

Ottawa River Institute (ORI) Directors' Report for 2020

Ottawa Valley Nature Fix

ORI's popular series of monthly Nature Fix newsletters and our [Nature Fix Ottawa Valley Facebook Page](#) continued throughout 2020. We have enthusiastically promoted the mental and physical health benefits of time spent in nature - a message that has never been more important (or more obvious) than it is today. We love to see your photos and receive your suggestions for places to go, and to share them with others.

We had ambitious plans for monthly Nature Fix outings throughout 2020. The year began with three very-well-attended winter snowshoe/hiking events: January 25th at the Beachburg County Forest, February 23rd on the K&P Trail near Renfrew, and March 21st (with physical distancing) at the Petawawa Research Forest. So many of you came out for some winter fun!

Although the pandemic curtailed further group outings, you'll certainly have noticed the explosion of family groups and individuals walking, bicycling, skiing, and snowshoeing in the more rural and wilder parts of the Ottawa Valley, as well as on paths and quiet streets in urban settings.

There is absolutely no doubt that spending time outdoors has been critically important for all of us during the past year or so. This means that more and more people have come to appreciate the Ottawa Valley's beautiful woodlands, lakes and fields. We predict that the demand for publicly accessible natural areas and trails will persist, and is likely to increase further. Will the supply keep up, or will the quality of our nature experiences decline owing to over-crowded conditions (such as those at the Eagle's Nest trail near Calabogie over the Thanksgiving holiday)?

This issue concerns our Board. We've been discussing how to address it and would welcome any thoughts you can share.

We wish to again thank the Sisters of St. Joseph for the generous donation that inspired the Ottawa River Institute Nature Fix initiative.

Renfrew County Trails Association

Ottawa Valley residents are extremely fortunate to have the Algonquin (Ottawa Valley Recreation) Trail running through Arnprior, Renfrew, Cobden, Pembroke and Petawawa; and the K&P Trail running from Renfrew to Calabogie.

The County of Renfrew's decision to focus its upgrades to the Algonquin Trail in urban areas has proven to be a wise move, noting in particular the new section that recently opened in the Pembroke area. Both the Algonquin and K&P Trails remained publicly accessible throughout 2020 and 2021, providing outdoor recreation opportunities that have been so important during the pandemic. We're grateful to the County for its foresight in creating these valuable public resources, and for its oversight of ongoing maintenance operations and improvements to their quality.

ORI convened meetings of an informal Renfrew County Trails Association in May 2020 (and again in 2021) with representatives from the County and local trail user groups (snowmobilers, cyclists, ATVers, walkers). The snowmobilers have been instrumental in securing funding to make water crossings safe for public use. The County is improving trail surfaces and road crossings, installing additional signage, making ongoing educational efforts, and collaborating with the Ontario Provincial Police on enforcement.

Progress continues towards an eventual goal of an Algonquin Trail that is fully accessible all the way to Mattawa. This will be a major tourist attraction as well as a resource for local residents. The section along the Ottawa River between Arnprior and Castletford is already attracting Ottawa-area cyclists.

For the latest developments, see <http://www.ottawavalleytrail.com> and <http://www.facebook.com/ottawavalleytrail>.

Celebrate Our Rivers and Watersheds

During the past decade ORI organized many paddle outings, in cooperation with the Bonnechere River Watershed Project and other partners, as part of the Celebrate Our Rivers and Watersheds series. Because of the uncertainty regarding group events in 2020 we were unable to release a schedule in advance of the paddling season.

Nonetheless, keeping the tradition alive, when restrictions loosened we were able to organize a small number of paddles with limited numbers of participants, and promote them through our monthly Nature Fix newsletters and on Facebook. These included trips on the Little Mississippi and on the Ottawa River to Oiseau Rock. The season's highlight was a fall outing from the Meath Hill boat launch down the Muskrat River into Mud Lake, which gave keen paddlers a last chance to get out their canoes, kayaks and cameras and poke around in the wild rice beds and cattails.

ORI Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Last year's AGM, on May 27, 2020, was held by teleconference. During this "virtual" AGM we discussed iNaturalist, a popular citizen science-based social network used to share species observations obtained using cell phones and cameras. iNaturalist information is increasingly used by research scientists and wildlife managers.

