

December 30, 2024

2024 Save Our Sodus Year End Report

Authors: Don Riling, Janet Halasinski & Jessica Stone



Presidents Statement

2024 has brought a successful year for Save our Sodus in building the organization and accomplishing our mission initiatives for 2024.

Here are our 2024 focus areas:

I. Return to Water Quality

- A. A group of dedicated board members and volunteers developed our Weekly Water Wellness program – routine water testing of the bay **[please read “A Return to Water Testing” in the 2024 report]**
- B. Together, they began a reporting mechanism to share the results of that water testing with the community and local agencies.
- C. Nab-A-Hab marked year two. The board received an estimate for a website reporting mechanism for HABs and decided against spending the money this year as there was just one confirmed HAB report for the season.
- D. Battle Weeds: SOS planned and executed a community weed harvesting or creek clean-up session late in the summer, and plans to hold additional opportunities in 2025.

II. Advocacy and Partnerships

- A. The SOS board empowered the organization to investigate and establish relationships with federal, state, and local agencies and organizations that are existing stakeholders or have current government mandates associated with water quality. This year-long effort laid significant groundwork for SOS to become a partner in exciting programs that will benefit the communities around the bay in the coming years.
- B. Laying the groundwork has been instrumental in re-establishing Save Our Sodus as a credible partner to give voice to larger initiatives that advocate for our community’s needs. **[please read “Advocacy and the Importance of Partnerships” in the 2024 report]**

III. Education Initiatives:

- A. The Bay Day celebration provided a comprehensive opportunity to learn about the 25 year history of SOS. It also provided a chance to engage with guest speakers who outlined the threats to the region’s ecosystem.
 - a. Visitors learned what they can do individually to help mitigate or stop some of these threats and discovered regional research projects to create healthy land and water environments.
 - b. Bay Day hosted a children’s interactive learning area called- Discovery Place- where kids of all ages could learn about land, water and animal sciences, create art and have fun.
 - c. SOS initiated eco-tours on Bay Day for the general public and several other tours for public officials throughout the year.
 - d. To keep our community engaged and informed throughout the entire year, we are planning a speaker series of interesting topics regarding the history of fishing and ecology of the Bay . SOS also worked with NY SeaGrant to establish the curriculum and locate

funding streams for a kids summer eco-boot camp in 2025. **[please read “Education through Action ” in the 2024 report]**

IV. Grants & Communications

- A. SOS worked with Senator Chuck Schumer’s office to apply for an earmark for water testing and educational funds. While the earmark request did not move forward in committee, the work SOS did to prepare proved crucial in subsequent grant applications for a children’s eco-boot camp.
- B. In 2024, SOS set out to build our community engagement through improved communication with our E-newsletter and social media presence.
- C. With more programs and events for the community, SOS had reason to reach beyond our usual circle of communication and participate in radio and TV segments to promote the SOS mission.
- D. SOS added more than 1000 names to our mailing list and increased engagement on our website and Facebook pages. Building momentum for SOS in our community through increased engagement is a continuous endeavor that we look forward to improving year after year. The statistics are pretty amazing. **[please read “Grants & Communications” in the report]**

Collectively, SOS’s 2024 decisions to refocus on our original water quality mission, to increase engagement with community stakeholders and to elevate our communications are all part of efforts to better leverage each donation you make to accomplish the goals we set out for you in 2024 and which you will see laid out in our vision for 2025. We are positioning SOS to access government grant monies, community foundation donations and other revenue streams besides our faithful Sodus Bay donors. We believe this is the best way to honor the legacy of the past 25 years of public service and to grow the organization into a reliable partner to *preserve*, *protect* and *promote* Sodus Bay for many years to come.

We are thankful for all our donors, volunteers and advocate partners for making this rebuilding year a successful one.

Please enjoy our 2024 recap below, which is a compilation of reports from our team and discover the exciting initiatives we have in mind for 2025.

We look forward to hearing from you in the coming year.

Don Riling, President
On behalf of the SOS Board of Directors

I. A Return to Water Quality

Challenge:

Save our Sodus has its roots in water quality protection. Upon the urging of longtime board members, SOS returned to its original mission by re-starting routine water testing throughout Sodus Bay.

In January of 2024, Sodus Point Mayor Dave McDowell and SOS President, Don Riling, traveled to Buffalo to meet with the leadership of the Army Corps of Engineers regarding the East Breakwall project. As part of this trip, they met with the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper organization. This group has had a close working relationship with the Army Corps during their 35-year history. Over the last 12 years, the organization has acquired more than \$150 million in grants for regional projects.

Hoping to gain insight into their success, SOS met with Ms. Kerrie Gallo, Deputy Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives. Kerri strongly urged SOS to begin weekly water testing using “citizen scientists” (a member of the general public who collects and analyzes data relating to the natural world.) She advised that this step “shows the commitment of your organization to your community and in keeping them informed of potential issues in the places they live, work and recreate.”

Responses:

SOS launched Weekly Water Wellness in 2024 and continued Nab-A-Hab as well as The DEC Citizen Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) participation. The organization also planned one community weed pull for invasive species and researched the current weed harvesting mechanisms in order to look for efficiencies. SOS plans to grow all of these efforts in 2025.

Outcomes:

A. Weekly Water Wellness Program (W3)

In 2024, board member, Nell Gardner, and volunteer, Ann Ghyzel, created the Weekly Water Wellness water testing program. Volunteer, Dennis Chasse, hosted them weekly on his pontoon boat and donated the fuel. The goal for year one was to establish a baseline set of data that might warn of future problems and to report the results weekly to the community through our social media channels. We have also published the summer’s results on our [website. \(Please scroll down & click on the button marked 2024 results for a copy.\)](#)

These citizen scientists began testing in July after spending several months laying the foundations of tools, equipment and protocols necessary for this work. The W3 team went out each week and gathered water samples from multiple locations, based on five protocols. The team added testing for phosphates and nitrates at the very end of the season as well as tracking invasive species.

The team had an opportunity to collaborate with Stacy Furgal, Great Lakes Fisheries and Ecosystem Specialist at NY Sea Grant and Dr. Anna Haws, Aquatic Invasive Species Research and Outreach Specialist with NYS Water Resources Institute.

Each week results were posted on our Facebook page and on our website, saveoursodus.com.



Dennis Chasse & Nell Gardner gather samples (L) & Ann Ghyzel records test results (R)

See Appendix B for the full W3 Report from board member, Nell Gardiner. All graphs and testing results are included. It's a very interesting read.

