Participant Statement (OLT-26-000364):
Ottawa South Eco-Action Network (OSEAN)

Regarding:
National Capital Commission appeal against the City of Ottawa Zoning By-law (2026-50)

Specifically:

This submission concerns the approximately 160-hectare area, identified by the National Capital Commission (NCC) as the "Rivergate–McCarthy" lands. This area, the McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor, includes connected woodlands, meadows, wetlands, transportation and utility corridors. The corridor extends from the Rideau River toward South Keys, south of Walkley Road.

The Ottawa South Eco-Action Network (OSEAN) supports the City of Ottawa's decision to retain existing zoning for the Rivergate–McCarthy lands for open-space, recreational, ecological and public-infrastructure functions. We ask the Tribunal to dismiss the NCC's

appeal and allow the City's integrated planning process to proceed, including public consultation and the development of a long-term integrated vision for these lands. The NCC's appeal would bypass city planning processes and policy without public consultation and enable development pressure on a connected urban natural corridor that the NCC has previously identified as serving regionally significant public interests.

Who this Statement Represents

I am making this submission on behalf of the OSEAN. OSEAN works with neighbourhood organizations, environmental groups - including Community Action for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES) Ottawa, Ecology Ottawa, Bird Friendly Ottawa, and Wild Pollinator Partners - and community associations (including the Hunt Club Community Association and Riverside Park Community Association). We also partner with the City of Ottawa on community sustainability and ecological health initiatives year-round. The neighbourhoods with which we work collectively represent more than 120,000 Ottawa residents. Many of our programs are also available to all Ottawa residents.

OSEAN works to advocate for, sustain, and support the eco-systems that enable communities and nature to thrive in mutually beneficial relationships. We support sustainably living with natural systems that provide climate mitigation while enabling the benefits of clean air, clean water, urban food security, healthy urban ecology, and natural spaces that provide communities with needed educational, recreational, cultural and health benefits.

Our Position on the National Capital Commission's Appeal of the new Zoning By-Law

As Ottawa experiences unprecedented growth, accessible urban green space is becoming more valuable, not less. The McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor provides a connected natural system of woodlands, meadows, wetlands and shoreline, stretching more than three kilometers across roughly 160 hectares and linking the Rideau River and the local creeks in its watershed, nearby neighbourhoods, trails, pathways and public transit. Its scale and connectivity make it a unique natural asset in the urban core of Ottawa and a rare asset among Canadian cities as they seek to manage growth while retaining the benefits of intact and healthy natural green spaces.

In the McCarthy Woods

OSEAN's position rests on three related issues:

- First, the appeal of the current zoning is inconsistent with the NCC's previous identification of these lands as Regional Interest Lands serving ecological, recreational and infrastructure-support functions.

- Second, development would risk the permanent loss and fragmentation of a large, connected urban natural system that provides habitat, stormwater management, cooling, recreation and public-health benefits.
- Third, decisions about the corridor should be made through an integrated process led by the City of Ottawa and aligned with applicable provincial policy, the City's Official Plan, climate and greenspace planning, and the NCC's approved plans.

Rationale and Support for our Position

1. **The NCC's appeal is not consistent with its "Regional Interest" land use designation and its stewardship mandate for these lands.** OSEAN has been a key advocate in the push to stop the NCC's abrogation of due process and disregard of its own approved plans for the McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor. We have found extensive long-term interest and increasing current support for the protection and conservation of these lands with a strong desire for the NCC to proceed with its approved designation as Regional Interest Lands.

   The National Capital Commission previously recognized these lands as important for recreation, ecology and public infrastructure. As stated in the approved NCC Capital Urban Lands Plan (2015):

   "Based on feedback gathered through public consultation activities conducted in support of the Capital Urban Lands Plan, a select group of Non-Designated NCC Properties were observed to support regionally-significant public interests. Properties supporting regionally-significant recreational, ecological or infrastructure-support functions have been identified as part of the Regional Interest Land Mass (RILM) Overlay. The purpose of this designation is to safeguard the public use of the RILM lands over the long-term and to conserve the public interest functions they support.

   Whereas the Capital Realm identifies lands that support essential Capital functions, RILM lands are understood to serve a secondary role in support of the development, conservation and improvement of the broader National Capital Region. Over time, the NCC will explore options to transfer NCC-owned RILM properties to another appropriate steward, such as a municipality or land conservation trust, for continued use in the public interest. The RILM is a tool for the NCC to identify and appropriately manage sites that play an important regional role, but that are not a part of the Capital Realm. Lands captured under the RILM Overlay will be managed

by the NCC in accordance with the Policy for the Management of RILM lands, once finalized."

