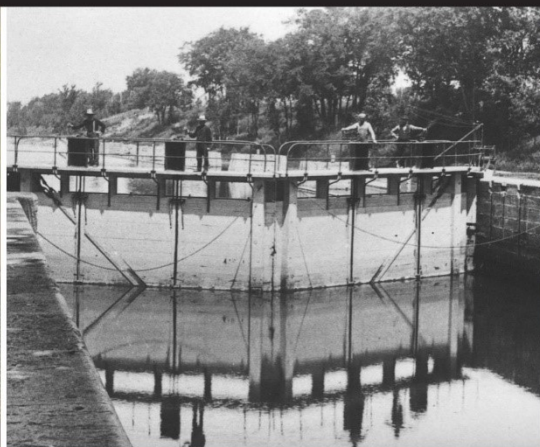




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Canada



Saint-Ours Canal

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2021



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SAINT-OURS CANAL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2021.

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Note to readers

The health and safety of visitors, employees and all Canadians are of the utmost importance. Parks Canada is following the advice and guidance of public health experts to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing Canadians to experience Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Parks Canada acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may have unforeseeable impacts on the *Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*. Parks Canada will inform Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public of any such impacts through its annual implementation update on the implementation of this plan.

For more information about the management plan or about
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Foreword



From coast to coast to coast, national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas are a source of shared pride for Canadians. They reflect Canada's natural and cultural heritage and tell stories of who we are, including the historic and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples.

These cherished places are a priority for the Government of Canada. We are committed to protecting natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places, and contributing to the recovery of species at risk.

At the same time, we continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities to ensure that more Canadians can experience these iconic destinations and learn about history, culture and the environment.

In collaboration with Indigenous communities and key partners, Parks Canada conserves and protects national historic sites and national parks; enables people to discover and connect with history and nature; and helps sustain the economic value of these places for local and regional communities.

This new management plan for the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site of Canada supports this vision.

Management plans are developed by a dedicated team at Parks Canada through extensive consultation and input from Indigenous partners, other partners and stakeholders, local communities, as well as visitors past and present. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this plan for their commitment and spirit of cooperation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort and I am pleased to approve the *Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*.

A blue ink signature of Steven Guilbeault, written in a cursive style.

Steven Guilbeault

Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

Recommendations

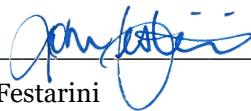
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Executive Summary

Located in the Richelieu Valley, the Saint-Ours Canal was designated a site of national historic significance in 1987. Opened to commercial navigation in 1849, the Saint-Ours Canal became a key component along the Richelieu River, which connected the St. Lawrence and Hudson River valleys. Thus, the Saint-Ours Canal was used to transport wood and various goods, including agricultural products from the Richelieu Valley, before becoming a recreational boating waterway and a recreational site of heritage value in the 1970s.

The national historic site stretches along both sides of the Richelieu River and includes some forty engineering structures and infrastructure, including the lock and Superintendent's house, as well as the Saint-Ours Dam, used to regulate the level of the Richelieu River, and the Vianney-Legendre Fishway, which allows several species of fish, including the copper redhorse (*Moxostoma hubbsi*), to swim up the river.

This management plan replaces that of 2005 and presents the vision for the management of the site for the next decade. As a pivotal point along the Richelieu River, the development of the various sectors of the Saint-Ours canal will make it possible to better meet the needs of a diversity of visitors and users, while making it possible to commemorate, for the region and Indigenous peoples, the importance of the Richelieu River. Finally, the biodiversity and exceptional natural environment of the canal will be showcased, while the effects of climate change, like flooding, will be better understood and documented to help mitigate the impacts on the site and infrastructure integrity. Three (3) key strategies support the vision for the management of the site over the next decade:

Strategy 1: A historical jewel and landmark along the Richelieu River

This strategy aims to take advantage of the location of the Saint-Ours Canal site, which spans the Richelieu River, in order to make it a main attraction along recreational and tourism routes in the Bas-Richelieu region. It also aims to increase visitors' understanding of the importance of the river over time, both to Indigenous peoples and to the development of the region. Finally, it aims to ensure that the historical richness of the canal is better highlighted by new tools and facilities.

