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From fiction to reality

Love is the secret weapon in facing our collective crises

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Dams, defunding and disappearing eel



Four species in the Ottawa River watershed are at risk of disappearing, the American eel chief among them, and the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada says shrinking budgets are leaving it unable to keep pace with the losses. (TF)



Tashi Farmilo
LJ Reporter

The Ottawa River once held so many eels that fisheries scientists classified them as the dominant species in the water. Today, 99 per cent of them are gone, and the federal committee responsible for tracking that kind of collapse is running out of room to do its job.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, known as COSEWIC, has spent nearly five decades assigning scientific designations to species in peril. Based in Gatineau, it is an independent advisory body of roughly 34 voting members drawn from universities, wildlife agencies, and research organizations, who meet twice a year to assess species and produce formal status reports. Their designations, ranging from "special concern"

through "threatened" and "endangered" to "extirpated" and "extinct," represent the most rigorous national accounting of what Canada is losing. The Ottawa River watershed alone is home to four species that have earned the committee's concern: the American eel, the lake sturgeon, the hickorynut mussel, and the spotted turtle.

The eel's story is the most dramatic, and the clearest in its cause. Born in the Sargasso Sea near the Bahamas, young eels drift on ocean currents to the Atlantic coast before swimming upstream into freshwater rivers, where they may spend 25 years maturing. The eels of the Ottawa are all female, and they grow larger than American eels found anywhere else. The Anishinabeg Algonquin had relied on them as a food source for at least 4,000 years. They are nearly gone.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE OTTAWA RIVERKEEPER

The 19 dams along the Ottawa River bear much of the responsibility. They block young eels trying to reach the river from the ocean, and their turbines kill large numbers of adults on the return journey downstream. Carillon, the first dam eels encounter after leaving the St. Lawrence River, sits roughly 100 kilometres downstream from Ottawa, spans 830 metres, and generates enough power for roughly 150,000 households. It has no eel ladder.

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Afro-Excellence fair returns on April 26 for its third edition

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Return of Cascades Train Station to Historic Rail Line

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LETTER

Infectious diseases expected to rise...

Despite a recent decline in immigrants from the United States to Canada, the erratic policies of President Donald Trump may soon cause a sharp reversal in this trend. The number of persons seeking asylum at land-border crossings may also increase with the return of warmer weather.

At St-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Quebec from July 1 to 27, 2025, there were 3089 asylum claims – five times more than in the same period the previous year. Over 15 million illegal migrants live in the United States, and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) is rounding up and deporting them.

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See page 3

Citizen group aims to protect 880 acres of public land around Chelsea



Mélissa Gélinas
LJJ Reporter

Action Chelsea pour le Respect de l'Environnement (ACRE) invites the public to sign a petition to protect 880 acres of undeveloped public land in the municipality of Chelsea, including 315 acres in Gatineau Park. Please note that the deadline to sign the petition is April 21, 2026.

GOALS

The goal of this proposal is to provide a better quality of life for the community while ensuring a healthy and prosperous future for future generations.

These natural spaces, owned by Hydro-Québec and the Ministère des Transports et de la Mobilité durable (MTMD), are made up of ecological corridors, river banks and forests located in and around Gatineau Park.

According to ACRE, the Gatineau Park Breach, the Gatineau River and the Chelsea Greenbelt are the pillars to be protected. Comprising many ecosystems, these areas play a fundamental role in the proper maintenance of biodiversity.

RESULTS THAT CAN BE COUNTED

By supporting this cause, the Town of Chelsea will be significantly closer to the global target of 30% by 2030, from 14% to 20% of its goal.

In addition, by protecting these natural areas, they will be able to be integrated into the National Capital Green Network, which is one of the largest trail networks in North America that generates an annual turnover of more than \$330 million.

In short, this will ensure that no highway is allowed in Chelsea, since social acceptability is currently zero.

ABOUT ACRE

ACRE is a charitable organization whose mission is to protect and preserve the environment of the Municipality of Chelsea. It promotes healthy living for the community by working closely with municipal governments while recognizing that the land is on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

For more information and to sign the petition: <https://www.facebook.com/acrechelsea> or <https://acrechelsea.qc.ca/>.

On voit grand —
315 acres de plus pour le parc de la Gatineau !



Size matters —
315 additional acres for Gatineau Park!

Action Chelsea pour le Respect de l'Environnement (ACRE) poster of the ACRE petition. (MG)

PHOTO: ACRE



La sécurité, une priorité !

ATTENTION !

Le débit des rivières est élevé et les conditions peuvent changer rapidement et sans préavis.

À CETTE PÉRIODE DE L'ANNÉE, RESTEZ À L'ÉCART DES RIVIÈRES !

Safety, a Priority!

WARNING!

River flow is high and conditions near dams can change quickly and without notice.

AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, STAY CLEAR OF RIVERS!



Dams, defunding and a disappearing eel

Continued from page 1

Ottawa Riverkeeper has spent years pressing Hydro-Québec to include one in the facility's \$750-million renovation, a project that began in 2020 and will unfold over 16 years. The technology is neither new nor experimental: two ladders at another Hydro-Québec facility on the St. Lawrence have allowed more than 700,000 eels to pass upstream since 2002. The Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council has formally requested a ladder at Carillon as a matter of ecological reparation. Hydro-Québec has pointed to ongoing research without committing to construction.

COSEWIC notes that recovery efforts for the eel involve a 50 per cent reduction in human-caused mortality compared to late 1990s levels, achieved through improved fish passage at dams and reduced fishing pressure, with a long-term goal of restoring abundance to mid-1980s levels. Reaching that goal requires ongoing negotiation among the Ontario and Quebec governments, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Indigenous groups, commercial fishers, and hydroelectric operators.

