



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®
GARDE-RIVIÈRE des Outaouais

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

It has been an incredible year for Ottawa Riverkeeper and more importantly, for our beloved Ottawa River. A lot less untreated sewage is flowing into the river from the City of Ottawa thanks to our collective voices, and leadership from Mayor Jim Watson, the province of Ontario and our federal government. This example of working together across jurisdictions is critical for the long-term health of our shared waters.

We are very proud that Ottawa Riverkeeper continues to lead the way to bring players together to find solutions to complex problems related to managing our shared rivers and lakes throughout our diverse watershed.

Our successful 2015 Ottawa River Summit marked an important breakthrough in the protection of the Ottawa River and its tributaries. We are thankful that our two provincial environment ministries have signalled their intention to work together to set protection and restoration priorities for the Ottawa River and to share information and data. It seems obvious, yet without the leadership of Ottawa Riverkeeper, this commitment to work together and share data would not be on the table.

At the Summit, there was energy and optimism in the packed room. There is momentum and a collective desire to acknowledge and celebrate the cultural, heritage, and natural values within the Ottawa River Watershed.

Our work continues to raise awareness in diverse circles, and the number and calibre of people who support us, attend our events and help us is impressive. On behalf of the Board of Directors of Ottawa Riverkeeper I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our good work. It takes a watershed to protect a river. Our river supports life and brings health and happiness to our communities.

We must continue to work together for a healthy and accessible river, and for a watershed where we can safely swim, drink and fish our local waters.

In the River Spirit,

Geoff Green C.M.

Chair, Ottawa Riverkeeper Board of Directors

Ottawa River Summit

Key watershed players from Ontario and Quebec came together on May 29, 2015, to take action on regional water protection at our biggest event ever. Together we charted the course for the future of our watershed.

Ottawa River Watershed Declaration



We're bringing forward a proposal on river governance using the guidelines put forward in The Ottawa River Watershed Declaration. The Declaration was championed by Advisory Committee members, John Karau (representing Conservation Authorities) and David Pharand (Mayor, Duhamel, QC).

These articulate leaders encouraged others to sign the declaration and acknowledge our shared responsibility to preserve the Watershed.

The declaration reminds leaders that the biodiversity and water quality affects the well-being of communities within your watershed. The mayors of Ottawa Jim Watson and of Gatineau Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin signed the Declaration. By acknowledging the important role their cities have to protect and celebrate the Ottawa River they've made themselves more accountable to you.

