

Coalition to Protect the South March Highlands -- Position Statement on Terry Fox Drive Extension

City of Ottawa is Failing to Protect Ottawa's Most Bio-diverse Area

We cannot allow a four-lane road to slice through the middle of Ottawa's richest and most diverse wild lands. The ecological costs of the Terry Fox Drive Extension are unacceptable, and the City of Ottawa has not properly fulfilled its obligations to assess and reduce those impacts. We must move quickly to protect this precious habitat.

The forests and wetlands of the South March Highlands are an overlooked gem of biodiversity within the City of Ottawa, on a par with Gatineau Park. The area contains unique Canadian Shield geology, wildlife habitats and pristine forests and is recognized by the province as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). The City of Kanata planned to ensure protection of these lands through restrictive zoning or acquisition. The City of Ottawa's own South March Conservation Plan states that this is the most densely bio-diverse area in the City. It is home to more than 654 species, seventeen of them species at risk of extinction, including the Blanding's Turtle, American Ginseng, Whip-poor-will and Butternut. Construction of the road, and the residential development to follow, will devastate this ecologically significant and sensitive area.

For many years community members, city councillors and scientists opposed development of these lands, but it has proceeded nonetheless. With the promise of federal stimulus money the City of Ottawa accelerated the road construction in order to meet the completion date of March 2011.

We must stop the bulldozers! Our key concerns and priorities are:

1. The City states that all necessary Environmental Assessments have been carried out; this is not the whole truth. Environmental studies were done in 2000 and 2004, but the scope of the project has changed significantly since that time. Provincial legislation requires that further assessments be conducted. City staff says this is not needed.

We call on the Ontario Minister of Environment to require an Individual Environmental Assessment, and on the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources to refuse to enter into an agreement with the City of Ottawa that would allow the killing of species protected by the Endangered Species Act.

2. Of several routes considered for the road, the City has chosen the most ecologically damaging. This shows utter disregard for public consultations which deemed ecological impact to be the number one criterion for route selection. Proposed mitigation measures to protect species are based on incomplete analysis and a piecemeal approach to planning.

We call on the City of Ottawa to halt construction on the current route and to conduct rigorous ecological studies of the area in order to choose a route that will minimize

ecological disruption and ensure that key natural areas are connected.

3. The need for the Terry Fox Extension was based on projections that employment figures would double between 2001 and 2011. Due to the recession and high-tech sector downturn, growth projections were significantly reduced during the last Official Plan Review (2009). City Council approved a two-lane road but staff increased it to four lanes, despite reduced traffic needs.

We call on City Council to assert its authority and ensure that a four-lane road is not built, and to direct the cost savings towards ecological protection in the area.

4. The road is being put in place to support future residential development and the alignment that has been chosen maximizes the opportunities for developers.

We call on City Council to re-think the Terry Fox Extension and development plans for the area as a whole, and to limit the urban development. The City should re-allocate the funds for Terry Fox Drive to purchase more reserve parkland in the South March Highlands, in accordance with the City's Official Plan to protect Natural Environmental Areas.

It's never too late to do the right thing.

We cannot allow deadlines for stimulus money from the federal and provincial governments to be used as justification for reckless development of Ottawa's most bio-diverse natural area.

As of May 12, 2010, this statement has been endorsed by the following groups and citizens:

Canadian Biodiversity Institute
Carp Residents Association
Ecology Ottawa
Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region
Gord Henderson, President, Kanata Beaverbrook Community Association
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre /Donna Dubreuil
Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club
Ottawa Riverkeeper
Sierra Club Canada
Sustainable Living Ottawa West
Transition Town Ottawa