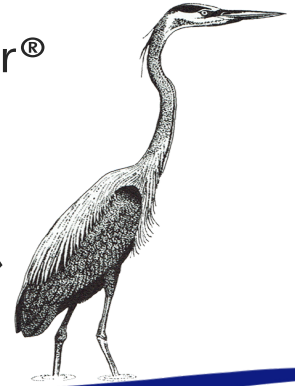


Save The River® Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper®

River Watch



Preserve. Protect. Restore.



Photo by Chris Murray Photography

Update on Local Efforts to Save Blind Bay

Last year, the River community took urgent action to protect a special place in danger of being changed forever. After learning of Customs & Border Protection's (CBP) plan to construct a new Border Patrol facility in the heart of the Thousand Islands, the River community stepped in to help prevent what could only be described as an unprecedented loss to our St. Lawrence River ecosystem. Numerous elected officials, regional agencies, and non-profit environmental organizations voiced opposition to CBP's proposed facility in Blind Bay including U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer, U.S.

Congresswoman Claudia Tenney, NY Senator Mark Walczyk, NY Assemblyman

Scott Gray, Jefferson County Legislator Phil Reed, Thousand Islands Park Association, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Region 6, SUNY ESF Thousand Islands Biological Station, Town of Clayton, and Town of Orleans. In addition, over a thousand members of the River community submitted public comments encouraging CBP to seek alternative sites.

Concerns surrounding the new Border Patrol facility, in this location, reinforced the importance of being proactive in protecting lands critical to the health of the River, a thriving local economy, and the region's overall quality of life. The construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed facility would pose permanent, adverse ecological impacts to Blind Bay and the greater Thousand Islands.

(continued on page 8)

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and fastest growing nonprofit solely focused on clean water.

Waterkeeper preserves and protects water by connecting local organizations worldwide. Our goal is swimmable, drinkable and fishable water everywhere. Today, [Waterkeeper Alliance](http://WaterkeeperAlliance.org) is made up of over 300 Waterkeeper Organizations & Affiliates protecting rivers, lakes and coastal waterways on six continents.

Event Schedule

- **Riverkeeper Outings @ Minna Anthony Common Nature Center on Wellesley Island:** every Thursday in July and August from 9am to 1pm
- **Water Chestnut Pull @ Guffin Bay in Dexter, New York:** Friday, August 4th from 9am to 12pm
- **Volunteer Appreciation Event* @ Rift Camp on Wellesley Island:** Thursday, August 10th from 5pm to 7pm
- **Annual Membership Meeting @ Save The River's office in Clayton, New York:** Thursday, August 24th from 3:30pm to 4pm

in order to attend this event, you must volunteer for a Save The River program or event

Seasonal Raffles

2022 Lighthouse Print Raffle

Congratulations to David & Sherri Dann from Oswego (and Morristown), the winners of the Lighthouse Print Raffle. This one of a kind image featuring Sunken Rock Lighthouse was photographed by David Zapatka, who is a volunteer photographer for the United States Lighthouse Society's USA Stars & Lights and was part of a project started in 2013 shooting Southern New England lighthouses from a time seldom photographed—at night. David & Sherri spend their time in the summers on the St. Lawrence at their place in Morristown but made a special winter trip to the River to pick up their new print.



2023 Charcuterie Board Raffle



Our Winter Raffle is “A Repast on The River,” featuring a one-of-a-kind charcuterie board that was created by local artisan Doug Drumm who is known for his unique artwork and furniture (including Save The River’s Great Blue Heron screen door) was drawn on May 1st and the lucky winner is Vida Denigan. Along with the board, Vida received a set of Save The River rocks glasses, a Thousand Islands blanket, a \$50 gift card to the River Rat Cheese store and a \$100 gift card for Save The River merchandise. Thank you to all of you who entered - your support of this raffle was greatly appreciated!

Shoalmarking Update

Thank you to [On the River Construction](#) and all of our many volunteers that help us maintain shoal markers on the River.

Special thanks to the [Thousand Islands Association](#) for providing the markers to make this possible in US locations.

