

### I N T U N E

#### Community Involvement

The Biosphere's Ecowatch Network of Environment Canada allows individuals and groups with a passion for the environment to take concrete action to improve the health of the Great Lakes—St. Lawrence ecosystem.

The Société pour la conservation de la tourbière de Lanoraie has established a buffer zone around the Tourbières de Lanoraie Ecological Reserve. This is a sterling example of how a local community can take charge of the environment.

This summer, the Il était un petit navire tour will hit the water, stopping at a dozen marinas between Lake St. François and Trois-Rivières. The project, carried out by six ZIP committees, is aimed at informing pleasure boaters about the importance of protecting the environment.

#### ZIP Chronicle

The Quebec City ZIP Committee recently announced the implementation of the first phase of its plan to renaturalize and develop Beauport Bay.

## The Biosphere's Ecowatch Network

*In protecting and developing the St. Lawrence, there is no such thing as a small gesture. All actions add up, and contribute to improving riverside communities' environment and quality of life. This conviction is a main motivation of the members of the Biosphere's Ecowatch Network, an Environment Canada program designed to stimulate concrete action to improve the health of the Great Lakes—St. Lawrence ecosystem. The activities of the Ecowatch Network are part of Community Involvement component within the SLV 2000 Action Plan.*

The Ecowatch Network is one of the tools developed by the Biosphere of Environment Canada to stimulate people to take action to protect and conserve water and aquatic ecosystems for future generations. The objective of the Ecowatch program is to encourage citizens and communities to take responsibility for the environment by developing structured environmental projects and exchanging the data and solutions obtained in the projects with each other, as well as with the scientific community.

There are two types of Ecowatch projects: local and network-wide projects. Local projects consist in activities carried out by individuals or groups in their communities in order to help protect the Great

Lakes—St. Lawrence ecosystem. Local projects may involve promoting awareness, acquiring knowledge or undertaking environmental action or monitoring. Although such projects have a limited time frame, they often result in a long-term commitment, with participants providing follow-up or acting as a resource person for their peers, based on the expertise they have acquired in the project.

Network projects, on the other hand, tap into the energy and activism of organizations such as educational institutions, municipalities and private firms, which work together to gather data for a single project involving the entire Great Lakes—St. Lawrence

### S U M M A R Y

THE BIOSPHERE'S ECOWATCH NETWORK	1
A BUFFER ZONE FOR THE TOURBIÈRES DE LANORAIE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE	4
SETTING SAIL ON THE ST. LAWRENCE TO MEET PLEASURE BOATERS	7
ZIP CHRONICLE	9



Assisted by a naturalist from Explos-Nature, young people learn about organisms living in the St. Lawrence estuary. The organisms were gathered by scuba divers and then returned to their native habitat.

**Photo :** Biosphere, Environment Canada

ecosystem. Most network projects give participants training and the tools needed to collect data to make it easier for them to get involved.

Currently, the Ecowatch Network has six network projects, four of which are designed for the schools.

**Freshwater Fish Observation Network** – Students monitor the health of freshwater fish in their region. The qualitative observations they make on such things as parasitism and external anomalies are sent to scientists, who analyze and comment on the data for the young people who collected the data.

**Adopt a River Network** – Students gather data on physical and chemical parameters and carry out an inventory of macroinvertebrates, to determine the health of a certain section of a watercourse. Then they determine what actions need to be taken to improve the river's health and carry them out.

**H2O Project** – The purpose is to encourage students to develop, implement and promote among their peers ways to conserve drinking water in their daily activities. France and Belgium also participate in this network.

**AQUAtox Network** – By conducting four simple tests, students look for traces of chemical and microbial pollution in drinking water. This network allows students from over 30 countries, a number of which are developing nations, to compare the quality of their own drinking water with that of other countries.

The other two networks are intended for adults participating as part of their professional activities.

**Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Water Quality Network** – The purpose of the network is to pool data on various water quality parameters measured by wastewater treatment and filtration plants in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence basin.

**Lower St. Lawrence Marine Mammal Ecowatch Network** – Firms providing marine transportation, cruises or sea kayak tours on the St. Lawrence work together to gather data on the distribution and behaviour of marine mammals. In making these observations, firms adhere to a code of ethics to protect the resource.

