

ONE ISLAND, ONE PARK – MAYBE

PLAN TO SAVE GREEN SPACE
Conservationists love the scheme,
but Mulcair's successor is less keen

MICHELLE LALONDE
THE GAZETTE

There are precious few places left on Montreal Island where you can close your eyes, smell nothing but moist earth and fresh air and enjoy the rat-a-tat of woodpeckers, a chorus of wood frogs, or the trickle of spring water over moss-covered rocks.

The forests and wetlands around Rivière à l'Orme in the West Island harbour some of those places, and conservationists say it's time Montréalers opened their eyes to the fact that natural spaces like these are disappearing at a shocking rate.

Since 1990, an estimated 1,000 hectares of forests have been stripped from the island to make way for private development.

This city now has the lowest percentage of protected natural areas of any North American urban centre.

Only six per cent of the island's land mass is unspoiled wilderness – woods, shoreline and wetlands – and half of that

is unprotected by any law or statute. Much of the unprotected half is owned by private developers.

An alliance of island conservation groups called the Green Coalition has been trying desperately to stop this steady erosion of green space. For the past two years, the coalition has been working with the provincial government on a project to give what's left of Montreal's natural spaces the legal status of a provincial park.

In fact, before he was turfed out of cabinet six weeks ago, former environment minister Thomas Mulcair was preparing to create a new provincial park on the island, starting at the shores of the Lake of Two Mountains and the Rivière à l'Orme, but eventually taking in all ecologically valuable land in the entire archipelago of Montreal. This includes the islands of Montreal and Laval, as well as dozens of other islands around them.

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FROM PAGE ONE

"You have to educate their viscera and their hearts. ... People have to place a value on these places, emotionally as well as in their pocketbooks." Conservationist David Fletcher



Green Coalition member David Fletcher says urban forests like the Rivière à l'Orme ecoterritory are a joy for hikers and provide habitat for migratory birds and many rare and endangered species. PIERRE ORNDORF / THE GAZETTE

PARK Ecoterritory designation won't stop development, Green Coalition says

CONTINUED FROM A1

In an interview with *The Gazette* last week, Mulcair said the provincial park idea was "moving along apace" when he was forced out of the environment portfolio.

"The idea was that we take everything in and around the Montreal archipelago that is worth saving," and consolidate it into what the Quebec government refers to as a "national" park, or what is called a provincial park in other Canadian provinces, he said.

It would be Quebec's first provincial park in an urban setting, and the first that would be made up of many unconnected pieces of land. Mulcair's enthusiasm for the plan had conservation groups rejoicing.

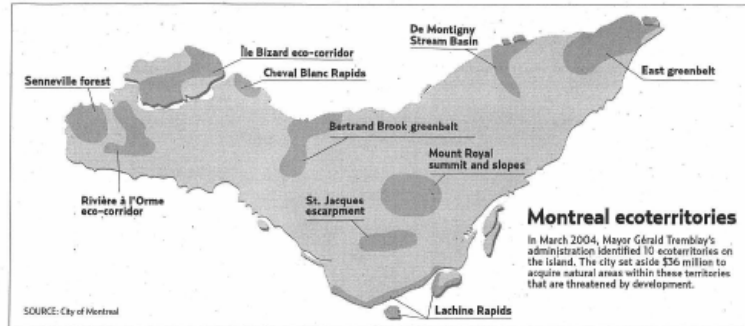
But the new environment minister, Claude Béchard, has been silent on the project, as his government deals with the fallout from its controversial plan to sell off parts of another provincial park at Mount Orford.

Letters to Béchard's office from members of the Green Coalition and Montreal city councillor Marvin Rotrand demanding to know if the Two Mountains Provincial Park idea is alive or dead, have gone unanswered.

♦♦♦

If you ask David Fletcher of the Green Coalition why we should save urban forests like Anse à l'Orme from development, his blue eyes light up.

Not only are these places a joy to hike through, he explains, but they provide habitat for migratory birds and many rare and endangered species. The islands in the Lake of Two Mountains, which include Montreal, Leval and many smaller islands, enjoy



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a micro-climate that allow certain rare plant and animal species to flourish.

For 30 years as a primary school teacher in Pierrefonds, Fletcher organized field trips so he could show children firsthand how everything—from the deer to the plants to the birds to the bivalve molluscs in the marsh—is interdependent.

Some of those kids are now active in the local conservation movement, he said.

"You have to educate their vision and their hearts. ... People have to place a value on these places, emotionally as well as in their pocketbooks."

Forests on the island of Montreal are home to large mammals such as foxes, coyotes, deer and moose, as well as rare and endangered animal and plant species, including the map turtle, brown snake, milk snake, wild leek, wild ginger and tooth wart.

