

I N T U N E

Community involvement

Nearly 130 representatives of organizations actively involved in protecting the St. Lawrence River met to take stock of their achievements and explore promising avenues for community commitment.

Corporate communications

The main results of a survey on the St. Lawrence River: perceptions, uses and information needs.

The survey is available on the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 website in PDF format.

Biodiversity

Thanks to the Vianney Legendre fish pass, which opened in May and was inaugurated in August, 60-some species of fish, including four vulnerable species, are now able to travel up the Richelieu River.

The St. Lawrence River—in good hands

Time out to reflect on community involvement and an opportunity to celebrate it

On September 7, 8 and 9, at the invitation of Stratégies Saint-Laurent (SSL), more than 100 people committed to community action related to the St. Lawrence River gathered together. Along with representatives of the government partners of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000), they discussed the contribution of community involvement to achieving the objectives of conserving, protecting and developing the St. Lawrence River. They then sketched out a common vision of community action. Discussion and dialogue were the order of the day. Promising avenues for community involvement related to the St. Lawrence were explored. Participants also took the opportunity to celebrate ten years of community involvement under the auspices of SLV 2000.

The forum “The St. Lawrence River—in good hands” was organized by SSL. Since the start of Phase II of the Action Plan, this organization has been charged with co-ordinating and promoting the ZIP Program. (ZIPs are areas of prime concern). SLV 2000’s federal and

provincial government partners were the main sponsors of the event, which also had the support of the federal Voluntary Sector Initiative.

The objective of the forum was to take stock of the knowledge acquired in the past 10 years in the field of community involvement and to define a common vision for the future in this respect, while promoting the exchange of ideas between representatives of the various government departments and organizations in attendance.

The many forms of community involvement under SLV 2000

At Hôtel Val-des-Neiges in Beauré, close to 130 representatives of

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Photo: Stratégies Saint-Laurent

numerous organizations actively involved in conserving, protecting and developing the ecosystem of the St. Lawrence and its tributaries, as well as various representatives of partner departments of SLV 2000, studied three programs associated with the Action Plan:

the **ZIP Program** which promotes collaboration within riverside communities, the **Biosphere's ObservAction Network** (Environment Canada): A water ecowatch centre, the ObservAction Network aims to promote concrete involvement in improving the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence ecosystem, and the **Community Interaction Program**, a financial and technical assistance program which supports community projects related to SLV 2000 objectives.

Non-profit organizations at the forum included all of the ZIP committees, several members of the Biosphere's ObservAction Network and many community groups whose activities were funded by the SLV 2000 Community Interaction Program.

Community involvement receives unanimous endorsement

Mimi Breton, Co-chair (Canada) of SLV 2000, began by stressing the positive impacts of community involvement under the Action Plan. "The organizations you represent have done great things, often with limited means. You have really made a difference," she told participants. Emphasizing the importance of the forum, she invited all participants to be creative in identifying new avenues, and thereby reinvigorate the partnership between community organizations and government.

Jean-Maurice Latulippe, Quebec Co-chair of SLV 2000 stated that the unique nature of the St. Lawrence River required the involvement of community groups. "Your numerous activities have produced concrete results which have translated

into highly significant environmental and economic gains. In addition to these gains, the most successful offshoot of community involvement is undoubtedly the collaborative nature of your actions as well as the commitment of thousands of volunteers to their success," he added.

Lynn Cleary, Acting Regional Manager of the Biosphere, described the ObservAction Network as a quiet environmental revolution. "This community involvement program is one-of-a-kind in terms of the willingness to embrace those who wish to participate, with their own means, in the conservation of the waters and the ecosystem of the St. Lawrence," she stated.

Marc Hudon, president of SSL, emphasized the influence of the SSL network and the solid roots of the ZIP committees within their respective regional communities, citing this as the key to the success of these organizations dedicated to community action. Mr. Hudon encouraged participants to pool their experience and promote reflection and discussion so as to identify a promising vision of the future. He also said he would like to see them take this opportunity to celebrate 10 years of sustained effort with SLV 2000.

Valuable discussions

One of the most highly rated exercises during the forum was the time devoted to *the turning point*. Forum participants were asked to form small groups and to choose, according to their preferences and interests, from among 14 community projects carried out by ZIP committees, members of the Biosphere's ObservAction Network, or organizations supported by the Community Interaction Program. For approximately 15 minutes, each group, led by a resource person belonging

to the organization, discussed the project and considered the material generated for the project, where applicable. Then, there was a rotation and new groups formed around the resource persons. This provided forum participants with a better understanding of four different community projects. This format was greatly appreciated due to its propensity for promoting discussion and networking.

