



## **Green Coalition Brief**

**Re: REPORT 07 + 08**  
**WORKING DOCUMENT**

**POLICY ON THE PROTECTION AND  
ENHANCEMENT OF NATURAL HABITATS**

**May 6, 2009**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Green Coalition is a non-profit association of grassroots volunteers. Its member-groups and individual members are dedicated to the conservation, protection and restoration of the environment.

As the United Nations “**2010 Biodiversity Target**” rapidly approaches, with 2010 shaping up to be **World Biodiversity Year**, the Green Coalition salutes the City of Montreal for its important steps towards the protection and enhancement of its natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

**Montreal on the World Stage:** Our city has taken up a prominent role among the cities of the world to meet the growing challenges for biodiversity conservation. The Green Coalition urges the city to redouble its efforts to protect the last natural spaces in the ecoterritories, ecosystems of high ecological value that are still at risk of being lost to development. And the city is urged to follow the change Quebec has made to its conservation target, from 8% to 12% of its territory. With over 1000 ha in the ecoterritories still unprotected and available, clearly 12% is possible here. New funds will be essential.

The City of Montreal is encouraged to increase new conservation action now to offset the huge loss of rich habitats incurred during the long moratorium on natural space acquisition. It is not only the last opportunity to catch-up here at home, but also the last chance to emulate the outstanding conservation achievements of other world-class cities. In fulfilling this exciting challenge, the City of Montreal will win true prestige on the World Stage.

## **CONTEXT / BACKGROUND**

### **The Legacy of the Montreal Urban Community - 1614 ha or 3.2% of the territory**

Persistent lobbying by the Green Coalition persuaded the MUC to adopt its \$200 million **Green Space Acquisition and Aménagement Program** in 1989. New nature-parks were created and others enlarged, but a moratorium on all greenspace spending ended the program in 1992, leaving one-half the budget, \$100 million, unspent and many important sites unprotected. It must be noted that the MUC left an important legacy to Montrealers. In the nine large nature-parks the MUC created, 1614 hectares were conserved, a little more than 3% of the territory.

### **Moratorium is lifted and Natural Spaces Policy adopted**

In response to the Green Coalition’s call, Mayor Gérald Tremblay lifted the spending moratorium in May 2002. More than 1,000 hectares of forests on Montreal Island had been lost during the long hiatus in greenspace conservation. In December 2004, the City of Montreal adopted its natural spaces policy, the **Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels** with a \$36 million budget. At the inception of the policy, 1600 hectares of unprotected natural spaces were identified as available for conservation in the ecoterritories. The target of the new policy was to conserve 8 % of the territory; 6% in land ecoterritories and 2% in water ecoterritories. In 2005, as reported in the **May 2006 Bilan**, 110 ha were protected or 0.2% of the territory.

## **THE REPORT OR BILAN 07+08**

In the interest of transparency, credibility and clarity, the Bilan must provide specific, precise and complete information, including a financial statement. The *Politique* adopted in 2004, requires that a year-end report be given each year. Yearly accounting on the progress of the program is essential. Comprehensive information is needed in the Bilan as follows:

### **1: A list of sites in the ecoterritories that have been protected is needed**

The Bilan must provide a complete list of sites that have been protected in the ecoterritories. This list must be limited to sites where transactions have been finalized. The location and size in hectares of each site conserved should be recorded and maps included showing their precise limits and cadastral lots and/or *real world* coordinates. Specifics on the attributes of these sites as corridors for flora and fauna are also needed.

In the Working Document, it is claimed on page 7 that *“a total of 2473 ha have been accorded protection status, representing 5% of the total island land mass”*. Given the partial data provided in the document on the numbers of hectares conserved, it is impossible to add up the figures to verify the 2473 total ha claimed to have been protected. The numbers barely add up to 300 ha. (MUC contributed 1614 ha, 3.2% of the 2473 total.)

At the information session April 15, additional data was given. The city claimed that since the adoption of the policy, 430 ha have been protected in the ecoterritories; and 427 ha in existing parks. But only 285 of the 430 ha can be counted as protected now; 145 ha in ecoterritories are still in transaction and belong in next year's Bilan, if finalized. The 285 ha conserved in ecoterritories to date is well short of an increase of 1%. (1 percentage point equals 500 ha) And, the total 712 ha protected in ecoterritories and existing parks is short of an increase of the 1.8% or 885 ha needed to achieve the 5% claimed by the city.

