



Protected - The Chute, Ivanhoe River – photo by Marc Clement

ONTARIO RIVERS ALLIANCE

2017 – 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

20 October 2018

Prepared by: Linda Heron, Chair



ORA Board of Directors

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A BIG thank you to ORA's Board of Directors for your dedicated service!

Letter from the Chair

Over the last eight years the Ontario Rivers Alliance (ORA) has been working diligently with its members and partners to fulfill our mission to protect, conserve and restore Ontario riverine ecosystems.

Through our strong advocacy, strategizing and collaboration, this organization has achieved many important successes, some of which are:

- 24 sites on 12 Ontario rivers were protected from hydroelectric development
- Energy East Project - terminated
- Completion of the Rudd Dam Removal Project on the West Credit River
- \$25,000 Great Lakes Community Fund grant for the Rudd Dam Removal Project
- \$35,000 Mountain Equipment Coop grant to develop ORA's website and a 5-year Strategic Plan

ORA has also been very active over this last year, commenting on the federal government's modernization and review of several key pieces of legislation, such as the

- Fisheries Act
- Impact Assessment Act
- Canadian Environmental Assessment Act

Over the last year ORA also commented on numerous provincial and municipal development and regulatory opportunities. You will find links to those submissions within this Annual Report.

I'm very pleased to report that ORA has advocated for the decommissioning of several old and deteriorating dams within the Province over this past year. Our organization is also looking forward to working with the Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry and the Credit Valley Conservation Authority to begin the planning process for the Ainsworth Dam Removal Project.

ORA is also a member of the Great Lakes Protection Alliance, which is a large network of environmental organizations that include the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Environmental Defence, Freshwater Futures, World Wildlife Federation Canada, and many others, that advocate for relevant legislative and policy changes within Ontario and Canada. This collaboration of partners provides diverse expertise, but most importantly, a much stronger and more compelling voice.

Of course, our successes would not be possible without the support of our volunteers and members – so thank you!!

What follows is a list of our submissions, presentations, publications, etc., and the status of some of our ongoing projects.

Yours in Conservation,



Chair, Ontario Rivers Alliance

About ORA:

Ontario Rivers Alliance (ORA) is a Not-for-Profit grassroots organization with a focus on healthy river ecosystems all across Ontario. ORA is a voice for a number of member and partner organizations, stewardships and associations, as well as many other private and Indigenous citizens. We have come together to protect, conserve and restore healthy river ecosystems, and to ensure that development affecting Ontario rivers is environmentally and socially sustainable and responsible.

ORA has a broad overarching perspective in our approach to conserving and protecting Ontario's freshwater resources. We collaborate with other organizations, individuals and Indigenous citizens throughout the province to share, communicate, assist, and join our voices, experience and strengths in a coordinated effort to address risky or threatening developments and unhealthy river ecosystems. ORA's success and accomplishments are entirely the result of the efforts of dedicated volunteers and members.

Since our beginnings early in 2011, ORA has worked tirelessly to address risky developments, influence policy, process and legislation, to improve the environmental assessment and approvals process, to increase public awareness of the impacts development is imposing, and the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring riverine ecosystems.

ORA works to raise awareness through our website, E-newsletter, Action Alerts, public speaking engagements, and other communication and outreach initiatives and campaigns in order to build a strong engaged network of like-minded individuals and organizations.

ORA has assisted numerous individuals and groups in advocating for river protection, conservation and, most recently, dam removal and restoration, with the assistance of our network of volunteers that provide scientific and technical expertise and advice.

ORA has a solid track record of providing science-based and reasoned advice on policy and development that affects Ontario rivers.

Challenges to Ontario Rivers:

ORA is concerned with all issues affecting Ontario rivers and lakes, including the cumulative and ongoing negative effects of hydroelectric, waste water treatment facilities, mining and industry releasing effluent into our waterways, diminished water quality and water quantity, forestry impacts, blue-green algae, invasive species, overdevelopment of our shorelines, endangered species, threatened fisheries, old dams that no longer serve any useful purpose and block our waterways, and the most daunting challenge of all, climate change.

Healthy rivers provide drinking water, food, flood protection, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and economic benefits to local and First Nation communities. They are a vital part of our heritage and are sources of community identity and pride. In an era of global warming, effective long-term protection for rivers must begin at the headwaters and encompass the entire watershed.

