

“A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.”

From *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau



The Lake Challenge

A COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT OTSEGO LAKE

Photo: Matt Albright

CASE STATEMENT

The Lake Challenge: A Community Campaign to Protect Otsego Lake

The Precarious State of the Lake: A Call to Action

To the naked eye, Otsego Lake is a pristine body of water and the area's greatest natural resource, featuring postcard-quality images everywhere one looks – Kingfisher Tower in the morning fog, sailboats gliding across its smooth surface, songbirds serenading along its banks, flocks of rare waterfowl and tanned children splashing in the water along the shoreline.

Appearances, however, can be deceiving. Failed septic systems, leaking untreated sewage and algae-growing phosphorus; deposits of sediment, manure and fertilizers from farm runoff; the introduction of invasive species, such as zebra mussels; and internal phosphorous-loading are a few of the dire threats to Otsego Lake in the immediate future. If the ecological stability of Otsego Lake's ecosystem disintegrates, recreation, fishing, hunting and the aesthetic enjoyment of the lake by residents and tourists alike will become mere nostalgic memories.

The historic rainstorm of June 2006 and the discovery of zebra mussels in June 2007 should be wake-up calls to all.

June 2006 – Major flooding

The lake's water quality plummets when it rains so heavily. The June flooding caused major contamination from runoff to enter the lake. Fecal coliform was found in the water as the lake rose over 4½ ft. above its mean level. As the summer season began, residents and tourists were warned that the lake was deemed unsafe for recreation. Beaches were temporarily closed. With the possibility of skin rashes, ear infections and gastrointestinal ailments from polluted water, many parents were reluctant to let their children swim or play in the lake. What if the beaches were closed permanently? It could happen.

Also alarming is the fact that Otsego Lake is the primary potable water source for the Village of Cooperstown and many lakeside residences. Health-related problems may occur when deteriorating ecological conditions interfere with drinking water prior to treatment. Consuming water from a lake that is experiencing blooms of blue-green algae, an indicator of ecological decline, is another cause of gastrointestinal disorders.

June 2007 – Zebra mussels detected in Otsego Lake

Adult zebra mussels have been found in multiple locations in Otsego Lake, indicating that this dreaded mollusk is established at levels high enough to breed. A mature female zebra mussel can produce 30,000 to 50,000 eggs that hatch throughout the spring and summer months. Fertilized eggs develop into free-swimming larvae that drift before attaching to a suitable hard surface.

If zebra mussels multiply into dense colonies in Otsego Lake, they will create havoc by attaching to objects such as docks and boats as well as waterlines and the near-shore bottom. Colonies of mussels clog water intakes, filters and drinking water facilities. Mussels compete for space and food with native

sport fish, and foul nets, boat motors and hulls. Their detritus produces an unpleasant odor and their sharp shells can cause injury.

A Future for Otsego Lake?

Like other lakes in New York State, Otsego Lake can become an ecological and economic disaster in our lifetimes. Now is the time to join your friends, neighbors and other concerned people to ensure that effective action will continue to be taken. Negative trends must be reversed before they escalate. Lakeside property owners and residents of the Village of Cooperstown benefit from a clean, beautiful and healthy lake. But so do view-shed residents, seasonal residents, businesses and thousands of tourists who travel to the area.

The Lake Challenge: A Three-Year Community Campaign

In mid-2007, the board of directors of the Otsego County Conservation Association (OCCA) launched **The Lake Challenge: A Community Campaign to Protect Otsego Lake**, a three-year campaign to raise funds to implement programs for the protection and preservation of Otsego Lake and the Upper Susquehanna River. In the coming months, OCCA will focus a significant portion of its energies on this campaign to ensure continuation of the proactive lake stewardship it has demonstrated over the last 40 years.

The Lake Challenge Campaign steering committee and development committee, comprised of OCCA board members and volunteers, are in place. At the outset of the campaign, approximately 200 lake-oriented prospective donors will be contacted by the development committee. In total, by the end of the campaign, over 1000 prospective donors will be contacted. Committee members will inform prospects on the status of the lake, including the recent discovery of zebra mussels. They will also describe OCCA's lake programs and request financial support. Over time, the community-at-large will also have the opportunity to support the campaign.

The focus of the community campaign is to enlist the support of donors in 2007 through three-year pledges and gifts of cash. Such commitments will enable OCCA to continue to fund programs to keep Otsego Lake healthy. By meeting the campaign's financial goals this year, the organization will be able to move on to other pressing country-wide issues.

