



WATER. OUR LIFE. OUR FUTURE.
QUÉBEC WATER POLICY



Highlights

Québec 

A Word from the Premier

A WATER POLICY ROOTED IN A VISION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Water in Québec is a source of life, culture, development, pleasure and good health. Indeed, the abundance, exceptional quality and accessibility of water in this province provide security not only for our quality of life, but for that of future generations. For this reason, we shall today unveil Québec's new approach to managing this invaluable resource, striving towards a global vision within a perspective of sustainable development.

I take great pride in presenting this innovative Policy that recognizes water as a natural resource belonging to Québec society as a whole. The policy is based on grassroots participation and the democratization of information. It also confirms the Québec government's determination to ensure a sound system of water governance that conforms to its character as part of the collective heritage of all Quebecers. This governance

demands the highest level of public participation, and we are calling upon all Québec citizens to contribute to water and ecosystem management. Indeed, the cornerstone of the Québec Water Policy is a strong commitment from all Quebecers to join together and build momentum for this important cause.

Renewable freshwater resources in our rivers alone account for 3% of the world's reserves – an impressive quantity particularly when compared with other countries. Our province is a natural tapestry of thousands of lakes and rivers. Among these is the majestic St. Lawrence, which has played a key role in our history and continues to be a source of prosperity and pride as one of the most important waterways in the world. There is no substitute for water, which makes it the most precious of Québec's abundant resources. It is also one of the most endangered.

In recent years, Quebecers, like citizens in other countries, have become increasingly aware of the vulnerability of this wealth that our current practices may threaten. Therefore, it became imperative that we undertake a process of in-depth reflection in an effort to develop a water policy that would guarantee the sustainability of this resource, as well as the protection of both public health and aquatic ecosystems, and greater harmony of all our interventions. These reflections have now been translated into the new Québec Water Policy.

Indeed, it is in a perspective of integrated management that I have delegated a Minister of State to oversee the coordination of water management. I wanted to ensure that the laws, regulations, policies, programs and other intervention mechanisms at the provincial or international levels likely to have an influence on water and aquatic ecosystems reflect a consistent strategy.

The integrated management will be made possible by means of close collaboration among the ministries and public agencies that have a joint responsibility for water management. This new approach will also call upon all water-management players at the different levels of intervention: local and regional, public and private

managers of this resource, major water users, social, economic, environmental and scientific sectors, and especially all Québec citizens. Over fifty government commitments will be implemented within the context of this Policy, in concert with all players.

Therefore, the Québec Water Policy establishes a broader context that complements and integrates the sector-based policies of rural and marine and river transport.

The new water governance that we intend to apply in the 21st century is based on two values cherished by Québécois - democracy and collaboration. Moreover, it takes into account major global trends in matters of water protection and enhancement, as well as a water management framework.

The commitment we are making today demonstrates Québec's determination to assume its responsibilities at home and throughout the world, with respect to provincial water management. Rooted in a vision of sustainable development, these commitments represent our pledge to protect and preserve this wealth that is a source of life for us and for future generations, whose fate is the responsibility of each and every one of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernard Landry', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bernard Landry

*A Word from the
Minister of State for
Municipal Affairs and
Greater Montréal, the
Environment and Water*

A NEW VISION OF
WATER GOVERNANCE



It is a great honour for me as Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Greater Montréal, the Environment and Water to present to Quebecers this first Québec Water Policy that introduces a new vision of water governance.

This Policy is part of a global effort to provide a better framework for water management. It meets the legitimate expectations of the population in terms of the way in which we must henceforth manage, protect, restore and develop this critical resource that is inextricably intertwined with our development and our future.

The Québec Water Policy contains recognition of the fundamental rights of Quebecers to enjoy full access to water to satisfy their essential needs. By means of this Policy, we are reaffirming that water is considered the collective heritage of Quebecers, and that it constitutes “a common good”, which means that in its natural state water cannot be subject to proprietary interests. The reaffirmation of this status of water, in a perspective of sustainable development, imposes an obligation on the government to act in the public interest to regulate water management in order to preserve this resource and its ecosystems, while reconciling the often-conflicting uses of water.

We also intend to protect the quality of water and aquatic ecosystems, in order to ensure their sustainability and better protection of public health. That is why we have adopted a global, integrated approach with a view to increasing the accountability of managers and users of water within a natural groundwater basin, or watershed. We also expect to apply an integrated management to the extensive St. Lawrence River system that overflows Québec borders in many places, a process requiring close collaboration among all the bordering States. We intend to grant this river special status in recognition of its remarkable natural environment, to take precedence over its important economic value.

The Québec Water Policy is the Québec government’s pledge to take several measures in order to attain these objectives. To this end, various commitments have been put forward related to water monitoring and treatment, notably in the agricultural, industrial and municipal sectors; access to more complete information on water and aquatic ecosystems; protection and restoration of aquatic ecosystems; strengthening Québec’s participation in cross-border and international organizations, notably those concerned with the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River; municipal infrastructures for which we are striving to ensure sustainability and improve water management services; and lastly, public access to numerous bodies of water and the development of recreation-based tourism – all of which will greatly contribute to improving the quality of life for Quebecers.

