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## Funds sought to protect watershed

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The Otsego County Conservation Association this week kicked off a three-year campaign to raise funds to implement programs for the protection and preservation of Otsego Lake and the Upper Susquehanna River.

The association's effort to raise \$300,000 in three years is being bolstered by the Lou and Susanna Hager Matching Challenge Grant of \$150,000. The grant will match dollar-for-dollar all donations up to \$150,000.

"Forty years ago, OCCA recognized the need for stewardship of our natural resources in Otsego County. Having picked up the environmental gauntlet early on, OCCA has identified and addressed many key issues," the Hagers stated while announcing the grant. "We owe this unique environmental organization a debt of gratitude for the work it has done to promote the enjoyment and sustainable use of our natural resources through education, advocacy, resource management, research and planning."

"This is the first time in 40 years we've had a public campaign. We've always been a mom and pop operation," OCCA Executive Director Erik Miller said last week.

The OCCA continues to focus on its five-year commitment to the implementation of the Otsego Lake Management Plan, Miller said. Programs to be supported by campaign funds include the septic system management plan, invasive species prevention, control, and mitigation, streamside buffer plantings on both farms and residential properties, and agricultural water quality projects throughout the Otsego Lake watershed. "We have a clean lake up here, but it can be much better," Miller said.

According to Miller and the OCCA, the lake appears to be a pristine body of water and a great natural resource, but appearances can be deceptive. There are failed septic systems, agricultural runoff, invasive species and phosphorus loading that threaten the future of the lake.

The OCCA continues to focus on its five-year commitment to the implementation of the Otsego Lake Management Plan. According to Miller, programs to be supported by campaign funds include the septic system management plan, invasive species prevention, control, and mitigation, streamside buffer plantings on both farms and residential properties, and agricultural water quality projects throughout the Otsego Lake watershed. "Lake management plans never end," said OCCA president Win McIntyre, who has made it his goal to secure the organization's financial security. "There will be new challenges and new issues that will arise. With support and involvement of committed stakeholders throughout the region, OCCA will continue to find solutions that sustain the lake and watershed for ourselves, our children and their children."

For more information about the drive, contact the OCCA at 547-4488.