CHAUTAUQUA LAKE PARTNERSHIP

2026 Chautauqua Lake Survey:

Respondents Report Major Turnaround in Usability and Satisfaction

The 2026 Chautauqua Lake user survey captured physical condition observations from a total sample size of 198 respondents ($N = 198$). The clear majority of users experienced heavily improved water conditions and enhanced day-to-day lake usability compared to the highly challenging 2025 season. Motorized watercraft operation and open-water navigation saw substantial improvements across both lake basins, although localized challenges remained regarding water quality and clarity.

Quantitative Data Overview

Annual Trend Comparison

User metrics tracking whether overall water clarity, algae, and weed conditions this year were better, the same, or worse than the prior season:

- **Much or Somewhat Better:** 81% (160 responses)
- **About the Same:** 11% (22 responses)
- **Somewhat or Much Worse:** 5% (10 responses)
- **No Response / N/A:** 3% (6 responses)

Recreational Suitability Impact

User metrics grouping how heavily seasonal weeds or algae physically impacted the daily use and enjoyment of the lake:

- **Minimal to No Impact (Perfect/Great):** 58% (115 responses)
- **Manageable Impact (OK/Manageable):** 29% (57 responses)
- **Severe Restriction (Challenging/Impossible):** 10% (20 responses)
- **No Response / N/A:** 3% (6 responses)

Geographic Basin Stratification Table

Responses are mapped by community boundaries, splitting the North Basin and South Basin at the Stow-Bemus Point narrows (I-86 Bridge):

Basin	Town / Geographic Zone	Total Responses
North Basin	Town of Ellery (North) (Long Point to Shore Acres / Bayberry Landing to Long Point)	43
	Town of Chautauqua (including Mayville, Chautauqua Institution, Wooglin, Magnolia)	25
	Town of North Harmony (North) (Magnolia to Stow)	8
South Basin	Town of Ellicott (including Burtis Bay, Longview, Celoron, Outlet, Fluvanna)	44
	Town of Busti (including Lakewood, Loomis Bay)	41
	Town of North Harmony (South) (Stow to Loomis Bay)	23
	Town of Ellery (South) (Phillips Mills to Elmhurst)	14
	Total Processed Responses	**198**

Basin Narrative Synthesis

North Basin Experience

- **Observational Timeline:** Early-season conditions featured excellent water clarity, with the lake bottom easily visible and very low initial weed growth. By mid-to-late summer, conditions in near-shore locations around Mayville and the Chautauqua

Institution degraded, featuring lower visibility, persistent bright green surface scum, and localized foul odors.
- **Physical Navigation:** Late summer brought dense patches of weeds topping out at the surface, which physically caught on boat propellers, clogged small sailboat motors, and restricted non-motorized paddleboard and kayak movement near docks.
- **Shoreline Accumulation:** Downwind properties, particularly north of the narrows, documented a heavy physical accumulation of loose, trimmed, floating weed mats drifting directly onto shorelines and trapping rotting debris.
- **User Habits:** High adoption was recorded for voluntary preventive habits such as avoidance of fertilizer use, trash removal and cleaning or drying watercraft hulls. However, manual raking of shoreline debris showed significantly lower participation rates.

South Basin Experience

- **Observational Baseline:** Mid-to-late summer water clarity sat consistently at fair to poor levels, with physical visibility depths frequently averaging between 1 and 3 feet, occasionally dropping below 1 foot. The water column maintained a continuous turbid, murky color with sporadic surface algae slicks throughout July and August.
- **Watercraft Mobility:** Despite low clarity, surface weed interference was nearly non-existent across channels, hotel marinas, and public launches. Jet skis, paddleboards, and boat lifts in Lakewood and Busti operated continuously all season without suffering clogged water intakes, fouled propellers, or engine overheating.
- **User Habits:** Similar to the North Basin, property owners reported consistent compliance with avoiding nearby fertilizer use and cleaning hulls, but noted that shoreline raking and financial contributions to lake organizations were practiced far less frequently.

Response Bias

- **Demographic Composition:** The survey dataset exhibits greater representation of private lakefront property owners over transient tourists, off-lake county residents, or day-use public access visitors. This structural composition captures observations from key geographic and economic stakeholders who function as long-term, continuous observers of daily lake conditions.

- **Recreational Activity Skew:** The data weights strongly favor the perspectives of motorized watercraft operators (boaters, jet-ski users). Because a "favorable" lake season for this group prioritizes unobstructed navigation, the baseline scores inherently emphasize clear surface waters over the habitat preferences of shore-bound conservationists or active anglers.

