

**A Critique  
On The Proposed  
McConnell-Laramée Extension**

**Safeguarding Rare Ecosystem  
Components In Gatineau Park's  
Gateway Sector**

formal submission BAPE hearings  
April 24 2001

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April 2001

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**ABSTRACT**

This report examines the appropriateness of a proposed four lane expressway ( McConnell-Laramée highway) through Gatineau Park. It examines the inevitable loss of valued ecosystem components of ecological and historical significance. It questions why viable alternative(s) to the project were prematurely abandoned during the early planning stages over a decade ago.

The proposed McConnell-Laramée extension through Gatineau Park would see the partition of the Gateway Sector into four sections all within a few kilometers of one another. Ecological fragmentation has serious repercussions on wetland function and the mobility, dispersal, composition, and predation of flora and fauna. The Lac Des Fees wetland and upland forest complex is extremely rich in rare species many of which are listed as "species at risk" and protected in articles 6,7,8 of "La Loi sur les espèces menacées ou vulnérables ( l.R.Q., c. E-12.01). It harbours at least five (5) remnant old-growth White Pine estimated between 324-500 years old and measuring ten (10) feet in circumference.

**INTRODUCTION**

Gatineau Park encompasses 36,131 hectares of Great-Lakes /St-Lawrence forest on the Canadian Shield. It is a federal land-holding managed by the National Capital Commission. Unlike Canada's national park system which is governed by the National Parks Act, Gatineau Park is managed under the National Capital Act. During the late 1960s a network of expressways were proposed for the Outaouais. The McConnell-Laramée Hwy. was a project designed to facilitate commuter traffic through Aylmer, Hull and Gatineau. Since, its first inception the National Capital Region including the Outaouais has experienced exponential urban growth. An unfortunate byproduct of this rapid urbanization was the loss of the region's many forests

and wetlands. Presently, Gatineau Park is the only substantial remaining strong-hold safeguarding representation of the Capital Region's natural landscape features of the Grenville geological province. A four-lane traffic corridor, the McConnell-Laramée, is proposed through Gatineau Park south of Lac Des Fees.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 1994 the McConnell-Laramée highway was built through Aylmer parallel to the original McConnell Road and north of the residential enclave of Champlain Park. Controversy reigned for several months prior to construction when citizens attempted to preserve an exceptional grove of ancient White Pine that exceeded 125 feet tall and were aged between 125-250 years. The Ministry of Transport for Quebec had failed to identify the 14 acre stand during the planning phase, and despite emergency meetings with the region's leading environmentalists the Deputy Minister of Transport and MLA for the Pontiac refused to agree to realign the highway 100-200 metres around the forest. During the disturbing procedure of cutting the forest an active Red Tailed Hawk's nest containing offspring was knowingly destroyed and the fledglings killed. This was despite angry protests of Champlain Park residents and formal requests to the regional wildlife authorities for intervention. (\* see appendix "A" news articles)

The second phase of the four-lane McConnell-Laramée Hwy. is planned to traverse Gatineau Park for 1.8 km between Mountain Road and Promenade Lac Des Fees. 19.65 hectares of sensitive wildlife habitat, 57% of which is mature forest, would be cleared. In addition the National Capital Commission (NCC) has proposed two extensive access ramps to be built connecting the highway to promenade du Parc de la Gatineau and Promenade Lac Des Fees. The northern ramp follows the total length of a rock escarpment for several hundred metres. The southern ramp cuts through an exceptional climax Eastern Hemlock, White Pine and Cedar grove.

Apparently, the National Capital Commission (NCC) views the southern section of Gatineau Park as a political liability. It eventually would like to divulge itself of management responsibilities in the Gateway Sector south of Gamelin Blvd. (pers. comm. Gershon Rother Jan. 23 1992). Following, overwhelming public opposition to a "Tamed Nature" concept released in January 1992, (see attachment; Ottawa Citizen, 1-92) the NCC temporarily shelved the controversial development scenario waiting for the final planning stages of the McConnell-Laramée's construction before again revitalizing the project.

The McConnell-Laramée appears to be a mechanism to justify a scenario of urban walkways and facilities in the park's Gateway Sector.

The proponent, Quebec's Transport Ministry ( MTQ) failed to conduct comprehensive life-science inventories until after it had drafted architectural plans and was psychologically committed to the project. Surprisingly, a preliminary scoping exercise of the Lac Des Fees sector commissioned by the NCC in 1994 warned that a highway and associated activities would produce irreversible damage to this ecologically significant area. ( Plan de Zone Lac Des Fees, Arbour et al. 1994) More recent floristic inventories revealed a list of ten (10) vascular and non-vascular flora protected under the " Lois sur les especes menacees ou vulnerables ( L.R.Q. c. E-12.01). ( Rapport d'étude environnementale MTQ , et Axe McConnell-Laramée. Inventaire de la flore à statut précaire juin 2000.)

Studies yet to be completed expect to identify reptiles, amphibians and small mammals similarly listed at risk and protected under provincial law ( pers. comm. D. St-Hilaire, J. Fink Mar. 2001)

## **METHODOLOGY**

A field inspection of the study area for the proposed McConnell-Laramée extension between Mountain Road and Promenade du Lac Des Fees by the author transpired in March and April 2001. The purpose of the field reconnaissance was to familiarize the author with landscape features, signs of early spring vertebrate activity, and "ground truth" existing forest inventories summarized in the MTQ's environmental report. A literature review of BAPE documents, Gatineau Park planning manuals, and media archival material was also reviewed. Seasonal constraints consisting of late winter snow accumulation, and extended spring thaw prevented recording early emergent flora , reptiles and amphibians. However, activity by mammals recorded in tracks and scat were noted and exceptional upper canopy trees were recorded.

## **CRITICAL HABITAT FOR SUSCEPTIBLE, THREATENED AND VULNERABLE SPECIES**

Gatineau Park preserves 48 plants classified as susceptible, threatened or vulnerable ( species at risk). The municipality of Hull contains 21 species species at risk. The area proposed for the highway contains 10 species of flora at risk. Of the 374 species of vascular plants in Quebec 117 have been identified in this region of the Outaouais. Twenty hectares ( 20 ha,) will be cleared inside the park for the 4-lane highway.

