

IN TUNE

Réserve naturelle de l'Île-d'Orléans: A newly protected wetland

In recent months, the Société de conservation des milieux humides du Québec has signed several agreements with private landowners to protect and enhance wetlands on the north shore of the Île d'Orléans. This voluntary conservation project was carried out with financial help from the Community Interactions Program.

Haut-Saint-Laurent ZIP Committee — In the Upper St. Lawrence, the wetlands are in good hands

The Haut-Saint-Laurent ZIP Committee can count on support from a number of different partners in the community in implementing its ecological remedial action plans (ERAPs). The committee's partners contribute to the development of the region and to achieving the priorities laid out in the ERAPs.

Réserve naturelle de l'Île-d'Orléans: A newly protected wetland

The Société de conservation des milieux humides du Québec, which was founded in 1996, is a non-profit land trust whose mission is to protect and develop Quebec's wetlands for the benefit of current and future generations. The organization negotiates voluntary agreements with landowners to protect marshes, swamps and bogs and is involved in a number of conservation projects in Quebec. It recently signed several agreements to protect the extensive wetlands on Île d'Orléans, with financial support from the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Community Interactions Program.

Since 1999, the Société de conservation des milieux humides du Québec (SCMHQ) has been involved in protecting ten hectares of wetlands in the municipality of Saint Pierre de l'Île d'Orléans, located on the north shore of Île d'Orléans. These wetlands on the St. Lawrence floodplain are affected daily by the strong tides of the freshwater estuary.

The nature preserve includes an extensive treed swamp containing crack willow, northern red ash and American elm. According to



Photo : SCMHQ

Environment Canada's latest State of the Environment Report on the St. Lawrence River, published in 1996, the freshwater estuary contains barely 300 hectares of this kind of swamp

SUMMARY

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Photo : SCMHQ

Legend : Aerial view of the north shore of Île d'Orléans

habitat. Floodplain forests are disappearing quickly, mainly due to urban sprawl and incompatible human activities. The project to establish the Réserve naturelle de l'Île-d'Orléans, initiated by the SCMHQ in 1997, is an excellent example of the protection

of an endangered forest ecosystem in the freshwater estuary of the St. Lawrence.

The protected area also provides crucial breeding habitat for waterfowl and staging habitat for Snow Geese.



Photo : Canadian Wildlife Service
Snow Goose

These wetlands support a great diversity of plant and animal species, including several plants that are threatened or vulnerable.

The SCMHQ's activities include promoting awareness in waterfront communities of the value of wetlands and encouraging participation in protecting swamps and marshes along the St. Lawrence. "Landowners are well aware of the ecological value of wetlands on their property and they are very concerned about protecting them," explains Pierre Boutet, SCMHQ secretary.

The Île d'Orléans nature preserve conservation project was carried out in cooperation with waterfront property owners in the area. In addition, Hydro-Québec has recently signed an agreement to conserve and develop the wetlands on its land in this area, one of the first agreements of this type

that the Crown corporation has signed. The agreement allows the SCMHQ to make the land accessible for research and educational purposes. The nature preserve will therefore contribute substantially to making the St. Lawrence more accessible to local citizens, an issue which has been of great concern to local organizations and is one of the priorities of the Ecological Remedial Action Plan (ERAP) formulated by the Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches ZIP committee.

The Île d'Orléans nature preserve is the third natural site along the St. Lawrence to be protected due to the efforts of the SCMHQ, making a total of 130 hectares in the SCMHQ's network. This is an excellent example of community-based private land stewardship at work to conserve exceptional natural ecosystems that would otherwise be completely unprotected.

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Chronicle

ZIP Committees in
the Heat of the Action

Haut-Saint-Laurent ZIP Committee

In the Upper St. Lawrence, the wetlands are in good hands

ZIP committees can count on support from different partners in implementing their ecological remedial action plans (ERAPs), ranging from environmental groups to municipal governments, users' associations and industry. Some technical activities can be even handled entirely by community groups. In the Upper St. Lawrence region, for example, the ZIP committee is fortunate to have two dynamic partners involved in protecting and developing the increasingly rare wetlands along this section of the St. Lawrence.

