

I N T U N E

Biodiversity

Conservation organizations make a major contribution to protecting natural habitat, with 15 projects implemented since 1998.

Corporate Affairs

SLV 2000 has a new Quebec co-chair Pierre Baril is appointed chair for Quebec.

Community Involvement

ZIP Chronicle

The Lake St. Pierre ZIP Committee invited members of the local community to examine the idea of establishing a community wildlife area.

Nongovernmental organizations and master plans crucial in conserving the St. Lawrence

One of the objectives that the Habitats subcommittee has set for itself under Phase III of the St Lawrence Vision 2000 (SLV 2000) Action Plan is the protection of 120,000 ha of natural habitat. This article discusses the crucial role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in achieving this goal. It also describes the main activities involved in implementing the master plan for the Fouquette River, a tributary of the St. Lawrence. This work is related to another of the subcommittee's goals, namely the formulation and implementation of conservation and management plans.

NGOs, essential partners in protecting the St. Lawrence

It is a well-known fact that habitat integrity and ecosystem health are closely linked. The Quebec and federal governments are working to create protected areas (national parks, wildlife refuges, ecological reserves and other entities) to ensure the long-term protection of natural habitats, including those along the St. Lawrence. Governments are not alone in this mission, however, and several NGOs are also playing a crucial role in this effort. Indeed,

SLV 2000 partners have estimated that, during phase III, NGOs will be active in protecting 650 ha of natural habitat.

Since 1998, six conservation organizations have been working on fifteen habitat protection projects. Two of these organizations—the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the *Société de conservation des milieux humides du Québec* (which protects wetlands)—work in the entire area targeted by the action plan and account for 11 of the 15 projects. The other four organizations are involved on a more local scale: *Société pour la conservation de la tourbière de*

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Islands around Repentigny — The *Société canadienne pour la conservation de la nature* (Québec) acquired Île à l'Aigle and Île aux Cerfeuil to ensure that these islands of great ecological interest were protected.

Photo by: *Société canadienne pour la conservation de la nature* (Québec)

Lanoraie (which works to protect the Lanoraie bogs), *Fondation québécoise pour la protection du patrimoine naturel* (a Quebec foundation to protect natural heritage), *Éco-Nature* (a Laval group) and Canadian Heritage of Quebec. Most of these projects involve land acquisition. The objective set in the Action Plan has been greatly exceeded, with 790 ha now protected.

“Interestingly, four projects by NGOs have resulted in the creation of buffer zones around ecological reserves designated by the Quebec Department of the Environment,” explained Luc Robillard of Environment Canada’s Canadian Wildlife Service. “This helps maintain the ecological integrity of the protected areas by ensuring compatible land use on the adjacent land. In addition, it allows new types of partnerships to be established between local communities and the managers of legally protected areas.”

To ensure the success of these habitat protection efforts, NGOs have received financial support under the Community Interactions program, which is the joint responsibility of Environment Canada, the *Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec* (Quebec wildlife and parks agency) and the Quebec Department of the Environment. Funding has also been provided under the federal government’s Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk and the federal government’s Blue Montreal initiative.

“Such funding only represents part of the resources required to successfully carry out habitat protection projects,” Robillard explained. “Organizations also provide some of the funding themselves, from their own budgets or from partners such as educational institutions, municipal governments, foundations, parapublic agencies and private firms. In addition, NGOs contribute substantial resources in the form of the services provided by their volunteers. Such

contributions of money and services are significant and should also be recognized.”

The NGOs’ role does not end with land acquisition, however. By becoming owners or managers of the natural habitats to be preserved, they take on a number of additional responsibilities such as protection and monitoring, maintaining partnerships and fundraising for such things as municipal taxes and insurance. “These tasks are part of NGOs’ day-to-day work and require a substantial long-term commitment,” Robillard concluded.

A master plan to restore the Fouquette River

To assist NGOs that choose to work towards conserving and developing St. Lawrence tributaries, SLV 2000 partners have also supported the formulation of four master plans, including one for the integrated conservation and management of the resources of the Fouquette River watershed (Plan directeur de conservation et de gestion intégrée des ressources du bassin versant de la rivière Fouquette).

The mouth of the Fouquette River houses the second largest spawning grounds for rainbow smelt in the southern estuary. In addition, the population that uses the area is genetically distinct from other populations in the St. Lawrence and the area makes up over one third of its spawning grounds. Previously abundant, the population has decreased substantially in the past thirty years and since the late 1980s, has been restricted to only three known spawning grounds, one of which is the Fouquette River site.



Aerial view of the Fouquette River near its mouth.

