

Like thousands of others in the London region, I have always impatiently waited for spring and the chance to launch my canoe in the “lake” at Springbank. From the time of our founding of the London Canoe Club, countless citizens have been attracted to the area to learn paddling skills, meander upstream to the Forks or take the semi wilderness route to Chatham and beyond to Lake St. Claire, Like those who have historically relied on the Thames for transportation, trade and leisure, there is something magical about this amazing resource within our City.

Long after the Springbank Dam had been constructed and used in summer months to create the “Lake”, The Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) was established. In 1984 federal, provincial and territorial governments decided 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. Today, there are 38 Canadian Heritage Rivers designated. The Thames is one of them! With its Dams and Weirs and Dykes.

Mayor Brown has inspired us to look “Back to the River”. Marvellous plans are unfolding that rely on his commitment to restore the weir (dam) at Springbank. The realization of the imaginative river restoration plan at the junction of the North and South Branches of the river requires it. We support it.

But it is not just the Forks that will be the beneficiary of refurbishing the dam. The Dragon Boaters will return. The skullers will once again be able to use the very functional McManus Canoe Club facility. The river pageants and tours between the Forks and Springbank will once again be possible. The recreational paddlers – experts and learners - the board paddlers, the kayaks and canoes will once again ply the waters of Springbank. The K-1’s, the C-2 and C-4’s will once again feel the challenges of competition at the Wharencliff turn. . The walkers, the bird feeders, photographers, artists, lovers and children in buggies will be seen to enjoy the trails alongside the Lake.

The restoration of the weir at Springbank will most assuredly increased recreational use of the main branch, which would bring back the enjoyment to citizens. The river is currently traversable by canoe or kayaks certain times of the year on the main and south branches for short distances, but having the dam restored will once again extend the season for many more months each year.

The letter from the former Mayor of Toronto opining on the quality of life in London calls for a response. David Miller suggests that Londoners have enjoyed the Thames River for nearly a decade because it is in a “natural state”. I disagree. Londoner’s have enjoyed it for over 200 years and are now wanting to come “Back to the River”.

We need to salute and support our Mayor in his pledge to restore the dam with environmentally secure operational policies. We can achieve the best of both worlds.

It is clear that there has been growing pressure from some advocacy groups to decommission the Springbank Dam rather than repair it. I will tell you why I agree with the position of our innovative and visionary Mayor who has promised to ensure that its value to the citizens of London is restored.

The Thames flows 273 km through southern Ontario, meandering quietly past the cities of London and Chatham to Lake St. Clair – not Lake Erie as Mr. Miller suggests. That is like saying the Don and Humber Rivers flow into the Atlantic Ocean.

Former Mayor Miller is the president and CEO of World Wildlife Fund-Canada. He asserts that if the dam is removed, the river and the creatures that live in and near its waters will continue to benefit; restoring flow, water quality and habitat in the immediate area and downstream. He reminds us that the water has been left to flow freely “since 2006 due to damages and failed repairs. In that time, people and wildlife have benefitted as the river’s natural processes begin to restore”. He states that blocking the river for the summer months turns the flowing waters into a stagnant reservoir. He is wrong. In dozens of seasons canoeing on the Springbank Lake, this has not been my observation. Has Tonto Mayor Miller ever actually been to Springbank to witness this before 2008?

I am not sure of his experience with the Humber or the Don in Toronto but the same World Wildlife Federation argues specifically that as a marker for algae blooms “water quality scores for phosphorus in and around the [Springbank] dam . . . exceeded water-quality guidelines in more than 70 per cent of water samples taken between 2008 and 2012.” But, the years 2008 to 2012 are precisely the years when the river was flowing freely because the dam had already broken. He is all wet to suggest this as an argument for decommissioning.

As noted environmentalist, Dr. Jan Pennycook argues: “simply allowing the water to flow freely does nothing to improve its quality.”

There is an interesting contradiction to President’s Miller’s assertion found on the WWF web-site. The dam has been down since 2006 so that means since 2012 they were actually testing the water when it was "running naturally". If this was a court case it would be case closed.

The argument suggests that by having a dam (reservoir, weir or dam) on a “wild river” the sedimentation being caught leads to environmental degradation. The UTRCA indicates that there are over 170 private, municipal and Upper Thames River Conservation Authority managed impediments. Dykes, natural weirs, man-made weirs

and dams. The Springbank "Dam" is technically a weir. It is not purposed for flood control. The Medway Creek tributary alone has 29 such water flow impediments.

The Ontario Rivers Alliance (Jan. 23, 2016) and the Thames River Anglers Association (Dec. 20, 2015) make broad claims about potential ecological benefits if the Springbank Dam is not restored. The expectation seems to be that the water in the Thames River will clean itself if allowed to flow unhindered through the Springbank Dam. They have not reviewed the science!

