Presentation at the Environmental Conference at MacSkimming Outdoor Centre, April 26, 2025
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Summary:

Over the past 20 years the St-Laurent Academy Macoun Marsh project at the Beechwood Cemetery (with over 1500 species recorded) has received provincial, national, and international attention. In 2009 we hosted an international gathering of youth, working on similar biodiversity grass-roots projects. Working with the *Convention on Biodiversity*, we had 100 delegates from 7 different countries attend and we then developed an *International Accord on Biodiversity* that has been drafted by an even wider caucus of international youth. During 2010 our youth team collected signatures of support for the accord. By the end of December 2010 there were over 5000 signatures from 83 countries, and the Accord was translated into 25 languages!

In late October, 2010 some of our biodiversity team presented our Youth Accord at the Convention of the Parties, (COP10), in Nagoya, Japan. Eight Canadian youth from British Columbia to Atlantic Canada presented our environmental concerns and love for our natural heritage. Some of these youth delegates used Skype with our students in Canada to allow them a chance to be part of the Japan experience.

The Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) evolved from our global coalition of young people in Nagoya, Japan. Since 2012 GYBN has been recognized as the international coordination platform for youth participation in the Convention on Biological Diversity. There are presently 1.2 million members from 172 countries involved in the Global Youth Network.

Local Youth Accord for Ottawa/ Gatineau

Cities will face many challenges over the coming decades, from adapting to a changing climate and rapid human population growth. A related challenge threatens global biodiversity, resulting in many species facing extinction. Many modern city planners believe people, plants, and animals can live in harmony through nature-friendly urban design. UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program is connecting people to nature. Biosphere reserves have three interconnected functions: protecting bio- and cultural diversity, fostering economic and human development, and serving as a site for environmental education, training, and research. There are currently 714 biosphere reserves in 129 countries.

The cities of Ottawa and Gatineau would be excellent candidates for UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program. There is an amazing collection of wild and green spaces in and around our national capital. Mud Lake, Lac Leamy Park, Macoun Marsh, Petrie Island, Fletcher's Wildlife Garden, Gatineau Park, and Mer Bleu to name a few. Ottawa and Gatineau residents are passionate about their green spaces. Plans to allow movement through green corridors will continue with a focus on quality and sustainability.

The Ottawa Stewardship Council has now taken on the project to develop a Biosphere Reserve for our region. Youth from around the Ottawa Valley and Gatineau are being invited to work with the help of the University of Ottawa to develop a local accord of sustainability for the proposed Biosphere Reserve. This Accord would be the framework for which the Reserve would stand on.