



## Government of Canada Ottawa River Watershed Study: A Primer

### I. Purpose of the Study

The decision to conduct a study on the Ottawa River watershed was initiated by Private Member's Motion M-104, passed by the House of Commons on May 3, 2017. The Motion reads as follows:

*“That, in the opinion of the House, the government should undertake a detailed study with regard to the creation of an Ottawa River Watershed Council, which would bring a comprehensive, inclusive, co-management approach to the Ottawa River Watershed, in order to foster ecological integrity, sustainable economic opportunities, and quality of life; in its study, the government should examine (i) the council membership, which would include, but would not be limited to, federal, provincial, regional, and municipal governments, First Nations, industry groups, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions, (ii) important indicators such as water quality, biodiversity, and shoreline integrity, in order to assist with the creation of a co-management plan and conservation strategy, (iii) the economic, cultural, heritage, and natural values within the Ottawa River Watershed.”*

The study is being led by ECCC, on behalf of the Government of Canada. As per Motion M-104, the purpose of the study is to examine (1) the natural, cultural, heritage and economic values associated with the Ottawa River watershed, (2) important indicators for assessing the health of the Ottawa River watershed, as well as (3) the potential creation of an Ottawa River Watershed Council.

Conducting a study of this nature aligns with ECCC's mandate, and with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change's mandate letter priorities to (1) treat freshwater as a precious resource that deserves protection and careful stewardship; and (2) renew Canada's commitment to protect the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River basin. Both the Great Lakes basin and the St. Lawrence River basin surround the Ottawa River watershed. In fact, the Ottawa River is the largest tributary to the St. Lawrence River.

The study and its associated engagement process are also in line with government-wide commitments related to reconciliation and a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples; the integration of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in decision-making; and the implementation of the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy.

## II. Geographic Scope

For the purposes of this study, the Ottawa River watershed includes the Ottawa River from its headwaters in Quebec's Laurentian Mountains to its junction with the St. Lawrence River at the Lake of Two Mountains, as well as streams, rivers and lakes that are connected to the Ottawa River (see *Population Centres* map in the annex 1). The scope of the study focuses primarily on communities within the boundaries of the Ottawa River watershed, but the participation of communities outside of the watershed boundaries will also be sought.

## III. Engagement Strategy

At every stage of our public engagement process, we are working to reflect the following principles:

- **Transparent:** We communicate broadly about engagement opportunities. We let participants know the purpose of engagement and how their input will be used. We allow participants time to prepare and provide input.
- **Relevant:** We listen and talk to interested and affected groups and individuals about issues that matter to them. When we convene participants, we are clear about what will be discussed and where the information will be going.
- **Open:** We will be "open by default" with non-sensitive information that we gather or the resources that we produce in the context of the study, and will identify the most appropriate platform where this data can be made available and accessible to Canadians, so that others may re-use and build on our work in the future.
- **Inclusive:** We engage a range of views and perspectives that reflect the diversity of organizations and people with an interest in the Ottawa River watershed. We reduce barriers to participation, whether physical, cultural, geographical, linguistic, information, digital, or other. We offer a variety of channels/mixed methods to engage. We document who was involved and how they were engaged.
- **Accountable:** We commit to making public what we hear from participants if we have the agreement of those that provided the input. We report back to participants and to Canadians to explain our recommendations, including how their input was used.
- **Responsive and Adaptable:** We commit to continuous learning. We monitor the public engagement throughout the process, and change our approach if necessary to encourage participation or to respond to the needs of our target audiences.

Groups being engaged by ECCC include federal departments and agencies, Indigenous Peoples, the governments of Quebec and Ontario, municipalities and counties, water management agencies, industry representatives, non-governmental organizations, and the general public. ECCC's engagement strategy, to share information relevant to the study and to receive input, is multi-pronged, involving in-person engagement through meetings, workshops, and/or Town Halls; an online engagement platform; and a dedicated e-mail account.

Collaboration with Indigenous Peoples is vital to the success of the study. A number of Indigenous groups, both within and outside of the Ottawa River watershed, were identified as having historical ties to it (see *Indigenous Communities* map in the annex 2). Engagement opportunities are being tailored to the specific Indigenous communities that express interest. In addition, Indigenous communities will be welcome to participate in activities involved in the multi-pronged engagement approach outlined above.

Finally, due to the Government of Canada's commitment to strengthening GBA+ implementation, it was determined that ECCC would strive to integrate GBA+ considerations throughout the study process. GBA+ is an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives, while also considering many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability. It is a standard approach to policy that is undertaken to mitigate potential adverse impacts on different segments of the population. GBA+ will help us understand how diverse groups of people experience the Ottawa River Watershed, potential impacts of creating an Ottawa River Watershed Council, and how to mitigate or eliminate any differential impacts.

