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Creation of a protected area in the watersheds of the Noire and Coulonge Rivers  
**A first step for the population of the Pontiac**

**Gatineau, June 17, 2022** - Economic, municipal and environmental stakeholders applaud the Government of Québec for announcing its intention to create the Noire and Coulonge Rivers Biodiversity Reserve, the largest protected area in the Outaouais. This announcement marks a positive first step in showcasing the unique Outaouais wilderness. This decision sends a strong signal about how serious the Government of Québec is about protecting the territory. The next step is to determine the boundaries and governance parameters of the protected area based on the consensus reached at the end of the current consultation process. For Benoit Delage, Executive Director of the *Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable de l'Outaouais* (CREDDO), "the commitment of all stakeholders will be essential for the future. It will allow us to develop further the watersheds of the Noire and Coulonge Rivers, coherently, according to the needs expressed by the Pontiac community."

**A source of pride**

The actors gathered agreed to underline the strong positive impact that the creation of the protected area will have on the region. In addition to preserving, conserving and enhancing a significant portion of the Outaouais territory, this planned protected area could contribute to the local economic diversification.

"This announcement represents exceptional potential for the diversification of the Pontiac economy. The creation of a protected area would allow appealing recreational tourism development for the Outaouais and fits perfectly with our regional priorities, such as outdoor outfitting, boating, camping and sustainable tourism." says **Julie Kinnear, CEO of Tourisme Outaouais**.

"People are attracted to the Pontiac because of our beautiful wilderness, especially our pristine Noire and Coulonge Rivers. We need to protect their waters. To maximize the positive impacts of the protected area, the continuation of the consultation process is essential. For the community to fully profit from the economic, social and environmental benefits of the protected area, we must listen to its needs and expectations concerning the project. It will allow the creation of a protected area which, built on the strength of the consensus within our community, will become a flagship of the local economy." says **Jane Toller, Warden of the MRC Pontiac**.

**A consultation process essential for success**

Over the past three years, CREDDO and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Ottawa Valley Chapter (CPAWS-OV) have led consultations with regional stakeholders. These will continue until recommendations are made to the government. The CREDDO and CPAWS-OV will continue working with the community to ensure the project is successful.

"The consultations will allow the population of the Pontiac, local experts, to express themselves on the places they wish to see included in the protected area. Our teams are delighted that the government is open to

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expanding the project through community input." clarified **Geneviève Le Blanc, Director of Conservation for the Ottawa Valley Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS-OV)**.

"The consultations we have carried out so far have shown that citizens, outfitters, municipalities and the MRC are keen to get involved in the decisions regarding the future of the protected area and its boundaries, as evidenced by a resolution unanimously supported by the mayors of the MRC Pontiac." says **John McDonnell, executive director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Ottawa Valley Chapter (CPAWS-OV)**.

The consultation process has already mobilized stakeholders in the region. However, more work is still required to allow the community to take ownership of the project and adapt it to its reality. This approach, new in Québec, could serve as a model for other protected areas. CREDDO and CPAWS-OV will continue to work with the community to ensure the realization of the project. The next steps will result in a consensus proposal that we will present to the government during the information sessions conducted by the *Bureau des audiences publiques en Environnement* (BAPE).

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**About CREDDO**

CREDDO is one of 16 regional environmental councils spread across the regions of Quebec. As such, it is the privileged interlocutor of the *Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques* (MELCC). Its main mandate is to ensure consultation among Outaouais stakeholders around environmental issues in the region. Active in the region since 1990, we now have nearly a hundred members made up of associative groups, businesses, government entities and individuals. Our projects provide solutions for the management of residual materials, the fight against and adaptation to climate change, sustainable development, the conservation of biodiversity and the development of a green economy.

**About CPAWS-OV**

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) is Canada's pre-eminent, national community-based voice for public wilderness protection. The Ottawa Valley Chapter of CPAWS (CPAWS-OV) works to protect public lands in the watershed of the Ottawa River. Established in 1969 when a group of concerned citizens learned about major development plans for Gatineau Park, the Chapter has since become involved in many issues of wilderness protection in Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec.

**About Tourisme Outaouais**

Created by and for the industry, Tourisme Outaouais is a private, not-for-profit organization with a current membership of more than 550 businesses, mostly small to medium enterprises working in the regional tourism industry. The common objective: to promote the Outaouais region as a prime tourist destination!

Our tourism industry is a driving force of the regional economy:

3.9 million visitors

\$423 million annually in tourism spending

16,692 tourism-related jobs.

For 40 years we have worked closely with a top portfolio of tourism businesses, including accommodation, food and restaurant services, festivals and events, and various attractions and activities. Part of our mandate is

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to facilitate a cohesive, unified approach to regional tourism marketing and development. With that in mind, our organization coordinates research studies and surveys in order to provide our members with useful information about current tourism industry markets, clientele and trends.

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**To learn more about the protected area project and the consultation process:**

<http://www.creddo.ca/protected-area>

**Click here to access photos of the protected area for media use:**

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1v-vrghR6ist0sRcVaXhxRZpQ\\_oeK3oE0?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1v-vrghR6ist0sRcVaXhxRZpQ_oeK3oE0?usp=sharing)