

l'Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM)

**Establishing A Falaise St. Jacques Nature Park With A Future
Meadowbrook Nature Park To Complete The Project**

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Executive Summary

Many Montreal residents and supporters for the protection of existing green spaces and the creation of new ones, are extremely pleased with the City of Montreal's proposed Falaise St. Jacques Nature Park and appreciate the initiative to give Montrealers a new park which combines a massive hillside forest area and restores green space lost due to centuries of industrial development, a rail yard and mainline track, and the building of a major highway (Highway 20) that carries a massive amount of traffic daily.

While having the new park is excellent, it is only a partial solution to an even bigger problem. The city also needs to convert the 57-hectare Meadowbrook golf course residential into a nature park. The golf course, currently safe from development, is only accessible to golfers from spring to fall. Converting it into a municipal park would create a wilderness/green space that could easily serve several hundred thousands of people living in the boroughs of CDN/NDG, Lachine, Verdun, and LaSalle; and the residents of Cote Saint Luc, Montreal West, Hampstead, and Westmount.

The golf course, which lays between Lachine and Cote Saint Luc, is a perfect place to establish a nature park that people could enjoy year-round and provides an opportunity to re-wild the area with a variety of native trees, plants, and shrubs, and create a safe habitat for a great diversity of native birds, animals, reptiles, and insects that are declining in numbers due to non-stop development that encroaches upon our remaining wilderness, wetlands, and green spaces, as well as former farm land on the island.

Much of the wildlife that can be seen at Meadowbrook, also utilize the forest at the escarpment and vice-versa. When both areas are fully restored and rewilded, we can expect an explosion of life and greater protection for our threatened biodiversity in the greater Montreal area.

A St. Jacques Park will give immediate access to 80,000 plus NDG and Snowden residents to an immense wilderness and without question, lift some of the pressure on Mount Royal Park which is visited by too many people and the impacts of that are illustrated daily. A Meadowbrook nature will have the same impact.

While both wilderness/green spaces are physically separated, they are linked via a railway corridor, which animals use daily and seasonally. Commercial, industrial, and residential development prevents the creation of a green corridor to link both areas, however, a simple solution is to layout a route/path, similar to the one linking Mount Royal to the Old Port – one that can be used by pedestrians and cyclists.

The forest at the escarpment, as is well known, has greatly suffered and endured decades of neglect and ever-present threats to its very existence through pollution, the ongoing construction of the Turcot Interchange, and no legal protection whatsoever. Currently, the forest is an ecoterritory, which gives it no official status and it can be damaged at will. With the recognition

of the two large areas as official nature parks, Montreal and the municipalities that form the Agglomeration Council, can take a major step forward to support and protect threatened biodiversity, create more green space and wilderness to be enjoyed year-round, and give the City of Montreal a much more thorough and strengthened network of parks and natural areas which are becoming rarer and of greater importance to all.

The new St. Jacques park also gives us a unique opportunity to restore Lac à l'ouest, also referred to as Lac St-Pierre, that was formed by water flowing west via the St-Pierre River. The Turcot section of the park wants to place a lake in the green space on the former Turcot Yard. This lake can eventually be fully maintained with water of the St. Pierre River, and gives the city a perfect opportunity to "daylight" another section of the St. Pierre, that in practical terms has been buried through the installation of underground water infrastructure. The sole open section of the river – 200 meters, is found at Meadowbrook.

The need for the St. Jacques park is no secret and groups such as Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook, Sauvons la falaise and the Green Coalition fully support the park project. Citizens want this park and have made that crystal clear. Thus the City of Montreal can fully depend on the active assistance of many to create both parks, which will reap immediate and long-term benefits.

Introduction

The city's desire to establish a Falaise St. Jacques Nature Park that will unite 70 plus hectares of forest and restored lands occupied by the former Turcot Rail Yards, has been met with great fanfare and thumbs up by thousands of people and this reflected in the active interest in the OCPM hearings, on-line surveys, and those who will present at the upcoming OCPM hearings. These people want to see the city do all that is possible to protect as much wilderness, wetlands, green spaces, and former farmland from development that remains. Creating the new nature park, which must include the forested escarpment area – we have since learned that this area was dropped from the park proposal – is a given. The forest and its flora and fauna, which in many cases are barely hanging on, need protection and help to thrive and multiply.

Many in their appreciation of the project, particularly as the forest was part of the proposal, have expressed their concerns for the need to protect the existing forests and wetlands of the escarpment, which is a critical home for the endangered Brown Snake that is losing habitat across the region due to development, as well as threatened and endangered species of birds and plants. This forest is also home to many common species of animals, birds, reptiles, and insects that are also losing ground and numbers. Just a few years ago, one or several deer, had been spotted living in the forest. They made their way there via the railway corridor.

