

STRENGTH
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Commission sur l'eau, l'environnement,
le développement durable et les grands parcs
commissions@montreal.ca

RE : MCK Comments on the Public Consultation on the Future of Water in Montreal

To Whom It May Concern:

The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke (**MCK**) thanks the Commission sur l'eau, l'environnement, le développement durable et les grands parcs and the Commissioner of Indigenous relations for inviting the MCK to participate in the public consultation on the Future of Water in Montreal.

The Kaniatarowanenne (St. Lawrence River), Richelieu River (featured on many historical maps as the "Iroquois River"), Regioghne (Lake Champlain), and the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers collectively form the entrance or the "Eastern Door" to the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy). Within the Iroquois Confederacy, the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawks) were and continue to be recognized as Keepers of the Eastern Door and are responsible for addressing issues that arise from the east, from the mouth of the Kaniatarowanenne to the Great Lakes. Part and parcel of this role, the Kanien'kehá:ka assert governance rights which include a responsibility, as stewards of the lands and waters, to care for and protect these ecosystems for future generations. The Kanien'kehá:ka do this by applying our own traditional laws and practices.

The Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén (the words that come before all else) is an environmental and spiritual code based on our traditional laws and practices. It encompasses principles that lead us to carefully consider intricate ecological connections that may not be readily apparent when evaluating a single area, species or activity. The application of the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén serves as an expression of our custodial rights and demonstrates to all the importance of human responsibility in ensuring that relationships with all living beings are well balanced and all environmental aspects are considered.

The Kanien'kehá:ka are the rights holders and stewards of the land since time immemorial. We are actively involved in consultations with the city, provincial and federal governments that are intimately related to the Future of Water plan. These include consultations addressing:

- the construction of the new ozone treatment facilities at Jean-Marcotte;
- building resilient parks to channel storm water;
- new wastewater outflows on the island of Laval;

- multiple projects addressing restoration of fish habitat; and
- a constant flow of bank stabilization initiatives that, invariably, impact the health of the city's waterways.

Moreover, community members regularly fish, hunt and travel along the St. Lawrence River. There is no doubt that planning for the future in Montreal, prioritization of infrastructure projects and spending will impact the inherent and Aboriginal rights of the Kanien'kehá:ka and have a direct impact on the MCK's ability to fulfill its stewardship duties.

The MCK is encouraged to see the City of Montreal working on protecting the water, however as detailed below, MCK has concerns around the consideration of Indigenous rights, land-use, and priorities in this work. We are also troubled by the inadequate consideration of cumulative impacts.

Fairness and Equity

1. The Future of Water in Montreal must include an evaluation of Indigenous rights, land-use and issues.

The focus on intergenerational fairness in the Future of water materials is overly narrow and excludes important considerations of existing inequities for Indigenous people and our rights. That the consultation document contains not a single mention of Indigenous rights, Indigenous people or Indigenous Peoples is a glaring omission.

The Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke are located on the St. Lawrence River, directly across from the island of Montreal. The community has deep roots with the St. Lawrence River and continues to be an important area for the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke. The river supports activities such as fishing (including sturgeon, perch etc.), hunting, gathering and travel to historic sites. Yes, water is an integral part of Montreal's identity, but these are *our* waters and to leave our story out of the narrative will produce a plan that perpetuates historical injustices and present inequities.

Fortunately, the identification of issues within the Future of Water in Montreal offers an opportunity for identifying how issues in the region articulate with Indigenous land use and rights, both historically and today. For example, contaminants like PFAS as identified in section 2.3 are a concern for the MCK, as they bioaccumulate in fish and impact the health and quality of fish harvested by the community. Restricted access to shorelines, whether due to industrialization and development or waters contaminated by waste, is also a major concern that impacts community fishing and harvesting rights.

A section in the Future of Water in Montreal should be included which details the context whereby Indigenous Peoples will participate in this plan, including the history and impacts that have been faced by Indigenous Peoples. Following this, Indigenous-identified issues can be added to the plan, presenting our concerns related to water management, including contaminants, wastewater quality, shoreline quality and habitat rehabilitation. These sections must be drafted and validated by Indigenous Peoples.