Through these projects, the Ecowatch Network supports individuals and groups that want to take charge of improving their environment through concrete action. Thérèse Baribeau, who heads the Ecowatch Network, cites the example of the Marine Mammal Ecowatch Network, which was set up in response to a proposal from a owner of a whalewatching company. "This businessman wanted to encourage his peers to make available to scientists the wealth of information they were able to gather in their daily observations. Our role, therefore, involves meeting the needs of communities that want to participate in improving the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence ecosystem and helping them carry out their projects," she explains.

### **A network that stimulates participation**

Project proponents derive a number of potential benefits from participating in the Ecowatch Network. Members can exchange technical and scientific information on their projects, results, solutions attempted and other things. In joining the network, each member undertakes to regularly send the information, data or solutions obtained

in their project to the Biosphere and to share with other network members any information that may be useful in similar activities. Members, therefore, have access to a veritable bank of information on their area of interest. Biosphere staff are also able to provide scientific support to Ecowatch members.

In addition, the Biosphere's Web site, conferences, exhibitions and publications give Network members added visibility for their organization and project.

Aside from the scientific and technical support afforded, members also appreciate the fact that they belong to a dynamic, active group in which the members are all driven by the same passion: taking action to save the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence ecosystem.

#### **A wide range of projects, reflecting the diversity of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence ecosystem itself**

Any organized, concrete project related to protecting water quality and aquatic ecosystems in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence system or that involves environmental education can be submitted to the Biosphere. Projects selected meet criteria involving scientific value, the potential of promoting community awareness, social and environmental relevance and overall equality. Examples include:

- sixth graders from the École Émile-Nelligan designed a brochure to inform fellow students and parents about conserving drinking water;
- members of the Marieville Club Agri-Durable and Nature-Action Québec used a vegetation engineering technique involving the use of plants that is more environmentally friendly



The group Nature-Action Québec is restoring shoreline habitat using plant-based engineering techniques.

**Photo :** Biosphere, Environment Canada

than traditional rockfill techniques to stabilize the banks of four watercourses in the Yamaska River watershed;

- the group Explos-Nature developed a project to make observations on the subaquatic environment and send their data to the Biosphere.

Although each organization is financially responsible for its own project, the Biosphere can provide help in seeking funding.

Founded in 1995, the Ecowatch Network began with a dozen members. Five years later, it already has close to 95 members and encouraged over 5000 people to participate. The network also benefits from the support of two Eco-Action stations, which act as satellite stations. The Corporation pour le développement de l'île Saint-Quentin, in Trois-Rivières, and the group GREEN Belgium, in Belgium, are environmental leaders in their communities, helping local citizens carry out projects in which they are passionately involved. All together,

Ecowatch partners devote more than 300,000 hours to their projects every year. This demonstrates the growing interest in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence ecosystem as well as communities' desire to participate in improving the ecosystem.

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# A buffer zone for the Tourbières de Lanoraie ecological reserve



Tourbières de Lanoraie ecological reserve  
**Mosaic:** ministère de l'Environnement du Québec

*Maintaining biodiversity is one of the objectives of setting aside land as a protected area in Quebec. Sometimes, however, the achievement of this objective is compromised by activities along the edge of the protected area. Consequently, the Société pour la conservation de la tourbière de Lanoraie, a community organization whose goal is to protect the bogs in the Lanoraie region, set out to establish a buffer zone around the Réserve écologique des Tourbières-de-Lanoraie. This is an important step towards ensuring the sustainable development of resources in the protected area.*

Some protected areas<sup>1</sup> are developed to accommodate visitors who want to discover Quebec's natural heritage by participating in outdoor recreational activities. Other protected areas, on the other hand, are rigorously protected and access is only allowed in specific situations. Ecological reserves, which benefit from the highest level of protection given to protected areas in Quebec, fall under the second category. Ecological reserves are established to preserve, on a complete and permanent basis, examples of the natural environment that represent the ecological and genetic diversity of our natural heritage, or to protect threatened or vulnerable plant and animal species. They can only be accessed for scientific, educational or management purposes, with the authorization of the Quebec Department of the Environment.

Assigning an area protected status, however, does not shield it from pressures caused by human activities on adjacent land. Resource exploitation, urban sprawl and drainage for agriculture or logging are only some of the activities that when, practised on the edge of protected areas, may negatively affect ecosystems in these areas.

