

Montreal's Greenspace Story

CHRONOLOGICAL NOTES : 1977 - 2011*

- 1977 On a hot day in July 1977, my children came running home – shouting, “They are going to cut down Saraguay Forest.” Plans are in second reading. The forest is targeted for housing, 14 apartment blocks, 2 shopping centres, Twin Towers on Gouin, Port-Plaisance Marina on the waterfront: a major road – de Salaberry – is to cut through Village and Forest. Our family and neighbours form Saraguay Citizens Group; mount a media and letter-writing campaign; invoke Mayor Jean Drapeau’s merger promise that Saraguay would retain its “caractère champêtre et villageois.” More than 95% of proprietors sign a petition. The project is dropped: de Salaberry shelved.
- 77-79 Bois-de-Saraguay is the bijou of Montreal’s natural spaces - the scientific community extols its ecological quality: the Société d’Horticulture et d’Ecologie du Nord de Montréal campaigns for a “Parc Naturel Urbain.”
- 1979 “Déclencheur”:** “The campaign to save Bois-de-Saraguay was the catalyst or déclencheur for the conservation of Montreal’s natural spaces and the creation of the regional parks network.” stated the late André Bouchard, professeur titulaire au Département de sciences biologiques de l’Université de Montréal et à l’Institut de recherche en biologie végétale. The furor over Bois-de-Saraguay persuades the Quebec government to grant the Montreal Urban Community the legal means and mandate to acquire, protect and manage regional parks (now called Nature-Parks). Quebec injects \$10.5 million to kick-start the conservation measures.
- 79-82 Pointe-aux-Prairies, Île-de-la-Visitation, Bois-de-Saraguay, Cap St. Jacques, Bois-de-Liesse and Anse-à-l’Orme are acquired as Regional Parks. Bois-de-Saraguay is designated an *Arrondissement naturel* under the aegis of the Cultural Affairs Ministry. Quebec injects an additional \$2 million.
- 1987 Bertrand Creek no longer freezes in winter. Saraguay Citizens Group leads a massive protest and call for the clean-up of West-Island creeks; an investigation is conducted. In April 1988, sections of the beds of Bouchard and Bertrand Creeks are designated dangerous waste sites (first time ever for creek beds) and 200 companies are identified as responsible. Clean-up measures follow.
- 1987 Bois-Franc Forest is threatened by high-rise development and the extension of de Salaberry Boulevard. Saraguay Citizens offer ski trips to promote saving Bois-Franc within the Bois-de-Liesse Nature-Park. Mayors and Councillors ski and Environment Minister Clifford Lincoln walks the forest trails.
- 1987 The Montreal Urban Community (MUC) adopts its first and only Schéma d’Aménagement. IT CONTAINS NO GREENSPACE ACQUISITION PROGRAM!**
- 1988 **Green Day on May 14, 1988** in Bois-de-Liesse Regional Park. Thirteen groups invite the public to call for an MUC Green Space Program by their presence Three thousand people joined the festivities! More groups participate. By September 1989, the Green Coalition (Coalition Verte) is born with 40 member-groups.
- 1989 Vigorous lobbying finally persuades the MUC Council to adopt its \$200 million Green Space Acquisition and Aménagement Program on December 20, 1989. Bois-Franc will be purchased and added to Bois-de-Liesse Nature-Park. Bois-de-l’Île-Bizard will be a new Nature-Park. These are the first acquisitions.**
- 1991 **Farmland de-zoning:** Green Coalition mounts a campaign to stop the de-zoning of 700 hectares of the "Permanent" Agricultural Zone. At the Council meeting of the MUC, June 19, 1991, a blatant example of incoherent planning was revealed. Council voted to approve the proposal to

de-zone large tracts of MUC farmland. At the same meeting, council approved the creation of a non-profit re-greening society to plant trees throughout the territory because studies show that the vegetation cover in the MUC is severely depleted and must be augmented by 25%. It is illogical to diminish the vegetation cover by eliminating an area 3 ½ times the size of Mont Royal Park from the Zone Agricole, characterized in MUC studies as “les poumons de l’agglomération montrealaise. Illogical to undermine the thrust of the new Green Space Acquisition Program, too! But the de-zoning proceeds.

