

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Ottawa River Heritage Designation Initiative

Citizen interest in honouring the Ottawa River as a Canadian Heritage River has been building over several years. In 2003, the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee (ORHDC) was formed in order to spearhead the process. This citizens' group represents the general public, organizations, agencies and municipalities along the Ottawa River.

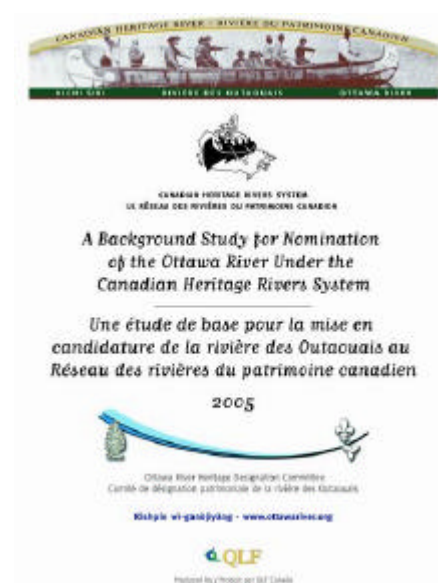
ORHDC completed a substantial background study of the heritage values of the Ottawa River in fall 2005. Local experts in the fields of archaeology, geology, Aboriginal history, regional river history and river-based artwork contributed written chapters to the study. Several regional sub-committees were formed to coordinate public involvement and the gathering of research describing key heritage values in each region.

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. QLF has also been contracted to coordinate and write this nomination document.

In addition to overseeing the creation of a background study and nomination document, ORHDC coordinates a public involvement strategy that includes their website, <http://www.ottawariver.org>, as well as a series of public consultations along the river.

Designation of the Ottawa River as a Canadian Heritage River would significantly increase awareness of the river's unique cultural, natural and recreational values as well as enhancing the profile of the river and encouraging its conservation and sustainable management.

Figure 1.1 Ottawa River Background Study



#### 1.1.1 Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee Structure

Elder William Commanda, Honorary Chair, Kitigan Zibi, Maniwaki, Quebec

##### Executive Committee

Len Hopkins, Co-Chair representing the Province of Ontario, Petawawa, Ontario

Chief Kirby Whiteduck, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, Golden Lake, Ontario  
Chief Harry St. Denis, Wolf Lake First Nation, Témiscaming Quebec

### **Administrative Support**

Brian Grimsey, Canadian Heritage Rivers System, Parks Canada, Gatineau, Quebec  
Nicole Desroches, Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable de l'Outaouais, Gatineau, Quebec  
Jim Fraser, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Parks, Pembroke, Ontario  
Adrienne Blattel and Simone Hanchet, Quebec-Labrador Foundation, Montreal, Quebec

### **Ontario Steering Committee**

Lake Timiskaming Region:

- Norm Hawirko, Keenabeek, Ontario
- Chris Oslund, Haileybury, Ontario

Mattawa Region:

- Garry Thibert, Mattawa, Ontario

North Renfrew County Region:

- Lyall Smith, Deep River, Ontario
- Doug Champ, Deep River, Ontario

South Renfrew County Region:

- Fred Blackstein, Laurentian Valley, Ontario
- Larry Graham, Pembroke, Ontario

National Capital Region:

- Cam McNeil, Ottawa, Ontario

Prescott - Russell Region

- Dr. Paule Doucet, L'Orignal, Ontario
- Louise Bissonnette, L'Orignal, Ontario

Information Support:

- Charles Langlais, Interpreter (short documents), Deep River, Ontario
- Ray Metcalfe, Technical Writing Review, Deep River, Ontario

### **Quebec Steering Committee**

Lake Timiskaming Region:

- Hélène Landry, Ville Marie, Quebec

Gatineau Region:

- Richard M. Bégin, Gatineau, Quebec

**Figure 1.2 Ontario Chair Len Hopkins Launching the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Project**



Source: Courtesy of Jim Fraser

## **1.1.2 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. Extensive onsite meetings have taken place in communities along both sides of the river between spring 2003 and winter 2005. These meetings represent a major strength of the Ottawa River nomination process, and have

enabled the engagement of a diverse group of citizens and organizations. Please refer to Appendix A: Community Meetings Along the Ottawa River for a full list of meetings to date.

