



Save The River! River Watch

Spring 2017

Success! Plan 2014 Enacted!

Natural Flows & Critical Wetland Habitat to be Restored

After almost 20 years of effort the St. Lawrence River has a new, modern water levels plan. In December, the International Joint Commission approved Plan 2014. The plan which returns more natural levels and flows to the River went into effect January 7th. It is second only to the restoration of the Everglades as the largest wetland restoration project in North America.

The benefits of replacing the current, more than 50-year-old plan, include: a 40% increase in wet meadow acreage; a 39% rebound in populations of Northern Pike, the top fish predator in coastal marshes; a 16% rebound in Black Tern populations; a \$9.1 million annual increase in recreational activity along the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario; a frequently longer recreational boating season; and the continuation of significant shoreline protection.

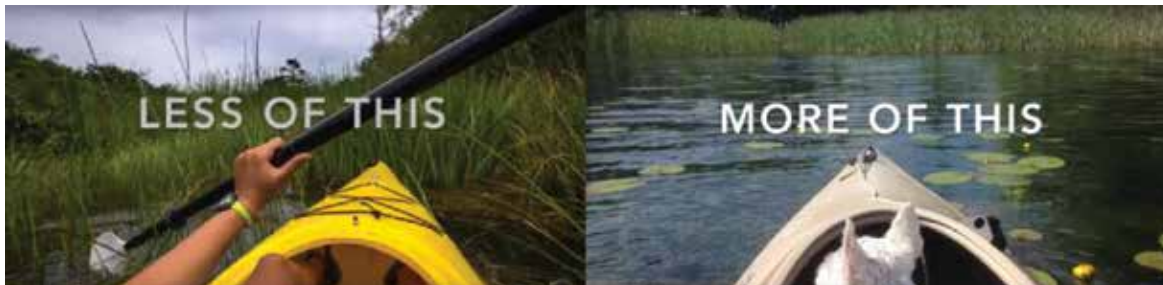


The long fight to achieve a new water levels plan for the River received a significant boost last April when American Rivers designated the St. Lawrence one of **America's Most Endangered Rivers®** due to the environmental harm caused by the old plan. That led to an outpouring of support from thousands of individuals who love the River and from conservation, environmental and sportsmen organizations, businesses, governments, and elected officials who demanded action to approve Plan 2014.

In a final push last fall, Save The River, with our partners American Rivers, Audubon, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Ducks Unlimited, the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, The Nature Conservancy and World Wildlife Fund-Canada, delivered over 36,000 expressions of support for the Plan to the White House.

Save The River is committed to seeing that the improvements in River health envisioned in Plan 2014 are realized. And while the new plan is a significant step to restoring the health of the River, it is just a piece of our mission to preserve, protect and restore the St. Lawrence River.

There is still much more to do before we can ensure the River is passed on undiminished for future generations to share; providing safe drinking water, is a home to a thriving range of indigenous species and supports sustainable economic activity.



Protecting the St. Lawrence River through advocacy, education and research.



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Save The River's

Mission: Save The River is a non-profit, environmental organization whose mission is to restore, preserve and protect the ecological integrity of the Upper St. Lawrence River through advocacy, education and research.

Vision: Save The River envisions a healthy Upper St. Lawrence River that provides safe drinking water, is home to a thriving range of indigenous species and supports sustainable economic activity.

Values: The River is a commons to be nurtured and passed on undiminished for future generations to share.

Save The River is honored to have received memorial contributions in memory of the following:
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Special Thanks to . . .

. . . our 2016 Volunteer of the Year, Evan Brown, who helped raise awareness and much needed financial assistance in our effort to secure approval of Plan 2014,

. . . to all our other terrific volunteers, without whose assistance, dedication and hard work we would not be able to do all that we do,

. . . to the 36,000 plus individuals and many environmental, conservation, sportsmen organizations, businesses, governments and elected officials who joined us in demanding action on Plan 2014,

. . . the many, many kids and adults who "Took the Plunge" jumping into the River to show their support for Plan 2014,

. . . to the many photographers who contributed photos for the 2017-2018 calendar,

. . . and to all business sponsors of Save The River's annual calendar fundraiser.



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Save The River / Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper is proud to be a member of the **international Waterkeeper Alliance**, the largest & fastest growing nonprofit solely focused on clean water. Waterkeeper preserves & protects water by connecting local organizations worldwide. Our goal is swimmable, drinkable & fishable water everywhere. Today, Waterkeeper Alliance is made up of over 300 Waterkeeper Organizations & Affiliates protecting rivers, lakes & coastal waterways on 6 continents.