Three organizations representing the programs targeted by the event also shared their experience with their peers during the forum. These were the Alma-Jonquière ZIP committee, the Canadian Museum of Nature and the St Paul College of Varennes.

Summing it all up

The participants then split up according to their area of expertise to participate in three separate workshops on each of the SLV 2000 community programs. In these workshops, each group was asked to take stock of the program's strengths and weaknesses. In the latter case, solutions were identified.

Then, workshop findings were reported in plenary session. For example, participants in the workshop on the ZIP program stressed that collaboration had been key to getting players from very different backgrounds to sit down together and discuss ideas and pool their resources. Moreover, the implementation of actions set out in the ERAPs had enabled the ZIP committees to establish their credibility and influence several players. However, they stressed the committees' need to acquire scientific and technical knowledge.

The ObservAction Network workshop stressed the potential of the projects proposed to educational institutions to motivate and mobilize students and teachers alike. Moreover, scientists are increasingly interested in scientific data obtained by community groups. However, the need to ensure better continuity of projects between various school levels, for example, from elementary to high school, even to college, was raised.

Among the strengths of the Community Interactions Program, the participants specifically cited the experience and expertise acquired by organizations, as well as the lasting nature of the partnerships created through projects. However, they deplored the short duration of financial assistance granted.

Looking to the future of community action under SLV 2000

Back in the workshops, participants then focused on identifying a common vision for the three programs. This exercise concluded with an open plenary discussion.

Among the many topics raised, there was considerable discussion of questions related to funding for groups committed to community action. The difficulty in obtaining recurrent funding was cited as a frequent cause of loss of expertise. Moreover, the need to more effectively raise awareness of the groups' accomplishments and thus further mobilize Quebecers was expressed. In addition, participants said they would like further opportunities for discussion and suggested holding an event such as the forum on a regular basis. Participants also expressed their desire to actively collaborate in the discussions regarding follow-up to the SLV 2000 Action Plan.

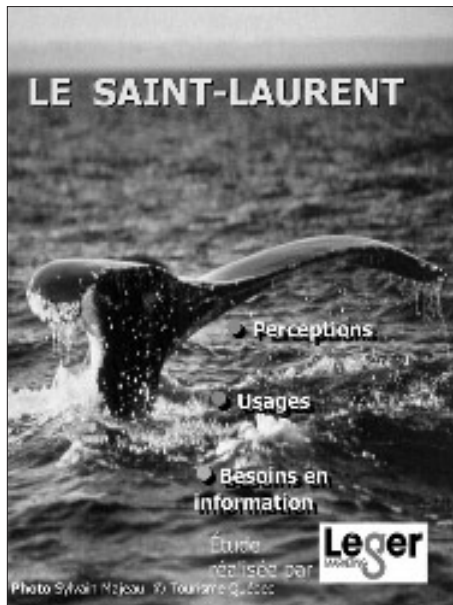
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The St. Lawrence River: Perceptions, Uses and Information Needs



In June, 1,004 Quebecers were surveyed about their perceptions and uses of the St. Lawrence and the information they need about the ecosystem. The survey was conducted by Léger Marketing for the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 (SLV 2000) Communications Co-ordinating Committee. This article describes some of the survey's results.

The main objectives of the survey, entitled *The St. Lawrence River: Perceptions, Uses and Information Needs*, were to provide SLV 2000 partners with an accurate portrait of Quebecers' perceptions about the current state of the St. Lawrence River and give them more information about the public's use of the river.

The results are based on the responses of 1,004 Quebec residents of riverside municipalities along the St. Lawrence, municipalities not along

the river that obtain their drinking water from it and municipalities along the Saguenay and other priority tributaries. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The results are considered statistically reliable and can be generalized to the province's entire population.

The St. Lawrence: still a matter of concern

A large majority of Quebecers are concerned about the state of the St. Lawrence (75% of respondents said they were very or somewhat concerned).

Two out of five Quebecers (41%) believed that the state of the St. Lawrence had improved in the last 20 years. When asked about possible sources of pollution, they felt that improvements had been made in the following areas:

- municipal wastewater disposal.....**56%**
- industrial pollution.....**45%**
- agricultural pollution.....**40%**

In contrast, 45% of respondents felt that heavy maritime traffic pollution had worsened.

With regard to perceived responsibility for protecting and conserving the St. Lawrence, respondents named:

- the federal government.....**43%**
- the Quebec government.....**40%**
- citizens.....**28%**
- business.....**25%**
- NGOs working to protect the St. Lawrence.....**4,5%**

However, 22% of Quebecers believed that this responsibility is shared equally by all of the above.