Restoring the escarpment forest and rewilding the Turcot section's green space

The terrible damage that the escarpment forest ecosystem has suffered is serious. For decades, businesses along the border of the escarpment, have been dumping worn tires, various used oils, a plethora of construction materials, many types of trash, and other items at the top of the hill. This is bad enough, but the impacts are multiplied as this material can be found along many sections of the forest and over the years, the materials spreads throughout the forest due to gravity and being moved by melting snow. This damage not only affects the ground, but the forest itself – a healthy and strong forest prevents erosion and ensures the topsoil remains. The loss of individual trees and sections of forest results in landslides and a weak ecosystem.

The damage created due to the Turcot Interchange project has resulted in many hectares of forest being clear-cut (including many rare wild plum trees that provided a food source for many birds and mammals), the loss of the marshes at the bottom of the escarpment that were completely covered up with construction debris (thus wiping out self-sustaining ecosystems and the life within them), as well as large and major sections at the bottom of the hill where construction debris was dumped willy-nilly; and as noted, the decades of neglect that has weakened the ecosystem as a whole.

A major and sustained effort is required to restore the ecosystem, which must include removing invasive species of trees, plants and other flora, and to plant the hillside with a serious amount of native trees to prevent additional erosion and create much needed habitat to support a wide variety of birds, animals, and insects that are found there now, and to establish the necessary conditions to bring back biodiversity that had driven from it in the past.

This is no easy task, but a restoration is doable and people will volunteer to help in that effort through their expertise, physical labor, and donations to acquire seeds, trees, and necessary materials. Funding can also be secured from the federal and provincial governments for these efforts, and the provincial park system is an excellent source of seeds and mature trees and plants that can be relocated to the escarpment forest.

The former Turcot Yard area has been seriously impacted by many types of pollution from decades of rail operations. The land for this section of the park must be fully cleaned up, and following that, be restored as a thriving forest and natural green space. This is also difficult, but can be done. The view of having a minimum of 75 percent of the site dedicated to forest and fields should be altered to 100-percent. The lake will provide an excellent habitat for birds and fish. The forests should consist of native trees and the fields planted with native grasses, shrubs and bushes. A large forest will help absorb the GHG emissions generated by cars and industry, and a tree barrier along the Turcot section's borders can easily be planted, along with hedges. This will also help reduce the noise from the cars, trucks, and trains.

As was noted by ongoing OCPM surveys, 75 percent plus of respondents are calling for the Turcot section to be fully devoted to forests and natural fields with a variety of flora. An area between a highway and mainline rail lines is not an ideal location to play sports such as soccer

and baseball. Nor is a parking lot necessary as this section of the park can be accessed with public transit and those getting there by bike and foot.

It is absolutely necessary to fill the area with native flora, which benefits wildlife and gives people an opportunity to see the unique biodiversity of our area. Without question, a sizeable section of the area can easily be allotted to create a pollinator garden where milkweed and other plants can be planted to support the Monarch Butterfly (our city is at the northern tip of the butterfly's range), hummingbirds, various species of bees, and other insects that have seen their populations plummet. Bee hives can easily be placed in both sections of the new park.

The park's chalet, which should be placed in the Turcot section of the park, can easily be designed to blend in with the natural area. The chalet, not too large, can include washrooms; a kiosk with information about the park, its biodiversity, and a history of the area; and provide a place to relax and rest. The paths in this section of the park should be natural – there is no need to use concrete. For the escarpment section, information boards can be placed along the paths about the wildlife and trees in the area, include maps, and explain why much of the park is off-limits to people and how the area is one where nature is restoring itself.

The green area at the bottom of the escarpment - between the bike path and the railway track, should not have any grass and instead be filled with pollinator-friendly plants, clover, and other species that can survive with minimal watering - there is no need for the use of lawnmowers and leaf blowers. The wetlands at the bottom of the hillside, which have been covered up, definitely must be restored with native vegetation, reptiles, and amphibians that had resided there before the damage. We know what was there and we have the expertise to restore the damage.

Building the Dalle Park and creating safe access points for the park

The Turcot section is located between the relocated mainline rail tracks/several lanes of Highway 20 and Notre Dame Street – home to many large and medium-sized businesses located on the south side of the busy road, complete with constant traffic moving rapidly throughout the day. This generates a fair amount of pollution, constant noise and vibrations, especially via the trains; and as it is today, there are few points for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the street.

