

FAQ: Clarifying Facts About the 2026 Chautauqua Lake Herbicide Permitting Approach

This FAQ provides additional context and addresses some common misconceptions about aquatic herbicide use and permitting on Chautauqua Lake.

1. Does a larger permit area mean the lake will be “blanket sprayed”?

No. This interpretation would be extremely inaccurate and potentially inflammatory.

A larger permitted area does not automatically authorize or result in blanket treatment. Further, modern aquatic herbicide applications are precisely dosed and professionally applied underwater, not “sprayed”. Permits define where treatment may occur only if field conditions justify it, and actual treatment areas are determined through on-site assessments, environmental safeguards, and DEC oversight.

Permit flexibility exists to respond to shifting plant locations, growth timing, and site conditions, not to expand treatment indiscriminately. Adaptive management ensures each decision is tailored to current lake conditions.

2. Is CLP prioritizing safe navigation over environmental protection?

No. Safe navigation and environmental protection are complementary priorities.

In 2025, dense growth of native and invasive plants created unsafe conditions. Mechanical harvesting alone was insufficient to maintain navigation safety and commercial access.

For 2026, CLP is proactively establishing navigation channels early in the season before growth becomes unmanageable. Adaptive management ensures these interventions are strategic, site-specific, and environmentally responsible, balancing public safety and ecological protection.

3. Why not rely only on mechanical harvesting?

Mechanical harvesting is capacity limited and does not address invasive species management.

- In a difficult year such as 2025, capacity is not sufficient to maintain safe navigation and shorelines
- Does not remove invasive plant roots, and can spread viable fragments

Strategic herbicide use reduces invasive plant density at the source, making harvesting more effective and cost-efficient over time.

4. How does this approach protect native plants?

The updated framework allows managers to:

- Treat invasive species species-selective products at optimal growth stages
- Avoid unnecessary disturbance to native vegetation
- Minimize biomass decay

Adaptive management ensures treatments respond to actual field conditions, reducing ecological risk compared with rigid, pre-set schedules.

5. How does herbicide use relate to harmful algal blooms (HABs)?

Herbicides, as applied according to DEC permits and label instructions, do not bare the bottom or cause HABs. Claims to the contrary are inaccurate.

HABs are primarily driven by nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen), warm temperatures, and water column stability, not by properly applied herbicides.

The 2026 approach reduces HAB risk through adaptive, site-specific management:

- Timing treatments to avoid rapid, large-scale plant decay
- Targeting invasive species, not native plants
- Managing biomass carefully, not “baring the bottom”

Unmanaged invasive overgrowth can exacerbate low oxygen and nutrient cycling. Strategic, well-timed management mitigates these risks while protecting water quality, native species, and fisheries.

6. Why one permit entity instead of multiple municipal entities?

The consolidated permit entity benefits both the local municipalities and the regulating agency:

- Demonstrates municipal cooperation
- Improves consistency and accountability, lake-wide
- Reduces administrative redundancy
- Enhances DEC review and compliance tracking efficiency

Local input and awareness remain intact, and municipalities remain fully informed of activities in their areas.

7. Do wetlands regulations change anything?

No. They add complexity and risk.

Despite ongoing litigation, CLP assumes wetlands permitting remains required and complies fully with regulations. No treatments will occur in regulated wetlands without appropriate authorization and safeguards.

8. Are decisions being made behind closed doors?

No. All of this was shared openly with representatives from the Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance, The Chautauqua Lake Association, and the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy in a November 2025 meeting with the DEC at the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel.

In addition, CLP provides:

- Public notifications to riparian owners
- Municipal coordination
- Website updates and email alerts

Few lake management programs in New York maintain this level of ongoing engagement or public communication.

9. What is the long-term goal of herbicide use?

Herbicides are a critical component of a long-term, integrated management strategy to improve the overall ecological health and water quality of Chautauqua Lake.

The long-term objectives of herbicide use are to:

- Control invasive aquatic plants that interfere with navigation, recreation, fisheries, and native habitats
- Support the recovery and resilience of native aquatic plant communities
- Improve overall ecosystem balance
- Reduce the frequency and severity of harmful algal blooms (HABs)

Herbicide use is not a standalone solution. A successful long-term strategy also requires nutrient reduction measures and mechanical harvesting. Nutrient reduction is essential to address the root causes of HABs and to limit excessive growth of all aquatic vegetation, including native species that can reach nuisance levels. Mechanical harvesting is expected to remain necessary for many years, given the extended time frame required to achieve sustained invasive species control and meaningful nutrient reductions in the lake.