



HEADING UP THE RIVER

A unique fish ladder is helping species at risk reclaim their habitat

The Copper Redhorse (*Moxostoma hubbsi*) is running up the Richelieu River again. This is a major victory for the unusual coppery coloured fish species, which is found only in southwestern Quebec. A dam built in 1967 hindered this endangered species' migration to its most important spawning area upstream from the Canal-de-Saint-Ours National Historic Site of Canada. Now a fish ladder of unique design is rightening the future for the Copper Redhorse.



Canal-de-Saint-Ours National Historic Site of Canada

The lake sturgeon, American eel, and copper redhorse are three species present in the Richelieu River © G. Caron, Parks Canada

Multiple challenges

Like the Copper Redhorse, other denizens of the Richelieu had long been stranded below the dam. Up to 60 fish species use the river, including several species at risk. The Lake Sturgeon and American Shad, among other species, could no longer follow their migratory paths, nor could the American Eel, which had supported an important local commercial fishery before the dam was built.

Building a fish ladder, step by step

Solving the problem required diligent research and cooperation from several federal and provincial agencies and conservation groups. Parks Canada, as manager of the historic site, was responsible for species at risk on the site. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation and the Ministère des ressources naturelles et de la faune, had both fisheries and species at risk responsibilities. Transport Canada also had to be involved, as it had built the dam. "It was a financial challenge, a partnership challenge and an engineering challenge," says Quebec Service Centre Species at Risk Coordinator Sylvain Paradis.

It all came together in 2001. Parks Canada built a unique fishway with funding from many sources, including proceeds from Rescousse beer, a beer created to support the recovery of species at risk. They named it the Vianney-Legendre fishway, after the ichthyologist who had first officially described the Copper Redhorse in the 1950s.

The copper redhorse is found only in southwestern Quebec © N. Vachon



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