
Submission by the Ottawa Valley Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society on the draft report “Identification et caractérisation des corridors écologiques adjacents au parc de la Gatineau” November 2011.

February 17th 2012

The Ottawa Valley Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS-OV) is pleased to participate in the National Capital Commission’s study of possible ecological connections between Gatineau Park and other significant natural areas in the region. We congratulate the NCC for having undertaken this initiative and we look forward to working with you through the implementation stages. We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Del Degan, Massé draft report, “**Identification et caractérisation des corridors écologiques adjacents au parc de la Gatineau**” presented in Old Chelsea on January 13th 2012.

Since habitat fragmentation, the loss of ecological integrity, the risk of ecological isolation and the risk of loss of diversity in Gatineau Park are prominently highlighted by the NCC as major concerns in its Gatineau Park Master Plan (2005), we feel the identification of these twelve connections will help address some of these concerns.

Unfortunately the recent construction of two new large highways – Boulevard des Allumettières and the Autoroute 5 extension – through the park have further fragmented the park’s ecosystems. The recent decision by the NCC to permanently close a section of Gamelin Boulevard will help to ease fragmentation in the south of the park, but the NCC must commit to not allow for the construction of any new roads or other built facilities within the park.

The establishment, maintenance and preservation of appropriate, functional ecological corridors between Gatineau Park and natural areas surrounding the park is essential to maintenance of the park’s ecological integrity, and indeed its long-term survival, especially in light of global climate change, anticipated urban development in the region and increased pressures caused by recreation. This essential need is highlighted in the NCC’s Gatineau Park Ecosystem Conservation Plan (2010).

It is apparent that considerable research, analysis and effort was expended in the production of the Del Degan, Massé report. It is comprehensive, well-reasoned and thorough. The final report should form an excellent basis for a comprehensive action plan for Gatineau Park’s ecological corridors.

It is important to recognize that many of the identified corridors exist to all intents and purposes today, and are used as such by animals and plants. In some cases, bottlenecks or other obstacles impede their effectiveness. In most cases these corridors are not formally recognized and they are not protected from loss due to development or other inappropriate land use.

The report should include a map identifying the tracts of land outside Gatineau Park that are publicly owned – Crown lands, Quebec government lands, and lands owned by local municipalities. Another map showing municipal zoning in the areas around the park would have been helpful in attempting to evaluate the corridors. While this information is available from the local municipalities, small organizations like ours are often unable to gather this information in a timely fashion. Undoubtedly this information was used by Del Degan to produce its maps, especially north of the park; it would be helpful in evaluating identified corridors.

While this document is not intended for public distribution, we are concerned that it provides rather precise locations of species at risk, such as the Ram's Head Lady's-slipper, which is vulnerable to orchid collectors (page 34). Species which are sought after should not be highlighted with a photo and pointing to their location. The Shawville corridor contains American Ginseng, another species at risk with a high value on the black market, but no indication is given as to its actual location on the ground, which should be the case for all species at risk. While we have no intention of releasing this document, it is quite possible that copies will be made and circulated which could end up in the hands of poachers.

The report rightly identifies bottlenecks in corridors as a major concern. However, hugely important is the nature of the particular bottleneck – for example, is it a long narrow enclosed tunnel under a highway, or an abandoned dirt road? Is the land adjacent to the bottleneck a shopping mall, a housing subdivision, or cultivated farmland? The nature of the bottleneck will have a huge impact on the corridor's utilization and hence its ecological value. This is especially true for wildlife, and in particular large predators. In the report, the nature of all bottlenecks needs to be clearly specified and considered, and possible mitigation/elimination measures presented/discussed.

It is not clear how much research was conducted or consulted to quantitatively measure wildlife movements along identified corridors. It would be useful to know how and when the data used to assess the corridors was collected.

Finally, we feel it would be useful to list all the organizations that were invited to provide input into this plan (page 4). While CPAWS Ottawa Valley has attended all the meetings related to this project and offered a presentation on our connectivity programs at one such meeting, we are not listed as having contributed to the project.

Comparison with Ecosystem Conservation Plan

It is interesting and perhaps telling to compare the 12 corridors identified and studied by Del Degan for this report to the potential corridors identified for the Gatineau Park Ecosystem Conservation Plan (2010), also prepared by Del Degan. (Note that, although the Ecosystem Conservation Plan refers to 14 corridors, only 13 are labelled on the map in that report.) Several major differences are noteworthy.

