



PM# 40005333

# The Eganville Leader

*Renfrew County's largest paid circulation newspaper**Independently-owned since 1902*

115th Year - No. 7

Wednesday, August 3, 2016

Eganville, Ontario

(\$1.90 plus 10 cents GST) **\$2**

## After 13 years, the Ottawa is designated a heritage river

By Debbi Christinck  
Staff Writer**Pembroke** -- This time it is official as the Ottawa River has at last achieved heritage river designation.

The announcement was made last week, although Canadian Minister of the Environment Catherine McKenna had as much as announced the designation a month ago. After the many "near designations" in the past decade, the official announcement came last Thursday, made by Kathryn McGarry, the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Ms. McKenna, who is also the federal minister responsible for Parks Canada.

This designation covers the entire course of the Ontario portion of the Ottawa River through the Ottawa Valley and the County of Renfrew and all the way upriver to Lake Timiskaming and downriver to the Quebec border at East Hawkesbury, a total length of 590 kilometres. This only covers the Ontario side of the river, but it is expected Quebec will soon assign a Province of Quebec heritage designation to their portion of the river, adding the 681 kilometres of the Ottawa, which flow entirely in Quebec for a total of 1,271 kilometres of the heritage designation.

The designation was the dream of the late Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MP Len Hopkins, who represented the riding for three decades and began the background work into

heritage river status in 2003. The official application was made in 2006 but stalled repeatedly. In 2009, the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board endorsed the nomination which led to a great deal of enthusiasm locally about the forthcoming designation. Then things stalled, with the nomination apparently remaining on the desk of successive ministers of the environment without receiving the necessary signature. After numerous "almost" designations, including the strong support of then Minister of the Environment John Baird, it has taken over a decade to have the designation of the river officially endorsed by the federal government.

One reason for the delay could have been the extreme hesitation of current Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MP Cheryl Gallant who has stated the designation may hinder development along the river.

"I am concerned," she told the *Leader* in June when the announcement about the pending designation was made. "It does not just affect property owners along the river, but across the riding."

The day the announcement was made, she re-iterated her concerns at the summer meeting of the Renfrew County Private Landowners' Association. While admitting the designation does not bring along restrictions with it, she said it would generate deeper scrutiny along the river by government agencies.

"We want to conserve our rivers, but not to the point of impeding what a private landowner or business can do with their own properties," she was quoted as saying.

Her provincial counterpart, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke John Yakabuski has a different interpretation of the designation.

"I have supported it all along," he said. "If you look across the country at how many rivers have received the designation it is only fitting that the Ottawa River be similarly recognized."

When the designation was first discussed, he looked into the implications, asking various government officials about the impact.

"I've looked at it from all angles," he said.

Property rights have always been a concern for him, but in this instance property rights will not be negatively impacted, he said.

"I'm satisfied there is nothing in this in any legislative way which affects property rights," he said.

The designation will be a good thing for the area, the MPP maintains.

"I have the prints in my office they made to support the designation," he said. "I think it is a good thing."

As well, local reaction to the official designation among tourist-based organizations has been positive, with the consensus being the designation only means good things for the economy of the Upper Ottawa Valley.

"Already known as The Whitewa-

ter Capital of Canada because of the world-class whitewater rafting, kayaking and canoeing in the Rocher Fendu section of the Ottawa in White-water Region Township, the Canadian Heritage River designation is national recognition of the historical, cultural and recreational importance of the Ottawa River," states Chris Hinsperger, President of the Ottawa Valley Tourist Association (OVTA). "It is an exciting day for all residents of the Ottawa Valley and for all of Canada.

"We know the Ottawa is a vitally important river, the key travel route for our First Nations and for explorers, fur traders, settlers and loggers, and now all of Canada and the world will share in this knowledge and recognition," he said.

OVTA Manager Alastair Baird said it would be a great bonus in the coming year.

"As we approach the celebration of Canada 150th in 2017, this Canadian Heritage River designation of the Ottawa River is a powerful new promotional tool for us to promote all the recreational and heritage features of the Ottawa River, and all our other tributary waterways, tourism businesses, museums, artists and communities," he said.

Larry Graham, chair of the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee, said this designation means the river is finally receiving the recognition it deserves.

"The committee is thrilled this

important Canadian river, arguably its greatest, has now fully joined the Canadian Heritage River system," he said. "The Canadian Heritage River designation will provide the opportunity for communities both large and small from Hawkesbury to Haileybury to join together in celebration of the Ottawa's rich cultural heritage and world class recreational activities."

The committee had put a lot of effort into the application, including a 300-page background study. The Ottawa is Canada's eighth largest river and was a key transportation corridor for not only indigenous peoples, but also early European settlers. Yet the designation lagged behind many other rivers.

"The French and Mattawa were designated before the Ottawa, but how did they get to those rivers?" he asked.

Now things have been moving very quickly for the committee after the 13 year build up. The plaque to mark the designation is being cast and will be unveiled in Ottawa soon. Then it will make its way up to Petawawa Point where it will be installed and dedicated in September.

"Petawawa was the base for all committee activities," he explained.

Once this official plaque has been unveiled it will be up to local communities along the river how they choose to mark and honour the designation, he said.

"They have an incredible tool to run with for generations," he said.

For Mr. Graham it has also been an

emotional time, especially as he has seen many of the founding members of the designation committee pass away, notably Mr. Hopkins and Elder William Commanda. Another committee member passed away this year.

"We are a little bit remorseful it could not have happened in their lifetime," he said. "We have had people working on this for 13 years."

Support in the Algonquin community has been strong for the designation and Mr. Graham said the committee has had a lot of support from Pikwakanagan Chief Kirby Whiteduck.

For now, Mr. Graham is looking forward to taking his first paddle on Canada's newest Heritage River, the Ottawa, even though it will be an emotional experience for him. He will also be joined on the weekend by many others for the Heritage Paddle at Petawawa on Sunday morning.

"The Ottawa River Canoe Brigade we used to promote the designation will also be there," he said. "It will be part of the festival."

This is an exciting time for him and other committee members and he feels the excitement will build locally as people realize how important this designation is. Limited edition prints, which were part of the initial campaign to promote the heritage designation, are still available for sale at the Champlain Trail Museum.

"They will become even more valuable now that we have the designation," he added.