

Local groups unite to save green space

'It's a desperate situation,' activists say

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More than 40 environmental groups have united to protect what's left of natural spaces in and around Montreal.

The goal is to reactivate a dormant project in which the Quebec government would create a Montreal Archipelago Ecological Park to conserve the area's maple-hickory forest domain and other natural areas.

The project would require the province to protect forests, flood plains, wetlands, natural corridors and islands from the Ontario and U.S. borders to Sorel. About 80 per cent of the area is urbanized or under cultivation.

"It's a desperate situation, and with 20 per cent left, we've got to act quickly," said David Fletcher, a Green Coalition activist and spokesman for the groups. "If these areas are not saved, all the plant and animal species that live there will not be saved." These include the brown snake, said to be unique to the area, the wild leek, the purple twayblade (a rare orchid), the western chorus frog, the map turtle, black maple and butternut trees, the red-shouldered hawk and the least bittern (a small heron).

The park would differ from traditional provincial parks that conserve land masses as natural refuges. Under the new concept, far-flung corridors around waterways would be protected, comprising about 12 per cent of the territory to be conserved.

That plan "disappeared" from the Liberal government's agenda with the departure of Thomas Mulcair from the environment portfolio, said Tommy Montpetit, another coalition spokesman.

The coalition urged cities and towns to act as well, and speakers lauded Longueuil for protecting 13 per cent of its land mass.

Mulcair, Outremont's newly elected MP, said he was stunned by ADQ leader Mario Dumont's insistence Sunday that the environment take a back seat to development. "He doesn't understand a thing about sustainable development."