



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

It Was a Minute to Midnight: Quebec Crosses the Threshold of 17 % of Protected Areas

Montreal, December 17, 2020 – The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Quebec chapter (SNAP Québec) is very pleased that the Quebec government is now protecting 17 % of its territory, a significant step forward in favour of conservation in Québec. Today's announcements add 66,000 km² of protected areas, an area equivalent to 12 times Prince Edward Island.

"We applaud the government's will to achieve international protected area targets and play a leading role in terms of conservation. Quebec is only the second province in Canada to reach the 17 % target and occupies the first place in terms of total surface area protected with more than 257,000 km², a surface area larger than the United Kingdom," highlights Alain Branchaud, executive director of SNAP Québec.

Protecting the Territory to Protect a Way of Life

SNAP Québec congratulates the Cree Nation Government for its impressive leadership in conservation and is very pleased with the more than 39,000 km² of newly announced protected areas in Eeyou Istchee. These are the result of extensive consultations with the communities conducted by the Cree Nation Government, notably with Cree trappers and hunters. The sites thus identified therefore represent territories of high biocultural significance for these communities.

It is now 23 % of Eeyou Istchee that is protected from industrial development. *"This region having been impacted by hydroelectric, mining and forestry activities, this network of protected areas will allow for the conservation of territories used since a time immemorial by the Cree. Protecting these sites will contribute to preserving the Cree traditional way of life by protecting the habitat of cultural keystone species such as the beaver, the black bear and the marten,"* notes Véronique Bussières, manager of biocultural conservation at SNAP Québec. Located at the

heart of the boreal forest, these new protected areas will also contribute to protecting woodland caribou habitat.

SNAP Québec also highlights the creation of a protected area in the famous Chic-Chocs Mountains in the Bas-St-Laurent region. SNAP Québec and its partners organized a major mobilization campaign last summer that illustrated citizens' profound attachment to this iconic territory. Protecting part of this territory will benefit endangered species such as the Gaspésie caribou and the Bicknell's Thrush.

Protected Area Projects Not to be Forgotten

SNAP Québec is however disappointed by the many missed opportunities in Southern Quebec and urges the government to make up for these by the end of its mandate. Numerous projects undertaken by citizen groups or Indigenous communities (some of which for more than a decade) were put aside by the government. Amongst these we can point to Kaaikop Mountain in the Laurentian region or the Peribonka River area and Kenogami Lake in the Saguenay Lac Saint-Jean region.

"It is very disappointing that several proposals from the Ministry of Environment, who put forward projects of genuine ecological value and supported by local communities, have been blocked by the Ministry of Forests, Fauna and Parks as well as by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources in the final round of negotiations," adds Pier-Olivier Boudreault, conservation biologist at SNAP Québec.

A significant oversight in today's announcements is, without a doubt, the Magpie River, which, despite repeated requests and a consensus among the Ekuanishit Innu Band Council and the Minganie regional county municipality as well as strong regional support, was not protected due to stiff opposition from Hydro-Québec. Earlier this week, SNAP Québec presented to the Quebec Premier a petition containing 11,596 signatures in favor of protecting the Magpie River and will pursue resolutely its actions in the upcoming weeks.

A Catching-Up Exercise for Southern Quebec

We want to provide a reminder that the commitment to protect 17 % of the territory stems from the Convention on Biological Diversity, whose Secretariat is located here in Quebec. This target represents an interim goal, and further requires that the areas chosen to be protected must be representative of the province's ecosystems as well as distributed amongst several regions.

SNAP Québec recommends that the government improve the conservation situation in Southern Quebec by the end of its mandate, in particular by creating protected areas in the public forest and by achieving a 22 % conservation target by 2022. We then call on the government to take the conservation staircase to ensure constant progress towards the new international target of 30 % by 2030, and thus not wait once again until it is a minute to midnight to act.

“It is important to remind ourselves that the COVID-19 pandemic originates in our broken relationship with natural spaces and the other species with whom we share them. Now more than ever, protecting Nature must remain at the core of government priorities,” concludes Alice de Swarte, conservation and policy analyst coordinator at SNAP Québec.

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Additional Information :

Aichi Target 11: “By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.”