

Elisabeth and Victor Allistone in the old-growth forest safeguarded through their ecological donation

Photo: © The Nature Conservancy of Canada



ELISABETH AND VICTOR FRANK ALLISTONE

The ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

A Century-old Forest Safeguarded in the Sutton Mountains

City dwellers, country weekenders, and dedicated full-time country folks: this roughly summarizes Victor and Elisabeth Allistone's path to nature. Arriving as emigrants from England in 1956, they settled in Montréal, where they spent their entire working lives. In their free time they enjoyed exploring the beautiful Quebec countryside. During one of their occasional weekend trips, they discovered the Sutton Mountains area of the Eastern Townships. "The forest-covered mountains, the large herds of dairy cattle grazing in the undulating pastures that provided a lush foreground to the high mountaintops ... No wonder that dreams of owning a little corner of this bucolic paradise were dancing in our heads," the Allistones once wrote. One day in 1961, at a bend in the road, they saw an old farmhouse, a barn and a former schoolhouse that sat on a 10-acre piece of land at the foot of Mount Echo and Mount Gagnon. Although the buildings were in bad condition, the couple fell in love with the place and bought it, hoping they could live there someday.



The Sutton Mountains of the Eastern Townships

Photo : © The Nature Conservancy of Canada

Over the next twenty years, the Allistones spent most of their weekends and vacations at their Sutton property, renovating the house and learning new skills, patience, and the ways of the seasons. "We were not exactly what you might call country people, but being in such beautiful surroundings, planting trees and working in our rubber boots, we soon developed a close link with nature," they say. In the 1970s, worried about encroaching development, the couple were fortunate to acquire a large area of forested land adjacent to their property and located on the northern flank of mounts Echo and Gagnon. They later became interested in woodlot management, took some extension courses at Macdonald College of McGill

University, and eventually were recognized as a certified tree farm by the Association forestière des Cantons-de-l'Est (Eastern Townships Forestry Association). It was then that they settled permanently in the scenic countryside. In the late 1990s, they began to do selective cutting under a forest management plan. "One day, François Pelletier, the supervising forest engineer, told us he had found something quite extraordinary on our property. On the mountain, he had come upon a deep ravine with a clear, swift-running brook, bordered by very tall hemlocks. There he discovered a stand of Sugar Maples, beeches, and Yellow Birches more than one hundred years old. Since old-growth forests like this are rare in the Sutton Mountains, Mr. Pelletier said it was a real ecological find that should be preserved," the Allistones recall.

The couple didn't need to be convinced. Not only were they willing to protect their forest and the brook, they wanted this land to remain forever wild. A friend put them in touch with the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)¹, a private organization dedicated to protecting natural areas.





Photo: © Clément Robidoux

The Spring Salamander lives in the clear, cold streams of the mountains and forests of southern Quebec. Habitat modification is the main threat to its survival.

In 2002, the Allistones decided to donate their 32-acre (13-hectare) tract of old-growth forest to the group. The donation was made through Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program, which provided them with special income tax benefits. During this process, the couple learned that the property's many intermittent and permanent brooks are home to three species of salamanders, including the Spring Salamander, a salmon-coloured amphibian of special concern in Canada. They

also learned that the Wild Leek, a vulnerable plant in Quebec, grows in this mature forest, which also shelters a variety of bird species including the American Redstart, the Ovenbird, the Wood Thrush, and the Scarlet Tanager. In addition, many of the forest's beeches have scratches left by Black Bears that climb the trees in search of the nutritious beechnuts.

Since they came to Canada some fifty years ago, the Allistones have demonstrated their strong attachment to their adoptive country in many ways. The couple, who were already members of several local conservation and nature associations, recently helped to found the Mount Echo Conservation Association. They firmly believe that grassroots initiatives can go a long way toward ensuring stewardship of the land. Furthermore, they hope that their ecological gift will encourage other people to get involved in voluntary conservation through a donation

of land or a servitude. Besides preserving a valuable portion of the Sutton Mountains, the Allistones' donation adds to other private protected areas of the Appalachian Corridor, an initiative aimed at preserving a wide strip of unfragmented forest between the Eastern Townships and Vermont. When asked what motivated their generous gift, they simply say, smiling, "We were very happy to give something in return for the many wonderful years we have spent in Canada."



Photo: © Clément Robidoux

The Wild Leek grows mostly in maple forests. Loss of habitat and overharvesting have caused a significant decline in its population in Quebec.

For more information on ecological gifts, please contact:

The Ecological Gifts Program
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
Quebec Region
1141 Route de l'Église, P.O. Box 10100
Sainte-Foy, Quebec
G1V 4H5

Tel.: 1-800-463-4311

E-mail: quebec.scf@ec.gc.ca

¹ www.natureconservancy.ca

Ce document est également disponible en français

ISBN: 978-0-662-44770-2

Cat. no.: CW66-266/2-2007E

ELISABETH AND VICTOR FRANK ALLISTONE