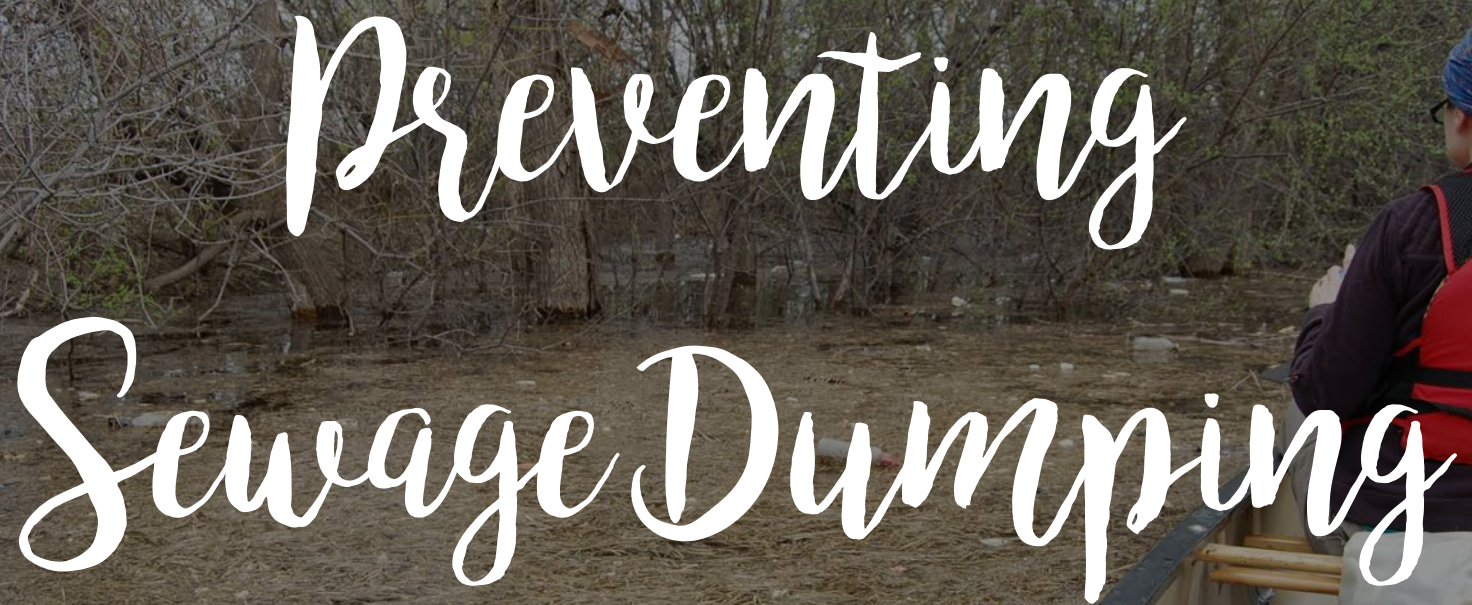
Joint Committee on Water Management

With your help, and the support of the de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation, we welcomed Honourable David Heurtel, Quebec Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and the Fight Against Climate Change and the Honourable Glen Murray, Ontario Minister of Environment and Climate Change to announce the creation of a joint Ontario-Quebec Committee on Water Management.

This committee makes co-operation between Québec and Ontario simpler than before. Now they'll be able to easily share resources and information on a wide range of water management issues.



Preventing Sewage Dumping

A person wearing a blue headband, a dark jacket, and a red life vest is seen from behind, paddling a canoe on a river. The background shows a wooded area with bare trees and a sandy bank.

Almost 10 years ago the father of an avid teenaged paddler approached us about the polluted water his child was training in. Raw sewage was frequently spilling into the teen's training ground via the city's combined sewers. Now we are seeing real change.

This year we celebrated when three levels of government came together to fund new improved infrastructure to reduce the volume of untreated sewage flowing into the Ottawa River from the City of Ottawa's combined sewers. Progress like this only comes with champions like Mayor Jim Watson, MP John Baird, Ottawa Riverkeeper and thousands of people like you who stood up and said no to sewage dumping in our playground.





You helped by...



Plunging In

The second annual Riverkeeper 4K open water swim brought 58 endurance swimmers and 40 volunteers from the shores of Quebec to Ontario proving that water quality knows no borders. The swim highlighted the need for collaboration and action on both sides of the Ottawa River.

Reducing Pollution

Thanks to the support from forward-thinking companies like LUSH and your petitioning, the federal government announced their proposal to add microbeads to the list of toxic substances under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. This step towards eliminating this source of pollution proves how strong your voice is when we speak together for the river.





Embracing your river

Your love of the Ottawa River attracted Alexandra Cousteau who travelled the Ottawa river with a crew of talented filmmakers. They captured the dedicated people and magnificent places that make up our beautiful river while raising awareness of watershed-wide issues.

Reporting Concerns

When you saw something that didn't look right in or around your river, you called our Pollution Hotline so we could help you report the problem and put a stop to the harm.



Taking Action

You got up early on the weekend and headed out to shoreline cleanups and numerous other events and fundraisers in your communities all in the name of a swimmable, drinkable, fishable future. Picking up trash together today keeps the river clean for all us tomorrow.

Riverwatchers



There are 71 Riverwatchers throughout the watershed that work to take care of those sections of the river and tributaries closest to them. Being a Riverwatcher goes beyond using your eyes and ears on the river and around the watershed. Each one is an active community member who dedicates their time to citizen science, outreach and/or community issues related to river health.

Riverwatcher Louis Lafontaine is a shining example of the positive impact our Riverwatchers can have on their communities. Louis grew up in Hawkesbury. He remembers how the construction of the Carillon dam in the early 1960s changed the landscape of the town and how pollution from pulp and paper mills made the river and creeks unswimmable.

The image of the discoloured water and sulfur smell stayed in his mind. It inspired him to do environmental volunteer work for different organizations and groups. Three and a half years ago Louis became a Riverwatcher after his friend Bonnie, also a Riverwatcher, recommended he get involved with Riverkeeper.

Over his time as a riverwatcher, Louis has monitored the water quality of both the river and Hawkesbury Creek. He has organized shoreline cleanups, spoken to schools and community groups about stewardship and reached out to his friends and neighbours.

His most recent shoreline cleanup brought together members of his fishing club, neighbours and a school group. The area this cleanup focused on had the unique problem of being very close to a snow dump on the shore of the Ottawa River. In the spring, when the melt starts, the accumulated garbage that was in the snow ends up in the river. By cleaning up the site early Louis and his team stopped garbage from getting into the river.

Louis has also reached out to youth in his community using Riverkeeper's interactive stormwater model to teach children how land use impacts water quality and river health in high schools and at the National Defense Headquarters annual Fishing Day. Like Louis, all Riverwatchers work with Ottawa Riverkeeper to find effective solutions to their local problems by using their own unique skills and passions to inspire river appreciate and action.