One huge difference is the Corridor de Masham. This corridor has shrunk in size dramatically – it no longer includes the large swath of mostly undeveloped and forested land south and north of Highway 366 and the villages of Saint-Louis-de-Masham, Saint-François-de-Masham, and Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham. The Corridor de Masham should extend north and merge with the Corridor du Nord. Why was this obviously strong candidate corridor dropped from consideration?

The second major corridor difference between this report and the Ecosystem Conservation Plan occurs northeast of the park. The Wakefield corridor has been renamed Corridor Nord-est du Parc, and the corridor formerly called Corridor Nord-est du Parc has disappeared. This obvious corridor, connecting the southern end of Vallée Meech to the Gatineau River, has likely fallen victim to the Autoroute 5 extension (Chelsea section) and the industrial complex recently established on Highway 105 across from the Eco Echo lands.

Comments on Specific Corridors

1. Champlain-Voyageurs Corridor

The consultant's report notes that this corridor affords only one connection to Gatineau Park and that these connections are tenuous as a result of the presence of Boulevard des Allumettières, Boulevard St-Raymond and other major roads. While we understand the constraints associated with identifying ecological connections in an urbanized area, we are concerned that the proposed connection will not be viable in the long term as a result of municipal zoning which allows for almost 60 hectares of the proposed corridor to be used for commercial and residential development. Furthermore, it is stated that the corridor may be used for "other uses", such as security and defence installations, educational institutions and major transportation infrastructure. While just over 400 hectares of the proposed corridor is zoned for recreotourism, the bulk of this area is, in reality, golf courses which can present serious obstacles to the movement of species as a result of lawn care and other maintenance activities which may be harmful to native plants and wildlife. We also question why the Moore Farm property was not identified as part of this corridor. The Moore Farm presents several advantages, in that it is connected to Gatineau Park and the only fragmentation is around Alexandre-Taché and Lucerne Boulevards (and some limited associated development). Since the NCC already owns the Moore Farm property, it would seem natural to make use of it in the context of ecological connections. Moreover, any development planned for the Moore Farm should be done in a way as to not cut off connectivity in this sector. The NCC should work with the City of Gatineau to ensure that the

large block of undisturbed forest just south of Boulevard des Allumettières is protected from development while investigating ways to make Boulevard des Allumettières more permeable to wildlife.

2. Aylmer Corridor

The Corridor d'Aylmer as presented has only a single, very narrow connection to the Ottawa River. A second connection north of Boulevard des Allumettières should be defined before these lands are lost forever to development. A number of possible connections appear to have been ignored, including a connection across Perry and Eardley roads toward the Ottawa River. While there is some residential development along the shore of the Ottawa River, these areas could still be of use for a number of species to migrate between the park and the Ottawa River. The current proposal only includes a very narrow connection through heavily developed residential areas. We are concerned about the future viability of this connection as a result of urban and highway development; in particular, there are plans to widen Pink Road which could lead to a major break in the connection. The NCC should work with the City of Gatineau to ensure that any new or expanded roads are designed to allow for the movement of wildlife, especially since this corridor is dedicated mainly to terrestrial wildlife. The presence of a large quarry and the possible expansion of quarrying in the area is of concern to CPAWS Ottawa Valley. We are also concerned that almost 600 hectares of the proposed connection is zoned for residential and commercial development and while some 337 hectares are zoned as agricultural land, it is quite possible for this zoning could be changed to residential in the future.

3. Ruisseau Breckenridge Corridor

We are pleased with the design of the proposed Breckenridge Creek corridor as it appears to be largely based on ecological features and natural “boundaries”. By taking in the main creek and its numerous branches, this corridor has the potential to provide a strong connection between Gatineau Park and the Ottawa River. The varied landscape of mature forests, former and active agricultural lands and wetlands provides habitat to a large number of plants and animals. We are not overly concerned about the apparent bottlenecks near chemin de la Montagne at the northern extremity of the proposed corridor, as the lands adjacent are used for agriculture. We do question why two streams were left out of the proposed connection as well as what appears to be an agricultural drainage ditch. These features provide additional connections to the park and since 691 hectares of the proposed corridor are zoned for conservation, we feel the potential for successfully establishing a connection in this location is very high. We urge the NCC to establish a dialogue with the municipality of Pontiac to ensure that the latter can derive some benefits from it as well.