Thus the need to build the Dalle Park – a bridge dedicated for pedestrians and cyclists, which would link the southern end of Cavendish Boulevard and the Lachine Canal. People would walk down the hill along a path, which will start in the area separating the Provigo store and Rose Bowl bowling alley. The bridge will have one segment spanning the rail tracks and highway and the other above Notre Dame. The bridge, when built, would link the Southwest and CDN/NDG boroughs, as well as provide an access point to the Lachine Canal where people can turn onto the bike path along it or walk along the canal and use the green space along this historic canal. Right now, NDG and West End residents that want to access the Lachine Canal bike path, either have to cycle to the Glenn underpass in Westmount or go to Ville St. Pierre and pass through an

underpass, which is considered as dangerous for cyclists due to the non-stop traffic, which includes many trucks. Several years ago, a cyclist was hit by a truck and killed.

Because Notre Dame is busy, several crossings are required to safely access this section of the park with traffic signal which give people sufficient time to cross. The escarpment hillside, off of St. Jacques also needs entry points. Obviously there will be one at Cavendish, and others can be established at Terry Fox Park and near the Super C grocery store. The nearly four kilometer-long bike path at the bottom of the hill has an entry point in Montreal West and a similar entrance will be needed at the eastern end, close to the Decarie Expressway.

Access for bicycles along St. Jacques should be limited to the Cavendish entrance, and no mountain biking trails should ever be developed. Mountain biking must be banned, and anyone caught doing it should immediately be given stiff fine, including losing demerit points on their driver's license. The damage caused by these cycling enthusiasts at Mount Royal Park is well documented, and they continue to inflict serious damage on the fragile mountain ecosystem. The hiking trails for the escarpment should be natural and six feet in length at most. Smaller, but limited distance trails can be placed along the main trails with signs warning visitors to not step off them in order to help the areas recovering from decades of damage and neglect.

Dogs can be allowed in the park, but they must be on leashes. During the nesting season and periods when the chicks are fledgling, dogs should be banned to protect them. Feral cats pose major problems for wildlife and strict rules are needed to prevent people from feeding them in the park. Efforts can also be initiated to eliminate feral cats from the escarpment.

Trails in the Turcot section should be designed to maximize an appreciation of the park – its purpose and beauty. This section, clearly, will be more accessible and can incorporate the best practices of park designs from Europe, North America, and Asia. A design concept can be found that will allow people and wildlife to successfully live together. In addition to native flora, this section of the park should have bird and bat boxes, bird feeders, etc. The lake can contain islands to give ducks and geese a safe place to establish nests, and be stocked with fish, crayfish, and frogs to encourage visits by Great Blue Herons and other birds that use them as a food source

The Turcot section lake and daylighting a portion of the St. Pierre River

As to whether the lake is filled by rain water or fed by the St. Pierre River, this will be determined as the park's plan are developed and finalized. This area was the site of Lac à l'ouest, which was filled with water from the St-Pierre. The lake was utilized by First Nations peoples' as a major transportation link and hub. The river was one of the prime reasons why Ville St. Pierre had been settled in the early 1700s. Unfortunately, the lake had dried up due to the construction of the Lachine Canal, which had drained its waters and the installation of the St-Pierre collector, which currently runs beneath the site.

The current plan imply that the water for the small lake will be sourced through stormwater drainage from the surface of the site. Many are urging that the city and its engineers use this opportunity to consider an alternative solution.

Due to concerns about for climate-change-related flooding, cities across the globe are redesigning their current drainage systems. Montreal should join this group, particularly as the city will likely have no choice in the way it overseas stormwater and the many rivers that have been capped and buried as storm drains. Sections of these “lost rivers” can be daylighted and become natural areas for all to enjoy.

The St-Pierre River can set an example for other areas of the island. Collector water for the lake is literally a few kilometers away from where the storm drain and the sewer drain in Lachine become one. Right now the city has initiated a major restoration and refurbishment of its aging underground water infrastructure system. Should the city choose to, separate storm and sewer mains can be installed and clean water from the St. Pierre can be veered to the proposed lake, which would allow biodiversity to thrive, and help with flood mitigation and bioremediation.

This can be done in stages, and according to experts, this could start with a smaller lake for runoff with room to grow when the necessary collector renovations take place. Having a large and natural lake would give the park a unique feature, and attract wildlife and visitors. It will also create stronger connections with a Meadowbrook Nature Park. Birds living and nesting in Meadowbrook, as well as in NDG and the Southwest borough, will benefit from the lake and its fish and insects.