For an overview of what ORA has achieved since our inception in 2011, you can check out our previous Annual Reports and Blog, located on our website here.

ORA Activities – October 2017 to October 2018:

1. ORA Comments on EBR Submissions:

- 11 Dec 2017 – EBR-013-1476 – Draft GRS for the American Eel Recovery Strategy
- 20 Feb 2018 - EBR-013-1839 & 1840 – Clean Water Act Amendments
- 7 Mar 2018 – EBR-013-1661 – Protecting our Water
- 7 Apr 2018 – EBR 013-1817 – Watershed Planning Guidance
- 12 Apr 2018 – EBR-013-2099 - Updating the Part II Order Request Process, EAA
- 10 Oct 2018 - EBR-013-3738 – Bill 4, Cap & Trade Cancellation Act, 2018

2. Federal Regulatory Submissions:

- 6 Nov 2017 - Response from Catherine McKenna, on 28 Aug 2017 submission – Re: Discussion Paper on the review of the environmental & regulatory processes
- 4 Apr 2018 - Briefing Note on Bill C-69 – Impact Assessment Act
- 15 May 2018 - Canadian Environmental Protection Act
- 28 May 2018 - Impact Assessment Act
- 21 Sep 2018 - Approach to a key regulation under the proposed Fish and Fish Habitat Divisions of the Fisheries Act

3. Dam Decommissioning:

- 9 Jan 2018 – TRAA & ORA - One River Stage 1 Master Plan EA Report – Springbank Dam - ORA & 16 Partners
- 18 Apr 2018 – Riverside Dam Class EA – Speed River
- 19 Apr 2018 – Gorrie Dam Failure – North Maitland River
- 24 Apr 2018 – Decommission Howson Dam on North Maitland River
- 16 May 2018 – Riverside Dam Class EA – Update to Preliminary Preferred Alternative – ORA & Partners
- 28 Sep 2018 - Riverside Dam Class ER - Part II Order Request – ORA & Partners

4. Joint Submissions:

- 22 Feb 2018 – Environmental Groups' Response to Environment and Climate Change Canada's and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's decision to reject without consultation the ENGO Proposal to Add Radionuclides to the National Pollutant Release Inventory
- 19 Mar 2018 – Joint Submission to The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Re: Listing American Eel under the Species at Risk Act as Threatened
- 12 Apr 2018 – Ontario Freshwater Priorities
- 4 Jun 2018 – Towards Zero Plastic Waste Canada
- 20 Sep 2018 – Screening Assessment Tool for Coal Tar Sealants

5. Endorsed Submissions:

- 7 Mar 2018 – EBR-013-1661 – Protecting our Water
- 28 May 2018 – CELA et al. Comments on PBDE Draft Strategy
- 15 Jun 2018 – Draft Great Lakes Binational Strategy for Mercury Risk Management
- 16 Oct 2018 – Amending the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999

6. Other Publications:

- 21 Oct 2017 – 2016 – 2017 ORA Annual Report
- Jan 2018 – ORA River Run E-Newsletter
- Jun 2018 – ORA River Run E-newsletter

7. Presentations:

- 23 Nov 2017 – University of Sudbury, Indigenous Studies
- 10 May 2018 – Save the Blue Heart – Patagonia Event
- 18 Jun 2018 - Township of North Huron, Wingham – Howson Dam
- 26 Jun 2018 - Riverside Dam on the Speed River – Robert Huber to Cambridge City Council

8. Grant Applications:

- 17 Jun 2018 – Lush Water Strategy – Pre-Application Summary: Healthy Rivers for the Great Lakes - \$75,000 over 3 years (No decision to date)

9. Press Releases:

- 9 Jan 2018 – CWF, Ottawa Riverkeeper, Ontario Nature & ORAA Joint Press Release – “Not a second to spare: environmental groups react to Ontario government’s plan for recovering endangered eels”
- 25 Jan 2018 - London City Council Says Springbank Dam Must Go
- 27 Feb 2018 – Joint Press Release - The Government of Canada hits a home run for biodiversity conservation - Now, the Government of Ontario needs to step up to the plate
- 19 Mar 2018 – Joint Press Release - Conservationists Urge Canadian Government to Protect American Eel

10. Campaigns:

- 11 Dec 2017 – EBR-013-1476 – Draft GRS for the American Eel Recovery Strategy
- May 2018 - The Protected Places Declaration – Joint with Ontario Nature

11. Awards:

- 2 Apr 2018 – Freshwater Future named ORA Chair, as a 2018 Freshwater Hero - International Award

12. Media Coverage:

- Jun 2018 - Lifeblood of the North, Chair’s Interview, by Scott Haddow, Wild Northerner Magazine

13. Hydroelectric Proposals - Updates:

ORA has engaged in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process of several proposed waterpower developments which had been going through the environmental screening and approvals process for several years. The purpose of the EA process is to determine the potential impacts and risks to the environment, as well as public health and safety.

