

Summary of speech for the falaise St. Jacques

La Falaise Saint-Jacques -- or the St. Jacques Escarpment -- is one of 10 eco-territories on the Island of Montreal "slated for priority protection and enhancement," according to Montreal's own Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats.

It stretches from Vendome Metro to the Montreal West Interchange just below the businesses on the South side of St Jacques St. in NDG, ending at Pullman Blvd and the Turcot Yards, and bordering the Southwest Brorough.

It is the key to any green belt that could be established and its strategic importance for a greenbelt is accepted by every environmental group on Montreal Island.

Some 65 species of birds can be found in this 20-hectare green space, including many species which follow the falaise as part of their migratory flight path. It is easy to see why this area is recognized as "vital" by Bird Protection Quebec. Beyond that, this green space, which stretches 4 km long, diffuses the effects of the air pollution from traffic. So, the falaise also contributes to the health and well-being of hundreds of citizens, as well as being crucial for birds.

But this vital area is under attack. Some 10% of the falaise has already been bulldozed by the MTQ as a necessary "incursion" for part of the Turcot construction project.

Ten percent is a lot of this important natural space, and if we are not vigilant, bits and pieces of this or other eco-territories may be chipped away and disappear.

The aim of Sauvons la falaise! is to be a watchdog over this vital green space, but it is really in everyone's best interests to make sure that the MTQ keeps its word and does not further encroach on the falaise St. Jacques. As well, Sauvons la falaise! would like to ensure the connectivity between the areas which surround the falaise, including the Southwest, NDG, Lachine, Lasalle and Westmount through bike and pedestrian paths, creating a green corridor which would include the falaise St. Jacques, connect south to Parc Angrignon, the Douglas Hospital and parc des Rapides, east to Mont Royal and West to Meadowbrook, Dorval Golf and hopefully all the way to l'Anse a l'Orme.

Beyond this, Sauvons la falaise Saint-Jacques wants Montreal to live up to its responsibilities in protecting and enhancing the falaise, an area still used as a dump by many nearby companies. We also want Montreal to reach its stated goal of having 10% of the Island preserved as green space, a percentage still below that found in many other urban areas in Canada. To reach that goal, we cannot afford to lose any existing green spaces.

The story of the falaise is a partial success story. Though we lost 2 hectares of greenspace, we did not lose more, and the MTQ knows its actions are being watched. There is much political and public support as well as support from other green organizations. The CDN/NDG borough council unanimously passed a motion this month to protect the falaise, clean it up, and ensure connectivity. The Southwest borough is also extremely supportive. We will be holding a public assembly in May in order to mobilize citizens and create public support.