High Water Levels – Is Plan 2014 to Blame?

The St. Lawrence River has been running high this Spring; at times about 21” higher than the average. So has Lake Ontario. And, so have the passions of shoreline property owners impacted by the high levels, local elected officials and some journalists.

Anger, frustration and a demand for answers about why it is happening, how can it be stopped and what will prevent it from happening in the future are understandable reactions to homes and property being threatened. Unfortunately, in the case of this Spring’s high water the blame is being misplaced and the solution being sought is no solution at all.

Is the new water management plan – Plan 2014 – the reason the water is high?

No - the Lake and River would be at similar levels whether Plan 2014 was implemented or not.

Is Plan 2014 the reason water isn’t being let through the dam to lower the Lake and River?

No - the Board of Control is doing all they can to fairly balance and minimize flooding on both Lake Ontario and on the River at Lake St. Louis (at Montreal). They made numerous flow adjustments to keep this balance. Adding to the challenge is the fact that Ottawa River outflows this Spring have been at record high values.

Why are water levels higher than in previous years? It is important to remember that neither the River or the Lake are isolated bodies of water, they are part of a large, complex system. A system that holds 40% of North America’s freshwater.

Nature plays the biggest role in water levels in the Lake Ontario - St. Lawrence River system.

The River is fed by the outflow from Lakes Ontario and Erie, snowfall, and rainfall and runoff. And at times its outflow must be controlled due to conditions on the lower river below the Moses-Saunders Dam. It is also important to remember that there have been several periods of higher water in the past under the previous plan – Plan 1958DD.

The water in the St Lawrence is higher than last year because the supply of water flowing into it has been greater. And the water it has received has had to be held back at times because the river below the dam has experienced flooding and evacuations.

According to the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board,

“The wet conditions have resulted in rapidly rising water levels throughout the Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River system. . . To prevent . . . levels from rising further and causing more extensive damage [below the dam], the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board reduced outflows from Lake Ontario in accordance with Plan 2014.”

What will Plan 2014 mean for water levels in the future?

Water levels have and will always fluctuate. It is important to understand that while we on the River tend to like our water levels to be on the higher side, the health of the St. Lawrence depends on having a variety of levels including some infrequent low levels. In a very few years, likely 6 or fewer years per century, levels will drop below the long-term average when water supplies to the River are naturally lower. These occasional low levels are essential to the health of the fish, the wildlife and the wetlands of the St. Lawrence River.

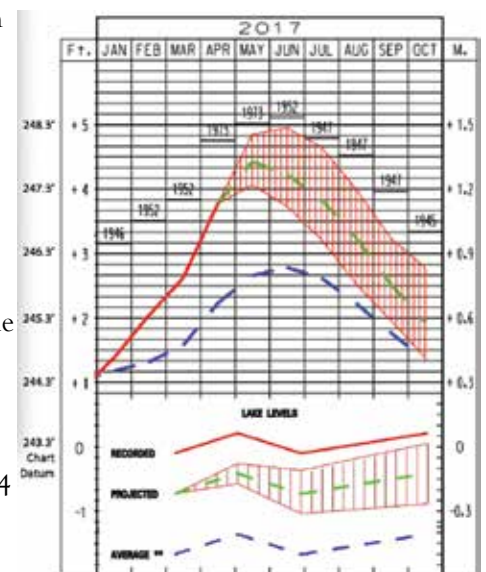
Will Plan 2014 mean a longer boating season?

Most of the time yes, but not always. Overall, it’s clear that Plan 2014 will extend the boating season. Over the last hundred years, the boating season under Plan 2014 would have been 23 weeks or longer in 51 out of every 100 years.

For more on Plan 2014



<http://blog.savetheriver.org/?p=10025>



Army Corps of Engineers Projection

Our 28th Winter Environmental Conference

February 4th was a red-letter day for the annual gathering of almost 200 River-aficionados at the 1000 Islands Harbor Hotel. They were there to hear from representatives of the International Joint Commission, a world-class angler, our Congresswoman, robotics champions, the first class of “Friends of the River” (see below) and more.

It started with a warm welcome from Clayton Mayor Norma Zimmer and Save The River Board President Jeff Garnsey. The inaugural screening of *“Save The River’s Plan 2014 Remembrance & Thank You”* followed. The short video is in recognition of the December approval & January implementation of the new water levels plan that Save The River & the River community s been fighting for since the 1990’s.

