

Outaouais Regional Public Consultation on protected areas 2012
Territories of interest for expansion of the network of protected areas in l'Outaouais

Comments from:



The Mont O'Brien Association
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October 25, 2012

Natalie Magnan, ing.f.
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Conférence régionale des élus de l'Outaouais
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Gatineau, QC J8P 7Z5

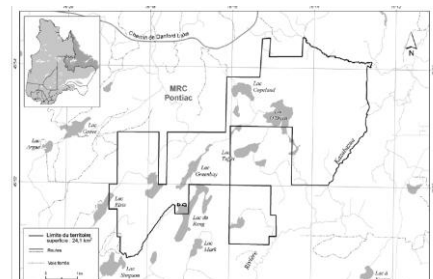
Dear Mme. Magnan:

The Board of Directors of the Mont O'Brien Association wishes to express its appreciation for your efforts and the efforts of the Québec Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment, Parks, and Wildlife (Marc-André Bouchard), along with the Québec Ministry of Natural Resources (Denis Bouillon) in conducting this public consultation on proposals for new biodiversity/aquatic reserves in the Outaouais Region.

The Mont O'Brien Association takes great interest in the proposals shown, and it supports this major increase in areas that are protected for conservation of biological diversity. We note with pride and pleasure that the Québec Government intends to follow through on its commitment to increase protected area to 12% by the year 2015.

The Mont O'Brien Association formed as a grass-roots group in the Municipality of Allevyn-et-Cawood, MRC Pontiac, in the year 2000. It registered then with the Québec Registre des Entreprises as a non-profit organisation. The purpose of the Association has been to provide access to the public territory of the Mont O'Brien area, to protect the forest, lakes, and wildlife of the territory, and to provide recreational and educational opportunities for the public. In the year 2005, the Association applied to the Québec Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment, and Parks (MDDEP) to have the protected status of "biodiversity reserve" applied to the territory, under the new Québec Act for the Conservation of Natural Heritage. The territory was granted this provisional status in 2008.

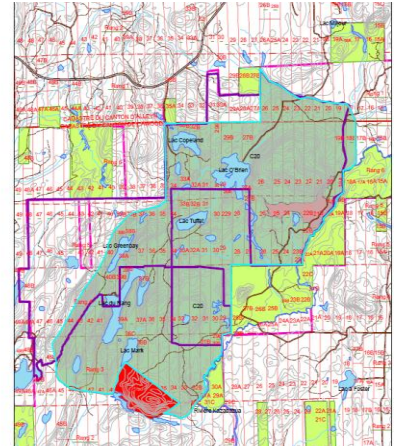
When delimitation for the suggested Biodiversity Reserve was being drawn, in 2007-2008, the MDDEP delimitations were in three blocks with a total area of 24.7 km². This map is from the basic "Conservation Plan" that was prepared by the MDDEP:



The odd shape was because of a block of mining claims that was located in its middle. The claims expired in late 2008.

The MRC Pontiac mayors naturally saw that three blocks would not be a good shape for a biodiversity reserve. The mayors considered an ultimate delimitation that would be compact and manageable, instead. It would protect a large wetland in the reserve's middle, and would extend south to 'Paddy's Creek', so as to include an isolated, roadless hill of old forest with large, productive oaks, and undisturbed habitat for interior forest wildlife and rare plants. Most of the reserve would be surrounded by a buffer zone of public land.

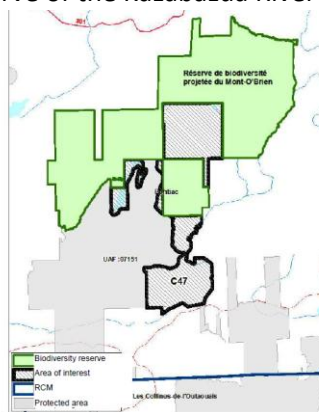
The MRC Pontiac Forestry Department, with the collaboration of the Mont O'Brien Association, created this map with such a delimitation (shown in grey at right over a cadastral map) in February of 2008. The 3 blocks originally suggested by the MDDEP are outlined in purple. The green areas are TPI lots (public forest area managed by the MRC according to an agreement with the MRN; the rest of the public land buffer to the south and north is not shown on this map, however). At the time, the red half-circle was an old-growth forest biological refuge that would also be protected. Mont O'Brien (with a hiking trail) is in the northeast, and Kaz Creek is along the east side. Threatened species occur there. Six relatively pristine lakes are within this delimitation. Highway 301 between Otter Lake and Kazabazua is one mile north. (In 2012, the MDDEP mentions the high value of the Mont O'Brien Reserve in the context of the small amount of public land available for protected areas establishment in the south of l'Outaouais; it is also high value because very little forest is available for protection in the "Sugar Maple-Basswood forest domain" of Québec. All of the delimitation shown on the above map from the MRC and the Association is within that biogeographical "domain".)