[Click here to learn more about our shoal marking program and view our online map of marker locations.](#)



Winter Environmental Conference Recap

Save The River's 34th annual Winter Environmental Conference (WEC) was an educational success. The hybrid event was well attended: with over 100 members of the River community gathering at the 1000 Islands Harbor Hotel and another 35 members were in attendance via livestream. Attendees were able to engage with a diverse group of presenters discussing a variety of topics related to the health of the St. Lawrence River.

This year's Friend of the River award was presented to Jeff Garnsey. He is well recognized as a spokesman for the River's fish and environment, and has been a leader in our *Trash Free River* program and **Save Blind Bay** advocacy campaign - along with many other programs. He has educated many politicians and commissioners about the habitat of muskies and the importance of all aspects of the River environment.



In addition to the presentations, [which can be viewed here](#), guests had the opportunity to browse tables and learn from the following organizations: US Coast Guard, Adirondack to Algonquin (A2A), Minna Anthony Common Nature Center, Thousand Islands Land Trust, SLELO PRISM, Tug Hill Tomorrow, Department of Environmental Conservation, Converse Laboratories, River Institute, Thousand Islands Arts Center, and Thousand Islands Area Residents Association.

Our conference was made possible through the support of business sponsors including Uncle Sam Boat Tours, Wellesley Island Building Supply, Swan Bay Resort, Maitland Tower, and Converse Laboratories. WEC also received support from many generous individual and couple sponsors.

Plans are already underway for next year's conference - save the date for **January 27, 2024** at the 1000 Islands Harbor Hotel for WEC 2024!



Save The River received the New York State Senate 2023 Empire Award from Senator Mark Walczyk



Sydney Floyd was the 2022 winner for Bass Catch & Release while Derek Balmas received the annual Dan Tack Muskie Catch & Release award for 2022.



Education Update

Education hit the ground running with the new year!

After launching our new Floating Classroom program at WEC we are happy to announce that we have four confirmed dates in July and August. Focusing on citizen science opportunities with ages 12-15, we will be teaching the kids directly on the river through field observations, water quality testing, plankton surveys, and aquatic invasive species pulls. One of these four days will be focused on military youth that do not have abundant opportunities to be out on the River. We hope to have guest speakers from SLELO PRISM, United States Coast Guard, and more.

[In The Classroom](#) programs started in March with over 20 programs planned in LaFargeville, Carthage, Copenhagen, Cape Vincent, Hammond and Watertown. This spring we partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Afterschool program to reach even more students across Jefferson County. At the beginning of April, Robin took part in an Inclusive Boating event with Encompass Recreation in Cape Vincent where she taught kids of all ages how boats sink or float using tin foil and a lot of imagination. Through these partnerships, along with the Thousand Islands Art Center, we have reached over 230 students by the first week of April.

[On The Water](#) programs will begin on May 19th, with our first outing being Rock Island Lighthouse with Lyme and Bashaw's kindergarten classes. We have two other trips planned in June with the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center.

We are excited to continue our summer programs with MAC Nature Center, TILT, Antique Boat Museum, and the Zoo New York.

Here's to a fun and busy 2023 season!



Interested in bringing the River to your classroom?
View our [Spring Educator's Guide here](#) or contact us at education@savetheriver.org.

Trash Free River

Our *Trash Free River* program has had some exciting developments as we continue to expand the shoreline cleanups! You can now visit trashfreeriver.org for program updates, volunteer information, and more!

The 2023 *Trash Free River* season started strong with Earth Day, at various sites, and I Love My Parks Day hosted at the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center. Staff and volunteers were able to remove **1,031 pounds** of polystyrene, glass, metal, and other garbage from shoreline and wetland areas during these cleanups.

We will be hosting our 2nd annual River Days on July 28th and July 29th with sites from Cape Vincent to Ogdensburg. We will continue to work with the Thousand Islands Association as they coordinate shoreline cleanup on the Canadian side.



Trash Free River has some new and exciting partnerships with the Alexandria Bay Chamber of Commerce to host Love Our River/*Trash Free River* Day in downtown Alexandria Bay. We are also collaborating with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne's Great River Cleanup.

In addition to our shoreline cleanups, Save The River will be holding Household Hazardous Waste Cleanup Day on August 19th. These cleanups help remove outdated and potentially dangerous products from homes and cottages. Collection days are currently held semi-annually by Jefferson, St. Lawrence, and Lewis counties.