The NCC's current position is in striking contrast to recommendations in a study it commissioned seven years ago. In a NCC document published in 1994 ; " Plan de Zone Lac Des Fees" authors; Arbour, Berthiaume et Beaugard highlight the ecological significance of the study area and anticipated non-mitigable impacts following the highway's completion:

*" A notre avis, les strates forestieres du sector A < situe entre la ligne de 315 Kv et la Blvd Laramee> sont celles qui demontrent la meilleure valeur ecologique"*

*"Les peuplements forestiers de la partie sud-ouest du secteur et la vegetation des marais ont une valeur ecologique importante et sont aussi des elements d'interpretation d'interet, de meme que les endroits caracterises par la presence de plant rares."*

*"Le secteur "A" risque d'etre largement perturbe par la construction du Blvd. Laramee qui modifiera les conditions actuelles d'ensoleillement, de vent et sera une source probable d'embruns salins. Les perturbations causeront une degradation acceleree de la vegetation pendant les cinq (5) premieres annees et une mortalite d'une grande partie des feuillus s'etaland sur uneperiode de 10 ans."*

*"L'effet du pietinement ( tant par les gens que par les vehicules) peut alterer la composition de la flore et les proprietes des sols et ainsi resulter en une degradation des milieux." ( Plan de Zone Lac des Fees 1994 P 35-)*

The question is unanswered as to why the NCC ignored the dire warning of its own consultants and reversed Gatineau Park's policy to safeguard the ecological integrity of this exceptional sector of Gatineau Park.

A complementary study by the MTQ also supports the above conclusion. A classified MTQ floristic inventory was released after public hearing were almost completed in March 2001. It confirms the existence of 10 species of flora designated in the " Gazette Officielle du Quebec" as threatened, vulnerable or susceptible. This latest study is limited to flora within the study area. A comprehensive inventory on amphibians, reptiles and small mammals has yet to be produced by the proponent. This delay is in spite of the high probability of the presence of rare and threatened invertebrates in the study area, such as the Southern Flying Squirrel, Showy Mole, Blandings Turtle, and Canadian Lynx .

However, a field inspection by the author revealed some outstanding natural features. Contrary to the forest map analysis concluding a maximum average age class of 70 years, the author discovered an abundance of "super canopy trees" exceeding several centuries in age. This age estimate is based

on measuring a small representative sample of the diameter (dbh) of random "upper canopy trees" in two sectors. (1) north of the Hull Prison and east of Marais a Scirpe (2) a small pine grove on a plateau east of Marais a Wolffia. These diameters were then compared to the largest trees recorded in comparable geography in the municipality of Aylmer (in the Champlain Pine forest and at Blueberry Point) where ages are recorded. The figures were also compared to the finest old-growth white pine ( pinus strobus) forest remaining in North America; located in Algonquin Park's Old Crow Nature Reserve. In the Outaouais, a remnant stand of exceptional white pine can be found in La Verendyre Park, where the average old-growth specimen reaches 29 " dbh. This is considerably smaller than the pines identified growing adjacent to Wolffia Marsh. The Quebec Ministry of Natural Resources classifies white pine as exceptional which have reached 200 years and measure 25 " dbh ( pers. comm. Katherine Rooney). The comparison is outlined below:

**A Comparison Of the Mean Average Trunk Diameters (DBH) For Emergent Super Canopy Trees (Pinus Strobus) at Four Locations**

	<u>Blueberry Pt.</u>	<u>Champlain Forest</u>	<u>Old Crow Reserve</u>	<u>Lac Des Fees</u>
size (n)	5	12	9	5
range	21-29"	20-36"	33-48"	34-39"
average	26"	23"	41"	36"

Extrapolation from private research ( Huggett et. al.) involving core sampling in the Outaouais using an increment borer suggests the super canopy trees in the Lac Des Fees sector and threatened by the highway alignment have actual ages between:

324-360 years for the smaller 32" dbh specimen  
 464-500 years for the largest 39' dbh. "

(Note: These latter age estimates coincide with increment bore samples taken at Blueberry Point in Oct. 1996 where a 27" dbh = 270 years, and a 28 " dbh was recorded at 280 years. Several correlation's were made between the known tree age and tree diameter to estimate and factor in the decrease in annual increment typical of old growth trees over 120 years when biomass production is reduced to maintenance and repair. The ages for the smallest and largest "super-canopy trees" threatened by the highway proposal were estimated using this equation. However, the use of a "west-coast" increment borer would be required to establish exact figures) .

## INFLUENCE ON WETLANDS FUNCTION

Three (3) types of wetland would be effected by the project: (Scirpes ,Typha, Wolffia). They provide critical habitat for an exceptional complement of flora and fauna. Several RARE plants have been identified which would be destroyed in Gatineau Park's Lac Des Fees sector. They are identified in the MTQ's floristic report # DB4 . The following plants/trees ( all of which have official recognition as being susceptible, threatened or vulnerable as published in the Gazette Officielle du Quebec) would be adversely effected or completely destroyed:

ACER NIGRUM

CELTIS OCCIDENTALIS

QUERCUS ALBA

QUERCUS BICOLOR ( first record for the Outaouais)

CAREX CRISTATELLA

CAREX HIRTIFOLIA

CAREX HITCHCOCKIANA

CYPRIPEDIUM PARVIFLORUM VAR. PLANIPETALUM

WOLFFIA BOREALIS ( less than 5 recorded locations exists in Quebec)

WOLFFIA COLUMBIANA ( only 20 other locations recorded in Quebec)

(\* In addition Hamamelis virginiana and a colony of Morchella esculenta was identified.)

MTQ's studies fail to seriously address the protection of these wetlands. Post construction monitoring, overpasses and translocation of rare plants are not qualified as legitimate mitigation strategies based on the following scientific facts;

It has been identified in the MTQ's report that rare duckweed species such as Wollfia Borealis ( found in only five other locations in Quebec) and Wolffia Columbiana ( identified in only 20 other provincial locations) would be adversely effected with a drop in water level. The completion of the highway extension and overpass would alter the water level maintained by resident beaver colonies.

Currently more than two beaver dams maintain water levels. The intrusion of human activity would potentially displace beaver activity elsewhere causing water levels to drop in Wollfia Marsh. The Wollfia specie(s) which blanket the wetlands would disappear. Engineering solutions such as artificial detention ponds would effectively remove any semblance of natural habitat. Extensive water flow/ regulation measures already have been constructed down stream by the City of Hull. This has altered dissolved

oxygen levels and increased bank erosion and flow discharge by reducing shoreline shade from overhanging vegetation and channelizing meanders .

