



## Canadian Heritage River designation

December 2014

The Grand River and its major tributaries – Nith, Conestogo, Eramosa and Speed – were designated Canadian Heritage Rivers in 1994.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers Program was established in 1984 by federal, provincial and territorial governments to conserve rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and recreational heritage, to give them national recognition, and to encourage the public to enjoy and appreciate them.

The 20th anniversary of the designation was marked with creation of a special logo, which was used on GRCA letterhead, the website and various publications. Special Watershed Awards were presented to individuals and organizations that worked to promote the designation since 1994. Articles on the designation and its significance appeared in GRCA publications.

The Grand River system was designated on the basis of its outstanding and abundant human heritage and recreational features.

The designation of the Grand marked a new chapter in the program. Prior to 1990, almost all nominated rivers were either within protected area (e.g. national parks) or were short sections of larger rivers.

The process of designating the Grand River began in 1987. The Grand River Conservation Authority, supported by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, spearheaded the process on behalf of watershed municipalities. The Heritage Resources Centre at the University of Waterloo produced an inventory of significant human heritage and natural features and values.

As part of the application, a management plan called The Grand Strategy was submitted to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board. The strategy was developed through a collaborative process involving more than 200 representatives of community groups, businesses, educational institutions, municipalities, federal and provincial agencies, First Nations and the GRCA.

Heritage River status gives national recognition but carries no regulatory or legal restrictions.



*A colorful ceremony in Cambridge marked the designation of the Grand as a Canadian Heritage River.*

### Reasons for the designation

The nomination document described the human heritage and recreational features supporting the designation.

#### Human heritage values

Five major themes were listed to describe the human heritage values:

- The watershed's cultural mosaic since the mid-19th century
- The strong association of native peoples with the watershed for thousands of years
- The Grand River's industrial heritage
- Human adaptation to fluctuating river flows
- The many famous people associated with the watershed.

The nomination noted the many unique historical sites associated with the themes such as Pioneer Memorial Tower, the West Montrose covered bridge, the Alexander Graham Bell Homestead, Her Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks and the Shand Dam.

#### Recreational values

Five types of recreational opportunities were identified:

- **Water sports:** canoeing, kayaking, sailing, power

boating, water skiing and swimming

- **Nature/scenic appreciation:** picnicking, camping, bird watching and photography
- **Fishing and hunting**
- **Trails and corridors:** pedestrian and/or equestrian trails, scenic drives, cycling routes, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling trails
- **Human heritage appreciation:** historic walking tours, historic buildings, events and festivals.

## The Grand Strategy

The Grand Strategy, which was developed between 1990 and 1994, described how the heritage and recreational resources would be managed to maintain, celebrate and honour the Grand's status as a Canadian Heritage River.

The strategy was developed using a collaborative approach involving representatives of a wide variety of public and private agencies, governments and individuals. Twenty community open houses and workshops were held.

Two central, long-term goals were listed:

- To strengthen, through shared responsibility, the knowledge, stewardship and enjoyment of the heritage and recreational resources of the Grand River watershed.
- To improve the well-being of all life in the Grand River watershed.

## Outcomes of the Grand Strategy.

The Grand Strategy has created partnerships, products and actions in a number of areas.

Some notable results include:

**Water Managers Working Group:** Water managers from the GRCA, municipalities, provincial and federal agencies and other organizations meet regularly to discuss items of common concern. Among recent accomplishments was a study on spills and bypasses which led to an initiative to promote wastewater optimization programs at municipal treatment plants. The members of the working group were core members of the Steering Committee and Project Team for the Water Management Plan Update which was completed in 2014. This working group has been reconstituted to promote the implementation of the new Water Management Plan.

**Heritage Working Group:** This group works to conserve, interpret and honour the human heritage resources in the watershed. Members represent municipalities, Parks Canada, museums, universities, heritage groups and the GRCA. It holds an annual Heritage Day



*Pioneer Tower in Kitchener*

Workshop in mid-February.

**Grand River Country:** Originally the tourism working group, Grand River Country has evolved into a stand-alone group supported by municipal and First Nations tourism organizations. It publishes a tourism guide, maintains a website, participates in trade shows and carries out other marketing efforts.

**Grand River Fisheries Management Plan:** Although developed in a separate process led by the GRCA and Ministry of Natural Resources, the plan has been incorporated into The Grand Strategy. It informs fisheries management decisions and identifies rehabilitation projects. Implementation is overseen by a committee of representatives from the GRCA, MNR, fishing groups and others organizations.

**Heritage bridge inventories:** An initial inventory was carried out in 2003; a second, more comprehensive inventory was completed in 2013.

**Heritage Inventory database:** The searchable database on the GRCA website contains descriptions and maps of human heritage features which support the designation.

## Maintaining the designation

An annual report outlining accomplishments is submitted to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board. Every ten years, a more detailed report assessing the changes to and integrity of the features and values for which the river was designated is completed. The latest report was submitted in 2014. The Canadian Heritage Rivers System has a process for de-designating a Canadian Heritage River should a significant number of heritage features or values be lost over time. While the loss of one feature or value would not affect the designation, the cumulative loss of many features may.