

John Sauro watches as dusk descends on the two ponds he saved from destruction in 1982.

Photo: © Christiane Foley



JOHN SAURO

Buys Land and Donates it to Ensure Its Protection

The ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

Buy in order to protect: John Sauro knows exactly what that means. To date, he has spent over \$200,000 on the purchase of 360 acres of marsh, bog and forest in Venise-en-Québec, near Lake Champlain. What for? Well, for no reason other than to relieve the land of the man-made pressures that were threatening it. He bought his first lot in 1982: two beaver ponds that had been drained to make a golf course and a residential area. In order to save this small piece of nature, the 23-year-old man had to cash in his Canada Savings Bonds and borrow money from his mother and one of his brothers. Around ten years later, after paying off his debts, Mr. Sauro managed to acquire four additional lots adjoining the first one, including a mature pine forest that was in imminent danger of becoming a housing development. He remortgaged his home three times to get the necessary money to buy these pieces of land.

This “marsh-lover” was actually brought up far from nature. His father, an Italian miller whose business was ruined during the Second World War, immigrated to Montréal in 1949. His mother arrived the following year, along with their first three children and a huge trunk, full of Italian

food. In 1953, the couple bought a modest home in Ville Saint-Michel, which has since become a district of Montréal, and raised their seven children there. John Sauro had never ventured far from this urban neighbourhood before he took part, at the age of 12, in a camping trip north of Montréal that was organized by three teachers from his school. When the bus left the city, the boy couldn't believe what he was seeing—a whole new world of trees and mountains. The next day, as he was out hiking, he wandered away from the rest of his group to better discover the silence and the sounds of nature: the wind in the leaves, the rushing water and the birds all around. Some fish were swimming upstream. Were they trout? He had no idea, but he was sure of one thing: nature would be a part of his life from then on.

Some thirty-five years on and it is hard to believe that at one time John Sauro couldn't recognize a trout. He is now a wildlife management technician and a keen hunter, fisherman and a strong advocate for wetland protection. The two drained ponds that he acquired in 1982 have been reflooded and are used each year by thousands of ducks and other waterfowl, by different

species of frogs and turtles, and by mammals like Beaver, River Otter and Fisher. He operates a duck banding station there in partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Service.



Photo: © Canadian Wildlife Service

One of the beaver ponds bought by Mr Sauro

A few years ago, Mr. Sauro began to think about the future of his land. He wanted it to be set aside for wildlife forever. After discussing the subject with his notary, he chose to donate his land to a conservation group rather than to his children. And so it was that in 2001, he transferred most of his land to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)¹, a private non-profit organization, and in 2003, he made the ecological gift of his 12-acre (5-hectare) pine forest to the same group as part of Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program.



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This forest, located by the two ponds, is largely made up of a White Pine–Red Maple stand, a forest community that has

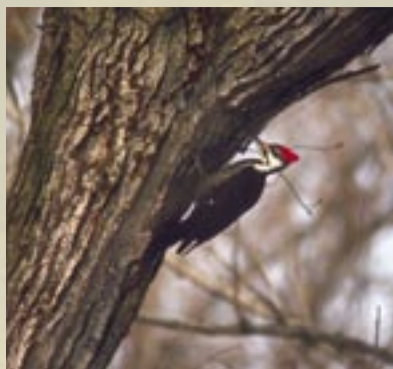


Photo: © Léo-Guy de Repentigny,
Canadian Wildlife Service

The donated property offers suitable habitat for the Pileated Woodpecker, a crow-sized bird. Mature forests and dead trees are essential to the survival of this species.

progressively disappeared from the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Lowlands region since the beginning of colonization. It offers a rich habitat for various animals, such as Pileated Woodpecker, Great Horned Owl and White-tailed Deer, and is an important

buffer zone between populated areas and the bogs of Venise Ouest. These bogs, as well as filtering the waters of Lake Champlain, shelter a large variety of plants, including Pitch Pine and Bog Fern, two species that are listed as threatened in Quebec and are only found at two other locations in the whole province. The Ecological Gifts Program thus ensures the protection of a forest that is highly significant ecologically for these wetlands. It also made it possible for Mr. Sauro to receive a tax credit, a financial relief that was welcomed by this man who has made so many sacrifices during his lifetime to protect the lands that he loves so much.

His school teachers Clem Prioletta, Frank Buffa and Walter Ninzatti surely never imagined the effect that a camping trip could have had on one of their students back in 1971. They only learned about it a few years ago, when Mr. Sauro called them each

individually to thank them for the trip that had changed his life. John Sauro received a *Phénix de l'Environnement* Award in 2002, marking his many years of hard work dedicated to the protection of the Lake Champlain bogs and his other individual conservation achievements. His most generous donation has ensured, once and for all, that his efforts will not have been in vain.



Photo: © Christiane Foley

The Venise Ouest bog shelters one of the three known Pitch Pine populations in Quebec. Mr. Sauro's ecological gift will preserve a buffer zone between this bog and populated areas.

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

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