



## Ottawa Riverkeeper Works Cooperatively to Protect Our River

### Who We Are

Citizen-based Ottawa Riverkeeper works to protect and enhance the ecological health and integrity of the Ottawa River system for the enjoyment and benefit of its Ontario and Québec communities. We encourage responsible decision-making, public education and participation, and compliance with existing protection regulations through expert, independent and cooperative actions. We work cooperatively to ensure that communities maintain control over their local waterway.

Ottawa Riverkeeper is a licensed member of Waterkeeper Alliance, an international grass roots advocacy organization founded by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The importance of the Ottawa River has long been recognized by individuals and communities that have established on the great river's shores. Everyone living in the watershed benefits from the critical services this freshwater ecosystem provides. No one can deny our need for clean water.

In 2001, a group of concerned citizens formed a board of directors and started Ottawa Riverkeeper to respond to increasing anthropogenic pressures facing the river system as well as jurisdictional difficulties associated with this inter-provincial river.

Ottawa Riverkeeper understands that solutions to our current problems must come from individuals as well as business and government.

The organization has been operating with professional, full-time staff since 2003 and together with a team of dedicated and highly skilled volunteers we are making waves throughout the watershed.

In May 2006 Ottawa Riverkeeper released the first ever State of the River Report for the Ottawa River system. The report confirmed our credibility as a science-based organization and authority on the health of the river.

Involvement in local and regional issues over time has established our "watchdog" reputation on the river.

The general public, municipalities and government agencies are turning to

Ottawa Riverkeeper for leadership and action. This summer alone Ottawa Riverkeeper headlined CBC and CTV news (radio and television) three times while working on issues that concern the public; beach closures, fish kills and illegal shoreline development practices.

In communities throughout the watershed Ottawa Riverkeeper is being asked to sit on advisory committees, meet with members of parliament, meet with environment ministries, make presentations, take on local issues, meet with mayors and councillors, inform the media, monitor water quality and investigate and stop illegal practices that impact the river.

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:

### The Ottawa River:

- Globally significant; part of the world's largest freshwater ecosystem
- A major source of drinking water and electricity for over two million people
- Provides recreation, tourism and enjoyment for millions of Canadians each year

- **River Watch**
- **River Report**
- **Pollution Hotline**
- **Website and Current News**
- **River Patrol**
- **Speaker Series**
- **Presentations**
- **Community Events**
- **Volunteer Network**
- **Finding Effective Solutions**

### The Ottawa River:

- Water quality has declined; fish contain unsafe levels of contaminants, beaches are often closed
- Over 40 species of plants, fish, insects, reptiles, birds and mammals are at risk
- Untreated stormwater and sewage continues to flow into the river along its length



# PROGRAMS & SERVICES

## RIVER WATCH



Up and down the enormous Ottawa River there are many people and community groups who want to help protect the health of the river system. Many are unsure of what they can do. Working in unison, we create a strong and clear voice when it comes to protecting our river.

River Watchers identify themselves with specific sections of the river or a tributary and become involved in ways that reflect their own interest, time and skills. Each River Watch group identifies the activities in their local community that may be having an impact on the river. Together, they work with Ottawa Riverkeeper to find effective solutions to their local problems.

The River Watch network goes beyond having eyes and ears on the river around the watershed. It is a program that builds capacity among individuals and community stewardship groups along the Ottawa River and its tributaries.

Ottawa Riverkeeper supports River Watch groups with:

- training and workshops
- information and expertise about current issues and effective solutions
- contacts for important authorities, groups and valuable resources
- support through web page hosting, publicity, promotion materials, ideas and problem solving strategies
- access to the Ottawa Riverkeeper for events, meetings, water patrols and site investigations

Each year more energetic citizens and organized groups of cottage associations and stewardship groups join our official network of River Watchers. We currently have twelve official River Watch groups as well as a group of pilots, paddlers and scuba divers who view the river from above, at the surface and below where most eyes don't go!