We had not addressed any new hydroelectric proposals in the last few years because dam building in Ontario had fallen out of favour and had significantly diminished. Additionally, just recently the new Provincial government cancelled 758 Renewable Energy Feed In Tariff (FIT) Contracts, including 15 hydroelectric proposals.

As a result of the cancellation of FIT Contracts, ORA’s outstanding Part II Order requests filed with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change have died a natural death – they include Marter Township GS, Ivanhoe River GS, Frederick House GS, Trout Lake River GS, and Kabinakami River GS. That leaves the following:

❖ **Wabagishik Rapids Waterpower Project – Vermilion River**

Xeneca Power Development Inc. proposed to construct a 3.4 MW modified run-of-river hydroelectric power generation station at Wabagishik Rapids, on the Vermilion River. Wabagishik Rapids is the site of a significant walleye spawning habitat, and Lake Sturgeon were discovered immediately below the proposed dam location.

ORA and 21 others made Part II Order requests to the Minister of Environment (MOE), asking that the ER be elevated to an Individual EA. MOECC's public file reveals the Environmental Report (ER) had numerous deficiencies.

- ORA to Xeneca – Comments on ER, Oct 2013.
- ORA to MOECC – Part II Order request, Nov 2013
- ORA to MOECC – Follow-up, Feb 2014
- ORA to MOECC – Request for Meeting, Jun 2014
- MOECC to ORA - Response, Jun 2014
- Met with MOECC staff and made presentation – Wabagishik Rapids Heavy Metal Contamination, and discussed merits of the ER, Jul 2014
- MOECC, Minister's Decision Letter to VRS – Proposed Wabagishik Rapids ER, May 2016
- MOECC, Minister's Decision Letter to Xeneca – Proposed Wabagishik Rapids ER, May 2016
- Wabagishik Rapids GS, ORA/VRS to Minister of Environment – Re: Decision on Part II Order Request, Jul 2016
- Minister Response to ORA/VRS 11 July 2016 Letter, Wabagishik Rapids, Aug 2016
- Xeneca to ORA/VRS – Wabagishik GS Notice of Meeting, Oct 2016
- **Update:** The Minister of Environment and Climate Change granted Xeneca a conditional approval; however, the proponent has no power procurement contract, and all of the northern territory has no available connection to transmission, so it is unlikely the project will ever go forward.
- **Xeneca had 2 years from May of 2016 to meet the conditions of the MOECC's conditional approval. Consequently, the Wabagishik ER expired in May 2018 and is no longer valid.**

❖ **Bala Falls**

Swift River Energy Limited proposed a 3 to 5 MW “run of river” hydroelectric facility near the south end of Bala's existing north dam, located in the Town of Bala, Township of Muskoka Lakes, Ontario.

ORA, Save Bala Falls, and others, made Part II Order requests to the MOECC in 2011. We and others appealed the Director's decision in 2012. The appeal was denied and the Statement of Completion issued in 2013. The project is now being contested by First Nations on the grounds that duty to consult was not properly fulfilled. There is ongoing and strong advocacy by Save Bala Falls.

- Part II Order request, May 2011
- Comments to Muskoka Lakes, Aug 2011
- Comments to MOECC, Apr 2012
- ORA to MOECC, Re Addendum, Jun 2012
- Request to Review Director's Decision, Oct 2012
- Request denied by MOECC, Jan 2013
- Request for Addendum, May 2015
- **Building has commenced.**

In Conclusion:

ORA has been advocating for several other potential dam removal projects, and we are hopeful our labours will bear fruit.

ORA will continue to build on its successes, and explore innovative ways to better serve our membership and Ontario Rivers.

A big thank you to all those who have assisted ORA by way of membership dues, donations and volunteer work! We couldn't do what we do without your continued support!

Yours in Conservation,



Linda Heron
Chair
Ontario Rivers Alliance
OntarioRiversAlliance.ca