



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®
GARDE-RIVIÈRE des Outaouais

Annual Report 2017



A LETTER FROM OUR *Chair of the Board*

Dear friends and supporters,

It has been another successful and eventful year for Ottawa Riverkeeper. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to our work this year. We are grateful to have so many great people and partners that are helping the organization to continue to grow, improve, and ultimately benefit the Ottawa River and Watershed!

Over the past six months, I was very connected to our country's oceans, lakes and rivers, while leading the Canada C3 expedition, a 150-day coast to coast to coast journey from Toronto to Victoria via the Northwest Passage. It was an extraordinary experience of sharing, learning and discovery that also reinforced how water truly connects Canada and Canadians. I was very pleased to welcome our Riverkeeper Meredith Brown on the opening leg of the C3 voyage, where she worked as the Chief Scientist from Toronto to Montreal. Throughout this Canada 150 project, we focused on four main tenets - Diversity and Inclusion, Reconciliation, Youth Engagement, and the Environment. These are themes that Ottawa Riverkeeper embodies as well, through inclusive events like the River Parade, the new Beachkeeper program that's growing through schools in the National Capital Region, the twinning of the Ottawa and Potomac Rivers, the important work on the Chalk River nuclear dump file, and through many of the other important issues and initiatives where we strive to keep our watershed safe and clean for all.

The four sections featured in this annual report - Stewards, Together; Love Your River; Know Your River; and A Strong Ottawa Riverkeeper - are the pillars of our Strategic Plan. They demonstrate how our shared accomplishments are contributing to the vision of a healthy, sustainable and accessible Ottawa River Watershed where we can safely swim, drink, fish and more.

I look forward to continuing our important work together in 2018!

In the River Spirit,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Green', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Geoff Green C.M.
Chair

A LETTER FROM OUR

Executive Director

Dear river lovers,

If I were to describe this year at Ottawa Riverkeeper in a single word, that word just might be change. In the past few months alone, we welcomed five new staff members to our team, revealed a brand new french name for our organization, unveiled a new e-newsletter, and moved to a new office (do come visit!). All this within our biggest budget year to date, surrounded by the most supporters we've ever had.

And all that change didn't stop at our doorstep. I'm proud to report that over 3000 concerned citizens joined us in pushing their mayors for change on their handling of sewage overflows. We welcomed change on files we've been engaging on for years, including the abandonment of the Energy East pipeline, the reversal of plans to permanently dispose of intermediate-level nuclear waste near the Ottawa River, and the long-awaited collective acknowledgement by three governments of the Ottawa River's heritage value.

An old proverb says that when the winds of change blow, some people build walls while others build windmills. I think it's safe to say we've been busy building windmills all year - and that's in no small part thanks to the efforts of hundreds of supporters like you.

If you appreciate what you read in the following pages, I invite you to get involved in river initiatives in your local community, volunteer your time, or simply pick up the phone and give us a call. It truly takes a watershed to protect a river.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Patrick Nadeau", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick Nadeau
Executive Director



Photo: Martin Lipman



Photo: Martin Lipman

A LETTER FROM OUR *Riverkeeper*

Dear Friends,

What a year it has been for our rivers and watershed! 2017, year of the floods. A wake up call, perhaps? It certainly has brought significant watershed issues into public and policy conversations. It has also reaffirmed how important connection and collaboration is within our watershed. At the height of flooding, it was beautiful to see communities coming together to help one another and volunteers assembling to help strangers.

Our organization feels stronger than ever and I am honoured to continue to serve as your Riverkeeper for the mighty Ottawa River. I'm proud of our team, who worked across borders this year (both provincial and international) to bring the Ottawa River into the spotlight and into our hearts. From Quebec's Lieu Historique Designation to Twinning our Capital Rivers, to initiating an Ottawa River Watershed Council, we continue to bring together individuals, organizations, and governments to share responsibilities and take action to protect our watershed.

Our river continues to be polluted and this year we have been researching and rallying to raise awareness and help inform tough decisions. From ongoing sewage pollution to a proposal for an enormous nuclear waste dump - we are heartened and strengthened by the large number of people standing up for their river, for their rights to a swimmable, drinkable, fishable future.

