

## **OONA ENVIRONMENTAL NEWSLETTER, February, 2026**

**Fellow Oak Orchard Neighborhood Association members:** Here is our latest environmentally focused newsletter. It is being emailed to members and sponsors, and also published on the members-only OONA Facebook site. In this edition, we take on these topics:

1. Current and short-term-future Lake Ontario water levels
2. The ecological health of the Oak Orchard River
3. STAMP/ Data Center update
4. How AI might or might not change your life

Comments, suggestions, questions, corrections, and constructive criticism are always welcome. Thanks for reading. Dave G and Frank P (*The OONA Environment and Preservation Committee*)

## I. LAKE ONTARIO WATER LEVELS

*“Prediction is difficult, especially about the future.” Niels Bohr*



From the Army Corps of Engineers website:

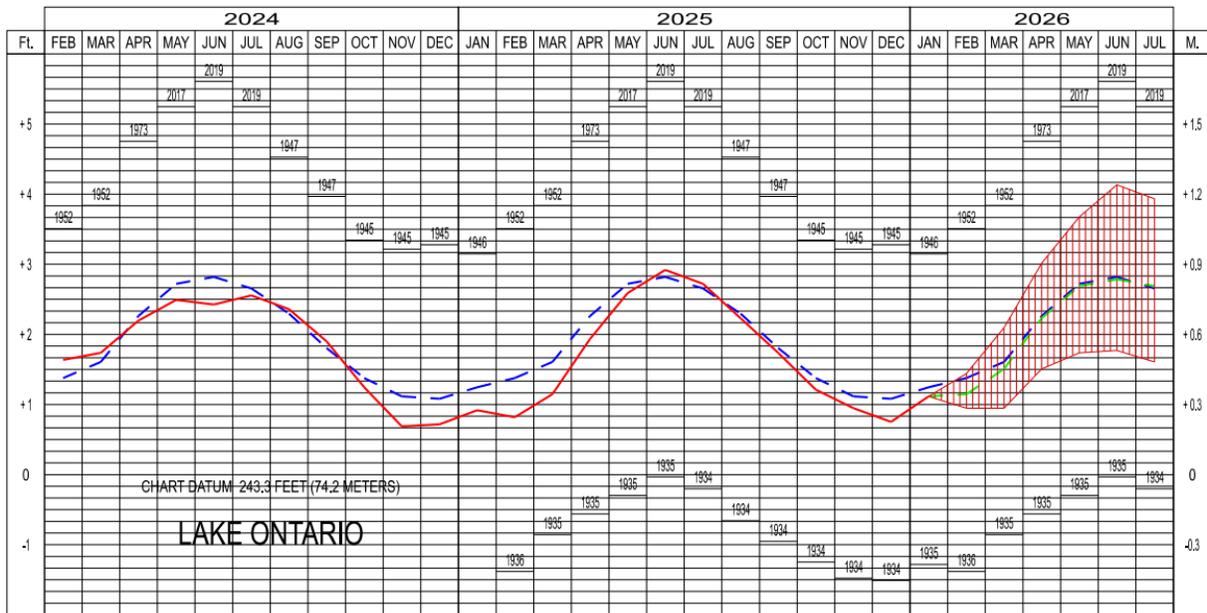
Things don't look too bad, knock on wood. Here's a quick, AI-generated summary of the status and the forecast for Lake Ontario levels.

- **Current Status:** Water levels are around 243.44 feet, with a slight rise projected in the coming month.
- **Comparison:** Levels are above the 2025 mark but remain below the long-term February average.
- **Forecast:** A 2-inch rise is expected by March 13, 2026, according to the US Army Corps of Engineers - Water Management (.mil).
- **Regulation:** The International Lake Ontario - St. Lawrence River Board manages outflows, but natural factors (precipitation, evaporation) heavily influence the lake's state.