The situation of the hickorynut mussel and the lake sturgeon illustrates a different problem: the ecology of dependency. The mussel cannot complete its life cycle without a host fish, and the lake sturgeon is among its most important ones. Both species have been assessed as at risk. Their fates are intertwined in ways that recovery plans focused on individual species

can struggle to address.

The spotted turtle, small and easily overlooked in the watershed's wetlands, carries its own urgency. COSEWIC designated it endangered in 2004 and reaffirmed that status a decade later, citing its late maturity, low reproductive output, and fragmented, isolated subpopulations. Road mortality, collection for the pet trade, and wetland loss are its primary threats.

Against this backdrop, COSEWIC itself is under strain. The committee's most recent annual report acknowledged that reduced federal funding has caused a drop in the number of species assessed each year and a growing backlog of cases awaiting review, concerns that were independently confirmed by the Auditor General in 2024. The number of species the committee is resourced to assess annually has fallen considerably in recent years, and the backlog is expected to grow substantially by the end of the decade.

A COSEWIC designation does not, on its own, protect anything. A species must still be formally listed under the Species at Risk Act before any legal protections apply, a decision that belongs to cabinet and one that has sometimes taken years or never come at all. The American eel, assessed as threatened by COSEWIC more than a decade ago, remains unlisted under the federal act. The renovation of the dam most responsible for its collapse in the Ottawa River proceeds without a ladder.

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Gatineau Scout group launches GoFundMe to rebuild obstacle course at Otter Lake camp



Tashi Farmilo
LJJ Reporter

The 2nd Gatineau Scout Group has launched a GoFundMe campaign seeking \$20,000 to repair, upgrade, and expand the challenge and obstacle course at Scout Camp Otter Lake, located on the shores of Lac Hughes in Otter Lake, Quebec. The camp is owned by Scouts Canada and run entirely by volunteers. It serves Scouting youth from Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec, as well as Girl Guides, Cadets, schools, and other youth groups.

The camp was established in 1957 and has been steadily improved over the decades through volunteer labour, with facilities now including a main cabin, storage buildings, an outdoor dining shelter, docks, campsites, trails, a target range, and a large tipi. Programming runs year-round and includes water activities, archery, mountain biking, survival training, orienteering, winter camping, and the challenge course.

In 2016 and 2017, the 2nd Gatineau Venturers/Rovers and the Heritage Area Rover Crew funded and built 15 obstacles across two phases of the course. It quickly became one of the camp's most popular activities.

But during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the camp saw limited use and no maintenance could be performed. Several obstacles deteriorated and were deemed unsafe. An inspection by Adventureworks Associates Inc. in the fall of 2023 outlined what would be needed to bring the course up to standard. Some minimum repairs were completed in 2024, but funding limitations forced certain obstacles to



The 2nd Gatineau Scout Group is raising \$20,000 to repair and expand a challenge course at Scout Camp Otter Lake that was forced to close after years of pandemic-related neglect left its obstacles unsafe. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY

remain closed, and by the fall of 2025 the entire course was shut down.

Cal Clupp, Group Commissioner for the 2nd Gatineau Scout Group, is leading the fundraising effort. The group has been involved with Scout Camp Otter Lake for more than 40 years. Clupp said he has served in various roles with the group for about 33 years, including as a senior youth adviser and as treasurer on the camp committee.

When asked why Scouts Canada could not cover the costs, Clupp said, "They don't

have the money. Since Covid, it's been difficult for them to recover."

The campaign's \$20,000 goal breaks down to \$5,000 for materials to repair and upgrade Phases One and Three, \$10,000 for materials to construct Phase Two, and \$5,000 for materials to build a 40-foot horizontal climbing wall. Phase Two would add 11 new, more challenging obstacles aimed at older youth. All labour is provided by volunteers, so every dollar raised goes directly to materials and hardware.

The camp's programming serves youth

from ages five to 26, teaching skills ranging from outdoor survival to teamwork. Clupp said the course is particularly valuable because of what it draws out of young people. "They learn teamwork," he said. "They learn to push themselves and to have confidence in their abilities."

He noted that the skills youth pick up on the course, along with activities like archery and target shooting, translate into badges they can earn through the Scouting programme.

Clupp said the camp is always looking for volunteers to help with upkeep, particularly during work weekends in the spring, and that business sponsorships are welcome. The GoFundMe campaign can be found at gofund.me/376f15898.

The 2nd Gatineau Scout Group meets at two locations in Gatineau. Beavers meet on Wednesdays from 6 - 8 pm and Cubs meet on Mondays from 6:30 - 8:30 pm, both at St-Aloysius Church at 300 Rue de l'Abbé-Murray. Scouts and Venturers meet on Mondays from 6:30 - 8:30 pm at St George's Anglican Church at 175 Broadway Street.

Clupp said the course makes a real difference in the lives of the young people who use it. The obstacles are designed to challenge youth at their own level, building confidence as they work through tasks that may initially seem daunting. Whether it's walking across a rope or tackling a climbing element, the course pushes participants to trust themselves and rely on one another. "A lot of them overcome their fears," Clupp said. "They learn teamwork, they learn to push themselves, and you show them that they can do things they didn't think they could do."

Quebec announces \$995k to help English-speaking Quebecers navigate the health system



Sophie Demers
LJJ Reporter

The province has provided Réseau communautaire de santé et de services sociaux (RCSSS) with \$995,000 in funding with the objective to support English-

speaking residents navigate the health care system. This was announced on April 2 by Christopher Skeete, Minister of International Relations and Francophonie, Minister responsible for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, and Minister responsible for the Fight against Racism.

"Access to health care and social services

must be equitable for all Quebecers," said Minister Skeete. "With this pilot project, we are taking concrete action by offering services tailored to the needs of Quebec's English-speaking communities. I welcome the support of the RCSSS organization, which has all the expertise necessary for the success of this project."