## The Lanoraie peat bogs

A huge complex of peat bogs, spanning 6,600 ha, can be found southeast of Joliette, between Saint-Thomas de Joliette and Lanoraie. Since 1992, a local organization, the Société pour la conservation de la tourbière de Lanoraie (SCTL), has worked to preserve this ecosystem through land acquisition or private stewardship arrangements.

Bog formation, a process that takes several thousand years, occurs when environmental conditions favour the accumulation rather than the decomposition of organic material produced by plants. A portion of this organic material dies off every year and accumulates on the ground in the form of litter, which is then decomposed by bacteria. Bogs form when the quantity of litter produced exceeds the quantity decomposed. The litter accumulates and, over time, eventually forms a deposit called peat. The accumulated peat and vegetation that grows there constitutes the bog.

Bogs are abundant in Quebec, especially in the north, where most have been left untouched. In southern Quebec, however, large intact bogs are rarer. In addition, southern bogs are more accessible for exploitation and a number are used to produce dry peat. This is particularly true in the Lower St. Lawrence region, where all the large bogs are exploited. In the Lanoraie area, however, the peat occurs in the form of muck soil, which has probably helped to protect the bogs until recently.

Bogs in southern Quebec also support some plant and animal species usually only found in more northerly regions, therefore serving as refugia for these species.



Sedge meadow with few-seeded sedge (*Carex oligosperma*) and low birch (*Betula pumila*)

**Photo :** Luc Robillard

## Real threats to the integrity of the bogs

Although the Lanoraie bogs are threatened by a number of human activities, drainage is one of the most worrisome, according to SCTL volunteers. Some bog owners drain their bogs for farming, to increase timber yield or to facilitate access for logging operations. Logging is also a threat to the ecological integrity of the bogs.

During the last few decades, and particularly in recent years, significant portions of bog habitat in the region have been lost. Concerned with this situation, the SCTL decided to take action first to protect areas adjoining the Tourbières de Lanoraie ecological reserve, a 415-ha protected area created by the Quebec Department of the Environment in 1994. Enhancing and consolidating the conservation gains already made was the main motivation behind the Society's decision. This approach would improve the site's ecological integrity by favouring the long-term survival

of animal species requiring larger home ranges. In addition, it is always preferable to protect a large area of natural habitat rather than a series of isolated territories, which are usually harder to manage.

## A buffer zone that strengthens the viability of the protected area

Three years ago, the SCTL set out to contact landowners bordering the ecological reserve. To date, nine agreements have been reached, resulting in the acquisition of roughly one hundred hectares of bog habitat on the edge of the protected area. Two pieces of land along the Saint-Joseph River, in the same watershed as the ecological reserve, have been purchased, bringing the area of land managed by the Society to 150 hectares. The acquisitions were made possible by funding obtained under the Community Interaction program of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan and from the Fondation de la faune du Québec.

Luc Robillard, SCTL president, has drawn several conclusions from the experience, which was the subject of a presentation last May at a conference held by the francophone science organization *Association francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS)*. "It is important to understand what landowners next to protected areas intend to do with their property. We found that owners who do not live in the region and do not carry out any activities on their land do not feel much attachment to their land and are generally interested in the idea of selling it. Similarly, they are also more likely to sell their land to those wanting to exploit the resources unwisely. If a local conservation organization acquires the properties, they can put in place a policy for protecting the land around the protected area, while allowing uses with no significant impact."

Conversely, local landowners adjacent to the reserve who were actively using their bogs were not very interested in selling their land or setting up a stewardship arrangement. These owners are strongly rooted in their community and have a longstanding feeling of attachment to the land. "These people use their land to hunt, cut firewood or farm on the sandy soil nearby," Robillard explains. "If the appropriate practices are used, these activities do not threaten the integrity of the ecological reserve. The wise



Black spruce and tamarack bog

**Photos :** Luc Robillard



Aerial photo of the St. Joseph River  
downstream from the ecological reserve  
**Photo:** Chantal Lavigne

<sup>1</sup> According to the World Conservation Union (1994), a protected area is defined as “an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.” ■

use these owners have made of their land for decades is, in a sense, a guarantee that the natural environment will be protected.” Consequently, lots belonging to these owners are considered an integral part of the buffer area around the Tourbières de Lanoraie ecological reserve.

This is not the only action taken by the local community to conserve the bogs. Since 1995, the Bande à Bonneau de Lanoraie has offered an interpretation program in the reserve. Currently, out of the 64 ecological reserves in Quebec, only one other has an ongoing educational program for the general public.