## PROBLEMS WITH MITIGATION

"Technical fixes" such as building overpasses above the marsh fail to address the unavoidable impact of road salt ( chloride), anti-freeze and petroleum wastes which would enter the marsh from above. These elements and compounds would influence wetland chemistry, disrupting amphibian reproduction. Noise and human activities associated with the four lane highway and enhanced pedestrian traffic would displace nesting activity by resident Wood Ducks, Green Herons and Raptors. The site is strategic for migratory song-birds.

An unstable waste disposal site located north of the highway is leaking leachate into the marsh. A parking lot is proposed for the landfill site. Any alteration to Wollfia Marsh and Moore Creek could compromise the biochemical decomposition of contaminates entering from the dump site. These contaminates rapidly enter the Ottawa River after draining from the Marsh.

## ALTERNATIVES

### MTQ and NCC HAVE FAILED TO ADEQUATELY EXAMINE ALTERNATIVES

The first fundamental requirement of an environmental impact assessment or screening (either at a federal or provincial level) is to carefully examine " alternatives to " and "alternative *means* " of carrying out the undertaking. Justification of the project should not be based solely on economics and the transient values of society. A more objective criteria is required based on scientific principles. The Quebec Transport Ministry and NCC has declined to investigate alternative *means* of lubricating traffic congestion through the Outaouais by encouraging mass public transportation such as light rail and improving existing public transportation.

(Since this aspect has been emphasized elsewhere by regional NGO such as Transport 2000, and CREDDO it will not be elaborated here). Nonetheless, the MTQ's impact study doesn't make a concerted attempt to investigate alternatives *means* to the project.

Alternatives *to* the project such as expanding extra lanes on Saint-Raymond Avenue, or using an existing corridor through Gatineau Park such as Gamelin Boulevard have not been seriously considered in the MTQ's report.

These options would utilize existing transportation corridors to connect Mountain Road with Laramme Street in Hull and avoid an additional severance of Gatineau Park, proposed in the chosen route south of Lac Des Fees.

It is interesting to note that seven (7) advantages were identified using the Gamelin Blvd. as a corridor to cross the park , and only one disadvantage ( see; MTQ PR5.2 Axe McConnell-Laramee Avis de recevabilite; Response a la 2e serie de questions March 2001 p. 6-7.)

Advantages:

- 1) aucune interface avec la circulation sur McConnell-Laramee
- 2) impact minimum sur l' environnement
- 3) bon acces et visibilite via Laramee
- 4) possibilite d'eviter la circulation de transit sur Gamelin
- 5) access direct a la Promenade de la Gatineau
- 6) access direct au centre d'accueil projete
- 7) couts de construction munimaux

Inconvenients:

- 1) acces indirect au stationnement saisonnier existant

The NCC's reasoning behind their rejection of this promising option to use Gamelin Blvd. would appear both illogical and misleading. Their explanation was expressed to a skeptical audience at the second series of questions during the BAPE hearings in March 2001... ( see appendix , news item Ottawa Citizen)

*Cette option ( ie. Gamelin Blvd) ne repond pas au besoin de la CCN pour les raisons suivantes:*

- 1) Elle ne permet pas de desservir de facon optimale, la clientele en provenance de l'ouest ( Aylmer, notamment des secteurs des Trembles et du Plateau).
- 2) Il peut etre difficile de rassurer la population que le lien reliant la Promenade du Lac-des-Fees et le chemin de la Montagne soit un jour ouvert, permettant ainsi la circulationj de transit sur Gamelin, a travers le parc.
- 3) Le fait que les visiteurs aient a emprunter le chemin de la Montagne, ne serait-ce que sur une courte distance, represente une discontinuite au niveau visuel et perception. ( MTQ. PR5.2 Mar. 2001 p 6-7)

It would appear that the NCC has rejected this viable corridor option despite overwhelming evidence of it being an almost optimal solution. The commission's reasoning behind its rejection of the Gamelin option appears nonsensical, petty and irrelevant. The several advantages of choosing Gamelin Blvd. are largely ignored which includes reduction in construction costs and minimizing environmental effects to the park's ecological integrity.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Carefully evaluation of the project and the park's habitat characteristics conclude that anticipated impacts are simply non-mitigable along the selected corridor. Attempts to argue otherwise would reveal a fundamental denial of scientific principles .

The McConnell-Laramee extension through Gatineau Park at the chosen location south of Lac Des Fee stands to irreversibly alter wetland habitat and upland forest of provincial significance. In the process the area's complement of threatened, susceptible and vulnerable flora and fauna would undoubtedly disappear. A small remnant of exceptionally large and old White Pine trees which pre-date Canada's colonization (dating back as early as the year 1500) would be lost to antiquity.

Justification of need for the McConnell-Laramee remains questionable since alternatives have not been sufficiently evaluated. It behooves all levels of government to condense impacts into as few corridors as possible crossing Gatineau Park if it is to retain any semblance as a natural environment park. Failure to do so, would result in the tragic impoverishment characteristic of piece-meal urban encroachment and ecological fragmentation. Gamelin Blvd. remains the most viable alternative corridor option. Finally, this project which involves both federal funds and land holdings is subject to a comprehensive federal environmental assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA). The dissatisfaction by the reviewing ministerial authorities with the MTQ's provincial impact assessment supports the execution of this federal requirement.

### **Acknowledgment:**

The author would like to acknowledge the following individuals, for their assistance and advise in the production of this report. Their acknowledgment here does not necessarily indicate their support for the report's contents and conclusions:

Paul Chenard  
Geof Burbidge ( photographs)  
David Desjardins  
Gerard Desjardins  
Jerry Demarco ( Sierra Legal Defense Fund)  
Daniel St-Hilaire  
Stephen Knowles  
Katherine Rooney

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annexes.