The Lake Challenge Campaign's \$300,000 Goal

Monies will be used to fulfill the critical programs prescribed in the Plan for the Management of the Otsego Lake Watershed. (A copy of this plan, with updates on its progress, is included.) OCCA has designated approximately \$250,000 for Otsego Lake and \$30,000 for the Upper Susquehanna River.

The Lou and Susanna Hager \$150,000 Matching Challenge Grant

OCCA is honored to announce that a matching challenge grant of \$150,000 has been made by Lou and Susanna Hager. This remarkable dollar-for-dollar matching gift underscores Mr. and Mrs. Hager's commitment to the preservation of the lake and will motivate regional residents and visitors to participate in the campaign.

The Lou and Susanna Hager Matching Challenge Grant will match dollar-for-dollar every gift to the campaign. Each contribution – whether cash gifts, increased gifts, or single and multiyear pledges – will

immediately be doubled in value. The matching challenge grant also will inspire and motivate others to give as generously as possible to this critical and timely campaign.

KEY CAMPAIGN INITIATIVES

Fulfilling the Otsego Lake Watershed Management Plan

OCCA played a key role in the drafting the Plan for the Management of the Otsego Lake Watershed, which identified nutrient loading as the major threat to Otsego Lake. Since the plan's adoption, OCCA has made significant progress to reduce the harmful effects of nutrient loading; however, much more remains to be done before irreversible ecological damage occurs. Successful accomplishment of the Lake Challenge Campaign's fund-raising goals will accelerate and complete key components of the OCCA's major water quality improvement plans for the lake. These plans include:

1. Otsego Lake Septic Systems: Inspection and replacement of septic systems around Otsego Lake is OCCA's highest priority program and has been underway for two years. Half of all the systems have been inspected, with close to 60 percent found to be in failure. Replacement of those failed systems is in progress. Completion is set for 2009. If not rectified, the remaining failed septic systems will threaten the lake with untreated sewage and algae-growing phosphorus. Another rainstorm equal to or surpassing the June 2006 downpour could wreak disaster. Fecal coliform and *E. coli* could permanently affect the lake's ecology, and the health of residents and tourists who swim in or drink the contaminated waters.

To date, OCCA has spent \$87,000 on the septic system management program. Through the campaign, it will allocate an additional \$100,000 to cover the remaining two-thirds of the program costs and ensure completion of inspections by 2009.

2. Zebra mussel control

In summer 2007, despite intensive prevention efforts through boat inspection, Otsego Lake fell victim to a dreaded invasive species – the zebra mussel, whose ill effects include ecological destabilization, damage to municipal, residential, and commercial intake pipes, production of sharp shells causing injury to recreational users of the lake, and emission of unpleasant odors. There is no denying that these mollusks present a serious problem; however, due to the prevalence of zebra mussels in lakes throughout New York State, recent research on zebra mussel control is promising.

Over the next three years, OCCA plans commit \$10,000 to explore the possibilities of putting research on zebra mussel into action on Otsego Lake.

3. Invasive Species Boat Inspections: The zebra mussel is now a reality in Otsego Lake; however, other invasive species also pose a threat. Like the zebra mussel these invasives are spread by recreational boaters and fishermen who unwittingly introduce destructive plant and animal species to clean lakes from infested ones. It is therefore of utmost importance to maintain and expand the existing boat inspection program.

In particular, Otsego Lake is susceptible to invasion by several aquatic species: water chestnut (now present in Goodyear Lake); spiny tail water flea; fish hook water flea; round goby, and hydrilla. Ecological damage from these invasive species includes competition with and potential elimination of native species, alteration of water chemistry and oxygen levels, and negative impacts on recreational swimming, fishing, and boating.

Increased funding will strengthen this preventive program and assure that all boats from all launch sites are properly inspected. OCCA's community strategy also includes educational efforts to heighten public awareness of entry pathways and preventive measures.

Since 2005, OCCA has contributed \$30,000 to the boat inspection program and is planning to donate an additional \$30,000 in campaign funding through 2009, thus defraying total cost of the program by 50%, making possible the inspection of approximately 6000 boats. Increased and expanded inspections improve our chances of preventing the establishment of additional non-native species in Otsego Lake, the presence of which could spell disaster for Otsego Lake.

