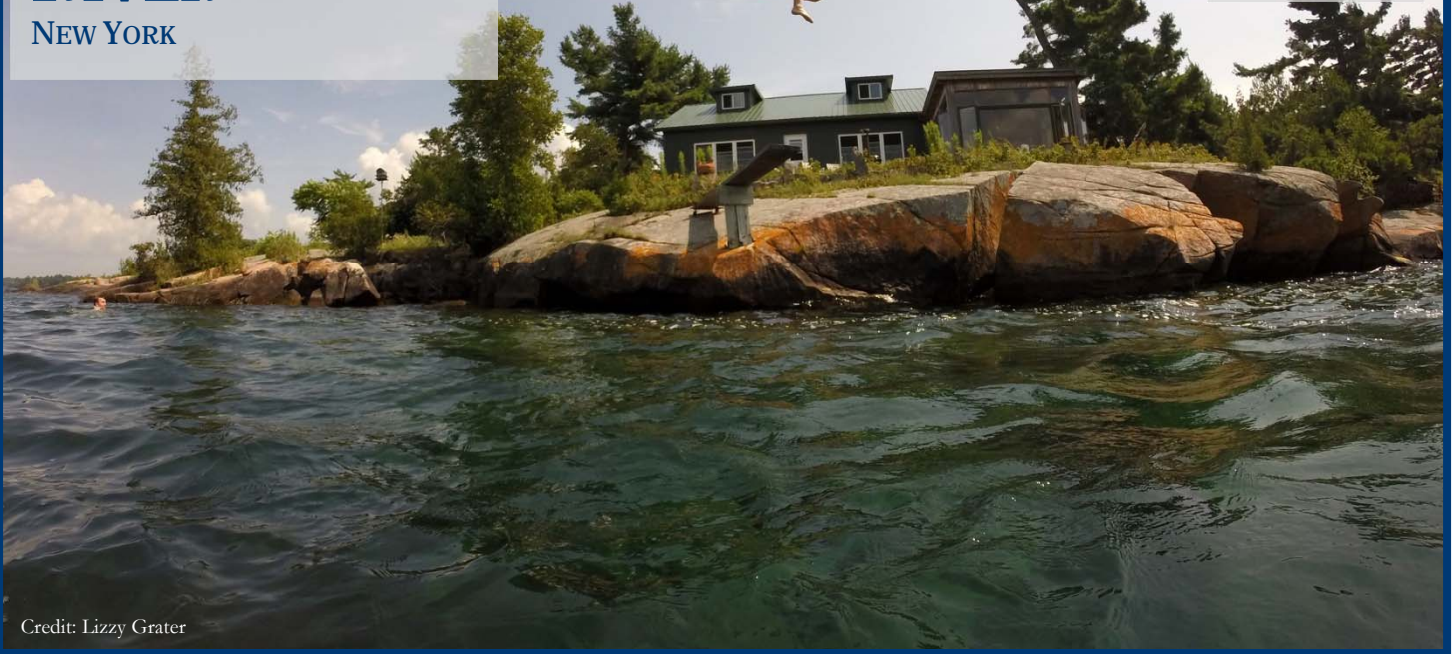


ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

NEW YORK

#9



Credit: Lizzy Grater

THREAT: OUTDATED DAM MANAGEMENT

**AT RISK: WETLAND HABITAT, FISH AND WILDLIFE,
AND RECREATIONAL USES**

Summary

The St. Lawrence River has been a lifeline of the region for thousands of years, rich in history and biodiversity. Unfortunately, the river's dam management is stuck in the 1950's, a time when little consideration was given to environmental values. Unless U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion approve a proposed plan for improved dam operations, the river and its fish and wildlife will continue to suffer irreversible damage. Fortunately, the U.S. and Canadian governments can remove the St. Lawrence River from the list of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® with the simple stroke of a pen.

The River

Historically a major trade route, the St. Lawrence River connects the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean and flows along the border between the U.S. and Canada. With a 518,996 square mile watershed, it is one of the longest North American rivers, flowing 744 miles from Lake Ontario to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The river provides shelter, breeding grounds, and nurseries to an abundance of fish and wildlife. It is home to 87 freshwater and 18 migrating species of fish and 115 species of waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. Known as one of the great freshwater sport fishing grounds for pike, bass and muskellunge, it is a world-renowned tourist destination, with great opportunities for swimming, camping, boating, hunting and scuba diving.

In addition, the St. Lawrence provides drinking water to approximately four million people in the U.S. and Canada. The river also supplies an abundance of other services, including: the production of almost 12 billion kilowatts of electricity per year; water for industry; an international shipping channel that allows deep water vessels to reach the Great Lakes; and the receiving waters for industrial and human wastewater discharges. Its banks are lined with public parks and sites of historic significance to First Nation tribal communities and American and Canadian people.



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The Threat

In the past 50 years since the construction of the Moses-Saunders Hydropower Dam, the ecosystem of the St. Lawrence River has suffered consistent losses to its globally-significant biodiversity due to poorly



Moses-Saunders Hydropower Dam; Credit: Felix Castor [flickr]

regulated water levels. Environmental considerations were not part of planning in the 1950's when the dam and shipping channel were constructed. As a result, this outdated management strategy does not allow for the natural variability in water levels and flows essential to maintain a healthy river. Instead, current management significantly limits the range of water level fluctuations. The resulting artificially-constrained water levels have caused a loss of biodiversity in coastal wetlands and significant impacts to many fish species and nesting water birds.



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Consequently, more than 64,000 acres of wetlands in the Great Lakes have been gradually starved of their natural biodiversity and morphed into wall-to-wall cattail stands. Researchers have found that the wet meadow – a major component of coastal wetlands – has declined by over 50 percent. Black Tern, a state-listed endangered bird species that depends on a diverse marsh habitat, has declined by over 80 percent. Northern Pike, the top fish predator in coastal marshes, has declined by 70 percent. These species were specifically studied because they are indicators of ecosystem response, and show how far-reaching the impacts have been to the entire river environment.

What Must Be Done

After more than two decades of research and deliberation, a \$20 million binational study, and extensive public comment and consultation with government at all levels and a variety of stakeholders, the trans-boundary International Joint Commission (IJC) developed a new plan for water management in the St. Lawrence River Basin,

known as “Plan 2014.” Plan 2014 is based on science and promotes the benefits of healthy, intact wetlands including: improved water quality, stronger fisheries, increased biodiversity and erosion control. Plan 2014, when implemented, will place the environment at the center of decisions about water level regulations on the St. Lawrence River and will be one of the largest wetland restorations in North America.

However, since the IJC recommended Plan 2014 in June 2014, it has languished in inter-agency review, with no action by either the U.S. or Canadian governments. The St. Lawrence River is at a once-in-a-lifetime turning point. It is time for the U.S. State Department to take the lead and accept Plan 2014 in order to begin the restoration of the St. Lawrence River.

For More Information:

Rupak Thapaliya
American Rivers
(202) 347-7550
rthapaliya@americanrivers.org

Lee Willbanks
Save The River & Upper St.
Lawrence Riverkeeper
(315) 686-2010
lee@savetheriver.org

Brian Smith
Citizens Campaign for the
Environment
716-831-3206
bsmith@citizenscampaign.org

Paul Webb
International Water Levels
Coalition
(315) 767-6100
flox1912@aol.com

How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/StLawrence and take action!
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #WeAreRivers
- Share St. Lawrence River posts on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com)