The people of our watershed continue to inspire me as they volunteer time and expertise to help us fulfill our mission. I'd like to personally thank my amazing colleagues and volunteers. This year has shown, once again, what we can accomplish together. I can't wait to dive into the next year with you.

Your Riverkeeper,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'M. Brown', with a stylized, flowing script.

Meredith Brown



Stewards, Together

Bringing together key players to
protect watershed health

Ottawa River's heritage status recognized by all

For years, dedicated citizens from Ontario and Quebec, beginning with those in the Ottawa Valley, have been pushing for formal recognition of the cultural and heritage values of the Ottawa River. In 2016, it was formally recognized as a Canadian Heritage River in Ontario. In Quebec, Ottawa Riverkeeper nominated the river and worked with the government and our partners to see it designated as a Lieu Historique. We were thrilled to participate in the official announcement this summer, along with the governments of Quebec, Ontario, and Canada. The Ottawa River is only the second location to be given this designation under Quebec's Cultural Heritage Act.

"Tourisme Outaouais salutes Ottawa Riverkeeper's leadership in recognizing the heritage value of the Ottawa River, which earned it a historic designation in Quebec. It's always a pleasure to collaborate with this team!" - Geneviève Dumas, Chairman of Tourisme Outaouais

We convened the Ottawa River Watershed Council

Some issues can't be solved alone. Building upon the Gatineau Declaration, Ottawa Riverkeeper is leading in the creation of the Ottawa River Watershed Council, which brings together key players in our watershed. This year, we held workshops exploring common ground between First Nations, industry, governments, and organizations with a vested interest in the health and governance of our watershed. We have also hired a Watershed Council Director to drive our work forward on this collective impact initiative.

"I am very pleased with the proposed governance model for an integrated and collaborative approach to sustainable water management within the Ottawa River Watershed" - John Karau, Chair of the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority and Conservation Authority representative for Ottawa Riverkeeper's work to create the Ottawa River Watershed Council.

Stewards, Together

Bringing together key players to
protect watershed health

We shone a spotlight on the Chalk River nuclear waste disposal facility

A proposal to build a nuclear waste disposal facility near Chalk River has us - and thousands of citizens - concerned. In response, Ottawa Riverkeeper hired experts to review the proposal, gave dozens of media interviews, coordinated with groups in two provinces, and met with elected officials about the project. We also submitted 66 pages of formal comments to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, addressing our concerns with the proposal. Thus far, Canadian Nuclear Laboratories have reversed their decisions on two elements which Ottawa Riverkeeper highly criticized: the release of their documents only in English, as well as their proposal to include Intermediate Level Waste (ILW) in the dump. We are busy preparing for public hearings in 2018.

“Bravo! Ottawa Riverkeeper does an excellent job of researching and documenting the risks the radioactive waste dump project in Chalk River poses to the population. Ottawa Riverkeeper represents well the concerns of citizens and environmental organizations in the region who want to protect their drinking water.” - Réal Lalande, President of Equiterre’s Action Group in Outaouais and Coordinator of the STOP Oléoduc Outaouais Committee

We sought transparency on Sewage Overflows

Untreated sewage often flows into the Ottawa River especially when it rains or when snow melts. Ottawa Riverkeeper spearheaded a letter-writing campaign that enabled over 3,000 concerned citizens from Ottawa and Gatineau to ask their mayors for real-time reporting of sewage overflows. We also released a report on water quality, following 5 years of research and collaboration with the Friends of Brewery Creek (Les amis du ruisseau de la Brasserie), conducted numerous media interviews, and held candidates in Quebec’s municipal election accountable for this issue. We will continue to work to increase transparency and ultimately end these overflows.

“Ottawa Riverkeeper transformed the commitment and concerns of our grassroots group, Friends of Brewery Creek, into citizen action and citizen science by training and funding us to collect weekly water samples along Brewery Creek. Ottawa Riverkeeper made excellent use of the five year run of data we collected in its public report and as a part of the WeWanttoKnow campaign. Thanks to the expertise and resources of Ottawa Riverkeeper, ordinary citizens were empowered to help identify and publicize a serious water issue.” - Sheila Jones, Riverwatcher and member of Friends of Brewery Creek





Photo: Martin Lipman

Stewards, Together

Bringing together key players to
protect watershed health

We released over 400 American Eels into the river

The American Eel is a native species of migratory fish whose once plentiful population in the Ottawa River has collapsed by 98%. Once again this summer, as an emergency measure, we released over 400 eels into the Ottawa River at the shores of Petrie Island – part of a collaborative project with the Canadian Wildlife Federation. Along with the governments of Québec and Ontario, Hydro Ottawa, Ontario Power Generation, and Hydro Québec, we are working towards our priority objective of improving fish passage at the first two hydroelectric dams on the Ottawa River, Carillon and Chaudière.

