

The protected marine area

Created in 1998 after years of pressure from the regional community, consultations and negotiations, the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park is a protected marine area jointly managed by the federal and Quebec governments, with the participation of the regional community. All the towns bordering on the marine park have been called upon to be actively involved in conservation, educational and discovery activities, thus forming the marine park's co-ordination zone. The park's co-ordinating committee is made up representatives of the regional community, the Innu community of Essipit, the scientific, academic and conservation communities, and the federal and Quebec governments. It is the ideal forum for ensuring that the regional community participates in the management of the marine park.

Visitors and the marine park as a tourist attraction

In addition to the region's residents, numerous visitors come to the marine park to discover its natural and cultural resources. More than a million visits to the marine park in 2005; the tourists came from Quebec (62%), elsewhere in Canada (6%), the United States (3%) and other countries (29%), mainly France. Less than half (40%) were first-time visitors to the region. The beauty of the landscapes is the primary reason visitors come, with the observation of marine mammals the second most common reason for visiting the park.

Today, our society is once again seeking to take ownership of the marine environment and learn about its history. Like explorers and hunters of the past, today's visitors and local residents have rediscovered the excitement of observing marine mammals and are now photo enthusiasts. A close and careful look at the many years of human intervention in the region of the marine park reveals the decisive impact of marine ecosystems on human heritage.

THE MARINE PARK, Crossroads of Peoples, Wellspring of Resources



Photo: Nelson Boisvert, Parks Canada

Marine mammals observation



Saguenay-St. Lawrence
MARINE PARK



Ore ship in the Saguenay fjord
Photo: Charles Lessard, Parks Canada

For thousands of years, the confluence of the Saguenay and St. Lawrence rivers has created favourable conditions for the harvesting of marine resources by humans, which in turn has made the region a place where Amerindian and European peoples have come together.

From the Paleoamerindians to the first Europeans

Beginning in the Archaic Period (8000 BC to 3000 BC), the region around the marine park was originally inhabited by ancestors of Amerindian populations drawn to the area by its rich animal and plant life both on land and at sea. Numerous artefacts have been found on the sites of former seal-hunting stations, particularly at Cap de Bon-Désir, where Archaic sites have been discovered, and at Baie Sainte-Marguerite along the Saguenay River, an area inhabited as early as 7000 BC.

But, the presence of hunters in the Upper North Shore region can be traced back to mainly around 5000 BC. At the mouth of the Saguenay, between Tadoussac and Les Escoumins, no less than 14 sites dating back to that period have been found on marine terraces. The remains discovered date back to the Woodland Period, which lasted from 3000 BC up until the Historic Period, and reveal continuous harvesting of marine mammals and cultural exchanges between Amerindian peoples. Excavations at Anse aux Pilotes in particular show that shellfish were harvested and seals and belugas hunted there.



Photo: Marc Paillé, Parks Canada

Coast Guard opening the way in the fjord

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The Tadoussac region was a meeting place and trading centre for Amerindian nations prior to being a cultural crossroads for Amerindian and European civilizations. The rich marine environment continued to support the Amerindians and early Europeans, including Basques, who in the 16th century ventured up to the mouth of the Saguenay to hunt whales. By the end of that century, the Tadoussac region had become the largest fur trading centre in North America as a result of the efforts of a number of Amerindian nations, mainly Algonquins. These groups traded with private French interests over a territory that went considerably beyond the present boundaries of the marine park.



Photo: Alexander Henderson, Library and Archives Canada
Traditional making of canoe



Photo: Library and Archives Canada
Native family in Tadoussac



Photo: Denis Dufour, Parks Canada
Hanging fur at the Nouvelle-France site

Harvesting the forests and industrialization

Over the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the Amerindians increasingly hunted land animals and captured marine wildlife. At the same time as the fur trade, Europeans were harvesting marine resources. In the 19th century the focus changed somewhat and the harvesting of forest resources began, which continued in the form of industrialized forestry operations up until the 20th century. A way of life centred around the forest and subsistence farming also began in the early 19th century. In addition to promoting development of the region, the forest industry opened up a new region to settlers and changed the landscape. For example, in 1842 there were a dozen sawmills between Tadoussac and Saint-Fulgence; 20 years later, there were 58, employing some 2,000 workers.



Photo: William James Topley, Library and Archives Canada
Price sawmill at anse de Saint-Étienne around 1900

The growth of the forest industry also brought about a new form of social organization— seasonal activities attracted tourists, fishing enthusiasts and resort goers. Indeed, it was forestry contractors who were the first to lay the foundations for a tourist industry by building hotels and organizing cruises on the Saguenay.

Commercial navigation

Before the laying down of rail lines that began in 1888, forestry operations depended entirely on the waterways. The Price company began using steam-powered tug boats in the 1840s to tow sailing vessels caught in opposing currents in the mouth of the Saguenay River. Timber rafts were also being towed to the sawmills. Considerable coastal shipping led to the building of ships and wharves.



Photo: Denis Dufour, Parks Canada
Cap de la Tête au chien Lighthouse

In the 20th century, the operations of pulp and paper mills and aluminium smelters in the Upper Saguenay region also led to considerable traffic. In the estuary, increased traffic in a navigation zone that was subject to hazardous conditions meant that the waterway had to be marked with beacons. Twenty-two lighthouses were built on the river and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence between 1805 and 1860, including 10 in the estuary. Commercial navigation and cruise ships, with their famous “white ships”, became an important part of the region’s cultural landscape.



Photo: Denis Dufour, Parks Canada
Boats at the Baie-Sainte-Catherine wharf

A vibrant living environment

Activities now considered marginal – the fishing and hunting of marine wildlife – were means of survival that long characterized the way of life in the region’s communities. Around the marine park are remains indicative of human activities of the past and more recent times. Among them are shipwrecks, remains of forestry operations and certain wharves.

The interaction between humans and the environment has radically changed with the intensive industrialization of the past 60 years; once a source of food, the marine environment has become a more utilitarian environment. With the advent of the St. Lawrence Seaway it has remained an area of maritime navigation, with considerable traffic and transshipping operations in the estuary and the Saguenay. The region around the marine park is thus still a vibrant living environment.



Photo: Jean-François Bergeron, Parks Canada
Anse de la Boule