

Cut the Crap, Fund the Plan:
2014 Should be a Breakthrough Year
for Ottawa's Rivers



Ecology Ottawa
February 2014

Executive Summary

Enough is enough. It is time for the federal and provincial governments to provide the infrastructure funding that the City of Ottawa needs to stop the dumping of untreated sewage directly into the Ottawa River. The 2014 federal and provincial budgets are an opportunity to put sewage dumping behind us so that we clean up our rivers and focus on other major challenges like expanding light rail and improving stormwater management.

We have come a long way since the scandalous events of 2006 when a broken sewage gate jammed open and dumped almost a billion litres of untreated sewage into the Ottawa River over the course of more than a week. The City of Ottawa was charged and convicted for allowing the spill to happen and for failing to notify the province's Environment Ministry in a timely fashion. The 2006 spill was a shocking accident, but it was also a reminder that every time it rains 2.5 millimetres per hour or more — which is a fairly moderate rate that occurs often in Ottawa — our sewage system gets overwhelmed and we start dumping a mixture of raw sewage and polluted stormwater from one of 18 sewer overflow sites on the Ottawa and Rideau rivers.

In 2010, the City of Ottawa adopted the Ottawa River Action Plan (ORAP or the "River Plan") to fix the problem. The provincial and federal governments supported the first phase of the plan and, thanks to some of the measures that have since been taken, we have significantly reduced the outrageous volumes of sewage we are dumping into the river. In 2013, we dumped about 225 million litres of untreated sewage into the Ottawa River, down from over 670 million litres in 2010. Yet, the next phase of the plan — building underground tunnels to hold the excess water and prevent overflow discharges — has still not been implemented. The federal and provincial governments have still not come through with funding for this important infrastructure project, a critical measure that will allow us to largely stop the dumping.

The City needs about \$195 million to build these underground tunnels. It has already committed its fair share of the funding, but it needs the federal and provincial governments to each contribute about \$65 million to the project.

In a letter to Ecology Ottawa in 2012, Minister John Baird stated that he would "ensure that the clean-up of the Ottawa River is the number one project for the Federal Government" in the City of Ottawa during the next round of infrastructure funding. In March 2013, the federal government announced a new nationwide 10-year, \$53-billion infrastructure program, but funding for the River Plan has still not been announced.

It is clear that the federal government is already spending this new infrastructure money. In September it announced a \$660 million contribution to a subway extension in Toronto. When Minister Flaherty made the announcement alongside Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, he was asked why the announcement was being made at that time (before the criteria for the infrastructure funding had been clearly established). Minister Flaherty replied: "Because the mayor wrote to us and asked."

The people of Ottawa have been writing letters and asking for federal support for years and we are looking to the 2014 budget for an indication that the federal government is listening. Over 10,000 people have signed Ecology Ottawa's petition calling on the federal and provincial governments to support the Ottawa River Action Plan, and the Mayor of Ottawa has repeatedly made it clear that funding for light rail and the River Plan are his two key infrastructure priorities.

And much like the federal government, 2014 will also give us some indication of how closely the provincial government is listening. In 2013, provincial Minister Chiarelli wrote to Ecology Ottawa and said that while the province was very supportive of the River Plan, the Government of Ontario "would not be able to make a commitment without the federal government coming to the table as well."

Ecology Ottawa is grateful for both federal and provincial statements of support, and for the investments that they have made so far, but it is time for the provincial government to unambiguously state that they intend to finance their fair share of this infrastructure project and to call on the federal government to do the same. The 2014 provincial budget will be an excellent opportunity to make their position clear.

This issue has been dragging on for too long and we need to put the funding question behind us so that we can focus on new challenges. We should be talking about federal and provincial support for expanding light rail, not a 2010 plan to clean up the river, and it is time to move forward with other critical measures to protect our waterways.

There are more than 4,500 kilometers of streams and rivers inside the City of Ottawa and the delay in federal and provincial funding to support the sewage infrastructure is diverting us from other pressing issues. The City of Ottawa should complete its long overdue Water Environment Strategy and develop a new vision and a new River Plan. We should be talking about how to deal with the cocktail of contaminants that gets picked up off our roads, roofs and park lots every time it rains and swept into the river in the form of stormwater. We should be talking about how to make strategic investments that will slow down, soak up, and keep stormwater clean and protect the structural integrity and the life of our rivers, creeks and streams.