## GATINEAU PARK PLANNING

# Groups want to stop growth in public access

Jan, 14 '92

By Doug Yonson  
Citizen staff writer

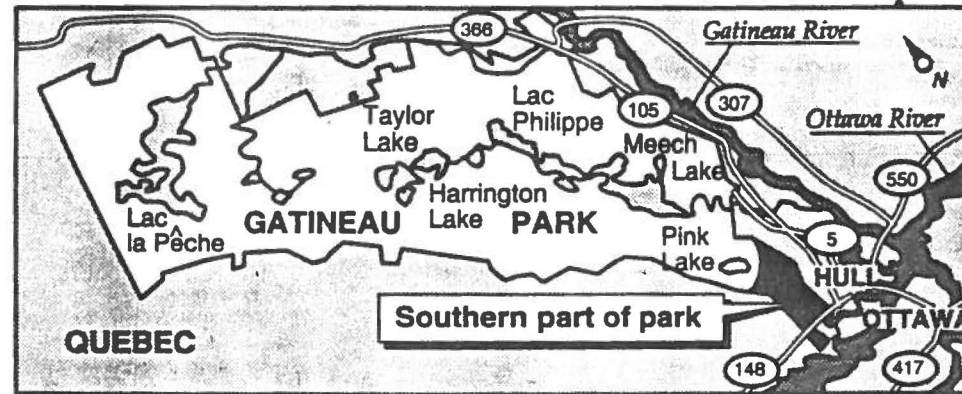
Conservation groups want the National Capital Commission to prevent greater public access to the southern, most urban section of Gatineau Park.

Some Hull residents, however, say that that area of the park must continue to serve local neighborhoods.

The commission is working on detailed plans for the so-called Gateway Sector, extending from the park boundary along Taché Boulevard to just south of Pink Lake. The NCC finished two days of public consultation Monday.

A master plan for Gatineau Park was approved in 1990. It concluded that the Gateway Sector should increase the visibility of the park for visitors while respecting its ecosystem. In particular, the plan says access by the main entrance, off Taché Boulevard, should be improved and a visitor centre established nearby. The NCC is working out details of the plan.

The plan proposes two concepts for the area. The "wild nature" option would con-



centrate public uses, now spread across the sector. A beginner ski hill and an amphitheatre, both near Lac des Fées, would be relocated. The bulk of the sector would be reforested and a few new trails would be added.

The "tamed nature" option provides greater public access to this section of the park. The ski hill and amphitheatre would stay near Lac des Fées, the number of trails would be increased, and land along Lac des Fées Parkway might be sold.

Naturalist Ian Huggett said he wants no new roads, trails or other development because they limit the mobility of wildlife and their access to the Ottawa and Gatineau Rivers.

But NCC planner Gershon Rother said that although freezing public access is feasible, "I'm not sure it is desirable. Gatineau Park is a people place. It's not meant to be a nature reserve."

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society is concerned that new trails, for ex-

ample, will simply increase the public impact on the park, said Scott Findlay, who is studying the master plan on behalf of the society's Ottawa branch. But some development may be desirable if it means visitors are directed to less ecologically-sensitive parts of the park.

"The underlying logic is if the development plan increases the conservation value of the park, we like it," Findlay said.

Many of those attending the open house were area residents concerned about their future casual use of the park.

For Mike Blakeney, a lifelong resident of the Wrightville section of Hull, east of the park, community access to the area should be maintained, and the ski hill, for example, be left where it now is.

Some of the greatest environmental damage to this part of the park will be caused by the construction of three major roads the NCC is already committed to. An extension of St-Raymond Boulevard across the park was completed about two years ago and the commission has agreed to the general routings for the McConnell-Laramie expressway and the A50 autoroute.

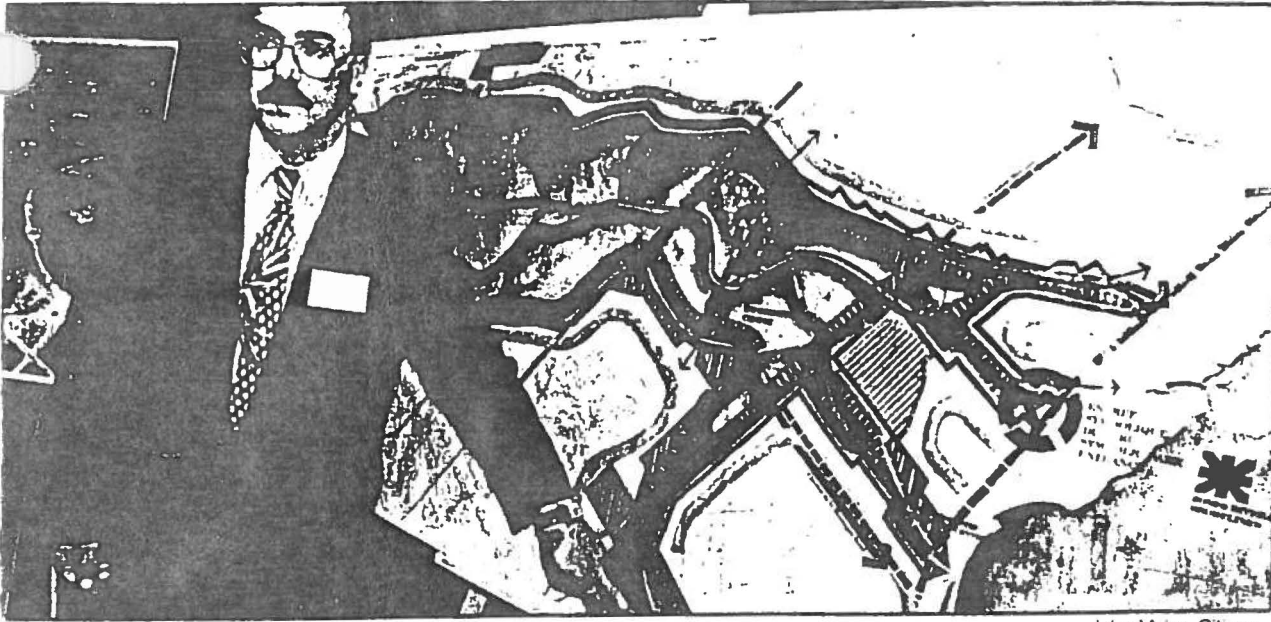
ing cooperative housing, group homes for young offenders, shelters for battered women and the homeless — any form of social housing.

Ottawa Coun. Nancy Mitchell, a supporter of social housing, believes that often the public is not given suf-

... says the region would be happy to locate its homes elsewhere, especially because downtown property prices are extremely high.

But in many cases, staff have limited choices. Many of the people the region has to look after

ing could mean ar homes for young c  
"Anything that c  
and alarm," she sa  
prises."



— John Major, Citizen

**Tinkering:** Pierre Dubé says people want park preserved as natural area

# Gatineau Park spared overhaul as NCC listens to pleas of public

Citizen staff

The National Capital Commission will do some tinkering with the southern end of Gatineau Park over the next 10 years.

