

L'Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM)

Our Vision and Suggestions for the Proposed

Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park

By

Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook

lesamisdemeadowbrook.org

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Executive Summary

Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook (Les Amis) fully supports the creation of the proposed Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park and applauds the City of Montreal for its initiative to give Montrealers a new park combining an existing large hillside forest, the Falaise Saint-Jacques, and space left over from the reconstruction of the Turcot interchange.

Les Amis was founded 29 years ago to protect the 57-hectare Meadowbrook golf course from residential development and have it converted into a nature park to serve hundreds of thousands of Montrealers living in the CDN/NDG, Lachine, Verdun and LaSalle boroughs and the residents of Côte Saint-Luc, Montreal West, Hampstead and Westmount.

The Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park would help relieve pressure on the already-overused Mount Royal Park. A similar park at nearby Meadowbrook would do the same. Both would decrease vehicular traffic across CDN/NDG, lower GHG emissions and improve overall traffic flow.

A Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park is needed, as is a Meadowbrook Park, and although they are not contiguous, they are interconnected: wildlife use both areas. The existing railway corridor provides a link for animals to travel between the two sites. And while commercial, industrial and residential development have made it impossible to create a green corridor linking the sites, it is possible to create a bicycle and pedestrian path similar to the one linking the mountain to the Old Port.

Zoning already protects Meadowbrook from development, although use is restricted to golfers, and it is open only about five months a year. The nearby forested escarpment of the Falaise Saint-Jacques, on the other hand, has suffered decades of neglect and ongoing threats by pollution and construction of the new Turcot Interchange. Right now it is a designated eco-territory with no specific protection. If both parcels were fully designated nature parks, Montreal could create protected areas to preserve threatened biodiversity, provide green space and wilderness for many Montrealers to enjoy and give the City a more comprehensive and stronger system of parks and natural areas.

The Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park would also provide an opportunity to highlight the history of the bygone Lac à la Loutre, also known as Lac Saint-Pierre, which was fed from the west by the St. Pierre River. The official plan for the Turcot section of the park calls for the creation of a lake. This is appreciated and is an interesting way to daylight another section of the St. Pierre which has essentially been buried. One of the few remaining open sections of the river is found in Meadowbrook.

The City knows that it can depend on Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook and other environmental groups such as Sauvons la falaise to assist in every possible way to create these parks and meet its goal of maximizing wilderness and green spaces.

Introduction

The City of Montreal's determination to create a Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park that brings together the forested Falaise Saint-Jacques —currently designated as an Eco-territory—and the former Turcot Rail Yards is applauded by Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook and other environmental groups as well as thousands of residents from the CDN/NDG and Southwest boroughs, and residents from across the island who want the City to protect wilderness, wetlands, green spaces and former farmland from development as much as possible.

The lands occupied by the former Turcot Yards were the site of major rail operations for decades and have felt the impact of various types of pollution from those operations. They need to be cleaned up and restored to forest and natural space. The plan to dedicate a minimum of 75 percent of the site to nature, with a large lake, forested areas (native trees) and fields with native grasses, shrubs and bushes, is excellent. A real forest could help absorb vehicular emissions, and a wall of trees could be planted along the borders of the Turcot section to mitigate noise.

According to OCPM surveys, the majority of the Turcot section should be devoted to forests and green spaces; this is not an ideal location for soccer and baseball fields or a parking lot. Ideally, the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park should be accessed by public transit, by bicycle and on foot.

Native species of plants, shrubs and bushes should be planted for the benefit of wildlife and people. A significant area should be set aside for a pollinator garden where milkweed and other plants can help sustain the Monarch Butterfly (Montreal is at the northern tip of its range), hummingbirds, native bees and other insects. Hives could be placed in the park, and honey and royal jelly could be harvested and sold at the park chalet, which should be designed to blend in with the Turcot section of the park.

The chalet—it should not be too large—would include washrooms and information about the park and its biodiversity and provide a place to relax. Bicycle racks could be placed outside it, and the paths leading to it should be natural, with no concrete whatsoever.

The need for the Dalle Parc and safe access to Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park

Several problems arise from the fact that the Turcot section of the park lies between the relocated mainline rail tracks, six lanes of Highway 20 and Notre Dame Street, which carries a heavy volume of traffic. These include a large amount of pollution generated by cars, trucks and trains; constant noise and vibration; and limited access for pedestrians and cyclists. Notre Dame is a busy street, and several entrances will be needed to access this part of the park, with crossings, complete with traffic signals, to allow ample time to cross the thoroughfare.

