



Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve

Conservation plan



February 2003

1. Plan and description

1.1. Geographic location, boundaries and dimensions

The plan of the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve and its location are shown on the maps in Schedules A.1 and A.2.

The proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve is located in the Saguenay–Lac Saint-Jean region, between 48°40' and 50°45' latitude north and 73°42' and 72°44' longitude west. It is at the northwestern end of Lac Saint-Jean, roughly thirty kilometres from ville de Saint-Félicien.

It lies within the territory of the regional municipal counties of Le Domaine-du-Roy (to the south of the river and to the west of Du Chef river) and Maria-Chapdelaine (to the north of the river and to the east of Du Chef river).

From upstream to downstream, the reserve covers the non-municipalized territories of Lac-Ashuapmushuan and Rivière-Mistassini, and extends to the southwestern boundary of municipalité de Saint-Thomas-Didyme.

The proposed aquatic reserve covers an area of 276.6 km². Its boundaries were defined using a visibility model to simulate what can be perceived from a canoe on the Ashuapmushuan river. It comprises a corridor between 600 m and 6 km wide, taking in the main bed of the Ashuapmushuan river and the slopes of its valley from km 177 to km 51 from its mouth.

1.2. Ecological overview

The area is in the Central Laurentian natural province. It protects a river that is characteristic of the natural region of the Manouane lake depression.

1.2.1. Representative elements

Climate: The Ashuapmushuan river watershed is characterized by a subpolar, subhumid continental climate, with a middle growing season. Its upstream portion belongs to the bioclimatic field of mossy spruce stands, and its downstream portion to the bioclimatic field of fir stands with white birch.

Geology and geomorphology: The territory is part of the Laurentian highlands, attached to the Canadian Shield. Its average altitude is 335 m, varying between 155 m and 509 m. The substratum mainly comprises felsic rock. The valley slopes are covered by moderately drained till. The valley bottom is covered with glaciofluvial deposits (sand and gravel), except where there are rapids, where rock and washed till are found.

Hydrography: The Ashuapmushuan river is a Strahler 7 river. It is, after the Mistassini and the Péribonka, the largest of the 45 tributaries flowing into Lac Saint-Jean. It carries a little over one-fifth of the inflow into the lake. Its source is in the lake of the same name at an altitude of 360 m. Over most of its length it flows in narrow valleys. It is fed by some thirty permanent tributaries, the most important of which are the Du Chef, Normandin, Chigoubiche, Marquette, Aux Saumons and Du Cran rivers. It has around twelve waterfalls, the most spectacular being the De la Chaudière waterfall at km 82. The extensive hydrographic features cover 10% of the territory. The protected area also includes 92 islands covering a total area of 0.8 km², or 0.3% of its total area.

Vegetation: The land in the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve is forest-covered, with trees growing on nine-tenths of the protected area. Half of the land is covered by young, mainly softwood stands, and one-third by mixed stands. Black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) are the main species on high ground, while jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) is found on sandy terraces. Hardwood stands and wetlands (peat bogs and alder groves) are generally found in valley bottoms. One-quarter of the reserve was recently logged.

1.2.2. Outstanding elements

The Ashuapmushuan is a major habitat for landlocked salmon (*Salmo salar ouananiche*), a freshwater form of the Atlantic salmon, which is found as a native northern species in the northern hemisphere. The Ashuapmushuan river is accessible to salmon up to the De la Chaudière falls. It contains several spawning and parr raising sites, and makes a substantial contribution (70% to 90%) to the salmon production in Lac Saint-Jean. It is also a key biological corridor between Lac Saint-Jean and other salmon rivers (such as the Aux Saumons, À l'Ours, Pémonca and Du Cran rivers). The landlocked salmon population has been in a worrying decline since the 1900s. The implementation of regulatory measures and a stocking program have helped re-establish the salmon, but over the last two years the situation has once again become a cause for concern.

The Ashuapmushuan river is also important in terms of heritage. The Ashuapmushuan basin contains several archaeological sites that bear witness to occupation at an early date (6,500 to 7,000 B.C.), especially old Amerindian cemeteries and celebration sites used by the first inhabitants of North America. The river also played a major role in expeditions along the fur route between Tadoussac and Hudson Bay. The remains of the religious and commercial settlement built in 1686 on the eastern shore of Ashuapmushuan lake, at the western edge of the protected area, are one of the most outstanding and best-preserved remnants of the fur-trading period in Québec. In later times, the Ashuapmushuan was used for timber driving. The heritage value of the river is also confirmed by the presence in its waters of over twenty species of fish, including the landlocked salmon that, in 1988, became the regional emblem of the Saguenay–Lac Saint-Jean region.

1.3. Land occupation and use

The land occupations and uses in the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve are shown on the map in Schedule A.3.

Four power transmission lines, 19 km in total length, cross the zone from the west to the south. To the west, the area is bounded over a distance of 4.5 km by paved Highway 167.

The road network comprises 78% of roads unsuitable for road vehicles (220 km) and 20% of unpaved roads (58 km). The longest unpaved road follows the southern bank of the Ashuapmushuan for 30 km, from km 120.

Land rights have been granted on four sites on the perimeter of the protected area (3 Native camps and 1 commercial tourism lease).

The entire area is also an integral part of the Roberval beaver reserve, where the Inuit community of Mashteuiatsh residing at Pointe-Bleue has special rights regarding the hunting and trapping of fur-bearing animals.