Summer 2023 Dates

Trash Free River Cleanups

June 3rd - Akwesasne's Great River Cleanup

June 11th - Love Our River Day

July 28th & 29th - River Days

September 16th - International Coastal Cleanup Day

*Additional Dates TBD

Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days

May 13th - Canton

June 3rd - Watertown

August 19th - Clayton

September 9th - Lowville

September 23rd - Canton

Interested in being a *Trash Free River* program sponsor?

We are always looking for ways to work with new people! Our cleanups are a great way to volunteer with your team, get out on the river, and promote your business. We are also looking for volunteers with boats, trucks, and dump trailers to help make our cleanups a success. Contact Bridget at bridget@savetheriver.org to learn more!

Our cleanup efforts are made possible thanks to the Leonard C. & Mildred F. Ferguson Foundation, Labatt USA, Community Bank, N.A., National Grid Project C, the Northern New York Community Foundation, ICC #Team-Seas.

What is PFAS?

PFAS - including PFOS and PFOA - are a diverse class of manmade chemicals. They are water, heat, and stain resistant - and they don't degrade or break down. PFAS have been detected worldwide, and have been linked to cancer, liver damage, decreased fertility, and other health impacts. Exposure to PFAS is commonly through drinking and ground water, but can also be through occupation (firefighting, for example).

Producers and regulators know that 'forever chemicals' pose a threat to the health of our waterways and our drinking water. But PFAS is not designated as a hazardous material, and the chemicals are not regulated under the Clean Water Act.



In March, the EPA proposed national drinking water standards, intending to set standards for this class of chemicals. Under the new rule, six of the most common PFAS chemicals will be monitored and enforced. For PFOS and PFOA, the limit would be 4 parts per trillion. The other four would be controlled by a combined limit.

Save The River Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper and other water advocates across the state are urging the DOH and EPA to set the lowest notification levels for PFAS contamination in our drinking water, to protect the health of all New Yorkers.

Wheeler Creek Testing



Save The River has begun a series of water quality sampling in the Wheeler Creek tributary to determine if there is a high level of pollutants entering the River at Sawmill Bay. A recent complaint filed by the Center for Food Safety alleged high levels of total coliform and E.coli in the creek during January of 2023.

A testing protocol modeled after Waterkeeper Alliance's shallow creek sampling model is being used to determine the levels in the Wheeler Creek waters. Creekside residents have given Save The River permission to test from their shorelines.



Furthermore, it would undermine the Thousand Islands Land Trust's (TILT) and the federal government's existing investments in the adjacent conserved land. The cumulative environmental consequences of habitat fragmentation, edge encroachment, migration barriers such as perimeter fencing, high-density light pollution, and wetland degradation associated with such a facility would have lasting impacts that reach far beyond its boundaries.

In November, the Land Trust officially acquired the 22-acre property. A true environmental treasure, Blind Bay is not only a historic breeding ground for muskellunge and 53 additional fish species, it also is home to numerous mammal and bird species that are characteristic of the Thousand Islands. "TILT focuses on the conservation, protection, and restoration of the environmental integrity and water quality of the Thousand Islands and St. Lawrence River Valley regions," stated Jake Tibbles, TILT's Executive Director. "By conserving over 12,500 acres of critical habitat TILT is supporting a variety of threatened and endangered species and has a substantial, vested interest in protecting the environmental character of Blind Bay and the broader River region."

Since the acquisition was finalized, TILT and Save The River Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper (STR) have been focused on developing a long-term conservation plan for Blind Bay. Recently, the organizations hosted a group of Scouts from Fort Drum. As part of our Blind Bay Stewardship Day, the group installed wood duck boxes and a variety of songbird nest boxes. "Blind Bay is an important community project, and we want children to get out on the Preserve so that they can learn the importance of protecting our region's most important natural resources," stated Shannon Walter, TILT's Education & Outreach Coordinator. The Scouts reveled in a unique firsthand experience by engaging with the land and contributing to the critical stewardship of wildlife habitat. "Educating the next generation on what the Blind Bay Preserve provides is a big step in our advocacy. It's imperative that our youth become the stewards of Blind Bay, the stewards of the broader Thousand Islands region," added Robin Hall, STR's Education Coordinator.



