



News Release for immediate release

Montreal, October 31, 2006

New plan to gut Montreal's last forests, natural spaces is a disaster About one-half of Montreal's unprotected ecoterritory green spaces face new risk Commission to adopt new priorities for natural spaces policy

**Commission du conseil d'agglomération sur les grands équipements et les activités d'intérêt
d'agglomération**

**Wednesday, November 1, 2006 at 7pm
Council chamber of Montreal city hall**

Mayor Tremblay gave hope to Montrealers when he promised, "What's green will stay green"

That campaign slogan and the creation of a new Natural Spaces policy, the "*Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels*" encouraged the electorate. The Policy promised that 8% of the island would be protected natural green space; officials explained that 6% would be protected in 'land ecoterritories' and 2% in 'water ecoterritories'. But, during the Tremblay mandate just 0.2% (110 hectares) has been conserved. This is the first land protected since 1992. And still, only a little over 3% of the Island is protected natural space.

Mayor's promise is eroded: City's new 'priorities' signal the loss of about 800 ecoterritory hectares

On Wednesday, the *Commission sur les grands équipements* is to adopt new priorities for the Natural Spaces Policy. According to these priorities set out in its May 2006 *Bilan*, the city is prepared to sacrifice approximately one-half (about 800 hectares) of the Island's last unprotected natural spaces in the ecoterritories to urban development. From east to west across the city, ecosystems of irreplaceable biodiversity are at risk as never before. More than 1,000 hectares of natural spaces have already been lost under concrete and asphalt across the island since 1990. The loss of 800 more hectares in the ecoterritories is unconscionable.

At Rapides du Cheval Blanc, in Pierrefonds, the ecoterritory green spaces are already under siege

For forty years, Montrealers have called for the conservation of the green spaces along Rivière des Prairies at the Cheval Blanc Rapids, now identified as an ecoterritory in the natural spaces policy. But much of Cheval Blanc East has been lost to concrete and condos during the Tremblay regime. Now citizens are outraged by a land-swap that will gouge 10.5 hectares from the 'protected' ecoterritory lands at Cheval Blanc West for a large-scale residential project. The land-swap scheme also paves the way for even more adjacent green space hectares to be developed later.

City officials mix up the numbers: Officials tout the deal, claiming the city is ceding 5 hectares for 15 hectares from the developer. Not so! Land-swap documents reveal that the city is prepared to trade away 9 hectares of publicly-owned, buildable Cheval Blanc lands for 7.5 hectares of flood-plain owned by the developer nearby. Because the flood-plains in the ecoterritory are already protected from construction by Quebec statutes, the city will not have saved a single hectare of Cheval Blanc West with this deal. To the contrary, all Montrealers are the losers, as the Tremblay regime hands over publicly-owned green spaces for the massive building project that endangers the ecological integrity of all of this rare waterfront green space.

Three land-swap votes - on May 23, on August 31 and on October 30 – remove ‘protected’ lands from the Rapides du Cheval Blanc ecoterritory, despite a Quebec Cabinet Decree

A December 2005 Québec Cabinet decree proscribes the sale or swap of publicly-owned ecoterritory lands on Montreal Island. But despite the decree, with two votes at Montreal City Council and one at the Agglomeration Council, the city has approved the land-swap of publicly-owned Cheval Blanc ecoterritory lands for the large-scale housing project. Moreover, the city is fast-tracking these development plans for the ‘protected’ ecoterritory **without any prior public consultation whatsoever.**

Meeting date is hidden: Now, a public meeting to unveil the controversial residential development plan for Cheval Blanc is promised in the Pierrefonds/Roxboro borough in November. The borough refuses to confirm the meeting date that has been unofficially announced, then changed three times. Routinely, notice of such meetings is given just three days, sometimes two days prior to the meeting. Frustrated citizens fear that any public input they are now permitted to make will have little effect on a “fait accompli”.

Participatory democracy, Tremblay-style, distresses citizens. The visionary principles set out at the Montreal Summit and entrenched in the City’s Charter of Rights and Responsibilities are being compromised. **Bilan Priorities** to be adopted on November 1, call for meetings to “*spur citizen involvement in formulating a vision of the future of each ecoterritory, that takes the form of a concept development plan.*” But no such meetings have ever taken place about the Rapides du Cheval Blanc Ecoterritory. There is no ‘concept development plan’ for that ecoterritory, only residential development plans.

Great potential of the Natural Spaces policy will be lost unless the City administration changes course
The debacle over Cheval Blanc has hurt public confidence in the Natural Spaces policy. And, the city’s new priorities for the ecoterritories, to protect only about one-half the 1600 hectares set out in the policy are unacceptable. The Green Coalition urges the administration to quickly change course so that the laudable goals of the ‘*Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels*’ can be achieved.

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