B. Nab-a-Hab

The Nab-A-Hab program marked its second year in 2024. The team is led by SOS board member, Beth Palmer, and supported by previous board member, David Scudder. They stayed on alert this summer for any sightings of Blue-Green Algae, also known as hazardous algal blooms (ie. "HAB."). Nab-A-Hab is designed to give Bay residents or visitors a method for alerting authorities to the possible occurrence of blue/green algae which can make animals and humans sick. There have been serious outbreaks in regional water bodies like Canandaigua Lake in the past year, and our team worked with community volunteers to track and report any sightings on Facebook throughout the summer in Sodus Bay.

At the beginning of the summer boating season, SOS had three reports close together of a possible HAB which came to us through social media. The Nab-A-Hab team sprang into action -- determining that it was in fact, a HAB. SOS posted the positive identification information on our social media channels and shared it with the surrounding municipalities as well as the Department of Environmental Conservation which tracks these verified reports. [Click here to see our report on the DEC webpage.](#)

June 13, 2024: (#1) is located along Lake Bluff Road, between Skipper's and Pier 53. (#2) is located off Leroy Island (this is the photo Scudder took) (#3) was reported by one of our SOS volunteers, again along the Lake Bluff shoreline going towards Skippers/ Pier 53 area

Special thanks to our other trained volunteers: Tom & Nancy Schieder, John & Evelyn Lenhard, and Gerry Palmer for standing at the ready all summer long to sample and report when needed.

SOS also reports any Harmful Algal Blooms to the DEC which informs the public on their website with an online map indicating where HABs have been reported and confirmed. We will be promoting this site regularly in 2025.

C. CSLAP Testing

The Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program is a project of The NY State Federation of Lake Associations (NYSFOLA). They have been a powerful force in protecting the lakes statewide. Board member, Beth Palmer, has been a long-time member of the CSLAP testing team and is certified to collect monthly samples for the statewide database NYSFOLA maintains. See **Appendix C** for more background on CSLAP.

D. Battle Weeds

The 2024 initiative this year was to:

- Plan several “Get Out and Get Dirty” community Water Chestnut Pulls.
- Increase the cadence and reach of weed harvesting on the bay by partnering with existing harvesting machine-owners to pay for their unused time through grants and/or fundraising.
- Study the feasibility & need for additional tax districts to fund more weed harvesting long-term. Work with state and national agencies on methodologies and funding

1. Second Creek Cleanup - September 21, 2024

Water chestnuts have become a serious problem throughout the bay in past years. Some New York State waterways are completely choked by them. The “nutlets” or seeds they create have sharp spines that can penetrate a flip-flop or sneaker and can cause bacterial infections. The only way to eradicate them is to pull them by hand before August, when the seeds drop. It takes 10 years of pulling to completely snuff them out.

Jeanne Grace is the community’s most dedicated volunteer on the eradication of water chestnuts. She shared the results of her efforts with Dave Scudder & SOS in July, directing us to Second Creek to plan our community cleanup.

On September 21, SOS hosted a Fall cleanup of Second Creek outlet as part of International Coastal Cleanup Day. Volunteers fought low water and mud to pluck out those pesky water chestnuts and refuse — choking the mouth of the outlet. Special thanks to Bryan and Kristy Ritter at Pier 53 for loaning the pontoon boat and three kayaks. We also extend our gratitude to Matt King for

providing the dumpster and the work boats! Finally, faithful volunteer, Chelsea Owens, took notes on our experience so we can do it even better in Spring 2025.



SOS had committed from the beginning of the season to provide a community opportunity for a cleanup effort along the bay. We gratefully accepted the donated time of a pontoon boat from Pier 53 and some additional kayaks and canoes and the volunteer time of board members, Jennifer DiGaetano, Keith Smith, Janet Halasinski, Don Riling and faithful volunteer, Chelsea Owens.

2. In order to Increase the cadence and reach of weed harvesting on the bay and explore the possibility of an additional tax district for longterm harvesting, SOS needed to understand the current structure and examine its efficacy.

The two major weed harvesting operations on the bay are The Sodus Bay Improvement Association (SBIA), representing homes on the east side of the bay, and Wayne County Soil & Water Conservation District (WCSWCD), covering the rest of the bay.

- a. SBIA has created a special tax district in Huron, and whoever has opted in to that program pays on their tax bill, then gets weed harvesting services. They work near-shore, between docks and out to 30' from shore. SBIA owns one large and one smaller harvester and shows the route of the work on their Instagram page weekly, by the use of GPS locators on the machines. SBIA has a very high service rating among homeowners, receiving very few complaints each year.
- b. The Wayne County Soil & Water Conservation District focuses more on the "hot spots" in the bay, where the weeds are clogging boat traffic. They have two large harvesters and begin each season harvesting south of the Sodus Creek Bay bridge, since it is the largest supplier of weeds to the rest of the bay. (One of the harvesters was purchased through SOS advocacy in 2002. SOS obtained [\\$75,000 in grants from Senator Mike Nozzolio](#) to purchase a weed harvester.) SOS identified two key challenges to the effectiveness of the WCSWCD harvesting program:
 - It has multiple commitments to service other Wayne County bays
 - WCSWCD struggles to find enough drivers to harvest and truck away the weeds.

Learning:

In 2024, SOS joined the Town of Huron, NY SeaGrant, SBIA and WCSWCD **to open regular communication between the bay's two weed harvesting programs – for the first time in 10 years.**

Huron Town Supervisor, Dave Fantuzzo, initiated the effort. SOS President, Don Riling, represents bay residents alongside representatives from NY SeaGrant and the county. Feel free to contact SOS with your questions or concerns for this effort!

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***"You're doing a great job. Lots of new vitality and initiatives."***

~ Kay Embrey; Sodus Point ~  
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II. Advocacy and the Importance of Partnerships

Challenge:

The current SOS board has no officers who maintain the institutional knowledge and relationships with regional environmental organizations, which historically enabled the advocacy work of the organization and its largest initiatives.

Response:

In order to reinvigorate the organization, SOS needed to survey all regional environmental organizations and execute the following:

- Establish effective communication
- Re-establish the credibility of SOS as a non-profit community organization dedicated to water quality and shoreline resilience for the region
- Assess areas of cooperation between SOS and other organizations
- Leverage the institutional knowledge and expertise of these organizations to map and evaluate funding streams for SOS initiatives
- Avoid duplicating the work of these organizations in order to more responsibly leverage SOS donor dollars towards SOS initiatives

Research showed that in order for community-based organizations to increase their effectiveness and facilitate regional initiatives, they had to begin to pay staff. These nearby organizations include staffing in their budgets:

- Save The River, in Clayton, NY, (six staff)
- The Canandaigua Watershed Association, (one full time manager)
- Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper (thirteen full-time staff).