Clément Dugas, Canada Co-chair of the SLV 2000 Communications Co-ordinating Committee, said "Our survey showed that 82.1% of Quebecers feel that NGOs have taken appropriate action in the last 20 years to improve the state of the St. Lawrence." The survey results were released to participants of the "Le Saint-Laurent, un fleuve entre bonnes mains" [The St. Lawrence River—in good hands] forum, held on September 7, 8 and 9. Nearly 130 ZIP committee representatives, members of Environment Canada's Biosphere ObservAction Network and representatives of many community groups that have received financial assistance from the SLV 2000 Community Interaction Program attended the forum.

According to respondents, priorities for improving the state of the St. Lawrence should focus on:

- industrial pollution.....**67%**
- municipal wastewater disposal...**36%**
- agricultural activities.....**32%**
- heavy maritime traffic.....**25%**
- riverbank and habitat protection.....**12%**
- dredging activities.....**4%**

Taking back the St. Lawrence one step at a time

The survey also showed that two out of three Quebecers felt that a significantly or somewhat larger number of people are using the St. Lawrence and its banks compared to 20 years ago.

Forty-three per cent of respondents had engaged in at least one activity on or along the St. Lawrence in the previous 12 months. The main activities mentioned were:

- walking.....56%
- cycling.....17%
- cruises.....16%
- fishing.....13%

Of the Quebecers who had not carried out any recreational activities on or along the river in the previous year, only 8% gave a lack of interest as their reason. A large percentage of the population is thus open to being persuaded to return to the St. Lawrence by the many enhancement projects planned by the ZIP committees.

Improved communications

The survey also gave the Action Plan's communications personnel a better idea of the information that Quebecers need about the St. Lawrence River.

Lise Monette, Quebec Co-chair of the SLV 2000 Communications Co-ordinating Committee, pointed out that "seven out of ten Quebecers would like to have more information about the current state of the St. Lawrence." The main topics of interest mentioned by respondents were:

- quality of water as drinking water.....33%
- pollution/state of the St. Lawrence.....19%
- fish/shellfish quality.....15%
- quality of water for swimming.....14%
- efforts/actions/methods for cleaning up pollution.....12%

"With this information, we will be better equipped to target and plan communications activities for the various publics we wish to reach," concluded Ms. Monette.

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The Vianney Legendre fish pass: A concerted effort in support of the biodiversity of the Richelieu River



From left to right:

Bernard Beaudin, President of the Fondation de la faune du Québec, Suzanne Durez, Mayor of St. Roch de Richelieu, Léandre Dion, MNA for St. Hyacinthe and Parliamentary Assistant to the Quebec Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Pierre Legendre, son of Vianney Legendre, the Honourable Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage, Marie Bouchard, Mayor of St. Ours and Alain Branchaud, Biologist, President of *Projet Rescousse*

Photo: Jean A. Martin

August 29, 2001 was marked by an important event for several partners concerned with maintaining the biodiversity of the Richelieu River, one of the main tributaries of the St. Lawrence, with the inauguration of the Vianney Legendre fish pass at the Sain-Ours Canal National Historic Site. The pass was built to enable four vulnerable species of fish to again reach habitats located between the Chambly and St. Ours dams. In total, some 60 species of fish will benefit from the fish pass.

Between September 2000 and April 2001, two fish passes were built at the St. Ours dam. Falling under Phase III of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan (SLV 2000), this project makes a significant contribution to preserving the biodiversity of the Richelieu River, one of the main tributaries of the St. Lawrence. The site inauguration was attended by the Honorable Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage, Monique Bégin, President and CEO of the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec, and Léandre Dion, MNA for Saint-Hyacinthe.

Several financial partners contributed to the project's success, including Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment Canada, Canada Economic Development, Transport Canada, Société de la faune et des parcs

du Québec, Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec, Fondation de la faune du Québec, and the Rescousse project. Note that profits from the sale of Rescousse beer go to support projects to protect and restore threatened species.

A long-standing obstacle

The St. Ours dam was built in 1846 to open up navigation on the Richelieu River as far as New York State. At the time, its construction had only minor repercussions on fish movement.

In 1911, a fish pass was added to the structure. However, when the dam was rebuilt between 1967 and 1969, this fish pass was not replaced by the dam's owner, Transport Canada. Then, in 1972, the entire site and its structures were transferred to Parks Canada.

