

Oral Commentary
to accompany
The Green Coalition Brief
Report 07 + 08
POLICY ON THE PROTECTION AND
ENHANCEMENT OF NATURAL HABITATS
May 6, 2009

At Bonn Germany, in May last year, as a leader of the LOCAL ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY, a part of the COP9 process, the mayor pronounced “... *when talking about the future, we have to take into account the wishes and needs of our children, especially those expressed in the Declaration of the International Bonn Youth Summit. In that Declaration, the children challenged us, elected officials, to stop talking and finally make some decisions about the future, their future. Decisions that ARE NOT BASED SOLELY ON ECONOMIC INTEREST, but take into account the ecological challenges we face on our way to sustainable development, worldwide. The young people made it very clear that we talk too much and take too little action.*”

The Green Coalition agrees heartily with the youth making the case for results over promises. Talk is not action, and action, in the minds of those who manage our affairs, means money. **More of our fiscal resources** must be devoted **at the municipal level** to securing the last remaining biodiversity sites on our islands that may soon be lost forever to development. This, and only this, will represent leadership on the local as well as on the world scene.

*“I want to appeal to the heads of state and government that they **stop spending money for things that are unsustainable** . . .”* This comment was directed by M. Tremblay at the superior levels of government, but the same must apply to all levels municipal governance as well.

When considering budgetary allocations, ESPECIALLY IN THE NEAR TERM, Montreal must adopt and stringently apply a set of priorities that strongly favours biodiversity

conservation over many other potential projects, until the job is fully done.

- \$29 million spent in a triennial, or less than \$10 million per year, does not stack up high against a city budget of approximately \$4 billion. In fact, it represents about 0.25% per annum, hardly a burden even if it were tripled or quadrupled. And such expenditures would not be needed in the very long term given that, at this stage of our development history, there is not a huge number of sites left to choose from. **The investments after all only need be made once.**

- The city cannot say that more money is not available for further conservation while standing ready to input public moneys, as one example, to the defense of a **Formula 1 racing event** that not only glorifies the internal combustion engine, but draws a privileged, moneyed spectatorship from the far corners of the world, leaving behind them an unsustainable carbon footprint.

The city has not been, is not, and must be more, ambitiously and aggressively devoted to the biodiversity conservation undertaking. Neither nationally, nor globally, do Montrealers, Quebecers and Canadians want to see **this** city lagging behind the pack. **The capacity exists yet, in the ecoterritories, to do much more and this should be job number 1.** And there are many sites outside the ecoterritories and existing parks, that remain available — but not for long. Finding pieces in existing parks to pad the numbers, while a laudable objective, can wait; **they** are **not** in imminent danger.

If we believe in the figures the public has been given, in the working document of April 15, then about 285 — 290 hectares (*some conservation cited as cadastral lots rather than precise area*) is the real total of lands actually conserved in the ecoterritories to date, since the inception of the policy over 4 years ago. This represents an addition of about 0.6%, against the 500 hectares that constitutes a full percentage point. We must remember that what the rest of the 430 hectares the city claims, is still in negotiation and has not actually been acquired.

It is important to consider this figure of 285 ha, against what was identified as woodland available according to the *Atlas des Bois*, published jointly by the CUM and Environment Ministry in December 2001. The Atlas cited a figure of 1600 ha + of treed sites of interest at that time. Against that benchmark, only around 18% of what was available as forest has been protected as of today, 7 years later.

If we measure the 285 ha against the original figure for areas of ecological value cited in the Natural Spaces Policy of 1049 ha, we derive a mere 27% of what might be acquired or protected. It is only a little more than 50% of the 524 ha set as the actual target in the policy.

Clearly, there is room for much improvement.

The Policy set a qualifying **benchmark for inclusion in conservation measures of 15 ha**. Since we have no listing or location of natural sites in existing parks, we have no way to determine if they fulfill this criterion. However, we feel it would stretch credulity to think that all of these exceed that standard. Sites outside the ecoterritories or existing parks, that are equivalent in size to what has been conserved inside existing parks should be prioritized, since they are in imminent danger of being lost. Some of these harbour indigenous species that are of patrimonial and ecological value; a case in point is the site north of the Trans Canada Highway between Merck-Frosst and Fairview. It is scheduled for development.

*“To secure world future, we need respect towards all kinds of living creatures. **And we need justice in the distribution of available resources,**”* said the mayor to his colleagues in Bonn. He was applying this critique to higher jurisdictions in Ottawa and Quebec City, but could with introspection have been looking at the workings of his own administration and budget.

[The moneys squandered through the Contrecoeur and SHDM deals and the outsourcing of legal services could have gone a long way to securing valuable lands.]

“Are we ready - as individuals or collectively – to initiate changes in our actions and our mentalities? Are we ready to find new solutions? Are we ready to create continuing richness? Are we ready to distribute resources in a better way?” asked the mayor of his co-participants in Germany. We must now return the question to the City of Montreal and the Tremblay administration!