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2023

ANNUAL REPORT

Banc-des-Américains
Marine Protected Area





At-a-glance

Date of designation:

2019

Size:

1,000 km²

Contribution towards the marine conservation targets:

0.02%

Location:

This MPA is located to the east of the Gaspé Peninsula within the Estuary and the Gulf of St. Lawrence bioregion; in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Co-managed by:

The MPA is jointly managed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Government of Quebec, including the following partners:

- Department of Environment, the Fight Against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks (MELCCFP)
- Department of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF)
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ)

Acknowledgement:

The MPA is located on Gespe'gewa'gi, the ancestral land of the Mi'gmaq First Nations. It is near the Mi'gmaq communities of Gespeg, Gesgapegiag and Listuguj.

Zones:

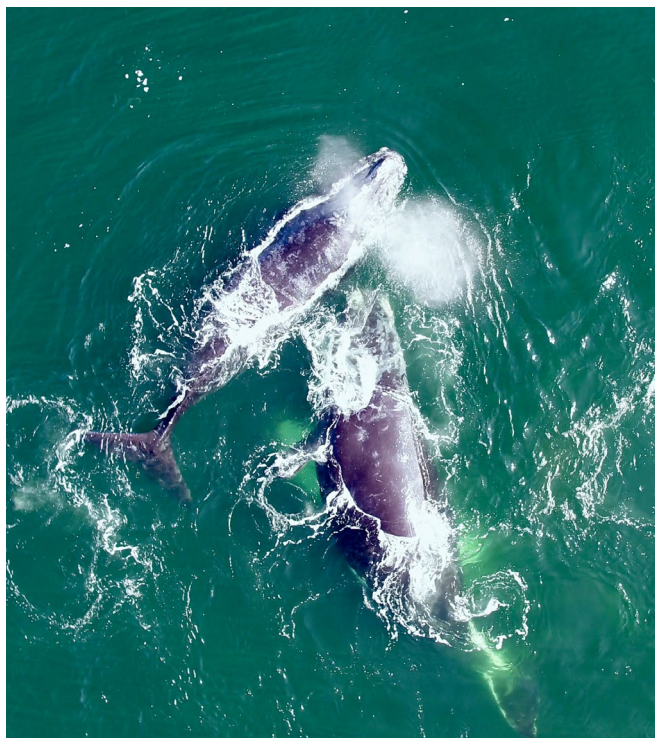
There are two management zones, including:

- the core protection zone: rocky ridge and escarpments (Zone 1); and
- the adaptive management zone: the plains adjacent to the ridge (Zones 2a and 2b).



Key highlights

This area is currently named the Banc-des-Américains Marine Protected Area (BdA MPA). The common name refers to the MPA that is co-managed with the Government of Quebec, where federal and Quebec protection statuses overlap. The term MPA is used in this document where joint actions with the Government of Quebec are concerned.



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In May 2023, the BdA MPA Advisory Committee was formed, and its first meeting was held in Gaspé in August 2023. The Advisory Committee includes one or more members representing:

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous commercial fish harvesters;
- boat operators;
- the tourism industry;
- environmental and educational non-governmental organizations; and
- scientific research.

Every year, a variety of different science missions are carried out.

The Mi'gmaq Wolastoqey Indigenous Fisheries Management Association (MWIFMA) is also involved in monitoring seals and microplastics, this monitoring work is supported by funding from DFO contribution agreements.

A CSAS science advisory report and a research document on the review of DFO monitoring indicators for the BdA MPA were published.

The draft of the first management plan for the 2024–2029 status of the BdA MPA was sent out with a call for comments to the three Mi'gmaq First Nations communities, as well as other key partners and stakeholders.



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In the spotlight: benefits

Ecological	Socio-cultural	Economic
<p>The MPA protects the BdA ecosystem and ensures the sound management of human activities to help achieve MPA conservation objectives, including the protection of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benthic (seabed) habitats; • pelagic (water column) habitats and forage species (prey); and • at-risk whales and wolffish. <p>For example, fisheries for prey species (herring, sand lance, mackerel, capelin, krill and copepods) are prohibited because these species are protected as part of the conservation objectives.</p> <p>A fact sheet on best practices to follow when observing marine mammals was also produced and distributed to tour boat operators in the area.</p>	<p>Indigenous food, social and ceremonial fisheries are permitted throughout the MPA. A number of projects have demonstrated the socio-cultural importance of the area, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MWIFMA carried out a project to document Mi'gmaq traditional and ecological knowledge on the area with members of the Gespeg and Gesgapegiag communities. • A review of site knowledge was conducted to produce outreach materials for member communities and other partners. 	<p>Through contribution agreements under the Oceans Management Program, funding was granted to a First Nations organization and two environmental non-profit organizations. This funding enabled their participation in ecological monitoring, outreach activities to educate the general public and boat operators, and other activities in the area.</p> <p>The conservation of the ecosystem also supports continued opportunities for marine mammal watching activities organized by cruise operators, and the conservation of the seabed creates a favourable environment for commercially-valued species, such as snow crab and Atlantic halibut.</p>



Education and outreach

During the summer of 2023, DFO's Maurice Lamontagne Institute held an open house. The guided tour included an information kiosk on the BdA MPA.

