

## Protected areas... maybe, some day

Kate Aley – Pontiac Journal

**PONTIAC** – The wilderness areas currently seeking designation as 'protected areas' are a few steps closer to success following several recent key meetings. At the last MRC meeting, March 31, mayors agreed to expand the proposed 60 metre protected zone along river banks to a dizzying 500 meters. These changes were presented at a further meeting with CREO in Gatineau on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The legal basis for the establishment of new protected areas is the 2002 "Law on the conservation of natural heritage" (Loi sur la conservation du patrimoine naturel). This law sees the province placing at least 8% of its land under some sort of protected status by 2008. In 2004, the Parks Department was switched from the Environment Ministry to the Ministry of Natural Resources and then back again a few years later, leading to criteria changes for protected areas and raising concerns about the status of the southern territory's hoped for 8%.

The ministry's selection criteria is a combination of 'C-Plan', (a scientific methodology based on geomorphological information which gives indications of large-scale biological diversity) and advice and pressure from the public and conservation organisations, (e.g. the campaign to preserve the Dumoine River watershed).

"The meetings provided more information on a few of the protected areas, especially the River Noire (Black River)," reported CPAWS agent and Executive Director of Amis de la Forêt La Blanche, John McDonnell. "There was a lot of confusion and many questions as to how and why the MDDEP selected certain sites over others and the Gatineau meeting was called to address that. The original Black River plan envisioned two protected areas - one on the lower river and one above Lac St-Patrice - excluding the lake due to a hydro dam. I would say there is a consensus on about 80% of the protected area proposed, with just some fine-tuning needed. The Dumoine and Mount O'Brien Protected Areas should go ahead. For those two areas, this region has given itself until May 5 to send its opinion to the MDDEP, rather than January 15, as all the other regions did."

"We certainly will not reach the 8% for the Outaouais; more like 7.2% or less," continued Mr. McDonnell. "The MDDEP is including Gatineau Park and Leamy Lake Parks in their calculations and neither of those places are really protected - especially Gatineau Park, as its boundaries have never been legislated. The MDDEP is also including about 500 sq. km of deer-yards as protected areas, even though small clear cuts and roads (as wide as 30 meters) can take place in these areas. But they steadfastly maintain that they will reach 8% of the province by the end of 2008."

Forester Paula Dalgaard Armstrong also attended the meetings. "Deer yards are considered as protected areas, even though logging and road building is allowed there just the same as in the rest of the public forest. At present, about 1.2% of the 7.2% they say will be protected after this exercise is

completed are deer yards and heronries, so actually the proposed area of 7.2% is only about 6%. Subtracting Gatineau Park and Lac Leamy, which are federal properties, would lower it to 5%.”

“The MRC Pontiac is especially interested in protecting areas that will benefit the tourism industry, and a lot of the area they support for protection is along canoe routes. Fort-Coulonge Mayor, Raymond Durocher, wants to see the largest projected protected area, the Dumoine River and some of its watershed, become a Québec national park within six years. So if 4.7% is protected or under moratorium in L'Outaouais by the end of 2008, that would be about 600 square miles.”

“We need a more sincere, informed, concerted effort from the government of Québec to accomplish the 8% goal in the southern parts of the province, where it is both more difficult and more urgent,” stated Ms Armstrong. “So far, regionalisation of public land management here in the Outaouais does not look promising for improving the situation, because the forestry industry is still in control, especially in the rural MRCs where these latest consultations took place.”

President of the Pontiac Tourist Association, Denis Blaedow, feels the MRC finally comprehends the economic reality of protecting the forests for tourism use rather than logging. “Assuming the forests were filled with grade A white pine, they'd be worth about \$92 - 95,000 per hectare; but they'd take 150 to 200 years to regenerate,” he explained. “If those forests were visited by 5 people per hectare per day for the next 100 years, the same area would bring us \$10 million in tourism revenue. Logging is a one time income opportunity and much of the revenue leaves the region. Tourism revenue stays right here. We have to understand the immense value in leaving those trees standing.”

For more information on the protected area process, go to the MDDEP website: [www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca). Go to the Biodiversity menu, then Protected Areas. The CPAWS website is [www.cpaws-ov-vo.org](http://www.cpaws-ov-vo.org)