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HABITATS

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A Word from the Director

by **Jean-Cinq Mars**, Regional Director, Canadian Wildlife Service



Photo : Léo-Guy de Repentigny

The protection of habitats in Quebec has always been one of the primary goals of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). Conservation of wetlands is essential for wildlife and plants, as well as for ourselves, since we share the same environment. The quality of such areas is a good indicator of just how far we can push development.

To date, the CWS has contributed to the protection of habitats by creating eight national wildlife reserves, mainly along the St Lawrence corridor. These areas comprise habitats that are critical, vulnerable and essential for migratory birds and wildlife in general. They offer not only a choice habitat for wildlife, but also, in some cases, natural green space much appreciated by the public.

Today, the notion of habitat protection has made great strides. Acquiring and managing land to preserve habitats for present and future generations can no longer be the sole responsibility of governments. In the United States and in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, the current trend is toward increasingly greater involvement by conservation groups, as well as the creation of new organizations, such as land trusts (of which there are more than 700 in the United States alone), all with the same common goal -- the protection of natural habitats.

In Quebec, it is essential that, in order to achieve the conservation objectives of the St Lawrence Action Plan, we take action to co-ordinate activities and co-operate with the various agencies involved. An effort toward harmonization is necessary in order to obtain concrete results.

With those ends in view, in December 1988 the CWS arranged a workshop on habitat protection. More than thirty organizations expressed a desire to become involved as partners in the management, enhancement and acquisition of land. Moreover, the organizations asked government agencies for measures that would allow them to become fully involved in habitat protection projects. In response to that request, the CWS created and implemented the Habitat Management and Acquisition Assistance Program specifically for environmental organizations.

The CWS also arranged workshops on the same issues for November 25 and 26, 1989 in order to keep the various groups and agencies abreast of habitat protection activities, trends and policies.

The HABITATS information bulletin is an essential communication tool which will promote information exchange and help form links between the various groups committed to the preservation of habitats.

By publishing articles relating their experiences in the habitat protection field, the CWS also offers non-government organizations and partners from the public and private sectors a chance to participate in the exchange.

All CWS initiatives have one ultimate goal -- to promote and support the active participation of environmental groups in co-operation with governments, corporations, industry and the general public in a spirit of partnership, so that we may preserve our natural heritage. ■

Habitat Management and Acquisition Assistance Program

On October 13, 1989, the Canadian Wildlife Service announced its new Habitat Management and Acquisition Assistance Program. This program, which comes under the St Lawrence Action Plan, provides environmental groups with an opportunity to become practically involved as full partners and to combine their efforts with those of government agencies, corporations, industry and the general public for the protection of habitats in Quebec.

The program, which has been allocated a budget of \$600,000 over four years, includes two components: assistance for habitat management and enhancement, and assistance for habitat acquisition.

Any non-profit organization with an interest in habitat protection operating in Quebec is eligible for the program.

The first closing date for project submissions will, as an exception, be December 1, 1989. As of 1990, closing dates will be March 1 and September 1. Each project will be evaluated by a committee set up for that purpose, and decisions will be announced twice a year.

For further information on the program and a copy of project submission guidelines, please contact the Canadian Wildlife Service office at the following address:

Habitat Management and Acquisition Assistance Program
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
1141 route de l'Église
PO Box 10 100, 9th Floor
Ste Foy, Quebec
G1V 4H5

North American Waterfowl Management Plan and Eastern Habitat Joint Venture

by Raymond Sarrazin, Canadian Wildlife Service



Black Ducks in Pointe-au-Père marsh
Photo: Léo-Guy de Repentigny

For decades, wetlands were considered of little use, good only for conversion to more productive ends. Thousands of hectares of Canadian marsh have been drained or filled for farming, road building and residential and industrial development. Now that we have a clearer understanding of the crucial function of wetlands in the hydrologic balance, as wildlife habitats and as recreation sites, their large-scale disappearance has become a matter of national concern.

