



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®
GARDE-RIVIÈRE des Outaouais

Welcome!

Dear friends in river protection,

This year has been a year of dreams coming true. Thanks to your unwavering support, dedication, and love for the river, we've made remarkable strides to ensure that this beloved freshwater gem remains swimmable, drinkable, and fishable for all species and all generations.

The stories and achievements you'll find in this report are all because of you. From the community scientists shedding light on the challenges facing our watershed to the volunteers bringing life and energy to the Learning Lab, and the donors whose generosity enables crucial discussions with decision-makers about freshwater protection—you are the force behind it all.

This was a big year! We launched Ottawa Riverkeeper's first-ever Watershed Report Card, our comprehensive review of the Ottawa River's health based on the work of our science team and powered by your involvement in community-based monitoring. We also realized a long-standing dream with the official launch of River School, providing educational programming to classrooms and students throughout the watershed, and we've been blown away by the response and popularity of the program. And all of this, and so much more, has taken root in our new home at River House, which has blossomed into a vibrant hub connecting our community to the river.

Thank you, merci, and mīgwech—for being part of this incredible journey. Together, we are ensuring a thriving river for all who depend on it.

In the river spirit,



Colleen Westeinde

Colleen Westeinde
Chair of the Board of Directors



L. Reinsborough

Laura Reinsborough
Riverkeeper & CEO

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The watershed of the Kichi Zībī is located on the unceded territories of the Anishinābeg Algonquin Nation. The people of the Anishinābeg Algonquin Nation are the traditional and ongoing stewards of these lands and waters.

Ottawa Riverkeeper recognizes the legacy of colonialism that continues to have profound impacts on the rights of Algonquin people, and that there is urgent need for meaningful actions that truly confront this legacy.

Science

Watershed Report Card

In 2024, Ottawa Riverkeeper unveiled our most comprehensive analysis of the Ottawa River and its tributaries to date. Using the 14 indicators of watershed health we've tracked for years, the 2024 Watershed Report Card contains much to celebrate, alongside trends to monitor, and reasons for concern.

The overall grade for the health of the watershed was a C. That's a passing grade, but not the grade that this river deserves. As the Report Card emphasizes, climate change and human development are reshaping the Ottawa River. Now is the time to act: to deepen our understanding of these shifts, mitigate their impacts, and reverse the trends threatening the health of our watershed.

To complement the Report Card, we released a wealth of additional resources throughout the year. These included detailed reports on surprising findings, such as mercury levels and shifting flow patterns, along with interactive dashboards on dams and invasive species. We also launched videos explaining key indicators and made all our data publicly accessible via our Open Data Portal.

The Report Card not only provides a clear picture of watershed health but also outlines critical actions for the public and policymakers to safeguard this remarkable resource. This foundational work will guide us in building targeted strategies and taking meaningful action to protect and restore the watershed for years to come.



C
Overall Grade



28,795

visits to our Open Data Portal

Community-based Monitoring

This year, our science team continued to nurture our expansive community-based monitoring programs with new tools and opportunities to contribute data, forging connections across the watershed. We hosted training sessions, both in-person and on-line, and engaged directly with community members from the mouth of the river up to Lake Temiskaming and beyond.

We are more equipped than ever to work together to understand the health of our watershed, through programs like phosphorus monitoring, algal bloom observations, invasive species spotting, and our road salt monitoring program.



845

water samples processed

Beachgoers checked water quality on Swim Guide

349,472

times

In 2024

121

community scientists

275

samples collected

146

monitoring locations

1,130

reports and observations



Recreational Water Quality Monitoring

We had another year of successful beach water quality testing, continuing to monitor recreational water quality at beaches and swimming spots in the National Capital Region, and compiling watershed-wide water quality results for public viewing on Swim Guide.

The verdict is that we are lucky to have such great water quality in the National Capital Region! We even made a bit of a splash this year by comparing the stellar water quality results of the Ottawa River to another capital river, the Seine, which faced numerous water quality issues during the Olympics.

Education

River School

Dreams do come true! In 2024, Ottawa Riverkeeper officially launched River School, offering educational workshops designed to connect students of the watershed with the rivers that flow through their communities.



151 workshops delivered in 2024
reaching nearly 4,000 students

The response exceeded all expectations: our fall 2024 workshops filled up quickly, and bookings have already extended into spring 2025 and beyond. Seeing this vision resonate so strongly with students and teachers alike confirms the need for hands-on, place-based river education. We believe people protect what they love, and fostering students' connection to the Ottawa River helps them appreciate its importance and understand their role in its stewardship.