These examples of a local community acting to help conserve biodiversity in a protected area are likely to be relevant to many managers of similar areas wondering how to prevent negative impacts from activities on the edge of their land.

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## Setting sail on the St. Lawrence to meet pleasure boaters



Photo : Lifesaving Society

*World Environment Day provided an opportunity for the six ZIP committees in the freshwater section of the St. Lawrence to announce an innovative project to raise environmental awareness among pleasure boaters. On June 5, the *Il était un petit navire* tour was officially launched. During the next few weeks, the boat and its crew will no doubt attract the attention of many pleasure boaters as it makes the rounds of local marinas.*

A new boating season is underway on the St. Lawrence, with thousands of pleasure boaters rediscovering the river and its many attractions. To encourage these users of the river ecosystem to adopt environmentally friendly boating practices, the *Il était un petit navire* tour (the name alludes to the title of a well-known folk song about a little ship) will stop at eleven marinas between Lake Saint-François and Trois-Rivières, from June 23 to August 5, 2001.

### **A concern shared by many ZIP committees**

The need to raise awareness among pleasure boaters of the importance of protecting the St. Lawrence is a priority in the Environmental Remedial Action Plans (ERAP) of a number of ZIP committees (ZIP stands for Zone d'intervention prioritaire or area of prime concern). Consequently, the Ville-Marie, Jacques-Cartier, Des Seigneuries, Lake Saint Pierre and Les Deux Rives ZIP committees eagerly joined the project, which was initiated by the Haut Saint-Laurent ZIP committee.

On the strength of this interest, Stratégies Saint-Laurent obtained a portion of the funds required through the Community Interaction program of St. Lawrence Vision 2000. Stratégies Saint-Laurent is a nongovernmental organization active in promoting concerted action among riverside residents. It provides support to ZIP committees and coordinates the creation of new committees when regional communities demonstrate that they have a desire to participate actively in saving the St. Lawrence and are able to work jointly.

A number of other partners helped make the project a reality, including the Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons, Canadian Coast Guard, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, Lifesaving Society, Shell Environment Fund, Alcan, Mercury/Bombardier,

St. Lawrence Seaway, Association maritime du Québec, marine patrols and the Quebec Wildlife Federation.

### **A tour that is attracting interest**

As the Petit Navire makes its way from Salaberry-de-Valleyfield to Trois-Rivières, the crew will explain to boating enthusiasts how to reduce the negative impacts that pleasure boating can have on the environment. Boat owners and marina managers alike will be informed about such topics as how to safely dispose of wastewater, cut their speed to prevent bank erosion and the degradation of natural habitats, maintain equipment and engines safely and use biodegradable products to clean their boats.

Under the tour tent, interested boaters can meet with representatives of the ZIP committees as well as the Canadian Coast Guard and Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons. Each ZIP committee has also enlisted the help of local partners who will be there to chat with boaters. Boaters will also be able to obtain a brochure produced

by Stratégies Saint-Laurent, with the help of several of the tour's partners. The brochure describes the pleasure boater's eleven commandments, as well as recommending other relevant documents.

The Petit Navire was officially launched on June 13 at the Campi marina, where it began its voyage through the territory of the Haut Saint-Laurent ZIP committee. According to Marthe C. Théorêt, project officer for Stratégies Saint-Laurent, the Petit Navire is eagerly awaited in a number of marinas. A boating enthusiast for over 30 years, Ms. Théorêt believes that her fellow boaters will respond to the invitation to learn more about the river they love so much. Better informed, they will agree to do their part to ensure that future generations of boaters, along with other users of the St. Lawrence, will be able to enjoy a healthy river.

