

What you can do to help preserve our fresh water:

Conserve



Turning off the tap when you brush your teeth can save nearly 10 litres of fresh water. The average shower uses a whopping 100 litres of water; a bath, 60 litres. If you take a 5-minute shower using a low-flow shower head, you will use only 35 litres of water. Installing a low-flow toilet will also save nearly 15 litres of water. Or, listen to your grandmother's advice, "if it's yellow, let it mellow; if it's brown, flush it down."

Stash your trash

Littering not only makes our natural areas messy, it also harms wildlife and pollutes our rivers and lakes. Reduce the amount of garbage you generate by recycling glass, metal, plastic and paper products and composting kitchen scraps and yard waste.

Conserve electricity

By turning off lights when no one is in the room and finding other ways of reducing the amount of electricity you use, you are also helping to preserve our supply of fresh water. Electricity that is generated through hydroelectric dams causes large-scale damage to the natural environment, bodies of water and wildlife. Other forms of electricity generation also pollute our air and water.

Reduce the amount of pesticides and fertilizers used on your lawn

These chemicals are harmful to you and your pets and will eventually seep into the waterways, harming aquatic insects and fish as well.

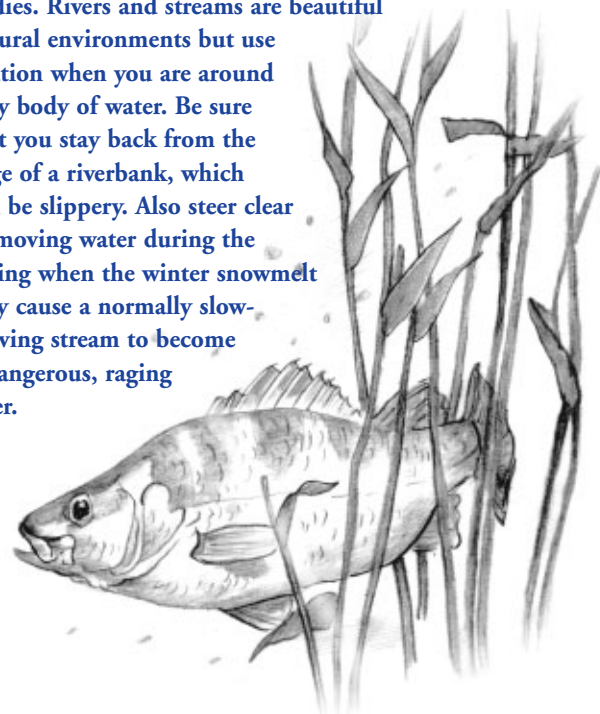
Don't dump chemicals down the sewer

Everything that goes down the drain eventually ends up in our lakes and rivers. Unfortunately, some people dump oil from their vehicles and left over paint down storm drains. This pollutes our water and harms fish and other aquatic creatures.

Become a volunteer with Yellow Fish Road

This organization has been raising awareness about water pollution since 1991. Volunteers paint yellow fish beside storm drains along roads to remind people that any chemicals or garbage that enter the storm drains will eventually end up in a local water body. Most storm drains flow directly into water bodies without being treated. Oil, gasoline, leftover paint, pesticides and other chemicals that may be commonly dumped into storm drains end up in the waterways where they harm fish and their habitat.

Safety Note: Use ex'stream' caution around water bodies. Rivers and streams are beautiful natural environments but use caution when you are around any body of water. Be sure that you stay back from the edge of a riverbank, which can be slippery. Also steer clear of moving water during the spring when the winter snowmelt may cause a normally slow-moving stream to become a dangerous, raging river.



For more information about waterways in Ontario, check out these web sites:

The Canoe Museum – www.canoemuseum.net

Yellow Fish Road – www.yellowfishroad.org

The Story of the Don River – www.toronto.ca/don/watershed.htm

Great Canadian Rivers – www.greatcanadianrivers.com



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Ontario's Waterways

A Journey to our Past

I can run but never walk. I have a mouth but I never talk.
I have a bed but I never lie still. What am I? I am a stream.