**Our River Watchers are volunteering their time to undertake the following challenges in their communities:**

- water quality monitoring
- river clean ups
- public education and outreach
- observations of river features over time
- riverbank naturalization projects
- inventory of plants and wildlife
- community mapping
- working with local and provincial authorities to resolve ecological problems at the local level



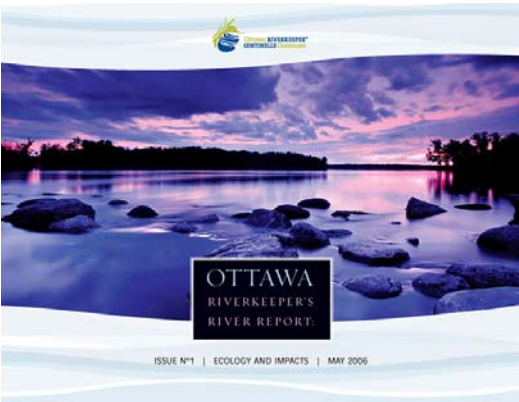
*Ottawa Riverkeeper staff on the river with River Watcher Evelyn St. Amour*



## THE RIVER REPORT

In May 2006, Ottawa Riverkeeper released a comprehensive report on the state of the Ottawa River. The report was published to inform a broad audience about the current physical and biological conditions of the Ottawa River watershed and the impacts of human activities on the river. The report reflects Ottawa Riverkeeper's mandate which is to protect the ecological integrity of the Ottawa River system by gathering independent science-based data that can be used to identify important ecological issues and priorities affecting the health of the river. Ottawa Riverkeeper's River Report is unique because no other group is studying and reporting on the cumulative impacts of pollution and development on the river system.

The report has been extremely well received; findings from the report headlined CBC, Radio Canada and CTV news, the Riverkeeper gave 5 radio interviews and many newspapers around the watershed ran stories on Ottawa Riverkeeper's River Report. The professional, science-based report has served to raise the profile of our organization with the general public as well as government agencies and politicians. Ottawa Riverkeeper will publish a report every two years with a focussed theme for each subsequent report. Each report will build on knowledge, research and events from the previous years.



"This report is the first ever comprehensive and broad-scale publication on the health of the Ottawa River system."

## POLLUTION HOTLINE & WEBSITE

The hotline is a toll-free number that people call to ask questions or report concerns regarding the health of the river. As well, our bilingual website is a very important information source and while online, people can file a pollution report that goes directly to the Riverkeeper via email. Ottawa Riverkeeper receives phone calls and emails on a daily basis. During the month of August this year there was a major fish kill on the Ottawa River. Our Riverkeeper fielded over one hundred calls and email enquiries from concerned citizens on both sides of the river with information or questions regarding the fish kill. At the peak of the fish kill our website received over 5000 hits in one day. Through our website and numerous media interviews, Ottawa Riverkeeper kept interested individuals informed about the fish kill investigation. As our organization gains profile, we are receiving an increasing number of enquiries and therefore the time required to respond to the public's concerns is also increasing. Our website also features a free electronic newsletter that is published in both official languages. We currently have over 750 subscribers to our e-news.

"At the peak of the fish kill our website received over 5000 hits in one day."

**Hotline: 1-888-9KEEPER**

**[www.ottawariverkeeper.ca](http://www.ottawariverkeeper.ca)**



# RIVER PATROL

During the months of June through September the Riverkeeper patrols different sections of the Ottawa River. The objectives of being on the river are to:

1. investigate citizen complaints about river issues
2. investigate point and non-point pollution sources
3. monitor water quality
4. become familiar with the river and track changes over time
5. map important ecological features
6. meet people who are using the river and educate them
7. bring media and decision-makers onto the river
8. promote stewardship and be a visible presence; and learn from the river



*There is no substitute for being on the river to fully understand the pressures the river is currently facing.*

To date, the Riverkeeper has been patrolling the river by kayak and canoe or in motor boats with local guides who are willing to take the Riverkeeper out on their section of the river. This has been extremely successful and we will continue to get out on the river in this capacity. However, to effectively respond to complaints and incidents on the river, Ottawa Riverkeeper is looking to own our own boat.

