



**Mont O'Brien Association
President's Report from March 2005 to May 2006
and proposed Action Plan for 2006
Prepared by Pam Miles, President**

The Mont O'Brien Association continues to be a very active organization whose mandate is to maintain the wilderness environment of the Mont O'Brien area by protecting the numbers and varieties of flora and fauna while providing educational opportunities and recreational access to the forests, lakes, rivers and mountains. The past 15 months have been a busy and very productive period. The following are the highlights:

The Board of Directors: In April 2005, the executive of the Board of Directors was selected as follows: Pam Miles, President; Roy Peck, President; Joe Jamison, Treasurer; and, John Noel, Secretary. The directors-at-large are Harold Emery, Allen Noel, John Lanthier (term ended in Nov 05), Lindsay Peck and Ellis Adam. The board met 11 times over the past year.

Two meetings with the mayor and council members and other community groups took place in August and September to ensure continued open communications between Alleyn-and-Cawood volunteer organizations and with the municipality. The Municipal Council recently passed a resolution in support of the Association's efforts to have eight trails south of highway 301 registered with the Quebec government. Mayor Joseph Squitti provided a letter of endorsement for our grant application to Mountain Equipment Co-op. For the last few years there has been no Council representative attending the Mont O'Brien Board, despite the requirement in our bylaws. Mayor Squitti has attended a few times.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to obtain liability insurance for members and volunteer workers who access the Mont O'Brien area. Volunteers at Carmen Trails in Gatineau Park have given us a lead which has to be followed up on. The Board will continue to pursue this.

Protected Area Status: As part of the Quebec government's policy that it will protect 8% of its land surface from industrial exploitation, the Mont O'Brien Board of Directors submitted a three-page letter to the Ministry of the Environment (MDDEP), including a detailed map, and describing the main area it would like to see given "Biodiversity Reserve" protected area status. The MDDEP is directing this province-wide initiative. It launched the process for the Outaouais in 2005. We submitted our letter to the regional office of the MDDEP July 15th, 2005. Our Board requested that the 60 square km of Crown land south of Highway 301 referred to as 'Mont O'Brien' become a Biodiversity Reserve under Québec's new "Loi sur la conservation du patrimoine naturel" (2002). We discussed applying in October, 2004, and it was discussed and approved for all 60 square km at the March 2005 Annual General Meeting. The CPAWS Ottawa Valley chapter has been very helpful in this process and provided advice and encouragement during the last couple of years as Mont O'Brien prepared its submission.

In its letter to the ministry, the Board also requested that the equally-large area of Crown land surrounding the Picanoc River in the northern part of Alleyn-and-Cawood Municipality be considered for Protected Area status. As stated in the submission, "*The Picanoc River area once supported magnificent northern red oak stands, and the river is excellent for fishing and*

canoeing. Members believe it should begin to be restored to its former glory, and that protected area status might help achieve this. We are submitting all the Crown land outlined on the map, but our priority is the 60 square km area we refer to as 'Mont O'Brien'." Sadly, some of the Crown land forest surrounding the Picanoc River has been heavily logged in the past few years. Biodiversity Reserve status would help preserve the forest and the Picanoc River. It would also restore public access to the river and this Crown land, something which has been lost during the past few years.

This past winter, Marc Dubreuil, regional director of the MDDEP, said that they had received 40 submissions for protected area status in the Outaouais region and that this represented 95% of the crown land – with many requests overlapping. Right now, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife (MRNF) is negotiating with the MDDEP. We should know in early June if these negotiations mean reserve status is still possible - but probably not regarding interim status until this Fall. Interim status lasts approximately four years, all forest harvesting ceases, and management as a reserve begins. Then if this is satisfactory, permanent status begins.

In the Outaouais, the only Protected Area established since 2002 under the Natural Heritage Conservation Act is the 21-square-km Forêt La Blanche north of Mayo, which is an "Ecological Reserve", a higher protection category than "Biodiversity Reserve". Traditional fishing, hunting, and trapping do not continue on an Ecological Reserve, but they do on a Biodiversity Reserve. We will hear from John McDonnell about Forêt La Blanche at the end of this meeting.

Relationship with forestry companies and Quebec's Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife: Paula Armstrong, who is a forest biologist, and is volunteer with the Association, has attended many meetings of the Table de concertation GIR for the past two years, to ensure that the Mont O'Brien's interests are considered as sawmills and pulp-mills and the MRNF develop plans and carry out harvesting on Crown land in the municipality, and as Public land use decisions are made.

Under the leadership of Paula Armstrong, we are in a conciliation-request phase along with the group Pontiac Environmental Protection (PEP), with the ministry regarding logging north of the Picanoc River during the coming year. Under new MRNF rules, on March 2nd PEP and the Association requested setting aside about 60 acres out of a five square mile harvest section. One large beautiful stand of old hemlock on a hilltop would be forever saved, to become an area of rare eastern Canadian "old growth forest". Michèle Borchers's assistance with translation has been invaluable in this project. Our request has been carefully made following these new rules, and we expect to hear back from minister Pierre Corbeil at any moment.

In the Mont O'Brien area (south of Hwy 301), clear-cutting was done last year (2004-2005) on approximately 100 hectares (250 acres) by Louisiana-Pacific. Right now no areas of cutting are scheduled south of the highway, even though cuts are scheduled north of the highway in 2006-2008. If the mills want to cut on any areas that have not been reviewed in public consultation, another consultation has to be called.

Astronomical Observatory Feasibility Study: A feasibility study was carried out by the CLD (the office of economic development for the MRC Pontiac) for an astronomical observatory for the top of Mont O'Brien, and this was received by us in March 2005. The study was prepared in French.