There are conflicts of interest between the preservation of wetlands in their natural state and their conversion to other uses. Such conflicts are particularly marked in four of the main marsh regions of Southern Canada where population, agriculture and development are concentrated -- the Atlantic coastal region, the region between the Lower Great Lakes Basin and St Lawrence Estuary, the Prairie catchment region and the Pacific coastal region.

Wetlands, once abundant there, have become a scarce and precious resource. Since colonization began, some 65% of coastal and saltwater marshes in the Atlantic provinces, 70% of wetlands in the Lower Great Lakes-St Lawrence Basin, 71% of wetlands on the Prairies and 80% of Fraser River marshes have been converted, primarily to agriculture.

Over the past ten years, the crucial role and value of wetlands have been recognized nationally and internationally by both politicians and economists.

In 1986, the Canadian and US governments signed a pivotal document, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). This historic agreement now stands as an innovative example of international partnership in wildlife conservation. It has fostered an unprecedented level of co-operation between the Canadian, provincial and US governments and private organizations committed to conservation in the two countries.

The partners' first act was to set up joint ventures in which representatives of the public and private sectors participated. Six joint ventures are now in place in the United States (Atlantic Coast; California Central Valley; Gulf of Mexico Coast; Lower Great Lakes-St Lawrence Basin; Lower Mississippi Valley; and Prairie Pothole Region), while four have been implemented in Canada (Arctic Goose; Black Duck; Prairie Habitat; and Eastern Habitat).

The NAWMP's objective is to restore duck populations to their 1970 levels by the year 2000. The Plan is also concerned with breeding, resting and wintering areas in the two countries. For example, in Canada the NAWMP identifies 3.6 million acres in the Prairie provinces, 60,000 acres in the lowlands of the Great Lakes-St Lawrence Basin and 10,000 acres on the Atlantic coast requiring protection or improvement. Even though the NAWMP is geared to waterfowl, other species will benefit from its activities as well. Waterfowl habitats also host a variety of shorebirds, songbirds, mammals and other vertebrates. Moreover, wetlands generate

invertebrate and plant species which constitute an important food resource for wildlife.

As part of the NAWMP, the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture (EHJV) is aimed at conserving wetlands on a large scale and maintaining a good network of choice wetlands in the most productive regions. To attain these objectives, the federal government, along with Ontario, Quebec, the Atlantic provinces, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada and other conservation organizations, will rely on two types of approach:

- a direct program to protect, improve and restore some 600,000 acres of wetlands in those sectors designated in the NAWMP and other high-potential habitats;

- an indirect program to be applied on a far larger scale (some 3.8 million acres) by means of incentives for private owners, public education and administrative agreements aimed at integrated resource management and designation of wetlands as an integral part of sustainable development.

Fifty percent of the funding required for habitat acquisition, improvement and restoration projects is to come from Canadian sources and 50% from US sources.

The EHJV is already in place, with five projects currently in progress. The site for one of the first projects is Matchedash Bay (Lake Huron), in Ontario. By the time the project is completed in seven years, 5,400 acres of wetlands will have been acquired and developed at a cost of \$8.2 million.

In Quebec, the partners under the Five-Year Habitat Conservation Agreement* joined with the EHJV to acquire and develop a section of the Lac St Pierre floodplain, located between Baie du Febvre and Nicolet Sud. This large-scale project combines agricultural and wetland conservation interests,

and disbursements on the order of \$1.7 million are anticipated over the next four years.

Another EHJV project focusses on the Grand Lake marsh, along the St John River in New Brunswick. This year, 1,250 acres have already been acquired and developed, at a cost of \$340,000.

The acquisition of 1,200 acres of wetlands and designation of 650 acres have made it possible to create a significant «wildlife development unit» on Prince Edward Island. This autumn, Ducks Unlimited is to complete development work valued at \$100,000.