For the first time, Québec has a policy that integrates the different aspects of water management within the framework of a new form of governance based on the concerted efforts and accountability of all concerned parties. This global vision, which is a definite integral part of the sustainable development perspective, will enable us to better ensure the quality and preservation of water in Québec, as well as its many uses.

I should like to extend a special word of thanks to the personnel of the ministère de l'Environnement for the quality of the vision of which they never lost sight, throughout the drafting of this policy. I also wish to congratulate my fellow members and ministers who enthusiastically contributed to making this vision a reality in a spirit of cooperation. Lastly, I commend the efforts of all those individuals who on behalf of

environmental groups, citizen committees, sector-based, municipal or industrial associations provided input, either directly by playing a consultant role or indirectly by devoting their unflagging efforts to foster sustainable development. Indeed, this type of commitment represents, beyond any shadow of a doubt, one of our society's greatest sources of wealth.

I invite all of you now to rise collectively, so together we can meet this new challenge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'André Boisclair', with a stylized flourish at the end.

André Boisclair

THE ISSUES AND MAIN POLICY ORIENTATIONS

In June 2000, after the Commission sur la gestion de l'eau tabled its report, effected by the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement, the government adopted a general orientation paper for a future policy on water management. It set forth the government's guiding principle for water management, namely "a commitment to environment quality and sustainable renewable resources."

Extensive deliberations and consultations over the last two years have helped to define the target issues and orientations of the Québec Water Policy. The issues are:

- 1) recognition of water as a collective heritage of Quebecers;
- 2) protection of public health and aquatic ecosystems;
- 3) integrated management of water with a view to sustainable development.

RECOGNITION OF WATER AS A COLLECTIVE HERITAGE OF ALL QUEBECERS

The Québec government first wishes to reaffirm, through this Policy, its determination to recognize this resource as a valuable asset of Québec society and an integral part of its collective heritage. Water, both surface and groundwater, is recognized in the *Civil Code of Québec* as something whose use is common to all, subject to rights of use or limited appropriation rights, that may be recognized. This "common to all" status implies that all members of society have the right to access water and use it in a manner consistent with its nature, and that the government has a responsibility to regulate water use, establish priority uses and preserve its quality and quantity, while taking the public interest into account. Therefore, the government intends to create the necessary instruments so that they may give precedence, in the event of conflict, to the fundamental right of individuals to access this resource for their basic needs.

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

Water quality is first and foremost a matter of protecting public health. This applies both to human consumption and activities involving contact with water (swimming and water sports). The Québec government recently tightened its standards in this area by adopting the *Regulation respecting the quality of drinking water*, making drinking water in Québec among the safest in the world. As for groundwater, the government has adopted the *Regulation respecting groundwater catchment*. This regulation sets standards to ensure the best possible quality of raw water by requiring protection perimeters to be delimited around groundwater catchment works. Along with the implementation of this Policy, several complementary actions are planned to guarantee the quality of water, and consequently, enhance public health protection.

Furthermore, human, plant and animal life and social development are all inconceivable without the presence of quality water and healthy aquatic ecosystems. The St. Lawrence River, and our lakes, rivers, swamps, marshes and bogs are teeming with animal and plant biodiversity. These habitats also play an essential role as water purifiers.

When ecosystems break down and water quality deteriorates, the benefits for the population are reduced accordingly. This situation threatens the entire food chain, and consequently, the very survival of human populations.

Water has no substitute. That is why the Québec Water Policy has enunciated many commitments aimed at improving the quality of drinking water and sustaining aquatic ecosystems.



Source: Ministère de l'Environnement

Water reserves - Water is a rare and precious commodity. Rampant global economic development has turned it into a world-scale strategic resource.

INTEGRATED AND SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT

The various problems of water management in Québec, as in the rest of the world, are not only issues of protection, restoration and development of this resource. They are also questions of the ways things are done.

The road to integrated water management lies in consistent action at the different levels of intervention (government, local and regional) and the effective use of intervention tools. Thus, the Québec Water Policy will bring changes to sectoral ways of doing things through a genuine, integrated management using a watershed-based approach. A more global and sustainable approach to management appears necessary to prioritize actions or projects based on cumulative environmental impacts. To this end, within an integrated management approach, the government of Québec recently appointed a Minister of State for the Environment and Water, whose primary role is to ensure consistency among all government actions related to water and aquatic ecosystems, in collaboration with the ministers involved in water management.

The government of Québec intends to urge citizens to become much more involved in the management of this vital collective heritage. They will be called on to play a larger role in water management, particularly in the integrated management of watersheds and the St. Lawrence River, as members of organizations or through consultations and actions accomplished on their behalf.

Therefore, the Québec Water Policy ultimately revolves around the five following key orientations:

- Orientation 1: Water governance reform;**
- Orientation 2: Integrated management of the St. Lawrence River;**
- Orientation 3: Protection of water quality and aquatic ecosystems;**
- Orientation 4: Continued clean-up and improved management of water services;**
- Orientation 5: Promotion of water-related recreation activities.**

These orientations imply various courses of action, along with over fifty associated government commitments.

Orientation 1

WATER GOVERNANCE REFORM: A STRATEGIC CHOICE

Improved water governance will require a revision of the present system, more specifically through the development and enunciation of a shared, comprehensive vision of water resources. This would involve increased participation by the different users in both decision-making and actions. This evolving process must be organized around:

- local and regional leadership from the watershed-management players, and provincial leadership from the government of Québec;
- accountability of water-management players with respect to their own management of this resource and the impact of their decisions on all other users and concerned players within a long-term and ecosystem-based perspective;
- coordination of the activities and increased accountability of all water-management players to ensure consistent implementation of governance reform.