Protecting the Resource

As the plan rightfully notes, the City of Montreal is responsible for 40% of the wastewater that is dumped into the St-Lawrence. The MCK urges the City of Montreal to prioritize reform and upgrades in this area.

Penny-pinching in this area has gone on far too long and the ecosystems around us are suffering as a result.

2. The City of Montreal must prioritize secondary treatment at the Jean-R.-Marcotte wastewater treatment plant.

As the City is well aware the MCK continues to be concerned about the quality of effluent produced by the Jean-R.-Marcotte wastewater treatment plant. While ozone sanitation will address issues related to pharmaceutical, bacteriological, and viral contamination, the lack of secondary treatment at the Jean-R.-Marcotte wastewater will continue to result in high loadings of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous. Flowing downstream, these excess nutrients can have a significant impact on the wetlands and ecosystem downstream from the emissary.¹ Secondary (biological) treatment must be prioritized in the plan to address excessive nutrient loading generated by wastewater.

3. The City of Montreal must take urgent action to reduce the impact of combined sewer overflows.

Combined sewer overflows result in massive volumes of untreated sewage flowing into the St. Lawrence River. This has negative impacts on the environment, with contaminating sediments, harms to fish and fish habitat also impairing the ability of community members to exercise fishing rights along the river. Within the context of climate change where stronger and more intense precipitation will put more pressure on the combined sewer system, the MCK urges the City of Montreal to develop a strategic plan to separate the sewer system and build climate change resiliency in the wastewater treatment system, reducing the volume of combined sewer overflows.

Understanding that separating the sewer system will be a long-term goal, the MCK also urges the City of Montreal to develop short-term mitigation measures to reduce the impact of combined sewer overflows on the environment and the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke. The MCK has been repeatedly requesting information on how overflow locations are selected since November 2022, but this information has not been forthcoming (see, e.g. attached). Participation in selecting the factors used to select overflow locations within the system is important to mitigate impacts on areas along the shoreline that are utilized by community members for fishing. Other mitigation measures can include the installation of hydrodynamic separators to remove sediment and floating debris from runoff and regular inspections of shorelines after overflow events.

4. The Future of Water in Montreal plan must allocate funding to address the legacy and cumulative effects of wastewater in the St. Lawrence River.

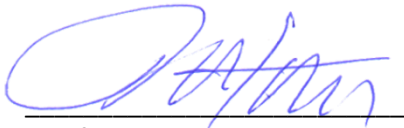
Poor wastewater treatment, and overflows have contributed to significant negative cumulative impacts on the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke and on the health of the environment and ecosystems along the St. Lawrence River. As mentioned continually, community members fish, hunt and gather along the St. Lawrence River. While these activities are still practiced, the ability of community members to support their families through these activities has been significantly impacted. The MCK actively works to restore shorelines, fish and fish habitat and other community initiatives to reduce the cumulative effects of human activities.

¹ Dulude A. M. (2016). *Déversement des eaux usées de la Ville de Montréal portrait de la situation*. La coopérative de solidarité de la réserve de la biosphère du Lac-Saint-Pierre.
https://belsp.uqtr.ca/id/eprint/1380/1/Dulude_eaux_us%C3%A9es_portrait_%202016_A.pdf

As such, in addition to funding the upgrade of infrastructure to reduce and eliminate additional contamination, funds must also be allocated to remediate, and compensate for the cumulative effects resulting from wastewater in the St. Lawrence River. The City of Montreal must work collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples, surrounding municipalities, and other partners to identify and carry out projects to improve shorelines and waters that have been negatively impacted by overflows, and wastewater contamination.

Given the importance of our rights and the connection that the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke have with the St. Lawrence River, the MCK requests a meeting with the City of Montreal to discuss water issues in general. As the City of Montreal continues to change how it manages water through initiatives such as the Future of Water in Montreal and specific infrastructure projects like the Jean-R.-Marcotte wastewater treatment plan, it is important to the MCK that a relationship be developed with the City of Montreal so that our context can be understood and so that our issues can be discussed within the regional context of ongoing projects and future goals. The MCK looks forward to building a relationship together with the City of Montreal.

In peace and friendship,



Chief Ross Montour
Consultation Portfolio Lead
Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke