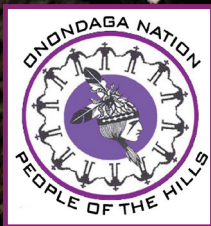




THE ONONDAGA NATION'S VISION FOR A CLEAN ONONDAGA LAKE





The People

From time immemorial, our ancestors lived near Onondaga Lake. The Lake, its waters, plants, fish, shore birds, and animals are an intrinsic part of our existence.

Long ago, the Peacemaker brought together the five Nations on the shores of Onondaga Lake to bury the weapons of war and form our government. The Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy continues to this day to meet at Onondaga.

The Lake is the living sum of everything in its watershed: the fish, the people, the plants, the soils, the tributaries. Onondaga Lake provides water which should be safe for drinking. Fish and birds make their home in and around the Lake. Food and medicinal plants grow along the shores of the Lake.

The Lake was a place for people to fish and hunt. It was a place for children to play and swim and learn. Delegations would arrive at Onondaga for Confederacy meetings by traveling along the Seneca River to Onondaga Lake.

We are carrying out our responsibility to the Lake. We have our own name for the Lake, one which conveys the respect and sacredness of the place and the proper relationship with it. Someday we hope to share this name with our neighbors.

We will work to remove the contamination from the Lake and surrounding land. We will be sure that the Lake is clean enough to drink the water and eat the fish, and clean enough for children to play and swim in the water. We will strengthen our culture and restore our trust in the Lake. We will take our children and grandchildren to important places around the lake and teach them the proper names and stories for them.

On this we agree.



The Earth

The lands around Onondaga Lake are continuing to carry out their duty to Mother Earth, to all things of creation, and for this we are truly thankful. Minerals present in the soils and rocks nourish life. Rich organic wetland soils provide a home for many different plants, trees, shrubs and a wide variety of birds and other animals. Other plants and animals live on the uplands. Groundwater moves through the soils and the glacial deposits beneath, through the bedrock.

Before the pollution was emptied onto the land, the lands were doing what they were supposed to do. They had mineral wealth, stable geology, complex geomorphology, healthy wetlands, and benthic sediments. In everything Mother Earth was supposed to have been present. The Lake bottom was rich with life. The soils around the Lake filtered and cleaned the groundwater which provided clean water to the Lake.

The Land needs to be healed in order for the Lake to be healed. We will clean and restore the land around the Lake. Contamination of the land will no longer pollute the groundwater that flows to the lake, because the wounds of Mother Earth will be cleaned out so that she can heal. Contaminated soils will be cleaned to the point that the full and proper relationship with the land by people, plants, and animals may be resumed again. Groundwater will flow clean. The land will no longer be smothered by acres upon acres of waste.

On this we agree.



The Waters

We are thankful that the waters of Onondaga Lake and its tributaries are still performing their duties. Water is the source of life. The lake reflects the sky, and its beauty refreshes the people. The water of Onondaga Lake provides fish, birds, and other animals small and large with a place to live. The water can be used for drinking, and for making medicines and foods.

The waters of the Lake will be restored. People will drink the water and everyone, especially children, will swim and play in the Lake.

The waters of the Lake will be reconnected with the surrounding wetlands, and the wetlands themselves will be restored. In this proper relationship the wetlands will help guard against any future pollution.

When the rain falls in Onondaga Lake's watershed, it will follow the natural cycle of water: collection and use by plants, people, and animals, and infiltration into the ground to replenish groundwater and aquifers that slowly make their way through the ground to the streams and rivers that flow to Onondaga Lake.

We will use green infrastructure, such as vegetated roofs, rain barrels and cisterns for rainwater harvesting; and permeable pavement, green street design, rain gardens and swales to let the water reconnect to the ground. We will prevent both non-point-source pollution from runoff as well as point source pollution from combined sewer overflows. There will be no more sewer overflows into the tributaries of the Lake.

The long history and damage to the Tully Valley from the salt solution mining will be addressed and the root causes will be corrected. Mudboils will no longer pour sediment into Onondaga Creek. The Creek will flow through the Onondaga Nation to Onondaga Lake with clear waters once again.

On this we agree.



The Fish

We thank the fish for their presence in Onondaga Lake. Onondaga Lake has always been their home, and we know that native fish have been absent from the Lake.

Fish provide food for people, for birds and for other fish and animals in the Lake. Migratory fish connect the waters of Onondaga Lake to its tributaries, and to the Seneca River and the Great Lakes. Fish use and live in the sediments of the Lake and with the large and small invertebrates form communities with the plants that transform the lake environment.

We will work to restore native fish to Onondaga Lake and its tributaries. The fish will be safe to eat in quantities that sustain life and the Onondaga lifeway. Native fish will return and thrive, including whitefish, Atlantic salmon, horned dace, brook trout (not brown trout), sturgeon, and eel. We will restore the habitat for the native fish, and manage the habitat, including the invasive species that are present, so that the fish will thrive.

On this we agree.