Photo by: Rémi Tardif

The river's 70-km² watershed takes in four municipalities in the Kamouraska Regional County Municipality. Agriculture is the main land use in the watershed. Recent surveys have shown that water quality and the quality of riparian habitat along the river have deteriorated in agricultural areas due to excessive fertilizer input, bank erosion and repeated use by farm machinery and

livestock. In addition, characterization studies have shown that municipal wastewater is being discharged without adequate treatment. In fact, the poor water quality in the Fouquette River could, in the short term, result in the abandonment of the spawning grounds at its mouth by the smelt.

This characterization work was carried out by the Société de la faune et des

parcs du Québec in co-operation with the Comité de bassin de la rivière Fouquette (Fouquette River watershed committee). The latter is made up of representatives of the Kamouraska Regional County Municipality, the four municipalities through which the river and its tributaries flow, the Conseil régional de l'environnement du Bas-Saint-Laurent (Lower St. Lawrence regional environment council), the Fédération de l'Union des producteurs agricoles de la Côte-du-Sud (the Côte-du-Sud branch of the Quebec farmers' union), the tourism and industrial sectors and the Quebec government (Société de la faune et des parcs, Quebec Department of the Environment and Quebec Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food).

"After the implementation of the master plan, which was produced with support from SLV 2000, the Fouquette River watershed committee undertook various projects to help improve water quality in the watershed," explained Gontrand Pouliot of the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec. The committee believes that the joint action it has undertaken to clean up municipal wastewater should result in a significant improvement in water quality in the river in a relatively short time. However, the committee has put most of its energy into agricultural problems. "We managed to convince nine farmers that it was crucial to keep their livestock away from the river. With financial assistance from the committee and its partners, the farmers installed fences and other structures allowing livestock access to drinking water but not to the river. Now, close to 3,000 m of the shoreline is protected from trampling by livestock," Pouliot said. He added that the shoreline vegetation is restoring itself very quickly.



Rainbow smelt

Photo by: Guy Trenchia

In the summer of 2002, the committee plans to undertake major bank stabilization work near the spawning grounds, for which Transport Canada will provide funding. "The master plan not only promotes the joint establishment of priorities, but is also extremely useful when seeking financial partners," said Pouliot.

The committee's projects should gradually result in improved water quality in the Fouquette River watershed. For riverfront residents, this will improve the value of the watershed to wildlife, which in turn will help ensure the sustainability of the smelt fishery, which is very popular in the region. On a larger scale, the committee's work helps maintain biodiversity in the St. Lawrence.

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Source:

POULIOT, G., and G. VERREAULT.
2001. Plan directeur de conservation
et de gestion intégrée des ressources
du bassin versant de la rivière
Fouquette, Rivière-du-Loup, Société
de la faune et des parcs du Québec,
Direction de l'aménagement de la
faune du Bas-Saint-Laurent, 94 p. +
appendices. ■

St. Lawrence Vision 2000—New chair for Quebec



M. Pierre Baril

On March 12, Pierre Baril became the new Quebec chair of the agreement management committee for the Canada-Quebec Agreement for Joint Action on the St. Lawrence. He takes over from Me Jean Maurice Latulippe, who is now chairman and CEO of the Société québécoise de récupération et de recyclage (RECYC-QUÉBEC), the Quebec recycling corporation. Baril said that he was “pleased to take on this co-ordination mandate in collaboration with the chair for Canada, Mimi Breton, and to continue this joint work, emphasizing dialogue and transparency, which has produced such excellent results up to now.”

In March 2002, Baril was also appointed Assistant Deputy Minister of environmental policy on water and agricultural and municipal activities

at the Quebec Department of the Environment. Previously, he served as vice president, technology research and development, at Quebec’s industrial research centre, the Centre de recherche industrielle du Québec. Baril not only has a master’s degree in environmental engineering and a doctorate in agricultural engineering from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (a Swiss polytechnic institute), but also has extensive experience in the field, which will be of great benefit to him in his work at St. Lawrence Vision 2000.

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Chronicle

ZIP Committees in
the Heat of the Action

Lake St. Pierre ZIP Committee



Lake St. Pierre, sector Baie-du-Febvre

Photo by: Yves Aubry, Environment Canada

A new way of managing sport fishing on Lake St. Pierre under study

Sport and commercial fishers share in the harvest of a number of fish species in Lake St. Pierre. Recently, however, many anglers have observed a decrease in the quality of the catch. To respond to this problem, the Lake St. Pierre ZIP Committee (ZIP stands for zone d'intervention prioritaire, or area of prime concern) is examining a new method of managing this wildlife resource. On February 23, regional stakeholders were invited to take part in a workshop entitled Sport Fishing on Lake St. Pierre and the Concept of Community Wildlife Areas to discuss this idea.