This orientation is based on five courses of action: the revision of the legal framework pertaining to water, the implementation of watershed-based management, the acquisition of knowledge and information about water, the introduction of economic instruments for governance, and the strengthening of Québec's partnerships and relations.

ACTION 1: Revision of the legal framework pertaining to water

To reform the governance of the different uses of water, the government of Québec must update and consolidate the existing legal framework (laws and regulations) pertaining to water.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 1- Effect an immediate revision of the legal framework with respect to water, and develop the legal instruments required to implement its Policy.

Source: Julie Moisan, Ministère de l'Environnement



Rivière Saint-Maurice - Since 1992, the Corporation de gestion du développement du bassin de la rivière Saint-Maurice has been making a concerted effort to develop recreotourism on the river, particularly after timber floating operations were discontinued in 1993.

Expected results:

- revise existing mechanisms so that water is more explicitly recognized as a collective heritage;
- revise the instruments governing water use;
- revise the legislative provisions governing municipal responsibilities in matters relating to the management of municipal watercourses;
- establish mechanisms for implementing the “user-pays” and “polluter-pays” principle, as well as various economic mechanisms (charges, taxes, permits, imposition of conditions, tax exemptions and deterrent measures) designed to support them;
- devise integrated watershed-based management tools;
- recognize, at the national and international levels, Québec’s jurisdictions and powers in the domain of water, and strengthen its participation in international agreements and its role within international bodies whose decisions are likely to have an impact on its territory.

ACTION 2: Implementation of watershed-based management

Watershed-based management constitutes a major course of action in this Water Policy. This management style is primarily characterized by a territorial approach, which defines the watershed as the territorial unit of intervention for water management. It also strives to take a comprehensive view of natural phenomena and the impact of human activities on the watershed, in order to better understand and explain problems related to the quantity and quality of the water, and to develop more effective policies, programs, and projects of various kinds. Finally, watershed-based management is based on the concerted efforts of all the water-management players involved (municipalities or RCMs, citizens, developers and interest groups, ministries and government organizations), and it aims to facilitate better integration of the multiple interests, uses, concerns, and action mechanisms of the community.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 2- Gradually introduce integrated watershed-based management.
- 3- Provide financial and technical support for the establishment of 33 watershed agencies.

Expected results:

- cooperation among all the water-management players based on the principle of sustainable development;
- systematic protection of water bodies, wetlands and ecosystems with an ecological value from the standpoint of water;
- an integrated framework for the implementation of watershed-based activities;
- possibility for the population to be more actively involved in the future of water bodies;
- more effective, innovative measures for watercourse management and the organization of new partnerships;
- improved health of watercourses, lakes and associated ecosystems;
- maintenance or restoration of lost uses such as swimming, fishing and other recreotourism activities.

ACTION 3: Acquisition of knowledge and information about water

Québec is blessed with a wealth and diversity of data, information, knowledge and expertise relating directly or indirectly to water and aquatic ecosystems. These are produced and compiled by various governmental and non-governmental agencies. However, such dispersion of data does not facilitate ready access or use. Information must therefore be centralized and made available so that it can be distributed to all water-management players. This is essential for the integrated management of watersheds and the St. Lawrence River basin. To this end,

the Ministère de l'Environnement intends to gather the information on water required to supplement the existing body of expertise. Furthermore, there is a need for more information in the area of underground water resources. There is also an increasing need for information about lakes. In addition, citizens and the various water-management players and water users must increase their awareness and knowledge so they may make wiser uses of our water and aquatic ecosystems.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 4- Gather and develop the information on water resources and aquatic ecosystems required for purposes of water governance.
- 5- Conduct an inventory of Québec's major groundwater resources (aquifers).
- 6- Broaden and enrich our knowledge of Québec's major watersheds, and provide support for the updating of relevant information on an ongoing basis.
- 7- Provide technical and financial support to riparian property owner associations on recreational lakes.
- 8- Develop and implement awareness-raising and educational programs directed at the various water-management players.

Expected results:

- more consistent action among all the water-management players in the various areas of water governance and at the different levels of intervention: local, regional, provincial, federal and international;
- improved knowledge of the quantity and quality of our groundwater resources;

- establishment, description and quantification of the pressures exerted by industrial, agricultural, municipal and forestry activities on water resources and aquatic ecosystems of the major watersheds;
- participation in the determination of environmental targets for residues;
- diagnoses of lake conditions for citizens wishing to take action to protect and restore them;
- promotion of local and regional initiatives in the areas of awareness-raising and education, and encouragement of users to collectively assume greater responsibility for water governance.

ACTION 4: Introduction of economic instruments for governance

One of the guiding principles of the Policy states that users must be accountable for the utilization and deterioration of water by means of a user-pays and polluter-pays approach. The application of this principle supports the development of economic tools such as user charges for water. This is an economic stipulation that users must finance the social costs of their activities (including environmental costs), the main goal of which is to reduce activities harmful to the resource. In particular, the aim is to make water users accountable for the value of this resource and for the costs associated with protecting, restoring, and developing it. In the context of sustainable development, the user/polluter-pays principle mediates between economic imperatives and the perception of water as a life source for human, wildlife and plant communities.