With the many changes it underwent, the St. Ours dam thus became a significant obstacle to the passage of fish, as was shown several years later by various studies conducted under Phase II of SLV 2000.

The search for a appropriate solution

In 1996, representatives of Parks Canada and MEF (Quebec Department of Environment and Wildlife) met to discuss the consequences of the dam on several species of fish which were trying unsuccessfully to travel up the Richelieu River to feed or reproduce.

Further to this meeting, a federal-provincial interdepartmental committee comprised of biologists, engineers and managers from Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and MEF was created. This committee was mandated to examine the various possibilities for

re-establishing the free passage of fish. The characteristics of four species of fish at risk (copper redhorse, lake sturgeon, American shad and American eel) were specifically taken into consideration by the team of specialists.

Pooling their expertise, the specialists finally recommended the construction of a multi-species fish pass enabling the copper redhorse, lake sturgeon and American shad to travel to their breeding areas. In designing this structure, many factors were taken into account, specifically the ability of various species to clear a vertical obstacle, the size of the pools required to hold the fish (lake sturgeon, for example, can grow up to 1 m), and the various spawning run periods.

The committee also suggested building a second pass specifically for the American eel, to enable this species to reach its feeding grounds.

A resounding success

"The minute the multi-species pass was opened last May, the fish literally swarmed into it," said Parks Canada biologist Sylvain Paradis. "Although still preliminary, the data collected in 2001 confirm that at least 15 species are already using the fish pass," he went on, saying that rigorous follow-up would be done over the next four years to validate the effectiveness of the multi-species pass and fine-tune its functioning. "European and American engineers have already expressed interest in the innovative design of the multi-species pass developed for the St. Ours dam." In fact, although fish passes built for salmon, for example, are common, the design and construction of a multi-species structure is a significant technical challenge.

In addition to its positive impacts on biodiversity, the project is also likely to generate economic benefits for the region. In fact, Parks Canada plans to organize various educational activities around these facilities. Accordingly, increased tourism can be expected at the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site, part of the national Historic Canals network managed by Parks Canada. Moreover, as the new fish pass enables the American eel to travel upstream to its feeding grounds, it will probably have a positive impact on commercial fishing of this species.

Strong support for a species fighting for survival

The copper redhorse is certainly one of the most highly anticipated users of the multi-species fish pass. It is the only vertebrate species found solely in Quebec. No specimens have ever been found elsewhere in the world. Moreover, it now frequents only a few stretches of rivers in the St. Lawrence Plain (Richelieu, Mille Îles, Yamaska and Noire rivers), as well as the stretch of the St. Lawrence between the Island of Montreal and the eastern tip of Lake St Pierre. One of the two known spawning grounds of the copper redhorse is located about 200 m downstream from the St. Ours dam, whereas the other, much larger one is located in the Chambly Rapids, approximately 30 km upstream. Thanks to the multi-species pass, copper redhorse spawners can now get past the St. Ours dam to reach their main spawning ground.

The copper redhorse was designated a threatened species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada in 1987, as well as under Quebec's Act respecting threatened or vulnerable species in spring 1999. In 1998, a rehabilitation plan for this species

was drawn up under SLV 2000. The construction of the St. Ours dam fish pass represents the achievement of one of the main recommendations of this plan.

The inauguration of the fish pass was an opportunity to pay homage to Quebec biologist Vianney Legendre (1917-1990) who, in 1942, was the first to officially describe the copper redhorse. The multi-species structure was named the Vianney Legendre fish pass in his honour in recognition of his contribution to the historical knowledge of Quebec's fish.

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News *in* BRIEF

Tabling of environmental assessments to Sud de l'estuaire ZIP committee

On October 23 and 24, the government partners of St. Lawrence Vision 2000 (SLV 2000) will publicly table the environmental assessments for the south shore sectors of the middle and lower estuaries of the St. Lawrence River which fall under the jurisdiction of the Sud de l'estuaire ZIP committee.

These assessments, in the form of technical reports, sketch the knowledge base regarding the physical and chemical aspects of the water and sediments, biological communities, and socio-economic aspects of this stretch of the St. Lawrence ecosystem. They are a decision-making tool for setting common conservation and ecological rehabilitation priorities for these sectors.

These reports will be tabled at press conferences to be held on October 23 and 24 in Rimouski and Montmagny, respectively.

The Sud de l'estuaire ZIP committee will also hold a public consultation on November 16 and 17 in Rivière-du-Loup, in order to agree on priorities and measures to take in implementing an environmental remedial action plan (ERAP) for this sector.

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LE FLEUVE

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