



*East Channel, Eramosa River – Weir Removal*

# **ONTARIO RIVERS ALLIANCE**

**2019 – 2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**24 October 2020**

**Linda Heron, Chair and CAO**



## **ORA Board of Directors**

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

## Letter from the Chair

Greetings everyone, I wish you the best of health and resilience!

The Ontario Rivers Alliance (ORA) has had another busy year, and COVID-19 has made many aspects of life and work quite challenging. In-person meetings are a thing of the past, at least for now, and we miss those important interactions with our volunteers and members. However, the pandemic hasn't slowed down ORA's advocacy work for strong policy and legislation or kept us from addressing issues that pose a threat to Ontario rivers.

I am very pleased to report that our dam decommissioning advocacy work is paying off, with the Eramosa River, East Branch weir removed in September of this year (on the front cover), and the Gorrie and Springbank Dams are scheduled to be decommissioned in 2021. There should be a decision on the Howson Dam sometime next year as well.

The ORA is very concerned about recent major amendments to several pieces of legislation and policy affecting our freshwater, including an undermining of public and Indigenous consultation and participation. These amendments have wiped out protective environmental legislation and policy that has taken over 50 years of hard lessons learned to develop. Stay tuned for yet another assault coming in the new year – if not sooner.

ORA is a member of the Great Lakes Protection Act 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 protective 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.

ORA has also completed its 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan and it is available on our website here.

What follows is a list of ORA's Activities. You can click on the live links embedded in the text of each item to access those documents on our website Blog, where you will find more detailed information.

Yours in Conservation,



Chair & Chief Administrative Officer

## **About ORA:**

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 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 a dedicated team of volunteers and members.

Since our beginnings early in 2011, ORA has worked tirelessly to address concerning 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 dam removal and restoration. This wouldn't be possible without the assistance of our network of volunteers and partners which provide scientific and technical expertise and advice.

ORA has a solid track record of providing evidenced-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 website Blog, located [here](#).

## **ORA Activities – November 2019 to October 2020:**

### **1. Provincial Regulatory Submissions:**

- 4 November 2019 – ERO-019-0556 - Proposed Amendments to the Aggregate Resources Act
- 12 November 2019 – ERO-019-0518 – Ontario’s Sustainable Bait Management Strategy – Draft 2019
- 23 November 2019 – Bill 132 and Proposed Waterpower Exemption to a PTTW
- 5 December 2019 – ERO-019-0545 - Proposed Waterpower Exemption to a PTTW & Related Amendments to LRIA
- 3 February – ERO-019-1060 – Proposed Amendment to LRIA Reg. 454/96 - Wetland Dams
- 4 February – ERO-019-0880 – Ontario’s Draft Forest Sector Strategy
- 29 March – MNRF response to ORA – LRIA Regulation 454/96
- 17 April – CELA – ERO-019-1599 - Temporary exemption of Proposals from EBR during Declaration of Emergency
- 19 May 2020 – Monitoring of Mercury Near Dams – LRIA, O.R. 102/20
- 18 June 2020 – ERO-019-1620 – Proposed amendment to a regulation under Endangered Species Act, 2007, relating to Forest Operations in Crown Forests
- 28 June 2020 – ERO–019-1749 – Developing GRSs for nine Species at Risk under the ESA, 2007
- 22 August 2020 – Bill 197 & Proposed Major Amendment to the Class Environmental Assessment for Waterpower

### **2. Hydroelectric Updates:**

- 31 January 2020 – Calabogie GS Upgrade – Madawaska River - OPG
- 17 February 2020 – Little Long GS Upgrade – OPG – Mattagami River
- 24 February 2020 – OPG Response to ORA - Calabogie GS Upgrade, Madawaska River
- 27 April 2020 – Lake Sturgeon Rescue from the Lower Mattagami Generating Complex - OPG
- 6 October 2020 – Trout Lake River GS, MECP to ORA
- 6 October 2020 – Trout Lake River GS, MECP to Horizon Hydro Operations Ltd.

Since our inception ORA has engaged in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process of several proposed waterpower developments and potential dam removal projects. The purpose of the EA process is to determine best options, and the potential impacts and risks to the environment. There has always been an opportunity for improving mitigation measures and the project in general.

Last September the Ford government passed legislation that exempted hydroelectric from the requirement of obtaining a Permit to Take Water (PTTW). The PTTW ensured the fair sharing of water with other users within the river system.

In August of this year, the government passed Omnibus Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, which made major amendments to 8 different Acts, including the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA), without any public or Indigenous consultation.