River School workshops align with Quebec and Ontario curricula, offering hands-on learning for Grades 2-12 on topics such as Biodiversity, Water Quality, and Plastic Pollution. We are also co-creating educational programming with Indigenous knowledge holders, weaving together Indigenous knowledge and the scientific insights gained through our community science work and data analysis.



"Ottawa needs a River School to connect youth to water and to help guide and inspire our future water leaders."

- Riverkeeper Emerita Meredith Brown in "ARMCHAIR MAYOR: Why Ottawa needs a 'River School'", the Ottawa Citizen, August 21st, 2018



Over 585 hrs spent building the canoe

Canoeing Together

For over a year, Indigenous youth have been building a wigwāš chīman (birch bark canoe) at Ottawa Riverkeeper's Learning Lab. Led by Anishinaabe Algonquin knowledge holder Pinock Smith from Kitigan Zibi, the canoe has transformed from rolls of bark and strands of spruce roots into a frame and now into a vessel ready to paddle down the river! Participants, including dedicated youth from the Assembly of Seven Generations, gained hands-on experience in every aspect of the build, from harvesting materials to gumming.

Throughout the process, participants learned about watershed health and how traditional techniques, such as those used by Pinock, rely on healthy forests and ecosystems. With these ecosystems increasingly under threat from climate change and other stressors, the traditions tied to them face challenges too. The teachings from this project will inform new educational content that weaves together traditional and scientific knowledge around watershed health.

Turtle Conservation Project

Baby turtles returned to River House again this year! This collaborative conservation project, involving the Petrie Island Turtle Project, Friends of Petrie Island, the Canadian Wildlife Federation, and Ottawa Riverkeeper, helps to protect and support local turtle populations. Collecting and incubating at-risk turtle eggs gives these turtles a head start during the most vulnerable point in their life.

The program also serves as a powerful educational and outreach initiative, drawing hundreds of visitors eager to see the newly hatched turtles and learn about the river's ecosystems and biodiversity. These tiny hatchlings have quickly become powerful ambassadors for the Ottawa River.



354 baby turtles released back to the river over the course of 15 release events

Over 580 people joined Ottawa Riverkeeper for turtle days



Outreach

Shoreline Cleanups

Nothing embodies this community's dedication to a healthy river more than gathering for a shoreline cleanup. These inspiring events spark direct community action and create opportunities for meaningful collaboration.

This year, volunteers joined forces to clean up multiple sites along the river, including the ecologically significant protected area on Kettle Island, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Whether the cleanup was with students at a regional school, with families in a city park, or a team-building project with local businesses, each cleanup was a showcase of this community's dedication to the Ottawa River.

823
participants collected over
1,600 kg
of trash at
13 shoreline cleanups



Learning Lab

The Learning Lab located on the lower level of the NCC River House is well on its way to becoming the essential hub for public education and the vibrant space for community engagement that we have dreamed of. This year, our staff and dedicated volunteers welcomed visitors into an immersive world filled with hands-on activities, games, and educational experiences, all focused on deepening a connection to the Ottawa River.

Over the summer, we opened the Learning Lab to the public for four days a week and featured special themed events every Saturday, such as an exploration of benthic macroinvertebrates, a turtle-themed crafting workshop with the Beacon Hill Craft Club, collaborative art projects with Carol Howard Donati and Emily Rose Michaud, and a dive into the region's history led by youth participants in the Anishinābe Odjibikan Indigenous Archaeological Field School.

5,048
people reached at the Learning Lab in 2024



220

visitors to our booth



Courons Gatineau

We were thrilled to be part of the first-ever Courons Gatineau event as the charity partner. This running race paid homage to the region's rivers, the Ottawa and the Gatineau, with the slogan "River to River." It was wonderful to connect with attendees and community members at our booth where our outreach volunteers shared the wonders of our local waterways. Thank you to everyone who donated as part of their registration!

\$3,254

raised for river protection



2,400

people learned about the river at

16 community events



In the Community

Engaging with the river community on your turf is one of our favourite ways to spread the love for the Ottawa River. This year, we showed up at local events, museums, bioblitzes, Rotary club gatherings, fishing and angling meetups, a water-themed Steampunk show, and many more community events.



Advocacy

Nuclear Waste

After many years of interventions, assessments, criticisms and public concern, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) approved the construction of the Near Surface Disposal Facility (NSDF) at Chalk River in February 2024. Although the project has improved since it was originally proposed, thanks in part to interventions from Ottawa Riverkeeper and many other advocacy organizations, there remain serious concerns.