The Plants

We are thankful to the plants around Onondaga Lake, which are still performing their duties. Plants provide food and medicine for the people. Different plant communities provide habitat around and in the lake: water plants, wetlands, emergent wetlands, trees and shrubs. We will work to be sure that the native plants of the area will be found around the lake. In order to heal the lake, the species that originally existed in symbiosis with the lake must be restored. We will restore the relationship between people and plants, so that medicinal plants can be honored and used and will thrive. We will honor the changing climate in restoring the lake, so that native species and varieties that have thrived in slightly warmer climates will be present, and we will manage invasive species responsibly.

On this we agree.



The Food Plants

We are grateful that there are wild foods around the Lake. The land around the lake gave us wild foods that our people used daily and enjoyed before they became unsafe or disappeared. In upland gardens we grew the Three Sisters: corn, beans and squash. Berry plants fed people and children while they were at work and play. Wetland plants such as cattails provided tubers and pollen. These foods give nourishment for strong bodies and minds.

We will clean the land around the lake, so that traditional plantings and gardens can be restored. Corn, beans, squash, berries, and fruit trees will be planted not just for us, but for all creation. Native wetlands will be restored and will include food and medicinal plants. We know that the food and medicinal plants will help the land.

On this we agree.



The Animals

The animals around Onondaga Lake are carrying out their responsibilities, though not all are still present. The Bear, Wolf, Turtle, Deer, Eel, Hawk, Beaver, Heron, and Snipe clans of the Haudenosaunee have a deep relationship with these animals, birds, and fish.

The animals know their responsibility to all of creation. Some of them even sacrifice of themselves their lives so the rest of creation can go on. The rabbits feed the wolves. The wolves feed the land. The great cycle will go on. And we are part of the cycle. We will eat the fish and the rabbits and use the fur of the wolf, and this is part of the cycle. This is how it is meant to be.

We will clean the land around the lake so that all of our brothers and sisters will be able to thrive. Deer, and perhaps even moose and elk will browse on the uplands. Turtles, salamanders and frogs will breed in the waters in and around the lake. Insects will be found in diverse abundance and will provide healthy food for the animals that rely on them. Shrews, moles, voles and mice will be able to create safe homes in the upland soils. Otter, mink, muskrat and beavers will return. Eels will be restored to Onondaga Lake. Bears and wolves will visit the lake.

On this we agree.



The Trees

We are grateful to the trees around Onondaga Lake that are still growing and carrying out their responsibilities. The trees are a fundamental part of our relationship with the land around Onondaga Lake. They represent how we should live our lives and protect the land and people. The land around Onondaga Lake once supported black ash, cedar, willow, elm, butternut, red maple, chestnut, tamarack, and others.

We honor the maple as the Leader of all trees. The sugar maple is the source of sap, important for ceremonies and sustenance. Black Ash gives us material to make baskets. Butternuts give us food. Willow gives us medicine for headaches. American Elm provides medicine, and bark for housing, cooking utensils and ceremonial objects.

We will restore native trees around Onondaga Lake, and work to keep them healthy. We will try to prevent Dutch elm disease, and protect ash from emerald ash borer. We'll protect the sugar maple from the Asian long horned beetle and other threats.

We will make sure that we create an environment adequate for the trees to help with the cleanup. Poplar, basswood, and other trees take up and destroy organic compounds, and lock up metals so they are inaccessible. We will use these trees to help us as we work to restore the Lake.

On this we agree.



The Birds

We give thanks for the birds, both the birds that should be at the Lake and the many birds that are there. We celebrate the eagle's flight, the osprey's catching fish, and the songs that the songbirds sing so our souls may be uplifted.

We empower ourselves to restore the habitat and provide housing for the birds while the Lake and the land around it recovers. Our children will build nest boxes, for ducks, robins, bluebirds and other birds. We will be sure that wetland, shoreline and upland habitat is suitable for the native birds that once lived on and around Onondaga Lake.

We will listen to the birds in order that we will know when the Lake is clean. Herons, bitterns, snipes, ospreys, sandpipers, plovers, and other wetland and shorebirds will find a home along the shores of Onondaga Lake. Upland songbirds, bank and tree swallows, flycatchers, kingfishers, eagles, ospreys, owls and hawks will be protected and restored.

On this we agree.



The Four Winds

We celebrate the Four Great Winds. We know that the winds will challenge us to live upon this land. The north wind will challenge us with cold winters so that we must prepare to survive using animals and trees, but warm south winds will come and make earth fruitful for us. East and west winds have duties at sunrise and sunset.

We will show concern for the airshed around the Lake. We will continue to monitor the winds and empower ourselves to clean up all the other areas that add contamination to our lake. We will consider using wind power to fuel the cleanup of the Lake, but we will be sure that it is on a small scale, so that the birds are not harmed. Weather changes will affect storm water runoff to the Lake, and pollution control measures will be designed to account for these changes. We will honor the contributions of the wind.

On this we agree.



The Thunderers

The Thunderers are the voices of the grandfathers. The Thunderers bring the first rains of spring to wake up the world. The rains replenish the water of Onondaga Lake and purify the air around us. They also stab the earth with their lightning bolts to keep under the ground those things that should remain there. The grandfathers have not been consulted about the mining of salt from the Tully Valley or the limestone from the Jamesville Quarries, and they have warned us to be vigilant around these activities.