The area administered by the Haut-Saint-Laurent ZIP committee, which extends from the Ontario border to the Mercier Bridge, has already been the object of two ERAPs: one for Lake St. Louis, launched in 1996, followed by another a year later for Lake St. François. A few months ago, the consultations leading up to the publication of the *Entre deux lacs* ERAP, scheduled for November 2000, were completed.

"Of the forty or so technical activities designated as priorities by local communities, close to half have been undertaken by local organizations," explains Claire Lachance, coordinator of the Haut-Saint-Laurent ZIP Committee. "Héritage Saint-Bernard and Les Amis de la Réserve nationale de faune du lac Saint-François, for example, are highly autonomous organizations, eager to advance their own goals and initiatives. Their support allows the ZIP committee to concentrate on areas that require closer follow-up."



Photo : Map room — Environnement Québec

Marguerite D'Youville wildlife refuge and Saint-Jean Creek

Over the years, the Grey Nuns have worked to preserve the natural character of Saint-Bernard Island and the Commune Marsh in Châteauguay, although such natural environments are becoming increasingly rare in the Montreal archipelago. Today, these two sites are undoubtedly among the richest and most productive ecosystems along the shores of Lake Saint-Louis.

This 223.5-hectares area is the largest intact floodplain and spawning grounds for fish on Lake Saint-Louis. A great diversity of plant communities are also found here and Lake Saint-Louis is the third largest autumn waterfowl staging area along the St. Lawrence, attracting thousands of ducks and geese annually.

A site whose value has been recognized repeatedly

To protect the site and maintain its ecological integrity, an agreement was signed in 1993 between the Grey Nuns, the municipality of Châteauguay and several conservation organizations represented by the Fondation de la faune du Québec. The following year, these partners reached an agreement with the Ministère de l'environnement et de la faune du Québec (Quebec Department of the Environment and Wildlife) to give the site official status as a wildlife refuge, thereby recognizing its significance. The refuge bears the name of the founder of the Grey Nuns, Marguerite D'Youville.

The value of the site has also been recognized in the Lake Saint-Louis ERAP, which emphasized the need to manage it for wildlife and develop a network of paths for hiking and nature interpretation.

The Saint-Jean Creek site, which borders the refuge and is roughly the same size, has also been targeted by the community as an important marsh requiring restoration to facilitate fish migration, since it is the largest multi-species spawning ground on the Lake Saint-Louis floodplain.

Héritage Saint-Bernard, a perfect partner

Founded in 1987, the Corporation Héritage Saint-Bernard appeared to be the perfect group to take on the technical activities required to develop the site. It was given the mandate to manage, protect and develop the Refuge Faunique Marguerite-D'Youville and Saint-Jean Creek.

In 1998 and 1999, the Corporation began the development of Saint-Bernard Island for recreation and education. A nature interpretation trail of nearly 3.7 km, a 170-m walkway through the marsh, a shelter for school

groups and an observation platform with an unrestricted view of Lake Saint-Louis and the Montreal skyline were constructed. At the same time, Ducks Unlimited installed dikes and water level control structures to create optimal conditions for breeding waterfowl and the spawning of various fish species.

"Development activities were designed to be compatible with wildlife and access to the island is strictly controlled," explains Luc L'Écuyer, head of Héritage Saint-Bernard. "To ensure that nesting is not disturbed, no activities are offered between May 1 and July 15. The rest of the year, visitors can enjoy the beauty of the site alone or in the company of a refuge naturalist. School groups also come here in autumn." When the site is closed to visitors, over 20 volunteers take turns looking after the site, thus discouraging poachers or other potential trespassers who are likely to disturb wildlife.

"The recognition given by the ERAP has been a great benefit, since an increasing number of financial support programs are taking account of the priorities established in these plans," L'Écuyer explains. Some of the activities initiated by Héritage Saint-Bernard have received financial support under the St. Lawrence Vision 2000 Community Interactions Program.

Although some work remains to be done on Saint-Bernard Island, the organization is now focussing its efforts on adjacent Saint-Jean Creek. Investments of roughly \$1.2 million have been slated for recreational and educational development on the 500-hectares site managed by

Héritage Saint-Bernard. One of the greatest challenges remaining for the group, however, is to obtain the funding required to maintain an office, an essential condition for co-ordinating the activities planned.