Comment Analysis: Top Themes

- **Dramatic Seasonal Improvement (2026 vs. 2025):** A vast majority of respondents noted that 2026 was "night and day" better than 2025. Many explicitly thanked the lake organizations for contributions to a season where they could finally use boats and jet skis without destroying motors or props.
- **Herbicide vs. Mechanical Harvesting Only:** The majority of respondents express a preference for expanded chemical treatments in addition to mechanical harvesting, while a small minority remain opposed.
- **Inter-Agency Collaboration & Leadership:** Residents noticed and highly appreciated the visible increase in cooperation among the CLA (Chautauqua Lake Association), CLP (Chautauqua Lake Partnership), and the Alliance. There is strong support for continued cooperation and implementation of the NCSU Long Term Management.
- **Frustration with Shoreline Weed Debris:** Even though harvesting was deemed successful, some comments noted shoreline accumulation of floating weed fragments. Weed debris frequently wash up onto private docks and shores, and is beyond the physical ability of homeowners to manage, especially seniors.
- **External Watershed Pollution & Internal Loading:** Multiple respondents pointed out that the lake's water quality is heavily driven by nutrient pollution - both from external and internal sources. There is awareness of the new sewering around the lake, but concerns about continuing sources from runoff and legacy sources as well as internal loading.

Summary Statement

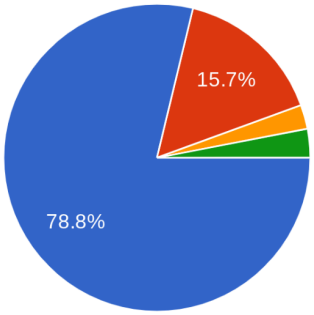
The 2026 survey data reveals a **dramatic turnaround in user satisfaction regarding aquatic weed reduction and watercraft navigation** compared to 2025, driving a high volume of enthusiastic community feedback. While open-water mobility improved significantly, overall positive sentiment remains tempered by a mid-summer decline in water clarity and reports of floating scum and Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs). Looking ahead, the community demonstrated overwhelming awareness of and support for

replacing fragmented, town-by-town decision-making with the NCSU Management Plan—a single, integrated, and adaptive long-term framework.

Survey Charts

Please select the option that best describes your primary access point

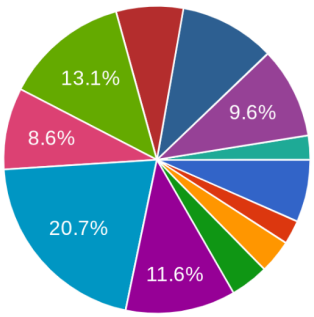
198 responses



- Private lakefront property
- Private property with deeded/shared lakefront access
- Semi-private access point such as a marina or membership club
- Public access point such as a boat launch or park

Please choose the location of your access point (choose one based on the map link)