A system of charges will be gradually phased in over the sectors that are subject to it. In the start-up phase, the Québec government plans to target economic sectors that use and benefit from high-quality water in their production processes.

The government recognizes that the vast majority of citizens already pay for access to drinking water and wastewater treatment through municipal taxes. This financial effort on their behalf excludes them from the system of charges.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 9- Develop and gradually implement, beginning in 2003, a system of charges for the use (withdrawal and disposal) of Québec's water resources.

Expected results:

- more efficient water-utilization management, by bringing to light the true costs of the various uses of water;
- application of the user-pays and polluter-pays principle.

ACTION 5: Strengthening of Québec's partnerships and relationships

Administrative boundaries and geo-political constraints have a major impact on the future of water resources in Québec. A concerted effort by all water-management players is essential if we are to achieve a more effective management.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 10- Ensure the participation of Aboriginal nations and communities in water management, within the framework of the agreements signed and those to be signed with the government of Québec.
- 11- Strengthen Québec's participation in international organizations concerned with the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin.
- 12- Strengthen, in all areas pertaining to water, the participation and representation of the Québec government, in order to promote its interests and share its expertise in international agreements, organizations, and forums.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

(continued)

- 13- Step up Québec's efforts on the international scene by supporting and facilitating the export of its public and private expertise in the areas of water resources technology, management, and protection.

Expected results:

- enable Aboriginal communities to take charge of their own development and thereby achieve greater autonomy;
- eliminate overlap between federal and Québec interventions;
- ensure that the cumulative impact of water withdrawals and diversions from the St. Lawrence River are accounted for, and ensure maintenance of the flow levels required for the health of the aquatic ecosystems and of the socio-economic activities;
- become more actively involved in setting up water-management tools for the protection, conservation, restoration, research and development of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin;
- ensure that the International Joint Commission takes into consideration the priorities and interests of Quebecers in connection with the St. Lawrence River;
- promote Québec's interests and vision with regard to water governance;
- incorporate and benefit from the knowledge, expertise, and exchanges of ideas and solutions endorsed by multilateral forums and international decision-making organizations, while offering the international community the benefit of its experience in water management.

Orientation 2

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER: A MAJOR CHALLENGE

The condition of the St. Lawrence River reached a critical threshold in the early 1970s. Since then, clean-up efforts under the Programme d'assainissement des eaux du Québec, Programme d'assainissement des eaux usées municipales, Programme Eaux Vives, and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, as well as interventions from the industrial sector, have significantly improved the water quality of the St. Lawrence River. However, a great deal of work remains to be done.

Recognizing the necessity of protecting and restoring the St. Lawrence, the governments of Québec and Canada joined forces in 1989 to develop and implement the St. Lawrence Action Plan. Implementation of the first three phases produced tangible results in terms of environmental protection, industrial and urban clean-up, commercial navigation, human health and community involvement. The St. Lawrence now has 14 Zones of Primary Intervention (ZIPs) where local committees work on

implementing Ecological Remedial Action Plans. Riverside communities play a major role in this endeavor.

The various plans for development and management of the St. Lawrence River over the past 30 years and the public consultations conducted by the BAPE on water management in Québec, have given rise to the following two courses of action designed to protect, restore and develop the St. Lawrence: granting the St. Lawrence special status and implementing integrated management of the St. Lawrence.

ACTION 1: Grant the St. Lawrence special status

The St. Lawrence River comprises the river, estuary, and maritime segments between the Ontario border and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, inclusively. Québec intends to grant the St. Lawrence a status that reflects its irreplaceable heritage value and importance for Québec.



Source: P.G. Adam/Publiphoto

Tadoussac - The government of Québec recognizes the importance of the St. Lawrence River for its historic, economic, social, cultural and heritage attributes, aside from the wealth of its natural environments.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 14- Translate, through official recognition, its vision of the St. Lawrence River as a national heritage to be protected, developed, and valued.

Expected results:

- grant the St. Lawrence a status that reflects its intrinsic value for Quebecers on a historical, economic, social, cultural and heritage level, and showcase its natural richness;
- affirm Québec's jurisdiction over the management of this remarkable territory;
- express a vision of the St. Lawrence for its protection, restoration and development which we intend to pursue in the years ahead, on a sustainable development basis.

ACTION 2: Integrated management of the St. Lawrence River

It would appear essential to apply the principle of enlightened, forward-looking, concerted, and integrated governance to the entire main watercourse of the St. Lawrence, as well as its coastal zones, riverbanks, wetlands, tributary mouths, islands, archipelagos, and fluvial lakes. Such governance will require all the communities to play a major role in decision-making and implementing the various actions concerning the St. Lawrence.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 15- Implement integrated management of the St. Lawrence River.
- 16- Sign a new agreement concerning the St. Lawrence and its federal partners, in order to ensure its implementation.

Expected results:

- collaboration of all players to ensure a more integrated governance of the entire main watercourse of the St. Lawrence, from the Ontario border to the Gulf, inclusively;
- development and implementation of a five-year integrated St. Lawrence management plan;
- minimization of the negative impact of harmful human activities on the St. Lawrence and its ecosystems;
- maintenance, restoration and development of utilizations such as drinking water sources, commercial navigation, recreotourism activities, swimming and commercial fishing;
- commitment to integrated management of the St. Lawrence in any negotiations with the federal government pertaining to the Canada-Québec St. Lawrence Vision 2000 agreement and to the St. Lawrence River.