The funding will support the RCSSS's Accompanying Guides for English-speaking patients (GAP) project. The project started in Quebec City with one patient support guide that aided English-speaking patients navigate the primarily French health-care system.

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Artificial Intelligence and your local newspaper: the *West Quebec Post's* commitment to credibility



LILY Ryan

In the four corners of the world, it seems as though the word 'AI' — short for generative Artificial Intelligence programs — is everywhere. There are several programs that are widely available and very complex.

The complexity and availability of these programs is why folks are so obsessed with it. The federal government is shifting jobs to AI. There are AI-generated newspapers in Quebec. With the lack of health care providers, plenty of people are turning to AI for diagnosis' and even mental health therapy.

The *West Quebec Post* adheres to the Journalism Code of Ethics, as published by the Quebec Press Council. This means that readers, advertisers, and community organizers can count on the *Post* to be a responsible, trustworthy and reliable voice in the Pontiac. "What you see is what you get" fits the *West Quebec Post's* publishing philosophy perfectly. Along with this ethical foundation of publishing is the use of Artificial Intelligence.

Each journalist has signed an agreement with the editor, engaging in a commitment to operate within ethical guidelines. There is no Artificial Intelligence production of content in the *West Quebec Post*. Journalists write their own work and there's a human

creating the newspaper at every step of the way.

Some aspects of newspaper production are appropriate for generative AI help, and the *West Quebec Post* team makes use of these aides. Asking AI to gather research results about salt use on roads is an example of how the newsroom uses AI. As is asking AI to create steps in a plan for helping tourism businesses promote themselves outside the closed social media bubbles used right now. Translating a letter to a potential advertiser is sometimes an AI task.

Each time AI is used, a human checks the work, though. The human factor is the key to success at each step. The concept of hallucinating artificial intelligence is

widespread. Anyone who has used the common AI programs (Claude, Chat GPT, Gemini, Grok etc) will have hilarious anecdotes of AI hallucinations. This happens most visually in arts — a gymnast spinning between parallel bars that show the feet coming through the floor or a dancer with five arms.

For a newsroom, these hallucinations equal radical loss of credibility. The impact of radon on human health demands absolute accuracy. How many fish are permitted in a fish tank can only be reported as the correct maximum. Relying on AI to gather a variety of sources about these topics is useful. Just letting AI write up an article about them, well, that's as credible as a flying fish on April 1.

LETTERS

to the **Editor** *Opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the paper*

Robust protection for our trees and wetlands on paper, but is it working?

The arrival of Earth Day on April 22, 2026, is a good opportunity to remind decision makers of the continuing need to protect the fragile environment we live in. Gatineau's Master Plan and climate commitments have clear, measurable promises to protect our natural ecosystems with the city stating that conserving trees and woodlots, protecting wetlands and watercourses, and safeguarding habitats of vulnerable species are key to biodiversity and climate resilience.

The city has pledged to conserve roughly 96.8% of our wetland areas by integrating them into a connected green network, where development is supposed to be tightly controlled to maintain natural conditions. Gatineau has also committed to concrete measures for the protection of our trees. Planning tools speak of minimum treerentention ratios ranging from 15% up to 50% in valuable wooded areas, and of limiting clearing in protection woodlots to the strict minimum, backed by a development guide and stronger sanctions to deter unnecessary or illegal cutting. Yet, citizens are witnessing the loss of wetlands and trees with each development project. Examples include the current construction adjacent to the Lamoureux marshland as well as other projects

along Lucerne Boulevard.

Our City Council should be commended for requiring specific targets and rules to guide every planning decision. Yet residents regularly see mature native trees treated as expendable and wetlands degraded under exemptions and zoning changes that appear to contradict these commitments. Each loss increases our exposure to flooding, heat and biodiversity decline, with these costs being borne by the community rather than those who profit from the development.

If Gatineau is serious about its Master Plan and climate pledges, it must start by applying its own policies consistently and transparently. Our city cannot claim climate leadership while allowing the very ecosystems that protect us to be chipped away. City Council and staff must apply their own rules to reflect these goals and publicly report on whether they are meeting the wetland and tree-retention targets. So, by copy of this letter to our mayor, I am hoping that such a report on our progress towards these protection targets will be made available soon.

**Michael Wong,
North Lucerne**

[letter submitted prior to Earth Day and published on Earth Day, April 22]

Infectious diseases expected to rise in Canada as migrants move north

Continued from page 1

Infectious diseases are greatly increasing on both sides of the border. In Canada, there are surges in the incidence of HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B, and drug-resistant TB. In the US, reported TB cases increased by 34% from 2020 to 2024.

Shannon Charlebois and Jasmine Pawa in the July 2, 2025 issue of the [italics] Canadian Medical Association Journal wrote the following:

"A crisis of communicable diseases is unfolding in North America, just as Canada's health system responses are being hampered by the dismantling of health and research infrastructure in the United States."

The Iran war is costing the US government over \$ 1 billion per day. Yet Donald Trump has proposed halving the budget of the CDC and has already cut the budget of the NIH by 50%. Total staff positions at HHS overall will be reduced by 16%. These cuts have led to pausing of important research and safety functions and have reduced the ability of US health institutions to collect, interpret, and share data.

The US is attempting to terminate Temporary Protected Status for over one million persons and has halted the processing of existing asylum claims from 19 countries and may try to reverse some of them.

ICE agents have been especially brutal and unconcerned about Constitutional and human rights. Non-white immigrants across the US are scared. Many are missing vital appoint-

ments at hospitals and clinics for fear of being detained by ICE agents. This increases the likelihood that if they eventually cross into Canada, they may be bringing undiagnosed infectious diseases.

Once in Canada, asylum seekers have 30 days to see a physician for a history, physical exam, chest X-ray, and blood work.

