



## News Release for immediate release

Montreal, March 14, 2005      At the Consultation on "Québec's Sustainable Development Plan"

### **Green Coalition formally requests BAPE hearings on the protection of Montreal's last natural spaces**

### **World spotlight to shine on Montreal - City needs help of superior governments to shape up as the "Sustainable Development City"**

The Green Coalition is formally appealing to Environment Minister Thomas J. Mulcair for hearings by the BAPE (Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement) on the protection of Montreal's last natural spaces. In Montreal the public has been heard but ignored; the new Natural Spaces Policy is flawed and construction in "ecoterritories" is threatened. The Green Coalition is calling on the Minister for BAPE hearings – a higher court of appeal. While these issues are being scrutinized, a moratorium on construction is absolutely necessary to halt incursions into the remnants of the city's natural areas. Equally rigorous attention is needed for the entire Greater Montreal Region, the most ecologically distinct corner of Québec. This region, so rich with a diversity of species and habitats, is also the region subject to the most unrelenting urbanization.

**Flawed :** The City of Montreal's new Natural Spaces Policy – *La politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels* is flawed. Major development projects and road building will be permitted within the limits of the ecoterritories identified for protection. This basic premise of Montreal's conservation strategy needs scrutiny. Acquisition through outright purchase is to be used to secure desirable parklands only as a last resort. Instead, bargaining with landowners - in most cases real estate developers - is to determine whether lands will be saved or not. Citizens fear that the policy is weighted in favour of the interests of real estate development and real estate developers – and that encroachment through building will despoil the last natural sites.

### **Public heard but ignored in Montreal; OCPM recommendations rejected**

A considerable body of opinion exists that development should be kept outside the ecoterritories; that building in natural spaces is no way to protect them. This opinion, garnered at public hearings in all corners of the city during the months of March, April and May, 2004, was summarized in the Office de consultation publique de Montréal report - "...to reduce current pressures on certain areas targeted by the policy, the Commission recognizes the necessity of imposing a moratorium on all development projects in the ecoterritories natural spaces and buffer zones." (communiqué OCPM). The Office also recommended adding Meadowbrook and offshore islands to the plan, increasing the number of ecoterritories to twelve. The recommendations were rejected.

**Major new projects in ecoterritories need attention of the BAPE :** Last Monday, March 7, a new construction project was discussed at Pierrefonds borough council that will carve into a **“forêt centenaire” in the Rivière-à-l’Orme Ecoforest Corridor**. This is incompatible the Natural Spaces Policy objective to “create a sustainable ecological corridor of great biodiversity in the area surrounding the only inland river on the Island of Montréal.” And a major road is planned that will cut through the Corridor, through rare forest, beaver marsh, deer yards and the river course. Because of the configuration of the L-shaped ecocorridor and the curving road, the highway would traverse the greenbelt not once but twice. Other roads and residential developments are planned in this exceptional natural area.

Controversy swirls over the colossal, Miami Beach style project proposed for the unique shoreline **Cheval Blanc Ecoterritory** in Pierrefonds. Twenty substantial structures including five condo towers could loom over Cheval Blanc West. Most of Cheval Blanc East has been lost to development since 2002. Thanks to Environment Minister Mulcair the condo project is on hold for now.

**Politicians trumpet Montreal as the “Sustainable Development City” – an empty boast.** To earn the title, the City must comply with rigorous international standards. Pivotal among the requirements are the conservation of natural spaces and protection of indigenous biodiversity. But just a pitiful 3% of the territory is protected natural land versus the internationally accepted minimum of 8%. Unchecked, construction has stripped 1,000 hectares of forested lands from the metropolis since the late 1980s. Now, so few natural green spaces are left (1600 hectares) that quotas can only be boosted to about 6% if all the last green spaces are saved.

**Help needed for “last chance” green space program:** Montreal needs the help of the superior governments to shape up. The Green Coalition presses for action on landbanking! Surplus Québec and Federal properties can be swapped for natural spaces owned by developers; and also revitalized brownfields (contaminated lands) can be traded for greenfields. And the Coalition again asks the Québec Government for a one-time injection of dedicated funds of at least \$40 million, over 3 years to match the City of Montreal contribution for the new Natural Spaces Policy. The Green Coalition seeks an equal contribution from the Federal Government so that this “last chance” green space program can succeed. Unlike ongoing major expenditures that drain public coffers, investments in natural spaces need be done but once!

**World spotlight to shine on Montreal:** Soon, the City of Montreal will host the *World Conference on Climate Change*. The World will look to Canada to set high standards, not just on climate-change, but for sustainable development and the protection of environmental integrity and biodiversity. Central and intrinsic to these challenges is the conservation of urban forests and natural milieux. The World spotlight will shine on Québec’s Metropolis - Montreal. Exceptional efforts will be demanded of political leaders to balance the region’s big deficit in protected natural green space, to boost quotas to accepted international norms – **here, where people live!**

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