Lake Saint-François National Wildlife Area

Located in the municipality of Sainte Agnès de Dundee, the Lake Saint-François National Wildlife Area was established to preserve and develop these fragile wetlands in southwestern Quebec. With an area of 1350 ha, this NWA was established officially in 1978 and, in 1987, was recognized as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Most of the wildlife area consists of marshes, swamps, aquatic beds, and channels of open water, along with a few wooded islands, thus providing a wide variety of habitats. It offers shelter and food for over 230 species of birds, over half of which breed in the NWA every year. In the 1980s, Ducks Unlimited developed the marsh to improve breeding habitat for waterfowl. Mammals, amphibians, fish and reptiles also use the habitat.

Friends you can count on

The nonprofit corporation Les Amis de la Réserve nationale de faune du lac Saint-François (Friends of the Saint-François National Wildlife Area) was founded in 1992, as part of an initiative by the citizens of the Upper St. Lawrence region. The corporation's goal is to help the public benefit from the richness of these wetlands.



Photo : Luc L'Écuyer



Photo : Serge Bourdon

Since 1990, the Canadian Wildlife Service has built some infrastructures in the NWA required to serve visitors. However, the local community is responsible for infrastructure upkeep and interpretation activities. The Friends of Lake Saint-François oversee activities in the NWA, design educational programs and develop the facilities visitors need to access and discover the site, with the help of local and national partners.

office on the site and are able to provide monitoring, it will be easier to convince financial partners to support our projects.”

“In addition, when the regional community assumes responsibility for the development of the site, the natural environment takes on a special identity, that of the community. This is why each natural site has a special character and provides visitors with an unequalled and unique experience,” Bourdon concludes.

Web site:

Lake Saint-François National Wildlife Area http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/faune/html/rnf_lsf.html

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Photo : Serge Bourdon

The Friends' activities have made the site more accessible to visitors, corresponding to one of the priorities stated in the Lake Saint-François ERAP in 1997. Visitors now have access to roughly 15 km of trails and an accompanying brochure describing the fauna and flora on the site is available for interpretation. The biodiversity of the wetlands can be discovered at an even closer range from a freight canoe

(rabaska). An aquatic nature interpretation trail, which takes two to five hours to complete, was developed with funding from the Community Interactions program. And, of course, young people have not been left out, since school groups can take advantage of a special program designed for them.

Development with a regional flavour

“We can count on the neighbouring municipalities to provide financial support,” explains Serge Bourdon, coordinator of the Les Amis de la Réserve nationale de faune du lac Saint-François. “Elected officials have become aware of the value of this natural environment and are convinced of its recreational and educational potential. However, since the national wildlife area is the only natural environment accessible to the public in the entire region, it is crucial to encourage a sense of stewardship on a larger scale. Greater participation by the regional community will allow us to open an office and to increase recreational and educational activities. Once we have established a permanent

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News *in* BRIEF

The St. Lawrence Observatory

In 1996, the Ocean Sciences Division of the Maurice Lamontagne Institute (Fisheries and Oceans Canada) launched the St. Lawrence Observatory (SLO) project. The main goal of the project is to achieve economies of scale in the collection, dissemination and use of data on the St. Lawrence, by taking advantage of the many possibilities offered by the Internet. The SLO targets not only data producers and users, but all users of the St. Lawrence. The Web site (www.osl.gc.ca), which has been up and running for a few weeks now, can be compared to a virtual shopping centre in which interested "consumers" can find a variety of oceanographic and hydrographic data as well as scientific information and resources.

This project is the last in a series of nationwide initiatives that use the Internet to disseminate environmental data. In the implementation phase (1999-2001), the SLO will receive financial support from Economic Development Canada (EDC) and the navigation component of St. Lawrence Vision 2000, as well as logistical support from DFO's Laurentian Region. This partnership augurs well since several scientific partners have already given the SLO the mandate to develop and disseminate some of their products on the Web. Operationally, the St. Lawrence Observatory project is based on the partner-client concept, which should result in a fairly autonomous parapublic structure in the medium term. This new tool is intended for the entire community interested in scientific research on the marine St. Lawrence. Interest in this subject should grow along with the network of partners in the St. Lawrence Observatory.

LE FLEUVE

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