I suggest that St-Bernard-de-Lacolle and any other major land border crossings receiving large numbers of migrants from the United States be staffed 24/7 by nurses who could do a quick history and physical examination. Those asylum seekers who appear ill should be detained in a holding area, and fast-tracked to see a physician. The need for nurses at each land border crossing should be reassessed every few weeks.

We must act promptly. The 30-day waiting period to see a panel physician should be shortened and an increased number of MDs should be authorized to perform immigration exams. . Asylum seekers should not be permitted to disappear for so long when they may be harbouring TB and other infectious diseases that might easily infect many other persons in homeless shelters and similar facilities.

**Charles S. Shaver, MD
Ottawa**

Ottawa physician Dr. Charles S. Shaver was born in Montreal. He is the Former Chair of the Section on General Internal Medicine of the Ontario Medical Association. The views here are his own.

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From fiction to reality



Join me for a few moments as we journey back in time to our days of innocence. Someone was reciting that *Hey diddle diddle* rhyme, where a cow jumped over the moon, as a cat played a fiddle. Wide-eyed, you joyfully proclaimed that a cow couldn't jump over the moon...or a cat play a fiddle...or a dog laugh...or a dish run away with a spoon. You laughed, but how you enjoyed repeating that hilarious rhyme to those around you. Your children and your grandchildren responded as you did, way back when. That cow, despite science, continues jumping over the moon today.

The distance travelled through space to reach earth's closest satellite is over 400,000 km. It requires a vast amount of anti-gravity force to escape earth's atmosphere. We see this with every launch from NASA's launch pad at Key West. Yet, let us add a wee bit of imagination to that cow's remarkable feat.

Methane gas? Of course, a monumental explosion of methane gas rocketed that cow skywards. Haven't we all seen the sketches of the laugh on that cow's face? Do we not all smile with relief at the expulsion of pent-up gas just as that cow does?

During those earlier years, how often we referred to *The Man in the Moon*, or the moon as a chunk of cheese? Later in life, we learned that the moon's gravity caused the tides. At school, we read Walter de la Mare's poem *Silver*, where the words and assonance created a clear image:

Slowly, silently now the moon
Walks the night in her silver
shoon
This way, and that, she peers,
and sees,
Silver fruit upon silver trees.

Alfred Noyes' ballad poem, *The Highwayman*, did the same:

The moon was a ghostly galleon
tossed upon cloudy seas.

There are countless songs

that reference the moon. Frank Sinatra's *Fly Me to the Moon*, *Moon River*, as sung by Andy Williams, Doc Williams' *The Man in the Moon*, are but some of those.

During prohibition days, moonshine was produced illicitly by first fermenting corn silage, then distilling it to produce a 90% alcohol content. It was called moonshine since the distilling took place at night, lest the revenue officers come searching. Del McCoury sang:

I have lost my blue-eyed darling
Now I sit with a broken heart by
my cabin in the Carolina hills
Oh, I loved a shiner's daughter
Loved her true with all my heart
Til she fell into her pappy's
licker still

(Chorus)

Oh, what a waste of good corn
licker.

From the still they pulled the
plug

All the revenuers snickered
'cause she melted in the licker

And they had to bury poor Lilly
by the jug.

In 1969, we gathered around those rabbit-eared black and white TVs to watch Neil Armstrong step onto the moon's surface to exclaim: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

On April 6th, we watched in awe as the Artemis 2 crew circled the moon, for the first time.

Nancy MacGregor, who sings in the soprano section of the Atlantic Voices choir, brought it to our attention during our practice break. One of her grade 2 students had been Steve MacLean, who was among the first six Canadian astronauts and the second to perform a spacewalk. In January 2008, he was appointed the President of the Canadian Space Agency (CSA), where he remained until resigning on June 5, 2018.

Science and technology certainly trump a cow jumping over the moon.



Science Matters by David Sullivan & Faisal MO

Love is the secret weapon in facing our collective crises

I recently returned from performing the play *What You Won't Do for Love* in 15 cities with the love of my life, my wife Tara Cullis. It celebrates love for families, each other and the planet, and how these tangle together as we yearn for the rhythm of healthy oceans, rivers and forests to beat within the hearts of our grandchildren, while so many systems teeter on collapse.

When I travel within Canada and around the world, I'm struck by the indefatigable presence of grassroots organizations, fuelled by people who take collective action to protect and defend what, and who, they love — from people and places to creatures and plants.

Collectively we shared ideas and visions, fostering community-building, which in turn fosters resilience.

Worldwide, in places where people often struggle to meet basic needs, roadside bike repair shops exist, borne of a love of cycling. Local conservation initiatives thrive, championed by bird and wildlife lovers. Gardens and honey-collecting programs foster food security, rooted in the pleasures of working with our hands and watching living things flourish.

As Tara and I travelled to perform our play, we met with local activists who, rather than responding to current crises by taking flight or freezing (or staring at their phones), choose the third F: to fight for the things they care about. Collectively we shared ideas and visions, fostering community-building, which in turn fosters resilience.

As climate scientist and activist Susanne Moser says, these activists are not only taking action to care for the worlds they love; they are also facilitating survival: "We keep talking about the three Fs: fight, flight, or freeze, but there is a fourth one, and that's the one that actually helped us survive. The forming of bonds, or the be-friending. That's the piece that got us to cooperate as a species and recognize that we have greater advantage when we work together as opposed to everyone for themselves. This is biology. It is in the genetic history of our species. We are here because we cooperated. It's part of us."

Indigenous land defenders, carrying multi-generational relationships with the land, disproportionately put their bodies on the line to protect nature when other advocacy methods fail to yield results.