It is time to move on and focus on new measures that will reduce beach closures and reduce the toxicity of our fish. It is time to make it even easier for us to have a healthy relationship with the physical feature that most defines our great city, our rivers.

It is time to cut the crap and fund the Ottawa River Action Plan.

Ottawa defined by its northern border: the Ottawa River

Down at street level, asphalt corridors like the Queensway, Riverside Drive and many others, often seem to determine the flow of things. But if we get just a bit above all that concrete and congestion – climb the Peace Tower and look down; hike the escarpment in Gatineau Park and look south – our eyes and minds, reorient themselves. Suddenly, Ottawa becomes what it actually is: a river city. And we become what we really are: citizens of one of the great rivers of the world. Unfortunately, the Ottawa is also a river that very much needs our help.



OTTAWA RIVER WATERSHED Source: Natural Resources Canada - www.nrcan.gc.ca

Why the River Needs Our Support

Flowing for 1,271 kilometres, from Lake Capimitchigama in the Laurentians to the St. Lawrence at Montreal, the Ottawa is the second largest river in Eastern Canada. Providing precious habitat for endangered species like the Spotted Turtle, the Least Bittern and American Ginseng, along with hundreds of other aquatic, avian, and terrestrial species, the Ottawa River is no less precious for the human beings who live near its shores. For thousands of years, people have depended on the Ottawa for transportation, food, and recreation. So it is that the Algonquin have long identified themselves as the Kichi sipi anishnaabeg or “big river people.”

The critical role of the river in nurturing successful habitation along its shores has not lessened with time. But for residents of Ottawa who do not live within sight of its waters, it can be easy to forget our dependence on the river. However, when we turn on the tap: it is water from the Ottawa that fills our cups and flows into our homes.

Every day, the City of Ottawa draws more than 300 million litres of water from the river at the Britannia and Lemieux Island water purification plants — that’s more than 30 Olympic-sized swimming pools. While it’s no surprise to hear that the water from the Ottawa must be rigorously purified before it arrives at our taps (and our tap water is clean and healthy), it is worth detailing some of the particular threats to our beautiful river’s water:

- ◆ Nine pulp and paper mills that process timber along its shores release over 150,000 tonnes of wastewater (the weight of the cruise ship Queen Mary II) annually, containing heavy metals, carcinogens and other toxic substances.
- ◆ The Chalk River Nuclear Facility has experienced leaks of radioactive heavy water and its process sewer discharges into the Ottawa River 83 million litres per day of effluent that contains some residual chlorine from periodic shock chlorination of the reactor cooling water, and may contain small concentrations of radioactive materials.
- ◆ The City of Gatineau regularly discharges unquantified volumes of untreated or partially treated sewage into the Ottawa River, with occurrences that have gone from 1,475 to 982 per year between 2006 and 2012.
- ◆ Ottawa homes and businesses generate wastewater containing household, commercial and industrial chemicals and raw sewage. About 99% of this wastewater is treated at the municipal wastewater treatment plant (an average 420 million liters of wastewater / day) before being discharged into the Ottawa River. But the flow captured by stormwater sewers, which contains pesticide runoff, oil and other pollutants, and the discharges from combined sewer overflows (237 million liters in 2012 and nearly 225 million liters in 2013) are dumped untreated into our local waterways.

These threats to the river are totally unacceptable, yet we have somehow come to regard them as normal. For example, instead of ensuring our rivers are not poisoned and fish don’t become toxic, the government monitors how toxic the fish in our lakes and rivers are and recommends that we limit our consumption accordingly (see the Ontario Ministry of Environment’s [Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish](#)). In the case of the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers, limits are recommended for more than 10 species of fish, depending on the area. Much lower consumption limits are recommended for vulnerable populations like pregnant women and children. We have poisoned the Ottawa River to this point, but we should not accept this as normal. We can, and should, stop poisoning the river.

The solutions to the pulp mill effluent, radioactive leaks problems and Gatineau discharges extend beyond the city’s jurisdiction. But the local wastewater system is the City of Ottawa’s responsibility. Our responsibility.

Fifty years ago, all sewage and other forms of wastewater from the City of Ottawa were discharged into the Ottawa River untreated. Today, thanks to over \$1 billion in upgrades, the situation has improved substantially. But much remains to be done: every time it rains polluted stormwater, or untreated sewage mixed with stormwater, end up flowing into the Ottawa River. The latter is one of the most pressing issues facing the health of our river, and, ultimately, of all who rely on the river.