Orientation 3

PROTECTION OF WATER QUALITY AND AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS: A NECESSITY

Like air, water is vital to life, well-being, and health. It is therefore of the utmost importance to control its quality to protect the health of both the public and ecosystems. Of all its uses, drinking water has the greatest direct impact on people. Steps must be taken to ensure quality drinking water and protect aquatic ecosystems. These two aspects constitute the two courses of action associated with the third orientation of the Québec Water Policy.

ACTION 1: Ensuring safe, quality drinking water

Water-related health issues begin with the drinking water supply, which must be of the highest quality in order to

protect public health. The water supply is one of the basic services a municipality provides for its residents.

A regulatory approach is essential to protect public health in the area of drinking water. There are regulations in force to control the quality of drinking water and the practice of groundwater tapping, but complementary measures are required. Unlike groundwater, no specific measure currently protects surface sources of drinking water. We must therefore take measures to protect surface water collection sources used to supply drinking water.

To ensure the sustainability of water services, drinking-water purification systems have to be modernized. It is essential to upgrade these plants to the standards and requirements of the *Regulation respecting the quality of drinking water*.



Source: Claire Michaud, Ministère de l'Environnement

Water chestnut - In Montérégie, the MENV, the Société de la faune et des parcs (FAPAQ), Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Haut-Richelieu RCM and the Centre d'interprétation du milieu écologique du Haut-Richelieu are pooling their efforts in the battle against invasive water chestnut weeds in the rivière du Sud.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 17- Provide financial assistance for bringing all drinking water supply and treatment facilities up to standard over the next five years.
- 18- By 2004, develop a strategy for protecting surface water collection sources.
- 19- Increase and improve the ability of regional public health branches to intervene, investigate, and assess risks or impacts when standards are exceeded, water quality changes, or waterborne illnesses break out.

Expected results:

- upgrade municipal drinking water supplies and treatment facilities to meet required standards;
- reduce the risks of contamination of surface waters used as drinking water supply sources;
- enhance the government's ability to protect public health and prevent water borne public health problems.

ACTION 2: Protecting aquatic ecosystems

Aquatic and riparian ecosystems and wetlands such as marshes, swamps and bogs are known for their ecological abundance, biodiversity, and even their purification function. They are also suited to multiple forms of economic development, acting as settings for recreotourism activities such as fishing, hunting, trapping, fish farming, bird watching, water sports and peat harvesting. Yet human activities often have a negative impact on these environments. Certain forest management practices, the erection of structures designed to protect riverbanks and shorelines from erosion, encroachment and dredging to improve agricultural or urban drainage, are activities that put aquatic ecosystems under considerable pressure. Withdrawal and diversion projects can also have a substantially altering impact on aquatic ecosystems. In addition, such projects can intensify competition among users and engender conflicts among different interest groups.

To ensure the sustainable, multiple utilization of watercourses and the continuing health of aquatic ecosystems, the environment's support capacity must be respected. Moreover, actions must be taken to better protect and restore the banks and shores of lakes and watercourses, their floodplains and wetland environments. The government of Québec intends to take measures to control water withdrawals and watercourse diversions, establish networks of protected areas and protect certain gems of natural, cultural, and recreational heritage associated with watercourses.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 20- Step up knowledge acquisition and development activities that support the protection and restoration of wildlife habitats in aquatic, riparian, and wetland environments.
- 21- By 2004, develop and implement an action plan for the protection, restoration, and development of the banks and littoral zones of lakes and watercourses, their floodplains, and wetlands.
- 22- Extend the policy on ecological reserved flows for the protection of fish and their habitats to apply to other aquatic ecosystem features.
- 23- By 2005, set criteria for allocating water withdrawal and watercourse diversions.
- 24- Create a network of "aquatic reserves" in Québec by 2005.
- 25- By 2005, revise forest management practices with a view to reducing their impact on aquatic, riparian, and wetland environments.

Expected results:

- increased scientific knowledge on wildlife environments that have been, or are likely to be, degraded;
- support for initiatives aimed at acquiring, protecting, restoring and maintaining the biodiversity of wildlife habitats associated with aquatic, riparian, and wetland environments;
- evaluation of the efficacy of the legal and regulatory framework for protecting wetlands and riparian environments;
- improved consideration of all the features of aquatic ecosystems through determination of reserved flows with respect to support capacity;
- better management of water withdrawals and watershed diversions;
- preservation of watercourses, lakes and salt or brackish water ecosystems in order to enhance their natural, heritage, cultural, scenic, and recreational characteristics, or sections thereof that are deemed exceptional;
- contribution of forestry activities to the achievement of objectives for the quality of water and aquatic ecosystems by means of a watershed-based management approach;
- harmonization of management standards for public and private forests concerning protection and conservation of aquatic and littoral environments.

Orientation 4

CONTINUED CLEAN-UP AND IMPROVED MANAGEMENT OF WATER SERVICES: RECOVERING LOST USES

When the Programme d'assainissement des eaux du Québec (PAEQ) was introduced in 1978, it marked the start of efforts to give healthy watercourses back to Quebecers. Despite subsequent improvements, much remains to be done before we reach quality levels enabling full use of our water resources.