Strategy 2: A site that offers something for everyone

The goal of this strategy is to improve the condition and sustainability of the site's facilities and infrastructure in order to improve visitor experience and to better reflect the needs of different types of users. The increase in the visitors' sense of ownership towards the site helps to strengthen the canal's visibility.

Strategy 3: Enhancement of the site's natural environment

This strategy aims to enhance the site's rich natural characteristics in order to raise visitors' awareness about the canal's biodiversity and exceptional natural environment, including the Vianney-Legendre Fishway. It also aims to ensure the sustainability of the infrastructure and to preserve the commemorative integrity of the Saint-Ours Canal by mitigating the impacts of flooding.

The vision put forward in the management plan will serve as the framework to establish priorities regarding the management of the national historic site for the next ten (10) years. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the *Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site Management Plan*, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful.

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	iii
Recommendations	v
Executive Summary.....	vii
1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Significance of the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site.....	4
3.0 Planning Context	4
4.0 Development of the Management Plan	6
5.0 Vision	7
6.0 Key Strategies	8
7.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment	11

Maps

Map 1: Regional Setting	2
Map 2: Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site	3

1.0 Introduction

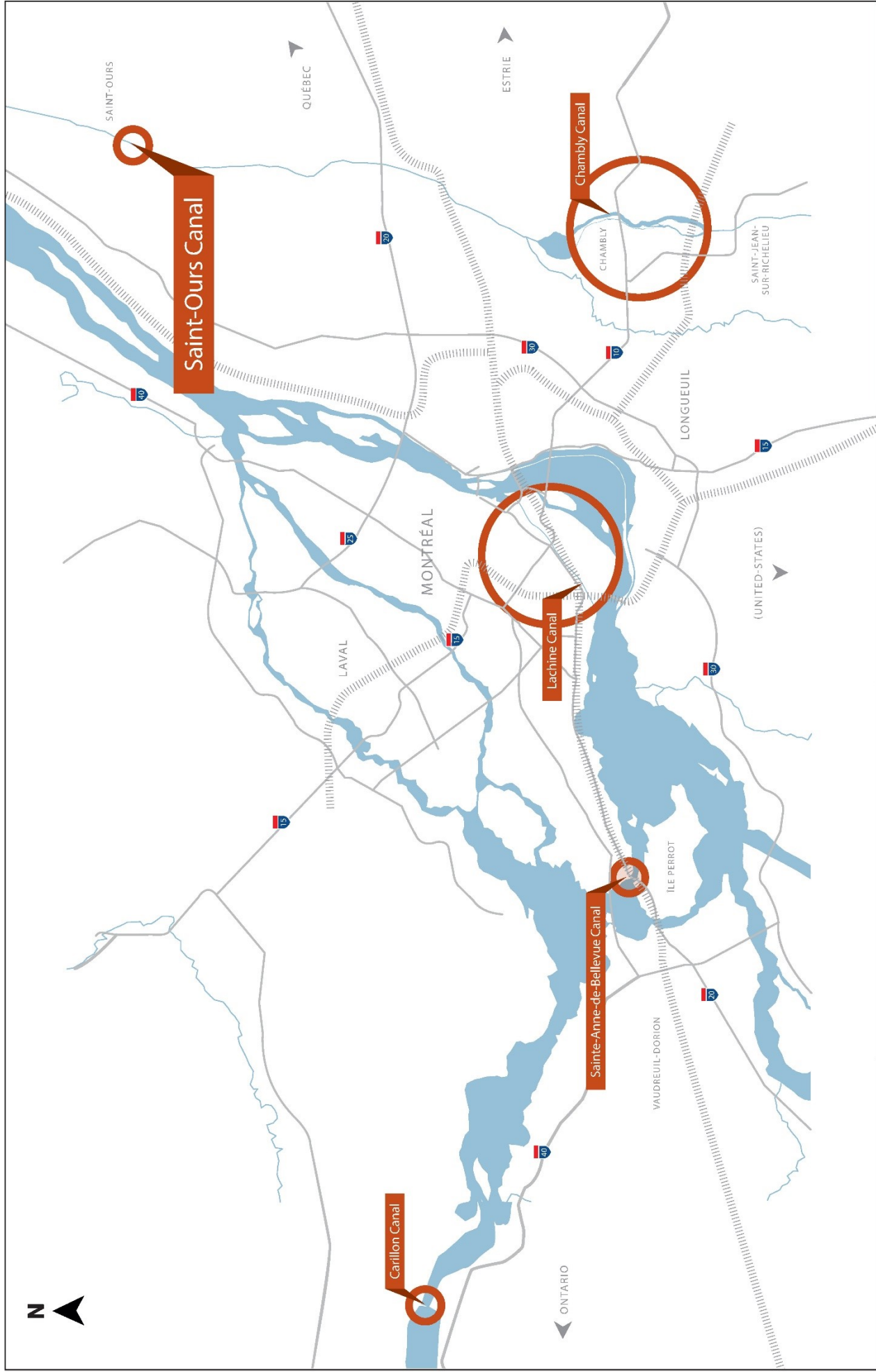
Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national historic site, national park, national marine conservation area and heritage canal administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years (10) or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement and, where appropriate, consultation, on the management of the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site in years to come.



