

The Thames River, Ontario

Canadian Heritage Rivers System

Ten-Year Monitoring Report 2012 to 2022

Schedule 7. Ten-Year Monitoring Report Template

Section 1: Chronology of Significant Events, Actions, Research, and/or Studies

Month/Year:

2013

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

9th Buxton Community Homecoming

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

The community of North Buxton and their descendants

Brief Description:

- The community of North Buxton in the lower Thames River watershed celebrated the 90th Buxton Homecoming.
- This four- day event focuses on Canada's Underground Railroad and is an important story for many residents in North Buxton.
- Approximately 3,000 people (descendants and others) attend each year from the United States and Canada.
- The museum at the settlement site has remained vital over the years.
- Photo courtesy of Buxton Museum.



Month/Year:

2013

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

40th Anniversary of the Thames Valley Trail Association

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

Volunteers and members of the Thames Valley Trail Association

Brief Description:

- The hiking club celebrated their 40th year with hikes, a dinner and events.
- The club maintains the 110 km trail that extends from south of London to St. Marys along the river.
- The club has an active membership and maintains relationships with landowners along the trail and the conservation authorities.
- Photo courtesy of Heather Poland.



Month/Year:

2014

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

Battle of Longwoods (War of 1812-14) Re-enactment

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

Volunteers of military re-enactment societies

Brief Description:

- On March 4th, War of 1812 enthusiasts gathered west of London to re-enact the Battle of Longwoods, a skirmish 200 years ago that resulted in an American victory and the deaths of 21 soldiers.
- It was part of a week of events marking the last significant conflict in this region during the war.
- Photo courtesy of Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA).

**Month/Year:**

2018

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

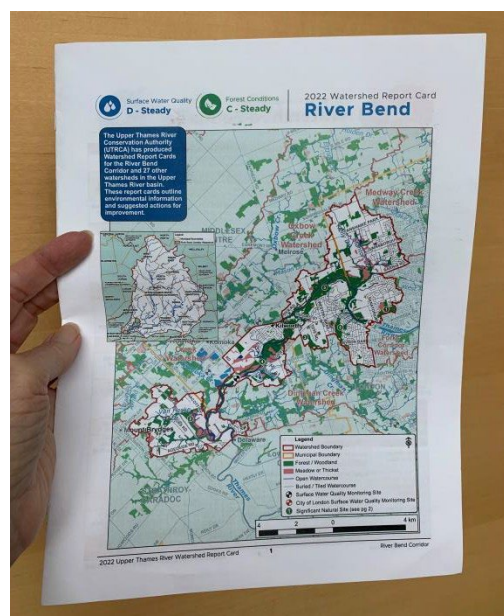
Watershed Report Cards

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) and Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA)

Brief Description:

- The UTRCA and LTVCA each produced watershed report cards in 2018. Data from authority water samples and mapping is used along with information collated from community partners, municipalities, and other agencies.
- The report cards are produced every 5 years as a means of reporting on local environmental conditions by subwatershed.
- These report cards summarize an extensive amount of environmental information into a readable 8-page package (UTRCA version) to guide local action and track environmental changes.
- Each report card provides a letter grade for surface water quality and forest conditions, summarizes watershed features, provides recommended actions for improvement, and highlights progress made.
- Surface water quality grades range from C to D and have remained stable overall, despite increased population and development, indicating conservation programs are working. Forest conditions grades range from C to F. Most grades remained steady but some experienced slight declines. Promotion of tree planting continues.
- Photo courtesy of UTRCA.



Month/Year:

2018

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

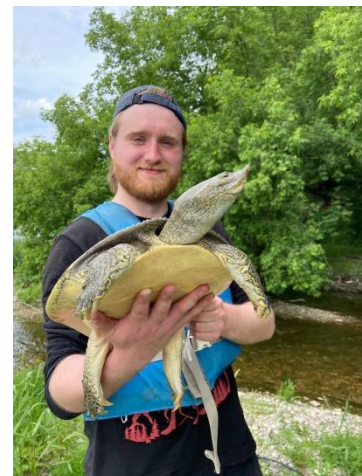
Spiny Softshell Turtle Research and Recovery, 25 years strong

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

UTRCA, LTVCA, volunteers, agencies

Brief Description:

- 2018 marked 25 years of intensive research on the endangered spiny softshell turtle in the Thames watershed by Scott Gillingwater (UTRCA).
- Tracking and tagging of these turtles, egg collection and incubation, and release of thousands of baby turtles each year is making a quantifiable difference.
- Increasing number of turtles in all age classes are now being observed, signifying efforts are successful.
- Efforts to decommission the Springbank Dam in London have finally been successful, meaning the turtles can now utilize a larger stretch of the river and connect previously fragmented populations.
- Photo courtesy of UTRCA.