Several ministries currently share responsibility for the government programs relating to water clean-up. These programs are directed at concerned sectors throughout Québec (agricultural, industrial and municipal). To clean up the St. Lawrence River, the federal and Ontario governments and the American states concerned must also be involved.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

26- Introduce a strategy for cleaning up watercourses at the watershed level.

Expected result:

- optimization and coordination of all government clean-up efforts with a view to achieving the common objectives of quality water and the protection of aquatic ecosystems, by means of a watershed-based management.

The government of Québec has determined four courses of action as the means for fulfilling this commitment, namely: intensifying agricultural clean-up efforts, broadening industrial clean-up efforts, supplementing municipal clean-up efforts, ensuring the sustainability of municipal infrastructures and improving their water services management.



Source: Ministère de l'Environnement

Drinking water treatment facilities - Continuing to clean up water and improve water services management is one of the main orientations of the Québec Water Policy.

ACTION 1: Intensifying agricultural clean-up efforts

As in many other countries, agricultural clean-up is required to recover lost uses of water. An agricultural strategy of sustainable development is needed to reestablish and maintain a balance between development of an economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural sector and a high-quality rural environment for current and future generations to enjoy. This agricultural strategy will be based on the coordination of actions to address agro-environmental issues, namely: soil support capacity, a government investment plan, the establishment of wooded riparian corridors in agricultural areas, ecoconditionality, the management of pesticides and a sustainable development strategy for freshwater fish farming.

The *Regulation respecting agricultural operations*, adopted June 13, 2002, will enable the management and control of animal waste spreading that creates phosphorus surpluses, in order to achieve a balance between plant fertilization and environmental risk. A moratorium on the establishment of any new pig-farming operations aims to restrict the environmental impact of this industry. By making decisions that weigh production needs against environmental protection, the government is responding to the citizens' demands for a healthier, safer environment.

These measures alone will not be sufficient. That is why the government of Québec has made further commitments to intensify agricultural clean-up efforts.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 27- Achieve, balanced phosphorus levels in soil, by 2010.
- 28- Follow up on and implement the decisions made by the Forum on agriculture and agri-food: “Un environnement à valoriser”.
- 29- Support the establishment of wooded riparian corridors on agricultural land to link natural settings.
- 30- Introduce ecoconditionality within a range of financial assistance programs in the agricultural sector.
- 31- Reduce the environmental impact of pesticides in agricultural areas by 2010.
- 32- Provide technical and financial support to existing fish-farming operations.

Expected results:

- better control of point and non-point sources of agricultural pollution, and improvement in the quality of water and aquatic ecosystems;
- establishment, maintenance and conservation of wooded riparian corridors in agricultural environments;
- increased global effectiveness of environmental measures addressing the agricultural sector, specifically pork production, through the introduction of ecoconditionality;
- reduction of environmental and human health hazards linked to pesticides;
- reduction in waste discharges into the environment by freshwater fish-farming operations.

ACTION 2: Broadening industrial clean-up efforts

Efforts undertaken since 1978 under wastewater treatment programs, the Canada–Québec program, and tighter regulatory provisions, to eliminate industrial wastes have yielded encouraging yet insufficient results. However, pulp and paper plants have achieved substantial waste reductions in compliance with regulatory requirements. In conventional pollutants, for example, wastes were reduced by 90% for organic materials and 47% for suspended particulates. Discharges of halogenated organic compounds fell by 46%, while dioxins and chlorinated furans were reduced by 91%. We must now follow up on these actions with clean-up efforts throughout the entire industrial sector.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 33- Broaden the application of the Industrial Waste Reduction Program (IWRP).
- 34- Establish an accountability mechanism for industries not subject to the IWRP.
- 35- Continue efforts to restore mine tailing sites.

Expected results:

- adoption of practices aiming for greater environmental efficiency in all major industrial sectors: pulp and paper, mineral industries, metallurgy industries, organic and inorganic chemical industries, metal finishing and metallurgical applications, and the agri-food, wood processing and textile industries;
- actions to address problematic industrial wastes not yet targeted by an IWRP order-in-council, or which will not be targeted;
- improved control of acid drainage from mining, and continued efforts to restore mining sites that have reverted to the Crown.

ACTION 3: Supplementing municipal clean-up efforts

Between 1978 and 2002, the government of Québec and municipalities invested a total of over \$7 billion in municipal wastewater treatment systems. These investments enabled 98% of the population served by sewer systems to acquire the infrastructures needed for wastewater treatment. Prior to 1978, only 2% were equipped with adequate infrastructures. These investments also contributed to a significant improvement in the water quality of our watercourses and lakes. However, not all the problems have been solved, and action is still required to supplement the urban wastewater treatment system. Issues remaining to be addressed include: overflows from municipal sewer systems during rainstorms; residual contamination in the effluents from municipal treatment plants; untreated wastewaters dumped directly into rivers by small municipalities; and untreated residential wastewater resulting from lack of access to municipal infrastructures and the use of inadequate, outdated septic tanks.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 36- Urge and assist municipalities to reduce by 20% the frequency of overflows in combined sewer systems during rainstorms, by 2007.
- 37- Eliminate wastewater discharges in periods of dry weather, by 2007.
- 38- Supplement wastewater treatment programs in over 50 small municipalities so as to eliminate direct discharges of wastewaters into watercourses, by 2007.
- 39- Disinfect wastewaters from treatment plants, where justified by the “protection of uses” principle.