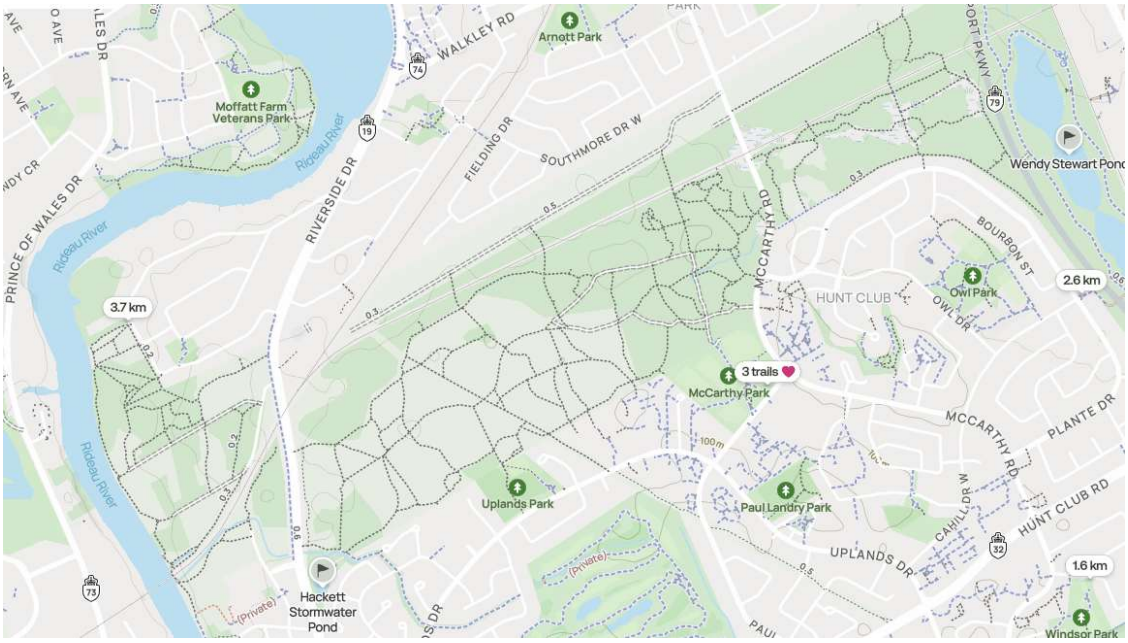
The NCC relies on its statutory mandate to prepare plans for, and assist in, the development, conservation and improvement of the National Capital Region. OSEAN submits that this mandate must be read as a whole and exercised consistently with the NCC's approved planning documents, its conservation and stewardship responsibilities, and the municipal planning framework that governs land use in Ottawa. The reference to "development" does not, on its own, establish that development is the appropriate use of these particular lands.

Now, without clear public consultation or community engagement, the NCC is treating this natural heritage area as underused land that could be opened to mixed-use development. That change in direction concerns us and everyone in our community who values accessible urban nature.

Riverwalk – West end of the McCarthy Nature Corridor

2. **The City of Ottawa's approved zoning respects the natural heritage value of the McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor.** In December 2025, several OSEAN members participated in delegations which made submissions and oral presentations at the City of Ottawa's Joint Planning Committee in support of the Brockington Motion. OSEAN has been a key participant in advocating against the National Capital Commission's attempt to rezone the Rivergate-McCarthy lands for development. The loss of these lands to development would be an irreplaceable, unequalled, unprecedented and significant loss of mature urban green space for Ottawa and our communities. Once redeveloped, this natural heritage is lost forever. We need to recognize this and to protect its true value.

   The NCC has stated that these lands are "underutilized" but has not shared any assessment of the methodology for this determination nor any recent assessments of the current human and environmental uses of these lands. Although there are many trails through these biodiverse lands, the NCC does not include them as part of its official trail system, nor promote them in any way, unlike trails and multi-use paths elsewhere on the Rideau River, Ottawa River, Rideau Canal, Green Belt and Gatineau Park. NCC has contributed to "underutilization" through lack of promotion and nature interpretation on these lands.