Protecting the escarpment forest from pollution and garbage

The hillside section of the park requires effective protection from those, presumably businesses that border the forest, who have been regularly throwing trash into the forest. As noted, this illegal dumping includes tires, various used oils, construction waste, various types of trash, etc. To prevent further assaults on the ecosystem, the city should install a fence – an eight-foot tall wooden one, along the border zone between the businesses and the ecoterritory. Either the businesses or city pay 100 percent of the cost or a funding formula is agreed upon.

Wildlife needs access to the adjacent areas, which means entry points can be placed under the fence to allow free movement. Such a barrier would also prevent the illegal cutting down of trees, as was the case several years ago when the Lincoln dealership cut down a large swath of trees in an attempt to place a large business sign.

The top of the escarpment sits in NDG, while the slope is in Southwest Borough territory. The proposed park, which must include the escarpment section, should come under the jurisdiction of the city’s park department and that department should have the authority to call on inspectors from the city itself or both boroughs to inspect border area and issue fines when violations are

discovered. The fence should be installed as soon as possible, whether there is a park or not. Cameras can be installed to monitor the barrier.

Construction companies involved in the ministry of transport's Turcot project did their fair amount of destruction via the cutting of trees, filling in of marshes, and the dumping of waste in the lower portion of the forest – too often with the consent of the ministry. A remediation fund should be created with monies collected from the construction companies and the ministry to cover the cost of remediation of the forest.

The escarpment's biodiversity – protecting it and restoring it

A comprehensive survey of the animal, plant, and insect life that reside in the escarpment must be conducted. A population of endangered Brown Snakes resides there, as well as the threatened Chimney Swift and Wood Thrush, and a serious survey conducted in 2007 helped to determine the extent of the forest's biodiversity. Thousands of crows living in the West End often roost in the forest.

More than 65 species of birds, in recent surveys, have been identified. These birds include the Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, Ravens, various Warblers, the Red Shouldered Hawk, White Throated Sparrow, White Crowned Sparrow, Baltimore orioles, and the Pileated Woodpecker.

The forest contains two threatened bird species – the Chimney Swift and Wood Thrush, both on the COSEWIC list (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). It also has over 100 species of plants, including two that are at risk – the hackberry (micocoulier) and the ostrich fern (Matteuccie fougère-à-l'autruche d'Amérique).

As part of an official nature park, efforts can be taken to strengthen the habitat for the Brown Snakes and increase their numbers, with the possibility of relocating some in the future to areas where they are now locally extinct. For the two species of plants, seeds can be planted in other parts of the park and they can also be cultivated for relocations to other areas.

The sections of the park where these endangered species are located must be off-limits to the public, save for researchers and naturalists studying them and participating in the conservation efforts.

Here are the links for the surveys conducted in 2007:

- http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P98/3.8.1_2007vegetationfalaisestjacques.pdf
- http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P98/3.8.2_2007herpetofaunefalaisestjacques.pdf

- http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P98/3.8.3_2007avifaunefalaisestjacques.pdf

With our knowledge of what was there in the past and today, initiatives can be taken to restore species and create habitats that they need to survive and thrive. For example, First Nations peoples, to reduce the numbers of mosquitoes and other insects, actively encouraged Purple Martins to nest in their villages. Purple Martin houses, which can serve several families, are found along the Lachine Canal.

The presence of First Nations peoples' is well documented and their representatives should be invited to participate in the planning of the park and its design. Environmental groups, flora and fauna specialists, wildlife experts, green space and wilderness park designers, and others should also be invited to participate in the planning. No doubt many will offer their services pro bono, and be very pleased to provide advice to maximize the goals of the park.

Hedges and hedgerows can be planted to provide shelter and nesting sites for birds and small mammals. The park can easily become a refuge for native plants and trees, and seeds collected from them can be planted at other municipal parks. The lost plum trees need to be replaced.

Establishing caves that only bats can access, where they can safely roost year-round and rear their pups, are needed. Nesting platforms can also be placed to attract raptors to set up residence in the park.

Creating a park users committee

When established, a park users committee should be established with a membership that brings together community and environmental groups, individual citizens, and municipal park department employees to oversee and manage the park. A committee such as this would be extremely useful to develop programs and to help create a variety of initiatives to bring in volunteers to help plant trees, wild flowers, and native bushes and shrubs, take part in clean-ups, collect seeds, participate in bird and animal counts and surveys, and the installation of birdhouses and bat boxes.