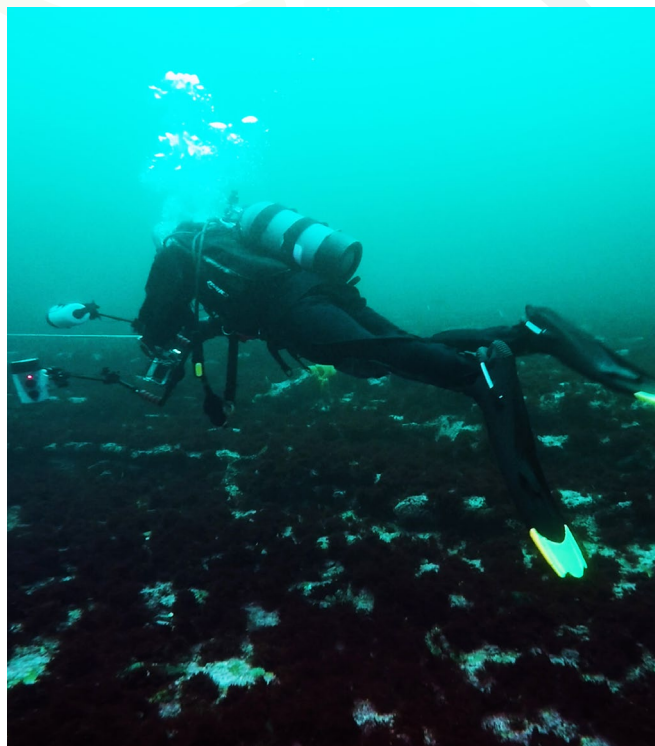
Under a contribution agreement, members of the MWIFMA participated in local events, such as the Gespeg First Nation's Mawiomí and Québec's provincial parks day to raise public awareness of the BdA MPA.

In November 2023, DFO and MELCCFP began taking steps with the Gaspésie ZIP Committee to develop a number of education and outreach tools for the BdA MPA, including podcast episodes, a drawing contest, a comic book and an immersive experience event.

The Marine Mammal Observation Network has also trained tour boat operators on how to use an online data collection tool to record marine mammal observations in the MPA.



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Research and monitoring

Monitoring plan

DFO's ecological monitoring plan is currently being prepared. An interim monitoring report will be published as a Science Response in winter/spring 2024 and will provide an update of the 14 priority ecological indicators. In addition, two documents resulting from the 2021 peer review process have now been made available online (DFO 2023; Faille et al. 2023). Some indicators could not be covered in the 2021 peer review process, and the next steps will be prioritized by the DFO Science Committee as part of its monitoring activities in the BdA MPA.

Research activities

Various scientific surveys were carried out in the MPA during the 2023 year (see table), and the data collected from these will help to ensure ongoing monitoring of the MPA. Most of the scientific surveys are large-scale studies, however, one specific expedition was dedicated to monitoring the MPA.

A science expedition in spring 2023 to monitor benthic communities collected underwater photos and videos using a drop camera, a benthic sled, baited cameras, as well as oceanographic data. The images obtained in the MPA during the 2023 mission will be analyzed in 2024–2025.

Analysis of stomach contents that were collected in 2020–2021 and in 2022 during the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence (sGSL) ecosystem survey is currently underway.

Activity	Lead	Outputs	Outcomes
Monitoring of benthic habitats in the BdA MPA	DFO	15 days at sea	Monitoring of epibenthic communities on the ridge and plains in the BdA MPA. Monitoring of the demersal fish community and mobile invertebrates. Environmental data collection (CTD and Niskin bottle). Deployment of six acoustic moorings to monitor sharks and other mobile species.
sGSL ecosystem survey	DFO	1 day in the BdA	Large-scale survey, not specific to the MPA, with two stations in the BdA. Monitoring of snow crab, Atlantic halibut, Atlantic cod, the survey spatial footprint of and the total biomass removed from survey stratum 416. Monitoring of demersal fish communities and suprabenthic communities (stomach contents). Monitoring of plankton communities (phytoplankton, zooplankton, chlorophyll a).
sGSL snow crab survey	DFO	2 to 3 days in the BdA	Large-scale survey, not specific to the MPA: seven stations in the BdA Monitoring of snow crab abundance (commercial-sized males and mature females). Monitoring of the exploitation rate for fishing carried out in the BdA.
AZMP, Viking buoy, opportunistic data	DFO	9 partial days in the BdA	Large-scale survey, not specific to the MPA: with eight stations in the BdA. The Viking buoy was deployed from May 13 to October 27. Environmental data tracking.



