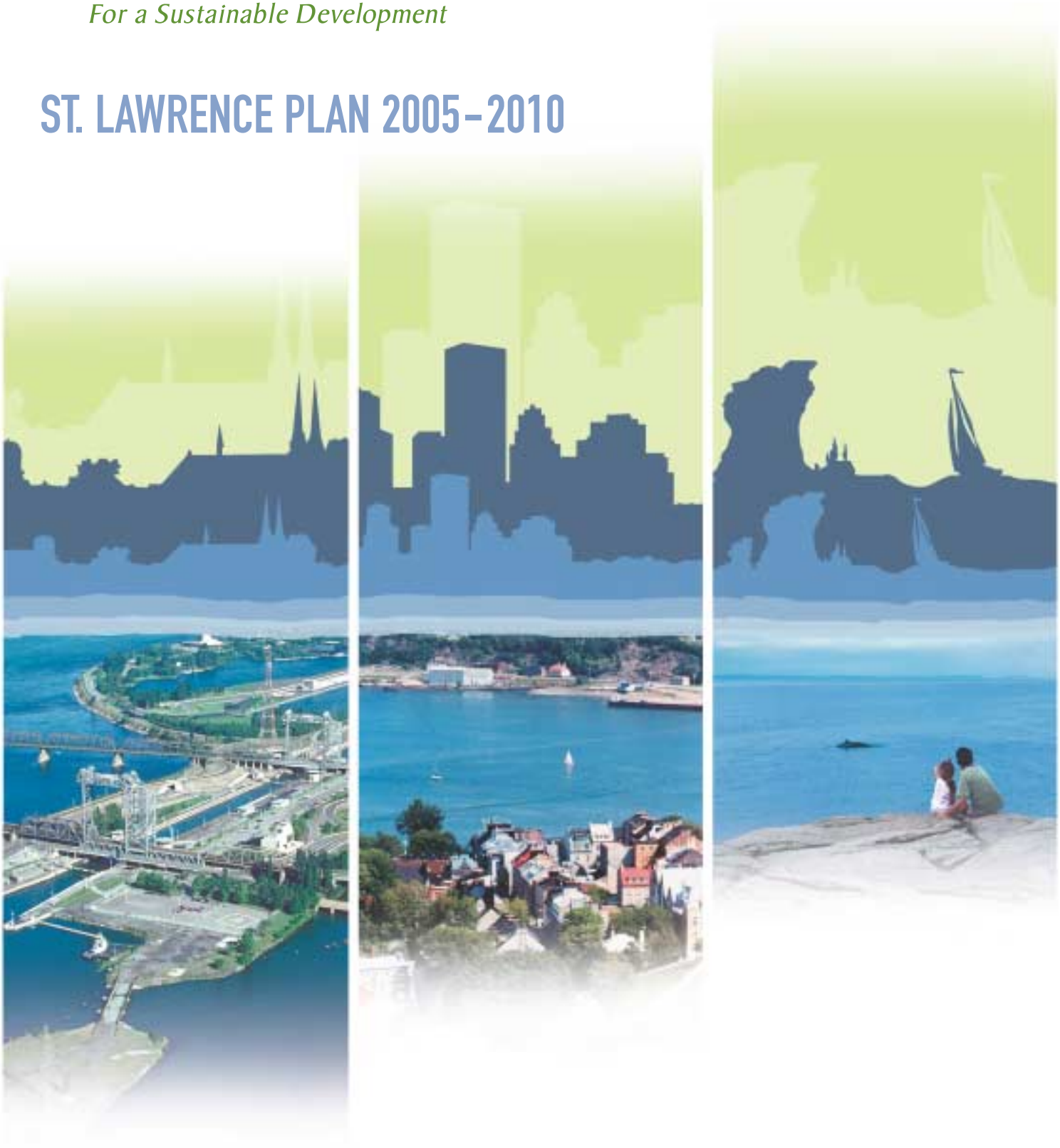
St. Lawrence Plan
For a Sustainable Development

ST. LAWRENCE PLAN 2005–2010



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Pour un développement durable

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P. F. Boisvert, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

After 15 years of action and collaboration to protect, conserve and enhance the St. Lawrence River, the governments of Canada and Québec as well as their partners are resolutely moving toward developing an increasingly integrated management approach.