Month/Year:

2018-2019

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

Paddling the Thames River

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

Author and canoeist Kevin Callan, with support from local counties, tourism organizations, and First Nations communities visited

Brief Description:

- Kevin Callan paddled the entire length of the Thames River in 2018 and produced a series of entertaining videos on *The Happy Camper's* canoe trip from Woodstock to Lake St. Clair. The series encourages people to explore their local river and nearby points of interest. He presented his epic journey down Canada's most southern river at a few local events in 2019.
- Separately, a group of volunteers produced a map and guide entitled *Thames River Paddling Routes* to share detailed information and to promote local paddling.
- Photo courtesy of UTRCA.



Month/Year:

2019

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

Annual Thames River Cleanup marks 20th anniversary

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

Community members, volunteers, municipalities, conservation authorities

Brief Description:

- The annual Thames River Cleanup celebrated its 20th year in 2019.
- This community volunteer event is now in over 17 communities and 50 sites along 200 kms of the river and tributaries.
- This event involved over 1500 volunteers.
- Photo courtesy of UTRCA.



Month/Year:

2020

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

CHRS Website Story Map Project (Thames Contribution)

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

UTRCA, LTVCA, partners

Brief Description:

- The UTRCA completed a contract to submit content on the Thames River for the CHRS website's new Story Map Project.
- Some 32 features of cultural, natural and recreational significance was described and highlighted with photographs and maps.
- The website was linked to the UTRCA website.

Month/Year:

2021

Title of Event, Action, Research and/or Study:

Municipal sewage infrastructure investments

Involved (river manager, partners, stakeholder, Indigenous communities, monitoring agencies, etc.):

The City of London, City of Woodstock, City of Stratford and others

Brief Description:

- The City of London budgeted \$700k a year towards reducing river pollution by separating combined sewers that lead to system overloads and the discharge of untreated sewage in high flow events.
- Other municipalities such as Woodstock and Stratford have also been investing in sewage treatment upgrades to safeguard water quality and improve energy efficiency.
- Photo courtesy City of London.



Section 2: Changes and Threats to Natural, Cultural and Recreational Values

NATURAL, CULTURAL OR RECREATIONAL VALUE	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE IN VALUE (e.g. magnitude, positive or negative change, immediate or long-term)	REASON FOR CHANGE (e.g. threat, stressor, management action)	ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE	CHANGE/THREAT STILL PRESENT?
Recreation: London Canoe Club	Change: The large and longstanding club has significantly downsized.	The seasonal Springbank Dam on the Thames River in London was officially decommissioned by Council in 2017 due to costs and environmental harms. The reservoir behind the dam was used by the canoe club.	The club now offers some paddling at Sharon Creek Conservation Area (CA). Also, canoe rentals are now available at Fanshawe CA. The City of London is developing a Paddling Plan to enhance canoe/boat access.	Still present. However, the demise of flat water canoeing opportunities in central London is balanced by a healthier river, unobstructed by a dam, and canoeing opportunities elsewhere.
Natural: Endangered Softshell Turtle Research	Possible negative change.	The 25-year research project is under threat from a lack of provincial funding that was available in the past. This turtle's range is focused on the Thames.	Local fundraising actions were taken in 2022 to keep the research afloat, and this was successful.	The threat is still present and makes the research even more challenging to undertake over the long term.
Natural: Endangered Wood-poppy Research	Positive	Federal government grants allowed renewed research into the remaining populations of the endangered wildflower, mostly found in the Thames watershed.	Dr. Jenny McCune, University of Lethbridge is studying the number and vigour of the plants and planting Wood-poppies grown from seed at the Western University Research Centre.	The research continues, a positive outcome for the future of the local population of this flower.