Numerous Well used trails of the McCarthy Corridor

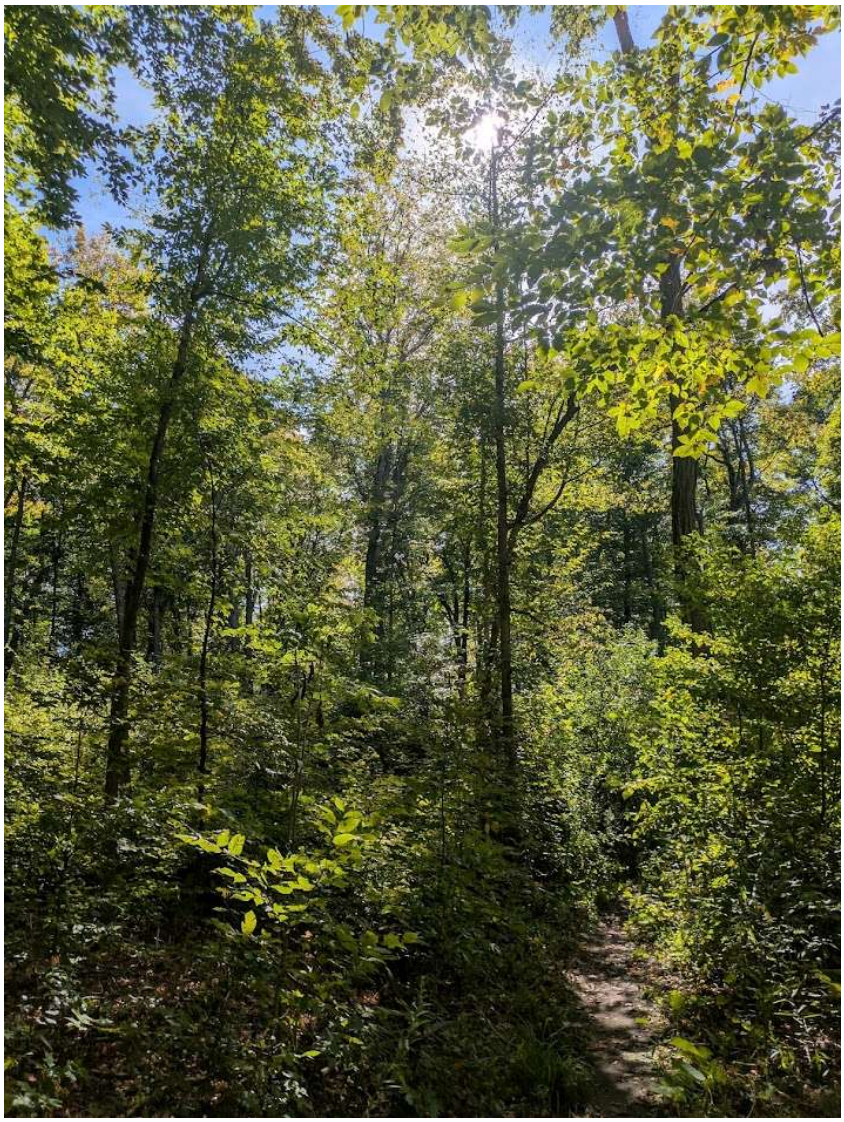
The nature corridor, encompassing the McCarthy Forest, is a diverse, intact and integrated ecosystem. The corridor has been recognized by the National Capital Commission, the City of Ottawa, and third-party assessments, as having significant

ecological and conservation value. It provides a valuable wildlife corridor north of the Ottawa Airport (which significantly fragments the Green Belt corridor) Despite this, the NCC is seeking zoning changes. Development would fragment habitat, weaken the buffer around McCarthy Woods, and risk irreversible loss of one of Ottawa's most significant intact natural landscapes.

McCarthy Meadow- Diversity Buffer for Woods

As the Chair of the Conservation Committee of the Ottawa Field Naturalist Club has shared: *"McCarthy Woods is the highest quality forest habitat inside the Greenbelt, and is in fact better than the vast majority of the habitat in the Greenbelt. However, it does not exist in a vacuum and is not static. Retaining the buffer space and allowing the expansion and recovery of natural vegetation around the woods would allow for sustainable populations of most if not all species it currently has. Conversely, reducing the woods to simply a core area isolated and hemmed in by intensified development would inevitably lead to the decline of the woods and the loss of significant biodiversity and ecological function. Add to this the effects of intensified recreational pressures, as an increased population has a significantly decreased amount of greenspace available to them....McCarthy Meadows is not truly separate*

from the woods, and a large number of wildlife species also benefit from the habitat heterogeneity and/or ecotones."