As a result, the SOS board passed a 2024 budget which included a part-time stipend for the president/executive director to expedite the building of regional partnerships. SOS also renewed a part-time stipend for a communications and political advisor (Jessica Stone) to facilitate introductions and communication with a range of environmental partners at the state and federal levels. Volunteer board members who had the time also participated.

Outcomes:

Through these efforts, key partnerships have emerged that will enhance and support the SOS mission in 2025 and going forward.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- 1) Establishing regular meetings with Sodus Bay regional leaders provides alignment between SOS initiatives and municipal needs
- 2) Collaborating with Wayne County Soil & Water District and DEC guides our Nab-A-Hab protocols.
- 3) Partnering with New York Sea Grant has identified grant opportunities and paired SOS with the partners to apply for them. This was a key force multiplier for SOS at a time when grant application and management had proven too large a task for our volunteer board's skillset.
- 4) Joining a regular cadence of meetings with the bay's two primary weed harvesting programs creates space for coordination to meet community needs.
- 5) Participating with the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (an advocacy organization representing municipal leaders throughout the Great Lakes) allowed SOS to host Great Lakes experts in Sodus Bay for a forum to share best practices from other Great Lakes regions facing similar environmental and financial challenges. (for GLSLCI's first visit to New York State.)
- 6) Connecting with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation's Great Lakes Action Agenda identified a unique opportunity for SOS to become a sought-after community partner for battling invasive species and preserving water quality in Sodus Bay.
- 7) Pooling resources with the Great Lakes Institute at SUNY Oswego and Rice Creek Research Station summer camps has provided technical expertise and potential funding streams to create our Eco-Boot camps to grow the next generation of environmental stewards on Sodus Bay.
- 8) Combining efforts with the Water Research Institute at Cornell University provides invasive species guidance for our Weekly Water Wellness Program through the work of Dr. Anna Haws.
- 9) Establishing regular monthly meetings with the Army Corps of Engineers Buffalo office provides valuable updates for the community on existing projects as well as access to engineering know-how for future water quality initiatives
- 10) Pursuing research with Indiana University's O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs has resulted in the inclusion of Sodus Bay in a wide-ranging effort to catalogue risk and strengthen the community's risk response to flooding which is part of our shoreline resilience initiative.

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***“The partnership between NY Sea Grant and Save Our Sodus has been invaluable in advancing shared priorities such as water quality, community resilience, and outreach/education. Save Our Sodus’s far-reaching network amplifies these efforts, ensuring meaningful engagement and impact throughout the region.”***

~ Mary Austerman; NY Sea Grant Coastal Community Specialist ~  
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Learning:

This progress was made possible because SOS recognized that the level of opportunity and expectation required us to think and plan at a different level. We needed to begin operating like a staffed-non-profit with recording systems, greater levels of financial transparency and a higher level of organizational communications.

The volume of work could not be done alone by an all-volunteer board made up of working professionals and several retirees.

We presented this idea to our supporters, who liked the idea, and invested. Our corporate and community foundation partners agreed.

With our commitment to our Bay Day celebration, we nearly doubled our donations from the year before.

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***“Thank you for all that you have done with Save our Sodus and keeping open lines of communication with the various organizations around the bay as well as the DEC, County and Army Corps. Your work has not gone unnoticed. Your efforts will pay dividends for years to come. Thank you.”***

~ Franklin T. Barker MS Ed.  
President; Charles Point Homeowners Association ~  
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III. Education through Action:

Challenge:

In order to grow the next generation of environmental stewards and create space for more comprehensive community involvement, SOS needs to implement additional education opportunities.

Responses:

- Begin Eco-tours on Sodus Bay, providing an interesting and entertaining experience to understand the history, beauty and challenges of our bay!
- Partner with local schools and summer education programs, to prepare future generations for environmental stewardship.
- Provide new educational materials to the region.

Outcomes:

A. Senator Chuck Schumer dedicates \$20 million federal investment to the East Breakwall repair - May 6, 2024

SOS worked with Senator Chuck Schumer's staff to put together an informational press conference in Sodus Point where remarks were shared by the Army Corps of Engineers as well as SOS President Don Riling. This remarkable gift came as a result of many advocacy efforts throughout the community - including those of Save our Sodus. SOS is staying on top of the timeline for awarding the bids and executing the work to improve bay protections through this repair project and will continue to keep the community informed as the project moves forward.

B. Summer Kick-off - June 2nd, 2024

SOS hosted an informational program to introduce SOS initiatives for the year and to host a presentation on the Breakwall Project from the Army Corp of Engineers at Pier 53 on the bay.



We welcomed 65 attendees to a chicken BBQ dinner as participants learned about the design and timeline of the breakwall project from ACE project manager, Doug Rebman. Don Riling, SOS president, talked about the organization's initiatives for the year and encouraged participants to sign up to volunteer and become involved in the many opportunities from water quality to event participation. Our efforts were successful as we signed up new Nab-A-Hab volunteers, Bay Day and clean-up volunteers, and even a new board member!

C. Bay Day - July 27th, 2024

We kicked off the day with a dedication ceremony for SOS's 25th anniversary where we honored the contributions of the founding SOS members, **The Bay Hero awards** were presented to Mr. David Scudder, who has served the bay's interests for over forty years, and Ms. Lindsay Gerstenslager, former District Director for the Wayne County Soil and Water District. SOS also received a state proclamation from our elected representatives. Special thanks to Ms. Ann Hayslip, who presented a report on the work carried out by SOS over 25 years.



SOS hosted a lecture series throughout the day in the main tent on topics from microplastics research to the introduction of the new Lake Ontario Marine Sanctuary, to environmental protections individuals can execute at home. As crowds around the tent visited the surrounding booths, others sat on a sunny day and listened to what these gifted speakers had to share.

Guest Speakers:

Dr. John Schull, Eco-Restoration Alliance,
Stacy Furgal, NY Sea Grant Fisheries Specialist
Mary Austerman, NY Sea Grant Coastal Community Development Specialist
Dr. Samantha Romanick, U of R Microplastics Research Hub
Bernie Gigas, International Joint Commission Public Advisory Group
Bob Morgan, Public Advisory Council for the Lake Ontario Marine Sanctuary

Thank you for bringing such rich knowledge and insight to Sodus Bay.

Throughout the day, we hosted 300 families in Sodus Point where we showcased more than 46 booths of state and federal agencies, local conservation efforts and other vendors. Participants in Bay Day had opportunities to:

- Learn about bees and other pollinators and their importance to the environment and the economy.
- Conserve New York's Great Lakes through the expertise of the DEC's watershed model and education resources
- Reduce energy use through Climate Accelerator Solutions free energy advising services offered through their Amped program
- Manage wildlife with guidance from the US Department of Agriculture
- Identify invasive species and how to prevent their spread from PRISM and Dr. Anna Haws from the Aquatic Invasive Species Research & Outreach NYS Water Resources Institute.
- Learn about local nature conservation efforts from Cracker Box Palace and Genesee Land Trust
- Brush up on water safety with Junior Bay Sail Association, US Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the Sodus Bay Maritime Captains Association.
- Understand bay weed harvesting strategies through Sodus Bay Improvement Association and the Town of Huron.
- Study Sodus Bay history with members of the Historical Society.