REGION	QUÉBEC WATERWAYS	PARKS CANADA'S HISTORIC CANALS (QUÉBEC)	REGIONAL CONTEXT
			MAP 1 OF 2



SAINT-OURS CANAL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

MAP 2 OF 2



- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- FORMER BUILDINGS
- FORMER LAYOUT
- LIMITS
- PARKS CANADA
- WOODED AREA

Saint-Ours
Saint-Roch-de-Richelieu

2.0 Significance of the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site

Located in the heart of the Richelieu River Valley, the Saint-Ours Canal has been part of the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Saint-Ours Canal is situated in the Quebec municipalities of Saint-Ours and Saint-Roch-de-Richelieu. Along with the Chambly Canal, it is a critical navigation component along the Richelieu River and Lake Champlain, which connects the St. Lawrence River to the Hudson River in the United States, connecting Montréal to New York City. As part of Canada's network of historic canals, the Saint-Ours Canal is distinguished above all by its dam and fishway—initially built in the mid-19th century—and still an integral part of the site today.

Before canals were built, the Richelieu River was first renowned as a communication route because of its strategic location. It played a multi-faceted role in developing the region: sustenance and trading routes among First Nations, a corridor for exploration, discovery and colonization, as well as a strategic military route. Opened to navigation in 1849, the Saint-Ours Canal was built for commercial purposes, contributing to the Richelieu River's role as a link between the St. Lawrence (Canada) and Hudson (United States) river valleys. The Saint-Ours Canal was used to transport wood and various goods, including agricultural products from the Richelieu Valley, before becoming a recreational boating waterway and a recreational site of heritage value in the 1970s. The Saint-Ours and Chambly Canals National Historic Sites commemorate the role played by these waterways in the 19th and 20th centuries as part of a network of canals linking Montréal to New York City.

The national historic site, which covers nearly 50,000 square metres on either side of the Richelieu River, has some forty (40) engineering works and structures, including the lock and the Superintendent's house. In addition to the infrastructure related to operating the canal, the Saint-Ours dam is an essential public infrastructure used to regulate the level of the Richelieu River in the watershed between the cities of Saint-Ours and Chambly. The Vianney-Legendre Fishway is also noteworthy for its design, which is adapted to several species of fish including the copper redhorse (*Moxostoma hubbsi*), a species at risk.