### **2: A list of natural sites in existing parks is missing**

In the Working Document, there is no data on natural sites in existing parks, not their size, nor their location. This lack of a complete official inventory is unacceptable. It is not stated if these sites are the minimum 15 ha in size nor if they qualify as corridors for flora and fauna to meet the criteria of the *Politique*. This information is needed now.

At the information session April 15, it was stated that 427 ha in existing parks will be included in the total of hectares being accorded protection status and that 200 more ha from such parks might be added later. It was claimed that it is difficult to compile a list of these sites in existing parks, but that such a list might become part of a Repertoire of all the protected natural areas on the island at some unspecified future date. This is needed now.

Green Coalition insists that priority action and funds of the *Politique* must go to the protection the last natural green spaces in the ecoterritories. These ecosystems at risk must not be sacrificed for those that are already protected in long-established parks. Ecological management and enhancement of natural sites in existing parks and elsewhere in the community is entirely appropriate. The Bilan should give details on how the ecological management will be conducted and funded. Funds for this purpose must come from sources other than the limited *Politique* budget.

### **3: A list of future sites to be protected in ecoterritories is needed**

The Bilan gives no specifics on new conservation to be undertaken in ecoterritories in 2009-2010 and beyond.

**Over 1000 ha still available:** At the inception of the policy, 1600 hectares of unprotected natural spaces of high ecological value were considered worthy of conservation in the ecoterritories. With 430 ha conserved to date (actual gains and transactions in progress) it is clear that there is ample potential for new conservation in the ecoterritories. Over 1000 ha more are still available in the ecoterritories – offering the potential to boost the city’s new conservation by at least 2% of the island territory. (One percentage point equals 500 ha. For reference, Parc Mont-Royal covers approximately 200 ha.)

#### **Meadowbrook – the eleventh ecoterritory:**

Following hearings in all corners of the city on the *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels* in 2004, the Office de consultation publique de Montréal recommended adding *Meadowbrook and its Little Saint-Pierre River* as the eleventh ecoterritory. Meadowbrook is an invaluable urban green space, offering great potential for renaturalization in the context of this policy. Being the only sizable green space biomass between Mont-Royal and the West Island, Meadowbrook must be included. With the capacity to serve a large, diverse population, Meadowbrook linked with the Falaise Saint-Jacques, must be conserved so that it may become the keystone piece of the *Trame Verte du sud-ouest*. Note that the Green Coalition called for Meadowbrook to be included in the Montreal Urban Community's Green Space Acquisition Program in 1989. Its omission then must be rectified now.

### **4: Financial Statement - essential**

There is no mention of finances in the Bilan. Montrealers deserve a detailed accounting of how and where their tax dollars are being invested to protect their natural heritage. A breakdown of the financial status of the *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels*, including how much has been spent on each acquisition, is essential to the Bilan.

At the information session April 15, it was stated that \$30 million of the original \$36 million budget has been spent. It was also stated that \$29 million was spent. It should be made clear which is the correct figure.

### **5: Protection Status - Clarification required**

It is stated in the Bilan on page 7 that “*a total of 2473 ha have been accorded protection status,...*” The Bilan must define what specific “*protection status*” has been conferred and if all these 2473 ha are now protected in perpetuity by legal and binding mechanisms.

On page 15 of the Bilan, there is a contradiction. It states that “*the City is considering according formal protection status to certain existing parks*”. It is therefore unclear if “*a total of 2473 ha*” has really been protected or if only part of the total 2473 ha has accorded protection status; and where these protected hectares might be. The Bilan must clarify this contradiction.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

### **1: Biodiversity losses continue**

The Bilan speaks of “*halting the annual loss of several dozens of woodlands ...*” Not so. During the years of the Tremblay administration, habitat and biodiversity loss continues. Eastern and western portions of the riverside ecoterritory, *Les rapides du Cheval Blanc* have been sacrificed to large residential developments; the southern reaches of *La coulee verte du ruisseau Bertrand* are being carved away at Golf Dorval; a significant part of the *Bois-de-Saraguay*, previously the Gordon family property, is now a deluxe housing development; at *Ruisseau de Montigny*, clear-cutting of woodlands was witnessed close to the stream; at *Les rapides de Lachine* ecoterritory more towers are planned for Île des Soeurs that will impede avian flyways and block vistas to and from Mont-Royal. Incursions in parks are adding up. For example, the expansion of McGill stadium at Mont-Royal and the Tennis facilities at Parc Jarry and building in local parks like Benny Park in NDG, Congregation Park in Point St. Charles, Pierrefonds’ A-Ma-Baie Park and Parc René-Masson in Rivière des Prairies. And now, the news that Dupuis and Rutherford Parks will close. Countless woodland patches, small and large, continue to be clear-cut for parking lots and development.

