



2009 CANADA'S RIVER DECLARATION

6th Canadian River Heritage Conference
Ottawa–Gatineau, June 14-17, 2009

Vision for Canada's Rivers

Canadian Rivers help to define Canada and Canadians: our future, our world identity, our health and heritage and history. Their integrity and sustainability can no longer be taken for granted. Many of our communities, including our growing cities, are situated on mighty rivers that both nurture our survival and reflect our ecological values.

Rivers and human activity, including equitable public access, need to be in better harmony and be truly sustainable for all inhabitants, vegetation, and the environment. People seek out and then cherish rivers when they are drinkable, swimmable, navigable, fishable, life sustaining, beautiful and pristine, and contribute to a quality of life.

As freshwater and rivers become increasingly threatened by climate change and human activity, an important component of our vision for Canada's rivers is effective governance and management. Our dream, needing to become a quick reality, is to have many players working cooperatively and effectively to enhance rivers and their watersheds and to recognize rivers as a priority for ongoing stewardship. Only then can we bring our vision to reality!

Values affirmed for future action for Canada's rivers:

- 1.1 Foster rivers and their water as a public trust, and not as a commodity;
- 1.2 Use a watershed approach when protecting, conserving, and enhancing our rivers for both ecological and economic well-being;
- 1.3 Understand and value the natural, archaeological, economic, social, historical, and cultural heritage of our rivers;
- 1.4 Increase public awareness, education, experiences, and involvement in stewardship for our rivers;
- 1.5 Employ standards, legislation, and formal oversight to mitigate pollution and restore resiliency for our rivers;
- 1.6 Encourage coalitions and partnerships amongst governments, businesses, and citizens when setting priorities and taking sustainable action for our rivers.

Main challenges facing Canada's rivers today:

- 2.1 Accelerated and inadequately planned "development", of all kinds, along riverbanks and in watersheds which culminates in degraded river ecosystems; a loss of wetlands, aquifers and other natural features; river ecological imbalance; and threatened quality and quantity of clean water;
- 2.2 Increased urbanization of waterways which can lead to more people disconnected and disinterested in their nearby rivers;
- 2.3 Short-term economic gains often receive higher priority than river integrity and sustainability for the future;
- 2.4 Climate change, and specifically the loss of glacial sources to feed rivers, which challenges the ecological integrity of our rivers and alters aquatic ecosystems;
- 2.5 Lack of public and media attention and focus on the threats and risks for our rivers;
- 2.6 Commercialization of river waters in such forms as "selling or permits for taking of water", possible future export of freshwater internationally, intensive hydropower generation, payment of penalties to pollute;
- 2.7 Invasive species entering river systems, along with an increase in Canadian species-at-risk
- 2.8 Increase of river pollution from non-point sources, chemical dumping and run-off, and waste water.

Priority Action for Meeting the Challenges and for Enhancing Canada's Rivers:

We call upon all governments in Canada, the private sector, communities and individuals to collectively and individually:

- 3.1 Create a Rivers Canada Endowment Fund to help support citizen-driven, non-government, and multi-sectoral action for Canada's rivers; community stewardship and sustained leadership; and a stronger voice for rivers;
- 3.2 Give priority to participatory management and stewardship of river watersheds with a focus on long-term river protection;
- 3.3 Engage urban residents and businesses in innovative programs to enhance the natural and cultural features of local rivers and to reduce urban runoff, river pollution, and the cumulative negative effects of development on local rivers;
- 3.4 Make explicit the impacts of land use changes and developments on rivers and their watersheds before approvals for development;
- 3.5 Produce well-publicised assessment reports about the ongoing health of river systems and the cumulative effects of human activity;
- 3.6 Link climate change targets and actions with the welfare of rivers and their watersheds;
- 3.7 Provide decision-makers with opportunities to experience and learn more about the ecological values and need for sustainable management of rivers' watersheds and their water quality and quantity;
- 3.8 Take national and local action on the commercialization of river waters following a time-limited, open and informed public discussion;
- 3.9 Ensure application of species-at-risk and environmental assessment Acts as they relate to watershed protection;
- 3.10 Recognize the long-term interests of Aboriginal communities in their use and stewardship of Canadian rivers;
- 3.11 Work with governments and non-government organizations in taking responsible action for the sustainability of the Transboundary Rivers.