OBJECTIVE

Contribute to a sustainable development that promotes ecological integrity, environmentally responsible economic activities, community commitment and informed, concerted and integrated governance of the St. Lawrence.

A UNIQUE ECOSYSTEM

The St. Lawrence River, a major gateway to the heart of North America that has played an essential role in the continent's development for several centuries, is over 3000 kilometres long. The St. Lawrence is fed by many tributaries, but its main source is the five immense bodies of water located in the heart of the largest and most populous industrial zone in North America: the Great Lakes. These reservoirs flow into a river that widens into three lakes, then turns into a broad freshwater tidal estuary, which expands and becomes brackish (Middle Estuary), then salty (Maritime Estuary), before emptying into an ocean-like gulf. More than 300 tributaries drain into the St. Lawrence. Despite the enormous human-induced environmental pressures of all kinds weighing down on it, the river's immense ecosystem survives thanks to a complex balancing act.

The St. Lawrence ecosystem is not only home to numerous species; it is also an important source of drinking water and other resources for people living within it. Furthermore, it is a commercial and recreational waterway and a unique place for carrying out various activities, such as sport and commercial fishing, the harvesting of shellfish and crustaceans, hunting, swimming, ecotourism and water sports. The continuation and development of these activities are major issues for the users of the St. Lawrence.

The complexity of the St. Lawrence ecosystem gives an idea of the difficulties linked with its preservation and valorization. Such a project requires the commitment of the highest possible number of stakeholders working toward a common vision.

THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE: CONCILIATE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Since 1989, the agreements reached between the governments of Canada and Québec initially dealt with major sources of pollution and contamination of the St. Lawrence. Then collaboration between governments concentrated on protecting biodiversity and ecosystem health. Subsequent phases targeted agriculture and, more recently, navigation, a concern of several riverside communities.

The St. Lawrence Plan (SLP), arising from the Canada–Québec Agreement on the St. Lawrence, 2005–2010, embraces a sustainable development perspective in which environmental, economic and social issues are inextricably linked. This plan is based on the concepts of ecological integrity, environmentally responsible economic activities, community commitment and informed, concerted and integrated governance of the St. Lawrence.

Building on achievements

After 15 years of action and collaboration, the departments and organizations involved have decided to share their integrated management expertise to increase consistency and complementarity and therefore become more effective. As far as expertise goes, the Government of Québec has adopted the Québec Water Policy, one of whose commitments is to achieve integrated management of the St. Lawrence and priority watersheds. For its part, the Government of Canada has launched Ecosystem Initiatives, Canada's Oceans Strategy and the Policy and Operational Framework for Integrated Management of Estuarine, Coastal and Marine Environments in Canada. The time has now come to combine all these efforts and achievements to ensure that all development is planned in an integrated manner with respect for the St. Lawrence ecosystem.

M. Plamondon, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

PRINCIPLES OF THE ST. LAWRENCE PLAN 2005 - 2010

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Paul Grant, © Le Québec en images, CCMD

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1 INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF THE ST. LAWRENCE

Paul Grant, © Le Québec en images, CCDMD

All stakeholders connected with the management or use of the St. Lawrence River and its resources, including civil society, users and government decision-makers, must commit to protecting the ecosystem and ensuring its sustainable development. Integrated management gives everyone the opportunity to take concrete action in keeping with their capacity, share resources and make the most of positive impacts for Canadians and the ecosystem. In establishing the St. Lawrence Plan, the governments of Canada and Québec intend to develop a concept of integrated management.

J.-P. Sylvestre, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Intergovernmental synergy

To lay the foundations of this process, and because concertation is essential to its success, both government partners created the Intergovernmental Working Group on Integrated Management of the St. Lawrence (IWG-IMSL) in fall 2003. The group's mandate, renewed in the St. Lawrence Plan, is to develop an integrated management concept and the tools to implement it. The group is made up of representatives of a number of departments: Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Transport Canada, Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec, Ministère des Transports du Québec, and Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune du Québec.

