dozen stakeholder organizations.