Biodiverse Ecosystems of the Woods

OSEAN understands that City Council did not request nor approve a Development Reserve designation for these lands and that such a designation was requested of city staff by the NCC. The zoning adopted by the city instead retains and adapts the existing zoning for these lands to new terms as greenspace, open-space, recreational facility and neighbourhood mixed-use designations. OSEAN submits that these designations are consistent with the lands' previously recognized ecological, recreational and infrastructure-support functions and the Official Plan as integrated within the city-wide planning policies and plans.

For the communities OSEAN represents, for Ottawa's human and wildlife residents, the Rivergate–McCarthy corridor is not vacant or underused land. It is a connected natural system that provides wildlife habitat, stormwater absorption, cooling, cleaner air, opportunities for active transportation and recreation, and daily access to nature. Its size, maturity and location within the urban area mean that these functions could not be replaced by isolated parks, rural greenspace or future offsets.

We submit the NCC should fulfill its mandate to steward nationally and regionally significant public places, and focus on conserving our natural heritage by protecting, rather than disposing of these lands for development, as this appeal seeks to support.

3. **The NCC needs to engage constructively with the City of Ottawa and community groups regarding the future of this urban natural area.** OSEAN submits that the NCC's appeal should not displace the City of Ottawa's comprehensive planning framework. The land should instead be considered through a coordinated intergovernmental process that addresses their ecological, recreational, infrastructure and community functions and is consistent with the City's approved planning documents, including its Official Plan and the NCC's applicable approved plans.

   As our cities grow, we need to recognize the value of our natural spaces and their role of these within cities. These spaces provide important climate mitigation and adaptation services, enable access to nature for respite and health, ensure that nature can thrive in our cities to sustain a livable healthy and thriving environment, and nurture the landscape and natural heritage that is a core national value of Canadians.

   Retaining this ecological corridor as urban greenspace would advance the City of Ottawa's urban growth plans as represented by its Official Plan, climate change and climate resilience plans, greenspace plans, housing and population growth plans, and other integrated urban planning policy and documents. NCC's proposed rezoning is not aligned to the City of Ottawa's comprehensive urban land planning. The NCC's primary responsibility is for *Capital Interest Lands* , which they have already indicated these lands are not.

   The McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor needs a fulsome assessment within the context of city-wide planning in collaboration with the City of Ottawa and its communities. Planning for the future of this space needs to be done in alignment

with Ottawa's Climate Action Plan, Urban Greenspace Plan and the National Capital Region's greenspace corridors and systems. The integrity, connections and scale of the ecological impact on the city as it continues to grow and densify need to be fully considered within a long-term sustainability plan and a permanent plan for the protection of its vital natural value.

Citizen Science and Education in the Woods – Fungi Walk September 2026

Other Considerations

Community support for protecting the corridor includes residents, local community associations, environmental organizations, biodiversity advocates and visitors who use its paths and natural areas. Their perspectives reinforce the corridor's ecological, recreational, cultural and public-health importance. Key supporters that have reached out to work with us in advocating for a long-term conservation include:

- Carleton University and the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club for its unique and substantive biodiversity,
- Algonquin College, which is taking on an assessment of the true value and environmental services provided to the City of Ottawa,
- Environmental organizations including specialists on birds, pollinators, streams, climate change and urban ecology,
- Hundreds of residents and visitors as represented at community meetings, surveys submitted on "Who walks in the corridor" and resident emails and contacts to OSEAN,
- Cultural and heritage groups including the Poets Pathway, artist groups, musicians and teachers speaking for the vitality and lasting impact this unique corridor has had and will continue to provide to a thriving city.

Voices we have heard to defeat this change of direction

Beginning in September, more than 3,000 people have signed OSEAN's online petition (within its first six weeks). The petition calls on the National Capital Commission, the Government of Canada and the City of Ottawa to recognize the corridor's long-term value, cease urban-development proceedings affecting it, and pursue permanent protection of the ecosystem as a natural-heritage reserve for residents and visitors. OSEAN relies on this response as evidence of broad and rapidly growing public concern about the proposed change in direction.

In addition, hundreds of residents have participated in open houses, biodiversity and corridor walks, and community information events. Across these activities, OSEAN has heard strong concern for NCC's non-transparent approach and sustained support for conserving the corridor as a significant part of Ottawa's natural and urban heritage. This participation demonstrates that the future of these lands is a matter of substantial public interest and warrants a transparent, comprehensive planning process.

