

Meech Valley Factsheet

Note: the following notes document some of the correspondence between the National Capital Commission (NCC), the Municipality of Chelsea, Environment Québec (MENVIQ prior to 2005, now MDDEP) and Environment Canada, regarding the pollution caused by cattle operations in the Meech Creek Valley. These notes have been compiled from documents that are stored in the Municipality of Chelsea archives and from documents received from Access to Information requests submitted by H2O Chelsea.

1975 --Property owners in the Meech Valley were expropriated by the Société d'aménagement de l'Outaouais (SAO). 47 land owners expropriated to prepare for the building of a zoo. The zoo was never built on the site.

1993 --the SAO was dissolved and the Communauté Urbaine de l'Outaouais (CUO) took over the Meech Valley.

1994 --CUO sells property to NCC.

December 1994—NCC completes report '*Plan de Zone de la Vallée du Ruisseau Meech*' recommending management options for the Meech Valley.

19 October 1995 – First documented complaint by the Municipality of Chelsea regarding cattle polluting the Meech Creek. NCC sends water quality results to Municipality of Chelsea that says that the results indicate that the *cattle operation does have an effect on water quality* but for the most part the results are safe for swimming.

31 July 2000 --Municipality of Chelsea request that cattle be removed from the valley (by way of a resolution from council) and that the NCC need to deal with environmental contamination caused by the cattle. Letter states that the environmental regulations set out by the *Meech Creek Valley Land Use Concept* report are being ignored.

17 July 2000—a letter is sent from the farmers who have a lease with the NCC for the Meech Valley to the Chelsea Municipal council asking to rescind the council resolution to ban cattle from Meech Valley. The farmers (*lessees*) state in the letter that “we will meet all the environmental requirements of the *Agricultural Assessment-Meech Valley Plan* report.”

17 August, 2000—Chairman of the NCC responds to the Municipality of Chelsea's 31st of July, 2000 letter saying the NCC will look at options then inform municipality of a work plan.

3 January 2001 – Municipality of Chelsea sends another letter to NCC requesting that environmental standards be met.

18 January 2001 – Chairman of the NCC responds to say that they will follow the recommendations of the *Agricultural Assessment- Meech Creek Valley* report, that notes the specific environmental standards that must be met (fencing, cattle crossings etc.).

26 January, 2001, MENVIQ sends NCC and the lessee of the Meech Valley a 'Notice of Infraction' (avis d'infraction -l'article 20 de la lois sur la qualité de l'environnement).

24 April, 2001 –Senior Manager of Natural Resources and Land Management at the NCC, replies to MENVIQ saying that they have developed a work plan to correct the situation that will take 3 years, and that a new lease will be signed in the future that includes environmental requirements, and that fences will be setback more than 10m and that the cattle crossings will be completed in 1 year.

16 May, 2001 - Municipality of Chelsea sends Chairman of the NCC resolutions from the Municipal council stating environmental infractions in Meech Valley need to be attended to immediately.

31 May, 2001— Chairman of the NCC writes Chelsea resident Huguette Poulin a letter stating that the tributaries of the Meech Creek will be fenced by the end of summer 2001.

18 June, 2001 – Municipality sends 'Mise en demeure' letter to the Director of Gatineau Park, stating that the work promised by the Chairman and the Senior Manager of Natural Resources and Land Management at the NCC, in the January 18, 2001 letter, has not been done and that the NCC has 10 days to respond with a plan, or the Municipality may consider legal action.

20 July, 2001, -- MENVIQ sends NCC and the lessee a 'Notice of Infraction' (avis d'infraction- l'article 20 de la lois sur la qualité de l'environnement)

October, 29 2002. A new lease is signed between the lessee and the NCC- 'for an initial 5 year term'. Term is from Sept 1st, 2002 till August 31st, 2007 Lease states that the lessee must respect all applicable environmental regulations or the lease can be terminated.

June 2003-- H₂O Chelsea, a partnership with University of Ottawa, Municipality of Chelsea and ACRE, develop a stream testing program that collects data that demonstrates a significant decrease in water quality of the Meech creek from upstream of the cattle operation to the downstream section of Meech creek (Dr. Antoine Morin U of O data).

Sept 1, 2004 Environment Canada sends a 'Lettre de promotion de la conformité' (letter stating environmental infractions were reported) to the NCC and the lessee.

Sept 15, 2004 –NCC sends letter to the lessee explaining Environment Canada's warning.

March 2005--H₂O Chelsea sends a copy of their *2004 Report* to the NCC. The report findings indicate that the cattle are causing significant pollution and erosion problems in the Meech Creek.

March 2005--H2O Chelsea sends their *2004 Report* and data to Environment Canada and the Environment Québec (MDDEP).

April 4, 2005—The Senior Manager, Natural Resources and Land Management of Gatineau Park, sends H2O Chelsea a letter regarding their 2004 Report stating that the fencing was almost all completed and respected the 10 metre set back required by the lease.

26 May, 2005, MDDEP sends NCC and the lessee a 'Notice of Infraction' (avis d'infraction pour l'article 4 du Règlement sur les exploitations agricoles).

7 June, 2005 – H2O Chelsea's Coordinator visits the Meech Creek Valley and photographs cattle in the stream, cattle in areas of the valley where cattle are not permitted, that existing fencing does not meet the 10m setback requirements of the lease and that only one tributary of the Meech Creek has been fenced. A summary of the visit, photographs of cattle in the creek and a map with notes was forwarded to the NCC, MDDEP and Environment Canada.

26 June, 2005-- MDDEP sends NCC and the lessee a 'Notice of Infraction' (avis d'infraction pour l'article 4 du Règlement sur les exploitations agricoles)

29 June, 2005 -NCC sends a Bailiffs Notice, signed by an NCC lawyer, informing the lessee that he has till August 31st 2005 to complete the fencing and cattle crossing. The letter states that after this date, the NCC will complete the work at the lessee's expense.

14 July, 2005 – Environment Canada sends a 'Warning 'to the NCC and the lessee regarding ongoing infractions .

September 20th, 2005 – H2O Chelsea's Coordinator visits Meech Creek Valley and photographs cattle in the stream, that existing fencing still does not meet the setback requirements of the lease and that only one tributary of the Meech Creek has been fenced. A summary of the visit, photographs of cattle in the creek, video of cattle walking under fencing and a map with notes was forwarded to the NCC and MDDEP and Environment Canada.

October, 2005 MDDEP and NCC work out an extension for the deadline. The lessee now has till November 7th 2005 to complete this work.