4. Streamside Plantings/Riparian Buffers: In recent years, OCCA has promoted and given monetary incentives to this United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program which plants trees along streams in the Otsego Lake watershed. These plantings, called riparian buffers, create a very effective filter to prevent sediment and nutrients such as phosphorus from entering tributaries to the lake. Since one of the main sources of sediment in Otsego Lake is runoff from farm lands, these plantings provide frontline protection to Otsego Lake. Without this program, the likelihood of more sediment, manure, and fertilizers entering the lake increases.

OCCA has invested \$16,500 to protect over 23 acres in the watershed and plans to allocate an additional \$35,000 through the lake campaign to support this program through 2009. This amount should ensure the planting of approximately 40,000 trees over 35 watershed acres.

5. Agricultural Water Quality Program: In 1994, recognizing farm runoff as a major cause of lake pollution, OCCA identified this USDA program as one from which the Otsego Lake watershed could particularly benefit. To date, with technical expertise and cost-sharing from the USDA, OCCA has made possible over 40 water quality projects in the Otsego Lake watershed. Measures taken on farms include shaping and grading of terrain, installation of fencing and gutters, manure storage facilities, and nutrient management plans – all of which prevent potentially polluting barnyard water, milk house wastes, or manure from entering feeder streams to Otsego Lake. Tremendous progress has been made through this program; however, several farms along major tributaries have not yet benefited from program implementation.

Since 1995, OCCA has contributed more than \$400,000 to carry out these projects in the Otsego Lake watershed. These funds have in turn leveraged \$1.6 million in federal funds. As a component of the lake campaign, OCCA intends to allocate an additional \$25,000 through 2009 to give all remaining prospects in the watershed the opportunity to make water quality improvements on their farms.

6. Monitoring, SUNY Biological Field Station: The SUNY Biological Field Station has been monitoring the water quality of Otsego Lake for nearly 40 years. When implementing programs

in the watershed to reduce non-point source pollution, it is essential to monitor both the lake and its feeder streams to determine whether programs are working.

Over the years, OCCA dedicated \$65,000 to lake monitoring, which has enabled annual State of the Lake Reports from the Biological Field Station. These reports point to conditions in the lake on which action should be taken. OCCA plans to assign \$12,500 of lake campaign monies to lake monitoring through 2009 as part of its lake program planning process.

7. Education Initiatives

OCCA provides multiple educational opportunities for the lake community and others interested in conservation and preservation. Local workshops on lakeshore and riparian plantings are held in the spring. Working with lake municipalities on lake-specific guidance and regulations is an ongoing service provided to lake communities by OCCA at no cost. In addition, OCCA has worked with highway superintendents regarding sanding and salting regiments, pesticide applications, and ditch digging procedures. OCCA has spearheaded lake forums focusing on zebra mussel invasion, septic system management and other Otsego Lake concerns.

Annually, OCCA offers grants to local schools for environmental programs and has regularly supported internships and lecture positions at the SUNY-Oneonta Biological Field Station. OCCA's presence at the annual Otsego Lake Festival has proven to be an effective way of educating people about lake protection and lake programs.

To continue with its efforts in environmental education – efforts designed to communicate scientific data to the general public and encourage practical application of this data – OCCA has allotted \$9,900 over the next three years.

8. New Program! The Susquehanna River Trail

OCCA is pleased to announce an exciting new program to designate the Susquehanna River as a Blueway Trail -- a route along a river or other body of water for people using small boats. This program is pursued in partnership with Parks and Trails New York, an advocacy organization working to expand, protect, and promote a network of parks, trails and open space throughout New York State. Focusing on the Susquehanna as a recreational resource will increase natural resource appreciation and also serve as a catalyst for economic development in communities such as Hartwick, Milford and Oneonta.

Campaign monies in the amount of \$2,500 are sought for mapping and signage for the Blueway, to be completed by 2009, making the Susquehanna River section in Otsego County the uppermost water trail in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Conclusion: Case for Support

The Lake Challenge: A Community Campaign to Protect Otsego Lake recognizes the fragility of this valuable natural ecosystem. OCCA urges you to support this campaign.

The Lou and Susanna Hager Matching Challenge Grant provides a unique opportunity for donors by doubling the value of each gift. New, renewed, and increased gifts will be immediately matched dollar for dollar.

By making a three-year pledge or a gift of cash, you share in the stewardship of the lake's well being, which is crucial not only to those living on or near it, but to the entire Susquehanna watershed system.