The purchase of 250 acres in Nova Scotia is the first step in an ambitious provincial saltmarsh protection and development program. To date, \$45,000 have been spent on acquisition and \$32,000 are earmarked for improvement.

The EHJV Advisory Council is now finalizing its first five-year operational plan. Even though the acquisition of endangered habitats is the EHJV's first priority, activities will also focus on integrated development programs for the territory on a larger scale.

*Quebec Wildlife Foundation; Quebec Department of Recreation, Fish and Game; Quebec Planning and Development Bureau; Ducks Unlimited Canada; Wildlife Habitat Canada; Canadian Wildlife Service.

St Lawrence Action Plan

by Isabelle Ringuet, Canadian Wildlife Service



Photo: Léo-Guy de Repentigny

The St Lawrence Action Plan, initiated in the autumn of 1988, consists of four components: protection, conservation, environmental technologies and restoration.

The protection component has two objectives: to reduce toxic input into the St Lawrence from the 50 largest industrial polluters designated in the Plan, and to identify the nature and quantity of toxic substances coming from the Great Lakes. The environmental technologies component focusses on the development and application of clean-up technologies and ecotoxicology expertise. Restoration measures are aimed at decontaminating federal harbour installations, as well as developing and applying expertise for the rehabilitation of St Lawrence wetlands.

The conservation component is geared to protecting endangered and vulnerable species and preserving habitats. Five thousand hectares of natural ecosystems and habitat for vulnerable or endangered species along the St Lawrence River are to be protected. Protection involves not only the acquisition of valuable areas, but also their management

and their development in a context of conservation. To protect endangered species, we must first identify them and subsequently develop and implement a specific survival plan for each one.

Once the Plan was set up, the Canadian Wildlife Service's (CWS) first concern was to consolidate some of the eight national wildlife reserves it manages in the St Lawrence system and to create an assistance program that would meet the needs of environmental groups while making it easier to attain Plan objectives. The innovative program was inaugurated in October 1989, and will no doubt prove very successful.

A survey of endangered birds in Quebec, prepared and published in co-operation with the Association québécoise des groupes d'ornithologues, enabled us to evaluate the birds' current status and rank them in order of priority to guide our activities in future years.

We are now in the process of implementing the harmonization mechanisms through a committee in charge of co-ordinating all measures taken. The 1990-1991 Work

Plan is soon to be prepared, and responsibilities will subsequently be shared between the partners.

The St Lawrence Action Plan primarily represents a challenge based on partnership. In Quebec, with the creation of foundations and actions by a number of dynamic agencies, the partnership has already been in place for some years. We are confident that the St Lawrence Action Plan will set an example that others will follow, and that its activities will extend into many regions and into both diverse and complementary fields. Our principal task in the months and years to come will be to build and maintain this partnership.

Habitats Protection and Development of Endangered Species

by Pierre Laporte, Canadian Wildlife Service

Habitat protection plays an important role in the preservation of endangered species. Concrete measures involve combining the endangered species and habitat protection programs with the conservation component of the St Lawrence Action Plan.

The mission of the St Lawrence Action Plan is to rehabilitate the environment of that majestic waterway. Environmental stress factors have affected a number of animal and plant species in the St Lawrence ecosystem more than others. The protection of those species, designated as endangered, is an important aspect of the conservation component, since conservation activities are designed to not only protect endangered species but also help them become re-established as an integral part of the ecosystem.

Our first step under the St Lawrence Action Plan was to prepare a listing of endangered birds, particularly those species found in the St Lawrence River corridor. The first survey, published in the summer of 1989 under the title *Les oiseaux menacés du Québec*, lists 22 endangered species in five categories, and enables us to orient our initiatives more effectively.

The categories **endangered** and **threatened** include species that have declined severely in numbers and thus require particular efforts to help populations become re-established at acceptable levels. The habitats of such species can be protected in two ways: by preserving the environment crucial to their survival and by encouraging development efforts aimed at increasing their numbers.

