

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The Ottawa River cradles the natural and cultural heart of eastern Ontario and western Quebec. Canada's Aboriginal Peoples established their presence here some 6,000 years ago, followed by Europeans in pursuit of furs, timber, and land. From the area's first inhabitants to the explorers, guides, traders, loggers, settlers, and entrepreneurs that followed, the Ottawa River was truly the original trans-Canada highway.

The Ottawa River played an integral role in many of the key stories that make up Canada's history. It was the route for much of the early European exploration of North America, including Samuel de Champlain. Explorers in search of the Northwest Passage began their journeys along the Ottawa River. Other celebrated figures in Canadian history including Nicollet, Radisson, La Vérendrye, Dulhut and De Troyes, traveled west along the Ottawa River to establish trade relationships with First Nations communities, laying the groundwork for the fur trade.

The fur trade relied on the famous waterway routes that began and ended with the Ottawa River. France's North American colonial economy depended on the fur trade, which led to the development of the *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs* era, and later to the creation of the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies. Amid the profound social, political, and economic changes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottawa River remained one of North America's most important trading routes. It played a central role in the story of the fur trade in North America, and thus in the development of Canada.

The rich forests along the Ottawa Waterway attracted thousands of European immigrants in search of work. Waterpower for mills and transporting logs first drew settlers, and these sites eventually became permanent settlements. Descendants of Irish, French Canadian, Scottish and other nationalities produced a unique Ottawa Valley culture that is expressed in language, music and dance.

The great white pines of the Ottawa River Valley built British warships, and went on to construct Boston, New York, and Chicago. The timber and later lumber trades of the Ottawa Valley were made possible by the river itself and its tributaries, which were at the heart of the distribution process. The canal and steamboating era permitted extensive travel, trade and settlement. Subsequent hydroelectric development over the past century has dramatically transformed the Ottawa River. Economic development and settlement along both shores of the Ottawa River continue to be intimately intertwined with river resources.

The natural heritage that made the Ottawa River so attractive to its early inhabitants continues to be significant on a national level. Flowing 1271 kilometres from its source deep in the wilderness of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the Ottawa River is one of the few rivers in the world to completely turn back on itself to flow southeast before reaching the St. Lawrence River. As the largest tributary to the St. Lawrence, the health of the Ottawa River watershed plays a significant role in the St. Lawrence basin ecosystem.

The Ottawa River traverses segments of the lithosphere that represent the past 3 billion years of the Earth's history. As the river continues to carry out its own, more recent process of erosion, it has exposed diverse features that can be viewed from the river or from shore. The accessibility of the geological features along the Ottawa River makes it an excellent and unique place to learn about our rich geoheritage.

The Ottawa River is home to many different ecosystems, each playing an important role in sustaining Canada's biodiversity. More than 300 species of bird have been inventoried along the river (Haxton and Chubbuck 4). About half of these are migratory species that use the Ottawa as one of the continent's most important migratory halts. In addition, 33 species of reptiles and amphibians, 53 species of mammals (DDEPQ), and 85 species of fish can also be observed along the river (Haxton and Chubbuck 3). Among these, several are rare and over 50 are considered to be species at risk.

Residents and visitors rely on the Ottawa River to reconnect with a natural environment. River-based recreation is a significant source of revenue for communities along the river, and represents one of the intrinsic values of the Ottawa River. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people practice paddling, boating, fishing, hiking and other forms of recreation along the Ottawa River. World-class whitewater paddling, and Ontario and Quebec's most popular canoe-camping parks are two major highlights that are associated with Ottawa River recreation.

Citizen interest and support has been building along the Ottawa River for several years to have it honoured as a Canadian Heritage River. The Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) will serve as a catalyst for governments, communities and local people to proactively promote, protect, and enhance the rich river heritage of the Ottawa. A citizen's group called the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee (ORHDC) is leading the initiative to have the Ottawa River formally proclaimed a Canadian Heritage River. Local sub-committees along the entire length of the Ottawa River and in both Quebec and Ontario and within First Nations communities are participating in this exciting process.