Cultural: Museums	Positive or Neutral	The COVID-19 pandemic threatened a lot of organizations, including museums and historic sites, as they were required to close to the public.	Many museums created online programming to continue public engagement.	We are unaware of any museum that has closed permanently. All seem to be offering a full range of programs. Examples of sites include: the Stratford Festival, Ska-Nah-Doht Village and Museum, Fanshawe Pioneer Village and the War of 1812 military re-enactments.
Cultural: First Nation PowWows	Positive	Like most public events, PowWows ceased during the pandemic.		In 2022 PowWows resumed at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (45 th Annual) and others.



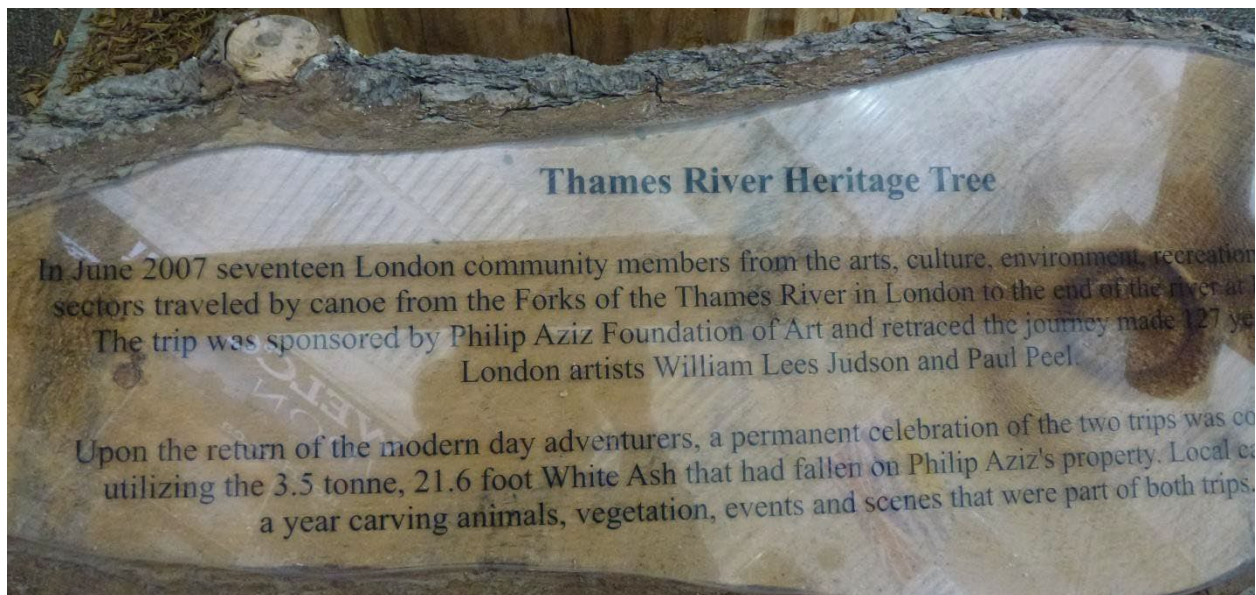
Wood-poppy researchers and Wood-poppies in bloom. Photos by Cathy Quinlan



Anglers enjoy fishing in the Thames River near Komoka. Photo by Cathy Quinlan



Historic St. Marys (Stonetown) on the North Thames River. Photo by Pat Donnelly.



London Airport continues to showcase the Thames River Heritage Tree carving. Photo Cathy Quinlan.

New Values (Optional)

No new values have been identified.

Section 3: Integrity Guidelines

NATURAL, CULTURAL OR RECREATIONAL INTEGRITY VALUE	CHANGE IN INTEGRITY VALUE (brief description)	THREAT OR STRESSOR (current, immediate, long-term)	ACTION(S) TAKEN TO ADDRESS THREAT	THREAT STILL PRESENT?
Cultural: Rich architectural heritage	There have been some successes in maintaining heritage structures and some losses.	Heritage buildings face ongoing challenges due to increased maintenance costs and pressure to redevelop. There are hundreds of structures in the Thames watershed and no specific structures or sites were mentioned in the Thames Strategy.	Many municipalities have designated heritage building lists. Often it takes a dedicated group or committee to fight for a particular structure. For example, the Fugitive Slave Chapel in London was relocated to the Fanshawe Pioneer Village as a permanent home after years of local fundraising. The Heritage Log Cabins at Ska-Nah-Doht Village and Museum have undergone repairs to some logs and accessibility ramps were installed.	The issue of preserving heritage architecture will be ongoing, as it is everywhere.