APPENDIX A
Documentation in Support of Priority Actions

“Freshwater Declaration” (November 2008) Science for Peace & Canadian

Pugwash, Global Issues Project, Expert Roundtable on Water 2008: Emerging Threats and Urgent Priorities

For papers, slideshows, for expert roundtable on freshwater visit:

<http://www.ihtec.org/index.php?id=214>

Freshwater Expert Roundtable, Global Issues Project, 8-9 Nov 2008

Freshwater, a critical and limited element, is the very basis of ecosystem health and of Canada's social and economic security. Water sustains life. It has a deeply spiritual association both within and outside of all our religious and aboriginal communities. It defines our national identity. But, Canadians have taken it for granted. We are noticing changes to this precious natural renewable resource. Freshwater shortages are becoming more common, mighty glaciers are disappearing, and pollution problems are worsening. We see disturbing alterations to the landscapes of our northern regions; lakes and rivers are polluted or otherwise threatened. The mistreatment of our water resources jeopardizes the health of our citizens, threatens our country's magnificent biodiversity, and places the well-being of our nation at risk. Many aboriginal communities endure conditions of Third-World poverty; their drinking water remains under indefinite boil-water advisories. We fail the test of sustainability by overuse and abuse of freshwater in many regions. In some parts of Canada, natural systems have reached a crossroad, beyond which recovery may not be possible.

We can restore life to our threatened lakes and rivers and groundwater, generate innovative solutions to our water problems, protect the health of our citizens, and build social and economic prosperity, but only on the foundation of healthy functioning freshwater ecosystems. To accomplish all this, we must have strong and enlightened governance. Canadians will have to work together. From all levels of our government we require leadership that empowers and enables local action coordinated at regional and national scales. Further, Canada must, in its own self-interest, work internationally to alleviate the global water crisis.

- Freshwater governance in Canada is severely fragmented, and uncoordinated between levels of government
- Water governance is not attentive to ecological foundations
- Freshwater is at risk due to erosion of science policy, severe reduction in programs of research and datacollection; and diminished emphasis on regulatory safeguards and formal oversight
- There is a communication problem between scientists and elected members of parliament, largely because of their very different backgrounds; this culture gap must be bridged for Canada to prosper in an age where decisions must be informed by good science
- There is no clear role for citizens in freshwater governance or sufficient support for the role of citizen's watershed conservation groups
- The Canadian climate is changing rapidly and this will have significant consequences for the water cycle and freshwater resource management
- Globally, Canada shares in a collective responsibility for access to clean water and sanitation

WE CALL UPON ALL GOVERNMENTS IN CANADA TO:

- transcend the jurisdictional barriers that have impeded progress
- give priority to participatory management and governance of freshwater resources, engaging municipalities, boriginal governments, key stakeholders, and civil society
- utilize known options for reducing freshwater use, establishing these as normal practices
- manage risk to help our adaptation to rapid climate change, population increase and urban growth, thus protecting our economic and social well-being
- begin a broader dialogue to develop a unifying vision for a **CANADA-WIDE FRESHWATER STRATEGY**, founded on key principles: **a conservation ethic, putting citizens at the centre, water as a public trust, and watershed thinking**

Water must be a public trust, and not a commodity. The traditional “hard” approach seeks to manipulate natural systems. Watershed boundaries seldom coincide with political boundaries. Watershed based management and decision making would recognize healthy ecosystem function as insurance that nature will continue to provide critical ecological goods and services for society; it would appreciate the complex interactions that occur between the natural hydrological system and human activities. We should satisfy human, agricultural and industrial needs through efficiency, reclamation, and conservation. It is the mandate of governments to protect and preserve freshwater resources for the needs and enjoyment of **all** Canadians.

WE CALL UPON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO:

Fullfil federal responsibilities by giving priority to the following actions:

- **Protect human health** — enforce drinking water protection across Canada
- **Stimulate a blue economy** — link funding for freshwater and wastewater infrastructure to plans that incorporate conservation, efficiency, and innovation
- **Manage transboundary water issues effectively** — protect the long-term interests of Canada; be aware of and manage “virtual” export of water
- **Keep water in place** — prohibit bulk water removals from Canada’s water basins
- **Protect ecosystems; strengthen regulatory frameworks** — develop effective frameworks to protect and maintain the water needs of nature.
- Develop a federal freshwater policy that is integrated with the **CANADA-WIDE FRESHWATER STRATEGY**
- **Respect aboriginal peoples** — honour aboriginal water rights
- **Improve knowledge** — invest in science and monitoring; bring climate change adaptation into the mainstream of water policies
- **Re-establish Canadian leadership in international water research and monitoring** — maintain and strengthen Canada’s role in UN agencies; restore Canada’s past status as a centre for world-class water research
- **Engage provinces** in co-operative reform of freshwater resources management, founded on evolving eco-social hydrological understanding
- **Direct its foreign aid** to ameliorate freshwater crises abroad, in the self-interest of Canadians, and as our global responsibility
- **Internationally, promote** the concept of water as a public trust, whereby equity of distribution is essential to fulfil basic personal and domestic needs

