2017 Vermilion River Clean-up on Wabagishik Lake

VERMILION RIVER STEWARDSHIP

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

28 March 2018

Prepared by:

Linda Heron, Chair
Our very important cooks – the barbecue is smoking – better check those burgers!!

2017 Annual Vermilion River Cleanup

A BIG THANK YOU to the Basso Family and the Whitefish District Lion’s Club for a wonderful hot lunch, and to all our volunteers for a successful 2017 Vermilion River Cleanup!
About the Vermilion River Stewardship

The Vermilion River Stewardship (VRS) is a grassroots Not-for-Profit organization serving the communities within the Vermilion River Watershed. It was formed in January of 2011 to address several development challenges that were posing a risk to the health of the Vermilion River. VRS incorporated as a Not-for-Profit in June of 2011.

Our Vision

“Community Supporting a Healthy, Natural and Sustainable River System”

Our Mission

The Vermilion River Stewardship will act as a voice for the Vermilion River and its Watershed, and work to build partnerships and strategic alliances with all other interested parties, communities, stewardships, organizations and industry to ensure clean and healthy water quality; and a balanced and sustainable ecosystem and natural habitat.

Stewardship of the Vermilion River is a responsibility shared by all those whose actions have an impact on its water quality.

Our Goals & Objectives

Acting on behalf of the Vermilion River for a healthy, balanced and sustainable ecosystem and natural habitat, this Stewardship will actively work to:

1. Encourage and promote cooperative stewardship;
2. Ensure its interests are fully represented and protected;
3. Preserve and protect its water quality, ecosystem, and natural habitat; and
4. Educate, promote and advocate for responsible and sustainable activities in the entire Vermilion Watershed

2017 Board of Directors:

Chair: Linda Heron
Vice-Chair: Sheri Johnson
Secretary/Treasurer: Terry Little
Board Members: Ron Basso
Dale Kilbey
Marc Samson
Byron Basso
Marte Holouka

Vermilion River Concerns

VRS is concerned with all issues affecting the Vermilion River Watershed and its connecting lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands. The Vermilion River continues to be compromised by the cumulative effects of 8 municipal and 2 mining/smelting industrial waste water treatment facilities, and associated infrastructure, releasing treated and undertreated effluent and pollutants into our waterways. The River is also impacted by overdevelopment of our shorelines, and of course the most daunting of all, climate change.
The Vermilion River also has a historical legacy of wastewater, mining and industrial pollution, which has resulted in degraded water quality, contaminated sediments, blue-green algae, invasive species, fish consumption restrictions, and threatened fisheries.

In the course of building alliances to advance VRS goals and objectives, we have membership and representation on the following:

- Ontario Rivers Alliance, Board of Directors
- Greater Sudbury Watershed Alliance, Board of Directors
- Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance, Chair is a Working Member

VRS decked out in our safety gear on a site visit of the Vale, Wabagishik Generating Station, at Lorne Falls on the Vermilion River – 26 February 2018.
What VRS is Doing to Address these Concerns

1. Vermilion River Clean-up – 2017

The VRS held its 3rd Annual Vermilion River Cleanup on 27 May 2017, and we had 25 volunteers come out to help clean up Wabagishik Lake and the Vermilion River. Every year we wonder if we are going to find much garbage, but we are never disappointed in our haul. It’s always surprising and strangely satisfying to see the number of old tires, lawn chairs, pails, plastic bottles, and dock fragments in our pile of garbage each year.

Those shoreline rocks are trecherous!

A big thank you to all those who came out to help with the cleanup, and especially to the Basso family and the Whitefish District Lion’s Club for providing all our volunteers with a hot and tasty lunch!

2. Vale - Wabagishik Generating Station

Vale is planning a Spillway Replacement Project at Wabagishik Generating Station, Lorne Falls on the Vermilion River, and on the 26th of February 2018, the Vermilion River Stewardship attended a tour of the facility with nine VRS members in attendance.