But the commission — mindful of some "passionate response" from 400 members of the public — has shelved any major overhauls.

The commission had been considering plans that included such things as returning the Lac des Fées ski hill to its natural state and moving the skiing elsewhere in the park.

But the NCC plan released Monday leaves the skiing right where it is. It's also scrapped plans to move an amphitheatre.

The southern parcel of land, called the Gateway Sector by the NCC, stretches from the park's urban boundary at Taché Boulevard in Hull, to just south of Pink Lake.

It's about one-tenth of the 88,000-acre Gatineau Park.

Park neighbors and conservationists made it clear during meetings in January they want the park preserved as a natural area but not fenced in, said Pierre Dubé, chief of urban planning for the NCC.

And they didn't want anything radical done.

"It's a fine-tuning plan. It's not a let's-start-over plan,"

**“It's a fine-tuning plan. It's not a let's-start-over plan.”**

—Gershon Rother  
NCC senior project manager

said Gershon Rother, senior project manager for Gatineau Park.

Among the changes:

- A slight re-drawing of the park map, with a few slivers of land severed by roads — about 40 acres in all — sold off.

On the plus side, about an equal amount of forest owned by the City of Hull, next to the Hull jail, would become part of the park.

- About 12 kilometres of pathways would be built along the border of the park land to provide better access without damaging sensitive land. Any of those paths which encroached on forest would be fairly primitive.

- Through traffic would no longer be allowed on Gamelin Boulevard, which goes through the park.

Two small parking lots would be set up on some scrub land to encourage people who insist on driving cars to park them.

- A visitor centre would be set up near Lac des Fées.

- The Taché Boulevard entrance to the Gatineau Parkway would be widened. Better signs would be installed at the entrance.

## HULL BAR STRIP

# Police wants to close

Citizen staff

Hull's police chief wants to strip bars from the strip by closing bars at 1 a.m. "It's plain to see," Lord said at 1 a.m., the client at home."

Hull council, which will meet Thursday, has a night to decide whether it had rejected the idea in

Hull Mayor Marcel Boivin after being briefed by Auditor General Jacques Aylmer and the

The Hull police force, being forced to handle an Ottawa-Carleton region — for example, Audy said. "They can't handle them."

Coun. Claude Bonhomme's strip, will present his 1 changes to a situation th

"We're not too sure what we discussed and there will be Jacques Roy, chief of Ma

By law, bars in Quebec City Council would have to submit a mission to change the law many patrons head across

Bonhomme's committee in February, saying that was rowdiness, petty crimes a downtown area for a dec

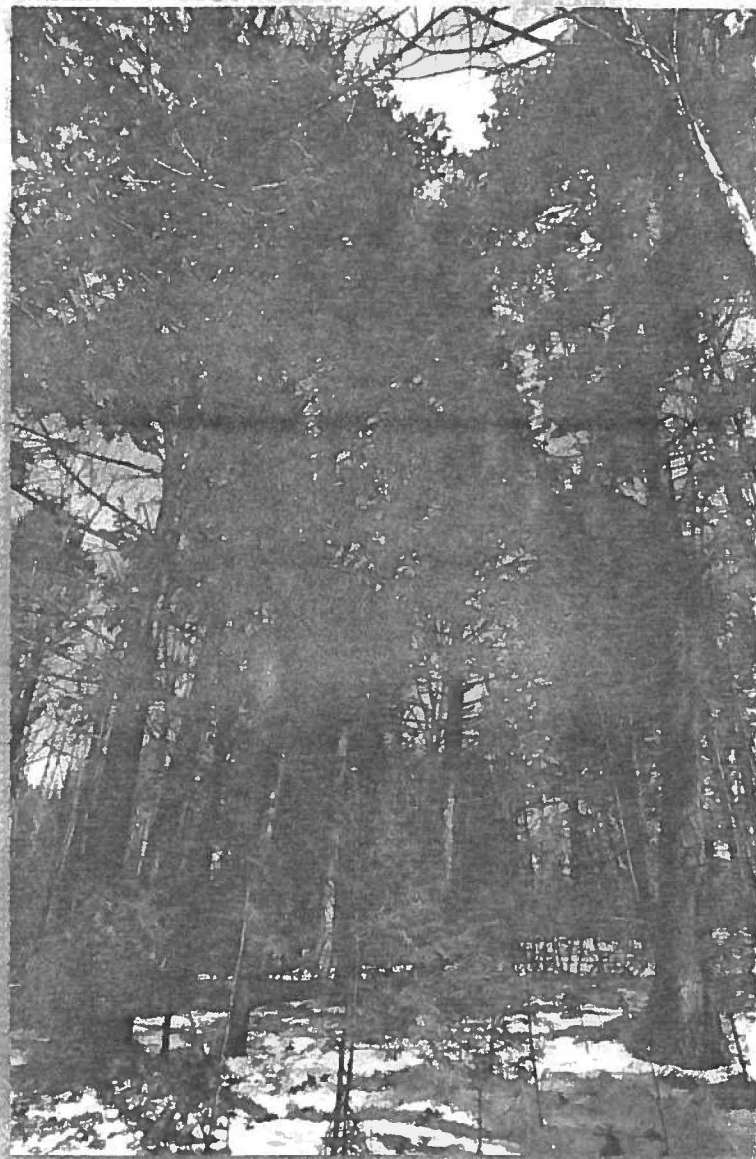
But Hull Council backed bar owners strongly object penalize all bars when onl ing to control their clients