Swim Guide

It is no secret we love swimming in our rivers which is why each summer we collaborate on Swim Guide with 45 other Waterkeeper organizations. Swim Guide is a worldwide network dedicated to giving you real time updates on beaches across North America and New Zealand. The app was built by our friends at Lake Ontario Waterkeeper who wanted to make getting in the water as simple and as safe as possible.

Ottawa Riverkeeper has added 332 beaches from around our watershed to Swim Guide. As of this year you can read about all of them in both official languages and discover whether they are safe for swimming.

This year alone we've expanded our coverage by adding 30 new beaches in Ontario and 50 in Quebec, adding the entire Montérégie region to Swim Guide, because we know people love to swim in Quebec! If your favourite beach is tagged in red it means that bacteria levels are elevated and swimming is not advised.

Recreational water quality guidelines were developed to protect us from potential health risks, so understanding water quality where you swim is really important.

We're excited that The Weather Network, Canada's most popular weather and information services, has begun using Swim Guide on their beach reports.

Reaching a digital audience is great but meeting swimmers face to face is the best way for us to get the word out. That's why our Swim Guide Coordinator and volunteers spent many summer days at beaches in Gatineau and Ottawa to talk to the community about Swim Guide and what we can do to improve water quality and protect our rights to swim in our river.

This summer Swim Guide reached over 500,000 individual users. That's amazing. A half a million people have better access to water quality, which means they can avoid getting sick from swimming in contaminated waters.



Aquahacking

Programmers, digital specialists and technically savvy people have long been putting their heads together to solve problems at events known as hackathons. We're proud to say that Ottawa Riverkeeper played an important role in organizing Canada's first hacking competition devoted to water.

Over the course of three months, dedicated teams of scientists, programmers, app developers and water lovers collaborated with mentors and field experts to build technological solutions for challenges facing the Ottawa River.

On May 30th, 15 teams of hackers pitched their innovative solutions at our Aquahacking event to a high-powered jury, presided by Alexandra Cousteau. Our partnership with the de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation and IBM brought together citizens, programmers and scientists who believe in using technology to protect Canada's waterways. There were five winning teams at the event including Kat and Mark who have now co-founded a non-profit organization named Water Rangers. The organization will help turn swimmers, paddlers, anglers and other recreational water users into water stewards.

Kat's family has had a cottage in the watershed for four generations. Her father tested water quality for the Federation of Lakes of Val-Des-Monts. Mark's love for the river was ignited after his move to Ottawa from the United States. He began volunteering on shoreline cleanups, swimming and biking by the river.

Becoming a water steward is easy with the Water Ranger app because it allows you to report observations of invasive species, garbage, pollution and water quality data. Their website makes your observations accessible to anyone, allowing stewards like you throughout the watershed to compare conditions and share insights about river health.

The Water Rangers team is working closely with Ottawa Riverkeeper to build an app that will work in the Ottawa River Watershed and beyond. This open, collaborative, and simple tool makes demanding change on the Ottawa River easier and more transparent than before. It launches this spring, when the snow melts.

Gala 2015

When more than 350 unabashed river lovers arrived for our 2015 Riverkeeper Gala something magical happened. A heretofore inaccessible industrial site in the middle of the river became the coolest place in town – uniting English, Québécois and First Nations guests around a shared passion for freshwater protection. Canada's Ambassador to Ireland and 2015 Honorary Riverkeeper award recipient Kevin Vickers, a man roundly regarded as a national hero for his selfless actions when a gunman stormed Parliament Hill, spoke movingly about the healing powers of rivers and his need to return home to the shores of the Miramichi River for solace after the life-changing events on October 22nd. Canadian hero Kevin Vickers spoke about the therapeutic power of his home water, the Miramichi River. After his speech guests were able to discuss the future of the Ottawa River with each other and celebrate its beauty.



Meet our Board of Directors

The Board of Directors of Ottawa Riverkeeper is responsible for the strategic direction of the organization and provides guidance to the Riverkeeper and Executive Director. Our board members have extensive and diverse expertise, but all share a concern and passion for the Ottawa River.

Geoff Green, C.M. Chair
Raymond Brunet, Vice-Chair
Regan Morris, Secretary
Mark Patry, Treasurer
David Spence, Past President
Jean Perras

Barry Stemshorn
Megan Conway
Kathleen Edwards
Carrie Wallace
Colleen Westeinde
Jean Castonguay

Meet our team

Meredith Brown

Ruth McKlusky

Lars Wessman

Amanda Masterson

Adele Michon

Lisa Harding

Brigitte Boudreau

Joe Ryan

Meaghan Murphy

Sophie Lafrance

Stephanie Bolt

Joel Hamieri

