



March 29, 2025

**Subject:** Comments on the Draft Terms of Reference for the Regional Assessment of the St. Lawrence River Area, Ref # 80913 (Document Reference No. 72)

To whom it may concern:

Sierra Club Canada Foundation is a national, grassroots organization with a mission to empower people to be leaders in protecting, restoring and enjoying healthy and safe ecosystems. We are committed to working to achieve ambitious goals during this critical decade for climate change and biodiversity. As part of our organization's commitment to the Decade of Change, 2020-2030:

- We champion climate solutions and a rapid transition to clean energy;
- We fight for environmental and social justice;
- We work to protect and restore nature and endangered species;
- We believe in getting people outside to explore and enjoy the outdoors; and
- We promote the conservation of resources and a circular economy.

Our membership has embraced advancing the rights of nature as a policy and value framework necessary to achieving the transformative change we seek to achieve the vision of the Decade of Change. This idea reflects our commitment to environmental and social justice, as in our experience rights of nature are key aspects of the cultural and legal frameworks of many Indigenous allies and collaborators. Rights of nature also reflects the experience of on-the-ground advocates, who have observed the failure of existing frameworks to stop the loss of biodiversity and create positive relationships between human communities and the natural environment.

We respectfully submit that consideration of the rights of nature or the rights of river systems may address the reasons given for undertaking the Regional Assessment of the St. Lawrence River Area, as described in the Context Section of the TOR: "MCK's [Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke's] request highlighted that notwithstanding the project-based environmental and impact assessments which had been conducted in the region, cumulative effects of development had failed to be thoroughly considered. As a result of the lack of consideration of cumulative effects, MCK is of the opinion that current environmental, and socio-economic conditions should

**Sierra Club Canada Foundation**  
CRA Charity # 11914 9789 RR0001  
PO Box 2007 Stn B, Ottawa Ontario K1P 5W3  
Tel. (613) 241-4611, Toll Free 1-888-810-4204  
[sccfoundation@sierraclub.ca](mailto:sccfoundation@sierraclub.ca), [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)

*Half a Century of Change and a Future of Action/ Un demi-siècle de changement - et un avenir d'action !*

not be used as reference points to assess the impacts of future projects. **According to MCK, future impact assessments should strive to enhance the environment at the regional scale, and respond to the historic impacts to the rights and interests of the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke which have already been incurred.**” [Emphasis added]

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) called for the recognition of the rights of the St. Lawrence River in 2023, and the regional assessment process could be a means to begin to explore how this concept could be applied to the St. Lawrence River Area.<sup>1</sup>

The Fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, Quebec, rights of nature was included in the text of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF):

Nature embodies different concepts for different people, including biodiversity, ecosystems, Mother Earth, and systems of life. Nature’s contributions to people also embody different concepts, such as ecosystem goods and services and nature’s gifts. Both nature and nature’s contributions to people are vital for human existence and good quality of life, including human well-being, living in harmony with nature, and living well in balance and harmony with Mother Earth. The Framework recognizes and considers these diverse value systems and concepts, including, for those countries that recognize them, rights of nature and rights of Mother Earth, as being an integral part of its successful implementation.”<sup>2</sup>

Target 19 of the GBF calls on Parties to:

Substantially and progressively increase the level of financial resources from all sources, in an effective, timely and easily accessible manner, including domestic, international, public and private resources, in accordance with Article 20 of the Convention, to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, mobilizing at least \$200 billion per year by 2030, including by:

...

---

1

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/rci/en/news/1975522/first-nations-in-quebec-and-labrador-recognize-the-rights-of-the-st-lawrence-river>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>

**Sierra Club Canada Foundation**  
CRA Charity # 11914 9789 RR0001  
PO Box 2007 Stn B, Ottawa Ontario K1P 5W3  
Tel. (613) 241-4611, Toll Free 1-888-810-4204  
[sccfoundation@sierraclub.ca](mailto:sccfoundation@sierraclub.ca), [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)

*Half a Century of Change and a Future of Action/ Un demi-siècle de changement - et un avenir d'action !*



(f) Enhancing the role of collective actions, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, Mother Earth centric actions<sup>3</sup> and non-market-based approaches including community based natural resource management and civil society cooperation and solidarity aimed at the conservation of biodiversity;

Given the calls from Indigenous leaders for the rights of the St. Lawrence River to the recognized and global commitments made by Canada as a signatory of the GBF, we recommend the following additions to the Draft Terms of Reference for the Regional Assessment of the St. Lawrence River Area:

- that the Scope of the Regional Assessment (Section 4.1 Assessment Priorities) includes reference to exploration of the rights of nature or the rights of Mother Earth, in consultation with Indigenous rights holders in the region.
- that the Regional Assessment Advisory Group consider striking an Advocacy Group and seeking experts to advise on rights of nature concepts and implementation in the context of the regional assessment.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Terms of Reference. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you require further information or have questions.

Sincerely,

<Original signed by>

---

Gretchen Fitzgerald  
Executive Director

---

<sup>3</sup> Mother Centric Actions are defined in the GBF as "Ecocentric and rights-based approach enabling the implementation of actions towards harmonic and complementary relationships between peoples and nature, promoting the continuity of all living beings and their communities and ensuring the non-commodification of environmental functions of Mother Earth."