These discharges of sewage and stormwater are known as Combined Sewer Overflows, or CSO, and they gravely undermine the health of our river by:

- ◆ Depleting its waters of oxygen (municipal wastewater is the main source of oxygen depleting substances like nitrogen and phosphorus);
- ◆ Making its riverbed toxic with heavy metals, carcinogens and endocrine disruptors;
- ◆ Choking its tributaries with sediment and debris; and
- ◆ Leaving resident predators, like bald eagles that feed on river fish, with dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals and chemicals in their tissues.

Untreated wastewater also contains very large quantities of bacteria. The most tangible way that many of us experience the effects of Combined Sewer Overflows are the beach closures that frequently follow heavy summer rains, due to high counts of fecal bacteria, such as E. coli, in the water. This contamination has multiple origins, including human waste, droppings from the numerous geese in our parks and along our paths, and waste from our pets throughout the city.

Beach Closures

During the swimming season (which ran in 2013 from June 15 to August 18), Ottawa Public Health (OPH) monitors recreational water quality 7 days a week at Mooney's Bay, Britannia Beach, Westboro Beach, Petrie East Bay and Petrie Island River Beaches to ensure that the water quality is safe for swimming. A no-swimming advisory will be issued if bacteria levels are over 200 E. coli per 100mL of water tested for one day; or if bacteria levels are over 100 E. coli per 100mL of water tested on two or more consecutive days. A 24-hour no-swim advisory may also be put in place at the beaches after significant rainfall.

During the 2013-swim season, from 15 June to 18 Aug. 2013, 9 CSO discharge events totalling 108,000 m³ of combined stormwater and sewage were reported and 27 no-swim advisories were issued, as shown below:

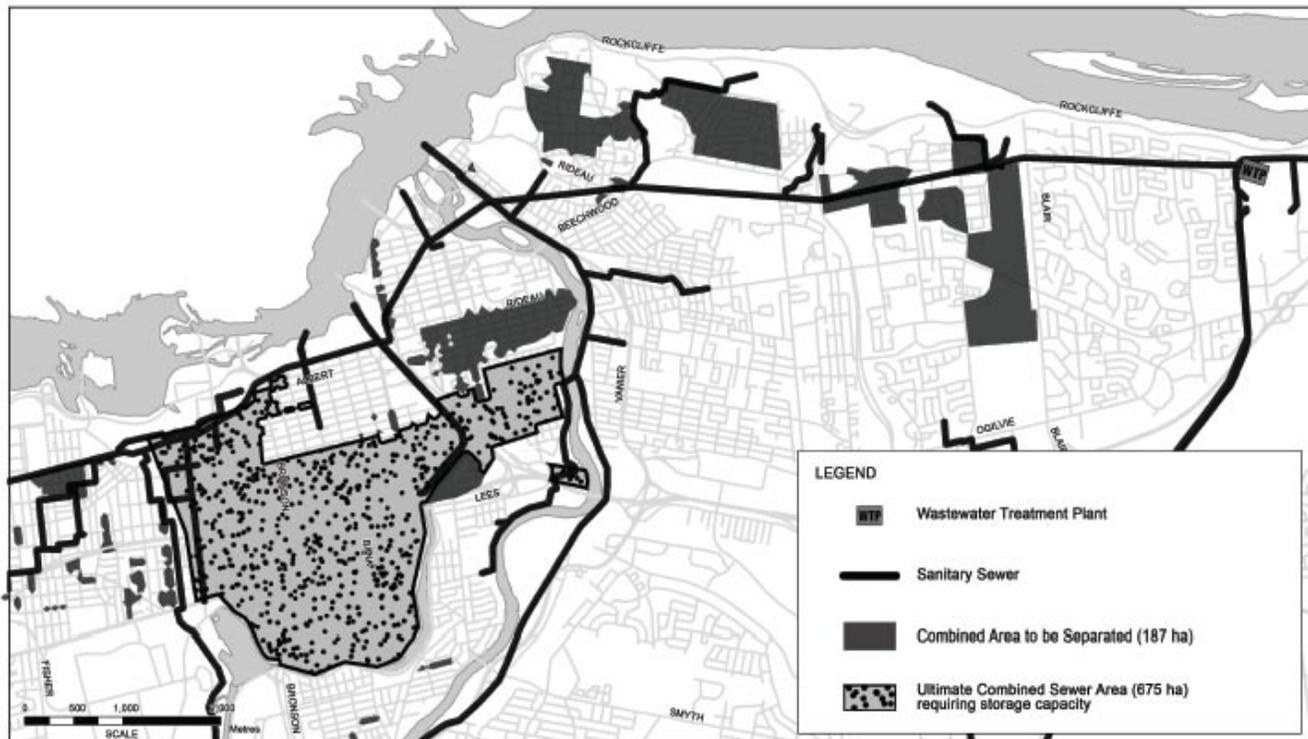
Date	CSO Discharge Events	Beach Closure Location	Amount of E.coli per 100 mL of water
23 June	CSO of 2,440 m ³ due to rain	-	-
25 June	-	Petrie Island River Beaches Westboro Beach Mooney's Bay	332 1000 387
26 June	-	Petrie Island River Beaches Westboro Beach	186 252
27 June	CSO of 17,890 m ³ due to rain	-	-
28 June	-	Westboro Beach	290
30 June	-	Petrie Island River Beaches	569
1 July	-	Petrie Island River Beaches Petrie Island East Bay Mooney's Bay	134 133 125
5 July	CSO of 1,960 m ³ due to rain	-	-
7 July	-	Petrie Island River Beaches	352
8 July	-	Petrie Island River Beaches	155
12 July	-	Westboro Beach	961
19 July	CSO of 8,820 m ³ due to rain	-	-
22 July	-	Petrie Island River Beaches Mooney's Bay	261 178
23 July	CSO of 1,230 m ³ due to rain	Petrie Island River Beaches Mooney's Bay	101 118
24 July	-	Petrie Island River Beaches	36*
29 July	CSO of 580 m ³ due to rain	-	-
30 July	-	Petrie Island River Beaches	58*
1 August	CSO of 15,420 m ³ due to rain	-	-
2 August	-	Mooney's Bay	172*
3 August	-	Mooney's Bay	119
8 August	CSO of 55,370 m ³ due to rain	Petrie Island East Bay Beach Petrie Island River Beaches	259 23*
9 August	-	Mooney's Bay Britannia Beach	208 351
13 August	CSO of 3,370 m ³ due to rain	-	-
14 August	CSO of 920 m ³ due to rain	Mooney's Bay	149*
15 August	-	Mooney's Bay	160
16 August	-	Mooney's Bay	147
18 August	-	Mooney's Bay	284