At the January World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Prime Minister Mark Carney spoke about a rupture in the global order. What better time to connect with each other and rebuild systems that are

more ecologically and socially just? Turning Naomi Klein's "disaster capitalism" on its head, writer Rebecca Solnit calls this "disaster collectivism" — "the sense of immersion in the moment and solidarity with others caused by the rupture in everyday life, an emotion graver than happiness but deeply positive." For systemic changes to stick, they must be supported by people on the ground.

Actor Ethan Hawke recently went viral for his take on life: "The one who's in love always wins." The older I get, the more I realize how foundational love is to addressing the collective challenges we face.

Policy changes have a critical role to play, too. While local toxics campaigns reach neighbours and maybe even municipalities, provincial bans upheld by law significantly multiply the impact. But those laws can be overturned. If there isn't sufficient public outcry, policy accomplishments that took years to achieve can be erased.

Indigenous land defenders, carrying multi-generational relationships with the land, disproportionately put their bodies on the line to protect nature when other advocacy methods fail to yield results.

Love is relational. It brings about the desire to nurture and give of ourselves.

Extraction and development activities that harm nature are often less visible to most people in Canada — city-dwellers. It isn't fair to place the burden of defending Northern Canada on the shoulders of Indigenous Peoples. Policies, laws and regulations are required to limit and reverse the ecological impacts from these activities.

Besides love, almost all the activist initiatives I heard about were informed by science, whether social, Western or Indigenous. After all, what is science but a means of testing hypotheses to understand how the world is held together, and the repairs that are needed when our actions fray the mechanisms binding natural and social systems?

Love is relational. It brings about the desire to nurture and give of ourselves. As Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." People define "winning" in different ways. The U.S. president has a twisted notion of it. But I agree with Ethan Hawke. Being sustained by love, returning it and acting upon it is truly winning.

New funding for dental care



Jean-Yves Duclos, Member of Parliament for Québec-Centre, accompanied by oral health students from Université Laval at the announcement of \$3.8 million in funding for the Oral Health Access Fund (OAHF) project (March 31, 2026). MG

PHOTO: COURTESY OF FACULTY OF DENTISTRY - UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL



Mélissa Gélinas
LJI Reporter

The Government of Canada announced \$3.8 million in funding for the Oral Health Access Fund (OAHF) project at Université Laval. This financial assistance will help support and improve the training of students in the Faculty of Dentistry while expanding access to dental care for the population. To do this, funding will be distributed for the completion of three projects.

1ST PROJECT

More than \$2.3 million has been awarded to create internships in social dentistry (a public health approach to making oral health care accessible to vulnerable people at a lower cost). These trainings will be offered in a community clinic located in downtown Quebec City and in a new clinic located in the South Shore region of Beauce.

2ND PROJECT

Thanks to more than \$1 million in funding, oral health care students will now be able to complete part of their training in private practices located in underserved regions of Quebec.

3RD PROJECT

More than \$450,000 will be allocated

to the training of students in oral health care, while maintaining and supporting adherence to the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDSP) among eligible residents of the Quebec City and Lévis regions.

A MUCH MORE EXTENSIVE INVESTMENT

These projects are part of an overall investment of more than \$35 million over three years to support 30 FASB projects in several Canadian provinces, including Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan.

