

Conservation group celebrates cleanup

By Rita Legault
SHERBROOKE

The river cleanup group Action St-François is celebrating successes of the past year, but remains aware that there is still a lot of work to do to clean up tributaries of the St-François River.

While volunteers for Action St-François have pulled some 370 metric tonnes of garbage from more than three dozen waterways over the past decade, the St-François river basin is made up of more than 1,000 streams, brooks and other waterways - many of which have their own hidden dumps adding to the deterioration of water quality throughout the watershed, say organizers.

This year, some 165 volunteers including Sherbrooke MP Serge Cardin, took part in 27 cleaning bees dragging some 17 tonnes of trash from eight waterways that feed into the St-François River. That included some 9,136 kilos of metal, 1,120 kilos of plastic and glass, 880 kilos of used tires and assorted other trash weighing in at another

5,383 tonnes.

Of that, some 67 per cent was recycled. The rest was carted off to the Sherbrooke municipal landfill which gives Action St-François free access to the dump.

Cardin, who has been a longtime supporter of the environmental group, said the actions have resulted in concrete results.

While the ecological group, which was founded in 1992, has had an impact on the quality of water in the St-François River basin, it has also raised awareness about the environment and conspicuous consumerism that is filling landfills, said board member Charles Coulombe.

Gendron said participants who remove used tires and margarine containers from the shores may think about what they buy and what happens to it after they have discarded it.

"Consumers need to be aware of what we consume and what we do with those objects when we no longer need them," said Gendron, noting that some

things can be more easily recycled than others.

Waterways that were visited last year include the Allan Stream in Huntingville, Ruisseau Carrier in Stoke, the St-François River in Westbury, the Salmon River in Milby, the Eaton River in East-Angus, the Doughty Stream in Richmond, Ruisseau Veillette in Compton and the Magog River in Katevale.

The Magog River cleanup, which was organized in collaboration with the Association pour la protection de la Rivière Magog, marked the first time the environmental group worked on the clean up of a river bottom with the help of scuba divers, said Gendron.

The association usually concentrates its efforts on river banks and lake shores, mainly removing trash from a variety of dumps where people have discarded everything from old refrigerators to cars and used tires.

Gendron said that over the last year, Action St-François received a helping hand from many other ecological groups and various associations.