The map above was submitted to the Conférence régionale des élus de l'Outaouais by the MRC Pontiac in April of 2008. Cré-O then sent the map to the MDDEP in its Avis on the public consultation.

The MDDEP presently suggests annexation of the middle square, of Range Lake, and of about four km² of public land on its southeast side of the Reserve. The "C47" land to the southeast has ecological value chiefly because it lies within a curve of the Kazabazua River and its wetlands border. On the terrestrial part of C47, however, the forest in approximately four km² was clear-cut by the Bowater mill about ten years ago, and is presently a forest of poplar saplings.

- Area of Interest C47:**
- 8.7 km²
 - Pontiac RCM
 - Expansion of Mont- O'Brien Reserve
 - FMU concerned: 7,151
 - Enhance biodiversity reserve's ability to maintain its ecological integrity



On the terrestrial part of C47, however, the forest in approximately four km² was clear-cut by the Bowater mill about ten years ago, and is presently a forest of poplar saplings.

The Mont O'Brien Association could certainly support addition of this land in the curve of the Kazabazua River, but at the same time it would like to re-iterate the importance of also including the area delimited in the

map from the MRC (at the top of this page), including the red half-circle of old forest, in the Provisional Biodiversity Reserve. This area was surveyed by a biologist in 2005, when the rare "spotted coral-root"

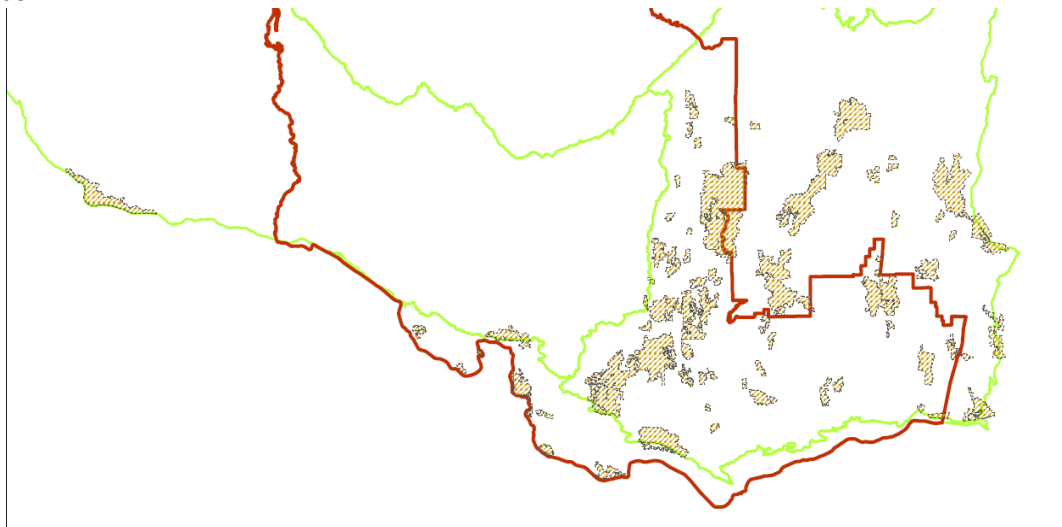
orchid was found. A very large black bear was also found here, feeding on acorns, in this most isolated part of the territory.

The difficulty with including this part of the public land as provisional biodiversity reserve or as a “territoire d’intérêt”, despite its value for biodiversity protection, has been that it is classified by the Québec Ministry of Natural Resources (MRN) as a “deer yard” (“une aire de concentration du cerf de Virginie”). Association members have not seen evidence of particular use by deer in summer or winter. The problem is not that, however, but with forestry interventions that would be allowed.

Ministry of Natural Resource (MRN) regulations for forestry in deer yards permit clear-cuts of up to 25 acres in conifer forest, and up to 62 acres in deciduous forest, along with wide roads for logging trucks. Such interventions would destroy the value of this forest area as “old growth” and for its associated old-growth species diversity.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that the MDDEP evaluates the amount of old forest that is included in the biodiversity reserves as an indication of Québec’s success in protection of biological diversity. This is shown in its documents for this public consultation¹. Clearly, classification of forest as deer yard is not compatible with biodiversity protection. Besides the harvest of old forest that is encouraged, in years when deer populations are high, they preferentially browse members of the lily family, avoid common fern species, and browse valuable tree seedlings, thus reducing wild plant diversity. It is also well known that presence of White-tailed deer is harmful to moose, because of the deadly internal parasite that spreads from deer to moose.

