

OCPM Brief: Falaise St-Jacques

UrbaNature is an environmental education organisation whose mission is:

- To facilitate, promote, and support place-based outdoor learning for all, especially children and youth;
- To create opportunities for Nature connection in urban settings and illustrate the value of the Natural world;
- To improve the physical and mental well-being of people of all ages, especially society's vulnerable sectors, through contact with Nature.

We are excited about the prospect of a Grand Parc in the Turcot area and the opportunities that it will afford our organisation to accomplish our mission through environmental education. In particular, the Falaise St-Jacques is special due to its wild-ness, its history, and its ecological importance to many bird, animal and plant species.

Many of our partner organisations have submitted briefs that include an overview of the history of the Escarpment. As such, we will not re-iterate the history of the Falaise; instead we would like to emphasize the educational potential that exists there. In addition, we will highlight the importance of Natural spaces on health and well-being.

Environmental & outdoor education

Outdoor & environmental education is recognized as a very effective pedagogy, and has been shown to increase student engagement, decrease attention deficits, improve behaviour, even increase test scores. In addition, students have the opportunity to connect to the Natural world, thereby bringing school to “life” and providing real-world learning. However, most outdoor & environmental education requires long bus rides, expensive transport and outdoor centre fees, and a significant time “away from” school.

In many parts of the city of Montreal, students have easy access to urban wilderness: Mont-Royal and Parc Angrignon are two examples that spring readily to mind; in the West Island, we have Nature parks such as Bois-de-Liesse and Cap-St-Jacques. These places make it possible to provide outdoor & environmental education to children and adolescents without leaving the island of Montreal. Indeed, for schools close to these areas, they are even accessible by public transit. This means that teachers can easily afford the time and cost associated with educating in a Natural environment.



Outdoor & environmental education is key to developing Nature connection in youth and in adults as well. It has been shown that increased connection with Nature leads to pro-environmental behaviour and to the development of an environmental ethos. As well, it has been associated with well-being, as will be discussed in the next section.

Knowing that Nature exists all around us is essential if we want to educate for sustainability. Knowing that Nature is *here* strengthens our connection to it and our environmental ethic is enhanced as well. Children in NDG, Lachine, Montreal West and the Sud-Ouest need a wild place close to them where they can connect with Nature and learn about their ecosystem.

Health & well-being

For many vulnerable sectors of society, as for all humans, Nature contact can decrease stress and provide enjoyment. It has been shown that proximity to Nature is important for health, well-being, community involvement and more. The Falaise is situated in an area bordered by less affluent neighborhoods where green space is limited. It has the potential to contribute enormously to public health in these neighborhoods.

This green space mitigates the effects of the air pollution from traffic. Situated as it is between an industrial zone on St Jacques, and the Turcot, the Falaise acts as the lungs of NDG and the SouthWest, filtering pollution and contributing to the health and well-being of hundreds of citizens, as well as being crucial for birds, animals and plants.

Our health and well-being is inextricably linked to that of our surrounding ecosystem and of the Earth as a whole. Protecting the Falaise by making it part of the Grand Park will lead to improved health for the citizens of Montreal and to that of the Natural world at the same time.

Ecology

The Falaise is one of ten natural spaces of interest, or *ecoterritories* “slated for priority protection and enhancement” in the 2004 *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels de l’agglomération de Montréal*. These extensive spaces contribute to biodiversity: they are home to a variety of animal and plant species, some of whose status is precarious. They are not protected in any way from development.

A survey of flora and fauna of the Falaise – Vegetation study done by Kim Marineau, biologist consultant, found six vegetation zones on the escarpment, 101 species identified (native and introduced), including 2 species with precarious status: Hackberry and Matteuccie Ostrich fern. Some common trees on the Falaise are: Ash, Maple, Willow, Oak, Hawthorne, Buckthorn, Spruce, And Cottonwood.

Study of herpetofauna and mammals found 43 brown snake specimens, including the brown snake, which is a species likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable in Quebec.

Nine species of terrestrial mammals were found, including deer, fox, groundhog, skunk and raccoon. Unfortunately, these species are finding it more difficult to survive there due to a lack of a significant water source.

According to a survey of flora and fauna done by GREBE inc., some 63 species of birds can be found in this 20-hectare green space, including many species which use the Falaise as a migratory stopover. 34 breeding species inhabit the Falaise. It is easy to see why this area is recognized as “vital” by Bird Protection Quebec.

This is an area that is vital to the ecosystem and that is also an excellent resource for environmental education in Montreal.

Indigenous history and heritage

There is a fair bit of evidence that the present site of the Falaise was the site of the village of Hochelaga, a settlement of approximately 3,000 people. This is a rich educational opportunity for Indigenous and settler Montrealers alike. As well, recognizing and honouring this site would be an important step in the road to reconciliation with the Indigenous communities around Montreal.

It is clear that the Falaise St-Jacques is a vital and precious resource for many reasons. Moreover, its potential as an educational site is second to none. Protecting this area, by making it part of the Grand Parc, would provide opportunities for education, health, well-being and connection with Nature for people in the surrounding neighborhoods and for all Montrealers. Montreal has the responsibility, for the reasons mentioned above, to add the Falaise St-Jacques to its protected green spaces.

OCPM and the Falaise

On June 21, 2018 it was announced publicly that the Falaise was to become a grand parc (<https://youtu.be/iTEUllc087I> - see minute 8:26). **For some reason, at this moment, the Falaise is not part of the grand parc** and no one is taking responsibility for the Falaise. Page 10 of the document *The Transformation of the Turcot Yards* calls this new grand park the: “The St Jacques Escarpment Nature Parc”, **yet the Falaise St Jacques is not being included in the park itself.**


The pamphlet *The Transformation of the Turcot Yards* speaks of the Falaise mentioning “conservation and design initiatives...” “...offering vista points of the park” (p5), “Connecting the site (Falaise) to surrounding districts with walking trails and bicycle paths(p5)” and especially concerning, “create new

vista points or new entranceways at the top of the escarpment (p7). “ These kind of actions could only be completed with significant damage being caused to the Falaise. The Falaise is not stable and the cutting of trees necessary to create new view points, for example, could easily cause landslides and other forms of erosion and will certainly damage this precious resource.

The most worrying phrase in the literature is, “Landscape the escarpment to stabilize the soil...” (p7). The last time some of the escarpment was ‘stabilized’ in 2015, two hectares was clearcut including 24 wild plum trees which are very rare. The ‘stabilized’ area no longer exists. The soil and trees have been removed and there is a wall.

The OCPM consultations were supposed to include the Falaise, the *Dalle Parc* and the *Cour Turcot*, but the Falaise has not been a subject of any of the consultations or ateliers. OCPM literature does refer to the Falaise and the substantial changes that are envisioned for it. The community organizations who have been working to protect this ecoterritory, such as urbaNature Education and our partners, want to see the Falaise protected and left for the birds and the animals. None of us has been consulted about what will happen with the Falaise. **It is our recommendation that important decisions as to the future of the Falaise be made with input from the public and the concerned organizations and citizens who have been working to save it and that the Falaise St. Jacques be part of the grand park.**

Sincerely,



Holly McIntyre
Co-founder & Curriculum Director

