

THIS YEAR, WE RALLIED TO PROTECT THE HEART OF CHELSEA!



We could have done a number of things, like selling the land, but we thought about how important it is to many of the residents of the community, as well as to the parishioners who for generations — since we owned this land in 1841 — have worked to preserve it in its natural state and its purity. Unless you have taken a walk through these woods, you are missing out on something — Suzanne Gibeault, former Warden of St. Stephen's Parish.



PHOTO CREDIT: ME MEGAN THROOP, CHRISTINA ERYUZLU & SASKIA MORGAN





ST. STEPHEN'S FOREST IS NOW PROTECTED!

On November 5th, St. Stephen's Parish and Action Chelsea for the Respect of the Environment (ACRE) signed conservation easements, officially completing the project on which they have been working for more than two years. This effort placed 70.9 acres behind the St. Stephen's Church in Chelsea under long-term protection. This marks ACRE's twelfth conservation property and its first one under conservation easements.



This unique forest is an integral part of Chelsea's natural and historic identity, defining the distinct character of the municipality. Ecologically rich, it is home to an upland hardwood forest with species "en situation précaire au Québec" that was identified as a high conservation priority in ACRE's Nature Chelsea Project. A recent independent study by le Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable de l'Outaouais (CREDDO) identified the St. Stephen's corridor as a potential ecological corridor that could enhance connectivity between Gatineau Park and the Gatineau River. Additionally, this project contributes to the Gouvernement du Québec's goal to conserve 30% of its continental and marine ecosystems by 2030.

St. Stephen's Parish, deeply committed to protecting this natural environment, accepted a payment significantly below the land's market value — a forever gift to Chelsea. The parish has also played a central role in this conservation project, and its commitment, vision, and proactive engagement were instrumental in making this acquisition a reality

What will happen next? A forest management plan will be developed, and a neighbourhood Stewardship Committee will be established to assist with managing and maintaining the forest. This committee will engage with community members and oversee key aspects such as trail management, ecological monitoring, and safety. An endowment fund, established by ACRE, will ensure the forest's conservation for years to come, with revenues used to support ongoing stewardship. While conservation is the primary goal, the forest trails will remain open for walking, snowshoeing, and enjoying nature, though cycling is currently not permitted. These trails will continue to be part of the community trail network, enhancing local access to this marvelous central green space.

This conservation effort coincides with Chelsea's 150th anniversary and St. Stephen's Parish's 180th anniversary—a perfect moment to celebrate a legacy of nature preservation.

ACRE is deeply grateful to the Anonymous Foundation; the Nature Conservancy of Canada¹, through the “Accélérer la conservation dans le sud du Québec (ACSQ)” project², for which the Gouvernement du Québec has granted fundings; the National Capital Commission³; the Leacross Foundation⁴; the Echo Foundation⁵; the Chelsea Foundation⁶; le Réseau de milieux naturels protégés for their support⁷; and 138 community donors⁸ for making this special project a reality. The Chelsea community had the chance of a lifetime to protect 70.9 acres—and they seized it! We would also like to express our profound gratitude to all the volunteers who have contributed to this project, including ACRE’s board members, members of the fundraising and executive committees, the sector and street captains involved in door-to-door canvassing and fundraising, and everyone who worked on the production of a video about the project. A special thank you goes to eight-year-old Mila Styles, who asked her friends attending her birthday party not to give her gifts, but to contribute to the project instead. A truly beautiful gesture from a very young supporter who will be able to enjoy the forest next to her home for many years to come!



¹The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is the country’s unifying force for nature. NCC seeks solutions to the twin crises of rapid biodiversity loss and climate change through large-scale, permanent land conservation. As a trusted partner, NCC works with people, communities, businesses and government to protect and care for our country’s most important natural areas. Since 1962, NCC has brought Canadians together to conserve and restore more than 15 million hectares. In Quebec, NCC partners regularly with Conservation de la nature Québec, a non-profit organization that is distinct from NCC, to conserve Quebec’s richest natural areas. Together, the two organizations have conserved more than 55,000 hectares of natural areas in the province. To learn more, visit natureconservancy.ca.

²The Accélérer la conservation dans le sud du Québec (ACSQ) project is a co-funding agreement between the Gouvernement du Québec and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), benefiting Quebec conservation organizations. The project aims to protect and conserve natural habitats of ecological interest, notably through the acquisition of private land, for protected and conserved areas and the establishment of ecological corridors. Through this, the ACSQ will promote the development and sound management of the network of protected areas on private land, as well as public access to nature. The Gouvernement du Québec grants invested in the ACSQ over five years must be matched by NCC and its partners with other funds not provided by the gouvernement du Québec.

³The National Capital Commission’s mission includes, among other things, the planning, development, conservation, and enhancement of the National Capital Region. In its Gatineau Park Master Plan (2021), the NCC emphasized the importance of protecting ecological corridors adjacent to Gatineau Park and established a partnership program for their protection, which provides funding for this project.

⁴The Leacross Foundation’s core mission is to educate women and children in society, using a gender lens on granting in areas of education, music/arts, the environment, and healthcare. The foundation has been a long-time supporter of environmental conservation and education across Canada.

⁵Echo Foundation is a private charitable foundation incorporated in 1983, whose head office is in Montreal. The Foundation’s environment grants focus on Eastern Canada (Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces), with a priority given to the protection of natural areas of ecological importance.

⁶The Chelsea Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization whose principal purpose is to promote sport, culture and leisure, as well as foster a sense of community in the municipality of Chelsea.

⁷You can find this property, along with all the others, on leRepertoire.org.

⁸The full list of community donors who consented to their names published on our website can be found [here](#).