It was not until 1987 that the Saint-Ours Canal obtained its status as a national historic site; the *Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada* (HSMBC) having overlooked the canal when the Canadian canals were designated of national historic significance in 1929. Under this designation, the landscape and landscape features of the Saint-Ours Canal are identified as being of national historic significance. Several other cultural resources also contribute to the site's identity, including the layout of the first canal, the Superintendent's house, the stone shed, the entrance caissons and the archaeological resources.

3.0 Planning Context

The last management plan for the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site was approved by the Minister and tabled in Parliament in 2005. It suggested various strategic directions and management strategies to achieve objectives relating to conservation and showcasing of the landscape, cultural and natural resources; transmission of messages of national significance and heritage values; visitation; development; management of the site; and co-operation with partners and stakeholders.

Some objectives identified in the 2005 management plan have been achieved or are in the process of being achieved, including repairing the Superintendent's house, performing maintenance on the Vianney-Legendre Fishway, the development of diverse activities in collaboration with the Friends of the Saint-Ours Canal (*Amis du canal de Saint-Ours*), as well as the increase and renewal of the client base, in particular by adding overnight accommodations on the site.

The site benefits from the recreational and tourist momentum of the Richelieu River and the chemin des Patriotes (Route 133)—also known as the “*Route du Richelieu*”, a tourist route popular among cyclists and motorcyclists for its historical attractions and beautiful landscapes. Visitors can take advantage of the site and take a leisurely stroll, enjoy a picnic, watch the boats go by or observe the operation of the lock.

In 2016, six (6) oTENTik units were installed on Darvard Island, offering overnight accommodations to visitors. After four (4) seasons in operation, the average annual occupancy rate of the oTENTik units, is below 40%, which leaves room for improvement for years to come. In 2019, site attendance was down from the previous year, with more than 26,000 visitors, while navigation remained stable with 4,300 boats transiting through the lock. While most boaters are from Québec, boaters from the United States accounted for 2.5% of lockages in 2019 and represent an important market for the canals along the Richelieu River.

As part of the Federal Infrastructure Investment Program, approximately \$7 million were granted in 2015 to carry out deferred maintenance work on the Saint-Ours Canal. As a result, repair work on the dam's mechanical, electrical and hydraulic systems, repairs to the lock and fishway, as well as repairs on some components of the Superintendent's house (roof and mechanical elements) were completed at the end of 2020. Historic structures, as well as many other assets, will require work to remain operational and meet security requirements. Climate change could affect the condition of certain infrastructure and landscape components of the site over time. In fact, recurring spring flooding and the spread of the emerald ash borer (*Agilus planipennis*), an invasive alien species, are specific examples of this reality. Certain areas of Darvard Island are particularly vulnerable in this regard.

To ensure concerted management of the national historic site, Parks Canada is working in collaboration with municipal, regional, environmental, nautical and tourism partners to increase visibility of the Saint-Ours Canal in the region. The Friends of the Saint-Ours Canal (*Amis du canal de Saint-Ours*) offer, through a permit, various activities (events, souvenir shop, etc.).

As for Indigenous communities who have traditional ties to the territory where the historic site is located, including the W8banaki (Abenaki) Nations of Odanak, Wôlinak¹ and the Kanien Nation: keha'ka (Mohawk) of Kahnawá: ke, no partnership or engagement strategy has been established to date, although steps were taken during the visioning exercise carried out with the site's partners as part of the Management Plan review, in March 2019. Themes of historical interest related to the Saint-Ours Canal, namely the importance of the Richelieu River as a military and commercial communication route since pre-contact times, represent an opportunity to include First Nations history in the management and commemoration of the site and to present the history of the site that includes Indigenous perspectives.