We contributed to Quebec's New National Water Strategy

The government of Quebec consulted the public on their National Water Strategy, a long-term plan managing its waters from 2017 - 2031. Ottawa Riverkeeper met with elected officials and experts, researched policy, and submitted formal recommendations for this plan. We hope to see many of our 21 recommendations included in the strategy, such as the implement of interprovincial management for the river and mandatory municipal plans for eliminating sewage overflows. We are awaiting the public release of this strategy, and are pushing for timely implementation of important measures.

TransCanada's Energy East pipeline project abandoned

TransCanada's Energy East pipeline was to run from Alberta to New Brunswick, with no technical information on how it would have safely crossed the Ottawa River. Ottawa Riverkeeper and other environmental groups deemed the original application incomplete and, in the summer, TransCanada dropped the project indefinitely. We were pleased to see so many people stand up for swimmable, drinkable, fishable waters.

Love Your River

Celebrating the values of the
Ottawa River Watershed

We connected on the river with a parade to remember

On a sunny September day, we encouraged people to remember why they love their river. Almost 400 people took to the Ottawa River for our Ride the River Parade and Picnic, paddling, sailing, and rowing 10 km down the Ottawa River. Together, we celebrated the waterway that unites our watershed, and renewed our commitment to protecting it.

“Having everybody together, bringing awareness to the river, and having everybody share their love for the river and be on the water, absolutely makes other people see how important it is.” - Savannah Westeinde, member of Junior Canadian Team for Freestyle Kayaking and parade participant

We twinned our nations’ two Capital Rivers

This fall, Ottawa Riverkeeper and Potomac Riverkeeper Network came together over shared values and forged a partnership, officially twinning our two Capital Rivers. Both Riverkeeper organizations are working toward fulfilling twinning initiatives. Already, we have released a series of educational videos about the rivers, participated in collaborative workshops, and conducted field visits. The twinning also has the support of organizations from outside the Waterkeeper Alliance, including the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, the City of Ottawa, and the National Capital Commission. In the years to come, all partners in the Twinning will continue to exchange experience, knowledge, and best practices to improve the governance of our Capital Rivers.

“We have an incredible opportunity with this twinning. Our rivers face so many similar challenges. By working together, by sharing our ideas and experiences, we can better address these issues and affect real change in our watersheds.”- Phillip Musegaas, Vice-President of Programs and Litigation for Potomac Riverkeeper Network





Love Your River

Celebrating the values of the
Ottawa River Watershed

We launched our Beachkeeper program

This summer we introduced our Beachkeeper program, encouraging community groups of all ages and sizes to adopt a beach. Ottawa Riverkeeper and Water Rangers provide each group with onsite training, giving them information on shoreline ecology, how to use water testing equipment, and how to identify water pollution. These groups then become an integral part of the Riverkeeper network. We already have several groups across Ottawa and Gatineau, and are recruiting more.

“Ottawa Riverkeeper inspires people to learn about and act to protect their watershed. When local youth ‘adopt a shoreline’, they learn the importance of water quality testing and activism to become the next generation of water protectors!” - Kat Kavanagh, Executive Director Water Rangers

Swim Guide a go-to for beachgoers

Ottawa Riverkeeper is a leading affiliate of Swim Guide, an innovative app that provides real-time water quality testing data for beaches across North America and New Zealand - letting people like you know when and where to swim safely. Use of the app has increased exponentially for

beaches managed by Ottawa Riverkeeper, growing from 17,121 clicks in 2014 to over 200,000 in 2017. Our most visited beach on the app this year was Plage Breton, on Lac Philippe in Gatineau Park. In total, the app has more than 1.5 million users.