These EAA amendments included limiting Part II Order requests to potential adverse impacts of projects to constitutionally protected Aboriginal or treaty rights. This was even applied retroactively to 2013 when ORA made a Part II Order request on the Trout Lake River GS Environmental Report. The Ontario government informed ORA that the only concerns they would consider would be those related to Indigenous treaty rights. So, all of ORA's other concerns relating to this project will not be addressed. This doesn't bode well for any other hydroelectric projects that have not had a final decision regarding Part II Order requests.

### **3. Dam Decommissioning Updates:**

- 18 February 2020 – EcoAction Support Letter – Middle Maitland River Dam Removal
- 21 February 2020 – EcoAction Support Letter – Town Pond Dam Removal, Armstrong Creek
- 27 February 2020 – EcoAction Support Letter – East Branch Weir Removal, Eramosa River
- Springbank Dam, Thames River – In the bidding process for decommissioning
- East Branch Weir, Eramosa River – Weir was removed in September 2020
- Riverside Dam, Speed River – Going through the planning phase of a rebuild
- Gorrie Dam, North Maitland River – Going through the planning phase for removal in 2021
- Howson Dam, North Maitland River – Awaiting Council decision

### **4. Wastewater Treatment Submission:**

- 23 June 2020 – Town of Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant – Concerns over Brook Trout and Fish Habitat on the West Credit River
- 22 August 2020 – ERO-019-1080 – Proposed changes to environmental approvals for municipal sewage collection works

### **5. Joint Submissions:**

- 21 October 2019 – ERO-019-0279 - Provincial Policy Statement Review
- 6 December 2019 – ERO-019-0773 – Proposal to transfer requirements from Ontario's industrial effluent monitoring and limit regulations into Environmental Compliance Approvals – ORA Support
- 16 December 2019 – NGO Comments on Draft Binational Criteria for Nominated Chemicals of Mutual Support – ORA Support
- 17 April – CELA – ERO-019-1599 - Temporary exemption of Proposals from EBR during Declaration of Emergency
- 27 April 2020 – Lake Sturgeon Rescue from the Lower Mattagami Generating Complex - OPG
- 27 April 2020 – 112 Organizations offer support for Conservation Authorities in Ontario - Endorsed
- 5 June 2020 – Minister Jeff Yurek's response to 27 April 2020 joint submission

- 10 July 2020 – Nature conservation should be central to Canada’s recovery from Covid-19 - Joint
- 28 July 2020 – Amendment to the Growth Plan to allow aggregate extraction in the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- 24 August 2020 – Ontario, Recycling is the Last Resort

## **6. Campaigns:**

- 5-day Petition Campaign – Speak up for Ontario Rivers - Waterpower Exemption to a PTTW
- 3-January 2020 – ORA Strategic Planning Survey

## **7. Other Publications:**

- 2020 – 2025 ORA Strategic Plan
- January 2020 - ORA E-Newsletter
- May 2020 - ORA E-Newsletter
- September 2020 – ORA E-Newsletter

## **8. Media Release:**

- 14 May 2020 – Time to clean the swimming pool, but where to drain the water?

## **9. Letter of Support**

- 1 May 2020 – Letter recommending Fred Schueler & Aleta Karstad for Award

## **10. Presentations:**

- 21 November 2019 – University of Sudbury Indigenous Studies – 3 Presentations to a total of approximately 150 students
- 25 November 2019 – ORA Presentation to Standing Committee on General Government – Omnibus Bill 132

## **11. Articles:**

- 3 October 2020 - The Koral Adventure Series: What happens when you fall in love with a river, by Mary Katherine Keown
- 7 October 2020 – Climate Change threatens Canada’s dams – but who’s keeping track, by Matthew McClearn

## **12. Subscribe to ORA’s online news sources:**

- ORA Website: <https://ontarioriversalliance.ca/blog/>
- E-newsletter: <https://www.ontarioriversalliance.ca/take-action/-join-our-newsletter>
- ORA Paper-li Daily Newspaper: [https://paper.li/OntarioRivers/1523792563#/#/](https://paper.li/OntarioRivers/1523792563#/)
- RSS Feed: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/ontarioriversalliance/KpBY>
- Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/OntarioRivers>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/OntarioRivers>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/OntarioRivers>

## **In Conclusion:**

ORA is 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Heron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Linda Heron  
Chair & CAO  
Ontario Rivers Alliance  
[OntarioRiversAlliance.ca](http://OntarioRiversAlliance.ca)