A stream is a body of water on the surface of the Earth that flows downhill. Large streams are called rivers, smaller bodies of moving water are creeks, and tiny streams are brooks or springs. Regardless of its size or the volume of water, rivers, creeks, brooks and springs are collectively called streams. In Ontario, water flows through more than 100 000 kilometres of streams; that's roughly equivalent to two-and-a-half times the circumference of the earth! Read on to learn about some of the waterways that wind their way through our majestic province.

Did you know...the Great Lakes contain the world's largest supply of fresh water.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway are important sources of fresh, clean drinking water, and are vital for shipping and transporting goods. Ships carrying grain from the prairies travel through the Great Lakes and out the St. Lawrence River to markets in Europe and the east coast of the United States. For the first part of this journey, ships travel from Lake Superior to Lake Huron via the St. Marys River. Long ago, First Nations peoples used the St. Marys River as a trade route. Europeans later learned about this route from the Ojibwe, and used this river to expand into the Canadian west. The twin cities of Sault Ste. Marie in the United States and Sault Ste. Marie in Canada are found along the St. Marys River, which acts as a border between Ontario and the state of Michigan. The St. Marys River contains many shallow sections and rapids that ships are unable to navigate. In 1855 and 1895, locks were built around the rapids to allow for the safe passage of commercial ships. For many years, the so-called Soo Locks was the busiest lock system in the world.

Early settlers, fur trappers and explorers used rivers to navigate through Ontario's wilderness and rough terrain. At over 1,000 kilometres in length, both First Nations peoples and early explorers used the Ottawa River as a major transportation route. In 1651, Samuel de Champlain and Étienne Brûlé were the first Europeans to travel up the Ottawa River to Lake Nipissing, then down the French River and into Georgian Bay, a route that fur traders would continue to travel for the next 200 years. Other explorers travelled along the Ottawa River to Lake Timiskaming and then portaged into rivers that would eventually empty into Hudson Bay, opening up vast areas of the province to trade and, eventually, settlement. In the 1800s, a booming lumber industry used the Ottawa River to gain access to vast white pine forests. In 1932, the creation of the Rideau Canal connected the Ottawa River to Lake Ontario, thus increasing the Ottawa River's importance to the Canadian shipping industry.

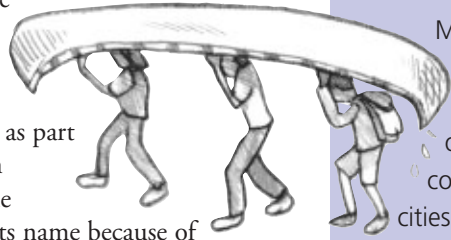


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The French River

The French River flows 110 kilometres from Lake Nipissing to Georgian Bay. The Algonquin natives used the French as one of their main transportation corridors and early fur traders used this river as part of a water highway to get from Montreal to Lake Superior. The Ojibwe people gave this river its name because of the large number of French-speaking explorers who navigated the waterway. In the late 1800s, logging opened up much of the area surrounding Lake Nipissing; however, due to the rugged landscape of the surrounding Canadian Shield, large tracts of the river remained untouched. These unspoiled wilderness areas are still favourite destinations for canoeists and kayakers.