*Beach closures due to rainfall, independent of the E.coli count.

Source: City of Ottawa website at <<http://ottawa.ca/en/residents/water-and-environment/sewers-and-septic-systems/overflow-activity>>, <<http://ottawa.ca/en/archives-beach-water-quality>> and <<http://ottawa.ca/en/residents/parks-and-recreation/parks-and-sports-fields/daily-water-quality-results>>.

Cleaning Up Our River: The Combined Sewer Overflow Tunnels

In an ideal world, the entire city’s combined sewer-stormwater pipes would be separated. Unfortunately, for a 675-hectare area of the downtown (known as the Ultimate Combined Sewer Area - UCSA), conversion to a two-pipe system in the near future would be both difficult and very costly. So single pipes are likely to remain part of Ottawa’s water system for the foreseeable future.



Source: Ottawa River Action Plan—NB. Solid areas indicate where the plan is to separate sewers within a 187-hectare area comprising a number of streets throughout the core. The stippled area indicates where storage is required to accommodate storm flows generated within a 675-hectare area that would continue to use combined water pipes.

Fortunately, technologies exist that could reduce the effects of CSO. Chief among these are Combined Sewer Overflow tunnels: storage tunnels that would temporarily hold surplus water flows during wet weather, thereby enabling their eventual treatment and preventing overflows into the Ottawa River.

The CSO tunnels project is a critical component of the City of Ottawa’s Ottawa River Action Plan, as it’s primary objective is to stop dumping sewage into the Ottawa River. Drafted in 2009, this Plan (known as ORAP) consists of 17 individual projects designed to restore and protect the health of our river for future generations.²

City staff, local environmental activists, a number of community associations, the Environmental Commissioner and the Ottawa Riverkeeper — a grassroots charity formed to protect the health of the Ottawa River — have endorsed the CSO tunnels approach. These tunnels would bring overflows from an annual average of thirty down to only one event per year with significant reductions in the number of beach closures; capture greater volumes from the more frequent and severe storms predicted to occur as a result of climate change; and allow for treatment of a great volume of urban stormwater — another major pollutant source. In addition, the tunnels could serve as backup to the main sewer in the core part of the city (the Interceptor Outfall Sewer, which is over 50 years old), and possibly pick-up stormwater from other locations for treatment at the sewage treatment plant, reducing pollution from urban stormwater runoff.