That's why the Green Coalition was pleased—but far from satisfied—in March 2004 when Montreal Mayor Gérald Tremblay's administration identified 10 "ecoterritories" on the island, including the Rivière à l'Orme eco-corridor.

The city set aside \$36 million to acquire natural areas within these territories that are threatened by development.

But the coalition pointed out that budget is far short of the more than \$200 million it would cost to buy outright all the privately owned land in the ecoterritories. And the ecoterritory designation does not automatically stop development. It means that developers will have to go before a special city committee to see if their plans can better accommodate environmental concerns.

"It's just a name that makes people think that these places are protected, which is simply not the case," said Sylvia Oljemark, co-founder of the Green Coalition.

Oljemark said the city is in a kind of conflict of interest, because development brings in tax dollars. In fact, she notes, the city of Montreal, along with local boroughs and other island municipalities, are promoting major projects—roads and highways, housing, condo and commercial developments—in several of the 10 ecoterritories. For example, Pierrefonds is planning to allow at least 4,000 new housing units to be built in the Rivière à l'Orme eco-corridor and major roads to serve that development would criss-cross that land.

Another major housing project is planned for the Cheval Blanc Rapids ecoterritory, also in Pierrefonds.

Verdun wants to allow 11 25-storey condo towers to be built on Nuns' Island. These would obstruct avian flyways in the Lachine Rapids ecoterritory.

And in Montreal's east end, Highway 25 would have a severe

impact on the De Montigny Stream Basin ecoterritory and the footings of the planned bridge to Leval would interfere with fish spawning grounds in Rivière des Prairies.

♦♦♦

In an interview with *The Gazette* last week, an Environment Department official said the project is not dead, but he tried to lower expectations raised by Mulcair.

"For the moment, the Two Mountains Park project is just a concept, an idea to better plan and integrate conservation actions," in the Greater Montreal region, said Patrick Beauchesne, acting director of ecological heritage and parks with the Quebec Environment Department.

"We are reflecting on it."

He confirmed that the department under Mulcair had undertaken a "gap analysis" to look at what ecologically sensitive areas

are currently not protected and are threatened by imminent development. He said that process continues under Béchard.

But in terms of concrete action, the new minister has only gone so far as to have an assistant deputy minister approach the Montreal Metropolitan Council, which is responsible for greenspace management in the area, to begin general talks about planning.

"We don't envision taking action such as expropriating private land," he said. "What will be better in the long term, and not so long term, is to rally people toward the idea of conservation."

He said the department will not usurp the municipal and regional authority on urban planning, but rather support them in conservation efforts.

"The idea is not to make a park to create a moratorium on development. It is to work with cities and regional governments to integrate conservation into urban planning," he said.

But Mulcair said the park project was already well advanced when he left the department.

He plans to continue to lobby for Two Mountains Provincial Park through other cabinet ministers like Geoffrey Kelley, a longtime supporter of the project.

Mulcair said the province is much better positioned than cities and regional councils to protect ecological heritage.

"If you don't have that overarching vision of what needs to be done from Lake of Two Mountains right to the other end of the island and the other islands beyond, you just won't be able to build for the future."

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2006-04-15 : Thank you Email to Thomas J. Mulcair, Minister for Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks

----- Original Message -----

From: Sylvia email

To: golfhawk@securenet.net

Sent: Saturday, April 15, 2006 9:32 PM

Subject: Thomas J Mulcair Sept 04: Meeting the Minister-Green Coalition

>Subject: Meeting the Minister-Green Coalition

>Date: Wed, 15 Sep 2004 07:02:57 -0400

>

>

>Monsieur Thomas J. Mulcair

>Ministre de l'Environnement et

>Leader adjoint du gouvernement

>

>Dear Minister,

>

>Dave Fletcher and I were buoyed up and encouraged by our meeting with

>you on Monday. Thank you for listening and participating through a long

>agenda!

>

>We hope that "Saving Montreal's Last Natural Spaces" can be a

>frontispiece when you launch your Green Plan. Green Coalition can bring

>along a good - sized cheering section, representing the grass-roots and

>the diverse environmental community across Montreal Island.

>

>As we mentioned, we are optimists!

>

>After years of the fractious merger/demerger debate, the electorate is

>grumpy and out of sorts with government. Citizens need a morale boost.

>Your leadership to salvage the natural heritage of the Metropolis now

>can provide that boost, satisfy the hopes and expectations of a broad

>spectrum of the populace and, at the same time, quite frankly, serve to

>build political capital! Popular support for action on the green space

>front is simply extraordinary. This issue is a winner! The polls

>commissioned by the City of Montreal are clear.

