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Tripartite collaboration about the coastal waters of Québec's Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region

The Gouvernement du Québec, the Cree Nation Government and the Government of Canada will continue working together on a new marine protection area project

Beaupré, October 18, 2024 – Recognizing the importance of protecting the ecological integrity, biodiversity and cultural value of the coastal waters of Québec's Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region, the Gouvernement du Québec, the Cree Nation Government and the Government of Canada are announcing their intention to work together on a project to establish a marine protection area (MPA) to preserve this natural and cultural treasure. This project is complementary to the Wiinipaakw Indigenous Protected Area and national marine conservation area (IPA-NMCA) project in the offshore waters of Baie James, which is also announced today, and would protect an important part of the area's unique northern ecosystems sustaining the Cree way of life.

Announced today by Benoit Charette, Minister of the Environment, the Fight Against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Laurentides Region, Mandy Gull-Masty, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and Chairperson of the Cree Nation Government, and Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, this project will also work towards creating a continuum of land-sea protection with the existing network of protected areas. Ultimately, this would be the first MPA in the coastal waters of the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region, enhancing the representativeness of Québec's MPA network.

This announcement is a first step. The Gouvernement du Québec, the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada will continue their discussions over the coming years to determine the precise area and conservation objectives of this MPA project. All stakeholders, including Indigenous communities and regional organizations, will be consulted on the project at key points in the process. In addition, the coastal marine environment in the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region will be protected according to traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices, as well as the latest scientific knowledge.

This initiative is in line with the commitment made by the governments of Québec and Canada to achieve the targets of the Kunming-Montréal Global Framework derived from the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the goal of conserving 30 per cent of land and water by 2030. It will also contribute to protecting the Cree way of life, and to the implementation of the *Cree Regional Conservation Strategy*, which aims to develop a world-class network of protected areas, from land to sea, in the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region. We all recognize that protecting such a precious natural environment and cultural landscape calls for strong cooperation, close collaboration and consultation with all involved.

Quotes:

"Our government is firmly committed to preserving biodiversity throughout Québec's territory. Through the Grand Alliance we formed with the Cree Nation in 2021, we were able to protect over 20 per cent of the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region by designating 23 new territorial reserves for protected area purposes. Today, we are taking a significant step by announcing the joint intention of the Gouvernement du Québec, the Cree Nation Government and the Government of Canada to continue their collaboration on a new marine protected area project in this exceptional area. I'm delighted with this new partnership, which aims to preserve this natural territory of immense ecological, historical and cultural value, both for us and for future generations."

Benoit Charette, Minister of the Environment, the Fight Against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Laurentides Region

“Protecting the coastal waters of Eeyou Istchee is extremely important for the Crees. Along the shore, the area we call yaayaau where the freshwater from the rivers meets the saltwater, is a place rich in waterfowl, fish, other animals and plants that is essential for Cree harvesting and the Cree way of life. The Crees have relied upon what the land and the sea provide since time immemorial, and we look forward to collaborating with the Gouvernement du Québec and the Government of Canada on harmonizing marine protected area initiatives in order to conserve this precious area for present and future generations.”

Mandy Gull-Masty, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and Chairperson of the Cree Nation Government

“The protection of marine and coastal ecosystems is a priority for our government. This collaborative project with the Cree Nation Government and the Gouvernement du Québec in the waters of Eeyou Istchee will ensure the continuity of Cree values and traditions. It will also enhance the protection of biodiversity in this world-class marine environment and contribute to our goal of conserving 30 per cent of marine and coastal areas in Canada by 2030.”

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

Quick facts:

- The area under study includes the coastal waters from the Québec-Ontario border in the south to as far north as the surrounding area of the community of Chisasibi. The precise area remains to be determined. The complementarity of the coastal waters MPA project and the IPA-NMCA project is illustrated on the map at the following address: [Marine Protected Area Project in the Coastal Waters of Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region \(gouv.qc.ca\)](https://www.gouv.qc.ca/actualites/actualites-2023/2023-05-16-protection-marine-estuaire-saint-laurent)
- The coastal waters of the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region that would be protected by this project are a unique natural environment, where the salt waters of the Hudson Bay system meet the freshwater plumes of various rivers. The area includes wetlands, tidal flats and eelgrass beds that support an abundance of invertebrates and fish species. It is also an important migration area for several species of geese. Protecting it would therefore help preserve the rich nature of this marine area, as well as essential habitats for several fish species.
- In 2023, a tripartite committee consisting of the Gouvernement du Québec, the Cree Nation Government and the Government of Canada was set up to initiate discussions on a conservation project in the coastal waters of Québec’s Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region, and the harmonization of all conservation projects in land, coastal and offshore environments in the area.
- This initiative of coastal waters MPA project is a continuation of the collaboration between the governments of Québec and Canada under the Entente de collaboration Canada-Québec pour l’établissement du réseau d’aires marines protégées au Québec (Canada-Québec Collaborative Agreement to Establish a Network of Marine Protected Areas in Québec).
- In addition to this project, other projects are currently under development in the Estuaire du Saint-Laurent and the Golfe du Saint-Laurent to ensure better representativeness of protected marine ecosystems across Québec.
- To support biodiversity, the governments of Québec and Canada are taking action to conserve coastal and marine waters in collaboration with Indigenous communities and other key partners. The governments of Québec and Canada have committed to protecting biodiversity and conserving 30 per cent of their territory by 2030.

Associated links:

- More information on [marine protection areas in Québec](https://www.gouv.qc.ca/actualites/actualites-2023/2023-05-16-protection-marine-estuaire-saint-laurent).

- [Marine Conservation at Parks Canada](#)

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Sources:

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