

Trees disrupt bureaucratic slumber

PONTIAC

Bureaucrats and developers must hate trees. They must loathe them. They must lie awake at night with visions of conifers storming through their heads, and when they dream they must dream of chainsaws.

After all, in just the last year we've had the Case of the Aylmer Pine Forest, the Imbroglia of the Arnprior Grove, and the Massacre of the Market Elm — all controversies in which local residents fought, with varying degrees of success, to preserve trees from the axes of developers and the ambitions of city governments.

Now we can add to the list the one-day long Campaign for the Three White Pines.

The trees in question reside in Gatineau Park. They are old — a century at least. Two of them have trunks 10-foot thick.

Now normally an ancient pine tree in the middle of Gatineau Park would be a happy, contented and utterly safe tree. But these three pines were marked for destruction. It is their unhappy fate to be alongside the Masham Road, a twisty dirt road running through the top of the park.

Road being widened

The road is being widened,



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Sept 4 1971*

LOCAL STORY B3

and red Xs appeared last weekend on the trees. The Xs surely meant the trees were to be cut down as part of the road widening.

Normally, the National Capital Commission, which is responsible for the park, would have something to say about anyone who wanted to take trees down inside the park's boundaries. However, since the trees are on the road's right-of-way, and are therefore on provincial land, the NCC has no jurisdiction.

Ken Rubin, a local researcher and flea in the fur of government, owns a farm nearby. When he saw the red Xs he launched a campaign to save the trees, which means he called his environmentally sensitive friends and contacted the media.

He won his campaign in less than eight hours.

Here's how it happened: At three in the afternoon, André

Rivet, chief of the Hull territory for the Quebec Transport department, said in a phone interview that he had heard from Rubin and was investigating the matter of the trees. However, he added, just two weeks ago there was an accident at that site.

"I have to choose between security and the environment," he observed.

Half an hour later a spokesman from the NCC called to announce, the feds and the Quebec people were going to sit down and talk about finding some way of re-aligning the road.

All a mistake

Half an hour after that, Rivet called again. The whole thing had been a mistake, he said. "No one had the intention to cut down the trees."

Whoever put those Xs on the trees had no authority, said Rivet, adding that he was going to investigate the matter.

Case closed.

Rubin was a bit bemused by it all. "I usually struggle for years." This battle was launched over breakfast and won in time for cocktails.

Rubin can sleep soundly, knowing his trees are safe. So can the rest of us.

Except, perhaps, a few bureaucrats.