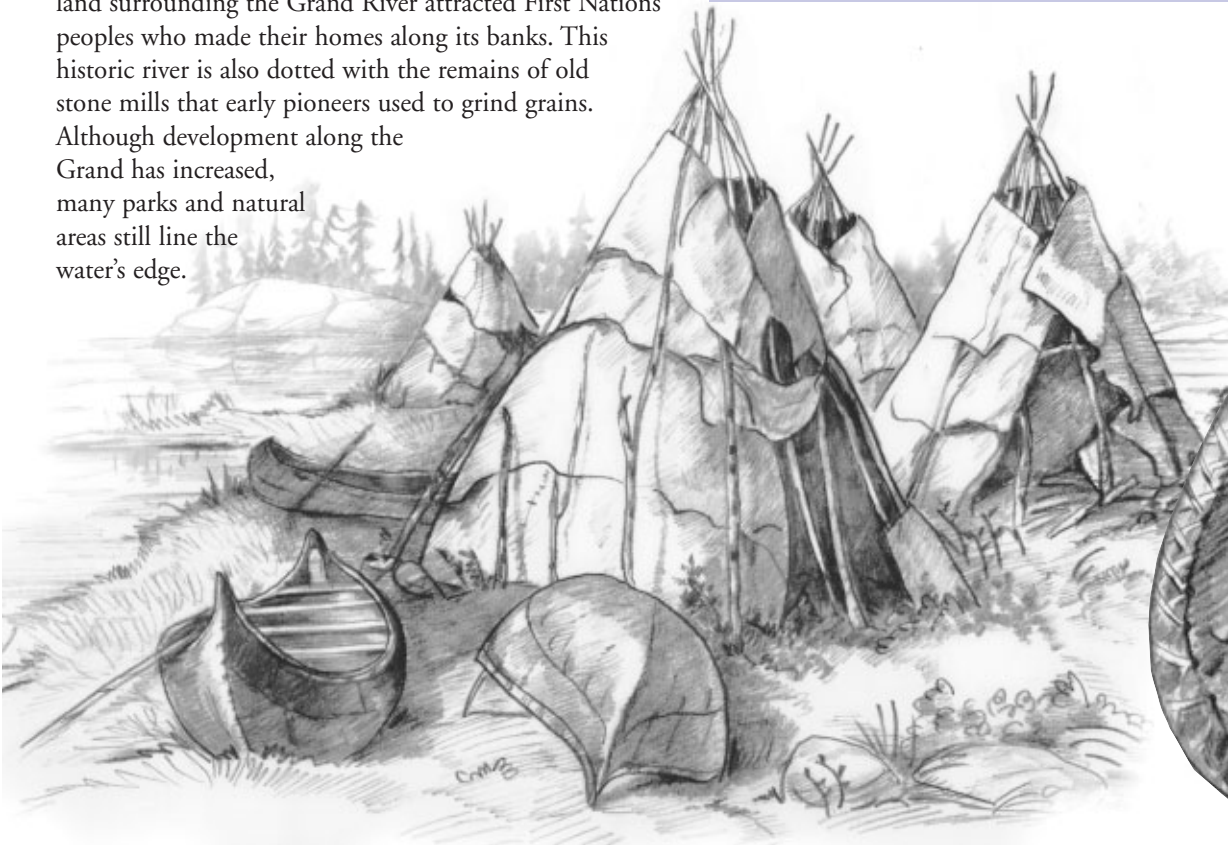


Niagara Falls

A sudden or extreme drop in the elevation of a river forms a waterfall. Dams are sometimes built in these areas to generate electricity from the power of the falling water. The most famous waterfall in Ontario is undoubtedly Niagara Falls – an amazing 54-metre drop! Enough water pours over Niagara Falls to fill two large swimming pools every second!

The Grand River

The Grand River winds through 290 kilometres of south-western Ontario and drains into Lake Erie. Along the way, the river falls over steep rock faces resulting in dramatic waterfalls, although most of the time it cuts gently through flat agricultural lands. Thousands of years ago, the fertile land surrounding the Grand River attracted First Nations peoples who made their homes along its banks. This historic river is also dotted with the remains of old stone mills that early pioneers used to grind grains. Although development along the Grand has increased, many parks and natural areas still line the water's edge.



Urban Rivers

Many rivers wind through the wilderness of our majestic province while others wind through the concrete jungles of our cities. Toronto, Ontario's largest city, contains the Don and Humber rivers. More than 200 years ago when Europeans first arrived, the Don River ran clear. It was full of fish and other water creatures. As the city grew, so too did the amount of pollution entering the river from the quarries, mills and factories lining its banks. The course of the increasingly dirty river was reconfigured and its future looked bleak. During the 1980s, many environmental organizations and concerned local citizens planted thousands of trees, countless wildflowers and other natural vegetation alongside the Don. Its wetlands were restored and native species of fish and animals have been reintroduced to the area.

Unfortunately, the Don is still haunted by its past. During heavy rainstorms, old sewers overflow releasing raw sewage into the river that pollutes and poisons the fish and their habitat.

Palaeo-Indians first settled along the Humber River, located in the west-end of Toronto today, more than 12 000 years ago. This early hunter-gatherer society eventually evolved into an agricultural-based society, which took advantage of the Humber's clean water and flat flood plain on which to grow food. Unlike the Don River, the Humber's high-quality agricultural lands remained free of large-scale industry. Moreover, its river valley was too small for factories. As a result, large portions of the Humber River support recreational activities such as canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and are surrounded by parklands, bicycle paths and walking trails.