Discovery Place-- a children's interactive learning center for kids of all ages allowed exploration of invasive weeds, what the water looks like under a microscope, examination of algae and examining the sand to see if microplastics exist. There were live turtles to engage with from Kyra Stephenson, Nature-Based Learning Coach from Rochester as well as an owl, and (2) hawks from Braddock Bay Raptor Research.



Participants learned about fish and got to see a 7-foot lifelike Sturgeon. It was a day of creativity under the tent for art projects too. We offered Origami butterfly bookmarks, bird and butterfly magnets, hydro painting and the favorite activity of the day- Gyotaku fish printing.


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***“My grandson loved making a fish print!”***

~ Sue Stevens; Town of Huron ~  
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EcoTours

On Sodus Bay, we offered free ecotours, hosted by Freedom Boat Club of the Finger Lakes and Seager Marine. These 50-minute tours highlighted historic and ecological elements of the bay and were led by our passionate volunteer, Billy Kedley, an environmental science major at SUNY Brockport and Nell Gardner, our Weekly Water Wellness Program Coordinator. Nell’s passion for the ecology of the bay, and its history, are inspiring.



None of this would have been possible without the participation of more than a dozen event sponsors which facilitated the costs associated with running this event to increase awareness of Save our Sodus in the community and to spread the joy of discovery with future generations of environmental stewards.

Special thanks goes to board members, Janet Halasinski and Beth Palmer, and committee members, Laurie Alverio and Don Riling for leading this initiative and to all of our board and volunteers who helped accomplish this event.

See **Appendix A** below for links to Youtube videos of the event.

D. Partner with local schools and summer education programs, to prepare future generations for environmental stewardship.

In planning for the next 25 years of SOS – the organization is actively looking for ways to pass on a passion for the environment to the next generation, so its decades of hard work do not die out with this generation.

1, Investigation and Laying the Groundwork

This summer SOS was invited to participate and observe an ecological educational program in the Sodus School district which has been run by Dr. April Luehman of the U of R Pre-service teachers in the Science Education Department for the last 22 years.

This program is a collaboration between the U of R Science Education Department, the school district, and Community Schools partners who together, run a transdisciplinary environmental climate action camp for teens for one week during the summer. Students and teachers come together to develop 5 or 6 relevant topics or issues, then throughout the week research and investigate the topics and at the end of the week present their findings in a science fair like setting to the public.

SOS was asked to participate with one of the groups to understand how to test for water quality. Through demonstrations of our equipment and instructions of the process, the students were able to develop their own methodologies and set out to test meaningful situations related to them to learn about water quality and why it is important in their daily lives.

This educational collaboration led to other partnerships throughout this year emphasizing the importance of nature and science to engage underserved communities in both rural and urban environments. Don Riling, Dr. April Luehman, and Kyra Stephenson- nature-based educator, Rochester City Schools District were guests on WXXI's Environmental Connections program with Jasmine Singer this fall. [\[see Grants and Communications for the link\]](#)

2. Summer Eco-Boot Camp Development (two, 1 week programs)

This fall we took steps to develop and fund two 1 week Eco-Boot Camps. Below is the summary description and objectives we set out to accomplish:

The Save our Sodus (SOS) Eco-Boot Camp will provide two, week-long, hands-on, experiential environmental education day programs in Sodus Bay, targeted specifically to increase water literacy and agency in underserved Western NY youth.

We will partner with NY Sea Grant's Nate Drag to adapt the "Day in the Life of a Watershed" program from a one-day field trip to a 5-day camp curriculum, supplemented by art and creative writing lessons. This program will incorporate classroom instruction, active scientific exploration, and data collection and analysis. During the camp, participants will learn about topics including: the

ecological and social history of the Sodus Bay watershed; the importance of water quality monitoring; methods to conduct various water quality assessments; and how data collection and analysis can be used to improve the health of a watershed. We are also collaborating with Kristen Haynes from Rice Creek field station for camp guidelines, Dr. Anna Haws at Cornell Water Research Institute for our invasive species instruction as well as Dr. April Luehmann who studies and prepares secondary science teachers to include nature-based learning.

Our first approach to fund the camp was through a grant application partnership with Dr. Lisa Glidden, Director, Great Lakes Research Institute, SUNY-Oswego, Dr. April Luehmann, University of Rochester; and Save our Sodus. As of this writing, the grant application did not advance to the 2nd round of approval. [**see Grants and Communications section for further information**]

SOS is dedicated to the educational part of our mission, and we will continue to look for ways in 2025 to fund the summer Eco-Boot Camp through specific donations and sponsorships.

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***“We encourage exposing all residents to the ecology of the bay and want to ensure access for those that are underserved.”***

~ Dave McDowell; Mayor of Sodus Point ~  
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IV. Communications & Grants

Challenge:

As SOS recruited new board members and spent time rebuilding the organization's connections to other environmental groups, municipal leaders and citizens, we were surprised to learn that residents around the bay had ***never heard*** of the organization – despite its 25 years of service to Sodus Bay.

The SOS Board acknowledged that raising the profile of Save our Sodus would both help broaden our programmatic reach, but also increase the organization's capacity to access funding streams outside of individual donations. This is important as some of the projects SOS plans to pursue or has been approached by communities and donors to pursue are of a scale and scope that cannot be accomplished without multiple layers of financial support and technical expertise.

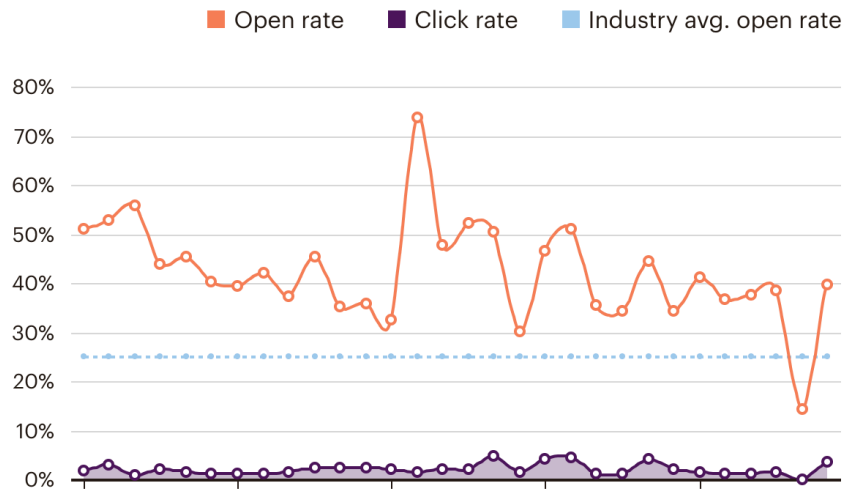
Communications Response:

In 2023, Save our Sodus's association with and sponsorship of Sodus Point's Summerfest raised SOS's profile in the community, but this year, the board wanted to make sure that the SOS mission was also highlighted as we increased visibility in social media, in our monthly E-newsletter and in public events (Bay Day, weed pulls, etc). We also added more than 1,000 additional addresses to our mailing list for non-electronic communication.

