

Backgrounder

Plan for Sea Activities in the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park (2011-2017)

The Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park region is considered one of the best places in the world for whale watching. It is home to a large marine observation fleet. Merchant shipping, recreational boaters and ferry boats, particularly those travelling between Baie-Sainte-Catherine and Tadoussac, are also significant users of the marine park created in 1998 by the governments of Quebec and Canada.

In order to ensure that activities comply with sustainable use principles, Parks Canada and Parcs Québec, which co-manage the marine park, developed, with local partners, a plan for sea activities. The plan was the subject of a wide-ranging session of consultations and received strong support. The members of the Eco-Whale Alliance, the Advisory Committee for observation activities at sea, the Coordinating Committee and the Harmonization Committee all supported the plan. These various committees, which are part of the park's participatory management structure, are composed of municipal officials of the region, representatives from the education sector and the scientific community, various departments of the governments of Quebec and Canada, non-governmental bodies, marine tour operators, First Nation Council of Essipit Innus, etc.

The plan for sea activities puts forward thirty or so measures to be implemented in the coming years. The measures relate to the management of the park, regulations, conservation of ecosystems, environmentally sustainable use of resources, presentation of natural heritage and public awareness. They will act as a complement to improve the protection of marine mammals, the quality of the visitor experience and the security of visitors.

These measures will help the marine park achieve its mandate that is to increase, for the benefit of present and future generations, the degree of protection of ecosystems in a representative section of the Saguenay Fjord and St. Lawrence Estuary for conservation purposes, while encouraging its use for educational, recreational and scientific purposes.

The Guide for Eco-Responsible Practices for Captains/Naturalists and the creation of the Éco-Baleine Fund for research and education, announced today, are actions included in the plan for sea activities. The members of the Alliance decided to embark on the development of these high-priority tools even before the formal adoption of the plan.

Among other planned measures, the revision of a regulation on marine activities, which will limit the number of vessels that can be in an observation zone of a ½ nautical mile to 10. The speed limit at the mouth of the Saguenay will also be lowered. A new section on behaviours to adopt with respect to belugas will be added and the excursion boats' privilege to approach in the vicinity of a cetacean with a calf and a cetacean at rest will be abolished.

The plan also makes provisions for the maintenance and development of monitoring programs for ecosystems and activities, such as monitoring the Sea Observation Activities (SOA) Industry, marine mammal prey, marine traffic, etc.

In addition, the plan addresses measures that foster good governance by recommending the establishment of memorandums of understanding between the marine park and principal government departments that have authority over aspects that allow the park to achieve its objectives. Moreover, it makes provisions to offer training to users of the marine park regarding the *Marine Activities in the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park Regulations* and zoning regulations. Finally, the installation of signalization and information panels at various access points in the marine park, which covers 1245 km², will raise awareness among users.

The planning schedule is coordinated with the revision of the marine park's management plan expected in 2017.

Also available at www.eco-baleine.ca

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