The following Background Study outlines the significant human, natural and recreational heritage values of the Ottawa River. For each of these values, major themes, background information and visible features along the river underline its importance. The Study concludes with an assessment of the river's values and recommends formal nomination of the Ottawa River as a Canadian Heritage River.

## 1.1 Description of the Ottawa River

The Ottawa River flows 1271 kilometres from its source deep in the wilderness of Abitibi-Témiscamingue until it joins the St. Lawrence River west of Montreal, making it the second-longest Canadian river flowing to the Atlantic Ocean. Rising 250 kilometres north of Ottawa in Lake Capimitchigama, a long and narrow lake in the southern Canadian Shield, the river flows west and then south through Lake Temiskaming<sup>1</sup> to its junction with the Mattawa River. The headwaters of the Ottawa are within 20 kilometres of those of the Gatineau River.

After a sharp turn east, the river follows the best-known part of its course over 500 kilometres to Montreal. Few major rivers completely turn back on themselves; the Ottawa River finishes its course in the opposite direction to its first third. The Ottawa Waterway, as the section from Montreal to Mattawa is known, gave early explorers access to the Northern Sea, the Pacific Ocean and the Mississippi. The Ottawa River still provides the shortest water route to the Great Lakes.

The Lower Ottawa River forms the border between the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. The watershed, draining an area of 146,300 square kilometres, is divided between the two provinces. The river upstream of Lake Temiskaming flows entirely within the province of Quebec. The Ottawa is the greatest tributary of the St. Lawrence, with an average flow greater than that of all of the rivers of England and Wales combined (Legget 3).

Figure 1.1 Ottawa River at its Source



Source: Robert Bell, Library and Archives Canada

The Upper Ottawa River is fed by many tributaries, including the Winneway River, which enters Lac Simard and then Lac des Quinze. Several tributaries including the Épinette, Kinojévis, Chochocouane, Capitachouane, Camachigama Rivers join the dense lake system of the Ottawa's upper stretches. Major lakes of the Upper Ottawa River include des Quinze, Granet, Simard, Témiscamingue and Grand Lac Victoria. The upper reaches of the Ottawa are located in the southern tip of the Canadian Shield. The region surrounding the Upper Ottawa is typically one of forests, lakes, rivers and rocks, an impenetrable wilderness area that is relatively flat.

Lake Temiskaming receives the waters of the Blanche River, the Montreal, the Matabitchouan, the Kipawa, and the Gordon. The Mattawa River joins the Ottawa from the west at the town of Mattawa. After the Ottawa River abruptly turns east, drops, and is joined by the Dumoine, the Noire and the Coulonge from the rocky northern shore. From the south come the Petawawa, the Bonnechere, the Madawaska and the Mississippi.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, the spelling "Temiskaming" will be used when referring to Lake Temiskaming, Temiskaming Shores and the community of Temiskaming in Quebec. National historic site Fort Témiscamingue will take the French spelling, as will the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The only other variations will be in the spelling of Timiskaming Nation and Reserve, and of the Timiskaming Mission.

**Figure 1.2 Aerial View of the Outaouais**



Source: Mia & Klaus

At Ottawa, the Rideau River flows in from the flat plains to the south. Downstream of Ottawa, the South Nation reaches the river from its source near the St. Lawrence. The Gatineau River, the largest tributary to the Ottawa, flows in from the north. The Lièvre, the Petite Nation, the Rouge and the Nord also reach the Ottawa from its north shore. The Ontario shore of the river's lower stretches is particularly flat. The Quebec shore of the Lower Ottawa River is located in the Laurentians and in the Outaouais region.

The Ottawa River joins the St. Lawrence River through four separate channels. Two channels are outlets draining Lake of Two Mountains into Lake St. Louis (one at Ste Anne de Bellevue and the other at Vaudreuil). The Rivière des Prairies is the third outlet, and the fourth forms the île Jésus at Laval. A small drop in water level between Lake of Two Mountains and Lake St. Louis forms a natural barrier. For purpose of this background study, the river is considered for nomination from its source at Lake Capimitchigama to the Lake of Two Mountains, after which it changes name and enters the St. Lawrence. Please refer to Appendix A, maps 1-5 of the Ottawa River.