Communications Outcomes:

A. SOS E-Newsletter

In 2024, SOS distributed a monthly E-newsletter to keep the community informed of SOS activity. Ahead of Bay Day, SOS also sent out weekly newsletters to build momentum and excitement about the historic event in Sodus Point. Since January, SOS sent out 30 E-newsletters and added more than 600 new active email addresses.

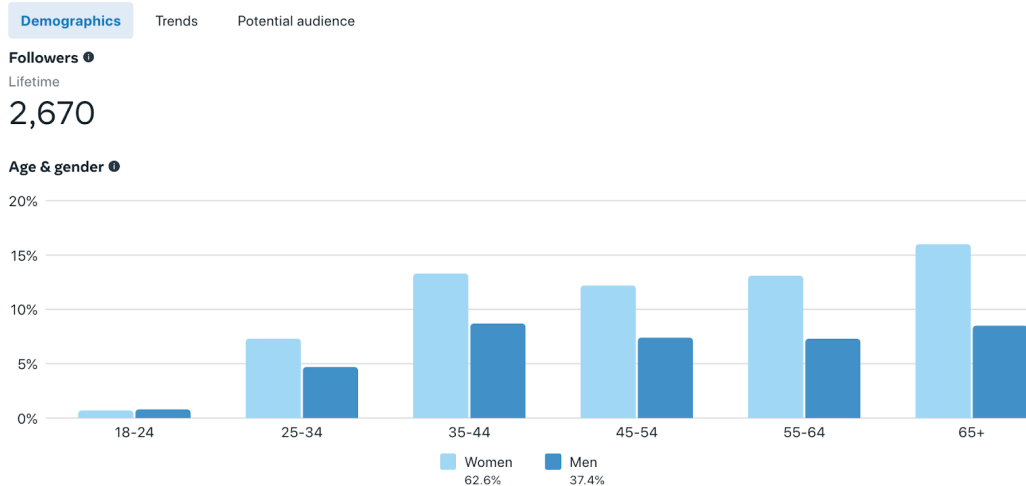


These newsletters are cross-posted on our Facebook page, and as you can see above, the open rate is consistently well above the national average (topping out at 73%.)

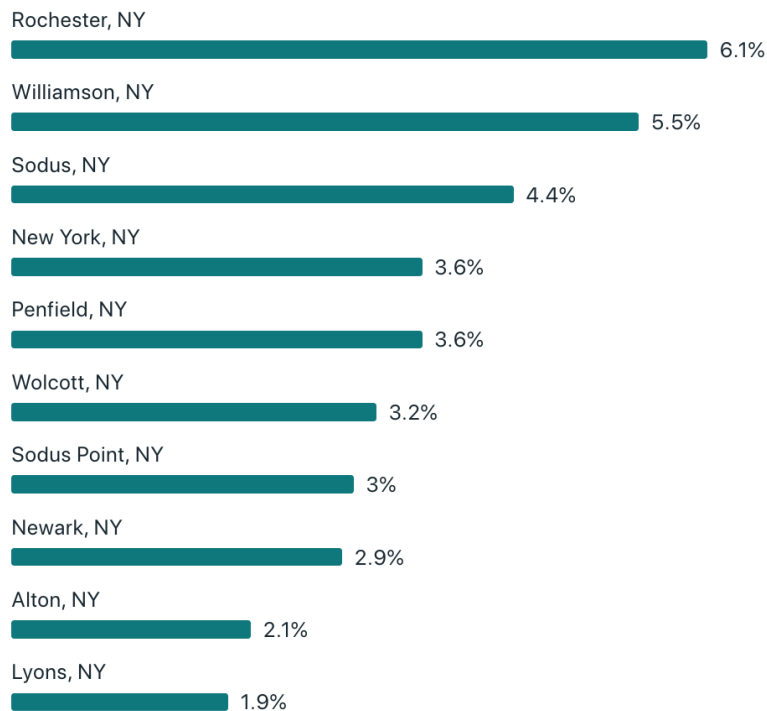
B. Social Media (Facebook + Instagram)

1. Audience

Since January 2024, SOS has added more than 150 new followers on its Facebook page and attracted more than 65,000 annual views on the page's content. Here's a snapshot of visitors:



Top cities



2. Engagement

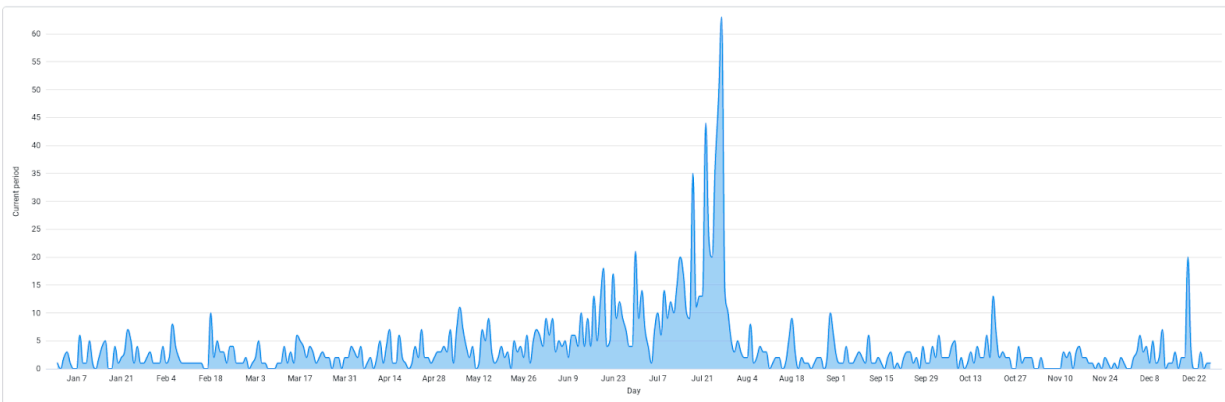
According to Facebook analytics, visits to the SOS page were up over 2023 by more than 160%, and SOS kept visitors' attention longer with videos, surveys and critical information about the Bay. SOS saw content interactions up by more than 64%, with more than 20,000 watching reels, videos and clicking on informative links

C. Website (saveoursodus.com)

After a total redesign of www.saveoursodus.com in 2023, SOS is still building traffic. In 2024, the website received more than 3,400 page views with 60% unique visitors. This year, we saw spikes in engagement on the website during the summer months as visitors came for event information and donation information.