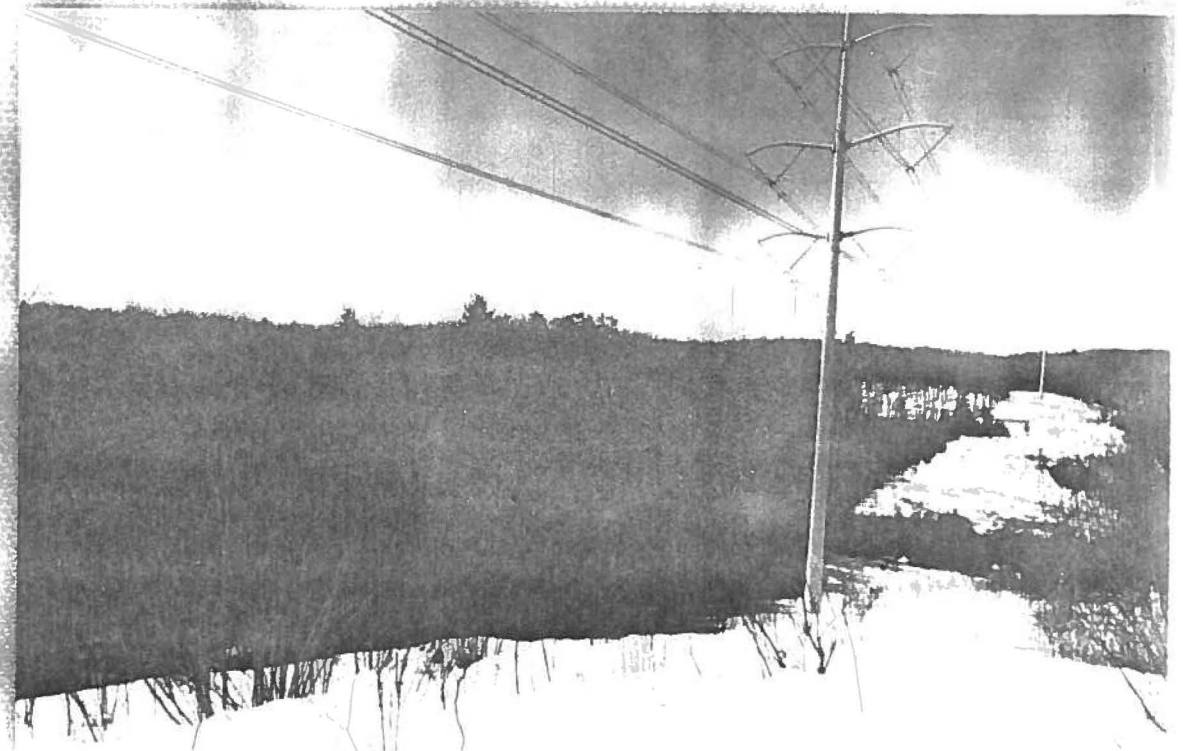
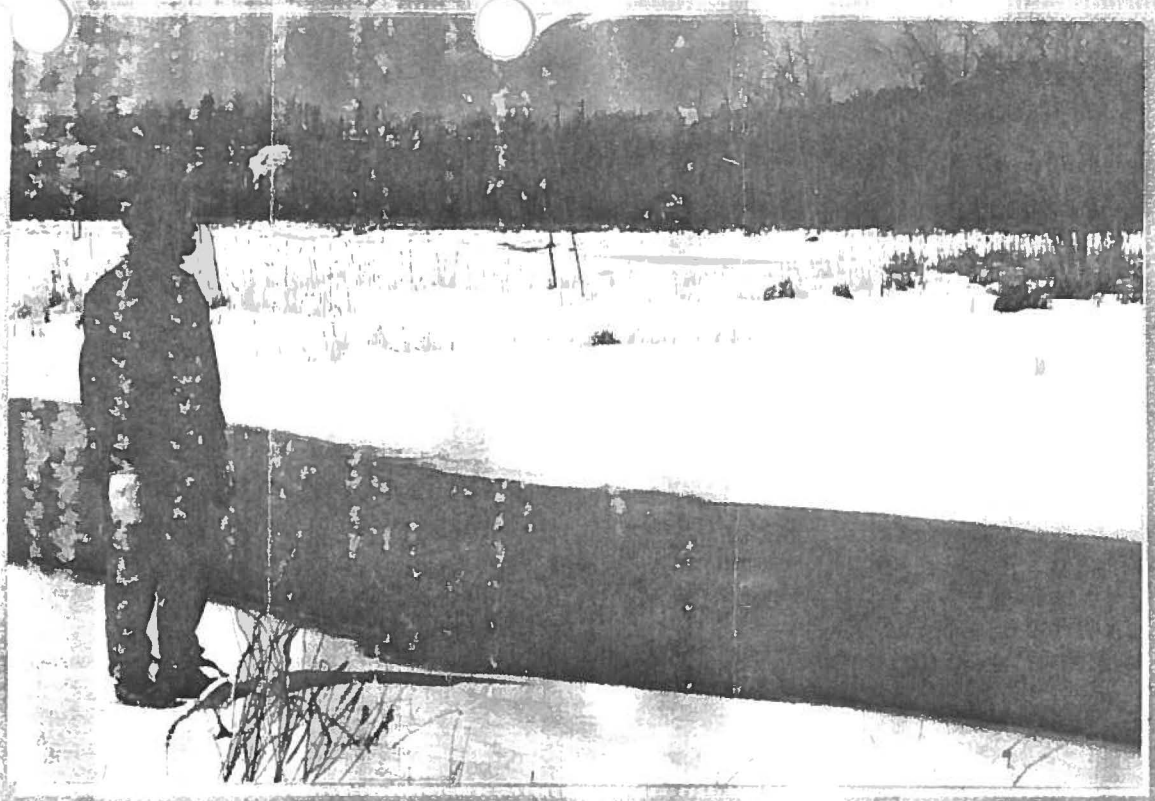
Bonhomme has refused recommending

Audy, who is a member of gestions, such as closing st installing video cameras to areas, are not enough to c

"There is no other solution things wouldn't be necessa

The special meeting, open If necessary, a formal court to bring the issue to a vot





■ HIGH PRIORITY/F4  
 ■ COMICS/F15

# City

## Aylmer forest falls to road

Neighbors angry as last-ditch efforts fail to save rare stand of pines

By Tom Spears  
 Citizen environment writer

Chainsaws turned the hopes of Aylmer residents to sawdust Tuesday as a crew cut a highway route through a 150-year-old forest they'd tried to save.

The McConnell Laramée highway, which will link Hull and Aylmer, ran up against an ecological treasure — the last old pine forest in the capital region.

The highway won Monday, provincial officials had a sod-turning ceremony. Tuesday morning, the heavy machinery moved in.

"I'm really angry that they did it so fast," said Patrice Martel, an Aylmer resident who was collecting signatures on a petition to move the highway.

"We were full of positive energy, feeling that if (moving the route) would work," he said, helplessly watching as trees fell.

"I was there Sunday. At the time, there was a constant going and coming" of visitors drawn by the forest.

By late Tuesday morning, there was a metre wide swath through the heart of the forest. The smell of pine sap filled the air as two CBC reporters stood holding microphones to capture the "Bzzzzzz — bump!" of chainsaws and crashing trees.