4. Lusville Corridor

We agree with the findings of the consultant in that we support connecting an important wetland and mature forests along the Ottawa River to Gatineau Park. We are concerned that the design of the proposed corridor will not be conducive to the movements of larger mammals as a result of the very narrow nature of some of the connectors and the fact that highway 148 crosses the proposed corridor at least four times and in two instances, the highway consists of four lanes with a signed speed limit of 90 km/h which presents a major barrier to wildlife movements. Since the zoning of the proposed corridor is entirely agricultural, we feel there is potential to increase the viability of this connection by working with landowners to increase forest cover along streams. Incentives could also be offered to create wider buffers along certain streams where no agriculture would be practiced.

5. Pontiac Corridor

We welcome this proposed corridor since it would link two important ecosystems to Gatineau Park, one being terrestrial and the other aquatic. We are concerned that the consultant is only proposing two relatively narrow connectors to Gatineau Park. We would suggest the addition of a connector along Mohr Creek and its various branches as well as a north-south connector following Murray Road to help enhance the potential of the entire corridor. The exclusion of Mohr Creek is a major omission as streams of this type are important migration routes, especially in a corridor dedicated to wildlife associated with forests and wetlands. While agricultural zoning is not a guard against future development, the fact that this entire corridor currently benefits from this type of zoning leads us to conclude that it also has the potential to provide a crucial link between Gatineau Park and the Ottawa River.

6. Shawville Corridor

CPAWS has long argued that parks and other protected areas be linked to one another to strengthen the viability of the greater ecosystem. We feel that this proposed corridor has the potential to not only enhance Gatineau Park, but also the proposed new park at Sault-des-Chats on the Ottawa River which contains some unique wetland and mature forest environments. We are concerned that the proposed corridor appears to bypass a number of streams which could help alleviate the bottleneck north of highway 148. This is especially concerning since this proposed corridor is dedicated, at least in part, to aquatic species. The zoning which consists largely of agricultural land and land zoned for recreotourism is favourable to the maintenance of ecological connectivity, however the presence of a gravel extraction site near the boundary of Gatineau Park is of concern to us, especially in the event of an expansion of the extraction area.

7. Du Nord Corridor

We are generally satisfied with the proposed design of this corridor. In particular, we are pleased that a block of land located north of Kelley Lake (which we identified to the NCC as

possible addition to the park) has been included in the corridor. However, around the north of the park, where there is limited development and very large tracts of forest, there is an opportunity to identify and formalize a much larger, more extensive ecological corridor. Such a corridor should extend from the northern boundary of the park all the way to new protected areas at Mont O'Brien and Mont Sainte-Marie. The connector to Gatineau Park could also be expanded to include the western shore of lac des Loups and then following highway 366 northward. The presence of a number of species of large mammals is well documented in the area. It is not clear why the Corridor du Nord as defined is so limited in scope as the zoning in the broader area is, generally, compatible with the establishment of a corridor.

8. Masham Corridor

We are disappointed that the proposed corridor does not extend beyond lac Mahon and lac Fairburn. There exists considerable potential to create a second linkage toward new protected areas at Mont O'Brien and Mont Sainte-Marie. There is also a significant gap between the Du Nord and Masham Corridors – much greater than between any other proposed corridors. There is potential for a corridor to the east of lac des Loups and lac Bélanger as well as for a connection in the area between Saint-François-de-Masham and Saint-Louis-de-Masham by way of lac Bélair. It is our understanding that this area is either zoned as agricultural, isolated residential or for cottage development which is generally compatible with an ecological corridor. We would be pleased to submit a detailed proposal for an enhanced corridor to the north of the park.