After the tour we met at the Beaver Lake Sports & Cultural Club and Vale made a presentation to inform VRS of the history, safety concerns, proposed new design, and supporting works and studies. It was an excellent tour and meeting!
3. **Xeneca - Wabagishik Rapids Generating Station**

When Xeneca submitted the Environmental Report (ER) for the Wabagishik Rapids Generating Station in November of 2013, VRS and the Ontario Rivers Alliance (ORA), along with twenty-one other local residents, made Part II Order requests to the Minister of Environment (MOE), setting out our concerns, and requested that the project be elevated to a much more rigorous Individual Environmental Assessment. In our opinion the ER did not meet the requirements of the Class EA for Waterpower.

In May of 2016, VRS received a letter from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, to inform that the Wabagishik Rapids Environmental Report had been approved with conditions that were to be met throughout the permitting phase. Xeneca has 5 years in which to meet these conditions. The community was devastated at the news; however, we were encouraged that the Minister ensured that all requesters would be invited to be part of a Project Liaison Committee that would be involved and informed throughout this permitting phase.

Fortunately, Xeneca no longer has a power procurement contract, and cannot start construction on the Project until they receive one. There is also very little chance of any new power procurement contracts being issued because there is no more connection capacity available in most areas across the north.
The other 3 projects upstream of Wabagishik are no longer a possibility as Xeneca terminated all their FIT Contracts. This was due to actions VRS and ORA and its members have taken over the years.

The VRS has always conducted itself in a very professional manner, followed government policy and process, and took advantage of every opportunity to make our concerns known to the regulators and the proponent. There has been a lot of documentation and correspondence generated, which you can find on our website here.

**Actions:**
- VRS received notice from the Minister of MOECC that Environmental Report was approved with conditions in May 2016
- FIT Contracts cancelled in 2015 - no power procurement contract – no construction
- VRS corresponded with the Minister protesting his decision in Jul 2016
- Attended a Wabagishik Project Liaison Committee Meeting in Oct 2016

### 4. Sewage Bypass Events at 8 Municipal Waste Water Treatment Facilities

There are eight municipal Waste Water Treatment Facilities (WWTF), two industrial (mining/smelters) WWTF, 3 sewage lagoons and numerous lift stations located within the Vermilion River Watershed that release treated, undertreated and untreated effluent into the environment. 5 WWTF are on the upper arm of the Vermilion River, and upstream of a water intake located just below Cascade Falls, that services 13,000 people in Lively, Walden, Copper
Cliff and Whitefish with their drinking water. The other 5 WWTF release into the lower arm of the Vermilion, through Junction Creek.

Large volumes of untreated and undertreated wastewater are being released into our local creeks, rivers, and lakes when heavy rain events occur, and this will become increasingly problematic as the climate warms. For example, on the 4th of April 2017, within a 24-hour period, a major primary bypass of 122,404 m³ (122,404,000 litres) and in February 2017, 65,169 m³ (65,169,000 litres) of raw sewage was released into the Vermilion River.

VRS commented on the City of Greater Sudbury Water and Wastewater Master Plan on 12 July 2017, to offer recommendations and support. It is imperative that we all advocate to the City for upgrades to our wastewater systems. Sufficient funds must be provided to ensure illegal downspout hookups that drain stormwater into the sewer system are disconnected, and inflow and infiltration into the sewage treatment facilities is addressed.

In 2014 City Council unanimously passed a Motion to develop a Sewage Bypass Alert process, where residents can register to receive alerts in real time when a bypass occurs. Sudbury is still only the 2nd City in Ontario to adopt the Bypass Alert system and is touted as the example to follow.

Sewage ByPass Alerts:

- The public can register on the City’s website to receive Sewage Bypass Alerts

5. Lower Vermilion Source Water Quality Monitoring Project

The Vermilion River and its connecting lakes experienced blue-green algae blooms on the entire lower arm of the Vermilion River in October of 2011, and again on Ella Lake in November of 2012, and through into ice break-up in the spring of 2013.