The most eagerly sought-after sport fishes in Lake St. Pierre are walleye, yellow perch, northern pike and muskellunge. Yellow perch is the best-known species; the perch population in the lake has been monitored for many years, showing a decrease in the number of landings and the size of individual fish. Although corrective measures have resulted in a slight improvement, the quality of the catch in this species and others remains of concern.

Community wildlife areas, a potential solution

In response to the decline in the quality of sport fishing in Lake St. Pierre, the Montérégie region branch of the Fédération québécoise de la faune (Quebec Wildlife Federation) and the Lake St. Pierre ZIP Committee decided to analyse the feasibility of establishing a community wildlife area in this part of the St. Lawrence. This work is being done in co-operation with the Association des chasseurs et pêcheurs de Sainte-Anne-de-Sorel, a local hunters and anglers association.

In Quebec, a community wildlife area is a body of water in which the management of sport fishing is entrusted to a non-profit corporation through a leasing arrangement with the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec (Quebec wildlife and parks agency). The non-profit corporation, made up of community representatives, is mandated to improve the quality of sport fishing. In this way, the agency retains its role as manager of the resource; for example, it continues to determine the species that can be fished, the quotas for each species and the authorized fishing gear. The non-profit corporation issues fishing licences and sets fees. The agency can use the income generated to protect the resource or improve habitat.

The decision to establish a community wildlife area is never imposed by the government. Instead, users must advise the agency of their interest in establishing such an area and demonstrate their willingness to become actively involved in managing and protecting the resource. The result is an increased feeling of responsibility by users towards the resource, which is likely to lead to changes in

behaviour, particularly decreased poaching, one of the possible reasons for the decline of some fish populations in Lake St. Pierre.

Since 1996, this form of fisheries management has been used in three Quebec regions: Lac Saint-Jean and the areas around the Baskatong and Gouin reservoirs.

Workshop to promote discussion

On February 23, more than 130 people responded to an invitation from the Lake St. Pierre ZIP Committee and attended a workshop to discuss the situation of sport fishing in the lake. The workshop was held thanks to a number of partners: the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec, the Table des députés du lac Saint-Pierre (a group of MNAs from the Lake St. Pierre region), Canada Economic Development, the Bas-Richelieu Regional County Municipality, the Montreal Port Corporation and St. Lawrence Vision 2000. The workshop began with speeches by guests of honour Aurèle Blais (Quebec Wildlife Federation), Rémy Désilets (MNA, Maskinongé) and Marcel Robert (Mayor of Sorel-Tracy).

A number of presentations were made at the workshop; speakers included representatives of the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec and the three existing community wildlife areas. The meeting then broke up into workshops in which managing a community wildlife area, improving sport fishing, ensuring the peaceful coexistence of sport and commercial fishing and developing tourism were discussed, among other topics. "An atmosphere of open-mindedness was maintained and discussions were very beneficial," explained Claudia

Prud'homme, project officer for the Lake St. Pierre ZIP Committee.

"Participants were very interested in learning more about the concept of a community wildlife area. The outcome of the discussion was that the concept is not incompatible with the characteristics of the area in question since every wildlife area is unique. The notion of respect, applied both to users and wildlife resources, was expressed by many participants as an essential condition for the success of such a project."

In the light of the conclusions reached at the workshop, the interim management committee of the Lake St. Pierre community wildlife area is now working to draft a management and development plan, which will be submitted to local residents during public consultations. If the results of the consultations are positive, the group will submit the plan to the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec, which is responsible for making the final decision on whether to establish a community wildlife area.

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La pêche sportive au lac Saint-Pierre et le concept d'aire faunique communautaire -- Actes du colloque.■

News *in* BRIEF

Ensuring high-quality sediment samples

Under the Navigation component of the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Action Plan, Environment Canada has revised and updated the methodology for sampling sediments in dredging and marine engineering projects. The resulting two-volume methods manual should help solve some of the problems now encountered in interpreting and comparing the results from different physicochemical characterization and ecotoxicological assessment studies.

The first volume, for characterization study planners, provides guidelines on how to prepare a sediment sampling plan appropriate to the environmental issues faced in the project. The second volume, intended for the technical teams carrying out the actual sampling work, provides guidelines to ensure the standardization of sampling operations in the field.

French and English versions of the guide will be available by the end of June 2002 on the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Web site and from Environment Canada's Technological Innovation and Industrial Sectors Section.

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