Mr. Mike Bloxam reported recently to the City Council on behalf of the Advisory Committee on the Environment (Springbank Dam). He succinctly states the issue of whether to repair or decommission the Springbank Dam has become a discussion point in the community lately. He states, without statistical authority that public opinion appears to support decommissioning the dam, including backing by groups such as First Nations, anglers, and citizens living near the river. On that conclusion he offers no data or basis upon which to make that assumption. Indeed, I believe him to be very wrong. Just ask any of the current and former members of the London Canoe Club, numberings over 7,300 paddling members. Until the Lake disappeared this was the largest canoe club in North America. It was the pride of the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association. It's paddle programs, family trip and safety session were enjoyed over the years by tens of thousands Londoners.

There are about 15 Kilometers of flow between the Fanshawe Dam and Springbank. There are many natural and manmade "dams" in that stretch of our natural resource. We are debating here, one more, the Springbank Weir (dam). This controlled dam has the flexibility to allow for lengthy periods of time when the water will run free over it mantel

In 2006 the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority approved an Environmental Planning Policy Manual which guides development and site alteration while protecting, preserving and enhancing the natural environment in the watershed. It is the Authority's integrated systems approach for watershed planning. It is valuable tool for the UTRCA's Board of Directors and staff as well as for our watershed municipalities, the land development industry and the public. We need to pay attention to the expertise coming from this body.

The policy includes a section on natural heritage, environmental protection and hazard policies. It fairly states that "every reasonable opportunity should be taken to: maintain the quality of air, land, water and biota; maintain biodiversity compatible with indigenous natural system and protect natural links and corridors. The improvement and enhancement of these features and systems is encouraged." Regulatory Flood and erosion standards are employed through the use of weirs and dams. This has been the policy for decades. The Springbank Dam has served this objective admirably.

The UTRCA's "**Thames River Clear Water Revival**" is a long-term partnership initiative that is committed to a healthy and vital river. Under the guidelines of the Provincial Flood Plain Planning Policy, Dykes, Dams and natural barriers play a roll. This

highly respected planning guide focuses on the key role played by the flood control features of the Springbank Dam. It notes the value of multi-purpose reservoirs providing for recreation use, irrigation or flow augmentation in addition to flood (erosion) control.

In any event, these kinds of major community decisions are not or should not be made on the basis of lobby groups holding out a parochial or an activity centred bias. They are made by thoughtful and community spirited politicians who have the best interests of the community; not on how many fish someone caught one day or who joined the family canoe excursion. Science and Geography, testing and experience with watersheds needs to factor into the decision, not advocacy groups that favour either river sports or wildlife fundraising campaigns.

The value and importance of restoring a community amenity – the Springbank lake - for appropriate periods of time during the year recognizes the diverse interests of a society that enjoys the outdoors in this beautiful city. Both environmentalists and recreationals can be accommodated by restoring the dam.

The diversity of species is reflected in the rich cultural heritage of the Thames. Its fertile valley has been home to people for over 11,000 years. Wars have been fought here, and commercial farming in Canada had its roots here. Those who have paddled it see a Thames valley still appearing as it did 200 years ago.

The Springbank Dam is, in fact, the last of at least of four dams on the Thames River as it flows through the City of London.

There are those who would want to decommission the dam and forever lose the value of the “Back to the River” plan. They would argue that by restoring the dam and creating a lake by re-establishing the weir (because it is not a flood-control dam) for 5 or 6 months of the year, it will have a negative environmental impact. “Paddle Canada” disagrees. Thousands of Londoners who have fond memories of picnics beside the lake or cheering on your favourite Dragon Boat team disagree. Hikers, paddleboat enthusiasts, kayakers, lake fishers, bird watchers and walkers disagree. We urge London city council to restore the Springbank weir and at the same time allow the water to flow freely in the previously managed way so people and wildlife can enjoy the benefits of a healthy Thames River. Here’s why.

Mayor Miller of the Don River and the World Wildlife Fund argues that when the dam is closed the river slows, allowing sediment to accumulate and the reservoir to warm, reducing water quality and jeopardizing habitat for fish and other aquatic creatures. The conditions in the blocked reservoir promote the growth of excess algae. Algal blooms do contribute to human and aquatic health risks. Large algae blooms can lead to oxygen-deprived water, which kills fish. When has he last seen this occur? I have been on the river often over many decades and have never seen this – maybe in the Humber, but not in the Thames in my experience.

We know from the City’s own data that the Thames River is sampled on a regular

monitoring program at 10 locations. The parameters analyzed include biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen, total phosphorous, ammonia, bacteriological quality, suspended solids, chlorides, nitrates, nitrites, and conductivity. Heavy metals are sampled at Clarke/Highbury, Whites, Byron and Komoka bridges. Monitoring is also conducted on a number of tributary creeks in the City of London on a monthly basis.

