

Environmentalists cry foul at airport

BY RAFFY BOUDJIKANIAN The Chronicle, November 29th 2007

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You might think you have seen Canada geese while teeing off in Golf Dorval, but a letter by Environment Minister John Baird suggests that they are not close enough to any of the construction activities going on in the airport expansion project there to suffer.

"Data from the Canadian Wildlife Service indicate that there are no colonies of migratory birds in the vicinity," the message to Green Coalition member Paul Wilkinson reads. It was sent in response to a 20, 000 name petition by the Coalition to stop the project.

"There are thousands of birds there," said Dorval Mayor Edgar Rouleau at their city council meeting Monday.

Christiane Beaulieu, vice president of public affairs with Aéroports de Montréal, said that she was unaware of the presence of migratory birds, and that the ADM's actions had been legal and documented through public consultations.

"Golf Dorval was a temporary agreement with the city," she said, adding that everybody always knew that the land would eventually be used by the airport.



Some birds at Golf Dorval

However, as bulldozers and construction vehicles lined parking lots in the golf course, Wilkinson cited a number of problems with ADM's plans. He said that the ADM was disobeying Canadian legislation by not submitting its project to an environmental study.

"How can the government of Canada create an entity which can then ignore Canadian laws?" He asked.

"Aéroports de Montréal must comply with applicable acts and regulations pertaining to environmental issues," according to the response letter by Environment Minister John Baird to Wilkinson.

In another letter, Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon also implied that the ADM is subject to pertinent Canadian laws, but does not really have to submit this particular project for approval.

"Since the project does not receive federal financing, and it falls within the original agreement with ADM, the ADM does not have to follow this (environmental assessment) law," said Transport Canada spokesperson François Nicolas Asselin.

"It's theirs, they can do whatever they want with it," said Rouleau, adding that Dorval's lawyers had already studied the project.

Wilkinson said that the current project goes beyond "airport expansion."

"This is nothing but land speculation," he said, pointing to a speech that ADM chairman James Cherry made to the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal last March. "Initial lots could be offered on the market beginning next fall," he said back then.

"We are not in the housing development business," explained Beaulieu, who said that any developments would still fall under "airport expansion" since they would only be offered to companies tied to the aeronautical industry.

Last Sunday afternoon, containers marked with Roxboro Excavation Inc's logo could be seen in Golf Dorval's parking area. According to an online Canadian business directory, the company offers dewatering services. Beaulieu said that Roxboro had been used to empty a man-made freshwater basin.

"We certainly have no intention of touching any streams," she said.

There are three running through Golf Dorval. One, Bertrand Stream, reaches Bois de Liesse Park and is recognized as an ecoterritory by the city of Montreal.

Asselin said that municipal definitions of green space do not matter in this case, only federal ones.

Environment Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans were unavailable as of press time.