The remainder of the morning was devoted to a deeper understanding of Plan 2014 with two presentations by representatives of the International Joint Commission (IJC). In his presentation, **Plan 2014 - The Long-Term Perspective**, Frank Bevacqua, Public Information Officer for the U.S. Section of the IJC, spoke about the origins and future of the plan. Rob Caldwell, Canadian Regulation Representative on the International Lake Ontario - St. Lawrence River Board, spoke about the **Regulation of Lake Ontario Outflows with Plan 2014**.



Following lunch Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, whose 21st Congressional District covers the entire length of the St. Lawrence River in the U.S. spoke about **Working Together for Real Results for Our River Community**, focused on her work to get Plan 2014 approved, stop the passage of the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, among other efforts she is undertaking with Save The River and other conservation groups in her district.

Lawrence Gunther, President, Blue Fish Canada, North America’s only blind professional angler & champion of fish conservation spoke to the conference about **“What Lies Below” An Exploration of Challenges facing Canada’s Wild Fish Stocks**. The documentary follows Lawrence & his guide dog as they explore ten fish habitat and sustainability stories throughout Canada. Lawrence is the only presenter in recent memory to receive a standing ovation following his presentation.



Mesha Boyer, Assistant Project Coordinator, St. Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Sciences, presented **“A Great River Runs Through Us”**, the video story of citizens from Cornwall and Akwesasne who came together in the summer of 2016 to clean debris out of the St. Lawrence River.



Clayton’s very own and tremendously knowledgeable First Lego League Team, the **Heritage Hi-Techs**, closed the conference. The team worked with Save The River’s Kate Breheny and Jeff Garnsey to include Muskellunge Catch and Release information in their award-winning robotics competition entry.

Links to the presentations and more can be found at: <http://ow.ly/A6Ui30aZU62>

Save The River’s 29th Winter Environmental Conference will be February 3, 2018 at the 1000 Islands Harbor Hotel. We’ll see you there.



The **“Friend of the River”** is an award given to individuals or groups who have contributed in some exceptional way to protecting the St. Lawrence River either through advocacy or programs in line with Save The River’s mission and vision for River, but not necessarily affiliated with or as part of a Save The River initiative or activity.

Lee Willbanks, Executive Director (left) and Jeff Garnsey, Save The River Board President (middle), presented the inaugural year “Friend of the River” awards to (from left to right): Congresswoman Elise Stefanik; Village of Clayton Mayor Norma Zimmer; Canadian Parliament Senator Robert Runciman; and former NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Regional Director Tom Brown.



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Some of the work we do to preserve and protect the River, now . . . and

Since 1978 Save The River has been the leading environmental organization for the River to continue to be a forceful advocate for policies and programs that promote

Advocacy

Defending Clean Water Protections - Clean water protections that we have relied on in our efforts to restore and protect the St. Lawrence River are being challenged. Save The River will vigorously defend the laws and regulations necessary to prevent any reversal in the health of the River, will continue to advocate for compliance with environmental laws, respond to citizen concerns, and identify and fight new threats to the River as they arise.

Preventing the Spread of Invasive Species -

Save The River is working to stop the introduction and movement of aquatic invasive species in the River and Great Lakes by advocating for the most rigorous measures achievable to prevent new introductions including fighting efforts to remove EPA jurisdiction over ballast water discharges. With others we are working to stop the spread of Asian Carp into the Great Lakes and eventually the River.

Oil Shipments on the River - Our River is being marketed as a “Highway H2O” over which to ship highly volatile Bakken crude oil and extremely difficult to handle Alberta tar sands oil. Save The River will challenge the transport of unrecoverable if spilled and highly volatile cargoes, until and unless safety and response measures that have been clearly demonstrated to be effective are in place.



Educational

Save The River In the Schools - Save The River works with school districts to bring the St. Lawrence River to the classroom by educating area school children about the importance of its protection. The program includes a “Clean Water” field trip experience that gets students out for the first time and allows them to

Riverkeeper & Jr. Riverkeeper Monitoring

River trains volunteers of all ages to monitor the River and to report incidences of pollution problems, wildlife die offs, changes in the River ecosystem that indicate changes in the health of the River. Incidents volunteers spot can be reported and tracked on Save The River’s online reporting system at report.savetheriver.org.

Shoal Marking Program - With many thanks to the Thousand Islands Association, Save The River has marked 90 of the more treacherous shoals in the River between Ogdensburg and the Thousand Islands. This program increases awareness of unseen hazards in the River and is used in navigation charts when on the River.

For almost 40 years Save The River has been the “Voice for the River”

In that time, we’ve achieved tremendous successes.

Our successes have always come with the help of an engaged and invested community of members and supporters – individuals, families, visitors, businesses and others who realize a healthy River means healthy communities.