The main issues that have led Parks Canada to review the means and strategies that will be conducive to promoting a concerted management approach for the site include: maintaining the cultural and natural landscape components necessary for understanding and interpreting the site, the challenge of offering facilities and services adapted to a diversified clientele, as well as the impacts of flooding and invasive alien species on the site. The area and segmentation of the site are also barriers to visitors' use and understanding of the site. The dam, given it is the only component linking the two (2) shores, also creates a barrier to site access, maintenance and operations. In short, the review of the management plan represents an opportunity to determine these priorities and to identify a strategic direction.

¹ The communities of Odanak and Wôlinak are represented by the Grand Conseil de la Nation Waban-Aki.

4.0 Development of the Management Plan

The development of the management plan for the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site was supported by a strategy to consult with the public and various stakeholders in order to ensure that the new vision for the management of the site reflects the aspirations of visitors and residents of adjacent municipalities, recreational boaters, community stakeholders and Indigenous peoples.

Prior to the preparation of the draft management plan, partners and stakeholders were invited to a visioning exercise for the future of the canal. Held in March 2019, the activity resulted in a day of reflection where participants were invited to imagine the Saint-Ours Canal of tomorrow. The ideas gathered during this exercise helped develop the content of the draft plan.

The public consultation process to review the management plan for a national historic site is generally carried out through a public event to which stakeholders are invited. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic (2020), Parks Canada implemented guidelines on public participation and consultations to allow consultation activities to continue safely and to be adapted to the local context and health measures. As part of the public consultations on the draft management plan for the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site, public participation and consultations through virtual and remote methods were favoured in order to respect the health measures applicable in Quebec.

In May 2021, Parks Canada launched virtual public consultations on the draft management plan. Despite the context of the pandemic, various means of providing feedback on the draft plan for the Saint-Ours Canal were made available so that all persons interested in the consultation process had the opportunity to participate. Parks Canada launched a website where it was possible to review the content of the draft management plan as well as to obtain all the information regarding the consultation process, which made it possible to facilitate the participation of stakeholders. The highlights of the draft plan were also presented in two (2) virtual sessions, where the public and various organizations interested in the management and operation of this national historic site were invited to comment on its content. An online survey also enabled participants to express their opinion and their level of support for the strategies, objectives and targets put forward in the draft management plan.

The participation of the Grand Conseil de la Nation W8banaki (Abénakis) and the Kanien: keha'ka (Mohawk) Nation of Kahnawá: ke in the management plan review process was also solicited, considering that these Indigenous communities have traditional ties to the territory where the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site is located. The Grand Conseil de la Nation W8banaki expressed its interest in collaborating with Parks Canada to highlight the importance of navigation for the W8banaki Nation along the Richelieu River, as well as the importance of also involving the Mohawk Nation. In a spirit of reconciliation, Parks Canada will continue its efforts to improve its relationship with these communities, by fostering co-operation and the establishment of new partnerships, in particular during the implementation of the Saint-Ours Canal management plan.

Finally, the results of the public consultation process were compiled in a consultation report, which was published in the fall of 2021. The content of the management plan was reviewed in light of the comments expressed during these various consultation activities.

5.0 Vision

The following vision is proposed as the future desired state for the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site for next ten (10) years.

The waterways managed by Parks Canada were once vital links for transportation and economic activity in Canada. Today, they continue to perpetuate this tradition in many Canadian communities by contributing to their socio-economic development. Parks Canada will work in partnership with others to transform the canals, on both the water and the land, into vibrant and lively sites, fostering recreation, tourism and economic development, while preserving the natural, historic and cultural environment for future generations.

The Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site is well rooted in the local communities of Saint-Ours and Saint-Roch-de-Richelieu, who contribute to its stewardship. The site, which offers a natural stop along the Richelieu River, helps commemorate the importance of the river for Indigenous communities, as well as for local and regional history. The Canal's identity is reflected in the efforts to protect and showcase its historic components, helping visitors better understand and appreciate the site.