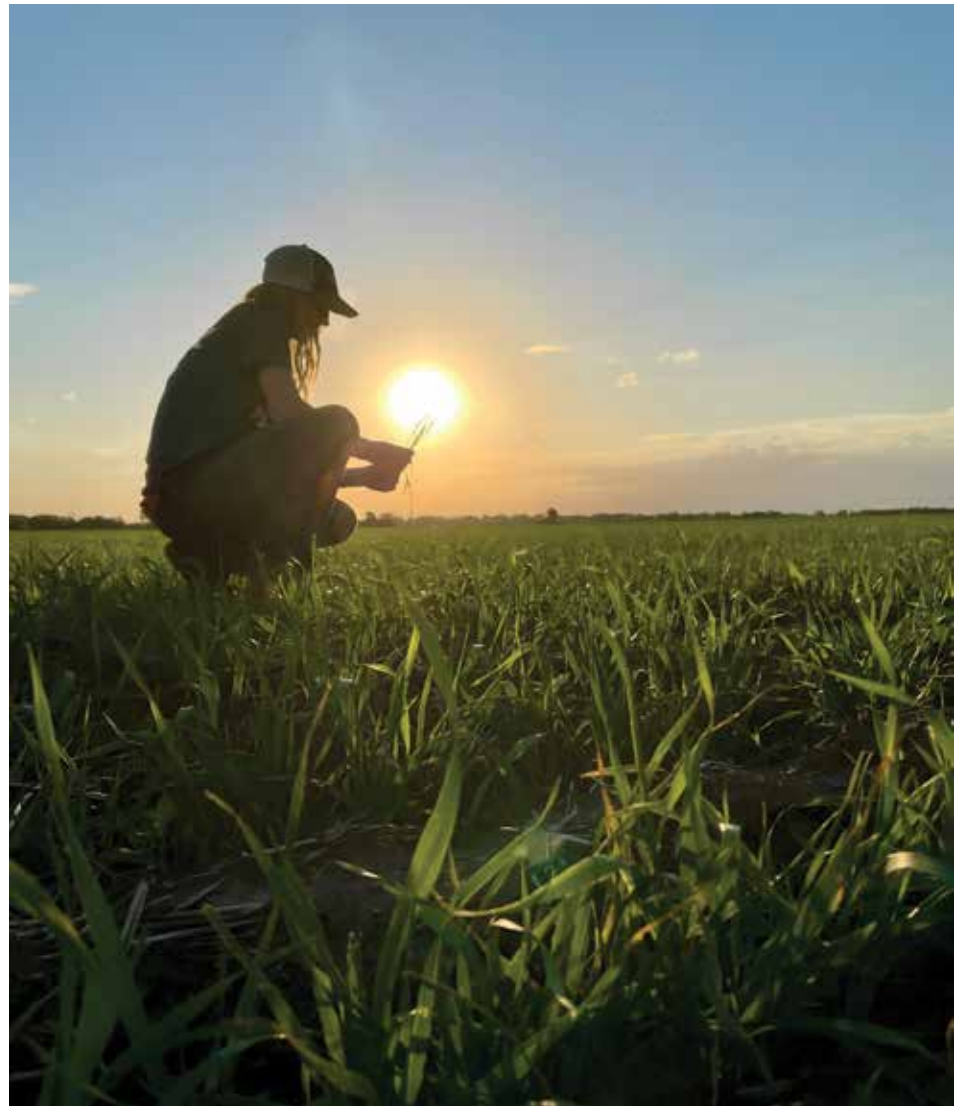
ABOUT THE FASB

The FASB is a grants and contributions program established by Health Canada. Since April 2025, the government has committed to distributing \$250 million over a three-year period.

Its objective is to improve oral health care training among students and to expand access to this care for vulnerable populations or living in remote areas, through the support of various projects.

The program also complements the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDHC), which currently benefits more than 6 million Canadians, including 1.7 million Quebecers who do not have access to private insurance and whose family net income is less than \$90,000.

Rural communities urged to apply for federal capital grants



Farm Credit Canada's AgriSpirit Fund is accepting applications until May 15 for grants of up to \$25,000 to support capital projects in rural communities across Canada. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY OF FARM CREDIT CANADA'S FACEBOOK PAGE



Tashi Farmilo
LJI Reporter

Farm Credit Canada is accepting applications for its 2026 AgriSpirit Fund, a capital grant program aimed at strengthening rural communities across the country. Pontiac-Kitigan Zibi MP Sophie Chatel is urging eligible organizations in her region to take advantage of the opportunity before the May 15 deadline.

The fund is open to registered charities and non-profit organizations in smaller communities, provided they partner with a municipal or Indigenous government. Grants range from \$10,000 to \$25,000, with \$1.5 million available in total for this year's cycle.

Eligible projects cover a broad range of community needs, including upgrades to local buildings, equipment to reduce food waste, greenhouses, agriculture and food initiatives, and improvements to accessibility.

The program has been running since 2004 and has backed more than 1,600 projects across rural Canada, distributing \$21 million in total over that period.

Chatel, who was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food following her re-election in 2025, pointed to the fund as a practical way to address the infrastructure gaps facing many communities in the riding. She became the first woman elected to represent Pontiac-Kitigan Zibi when she won the seat in 2021.

Applications are open until May 15 at fccagrispiritfund.ca, with successful recipients to be announced in the fall.

"Our rural communities are at the heart of our identity and our economy," Chatel said. "Investing in their infrastructure and local initiatives means investing in a stronger, more sustainable and more inclusive future for everyone."

The Afro-Excellence fair returns on April 26 for its third edition!



From left to right, Diarra and Ami Nuwame, who founded the event with their sister Divanita, during the 2025 edition of the Afro-Excellence fair (SD).



Event goers enjoying the 2025 edition of the fair (SD).



Performers showcasing traditional dances during the 2025 Afro-Excellence fair (SD).

PHOTOS: COURTESY



Sophie Demers
LJJ Reporter

Bringing together culture, entrepreneurs, and community, the Afro-Excellence fair is the perfect way to learn about Afro-Canadian culture, participate in activities, and support local businesses. The annual fair will take place on April 26 starting at 10 am in the Agora of the Maison du Citoyen located at 25 rue Laurier in Hull. The free event is open to all and will have activities for all ages.

The event was founded in 2024 by three sisters Diarra, Ami, and Divanita Nuwame. Their goal was to highlight the culture,

talent, and businesses of the people of African descent in the Outaouais. They hope to promote cultural exchange, address social issues, and cultivate community with an inclusive and vibrant event.

There will be 30 vendors and kiosks with local business, entrepreneurs, and organizations offering products, services, or information. The first activity of the day is a youth bullying prevention workshop followed by a traditional dance performance honouring African cultures. In the afternoon, there will be an Afro dance performance, and two intergenerational djembe drum workshops and sing-alongs open to children and adults. Later, there will

be another instrument workshop, focused on the balafon, and a mini show with the children who participated in the workshop activities. The event will close with a live performance from an African artist. This year's edition has added more activities for kids such as a dedicated children's room with an inflatable play structure as well as educational games.

This year the organizers have partnered with Service intégration travail Outaouais (SITO) to have a Human Library activity where the people are the books. Individuals can have a conversation and learn about various individuals' lives and their journeys. The library activity gives the opportunity to

ask questions and connect with others who have different life experiences.

"The event is a way to get to know each other better. My sisters and I were born in Africa. We came to Gatineau, in Canada, which we love, which means that we learned Canadian culture. You must do it to be able to live here. But others don't get the opportunity to learn African culture because there is less need to do so. Afro-Excellence is really a way to create that exchange, to get to know each other better," said Diarra Nuwame.

More information on the event can be found on the website: <https://www.unifest.ca/foire-afro-excellence-2026/>

Gas prices set to drop as Chatel backs federal excise tax suspension



Tashi Farmilo
LJJ Reporter

Sophie Chatel, the Liberal MP for Pontiac-Kitigan Zibi, has voiced her support for a federal government decision to temporarily cut a key fuel tax, saying it will ease the financial burden on families and businesses across her largely rural riding in the Outaouais.

Prime Minister Mark Carney announced on April 14 that the federal excise tax on gasoline and diesel will be suspended starting April 20 and running through to Labour Day, September 7. Drivers can expect to save about 10 cents per litre on regular gasoline and 4 cents per litre on

diesel, with aviation fuel included as well. The federal government estimates the measure will amount to roughly \$2.4 billion less in tax revenue, money that will instead stay in the pockets of Canadians.

