

I N T U N E

Biodiversity

Several actions intended to promote the protection and enhancement of the St. Lawrence have been taken. This article presents some of the results of two programs that aim at restoring public access to the St. Lawrence.

Agriculture

A series of articles which will highlight results achieved in each component of Phase III of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000), that ends in March 2003 will be published in the upcoming Newsletters. The first of the series presents the results obtained for Agriculture.

Two programs, one objective: Restore public access to the St. Lawrence

The population of Quebec is showing increased interest in enjoying the St. Lawrence and its attractions. Under the Biodiversity component of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000), the Habitats Subcommittee is carrying out several projects intended specifically to promote the preservation and enhancement of the St. Lawrence. Two of these projects are summarized here: The Access to the River program, under which visitor facilities can be built along the St. Lawrence and its tributaries, and the program to hand over surplus port structures, which maintains safe access to the St. Lawrence for riverside communities.

build public visitor facilities near the St. Lawrence River's wildlife attractions. Most of the communities that took advantage of this program worked in co-operation with local organizations to create access.

Through this project, administered by the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec, around ten projects have been launched to develop the land along the St. Lawrence and its tributaries. In Châteauguay, for example, the city built a rest area on the shores of Lake Saint-Louis for relaxation and recreation. In Neuville, just outside of Québec, municipal authorities installed picnic tables and benches for hikers out to enjoy the

The St. Lawrence, now even more accessible

In order to meet Canadians' expectations and improve their access to the St. Lawrence, financial support has been offered to the communities through the SLV 2000 Access to the River program.

Whether citizens visit the riverside on foot or by bicycle, gradually, they are reclaiming the St. Lawrence. The Access to the River program, which is nearing completion, was intended to

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"20 minutes west of Québec, the city of Neuville in co-operation with the Société Léon-Provancher, have built public trails and facilities along the St. Lawrence."
Photo: M. Lepage



Léon-Provancher Marsh, fall 1997
View of the riverbanks
Photo: M. Lepage

diversity of the natural environment of the Léon-Provancher Marsh. Hiking trails were also built along the river. Elsewhere, at Summerlea Park in Lachine for example, the riverbanks have been restored, and fishing spots and wildlife observation posts now await the public.

Visitor facilities can take various forms. Parking lots have been built near the Baie-du-Febvre and Saint-Barthélemy staging areas. Interpretation panels for the public have also been installed at the latter location. The community of Maple Grove (just outside Beauharnois) and the town of Lanoraie have, for their part, received financial aid from the program to develop their enhancement plan. The work will be done during a later phase. The town of Sainte-Anne-de-Sorel has built a boardwalk leading to Lavallière Bay.

Boucherville has invested in improving Frayère Park on the Rivière-aux-Pins: Hiking trails have been restored and created, and there is now a bike path for cyclists' enjoyment. According to Bruno Bergeron, Head of the Development and Programs Department for the City of Longueuil, who was the project co-ordinator, the park is very popular with Boucherville citizens and out-of-towners. According to Mr. Bergeron, its unique character owes a lot to the fact that "this park is one of the few St. Lawrence access points in a natural setting in Montréal's south-eastern region."

Public river access: A treasure to preserve

As the property administrator, Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) was mandated to dispose of 55 surplus marine structures in Quebec, such as

wharves or other port structures not needed for government activities. This department, having already assumed responsibility for transfer activities before the program began, has vast marine expertise, which has allowed it to implement the program to hand over surplus port structures.

One of this program's objectives is to help communities take control of sites or port structures that are a part of their local heritage and preserve the windows onto the St. Lawrence that these installations provide.

"Department experts conduct the necessary studies on stabilizing the wharf structures, particularly with respect to preventing the erosion of abutting river banks, and then propose solutions likely to be of interest to the communities affected by the handover," explains Yves Lavergne, project manager, Public Works and Government Services Canada.

He also states "that after having determined the costs of demolishing and handing over the structures, the Public Works and Government Services Canada team consults the municipality in question with a view to agreeing on a rehabilitation approach according to its needs and community development objectives and the set budget allocation. In all cases, the restoration costs must not exceed the demolition costs. To date, half of the projects have involved total demolition of the structure (wharf or protection wall) and the return to Quebec of shore and water lots.

