

\$57.5 million promised for St. Lawrence River preservation

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More money will be spent to preserve the St. Lawrence River for future generations as members of the provincial and federal governments gave an update on their 15-year action plan on Monday.

The plan was initially announced in 2011. Back then, it was planned for almost \$70 million to be spent, an amount that was reduced to \$57.5 million after the federal government cut \$15 million from their end.

The Quebec government said they would increase their contribution by \$2 million.

The current status of the plan has the federal government spending \$35.2 million over the next five years while the Quebec government will chip in \$22.3 million.

Federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna and her provincial counterpart David Heurtel were on hand to announce the latest developments.

"We will continue strengthening this important corridor of economic growth and ecological bio diversity," said McKenna.

The project is aimed at reducing pollution, protecting the habitat of both plants and animals and ensuring the health of people who swim in the river.

Heurtel said this year's devastating floods also illustrate the need to monitor the river's water levels.

"One of the programs in the action plan is to better monitor the water flow that's coming from the Great Lakes that's affecting the St-Lawrence River," he said, explaining the government will be using digital mapping technology. "By being better informed, we're going to use top-notch technology to give us a better mapping and understanding of the water flow."

Among the projects carried out in the past five years, the [St. Lawrence Action Plan](#) helped to discover a juvenile fish species, and added a new public interactive map.

Not everyone was pleased with the update Monday.

"I was left with questions, because we didn't get many concrete answers on what we're going to do now," said Femke Bergsma, who works with Lachine environmental organization GRAME.

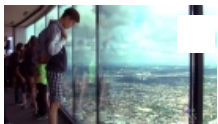
"I was surprised to hear the funding is going down," she said, adding that she wanted to hear about plans beyond monitoring of water levels.

"I think that's very important, but monitoring doesn't tell us what the concrete next step is. Are you going to put measures in place to change the water level if it's dangerous or raise it if it's too low? What are you doing? Just monitoring is nice, but you're still not putting your hands in the dirt to do something."

Bergsma pointed to many of GRAME's concerns including invasive species, wastewater, protection of the riverbanks and loss of biodiversity due to pollution.

"What is the plan doing to address all this?" she said. "I have a lot of questions now."

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