Originally, the Ottawa River consisted of mighty rapids alternating with lakes. The main rapids of the historic Ottawa River have been tamed by hydroelectric dams, making use of the Ottawa's total vertical drop of 370 metres, of which 130 metres are downstream of Mattawa (Legget 10). Today, the major rapids remaining along the Ottawa River are located in the Rocher Fendu channel and at the Chaudiere Falls. Large storage reservoirs along its tributaries and along the main course, and particularly the upper section, enable hydroelectric power generation and some flood control. There are many small regulating dams on the tributaries of the Ottawa.

The maximum depth of the river is 90 metres, at the Carillon reservoir upstream of Montreal. The river is only 15 metres wide between Lac des Outaouais and Dozois Reservoir. By the time it reaches its lower section, the river is up to several kilometres wide.

**Figure 1.3 Mouth of the Rideau Canal From Parliament Hill**



Source: Picturisque Canada

## 1.2 Project Structure

The project to nominate the Ottawa River as a Canadian Heritage River is led by the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee (ORHDC), a citizens' group representing the general public, organizations, agencies and municipalities along the Quebec and Ontario shores of the Ottawa River. The ORHDC meets regularly to oversee the project, review draft documents and coordinate a public involvement strategy.

### The Canadian Heritage Rivers System

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) was created by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments to recognize outstanding and exemplary rivers of Canada and to ensure the sustainable management of their heritage values for generations to come. To qualify for inclusion in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, a river or section of a river must demonstrate outstanding human heritage and/or natural heritage values, and offer quality recreational opportunities.

In order to gain Canadian Heritage River status, a citizen-led group must come forward to propose its local river to the CHRS Board. This typically involves compiling a background study of the heritage values and recreational potential of the river, from which a succinct nomination report is written and then presented formally before the CHRS board. Once a river's nomination is accepted, the citizens' group works extensively with stakeholders and members of the public along the river to generate a management plan, suggesting general guidelines of sound practices which promote the sustainable use and conservation of the river's heritage resources. The management plan is a strategic document rather than a prescriptive one, and does not involve any legislation or restrictions. Once the management plan is completed, the CHR Board considers the river for designation.

Gaining status as a Canadian Heritage River brings with it numerous advantages, including increased coordination between organizations along the river, better conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and a strengthened regional tourism sector. Please refer to Chapter 6.2.1: Benefits and Opportunities Associated With Canadian Heritage River Status for a more complete list of advantages.

Several regional sub-committees have been formed to coordinate public involvement and the gathering of research describing key heritage values in each region. Local experts in the fields of archaeology, geology, Aboriginal history, regional river history and river-based artwork contributed written chapters to the study. The Quebec-Labrador Foundation (QLF) is a non-profit organization that was contracted to write the background study and coordinate aspects of the sub-committee contributions.

**Table 1.1 Organizational Chart: The Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee**

<b>Ontario Executive Committee</b>	<b>Quebec Executive Committee</b>
<p><b>Len Hopkins</b> Co-Chair Ontario Petawawa ON</p>	<p><b>Honourable Benoît Pelletier</b> Co-Chair Quebec Member for Chapleau Quebec Liberal Party Minister responsible for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs</p>
<p><b>Norm Hawirko</b> Kenabeek ON</p>	<p><b>Nicole Desroches</b> Minister's Representative Director General, CREDDO, Hull QC</p>
<p><b>Gary Thibert</b> Councillor, Town of Mattawa ON</p>	<p><b>Hélène Landry</b> Conseillère Tourisme Plein Air Ville-Marie QC</p>
<p><b>Lyll Smith</b> Deep River ON</p>	<p><b>Chief Harry St Denis</b> Wolf Lake First Nation, Temiskaming QC</p>
<p><b>Doug Champ</b> Deep River ON</p>	<p><b>Richard M. Bégin</b> Gatineau (Secteur Aylmer) QC</p>
<p><b>Chief Kirby Whiteduck</b> Golden Lake Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, Golden Lake ON</p>	
<p><b>Cam McNeil</b> Ottawa ON</p>	
<p><b>Dr Paule Doucet</b> L'Orignal ON</p>	

