

Saint Lawrence seaway eels slipping into oblivion

October 21 2011, by Guillaume Lavallee



Eels, pictured on October 3, 2011, can be seen in a cage after being caught by fisherman on the shores of the Saint Lawrence River in Kamouraska, Quebec. Researchers and fishers noted a decline in the eel population starting in the 1980s.

Standing in tall rubber boots in mud smeared with gooey algae, Bruno Ouellet tugs on massive nets strewn across the shores of the Saint Lawrence River, hoping to snag just a few eels.

"The fishing isn't good," the 47-year-old says. "In the early 1980s, you could catch 1,000 eels in a cage, but today I've only got three and I have to work just as hard."

For centuries, aboriginals and later French colonists fished eels from the shores of the mighty waterway at Kamouraska, Quebec about 400 kilometers (250 miles) northeast of Montreal.

Then suddenly, the eel population collapsed and only a handful of fishermen are still tending their nets here, from September to October each year.

The eels of this region reproduce in the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the [North Atlantic Ocean](#).

The [larvae](#) migrate towards Canadian shores where they are fished, or they go on to inland lakes and rivers where they grow into adult eels that eventually return to the waters near Bermuda to start over the cycle.

Researchers and fishers noted a decline in the population starting in the 1980s. "It's a freefall," said Guy Verreault, a biologist with the Quebec ministry of natural resources.

Pollution in the Great Lakes is partly to blame.

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