

Editorial section

The Société de Conservation Zico de la Baie de Gaspé still working towards a non-toxic railway

GASPE: The Société de conservation ZICO de la Baie-de-Gaspé (SCZBG) is still working to achieve the total elimination of toxic herbicides and creosote on the Gaspésie railway. The SCZBG has updated its document, now 83 pages long: *Le chemin de fer de la Gaspésie – Un trajet de rêve empoisonné par les herbicides et la créosote* (The Gaspésie Railway – A Dream Trip Poisoned by Herbicides and Creosote).

The new information includes data on the herbicide added by the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) to its 2023 spray program. The product used is called Telar, which carries a label describing it as ecotoxic. It can contaminate groundwater and surface water. This toxic product affects development and the reproductive system.

All herbicides are toxic, regardless of the amount. Herbicides have no borders and, therefore, people can be affected without going near the railway.

As we have always said, there are many alternatives to herbicides, and we explain this in our document. For example, there is electro weeding, hot steam or water, and UV light, as well as mechanical means. These alternatives, and others too, are already in common use elsewhere on railways. We also explain about preventive rehabilitation without herbicides, which we are asking for on the Port-Daniel-Gascons-Gaspé portion of the line. This way of doing things, which furthermore improves the quality and lifespan of the railway, has been used for a long time in Europe, and can be found in North America also. We have added information about the

VIA Rail preventive project in Ontario.

As for creosote, another toxic product, the best alternative is to stop installing wooden ties. Ties made of composite, steel, concrete or plastic, all recycled and recyclable, are widely available and used in North America and around the world. Our document has a section explaining this, now including information on a Saskatchewan railway project.

The SCZBG sent its updated document to the advisory committee of the Transport and Sustainable Mobility Ministry of Quebec, which had already received our January 31, 2023, document. The Ministry formed the advisory committee in 2022 to study our demands after reading our letters and those of our supporters. In 2023, the Ministry advisory committee invited us to a virtual meeting.

After receiving the updated document, the Ministry thanked us and informed us that the advisory committee is starting consultations with its North American and European partners, which is an important phase in getting more information on solutions. The advisory committee assured us that the Ministry will share its report with us.

The SCZBG also sent its updated document to the

SCFG, which had received the January one too. The SCZBG is still continuing to inform the SCFG. Moreover, the office of the member of the National Assembly, Mr. Stéphane Sainte-Croix, has accepted our request for a meeting.

The SCZBG believes that its perseverance over the last years spent doing activism, plus research and giving all that information to the SCFG and the Ministry, as well as the support of our allies, is beginning to have a positive effect, and that this last day, August 31, of toxic spraying will be truly the last day for good.

The priority is our non-toxic future, health and environment, especially for our children.

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