*La participation des gens de divers milieux aux séances d'information publiques a été étonnante. Un groupe de travail a été formé et parmi les membres on y retrouve un représentant des Comtés unis de Prescott et Russell, des résidents de partout en région ainsi que d'autres qui ont signifié leur intérêt d'agir à titre de personnes-ressources. Tous souhaitent voir le projet avancer et progresser jusqu'à la désignation de la rivière des Outaouais comme rivière patrimoniale du Canada.*

- Prescott-Russell Region Working Group

### 1.1.3 Methodology

The Ottawa River Nomination Document identifies the significant natural and cultural heritage values and the recreational values of the Ottawa River and justifies its inclusion in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS). The Ottawa is being nominated on the basis of the river's outstanding cultural heritage values, thus adhering to the submission requirements of the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.

## 1.2 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 cultural heritage and/or natural heritage values, and offer quality recreational opportunities.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers Board is comprised of representatives named by the federal government, and all provinces and territories. Participation in the CHRS is voluntary, and participants retain their traditional legislative authority, including land ownership and management.

In order to gain Canadian Heritage River status, a citizen-led group and/or government jurisdiction must come forward to propose a river to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, proving that it meets one or more of the natural or cultural selection guidelines, as well as a set of integrity guidelines, as defined by CHRS (2001).

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 Canadian Heritage Rivers Board. Once a river's nomination is accepted, work commences involving stakeholders and members of the public along the river to generate a heritage strategy, proposing general guidelines of sound practices which promote the sustainable use and conservation of the river's heritage resources. The heritage strategy is not prescriptive, and does not involve any legislation or restrictions. Once the heritage strategy is completed, the Canadian Heritage Rivers 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.

## 1.3 Location and Description of the Ottawa River

The Ottawa River is known by the Algonquin community as the Kichi Sibi, or Big River, and as the Rivière des Outaouais in French. The section of the Ottawa River to be nominated as a Canadian Heritage River is the section bordering the Province of Ontario, including all of Lake Timiskaming to the junction of the Ottawa River with the St. Lawrence in the Lake of Two Mountains, a stretch of 618 kilometres. The section to be nominated is located in eastern Ontario and western Quebec.

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. The river flows west through a series of major lakes including Quinze, Simard and Grand Lac Victoria, and continues south through Lake Timiskaming. 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 waterway flows through regions named for the river: the Outaouais region in Quebec and the Upper and Lower Ottawa Valley in Ontario. Along its path the river encounters rural areas, towns, and the nation's more urbanised capital region: Ottawa-Gatineau.

The Ottawa River flows along 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 Ottawa is the greatest tributary of the St. Lawrence, and is Canada's 8<sup>th</sup> largest river in terms of mean discharge volume.

Notable tributaries include the Kipawa, flowing into Lake Timiskaming, the Mattawa, a Canadian Heritage River, and the Dumoine from the rocky northern shore. At Ottawa, the Rideau Waterway, also a Canadian Heritage River, flows in from the flat plains to the south; downstream of Ottawa, the South Nation empties into the river. The Gatineau River, the largest tributary to the Ottawa, flows in from the north.

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 around 400 metres. Today, the major untamed rapids remaining along the Ottawa River are located in the Rocher Fendu section near Fort Coulonge.

## 1.4 Role of the Ottawa River in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System

The Ottawa River possesses a number of cultural heritage themes that are significant and possibly unique from a Canadian perspective. The Ottawa River would add to or enhance current CHRS cultural heritage theme representation by recognizing the following cultural heritage values:

- A major historic trade and travel route to the heart of North America, earning its status as the original “trans-Canada highway”. It is interesting to note that much of the major exploration and trade in the continent began and ended with a trip on the Ottawa River, including travel along other Canadian Heritage Rivers.
- The legacy of First Nations/Algonquin cultures to the Ottawa River region as evidenced in the numerous riverside archaeological and spiritual sites.
- The role of the river in Canada’s fur trade as *the* major corridor to central and western Canada. The numerous forts and posts located strategically along the river from Lake Timiskaming to Montreal serve as an example of the commercial competition of the era.
- The designation of Ottawa as the capital of Canada, along the Ottawa River.
- The influence of the river as a 600-kilometre-long transportation corridor facilitating a wide range of commercial activities. Servicing the fur trade and lumber industries necessitated quantities of supplies previously unseen in Canada. Both industry and settlement relied on innovation in transportation, including the rafting of squared timber, the development of an early canal system, and the use of a variety of steamboats.
- The role of the river in establishing the timber and lumber industries, leading to the settlement of the Ottawa River Valley, providing timber for masts for Britain’s warships and lumber to build the cities of Boston, Chicago and New York.
- The presence of numerous buildings representing significant events and themes of Canadian Heritage, many of which relate directly to the river itself.
- In addition, the Ottawa River would be the first river in the system with two Canadian Heritage River tributaries: the Mattawa along the upper section, and the Rideau entering at Ottawa.