By achieving its \$300,000 fund-raising goal, The Lake Challenge Campaign will help maintain the lake's water quality, enhance its natural beauty, protect its fishery and assure that recreational uses of the lake will continue to be guided by environmentally sound practices today and for future generations.

Make a Gift

For more information on how you can make a gift to the Lake Challenge Community Campaign or how your contribution will be doubled through the **Lou and Susanna Hager Matching Challenge Grant**, or how to become a campaign volunteer, please contact:

Otsego County Conservation Association
101 Main St.
Cooperstown, NY 13326
Phone: 547-4488
E-mail: director@occainfo.org
Web site: <http://www.occainfo.org>

The Otsego County Conservation Association in Brief

In 1968, a group of local residents concerned about the maintenance and utilization of Otsego County's natural resources for current and future generations formed the Otsego County Conservation Association (OCCA).

The nonprofit organization is dedicated to the protection, appreciation and enhancement of the natural resources within Otsego County. The Association's activities are predicated on the belief that:

- the natural environment is inherently valuable;
- a well-informed public will enjoy and respect our natural heritage;
- working in partnership with public and private institutions is the best way to achieve its goals;
- local government should take a leadership role in land-use planning, solid waste management, and in enacting and enforcing conservation and land-use laws; and
- regional and long-term perspectives should be considered when judging the possible effects of any alterations in the natural environment.

Board of Directors

Martha B. Clarvoe, President
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Erik Miller, Executive Director
Teresa Winchester, Assistant Director
Danielle Jump, Administrative Assistant

Campaign Steering Committee

Lou and Susanna Hager, Honorary Chairs
Martha B. Clarvoe
Vicky Lentz, Ph.D.
William Ralston
Win McIntyre

OCCA PROGRAMS

THE LAKE CHALLENGE OCCA PROJECTED BUDGET 2007-2009

	2007	2008	2009
Otsego Lake			
Septic Program	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$30,000
Boat Inspection	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
Zebra Mussel Control	0	\$5,000	\$5,000
Lake/Stream Buffers	\$10,000	\$12,500	\$12,500
Agricultural Programs	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$5,000
Education	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500
Biological Field Station	\$2,500	\$5,000	\$5,000
Program Delivery	\$18,000	\$15,200	\$13,000
SUBTOTAL	\$83,000	\$100,200	\$83,000
Upper Susquehanna			
Studies	\$7,500	\$2,500	\$2,500
River Trail	\$1,000	\$750	\$750
Education	\$2,400	\$2,500	\$5,000
Program Delivery	\$4,200	\$2,500	\$2,200
SUBTOTAL	\$15,100	\$8,250	\$10,450
TOTAL ANNUAL COSTS	\$98,100	\$108,450	\$93,450
TOTAL COST 2007-2009	\$300,000		

**NON-CAMPAIGN PROGRAMS
OCCA PROJECTED BUDGET 2007-2009**

2007 2008 2009

LAND USE INITIATIVES

Sustainable Use: Trail Stewardship, Education, Studies	\$8,300	\$8,850	\$12,550
Proactive Planning: Municipal Partnerships, Grant Assistance, Staffing	\$68,200	\$73,750	\$73,800
Program Delivery	\$27,500	\$28,700	\$28,200
SUBTOTAL	\$104,000	\$111,300	\$114,550

SOLID WASTE INITIATIVES

Decrease Tonnage: Recycling, Composting	\$4,000	\$4,500	\$4,750
Promote Env. Sound Disposal: Education, Hazardous Waste Collection, Agricultural Plastics, Program Delivery	\$6,500 \$3,700	\$7,900 \$3,800	\$8,150 \$3,800
SUBTOTAL	\$14,200	\$16,200	\$16,700

ENERGY INITIATIVES

Education, Conservation Program Delivery	\$8,600 \$2,900	\$9,000 \$3,100	\$9,000 \$3,000
SUBTOTAL	\$11,500	\$12,100	\$12,000

OTHER PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

Mini-grants to schools, Light pollution, legal services Program Delivery	\$8,150 \$2,500	\$8,050 \$2,600	\$8,250 \$2,600
SUBTOTAL	\$10,650	\$10,650	\$10,850

Total Annual Non Campaign Related Program Costs	\$140,350	\$150,250	\$154,100
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Total Combined Campaign & Other Program Costs	\$238,450	\$258,700	\$247,550
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