>

>We look forward with the greatest anticipation to meeting you soon to

>learn what action you will chart for the survival of Montreal's natural

>environment - here in our fabulous city - here, where people live.

>

>Thank you for hearing us, Minister.

>

>Dave Fletcher and Sylvia Oljemark for the Green Coalition

2006-03-24 : Communiqué de presse

**Pour diffusion
immédiate**

Montréal, le 24 mars, 2006

**La Coalition Verte toise d'un regard critique le rapport de progrès du
plan des milieux naturels :**

Mme Helen Fotopulos, membre du comité exécutif responsable pour le dossier des espaces naturels, a annoncé qu'un rapport de fin d'année sur la ***Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels***, adoptée en décembre 2004, serait présenté à la fin du mois de mars. Elle a déclaré que «les chiffres démontrent que plus de 4%» ont été protégés. Elle explique que la politique vise à protéger 6% de l'Île de Montréal dans les «écoterritoires terrestres» et un autre 2% dans les «écoterritoires aquatiques».

Alors que la norme de l'Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature est de 12%, seulement 3% du territoire montréalais est protégé. Enfin l'administration Tremblay commence à mettre en vigueur sa politique qui vise la protection de 8% de l'île, dotée depuis 2003 d'une enveloppe de 36 millions \$. La politique a comme objectif entre autres d'augmenter, de consolider et de relier les parcs-nature dans les 10 «écoterritoires» désignés de part et d'autre de l'Île de Montréal. Il importe de noter qu'à l'intérieur des écoterritoires 1 600 hectares d'une grande valeur écologique ne jouissent d'aucun statut.

Toutefois, la Coalition Verte se pose des questions :

Pour bonifier de plus de un pour cent le territoire protégé, i.e. passer de 3% à «plus de 4%» tel qu'annoncé par Mme Fotopulos, il faudrait acquérir ou protéger au moins 500 hectares, car la surface de la métropole est de 50 000 hectares.

Le ***sommaire des projets de conservation*** (interim) du 21 septembre 2005 démontre que 109.56 hectares ont été protégés dans certains écoterritoires pour un investissement de 8 641 862,00 \$. A la fin de l'année, selon une communication verbale d'un fonctionnaire

de la Ville, un total de 124 hectares a été conservé au coût de 9 million \$. Ceci représente une augmentation d'un quart de un pour cent, soit bien en-dessous du 1%.

En effet, il manque quelque 376 hectares, c'est-à-dire la différence entre les 124 hectares protégés et les 500 hectares nécessaires pour en arriver au «plus de 4%». À titre d'exemple, le Parc Mont Royal fait environ 200 hectares; il faudrait donc tenir en ligne de compte presque deux fois le Parc.

Où sont donc les hectares protégés dans les écoterritoires que l'administration Tremblay prétend avoir protégés ? Se peut-il qu'en réalité une partie des parcs métropolitains établis depuis longtemps tels que Jarry et de Maisonneuve, servent à combler le déficit ? Ces terres ne risquent-elles pas de se faire développer sous peu!

Est-ce possible que l'administration veuille truquer les chiffres tout en faisant croire qu'ils veulent préserver les vrais milieux naturels et les écosystèmes de grande valeur écologique? Montréal ne peut se permettre de gaspiller ses milieux naturels. Depuis 1990, plus de 1 000 hectares ont été perdus au dépens du développement résidentiel et industriel. Maintenant il n'en reste à peine assez pour pouvoir en protéger que 6%.

Il faut remettre les pendules à l'heure :

Que les Montréalais ne s'y méprennent pas : le terme «écoterritoire» ne confère aucun statut légal et ne protège pas les espaces naturels qui s'y trouvent. Pire, la Ville de concert avec les arrondissements fait la promotion active de développement de projets, routes artérielles, autoroutes, condominiums ainsi que développements résidentiels et commerciaux dans plusieurs écoterritoires.

Quelques exemples : vers l'ouest, l'étalement urbain de Pierrefonds menace d'amputer les forêts, champs et milieux humides du **Corridor écoforestier de la Rivière à l'Orme**. Le plan d'arrondissement propose 6,000 nouvelles résidences desservies par des routes artérielles qui sillonneraient à-travers l'écoterritoire. Encore à Pierrefonds, on propose des tours de condos à la Miami dans l'**Écoterritoire des Rapides du Cheval Blanc**. Aux **Rapides de Lachine**, Verdun veut construire onze tours de 25 étages chacun sur l'Île des Sœurs ce qui obstrueraient les vues de l'horizon et perturberaient les voies des oiseaux migrateurs. Dans l'est, l'Autoroute 25 pourrait causer des dommages graves à **La coulée verte du ruisseau De Montigny**; les supports pour ce pont entre les îles de Montréal et Laval seraient plantés dans les frayères à poissons de la Rivière des Prairies.