St. Lawrence Centre

Importance of a common vision

Developing a common vision, based on social consensus, is the first step toward achieving integrated management of the St. Lawrence. This requires an in-depth understanding of the project and extensive knowledge of the bio-physical and socio-economic environments. This vision also needs to be based on principles that safeguard respect for the environment, our collective heritage, the free flow of information, government expertise and the representativeness of the groups involved.

Benefits of integrated management

Integrated management facilitates dialogue and enhances understanding of issues, quality of services and overall performance. It also promotes the creation of partnerships, which results in savings of both money and time. Furthermore, because stakeholders participate fully in the development of a common plan, they feel responsible and therefore show greater respect for the ecosystem.

The project's success depends on the participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process, the strength of the links between management mechanisms, and steady consensus-building on broad issues. Improved performance in protecting, conserving and enhancing the St. Lawrence is another measure of success.

OBJECTIVE

Develop a concept of integrated management of the St. Lawrence and tools to implement it.

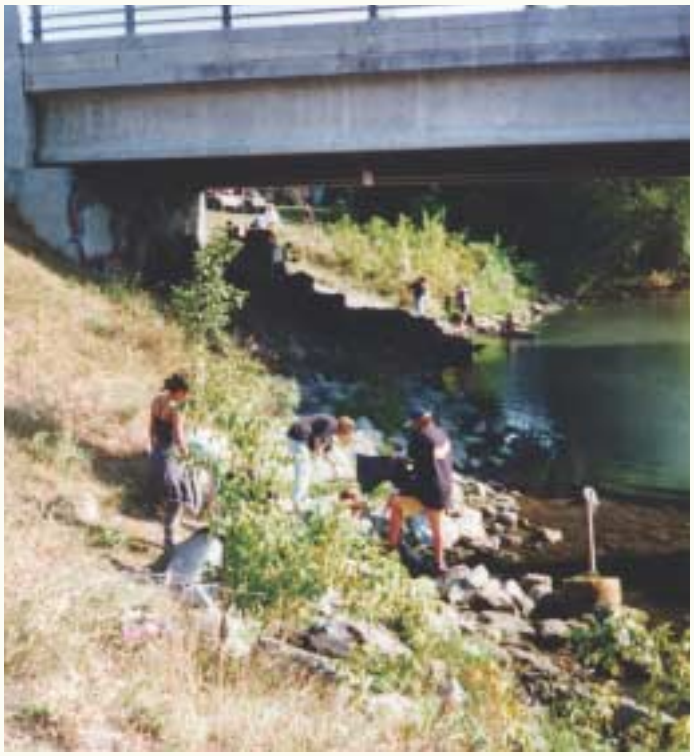
2 SOCIAL COMMITMENT

André Pichette, La Biosphère, EC

The overall vision characterizing sustainable development favours close partnerships between the stakeholders involved in protecting and enhancing the St. Lawrence. Among these stakeholders, riverside communities play a primary role, as they are particularly well placed to take part in achieving local initiatives. They can also share their experience and knowledge of the state of the ecosystem with other stakeholders and participate in gathering data and disseminating information.

Community involvement and awareness

Over the years, more and more communities have joined forces to protect and enhance the various resources and uses of the St. Lawrence, a clear indication of the importance citizens attribute to the environment in which they live. Since 1989, committees established along the St. Lawrence River, called ZIP (Area of Prime Concern) Committees, have been encouraging riverside communities to increase consultation to define priority environmental issues at the local level. Ecological Rehabilitation Action Plans (ERAPs) were then developed for each area to propose the projects that should be given priority. In order to support communities in carrying out their various actions, the government partners of the St. Lawrence Plan provide them with financial, scientific and technical support.