Under the program, approximately thirty projects have been completed and have resulted in the repair or consolidation of wharves, which were then turned over to communities interested in acquiring them. The most recent project undertaken involved the Grande-Vallée wharf, which was successfully transferred to the

municipality on November 13, 2001, following major repairs. The program to hand over surplus port structures is nearly complete. There are only two more projects to finish: the repair and transfer of the Baie-Saint-Paul wharf to the municipality; and the transfer of the Bonaventure wharf to the community of Fauvel upon completion of construction work on a breakwater protecting the waterfront.

According to Georges Pouliot, co-ordinator of Public Works and Government Services Canada's program to hand over surplus port structures, the program, which is scheduled to end in 2003-2004, facilitated the conservation of local heritage sites and maintenance of safe access to the St. Lawrence with the participation of the riverside towns and communities.

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Parc national d'Anticosti — Jewel at the heart of a mysterious island

Over a year ago, Parc national d'Anticosti became the 21st member of the Parcs Québec network. Since then, the exceptional natural setting of Parc national d'Anticosti has given it a central role in the consolidation of Quebec's network of protected areas. With its especially distinctive landscape, examples of which are Vauréal Falls and canyon, and its fragile and rare attributes (some 60 rare plants identified as threatened or vulnerable, 24 different species of mammals, 200 species of birds), this conservation park is also a local attraction.

Parc national d'Anticosti, which covers an area of 572 km², is located on Anticosti Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The park is protected by the Quebec government and is under the jurisdiction of the Société de la faune et des parcs. Several initiatives of the Habitats Subcommittee of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (phase III) focus on protecting this park.

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After five years of action, compelling results

The St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan has helped to improve the health of the St. Lawrence during the last five years

Since 1988, three agreements signed by the federal and Quebec governments to protect, conserve and enhance the St. Lawrence have allowed government partners to take action in various areas affecting the St. Lawrence. Since the third agreement (1998-2003) ends in March 2003, the editors of the newsletter *Le Fleuve* would like to take this opportunity to publicize some of the results achieved in each component of Phase III of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000).

In addition, in the coming months, we will feature a series of articles prepared in collaboration with the co-chairs of each component, who have agreed to update us on the most concrete results achieved up to now in their components, as well as prospects for the future. In this issue, the co-chairs of the Agricultural Advisory Committee—Pierre Fortin of the Quebec Department of the Environment and Denis Sanfaçon of Quebec's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—tell us about the impacts of the efforts undertaken in agriculture in the last five years.

The last five years in agriculture

One advantage of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan is that it provides a clear framework for action and promotes the achievement of specific objectives. During SLV 2000 Phase III, three major objectives were targeted: promoting community involvement and protecting ecosystem health and human health. In the Agriculture component, the four main objectives were:

- a 50% reduction in pesticide use and ensuring 70% of farmland is under integrated pest management by 2003;
- the establishment of green clubs for the Boyer River to ensure the agro-environmental management of the watershed and spur the return of the smelt population;
- validation of an indicator for surface water phosphorous contamination risk;
- control and inspection of agricultural clean-up efforts to ensure farm producers' compliance with the Regulation respecting the Reduction of Pollution from Agricultural Sources.

Agriculture has become more intensive in recent decades, putting strong pressure on natural resources. Water resources are particularly vulnerable to agricultural activities; moreover, these activities are concentrated in the

St. Lawrence Plain. As a result, agriculture clean-up efforts require solutions based on an integrated vision of resources in the region.

Challenges faced in the Agriculture component

Agricultural clean-up efforts during SLV2000 Phase III are part of a long-term process. In the agricultural sector, there is a long lag time between the point when change is initiated and the point when the effects are felt in the environment. This is why environmentally friendly farming practices are slow to be adopted. In addition, given the diffuse nature of agricultural pollution, co-operative joint action is required in the field to make real environmental gains. Consequently, "the challenge is to ensure integrated water management in agricultural tributaries," comments Pierre Fortin, co-chair of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and head of the agricultural policy directorate (Direction des politiques du secteur agricole) of the Quebec Department of the Environment.

Five years of achievements

Environmentally friendly farming practices are increasingly being adopted

Under SLV 2000 Phase III, efforts in agriculture have specifically targeted the reduction of pesticide use and the adoption of integrated pest management practices by farmers. These activities are being carried out in co-operation and partnership with farmers. The impact has been very positive.

