

## An Update Focused on Partnership and Co-operation

### **The SLV 2000 Action Plan has helped to improve the health of the St. Lawrence River in the last five years**

Since 1988, three agreements signed by the federal and Quebec governments to protect, conserve and enhance the St. Lawrence River have enabled 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 *Le Fleuve* would like to take this opportunity to publicize some of the results achieved under the components of Phase III of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000).

*Le Fleuve* continues its series on the most tangible results achieved since 1998 and the outlook in the various components. This month, we met with Co-chairs of the Community Involvement Co-ordination Committee, Josée De Guise of Environment Canada; Marc Hudon, Chair of Stratégies Saint-Laurent; and Jean-Yves Roy, of the Ministère de l'Environnement du Québec.

*The Community Involvement component, the main focus of Phase III of SLV 2000's Action Plan, focuses on increasing the public's commitment to protection and conservation efforts with regard to the St. Lawrence. As action in this component was deemed crucial, SLV 2000 government*

*partners increased their financial and technical support.*

*The proof is in the pudding: the co-operation and participation of riverside communities are a better guarantee of success in protecting and enhancing the uses and resources of the St. Lawrence.*

According to Jean-Yves Roy, "the Community Involvement component was strengthened in Phase III. It is also the component that received the most new funding from the Quebec and Canadian governments. The budget allocated for area of prime concern (ZIP — Zones d'intervention prioritaire) committees and Stratégies Saint-Laurent operations was increased from \$1.5 million to \$5.5 million, while the budget for the SLV 2000 Community Involvement funding program rose to \$7.5 million; that's twice what it was in the previous phase."

Marc Hudon pointed out that for every dollar invested by the governments, the local community invests \$1.60.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the investment is quite cost effective.

### **Stronger ZIP Program**

During Phase III, Stratégies Saint-Laurent helped create the following four ZIP committees: Îles de la Madeleine, Des Seigneuries, Les Deux Rives and Sud de l'Estuaire.

Stratégies Saint-Laurent is a non-profit organization, established in 1989, which normally does not participate in local activities, but rather provides administrative support for ZIP committees. In addition to co-ordinating and promoting the ZIP Program, Stratégies Saint-Laurent ensures riverside communities' co-operation, explains the organization's Chair

The purpose of the ZIP Program is to promote better understanding of the St. Lawrence ecosystem environment in order to encourage co-operation in the community and develop local projects to protect, restore, conserve and enhance the uses and resources of the St. Lawrence River with a view to sustainable development. Emphasis was on local action in Phase III.

"Stratégies Saint-Laurent is unique in North America," Mr. Hudon proudly asserts. "There is no other place where governments award the management of a program like the community involvement program to a non-governmental organization. Thanks to a framework agreement, Stratégies Saint-Laurent ensures the initiative's development and continuation."

Josée De Guise pointed out that "ZIP committees are important because they represent the people. They enable the community to be proactive with regard to local portions of the St. Lawrence ecosystem. The creation of a ZIP committee is the result of community co-ordination, since stakeholders have their say at public consultations.

There are currently 14 ZIP committees, which cover a significant

part of the St. Lawrence River. Three zones still do not have ZIP committees, but this situation will likely be corrected with the next agreement on the St. Lawrence. The Charlevoix, Gaspé Nord and Rivière des Mille Îles communities have shown an interest to that effect.”

### Steps in the ZIP Program

The ZIP committee receives an environmental assessment of its area, produced by a team of representatives of the federal and Quebec governments. The ZIP committee holds public consultations in which participants review the assessment and set priorities for action. Then the ZIP committee, in co-operation with players in the community, develops an Ecological Rehabilitation Action Plan (ERAP) in which a series of concrete actions are defined according to the established priorities. These actions can translate into projects aimed at improving access to and recovering uses of the St. Lawrence River and can be carried out by the ZIP committee or some of its partners.

