



WWF  
CANADA

# Cultivating a healthy and resilient SAINT JOHN RIVER

## Working locally to deliver national achievements

*In Eastern Canada, the Saint John River – called Wəlastəkw by the Maliseet people – winds its way 700 kilometres through blind bays, tributaries, lakes and marshlands. This single watershed is home to the Threatened wood turtle, the American eel, peregrine falcons, bald eagles and 53 species of fish, including the Endangered Atlantic salmon and shortnose sturgeon.*

It is also an economic powerhouse for the province, supporting local communities in the form of agriculture, forestry, fishing and energy production. Its mouth, in the Bay of Fundy, supports countless forage fish like capelin and herring that, in turn, feed Endangered North Atlantic Right Whales and porbeagle sharks.

Growing development in the watershed has resulted in an elevated level of stress on the river. The level of agricultural runoff, point-source pollution like sewage from municipalities and industrial sites, as well as fragmentation from dams, roads and rail infrastructure has us concerned about the level of stress this ecosystem is enduring. Water quality is of particular concern because the level of certain contaminants, specifically metals, has regularly exceeded water quality thresholds.

Climate change is compounding pressure on the river system, resulting in an increasing frequency of extreme weather events including heavy rainfall, blizzards, and ice and wind storms, resulting in flooding, displacement, and even habitat loss and degradation. Along with ecosystem damage, these events have had significant community impacts – including negative health effects, infrastructure damage, and economic loss at both the household and community level.

This great, historic river is at risk from increasing and compounding stressors.

## Our work

WWF's work in the Saint John River watershed is building a model for regional water management across Canada as part of our efforts to see all of Canada's freshwater in good health by 2025.

WWF-Canada has been working on the ground in the region for the past five years and will continue to work, in partnership with local groups, experts, communities and river stewards, to ensure the continued good health of the Saint John River in the face of increasing stress.

Specifically, WWF-Canada is working to support a healthy Saint John River by:

- Addressing the biggest stressors (pollution and habitat fragmentation) to the health of the river.
- Enabling evidence-based decision-making and planning on the river to enhance resilience.





## Repairing damage

To promote a healthy and resilient watershed that supports rich biodiversity and vibrant economies, the Saint John River watershed has to be restored after years of damage from pollution and habitat fragmentation. WWF is doing this in three ways:

### 1. Uniting and augmenting splintered conservation actions across the region

The Saint John River is fortunate to enjoy an established network of dedicated groups working to address issues in the watershed; however, these efforts have historically been disconnected – spanning multiple jurisdictions with minimal communication and information sharing between stakeholders. To address this, WWF-Canada hosts an annual Saint John River Summit that brings experts, government agencies, First Nations, watershed groups and communities

together to share information, avoid duplication of efforts and augment each region’s efforts.

### 2. Funding necessary community-level conservation

Through community-level grants like Loblaw Water Fund and WWF-Canada’s Restoration Fund, made possible through a partnership with Coca-Cola Canada, WWF-Canada has supported on-the-ground conservation efforts that include improving water quality, fish monitoring and stream restoration projects.

### 3. Modernizing New Brunswick’s water policy

WWF-Canada is working at the provincial level to implement policies on environmental flows, climate change adaptations and other healthy water solutions outlined in New Brunswick’s Water Strategy.

## Planning for resilience

Just as there is a lack of communication between jurisdictions, there also is a lack of data-sharing on the Saint John River. Missing data is painting an imperfect picture of the health of the watershed and is a barrier to informed decision and policy making. To support evidence-based decision making and planning, WWF-Canada is:

### 1. Assessing, compiling and sharing existing data in the watershed

WWF-Canada’s Watershed Reports unearthed existing data for the region and identified where gaps need filling.

### 2. Supporting an innovative tool that will allow data sharing between regions

WWF-Canada has supported the development of Atlantic Datastream – a tool for collecting and sharing data across communities, agencies and groups.

### 3. Developing community climate vulnerability assessments and action plans

WWF-Canada is addressing the threat of climate change by working with municipalities to implement green infrastructure and response planning to address community vulnerabilities to climate change-related impacts.



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