

What are the Benefits of Canadian Heritage River Designation?



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What is the Canadian Heritage Rivers System?

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) is Canada's national river conservation program. It is a cooperative program of the federal, provincial and territorial governments of Canada. Parks Canada is the lead federal agency for the program.

The objectives of the CHRS program are to give national recognition to Canada's outstanding rivers and to ensure their long-term management to conserve their natural, cultural and recreational values for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians, now and in the future.

Thirty-seven rivers have been designated to the CHRS, totalling over 9,000 kilometres.



Athabasca River (AB);
designated to the CHRS in 1989

How could our community benefit?

The designation of a river to the CHRS represents an opportunity to help determine your river's future and improve the quality of life of people living near it.

With designation comes a commitment by the managing governments to work with river stakeholders – residents, local governments, landowners, businesses, aboriginal groups and other

interested parties – to carry out actions detailed in a management strategy. Each river in the CHRS has a management strategy outlining how the river and its key heritage and recreational features will be managed in the long term.

If you want to promote your river, you can do it better if it is a Canadian Heritage River.

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What does designation mean?

- Designation is the formal proclamation of a river as a Canadian Heritage River by the Minister of the Environment and the equivalent provincial or territorial minister.

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How could our community benefit financially?

Does designation equal dollars? Not directly. But studies have shown that designation does bring recognition and status and provides an opportunity to promote your river to Canadians and the world...

- as a prime ecotourism region
- as a healthy ecosystem rich in wildlife
- as a culturally rich community
- as a great place to raise a family
- as a smart location to set up a business
- as a community with a vision.

By helping to attract visitors, new residents, money and/or jobs, designation can help to increase employment opportunities in your community's service and retail sectors.



River-based ecotourism

What about non-monetary benefits?

If your river is designated to the CHRS, you and your community could benefit from various recreational, cultural and environmental improvements.

Environment: Designation can do a lot to maintain or improve your river's environmental health. Designation requires the managing agency to monitor the river ecosystem and water quality, and to produce a report every ten years that includes information on the state of the river, the integrity of its ecosystem and the status of its natural heritage features. Designation can also provide the impetus to stimulate community involvement in river ecosystem restoration projects.



Soper River (NT) designated to the CHRS in 1992

Recreation: Opportunities for outdoor recreation along a Canadian Heritage River are enhanced, in particular (but not exclusively) water-based types of recreation. Management strategies may encourage facilities for activities that are compatible with the natural environment and scenery.

Heritage Appreciation: Education can be an important element of the management strategy. Designation can increase opportunities to learn about your river's natural and cultural heritage.

Preservation of Historic Sites: Publicity surrounding designation can generate support to preserve heritage buildings near the river. The management strategy can help ensure that historic aboriginal sites and key elements of the river's "cultural landscape" are respected and protected.

Community Development: The process of preparing and implementing a management strategy requires that stakeholders along the river are consulted on what should be done. Public involvement allows planners to learn of people's concerns and gives stakeholders a real voice in the future of their river. It also helps to develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and community among those whose lives are affected by the river.

What's in it for the river?

While your river may initially benefit from monitoring and conservation measures taken by government agencies, it will benefit more in the long run if local residents and other stakeholders become the “stewards” of the river. Appreciation of the river by its resident community is the best way of ensuring long-term protection.



Rideau Waterway (ON), designated to the CHRS in 2000

Coordinated River Management: A management strategy is not a general land-use plan; it focuses on the natural and cultural heritage and recreational values of the river. The management strategy process draws together all parties interested in the river's heritage and recreation to work together to a common end. These stakeholders include not only local residents, interest groups and river users, but also government agencies having environmental, heritage or recreational responsibilities. Coordinating the planning and management activities of these agencies inevitably results in better coordination of both new and existing programs for the river and reduced conflicts among river users.

Greater Environmental Protection: Designation is an opportunity for the lead provincial or territorial agency and for local governments to adopt policies that will enhance protection of the river. These measures could include green space zoning of river banks or property tax rate adjustments to encourage stew-

ardship of private lands. Local residents might be supported in setting up a “river watchdog network” or hotline. Designation is also a chance to address specific environmental issues on your river such as vegetation destruction, bank erosion, garbage, floodplain urbanization or fish stock depletion, as well as enforcement measures for resolving these.