Hence the need for the Dalle Parc, the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists, that would cross the rail tracks and highway. The bridge would create an access point to the new park, connecting the Southwest and CDN/NDG boroughs and an additional access point to the Lachine Canal, where pedestrians and cyclists could take the bicycle path and enjoy the green space along the historic canal.

Trails in the Turcot section of the park should provide an opportunity to appreciate the park's beauty and purpose. This section would be more accessible; based on the designs of many parks in Europe and North America, a concept can be developed to allow people and wildlife to co-exist successfully. This section of the park should have native trees, a variety of berry bushes and shrubs, bird and bat boxes, bird feeders, etc.

The possibility of daylighting a section of the St. Pierre River

As we know, the Turcot yards were the site of Lac à la Loutre, also called Lac Saint-Pierre, which was fed from the west by the St. Pierre River. The lake was a major transportation link for First Nations peoples and, along with the river, was one of the main reasons that Ville Saint-Pierre was settled in the early 18th century. The lake dried up with the construction of the Lachine Canal and the St. Pierre collector, which still runs beneath the site (*see maps in Appendix 1*).

The current plans suggest a small lake that would be fed by storm drainage from the surface of the site, part of an initiative to re-naturalize the area and reduce the amount of

water going into the collector. This is a great initiative. At the same time, we urge the city to take the opportunity to create a grander plan.

Like many cities with old drainage systems confronting the potential for climate-change-related flooding, Montreal will, in the next few years, have to seriously rethink the way it manages storm water, potentially bringing much more of it to the surface, or daylighting old rivers. The St. Pierre is a perfect candidate for this. Collector water here is only a few kilometers from the spot where the storm and sewer drains are joined in Lachine. If in the next few years the City cleans up the cross-connected sewers, the storm water the collector currently carries could be brought back to the surface to feed a larger lake here, with all of the advantages of a lake (biodiversity, flood mitigation, bioremediation).

This could potentially be considered in stages, starting with a smaller lake for runoff but with room to grow when the necessary collector renovations take place. A large natural lake in this area would make this a truly special park and a major attraction for wildlife and visitors, and would create an even stronger connection with the nearby Meadowbrook Park (currently a golf course) where one of the last remnants of the St. Pierre River currently runs.

Protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of the Falaise

This new nature park cannot be created without taking a serious look at its only existing natural component, the Falaise Saint-Jacques. The forested Falaise Saint-Jacques has suffered decades of neglect and ongoing threats to its existence through pollution and the construction of the new Turcot Interchange. It is a miracle that it survives as it is and that it has such a range of biodiversity (*see Appendix 2*). Currently, the hillside forest is an official eco-territory, but this does not come with the protection and status that a nature park enjoys.

More than 60 species of bird have been identified there in recent surveys. They include the Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, Ravens, various Warblers, the Red-shouldered Hawk, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Baltimore orioles and Pileated Woodpecker. Residents of NDG also know that thousands of crows often roost on the hillside forest in winter. Two threatened species are also present, the Chimney swift <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/cosewic-assessments-status-reports/chimney-swift/chapter-1.html> and the Wood thrush <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/cosewic-assessments-status-reports/wood-thrush-2012.html>, both on the COSEWIC list (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada).

The forest contains 100 species of plants, two of which are at risk: the Hackberry (Micocoulier) and the Ostrich fern (Matteuccie fougère-à-l'autruche d'Amérique). The areas where these endangered species grow should be closed to the public, with access only for those engaged in research and conservation efforts. Protecting them at the Falaise could lead to cultivation for relocation to other areas.

The Falaise is also home to a population of endangered Brown Snakes. With an official nature park, efforts could be taken to strengthen the habitat for the Brown Snake and increase their numbers, with the possibility of relocating some in the future to areas where they have become extinct.

A major effort is also needed to restore the ecosystem by removing invasive species of trees and plants and replanting the hillside with native trees. This would prevent further erosion and provide habitat needed to support the birds, animals and insects that currently live there and to create the conditions to restore wildlife driven from the area.

Protecting the Falaise from pollution and trash

Illegal dumping is a significant problem on the Falaise. The hillside requires effective protection from those, presumably businesses that border the forest, who have been regularly throwing their trash onto the forest. This includes tires, used oil, construction waste, various types of trash, etc. A fence already exists, but clearly it is not enough. Education is required and Les Amis and Sauvons la Falaise are partnering to sensitize neighbouring businesses to the importance of this green space.

