



**INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON FRESHWATER
MANAGEMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES–ST. LAWRENCE
RIVER BASIN**

**ORGANIZED BY THE
*COMITÉ DE CONCERTATION ET DE VALORISATION DU
BASSIN DE LA RIVIÈRE RICHELIEU (COVABAR)***

SEPTEMBER 13 – 15, 2007

SOREL - TRACY

PRESENTATION DOCUMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Problems relating to freshwater management in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence basin are currently of great interest. Managers from all levels of government in Quebec, Ontario, and the United States, as well as watershed organizations and other groups involved are deeply concerned about water levels and water quality. For the communities located in the lower part of this vast system, the volume and the quality of the water flowing into the St. Lawrence River from the Great Lakes and the tributaries of this basin are of prime concern. This is especially so as one goes upstream from Lake Saint-Pierre to the Great Lakes, an area in which Canadian and American cities are concentrated.

The potential problems could directly affect potable water intakes, hydroelectric power generation, commercial navigation, pleasure boating, public access to water, and aquatic life. Other concerns such as wastewater outflows, flooding, agricultural pollution, urban sprawl, groundwater deterioration, resuspension of toxic sediments, etc., which are impacting on the resource are also of great interest to managers.

These issues that have been unresolved for decades have made stakeholders and interveners realize that they must share their knowledge of the problems and solutions. Hence the importance of developing crucial solidarity in the subwatersheds, upstream and downstream, in light of, especially, the potential impacts of climate change. Last April, the City of Montreal wrote to all the municipalities bordering the St. Lawrence River in Quebec and Ontario, proposing that they issue a Common Declaration recognizing their collective responsibility for the waters of the St. Lawrence, as a clear sign of joint action in a project where solidarity is called for.

The *Comité de concertation et de valorisation du bassin de la rivière Richelieu* (COVABAR) shares this vision of the situation with many municipalities in the river basin, especially the city of Sorel-Tracy, which is located at the mouth of the Richelieu River and receives St. Lawrence River freshwater coming from the Great Lakes and all the upstream tributaries. Last year, COVABAR participated in many exchanges with foreign representatives of watersheds outside Quebec. They included meetings with officials of the Lake Champlain Basin Program (as part of the 2009 festivities to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's arrival in the Richelieu region of Quebec), and with representatives of the French Charente basin as part of a twinning project among basin organizations. More recently COVABAR participated in the world General Assembly of the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), as part of the Twin Basin project.

These activities generated great interest in Quebec's accomplishments in basin-based water management, particularly regarding the St. Lawrence River basin. Many water-management stakeholders have expressed the desire to visit Quebec and share expertise and experiences. In this context COVABAR decided to organize a symposium on freshwater management in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin.

Symposium objectives

- Enable organizations/individuals involved in Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin freshwater management to exchange information regarding water quantity data and quality of water in their respective areas and sub-basins, and identify joint courses of action.
- Allow foreign (from other countries and continents) stakeholders to present their approaches and types of actions carried out along with the experiences in Quebec, other Canadian provinces, and in the American states concerned. Evaluate what could be improved amongst watersheds.
- Provide the opportunity for the Quebec government and its basin-organization partners to discuss the Quebec Water Policy and its application.
- Allow the Ontario, Canadian and US governments to present complementary programs of action for the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin’s upstream region.

Date and location

The symposium will be held from September 13 to 15, 2007, in the Richelieu River watershed region at Sorel-Tracy, the port of entry to Lake Saint-Pierre and a downstream receiving point of freshwater from the St. Lawrence River.

Intended participants

Objective: approximately 150 participants

Representatives from government departments, municipalities, and other public sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with water management, such as:

- Government of Quebec (*Développement durable, Environnement et Parcs* (MDDEP), *Affaires intergouvernementales* and other departments);
- Ontario (Department of Environment and the Department of Natural resources) and Canada (Environment Canada branches in Quebec and Ontario);
- U.S federal and State governments (New York, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Vermont);
- Municipalities bordering the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes (the Great Lakes Cities Alliance) and their tributaries;
- Basin organizations in Quebec, Ontario, and the United States:
From Quebec: *Regroupement des organismes de bassin du Québec* (ROBVQ), Richelieu, Missisquoi Bay, Lake Champlain, Châteauguay, Rideau River, Outaouais, Gatineau, L’Assomption, Yamaska, Saint-François, Lake Saint-Pierre and others

downstream, ZIPS, etc.;

From Ontario: Conservation Ontario, Remedial Action Plans (RAPs);

- Other organizations: Hydro-Québec, Pollution Probe, UPA, Ontario Farm Bureau, International Joint Commission (IJC), the Chicago Canadian consulate, Council of Great Lakes Governors, Great Lakes Commission, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, USACE, Council of Great Lakes Industries;
- Overseas basin organizations: France (Lot, Charente), Brazil, *Réseau des bassins de la Méditerranée*;
- International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)

Note: Jean-François Donzier, INBO Secretary-General, and Lazlo Kothay, the new INBO president, have confirmed their presence.

Organization

Symposium direction/administration: COVABAR

Collaborators: ROBVQ and its member organizations, the city of Sorel-Tracy, *Conférence régionale des élus de la Montérégie de l'Est*, *Nature Québec*, *Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement du Québec* (RNCREQ), The International Secretariat for Water.

Overall theme

- Water management concerns everyone: from thinking globally to acting locally.
- The role of governments.
- The role of basin organizations.
- The case of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin.

Subtopics

- Quebec water management relative to programs elsewhere.
- Proposal to participants for a position statement on the condition of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence freshwater basin ecosystem and the primary actions to take to improve the situation.
- Proposal for establishing a North American network of basin organizations.