

## THE ATLANTIC COASTAL ACTION PROGRAM

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### DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

The Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP) is a community-based program that promotes local leadership and action. ACAP enhances the traditional government delivery of programs by empowering and building the capacity of ecosystem-based coalitions of stakeholders to take the lead in identifying and acting on their local environmental and sustainability priority issues.

ACAP was launched by the Government of Canada as part of its Green Plan in 1992 to help Atlantic Canadians restore and sustain watersheds and adjacent coastal areas. There are currently 14 watershed- and community-based, non-profit ACAP organizations throughout Atlantic Canada. Each organization operates independently, but is formally linked under the ACAP umbrella. A 15<sup>th</sup> site in Labrador is in development. The ACAP process has involved the development and implementation of comprehensive environmental management plans, partnership building, local action and awareness projects, and the advancement of science. These activities enhance and maintain the environmental integrity of coastal communities. ACAP accomplishments are widely recognized and they continue to gain respect and credibility locally, nationally and internationally.

Atlantic Canada consists of the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland & Labrador. Located on the East Coast of Canada, these provinces cover an area of approximately 540,303 square kilometres. ACAP communities are located throughout the region, from urban settings with polluted harbours, to polluted industrial areas, to coastal farmland. In accordance with their range of ecosystem and community characteristics, their successes also range widely, from solving problems related to sewage treatment and household hazardous wastes to improving water quality and restoring shellfish growing areas to building local capacity and educating communities on sustainability to monitoring local air and water quality. A detailed description of community projects is available on the ACAP Website at <http://atlantic-web1.ns.ec.gc.ca/community/acap/>.

### PARTNERS

ACAP community organizations partner with local citizens, businesses, industries, academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), First Nations and federal, provincial and municipal governments. In most cases, people from all of these sectors sit on the various Boards of Directors of the ACAP organizations. Environment Canada (EC) sits on these boards as an ex-officio partner. Such a broad network of people provides an invaluable mechanism for sharing information and resources with each other. It also advises government departments on the priority issues within communities throughout the Atlantic Region.

Community and government science priorities are advanced through the ACAP's Science Linkages Initiative. Here, EC scientists work in partnership with ACAP communities and their partners to carry out and communicate science. Over 60 EC scientists from all branches of EC-Atlantic and our national research institutes have worked directly with ACAP organizations on scientific research and outreach through this Initiative. In addition, there is active participation of scientists from other Canadian government departments (e.g., Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Health Canada) in these projects, as well as from provincial and municipal government departments and industrial scientists.

### INNOVATION

The ACAP model promotes a community-based form of governance for environmental management and differs from the traditional top-down model. The community-based approach of ACAP provides a supplementary framework of governance which allows the public to have more meaningful

involvement in decision making and program delivery. It involves all sectors (governments, industry, academia, communities) working together towards a common vision of sustainability. This approach addresses issues in a holistic manner, involving interested stakeholders from the very beginning of the process and throughout to identify priority issues and agree on common solutions and approaches.

The ACAP program also promotes an ecosystem approach to achieving community objectives. The use of natural systems boundaries is an important ACAP concept and allows for explicit ecosystem objectives with measurable indicators, such as water quality and air quality, percentage of solid waste recycled and sustained beneficial resource uses. The ecosystem approach also recognizes the important linkages between economic and social well being and the health of the environment.

In addition, relationships are built and maintained, and knowledge and experience flow between the communities and EC through ACAP 'Windows' - EC staff who work one-on-one with an ACAP community over the long term. ACAP Windows provide a human face to the department and serve as effective conduits for information flow and the pursuit of common priorities.

### **MAINSTREAMING/SUSTAINABILITY**

ACAP organizations are expanding throughout the Atlantic region through:

- increasingly adopting and mentoring neighboring watersheds and coastal areas, joining together in multi-site partnerships to work on regional issues or theme areas, such as inadequate sewage treatment and a water quality bio-monitoring network for the Atlantic Region.
- continuing to work with and build the capacity of multi-stakeholder coalitions organized around larger regional ecosystems. Education is a fundamental component underlying most of the work that the ACAP sites undertake. Many ACAPs have a store-front operation open to the public as a source of information on key environmental issues in the community. In addition, the majority of projects have integrated an education/outreach component (at times including training workshops for youth and the unemployed) to increase local awareness and facilitate behavioural change.

The multi-partnered, community-centered approach will continue to be applied progressively throughout Atlantic coastal ecosystems as capacity allows. Labrador was chosen unanimously by the 14 ACAP organizations and EC as the next focus area for expansion. In 2005-06 the ACAP presence in Labrador should be secured through the establishment of one or more sites.

EC and the ACAP organizations are also getting positive feedback on long range plans to promote the ACAP model in other parts of Canada. On the international front, the organizations are increasingly sharing their knowledge and experiences with other community organizations in Russia, Indonesia, Chile, China and Uruguay. For example, Sheldon Peddle, coordinator of ACAP Humber Arm, traveled to Montevideo, Uruguay to build working connections between ACAP communities and coastal communities along the Rio de la Plata.

### **BUDGET ISSUES**

ACAP was and continues to be a highly efficient and cost-effective program. Leverage on ACAP funds invested is on average 6 times the value, it has been as high as 15 times. A recent economic study of ACAP estimated that from 1997-2001, for an total investment of CDN \$6.1M, ACAP organizations generated a GDP impact of over CDN \$22M, a total tax impact of more than CDN \$8M, (Gardner Pinfold, 2002). The same study estimated that if EC attempted to undertake the same suite of projects and activities that the 14 ACAP organizations completed over the same period, it would have cost the department over CDN \$71M as opposed to the CDN \$6.1 M invested.

Beyond the money invested, it is the 'in kind' contributions and local commitment that make ACAP work. The ACAP process relies heavily on local involvement and support. While EC contributes to project funding and scientific expertise, community stakeholders supply resources through volunteer labour, in-kind contributions, and leveraged financial support from all available sectors, thus, sustaining the program and demonstrating the value of an inclusive community-based approach.

### **REPLICATING THE INITIATIVE**

All the ACAP communities and their partners now possess improved effectiveness in resource management. Their collective and extensive experiences with lobbying, management, research and education over the past twelve years puts the ACAP organizations in a unique position to inform and guide other community programs and organizations.

The structure of all ACAP organizations is:

- Board of Directors;
- Coordinator / Executive Director;
- Volunteers;
- Partnerships with local institutions, governments, industries, academia and others; and
- Local presence by having their offices within the community.

ACAP's multi-stakeholder partnership approach provides excellent opportunities to spread the risk of dependency on any one agency or partner, thereby strengthening the access to, and efficient use of, contributed resources. Diverse partners contribute both financial and in-kind support, constantly seek efficiencies and emphasize regular reporting on both institutional and environmental performance. In addition, ACAP provides an incentive for communities to share in the responsibility of developing and implementing innovative solutions to local and/or regional environmental, economic and social issues. It also leads to a better understanding of the constraints and opportunities available at the government levels, within industry and businesses and the community at large.

Some things to keep in mind:

- Integrated initiatives require some trial-and-error and learning-by-doing. All ACAP organizations went through an "evolution" of varying lengths of time.
- Thousands of volunteers and youth were instrumental in undertaking local projects, research and monitoring activities. One concern to be aware of is volunteer burn out.
- Coordinators or executive directors are hired by the local ACAP Board of Directors.
- The only salaried workers are the coordinators or executive directors, key project managers and administrative staff. The remaining are local volunteers.