All other integrity guidelines are unchanged.



Eldon House, London's oldest remaining house, is now a museum and overlooks the Thames River. Photo by Cathy Quinlan.

Section 4: Designation Document Recommendations and Current Status

RECOMMENDATION OR KEY ACTION	DEGREE OF ACHIEVEMENT (e.g. not yet initiated, initiated/underway, completed/addressed, on-going)	COMMENTS
Leadership: Establish and empower a Thames Implementation Committee to act as the catalyst that drives The Thames Strategy.	Completed.	The Thames Canadian Heritage River Committee met regularly for many years following designation. The committee met less frequently over time due to the health/age of several key members. The committee is no longer active. However, staff at the Upper Thames River and Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authorities continue the connection with the CHRS program.
Monitoring: Monitor the river's values by completing the Thames River Annual Report Checklist, and monitor the progress of The Thames Strategy every 10 years and present the results to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.	On-going.	Annual reports have been submitted (by UTRCA staff) every year since designation. A 10-year monitoring report was completed in 2013. This 10 year monitoring report fulfils the next requirement.
Outreach: Host a series of community workshops across the watershed inviting both non-government and government stakeholders and individuals.	Complete.	The Thames Canadian Heritage River Committee hosted annual workshops called <i>Thames River Symposiums</i> from 2001 to 2007. After 2007, it was felt the symposiums had run their course and achieved much of what had been desired. There continue to be workshops and webinars related to local watershed issues held across the watershed by the conservation authorities, museums, clubs and other groups.

Education: Promote and distribute the <i>Thames River Background Study</i> (print and CD) to schools, libraries, and other interested groups.	Complete.	The Background Study was distributed to schools, libraries and interested groups. While there are no print copies remaining, it continues to be posted on the websites of the UTRCA and LTVCA. In addition, Dr. Michael Troughton and Cathy Quinlan produced <i>The Thames River Watershed: A Heritage Landscape Guide</i> in 2009. Most of the copies have been sold or given to interested groups and libraries.
Communications: Write and distribute a regular Thames River Newsletter that includes information on local activities that promote CHRS values and facts about the river's environment, history and places of interest.	Complete.	The Thames River Happenings newsletter was distributed for several years following designation. The newsletter is no longer produced due to resource constraints (staff and funding). The UTRCA continues to publish a monthly newsletter on their website called the "FYI". It focuses on the environmental projects and partnerships.
Communications: Establish a Thames River website to communicate this information. Feature a regular column on the Thames River in local newspapers.	Ongoing and Partial.	The UTRCA and LTVCA both have websites that feature CHRS information. While the Thames Canadian Heritage River Committee was not able to host a regular column due to resource constraints, several newspapers host their own heritage columns or include regular stories on local heritage including the Thames River. The St. Marys Independent, for example, has a regular column written by the local museum curator.

Marketing: Establish and celebrate an annual Thames River Heritage Day throughout the watershed, highlighting specific river-related achievements.	Partial.	The LTVCA's Longwoods Road Conservation Area and Ska-Nah-Doht Village and Museum sometimes offer programming on Rivers Day. No funding could be secured to organize a Rivers Day event as of the date of this report.
Marketing: Erect plaques in communities explaining the designation of the Thames as a Canadian Heritage River.	Complete.	The CHRS bronze plaque donated by CHRS was installed at the Forks of the Thames in London in 2003. Community members from Chatham-Kent erected a Thames plaque on a boulder in Thamesgrove Conservation Area (in the lower Thames) in 2000, the site of the long-running Heritage Days weekend.
Marketing: Erect attractive signs at all major bridges over the Thames indicating it is a Canadian Heritage River.	Partial.	Bridge signs were designed by the UTRCA. Several signs were installed in the lower Thames area, thanks to funding from the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Foundation. Approvals for signs from municipal road departments and a lack of funding put the project on hold indefinitely.

