

**Ever more concerned by the plight of the Monteregian Hills
Conservation groups form a common front to demand an action plan**

Rougemont, 14 September 2021 – The Monteregian Hills are a distinctive feature of the landscape of the metropolitan region of Montreal, the Monteregie and the Eastern Townships providing a backdrop to the daily lives of more than a one third of Quebec’s population. However, there are numerous challenges that need to be addressed to achieve their protection and sane land-use development. In order for their concerns regarding the Monteregian Hills to be heard as a single voice by municipalities and governments, **nine (9) conservation organisations join forces** and announce the creation of a Coalition. The Coalition wishes to relaunch efforts to collaborate and **accelerate the elaboration of a regional action plan** supported by appropriate regulatory and financial measures.

Ten years after filing a diagnosis on the state of the Monteregian Hills, the formation of a working group by the Metropolitan Community of Montreal (CMM) announced in August 2021 gives encouragement to the Coalition that **significant gains will be achieved between now and 2025**.

The collective preoccupations directed towards more than thirty public entities

The coalition calls upon 22 municipalities, 9 MRCs, 2 agglomerations, the CMM as well as the provincial and federal governments to ensure the sustainability of the Monteregian Hills by means of five key actions: protection, accessibility, connectivity, awareness and support.

PROTECTION

- Ensure a permanent legal status for the protection of the Monteregian Hills
- Ensure their integration in all planning documents and measures for managing the territory

CONNECTIVITY

- Ensure connectivity between the Monteregian Hills and other significant forests patches by means of natural corridors

ACCESSIBILITY

- Permit access and authorize recreational and leisure activities within the limits allowed to protect biodiversity.

AWARENESS

- Promote the Monteregian Hills as a distinctive feature of the landscape.
- Increase recognition of their as a collective heritage through their geology, natural diversity, history, and culture.

SUPPORT

- Develop specific funding and tools for each Monteregian Hill to support conservation of mission and actions.

Increased pressures on iconic natural sites

The members of the Coalition report a sharp rise in visitor numbers and increased development on and around the Monteregian Hills which, combined with the impact of climate change, contributes to the accelerating degradation of their natural habitats. Concerned by the situation, the coalition stresses the urgency to collaborate and act to identify specific tools and funding required for each hill to protect, restore and connect these natural sites for the benefit of all.

In Québec, the Monteregian Hills represent a unique geographical feature. *“Each of the Monteregian Hill is a marked feature that identifies the landscape. From an ecological perspective the hills are islands of biodiversity and essential links to maintain connectivity and resilience of the communities in the St. Lawrence Lowlands. It is now that they need to be protected, restored and connected”* explains Geneviève Poirier, Responsible for Community Involvement, **Centre de la Nature du Mont Saint-Hilaire.**

“The Eastern Townships hold a rich heritage of natural resources within a distinctive landscape. Without a planned and acceptable development and sustainable use of these resources, this heritage is threatened. Together, we can work towards the conservation of the natural sites of ecological importance” adds Stéphane Tanguay, Director, **Nature Cantons-de-L’Est.**

“Climate change and demographic growth are creating considerable pressures on the ecosystems; it is therefore paramount to act in preserving our collective natural endowment for the benefit of our communities and future generations. The Society for the Conservation of

*Mont-Brome joins its voice with the coalition to increase awareness of the importance of the Monteregian Hills and the need to protect them” states Camil Poulin, Président, **Société de conservation du Mont Brome.***

*The Monteregian hills are located on a territory occupied by more than one third of the population of Quebec. For the communities that neighbour them, they are living environments essential to their well-being, filled with history and heritage," adds Hélène Panaïoti, **Executive Director of Les Amis de la montagne***

Already well studied sites and known problematic issues

Ten years have elapsed since several organisations collaborated in the preparation of a *Diagnosis identifying the issues regarding the protection and development of the Monteregian Hills*¹. According to Pascal Bigras, Director General of **Nature-Action Québec**, *“this diagnosis is still relevant. The need to limit activities incompatible with sustainable development of the Monteregian Hills persists; the requirement for a land-use framework by means of regulation, norms, educational programmes and coordination is obvious.”*

A call for action and collaboration

In 2016, the participants in a Forum, organized by the Conférence régionale des élus (CRÉ) of Montérégie-Est, identified the importance of producing a joint action plan with a common vision for Monteregians.¹

Five years later, conservation organizations are still waiting for this joint action plan. For Bryan Osborne, Vice-President of the **Fondation du Mont-Saint-Bruno**, *“the coalition will offer a rich source of knowledge and experience relevant to the discussion and planning of conservation and connectivity projects.”*

As managers and actors on these sites, some of whom have been active for more than five decades, the members of the Coalition are appealing to all stakeholders to take concrete and concerted action now. Steps have been taken to include other conservation groups working in the Monteregian landscape that face similar problems, including those involved in the Oka and Rigaud hills. *“We are more concerned than ever about the increased pressures of residential*

¹ Diagnostic et identification des enjeux relatifs à la protection des collines montréalaises. CRÉ Montérégie Est. 2012.
<http://www.lesmonteregiennes.ca/diagnostic.pdf>

development and the impact of recreational activities that are also increasingly intensive," says Michelle Durand, Administrator of **CIME Haut-Richelieu**.

"Each organisation closely monitors its territory and works to realise gains at a local level to assure the protection of the most vulnerable natural habitats. But true protection must take into account what may happen in the very long term. A common voice will allow us to connect with the community and those decision makers able to endorse special and permanent protection statuses" underlines Pierre Pontbriand, Coordinator, **Association du mont Rougemont**.

"The Monteregian Hills are of high ecological value and are an important part of Quebec's natural heritage to preserve. By working collectively, we can conserve more of this unique natural area and protect our rare and endangered species. Together, we can create a legacy for future generations." concludes Julien Poisson, Program Director - Southern Quebec at the **Nature Conservancy of Canada**.

The Coalition welcomes the recent decision of the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) to create a working group aimed at the recognition and protection of the Monteregian Hills and proposes to be an active participant. The Coalition's aim is to ensure that tools and substantial funding are deployed over the next five years to support protection objectives adapted to each of the hills comprising the Monteregian landscape. ²

The organizations of the coalition

The coalition includes: Association du Mont Rougemont, Centre de la Nature du mont Saint-Hilaire, CIME Haut-Richelieu, Conservation de la nature, La Fondation du Mont Saint-Bruno, Les amis de la montagne, Nature-Action Québec, Nature Cantons-de-l'Est, Société de conservation du Mont Brome.

Stakeholders working for the conservation of Mont Rigaud and the Oka Hills are invited to join the Coalition. The richness of biodiversity contained in these two areas and the problems encountered are the same as for the Monteregian hills.

² [CMM approves the creation of a working group on the Monteregian and Oka hills](#)

For the Coalition, the protection and connectivity of the hills includes the Monteregian Hills, underlain by Cretaceous igneous intrusions, that mark the St. Lawrence Lowlands and the Eastern Townships – Oka, Mount Royal, Saint-Bruno, Saint-Hilaire, Saint-Grégoire, Rougemont, Yamaska, Shefford, Brome and Mégantic - and Mont Rigaud, is characterized by Precambrian granitic bedrock. All share an exceptional and threatened biodiversity.

– 30 –

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