**Figure 1.3 Opening of the Parliament Buildings, June 8, 1866**



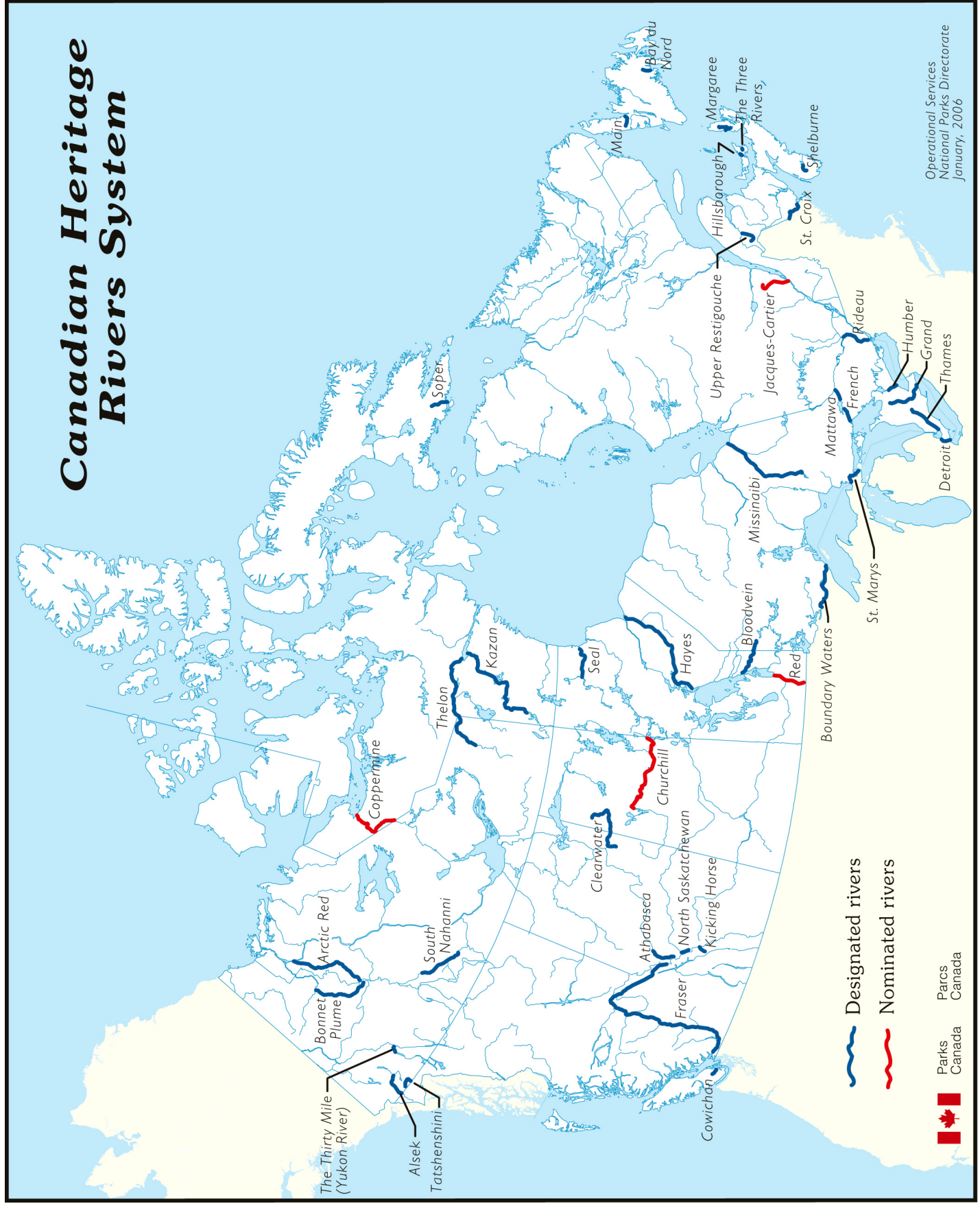
Source: Library and Archives Canada/PA-120596

The unique cultural heritage associated with the Ottawa River will complement existing CHRS themes. For example, some of Canada’s earliest canals were built on the Ottawa River. Ontario’s first seigneurie was built along the river at L’Orignal. The founding and development of the nation’s capital took place on its shores, and was intertwined with Ottawa River resources and transportation.

