

RIVERCARE 2000

An Opportunity to Make the Rideau-Catarraqui Waterway Really Sparkle for the Next Generation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada has a very rich and valuable river heritage. And one of the most familiar rivers to Canadians and visitors alike is Eastern Ontario's Rideau-Catarraqui system winding its way from Ottawa, through some of our best cottage country, and on down to Kingston on Lake Ontario. The Rideau-Catarraqui river is the economic, geographic and social backbone running through 16 municipalities in Eastern Ontario. The continuing environmental health of this waterway is crucial to the continuing economic health of the communities along its banks. There are signs of stress on the Rideau. Signs such as rapidly increasing shoreline development, conflicting user demands, and disappointing patterns of biodiversity change. When we factor in the expected effects of climate change, we anticipate even greater potential for degradation of the resource. Without care, those trends will gradually yet inevitably follow their course and become disasters for the landowners, users and business people of the corridor. We believe that it is time to undertake a comprehensive program of rehabilitation on a watershed basis instead of the band-aid approach often taken in the past. A little continuous river care goes a long way and is far cheaper than expensive remedial measures.

A partnership of five well-known agencies and municipalities, all with a long term interest in the health of the Rideau-Catarraqui system, have jointly identified extensive work to be done by governments and community groups to improve the river condition from Ottawa right down to Kingston. The partners ran a series of community meetings and technical studies up and down the river in the summer of 1999 gathering cleanup ideas from residents, municipalities and scientists and trying to organize some common interests and priorities.

The result is *Rivercare 2000*, a cooperative, comprehensive, cost-effective twenty year fund raising and action strategy to make the Rideau-Catarraqui really sparkle for the next generation. The goal is to keep the Rideau serving the economic, social and environmental needs of the people of Eastern Ontario well into the new millennium.

To achieve that goal, *Rivercare 2000* will do three main things: first, improve the natural aquatic environment through a major environmental stewardship program, second, make the Rideau-Catarraqui waterway an environmental model, a Canadian freshwater showcase of research, teaching and management, and third, create a lot of jobs for young people through a green jobs strategy. These themes are outlined below.

The **Environmental Stewardship** portion of *Rivercare 2000* is an investment in our children's future. The environmental cleanup and improvement project will leave the Rideau in a normal, healthy state as a legacy for future generations to enjoy. It speaks to collective well-being, to family health, to prosperity of the farms, towns and villages along the route and of giving children a safe natural environment in which to develop.

Rivercare 2000 will also create a **Canadian Freshwater Showcase** of environmental management and innovation. The work of an Environmental Forum made up of the post-secondary academic community lead by Queens University, Carleton, and University of Ottawa, and a broad alliance of strategic industry and government partners including the Canadian Museum of Nature, will create a critical mass of freshwater education, management and research specialists second to none in Canada. This showcase of Canadian technology and freshwater know-how in wastewater technology, pollution remediation and biodiversity protection will be of value to Canadian interns and river students. The Rideau-Catarqui waterway will become an important node of activity in the emerging National Centre of Excellence on Clean Water and very handy for visiting international delegations.

And *Rivercare 2000* will create hundreds of new **Green Jobs for Young Canadians** based on the biology, technology and ecotourism potential of the river. We will be able to relieve some of the chronic unemployment among the young people of the corridor by making environmental protection a valid economic activity.

The work identified includes Public Works (sewage and stormwater facilities), Private Land Works (with an agricultural incentive program), Community-based Rehabilitation work (based on six months of public consultation and the outstanding work contained in Ottawa South's *Restore the Rideau Action Kit*) and a Biodiversity and Quality Assessment program to make sure we stay on the right track.

The total cost of the *Rivercare 2000* package is \$135 million over the next 10 to 20 years. We are anticipating a fair share to come from the federal government, the provincial government, the municipal governments and the private sector. The detailed fundraising strategy is being developed.

This Eastern Ontario project addresses, with concrete environmental action, many of the expressed and implicit directions of the federal government as outlined in the latest Throne Speech including investing in our children's future, Canadian research expertise, public-private industry partnerships, and renewing aging infrastructure in our towns. It also helps meet some of our international obligations under the Great Lakes International Joint Commission, the Kyoto Convention on Greenhouse Gas Reductions, the Rio Convention on Biodiversity Protection and the RAMSAR Convention on Wetland Protection. It will give an economic boost and job opportunities to youth in the region and provide opportunities for maintaining our excellent research capabilities into environmental management questions. It will give us a nearby showcase of Canadian excellence in river

stewardship, especially as we await federal approval for the Rideau-Catarraqui waterway to become Canada's newest Canadian Heritage River. Business development, tourism benefits, quality of life for residents and visitors, measurable improvements in water quality and recreational opportunities, long term prosperity and well-being for Canadian citizens: *Rivercare 2000* is a win-win-win situation for the federal government, for Eastern Ontario families and for the environment.

The project is planned to start in 2000 and run for about two decades. It will be an opportunity to celebrate both the Millennium and the 150th anniversary of Canada in 2017. By that date, we will have solid evidence of how federal leadership and commitment cleaned up one of the premier heritage waterways in the country. *Rivercare 2000*, if successful in attracting the necessary funding, represents a unique opportunity to showcase water partners working together to achieve many benefits for the environment and the collective communities in Eastern Ontario.