WE CALL UPON CANADA’S PREMIERS AND PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL PARLIAMENTARIANS TO:

Show leadership and cooperation by building on existing efforts within the context of a pan-Canadian freshwater strategy

- together with the federal government, create nested watershed frameworks for Canada’s five major river basins
- **respond** to the climate change crisis by creating a Canada-wide freshwater conservation plan that includes drought preparedness and flood protection plans; **promote** water soft-path activities; **plan** source protection, water supply assessment, monitoring and reporting, education and outreach

PARTICIPANTS WHO VOTED TO ENDORSE THE STATEMENT:

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Gordon Young, *Ph.D., Former Coordinator, United Nations World Water Assessment Programme and President-Elect, International Association of Hydrological Sciences*

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Rivers Canada Foundation

Making the Case for Establishing an Independent Granting

Organisation Dedicated to Canadian River Conservation

By the Quebec-Labrador Foundation on behalf of citizens and river organisations across
Canada

River Heritage Conference, Ottawa, June 2009

Goals:

1. Support conservation and stewardship initiatives on rivers and watersheds in Canada;
2. Build local capacity and support leadership among Canada's river conservation and management community;
3. Enhance the awareness and implementation of the goals of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

The RCF shall serve as an effective source of funding for river and watershed conservation in Canada. In the face of development, climate change and fragmented governance, freshwater conservation is one of the most vexing and pressing environmental issues of our time. Despite a growing need, very few granting programs currently support river stewardship in Canada. To fill this gap, champions of river conservation across Canada recommend the creation of a national granting organisation called the **Rivers Canada Foundation (RCF)**. The initiative to create the RCF is a grassroots, citizen-led undertaking. We urge federal, provincial and territorial governments to work in partnership with the private sector and NGOs to establish a Rivers Canada Endowment Fund (RCEF), the earnings from which would support river conservation projects. The Rivers Canada Foundation, which would administer the fund, would send a clear message of governments' strong commitment to fostering on-the-ground, citizen-driven river conservation.

Mission statement of the proposed RCF:

The Rivers Canada Foundation is dedicated to enhancing local, regional, and national efforts to advance river conservation and stewardship in Canada through grants and leadership development.

Grant-making to nurture and sustain river conservation, management, and stewardship initiatives. RCF will be an independent, private, non-profit and charitable organization at "arm's length" from government, with a volunteer Board of Directors, a National Advisory Council and a Secretariat. Making RCF happen is up to each one of us. To support the creation of RCF, please consider signing the conference declaration, add your name to an e-mail list, and let your MP and MPP know about this initiative of national importance. We will be in touch to help coordinate this process.

Please contact us at 514.395.6020 or ablattel@qlf.org for more information.

APPENDIX B

Participants at the 2009 Canadian River Heritage Conference in Ottawa and other contributors to the development of this Declaration commit to its implementation and to making it action-oriented.

This Declaration is a Legacy Project of the Conference.

The Conference establishes a “Declaration Team” with an organizational and communication system that will:

- a) Deliver this signed Declaration to governments, Aboriginal communities, the private sector and non-government organizations who are in a position to implement the recommended actions. In so doing, the Declaration action can increase public support for making the protection of rivers a positive, win-win priority for different interests ;
- b) Help coordinate action amongst multi-sector leaders, in collaboration with other river conservation organizations;
- c) Identify and support “champions” for each of the priority actions recommended in the Declaration;
- d) Monitor the follow-up on the implementation of priority actions; and
- e) Report to the 2012 River Heritage Conference and link the outcomes of this Declaration to the 2012 Conference agenda.

The Conference wishes to reduce the environmental footprint of future River Heritage conferences.

Process for the Development of 2009 Canada Rivers Declaration

A Declaration Sub-committee of the Organizing Committee of the 2009 Canadian River Heritage Conference hosted a multi-step process from January to June 2009 to gather input and develop this 2009 Canada Rivers Declaration. This was done through an electronic dialogue in order to provide an opportunity for full participation from across Canada and to remain transparent throughout the process. The Conference web-site was used as well as an e-mail outreach to over 800 persons who expressed interest in the Conference and the topic. Conference delegates and other contributors are offered an opportunity to sign the resulting Declaration. The Declaration and a description of its implementation process was presented at the Conference on June 17, 2009.