Traffic Over Time

Select a time period this year to second Compare to is None Group by is Day Select a measure is Site sessions Exclude bots is Yes



Generated by Looker on December 28, 2024 at 1:37 PM UTC

D. Event Promotion (earned media)

Reinstituting Weekly Water Wellness & promoting Bay Day provided us with great opportunities to participate in a wide range of television news stories, radio interviews and morning show appearances. Over the summer, SOS President, Don Riling and Vice President, Kristy Fowler-Ritter, as well as board member, Nell Gardiner and volunteer Ann Ghyzel appeared on **every** Rochester-area broadcast media outlet. If you missed these appearances, just click on the hyperlinks and listen/watch for yourself!

[Spectrum News](#)

[WROC with Brennan Somers](#)

[WHEC with Berkeley Brean](#)

[WHAM/FOX Rochester](#)

[WXXI “Environmental Connections” with Jasmine Singer](#)

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***“Continue to keep waters in Sodus Bay clean for generations to come. You are doing a great job with information about the bay.”***

~ Sue Stevens; Town of Huron ~  
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Grants Response

As SOS pledged in our 2023 appeal, we sought to establish a grant-writing team. Rather than hiring someone outright, we leveraged board members who came in with expertise in this area. This team helped prepare our earmark application with Senator Schumer’s office at the direction of our communications advisor, Jessica Stone. At the same time, we asked the same team to research additional grant opportunities to accomplish our objectives in the areas of water quality testing and youth education. We brought that research to our partners at NY SeaGrant whose community action initiative pairs non-profits like SOS and community groups with funding opportunities and academic partners to accomplish their objectives.

Grants Outcomes

- A. Earmark Application (Congressionally Directed Spending/CDS)
 - a. In Spring 2024, SOS worked with Senator Chuck Schumer’s office to apply for an earmark for water testing and educational funds. Senator Schumer’s office chose the SOS earmark to advance in committee, but the House ban on nonprofits receiving earmark funding kept SOS out of the running. While the SOS earmark request did not move forward, the work SOS did to prepare proved crucial in subsequent grant applications for a children’s eco-boot camp.
- B. Water Resources Institute (WRI) Grant Application
 - a. The synergy of bringing in speakers for Bay Day from NY SeaGrant strengthened our ties with the organization’s expertise. This Fall, NY SeaGrant partnered with us to facilitate a grant application for a summer eco-boot camp for 2025. NY SeaGrant’s Stacy Furgal and Mary Austerman heard our proposal and then connected us to grant opportunities & academic partners needed for the application.
 - b. In November, we worked with the director of SUNY Oswego’s [Great Lakes Institute](#), Lisa Glidden, to apply for a DEC/WRI grant for environmental education. Kristen Haynes, director of the [Rice Creek Field Station](#) which has run youth summer programs for decades also added her support and technical expertise. We received news 12/20 that our pre-proposal will not

advance. But we have been invited to collaborate on additional grant opportunities with the same partners in the new year.

C. Indiana University National Science Foundation Grant (NSF)

- a. SOS Consultant, Jessica Stone, had previously reached out to and worked with Dr. Diane Henshel of Indiana University to include Sodus Bay residents in Henshel's survey research about risk assessment for communities subject to shoreline erosion and flooding. This set the groundwork for an outreach by Henshel as she is now working on an National Science Foundation grant which will enable more cataloguing of risk mitigation for communities like Sodus Point.
- b. In June 2023, SOS learned from Tony David, Director of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Environment Division that Sodus Point is the most vulnerable to lake level fluctuations of any location on Lake Ontario due to its low-lying level. David is also a member of the International Joint Commission's Lake Ontario St. Lawrence River Board which makes decisions on lake levels for Lake Ontario. SOS hosted Mr. David for an informational event, and has subsequently used that information to seek out opportunities to participate in studies and grant-making opportunities to position Sodus Bay residents for more aid should flood waters again rise on Lake Ontario.
- c. To that end, SOS is currently participating as a partner in this large grant application with Dr. Henshel and Indiana University to bring research dollars to Sodus Bay residents to assess their risk preparations for flood conditions and to better equip them to respond in the future. The deadlines for submission are in 2025.

V. Appendixes

A. Appendix A- Bay Day video link:

<https://youtu.be/kDS7She1-w?si=ccjIYM5aGnecJPrs>

B. Appendix B Complete W3 Report

SOS Weekly Water Wellness Testing On Sodus Bay

Team Members:

Ann Ghyzel, Nell Gardner, Dennis Chasse

This spring the SOS **Weekly Water Wellness** (W3) Team was tasked with the job of doing water testing on Sodus Bay. There is an ongoing water testing program through NYS DEC called CSLAP (Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program). Trained CSLAP volunteers currently test Sodus Bay water at one location a month. SOS was looking for weekly water testing with widely available results.

We researched equipment and purchased an easy-to-use meter with three probes. We can now test for dissolved oxygen, pH, temperature, and conductivity. These are some common measurements used to determine the health of a water system.

We selected six areas to test on Sodus Bay, five where the water comes in from local streams and one area where the water is fairly stagnant. All samples were taken at the water surface, three areas were sampled per week.

Overall, our test results have been within the healthy range for fresh, Class B recreational water. In areas with more plant growth and shallow water there were lower dissolved oxygen and higher pH readings. This may occur due to plant growth and decay.

Conductivity readings have been low overall but a little higher in the First Creek area probably because it is close to a road and an active marina.

By September we were able to purchase testing kits for Nitrogen and Phosphorus. Our first two weeks of testing turned up readings of zero at all sites. Our last sampling in early October turned up results in two sites on the East side of the Bay. Our kits only go

down to Parts per million of Phosphate and we registered 5 ppm at both sites. We did not measure any Nitrogen in the same locations.

Overall the water quality in the Bay is good and testing results are consistent with the ongoing CSLAP testing. The few minor variations in measurements are likely due to sampling in shallow water locations or near human activities. The NYS DEC classifies the water in the Bay as class B water, meaning it is suitable for recreational uses but not drinking.

In addition to water testing, the SOS Water Wellness team was tasked with monitoring aquatic plants and looking for invasives.

