

No migratory birds on Golf Dorval, government says

ANNA BRATULIC, Freelance West Island Gazette Published: January 10, 2008

Activists fighting to save Golf Dorval are balking at conclusions drawn by the federal departments of transport and the environment that play down the ecological merits of the 260-acre tract of land next to Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport.

In separate, but similarly worded responses to questions asked by the Green Coalition a few months ago, the ministers for both departments cite data from the Canadian Wildlife Service indicating there are no migratory birds or wetlands to speak of in the area, and as a result, development planned by Aéroports de Montréal on the site would not adversely affect them.

However, Green Coalition spokesman Paul Wilkinson strongly disputes that claim. "Their information is clearly wrong," said Wilkinson, pointing out that hundreds of Canada geese and ducks, as well as herons and egrets regularly flock to Golf Dorval.

There are three streams that run through the golf course, one of which, Bertrand Creek, is an eco-territory - land the city of Montreal has identified as worth preserving. Wilkinson noted that the airport authority spent \$10 million some years ago to clean up the streams, which were polluted with a chemical used to de-ice planes.

"Now, government leaders claim there are no wetlands," he said.

Environment Canada did not comment on the matter by press time.

The land is owned by Transport Canada but is leased to ADM for 60 years to operate and manage. In turn, ADM leased the land to Dorval for years to run a 36-hole golf course until the airport authority was ready to develop it.

That time came late last year, when ADM repossessed part of the course closest to the tarmac, where it plans to move all the airport hangars currently on the edge of the international jetty. The golf course was reduced to 18 holes for the next seven years.

ADM also plans to redevelop the north side of the golf course, near Aviation Rd., for industrial use. However, Wilkinson characterizes the move as "land speculation, pure and simple."

"We're prepared to accept that the airport needs to use the land for hangars and maintenance shops. Even though we don't agree with the location, it's land use that's appropriate to the airport's needs. On the north side of the course, this is a green space and that should not be touched."

Wilkinson says Dorval Mayor Edgar Rouleau should be doing more to protect the land and has suggested the city withhold municipal services to ADM if the development does not respect Dorval's zoning regulations.

He says Dorval should follow the lead of municipalities like Côte St. Luc, where the council rezoned part of Meadowbrook golf course to prohibit a residential development. The move provoked a \$20-million lawsuit against the city that is still unresolved.

However, Rouleau insists the city's options are limited.

"It's their land," he said, adding that the federal government does not need to request zoning changes. "They can do whatever they want on their land. That's the law."

ADM spokeswoman Christiane Beaulieu says development of land near the tarmac began in early fall, and included bulldozing a man-made pond that was used to water the golf course. ADM did not seek a permit from the Quebec Environment Ministry, which protects wetlands, because it was not a natural body of water.