Tours: Develop Thames River Heritage Tours that highlight various points of interest along the river and in the watershed that could be accessed by boat, car or bus.	Addressed and Complete.	This goal was achieved through the publication of <i>The Thames River Watershed: A Heritage Landscape Guide</i>, by Dr. Michael Troughton and Cathy Quinlan. The guide explores six landscapes within the watershed with over 45 sites highlighted, to encourage exploration by the local and visiting public.
Marketing/Tours: Produce a War of 1812-14 Daybook and/or Tour and erect signage at battlefield sites.	Complete.	The bicentennial commemoration activities surrounding the War of 1812-14 were numerous and popular. The Kent Military Re-enactment Society undertook battlefield signage and other activities. Museums also offered programming between 2012 and 2014.



Heritage mural in downtown Chatham. Photo by Cathy Quinlan



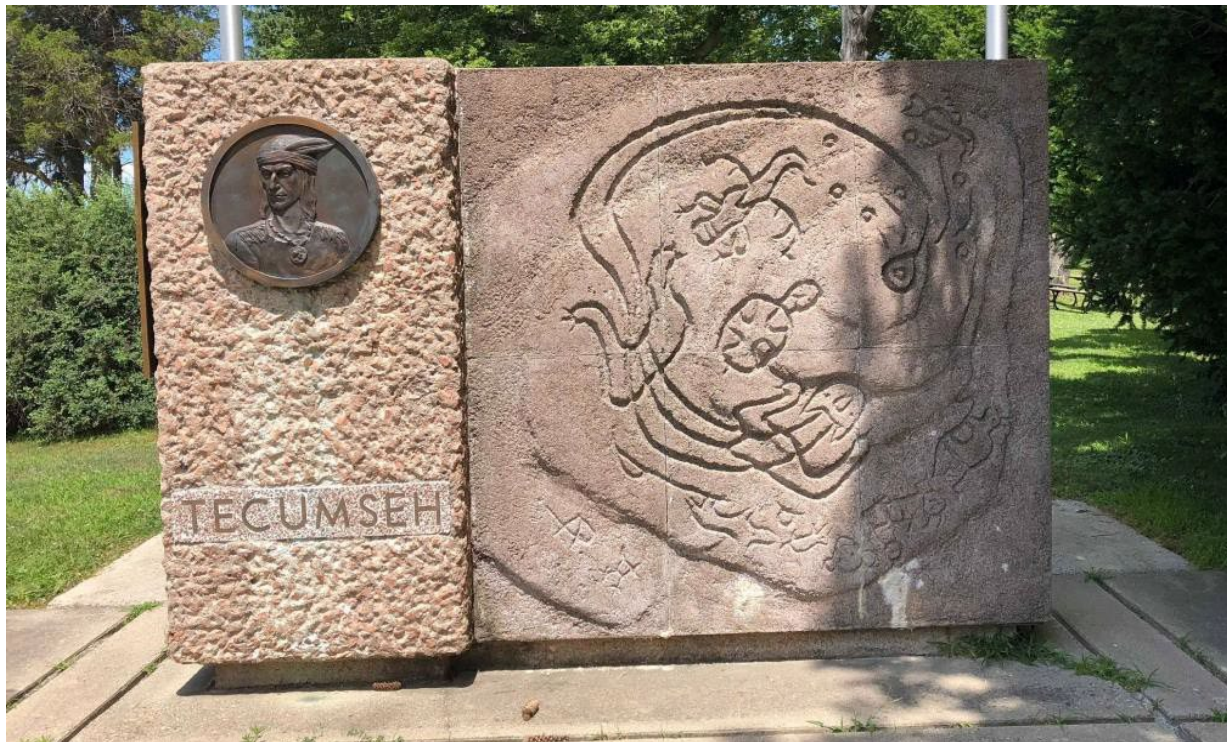
Pleasure boats access the Thames at Thamesgrove Conservation Area, Chatham. Photo by Cathy Quinlan



