



## Backgrounder

### LeTerrain: Building an innovative model for wilderness protection from the ground up—to the sky

[LeTerrain](#) is a 700-acre (430 private acres and 270 acres of Crown land) diverse wilderness ecosystem one hour north of Ottawa, in Quebec's Outaouais Region. When owner Steve Durand acquired the land in 2015, his mission from day one was to protect the wilderness by sharing it.

To save this old growth forest—home to deer, moose, wolves, coyotes, wolverines, ermines, otters, and countless species of birds—from the rampant clear-cut logging of the region, Durand had to cover his costs. He started building cabins and renovating the original settler's log home to offer comfortable off grid rental accommodations to people looking for authentic wilderness experiences. He also created a 20 km trail network that he maintains year-round.

Eight years and thousands of guests later, LeTerrain offers four rental cabins and two renovated RVs for nature enthusiasts to stay. Guests have come to connect with the wilderness, and with themselves, by *disconnecting*. They have come to recharge, explore, enjoy the views, stargaze, hike, snowshoe, create, marvel at mysterious ancient stone constructs, and more. And they have come back, repeatedly, as they built meaningful relationships with nature.

Through its Earth & Sky Foundation, LeTerrain is now poised to become a Canadian [Designated Dark-Sky Site](#), and is in discussions the Royal Canadian Astronomical Society of Canada on next steps. The Foundation received \$15,000 through the La Pêche Green Fund to explore the creation of a dark sky park for amateur astronomers, including control measures to minimize light pollution across the area.

As he engaged with LeTerrain visitors over the years, Durand came to understand the common thread they shared was the need to access and experience wilderness in a direct and personal way. Provincial parks have become overcrowded and increasingly regulated, often prohibiting off-trail exploration. And people are looking for alternatives to the global corporate platforms that monopolize the short-term rental market.

Similarly, Durand wanted to know the people with whom he was sharing this special place. He wanted to foster connections between people with knowledge about ecology and environmental protection; to create shared experiences through festivals, workshops, retreats and projects offering opportunities for learning, wellness and community—founded on an ongoing relationship with true wilderness.

And so, in Spring 2023, the LeTerrain Wilderness Park was born.

Access to the park and its cabins is now based on an annual membership model. Two tiers of membership, Earth and Sky, are offered. Earth members can visit the park during the day, while the Sky membership is geared towards those wanting to observe the incredible dark skies.

The response to the private wilderness park model has been overwhelming. The project is evolving into a peoples' initiative to co-create and conceptualize a collective stewardship model with the potential to inspire a much wider movement. LeTerrain memberships have been purchased from across Canada and from as far away as Spain, including by people who have never visited the site in person, but who support the concept. Inspired by his story, many have reached out to discuss recreating co-op or membership-based conservation models closer to home.

The health and wellness benefits of having direct access to nature are well known. Bringing people together to protect wilderness by sharing it is not only good for maintaining the health of local environments. On a personal level, it's empowering those looking to take action and make a real difference on a local level, something that is deeply meaningful in the face of a global climate crisis. Members are building a broader community of like-minded humans developing deep, ongoing connections with nature. Durand believes this is just the beginning.

#### **Contact:**

Steve Durand

[steve@leterrain.land](mailto:steve@leterrain.land)