

Vignette on endangered species

Marines Mammals

The St-Laurence waters are home to several marine mammals. They can be sighted from the coast, but also during excursions organized by a First Nation tourism agency that is specialized in marine mammal sighting. The general public and tourists have access to boats and experimented guides.

Unfortunately, throughout the years, the population of several species in the St-Laurence has dramatically decreased because of human activity:

- **Disruption:** pleasure craft traffic, commercial navigation and coastal activity can seriously disrupt marine mammals because these activities interfere with the mammals' vital socialization, feeding, rest, reproduction and care giving activities.
- **Noise pollution:** noise pollution caused by motors disrupts communication between the mammals and covers the ultrasounds that help the mammals locate their preys. This noise can agitate and modify their behavior.
- **Pollution:** pollution is a serious threat to the survival of whales and seals. Pollutant spills in the St-Laurence degrade the quality of the mammals' habitat and contaminate their tissues, which leads to serious illnesses such as cancer. Some mammals swallow inedible solid waste, which can even lead to death. Every year, at least 100 000 marine mammals (whales, dolphins, etc.) mistake plastic bags and other waste for jelly fish. They can choke to death by swallowing them because the bags obstruct their digestive system. Over a million seabirds and countless numbers of fish disappear because of this as well.
- **Risk of collisions:** the risks of a collision between marine mammals and boats are a constant and concerning threat, because commercial and recreational navigation have been rising over the years. The boats' hull or propeller hits the mammals.
- **Commercial fishing:** because gillnets are used for commercial fishing, the risks of an accidental catch are higher. However, with the moratorium on cod fishing, the use of gillnets has decreased in the past years.
- **Coastal development:** development has destroyed the seals' habitat and lead to other types of disruption.

Here are a few suggested actions and best practices to avoid interfering with the marine mammal population:

- Improve the network of protected zones
- Create awareness and educate people
- Further research and knowledge
- Follow an experimented guide to avoid interrupting the marine mammal's vital activities
- Limit your sightings, and thus reduce the risks of cumulative impacts due to sightseeing in the region
- Respect the animal's habitat and never leave any trace of your visit
- Dispose your wastewater and trash in the designated place
- Never go ashore on the haulouts (where the seals gather outside the water) and don't navigate close to them
- Never feed the animals.

Reference documents:

Best practices guide on marine mammals:

http://www.zipnord.qc.ca/enperil/PDF/outils/Guide%20bonnes%20pratiques%20en%20mer_fr.pdf