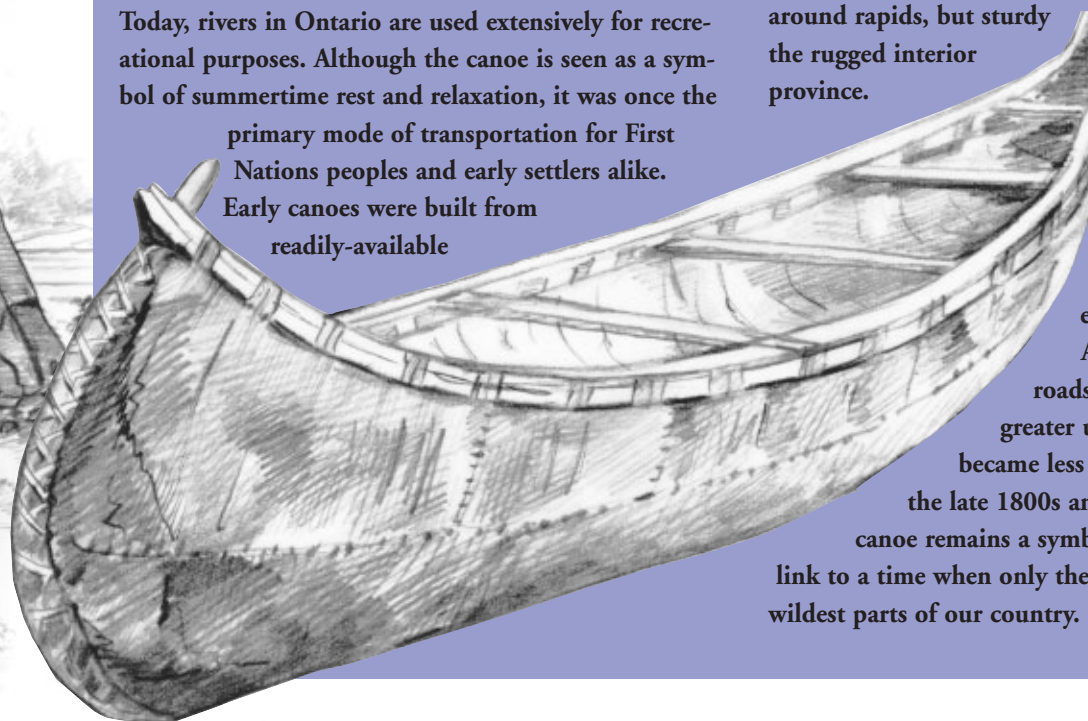
The Canoe

Today, rivers in Ontario are used extensively for recreational purposes. Although the canoe is seen as a symbol of summertime rest and relaxation, it was once the primary mode of transportation for First Nations peoples and early settlers alike. Early canoes were built from readily-available

natural materials such as cedar and birch bark. Canoes had to be light enough to portage over logjams and around rapids, but sturdy enough to withstand the rugged interior province.

Initially, early Europeans were skeptical of the seemingly flimsy canoe but they soon realized that this was the best way to explore the interior.