As a true recreational tourism destination offering attractive and accessible facilities, visitors benefit from an improved path throughout the site, where the different areas of the canal reflect the needs of a variety of visitors and users. The local communities' ownership of the site is enhanced by diversified programming and range of services, offered in collaboration with partners and local stakeholders.

The site's natural characteristics, better identified and protected, contribute to the enhancement of the exceptional natural environment of the Saint-Ours Canal. Visitors discover and learn more about the canal's biodiversity and exceptional natural environment. Better known and documented, the effects of climate change, including flooding, allow the impacts on the integrity of the site and infrastructure to be mitigated. Finally, visitors appreciate the Vianney-Legendre Fishway as a beacon for the protection and dissemination of knowledge about species at risk and other species of the Richelieu River.

6.0 Key Strategies

The three (3) key strategies presented below will guide the management of the site for the next decade. Specific objectives and targets are suggested for each of these key strategies in order to measure, over the coming years, the progress towards the desired vision. Unless otherwise indicated, these objectives are expected to be achieved within the plan's implementation period.

Key Strategy 1: A historical jewel and landmark along the Richelieu River

The purpose of this strategy is to take advantage of the location of the Saint-Ours Canal site, which straddles the Richelieu River, and make it a main attraction along the recreational and tourism routes in the Bas-Richelieu region. The goal is to better showcase the canal's rich history and improve visitors' understanding of the importance of the river throughout time, both for Indigenous peoples and for the region's development. Furthermore, renewed facilities and tools will help visitors better appreciate the site's rich history and natural components.

Objective 1.1: The Saint-Ours Canal is recognized as a pivotal point along recreational and tourist routes in the Bas-Richelieu region

Targets

- By 2022, initiatives with tourist organizations in the region are initiated to promote the site within the regional recreational offer (e.g., thematic tourist routes).
- By 2025, promotional actions, aimed at the site's target clientele (families, boaters, cyclists and motorcyclists on the Route du Richelieu) are implemented.
- By 2030, the number of visitors and the number of moored boats will each have increased annually by 2%.

Objective 1.2: The site helps highlight the historical significance of the Richelieu River for the region

Targets

- By 2023, a dialogue is initiated with Indigenous communities to identify means of collaboration to commemorate the significance of the Richelieu River to these communities.
- By 2025, new initiatives or experiences are implemented so that visitors better understand navigation along the Richelieu River throughout history, particularly in relation to the Chambly Canal.

Objective 1.3: The site's history is better recounted using renewed tools and facilities

Targets

- By 2024, depending on Indigenous communities' interest, a partnership is established to share their perspectives and experiences (stories, history, traditional knowledge, etc.) throughout the site.
- By 2027, tools for interpreting, promoting and showcasing historic heritage are renewed to better reflect the needs of visitors to the Saint-Ours Canal.

Key Strategy 2: A site that offers something for everyone

The goal of this strategy is to improve the condition of the site's facilities and infrastructure to ensure their sustainability and their contribution to visitor experience. It also includes confirming the function of the various areas of the site based on the needs of different users as well as improving the visitor experience offer. Citizens, local organizations and adjacent municipalities will feel a greater sense of ownership towards the site, which will foster a stronger sense of belonging and promote the canal regionally.

Objective 2.1: The condition of the site's facilities and infrastructure improves

Targets

- By 2025, a Strategic Asset Management Plan is developed to contribute to the protection and conservation of the Saint-Ours Canal's natural and cultural heritage.
- By 2030, the canal's engineering structures (assessed in "fair" condition in 2018) are improved.
- By 2030, at least one (1) historic canal structure undergoes repairs (e.g., original canal layout or stone shed).

Objective 2.2: The function of the site's different areas (Saint-Ours shore, Darvard Island, Saint-Roch shore) is better defined

Targets

- By 2024, initiatives to improve the connection between the site and the surrounding communities are implemented (e.g., additional signage, new developments, tourist trails).
- By 2026, the offer and experience of overnight stays on the site are reviewed and improved.
- By 2028, visitors benefit from improved access between the different areas of the site (the Saint-Ours shore, Darvard Island and the Saint-Roch shore).
- By 2030, the layout of at least one (1) area of the canal is improved (Saint-Ours shore, Darvard Island, or Saint-Roch shore).