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**First row, left to right:** Claire Lachance, coordinator of the Haut Saint-Laurent ZIP Committee; Jean-Claude Théorêt, captain of the Seven Seas; Marthe C. Théorêt, project officer for Stratégies Saint-Laurent

**Second row:** Patrice Gauthier, Sûreté régionale des riverains; Nicole Fafard, Port Lewis marina; Danielle Glaude, Canadian Power and Sail Squadron, Lake Saint-François; and Gilbert Léger, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary

**Photo:** Lifesaving Society





## Chronicle

ZIP Committees in  
the Heat of the Action

# The Quebec City and Chaudière-



Beauport Bay

**Photo :** Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP Committee

## Appalaches ZIP Committee tackles the renaturalization and development of Beauport Bay

*Much of the shoreline of the St. Lawrence in the Quebec City area is no longer natural, due to urban sprawl, the construction of highway infrastructures and industrial activities in the region. As a result, it has become less attractive to a number of bird and fish species. In addition, few people use the shoreline because of the lack of access. The Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP Committee (ZIP stands for Zone d'intervention prioritaire or Area of Prime Concern) has formulated a plan to improve the quality of natural landscapes and the productivity of wildlife habitats around Beauport Bay, one of the few areas in the region with river access. Recently, the committee announced that work would begin on the first phase of the project in the fall of 2001.*

On June 6, at a press conference attended by over 50 people, the Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP committee presented a study on a comprehensive plan to renaturalize and develop Beauport Bay, entitled Plan global de renaturalisation et de mise en valeur de la baie de Beauport. These objectives correspond to priorities laid out in the Environmental Remedial

Action Plan (ERAP) for the Quebec City and Lévis region. Indeed, as Hamida Hassein-Bey, coordinator of the ZIP committee, explains, "the renaturalization and development of this part of the shoreline in the Quebec City region emerged as clear priorities during three sets of public consultations held by the committee in 1995, 1997 and 1998."

### A natural choice

The interest expressed by the region's citizens in Beauport Bay is easy to understand. The artificial nature of the shoreline in the area is representative of the overall situation in the Quebec City region. Bordered by the Dufferin-Montmorency Boulevard in the north and northwest and land belonging to the Quebec City Port Authority in the south, Beauport Bay has suffered significant ecological damage, including the loss of 80 hectares of wetland. The bay also rates poorly in terms of landscape quality, with the massive riprap (rockfill) walls giving the shoreline a bare, artificial look. Moreover, many of the parts of the shoreline that are still in a natural state suffer from erosion.

In the past, the shores of Beauport Bay attracted sizeable numbers of birds. Despite serious habitat loss, a number of species still use the mudflats to forage and roost, as a staging area during migration and, less frequently, to breed. The area is also a favourite spot for birdwatchers, who come in fall for its wide diversity of shorebirds and dabbling ducks. Some species of fish also use the bay to forage at high tide.

In terms of recreation and tourism, the beach draws windsurfers, as well as cyclists using the bike path.

Beauport Bay's value for wildlife and recreation and tourism prompted the



**Photo :** Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP Committee

Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP committee to obtain the resources needed to formulate a renaturalization and development plan. Significant financing was received from the Community Interaction program of St. Lawrence Vision 2000 (SLV 2000). The Quebec Urban Community (Communauté urbaine de Québec), Quebec City Port Authority and the City of Beauport also participated in funding the study,

which was carried out by Argus Environmental Consultants.

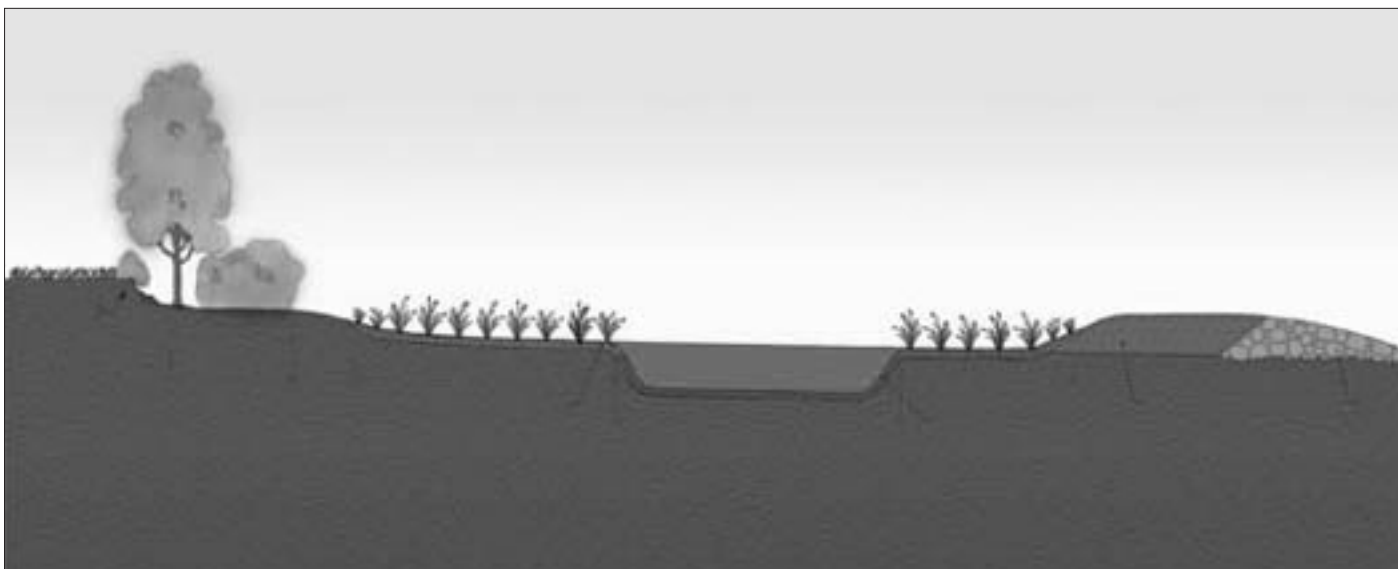
### **Solutions tailored to different types of shoreline**