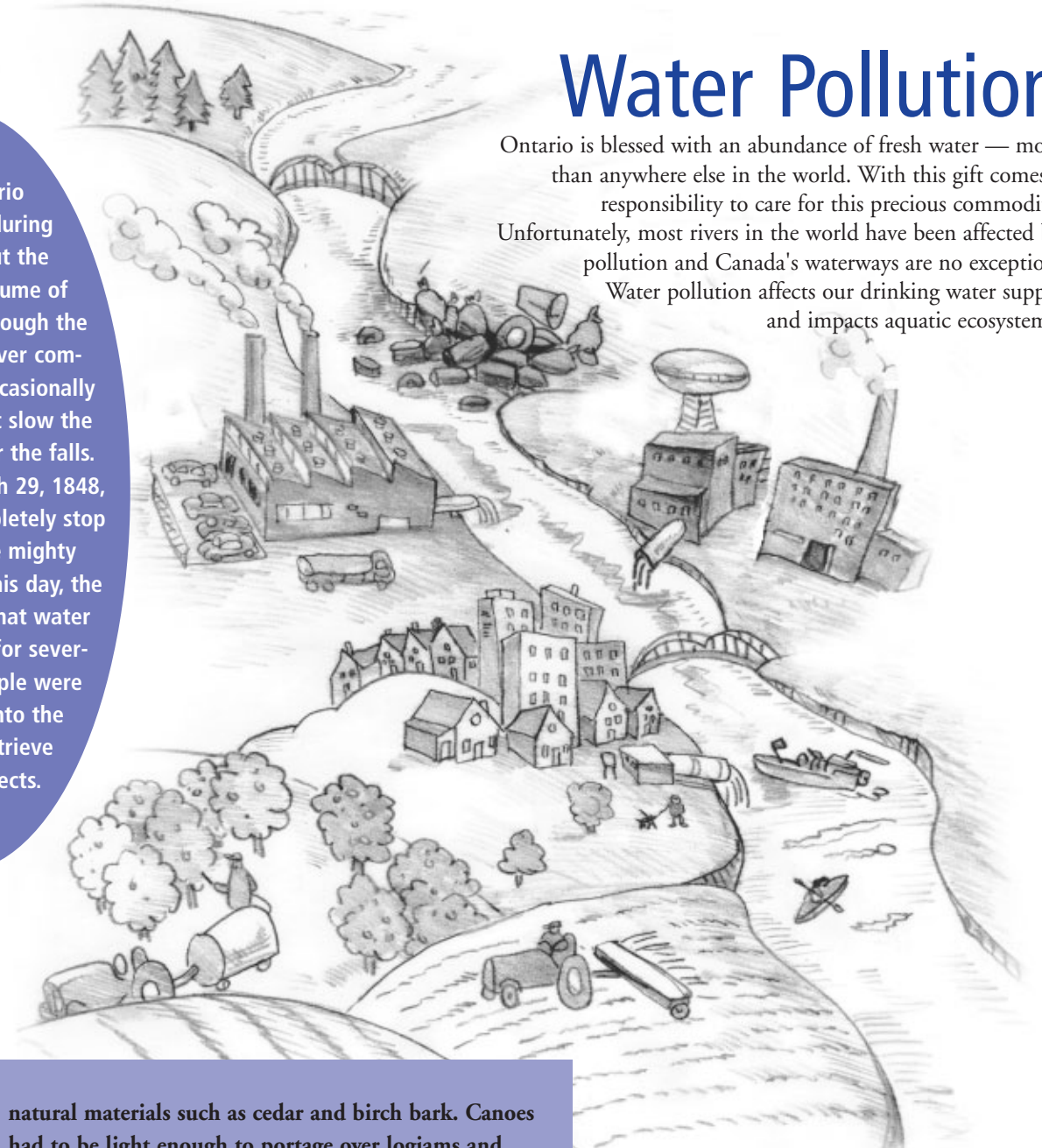
As forests were cleared, roads and railways came into greater use. Travel by water became less and less important during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Today, the canoe remains a symbol of our heritage and a link to a time when only the rivers could see the wildest parts of our country.



Many Ontario rivers freeze during the winter. But the tremendous volume of water flowing through the Niagara River never completely freezes. Occasionally ice jams form that slow the flow of water over the falls. Only once, on March 29, 1848, did the water completely stop flowing over the mighty Niagara Falls. On this day, the ice was so thick that water stopped flowing for several hours and people were able to walk onto the riverbed to retrieve long-lost objects.

Water Pollution

Ontario is blessed with an abundance of fresh water — more than anywhere else in the world. With this gift comes a responsibility to care for this precious commodity. Unfortunately, most rivers in the world have been affected by pollution and Canada's waterways are no exception. Water pollution affects our drinking water supply and impacts aquatic ecosystems.



Water pollution is caused by:

- raw sewage being dumped directly into water or overflowing from a storm drain after a heavy rainfall;
- factories releasing chemicals into the water;
- factories releasing excessively warmed water that was used to cool equipment in the manufacturing process;
- agricultural runoff from pesticides and fertilizers;
- people dumping chemicals, paints, oil, and other contaminants down storm drains;
- the improper disposal of garbage.