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Brief on the proposed Cour Turcot Nature Park

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on behalf of the Green Coalition/Coalition Verte

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Introduction

The Green Coalition/Coalition Verte (GCV) is a non-profit association of grassroots volunteers. Group and individual members are dedicated to the conservation, protection and restoration of the natural environment. For the last 30 years members have been actively involved in many issues such as protecting Montréal's last natural areas, preventing road building through established Nature-Parks and other green spaces, boosting public transit strategies; promoting alternatives to pesticides, pressing for the clean-up of waste-water runoff and polluted creeks, and for responsible waste reduction and management.

The Green Coalition and its member-group Sauvons la Falaise have been monitoring the Falaise Saint-Jacques area since 2004 when it was designated an ecoterritory by the Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats of the Montréal Agglomeration [1]. The Coalition has supported the idea of renaturalising the Cour Turcot since the it was proposed by participants in consultation

workshop on the enhancement of the Falaise held by the Service des grands parcs, du verdissement et du Mont-Royal in February 2015 [2] attended by members of the Coalition.

The Green Coalition thus enthusiastically supports the creation a new Nature Park in the Cour Turcot as proposed by the current consultation and offers the following comments for consideration in finalising the project.

Conservation

Rationale for Conservation

Sustainability

The definition of sustainable development adopted by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 [3] is 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Preserving sufficient natural areas to support biodiversity, provide ecosystem services and promote human health and well being is a vital element to a sustainable future that must not be sacrificed to provide short-term financial gain.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is vital to maintaining the web of interconnected organisms that sustains all life on earth and maintenance of biodiversity is a key element of a sustainable future.

Both Canada and Québec adhere to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and Montréal is home to the secretariat. At the 10th Conference of the Parties at Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010, in the presence of delegates from Quebec, the signatories adopted the Aichi Biodiversity Targets [4] which include "Strategic Goal C: Improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity.

Natural Infrastructure/Capital, Ecosystem Services and Climate Change

Maintenance of natural infrastructure or capital in the form of vegetation cover and viable wetlands are essential to mitigate the impacts of climate change, including: higher average and peak temperatures; increased average and peak precipitation; and more frequent, more intense weather events. Already much of the Agglomeration's infrastructure cannot cope with peak rainfall leading to the overloading of sewers and the flooding of highway interchanges and basements.

The important role of Natural Infrastructure was acknowledged by the City of Montréal in June 2016 when Mayor Denis Coderre gave the opening address to the 'Sommet sur les infrastructures naturelles du grand Montréal' but so far very little has been done to preserve or enhance it.

Montréal Conservation Targets

The 2015 Montréal Agglomeration Land Use and Development Plan [5] set a target to protect 10% of the land area of the Agglomeration as natural space. Although this was an improvement on the 6% target of the 2004 Natural Habitat Policy [1], which has almost been achieved, it would provide only 2.6 ha per 1000 residents and still be low compared to other cities. {A 2007 CBC News report [6] ranked Montréal last among major Canadian cities for per capita natural space with 1.2 ha per 1000 residents compared to Toronto with 3.2 and Ottawa with 8. The current figure stands at 1.4 ha/1000.}

A glance at a satellite view of Montréal shows how little natural space is left and it is thus important that all of the Cour Turcot be renaturalised rather than use a portion for playing fields.

If the protected water around the island is included with the 10% protected land Montréal can claim to have achieved Aichi target 11, which is to conserve 17% terrestrial and inland water by 2020. Renaturalisation of the Cour Turcot and the Falaise, however, really addresses the less well known Aichi target 15 which calls for the restoration of 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2020. Currently

approximately 10% of the island of Montréal is classified as “brownfield” mostly disused, contaminated, former industrial areas providing plenty of scope for further renaturalisation projects.

Management

The February 2015 workshop referenced in the introduction above was supposed to result in a “Plan concept” for the ecoterritory. Item 5 on page 7 of the document Transformation of the Turcot Yards [7] refers to a such a plan but to our knowledge it has never been made public. Since it appears that, at present, the Falaise itself is not to be included in the Cour Turcot Nature Park, the Green Coalition feels it is vital that a draft “Plan concept”, providing a coherent overall vision for the entire ecoterritory, be published and be the subject of a further consultation.

Access

Natural Environments and Human Health

An increasing number of studies have demonstrated that access to natural areas creates positive physical and psychological health benefits. A healthier, happier, population provides significant economic benefits including reduced health care costs, reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.

According to the ‘biophilia’ hypothesis proposed by E. O Wilson of Harvard University, evolution has hard-wired our brains to respond positively to the natural environment so that man-made urban environments, to which we are not attuned, create stress. Studies indicate that even relatively short exposures to a natural environment such as a walk in a park at lunchtime can significantly reduce this stress and make us more productive [8].

In his book Planet Heart [9] Montréal cardiologist Dr. François Reeves convincingly documents the various benefits both direct and indirect of access to natural spaces.