### A Broader Partnership Focused on Co-operation

Ms. De Guise explained that “since the ZIP committees are autonomous, they have established partnerships, particularly with municipalities, private firms and public health agencies. Their reputation has also enabled them to obtain financial support from other government socio-economic agencies. To meet the needs of the Community Interaction financial assistance program, they have also established an attractive and promising financial network.”

Mr. Hudon grouped the action of ZIP committee partners into two categories: “First are the members of the ZIP committees’ boards of directors, who focus their efforts largely on co-operation. Then there are ‘direct partners in project development.’ In both cases, co-operation is the key.”

Does the increase in the number of partners and the scale of projects have an effect on co-operation? In Montreal, where there is a large number of stakeholders, co-operation is certainly more difficult, but not impossible. Mr. Hudon gave the example of the co-operation project on contaminated sites in Sector 103 of the Port of Montreal, which has brought together business owners and experts. “The process was long but, locally, leaders, with support from the ZIP committee, worked together on the elements required for carrying out a clean-up project that is to begin shortly.”

“There are success stories in all ZIP committees,” said Ms. De Guise. “The environmental training project in small North Shore communities comes to mind. The persistence and the sheer determination that drives the people of such an extensive area is impressive. This municipal participation, though it is not the only one, leads us to expect a broader, and even systematic, commitment.”

As Mr. Hudon pointed out, “Community involvement is voluntary. Those who participate do it because they are contributing, in different ways, but always on an even footing, to making a difference for the environment and their quality of life.”

### The Community Interaction Program: Significant Financial Support

The Community Interaction funding program is for any non-profit, non-governmental organization. Although it is intended first and foremost to support ERAP projects, all proposals that meet program criteria are evaluated based on merit. Currently, 70% of the projects funded stem from ERAPs.

Mr. Roy said that the governments, having taken into consideration community organizations’ ability to establish financial partnerships in their area, lowered their percentage

of project funding from 70% to 50% of the total value. This new way of doing things has had positive spin offs, as it has expanded the partnership.

“What’s encouraging and motivating, is to see research projects taking shape. The example that comes to mind is the project for building safe beach access points and protecting dune environments in the Magdalen Islands. This project, which will increase economic development in the area, is also reflective of the tendency to associate the conservation and enhancement of an environment with its economic development.”

### Better Technical and Scientific Support from Governments

In order to improve technical and scientific support for ZIP committees, the federal and Quebec governments set up one-stop service centres to meet their information needs.

Mr. Roy explained that in 1999, “there was a province-wide meeting that brought together representatives of ZIP committees and several Quebec and Canadian government departments, as well as Stratégies Saint-Laurent and organizations involved in implementing ERAPs. The meeting helped raise awareness among ZIP committee partners of their need for technical and scientific support. One of the recommendations was that meetings be organized between government partners and ZIP committees. That is where the idea for a ZIP tour was born.”

“Since then,” added Ms. De Guise, “we have met the request for five ZIP committees: Jacques Cartier, Haut Saint Laurent, Saguenay, Îles de la Madeleine and Baie des Chaleurs. The meetings are requested and organized by ZIP committees that want to advance initiatives that need a helping hand (specific data, additional funding, etc).”

“Information exchanges between the 40 or so people and experts from the government and the community have

always been productive. Everyone benefits. It's a unique opportunity for us to get a feel for the community and determine the extent and quality of its commitment. These exchanges also provide a solid base for future discussions."

Mr. Roy added that "for government representatives, these meetings are learning opportunities. After conversations in person and in the field, they have a better understanding of the issues and can therefore better help the ZIP committees to implement their ERAPs."

### **The Biosphere ObservAction Network: an Educational or Awareness Tool to Develop**

The Biosphere ObservAction Network, established by the federal government, is an information hub that also contributes to the public's commitment to protect water and aquatic ecosystems, including the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes.