VOICES for the McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor:

"Let's save the McCarthy Woods Nature Corridor so it can continue to sustain and enrich the lives of the wildlife and communities which depend on it for their continued well-being", said **Mireille Trent, an**

OSEAN spokesperson. *“This natural community asset provides valuable habitat for wildlife and improves the lives of the over twenty thousand people who live close-by through flood control, cooling, and other valuable eco-services. It should be protected in perpetuity."*

Dave Coyle, President of the Riverside Park Community Association noted, *“the natural lands are not vacant, underutilized or surplus spaces. They are important ecological corridors and valued public greenspaces that support biodiversity, active transportation, mental wellness, and the long-term vibrancy of future community-building initiatives”.*

Councillor Riley Brockington championed the community voices against development noting, *"I disagree wholeheartedly with the NCC’s plans to develop the corridor and will do whatever I can to protect and preserve public greenspace for generations to come. There is an army of support standing with me, various local community and environmental groups, as well as concerned residents. Your support in this fight is appreciated, thank you!"*

"This natural corridor is a unique and irreplaceable natural asset for the city”, said Andrei Grushman of the **Hunt Club Community Association**, *“we need to see this recognized in the City of Ottawa's greenspace and community sustainability plans.”*

“The McCarthy Corridor is Ottawa's largest and most significant urban nature reserve”, noted **Angela Keller-Herzog (Executive Director, CAFES Ottawa**), *"Urban ecosystems such as these mitigate climate change physically and provide many benefits to making a livable city".*

“Walking in McCarthy woods has been part of my life since I was a kid! My kids and now my grandkids enjoy the woods! It is one of very few natural refuges in the area within walking distance—not only for us humans but wildlife. Please leave McCarthy Woods alone”. - **Patricia, Ottawa Resident** (on petition)

"White tailed Deer, Owls, Porcupine, Turkey Vultures, Turkeys, roughed grouse, Coyotes, Foxes, Woodpeckers, groundhogs, muskrats, beavers, migrating birds of prey, Cotton tails, voles, starnosed moles, red squirrels, grey squirrels, chipmunks, snakes, frogs, Salamanders, Red Admirals, Monarchs, dragonflies, Bats, snails, cottonwoods, basswoods, Balsam Poplar, Trembling Aspen, Paper Birch, Yellow Birch, black walnut, butternut, sugar maple, manitoba maple, burr Oaks, Beech trees, beaked hazelnuts, Blackberries, Black raspberries, raspberries, red currants, white currants, gooseberries, wild ginger, ghost pipes, beechdrops, turkeytail, jerusalem artichoke, large leaved Aster, new england Aster, canada goldenrod, showy goldenrod, milkweed, thimbleweeds, clammy groundcherries, wild strawberries, asparagus, mature apples, american elm, dogwood, willows, canada mint, canada wild lettuce, white trillium, red trillium, ramps, virginia creepers, showy mountain Ash/rowan, river grapes, wild cucumber, water plantain, wood nettles, skullcaps, snakeroot, joe pye weed, chicken of the woods, giant puffballs, bloodroot, baneberries, barberries, wild bergamot. Just some of the species I have been lucky to learn about from seeing them in the McCarthy/Rideau River Corridor. Many of the plants have uses, and are not readily found within the city or on large lots. Please support an Ottawa where our descendants will have nature accessible, freely educating and growing with their selves!"– **Grant, Ottawa Resident** on Petition ref https://www.change.org/p/save-the-mccarthy-woods-nature-corridor/feed

"I discovered the McCarthy Woods and Meadows during a spring Nature Walk with the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club in 2025. I was astounded by the diversity of native plants in this unique mature forest ecosystem, most of which I had yet to see anywhere in the region but in the Gatineau Park. There are so many early-blooming species, critical to native pollinators when little else is blooming, like hepatica, spring beauty, toothworts, blue cohosh, along with red and white trilliums, yellow trout lily and red elderberry. The meadows and open spaces provide summer and fall blooms and winter seeds of goldenrods, asters and other native wildflowers for pollinators, birds and mammals. These woods and the broader corridor are truly a hidden gem in Ottawa. Any decisions that may affect them must be made deliberately and transparently, with full consideration of impacts, not behind closed doors without consultation, which is how NCC has approached this zoning proposal to date." – **Lynne Patenaude**, Ottawa resident and OSEAN volunteer

Vivian Nguyen, PhD
Associate Professor, Carleton University
Institute of Environmental and Interdisciplinary Science | Department of Biology
"As an Associate Professor in the Department of Biology Institute of Environmental and Interdisciplinary Science and Department of Biology at Carleton University with expertise in social-ecological research, I support the City of Ottawa's approved zoning for the McCarthy Woods corridor and oppose the NCCIs preferred "Development Reserve" zoning for these lands. City Council's decision to provide alternative zoning reflected the important ecological and recreational benefits that were highlighted by community groups and individuals at the Joint Planning Committee in December, 2025.

