

## Is the South March Highlands Real-Life Avatar?

---



The South March Highlands (“SMH”) is a **“wild island”** within the City Limits of Canada’s Capital. No other major city in the world has an old growth forest with endangered species within its borders. The closest is Vancouver’s Stanley Park which is 1/3 the size, contains ½ the variety of plants, with no rare species – compared to the SMH which is **refuge for 20 documented species-at-risk of extinction**.

The SMH is a highland area which first emerged from the Champlain Sea **11,000 years ago** as the glaciers receded. Its **geology is unique** and it has been on the candidate list since 1992 as a Provincially Significant Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (“ANSI”) for its Life Science value (895 hectares). Yet after nearly 20 years, the Minister of Natural Resources has never completed the ANSI confirmation.

Scientific studies confirm the SMH as the **“most important reservoir of ecological potential”** in Ottawa because it has the **densest bio-diversity** of any natural area in Ottawa and its 30 eco-types of vegetation and 10 distinct habitats provide for the renewal of depleted natural areas elsewhere. In addition to being the aquifer for the suburb of north Kanata, the SMH also provides over half of the water flow into the nationally significant Shirley’s Bay wetland complex.

The SMH is **ecologically unique**, supporting over **440 native species of vascular plants**, including the **highest floristic diversity** of any natural area in Ottawa. This SMH is also home to over **240 species of**

# Is the South March Highlands Real-Life Avatar?

---

**wildlife**, including 136 species of birds that are known to breed in this area, twice the number found in Punta Cana's world famous ecological park.

Grandfather William Commanda, the 97-year old principal Spiritual Elder for Algonquin in all Ontario and Quebec, Officer of the Order of Canada, Ancestral Carrier of 3 Sacred Wampum Belts that pre-date the arrival of Europeans, has declared that **the South March Highlands is a Sacred place of Manitou** (Spirit).

Chief Nabesse Pishum of the Fall River Abenaki First Nation in the USA eloquently explains the religious significance of old-growth forests such as the SMH in his letter of protest to the City of Ottawa:

*"Please understand that we Indian people build no lofty cathedrals, temples or mosques. Our church is not found in steel and plastic but among the trees, rivers and mountains.*

*The sun, moon, stars and planets are our guides which connect us to the world of our ancestors who when we pass over will be there to greet and guide us.*

*Every rock, every plant is near and dear to us and in them we see the hand of the Creator at work. Our relations the deer, fox, the turtle, the bear as well as all the thousands of other animals on land in the air and in the waters give us our very existence and joy of life when we hear their songs and see their beauty and power."*

The ancestors of the Algonquin, Abenaki, Mohawk, Ojibwa, Huron, Mikmaq, Odawa, and other eastern First Nations were the Anishinabe who occupied all of northeastern North America when the glaciers receded. No fewer than 3 archaeological sites have been found in the SMH with **evidence of native occupation dating back 500 generations**. The first site, confirmed by eminent archaeologists, has been tied up in a court case by a developer who refused to pay for more detailed study. Most of it has since been destroyed by a housing development which proceeded in parallel with the court case. The 2<sup>nd</sup> site has not been properly assessed because the city of Ottawa refuses to hire an archaeologist to do so. The archaeological study done by another developer in the area of the 3<sup>rd</sup> site was denounced as "fatally flawed" by a former president of the Canadian Archaeological Association for not considering pre-European-contact culture. Recently independent review by well-respected archaeologists concluded that a new study is needed. Yet despite appeals to the Ontario Minister of Culture, **nothing has been done** – even though these sites are possibly **twice the age of Stonehenge** and may in fact be a world heritage site.

First Nations in both Ontario and Quebec as well as in the USA have joined with environmental groups representing over 14,000 people to protect the SMH from developers. We are asking that this land and environment that we all share be properly protected and that Canada's heritage be properly respected and preserved. The Algonquin have requested that the Crown consult with them but Ontario has **failed to accommodate** their request. Canada has signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian Constitution affirms those Rights. To-date, the Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has declined to uphold the Constitution and the honour of the Crown.

**Clear-cutting this great forest has started.** Algonquin Warriors have chained themselves to trees to protect this Sacred Land which has never been ceded via a treaty. Community groups have marched in the streets, and today a **Sacred Fire** was lit by Mohawk and Algonquin Fire Keepers at Queen's Park to protest **violence against nature** and lack of accommodation for aboriginal religious rights.

All citizens of Canada should condemn further desecration and destruction of the South March Highlands.