Haut Saint-Laurent ZIP Committee

Better informed citizens and decision-makers

Government scientists and professionals have access to a great deal of data and knowledge related to the environmental issues of the St. Lawrence. This information, even if it is published and disseminated on-line, does not always meet the needs of either those who have an interest in the St. Lawrence or those whose decisions could have an impact on the river. Decision-makers and the public are increasingly demanding information that is better adapted to their needs and presented in a manner designed to help them make informed decisions to guide them more effectively when taking action to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. One of the objectives of the St. Lawrence Plan is to better respond to expectations regarding information. In addition to traditional tools, Plan administrators make use of tools that rely on new information technology, such as a portal pertaining to the St. Lawrence. Local stakeholders' knowledge will therefore be built upon to present the most complete and accurate assessment as possible of the current state of the St. Lawrence.

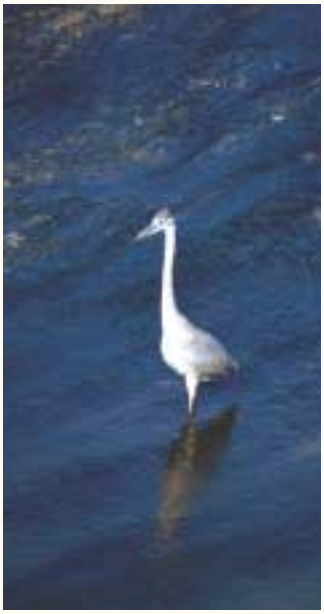
OBJECTIVE

Raise the awareness of communities, young people, users and decision-makers with respect to the advantages of choosing sustainable development and integrated management of the St. Lawrence and encourage their participation in related activities.

3 ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

St. Lawrence Centre

The St. Lawrence is a living whole, whose health is influenced by various interacting factors. Ecological integrity, an essential quality state for biodiversity to sustain itself and develop in a dynamic manner, is an indicator of the health of this vast ecosystem.



Michel Boullanne, Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec

Beyond studying the components (water, sediments, fish, plants and riverbanks), the ultimate purpose in terms of ecological integrity is to gain greater insight and better understanding of the complex interactions that make the St. Lawrence the unique ecosystem that it is. This knowledge, bolstered by the latest scientific findings, is then passed on to those stakeholders likely to make decisions that will have an impact on the St. Lawrence ecosystem. Thus, decision-makers will have the information necessary to make informed decisions that respect ecological integrity.

Maintaining ecological integrity

In terms of ecological integrity, the most significant human-induced pressures influencing the ecosystem result in fragmentation and the loss of habitat of species that maintain the ecosystem's balance. Agriculture, urbanization and road-infrastructure development are putting undeniable pressure on the environment. In addition, biodiversity is dwindling because of climate change, the appearance of invasive species, and contamination by various forms that disrupt both the ecosystem and its living species.

The challenge is therefore to determine those areas of the St. Lawrence that are at risk in order to protect the river's biodiversity and make more informed decisions. Tackling this challenge is made easier because of greater understanding of the various species and their habitats and the establishment of plans designed to protect them. In fact, the partners wish to set up a large-scale program covering the entire St. Lawrence Valley, which will foster increased concertation.

OBJECTIVE

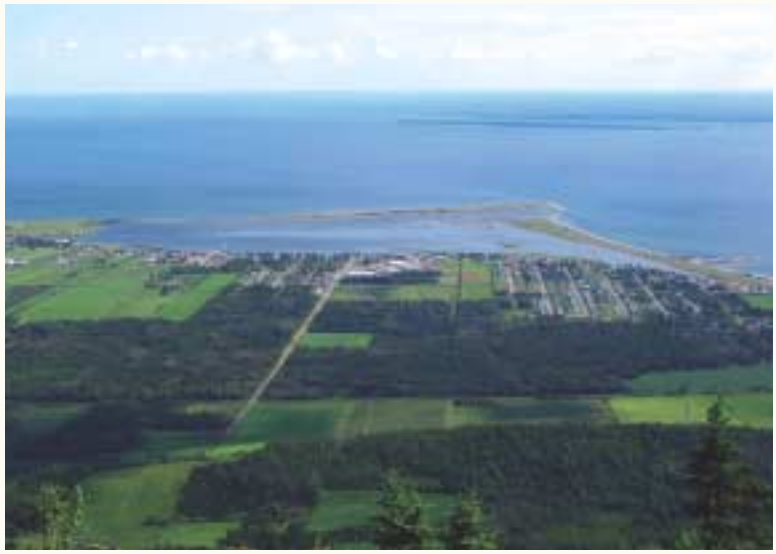
Achieve a better understanding of changes in the habitats and health of plant and wildlife populations in the St. Lawrence. Improve these habitats by establishing and implementing ecosystem protection plans and recovery plans for species deemed to be in difficulty.