The park will easily become a well-used wilderness laboratory for local schools that will provide a place to study nature and wildlife, and develop an appreciation bolster the protection of natural spaces and biodiversity, which are under serious threats across the globe. This is a perfect opportunity to stress the need to act locally and think globally.

The proposed falaise park and having a Meadowbrook nature park

As stressed earlier, creating the Falaise-Turcot nature park is a great first step, but it is incomplete without having a 57-hectare Meadowbrook nature park. Proponents of a Meadowbrook nature park have long linked the escarpment wilderness to it. Hence, the call by many for a Meadowbrook nature park in briefs.

The golf course sits on the territories of Lachine and Cote Saint Luc, with each having about 50 percent in their jurisdictions. Converting the golf course into a nature park would permit the park to be used year-round for activities such as hiking, bird watching, snowshoeing, and cross-country-skiing. The green space be rewilded with native trees and assorted flora, and become a large nursery for native plants to help many species survive and be transplanted to former area where they have thrived and are now extinct locally. And like the escarpment forest, Meadowbrook can become a serious wildlife refuge for birds, animals, reptiles, and insects. Meadowbrook, like the escarpment is part of the migration route for many birds. And like the lake for the Turcot section, should it be fed with water from the St. Pierre River, an extended Meadowbrook river network and lake and pond system can be established.

When nature is given a chance to repair and rebuild, positive things can happen and humans can aid in the process to have the repairs occurs more rapidly, which is a win-win for all.

As noted, having the two nature parks would reduce the number of visitors to Mount Royal, thus relieving pressure on the park and its ecosystem and reducing the number of cars travelling across the city to reach it.

While Meadowbrook and the escarpment are not physically connected, wildlife has found its way to access and utilize both sites. Montrealers and tourists use the mountain to the river path, following the signs. Such a route can be established for the path linking both nature parks, assuming the province's ministry of transportation cedes the Turcot lands to the city and Meadowbrook becomes public property. The path can take people thorough a variety of neighbourhoods by car, bike, and foot; and signs can be designed to highlight the parks.

Many citizens and elected officials recognize the need to preserve and conserve our remaining wilderness, green space, wetlands, and farmland. The administration of Mayor Valerie Plante is acting on this dossier by purchasing threatened wilderness and green space in the West Island as part of its initiative to create the national urban nature park that would incorporate Angell Woods, all 365 hectares of L'Anse a l'Orme, threatened forests and fields in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, and the Morgan Arboretum, as well as saving the green space that forms the Anjou golf course and attaching it to an existing park.

Conclusion

Creating the Falaise St. Jacques Nature Park is welcomed and necessary, and fits in with the view of CDN/NDG Mayor Sue Montgomery, who has publicly stated that NDG does not have enough green space. Having the escarpment forest will make a great deal of difference for NDG/Snowden and Southwest borough residents. Walking in the forest is a pleasant experience and it allows people to experience nature and wildlife.

The Turcot section of the park creates a new green space and a lake can allow for many activities to be enjoyed. Having the Dalle Park connects the CDN/NDG and Southwest boroughs, which is

very positive and creates more a more rapid and convenient access to the Lachine Canal bike path. Of course, having the new nature park does permit for the creation a new green space and protects a forest that needs to be revitalized. This park initiative, as stressed, gives us an opportunity to create a lake and daylight a lost section of the St. Pierre River.

Despite its protected status, Meadowbrook remains a golf course and is only used by golfers. From the beginning of November to spring, it is closed and cannot be used for winter sports activities. The escarpment still is designated as an ecoterritory and does not have the protective status of a nature park and all that it entails. We are lucky that the escarpment forest is still with us and that it harbors the biodiversity it contains.

Creating the new park St. Jacques-Turcot Park is a formidable task, but is quite doable, as is the creation of a Meadowbrook nature park. We can do both to enhance the quality of life for Montreal island residents and to protect and enhance out threatened biodiversity. We have the opportunity, resources, will, and public support to not only create these two nature parks, but take effective actions across the island and off-island to say in a clear way that preserving our remaining green spaces/wilderness area and biodiversity is important, and that we have do all we can to achieve that much vaunted and spoken of goal to have 17 percent of the island of Montreal as natural green areas and wilderness. We can do this and when we succeed in achieving this goal, future generations will thank us for acting on their behalf.

Appendix 1

The results of the 2007 surveys of the animals, birds, and plants that were found on the falaise/escarpment:

http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P98/3.8.1_2007vegetationfalaisestjacques.pdf

http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P98/3.8.2_2007herpetofaunefalaisestjacques.pdf

http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P98/3.8.3_2007avifaunefalaisestjacques.pdf