## 1.3 Project Scope

The Ottawa River Background Study includes a detailed review of the human heritage, natural heritage and recreation values of the Ottawa River, using guidelines identified by the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. In particular, the Background Study focuses on the human heritage, river-length themes of Aboriginal heritage, early explorers, the fur trade, riparian settlement, forestry, steamboats and hydroelectricity. In addition, a section on community heritage focuses on the relationship between the Ottawa River and various localities along the river.

The Background Study covers the entire length of the Ottawa River, from its source at Lake Capimitchigama to the Lake of Two Mountains, where it joins the St. Lawrence River. It focuses on the main river course, as opposed to the entire watershed.

## 1.4 Community Support and Involvement

Support for nominating the Ottawa River as a Canadian Heritage River is widespread. Many individuals representing organizations have been involved in this initiative. Committee meetings have been the main vehicle for continuing discussion and organization of the heritage nomination process. The following onsite meetings have been of key importance:

<i>September 30, 2003</i>	ORHDC Executive Committee Meeting. Petawawa, Ontario
<i>July 15, 2004</i>	Ottawa Region Committee Meeting. Kanata, Ontario
<i>August 17, 2004</i>	Gatineau Region Committee Meeting. Gatineau, Quebec
<i>September 2, 2004</i>	Meeting Regarding the Potential Role of Algonquin Communities in the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Process. Temiskaming, Quebec
<i>September 30, 2004</i>	Prescott-Russell Committee Meeting. Plantagenet, Ontario
<i>November 24, 2004</i>	ORHDC Executive Committee Meeting. Petawawa, Ontario
<i>February 16, 2005</i>	ORHDC Executive Committee Meeting. Gatineau, Quebec
<i>September 21-22, 2005</i>	ORHDC Executive Committee Meeting, Mattawa, Ontario

Community support has already been expressed by the following organizations and representatives:

### **Members of Parliament**

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Ottawa Centre  
 Cheryl Gallant: Renfrew - Nipissing - Pembroke  
 Marc Godbout: Ottawa - Orleans  
 Gordon O'Connor: Carleton - Mississippi Mills  
 Anthony Rota: Nipissing - Temiskaming

### **Members of Provincial Parliament**

John Baird: Nepean - Carleton  
 John Yakabuski: Renfrew - Nipissing - Pembroke  
 Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ottawa - Vanier

### **Municipalities**

City of Ottawa  
 United Townships of Head, Clara and Maria  
 Town of Petawawa  
 The City of Temiskaming Shores  
 United Counties of Prescott and Russell  
 County of Renfrew  
 Town of Hawkesbury



Town of Mattawa  
Township of McNab/Braeside  
Town of Deep River  
Township of Horton

**Agencies and Organizations**

Canadian Heritage Rivers System  
The Friends of Bonnechere Parks  
Ottawa River Waterway  
Heritage Renfrew  
Bromley Historical Society  
Ottawa Valley Tourist Association  
Ontario Parks  
TD Friends of the Environment  
Quebec-Labrador Foundation  
FedNor  
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources  
Environment Quebec  
Parks Canada  
CREDDO  
Canadian Heritage  
Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation  
Ontario Ministry of Culture  
Ontario Trillium Foundation  
Ottawa Riverkeeper - Sentinelles Outaouais  
Ottawa River Legacy Landmark Network: New Liskeard, Haileybury, Mattawa, Deep River, Petawawa,  
Pembroke, Arnprior, Fitzroy Provincial Park, Westboro Beach - Ottawa, Atocas Bay - Lefaiivre,  
Hawkesbury and Voyageur Provincial Park