Foremost among these concerns is the inadequate consultation of Indigenous communities. Ottawa Riverkeeper supports the Anishinābeg Algonquin communities who assert they were not adequately consulted as part of the NSDF licensing process.

Additional concerns include those around the choice of location for the NSDF, the wastewater treatment plant proposed, and ongoing monitoring at the site for years to come. We will continue to follow this issue as it develops and look for more opportunities to strengthen freshwater protection related to the issue of nuclear waste in our watershed in the years to come.

We first submitted comments about the NSDF in 2017, and since then we have:

participated in over **40** hearings and meetings with government and regulators,

written **15** articles to keep the public informed on this issue,

and made **8** official submissions and comments to government.



American Eel

The dramatic decline in the American eel population is one of the greatest ecological tragedies in the watershed. This year, Ottawa Riverkeeper continued advocating for eel ladders, which are essential for enabling this migratory species to access its natural habitat.

In collaboration with Indigenous groups and environmental organizations, we participated in key discussions at meetings in Akwesasne and at River House, where pathways for action were considered and set in motion.

Support for eel ladders is strong, and there is growing momentum for fish-safe turbines, with Anishinābeg Algonquin communities leading the way. We are determined to push this issue forward together.

Forever Chemicals

Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), known colloquially as “forever chemicals” due to their persistent nature, are an issue of concern in the watershed and globally. Ottawa Riverkeeper continues to advocate for much-needed protections from these substances to be put in place, alongside better tracking and data collection on their spread in the environment.

In 2024, we took significant steps, including participating in a press conference on Parliament Hill with allied organizations, submitting formal comments to the federal review of PFAS, and presenting to the Federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

One of our concerns has been that the monitoring done by the federal government is too narrowly targeted. We have therefore started to track PFAS contamination in the watershed by collecting our own data to better understand the spread of these forever chemicals in our waterways. We’ll have more to share once we’ve completed our monitoring and analysis of the data.



Working with Government

The official establishment of the Canada Water Agency (CWA) was a major development in 2024, and one we have anticipated and prepared for over several years. This year, Ottawa Riverkeeper engaged with the CWA to build strong working relationships and communicate the key issues affecting the Ottawa River watershed.

Our team met with Interim President Daniel Wolfish and other representatives multiple times, and we participated in the National Freshwater Data Strategy two-day workshop hosted by the CWA.

Beyond these efforts, we presented twice to the Federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development and held discussions with various government officials. In these engagements, we highlighted important findings from our 2024 Watershed Report Card, aiming to drive action toward effective solutions and mitigations.



Events

Riverkeeper Gala

The watershed's most anticipated party returned for a second year at the NCC River House, enchanting guests with an unforgettable night under a mystical theme. The 2024 Riverkeeper Gala, presented by Insurance Bureau of Canada, was a magical evening celebrating the river's future, complete with fortune readings, gourmet fare, and vibrant music.

The night was brilliantly emceed by long-time host Evan Solomon and opened with a welcome from Celine Whiteduck and a Water Song from Stephanie Peltier. Honorary Riverkeeper Jill Heinerth shared heartfelt words about the deep bond we share with the river and its vital role in our lives. The musical performances by River City Junction and Lyle Odjick set the tone for an evening of spirited celebration. From start to finish, the Gala was a breathtaking reminder of how we can gather together to support this amazing river.



Over
300
Gala guests &
more than
\$300K
raised for the river



Riverkeeper Classic

Gorgeous weather, enthusiastic players, and dedicated volunteers came together this year to mark a fantastic debut for our first-ever charity golf tournament, the Riverkeeper Classic.

Players enjoyed a round of 9 holes followed by dinner and a silent auction, all in support of the river. The event also featured special guest Olympic Sprint Canoeist Sophia Jensen, who shared her personal connection to the water and the importance of protecting it. All around, it was a hole-in-one for the Ottawa River!

\$18,825
raised for the river

THE BIG RIVER GIVE

This year we launched the largest fundraising campaign in Ottawa Riverkeeper history: **The Big River Give**.

This \$5 million campaign will secure a healthy future for the Ottawa River watershed by connecting you and your community to the river like never before. Together, we will amplify Ottawa Riverkeeper's programs and build a community of river lovers like you ready to take action on important environmental issues.