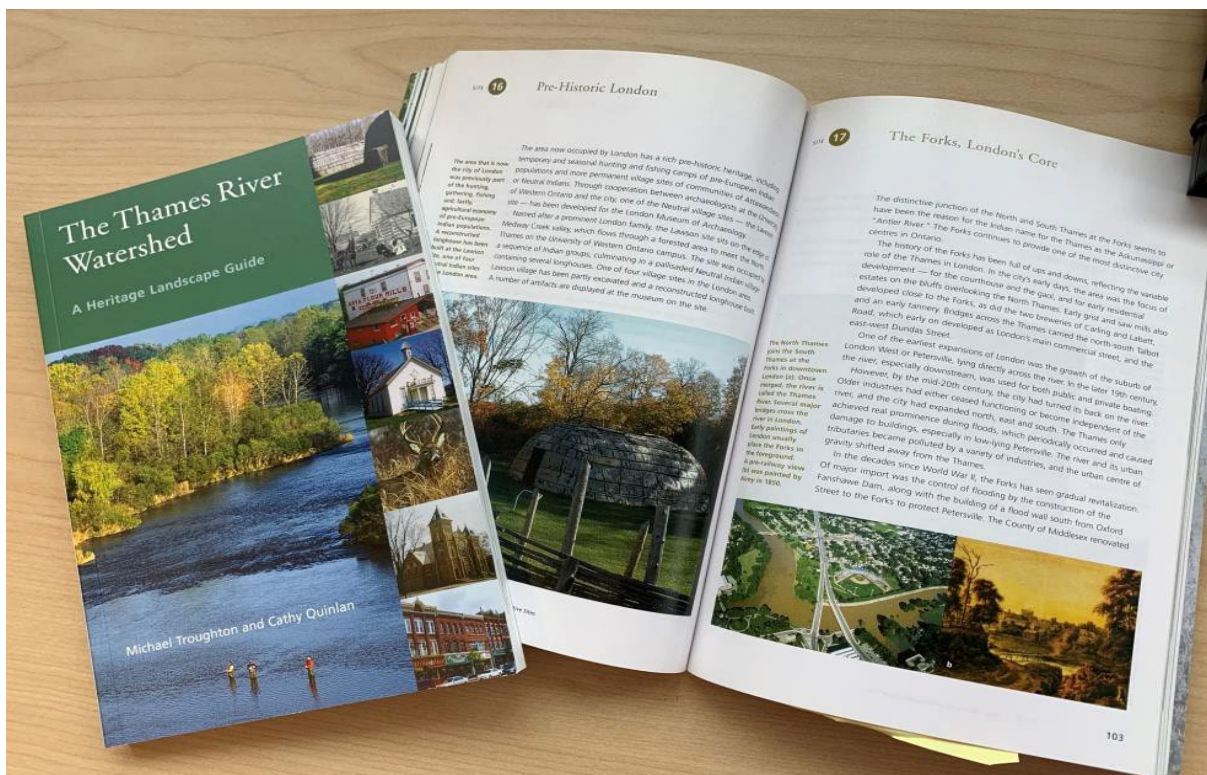
Thames River bridge signage over the lower Thames River. Photo by Cathy Quinlan



New foot bridges were installed over the north Thames River in London in 2021 to extend the Thames Valley Parkway multi-use trail. Photo by Cathy Quinlan



Tecumseh monument on Longwoods Road. Photo by Eric Labadie



The Thames River Watershed Heritage Guide by Michael Troughton and Cathy Quinlan. Photo by Cathy Quinlan

Section 5. River Spotlight (Optional)

The following links are just some of the agencies, groups and museums that provide river and heritage related information.

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority: <https://thamesriver.on.ca/about-us/thames-heritage-river/>

Thames River Clear Water Revival: <https://www.thamesrevival.ca/>

Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority: www.ltvca.ca
<https://www.lowerthames-conservation.on.ca/about-us/events/>

Historic Thames, article: <https://www.chathamdailynews.ca/opinion/columnists/a-look-at-our-historic-thames-river>

London Canoe Club: <https://www.facebook.com/LondonCanoeClubON/>

Thames Paddling Routes: <https://www.facebook.com/thamesriverpaddlingroutes/>

London's Paddling Plan: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/londong-paddling-plan-draft-1.6652319>

Battle of Longwoods, War of 1812: <https://www.lowerthames-conservation.on.ca/battle-of-longwoods-war-of-1812-reenactment/>

Buxton Museum: <https://www.buxtonmuseum.com/hcoming/hc-schedule.html>

Thames Valley Trail Association: <https://www.tvta.ca/>

The Avon Trail: <https://www.tvta.ca/>

Stratford Festival: <https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/>