The government says the move is a direct response to rising global fuel prices driven by ongoing conflict in the Middle East, which has disrupted oil supply chains and pushed up costs across Canada and around the world.

Chatel said the relief could not come at a better time for her constituents. Pontiac-Kitigan Zibi is one of Quebec's largest federal ridings, covering 41 municipalities and stretching from the outskirts of Gatineau hundreds of kilometres north along the Gatineau River, through a mix of small

towns, farming communities, and First Nations territory. Where many residents drive long distances just to reach work or essential services, and where agriculture and trucking dominate the local economy, higher fuel costs hit harder than in urban centres.

Chatel called the suspension a pragmatic response to an exceptional situation, saying it delivers concrete relief to families and local entrepreneurs while remaining fiscally responsible. The federal government has similarly argued the measure will benefit businesses in transportation, construction, food production, and delivery by lowering operating costs and freeing up resources to hire and expand.

Not everyone is satisfied with the scope of

the relief, however. Carney's announcement came on the same day the House of Commons was debating a Conservative Opposition motion calling for the removal of all federal fuel taxes until the end of the year. According to CBC News, Poilievre rose in the House to call the measure insufficient, saying Canadians cannot afford to fill their tanks and that his party wants all federal gas taxes eliminated for the remainder of 2026, not just the excise portion until Labour Day. The Conservative motion was ultimately voted down by the Liberals.

Chatel acknowledged the tax cut is only a temporary fix, and said further investment in long-term energy solutions will be needed to protect Canadians from the volatility of global fuel markets going forward.

Return of Cascades Train Station to Historic Rail Line



The 100-year-old station now sits at its new location on the Voie Verte Chelsea trail.



Christian Rochefort

The Cascades train station, which was moved to its present location at the Voie Verte Chelsea (V.V.C.) near Chemin Mill, in Novembre 2025, was inaugurated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, on Saturday April 18, 2026. Brian Nolan, Mayor of Chelsea, Marie-Claude Renaud, councillor District 1, Chelsea, Sophie Chatel, MP Pontiac-Kitiganzibi, Heather MacDonald, President of Sentier Chelsea (V.V.C.) and Sandy Foote, President of LaFab sur Mill, participated in the event.

Hosted by La Fab sur Mill and Eco Echo – an outdoor learning and research facility – the event was also part of Earth Day celebrations.

The station was on a property slated for development and has been relocated to its present location to ensure its preservation. The organization Voie Verte Chelsea has taken the task of transforming the station into a welcoming stop for hikers of the trail and a community story hub. “For the first time in over 100 years, the station once again stands along the former rail line, reconnecting the site to its historic role as a place of movement,



Brian Nolan, Mayor of Chelsea, Sophie Chatel, MP Pontiac-Kitiganzibi, Marie-Claude Renaud, councillor District 1, Chelsea, Heather MacDonald, President of Sentier Chelsea (V.V.C.) and Sandy Foote, President of LaFab sur Mill, in front of the station.

PHOTOS: CHRISTIAN ROCHEFORT

exchange, and community life.”, according to the press release.

The move and some renovations are made possible with a grant of \$121,000, half of which comes from the Municipality of Chelsea and the other 50 percent from Heritage Canada’s Legacy Fund.

Also highlighted by the celebration is a land art sculpture, called Holding Stories, which

is made of tree branches. Many community members created the art piece over many weeks, under the leadership of acclaimed land art sculptor, Marc Walter. The sculpture sits next to the old train station.

Over the next months, the station will be fully renovated to provide a resting place for hikers and cyclists as well as a place for historical information.

Planning a bike trip across Quebec just got easier



Tashi Farmilo

Vélo Québec, a Montreal-based cycling advocacy group that has promoted two-wheeled travel in the province for nearly six decades, launched a new website earlier this month that pulls together every bike trail, road route, and mountain biking path in Quebec into one place for residents and visitors planning a ride.

Until now, a cyclist wanting to cover several regions would have had to piece together information from a patchwork of regional tourism websites and paper maps. The new platform, lequebecavelo.ca, puts it all in one spot.

The site lets users browse routes by difficulty, duration, and discipline, whether that is a leisurely rail trail, a gravel road, or a technical mountain bike descent. A trip planner

lets riders map out a route, break it into daily stages, and find places to sleep, eat, and fix a flat along the way. A separate directory highlights businesses certified under the “Bienvenue cyclistes!” programme, a stamp of approval for hotels, B&Bs, and restaurants that offer things like secure bike storage and basic repair tools.

For riders in the Outaouais, the site maps out the region’s many routes, including Gatineau’s roughly 350 kilometres of bike paths, which link parks, neighbourhoods, and cross the river into Ottawa. Further afield, the Vélo des Draveurs winds 72 kilometres around lakes, forests, and farmland in the Gatineau Valley, while the Cycl-O-route de la Rivière des Outaouais runs 87 kilometres through the Petite-Nation countryside as part of the Route Verte, the province’s flagship long-distance cycling network.

Jean-François Rheault, the chief executive

of Vélo Québec, said the platform addresses a long-standing gap, calling it “a unified showcase to highlight all of Quebec’s cycling offerings” and adding that it reflects the organization’s determination to strengthen the province’s standing as a world-class cycling destination.

The numbers suggest that the market is worth cultivating. More than 1.2 million people ride across the province each year, spending \$803 million and supporting around 6,400 jobs. Marie-Hélène Hudon, director of business development at the Quebec Tourism Industry Alliance, said Quebec “n’a rien à envier” of other cycling destinations, meaning the province need not look elsewhere with admiration because it already has everything it needs, pointing to its safe trails, river and mountain landscapes, and picturesque villages. “Cycling and mountain biking enthusiasts are always spoiled for choice here,” she said.