For the last several months, the Blind Bay Coalition has been working with elected officials and community leaders to help identify alternative sites for the proposed Border Patrol facility. "While the Blind Bay Coalition is opposed to CBP siting the new facility in and around Blind Bay, it understands the important role the Agency plays when it comes to homeland security and protecting our nation's borders," Tibbles said. "That's one of the reasons why we have offered to assist CBP with the environmental evaluation of alternative sites."

A proposal by the Town of Alexandria to locate a new Border Patrol facility at the former Bonnie Castle Recreation Center was sent to CBP last year. The Recreation Center, located on Route 12 and adjacent to I-81, addresses CBP's need to access these two main highways to improve their response times to incidents and provides agents quicker access to patrol and surveillance areas.

"As highlighted in recent news articles, the Bonnie Castle Recreation Center offered by the Town of Alexandria seems to address Customs & Border Protection's needs, at the same time, avoids negatively impacting the environmentally sensitive Blind Bay," explained Phil Reed, Jefferson County Legislator. "This proposal looks to have the support of the local community and many elected officials."

Moving forward, the Blind Bay Coalition plans to keep the River community informed on any developments pertaining to CBP's proposal. It also plans to continue working with elected officials and proactively engaging CBP. "Considering our long-standing relationships with the River communities and deep knowledge of the region's complex ecosystems, Coalition partners are uniquely positioned to work with CBP to avoid other sites that may be equally or more sensitive than Blind Bay," described John Peach, STR's Executive Director.



Following the structure of STR's *Trash Free River* program, TILT and STR have scheduled a shoreline clean-up for shallow waters of Blind Bay. This spring, teams will use kayaks, tall rubber boots, nets, and trash grabbers to remove trash and debris from the shoreline and adjacent wetlands and woods. Last year, staff filled contractor bags full with a variety of polystyrene fragments and single-use plastics. STR has been cleaning up stretches of shoreline and boat slips for several years in an ongoing effort to make the St. Lawrence River "swimmable, fishable, and drinkable".

"The problem of trash in the water of the St. Lawrence River has been well documented and can be observed on a daily basis by islanders and boaters," stated Lauren Eggleston, STR's Assistant Director. "Removing plastics and other man-made debris from the St. Lawrence River is a pressing concern and by doing so will ensure that sensitive habitats, like those found in Blind Bay, stay clean and vibrant."



Echoing these concerns for biodiversity, Spencer Busler, TILT's Assistant Director stated "Over the coming months, mink will scurry along the rocky shoreline looking for food to feed their young and the sounds of our beloved loons will echo across the Bay. When combined with the existing conservation

lands, over 36 acres of mixed forest and grasslands and over 835 feet of undeveloped coastal shoreline are now under permanent protection, providing a safe haven for our local wildlife."

"The preservation of one of the most prolific muskellunge spawning areas in the Upper St. Lawrence is very important to the survival of the apex predator in the River. Save The River applauds TILT's bold initiative in protecting this critical habitat that is essential to support biodiversity in the River and along its shorelines," commented Peach. "TILT's commitment to conserving critical environmental habitat combined with STR's advocacy on behalf of the River has made the protection of Blind Bay possible. It's an excellent example of advocacy and conservation working hand in hand for the long-term benefit of our region."

This summer TILT and Save The River plan to hold additional environmental education programs and continue their support of the Thousand Islands Biological Station's Muskellunge Population Restoration Program. The two organizations also plan to host a community gathering to raise funds for the long-term conservation and legal defense of Blind Bay.

For more information regarding efforts to protect Blind Bay, visit saveblindbay.com.

Adopt a Tern

Field work for our tern sites is officially underway, which means that Common Terns will be returning to the St. Lawrence River soon. Staff went out to the navigation cells to prepare the sites for the terns in mid-April before going out with the Thousand Islands Land Trust to set up the exclusion grids on our other sites. Save The River also received a generous donation from Bass Pro Shops that allowed us to obtain new trail cameras to monitor our tern cells with.

Adopt-a-Tern kits are available now in store and online. These adoption kits include an e-card, updates at the beginning and end of breeding season, an official adoption certificate, a Common Tern fact sheet, coloring pages, STR swag, and more! To adopt your own Common Tern or sponsor a nesting site, [click here](#).