² Information on ORAP can be found at the City’s website: <ottawa.ca/en/env_water/tlg/alw/brs/orap/index.html>.

The Environmental Assessment report for the CSO tunnel project was tabled in January 2013, describing the project as follows:

The preferred alternative includes three major components, to be implemented in two phases:

Phase 1:

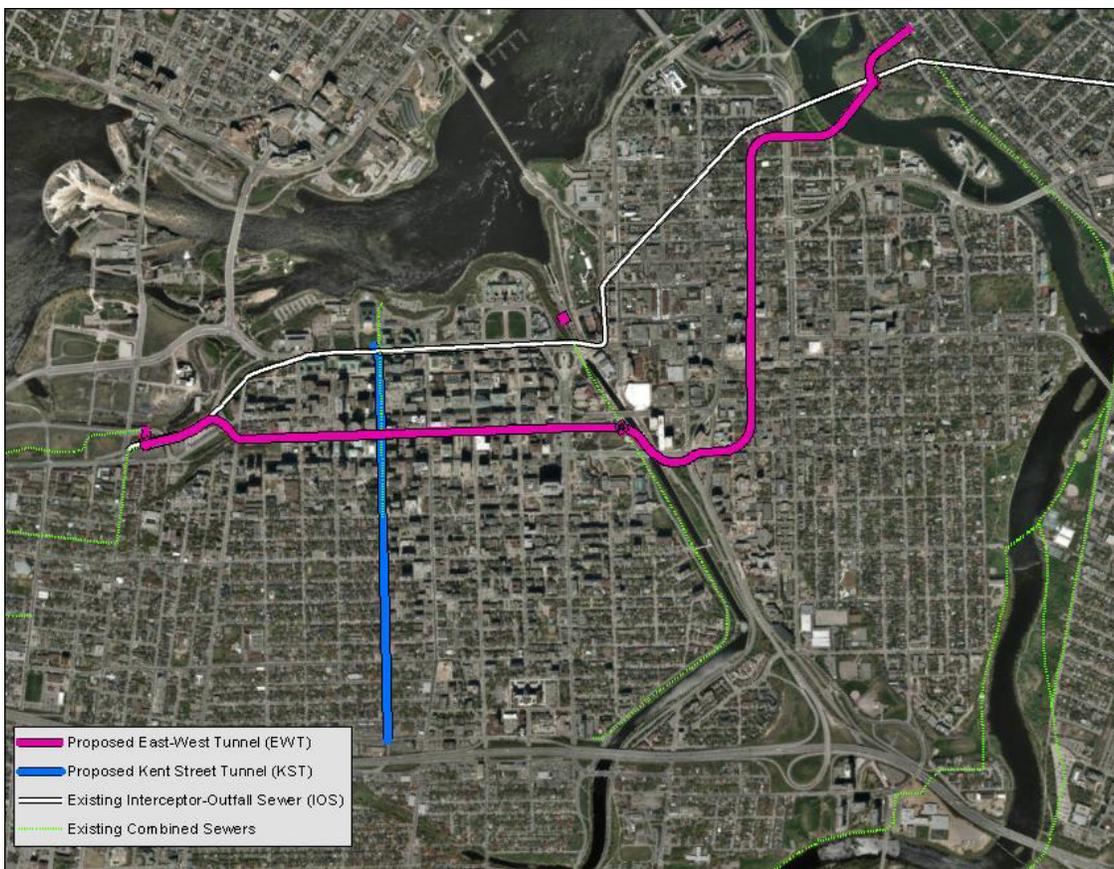
- *a Core Tunnel, capturing overflows in Lebreton Flats (from the West End Regulators), at the Rideau Canal north of Wellington (from the Rideau Canal Regulator), and in New Edinburgh (the Keefer Regulator).*
- *a North-South tunnel along Kent Street, interconnected to the Core Tunnel near Slater*

In conjunction with other ORAP projects, Phase 1 provides sufficient storage to achieve CSO control targets mandated by Council. These two tunnels total over 6 km in length providing over 42,000 cubic metres of storage (including allowances for growth and climate change). The alignment for Phase 1 is shown [below].

Phase 2:

- *an East Tunnel from the Keefer Regulator to the Robert O. Pickard Environmental Centre*

Phase 2 is to be implemented in the future, subject to funding. This Phase will improve significantly the overall reliability of the sewer system by creating redundancy for the Interceptor Outfall Sewer and will further improve CSOs control (for rainfall events larger than those found in the Design Year).



