

Citizens for a Better Plan
Lakeview Amphitheater Project:
Impacts on Wildlife and Birds

The western shore of urban Onondaga Lake includes approximately 400 acres of County-owned, undeveloped, semi-natural areas. The proposed Lakeview Amphitheater Project will permanently occupy 70 acres -- almost 20% -- of this undeveloped or minimally developed land and will temporarily disrupt an additional 30 acres during construction. Large concerts are projected to draw up to 17,500 attendees and to generate noise levels of more than 70 dB in adjacent natural areas. Smaller community theater events and regular use of scattered trails, designated nature areas, and picnic sites may draw hundreds of additional visitors to the area. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) recognizes that birds and other wildlife rely on the project site and adjacent areas, but minimizes potential disruption to their habitat and lifecycle, fails to quantify off-site impacts, ignores fragmentation and other potential negative effects, and fails to consider the lost opportunity for restoration.

❖ **The proposed amphitheater site and adjacent natural areas provide habitat for many birds and other wildlife of concern.**

- A 2012-2013 bird survey of Wastebeds 1 – 8, which includes the project site, noted the presence of Bald Eagles, Osprey and Common Tern. Area birders have also spotted Common Loon, Horned Larks, American Bittern, Bobolinks, Yellow-Bellied Flycatchers, and Acadian Flycatchers on or near the project site.
- Federally listed endangered Indiana and proposed endangered northern long-eared bats have been seen on or identified as likely to be drawn to the project site and adjacent undeveloped areas.
- The shoreline along the site is a major roosting and foraging site for waterbirds year-round. In 2008 and 2009, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service surveyed waterfowl on Onondaga Lake and found the NYS “threatened” Pied-Billed Grebe in the area along with Bald Eagles and Common Loons, a declining species.
- Other animals either spotted on or identified as likely to use the site and adjacent areas include muskrats, porcupines, red and gray foxes, coyotes, weasels, white-tailed deer, raccoons, and various small mammals.

❖ **The DEIS inappropriately minimizes the potential impact of noise, lights, and intensified human use on wildlife.**

- The construction- and operation-related impacts on wildlife identified in the DEIS include habitat loss, disturbance from noise and intensive human use, and possible accidents involving wildlife and construction equipment. However, these impacts are characterized as insignificant, since wildlife are presumed to be “habituated” to noise and human presence due to construction and remediation efforts on the Lake and in some areas along the lake shore.
- The DEIS fails to consider differences between concentrated construction and scattered, often distant remediation activities along the lake shore; differences in duration, timing, or quality of construction noise versus rock concert noise; differences in lighting specific construction projects versus lighting a large venue and creating the concert atmosphere desired by performers; or differences between temporary disturbances and summer-long disruptions extending into the foreseeable future.
- If successful, the amphitheater will routinely draw thousands of people to the site for large concerts with loud music and possibly light shows. Previously undisturbed parts of the site will be opened to visitors by the placement of walking trails, a picnic area, and other amenities. This represents a complete change in the disturbance regime of the site, which may highly and adversely impact sensitive species.
- The DEIS provides no hard data or other evidence to justify its conclusions or its comparison of intense, dispersed, unpredictable human use throughout the event complex and related trail systems to localized, limited, and often distant construction operations.

❖ **The DEIS doesn't adequately document the species that are present at the site and may be negatively impacted.**

- To properly assess the amphitheater's wildlife impacts, in addition to determining the species present, the County must determine their relative abundance, the role that this site plays in their lifecycle, and the availability of mitigation options. Similar data for adjacent areas is necessary to understand off-site impacts. No data beyond species presence was presented in the DEIS
- The County also failed to collect adequate site-specific data. The DEIS relies on generalized, non-site-specific data bases, such as the Breeding Bird Atlas, to identify birds present or likely to be present at the site. Recent studies, such as an extensive 2012-2013 site-specific survey, were ignored and the County's experts made no effort to collect site-specific bird data themselves.

❖ **The DEIS fails to consider the amphitheater's impacts on adjacent areas and uses or fragmentation effects.**

- The DEIS doesn't consider impacts on sensitive species, such as the American Bittern which has returned to nearby Nine Mile Creek, or birds on Onondaga Lake. The noise, bright lights, and crowds of the amphitheater are likely to make the area unsuitable for American Bitterns or other sensitive species and to disturb resting or roosting waterfowl.
- The western shoreline of Onondaga Lake is one of the few places in the Syracuse area that supports waterfowl hunting. Disturbances to area waterfowl may disrupt this use of the Lake.
- The DEIS suggests that endangered bats disturbed by site activity will move north or south of the site. The County provides no field data or other evidence that nearby areas are appropriate for bat roosting, foraging or breeding or, if present, would not be disrupted by site operations.
- Carving out almost 20% of the minimally developed land along the western lakeshore along will fragment this habitat. The intensely used, landscaped tract may create a barrier to movement within the area or attract undesirable, non-native species, such as European Starling which aggressively compete with other birds and mammals for food and nesting sites. The DEIS doesn't mention fragmentation.
- The DEIS briefly notes potential run-off from the site, including herbicides and fertilizers from landscaping and hydrocarbons, heavy metals, and salt from parking lots and roads. There is no assessment of the potential negative impacts of this run-off and absolutely no link made to habitat or wildlife impacts.
- These impacts may be particularly important in re-naturalized areas along Geddes Brook and Nine Mile Creek to the north and in mitigation wetlands being built to the south. A public project that undermines investments in habitat reconstruction and precludes returning the last undeveloped parcels along the Lake to a more natural state is particularly troubling, given strong public preferences for a natural lakeshore.

WHAT CAN I DO?

SUBMIT COMMENTS TO THE COUNTY BY SEPTEMBER 5, 2014

TELL THE COUNTY TO DO THE STUDY NEEDED TO PROTECT WILDLIFE!

Email your comments to:

- David Coburn, Onondaga County Office of the Environment, DavidCoburn@ongov.net
- Ryan McMahon, Onondaga County Legislature Chairman, jryanmcmahon@gmail.com
Mike Plochocki, Onondaga County Legislature Environmental Protection Committee Chairman, mikeplochocki@hotmail.com

Please also call or email your County Legislator: <http://www.ongov.net/legislature/members.html>

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