Just a few of our successes: ending the threat of year-round commercial shipping • securing a modern water levels plan to restore wetlands, habitat & key species • programs that stabilized muskellunge & restored common tern populations • educating thousands of students & getting many of them onto the River – some for the first time • training hundreds of adults & young people in how to spot potential threats to the River • being a key partner in efforts to clean up the Great Lakes – the source of 95% of the River’s water • and more

But the work is not finished, the River’s health is fragile. The River faces new and renewed challenges.

Programs and policies are being threatened or outright elimination at a time when existing programs and new threats are emerging.

Some of the challenges: attacks on Plan 21 • Bakken or tar sands crude being shipped to a waste repository in Ontario • continued discharge of waste to the River & Lakes • microplastic pollution • efforts to remove EPA jurisdiction over ballast water • the Clean Water Act; eliminate the Clean Water Act; defund Great Lakes Restoration, Sea Grant, and other change & earth science programs • and more

and for generations to come

fighting for the ecological integrity of the St. Lawrence River and is committed to clean water protections and to resist those that eliminate or weaken them.



Education

Save The River partners with area schools to bring the St. Lawrence River into the classroom, teaching about the River, its fragility, and the importance of clean water. The program also includes an "On the River" program where many of the students on the River do hands-on science while there.

Monitoring Programs - Save The River volunteers are the important eyes and ears on the River. They can detect potential problems and subtle changes that can indicate environmental incidents. These are often viewed at the community level.



Save The River has many volunteers, and in partnership with the St. Lawrence Biological Station, Save The River marks over 100 miles of the River between Cape Vincent and Malone. The program helps heighten boaters' awareness of the water and remind them to always practice responsible boating.

The River's voice must not go silent in the face of these challenges.

Threatened with dramatic reductions or elimination, existing threats are still unresolved and

2014 • the possibility of highly volatile water levels on the River • permitting of a nuclear power plant • dumping of billions of gallons of untreated sewage • microfiber pollution • the passage of the Clean Water Act • fast water, eliminate citizen suits under the Clean Water Act; overturn the Clean Water Rule; support NOAA, NASA & EPA clean water, climate change

Research



BeachWatch - Every summer, Save The River volunteers sample the water quality at popular swimming beaches to be tested for bacterial levels. The results are published weekly in numerous outlets including the international SwimGuide app.

Common Tern Restoration - With the Thousand Islands Land Trust, Save The River restores habitat for this small colonial water bird which is listed as threatened in New York. Volunteers adopt a nesting colony and check it once a week, recording nesting information such as the number of eggs, chicks, and nests - data which is used to help measure the success of restoration strategies.



Catch and Release - Since 1987 Save The River has worked with researchers at the Thousand Islands Biological Station on a research collection and incentive program that encourages fishermen to protect the St. Lawrence River's iconic, but threatened, muskellunge. Anglers who catch and release a legal-size muskie are presented an exclusive Michael Ringer print. In 2013, the catch and release program was expanded to include bass to improve the quality and sustainability of the River's renowned bass fishery.



The River needs its voice now more than ever! To remain the strong voice for the River, Save The River needs your support!

Invest in a healthy River today

- if not already a Save The River member, please join.
- if already a member, please consider increasing your membership contribution, or
- make a special donation.

Use the enclosed card & envelope or go directly to <https://donate.savetheriver.org> with the QR code
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from the Riverkeeper & Director,

December 8th of last year, the River community achieved an almost two decades-long goal of a new water levels plan - Plan 2014 - for the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. It is the 2nd largest wetland restoration effort in North America (second only to the Everglades).

Since then things have changed dramatically:

- subordinates of the new President, denying science and public will, have taken aim at the new Plan, blaming it for acts of nature (see page 3),
- in his budget outline the President zeroes out funding for Great Lakes restoration - a \$300 million reduction, and
- the President's highest-level appointees have articulated a clear intention and taken the initial steps to minimize or eliminate environmental protections across the board.



Lee Willbanks, Riverkeeper &
Executive Director

In short, our very mission is threatened - the protection and restoration of the St. Lawrence River - and, by extension, our ability to pass on to our children a healthy River that provides safe drinking water, is home to a thriving range of indigenous species and supports sustainable economic activity.

Access to clean - swimmable, fishable, drinkable - water is the most fundamental human right. All of us who care about and want to be part of a diverse, vibrant, healthy and inclusive society must work together to protect and extend the progress we have made.