Particular attention has been paid to producing high-quality outreach and extension materials (www.agr.gouv.qc.ca/dgpar/agroenv/strategie-slv.html). Thanks to a



Photo: Éric Labonté, MAPAQ

set of materials that were quickly made available to farmers as well as specialized field extension services, a large number of farm producers and agricultural agents and consultants are now aware of rational pesticide management and integrated pest management methods. The percentage of farmland under integrated pest management rose to over 40,000 ha, representing, as of March, 2001, 24% of the farmland covered by the green clubs. However, in spite of these efforts, the monitoring carried out by the Ministère de l'Environnement du Québec in selected tributaries does not yet show a reduction in the frequency of exceedance of water quality standards for pesticides. Denis Sanfaçon, co-chair of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and director of the environment and sustainable development at Quebec's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, explains that "in 1997, the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan meant nothing to farm producers. This is no longer true, since individual farmers have become aware of the issues, and now know that their actions have an impact not only on the river in front of them but on water quality in the tributaries that flow into the St. Lawrence."

Improving the management of the Boyer River watershed

The Boyer River has traditionally been a major spawning ground for rainbow smelt. Over the years, many efforts have been made to clean up the Boyer River watershed. Under Phase III, work has focused on improving agro-environmental management of the watershed and the river's water quality. Activities have included awareness-raising and promotion to encourage farmers to join the green clubs. The green clubs are a promising avenue; the dynamism that the Groupe d'intervention pour la restauration de la rivière Boyer (GIRB) (group for action to restore the Boyer River) has inspired among farm producers in the watershed is very positive. An approach based on identifying and rallying people from the community around a common local objective was used. Close to 110 farm producers now use the services of these agro-environmental groups, 96 of them are members and an increasing number of producers are more and more interested in modifying their farming practices.

The risks of phosphorous contamination of surface water are better known

Although phosphorous is essential to crop growth, excessive amounts in the soil can compromise surface water quality. Research led by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada on the dynamic modelling of phosphorous has resulted in continuous improvements in our knowledge of this important agricultural problem and knowledge transfer through roughly sixty conferences and workshops and the publication of various technical and scientific publications.

A growing number of farming enterprises are complying with manure storage and handling standards

To ensure that the standards for the storage, handling and spreading of manure in the Regulation respecting the Reduction of Pollution from Agricultural Sources are respected, various indicators have been developed to document the success of control efforts. These indicators show significant and increasing gains in this area. For example, over 2,700 regulation storage structures have been built, greatly exceeding the initial objective of around 2,000. This is quite a success.

Very ambitious initial objectives

An examination of the results shows that some of the objectives set for agriculture at the beginning of Phase III were clearly too ambitious. Despite the encouraging results, the adoption of agro-environmental pesticide management practices proved to be a more difficult challenge than expected. The objectives of reducing pesticide use by 50% and having integrated pest management practices

adopted on 70% of farmland will not be achieved in 2003. "At the beginning of Phase III, partners showed a great willingness and commitment to see solutions put in place, but the means available turned out to be too modest in relation to our ambitions. Because of the number of farm producers involved, efforts must be increased tenfold," explains Denis Sanfaçon.

Challenges for the future

Efforts in the field of agriculture must not only be continued but intensified. An integrated management approach targeting problem watersheds (i.e., where criteria are exceeded at the mouth of the tributary) should be adopted. In each target watershed, a response strategy will be formulated and recommendations made on actions involving the farming concerns found there. Information on water quality at the outlet of the tributary and downstream in the St. Lawrence could also be collected. In addition, products posing a risk may be identified and other less harmful products substituted. Lastly, the work in the field undertaken by the Quebec Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, targeting farm producers and involving concrete action in the areas of prevention, training and technology transfer, must be continued. In this way, the process of working towards sustainable development in agriculture may continue effectively.

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News *in* BRIEF

Regional tour by the Areas of Prime Concern (ZIP) Committees

The Saguenay Areas of Prime Concern (ZIP) Committee will hold its ZIP Tour on October 22 in Saguenay. This activity is part of the ZIP Committees' regional tours that began in June 2000. The objective of the tours is to allow the ZIP Committee and participating scientists to explore ways of working together with respect to technical and scientific support in order to implement projects under the Ecological Remedial Action Plan (ERAP). Half of the sixty participants expected at this event will be from Canadian and Quebec government departments, the remainder being local partners.

The topics in the tour's agenda will include water contamination, sediments, air quality, municipal wastewater, private wells and septic tanks, the state and contamination of the Saguenay River fish stocks and, lastly, revegetation of the shoreline.

The ZIP Tour is a unique opportunity for the ZIP Committee to build lasting relations with experts and representatives from organizations with respect to past or future activities on the territory. ■

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