

# A STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

**P**lan implementation steps include coordinating state, federal, and provincial programs for Lake cleanup; assuring that the public is involved in Lake issues; and building local support through nongovernmental organizations and municipalities. Long-term monitoring of the ecosystem's health and measuring the success or weaknesses of the Plan are also important. Implementation must also link Lake issues to legislative bodies and interest groups, and provide financial resources for specific projects and research.

## L'implantation du plan

L'implantation du plan comporte plusieurs étapes dont la coordination des programmes de dépollution du Vermont, de l'état de New York, du Québec et du gouvernement fédéral américain, l'engagement du public dans la défense du lac et l'obtention de l'appui local par le biais des organismes non gouvernementaux et des municipalités. La surveillance continue de l'écosystème et la mesure des réussites et des ratés du plan occupent une place tout aussi importante. Finalement, la mise en place du plan doit se faire en collaboration avec les autorités gouvernementales et les groupes d'intérêt et prévoir des ressources suffisantes pour financer des recherches et des projets particuliers.

Numerous cooperating agencies, organizations, and individuals have contributed their time and ideas toward producing a comprehensive pollution prevention, control, and restoration plan for Lake Champlain. The result of these efforts, *Opportunities for Action*, outlines these strategies for protecting and enhancing the environmental, cultural, recreational, and economic activities of or relating to the Lake. The challenge now is to implement these strategies.

Several themes have emerged from the planning process, which should guide agencies, organizations, and individuals as they implement *Opportunities for Action*. These themes include:

- *a partnership approach that relies on existing agencies, organizations, and individuals to implement the Plan, while building capabilities through the formation of innovative partnerships;*
- *an ecosystem approach in which management decisions are based on the complex interrelationships among the physical, biological and chemical components of the Lake Champlain Basin;*
- *a watershed approach in which water quality protection and ecosystem restoration efforts are focused along watershed rather than political boundaries;*

- *the integration of environmental and economic goals in the decision-making process and in selecting the most cost-effective actions to protect and enhance the resources of the Basin;*
- *pollution prevention as a cost-effective means to protect the environment by eliminating pollution before it is generated;*
- *a consensus-based, collaborative approach that strengthens the outcomes of decisions by facilitating a dialogue among multiple interested parties;*
- *flexibility within programs and organizations that enables them to adapt to emerging issues, resources, and technology.*

In developing the first edition of *Opportunities for Action* (1996), the Lake Champlain Management Conference analyzed the capabilities of existing local, regional, state, and federal organizations and determined that these organizations should be responsible, as part of an integrated effort, for implementing the Plan. Informing and involving the public at the local level is an important means through which recommended actions will be successfully carried out. The Management Conference also discussed new approaches to sustained coordination and successful implementation of *Opportunities for Action*. When the first edition of *Opportunities for Action* was approved, the planning task of the Management

Conference was concluded and it ended its existence, passing the tasks of Plan implementation to the Lake Champlain Steering Committee.

The Lake Champlain Steering Committee has followed the guidance of the Management Conference through the first five years of Plan implementation (1996 through 2001). This chapter describes the framework that the Lake Champlain Steering Committee finds most effective for continued implementation of the Plan. The framework described below is based on the established patterns of operations and relies extensively on the partnerships developed in the first five years of implementation.

## KEY PARTNERS AND THEIR POTENTIAL ROLES IN PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The actions presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 list a number of potential key partners who can play a pivotal role in carrying out steps contained in the Plan to protect the Lake. Several of these organizations are government agencies already involved in resource protection efforts at the federal, state, regional, and local levels. Existing agencies and organizations should continue their roles in managing resources in the Basin. The Plan does not advocate replacing these agencies and organizations or usurping their authority. However, in some cases, implementing the actions has required that existing programs shift their priorities or form intergovernmental partnerships to maximize scarce human and financial resources. Many of the actions recommend including additional partners in resource man-

agement decisions and supporting public/private partnerships for action. The following section describes the general roles and responsibilities that fall to the various levels of government, the private sector, and the public in meeting the demands to protect the resources of the Lake Champlain Basin.

