



Fact sheet

Purpose of the Agreement

The governments of Canada and Québec agree that it is in their mutual interest to ensure adequate protection of marine biodiversity in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, specifically the Îles-de-la-Madeleine maritime plateau, within their respective jurisdictions.

However, before any action is taken in this regard, especially with respect to marine protected areas, more information is needed on biodiversity conservation issues in relation to social and economic activities in the region. It is in this vein that the governments of Canada and Québec have signed the Agreement Regarding a Planned Study Concerning a Marine Protected Area in Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

The study will be done over two years. It will be equally funded by the two governments and will include five objectives:

- Characterize the study area from an ecological, economic, social, and cultural perspective
- Provide a portrait of natural resources (mineral, fisheries, oil and gas), their potential for development, and to what extent they represent the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence environment
- Analyze territorial conservation issues, impacts in terms of economic spinoffs, and conservation and development objectives to be promoted
- Identify and describe sectors of interest for the conservation of marine biodiversity and cultural resources
- Assess opportunities for development, education, and the enjoyment of the marine environment as well as challenges to the establishment of a marine protected area

Within two years of the signing of the agreement, the study's final report will be submitted to Parks Canada's Executive Director for the Quebec Region and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Sustainable Development of Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec.



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The Study Area

The study area covers approximately 16,500 km² (see the map). It features a large plateau, averaging less than 80 metres in depth and consisting primarily of sedimentary rock and sandy deposits. Water temperatures are among the warmest in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Water salinity is lower however than elsewhere in the Gulf due to the significant influx of fresh water from the St. Lawrence River, some of its tributaries, and land runoff.

With its abundant zooplankton, the îles-de-la-Madeleine marine plateau¹ is an important feeding and maturing area as well as a spawning and nursery habitat for many fish, including herring, mackerel, and rainbow smelt. Coastal waters provide an ideal growing environment for numerous invertebrates (lobster, rock crabs, and various mollusks) while others, like toad crabs and snow crabs, are found at greater depths.

This rich environment is home to many marine mammals, including four species of seals. Harbour porpoises, white-sided dolphins, pilot whales, and minke whales are also seen here at times, and leatherback turtles feed regularly in local waters during the summer.

Some of the Gulf's largest seabird colonies can be found in the area, notably at Rocher aux Oiseaux, where 20% of Canada's northern gannet population nests. Overall, 17 species of coastal and pelagic birds are found in the study area. Lagoons and inland bodies of water located along the edges of the marine area provide critical habitat for ducks, shorebirds, and certain endangered bird species such as the piping plover, roseate tern, and horned grebe. They also provide food and shelter for both estuarine fish and marine species that typically spend only one phase of their life cycle here.

Steeped in history, îles-de-la-Madeleine still retain ancient traces of human occupation. Several hundred wrecks have been recorded in the waters surrounding the islands, which boast five lighthouses, further enhancing the historic value of the area. Currently, over 30 kinds of sea-based activities primarily related to fishing, recreation, and tourism take place in this area.

¹ 2009 Commission for Environmental Cooperation. *Écorégions marines de l'Amérique du Nord*, Montreal, Canada, 200 pp.



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Regional and Aboriginal Community Participation

Under the Agreement Regarding a Planned Study Concerning a Marine Protected Area in Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the governments of Canada and Québec plan to involve local populations and relevant aboriginal communities.

Public Information

Various means will be implemented during the next two years to inform and consult with Îles-de-la-Madeleine residents.

First, in collaboration with the Îles-de-la-Madeleine Agglomeration Council, an advisory committee representing the sectors that are most affected will be formed so that the citizens involved can express their opinions and signal issues of concern.

Various communications tools will be developed to report on progress and keep the public and interested parties informed.

In addition, joint information sessions may be arranged with participating organizations so as to publicize the study's results and conclusions.

Individuals may also request additional information through the advisory committee or directly by contacting representatives of Parks Canada and Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec.

Aboriginal communities

Aboriginal groups with interests in the study area will be consulted.