

Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Trustee Council



Date: February 2, 2009

Contact: Lori Severino, NYS DEC 518-402-8000

Diana Weaver, U.S. FWS 413-253-8329

Joseph Heath, General Counsel for the Onondaga Nation, 315-475-2559

TRUSTEE COUNCIL FORMED TO ASSESS ONONDAGA LAKE INJURY U.S., New York, Onondaga Nation Join To Plan and Implement Restoration

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the Onondaga Nation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) today announced the formation of a trustee council that will assess natural resources injuries at the Onondaga Lake Superfund site and plan and implement restoration activities for the lake and the associated watershed.

The formation of the Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Trustee Council is an important step in the process of addressing natural resource injuries to the lake. Trustees, under the Superfund law, are permitted to make claims on behalf of the public and negotiate settlements to address natural resource injuries caused by the release of hazardous substances. Injuries can include ecological and recreational-use losses and cultural losses. Any resulting funds must be used for restoration projects.

“Onondaga Lake presents one of the most complex and challenging environmental concerns facing New York State,” said DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis. “We look forward to working with the Onondaga Nation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore the ecosystem of this once magnificent resource for the benefit of people of the Onondaga Nation, the city of Syracuse, and Central New York.”

“Members of the Trustee Council will work together to develop a restoration plan and to put that plan into action as swiftly as possible,” said Marvin E. Moriarty, regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Northeast. “When the lake is restored, we will all benefit -- the fish and wildlife that live in the lake and around it, and the people of New York, Onondaga Nation citizens, and the American people.”

“This is an important step towards healing old wounds and advancing the serious and complex work of restoring Onondaga Lake, which is sacred to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy,” said Joseph Heath, General Counsel for the Onondaga Nation. “The Nation looks forward to working with the trustee council to ensure that restoration fully addresses the devastating harm to the lake. The Nation has been a steward of Onondaga Lake for over 1,000 years. It is appropriate that the Nation is able to continue its stewardship in the context of this process.”

Working with the public, the trustee council will determine what restoration is needed to compensate for natural resource injuries. This work goes beyond any remedial actions required to address the contamination of Onondaga Lake and its environs by parties responsible for the releases of hazardous substances and oil to the environment. The trustees are currently working diligently at developing a cooperative agreement for the assessment of natural resource injuries with Honeywell, the company that is currently working under a legal order with DEC on the lake's cleanup and is one of the parties potentially responsible for the release of hazardous substances.

For more information on the Natural Resource Damages and Assessment Restoration process at Onondaga Lake, go to <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/nyfo/ec/nrda.htm>

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