The City and the CDN/NDG and Southwest boroughs should also send inspectors to the businesses bordering the escarpment to determine which types of waste and trash are being thrown out and by whom. Fines could be issued, and cameras could be installed to monitor the fence and identify those attempting to dispose of trash in the park.

The construction companies involved in the ministry of transport's Turcot project contributed to the destruction by cutting trees, filling marshes, and dumping waste on the forest floor, too often with the consent of the ministry. A fund should be created with money collected from the construction companies and the ministry to cover the cost of remediation. If at all possible, the wild plum trees (*Prunus Americana*) that were cut down earlier in the Turcot project should be replaced. <http://journalmetro.com/local/sud-ouest/actualites/857838/falaise-saint-jacques-les-travaux-de-deboisement-sont-completes/>

Connecting to a Meadowbrook Nature Park and beyond

The creation of the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park begs to revisit that of another nature park, long called for, at Meadowbrook. Such a park would host a variety of outdoor activities throughout the year: hiking, bird watching, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. It would also provide an opportunity to re-wild the golf course with native trees, plants and shrubs, and create a home for a vast array of native birds, animals, reptiles and insects that are barely surviving, as development continually encroaches on the remaining wilderness, wetlands, green spaces and farmland on the island (*see Information on Meadowbrook, Appendix 3*).

Although they are not contiguous, Meadowbrook and the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park are interconnected, as they are used by wildlife from both areas. The existing railway corridor already provides a link for animals to access both sites. Although development makes it impossible to have a continuous green causeway linking both sites, a path for pedestrians and cyclists, similar to the one linking Mount Royal to the St. Lawrence River at the Old Port (<http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/375/en/legs/promenade-fleuve-montagne>), could be created through the use of distinct signage (*see Accesses to Meadowbrook, Appendix 4*).

This is also an opportunity to look at the bigger picture and create a series of green spaces, in line with the stepping stone theory(1), that would form a ring around the downtown with Meadowbrook, Mount Royal, the Falaise, the new Turcot park and Angrignon Park as its main components (*see map Appendix 5*). This would prevent the donut effect of the green belt such as the one in Toronto that only serves to encourage urban sprawl.

Proximity to the downtown core is paramount, allowing Montrealers with fewer means, especially youth, to have access to nature close by. A number of neighborhoods in the Southwest, NDG and Lachine are among the lowest-income areas in Montreal. Some observers suggest a 5-minute travel norm for access to urban parks. The importance of a connection to nature has been proven time and again for mental and physical health (2), providing venues for outdoor activities and taking a break from the relentless pace of the city.

(1) https://www.fs.usda.gov/nac/buffers/guidelines/2_biodiversity/7.html

(2) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4049158/>

Creating a park-users' committee

Once the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park is created, it would require a park-users' committee, which should include environmental and community groups, individuals and municipal parks department employees to help manage it. The committee could be useful in creating programs to maximize enjoyment of the park and organizing volunteer initiatives such as planting trees, bushes and flowers, as well as park clean-ups, seed collection, regular bird and animal surveys, and erecting birdhouses and bat boxes. Park People (<https://parkpeople.ca/project/friends-of-city-parks>) now has a branch in Montreal that could likely help in this.

The park could also serve as a living laboratory for local schools, where students could learn about nature and wildlife and appreciate the need to protect natural spaces and biodiversity.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park is a golden opportunity to create a new and much-needed park, and to correct past mistakes in terms of wilderness/green space and biodiversity protection. It will improve walking and cycling links between NDG, Southwest Montreal, the Lachine Canal and beyond, and allow for a greener, more environmentally friendly city for current and future generations of Montrealers.

This includes the real possibility of recalling the presence of the St. Pierre River in the Turcot section of the park, which calls for a lake to be created. This would be a major step forward in the ongoing campaign to see the City of Montreal restore other lost rivers on the island.

Creating this new nature park would also allow us to set our sights on its main natural element, the Falaise Saint-Jacques. This forested escarpment has suffered decades of neglect and ongoing threats to its existence by pollution and construction of the new Turcot Interchange. It is a miracle that it has survived as it is and has such a range of biodiversity. It gives us an opportunity to start looking further to Meadowbrook, still a golf course and accessible only to golfers from spring to late fall, and also beyond to what could become a green corridor around downtown Montreal.