### ***PlaceSpeak***

We would like to take this opportunity to highlight PlaceSpeak. It is an innovative engagement platform that we'll be launching on January 22, 2018, and we will be the first federal department to use it. We believe this digital solution offers an additional, dynamic way for ECCC to engage individuals and stakeholders about the Ottawa River watershed. We will encourage those who want to share their perspectives to do so on this open space. Through discussion forums, noticeboards, and surveys, we can offer a variety of ways for people to provide input at their convenience. PlaceSpeak is map-based, which will allow the public to geographically pinpoint concerns that are being experienced within the watershed. While this online platform will be open to all Canadians, this tool will let us see whether those who participate in the discussions live within or near the watershed. PlaceSpeak is also a way to connect people within the watershed, and will give them a way to stay connected, even after our study is over.

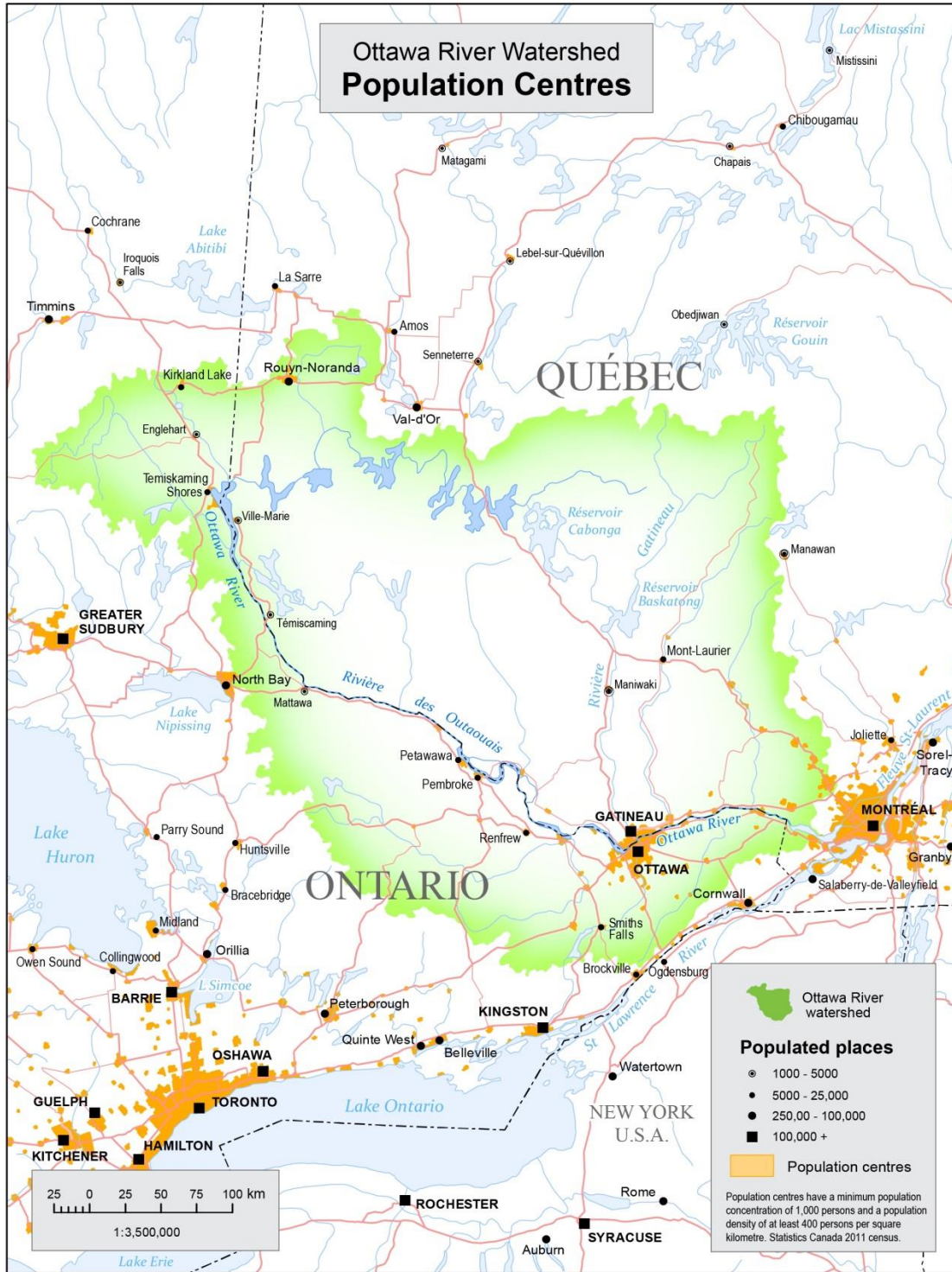
#### **IV. Next Steps and Contact information**

Should you have any comments or questions concerning our study, there are various options for getting in contact with ECCC—by email, or mail, as follows:

Email:            [ec.etude\\_bvro-orw\\_study.ec@canada.ca](mailto:ec.etude_bvro-orw_study.ec@canada.ca)

Mail:            Ottawa River Watershed Study  
Environment and Climate Change Canada  
200 boulevard Sacré-Cœur, FON-1318  
Gatineau, Québec  
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**Annex 1 – Ottawa River Watershed Population Centres map**





## Annex 2 – Ottawa River Watershed Indigenous Communities map