Although McCarthy Woods is zoned “Environmental Protection”, the NCC is seeking “Development Reserve” zoning for the surrounding greenspaces and natural areas – some 103 hectares from the Rideau River to the Airport Parkway.

This natural corridor includes one of the largest remaining urban forests in south Ottawa and provides ecological and social benefits that cannot be readily replaced by smaller parks, sports fields, landscaped green spaces, or future tree plantings. Its value extends beyond biodiversity conservation. It provides residents with opportunities for recreation, physical activity, mental restoration, and regular contact with nature close to home.

A substantial body of research demonstrates that access to natural green spaces is associated with improved mental health, reduced stress and anxiety, greater physical activity, and enhanced overall well-being. These benefits are particularly important when natural areas are located within walking distance of where people live and can be accessed as part of daily life. The loss or degradation of the McCarthy Woods natural area could diminish these benefits for the more than 20,000 residents living within a 15-minute walk of this important nature corridor.

The McCarthy Woods corridor also plays a critical role in fostering lifelong connections between people and nature. For children, access to natural environments supports learning, cognitive development, and environmental awareness. For adults and families, nearby forests provide opportunities for recreation, reflection, and stewardship. These experiences help build the environmental literacy and community engagement needed to address future environmental challenges. I recently visited the Ojibway Nature Park owned by the City of Windsor, that provides an excellent opportunity of what the McCarthy Woods nature corridor can serve as or is equivalent to.

As Ottawa faces increasing pressures from urban growth, biodiversity loss, climate change, and social isolation, accessible natural areas such as the McCarthy Woods corridor become increasingly valuable. This nature corridor is not simply an undeveloped parcel of land; it is part of the city's natural infrastructure, contributing to public health, quality of life, nature education, and community resilience. Once lost, the benefits associated with a mature urban forest would take decades to recover, if they can be recovered at all. Protecting the McCarthy Woods corridor therefore represents an investment not only in biodiversity, but also in the long-term well-being and resilience of Ottawa residents. Across Canada, there is growing recognition that urban natural areas are critical community assets. The recent establishment of Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor demonstrates how urban forests and natural corridors can support biodiversity conservation, public health, environmental education, and opportunities for Indigenous stewardship and connection to the land. While the McCarthy Woods corridor differs in scale, it represents a similar opportunity to protect and enhance access to nature for current and future generations of Ottawa residents.

Given the well-documented benefits of urban forests and green space, additional time should be provided to fully assess the ecological, social, health, and community values currently provided by the McCarthy Woods nature corridor, which is already of interest to Carleton researchers. As the City Council’s decision indicates, proceeding with Development Reserve zoning before adequately

evaluating these benefits risks overlooking significant contributions to the well-being and quality of life of nearby communities."

In addition, nearly 300 people completed a survey while waking the McCarthy Corridor, a summary is included as Appendix 1 Who Visits the Woods

OSEAN respectfully requests that the Tribunal dismiss the NCC's appeal and uphold the City of Ottawa's zoning decision for the Rivergate–McCarthy lands. In the alternative, if the Tribunal determines that further consideration is required, OSEAN asks that no zoning change enabling development be approved until the lands have been assessed through a transparent and coordinated process involving the City, the NCC, affected communities and appropriate conservation partners, with full consideration of the corridor's ecological, recreational, infrastructure and climate-resilience functions, and that comprehensive planning be fully aligned to city-wide plans and policy.

The Rivergate–McCarthy corridor should be evaluated as natural infrastructure and as an important connected regional interest landscape, not as vacant land awaiting another use. Protecting it would preserve the benefits that Ottawa's growing population will increasingly need: the habitat and biodiversity nurturing spaces, natural cooling and climate mitigation, stormwater management and climate resilience, recreational access to nature, and community health and cultural amenities that this intact corridor provides. OSEAN therefore asks the Tribunal to give substantial weight to the corridor's long-term public value as intact greenspace, the NCC's previous recognition of its regional-interest functions, and the City's integrated planning framework and the demonstrated concern of residents and community organizations, to dismiss the NCC's Zoning Bylaw Appeal, and allow a more consultative approach in the future for consideration of these lands.

The McCarthy Nature Corridor – Protect our Heritage, our Connections, our Community.