The project was financed by the Quebec government through its Plan pour une économie verte 2030 and coordinated in part by the Fonds d’action québécois pour le développement durable. Nicolas Girard, the fund’s executive director, said the support made it possible to bridge the gap between Vélo Québec’s expertise and tourism stakeholders across the province. “By harmonizing regional tourism offerings and giving cyclists the opportunity to create personalized routes, they are promoting slower, more environmentally friendly tourism,” he said.

Quebec Tourism Minister Amélie Dionne said the project demonstrates the industry’s commitment to developing the sector responsibly. “It is thanks to projects like this that tourism is positioning itself as a lever for action to contribute to the development of our territories and to the vitality of the regions,” she said.

Quebec announces \$995k to help English-speaking Quebecers navigate the health system

Continued from page 3

The project aims to bridge the language gap and create better health outcomes for patients.

The funding will expand the program by adding 11 patient support guides, three full-time and eight part-time, for nine regions across Quebec. These guides will accompany English-speakers through the health care system and ensure all information is understood by both clinician and patient. GAP is a pilot project that will take place over the next year ending

on March 31, 2027.

“The RCSSS is extremely proud of this announcement, which builds on eight years of expertise developed in Quebec City in patient support and will now extend the program to eight other regions of the province,” said Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director of RCSSS. “We have witnessed, on the ground, the concrete effect that adapted support can have when language barriers complicate access to care and social services. Studies are clear: these barriers can affect the quality of care and lead

to less favourable health outcomes. With these additional resources, our patient support guides will be able to intervene in a personalized way to mitigate these barriers, while strengthening the essential links between patients and the health-care system.”

Quebec acknowledges that anglophones face barriers in accessing health and social services in the current system. They also face difficulties accessing and understanding medical information in their language which can lead to misunderstandings.

“Both official languages are at the heart of our identity and represent a great strength for Canada. Language should not be a barrier to health. And through this investment, we are taking concrete action to ensure that all Canadians have access to safer, quality health care and services, including English-speaking communities in Quebec,” said Marc Miller, federal Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages.

Local leaders confirm that Centre Asticou is the site for the new Outaouais hospital



(From left to right) Mathieu Lévesque, MNA for Chapleau, Robert Buissière, MNA for Gatineau, Suzanne Tremblay, MNA for Hull, Mathieu Lacombe, Quebec Minister of Culture and Communications, Minister responsible for the Outaouais Region and MNA for Papineau, Dr. Lesley Fellows, Vice-President (Health and Medical Affairs) and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at McGill, and Dr. Marc Bilodeau, President-Director General of the Outaouais CISSS (JO) PHOTO: JUDE OSMOND



Jude Osmond

Local leaders announced the purchase of the Centre Asticou property to begin a new phase of the hospital's development on Boulevard de la Cité-des-Jeunes, officially named the Centre hospitalier affilié universitaire de l'Outaouais.

Pressure has been rising on the location of Centre Asticou, as CCHADO (Coalition pour un centre hospitalier accessible et durable de l'Outaouais) argues that locating the new hospital there raises concerns because it is not centrally located and doesn't work well with public transport. They recommended a location like Site Carrière/Casino, as it is centrally located and would provide quicker access for the population of Outaouais. CCHADO notes that extensive surface parking is unnecessary and should be reduced or shared with the casino and underground parking. It would reduce costs for the city and ease constraints on the construction of the hospital, thereby giving the population of Outaouais quicker access to a new hospital.

The site was valued at \$79 million, but they paid \$9 million. CCHADO argues the property is valuable for its low cost but could be used for another project, such as affordable housing or senior residences, without disrupting the surrounding residents' neighbourhoods.

They touched on renovations to Centre Asticou, which would take up a good chunk of the city's annual \$120 million infrastructure budget.

On April 7, a press conference was held featuring local leaders, including Mathieu Lacombe, Quebec Minister of Culture and Communications, Suzanne Tremblay, MNA for Hull, Greg Fergus, MP for Hull-Aylmer, and others, where it was announced that they were moving forward with the Centre Asticou as the site for the new hospital. Lacombe stated that changing the location again would result in an even longer delay to the project.

"The site is not ready yet, but there is no other site that would be ready at this moment," Lacombe stated.

Suzanne Tremblay went against CCHADO's claims of it being in a bad spot, noting that the site is in a good spot, as it is near two CEGEPS, and it is in the same sector as Université de Québec Outaouais and other places where it could be of service for a lot of people who are nearby.

They inspired confidence in Centre Asticou as the site for this hospital. Mathieu Lacombe acknowledged that more work is needed, as the site is close to being ready for deconstruction and decontamination. Still, he assured that a lot of work has been done on this project, and it's only going to keep growing.

"We could be at 40 per cent, but we are not at one per cent; we are not at 15, nor are we at 10 per cent. A lot of work has been done on this project," he said.

The target year for the hospital doors to open is 2034, with deconstruction, demolition, and other renovations planned for the project. 2034 is the preferred date, barring setbacks. The city also plans to extend Boulevard de la Cité-des-Jeunes from two to four lanes to allow quicker access for ambulances and other health-related vehicles.

Greg Fergus noted that citizens have been waiting patiently for the health-care infrastructure, and that by announcing the purchase of the property, the project is taking a good step in the right direction and is in good hands.

The plans for this hospital are to make it one of the largest in Quebec, offering a range of modern services to support the people of Outaouais. "It's going to allow us to meet the needs of our people in the region by centralizing some specialized services," said Dr. Marc Bilodeau, Président-directeur général of CISSS de l'Outaouais

Bilodeau noted that the new technology would also improve employees' working conditions, replacing the inefficiencies of older technologies.

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