Improve understanding of the operating processes of the St. Lawrence ecosystems to ensure they are maintained, safeguarded and used to their fullest.

Caroline Savage, St. Lawrence Centre

State of the St. Lawrence Monitoring

The State of the St. Lawrence Monitoring Program (SSLMP) is a valuable tool for measuring changes in ecosystem health, born out of a need voiced by several government representatives and riverside communities that wanted to know more about the health and evolution of the St. Lawrence ecosystem. The partners therefore, consolidated the collection of data from various government sources under one long-term environmental monitoring program.



Yves Lamontagne, Environment Canada

The implementation and development of the SSLMP continues under the St. Lawrence Plan. The partners will ensure that some components of the ecosystem will have better coverage under the program. In addition, the involvement of new partners and community participation are encouraged.

D. Chamard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Monitoring activities

Program partners regularly collect data and carry out related activities. These activities deal with the following major environmental issues:

- the contamination of water, sediments and biological resources by toxic substances;
- the physicochemical and bacteriological quality of water;
- the uses;
- the biodiversity (vegetation of wetlands, fish, birds, marine mammals and various exotic species);
- the water level fluctuations;
- the climate change.

The Program's development objectives

To attain sustainable development objectives, the partners of the SSLMP wish to improve the spatial and temporal coverage of some indicators and integrate new ones in order to monitor the changes the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence ecosystem as a whole are undergoing. The partners also encourage the participation of new collaborators not only to develop and use biophysical indicators, but also to include the monitoring of socio-economic indicators as part of the program. These data will complement information gathered on the environment within a sustainable development context. By strengthening partnerships with communities, both data gathering at the local level and the dissemination of information produced by the SSLMP can be improved.

OBJECTIVE

Monitor the evolution and report on the state of the St. Lawrence ecosystem.

4 ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

D. Chamard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Sustainable development means taking into account social, economic and environmental issues when making decisions and taking action in a manner that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to safeguard their interests and meet their needs. Because of this, the St. Lawrence Plan advocates respect for the environment while engaging in economic activities carried out along the St. Lawrence.

Agriculture

There are more than 32 000 farming enterprises in Québec, and most agriculture-related economic activities in the province take place in the St. Lawrence Lowlands. This area, which stretches essentially from Montréal to Québec, has not only the most fertile soil in Québec but also the most diverse ecosystems. Intensive farming of this soil for animal production and industrial crops has, however, reduced the quality of a number of the St. Lawrence River's tributaries and damaged various riparian ecosystems.

Michel Boullianne, Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec

An enormous challenge thus faces all stakeholders of this major activity sector of the St. Lawrence: they need to maintain a balance between developing an economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural industry and conserving a quality environment for future generations. Until now, efforts have concentrated on reducing pollution caused by agriculture. Best agri-environmental practices have been developed and adopted by farmers operating in the watersheds of the St. Lawrence's tributaries.

The St. Lawrence Plan aims to move agriculture toward integrated management. This new form of management is based on a better understanding of the causal relationships that exist between agri-environmental pressures and the St. Lawrence ecosystem.

In addition, emphasis is being placed on developing scientific knowledge on the effects of new agricultural management practices thanks to collaboration between researchers and agricultural stakeholders. Lastly, the environment component of the Canada's Agricultural Policy Framework will also help in reaching a major objective: to reduce non-point source agricultural pollution and, consequently, agriculture's negative effects on St. Lawrence tributaries and areas targeted by the St. Lawrence Plan.

OBJECTIVE

Conserve resources and decrease non-point source agricultural pollution.

Navigation

From the time the country was first colonized, navigation has played a key role in Canada's economy. However, with the arrival of heavier and larger ships, the St. Lawrence underwent a series of developments that had an undeniable impact on the environment.

