

26 January 2016

To: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage
The Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs
The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice and Attorney General
The Honourable Bardish Chagger, Minister of Small Business and Tourism

By Email

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers,

Re: The Chaudière and Albert Islands

We are writing to ask you to reverse a decision of the previous government that is of vital importance locally, regionally and for the nation.

In 2011, the previous government refused to provide the National Capital Commission with the necessary funds to buy the Domtar lands, including Chaudière and Albert Islands. The refusal by the previous government to purchase these lands was a grievous mistake. In December 2013, the property was bought by Windmill Developments. Their current plan is for a \$1.2-billion residential, commercial and retail project on Chaudière and Albert islands. (See <https://youtu.be/J9xwf-NKQiM>)

To understand the situation, seventy years ago the renowned French planner Jacques Gréber was asked to design a plan for Ottawa by then Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Much of Ottawa today is the result of his recommendations. The walking trails along the Rideau Canal, Colonel By Drive, the Ottawa River/Sir John A. MacDonald Parkway, the NCC Greenbelt and expansion of Gatineau Park are among the creations of the 1950 Plan for the National Capital.

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The Gréber report foresaw that the islands in the Ottawa River, once their industrial use was over, would be returned to their natural state. “The Master Plan is a long range programme based upon which the Capital will grow; urban planning demands resolute perseverance, and the Falls will always remain the main feature of Ottawa's natural setting.” (p. 230). “The restoration of the Chaudière Islands to their primitive beauty and wildness, is perhaps the theme of greatest importance, from the aesthetic point of view, the theme that will appeal, not only to local citizens, but to all Canadians who take pride in their country and its institutions” (p. 250).

In addition, the late elder Grandfather William Commanda, of the Kitigan Zibi, Anishnabeg First Nation, long ago proposed a comprehensive vision for Chaudière and Albert Islands (as well as Victoria Island). This vision included a restoration of native flora on the islands. His legacy vision also proposed a multi-functional, mainly open-space area, which would honour its long-standing role as a gathering place for indigenous peoples.

The Chaudière and Albert Islands are in the core of the national capital. Their re-dedication as a natural area, in recognition of indigenous claims, would be a powerful act of Reconciliation. This special area could become a central gathering place in the capital of Canada, for sharing the diverse natural and cultural stories of the land and its peoples. All of this would symbolize and embody the unfolding idea that is Canada.

There would be many benefits for the economy too. For example, permanent work would be created, not just temporary construction jobs. This employment would include people working in tourism, and as natural and cultural history guides.

The industrial heritage on the islands deserves to be commemorated. When the land is returned to the Crown, existing funds can help finance the required decontamination of the land. Additional funds could be raised from across the country to finance completion of the restoration.

We note that, in reality, actual development on these islands may be held up for years because of ongoing litigation. There is clear evidence from several First Nations that consultation to date has been insufficient. Windmill Developments would have to be compensated for costs incurred to date. This company could also be given an opportunity to transfer its development to other land, such as LeBreton Flats.

Prime Minister and Ministers, all of this can still be done. We ask you to act on this opportunity and make it a gift to the nation at our 150th anniversary.

Sincerely yours,

John McDonnell Nicole DesRoches Erwin Dreessen Fenja Broda

John McDonnell, Nicole DesRoches, Erwin Dreessen Fenja Brodo

Executive Director, Co-chairs, Greenspace Alliance President,

CPAWS-Ottawa Valley of Canada's Capital Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

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Cc:

Ms. Chandra Arya, MP (Nepean)

The Honourable Mauril Bélanger, MP (Ottawa-Vanier)

Mr. Andrew Leslie, MP (Orléans)

Ms. Karen McCrimmon, MP (Kanata-Carleton)

Mr. David J. McGuinty, MP (Ottawa South)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg, MP (Ottawa West-Nepean)

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre, MP (Carleton)

Mr. William Amos, MP (Pontiac)

Mr. Greg Fergus, MP (Hull-Aylmer)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon, MP (Gatineau)

Dr. Mark Kristmanson, CEO, National Capital Commission

Mr. Jim Watson, Mayor, City of Ottawa

Mr. Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, Mayor, City of Gatineau

Mr. Jeff Westeinde, founding partner, Windmill Developments