

Quebec aims to save local green spaces

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Quebec will unveil preliminary plans for a provincially protected park encompassing Lake of Two Mountains next month, according to Environment Minister Thomas Mulcair.

The initiative is expected to include the West Island's Cap St. Jacques Nature Park, Parc national d'Oka and Parc de la rivière des milles-iles, which are currently protected areas. In addition, Mulcair aims to incorporate stretches of shoreline, the lake itself, and undeveloped sites surrounding l'Anse à l'Orme Nature Park, which has been at the centre of controversy over encroaching residential development. Local environmentalists have been fighting to convince the borough of Pierrefonds/Roxboro to halt developers from building on the ecologically sensitive lands — some of the last remaining on the island of Montreal.



Chronicle, Sean Parker L'Anse à l'Orme forests, which are home to a deer herd, may become protected as part of a proposed park.

L'Anse à l'Orme Nature Park touches the borders of Pierrefonds/Roxboro, Senneville, Kirkland and Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

"We're going to work very hard to try and protect as much of (l'Anse à l'Orme) as we can," Mulcair told The Chronicle. "When you look at what percentage of the island of Montreal is already developed and what remains to be protected, it's really urgent that we protect as much as we can. That's part of the vision of this new park."

The project will be a first in Quebec, according to Brigitte Bérubé, assistant director of the environment ministry's Montreal's bureau. "We are looking at a concept we can put in place to bring together these protected lands in a type of metropolitan park," she said. "It's not a project as such to create a provincial park as we know now. It is completely new."

Bérubé says the province must develop a strategy for a park that will not be continuous. "Here . . . we have interesting natural spaces," she said. "We should protect them, but at the same time we are in an urban context where there are private properties as well, so all this is being examined."

The elaborate plan, which is being studied by a team of experts, will likely include protecting natural flood zones around the lake, Bérubé added.

"We are looking at the possibility to create an ensemble by adding other territories to territories that are already protected," she said. "It's an interesting concept."

Mulcair said the idea for the park came from meetings with Jacques-Cartier MNA Geoffrey Kelley and the Green Coalition, a Montreal environmental group. The province has been working closely with the City of Montreal to ensure the project is a success, he added. "We've already got an enthusiastic response from the CMM (Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal)," said the Beaconsfield resident, who expects the first draft of the park's plan to be released within the next six months. "We really want it to be a major project."

Meanwhile, Green Coalition vice-

president David Fletcher says preserving the forests and wetlands around l'Anse à l'Orme Nature Park is key to saving species that are threatened in the area. The Roxboro resident said the territory is home to mature stands of hackberry, black maple, cork elm, as well as map turtles, brown and milk snakes, and nesting sites for Cooper's hawks.

"That's good news," he said of the park project's developments. "Any efforts that are made towards conserving these spaces on the island (of Montreal) at this point go a great way to conserving these endangered species in the province."

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