

## ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

BELUGA WHALES, QUEBEC, CANADA © JANET FOSTER / WWF-CANADA

“Without protection of its critical habitat, this population is expected to shrink further.”

—Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada on the St. Lawrence beluga population

### 1994

WWF co-chairs the recovery team for the St. Lawrence estuary belugas

### March 2012

The Beluga Recovery Strategy is released

### 2014

WWF supports a lawsuit to stop TransCanada from conducting seismic tests in beluga nursery grounds

### September 2014

Quebec's Superior Court orders a temporary halt to TransCanada's exploratory drilling

### November 2014

COSEWIC revises its assessment of St. Lawrence belugas from “threatened” to “endangered”

### April 2015

TransCanada announces it will not build a port in critical nursery habitat for belugas

# PROTECTING THE “CANARIES OF THE SEA”

While most belugas live in the Arctic, you’ll also find some in the St. Lawrence, where freshwater mixes with the salty Atlantic Ocean. The St. Lawrence estuary provides relatively warm, shallow conditions for belugas to give birth and raise their young.

These small, white whales with smiling mouths have been nicknamed “canaries of the sea,” thanks to their musical chirps and whistles.

Because these mammals sit at the top of the marine food chain, they also serve as “canaries in the coal mine”—among the first to feel the effects of industrial pollution. In the past, some beluga carcasses were found to have contained so many contaminants they qualified as hazardous waste.

St. Lawrence belugas once numbered 10,000. Now there are fewer than 900. Although these whales have been protected from hunting since 1979, factors such as pollution, habitat destruction and degradation, noise pollution, and climate change stand in the way of their recovery.

Last November, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) revised its assessment of St. Lawrence belugas from “threatened” to “endangered.”

So when TransCanada proposed to build a terminal for its Energy East pipeline in Cacouna, Quebec—a critical nursery area for mothers and calves—WWF, along with many other organizations, pushed back on the proposal.

The following spring, after months of protests, TransCanada agreed to look for a terminal site elsewhere.

To ensure a future for these whales, WWF is working towards protecting habitat of critical importance for their survival and recovery, and we’re working with the Group for Research and Education on Marine Mammals (GREMM) to identify and protect the wintering grounds of the St. Lawrence population. We’re also collaborating with shipping companies on best practices to reduce shipping noise and prevent collisions with whales.

## Canada Steamship Lines (CSL): Developing better protection for belugas

David Martin, owner and chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee of the Board of Directors at The CSL Group, believes that a strong economy depends on a healthy environment. That’s why the marine shipping company has such a long-standing commitment to conservation.

CSL has worked with WWF on a number of projects including adopting best practices to decrease the risk of entanglement of right whales in fishing gear, supporting the transformation of fishing industry practices, and funding conservation initiatives to protect sharks and turtles.

Now, CSL is helping WWF develop better protection for the St. Lawrence belugas that live a few hundred kilometres downstream from the company’s Montreal headquarters. “As a primary user of the St. Lawrence River, CSL is actively engaged in leading industry action to implement sustainable business practices that respect our environment,” says David.



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