Here is the list of aquatic plants we found at our testing sites:

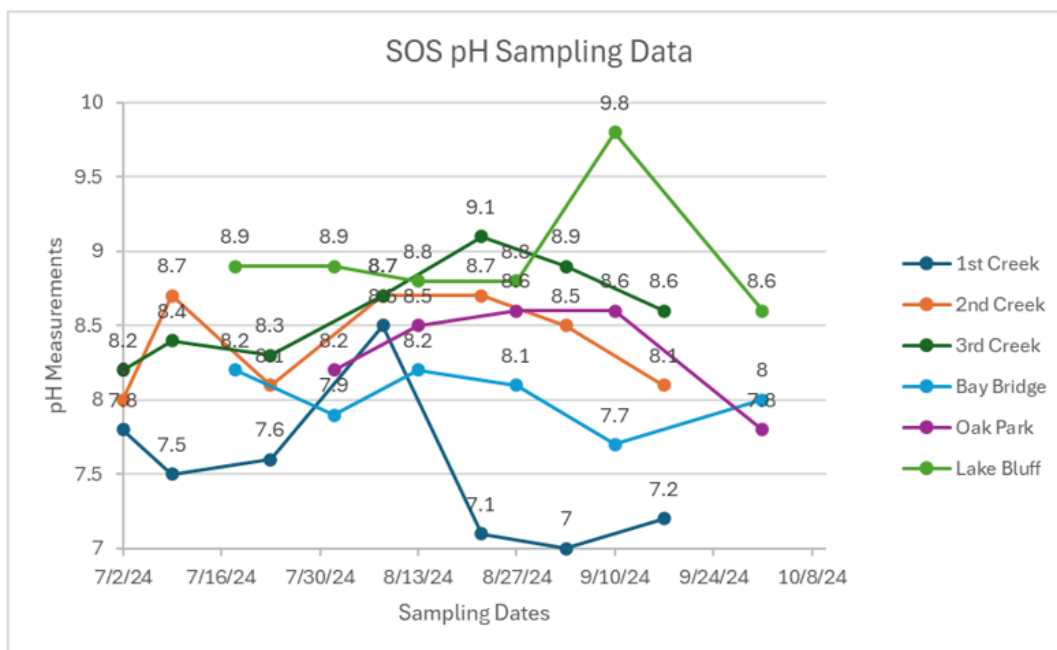
- Pond Weeds- many types including: Flat stemmed, floating, common, slender, long leaf, ribbon.
- Eel grass
- Sedge grass
- Duck weed- common and star leaved
- Hornwort
- Common water weed
- Water Milfoil
- Cattails
- Phragmites
- Pickerel
- Water Chestnut (non- native and invasive)

All were Native except for the Water Chestnuts which were hand pulled by volunteers and were virtually eliminated in our areas by the end of the season.

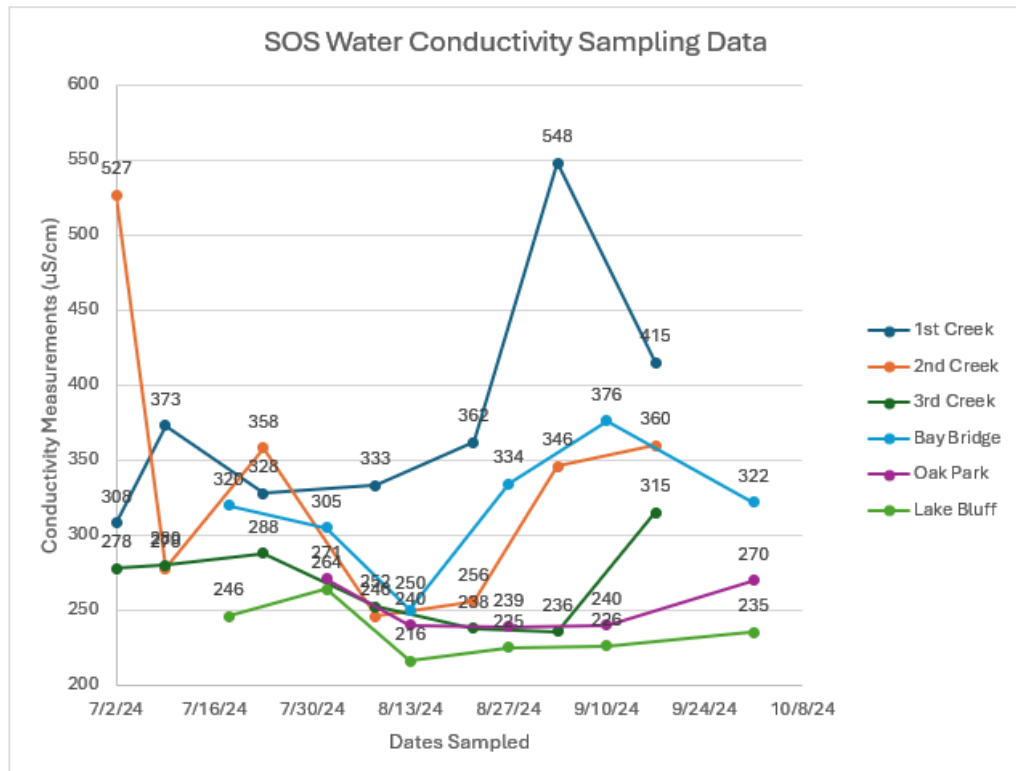
Native weeds- Floating, suspended, and rooted, have many uses in an ecosystem, both for fish and invertebrates and are indicators of a healthy aquatic environment.

October 13, 2024

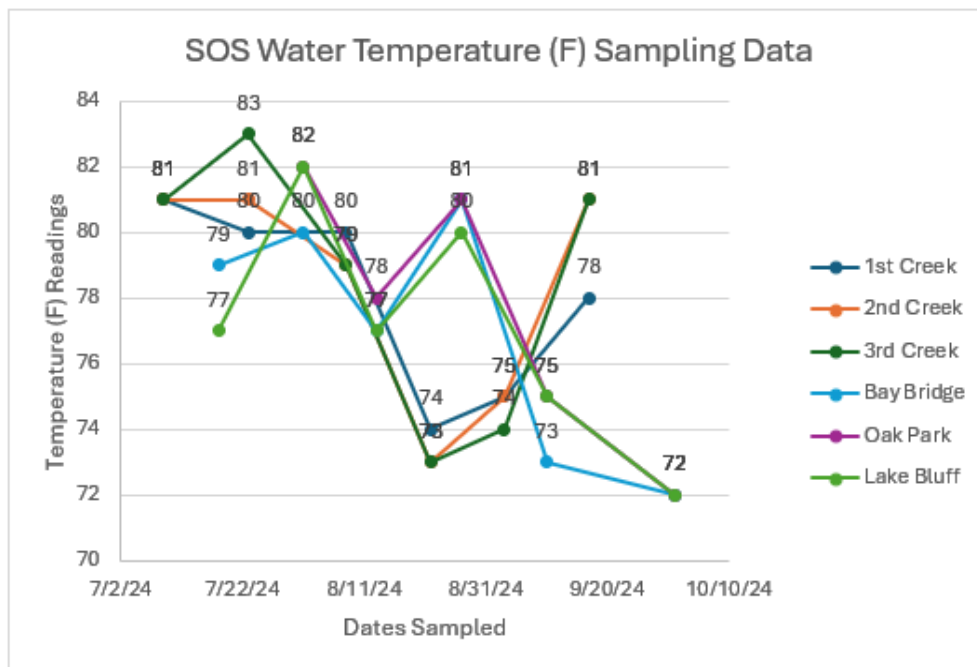
See water testing results in graphs below.