The Big River Give will:

Teach **2,500** additional students annually about the importance of a healthy river and ecosystem

Inspire **10,000** visitors to connect with the river at the Learning Lab every year

Bring community groups and decision-makers together to tackle the important issues facing your waterways

Uncover the state of the river, and what is threatening it, through new and expanded research and community science programs

Engage and equip communities to take action on important river issues



Our People

Staff

Riverkeeper & CEO
Laura Reinsborough

Managing Director
Dave Rayner

Director of Philanthropy
Chloe Hillier

Director of Science & Policy
Larissa Holman

Director of Education & Community Engagement
Julia Ostertag

Communications Manager
Matthew Brocklehurst

River School Manager
Jocelyn Sutherland

Communications & Design Coordinator
Mark Bernards

Database & Fundraising Coordinator
Ian Atwell

Scientist
Liam Nguyen

Educator
Maxime Chaumont-Lessard

Operations Coordinator
Naomi Davies

Science Programs Coordinator
Elizabeth Grater

Donor Stewardship Coordinator
Meryem Alami

Events Specialist
Caroline Gomersall

Fundraising Coordinator
Leah Smith

Seasonal Staff
Ana Andersson
Gabrielle Camp-Lagueux
Daniel Cantin
Libby Lacroix
Thanuji Ranasingha
Tara Wiebe

Outgoing Staff
Emily Smith

We want to acknowledge and thank everyone who has been a part of the Ottawa Riverkeeper team this year. Your work and dedication are so valuable in keeping the Ottawa River clean for us all!



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Meredith Brown

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Water Leaders
Stig Larsson
Sen. Rosa Galvez
Founders of Ottawa Riverkeeper
Pacte de l'Amitié
Mission 100 Tonnes
River Surf Ottawa-Gatineau
Autumn Peltier
Paul Dewar
de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation
Jim Watson
Gord Nixon

Ottawa Riverkeeper mourns the recent passing of the Honourable Murray Sinclair, Mizhana Gheezhik. Among his countless accomplishments, he generously accepted the title of Honorary Riverkeeper in 2017. We celebrate his remarkable life and legacy.

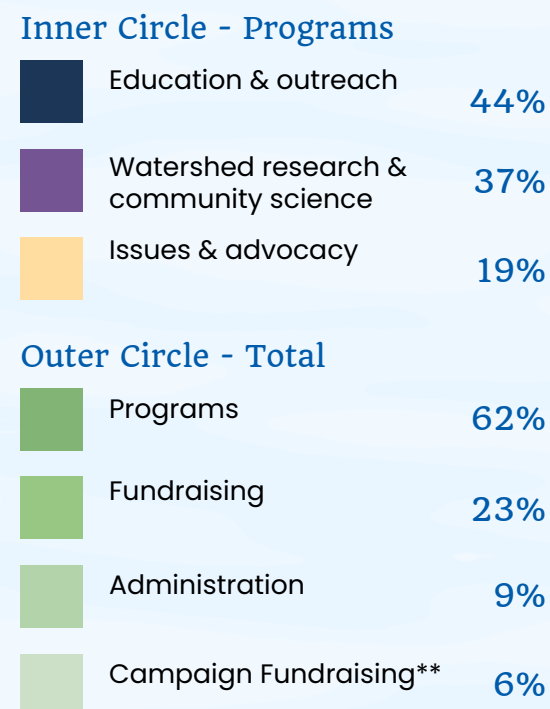
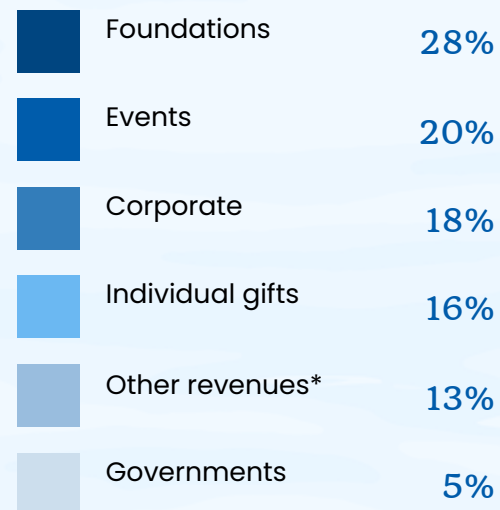
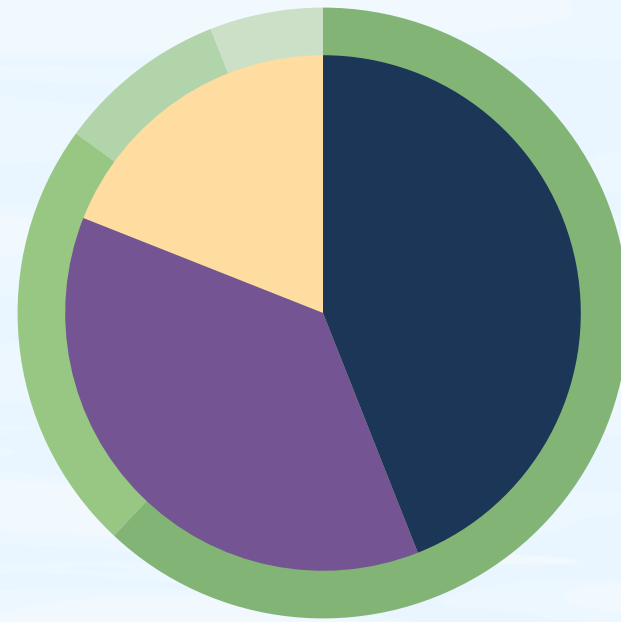
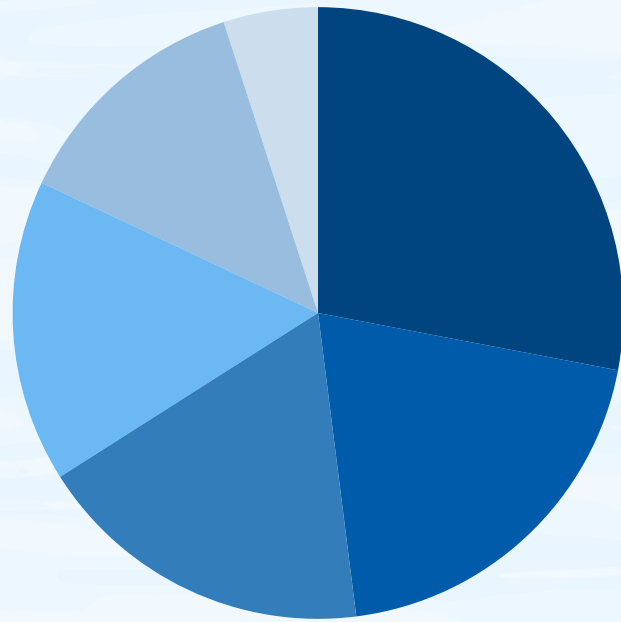