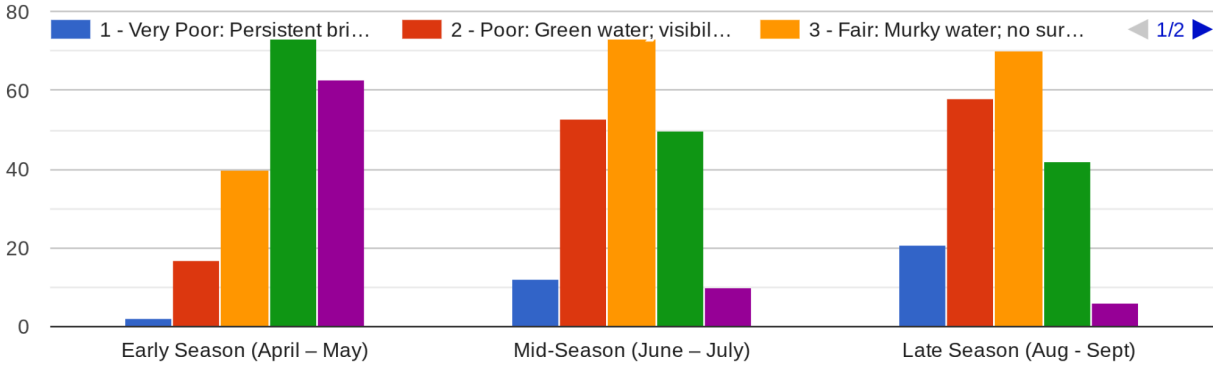
198 responses



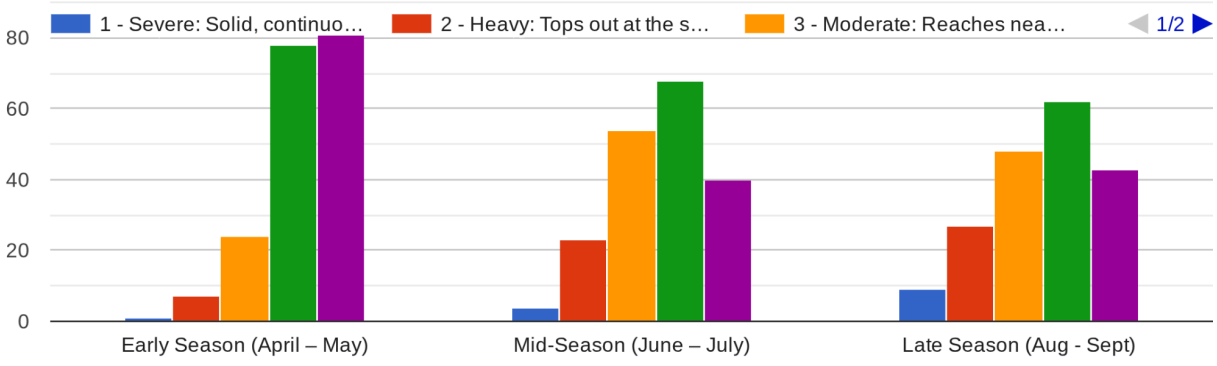
- Town of Chautauqua - Magnolia to P…
- Town of Chautauqua - Point Pleasant…
- Town of Chautauqua - Wooglin to Ca…
- Town of North Harmony - Magnolia to…
- Town of North Harmony - Stow to Loo…
- Town of Busti - Loomis Bay to Burtis B…
- Town of Ellery - Bayberry Landing to…
- Town of Ellery - Long Point to Shore A…

▲ 1/2 ▼

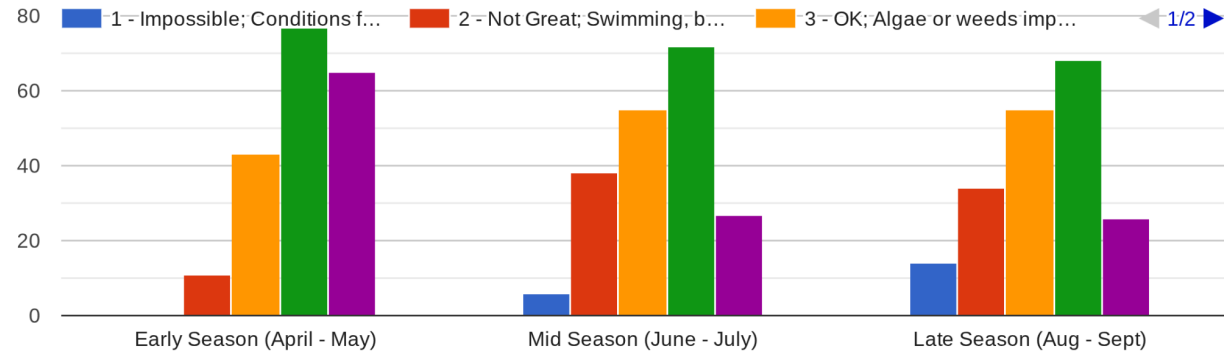
Water Clarity & Physical Appearance Rate the physical appearance of the water selecting the closest option below



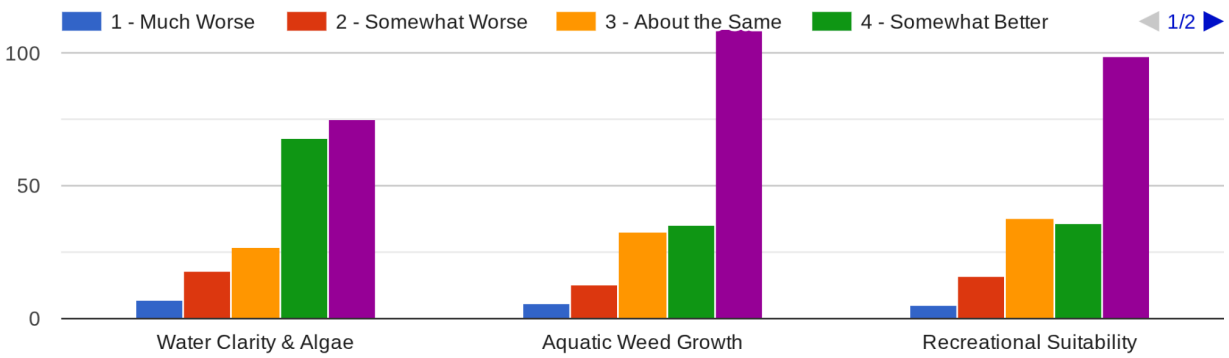
Aquatic Weed Growth Rate the aquatic plant/weed conditions in your primary area