Water quality in the Thames River has improved significantly since river monitoring was initiated in 1963. The dissolved oxygen levels have increased. Wastewater treatment has improved from 90% efficiency in the 1960s to the present where 98% of the BOD is removed. Typical wastewater treatment plants have an efficiency of 85 to 95% for BOD. The City of London Wastewater treatment plants remove 95% of suspended solids and 90% of total phosphorous.

A review of the data suggests that in the past 8 years while the river has been "running free" there has been no appreciable difference in water quality based on annual averages for river temperature, PH, Dissolved Oxygen, Oxygen saturation, biochemical demand, coli forms, ecoli, phosphorous, NO₂, NH₃, conductivity, suspended solids, chlorides, E-Colio coliforms all are within the mean established since testing began several decades ago. I respectfully suggest that the World Wildlife Funds gets its facts right or don't come asking for a charitable contribution in the Thames watershed.

Biological (benthic) quality was also measured in 2006, the poorest water quality was noted above and below Springbank Dam, which is composed two testing stations. Two potential sources of contamination were identified: Greenway PCP (800 m upstream) and the mouth of the Mud Creek (400 m upstream; ZEAS 2008). The 2012 results mimic many of the baseline results in 2006. That is to say, the river running free did not alter the quality of the river. In order to support a robust ecosystem that supports many forms of aquatic life – including some that may be at risk – attention must be paid to the scientific data from these reports. Tests before and after the removal of the dam show insignificant variations to the quality of the river water. But the results show a disastrous outcome to the diverse cultural utilization and amenities that existed before the dam broke.

It is perfectly understandable why our Mayor and his many colleagues on City Council have taken the position that the best interests of Londoner's will be served by restoring the weir.

The WWF strangely argues that concentrated accumulations of sediment and dead algae are released when the weir releases more water in the fall – after the canoeing season. This, it is said to diminish water quality and jeopardizes aquatic habitats downstream. Where does he think these material go when there is no dam? They further state that the river's water is already "poor." according to the current WWF Watershed Report, with levels of phosphorous often exceeding guidelines. Not true! Having reviewed the testing stations over the past 15 years, there is NO measurable difference to

the criteria mentioned above before or after the temporary decommissioning of the weir.

The WWF sate the Thames is the third largest contributor of phosphorous to Ontario waters and phosphorous promotes harmful algae blooms. A river in poor health has consequences for connected waters downstream as far as Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie. It makes it more difficult to fulfill international commitments to make the Thames River a priority in efforts to reduce the phosphorous that flows into Lake Erie. The Thames is the Thames – with or without its 178 weirs, dykes and dams. Restoring the dam will not change that!

If water quality in the Thames River is to be improved in any meaningful way, we need to address to efficacy of Fanshawe Dam and the quality of water flowing into the city from its reservoir. Fanshawe Lake is too often declared unsafe due to high levels of pollution, and yet this is the water that flows on through the city via the Thames River and into Lake St. Claire, with or without a weir at Springbank.

We do encourage the City to take a holistic view of the river, its water quality, its aesthetic appeal, it recreational and commercial value to the life and activity of its citizens. Certainly, the City can commit to a number of enhancements with or without the Springbank weir:

- fish passing through the dam infrastructure so as to allow aquatic life to traverse areas of the river currently restricted, such as the sewer pipe on the south branch near the bridge that terminates Richmond Street
- enhancements to pollution-control plants to reduce the risk of overflow of raw sewage into the river during extreme precipitation events (with or without a dam)
- Additional canoe/kayak launch points along north and south branches for canoeists to utilize larger stretch of the Springbank Lake and encourage its use.

We encourage Council to consider some of these enhancements.

The river and the creatures that live in and near its waters will continue to benefit with the weir is restored. The flow continues regardless. If emergencies arise during the paddling season. the dam can be flushed. Native plants will continue to flourish as they did before the dam broke! The stability of the riverbanks and prevention of erosion will be strengthened.

It is argued that natural flow through this section of the river (I suppose the reference is between Fanshawe and Springbank) would allow habitats to flex and change with the seasons, maintain more naturalized temperatures and reduce the risk of excess algal growth. The temperature and algae growth change is a myth. The records from the City's testing and monitoring needs to be referred to so that the science is not fabricated by those who would want to decommission a very useful asset in the City.

So we urge London city council to make the right choice: Allow the river to be seen as the important economic engine that is was. a beautiful natural resource and venue for the recreational pursuits for tens of thousands of Londoners. Restore the dam and the beautiful lake created and used by so many. Regulate its flow in the fall, winter and spring to maximize the benefit of a natural river.

“Friends of the Thames” may be the silent majority. They do not raise funds like the WW F does. The People of Oneida, Muncee, Moravian town and Chippewa have a stake as well in the control of waters.

Closing stgatement

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Barry Callow
Former Wildlife Rehabilatator liciened by the Federal and Provincial
Government.

Chair of Thames River Keepers

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