If both the Falaise and Meadowbrook were fully designated nature parks, Montreal would gain valuable support in its efforts to create more protected wilderness areas for threatened biodiversity and provide green space and wilderness for many Montrealers to enjoy throughout the year. It would permit the city to have a much more comprehensive, healthier system of parks and natural areas to benefit residents and biodiversity in the long term.

Many environmental and community groups are more than willing to pitch in so that the Falaise Saint-Jacques and Meadowbrook can be converted into the parks they are meant to be. Let us seize the moment and make this a reality.

Les Amis de Meadowbrook

Our suggestions in a nutshell

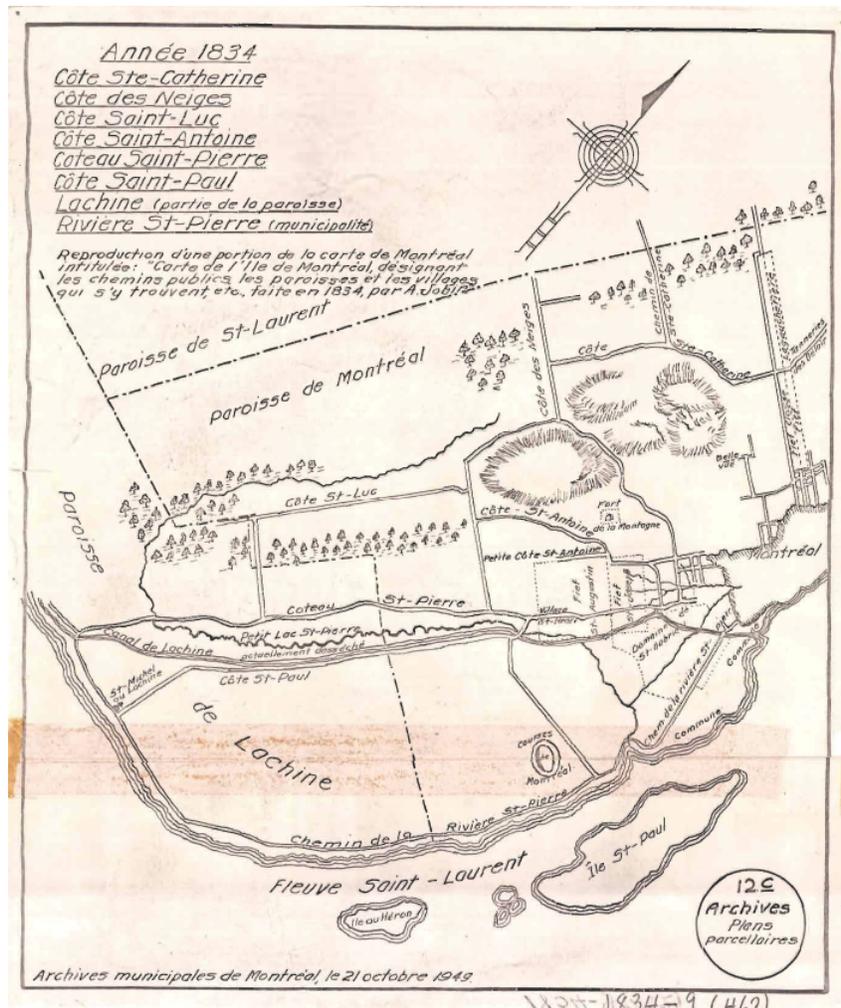
- Link Meadowbrook to the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park with a path for pedestrians and cyclists
- Ensure that the bande verte is linked to the existing bicycle-path network and the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park
- Guarantee full protection for the Falaise Saint-Jacques; any project on the Falaise would need to be the object of consultations with the population
- Stop illegal dumping on the Falaise Saint-Jacques
- Create a remediation fund for the Falaise Saint-Jacques
- Create a park-users' committee for Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park
- Create a green corridor of parks around downtown Montreal with Meadowbrook, Mount Royal, the Falaise, the new Turcot park and Angrignon Park as its main components