Source: Combined Sewage Storage Tunnel Environmental Assessment – Notice of Completion – Ottawa River Action Project No. 3

Combined, the CSO tunnels and 2 other ORAP projects (implementation of real time control and sewer separation in the Ultimate Combined Sewer Area) will lower the City’s annual contribution of E coli to the Ottawa River by an estimated 65%. Had they been in place in recent years, these projects would have reduced the number of CSO events during the swimming season from an average of thirty per year to one per year.

So while the problem of CSO is significant, the solution is clear and implementable. Unfortunately, obstacles to constructing the CSO tunnels remain. The most important is the federal and provincial governments’ failure so far to make good on their pledge to provide their share of financial support for Ottawa’s sewer system upgrade.

The ORAP to date: Making progress, but still short of funding and behind schedule

In February 2010, the City of Ottawa approved the Ottawa River Action Plan at a total projected cost of \$251.64 million. Central to successful completion of the plan would be a cost-sharing arrangement between three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal.

By the summer of 2011, with good faith being shown by all parties, \$100 million had been collectively invested and implementation of the plan was well underway. The **Year One Update** to City Council on the progress of the plan, dated September 13, 2011, found “all projects [...] moving forward [with] the majority [...] on-schedule.”³ However, the report also noted that the CSO tunnels component was facing 2 major constraints: securing land and easement agreements with the National Capital Commission and securing one-third funding contributions from both the Federal and Provincial governments for the cost of construction (\$150 million, at the point).

The **Year Two Update** to City Council on the progress of the plan, dated January 8, 2013, found “five projects already complete and most others well underway.” The report also noted “major progress has been made towards ORAP’s primary objective of limiting Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) through the implementation of Real Time Control, with an approximate reduction of 58% in measured CSO volumes from 2010 to 2012.”⁴ The only project that was reported as experiencing “potential barriers to success or budget pressures” was the CSO tunnels project. The Class Environmental Assessment study and functional design for the project are complete and were tabled at the same Council meeting the update was tabled, but construction is not expected to start until 2015, provided federal and provincial funding is secured. Also, the current total cost estimate is \$175 million (in 2012 dollars) plus \$15 to \$20 million, due to inflationary pressures.

So the cost estimate for the CSO tunnels project has now increased to possibly \$195 million, and funding from the federal and provincial governments is yet to be secured.

The Federal Perspective: Making Trade-offs Between Water and Transit

In a letter dated July 12, 2011, Mayor Jim Watson urged Minister John Baird to follow through on his government’s earlier pledge for funding to allow Ottawa to fully implement its Ottawa River Action Plan. Mayor Watson reminded Minister Baird, then interim Environment Minister, that at the time the initial funding arrangement was announced, Minister Baird “was explicit about how important this file was to [him] personally and to the federal government.”

In his reply to the mayor, Minister Baird noted that in addition to a \$33 million federal investment in ORAP that had already been delivered, the federal government had also provided the City of Ottawa with \$600 million for transit, on the understanding that transit, not sewer upgrading, was Ottawa’s top priority.

Leading up to the spring 2012 federal budget, many individuals and local organizations urged the federal government to fulfil its promise to help fund the Ottawa River Action Plan. Ecology Ottawa helped bring the issue into the spotlight, both through a letter-writing campaign and a tongue-in-cheek “Cut the Crap” publicity effort. Unfortunately, the 2012 federal budget did not provide the funding Ottawa needs for ORAP.

Later, a spokesman with Minister Baird’s office indicated that the federal government would be open to allowing the City to redirect some of the transit budget to the Ottawa River Action Plan, “should the city now be identifying that as its priority.”

In media interviews in August 2012, Minister Baird stated his personal support for the CSO project in very clear terms: “when you think of the environment, one of the most important treasures we have is the Ottawa River and the whole notion that we’d be dumping what is essentially raw sewage into this historic waterway certainly doesn’t sit well with me and with

³ The report can be found at <http://ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/occ/2011/09-28/ec/02-ORAP%20Report%20-%20ACS2011-ICS-ESD-0032_EN%5B1%5D.htm>.

⁴ The report can be found at <<http://app05.ottawa.ca/sirepub/mtgviewer.aspx?meetid=2480&doctype=MINUTES>>.

most of the people in the city.” Minister Baird then said that “[w]hen we look at the next round of federal infrastructure projects (in 2014), support for Ottawa River will be a real priority.”

