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Experts agree: Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson must designate Erin Waste Water Treatment Plant for Impact Assessment

The Coalition for the West Credit River recently received support from several experts making written statements to Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, strongly urging him to designate the Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant proposal for a full federal Impact Assessment.

Jack Imhof, an Aquatic Ecologist/Watershed Scientist, says *“It is essential an independent federal assessment of the Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant be conducted in order to ensure the health of downstream communities and survival of the last healthy Brook Trout and Redside dace populations left in the Credit River watershed. This is NOT a “Fish or People” issue.”* Jack Imhof has been involved in the study, assessment and management of the West Credit River since 1979, as well as the data collection and writing of the West Credit Subwatershed Study.

Chris Robinson, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Programs Manager, with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), states *“the assessment of Brook Trout in the West Credit River and the proponent’s understanding of the potential negative impacts to Brook Trout, are inadequate. Previously, the status of wild Brook Trout in this tributary did not support the discharge of wastewater into the West Credit River; it is not transparent as to what, if anything, has changed to now allow this major development to occur”*.

673 people wrote to Minister Wilkinson asking that he support the Coalition’s request to designate the Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant (Erin WWTP) for a federal review under the Impact Assessment Act.

Imhof and Robinson point out the importance of protecting the unique coldwater fish habitat in the West Credit River watershed.

Jack said, *“Southern Ontario has lost more than 80% of its resident, stream Brook Trout populations over the last 70 years (OMNRF report) and the Brook Trout and Redside Dace populations of the Credit are slim in general and only healthy in this small sub-watershed. Reasonable growth is one thing but to again sacrifice our healthy environments as a result of poor planning and inadequate design should not be allowed. A state-of-the-art design though not required everywhere is needed here. We should not be destroying the last remaining healthy subwatershed for expediency. This small watershed and its human community deserve better.”*

Chris adds *“The West Credit River includes Atlantic Salmon stocking sites and prime potential spawning habitat only a few kilometers from the proposed WWTP location [at point of sewage effluent discharge]. We also use the West Credit River in the village of Belfountain to stock Atlantic Salmon raised by local schools”*.

Chris further comments that *“While public comments have been made by the proponents that temperature and other parameters will be monitored throughout the construction and operation*

of the WWTP and adjustments made if needed, since such technologies are available a sounder, more precautionary and ultimately more cost-effective approach for taxpayers is to install the technologies proactively and be a leader in wastewater treatment. To that end, we expect a more thorough review by the federal government will consider requiring the municipality to adopt measures to ensure an appropriate water quality for effluent from the proposed WWTP into the sensitive West Credit River.”

Chris added “The project’s publicly available documentation appears to show the province repeatedly raising these issues, and the proponent’s consultants dismissing them, until in the end the province appears to surrender on the issues. Requests from the public for more information on the decision-making process have not produced answers. The proponent also appears unwilling to address how this project will interact with the cumulative effects of increased water-taking by a larger population base and climate change, which is not what a government acting in the public’s interests should be doing in 2021.”

The OFAH is a founding and lead partner in the Lake Ontario Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program, and active in a number of watersheds, including the Credit River, to bring this native species back.

The Coalition for the West Credit River represents the following organizations: the Belfountain Community Organization, Izaak Walton Fly Fishing Club, Ontario Rivers Alliance, Ontario Streams, Trout Unlimited Canada - Greg Clark Chapter and the West Credit River Watch.

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