Recreational Suitability Rate conditions in terms of your overall enjoyment of Chautauqua Lake



Rate the overall lake conditions you have observed THIS year in comparison to last year. (Skip this question if you did not observe or cannot accurately recall)

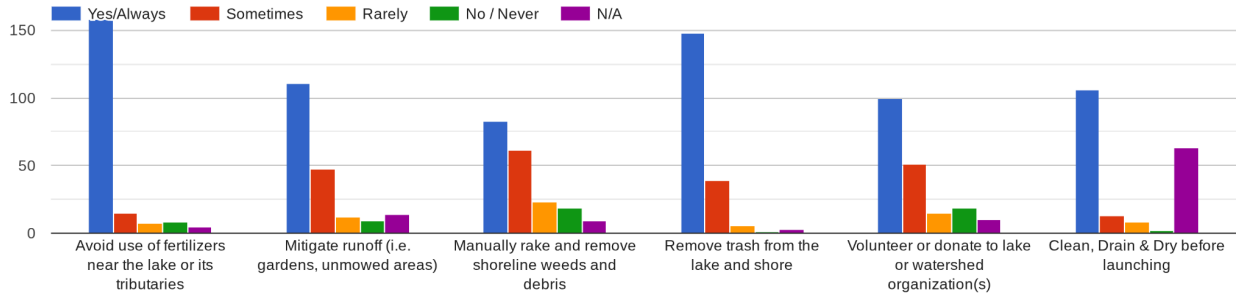


A long range integrated lake management plan (harvesting + herbicides) has been sponsored by the Chautauqua Lake Watershed & Management Alliance....our opinion about implementation? Link to plan

193 responses



Please rate your individual actions as a lake user/owner to protect the water quality of Chautauqua Lake Do you...



Data Analysis Procedure

The **online survey was conducted using Google Forms and analysis was assisted using Google AI.** The following instructions and parameters were used with the objective of producing a fair representation of the survey responses while avoiding the potential for inaccurate or uninformed attribution.

1. Title, Structure, & Executive Overview

- **Title Protocol:** Format precisely as: "**[Current Year] Chautauqua Lake Survey: [Dynamic Trend Summary Headline based on Majority Data Weight]**".
- **Executive Summary:** Lead with a concise overview paragraph identifying the total sample size (N) and a summary of whether the majority of users experienced improved, stable, or degraded conditions compared to the previous year.
- **Tone Constraint:** Enforce a purely administrative, non-conversational report structure. Eliminate all conversational preambles, introductory filler, or predictive AI remarks.

2. Quantitative Data Overview

Compute and display raw numbers and dataset-wide percentages for the following core metrics (ensuring percentages account for all inputs, including skipped or "N/A" responses):

- **Annual Trend Comparison:** Aggregate and display user metrics tracking whether overall conditions were better, the same, or worse than the prior year.
- **Recreational Suitability Impact:** Group responses into three distinct tiers: minimal to no recreational impact (*Perfect/Great*), manageable impact (*OK/Manageable*), and severe restriction (*Challenging/Impossible*).

3. Geographic Basin Stratification Table

Count and map individual responses to a clean markdown grid sorted by the official Chautauqua Lake Association (CLA) community boundaries and dividing north vs. south basin at the Stow-Bemus narrows (I-86 Bridge).

- **North Basin:** Aggregate rows where location corresponds to *Town of Chautauqua*, *Town of Ellery (North)*, or *Town of North Harmony (North)*.
- **South Basin:** Aggregate rows where location corresponds to *Town of Ellicott*, *Town of Busti*, *Town of North Harmony (South)*, or *Town of Ellery (South)*.

4. Basin Narrative Synthesis (Strict Observational Data Filter)

Draft localized summaries for the North Basin and South Basin experiences using these strict data filters:

- **Direct Physical Observations Only:** Restrict narratives exclusively to reported physical observations.
- **Zero Causality Attribution:** Strip away all user-submitted theories attributing lake conditions to specific human management activities. Report observations strictly as concurrent seasonal phenomena.

5. Transparent & Neutral Stakeholder Bias Tracking

Address dataset imbalances with complete analytical transparency to clarify sample composition without discrediting data validity.

6. Comment Analysis

Analyze comments and pull out the top themes.

7. Standardized Summary Statement

- End the entire report with a bolded, standalone heading titled "**Summary Statement**".
- Provide a single paragraph synthesizing the data: explicitly state the primary trends.