In March 2013, the federal government announced a new nationwide 10-year, \$53-billion infrastructure program. Mayor Watson welcomed the announcement and said with this the dream of cleaning up the Ottawa River can finally be achieved.

The Provincial Perspective: Support, But no Specifics

Similarly, the provincial government, including Members of Provincial Parliament in the Ottawa area, has also stated its commitment to the Ottawa River Action Plan. But with competing infrastructure demands and budgets being cut, the provincial government has not provided any clarity about when its share of the funding will be delivered. In August 2012, Minister Chiarielli said the federal funding had to be on the table first.

The 2013 Ontario budget approved in May includes \$35 billion in infrastructure spending over 3 years, but there is no specific reference to funding for the Ottawa River Action Plan. Premier Wynne was in Ottawa on June 27, but she talked about Toronto’s infrastructure, not Ottawa’s. However, Mayor Watson says he has briefed the premier on the next phase of the plan to clean up the Ottawa River and of the expected contributions from the province and the federal government.

Next Steps

It is our understanding that the next steps to secure funding for the CSO tunnels are:

- ◆ The respective investment from the Federal Infrastructure Fund needs to be formally allocated to this project through an agreement with the province and a memorandum of understanding between the province and the city; and
- ◆ The province's share of the resources needs to be allocated in the next provincial budget.

The equal-parts contributions from each level of government had been priced at \$55 million. However, as we noted earlier, city management reports indicate that taking into account inflationary pressures the project cost may be up to \$195 million by the time it is completed in 2018. This would bring the contributions from each level of government to \$65 million.

As noted, negotiations to allocate the federal infrastructure funds were expected to start in the fall of 2013. Minister Baird, Minister Chiarelli and Mayor Watson, have each expressed their commitment in the past for this plan to protect the Ottawa River. Ecology Ottawa is now calling on them to take this infrastructure from promise to material reality by working together to ensure the CSO Storage component of the plan is fully funded and its implementation kick-started no later than 2015, as foreseen by the project's environmental assessment.

At the same time, there is a need to secure funding for the four ORAP projects that will continue beyond 2013. The projects are Project 3 - CSO Storage in the Ultimate Combined Sewer Area; Project 5 - Sewer Separation Outside the Ultimate Combined Sewer Area; Project 7 - Implementation of the Wet Weather Infrastructure Management Plan; and Project 11 - Implementation of Stormwater Management Retrofit Plans. The amount of future funding that will be required is unknown according to the Year two ORAP Update, but we believe determining and securing this funding should be a priority to avoid any gaps and further delays, as we begin 2014.

Mayor Watson has said that stopping sewage overflows should be part of Canada's 150th anniversary celebration in 2017. We couldn't agree more. In addition, the Ottawa River's designation as a heritage river is long overdue. Efforts to achieve this designation began in 2003. In May 2008, when the Ottawa River was formally nominated, Minister Bair committed to this designation in response to Ottawa Center MP Paul Dewar's question in the House of Commons about the government's support to the Ottawa's heritage designation. However, its official designation is still pending because, while the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources endorsed the designation more than four years ago, on May 27, 2009, the federal Minister of Environment has not yet delivered on the government's promise to endorse it.

Beyond the CSO tunnels: Healthy Watersheds

Once the funding is secured, the construction of the CSO tunnels would conclude the primary objective of the Ottawa River Action Plan, which is to stop dumping sewage into the river. Completing this project would make Ottawa a world leader in Combined Sewer Overflow reduction. With far fewer beach closures, and a generally healthier aquatic system, this achievement alone would be cause for celebration and civic pride. But the effort to restore and protect the health of the Ottawa River and its watershed will only have begun.

As Canada's national capital, Ottawa should be a world leader in protecting our city's waterways. That starts with controlling our combined sewer overflow problems, but it doesn't end there. Ottawa will become a true world leader when we adopt a comprehensive, ecosystem-based strategy for our watersheds and implement long-term solutions that reduce pollution and runoff at the source, like Toronto's bylaw requiring green roofs on new buildings to reduce runoff.

In addition to the sewer overflow measures, the Ottawa River Action Plan also includes longer term projects that could lead to these long-term solutions: the reduction of stormwater impacts, the improvement of wastewater treatment, and the development of a long term Water Environment Strategy. We have to ensure that these components of the ORAP are ambitious in their development and effective in their implementation.