### How to read the following chart

- The vertical axis represents the lake level deviation from a standard depth, represented by “0” on the axis. Note that the standard “0” level is an arbitrary figure, and NOT the long-term average lake level.
- The black (sine wave) entries at the top and bottom of the chart are the highest and lowest lake levels ever recorded for that particular month.
- The blue dashed lines are the long-term average levels.
- The red continuous line is the actual measured level for the year and month.
- The green dashed line is the predicted future lake level
- The red hashed areas represent a range of possible deviations from the predicted levels. That is, it is likely that the actual levels will fall somewhere within the red hashed region.

LAKE ONTARIO WATER LEVELS - FEBRUARY 2026



So the prediction is that we will not approach the catastrophic flooding levels of 2017 and 2019.

**Summary.** Lake Ontario began its seasonal rise from December to January, rising 4 inches to a level of 244.55 feet. This level is 2 inches below the January LTA level, 2 inches above last January’s level, 29 inches above its January record low level, and 24 inches below its January record high level. January precipitation and water supplies\* were both well above average. The current 6-month water level forecast projects that Lake Ontario will likely continue its seasonal rise into June. From February to July, Lake Ontario levels are forecast to be within 4 inches of last year’s levels, 0 to 3 inches below LTA levels, 28 to 36 inches above record low levels, and 28 to 34 inches below record high levels.

## II. Ecological Health of the Oak Orchard River



We continue to work to get access to timely data on the health of the river. The latest official data was published in 2005, based on work done between 1997 and 1999. Some more recent results were published in 2017 (data gathered in 2015). So everything is really out of date. These data indicated that the river was quite impaired, with phosphorus probably the biggest contaminant.

Fortunately, there is currently a joint effort between Orleans and Genesee counties to get an updated assessment of the health of the waterway. In Orleans County, samples have been and will be taken at twelve sites along the river. We spoke with the principals of that effort, and we were assured that we would have access to the test results soon after they are released. We will report those results when they come in.

## III. STAMP / DATA CENTER UPDATE

*I know you're getting tired of this topic, but it affects our environment, our electric bills, and state tax dollars flowing our way.*

*We'll cut back in the next issue. Promise.*



Last fall, STREAM Data Centers (recently acquired by the private equity fund Apollo Capital Management) withdrew its plans for a 250 MW data center at STAMP. In December STREAM came back with a new set of plans for a much larger data center.

**Some info about the new data center:**

- Power usage: 500 MW of electricity, which is enough to power Rochester and all four counties of the GLOW region, combined.
- Will the data center have access to cheap hydropower from Niagara Falls? Unknown at this point.
- Size: 2.2 million square feet. That's a tad shy of 37 football fields.
- Cost to build: approximately \$11.2 billion.
- Permanent employees: 125
- Total tax abatements (sales and mortgage taxes): around \$801 million.
- Tax abatements per permanent job: \$6.4 million. This might be an all-time record for New York State.
- Cooling system: closed-loop liquid cooling with an aqueous coolant (probably water, propylene glycol, and some inorganic salts as anti-corrosion addenda. Exact formulas for these fluids are usually trade secrets). The closed loop system is important because it will tend to minimize water usage. Nevertheless, such recirculating systems do in fact generate industrial wastewater, which has to go somewhere.
- Estimated non-industrial wastewater (sewage) discharge per day: 20,000 gallons. This will all end up in Oak Orchard Creek.
- Estimated environmental impact: TBD. A formal environmental assessment is required. The GCEDC is in charge of this assessment.
- STREAM is building it, but who will actually use it? The tenant is not being disclosed, but we know It is a corporation worth hundreds of billions, maybe trillions of dollars.
- Fees collected by the GCEDC if this deal goes through: roughly \$100 million.
- As noted above, the lead agency managing the required environmental assessment is the GCEDC. Numerous individuals and news organizations have commented on what looks like a conflict of interest here.