A better balance must be found between protecting the environment and commercial shipping which, for its part, has to remain competitive. To achieve this, the Sustainable Navigation Strategy for the St. Lawrence was developed and implemented as part of the St. Lawrence Plan.

While supporting the development of recreational and commercial navigation activities, and in active co-operation with riverside communities, the strategy is aimed at protecting ecosystems and water, ensuring the safety of people and vessels and harmonizing the various uses of the St. Lawrence.

Furthermore, it is essential to increase concertation between navigation stakeholders and strive to reinforce good practices and innovative environmental management practices. It is also important to acquire and share knowledge, train people, disseminate information and assess the environmental impact of all actions. In other words, awareness-raising and commitment are thus the strategy's cornerstones.

Denis Chabot, © Le Québec en images, CCMD

In short, the partners are aiming to strike the right balance: reducing the environmental impact of navigation while promoting the benefits of this type of transportation, in particular by instilling in shippers and boaters the need to always behave responsibly.

OBJECTIVE

Implement and improve the Sustainable Navigation Strategy for the St. Lawrence.

Access to riverbanks

Over the years, industrialization, urbanization and the development of marine and road infrastructure along the St. Lawrence have gradually impinged on access to riverbanks and the various uses of the river, thus depriving the public of the opportunity to do more swimming, fishing and sailing. The St. Lawrence has enormous recreational, ecotourism, ecological and aesthetic potential and its enhancement can only contribute to the quality of life of both riverside communities and future generations.

With access to riverbanks so reduced at the moment, this is a major issue for communities along the St. Lawrence, especially given the growing public interest in it.

To improve public access to riverbanks, land development and local projects must be planned carefully. For example, riverbank development and infrastructure construction projects could take the form of scenic viewpoints, parking lots, launching ramps for small watercraft or ecosystem interpretation sites. These are all examples of projects whose implementation under the St. Lawrence Plan will foster alliances between municipalities and various other stakeholders.

Paul Grant, © Le Québec en images, CCMD

OBJECTIVE

Create, develop and restore public access points along the St. Lawrence.

MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS

The management mechanisms of the Canada–Québec Agreement pertaining to the St. Lawrence, 2005-2010 governing the St. Lawrence Plan were put in place to ensure that its objectives and expected results would be achieved. These mechanisms are aimed at improving effectiveness and consistency in decision-making, communicating with the public and accountability.

Françoise Lapointe, Environment Canada

COMMITTED PARTNERS

Through the St. Lawrence Plan, the governments of Canada and Québec agree to work together and with other partners to make the St. Lawrence an integrated and productive environment for the benefit of future generations.

The following agencies and departments are partners of the Agreement:

- Parks Canada Agency
- Canadian Space Agency
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Environment Canada
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Transport Canada
- Public Works and Government Services Canada
- Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec
- Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune du Québec
- Ministère des Transports du Québec

Area of Prime Concern (ZIP) Committees
Stratégies Saint-Laurent and the ZIP committees are key partners of the St. Lawrence Plan. The non-governmental organization, which is active in building consensus among the St. Lawrence River's riverside communities, co-ordinates all 14 ZIP committees. The committees are the driving force behind consensus-building mechanisms and public participation in projects aimed at protecting, conserving and enhancing the St. Lawrence in Québec's various regions.

The Areas of Prime Concern program encourages local initiatives to protect, restore, conserve and enhance the St. Lawrence River's various uses and resources.

The Biosphère's Observ*Action* Network
The Biosphère's Observ*Action* Network brings together young people committed to protecting the quality of water and aquatic ecosystems, including the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. The young people involved participate in organized environmental action and observation projects in their respective regions. The Network has a hundred or so partners who work in various fields related to the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes.

The Network acts as an information hub, connecting people locally, regionally and nationally by allowing them to share information, skills and knowledge on environmental issues.

THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER IS FOR EVERYONE

The St. Lawrence Plan is testimony to its partners' strong desire to respect the St. Lawrence ecosystem, however it is used. After devoting years to protecting, conserving and enhancing the St. Lawrence ecosystem, the partners have been able to develop a shared vision based on a more integrated management approach that fosters active public participation.