It looked more generally at possibilities for such an observatory, rather than for one on Mont O'Brien. Based on the resources available and the priorities of the O'Brien board of directors at the time, an observatory project was not recommended. The study was passed on to Mayor Joe Squitti for consideration. The Board of Directors is interested in assisting but is not able to take a lead on this project at this time.

Membership: In 2005, there were 158 paid memberships, which represents approximately 500 people. Thank you to Bertha and Chris Kirby who manage the membership database and ensure that everybody receives their membership card, a key to the gate and the latest map. At the moment, five months into 2006, we have 105 paid memberships with 320 names on the list of potential members.

The Annual Family Hikes continue to be popular with approximately 15 people coming out for the 2005 May spring hike and 36 people (and six dogs!) at the 2005 Thanksgiving family hike. Thanks to the efforts of several Board members and volunteers, they are a highlight of the year. Tea and bannock has become the tradition, thanks to Joe Jamison, Roy Peck, John and Allen Noel. Thank you also to Lindsay Peck, and Leonard Heeney for your role in making the annual hikes a success. Unfortunately, the Spring 2006 Family Hike had to be cancelled because of extremely wet weather.

Road work: Harold Emery led the efforts on upgrading the roads during the past year. With the use of trucks by Roger Johnson and Danny Lalonde, Harold put 30 loads of gravel on Renato Livinal's road leading to the Association land. The Municipality did some work at the entrance off Hwy 301, and Harold did some backhoe work on the road leading to Copeland Lake which Louisiana-Pacific had built in 2004. The municipality graded the road all the way to Ross' Creek recently, which makes it passable by car for the season.

Trail Management: Paula Armstrong has spent many hours over the past two years identifying and GPSing eight trails. We are now in the process, with the approval of the Board, and the support of the Council of Alleyn-and-Cawood, of having these trails registered with Quebec's Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife. This is necessary in order to protect them from clear-cutting, protection that is guaranteed in the Quebec RNI standards. This will be important if Mont O'Brien is unsuccessful in obtaining Protected Status. Several of the trails being registered are old narrow, winding forest roads from many decades ago that we consider a cultural heritage of the local community for future generations to appreciate.

GIS Activity: Chris Kirby is the Association's expert on GIS and mapping and volunteered over 100 hours on the following activities:

1. Added GPSed trails to Mont O'Brien maps.
2. Added location of Intra-municipal lots to Alleyn-and-Cawood map.
3. Produced various maps for Mont O'Brien Board of Directors.
4. Produced various maps for the municipality of Alleyn-and-Cawood.
5. Produced a new map of Mont O'Brien area for members.
6. Assisted various members of the community in the location of their property.
7. Developed a means to transfer maps to Garmin GPS.

Engineered landfill project: Representatives of the Board of Directors attended the information session hosted by Denis Rouleau of LDC Management in November 2005 regarding the engineered landfill project that proposes to serve the waste management needs of the Outaouais region. This 500-acre project would be located on Crown land north of Hwy 301, south of the Picanoc River, and west of the Mont O'Brien entrance. LDC has submitted its environmental impact studies to Quebec's Ministry of the Environment. The project will probably go to an environment ministry public consultation process, BAPE, in about late fall 2006, at which time members of Mont O'Brien can provide input. To ensure members were aware of the project, the 2006 membership forms mailed out in January 2006 included information on the project provided by the Coalition Against the Danford MegaDump. LDC also published an insert distributed in March 2006 in four local papers.

Fundraising and Grants: Refer to the 2005 Financial Statement for complete information. A total of \$700 was donated in 2005, and already this year \$940 has been donated. A Picnic table draw, thanks to Joe Jamison, Roy Peck and John Noel, raised \$590.50 in 2005.

Paula Armstrong and Pam Miles wrote and submitted two grants in March and April of 2006 for roads and trails development – one to Mountain Equipment Co-op for \$10,000 (to be determined); and one to the CLD of MRC Pontiac, under the Québec Volet II program for \$13,000 (rejected by the CLD).

Communications: Two newsletters have been sent to members this past year (Sept 2005 and April 2006) to highlight the Association's activities. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of Zenon C, the Association has a revised web-site. All French translation over the past year has been done by Michele Borchers who is an invaluable resource to the Association. Media coverage continues to be good, with front-page coverage by The Equity of the Thanksgiving Hike. The Low Down to Hull and Back also continues to feature Mont O'Brien activities. Kate Aley of the Pontiac Journal also plugs Mont O'Brien activities.

Conclusion: The Mont O'Brien Association's long-term goal is to preserve and protect this beautiful wilderness area and make it accessible to the public for many future generations. Because of the Association's efforts, hundreds of people each year, whether through an organized hike or for personal recreational use, can now enjoy this large area of Crown land. With the increasing development of land in the Outaouais area, it has never been more important to protect the Crown land we refer to as 'Mont O'Brien'.

The Board of Directors is most appreciative of the time and resources donated by so many people to help make Mont O'Brien a reality for us. See you on the Mont!

Proposed Action Plan for 2006

- 1.** Continue to pursue obtaining Biodiversity Reserve status with the Government of Québec
- 2.** Organize the 2006 Thanksgiving Hike
- 3.** Continue to encourage new and renewal of memberships
- 4.** Work on upgrading the roads to Lake O'Brien and Copeland Lake and maintain where needed

5. Follow through on trails registration with the MRNF and begin improving them
6. Follow through on the public consultation process with the MRNF to have about 60 acres of "old forest" in the 2006 Marle sector north of Picanoc preserved from harvesting
7. Work with CPAWS - Ottawa Valley Chapter, with PEP, and with other Québec organisations who support Mont O'Brien mission
8. Review by-laws
9. Maintain good communications with members through newsletters and website