Thank you to all those who have supported our Common Tern program so far.



The Dangers of Microplastics

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, microplastics are defined as “small plastic pieces less than five millimeters long, which can be harmful to our ocean and aquatic life.” Microplastics can be broken down into five categories: fragments, fibers, foam, nurdles, and microbeads.

The impacts of microplastics include:

- the penetration of the root of crops through soil and irrigation, travelling up to the parts humans consume
- the reduction of water quality, the disruption of filtration processes, and harm to filter feeders
- the disruption of reproductive systems, growth stunts, decrease in appetite, tissue inflammation, and liver damage for aquatic life
- allergic responses, cell damage or death, oxidative stress, DNA damage and inflammation, and tissue damage in humans



Save The River Merchandise

Celebrate Save The River's 45th birthday with a Throwback T-shirt! This T-shirt, reminiscent of the original STR shirt, is available in Men's, Womens V-Neck, Unisex Long Sleeve, Youth, Toddler and Infant sizes.



Show your support of Save The River's and Thousand Islands Land Trust's efforts to protect the fragile ecosystem of Blind Bay from the ill-conceived development of a CBP facility by purchasing a sweatshirt today! Sizes range from Small - 2XL and can be purchased [online](#) for \$50.



And while the refreshing chill is still in the air, we are still fully stocked with our traditional Navy and Charcoal Hoodies, as well as our "Blue Jean" crewneck sweatshirt sporting our logo on the front. Unisex sizes range from Small - 2XL.



And don't forget about our fully adjustable Navy and Chrome Grey baseball hats!

All items are available in our storefront or online (for delivery or local pickup).



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Estate Planning

The announcement of a recent bequest to Save The River is an excellent reminder to all of us to consider including Save The River in our wills and estate planning. We all know the importance of Save The River's mission to restore, preserve and protect the Upper St. Lawrence River now and for generations to come through advocacy, education, research and stewardship.



Save The River Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper is the grateful recipient of a generous bequest from the James P. Kennedy and Marilyn H. Kennedy Charitable Remainder Trust. Mr. Kennedy, a longtime summer resident of the 1000 Islands, established Kennedy Pharmacy in Clayton with his father, Jim in 1958. With long hours and hard work, the business flourished and became a mainstay of the community. He was an avid boater, golfer, and traveler, but his favorite place to be was on the St. Lawrence River resulting in his deep commitment to supporting Save The River's mission.

John Peach, Save The River's Executive Director, praised Mr. Kennedy's thoughtful generosity and estate planning. He said "this significant gift to Save The River will allow us to continue to strengthen Save The River's In the Schools and On the Water education

programs. Last year, we educated almost 2000 students through the hard work of our staff and excellent education committee volunteers." Peach went on to say that bequests such as the one from the Kennedy's can be added to Save The River's Legacy Fund which is used to endow the future of our critically important mission."

Save The River is thankful for these bequests as we know there will always be a need for Save The River to watch, protect, and preserve the River. Through planned giving and designating Save The River as a beneficiary, you can guarantee that Save The River will continue to be there for our children and grandchildren as the River's guardian.

The Save The River staff is available to talk with you about the future plans of Save The River and how to include Save The River in your will or estate. We can be reached at 315-686-2010 or by emailing bridget@savetheriver.org. We hope you will join several current and past Board and staff members in including Save The River in your estate planning.

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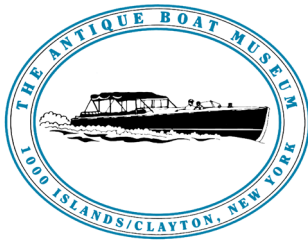
Interested in becoming a Save The River sponsor?

Save The River is celebrating its 45th Anniversary! Members, partners and businesses are sponsoring Save The River in support of our mission and to celebrate the progress our organization has made. We would like to thank our sponsors for assisting us in our vision to keep the River swimmable, drinkable and fishable now and for generations to come. You can make Save The River's 45th anniversary a memorable one by becoming becoming a sponsor. If you are interested please contact bridget@savetheriver.org. You can make a difference today!

