

Montreal moves to protect 8-hectare section of Ste. Anne woods

Developer will be paid \$5.2 million

Michelle Lalonde The Gazette West Island Plus Saturday, January 3, 2009 <http://westislandgazette.com/news/5322>



David Fletcher by the marsh in the woods. (Gazette file photo)

The city of Montreal will purchase and protect an eight-hectare piece of ecologically valuable forest in Ste. Anne de Bellevue that conservation activists have been struggling to save from land-hungry developers for more than 20 years.

“It is a small piece of land, but it is very valuable because of its exceptional ecological qualities,” said David Fletcher of the Green Coalition, a group that has been working to protect the lush wooded corridor along the Rivière à l’Orme in the West

Island since the late 1980s.

The sector, known as the “southern section of Woods #3,” was saved at the 11th hour last month when the Island council approved Montreal’s decision to buy the land from Grilli Property Group Inc. on Dec. 18.

The developer had begun clearing underbrush in the sector last summer in preparation for construction of 60 housing units.

The city will pay \$5.25 million to Grilli for the southern section of the woods, as well as a small piece of land on Île Bizard, where the developer had planned to build 27 more housing units.

That money was part of a \$36-million greenspace acquisition envelope set aside by the city of Montreal back in 2004, when it identified 10 “ecoterritories” - areas of ecological importance that the city would try to protect from development. The land on Île Bizard is within the Île Bizard forest corridor ecoterritory, while Woods #3 is in the Rivière à l’Orme forest corridor ecoterritory.

“We want to be really effusive in our praise of Montreal for doing this,” Fletcher said.

“This is unaltered, never-cut forest. It is a superb piece of land that has all kinds of vulnerable and endangered wildflower and tree species, as well as what are known in Quebec as ‘country foods,’ such as wild ginger and wild leeks.”

Fletcher noted Woods #3 is home to a population of deer, as well as mink, short- and long-tailed weasels, raccoons and beavers.

The move by Montreal to buy the southern section of the woods was opposed by Ste. Anne de Bellevue Mayor Bill Tierney. He argued his community should be compensated for lost tax revenues from the planned homes that will now not be built.

The city of Montreal purchased the much larger northern section of the woods in the early 1990s.

Talks are under way between city of Montreal officials and the province over a final key piece of the puzzle, a 36-hectare wooded area to the west of L’Anse à l’Orme Rd. The land is owned by the Société générale de financement du Québec, a holding corporation of the Quebec government. That land also is zoned for development, and the urban plan for Ste. Anne de Bellevue includes a condominium development in that area.

Fletcher said his group hopes that the SGF lands will soon be added to the protected area.

“With (the southern section of Woods #3) protected now, and if we can get the SGF lands in the west protected, then we will really have something substantive that secures the integrity of that whole L’Anse à l’Orme corridor.”