

Many municipalities are now purifying their waste water, and limits have been imposed on certain industries. Results are positive. Nearly 85 per cent of Canadians live in areas equipped with sewer systems, and some 80 per cent are supplied with treatment plants for drinking water.

Wetlands

Wetlands are also prey to numerous encroachments: they are filled in to build expressways, drained for agricultural purposes, contaminated and overcultivated. Governments are increasingly aware of the importance of wetlands and are more willing to intervene to protect them. Many environmental defence groups, from ornithologists to waterfowl hunters, are intent on safeguarding wetlands. In 1981, Canada ratified the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Significance; nearly 30 have now been so designated. In 1985, Canada and the United States agreed to a North American waterfowl management plan to protect, conserve and restore bird habitats. This is a comprehensive agreement intended to bring the bird population back to the mid-1970s level of 100 million migrating birds.

Oceans

Canada's maritime ecosystems are also subject to many constraints: overfishing; dams and diversions that stop the flow of water with its many nutrients into estuaries and destroy or block off salmon spawning grounds; the draining of coastal wetlands, which affects the Pacific coast especially; and coastal zone pollution.

To counter these encroachments, the Fisheries Act allows the federal government to take measures to ensure that work or construction affecting fish habitats can be carried out only after a thorough investigation. In addition, the national fish habitat management policy has been established in order to avoid any net loss in production capacity of a habitat. This policy emphasizes prevention through consultation and action plans.

Intelligent management

Canada's water policy aims at replacing the 1970s policy, which was more reactive, with an integrated rational management that will satisfy the social, economic and environmental needs of present and future generations. Canadians are being increasingly sensitized to the importance of water, although it is often taken for granted and undervalued. The government intends to encourage the adoption of a realistic rate structure for water-supply services in order to make people realize the value of water and reduce their consumption. It hopes to promote research and integrated planning, strengthen laws and regulations, and sensitize the population even more. This policy will be implemented in collaboration with the provinces, which have broad constitutional powers in the matter.