9. Nord-est du parc Corrdior

We are concerned that the corridor as proposed will not be viable as a result of the expansion of highway 5 and the NCC's reluctance to accept a gift of land comprising Eco Echo and adjacent properties. Please refer to correspondence sent by CPAWS to Marie Lemay and to Marie Boulet on the matter. Moreover, we disagree with the findings of the consultant with respect to a fence along highway 105 being a barrier to connectivity. The fence in question is nothing more than a standard agricultural fence – the same type of fence present in countless locations in all of the other proposed corridors. The NCC's reluctance to accept a generous gift of land has led to the conversion of open and regenerating fields to an industrial park. While this corridor will never be fully viable as a result of the construction of highway 5 and the industrial park, it could be improved by adding a connector across the block of forest to the south of Valle Verde road across to the remnants of the Eco Echo property. The proposed connection at Brown Lake / Rockhurst Road is not viable and should be eliminated and replaced with a connection through Eco Echo. Unless serious mitigation measures are put in place during the operation of highway 5, this connection will simply not function for most species of wildlife. We are deeply disappointed that the NCC failed to acquire some of these lands in 2010 as there existed a unique opportunity to connect the park to the Gatineau River by way of one of the last remaining large blocks of forest south of Wakefield. Moreover, most of the proposed

corridor is zoned for residential and commercial development with less than 8 hectares dedicated to conservation.

10. Larrimac Corridor

We agree with the consultant's conclusions that highway 5 presents a formidable obstacle to the movement of wildlife within this proposed corridor and that the two existing passages under the highway are insufficient to sustain wildlife movements in the area. We feel that this corridor has the potential to be viable by adding additional crossings for wildlife and by upgrading the existing crossings to make them more attractive to wildlife. We are also concerned that most of the proposed corridor is zoned for residential development with less than 1 hectare dedicated to conservation. The municipality of Chelsea is growing rapidly and it is quite possible that the connection to the Gatineau River will be lost as a result.

11. Chelsea Creek Corridor

We generally agree with the design of this corridor. By following Chelsea Creek and its various branches, the proposed corridor affords several connections to Gatineau Park and it is widely known that many species will either make use of the stream or its surrounding environment. The presence of highway 5 presents a significant challenge to the maintenance of a strong connection between the park and the Gatineau River and the presence of Boulevard St-Joseph further erodes the connection. We are concerned that 452 hectares of the proposed corridor is zoned for development which could seriously affect the ability of the corridor to fulfil its role. We urge the NCC to work with the City of Gatineau to ensure that new institutions and other developments planned for the corridor be constructed with as little impact on the corridor as possible, for example, by reducing the size of parking lots and by ensuring that a buffer is maintained along the stream.

12. Philemon-Leamy Corridor

While situated in a heavily urbanized area, the proposed Philemon-Leamy corridor is interesting in that it connects largely urban greenspace (Parc du lac Leamy) to Gatineau Park. In order to alleviate the bottleneck just north of Boulevard Riel, we would suggest including the area along the recreational pathway as a further connector to the park. While the presence of major roads are a challenge to the movements of most species, the presence of a vegetated corridor between the Gatineau River and Gatineau Park is useful to the migration of plants and birds and should not be discounted just because it is surrounded by development. We are concerned that the construction and operation of the new Rapibus transit route across the Gatineau River (Pont Noir) could impact connectivity and we urge the NCC to work with the City of Gatineau to ensure that the new transit route does not cause a significant break. We also understand that the NCC owns most of the land along Ruisseau de la Brasserie in the Hull sector which connects to NCC owned lands along the Ottawa River near the intersection of Montcalm Street and Taché Boulevard. While heavily

modified by industrial and highway development, the inclusion of the creek in this corridor could support efforts underway in the Hull sector to restore this area.

Implementation

Obviously the huge challenge now facing the NCC is project implementation. With the rampant development presently occurring around the southern end of Gatineau Park, there is a real risk that de facto and potential corridors will soon be lost forever.

Notwithstanding the effort that was expended in the report evaluating, ranking, rating and scoring individual corridors, CPAWS-OV believes that, for the future health of Gatineau Park, all the identified ecological corridors must be protected. We agree that the collaboration of and partnership with the local municipalities is critical for successful implementation, and all necessary effort must be expended to ensure this is achieved. The NCC must continue to drive this project through the implementation phase. We look forward to actively participating with the NCC in ensuring the success of this critical project.

Once again, we congratulate the NCC for having initiated this process and we look forward to working with you in the next phases of this project. We remain available to meet with you to provide further information or clarifications with respect to our comments. Please feel free to contact us at (613) 232-7297 or by email (jmcdonnell@cpaws.org) to arrange such a meeting.

Sincerely,

John McDonnell
Executive Director