As the cutting crew took down a young maple, a woman shouted at them: "Oh, re, pick on the baby — it can't fight back!"

Martel and Aylmer resident Ian Huggett said many opponents learned about the cutting after much of it was already done, cause the crew accidentally cut the neighborhood's phone line.

The highway builders Quebec's transport ministry and the National Capital Commission say just 57 pines will be cut.

Diane Dupuis, NCC spokeswoman, said the strip cut Tuesday is just half of the highway. There will be a median 10 metres wide with many trees left intact and then another strip of 25 metres cut out of the forest to allow for the four lane road.

The NCC has asked the Quebec transport ministry to leave as many trees standing as possible. Dupuis said this means leaving trees in the median and making the pathway for cyclists and walkers "meander" around the large trees.

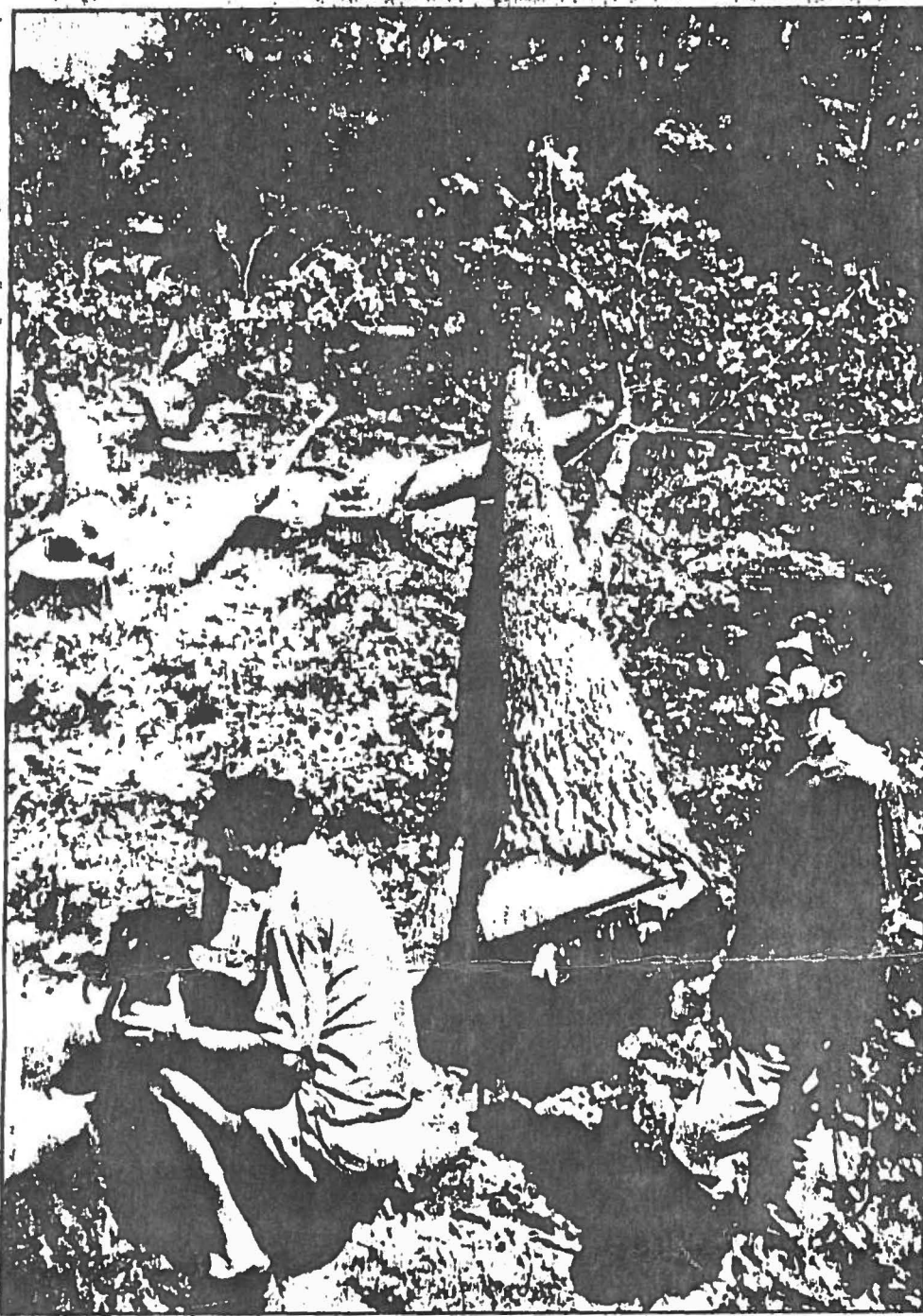
But Huggett warns that the cutting and chain-link fences will fragment the uninterrupted forest that shelters wild animals and birds like hawks and owls.

Opening the "canopy" of the forest will allow more trees to be toppled by storms, he says. He adds the road will be a barrier to animals that normally roam through the forest.

Finally, the total of 57 trees lost is just pines. Not counted are the maples, birches and other species that are also being razed, Huggett says.

The route was planned in 1988. Area residents, however, say they didn't realize until last month that it would cut through the forest. Everyone assumed it would be built on pasture just north of the forest, Huggett said.

Huggett and other naturalists have been lobbying Quebec and the NCC to move the road ever since.



— Wayne Cuddington, Citizen

Fallen giants: A Hull TV crew inspects remains of trees cut for highway

## If a tree falls in a forest

Residents want pine forest and new highway

**R**esidents from Champlain Park in Aylmer banded together Sunday to fight the destruction of an old white pine forest that is in the path of the future McConnell-Laramée highway.

The forest is about 100 metres northwest of Champlain Park, just behind some homes on Brouage Street.

According to Paul Chenard, regional director of the Association of Quebec biologists, and local residents, the forest is the last of its kind south of the Canadian Shield.

Chenard said it is ironic that the Environmental Summit in

Rio de Janeiro is trying to deal with the destruction of irreplaceable rain forests, when a local and rare forest like this one is in jeopardy.

### 125 years old

The white pine stand, with trees measuring up to 128 feet tall, is estimated to be between 125 and 150 years old. About half the trees would have to be cut for the construction of the new McConnell-Laramée highway.

About 240 residents gathered in the forest Sunday afternoon to sign a petition against the pending destruction of the stand. The petition, which has more

than 500 signatures, requests that the highway be detoured around the scenic forest. It will be sent to the provincial ministries of transport and the environment.

