



# Around the Rideau

Environmental Information For Municipalities In The Rideau Valley

Summer 2005

Special Edition

## Lower Rideau Watershed Strategy

### What is the Lower Rideau Watershed Strategy?

The Lower Rideau Watershed Strategy is a roadmap and a “to do” list for the protection and enhancement of the Lower Rideau River. It sets a direction for future investments in watershed management, from how land use and development should be managed, to what kind of scientific research is most needed, and what kinds of stewardship projects/programs should be pursued to protect the ecological, cultural and recreational values and features of the Rideau River and its watershed.

The Lower Rideau River flows from Burritts Rapids northwards to the Rideau Falls in Ottawa, a distance of about 95 kilometres, draining a total area of about 1,800 square kilometres, including the watersheds of the Jock River and Kemptville Creek for which watershed plans have previously been prepared. The final report is in preparation and formal expressions of support for the strategy will be sought from the executive levels of the participating organizations over the next several months.

### Problems on the Lower Rideau

#### ✓ Condition of River and Stream Corridors

Most tributary streams have been altered by urbanization or agriculture over the past 200 years. They erode at a faster pace, or they have been armoured against erosion, and no longer serve their natural fish and wildlife habitat functions (shelter, food, shade, breeding areas, etc). Along the Rideau waterway there are competing pressures on the streams and delicate riparian zone such as:

- hardened shorelines — built to protect shorelines against erosion from wind driven waves and power boat wakes
- developed and altered shorelines — to facilitate recreational access to the water and to create man-made landscapes, making “highest and best use” of very desirable real estate
- preservation and restoration of shorelines — to maximize their value as natural habitats and as buffers between fragile aquatic environments and adjacent land uses, such as agriculture and urban development.

#### ✓ Excessive Nutrient Runoff

Excess amounts of phosphorus and nitrogen from land management practices in the urban and rural areas are contributing to:

- excessive aquatic plant and algae growth
- accelerating change in aquatic habitats
- depleted dissolved oxygen in some locations (important for aquatic life)
- diminished aesthetics (appearance, feel and odour)
- diminished recreational experiences for users of the waterway and waterfront open spaces (power boaters, canoeists, anglers, hikers, cyclists, picnickers, etc.)

#### ✓ Inter-agency Coordination & Community Relations

Watershed management in the Lower Rideau is not simple. There is a large number of government and non-government organizations that have roles, responsibilities and resources. The Strategy recognizes the problem and commits to working towards a solution.

Long-term success also depends on fostering positive, cooperative relations between community (especially riparian landowners) and regulatory agencies. There is room for improvement in this, by:

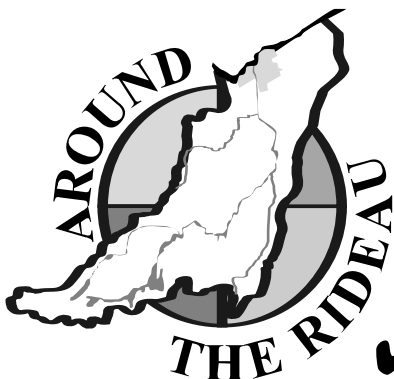
- streamlining regulatory approvals,
- consistently enforcing the rules,
- providing more and better information on watershed conditions, and
- creating more opportunities for community-agency interaction and dialogue.

#### ✓ Water Level and Flow Management

Water control for the purposes of operating the historic Rideau Waterway provides several additional but limited benefits, such as sustained aquatic habitats, somewhat reduced spring flood flows, and augmented flows in summer. There are unanswered questions that warrant further investigation:

1. Are there ways to improve water level control immediately before and after the official navigation season, to maximize aquatic habitat quality without compromising Rideau Canal operations?
2. What are the ecologically sustainable limits for water withdrawal from the Rideau and its tributaries, and could the demands for water withdrawal increase with continuing land use changes and global climate change?





## What We Plan to do About Them

### ✓ Revitalize River and Stream Corridors

**Key Actions:**

- Delineate and protect river and stream (riparian) corridors
- Evaluate the current conditions of riparian corridors and set long-term targets for improved future habitats
- Undertake subwatershed planning/rehabilitation studies
- Consistently enforce existing regulations on the waterway (e.g., navigational use, shoreline alteration, etc.) and expedite approvals for applications that incorporate good stewardship practices
- Investigate the sensitivity of shorelines to boat wake
- Identify aquatic habitat restoration opportunities

### ✓ Manage Nutrient Inputs to the River

**Key Actions:**

- Implement integrated stormwater management solutions for new development that address the need for aquatic habitat protection and maintenance of natural stream form and stability, as well as public health protection in the river and at the beaches
- Incorporate water quantity and quality controls into projects for the reconstruction of urban drainage systems, wherever possible and when the opportunities arise
- Promote, expand and integrate rural clean water quality incentive programs
- Inspect new infrastructure for cross-connections and continue to seek out and correct leaking sanitary sewers
- Phosphorus cycle modeling
- Selective aquatic plant harvesting in the Waterway

### ✓ Coordinate Action Through Inter-agency Working Groups and Communication with the Public

**Key Actions:**

- Formalize an inter-agency committee to coordinate annual work plans
- Integrate monitoring programs to ensure that the collected data are useful for detecting changes and understanding trends in the ecological status of the watershed
- Publish the findings from monitoring programs regularly
- Create additional opportunities for community involvement in watershed monitoring

### ✓ Public Education, Community Outreach, Research and Enforcement

**Key Actions:**

- Work toward a single comprehensive stewardship program
- Disseminate public information and educational material on water quality, best management practices (rural and urban areas), responsible boating practices and riparian zone functions and features
- Create regular opportunities and engage in meaningful dialogue with community members

### ✓ Fine Tune Water Levels and Flows

**Key Actions:**

- Complete critical habitat mapping to determine if further enhancements in the quality of aquatic habits in the river could be achieved by making practical adjustments to water control policies, and without creating other problems or risks
- Develop and apply numerical models to predict the watershed's response to future changes in land use, water demands, and climatic factors

Public agencies that have a regulatory or operational role in managing the lands and waters of the Lower Rideau Watershed, and have participated in the Lower Rideau Watershed Strategy, include:

- City of Ottawa
- Municipality of North Grenville
- Rideau Valley Conservation Authority
- Ontario Ministry of the Environment
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Rideau Canal — Parks Canada
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- National Capital Commission
- Public Works and Government Services Canada

Professional Services in preparation of the Strategy have been provided by:

- Aquafor Beech Ltd. in association with Robinson Consultants Inc.

We are interested in your comments and/or for more information contact **Bruce Reid** (RVCA) at 692-3571 ext. 1103 or 1-800-267-3504 ext. 1103, [bruce.reid@rideauvalley.on.ca](mailto:bruce.reid@rideauvalley.on.ca). An abbreviated version of the Strategy will be available for distribution this fall and it will be posted on a website dedicated to news about the the Lower Rideau Strategy and its implementation.



## Around the Rideau

**Rideau Valley Conservation Authority**  
**Office de protection de la nature de la**  
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*Around the Rideau* is delivered to 3,600 Heads of Council, Councillors, senior municipal and provincial staff, interested persons and the media throughout the 18 municipalities in the Rideau Valley watershed.

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