“Ottawa Riverkeeper is one of Swim Guide’s biggest champions and is our first bilingual affiliate. We are grateful for Ottawa Riverkeeper’s endless energy and commitment to this tool, which continues to grow and enrich the service we are able to offer to the public.” - Gabrielle Parent-Doliner, Swim Guide Program Manager at Swim Drink Fish Canada

Know Your River

Providing science-based information
about the health of the river

Our Riverwatch Network grew even more

Our Riverwatchers are tireless volunteers who serve as our eyes and ears along the river, but also as active members of their communities. This summer, they tackled some major projects, from shoreline naturalization, to water testing, to education on our river. With a whole network addressing these complex issues, we are able to expand our work over an enormous geographic region that we could never tackle alone. We committed to continuing our work across the watershed by doubling the number of Riverwatchers over the next three years.

“Together with Ottawa Riverkeeper, we were able to engage landowners and Riverwatchers on shoreline naturalization techniques. We look forward to working with them again in the near future!” Chloe Lajoie, Natural Edge Coordinator at Watersheds Canada

We published a scientific study on microplastics in our river

Ottawa Riverkeeper celebrated a big win last year with the federal ban on microbeads in personal care products. We also sampled the Ottawa River for microplastics and co-authored a peer-reviewed journal article on the issue, which will allow us to confirm the decrease in pollution as the ban comes into effect. But our work isn't over yet - microplastics are still an issue in our watershed. We will continue to research the impact of these plastics in our river and engage the public on our findings.

“The Riverwatch volunteers are integral to our microplastic studies on the Ottawa River and its tributaries. Their efforts in sampling for microplastics has already resulted in the publication of a scientific paper and to my knowledge they make up one of the largest citizen science groups in the world working to measure microplastic pollution in lakes and rivers.” - Dr. Jesse Vermaire, Assistant Professor Carleton University

We convened experts to report on the health of our river

Ottawa Riverkeeper gained momentum with our Watershed Health Committee, an expert panel with representatives from universities, subwatershed organizations, and provincial agencies, as well as relevant federal agencies. The committee is leading a science-based assessment of the health of the Ottawa River. They are highlighting data and knowledge gaps that limit the current understanding of watershed health, and will make recommendations to the Ottawa River Watershed Council on suitable indicators to track river health over time.



Photo: Martin Lipman



Photo: Martin Lipman

A Strong Ottawa Riverkeeper

A resilient organization for
the long haul

Senator Murray Sinclair joined our circle of Honorary Riverkeepers

On the last day of May, on the shores of Lemieux Island, some 450 river lovers joined us as we celebrated our fifth annual Riverkeeper Gala - the most successful in our history. From multi-national corporations to small businesses, the Gala was a major show of support from the business community, illustrating the role they have to play in the health of our river. Senator Murray Sinclair became an Honorary Riverkeeper, joining a prestigious circle that includes Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, Kevin Vickers, Stephen Poloz, and Mark Carney.

“There’s no room at the Ottawa Riverkeeper Gala for fairweather friends. That’s because it’s the kind of outdoor gala where one happily attends, rain or shine; it’s just that much fun.” - Caroline Phillips, Ottawa Business Journal

On the move

Ottawa Riverkeeper’s office had been at the old Trailhead building for the past 6 years. It was a cozy, eclectic spot with lots of charm and the occasional dog or two. It was also the place where our staff get to work protecting the health of our magnificent Ottawa River. But, there are plans to tear down the the Trailhead building and so we moved to new digs. Our new space on Bay Street is in a great location with lots of natural light, and an actual office for our Riverkeeper. We’re excited to settle in and get back to what we do best - protecting the river. Come visit us!

Garde-rivière is born

Ottawa Riverkeeper proudly revealed its new French name. After numerous discussions, surveys, and even focus groups, “Garde-rivière des Outaouais” was chosen. Throughout the last few years, we have worked hard to create a bilingual organization, increasing our francophone following online by over 400% by ensuring content is completely bilingual, and increasing subscriptions to our French newsletter by over 25%. Our new name will be an additional tool towards reaching even more francophones, no matter where they are in our watershed.

Your Support

You inspire us and make our work incredible. We are deeply grateful to all our friends, partners, and donors.

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