The government of Québec undertakes to:
(continued)

- 40- Reduce the toxicity of effluents by 2005, through the development and implementation of an action plan.
- 41- Establish a strategy to govern urban discharges in Québec.
- 42- Assist municipalities in enforcing isolated dwellings to comply with wastewater treatment standards.

Expected results:

- reduction in the frequency of overflows of wastewaters into the environment for improved protection of watercourses, especially for swimming and other recreational uses;
- resolution, on a priority basis, of problems of public health and environmental contamination in over 50 small municipalities where wastewaters are directly discharged into watercourses;
- disinfection of wastewaters from treatment plants, as required, to protect drinking water intakes and bodies of water and watercourses used by the public for recreational activities;
- reduction of the toxicity of effluents from wastewater treatment plants in order to reduce the impact of toxic substances on water, the food chain, and, consequently, human beings.

ACTION 4: Ensuring the sustainability of municipal infrastructures while improving the management of water services

In Québec, water services management is a public function. All Quebecers have a right to be served by adequate infrastructures for the provision, treatment, distribution and purification of water. It is therefore essential that these infrastructures remain in the public domain, along with the management of water services.

Québec municipalities have equipped themselves with water and sewer infrastructure systems in order to meet the demands of urbanization. From the mid-1940s to the 1990s, 80% of infrastructure budget allocations went into new infrastructure construction, with only 20% going to rehabilitation. Today, certain infrastructures have reached the end of their useful lives and need to be replaced, due to materials and soil conditions that have accelerated the aging process.

The sustainability of infrastructures for drinking-water purification and for wastewater treatment also depends on improving practices in this area, mainly with regard to knowledge of costs, the use of new technologies, and lower water consumption.

Municipalities will need to develop and implement intervention plans to ensure sustainability. Such intervention plans would include actions to optimize the management of water services in order to maintain and improve the quality of services offered. In addition, intervention plans would enable municipalities to prioritize the annual work required in terms of an infrastructure renewal percentage, and to allocate sufficient financial resources for infrastructures. The government of Québec intends to provide ongoing financial assistance to municipalities so they may carry out their responsibilities for water services. However, between now and 2007, the government plans to phase in a requirement for submission of an intervention plan before considering municipal applications for financial assistance under infrastructure programs.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 43- Urge all municipalities to achieve an infrastructure renewal rate of 0.8% per annum by 2007, and a rate of 1% per annum by 2012.
- 44- Ensure compliance with quality standards in the construction, rehabilitation, and replacement of existing infrastructures.
- 45- Achieve a 25% rate of infrastructure rehabilitation over replacement, beginning in 2005.
- 46- Develop, in 2003, a mechanism for determining the cost of water services.
- 47- Develop appropriate tools to measure water services management performance.
- 48- Increase Québec's expertise in water services by promoting the use of new technologies and best practices.
- 49- Develop a Québec strategy for drinking water conservation, making the allocation of any financial assistance to municipalities contingent upon their adoption of measures to conserve water and reduce leakage.
- 50- Institute a water conservation program in government buildings.
- 51- Establish a framework for the delegation of management functions to the private sector by promoting the use of standard form contracts for management and monitoring.

Expected results:

- rebuilt and rehabilitated infrastructure systems in line with upgrading goals;
- sustainability of municipal aqueducts and sewage drains;
- high-quality restored and newly constructed works;
- increased knowledge of water service production costs for municipalities;
- improved performance of water services provided by municipalities;
- public access to relevant information on the performance of municipal water services;
- utilization of the best available technologies and practices in the management of municipal infrastructures;
- introduction of measures to reduce water consumption and increase user awareness of the value of water;
- evaluation of actual water consumption in government buildings;
- assistance to municipalities in the drafting and monitoring of contracts awarded to private companies for the operation of drinking water purification facilities and wastewater treatment plants.

Orientation 5

PROMOTION OF WATER-RELATED RECREOTOURISM ACTIVITIES: THE PLEASURES OF WATER

Water represents a major asset for the Québec economy, especially in recreation, where it accounts for a very high percentage of Québec's tourism income. For example, excursion cruises, pleasure boating and yachting, fishing, adventure tourism, interpretation, and resorts generate over \$2 billion in revenue per year. The promotion of recreotourism activities therefore constitutes the fifth orientation of the Québec Policy on Water. This orientation implies three courses of action: expanding access to water bodies and promoting the development of sportfishing in Québec, fostering water safety and the quality of life on lakes and watercourses, and promoting water-based recreational tourism.

ACTION 1: Expanding access to water and promoting sportfishing

The quality of water in Québec lakes and watercourses has improved along with investments in wastewater treatment. This improvement in water quality, combined with the growing popularity of outdoor activities, is reviving the recreational use of lakes, rivers, and the St. Lawrence River. However, the resurgence in the use of

watercourses and bodies of water is hampered by a lack of public access. In fact, waterfront privatization and resort development has resulted in a decline in the number of areas open to the public.