Un échec :

En 2005, soit la première année d'implantation de la politique, l'administration Tremblay aura protégé 124 hectares, soit seulement ¼ de un pour cent du territoire de l'île. Le programme de financement se terminera à la fin de sa troisième année. Si on maintient le rythme actuel, au moment que le financement se termine, seulement ¾ de un pour cent aura été ajouté au 3% déjà protégé. Moins que 4% aura été gagné, ce qui est bien en-dessous de la moitié de l'objectif promis de 8%. Sur les 1 600 hectares disponibles, l'administration aura réussi à protéger seulement 23% soit moins que le quart! Pour la Coalition Verte, cela signifie un échec retentissant.

Ces efforts peu convaincants pour la conservation des espèces rares et des écosystèmes uniques à Montréal et dans le sud du Québec ne peuvent rivaliser l'essor du développement. Parmi quatorze villes canadiennes, Montréal arrive bonne dernière pour la conservation de ses milieux naturels, une des pires en Amérique du nord.

Bonifier les données du rapport avec des chiffres sur des espaces dont la valeur est plus récréative que naturelles tandis que l'on détruit les vrais trésors écologiques est reprehensible.

(traduction)

Source:

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News Release

for immediate release

Montreal, March 24, 2006

Progress report on natural spaces plan needs scrutiny: Green Coalition

Madame Helen Fotopulos, executive committee member responsible for the natural spaces file, has announced that a year-end report on the *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels*, adopted in December 2004, will be tabled at the end of March. Ms Fotopulos 'went on the record' at the Agglomeration Council meeting March 2. She stated that "figures show that over 4%" has been protected. It is the target of the policy to protect 6% of the Island of Montreal in "land ecoterritories" and a further 2% in "water ecoterritories", she explained.

For too long, just 3% of the territory has been recognized as protected natural green space, while the World Conservation Union benchmark has risen to 12%. Finally the Tremblay administration is moving to implement its policy that targets protection of 8% of the island. In 2003, \$36 million was earmarked for the purpose. The policy identifies 10 ecoterritories across the city that include established Nature-Parks and unprotected natural spaces (1600 hectares) of rich and varied biodiversity that are worthy of conservation. The policy includes objectives to augment, consolidate and link up the Nature-Parks in these ecoterritories. But the Green Coalition is uneasy.

Green Coalition has serious questions:

To increase the amount of protected lands by more than a full percentage point, from 3% to "more than 4%", as affirmed by Ms Fotopulos, would require the acquisition or protection of more than 500 hectares. The land surface of the metropolis is approximately 50,000 hectares.

An interim '*sommaire des projets de conservation*' dated September 21, 2005, shows that 109.56 hectares had been protected in various ecoterritories for an investment of \$8,641,862.00. A verbal accounting by a city official attested that by year's end a total of 124 hectares had been conserved for about \$9 million. This represents an increase of one-quarter of 1%, not more than a full percentage point.

There is a shortfall of some 376 hectares, the difference between the 124 hectares protected and the necessary 500 hectares needed to boost the tally to "more than 4%". For comparison, Mont Royal Park covers roughly 200 hectares. Missing then from the accounting are natural parklands almost twice the area of Mont Royal Park.

Where are the extra ecoterritory lands the administration is adding? Are hectares from long-established metropolitan parks outside the ecoterritories being used to inflate the

numbers – from Jarry Park, Maisonneuve Park, etc. - lands that are at negligible risk to development pressures? Such areas do not meet policy criteria. This ploy is akin to double-dipping!

Are truly natural green spaces, ecosystems of high ecological value and at immediate risk of development, being sacrificed to bookkeeping dodges? Montreal has no green spaces to squander. Since 1990, more than 1,000 hectares of the city's forests have been lost to development. There are only enough natural green spaces left on the Island to preserve a total of 6%.

Montrealers need to know the score:

The term “ecoterritory” is descriptive but misleading; it has no legal status and protects nothing. In fact, the City of Montreal, along with local boroughs, is promoting major building projects, roads and highways, housing, condo and commercial developments in many ecoterritories.