The land located to the south of the Ashuapmushuan river, and a 200m wide band along the northern bank, is in the Ashuapmushuan wildlife sanctuary. The sector managed by the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SÉPAQ) covers 190 km², or a little over two-thirds of the total area (68.7%). Recreational activities (small and big game hunting, fishing, blueberry picking, wildlife observation, hiking, canoeing, canoe-camping, etc.) are subject to the regulations in force (such as visitor registration and payment of the applicable fees).

The land located on the eastern bank of the Ashuapmushuan river, from Damville lake to Bouchain lake, is subject to the exclusive rights of the Damville outfitting operation. The wildlife management zone covers 11.2 km², or 4% of the total area.

Some river banks are part of the Lac Saint-Jean community wildlife area, covering an area of 11.2 km², or 1.9% of the proposed area.

Some sections of the territory were logged before the reserve was created.

2. Protection status

The proposed aquatic reserve safeguards the main bed of the Ashuapmushuan river and some of the slopes of its valley. The area includes landscapes of high quality and an outstanding cultural heritage. The

river offers, in addition, habitats that are essential to the maintenance of the landlocked salmon population, the regional emblem.

Aquatic reserve status would allow the pursuit of the following conservation objectives:

- ✓ the conservation of a representative river in the natural region of the Manouane lake depression;
- ✓ the protection of essential landlocked salmon habitats;
- ✓ the preservation of biodiversity in aquatic and land-based ecosystems;
- ✓ the ongoing sustainable management of fur-bearing animals;
- ✓ the development of certain key elements in the landscape (such as the De la Chaudière waterfall);
- ✓ the preservation of sites of recognized or potential archaeological interest, and of the landscape visible from the bottom of the Ashuapmushuan valley;
- ✓ the acquisition of new knowledge concerning natural and cultural heritage.

3. Activities within the reserve

All activities carried on within the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve are governed by the provisions of the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act* (S.Q. 2002, c. 74).

Except for the prohibition mentioned in item 3.1.2, this conservation plan does not specify any prohibited activity other than those prohibited in proposed aquatic reserves by the Act; nor does it authorize any other activities, or set any additional constraints on the activities permitted by the Act.

3.1. Prohibited activities

3.1.1. General prohibitions enacted by law

For reference purposes, it is important to note that under the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*, the main activities prohibited in an area designated as a proposed aquatic reserve are:

- mining, and gas or petroleum development;
- mining, gas or petroleum exploration, brine and underground reservoir exploration, prospecting, and digging or boring, where such activities necessitate stripping, the digging of trenches, excavation or deforestation;
- forest management activities within the meaning of section 3 of the *Forest Act* (R.S.Q., c. F-4.1);

- the development of hydraulic resources and any production of energy on a commercial or industrial basis;
- any new allocation of a right to occupy land for vacation resort purposes;
- earthwork, backfilling or construction work.

3.1.2. Additional prohibitions

In the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve, any type of activity likely to degrade the bed, banks or shores or to otherwise affect the integrity of any body of water or watercourse in the reserve is also prohibited.

3.2. Activities governed by other Acts

All activities carried on within the boundaries of the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve remain governed by the other applicable legislative and regulatory provisions, including those that require the issue of a permit or authorization or the payment of fees. The carrying on of certain activities may also be prohibited or limited by other Acts or regulations applicable within the boundaries of the proposed aquatic reserve.

In particular, within the boundaries of the proposed aquatic reserve, special legal rules may govern permitted and prohibited activities in connection with:

- **Archaeological research** (especially the measures contained in the *Cultural Property Act* [R.S.Q., c. B-4]);
- **Utilisation of wildlife resources** (especially the measures contained in the *Act respecting the conservation and development of wildlife* [R.S.Q., c. C-61.1], the regulation on beaver reserves and the management plan for the Ashuapmushuan wildlife reserve and, where applicable, the measures contained in the applicable federal legislation);
- **Access** (especially the measures contained in the *Act respecting the lands in the domain of the State* [R.S.Q., c. T-8.1]);
- **Land rights** (especially the measures contained in the *Act respecting the lands in the domain of the State* [R.S.Q., c. T-8.1] and in leases issued by the Minister of Natural Resources).

3.3. Supervision of activities

The Minister of the Environment is responsible for the application of the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*, and is also responsible for the proposed aquatic reserves established under that Act. The Minister will

supervise and monitor the measures contained in the Act with regard to permitted activities in protected areas.

All other government departments and bodies will retain their responsibilities as set out in all the legislative and regulatory texts that apply within a proposed aquatic reserve.

The Minister of Natural Resources will supervise all activities subject to the Minister's authority within the territory of the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve, in particular as regards permitted forms of land occupation.

The Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec (FAPAQ) remains responsible for supervising the activities relating to wildlife protection and management that are under its responsibility, and the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SÉPAQ) remains responsible for the Ashuapmushuan wildlife sanctuary.

4. Permanent protection status

The permanent protection status envisaged for the reserve is "aquatic reserve" status under the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*.

Schedules

A.1. Plan of the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve (provisional name)



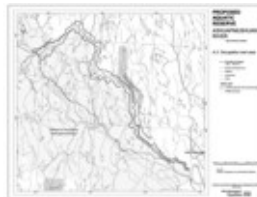
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A.2. Map showing the location of the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve (provisional name)



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A.3. Map showing land occupation and use in the proposed Ashuapmushuan river aquatic reserve (provisional name)



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