

required to develop solutions. Canada has been actively promoting international action to address problems related to persistent organic pollutants and their effects on human health and the environment. Canada continues to support the development of the protocol on the long-range transport of airborne pollutants under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention, to be signed in June 1998, and the development of a globally, legally binding instrument to control the atmospheric deposition of persistent organic pollutants under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme. Canada is also participating in the Arctic Council, which was established in 1996 to promote circumpolar cooperation in resolving the critical issues of environmental protection and sustainable development in this region.

An Ecosystem Approach

The cumulative losses of water quality and supply can often have a greater impact on resources and users than any one large development or impact. This type of loss is pervasive and is due to the incremental deterioration of ecosystems and watersheds as a result of myriad small decisions with impacts on flow regulation, land use change, and pollution. Experience has shown that these issues can best be addressed at the local level with the cooperation and assistance of federal and provincial governments. Networks of nongovernmental organizations, citizens, and communities across Canada have effectively mobilized to promote sustainable management through an ecosystem approach.

An ecosystem approach for watershed management has developed out of an understanding that all the components of an ecosystem — air, land, water, fish, wildlife, and humans — are interrelated. When managing any one component, such as water, one must consider how it influences and is influenced by the other components. Efforts to improve the health of rivers or lakes must include people and their activities that take place in or around them.

Federal, provincial, and municipal governments, communities, and other stakeholders have collaborated in developing basinwide action plans to prevent pollution and to restore polluted ecosystems. These regional initiatives include the Fraser River Action Plan, the Northern Rivers Ecosystem Initiative (follow-up to the Northern River Basins Study), Great Lakes 2000, the Atlantic Coastal Action Program, and St. Lawrence Vision 2000. For example, as part of St. Lawrence Vision 2000, communities participate in the ZIP (Zones of Primary Intervention) program by developing action plans to enhance and preserve their zones along the river. (For information about these initiatives, refer to their Web sites at the end of this monograph.)

Wetland Conservation

Canada has about one quarter of the world's wetland areas. Parts of Canada's original wetlands have been lost due to settlement. In 1992, the Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation was introduced. One of the world's first countrywide wetland conservation policies, it commits the Government of Canada to "no net loss of wetland functions" on Canada's federal lands. The federal policy is being complemented by the provinces, which are in the process of developing their own wetland conservation strategies.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada) coordinates the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and its habitat and species ventures. Major wetland and upland habitat initiatives are being undertaken through Canadian federal, provincial, territorial, nongovernmental, and corporate partnerships together with the involvement of United States federal, state, and nongovernmental interests.