Deer yards are valuable as an economic resource, to help deer survive slightly north of their natural range, and thus to support the hunting economy in l’Outaouais. This is why there are 413.2 square km of public land deer yards in this region, an area greater than all three present provisional biodiversity reserves combined. This map shows territory (both public and private) in l’Outaouais that is presently classified as deer yards:

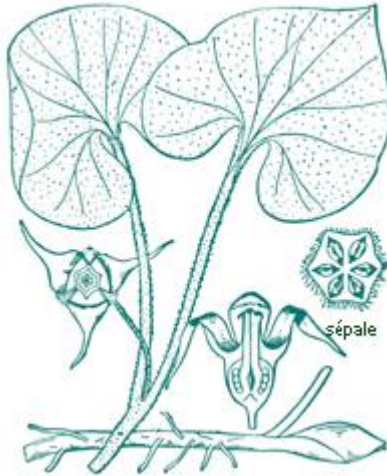


It should come as no surprise that at every one of the four public consultation meetings, some member of the public has spoken up to protest the inclusion of deer yards as protected areas that would count

¹ Portrait du réseau d’aires protégées au Québec, Version 3.0, Septembre 2012. **Analyse de carence ÉCORÉGIONALE**, Région administrative de l’**Outaouais**. See pages 9, 18, 27, and 36 of this 56-page document.

towards the Québec 12% protected area goal. Nevertheless, the Mont O'Brien Association firmly supports the protection of sufficient numbers of white-tailed deer to aid the local economy.

The Association would like to use this opportunity to point out the general importance of the southern part of l'Outaouais for biodiversity conservation. It is in the south of Québec that the most plant and animal species are found, as well as the largest proportion of threatened and endangered species^{2,3}. As well, many species find their northern or eastern limits in l'Outaouais⁴. We find Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*), for example, just a few kilometres south of the Mont O'Brien Biodiversity Reserve, and we watch for it to appear here.



We must increase our efforts to protect species on public land, especially in the south of l'Outaouais. In the "Plaine d'Ottawa" region, for example, only 6% of the territory is protected; if 18% of this is public land, more of it should have increased protection. As well, the province needs to support protection of threatened species on private land, such as by subsidizing more voluntary protection in small corridors leading from Gatineau Park, which shelters seventy-eight threatened and

endangered species.

The Québec government needs to perform serious analyses on the large landscape scale of threats to biodiversity from infrastructure development, such as roads of all type, urban sprawl, excessive cottaging surrounding lakes, etc., and from anthropogenic climate change. Much recent research in North America is available on this subject, but studies specific to Québec and adjacent territories are urgently needed. Protected areas help survival of species that are threatened by climate change, but connectivity among protected areas, such as protected corridors along the Noire and the Coulonge Rivers, is also valuable. Care in reducing fragmentation of the greater forest and wetlands between protected areas is starting to increase in the Québec Ministry of Natural Resources and at the local integrated planning panels (such as the "TLGirt" panel in which the Mont O'Brien Association participates). However, standards for selection and permanent protection of small "refuges biologiques" within the greater public forest of this region appear to need some independent study and possible improvement.

Yours respectfully,

Michael H. Walker
President

² CDPNQ [Centre de données sur le patrimoine naturel du Québec], 2008. *Les plantes menacées ou vulnérables du Québec*. 3e édition. Gouvernement du Québec, ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs, Direction du patrimoine écologique et des Parcs, Québec. 180 pages.

³ SARAKINOS, H., A.O. NICHOLLS, A. TUBERT, A. AGGARWAL, C.R. MARGULES and S. SARKAR. 2001. Area prioritization for biodiversity conservation in Québec on the basis of species distributions: a preliminary analysis. *Biodiversity and Conservation* **10**: 1419-1472.

⁴ COUILLARD L., N. DIGNARD, P. PETITCLERC, D. BASTIEN, A. SABOURIN et J. LABRECQUE, 2012. *Guide de reconnaissance des habitats forestiers des plantes menacées ou vulnérables. Outaouais, Laurentides et Lanaudière*. Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune et ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs. 434 pages.