The purpose of the network is to raise awareness among young people of water's importance in our lives. Its activities, based on the principles of environmental education, are based on information sharing between young people and their communities. It is made up of some 95 organizations — schools, companies, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, a few ZIP committees and Stratégies Saint-Laurent — that share information and compare the results of their research and testing activities. In addition, various newsletters are sent out to inform members about the St. Lawrence River and the achievements of SLV 2000.

"The purpose of the network, as a window on the world, is to become an important information and awareness tool for ZIP committees," Biosphere Director Lynn Cleary explained. "The results obtained by Network members are an important source of data on the state of water. Their approach also

meets the public awareness objective identified in most ZIP committees' ERAPs."

### **Phase III: Significant Progress**

"In a sense, we are victims of our own success: the more we accomplish, the more people become aware of the value of community involvement and the more they propose new projects, hoping that the ZIP committee will be able to implement them. In fact, the success of the last five years puts the ZIP committees in a very difficult position. Their operating budgets, prepared based on 1998 spending, no longer correspond to current needs or costs," explained Mr. Hudon.

He added that "one of the most important improvements in Phase III is, in my opinion, the heightened awareness of the importance of teamwork in the field (governments and citizens) and the elimination of independent practices in government organizations. I'm thinking, for instance, of the Navigation Co-ordination Committee, where issues of dredging, erosion, shipping and boating and environmental problems are discussed. Five years ago, government agencies each analysed a project separately, but today they communicate more so as to better co-ordinate and articulate their thoughts.

"Another example is the rehabilitation of toxic sediments in the St. Louis River, a project proposed to the Haut Saint Laurent ZIP committee and currently being developed in partnership with the companies involved. The project is being conducted in co-operation with the municipality, citizens and environmental groups in the community, and with government technical and scientific support. It's a promising way of doing things for the future!"

### **The Future: Continuity and New Outlook**

According to Mr. Hudon, the next program aimed at protecting the St. Lawrence must build on what has been learned so far and put even more emphasis on the ZIP Program. He would also like to see the governments continue the current decentralization trend, which should allow the public to play an even bigger role.

For Ms. De Guise, the watchword for the future is "continuity." "The ZIP committees and the many non-governmental organizations have acquired a great deal of knowledge and expertise. It is only normal that they should want to play a bigger role in discussions and, most of all, in decision-making. The next program, I hope, will meet those expectations."

As for Mr. Roy, he stressed that "the enactment of the Quebec Water Policy affects the renewal of the Canada-Quebec agreement on the St. Lawrence. In implementing this policy, Quebec will establish integrated management of the St. Lawrence River. In this context, and since Quebec wants to build on existing structures, the ZIP committees could be given broader mandates and more responsibilities.

"That way, ZIP committees would be recognized as major players in the protection and enhancement of the uses and resources of the St. Lawrence River."

<sup>1</sup> J.F. BIBEAL, S. HOUNGUÉ and C. LACHAPPELLE, 2002. *The SLV 2000 Action Plan, Phase III: A Unique Contribution to Sustainable Development — A Socioeconomic Cost/Benefit Assessment*, St. Lawrence Vision 2000, 51 p.

# News *in* BRIEF

## First St. Lawrence *Rendezvous* to be held

In the last issue of *Le Fleuve*, we told you that on January 30, 2003, the Ecosystem Monitoring Committee of the SLV 2000 Action Plan would launch the State of the St. Lawrence Monitoring Program at the Marie Guyart Building in Quebec City.

**The event has been postponed until February 27.**

## For more information

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## Ecological Rehabilitation Action Plan (ERAP)

The Sud de l'Estuaire ZIP Committee will validate its Ecological Rehabilitation Action Plan (ERAP). The results of the work outlined in the plan will be presented on Saturday, February 22, 2003, at the Hôtel Lévesque in Rivière-du-Loup. The ERAP includes technical fact sheets of 24 projects and describes the area and the issues raised at public consultations held in November 2001.

The ERAP is scheduled to be officially launched in spring 2003. For more information, contact the ZIP Committee at (418) 722-8833.

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