## Riverkeeper seeks Patrol Boat

As a member of the International **WATERKEEPER® Alliance**, Ottawa Riverkeeper is required to patrol our river system. Currently, we own a touring kayak which is adequate under certain conditions yet unfortunately does not fulfill all of the needs of our River Patrol Program. The new boat will be used to provide a visible presence on the Ottawa River and its tributaries. It will also provide a platform for ongoing water quality monitoring and research as well as outreach and education activities.

We are aiming to purchase a 16-18 foot flat water boat that is light weight and easy to transport (we have many dams to travel around in our watershed!). The boat must allow for running in shallow waters and give the Riverkeeper flexibility for investigating concerns along the river. The boat must seat at least 4 people comfortably. The majority of time the boat will have only one or two passengers so we are buying to accommodate the most typical use. Given our commitment to being stewards of the river, we will run a 4-stroke engine only as these engines run more efficiently and clean than any other.





# PUBLIC EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In its short existence, Ottawa Riverkeeper has become an important resource for people who have questions or concerns about the Ottawa River and its tributaries. The Ottawa River which divides the provinces of Québec and Ontario is a jurisdictional quagmire. When a problem arises on the river, it is not easy to know who to turn to. Multiple agencies and authorities govern regional and local issues and many problems fall between the cracks. Concerned citizens are turning to Ottawa Riverkeeper for answers.

To educate and engage the public regarding the health of our river system and how we can work together to protect it, Ottawa Riverkeeper has initiated the following programs and services:

## Speaker Series

Each quarter Ottawa Riverkeeper organizes a speaker to present a river topic of interest to a local audience. Our past topics included: water quality trends, recreational paddling on the river, geoh heritage of the Ottawa River and biodiversity in the river with an emphasis on Sturgeon and Mussels. Our presentations have been consistently well-attended.



*Tim Haxton spoke about Lake Sturgeon at one of our speaker series events.*

## Community Presentations

Our Riverkeeper gives presentations throughout the watershed to raise awareness of watershed issues and engage individuals or groups to become stewards of the river. Given the demand for such talks, we have become strategic about reaching out to targeted groups and geographical regions; unfortunately we cannot accept all of our invitations. Recent presentations our Riverkeeper gave were hosted by the Arnprior Field Naturalists, Esprit Rafting in Fort Coulonge, Rotary Club's Probus in Ottawa central and the Britannia Yacht Club. We have also been invited to a number of governmental organizations to discuss our organization's goals and programs. These include the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Commissioner of the Environment at the Auditor General of Canada and the City of Pembroke municipal council.

This year, a volunteer outreach committee that consists of experienced educators is committed to expanding Ottawa Riverkeeper's outreach program. Our goal is to engage youth and we will be targeting school kids as well as scouts and brownies to educate youth on water related concepts.



*The Riverkeeper talks to high school students about the Ottawa River at the annual Envirothon.*

## PUBLIC EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### Community Events

Encouraging people to get out and enjoy the river is the first step toward creating a river steward. Throughout the year we organize events to encourage people to celebrate their river and get involved in maintaining its ecological integrity. Our events include frequent river clean ups and a group paddle from Victoria Island to Petrie Island to celebrate Canadian Rivers Day (this year we had over 100 participants). We lead interpretive walks by the river and organize field trips to see sites of ecological significance. We also participate in and receive donations from the annual WaterWalker Film Festival in Ottawa/Gatineau and the Ottawa Riverkeeper Triathlon at Westboro Beach.

Ottawa Riverkeeper is invited to participate in numerous events throughout the year. We typically bring a booth with relevant information and news as well as a staff or volunteers to answer questions or concerns about the river.



*Canadian Rivers Day paddle on the Ottawa River, June 2006.*



*2006 Fall Paddle and Garbage Pickup*

### Volunteer Program

Our organization has been successful and effective thanks to the help of many skilled and enthusiastic volunteers who believe in our mission. We have four committees that bring expertise from our community to help Ottawa Riverkeeper. Our science committee has 12 scientists from academia, government and consulting companies that meet once a month to discuss the science behind emerging issues and current research. Our outreach committee of 6 professionals is working to bring our message to diverse audiences. Over 35 volunteers worked on the River Report in capacities as diverse as scientific research, mapping, photography, editing, translation, communication and graphic design. Hundreds of volunteers organize and participate in our stream cleanups throughout the watershed. We have no shortage of people who want to help, only staff capacity to guide and engage the volunteers.