Although it is not being nominated for its natural and recreational values, the Ottawa River provides significant representation for the following:

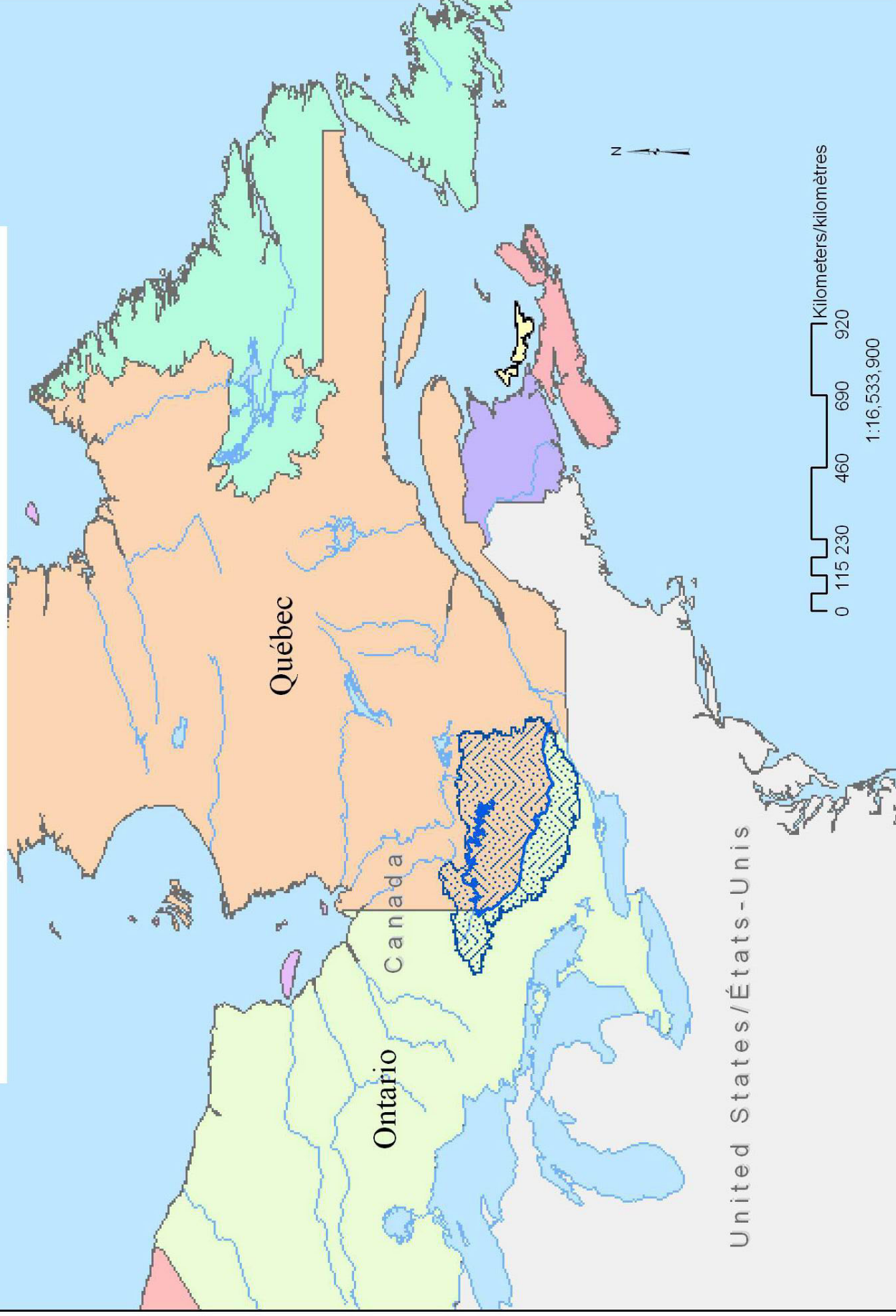
- The largest tributary of the St. Lawrence River and Seaway.
- The only river traversing four major geological subdivisions in Canada.
- Significant plant and animal communities including one of the continent's most important stopovers and major flyways for migratory birds.
- Confirmed populations of at least 80 provincially or federally recognized species at risk.
- World class whitewater paddling and rafting opportunities.
- Boating opportunities for a wide range of watercraft.
- A wide range of recreational activities and experiences within wilderness, rural or urban settings.
- Extraordinary opportunities for natural and cultural heritage appreciation.

# Canadian Heritage Rivers System





Location of the Ottawa River Watershed  
Localisation du bassin versant de la rivière des Outaouais





# Ottawa River Watershed Bassin versant de la rivière des Outaouais