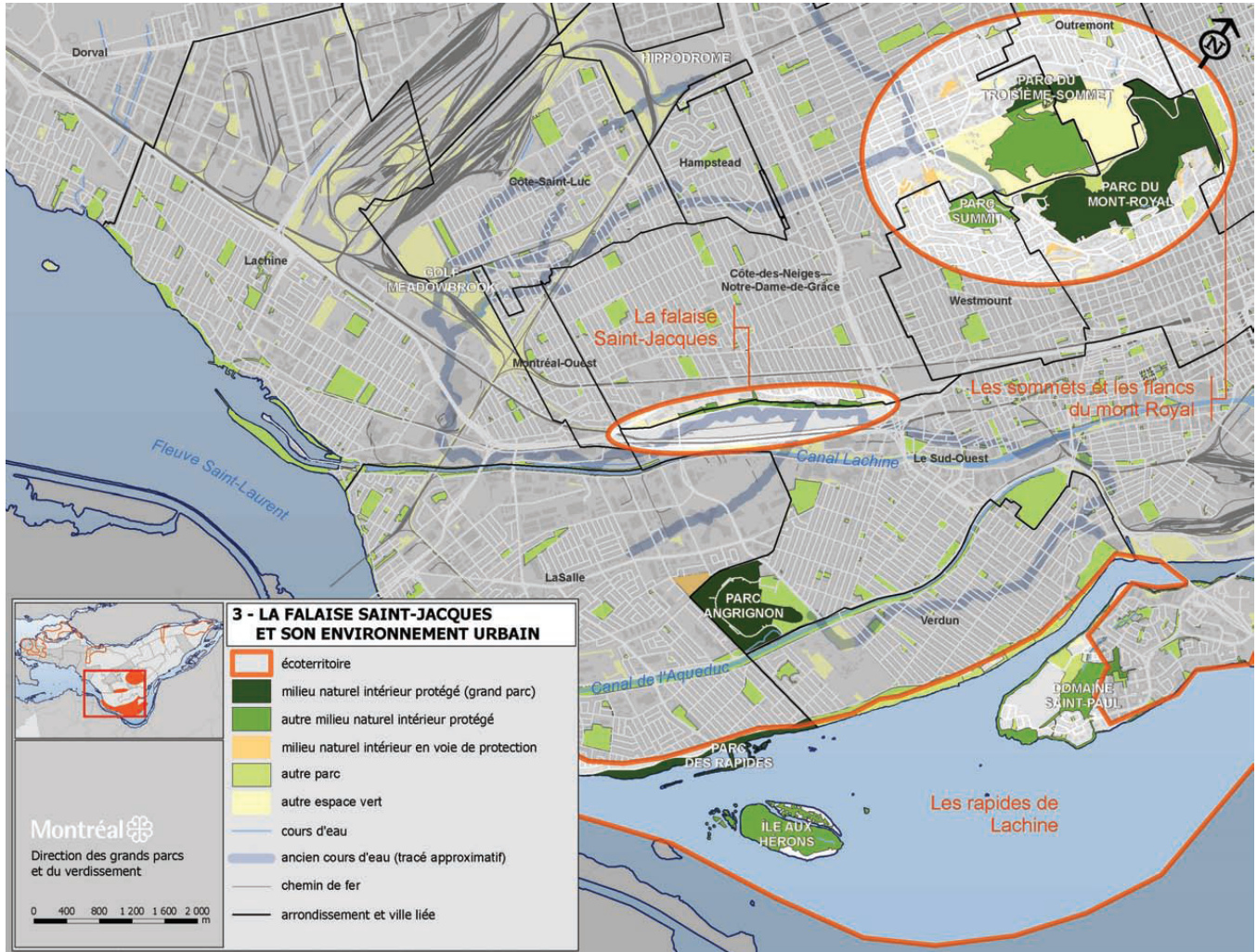
Access to the Cour Turcot Nature Park

Since the new park will be enclaved by transport infrastructure and industrial areas it needs to be made both attractive and easily accessible if people are to come. The proposed Dalle-parc from the top of the Falaise will be an important element in achieving this but additional North-South links across the highway/railway separating the Nature Park and the “Band verte” at the foot of the Falaise would facilitate utilisation by the population.

Connectivity

Whilst large, protected, natural areas are important in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity they are much more effective if linked together by suitable green corridors. The proposed “Dalle-parc” can provide such a corridor between the Falaise and the Cour Turcot but the value of the project can be further enhanced by providing green links through to the Lachine Rapids to the South and from the top of the Falaise to Meadowbrook to the West. A version of this concept is illustrated on page 32 of the “Bilan 2009-2013” for the Natural Habitat Policy [10] and is reproduced below.

With such links in place the Cour Turcot will make an important contribution to the “Trame verte et bleu” of the Montréal Agglomeration proposed in section 2.3 of the Land Use and Development Plan [5].



Conclusion

The Green Coalition applauds the creation of a new Nature Park in a renaturalised Cour Turcot and looks forward to further consultations on a “Plan concept” for the entire Falaise Saint-Jacques Ecoterritory.

References

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