

Recommendations concerning:

***City of Montreal Policy respecting the protection and
enhancement of the natural environment***

**Memorandum submitted by the *Ste. Anne de Bellevue
Environment Committee/ Comité de l'Environnement de
Ste. Anne de Bellevue***

by Ryan Young

**- Representative for the *Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment
Committee/ Comité de l'Environnement de Ste. Anne de
Bellevue***

Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee/ Comité de l'Environnement de Ste. Anne de Bellevue

The Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee is a citizens' advisory committee mandated by Ste. Anne de Bellevue Borough Councilor Bill Tierney to make recommendations concerning actions and projects taken and developed by the borough in relationship to the environment. The committee was first founded in 1998 when Bill Tierney won a second term as Mayor of Ste. Anne de Bellevue. At that time Councilor Luc Grenon was chosen to head it. It has been responsible for many innovative environmental projects in the former municipality, including: providing recycling for businesses on rue Ste. Anne; the collection and composting of yard waste during peak times; strengthening the bylaw concerning the cutting of trees; the distribution of mechanisms for toilets that resulted in the conservation of water; the development of a primarily organic, local farmers market, and many other innovative initiatives. These projects continue in the merged municipality and the committee continues to develop new ones.

Ryan Young – Member of the Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee

Ryan Young has been a member of the Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee since its founding in 1998. He has a Masters in Environmental Studies from York University and is currently teaching in the Creative Arts Department at John Abbott College. Ryan has been an avid naturalist for many years and has regularly led interpretive walks in local natural areas to teach people about the region's flora and fauna. He has explored the natural habitats of the Riviere a l'Orme since he was a young boy and therefore is very familiar with the area's biodiversity and has seen it change over time. He, along with some friends, discovered a rare Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi*) in Angell Woods last spring: up until that point Brown Snakes were not known to have existed in Angell Woods.

The Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee conducts its meetings in French and all of its written material is normally written only in French. This memorandum will be an exception to that practice due to the fact that Ryan Young is the author of the memorandum and his first and most comfortable language is English. Due to the limited time available it was also decided that translating the memorandum into French would take too long and is unnecessary.

Interest in the policy

As a committee representing citizens' interests and more specifically citizens with an interest in the protection and enhancement of the environment, the Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee is very concerned about the remaining natural green spaces in the borough. There has always been a consensus among committee members that the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Woods west of rivière à l'Orme need to be protected in their entirety to conserve the region's biodiversity.

Recommendations concerning the policy

If ecosystem viability hinges above all upon size, and the main objective of this policy is to protect those spaces of highest ecological value, it seems obvious to us that the Rivière à l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor is the natural choice for the city of Montreal to concentrate its financial resources for acquiring natural spaces. It is well known that there is a healthy population of White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) that winter in the cedar groves of the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Woods. There is a wetland in the interior of the forest that is also inhabited by Beavers (*Castor canadensis*). There is a mosaic of forests of different ages in these woods, which provide a diversity of habitats and feeding for many species of fauna. I have observed Red-Shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) and Cooper's hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) in this area many times and I suspect there are breeding pairs that use this territory. The Rivière à l'Orme is also the only inland river on the Island of Montréal.

There is no other area on the Montreal Island that is so well suited to consolidating natural corridors that are essential for wildlife, plantlife dispersion and can be used for recreational activities such as hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, and bird-watching. The Rivière à l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor is also naturally linked to other nearby natural spaces such as the Morgan Arboretum (which is connected to Senneville Woods), Cap-Saint-Jacques Nature Park, Bois-de-la-Roche Agricultural Park, and then across the water to both the Île Bizard Ecoforest Corridor and the Paul Sauvé National Park in Oka. Most of these areas have already been protected. The only other area that has not been fully protected and that is of comparable ecological value is the Île Bizard Ecoforest Corridor.

Any of the unprotected portions of the Rivière à l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor, most importantly Angell Woods and the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Woods west of rivière à l'Orme, should be prioritized as areas to protect. Even though Angell Woods is separated by the rest of the corridor by Highway 40, this is not a significant barrier for birds and many animals (Beavers are a case in point) still migrate underneath the highway in the sewer or simply cross it at night. The fact that the Ministry of Natural Resources

considers Angell Woods an exceptional forest ecosystem (EFE) is another prime example of the rich natural heritage of the woods and the wider corridor.

It is therefore truly possible to create a sustainable ecological corridor of great biodiversity in the area but we must act fast. It is also an area that is under some of the most intense pressure of being developed. These are also areas that will lose their potential as functioning ecosystems significantly if they are fragmented in any way. The city of Montreal must do everything in its power to preserve its natural integrity. This is not an area where any new roads should be built. This is an area where no compromises should be made in its protection and stronger statutes should be created to better protect the existing or newly created nature parks. It is an area already under pressure from nearby developments. If ever there were compromises made with a developer, every effort should be made to ensure the linkages or corridors are maintained between the different core zones of biodiversity.

Once the Rivière à l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor has been fully protected, there is a great potential for this area to be part of a recreational corridor that links up with surrounding natural areas for hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, and bird-watching. The community of Ste. Anne de Bellevue has attracted people for years that enjoy low impact recreation activities in a natural setting. Many residents and visitors use the Morgan Arboretum and Cap Saint-Jacques Nature Park for activities such as cross-country skiing, hiking, and bird-watching. There has been much discussion about building a bike path that would stretch from north Ste. Anne all the way down to the old village south of Highways 40 and 20. If the area becomes consolidated into a nature park, we believe it is important to formalize a network of trails with a pedestrian bridge that would connect Angell Woods with the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Woods. Another recommendation would be to have a series of signs that point to areas of unique biological interest along the trails.

The protection of the Rivière à l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor would also serve as a wonderful educational resource for our local educational institutions. Professors, researchers, and students studying and teaching in environment-related programs at Macdonald Campus of McGill University and at John Abbott College already use many of these areas for educational purposes and can only continue to do so if they remain intact in their natural state. Local primary and secondary schools also value these areas for educational field trips and will be more inclined to use them if there is a network of trails and educational signs to read.

Our region has the potential to be an area on the Montreal Island that can serve as a mecca for residents and visitors that want to reconnect with nature. If public transportation continues to be improved it can serve as a place for inner city Montrealers to come out and enjoy a breath of fresh air and see what the natural heritage of the Montreal Island is all about. Our stated goal in the Ste. Anne de Bellevue Environment Committee is to do whatever we can to make our borough into a model of sustainability for the world. Therefore we have a community that is not only supports green space protection but is the perfect match to a region that supports such a rich natural heritage.

We have a responsibility to future generations to protect this last remaining functioning ecosystem on an island that is almost completely covered in residential and industrial development. Protected areas like ours will be valued more and more in the coming years as development continues. All that is needed now is to consolidate some of the final components, namely Angell Woods and Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Woods, to finally achieve a lasting biological legacy that will be cherished for decades to come.

In the Advent of a Demerger

The committee would also like to stress that the protection of natural green spaces should be a responsibility of the central city administration and if Ste. Anne de Bellevue or any other former municipality demerges, an island-wide administrative body should be set up to ensure that the policy is still carried out in the eco-territories that are of the highest value and under the most pressure of being developed. Before the mega-city merger there was the MUC that acquired natural green spaces to make into nature parks and there is no reason why a similar organization cannot be mandated to do the same again. We fear that a demerged Ste. Anne de Bellevue would not have the resources or expertise to create and maintain properly a nature park of that caliber. Furthermore all Montrealers use these natural areas free of charge within the Nature Parks and so the city of Montreal should share the cost of creating and maintaining them.