*Team of volunteers with Riverkeeper*

## WORKING COOPERATIVELY TO FIND SOLUTIONS

One of Ottawa Riverkeeper's most important goals is to encourage individual residents, communities, governments and industry to make changes to improve the health of the Ottawa River system. This task requires many diverse tools. We believe it is important to recognize leaders around the watershed that are taking action to reduce their impact on our river systems. We continually work with individuals, business and governments to encourage positive change. Our Riverkeeper is able to advance change and work cooperatively to find effective solutions by:

- Attending community meetings and public consultations
- Giving presentations to municipal councils and committees
- Participating as a technical advisor to draft the City of Ottawa's Stormwater Management Strategy
- Participating on the AECL Stewardship Council for Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories
- Intervening at Public Hearings on behalf of the river
- Participating on the Rockcliffe Development Advisory Committee
- Facilitating the enforcement of existing ecological protection regulations
- Commenting on policy at all levels that may have an impact on the health of our river system

### GOALS OF OTTAWA RIVERKEEPER

1. Sustain and enhance the ecological health of the Ottawa River;  
**Identify breaches of environmental laws and regulations and pursue compliance**
2. Conduct ecological monitoring and research;  
**Develop and maintain an expert understanding of the river's ecological values, processes and special features**
3. Promote public awareness and stewardship;  
**Inform the public and key decision-makers about issues impacting the ecological health of the river**
4. Encourage partnerships and coordination.  
**Identify and establish partnerships with individuals, communities or organizations working toward a shared vision**



# The People Behind Ottawa Riverkeeper

## Board of Directors 2006-07

- John Bouza, *President*
- Dr. Ole Hendrickson
- Mark Patry
- Gordon Clifford
- Nicole DesRoches
- Debbie Ferrigan
- Geoff Green
- Linda Hiles
- Chad Nelson
- Dr. Colin Rennie

## Our Riverkeeper



**Meredith Brown** is the Riverkeeper and Executive Director for Ottawa Riverkeeper. Meredith has been studying freshwater ecosystems and working to protect and restore them for over ten years. She holds degrees in environmental engineering and biology as well as a Master's in Resource and Environmental Management. Meredith works with individuals, organized groups, business, municipalities and government agencies on both sides of the Ottawa River to find effective solutions to current pollution problems. In her two years as the Riverkeeper she has significantly raised the profile of Ottawa Riverkeeper so that it has become "the voice" for the Ottawa River. Meredith and her family live on the Gatineau River; the largest tributary of the Ottawa River.

A **KEEPER®** is a full-time, non-governmental ombudsman whose special responsibility is to be the full-time public advocate for a water body. Fundamentally, it is the keeper's job to advocate compliance with environmental laws, respond to citizen complaints, identify problems that affect his or her body of water and come up with appropriate solutions.

**Our hundreds of volunteers who help us deliver our programs and messages.**



## Director of Outreach

**Delphine Hasle** manages our volunteer program, coordinates our River Watch program and organizes our speakers series and other numerous events. She has a Masters Degree in Oceanography and extensive experience monitoring water quality. For many years Delphine ran the second largest volunteer estuarine water quality monitoring in the United States for Indian River Lagoon Watch.

Ottawa Riverkeeper's work is made possible by the generous support of our members, donors, businesses and foundations. Some of our community supporters include:



Ottawa **RIVERKEEPER®**

Office Location: **366 Richmond Road, Ottawa** (located at Mountain Equipment Co-op)

Phone: (613) 864-7442

Email: [keeper@ottawariverkeeper.ca](mailto:keeper@ottawariverkeeper.ca)

[www.ottawariverkeeper.ca](http://www.ottawariverkeeper.ca)

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