It should also be pointed out that municipalities have the power to pass zoning by-laws in order to develop and reserve public access points to water. They can also resort to expropriation. Thus, land can be set aside to create areas for public benefit (such as beaches and parks) and ecological observation sites.

Until recently, nearly one million Quebecers engaged in sportfishing. Although a major source of economic spin-offs in many Québec regions, this sport has nonetheless fallen into decline and the number of sportfishermen has dwindled. This is worrisome because of the economic stakes involved, both for the government and for the industries associated with this sport.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 52- Develop an assistance program for municipalities and community organizations in order to create a network of public access points to the St. Lawrence River and other bodies of water and watercourses in Québec.
- 53- Formulate a strategy for developing sportfishing in Québec.



Source: P.G. Adam / Publiphoto

Parc national du Mont-Tremblant - Québec's territory encompasses thousands of widespread lakes and watercourses that are accessible to Quebecers year-round. Shown here is parc national du Mont-Tremblant.

Expected results:

- development and redevelopment of public access points to bodies of water and watercourses in Québec, with improvements so that people may enjoy more recreational activities related to aquatic and riparian environments;
- development of sportfishing activities intended to draw, most notably, cultural communities and young families.

ACTION 2: Promoting water safety and the quality of life on lakes and watercourses

In April 1999, the *Comité de consultation sur la sécurité nautique et la qualité de vie sur les lacs et cours d'eau du Québec* presented its final report containing a number of recommendations for the public safety of citizens practicing activities on bodies of water and watercourses. Several recommendations were proposed, including the recommendation for municipalities to set speed limits on lakes and watercourses located in their territory, and the recommendation to open the way for negotiations with Québec manufacturers of pleasure craft and two-stroke motorboats to produce safer, less-polluting products.

In Québec, the federal government regulates navigation under the Canada Shipping Act and various related regulations, in particular one that sets restrictions on boating. Québec is limited in any actions it may wish to undertake in this area, particularly for matters of public health and safety.

To ensure public safety and to protect the quality of life of citizens in the vicinity of lakes and watercourses, the government has made certain commitments within the limits of its fields of jurisdiction.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 54- Apply the recommendations of the Comité sur la sécurité nautique et la qualité de vie sur les lacs et les cours d'eau du Québec.

Expected results:

- improved water safety on lakes and watercourses;
- improved quality of life in the vicinity of Québec lakes and watercourses;
- improved water quality and aquatic ecosystems.

ACTION 3: Promoting nautical tourism

In its 1998 policy on tourism development and its 2001-2002 action plan, Tourisme Québec sets forth a growth strategy advocating certain courses of action, including nautical tourism. The development of boat trails is one of the objectives set forth in the action strategies of the Politique de transport maritime et fluvial.

In the past few years, outdoor ecotourism activities have seen tremendous development across North America and in Québec. New linear concepts such as the Route verte and the National Trail have been set up, and demand for this type of activity is increasingly on the rise. One such activity, currently underdeveloped in Québec, is the boat trail. At present there are over 30 water or maritime (saltwater) trails in the United States and several Canadian provinces. A boat trail is a network of access points, rest areas, food and lodging services and wilderness campsites. A navigable route, it is specifically designed for small craft (with shallow draught) such as ocean kayaks, certain sailboats, small motorboats and rowboats. The St. Lawrence and Saguenay rivers boast a variety of breathtaking scenic shorelines, along with diverse habitats and ecosystems well-suited to this emerging tourism trend.

Furthermore, the international cruise industry offers excellent opportunities for Québec.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 55- Support the development of boat trails in Québec, in association with the Fédération québécoise du canot et du kayak and regional tourism associations.
- 56- Draw up a sustainable development plan for nautical tourism in the area of international cruises, by 2005.

Expected results:

- access to and development of the St. Lawrence River and its islands through responsible nautical ecotourism and the establishment of boat trails;
- development of awareness and motivation among users and the general public in order to protect ecosystems associated with the St. Lawrence and certain tributaries;
- establishment of development strategies for recreation opportunities on the St. Lawrence River, particularly in the area of international cruises.

Implementation

Representing the people as steward and manager of water and aquatic ecosystems, the Québec government has a responsibility to chart the course required to improve water governance, both for its own actions and those of its citizens and partners. A follow-up report on these commitments will be issued after the adoption of the Policy, and an evaluation report is scheduled for publication in five years' time.

The government of Québec undertakes to:

- 57- Develop Policy follow-up indicators, and publish a progress report every five years.

The task of government coordination will be entrusted to the Minister of State for the Environment and Water. The Minister will oversee the implementation of the Québec Water Policy. He will also be responsible for ensuring the consistency of all water-related government actions, throughout the course of policy development, program application, government committee participation, and international events likely to impact water and aquatic ecosystems. Furthermore, he will be responsible for implementing management for watershed areas and the St. Lawrence River. He will coordinate the development of the legal, economic, and administrative tools used to translate the Policy into practice, in accordance with the responsibilities and jurisdictions of Québec for water management.

The Minister will be assisted in this task by the ministers concerned with water management, according to their respective fields of expertise and the laws and regulations under their responsibility. The task of coordinating government actions will be assumed by the *Table interministérielle sur la Politique nationale de l'eau*.

Moreover, the Minister will extend citizens, regional and local decision-makers and all other partners a major role in the implementation of this Policy, particularly in the area of watershed-based management.

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