- 1992** Key natural areas are purchased; Bois-d’Anjou and Bois-de-Roche Nature-Parks are created; part of Ste-Anne’s forest is added to L’Anse-à-l’Orme Nature-Park, Hawthorndale linear park and a few islands acquired.
Then, despite vociferous opposition, the MUC declares a moratorium on all green space purchases. One-half the budget, \$100 million, is left unspent. The moratorium lasts for 10 long years. More than 1,000 hectares of forests are lost to development.
- 1998 The MUC plans to lease the Manoir MacDougall in Bois-de-Saraguay Nature-Park for up 30 years for a Hotel/Restaurant project. Saraguay Citizens Group rallies 150 residents to the public hearing at the Manoir on September 9. The city had set out only 40 chairs: the plan is soundly trounced. In 2001, Montreal has a multipurpose mega-plan for the Manoir unrelated to nature-park use – the municipal election halts that process.
- 2001 Montreal is to become a merged city. During the election campaign, Green Coalition leaders lobby candidates to lift the spending moratorium, to reboot the Green Space Program, to stop the extension of de Salaberry and to bolster nature-parks statutes – these are so weak that portions of nature-parks (if not whole parks) can be leased, sold or rezoned!
- 2002 In May, a ‘**spaghetti network**’ of new roads threatens Nature-Parks and other green spaces in the West Island. Bois-de-Liesse and its Bois-Franc Forest, L’Anse-à-l’Orme and Ste-Anne’s Forest, Bois-de-l’Île-Bizard and Pointe-Théorêt at Cap-Saint-Jacques and Angell Woods in Beaconsfield - all face this new menace. Citizen protests halt the road building.
- 2002 Also in May, new Mayor Gérald Tremblay lifts the **10 year moratorium on green space acquisition** and pledges to create a new framework to protect Montreal’s natural green spaces and shorelines. The Montreal Summit offers hope for the creation of a “sustainable development” city. In June, the Cheval Blanc waterfront controversy fast-tracks the Natural Spaces Policy.
- 2002 On October 26, in drenching rain, over 300 Green Coalition supporters greet Mayor Tremblay and invited dignitaries for the **Bois-Franc Forest Visit**. Together, citizens and officials walk the forest path where six-lane de Salaberry Boulevard could be built. Good promotion for the Natural Spaces Policy!
- 2003 January – The new *Contrat de ville* signed between Montreal and the Quebec government fails to provide core funding for the mayor’s Natural Spaces Policy.
- 2004 December – The city adopts its long-awaited Natural Spaces Policy – its *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels* to protect Montreal’s natural spaces and shorelines and to boost the quota of protected natural spaces from 3.2% of the territory (achieved by the MUC) to 8%. \$36 million over 3 years is budgeted for the program.**
- 2009 Bilan or Progress Report, May – The city claims 5% of the Island territory has been protected. Much of the increase above the 3.2% attained by the MUC is accomplished by re-labelling lands in existing parks. New conservation amounts to 285 hectares. (1% of the territory equals 500 hectares) The CRE-Montréal and Green Coalition call for the Politique target to be raised to 12%; both repeat calls for the conservation of Meadowbrook.

- 2009 By November, the city's commitment to the Natural Spaces Policy is slipping. Green Coalition mounts a letter-writing campaign addressed to Mayor Gérald Tremblay. The Mayor restores the funding for the program - \$36 million for the next triennial budget.
- 2003 ***Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal***; Concurrently, starting in 2003, Green Coalition volunteers promote a greenbelt project for Montreal and Southwestern Quebec, building support and partnerships in all parts of the community. **Endorsed by Environment Minister Thomas Mulcair, the keystone piece of the proposal calls for L'Anse-a-l'Orme Corridor and adjacent nature-parks on Montreal Island to become a Grand parc-national (first called the Lake of Two Mountains National Park).** Since the official launch of the *Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal* in 2007, the partners have doubled in number. Now, all the Partenaires share the stewardship of the project.
- 2010 **Green Coalition celebrates the International Year of Biodiversity, September 11, 2010.** The PPEAM holds a press conference and picnic at Parc Lafontaine... Mayors and councillors of 14 cities and boroughs speak in favour of the greenbelt project for le Grand Montréal and Southwestern Quebec. Tom Mulcair, Ministre du Développement durable de l'Environnement et des Parcs de 2003 à 2006, is Master of Ceremonies. Partenaires now number more than 80.

Partenaires du Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal (PPEAM)

- 2011 *More than eighty organizations have joined in partnership to create a greenbelt for Montreal and Southwestern Quebec, like those already achieved by other major North American urban centres. The goal of the project is to save a minimum of 12% of the maple-hickory forest domain ('domaine bioclimatique de l'érablière à caryer cordiforme') that stretches from the Lower Laurentians to the US border and from Suroit to Sorel. This ecological domain has the greatest biodiversity in all of Québec, but its unique species and habitats are in danger of being lost to urban development. The Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal will protect this natural heritage in perpetuity - in a greenbelt of forests and floodplains, agricultural lands, wetlands and islands linked together by green corridors and streams, and the great rivers of south-western Québec ('le Québec méridional').*

Sixteen (16) municipal partners have joined the PPEAM, adopting resolutions in their councils in favour of the greenbelt, the *Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal*. The partnership continues to grow!

- 2011 **PMAD:** Green Coalition and the *Partenaires du Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal (PPEAM)* mobilize citizens to participate at the Public Hearings on the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM's) Plan métropolitain d'aménagement et de développement (PMAD). Almost 400 memoires - a record - demand the region's natural spaces be protected! Adopted December 8, 2011, PMAD provides for a 'ceinture verte' or 'trame verte et bleue'; and promises to attain the Nagoya target of 17% of natural spaces by 2020 as well as the restoration of 30% of the region's forest cover.

*** NOTES : 1977 - 2011** were compiled for the PMAD Hearings in September 2011.

POSTSCRIPT : Communiqué de presse

LA VILLE DE MONTRÉAL DEVIENT LE CENTIÈME PARTENAIRE DU PPEAM

Montréal, le 14 mai 2012: Les *Partenaires du Parc Écologique de l'Archipel de Montréal* accueillent chaleureusement son centième partenaire, la Ville de Montréal, qui joint les rangs du PPEAM afin de promouvoir la création d'une ceinture verte pour le Grand Montréal et le Sud-Ouest du Québec, comme celles réalisées par de nombreux grands centres urbains de l'Amérique du Nord. L'appui de la Métropole, qui se situe au cœur même du projet de la ceinture verte, est impératif pour la réalisation de cette dernière.

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