We acknowledge that we have not heeded the Grandfathers' warnings. We will clean up the land around the lake that has been harmed by the waste from the salt and the limestone. We will work to correct the subsidence, the mudboils, and the fissures in the Tully Valley. We will remove the waste material that was deposited in and around the Lake. We will restore the balance that the grandfathers warned us against disturbing.

On this we agree.



Grandmother Moon

Grandmother Moon is the mother of Mother Earth, the leader of all women, and the bringer of children. Water and reproduction are intrinsically linked, and a healthy water ecosystem leads to healthy children and people.

Grandmother Moon has the ability to move all the waters of the world. She gives us the waters of the first environment, the womb. She moves the waters and the tides, and even the small tide of the Lake. Signals to the fish that its time to breed.

We will work to restore the balance of the waters for the people of future generations, so the water is free of PCBs, dioxins, and mercury in the water are that linked to reproductive problems. Balance will be restored between the waters and the people for future generations of women. Onondaga Lake will be part of an environment clean enough for healthy babies to be born under Grandmother Moon.

On this we agree.



The Sun

Our elder brother the sun provides warmth and energy for the plants and animals of Mother Earth. He warms the face of Mother Earth. We show our respect to our elder brother by giving thanks in the morning and evening. Plants welcome the sun, and it brings joy to children as we play. The sun gives us energy. We can transform this energy in many ways, by growing food, or by making electricity using photovoltaic cells. The sun's warmth creates a thermocline in the Lake that keeps the layers of water in the lake from mixing at certain times of the year, and lets them mix at others.

There are things we can do to help the sun carry out its duty. Due to global warming, the sun's rays are reaching the earth in ways that are harmful to all of us. Global warming and the sun's rays affect the life cycles of fish within Onondaga Lake and will change the habitat so that different plants and animals will thrive along its shores. We will work to lessen the impacts of global warming. With our plantings around the Lake we will provide shade along shorelines for fish to take refuge in, and places for animals to take refuge. When we construct the habitat layer at the bottom of the Lake, we will build ledges deep in the water where fishes can hide. Whatever populations of plants, animals, invertebrates and other living things come to inhabit Onondaga Lake as a result of changes in the warmth of the sun, they will not be limited in their ability to thrive by the presence of human induced contamination.

On this we agree.



The Stars

The stars show us the way. The stars add to the waters of the world. We can see them in the dew in the morning on the grass. They are our aunts and uncles and they shine on the surface of the world and foretell great events. They give us the awe and splendor of the evening. They instruct us when to plant.

We will work to minimize the effects of light pollution so that we will be able to clearly see the stars above Onondaga Lake. We will restore the relationship of people to stars. When people are able to see the constellations and they will know when it is the correct time for planting, and other things. We will protect animals in and around Onondaga Lake from light pollution. We will follow in the footsteps of the Dark Sky Initiative and install lights which shine down, instead of up, on the targets of safety and security, people and property, and use the least energy necessary. People will have a strong relationship with the stars above Onondaga Lake because they can see and learn from them.

On this we agree.



The Enlightened Teachers

Throughout history, Enlightened Teachers have brought wisdom to the people. The knowledge of the teachers is widespread. Onondaga Lake itself is a teacher of great wisdom. We have to listen also to the small voices in our communities because they bring forth great wisdom. The small minnow is also a teacher. It is a small voice, but can tell us a lot about the environment.

Through all of the studies that we are doing around Onondaga Lake, these enlightened teachers are telling us about the Lake. They will give us the prudence we need to make sure that the tasks we want to do are done well. They give us joy. A teacher is a joyful person because the teacher tells us the stories that lighten the heart and make learning easy. The teachers will help us see the joy in the world around us, by their experiments and their studies. We will encourage the enthusiasm of the teachers of the world, to communicate that wisdom to us and to our neighbors. We will store the wisdom of the elders and make sure it can be held and passed on for generations to come. That will be the beauty of this work to heal Onondaga Lake.

On this we agree.



The Creator

Onondaga Lake is central to the Onondaga Nation's aboriginal territory, and is deeply sacred to the people of the Onondaga Nation. Beauty and tranquility are gifts of the Creator. The rhythms and cycles of a healthy lake cause the people living around it to reflect on the rhythms and cycles of their own lives. The Lake will take care of the Community just as the Community will take care of the Lake.

We will continue to strive for innovation and creativity in cleaning up the Lake. By being creative we show the Creator that we are learning what our responsibilities are. We don't show that we are responsible by doing the same things over and over, but by being innovative. We will bring our best minds to correcting and restoring Onondaga Lake.

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. We would also invite all things of creation that can help us with our effort to clean up Onondaga Lake. We give thanks to all things of Creation. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.

Now that we have said this, we will bring together all of our best thoughts, best knowledge and best understanding to send to the creator of all things for the beauty that surrounds us. All of this is to remind humanity of our relationship to all living things.

On this we agree.



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