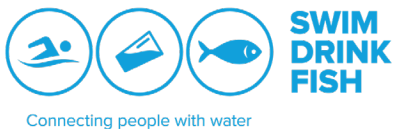
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From the Riverkeeper

Spring is one of my favorite times on The River. The winter ducks arrived very early this year, perhaps because they knew there was very little ice cover. According to Save The River board member Isabella Collelo, “a scientist at NOAA says that this winter we had the third lowest amount of ice coverage in the Great Lakes on record.”

As you make plans to head back to the River and open up your place, please remember to shop locally and support businesses that support Save The River. Our local businesses provide great services for all of us, and make the 1000 islands a very special place to live and visit!

The 2023 shipping season on the River began on March 22. Save The River continues to be very concerned about the need for stronger ballast water regulation on all ships transiting the River and Great Lakes. Lakers, ships that only operate within the Great Lakes system, are exempt from ballast water filtration requirements. Lakers are very efficient spreaders of larvae of aquatic invasive species, transporting large volumes of water picked up in one port and discharging the same water in other ports - often at the opposite end of one of the Great Lakes. Save The River continues to work with our coalition partners, Alliance for the Great Lakes and Healing our Waters (HOW), to deliver the message to Congress and the EPA that ballast water regulations must be put in place to match the regulations that Canada has already passed.



Save The River sent the following emails to Governor Hochul, Senator Walczyk, and Assemblyman Gray in support of Hudson Riverkeeper's efforts to stop the discharge of radioactive wastewater into the Hudson River. It is disturbing that this continues to be an issue after so many years of fighting discharge and transport of radioactive and nuclear wastes.

“Since the early 1980’s, Save The River Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper has advocated to ensure that hazardous wastes and nuclear materials are not allowed on the St. Lawrence River or through its watershed until and unless safety and response measures that have been clearly demonstrated to be effective are in place.

Holtec International, the firm responsible for decommissioning the Indian Point nuclear power plant, has stated that it will resume discharging radioactive wastewater into the Hudson River from a spent fuel pool on the site as early as August, and possibly sooner. This reckless plan must be stopped by supporting new legislation, S5181/A5338.

The legislation introduced by Senate Environmental Conservation Chairman Harckham and Assemblymember Dana Levenberg is written to halt any discharges of radioactive waste into waters across the state of New York. While inspired by the recent plans by Holtec International, it will protect waters across the state, not just the Hudson River. Our Rivers should not be used as dumping grounds for tritium or any radioactive wastes.

On behalf of Save The River’s 1500 members and 15,000 followers, we urge you to support this legislation and help ensure its passage this legislative session.”

Save The River intends to remain an active participant of the Public Advisory Group (PAG) in Phase 2 of the IJC's accelerated review of Plan 2014. We have been a strong proponent of allowing scientists to review the recovery of wetlands to determine the benefits of a more natural flow of water. We also join other local PAG representatives in voicing concerns about extreme water levels and their effects on the region.

Save The River continues working with US Customs officials at the new Wellesley Island Customs area on concerns about excessive night lighting at the facility. While recognizing the need for bright lights to protect the officers while they do their work at the border, the light is excessive and is spilling over into the wetlands, River, and into neighbors houses and yards. It will affect the fish, birds, insects, people and safety of boaters running at night in the area. Lighting designed properly does not have to be excessive to protect the border patrol agents. STR has been working with area neighbors, Customs officials and representatives from Congresswoman Stefanik's office in an attempt to find a solution that will resolve this problem and we will continue to do so.



Water levels information links - These are two sites I check on a regular basis for water level information and predictions. The [Detroit District Corps of Engineers](#) site is updated every Friday. The [Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board](#) website is a good way to track information on runoff in the Ottawa River. The Ottawa River Basin is larger than the Lake Ontario basin. As the Ottawa River starts its spring freshet, the outflow from the Upper St. Lawrence River often has to be decreased to keep from flooding Montreal. Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River form an incredibly complex hydrological system with a large number of interests on and in it. Save The River continues to advocate for the restoration of healthy wetlands that are the breeding grounds for so many of the River's species.

Please stop by Save The River and say hello when you arrive this summer. Our anniversary t-shirts are back in stock. They are always a quick seller - so get yours while they are available. Caryn will be planting our demonstration garden out in front in mid-May.



Save Blind Bay,

John Peach

*John Peach, Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper
& Executive Director*