Appendix 1

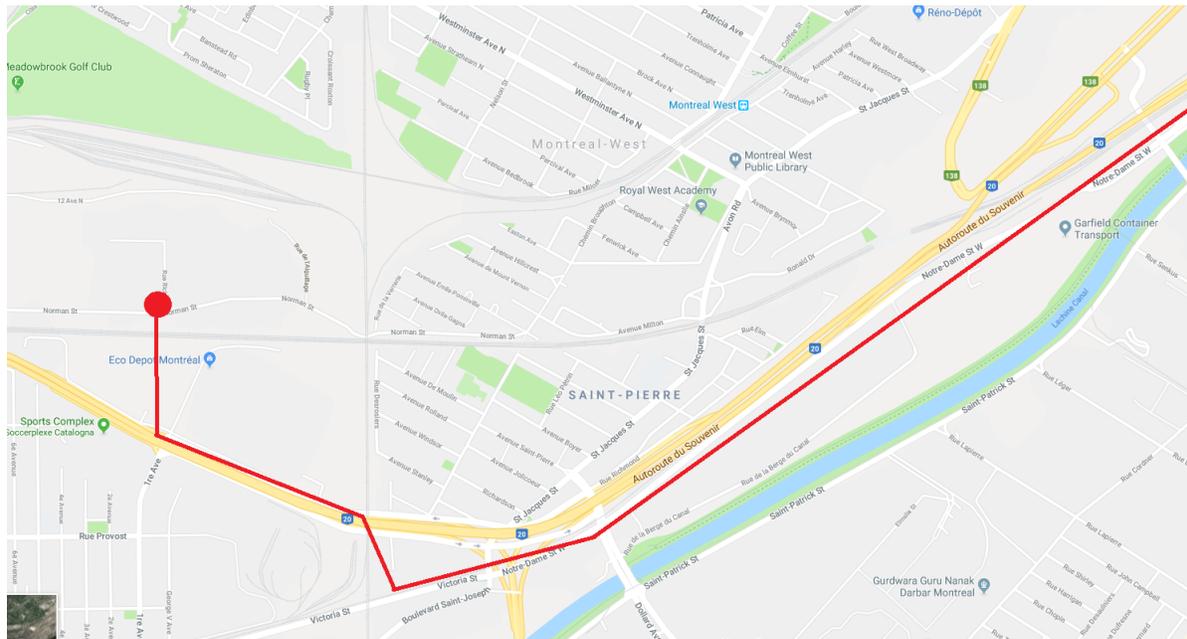
Maps charting the history of the St. Pierre River and the lake that lay at the bottom of the Falaise Saint-Jacques and the river/collector sewer today.

Map 1 Flow of St. Pierre River (1834)

The River started in the *Paroisse de Montréal* behind the mountain then- headed west, north along *Cote St-Luc Road* then turned south (parts of the system can still be seen on Meadowbrook Golf Course today) and east, south of *Coteau St.-Pierre* (now likely Upper Lachine Road/ St. Jacques St.) into *Petit lac St-Pierre*, north of *canal de Lachine*. It headed east and then south-east to the *Fleuve Saint-Laurent*, across from *Ile St.-Paul* (Nun's Island today)



Map 2 St. Pierre Collector Sewer today



Approximate location of cross between St-Pierre river runoff from Meadowbrook Golf Course and the Cote St-Luc Sewage collector, as well as the current path of the collector toward the site of the Turcot Nature Park.

Appendix 2

Results of the 2007 surveys of the animals, birds and plants that were found on the Falaise Saint-Jacques:

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

Appendix 3

Links with useful information on Meadowbrook

- The St. Pierre River <http://lesamisdemeadowbrook.org/development/the-st-pierre-river/>
- The Trees of Meadowbrook: <http://lesamisdemeadowbrook.org/uncategorized/the-trees-of-meadowbrook/>
- The Birds of Meadowbrook: <http://lesamisdemeadowbrook.org/environnement/the-birds-of-meadowbrook/>
- Masterplan for Meadowbrook Urban Nature Heritage Park Accessible to All: <http://lesamisdemeadowbrook.org/meadowbrook-park-masterplan/>

Appendix 4

Access to Meadowbrook

Meadowbrook is often considered hard to access, yet a number of entry points could be created relatively easily.

There are five possible entry points:

- three in Côte Saint-Luc (Mackle, Guelph and Côte Saint Luc Road)
- two in Montreal West, at Toe Blake Park and the southern end that can be reached by the Hydro-Québec right-of-way, accessible by bus routes 162 and 103 on Westminster

Meadowbrook and the Falaise Saint-Jacques Nature Park could be linked via the proposed bande verte at the foot of the escarpment. The western end is located on Brock Avenue in Montreal West and could easily be connected to the existing de Maisonneuve bicycle path.