In the Spring of 2012, VRS applied for and received a $103,200 Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) grant to undertake a two-year Lower Vermilion Source Water Quality Monitoring Project (Project). The purpose of the project was to characterize the lower Vermilion River to identify all the negative inputs affecting water quality and water quantity, and to ultimately recommend a course of action to protect and restore water quality on the Vermilion River. VRS contracted with Conservation Sudbury to provide expertise in the technical aspects during the 3-year term of the project, and to undertake the infield water quality sampling.

VRS completed 3 years of sampling at the end of 2015, and in March of 2016 made a Final Report to the OTF which takes into account the reports from Conservation Sudbury, Carrie Strangway and Zara Jennings. VRS’s Strategic Planning Committee has analyzed the data, prepared graphs and charts, and worked with Conservation Sudbury to complete our analysis. Total project value of the Project, including in-kind contributions: $276,000.00.

VRS has presented the study results to the public and industry and will present to City Council sometime in 2018. The study has also been used by the City of Sudbury to inform the Junction Creek and Ramsey Lake Sub-Watershed Studies.
The study resulted in the following:

- Vermilion River Watershed – Surface Water Quality Report on Current Conditions
- Master of Science published Thesis, Applied Bioscience, University of Ontario Institute of Technology – Phytoplankton Study
- 4th year Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science (Honours) at Queen’s University – Sediment Core Study


Parking at some local boat launch access points to the Vermilion River became a major issue in 2017. The owner of the property on which the stub or Trespass Road is located at Wirtanen Road closed off access to property owners residing on the other side of the river.

VRS made a formal request to the Mayor and Council to support a Motion to maintain jurisdiction and maintenance over Wirtanen Road and its stub, as well as all other Trespass Roads throughout the Greater City of Sudbury. VRS is sorry to report that the Mayor and Council turned down our request.

The closure of Wirtanen Road has now forced more traffic to Wabagishik Road and has significantly increased the number of vehicles parking there. This resulted in major congestion and safety issues when emergency vehicles were having trouble accessing local properties. Consequently, the City has been ticketing anyone parked longer than 4-hours, and now the City is also ticketing those parked on Ella Lake Road. VRS is working with the local property owners and Councillor Michael Vagnini to find a short-term and a long-term solution to this issue.

7. Mining Development

Vale has been the primary mining company operating in the Vermilion River Watershed for many years and has taken important measures to reduce their environmental impact over the years. Totten Mine went into full operation as of the spring of 2014.

**Glencore – Errington and Vermillion Projects:**

Glencore is redeveloping two brown-field sites on the shores of the Vermilion River – the Errington and Vermilion mines – zinc, copper, lead, silver and gold. The ore will be processed on site, rather than trucked to another location. There is no new information on the progress of this project.

**Victoria Mine Project:**

KGHM International is redeveloping the Victoria Mine, near Worthington. One of Sudbury’s oldest and most prolific mines. Victoria Mine is rich in copper, nickel and precious metals, and is now under development. Ore will not be processed at this plant, and to date there are no major concerns.
Conclusion

VRS has worked diligently to meet its Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives as set out in our Constitution and Bylaws.

Our Board and volunteers will continue to work to build partnerships and strategic alliances with all other interested parties, communities, stewardships, organizations, industry and government to ensure clean and healthy water quality; and a balanced and sustainable ecosystem and natural habitat. VRS looks forward to another productive year.

The VRS Board of Directors would like to thank our many volunteers and members who have continued to help with our river cleanups, joined in advocacy campaigns, and supported our efforts through generous donations and memberships. We count on our Community support!

Yours in sustainability,

Linda Heron  
Chair, Vermilion River Stewardship  
VermilionRiverStewards.ca