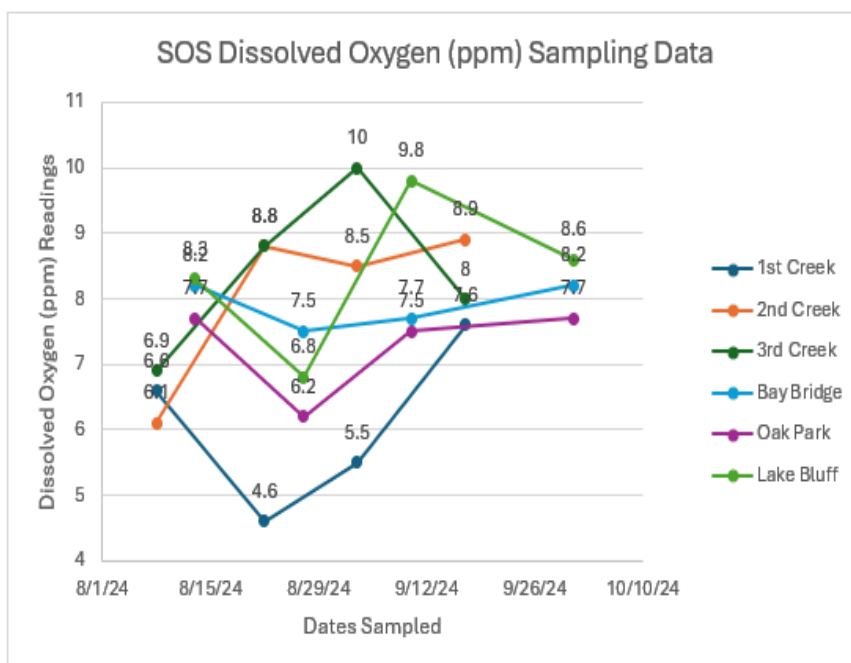
Note: Most fish prefer pH range from 6-9.



Note: High conductivity (1000s of uS/cm) indicates the water is salty or contaminated with chemicals



Note: Water temperature affects the growth of plants and the amount of dissolved oxygen



Note: Dissolved oxygen <5 ppm can negatively affect fish. Dissolved oxygen decreases as water temperature increases.

SOS Phosphate Data (ppm)

Note: Our sampling kits were on back order, so the 2024 data is limited.

Date	Location	Phosphate (ppm)
9/17/24	1 st Creek	<1
10/11/24	1 st Creek	<1
10/11/24	2 nd Creek	<1
10/11/24	3 rd Creek	<1
9/10/24	Bay Bridge	<1
10/1/24	Bay Bridge	5
9/10/24	Oak Park	<1
10/1/24	Oak Park	<1
9/10/24	Lake Bluff	<1
10/1/24	Lake Bluff	5
10/11/24	Lake Bluff	<1

High levels of phosphate will over fertilize the water and can cause rapid weed growth & algae blooms. Sources of excess phosphate can be found in fertilizers, leaking septic systems and soil sediment.

SOS Nitrate Data (ppm)

Note: Our sampling kits were on back order, so the 2024 data is limited.

Date	Location	Nitrate (ppm)
9/17/24	1 st Creek	<10
10/11/24	1 st Creek	<10
10/11/24	2 nd Creek	<10
10/11/24	3 rd Creek	<10
9/10/24	Bay Bridge	<10
10/1/24	Bay Bridge	<10
9/10/24	Oak Park	<10
10/1/24	Oak Park	<10
9/10/24	Lake Bluff	<10
10/1/24	Lake Bluff	<10
10/11/24	Lake Bluff	<10

High levels of nitrate can cause rapid weed growth & algae blooms, low levels of oxygen in the water and can directly harm aquatic animals. The most significant source of freshwater nitrates in NYS is agricultural fertilizer runoff, leaking septic systems is also a possible source.

C. **Appendix C** Background on CSLAP

The Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP) is a volunteer lake monitoring program run by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and the NYS Federation of Lake Associations, Inc. (NYSFOLA). It was established by NYS Environmental Conservation Law Section 17-305 in 1985. CSLAP was modeled after successful volunteer programs in Vermont, Maine, Illinois and Minnesota. Each participating lake association is a member of NYSFOLA, a not-for-profit coalition of lake associations and others interested in lake management. NYSFOLA was founded in 1983 and presently serves nearly 300 lake associations as well as individual and corporate members. Over 160 NYSFOLA member lake associations currently participate in CSLAP.

Trained citizen volunteers from NYSFOLA-member lake association (Sodus Bay covered by SOS volunteers) are responsible for collecting periodic water quality data and samples from June through September. More than 400 volunteers participate in the program each year on approximately 180 sites. Samples are collected from surface waters (epilimnion) for shallow lakes. Bottom, or hypolimnion, samples are collected from deeper lakes/bays...

Water samples are sent to a NY state lab for analyses. These results and other lake measurements are forwarded to NYSFOLA and NYSDEC. Each participating lake receives a report highlighting the year's sampling results. In addition, results are stored electronically to allow for comparison of historical data and current conditions. This allows changes and trends in water quality to be observed and predicted for CSLAP lakes. Ultimately, CSLAP participation provides NYSDEC and NYSFOLA lake associations with a basis for making management decisions

An annual statewide NYSFOLA conference is held in May. In addition, CSLAP holds several regional conferences throughout the summer months. SOS attends the Central Region conference (usually held south of Syracuse.) SOS strives to keep updated through presentations on experts on any existing or developing issues affecting freshwater health and simply to share information and ideas with other Central Region CSLAP fellow lake association members. It is impressive to see the dedication of so many NYS volunteers dedicated to the health of 'their' particular lake.

<https://nysfola.org/what-is-cslap>