We can be thankful that the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes and their tributaries have benefitted from decades of bipartisan cooperation at every level of government, from village, township, county, province and state to federal and international, by people of good will focused on restoring and protecting these waterbodies that hold 40% of North America's fresh water and provide drinking water to tens of millions. **However, we cannot return to a time when the River was viewed simply as a "resource" to be consumed, dammed, diverted, filled and fouled.**

The message is simple but it bears repeating, we are **watching and we will mobilize to protect hard fought and hard won victories for a clean St. Lawrence River now and for generations to come.**

Industrial Wind Update

In the Spring 2016 issue of River Watch we reprinted Save The River's updated position on Industrial Wind Development in the St. Lawrence River valley. In it we renewed our long-standing call for a halt in approvals until a comprehensive impact assessment is conducted.

In the time since, we submitted a letter to the Public Service Commission (PSC) calling attention to a US Fish & Wildlife Service study that experts interpret to recommend turbines be sited at least 10 miles from shorelines. And, in January, we wrote to the PSC and the Department of Environmental Conservation to renew our call for a comprehensive study - a Generic Environmental Impact Statement - that includes all proposed wind projects and critically examines all potential impacts before any permits are issued.

Of course, there is strength in numbers. We have encouraged others to reach out to the agencies. As we go to print, it is good to note the Thousand Islands Land Trust joined the call for governments "to conduct environmental studies, impact assessments and comprehensive studies that encompassed all current and proposed projects in the Thousand Islands."

Everyone concerned about industrial wind development in the River valley should contact the DEC and PSC. For more information go to: <http://blog.savetheriver.org/?p=9912>

Stay Informed



Upcoming Events - Save The Dates!

A Celebration of the River Non-Gala, Saturday, July 1, Sunset with us or on your dock, deck or porch

We invite you to enjoy a quiet evening reflecting on the natural beauty of the St. Lawrence River and join us in a River Illumination Ceremony. Light a candle at 9:00pm to show your love for the River and your solidarity with all of us who love it too. *(A Non-Invitation to follow)*

15th Annual Run for the River 5K/10K, Saturday, July 29

Frink Park, Clayton



Registration begins at 7:30am and the race starts promptly at 9am. Runners and walkers of all ages and abilities are encouraged to participate in the 5K Run/Walk or 10K run. To register go to www.zippyreg.com and find our event on the calendar on the "Register for an Event" link or use the QR code to go there directly.

Volunteer Appreciation Event, Thursday, August 10, 5-7pm

Rift Camp, Wellesley Island

Save The River staff, Board of Directors salute the hundreds of volunteers who donate thousands of hours each year in support of our outreach and education programs.

Annual Membership Meeting, Thursday, August 25, 4pm

location tbd

Join Save The River Members to vote for the election of Directors of Save The River, receive a report on the finances of Save The River, and consider any other matters that may come before the meeting.

for more information on these and other Save The River events
visit our Events page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/SaveTheRiver/events/>

Summer Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteering with Save The River is a great way to develop new skills, make new friends, stay active and give back to your River! Fun and meaningful opportunities are available with us throughout the Summer...

Run for the River 5K/10K Saturday, July 30th 8:30am: Volunteer opportunities include: Course Guard, Registration, Water Stations. Be a part of this exciting event!

Shoalmarking Program: Residents along Clayton's waterfront, on Grindstone (front and backside), and living along the American Narrows near Keewaydin are needed to assist with marking shoals at certain locations. Must have own boat.

Common Tern Monitoring: Weekly monitoring of nests, eggs & chicks in Goose Bay from late May - mid July. Must have own boat or kayak.

Thank You Volunteers!

Be sure to mark your calendars for our annual volunteer appreciation celebration on
Thursday, August 10th 5-7pm at the Rift Camp on Wellesley Island.

Celebrate your favorite body of water • Document your experience • Protect your waterbody



The Watermark Project is a community effort by Swim Drink Fish Canada® to protect important waterbodies by documenting the ways in which people interact with them. To do this, true individual water stories are collected and published in an online public record of local water knowledge. To submit your watermark, go to: www.watermarkproject.ca/submit



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Give monthly and receive a set of two etched "rocks" glasses when you sign up to become a **River Guide**.
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I want to become a "River Guide"

As a **River Guide** your membership payment is an ongoing, monthly amount (of your choosing) charged to your credit card.

Benefits of a River Guide membership.

- your gift is a dependable source of support for **Save The River** throughout the year & is a convenient way to include your donations into your personal budget;
- your gift will appear each month on your credit card;
- you will not receive phone solicitations or direct mail solicitations from us;
- your donation goes where it is needed most;
- you can change your gift any time by contacting us

_____ **Sounds great! Sign me up!**



Please return form to:

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409 Riverside Drive
Clayton, NY 13624

Thank you for your support!

phone: 315.686.2010
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