“Appreciation of the river by its resident community is the best way of ensuring long-term protection”

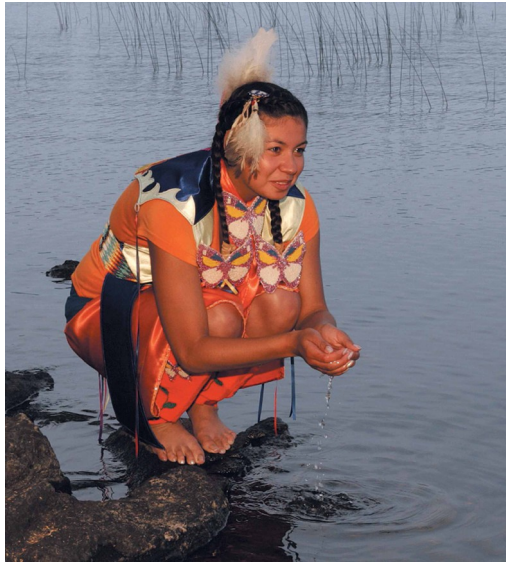
Water Quality Improvement: All of the features for which a Canadian Heritage River is nominated must be monitored. The one feature that is probably most closely watched is water quality. Monitoring programs on water quality have been started or upgraded on a number of Canadian Heritage Rivers as a direct result of their designation.

Focus for Government Programs: Many federal and provincial government programs can affect the heritage and recreational features of a river. These include environmental research, water quality monitoring, tourism development, fishery enhancement, reforestation, wildlife studies, and so on. Government agencies have used the designation of a Canadian Heritage River as a deciding factor in choosing where their programs should be located.



Common Loon

How might I benefit from designation?



Ottawa River (nominated to CHRS 200?)

There are many different ways in which you could personally benefit from CHRS designation. Common improvements to heritage rivers in densely settled parts of Canada include a healthier environment, cleaner water, scenic and aesthetic improvements, more opportunities for recreation and heritage appreciation, better and more sustainable business opportunities, and easier resolution and prevention of conflicts over water use. Each of these brings benefits to all individuals in a river valley.

On rivers in remote areas, wilderness values can be preserved for solitude and spiritual renewal, and cultural pride can be promoted, particularly for aboriginal peoples. As well, some business opportunities could be created, most often in outfitting, guiding and local arts and crafts.

Designation will benefit individuals differently according to their occupations, where they live and what they value most. The range of benefits that could accrue to any one individual or to a community is not easily predicted. Having input on how your river is managed, however, allows you to “tailor” the benefits of CHRS designation to some extent.

But our river is fine as it is!

It may be hard to believe, but your river will change within your lifetime. You can be sure that a river, even if it is in a park or other type of protected area, is not immune to external threats.

Designation to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System is no guarantee against these threats, but it is often your best opportunity to help secure the future of your river, by minimizing undesirable changes and helping ensure that the changes which do occur are beneficial.



Rivers are at the heart of our communities. They are part of our lives and our dreams.

Is there a downside to designation?

People are sometimes concerned that designation will curtail landowner rights and freedoms, or restrict development, or cost taxpayers money, or attract too many people and with them problems like trespassing and vandalism. Here are some responses to those concerns.

Landowner Rights and Freedoms: No new laws or regulations are created with designation, so all protective actions on Canadian Heritage Rivers depend on the enforcement of existing laws and regulations, and on the voluntary actions of stakeholders. Effective management of designated rivers can only be achieved with landowners' involvement in decisions and their willing stewardship of their properties. Even non-participating landowners benefit from environmental improvements through higher property values.



The Red River (MB); designated to the CHRS in 2007

Restrictions on Development: The primary goal in managing a Canadian Heritage River is to protect the heritage features for which it was included in the System. This means that timber harvesting, mining and other industrial activities can continue so long as they do not affect these heritage features. Potentially damaging developments within the designation area may be restricted by local or other government authorities, while sustainable and complementary developments, such as certain recreational facilities, may be encouraged. Through this type of

sustainable development, the community as a whole benefits in the long term.

Costing Taxpayers Money: Coordinated planning is actually a more efficient way of using taxpayers' money. Some up-front expenditures on planning and public involvement reap far larger long-term benefits by ensuring that public funds are not spent on overlapping, conflicting or unpopular programs. In many cases, implementing programs will depend on volunteers who are often attracted by the national recognition given to a river by its designation.

Trespassing and Vandalism: there is no evidence that these problems increase on Canadian Heritage Rivers. In fact, the status that comes with designation, together with community involvement and civic pride, discourage these types of behaviour. Such problems might occur where tourism increases substantially. But even then, mechanisms established through designation can help, such as controlling public access to the river, directing visitors to specific locations, education programs and promoting codes of personal conduct.

Increased Government Interference: Nominating agencies retain their general legal jurisdiction over lands along designated rivers. As designation is not legislated by the federal government, an additional layer of bureaucracy is not created. In any case, governments in Canada can no longer afford to become directly involved in more land resource management and fewer still can acquire property. That is why many of the benefits described in this pamphlet depend on the voluntary participation of local residents and other stakeholders.



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Publication information

For more information

If you have any other questions about what CHRS designation can do for your river, call the CHR Board Secretariat (819-994-2913) or your local board member. (Members are listed in the *Contact Us* section of the CHRS website; the Secretariat can also give you their name and phone number). For more information on the CHRS, including a list of the rivers and links to PDF versions of our publications, visit www.chrs.ca.

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