**Our understanding of the financial situation:** According to the deal with the GCEDC, STREAM will not have to pay sales or mortgage taxes, which is good for them and bad for everybody else, including us. Property taxes are a special case: The data center will be exempt from property taxes (incl. school taxes) but instead they will make PILOT payments (PILOT stands for Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) to compensate for these local taxes. These payments, going to the local government, will exceed what would have been collected from the former agricultural land at the STAMP site. The GCEDC and the Town of Alabama will benefit financially. For local schools the situation is not as clear, since the PILOT payments mean that NYS will withhold some funding to the district. Last but not least, it is very likely that everybody's electric rates will increase.

**Analysis.** The fundamental problem is that data centers are extractive entities, sucking up resources (land, electricity), generating almost zero permanent employment, channeling the wealth away from New York State and over to Silicon Valley, to some of the world's richest corporations. Environmental and social risks are offloaded onto the locals. A perfect extractive business model.

**What do we as a community get out of this?** Fewer tax dollars flowing into Orleans County. Higher electric bills. Greater risk to the health of the Oak Orchard River. I fail to see any positives for Orleans County. Maybe there will be, but I don't foresee them.

**Is it hopeless?** No. The situation isn't great, but there's some hope. In fact, a proposal for a three year moratorium for new data centers in New York was just recently introduced in Albany. It's still a long way from becoming a law, but at least some legislators are interested. Elsewhere, state legislators in Georgia, Michigan, and Wisconsin have proposed statewide moratoria on data center construction. The New Republic magazine reported that in Wisconsin, for example, at least four communities have recently defeated data center proposals, either by getting local authorities to reject them or by causing so much trouble that the companies withdrew their plans. Likewise, counties and cities in Georgia have passed moratoria on data centers. So, even in New York it may be possible. Finally, here's a link to a decent non-technical article from the MIT Technology Review, about widespread dissatisfaction with data centers.

[https://www.technologyreview.com/2026/01/14/1131253/data-centers-are-amazing-everyone-hates-them/?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20737314952&gbraid=0AAAAADg](https://www.technologyreview.com/2026/01/14/1131253/data-centers-are-amazing-everyone-hates-them/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20737314952&gbraid=0AAAAADg)

[O\\_mixAws\\_6VnCu6ehED4ekJ4EK&gclid=Cj0KCQiA49XMBhDRARIsAOOKJHY53ph86GJuxMN0WP1SP1vK5BVfknF0TJEtnyBjxxKkUfJ\\_CTD8acQaAnkYEALw\\_wcB](https://www.mixaws.com/6VnCu6ehED4ekJ4EK&gclid=Cj0KCQiA49XMBhDRARIsAOOKJHY53ph86GJuxMN0WP1SP1vK5BVfknF0TJEtnyBjxxKkUfJ_CTD8acQaAnkYEALw_wcB)

#### IV. Artificial Intelligence Will Change Your Life. *(For the better, right?)*



There's a common misconception that we "need" new data centers for things like storing all the photos we take on our phones, and other normal stuff that people and companies use computers for. That's wrong. We have enough computing and storage capacity for that. We also likely have enough capacity for crypto mining and related questionable activities. No, we need more data centers for the current mad rush by Silicon Valley to develop AI, or artificial intelligence. AI will change our lives.

Here's a link to a long but excellent non-technical article by Josh Tyrangiel in the March '26 issue of The Atlantic. I urge you to have a look at it. You shouldn't hit a paywall, but if you do let me (DG) know.

[https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/2026/03/ai-economy-labor-market-transformation/685731/?gift=bY\\_QuBCy0wCJBekYFo0cbxnTaSJAhl2m2pqk0-m1qoA&utm\\_source=copy-link&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=share](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/2026/03/ai-economy-labor-market-transformation/685731/?gift=bY_QuBCy0wCJBekYFo0cbxnTaSJAhl2m2pqk0-m1qoA&utm_source=copy-link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share)

**That's it for this issue. Thanks for reading! Dave and Frank**