The renaturalization and development plan identified a number of solutions for improving the quality of the natural environment and increasing the diversity of wildlife habitats. The proposed work to the shoreline was

described in terms of nine typical sections, each corresponding to the different problems found in Beauport Bay. By employing innovative vegetation engineering techniques, which involve the use of plants to stabilize and restore the shoreline, the project aims to reinstate, at least in part, the bay's ecological functions, absent for some thirty years.

The proposed solutions were studied by a roundtable, whose mandate was to provide support in formulating the renaturalization and development plan. Asked to identify an area of major concern to kick off the project, the roundtable members decided to focus on curbing erosion to minimize habitat loss and degradation. Based on this criterion, the cove in the western part of the bay was chosen for the first phase of the project, announced during the press conference. The first phase will include the following work:

- clean-up and restoration of the shoreline and littoral zone in the cove;
- stabilization and planting of shoreline using plants as reinforcement;



- creation and improvement of riparian wetland habitat;

- consolidation and naturalization of rockfilled areas using plant-based engineering techniques.

“The first phase of the project will begin in the autumn of 2001, thanks to funding from the Quebec City Port Authority and SLV 2000. We have every hope that the institutions owning the land in question as well as governments will support the rest of the work,” Hassein-Bey explains. To successfully complete the project, which was devised in cooperation with community stakeholders, she is counting on the pool of expertise already assembled in the Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP committee.

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Environment Consultants, 62 p. +  
4 appendices.■



# News *in* BRIEF

## Forum on community involvement

On September 7, 8 and 9, Stratégies Saint-Laurent will hold a forum on community involvement under the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000). Over 150 representatives of organizations are expected to attend. These organizations are working actively to protect, conserve and develop the St. Lawrence, under three SLV 2000 programs: ZIP (areas of prime concern), Community Interaction and the Biosphere's Ecowatch Network.

The goal of the forum is to assess the progress made in recent years and elucidate a common vision of community involvement for the future. The results will be published in a fall issue of this newsletter.

This summer, the Biosphere is presenting two exhibits that highlight the St. Lawrence's natural beauty and historical heritage, as well as the main environmental issues associated with the river.

## Exhibits at the Biosphere

This summer, the Biosphere is presenting two exhibits that highlight the St. Lawrence's natural beauty and historical heritage, as well as the main environmental issues associated with the river.

**The St. Lawrence River, from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic** is an exhibit of original photographs by over 360 amateur and professional photographers. The theme of the exhibit is the river's natural beauty and historical treasures. It will run until September 3.

The second exhibition, **Climate Warning!**, deals with global warning, its impacts on our ecosystems and how we can slow the process. Photographs, videoclips and giant caricatures will be on display until April 1, 2002.

This summer, come visit the Biosphere!

## Public Forum on Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Water Quality

On September 14 and 15, the International Joint Commission will hold the **Public Forum on Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Water Quality**. St. Lawrence Vision 2000 will be chairing two workshops at the event: **The Impact of Fluctuating Water Levels on the St. Lawrence River Ecosystem and Towards Sustainable Navigation in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River System**. The forum will also feature various exhibits, including one by SLV 2000.■

# LE FLEUVE

## NEWSLETTER ST. LAWRENCE VISION 2000

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