

**ARTICLE IN OTTAWA RIVERKEEPER's FEB 1/2011 Newsletter**  
**Clearcutting of the Beaver Pond Forest has begun.**

KNL Developments, a partnership between Urbandale and Richcraft, has started clearing a 29-hectare section of Kanata's South March Highlands — which includes two square kilometres of Beaver Pond Forest — to make way for a 3,200-house subdivision. The development was approved 7 years ago by Ottawa City Council, but has met stiff resistance from the community at large. The proposed development will have devastating environmental impacts on wetlands, local ecology and surrounding ecosystems and in addition, Algonquin First Nations claim that the site has significant archeological, historical and spiritual value that will be forever lost in its destruction. Yesterday, the Ottawa Citizen reported heavy equipment moving into the Beaver Pond area of the South March Highlands. Today KLN and the City of Ottawa have ignored the will of a broad and dedicated group of citizens, community groups and Algonquin groups seeking to preserve this culturally, historically, and ecologically priceless region.

As of today, individuals from Algonquin First Nations had chained themselves to trees in the Beaver Pond Forest, in an effort to halt the clearing until a proper – and comprehensive – archeological study of the area is conducted. Their request for further assessment of the land remains unanswered. Meanwhile, clear cutting continues as at the hands of an unresponsive City Council and the Province's Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

The central themes of this struggle are likely familiar to residents across the Ottawa Region: developers, pressing for increases in urban boundaries and access to cheap land, clear-cut forest and destroy wetlands to create poorly planned and environmentally unsustainable subdivisions.

The South March Highlands represents the type of important water feature that cities everywhere have been neglecting for too long. The wetland portion of the highlands absorbs rainwater and slowly diverts it to tributaries (which eventually feed the Ottawa River) and contributes to groundwater re-charge. Both of these functions will be impaired or destroyed by the proposed development. More concrete and asphalt means an increase in the amount of impermeable surface, which diverts water to sewers rather than re-absorbing it into the natural environment. The diverted water puts stress on existing infrastructure, which has already seen significant capacity issues in

recent years, leading to serious and frequent flooding in Kanata West.

In Ottawa, we must be mindful of how development impacts ground water. Today, west end residents, already dependant on wells for their drinking water, have issues with elevated sodium. When road salt melts and is exposed to sunlight it breaks down into its component parts – sodium and chloride. Sodium stays near the surface and contaminates roadside ecosystems. Chloride, however, sinks deep down into the soil, contaminating ground water systems and eventually contributing a “salty” taste to the water. Once contaminated, it is incredibly difficult to flush chloride from the ground water, which makes it imperative that we protect regions containing high quality ground water before they are affected. **The area proposed for development sits almost directly atop some of the best quality fresh water aquifers in the city.** To create a residential development in this area would reduce the rate of groundwater recharge, while increasing the level of contaminants within it.

South March Highlands is also home to a number of regionally threatened and endangered species, whose habitat will be destroyed by the development. An impressive list of both plant and animal species inhabiting the area, can be found at the website [www.ottawagreatforest.com](http://www.ottawagreatforest.com) . There are over 30 threatened or endangered species currently inhabiting the area, including the Blanding's Turtle and Butternut Maple. Taken together as an ecosystem, the South March Highlands are amongst the most diverse in the region. Recently, evidence was also discovered to suggest that the land is one of the oldest known First Nations settlements in the region. Chief William Commanda of the Algonquin First Nation has made a personal appeal to stop the clear cutting of this area, calling for the preservation of what he refers to as “a living temple”.

One of the most impressive aspects of this story is the sheer size and diversity of the community that has risen up to fight the clearcut of the South March Highlands. The Coalition to protect the South March Highlands has played an active role in the fight to preserve the Beaver Pond and its surroundings. The group has also prepared an impressive Stewardship Plan which has gained the support and signatures of over 6900 Ottawa residents. The Coalition has gained the attention and blessing of the David Suzuki Foundation, the Sierra Club of Canada, the Greenbelt Coalition, Canadian Parks & Wilderness, the Federation of Community Associations, the Green Party of Canada, Ecology Ottawa, the Ottawa Valley Field Naturalists, the Ottawa Carleton

Wildlife Centre, the Greenspace Alliance and, of course, Ottawa Riverkeeper amongst many others.

The destruction of the South March Highlands in the face of such stringent community opposition would represent the abject failure of government to deal with the demands of our communities and the environment. Development of significant forest and wetlands has environmental and financial consequences that go far beyond the region in question. The Municipal, Provincial, and Federal governments have all had ample opportunity to intervene and have failed in their duty to protect the interest of our community, siding instead with property developers.

There is no "Pave The South March Highlands" coalition – only developers who stand to profit. In a matter of months, another free and natural water storage and filtration feature will be completely destroyed. And a few decades from now, the City of Ottawa will be asking taxpayers to fund another costly concrete solution to remediate the water management issues created by the loss of natural features in this region. The City of Ottawa has traveled this path before - please take the time to stand up and say NO MORE.

## **TAKE ACTION - SAVE BEAVER POND**

As of February 1, the most effective way to stop the clearcutting of the Beaver Pond Forest is through an appeal to the Ontario Minister of Tourism and Culture. The Algonquin First Nation have invoked their constitutional right to demand a new archaeological assesment of the area. In supporting their request, help put pressure on the provincial government to stop the clearcutting and recognize the importance of the Beaver Pond site. We urge you to call or send comments to:

**Michael Chan, Minister of Tourism and Culture** Email: [mchan.mpp@liberal.ola.org](mailto:mchan.mpp@liberal.ola.org) Constituency Office: Tel: 905-305-1935 Fax: 905-305-1938

## **Waterkeeper's at Work**