Residents made it clear they were not against the highway, but the fact that it is slated to go down the centre of the unusual pine stand. They say a detour of 200 metres would save the forest.

According to the Ministry of Transport, such a detour would delay construction of the highway by two years. Construction of the first phase of the McConnell-Laramée project began last week.

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Chris Mikula, Citizen

Unique forest: Martin Pagnan checks age of fallen tree

## AYLMER-HULL BYPASS

# Group hopes to save oldest pine forest from bulldozers

By Tom Spears  
Citizen environment writer

Aylmer residents say they've just learned that construction of a new highway will soon cut an 80-metre-wide swath through one of the region's oldest forests.

The four-lane bypass joining McConnell Road in Aylmer with Laramée Boulevard in Hull will involve bulldozing white pines 150 years old, they say.

And they say a 1988 environmental assessment of the project looked at noise and possible well contamination — but never at the destruction of the woods.

"Four lanes — you're talking about a Queensway through here," said Aylmer resident Ian Huggett as he led reporters and photographers through the quiet woods Wednesday.

The area is on a hill north of the Champlain Park subdivision. White pines, sugar maples and beech and birch trees cover the hill in an unbroken area several hundred metres across.

"This is the oldest pine stand on the Canadian Shield," said Paul Chenard, regional director of the Association of Biologists of Quebec. "It's the age of the forest that makes it unique."

Opponents of the highway say everything would be solved if planners looped the bypass a couple of hundred metres to the north. That way they say it would miss the old trees and cut across some abandoned farm fields.

They will present their plan to Aylmer M.L.A. Robert Middlemiss Friday morning.

The residents have known for a long time that a bypass was going to go through north of their homes, said Champlain Park resident Martin Pagnan. But he said no one realized it was cutting through the heart of the forest until they found surveyors' stakes a few days ago.

"You really don't get a solid idea of where it's going until you see the red stakes go in," he said.

"It's not just an issue of my backyard," he said. "It's quite a remarkable forest for future generations to wander through. When it's gone,

it's gone."

The woods are home to a variety of wildlife, said Michael Murphy of the Ottawa Field Naturalists. He said there are bear footprints, and birders have seen hawks, owls and other creatures that are rare near cities.

Officials at Transport Quebec, which is planning the project, couldn't be reached Wednesday. The residents say construction is scheduled to begin later this month.

## OUTAOUAIS

# Highway to cut through pines despite pleas to re-route road

Citizen staff

Outaouais residents opposing plans to build a highway through an old white pine forest in Aylmer have failed in a late attempt to re-route the highway.

"Construction is imminent," said Paul Chenard, a biologist trying to save the forest north of Champlain Park.

On Friday, the group made their pitch for a re-routing of the McConnell-Laramée bypass to Pontiac M.N.A. Robert Middlemiss, Quebec's associate transport minister.

But Chenard said Middlemiss refused because it would take too much time and money to change the route and expropriate new land for the four-lane route between Hull and Aylmer.

Middlemiss's office couldn't be reached Monday.

Chenard agreed that bending the highway around the pine grove's northern edge would cause a major delay in the project.

"The thing that bothers us is that this thing slipped through the cracks in the first place," he said.

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## LA RÉGION



LE-NE-BINE/LeDroit

Paul Chenard, directeur régional de l'Association des biologistes du Québec, se porte à la défense des vieux pins près du secteur Champlain à Aylmer.

# Les écologistes veulent sauver les vieux pins d'Aylmer

LeDroit

La construction de l'autoroute McConnell risque de faire disparaître une partie de la forêt de vieux pins âgés de 150 ans que l'on retrouve près du secteur du parc Champlain à Aylmer.

Un groupe de citoyens et d'écologistes souhaitent ainsi convaincre les autorités de détourner la tracé de l'autoroute dont les travaux devraient débuter prochainement.

Hier midi, ils avaient convoqué la presse à une visite sur le terrain pour voir ces arbres majestueux dont certains s'élèvent à plus de 40 mètres du sol.

«Personne n'était vraiment au courant de la présence de

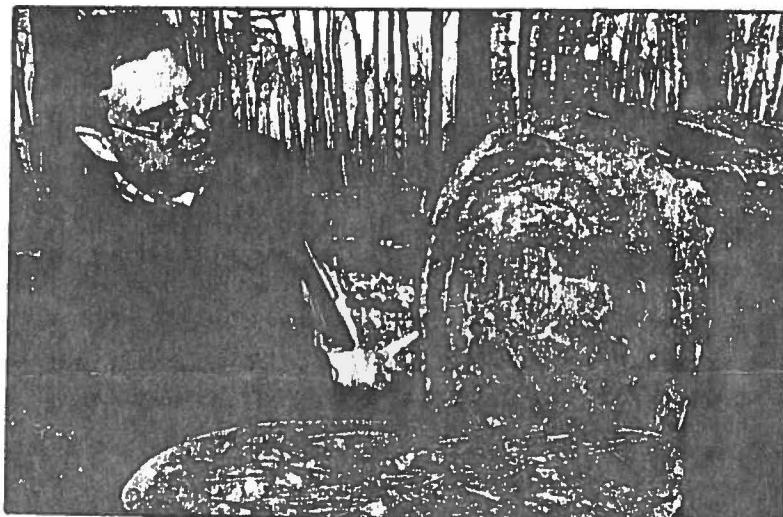
ces arbres avant la semaine dernière.

«Nous avons vérifié, et il n'y aurait rien à ce sujet dans les documents préparés dans le cadre des audiences publiques sur l'environnement tenues en 1988 sur le projet d'autoroute», a raconté hier Lorne Peterson, un porte-parole du groupe Eco-Watch, auteur et photographe d'Ottawa.

Le groupe croit que cette forêt unique devrait être préservée, et souhaite obtenir des appuis pour forcer les autorités à réévaluer le tracé.

«Il n'est pas trop tard à notre avis pour modifier le tracé. Ce serait terrible de perdre cette forêt», mentionne M. Peterson.

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— Citizen file photo

**Doomed:** Neighbor Martin Pagnan fought to save grove

A 1988 environmental assessment of the bypass makes no mention of cutting the grove, which has 150-year-old trees.

The highway's opponents say they only learned in recent weeks that the road will go through the grove.

The highway will cut a swath 70 to 80 metres wide through the grove, which sits on a hilltop several hundred metres across. Chenard, head of the Outaouais section of the Association of Biologists of Quebec, said construction is to begin this month.