Reduction of stormwater impacts

Three ORAP projects aim to reduce stormwater impacts in order to reduce beach pollution and maintain healthy aquatic ecosystems:

- ◆ Pinecrest Creek / Westboro Stormwater Management Retrofit Plan – The Plan was approved by Council in October 2011. It recommends a range of measures to reduce stormwater impact at different levels, from city infrastructure retrofits to actions by individual homeowners, with a 50-year life cycle and a cost of \$43,000,000. Its implementation is expected to improve the longstanding impacts of uncontrolled stormwater runoff, such as erosion in receiving watercourses and poor water quality at Westboro Beach. The project also was meant as a pilot to develop a methodology to be applied to future stormwater management retrofit plans within the urban area.
- ◆ Eastern Subwatersheds Stormwater Retrofit Study – This study includes Billberry, Voyageur, Taylor, and Green's Creeks subwatersheds and aims to mitigate the impacts of uncontrolled runoff on the creeks, the Ottawa River and Petrie Island Beach. It is scheduled for completion in December 2013.
- ◆ Implementation of Retrofit Plans – The ORAP includes initial implementation measures for these SWM plans, which are reported as being in the early planning phases. The focus is on 2 initiatives:
 - Identifying retrofit opportunities on City owned properties and rights-of-way in concert with life-cycle replacements; and
 - Conducting a feasibility study for an end-of-pipe stormwater management facility proposed at the northeast corner of Baseline Road and Woodroffe Avenue.

Engaging the community in effective stormwater management and retrofits is a priority for Ecology Ottawa. We are studying the Pinecrest Creek / Westboro Stormwater Management Retrofit Plan to identify ways to support and monitor its effective implementation and we are looking forward to the release of the Eastern Subwatersheds Study to help engage the communities in support of effective stormwater management and retrofit measures.

Improvement of wastewater treatment

According to the **Year Two Update** on ORAP implementation, "the nearly-complete R.O. Pickard Environmental Centre effluent dechlorination facility will reduce chlorine levels within the treated wastewater effluent below federal regulation limits."

Water Environment Strategy

Developing a long-term water environment strategy is the last component of ORAP, along with measuring and monitoring the City's performance and public outreach and education. According to the Year Two ORAP Update, the Water Environment Strategy (WES) was scheduled to be tabled at Environment Committee in first quarter of 2013 and it will include goals, objectives, a five-year action plan and a coordinating framework. Reportedly it would be released in the fourth quarter of 2013, but it has not yet been released. Ecology Ottawa is looking forward to its release and hopes to see it establish a strong commitment and a clear path to ecosystem-based watershed management for healthy Ottawa watersheds.

Taking Action

The City of Ottawa and its citizens must actively promote and assist in the long-term wellbeing of the river that underpins our city's very existence. Because water is life, we will never stop needing the Ottawa River. But now and in the years to come, it's clear that the river also needs us.

Ecology Ottawa is spearheading a citywide petition drive that has already collected more than 10,000 signatures to "Stop Dumping Raw Sewage into the Ottawa River".

Through the Healthy Watersheds Local Initiative, Ecology Ottawa's Community Network is working with neighbourhoods across the city to engage citizens in the protection and restoration of their local watersheds.

If you haven't signed the petition to keep pressure on our federal representatives and our provincial representatives, go to ecologyottawa.ca. If you would like to be more involved in collecting signatures in your neighbourhood or if you want to join or lead a local Healthy Watersheds project in your community, contact Ecology Ottawa at 613-860-5353 or visit the volunteer section on the website.

Conclusion:

This issue has been dragging on for too long and we need to put the funding question behind us so that we can focus on new challenges. We should be talking about federal and provincial support for expanding light rail, not a 2010 plan to clean up the river, and it is time to move forward with other critical measures to protect our waterways.

There are more than 4,500 kilometers of streams and rivers inside the City of Ottawa and the delay in federal and provincial funding to support the sewage infrastructure is diverting us from other pressing issues. The City of Ottawa should complete its long overdue Water Environment Strategy and develop a new vision and a new River Plan. We should be talking about how to deal with the cocktail of contaminants that gets picked up off our roads, roofs and park lots every time it rains and swept into the river in the form of stormwater. We should be talking about how to make strategic investments that will slow down, soak up, and keep stormwater clean and protect the structural integrity and the life of our rivers, creeks and streams.

It is time to move on and focus on new measures that will reduce beach closures and reduce the toxicity of our fish. It is time to make it even easier for us to have a healthy relationship with the physical feature that most defines our great city, our rivers.

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