The St. Lawrence Plan for a Sustainable Development is a major step toward the joint management of an ambitious future project: *The St. Lawrence River is for Everyone*.

St. Lawrence Plan
For a Sustainable Development

ST. LAWRENCE PLAN 2005–2010

OBJECTIVE Contribute to a sustainable development approach that promotes ecological integrity, environmentally responsible economic activities, community commitment and informed, concerted and integrated governance of the St. Lawrence.

TARGETED RESULTS

1 INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF THE ST. LAWRENCE

- Develop a joint concept for the integrated management of the St. Lawrence and the tools to implement it
- Take into account the visions, concerns, suggestions and recommendations of the other players with a stake in the integrated management of the St. Lawrence

Canada $0.2M** **Québec** $5.5M*

* This amount includes $5.3M that Québec intends to invest in implementing the integrated management of the St. Lawrence.

** Canada is planning to contribute in implementing the integrated management of the St. Lawrence by using its resources dedicated to the ZIP program (Environment Canada) and integrated ocean management Program (Fisheries and Oceans Canada).

2 SOCIAL COMMITMENT

Community Involvement and Awareness

- Support the concerted action of riverside communities on local environmental issues, including the priorities set out in Ecological Rehabilitation Action Plans
- Support the implementation of 150 community and environmental projects
- Provide riverside communities with scientific and technical support
- Make more young people aware of sustainable development through educational programs and tools with the Biosphère's local partners
- Adapt scientific information and knowledge to meet the needs of stakeholders, decision-makers and citizens, and make them available (by using traditional and electronic tools such as a portal)

Canada $17.7M **Québec** $6.8M

3 ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

- Identify and assess populations of wildlife species potentially at risk and implement concrete actions to protect priority habitats
- Develop and implement conservation plans for the St. Lawrence, including the riverbanks, littoral zone, flood plains, wetlands and aquatic habitats
- Implement concrete actions for the recovery of species at risk based on existing recovery plans and develop or update other plans
- Assess, consolidate and improve the network of protected and developed areas and territories along the St. Lawrence River
- Acquire, integrate and share with decision-makers, researchers and communities new knowledge on the biodiversity of the St. Lawrence, including the river's physical environment
- Study the stress effects on ecosystems, particularly urban pollution, climate change, water level fluctuations, and introduction of exotic species in order to help safeguard ecosystems while ensuring the fullest use of the St. Lawrence

Canada $26.5M **Québec** $9.7M

State of the St. Lawrence Monitoring

- Provide an assessment on the state of the St. Lawrence River and the changes it has undergone according to the area under study and in relation to the Great Lakes using scientific information generated by the State of the St. Lawrence Monitoring Program
- Regularly inform decision-makers and riverside communities about the health of and changes in the St. Lawrence River using dissemination means tailored to their needs that facilitate access to information

Canada $18.4M **Québec** $3.5M

4 ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Agriculture

- Reduce the impact of agricultural activities on tributaries or sections of the St. Lawrence
- Improve knowledge to develop new agricultural management practices and for better monitoring the tributaries state of the St. Lawrence or its sections

Canada $10.9M **Québec** $4.9M

Navigation

- Maintain concertation among navigation stakeholders in relation to the broad issues affecting the St. Lawrence
- Raise the awareness of the public and decision-makers about the advantages and constraints related to navigation
- Implement integrated management of dredging and sediments
- Evaluate adaptation options for commercial navigation in the event of a drop in water levels
- Prevent the impact of wave action of ships and recreational boats on sensitive areas of the St. Lawrence
- Improve the management of wastewater discharges and cargo waste
- Reduce the risk of introducing exotic organisms for all types of ships
- Encourage the collaboration of riverside communities with emergency response specialists in case of dangerous goods spills

Canada $3.9M **Québec** $1.8M

Access to Riverbanks

- Support five municipal projects aimed at improving access to the St. Lawrence
- Repair marine infrastructure that provides access to the St. Lawrence

Canada $0.7M **Québec** $0.3M

TOTAL INVESTMENT* **Canada** $80.8M **Québec** $33.4M

*** (including administration and communications)

Canada Québec

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