A few examples: To the west, Pierrefonds' urban sprawl threatens to carve forest, fields, marshlands and flood plains from **Le corridor écoforestier de la rivière à l'Orme**. Major arterial roads are to crisscross the ecoterritory, making way for 6,000 new housing units. At **Les rapides du Cheval Blanc** also in Pierrefonds, controversy swirls over the colossal, Miami Beach style project proposed for the riverside ecoterritory. At **Les rapides de Lachine** to the south, Verdun is pressing for the construction of eleven 25 storey condo towers on Île des Soeurs that will obscure ecoterritory vistas and obstruct avian flyways. In the east-end, Autoroute 25 signals severe impacts for **La coulée verte du ruisseau De Montigny** and footings for the bridge to Laval would be planted in this ecoterritory's spawning grounds in Rivière des Prairies.

No passing grade

In 2005, the first year of implementing the natural spaces policy, the Tremblay administration has allegedly protected 124 hectares, one-quarter of 1% of the Island. Policy funding runs out at the end of its third year. At the current rate, only three-quarters of 1% will have been added to the original 3% of protected lands when the plan ends. Less than 4% or less than one-half the policy target of 8% will have been achieved. Measured against the 1600 available hectares, only 23% - less than one-quarter of the available natural green spaces will have been saved! The Green Coalition judges this performance a monumental failure.

The ecoterritories contain rare species and ecosystems unique to Montreal and southern Quebec, but lacklustre efforts for their conservation are being outstripped by the push for development profit. In a field of 14 Canadian cities, Montreal ranks dead last for per capita green space and continues to be at rock bottom compared to other North American urban centres.

To pad the numbers in the report with inappropriate spaces while promoting the destruction of major ecological assets in the ecoterritories is reprehensible.

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2006-01-24 : Quebec aims to save local green spaces, TheSuburban

Quebec aims to save local green spaces

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Quebec aims to save local green spaces

> Andy Blatchford
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Article online since 24 Janvier 2006 à 17:45 and was viewed 43 times

BY ANDY BLATCHFORD

The Chronicle

Quebec will unveil preliminary plans for a provincially protected park encompassing Lake of Two Mountains next month, according to Environment Minister Thomas Mulcair.

The initiative is expected to include the West Island's Cap St. Jacques Nature Park, Parc national d'Oka and Parc de la rivière des milles-iles, which are currently protected areas. In addition, Mulcair aims to incorporate stretches of shoreline, the lake itself, and undeveloped sites surrounding l'Anse à l'Orme Nature Park, which has been at the centre of controversy over encroaching residential development. Local environmentalists have been fighting to convince the borough of Pierrefonds/Roxboro to halt developers from building on the ecologically sensitive lands — some of the last remaining on the island of Montreal.



Chronicle, Sean Parker L'Anse à l'Orme forests, which are home to a deer herd, may become protected as part of a proposed park.

L'Anse à l'Orme Nature Park touches the borders of Pierrefonds/Roxboro, Senneville, Kirkland and Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

"We're going to work very hard to try and protect as much of (l'Anse à l'Orme) as we can," Mulcair told The Chronicle. "When you look at what percentage of the island of Montreal is already developed and what remains to be protected, it's really urgent that we protect as much as we can. That's part of the vision of this new park."

The project will be a first in Quebec, according to Brigitte Bérubé, assistant director of the environment ministry's Montreal's bureau. "We are looking at a concept we can put in place to bring together these protected lands in a type of metropolitan park," she said. "It's not a project as such to create a provincial park as we know now. It is completely new."

Bérubé says the province must develop a strategy for a park that will not be continuous. "Here . . . we have interesting natural spaces," she said. "We should protect them, but at the same time we are in an urban context where there are private properties as well, so all this is being examined."

The elaborate plan, which is being studied by a team of experts, will likely include protecting natural flood zones around the lake, Bérubé added.

"We are looking at the possibility to create an ensemble by adding other territories to territories that are already protected," she said. "It's an interesting concept."

Mulcair said the idea for the park came from meetings with Jacques-Cartier MNA Geoffrey Kelley and the Green Coalition, a Montreal environmental group. The province has been working closely with the City of Montreal to ensure the project is a success, he added. "We've already got an enthusiastic response from the CMM (Communauté métropolitaine de Montreal)," said the Beaconsfield resident, who expects the first draft of the park's plan to be released within the next six months. "We really want it to be a major project."

Meanwhile, Green Coalition vice-

president David Fletcher says preserving the forests and wetlands around l'Anse à l'Orme Nature Park is key to saving species that are threatened in the area. The Roxboro resident said the territory is home to mature stands of hickberry, black maple, oak elm, as well as map turtles, brown and milk snakes, and nesting sites for Cooper's hawks.

"That's good news," he said of the park project's developments. "Any efforts that are made towards conserving these spaces on the island (of Montreal) at this point go a great way to conserving these endangered species in the province."
