



Travelling from Victoria Island to Kettle Island in a flotilla during September's "Paddles Up" event, canoeists and kayakers got together to explore and celebrate the Ottawa River.

The Great River Project

Creating a network of care along the Ottawa River

By Iona Green
*Community Foundation
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Founded in 2001, Ottawa Riverkeeper is a grassroots organization dedicated to protecting, promoting and improving the health and future of the Ottawa River.

With the help of a grant from the Community Foundation of Ottawa, the volunteer-driven organization recently launched the Great River Project, an ambitious and interactive journey to document the state of the Ottawa River and share its ecology and rich cultural heritage with a wide audience.

"It's about connecting the communities who live up and down the river," says Riverkeeper Meredith Brown, "This river is absolutely worth protecting and it needs us all to be paying attention to what's happening all along its length."

Designed to grow a large network of clean water stewards throughout the region, the goal of the Great River Project is to mon-

itor, measure and report on the impacts of water pollution.

"When a river is over 1,200 kilometres long and its 147,000 square kilometre basin contains over 1.6 million people, finding the largest sources of pollution and determining which are most harmful is a daunting task," says Brown. "This project will help us, along with youth, volunteers and other concerned citizens, to learn and understand some of the causes of regional water pollution and what we can do to stop it."

To celebrate World River Day and launch the final leg of the Great River Project journey, Ottawa Riverkeeper invited the public to participate in a "Paddles Up" event in late September. Travelling from Victoria Island to Kettle Island in a flotilla, canoeists and kayakers got together to explore and celebrate the Ottawa River as they paddled past Parliament Hill.

"Our beautiful river is home to a diverse range of species, is a source of drinking water for over two million people, supports local economies, is a world-class rec-

reation destination and is an important part of our culture and heritage," says Brown. "Yet threats to the river are growing and the need for collective action is stronger than ever."

Community Foundation of Ottawa board members Judith Maxwell and Brian Toller, along with their spouses, threw their support behind the event, pitching in their paddle-power on one of the Riverkeeper's Voyageur canoes.

"The support of the Community Foundation and all our partners has been invaluable in helping us to launch a project of this magnitude," says Brown. "In order for us to succeed, it's crucial that we connect with young water stewards and new volunteers up and down the river."

With the help of its student volunteers, Ottawa Riverkeeper has been documenting the various stages of the Great River Project in an expedition blog, and will be releasing an Ottawa River Scorecard in early 2012.

To learn more, visit www.ottawariverkeeper.ca.