

Ottawa River Institute (ORI) Annual Report for 2016

ORI-sponsored events and actions to improve our environment continued throughout 2016, largely in partnership with other local groups.

Individual donors and event revenues were our sole funding sources in 2016. We are very grateful for the continuing interest and support of our members and friends, which enabled the work described in this report.

Celebrate Our Rivers Paddle Series

ORI partnered with the Bonnechere River Watershed Project (BRWP) to organize kayak/canoe outings on local rivers throughout summer 2016. One highlight was the June 11th paddle on the lower Bonnechere from Renfrew to the Ottawa River, with amazing views of the massive landslide upstream from the First Chute. One week later, on a warm and sunny June 18th, ORI led a paddle through the Snake River Marsh – a great place to see water birds.

Despite numerous letters of support from local municipalities and from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, our ORI-BRWP Canada 150 proposal, *“Coming Together on Our Waterways,”* was turned down. It would have enabled a series of talks in 2017 about canoe-building, cultural heritage, paddling, etc.; as well as an expanded series of paddle outings. Nonetheless, we went ahead with plans to add some new outings to the *Celebrate Our River Paddle Series* for 2017.

2016 Renfrew County Stewardship Forum

More than 30 people gathered at the Royal Canadian Legion in Renfrew on November 30th for the Fifth Annual Renfrew County Stewardship Forum, co-sponsored by ORI, BRWP and Sustainable Eastern Ontario, with a theme of “Our Trails, Our Future”. Renfrew Mayor Don Eady opened the event, noting the importance of the Bonnechere River to local residents. Recreation Directors Glen Arthur, Kevin Hill, Geoff Patterson and Kathleen Rogers (Arnprior, Renfrew, McNab-Braeside and Horton) spoke about their municipalities’ trails and efforts to get more people using them, from children to seniors. Arnprior Mayor David Reid said that when County finalizes its plans for trails, municipalities will come together to promote their use.

Next up was a panel featuring representatives of a wide range of volunteer-based, non-profit organizations: Joanne McCann (Friends of Oiseau Rock), Lyndsey Mask (Shaw Woods Outdoor Education Centre), Terry Vaudry (Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs District 6), Ish Theilheimer (Ottawa Valley Cycling and Active Transportation Alliance), Teresa Gamble (Renfrew County ATV Club), and David Miller (Algonquin to Adirondack (A2A) Collaborative. These panelists described their groups’ efforts in trail development and maintenance, tourism, safety, education, and promotion of cultural heritage,

After lunch, Jason Davis, Forestry and GIS Manager with the County of Renfrew, provided an update on the County’s Trail Strategy and its purchase of the former CP rail line - the Ottawa Valley Recreation Trail (or Algonquin Trail, as it is known in the County). There was a lively discussion with many questions from Forum participants about the County’s plans for the new Algonquin Trail. Jason noted that the Trail Strategy calls for formation of a multi-user trail association, with support from County staff. ORI, as one of the Forum sponsors, agreed to follow up on this. We developed a list of Forum attendees and others who are interested in participating, shared this list with the County, and convened a first meeting by teleconference.

Meeting participants declined to create a formal association but agreed that the meeting was useful and that discussions with the County about its trails plans should continue.

Climate Change Town Hall

ORI, in partnership with two other community-based organizations (BRWP and Pipeline Awareness Renfrew County), hosted a climate change town hall on August 16th at the Royal Canadian Legion in Eganville. After hearing about the latest findings on what's happening with climate change, 46 attendees engaged in lively and energetic discussions on actions that can be taken by governments, businesses and individuals to limit the damage caused by a changing climate to our environment and our quality of life.

Renfrew County Public Beach Monitoring

In August 2016, ORI and BRWP teamed up to sample water quality at four locations in the Bonnechere watershed: the former Renfrew Beach, the Jamie Kilby nature park in Douglas, the Wieland Shore Road beach on Lake Clear, and the MTO picnic area in Deacon. The Renfrew County and District Health Unit monitors *E. coli* levels at many local beaches but these four locations are not included. *E. coli* counts were low at all four locations and well within acceptable limits for water-based activities such as swimming and paddling. But please note: these were one-time samples, taken during a dry period, not right after a major rainfall (when coliform levels may go up). We are grateful to the Renfrew County and District Health Unit for providing sample bottles and instructions, getting samples analyzed, and sharing results.

Watershed Research and Planning

The *Renfrew County Water Quality Leadership Group* - a coalition of agricultural and environmental groups – was formed at the 2015 Renfrew County Stewardship Forum. This Group, which includes ORI, made a detailed Official Plan submission calling on the County of Renfrew to support a County-wide, citizen-based Watershed Council to enable continuing action to maintain and improve the health of our many lakes, rivers and creeks. The Group has also met with local elected officials to discuss the Watershed Council idea. We will keep ORI members posted on future developments.

Muskrat Watershed Council Science and Water Quality Committee

ORI continues to be active on the Science and Water Quality Committee of the Muskrat Watershed Council. Water quality monitoring activities led by the Science and Water Quality Committee in previous years are now enabling interesting and innovative on-the-ground projects. These include installation of controlled tile drains on farms adjacent to the Snake River (the watershed's largest waterway) and Stoqua Creek, and restoration of shoreline vegetation on properties along Muskrat Lake itself.

9th Annual Seedy Sunday in the Ottawa Valley

Seedy Sunday's move to a new location certainly didn't dampen the numbers and enthusiasm of attendees. ORI once again helped sponsor this event, held March 8th, 2016 at the Rankin Community Centre. Our congratulations and thanks go out to Claire Lepine and Pat Tamosetis, who after many years as the main organizers of this popular event have "retired" and passed the baton to a new team.

ORI Annual General Meeting

ORI's 2016 Annual General Meeting was held Sunday May 15th at the NHL/NHA Hockey Museum in Renfrew. It was preceded by a morning outing on the Centennial Trail behind the Ma-Te-Way Park activity centre. ORI president Ole Hendrickson gave a short talk at the AGM reviewing ORI's 15-year history. Immediately after this year's AGM we held a joint Board meeting with BRWP, discussing past, present and future joint projects. We considered the possibility of amalgamation, noting that ORI's coordinator, Cheryl Keetch, also works for BRWP. But we agreed to continue with separate organizations for the time being, while cross-linking information on our web-sites and partnering on specific projects.

We would like to extend a big thank-you to Kendra Smith, who has stepped down after several years of service on the ORI Board. As always, we welcome new Board members. If you're interested, please let us know.

"Blue Water Trails" Presentation at the Trailhead Ontario 2017 Conference

ORI president Ole Hendrickson gave a talk on "Blue Water Trails" at the Trailhead Ontario 2016 Conference at the Calabogie Peaks Resort on June 21, 2016. He described the numerous paddling opportunities in Renfrew County, including in our dozen or so protected waterways, parks and conservation reserves along the Barron, Little Mississippi, Madawaska, Muskrat, Snake and York Rivers; and along Bissett, Black Donald, Constant, Grant's, and Silver Creeks.

and in closing...

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

And, finally, a big thank you to all ORI members and supporters for helping us successfully conclude our 16th year, from ORI Directors John Almstedt, Ole Hendrickson, Lynn Jones and Craig Robinson; and from ORI Coordinator Cheryl Keetch.