

Call to march for the protection of forests

The earth is our mother
The rivers are her arteries
The lakes her vital organs
The forest makes her breathe

Her heart beats at the same rate as ours:
Our bodies are part of her body
We come from her loving womb

The earth is our mother.
She also birthed all the other life that surrounds us
She has always known how to heal us

What's worse, we're hurting her, hurting the one who cares for us by abusing her kindness

To respect her, to respect her other children, our brothers and our sisters, the plants, the other animals, water and air, we all have to come together and protect her.

To do that we must begin where we live.

Currently in Québec, the 83 protected area projects located in the southernmost public territories and representing the most intact natural forest environments in the province, have just been cancelled by the ministers. Yet it is in southern Québec, where the ecosystems are most fragile that they are most threatened by industry, and it is also here in the south where biodiversity is most abundant.

These 83 protected areas were excluded, but why? Because several large natural resource extraction companies are a powerful lobby. For some, money talks louder than needs of the rest of the world. Have you ever heard this proverb from the First Peoples? "When the last tree is cut down, the last river poisoned, the last fish caught, only then will you realize that you cannot eat money." It seems to me that says it all.

Not only are protected forests in Québec necessary for our present and future physical and mental health, but also for several animal species such as the Cerulean warbler, the Wood turtle and the Woodland caribou. We and they are part of the same interconnected circle that sustains our common survival.

Among the First Peoples, the Caribou has long been considered a kind of spokesperson or representative. It is probably the species that enabled the establishment of human life in the aftermath of the Ice Age. Caribou deserve gratitude, respect and understanding. Right now, their decline is a bad sign according to those who have always known them.

The protection of these lands is at the heart of indigenous cultures, Atikamekw, Innu, Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Lnu'k (Mi'kmaq), Anishinaabe (Algonquin), Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Eeyou (Cree), Abenaki, and Inuit. It also in the heart of the many Quebecers who live on, or visit them to reconnect to life itself. Many work tirelessly to preserve these lands by thinking of present and future generations, in addition to honouring those who cared for them in the past.

All this land

Isn't ours

Isn't yours

It is **we** who belong to **it**

We are the ones who must protect it if we want it to continue to care for us

If we want those who come after us to be cared for by it too

In addition, the life lesson the pandemic teaches us is that viruses will spread more and more within the human community if the world does not respect biodiversity. Yet policymakers are doing the exact opposite! It is time to stand up and change this trend. If we come together, it is possible.

On October 11, you can become Land Protectors by participating in all kinds of ways on the *Great Forest Protection March*. Together we can create a mass movement large enough to make decision-makers understand the importance of protected areas for our common good and common survival.

- Marie-Andrée Gill

Pekuakamishkueu, Innu Mashteuiatsh