### Local Government

Most of the solutions to problems affecting the Basin, such as nonpoint source pollution from urban and agricultural land uses, failing septic systems, planning for future development, and recreation conflicts are best implemented at the local level. The Plan identifies several actions that local governments can implement to address these matters. Key partners likely to implement such actions are local boards and commissions. Because local governments have primary authority over planning and zoning (in all cases except agriculture in Vermont) and some public health issues, transferring authority to other groups is not envisioned in most situations. Local governments can also incorporate a watershed planning focus into local comprehensive plans.

### Regional Government Organizations

Protecting Lake Champlain requires cooperation among the communities within its watershed. Watersheds cross town boundaries, and one town acting alone may not be sufficient to address all issues. Protecting the entire Basin demands a high level of attention from all municipalities in the watershed. Regional organizations—such as the Regional Planning Commissions in Vermont and the County Planning Offices in New York work with a

number of jurisdictions to coordinate efforts that address issues of mutual concern. They will continue to be key partners in focusing implementation efforts through a watershed approach to planning and ensuring that the recommendations of the Plan are carried out equitably.

### State and Provincial Agencies

State and provincial agencies in New York, Vermont, and Québec have several key roles in protecting the resources of the Basin. They administer a number of critically important resource management programs, including water quality protection programs, wetlands protection programs, fish and wildlife management programs, and recreation and cultural resource programs, among others. The states and province also provide technical and financial assistance, such as training for wastewater treatment plant operators and funding for local nonpoint source pollution control projects, to ensure that the appropriate people have the expertise to implement their programs.

Although several state and provincial agencies are listed in the Plan, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VTANR), and Québec's Minister of Environment (QC MENV) have major roles in implementation. As the leading environmental agencies in each jurisdiction, NYSDEC, VTANR, and QC MENV have critical responsibilities in every major action area in the Plan. Other key state agencies are the Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (for agricultural land use, nonpoint source and pesticide issues) and the New York Department

of Agriculture and Markets (for nonpoint source issues); Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and New York State Department of Economic Development (for economic issues); New York and Vermont Departments of Health (for health advisories); and Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, and New York Department of State (for recreation and cultural resource issues). Other key ministries in Québec include the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food, and the Wildlife and Parks Agency.

## Federal Agencies

Many of the activities necessary to implement the Plan need to occur at the local level and, to some degree, at the state level. However, federal agencies have taken a vital role in providing support for Plan implementation in the unique network of partnerships reflected below. Several federal agencies recently signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* to facilitate their cooperation and coordination through the Lake Champlain Basin Program. Representatives of these agencies are active in many of LCBP activities.

- *The USEPA provides financial and technical support to the states for implementing several federal environmental programs. They ensure that all Americans are protected from significant risks to human health and the environment where they live, learn, and work.*
- *The US Department of Agriculture provides financial support and technical information on best management practices for controlling nonpoint source*

*pollution, and especially for preventing pollution from agricultural runoff.*

- *The US Department of the Interior supports the management plan through three services. The Fish and Wildlife Service cooperates with the states in the management of fish and wildlife resources, operates a National Wildlife Refuge and a National Fish Hatchery in the Basin, and helps ensure that the actions of other federal agencies are consistent with the needs for fish and wildlife conservation. The National Park Service provides financial and technical support for programs concerning cultural heritage and recreational resources associated with the Champlain Valley. The US Geological Survey provides financial and technical support through stream gauge monitoring and watershed research.*
- *The US Army Corps of Engineers provides financial and technical support for management of invasive aquatic species, maintenance of structures within waterways, stream stabilization programs, and nonpoint source pollution control.*
- *The US Department of Commerce, through the National Sea Grant College programs, provides financial and technical support for research, management of fisheries and other aquatic resources, and related watershed programs.*
- *The US Department of Transportation, through the National Scenic Byways Program provides financial and technical support for recreational and economic programs related to the Lake Champlain Byways program.*