Objective 2.3: The community's sense of ownership towards the site increases, helping to promote the canal's visibility

Targets

- By 2024, at least one (1) new initiative to enhance programming and services offered to target clientele is carried out in partnership with the community.
- By 2030, the number of activities carried out to better animate the site, offered by partners, organizations or citizens, increases.

Key Strategy 3: Enhancement of the site's natural environment

This strategy aims to identify the site's flora and fauna to enable visitors to learn about the canal's biodiversity and exceptional natural environment. Furthermore, in light of climate change, this strategy involves mitigating the impacts of flooding on infrastructure sustainability and the commemorative integrity of the Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site. Finally, this strategy also aims for the Vianney-Legendre Fishway to contribute significantly to the protection and dissemination of knowledge regarding species at risk or likely to be at risk in the Richelieu River.

Objective 3.1: The biodiversity and natural environment of the Saint-Ours Canal are protected and showcased

Targets

- By 2022, an emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) Management Action Plan is implemented.
- By 2023, an inventory of the site's fauna and flora is completed, in collaboration with experts (government departments, universities, research centres, etc.) and the local community.
- By 2024, activities and tools to raise awareness regarding recreational fishing on the site are developed.
- By 2027, new tools to promote, raise awareness and showcase the site's fauna and flora are implemented so that visitors have a better appreciation of the canal's biodiversity and exceptional environment.

Objective 3.2: The Richelieu River flooding impacts on the site are better documented and monitored

Targets

- By 2023, temporary measures are implemented to ensure visitor safety and service continuity at the site (access to the site, navigation, etc.).
- By 2024, a study of the impacts of flooding on the integrity of the site's components is carried out (infrastructure, shoreline, Darvard Island, etc.).
- By 2026, adaptation and mitigation measures are implemented to reduce flood impacts on the site's components.

Objective 3.3: The Vianney-Legendre Fishway is recognized as a beacon for the protection and dissemination of knowledge about species at risk in the Richelieu River

Targets

- By 2026, collaborative initiatives and partnerships are established to improve on-site facilities dedicated to researchers working to protect species at risk, including the copper redhorse (*Moxostoma hubbsi*).
- By 2030, the facilities and activities near the fishway are reviewed to improve visitor experience and better impart knowledge to visitors.

7.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The purpose of a strategic environmental assessment is to incorporate environmental considerations into the development of public policies, plans, and program proposals, to support environmentally-sound decision-making. In accordance with *The Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* (2010), a strategic environmental assessment was conducted on the *Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site Management Plan*.

Many positive effects will occur as a result of the implementation of the plan, for example: carrying out an inventory of the site's fauna and flora and developing tools to raise awareness concerning recreational fishing at the site. In addition, the presence of the Vianney-Legendre Fishway at the site contributes significantly to the protection and dissemination of knowledge concerning species at risk or likely to be in the Richelieu River. The management plan will help connect Canadians with nature contributing to the implementation of the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy*. The management plan also supports the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* goal of "Healthy Wildlife Populations."

Some objectives or targets identified in the management plan could potentially result in negative environmental effects including: the new service offer which will increase the number of visitors to the site and the rehabilitation work of the historic canal structures. The strategic environmental assessment identified possible environmental impacts on cultural resources and canal components. However, these impacts can be minimized through good planning, including respecting environmentally sensitive periods in order to minimize the impact on species of fish, bats and birds; an appropriate initial design of the works as well as carrying out impact assessments for projects when necessary.

Comments from Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public were incorporated into the strategic environmental assessment and management plan as appropriate.

There are no important negative environmental effects anticipated from the implementation of the management plan. Individual projects at the site will be evaluated separately under the *Impact Assessment Act*, or successor legislation, as necessary.