### **Dezoning Agricultural land in Pierrefonds and Île Bizard is unconscionable**

Wisdom for the New Millennium calls for the protection of food lands in and around urban centres. With world food shortages looming and increasing energy costs with Peak Oil, farming close to markets makes sense, eliminating long-haul GHG emissions that contribute to global warming. Montreal’s excellent farmlands are Quebec’s finest. The island micro-climate, surrounded by waterways, provides the longest frost-free growing season and can produce bumper harvests. The farmlands are ecologically valuable in their own right, providing habitat for animal and bird species – many in severe decline. That the City of Montreal has permitted the dezoning of over 200 ha of prime farmland in western Pierrefonds and more in Ile Bizard is unconscionable. This runs counter to the spirit of the city’s own ***Sustainable Development Policy***. (In 1991, the Green Coalition opposed the dezoning of 700 ha of Montreal’s prime farmland.)

### **2: Inspiring initiatives – Citizens participate**

The participation of local citizens, along with *Conseil Régional de l’environnement de Montréal* and *Comité ZIP Jacques-Cartier* has brought about the creation of the concept plan for the East Island Greenbelt, focusing on nature and water. The work of the Table de Concertation du Mont Royal, including *Les amis de la montagne*, *Conseil Régional de l’environnement de Montréal* and *Héritage Montréal* has led to the signing of the *Pacte patrimonial du mont Royal* that can help ensure the mountain’s protection while achieving major increases in its biodiversity. Especially inspiring is the work of a group of Ile Bizard residents commissioned to study the concept plan for conservation on that island. The citizens have initiated a *projet de paysage humanisé* to celebrate the island’s pastoral culture and a unique plan to revive farming practice on Ile Bizard. Plans are evolving for a major *Conservation Park* stretching from Angell Woods to Lake of Two Mountains in the watershed of Montreal’s only inland river, the Rivière à l’Orme. For local groups involved in Anse à l’Orme conservation efforts and for all Montrealers, this is an exciting prospect.

## **CONCLUSION**

Let's recall the campaign slogan of Mayor Gérald Tremblay, as he sought his first electoral mandate, **“What's green will stay green!”**

There are still over 1000 hectares of unprotected natural space in the island's ecoterritories that remain at risk, offering the city plenty of scope to protect more of its biodiversity and to keep pace with the conservation achievements of other world-class cities. The Green Coalition urges the City of Montreal to match and surpass the numbers of “recycled” hectares being protected in existing parks with additional new conservation of natural spaces of high ecological quality in the ecoterritories. And, of course, Meadowbrook must be protected as an integral part of the Trame Verte du sud-ouest.

Quebec has raised the bar. The government's conservation target is no longer 8%, but has moved to 12% of its territory. May the City of Montreal follow this example so that more of our Island **can truly stay green!**

### **A Greenbelt for Montreal and southwestern Quebec:**

In closing, the Green Coalition appeals to the City of Montreal to take a leadership role in the creation of the *Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal*. More than sixty organizations have joined in partnership to save *a minimum of 12%* of the maple-hickory forest domain (‘domaine de l'érable à caryer’) that stretches from the Lower Laurentians to the US border and from Sûroit to Sorel. This ecological domain has the greatest biodiversity in all of Québec, but its unique species and habitats are in danger of being lost to urban development. The goal of this innovative project is to create a greenbelt for Montreal and southwestern Quebec - a greenbelt of forests and floodplains, wetlands and islands linked together by green corridors and streams, and the great rivers of south-western Québec (‘le Québec méridional’).

Certainly, the Metropolis, verdant and revitalized, will be the heart of the *Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal*. Imagine! The Island of Montreal, with ecosystems and ecoterritories protected, parklands and degraded sites renaturalized, with streams, shorelines and beaches reclaimed, and then woven together by green corridors for the mobility of animals and the regeneration of native plants. All providing more access for Montrealers to the rich and biologically diverse environment that surrounds them.

Presented by David Fletcher  
Text by Sylvia Oljemark  
Spokespersons for Green Coalition  
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[www.greencoalitionverte.ca](http://www.greencoalitionverte.ca)