Antler River Rally: facebook.com/AntlerRiverRally/

Thames River Cleanup: <https://www.thamesrivercleanup.ca/>

Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Competition Powwow: <https://cottfnpowwow.com/>

Oxford County Trails Association: <http://www.oxfordcountytrailsCouncil.ca/>

Chatham-Kent Ghost Walks: <https://www.facebook.com/ckghostwalks/>

London Walking Tours: <https://museumlondon.ca/walking-tours>

Thames Talbot Land Trust: <https://www.thamestalbotlandtrust.ca/>

Section 6: Condition of Plaque

CONDITION OF PLAQUE	
General Condition of Plaque (select one)	☒ Good ☐ Fair (will need repair soon) ☐ Needs Repair
Describe the condition of bronze, paint and lacquer, and mount.	The plaque was spray painted in 2022 (vandalism) but City staff were able to remove it quite well. No corrosion or other issues were noted.
Describe the condition of the site.	The garden bed site by the Forks of the Thames is still well maintained by City of London staff. The plaque is behind a railing.
If needs repair has been checked in section one, describe the necessary repairs required.	N/A
If needs repair has been checked, indicate a date by which the repairs will be complete.	N/A
Image of Plaque	Image attached below.



June 2022 photograph of the Thames plaque. Spray paint was removed but traces remain.



July 2023 photo of the plaque by the Forks and fountain. Photo by Cathy Quinlan.

Section 7: Summary of Benefits and/or Detrimental Effects Since Designation

TYPE OF BENEFIT	DESCRIPTION
Environmental	The UTRCA and LTVCA continue to be very active in providing programming around water quality protection, habitat restoration, environmental education and species recovery. Recent Watershed Report Cards show water quality and forest conditions have remained fairly steady, with some subwatersheds showing improvements and some declines. With continued growing population pressures, this result is seen as an indication that programs are working (we just need more of them). While it is difficult to conclusively prove whether the heritage designation is a factor, the conservation authorities routinely use the CHRS logo on all major products and websites as an added reason to steward the watershed.
Cultural	There is a general increase in the appreciation of the river and watershed as it is common to hear groups, museums and agencies refer to the Thames as a Canadian Heritage River. Community groups often use the designation as another reason to support the protection of a heritage building or site.
Recreational	There has been recent renewed interest in paddling the river, as evidenced by the City of London's upcoming Paddling Plan, Thames River Paddling Routes website (run by volunteers), people or small groups challenging themselves by paddling the entire river (and posting videos and articles), and others. All have made reference to the Thames' designation.
Cultural	Awareness and appreciation of the First Nation communities along the river has also grown since designation, but also since Canada has started to embrace reconciliation. There is a growing list of partnership projects involving the local First Nation communities and non-indigenous groups and agencies including: - floodplain mapping (LTVCA drew on local indigenous knowledge on First Nation lands on the river); - local educator Ian McCallum translated a 1931 London Free Press story about the death and mysterious burial of Shawnee Chief Tecumseh during the War of 1812, into the Munsee language; - Youth summer experience programs (Conservation Authorities and local First Nations); and - Archaeological digs (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames with the Ontario Archeological Society).

Stewardship	Volunteer groups that host river cleanups have seen their efforts grow. The Antler River Rally in London and the Thames River Cleanup have been expanding over the years as awareness and appreciation of the river has increased.
Community Engagement and Collaboration	After years of discussion, there has been action on the establishment of a river management plan. In 2012, partners in the watershed formed the Thames River Clear Water Revival to work together on the protection of water, with the shared goal of a healthy and vital Thames River which would also benefit Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie. This partnership brings together Indigenous Peoples, three levels of government, two conservation authorities, and the local community. A state of the environment report with a focus on actions needed for water quantity and quality was completed in 2019, called <i>The Thames River (Deshkan Zibi) Shared Waters Approach to Water Quality and Quantity</i> . Implementation is under way.
Education	Increased awareness of the river and water in general has led the Conservation Authorities to deliver more water themed programming including the annual Children's Water Festival, water sampling and report cards with high schools, water safety, flooding and stormwater management, and pond studies.

DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS	DESCRIPTION
None of note	

Section 8: Overall Assessment

The designation as a Canadian Heritage River should:

- ☒ Remain in place
- ☐ Be reviewed by the board due to the following concerns (list concerns in bulleted format):