Our Financials

For the fiscal year ending March 31 2024

Revenue: \$ 1,851,953

Expenses: \$ 1,854,643



* Other revenues include amortization of deferred contributions received in prior years relating to capital assets

** Activities related to the Big River Give

Your Support

For the fiscal year ending March 31 2024

\$ 100,000 +

Desjardins
RBC Foundation

\$ 50,000 - \$ 99,999

Anonymous
Echo Foundation
Five B Family Foundation
Government of Canada - Canada
Community Revitalization Fund
Government of Canada - NSERC
PromoScience
Insurance Bureau of Canada
Ontario Trillium Foundation
Taggart Parkes Foundation
The Crabtree Foundation
The Mosaic Company

\$ 25,000 - \$ 49,999

Anonymous
Barbara Crook & Dan Greenberg,
The Danbe Foundation
Canyon Foundation

\$ 1,000 - \$ 4,999

Anonymous donors (10)
Abacus Data
Adobe
Andrew Browne
Ashbury College
Barry Sims
Bill & Margaret Dean Perpetual
Motion*
Bill & Penny Clelland
Blattel Family Fund*
Canadian Museum of Nature
Christopher Griffin Art Studio
Colleen & Jeff Westeinde
Dave Rostenne
David & Helen Spence
David Runnalls
Drop in Sports
Elgin St. Public School
ExecHealth

\$ 25,000 - \$ 49,999 (cont.)

CIBC
CN
Government of Canada - Canada
Summer Jobs
Lefebvre-Boulanger Family
Ottawa Community Foundation
Senators Community Foundation
TD Bank Group

\$ 10,000 - \$ 24,999

Anonymous
Bayne Family
Brigil
Cement Association of Canada
Chemistry Industry Association of
Canada
Dentons Canada LLP
Evolugen
Jeff Parkes & Gillian Rowan-Legg
Leacross Foundation
The McLean Foundation
Thyme & Again

\$ 5,000 - \$ 9,999

Bloomberg Philanthropies
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Labarge Charitable Foundation
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Peter MacKechnie & Anik Bedard
Pomerleau
Robert Slater
Roundell Lee Family
Soif
St. Jerome Catholic School
Steve Bews
Stewart Family
Students on Ice Foundation
Susan Rayner
The Hill Times
The KPMG Foundation
The Metcalf Foundation
Toob
United Way East Ontario
Weider Family
Wildlife Habitat Canada
William M. Laidlaw

< \$ 1,000

We recognize and thank the over 800 donors who contributed at this level.

* Fund established at the Ottawa Community Foundation



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®
GARDE-RIVIÈRE des Outaouais

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