

What the River means to us

Shared in **266 stories** submitted

The international reputation of the river is an element of pride for Canadians. Paddlers from all over the world come to the Ottawa River to enjoy her famous warm water, big waves, and hospitality.

Themes that emerged in the stories:

- Concern about lack of public access points
- Life Changing experiences
- Connections to Heritage
- Love Stories
- Tourism
- Environment
- Community, Friends & Family
- Tourism & International Reputation
- Health

- Out of 266 stories submitted, **nearly 100%** expressed concern over public access.
- 51 from Ottawa Valley Residents and more than 40 are Whitewater Region Property Owners
- 29 respondents moved to the area because of the river
- More than **20%** of stories included families paddling with their children or youth access to paddling.
- Many expressed concern over equal access and worries that low-income families will not have the ability to use the river.

“Everyone should be able to experience this magnificent river **regardless of financial status”**



32 stories concerned **unequal access**

*“Unfortunately as much as we love the river we do not come out to the area as much as we would like **because of access issues.**”*

Many of the stories came from people that have been paddling the river for **decades.**

10 + years: 20 stories
20 + years: 24 stories
30 + years: 16 stories



*“I was first introduced to the Whitewater Region ten years ago, and ever since it has become my **home.**”*

The Whitewater Region attracts people from **all corners of the globe.**

*“I used to paddle in South Africa for a living. When I moved to Canada, the Ottawa River was the deciding factor for me to move to the Ottawa Valley and make my roots here. The river is a **place of joy** for me in my outdoor pursuits.*

*“I first arrived at the river in 2007 from the UK...Over the next 5 summers the river became home and the community of paddlers drawn to it became my closest life long friends. Now living back in the UK I travel to the river with my family every couple of years to kayak, vacation and see friends. I’m so sad to hear of the demise of such a wonderful natural asset that Canada and the local community should be **proud of and celebrate.** Moving forward I would rethink holidaying to this region and I think others would to. I presume this has been done for financial gain but will result in a financial loss for the wider community.”*

*“I have been paddling the Rocher Fendu section of the Outaouais river for over 20 years now. I live over 3 hours away and have always been willing to make the drive multiple times every season to enjoy the section and **contribute economically to local business.**”*



22 stories are from local residents. Some grew up in the Whitewater Region and became paddlers. Others moved to the region and set down roots. The river has built a community of people that have moved to the region to enjoy living closer to the water and like-minded people. Others love the river and the community so much that they are making plans to move here. Professionals, including doctors, discussed how the river influenced their decision to move here.

*"I moved nearly 6000km to whitewater region over a decade ago after falling in love with the Rocher Fendu section of the Ottawa river. I bought a house here, and started a family here."
- A Registered Nurse*

"Growing up on the river, access to the river was key in learning more about the place we call home."

"I recently relocated to the Ottawa valley for the love of the outdoors, that is mainly whitewater kayaking. The community of boaters is so great and friendly"

"Because of this amazing place, I have now bought property, other family members have bought property of homes in the region, and we are all raising the next generation on the banks of the Ottawa river."

"...we enjoy camping and visiting the area so much that we plan to move and put downroots in the next couple years"

"We have come to love this area and have made it home to us and our 2 boys. Our boys have followed in our love for the river and took up kayaking at a young age. Now in their young adult years, they remain in the area to be close to the river that they love."

Many stories highlighted the importance of a public access point for emergency services.

*"The most important issue is a **public health issue**, the sports undertaken on this section carry an inherent element of risk so access for paramedic and rescue service should be available to the public."*

"Access to the rapids should be available to everyone and it would make rescuing injured paddlers much easier."

11 stories mention the health benefits of the river, particularly for mental health.

*"I find it hard to understand why such an **internationally significant** section of whitewater does not have protection for the public to access other than through commercial operations."*

"Public river access is critical to enable river based activities to grow, which is good for physical and mental health as well as regional economic development."

*"**We know how important natural spaces are to our mental and physical well-being.**"*

66 stories included people who share the river with children and youth.

"I hope to bring my kids up for rafting when they're bigger and eventually teach them to kayak as I strongly believe that outdoors sports, like kayaking, are a family activity that can be carried on well into adulthood."

"My boys have been paddling this river for the past 10 years. There is no better way to spend a weekend than watching them surf garburator wave, push button or corner wave."

Seven love stories emerged from this river.



*"**This sport and especially this river has brought me so much joy, laughter, friendship and introduced me to who is now my husband and father of our children.**"*



*"The Rocher Fendu section is truly world class and there's nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. It's warm, deep big water is incredible. I've personally met paddlers from across the world on the Ottawa - making their own pilgrimage to **experience its magic.**"*