You may recall that in 2019 ORI had helped organize two June Bioblitzes at Alexander Stewart Provincial Park, a nature reserve near the McNab-Braeside town hall. At that time, little was known about the park's biodiversity. Since then, iNaturalist has accumulated more than 180 observations of 118 species for the park. Although we did not have a BioBlitz in 2020, we continue to encourage you to upload your pictures of Ottawa Valley plants, animals, fungi, etc. to iNaturalist. You'll be doing a big favor for future generations!

During the AGM, John Almstedt, Ole Hendrickson, and Lynn Jones were re-elected to the ORI Board for 2-year terms.

World-class nuclear waste clean-up at Chalk River

ORI remains active in promoting better ways to address the Government of Canada's \$8 billion radioactive waste liability at the Chalk River Laboratories and other federal nuclear sites. ORI members have participated in the federal government development of a national radioactive waste policy. ORI has joined other groups in expressing concerns about proposals from the privately-owned Canadian Nuclear Laboratories for low-budget disposal projects that would allow radioactive materials to leak into the Ottawa River, essentially forever.

We continue to say, "There is a better way!" Canada can be a world leader in keeping radioactive waste out of the biosphere while providing economic stimulus to the local economy and jobs for generations of Ottawa Valley residents. Our fact sheet on world class cleanup is available [here](#). We are collaborating with a network of Indigenous communities, civil society groups, NGOs, retired AECL scientists, and concerned citizens to advocate for better solutions for Canada's federally-owned nuclear waste.

The strongest and clearest statement on management of radioactive waste to date in Canada was developed by the Anishinabek Nation-Iroquois Caucus. Their Joint Declaration can be viewed in full [here](#). It includes the following five principles: 1) no abandonment, 2) monitored and retrievable storage 3) better containment, more packaging, 2) away from drinking water and major water bodies and 5) no unnecessary transport (exports and imports) The declaration was endorsed by resolution by the Assembly of First Nations in 2018. These principles were read aloud by the Chair at the end of an eight hour meeting of the City of Ottawa Environment Committee meeting on the Chalk River radioactive waste problem, at the end of which a resolution of concern was passed unanimously. The eight hour environment committee meeting is [here](#). City of Ottawa Resolution is [here](#).

Other Activities

ORI participated in a 1-day on-line Ontario region workshop on creating a Canada Water Agency. Our input noted the opportunity to develop better watershed-scale information, models and predictions of water flow, helping cope with floods and droughts. We also suggested consideration of creating watershed councils co-managed by Indigenous peoples. ORI submitted comments on the province of Ontario's proposed changes to Conservation Authorities, asking that the government retract its proposal to restrict the ability of municipalities to make appointments to Conservation Authority boards (that change was made).

In support of a group of property owners in the Downey's Bay area of the Municipality of Sheenboro we asked the mayor for a careful review of how a proposed new development on the Ottawa River shoreline could affect trout spawning habitat and water quality, noting that blue-green algae blooms have already been observed in the area. And we sent a note to the MRC Pontiac warden suggesting that promoting use of motion-sensor lights near water bodies could reduce adverse impacts of artificial light at night on fish, birds, insects, and turtles.

We had an extensive interaction with staff at the Pembroke office of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry regarding the new logging plan for Algonquin Park. Our comments discussed issues related to the impact of logging on water yields and

flooding, the potential for increased carbon storage by allowing semi-mature forests to reach “old-growth” status (“proforestation”), protecting biodiversity in the park, including rarer tree species, and the potential to accommodate recreational users such as mountain bikers in the two-thirds of the park designated for timber management.

We’d like to say a big “THANK YOU” to all ORI members, supporters and partners as we mark our 19th year; from ORI Directors John Almstedt, Ole Hendrickson, Lynn Jones, Sandra Palmer, Craig Robinson, and Kelly O’Grady; and from ORI Coordinator Cheryl Keetch.

Please visit the [ORI website](#), [ORI Facebook page](#), [Nature Notebook website](#) and [Nature Notebook Facebook Page](#) and [Nature Fix Ottawa Valley Facebook Page](#). We’re trying to make our web presence as helpful to members as possible and appreciate your feedback.

For more information and/or to get involved in anything you read about in this report, please get in touch (our e-mail is info@ottawariverinstitute.ca). We would love to hear from you!