Photo credit : Sandra Autef



Surveillance and enforcement

The enforcement plan was developed in 2019 and remains in effect. The following surveillance and enforcement activities took place in the MPA over the past year:

Surveillance	Total
Number of hours of aerial patrols/ patrol # (ESAM)	6
Number of hours of water patrols (ESAM)	127
Number of aerial patrols (ESAM)	22
Number of water patrols (ESAM)	28
Number of hours of electronic monitoring by VMS (ESAM and FO)	40.75
Number of hours of field surveillance (FO)	14.5
Number of hours of monitoring in Zodiac boats (FO)	0
Number of hours of outreach and education for fish harvesters and COMM (FO)	14.5

FO : Fishery Officer

COMM : Marine Mammal Observation Company

ESAM: Air and Sea Surveillance Team.

An investigation is underway concerning an activity that may have disturbed living marine organisms or any part of their habitat in Zone 1 of the MPA.



Collaborations and partnerships

The Advisory Committee, which consists of representatives from various sectors associated with the MPA, was appointed in May 2023. This Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the BdA MPA Management Committee. In 2023, a number of steps were taken under three contribution agreements:

1. 2020–2026 Implementation of the pinniped abundance monitoring plan and portrait of recreational boating activities in the BdA MPA, with the Mi'gmaq Wolastoqey Indigenous Fisheries Management Association
2. 2023–2025 Education and outreach activities in the BdA MPA, with the Gaspésie ZIP Committee
3. 2021–2024 Project devoted to characterizing marine observation activities and data collection concerning marine conservation initiatives, with the Marine Mammal Observation Network



Management and governance

This MPA is the first joint project under the Canada–Quebec Collaborative Agreement for the Establishment of a Network of Marine Protected Areas in Quebec. A specific agreement, the Canada–Quebec joint project agreement regarding the BdA MPA, was also signed. Thus, this site benefits from a double status of protection, as a marine protected area under the *Oceans Act* and as a proposed aquatic reserve under Quebec’s *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*.

The Canada–Quebec management committee met five times in 2023, while the new Advisory Committee (established in 2023) met once.

Discussions are currently underway with the three Mi'gmaq First Nations communities of the Gaspé Peninsula to learn how they would like to be involved in managing the MPA.

Five new activity plans were submitted and approved by DFO. Four updates to existing three-year activity plans were also submitted.

The management plan is currently in the consultations phase involving the Advisory Committee, First Nations, and other federal departments, and is scheduled to be published in 2024.

Looking to the year ahead

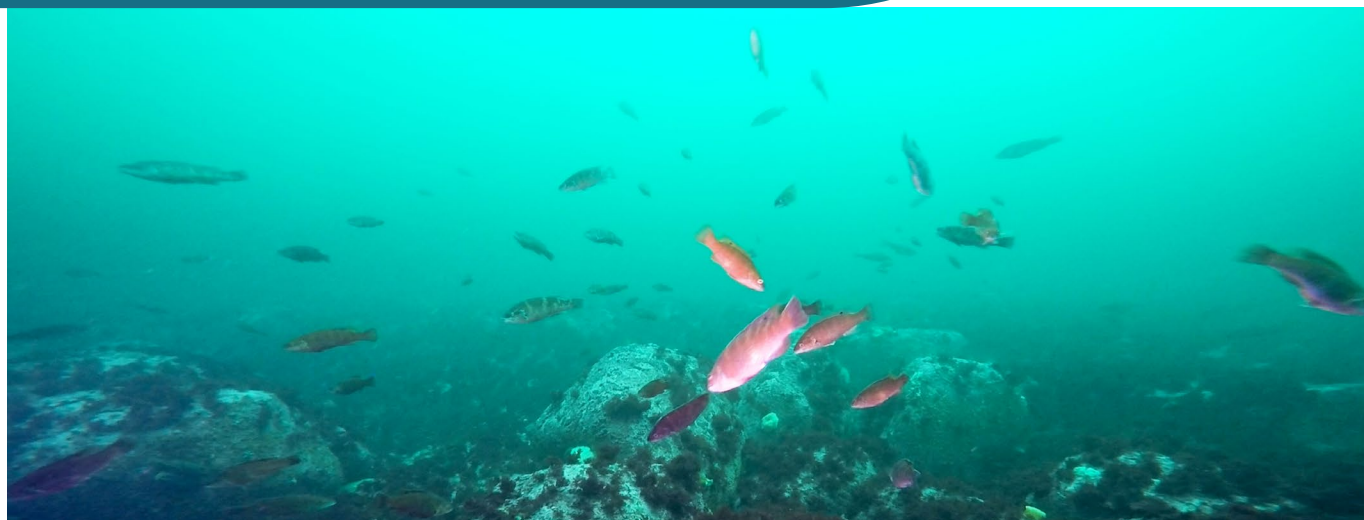
A CSAS peer-review meeting will review the interim ecological monitoring report on priority indicators.

In spring 2024, the DFO team will follow up with cruise lines that operate off the tip of the Gaspé Peninsula, to raise awareness of the regulations in effect and on best practices for marine mammal observation activities.

Three promotional video clips will be released on the following themes :

1. scientific activities
2. marine observation activities
3. compliance and enforcement of MPA Regulations

The MPA management plan is scheduled for publication in 2024.





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