## Business and Industry

The activities of private businesses and chambers of commerce are a critical component of protecting the resources that support the economic vitality of the Basin. Voluntary efforts to recycle and prevent pollution are examples of how the private sector has been active in implementing elements of the Plan. Educational partnerships with television and other news media have tremendously increased public awareness of the importance of



A scientist from the Québec Ministry of Environment monitors the Missisquoi River.

individual citizen participation and community involvement in good lake stewardship practices. Chambers of commerce have been effective at drawing together business interests to assist in the planning process and will continue to contribute knowledge through the course of Plan implementation.

## Academic Institutions and Research Organizations

Academic institutions, research organizations, and cooperative extension programs have served vital roles in studying Lake Champlain and its Basin. They also have been highly effective in educating students, teachers, and other citizens about Lake Champlain issues. Many actions in the Plan call for research concerning lakewide problems and emerging issues. Continued Plan implementation requires continued participation by academic institutions and research organizations, and depends greatly on the soundness of data and information collected by them.

## Nongovernmental Organizations

Many actions in the Plan list nonprofit and citizen-based organizations as potential key partners. Watershed associations and environmental groups have long been active in organizing and supporting the activities of individual interests in the Basin. Examples of activities by nonprofit/nongovernmental organizations that implement elements of the Plan include water quality monitoring, research, and conservation of cultural heritage resources found submerged in the Lake. Citizen groups, including watershed organizations, have been especially successful in implementing educational workshops, streambank stabilization, toxic reduction initiatives, aquatic species control, public forums, the restoration of contaminated sites, the encouragement of low impact recreational activities, and continued communication with the Lake Champlain Basin Program about emerging issues and priorities.

## Legislative Bodies

Legislative bodies in the Basin are responsible for passing laws and appropriating funds for many programs important to the Lake. Several actions in the Plan call for consistent policies among New York, Vermont, and Québec. This requires extensive cooperation among their legislative bodies. Successful Plan implementation also requires that legislative bodies respond to the will of their constituents and act decisively and creatively to protect and enhance the resources of the Basin in the face of technical, political, and financial obstacles.

## Residents and Visitors

The cumulative results of many individual actions make perhaps the greatest difference in the complex issues facing the Lake Champlain Basin. Nearly 600,000 people live, work, and play in the Lake Champlain Basin, which they share with over six million visitors annually. Underlying all of the actions in the Plan is the need for public involvement. Residents of the Basin can be involved in the implementation process in many ways. They can change activities in their own households, maintain septic systems properly, and reduce the use of toxic chemicals in cleaning and lawn care. They can support local initiatives for action, or be prepared to demand action if none is taken. They also can volunteer for local boards, monitor their activities, and participate in citizen groups. Most importantly, residents can inform themselves about caring for their watershed.

Visitors are often involved in the implementation of the Plan through their support of the economic and environmental integrity of the Basin. The inherent beauty of the Basin is a key attraction for visitors, who often bring a heightened sense of appreciation of the quality of the natural environment. They spend numerous dollars in the Basin and can act in environmentally sound ways when they are here.

## Coordinating Organizations

The need for state and international communication and cooperation regarding the management of the Lake Champlain Basin has been apparent since the 1940s. There have been numerous successful efforts to bring the two states and countries together since that time, including the International Joint Commission, the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative, the Lake Champlain Research Consortium, and Citizens Advisory Committees. The New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission, which coordinates the fiscal affairs of the Lake Champlain Basin Program, is itself a cooperative partnership of the six New England States and New York State.

The coordinating role of the **Lake Champlain Steering Committee**, which operates the LCBP, relies on the cooperation of each of these efforts. Each of these organizations, and others like them, has played a vital role in drawing together key partners to produce coordinated research and consistent policies for the Basin. For specific information on these organizations, see the next section on “Framework for Plan Implementation.”