The Peregrine Falcon and Piping Plover are now covered by a national Rehabilitation Plan, since both have significant populations in the St Lawrence corridor. At present, a number of Peregrine Falcon release projects are in progress, and techniques to increase the piping Plover's productivity are being developed.

The survey also revealed that Loggerhead Shrike numbers in the St Lawrence corridor have decreased significantly. Our priority will therefore be to define adequate means by which we can help the population to become re-established.

The survey also made it possible to identify other species considered **vulnerable**; these are also best assisted by means of the protecting their habitat. Even though such species are often scarce, they are still well adapted to their particular niches and are as essential to the ecosystem balance as more abundant species.

Species that utilize a single type of habitat are particularly vulnerable to deterioration of their environments. For example, the Least Bittern, which lives in freshwater bulrush marshes, a habitat now dwindling in Quebec, is becoming increasingly scarce. The Horned Grebe nests only in the Magdalen Islands, in freshwater marshes near shallow expanses of saltwater. The St Lawrence corridor has few suitable habitats for these species. Habitat preservation is often the only means of protecting the populations of such «specialized» species.

The Yellow Rail and Sedge Wren are two other vulnerable species closely associated with wetlands. Their

biological requirements will have to be studied so that their habitats may be better characterized. The inclusion of these two species in a habitat protection plan will improve their chances of survival.

The next stages should provide a basis for action plans focussing on the most highly endangered species. An action plan for the Loggerhead Shrike is currently being prepared. The Roseate and Caspian Terns will be addressed by a different action plan. Action plans for other species are also to be prepared, depending on how endangered individual species are and the options available.

Studies will have to be conducted on vulnerable species with habitats that are closely associated with their presence and survival in order for their environments to be better characterized. The results of those studies would also be useful in establishing a habitat protection program and make it possible to determine conservation and protection priorities for the areas in question.

Thus, habitat protection is an important stage in helping an endangered species to survive. Through its conservation component, the St Lawrence Action Plan constitutes an effective tool for action aimed at re-establishing the delicate balance of the St Lawrence River for future generations.

Emergency Intervention Plan for St Lawrence Waterfowl

The Canadian Wildlife Service has just inaugurated six bird cleaning centres at the most critical areas along the St Lawrence River.

These centres will make it possible to recover, clean and care for birds contaminated and soiled by oil.

The initiative -- a first in Canada -- was made possible by the establishment of an impressive network of partners.

In addition to the administrative services provided by the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Quebec Department of Recreation, Fish and Game, the Canadian Parks Service and MacDonald College, the centres enjoy the support of some 30 organizations. Some, such as Ultramar Canada and the Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds, provided financial assistance for the creation of the network.

HABITATS is published and distributed free of charge by the Canadian Wildlife Service to facilitate exchanges of information between the various groups and individuals interested in habitat protection.

Those who wish to take part in this exchange and share their experiences in the various aspects of habitat protection may do so by writing articles and sending them to Francine Hone, at the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Texts and information contained in this bulletin may be reproduced provided that the author's name and the source, **HABITATS**, are mentioned.

The Canadian Wildlife Service is confident that this plan will help to radically reduce bird mortality rates during ecological accidents that have a major impact on wildlife.

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of Environment Canada.

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New publications

Les oiseaux menacés du Québec, a first survey.

On June 28, 1989, the Canadian Wildlife Service published the first survey of endangered birds in Quebec, focussing on species nesting along the St Lawrence corridor. The survey was conducted by the Association québécoise des groupes d'ornithologues (AQGO) as part of the St Lawrence Action Plan.

A copy of the survey may be obtained by writing to the Canadian Wildlife Service Office.

Protected Areas managed by Environment Canada

A series of pamphlets entitled *Protected Areas Managed by Environment Canada* has just been published jointly by the Canadian Parks Service and Canadian Wildlife Service.

They are intended to provide information about national parks and national wildlife reserves in Quebec.

The pamphlets may be obtained by writing to the Canadian Wildlife Service Office.



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