



News Release
For immediate release

Montreal, April 26, 2005

ON APRIL 30, NATURE COMES TO TOWN!

**HUGE RALLY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE LAST NATURAL AREAS
IN THE SOUTH OF QUEBEC**

Rendez-vous at 1 pm at Place du Canada (corner Peel and René-Lévesque; Métro Bonaventure or Peel). We will march to the Premier's office, where Green Front spokesmen will address the crowd at approximately 2 :15 pm (corner of McGill College and Sherbrooke).

The Green Front invites everybody to join us in sending a clear message to our politicians : citizens place a high value on natural habitat, and are determined to preserve it. We denounce the systematic and rapid destruction of the last natural spaces in southern Quebec, happening right before the eyes of the very government agencies charged with their protection.

Citizens from every corner of our region are tired of never-ending battles to preserve our precious natural spaces, and of our society's laissez-faire attitude which favours the interest of developers, resulting in choices which are disastrous for the environment.

The Green Front demands the immediate and rigorous application of existing laws, and demands nothing less than a commission of public inquiry into the conservation and management of natural habitat on private land, the development of a coherent plan for the protection of natural spaces, and a moratorium on all development until the results of the commission's inquiry have been made public.

Come one come all to show your support for the protection of our natural spaces, the heritage of our future generations. Bring your kids, and wear a green headband. Nature comes to town!

Southern Quebec's last natural spaces are disappearing like melting snow before the onslaught of urban sprawl, industrial farming, and the housing boom. There has been a corresponding emergence of tenacious citizens' groups, appalled by the degradation of our precious forests and wetlands and absolutely determined to protect them. However, they look like David facing Goliath compared to the promoters, municipalities, and even provincial government agencies who should be protecting the environment.

The Tremblay Forest in Longueuil; the St Hubert Bog; the La Prairie and Boucherville forests; the Anse à l'Orme River forest; the Cheval Blanc ecoterritory in Pierrefonds; Grand Coteau Forest in Rosemère/Lorraine; Small and Large Tea Field bogs in St-Anicet; mixed and coniferous forests and wetlands in Ile Perrot, Vaudreuil, and Hudson; and in east-end Montreal, so deprived of green space, Coulée verte du ruisseau De Montigny and its off-shore islands: these precious gems are only a sampling of the threatened ecosystems in southern Quebec. "It is time for citizens to unite and to show their determination that the little that remains of natural habitat in the urban and agricultural zones in southern Quebec be preserved," declared Tommy Montpetit, francophone spokesperson for the Green Front, a movement that brings together over twenty citizens associations and environmental groups.

David Fletcher, spokesman for the Green Front, claims, "We need to protect all the natural spaces in southern Quebec, because from an ecological point of view, it is the most varied, distinct and species-rich part of the province. At the same time it is also the part which is suffering the worst onslaught of urbanisation."

Forced to accept one compromise after another, citizens are witness to the destruction of large natural areas in exchange for the 'conservation' of small scraps of land. These so-called environmental victories will be of short duration. When land to build on becomes even scarcer, they will once more be coveted by developers, in the name of what they think of as sustainable development.

The numbers speak for themselves : in the last fifteen years, construction of housing on **Montreal** Island destroyed forever 1000 hectares of forest. If we immediately protected all of what is left in the way of natural habitat, we still could not achieve the standard of 8 %. Even this pathetic remnant is presently under threat of development, including parts of the ecoterritories defined in Montreal's Policy to Protect Natural Habitat. The situation is just as alarming in **Monterégie**, where deforestation has increased from 1200 hectares a year in the nineties to 3000 hectares yearly from 1999 – 2000. In certain MRC's, only 10 % of the forest is left, and at this rate will disappear in twenty years.

The Green Front deploras this myopic view of development, desperately lacking in historical perspective, which completely ignores the ecological, economical and social value of natural spaces. We demand a commission of public inquiry into the conservation and management of natural habitat on private land, the development of a coherent plan for the protection of natural spaces, and a moratorium on all development until the results of the commission's inquiry have been issued.

The roots of the problem of destruction of natural habitats are profound and complex : feeble environmental laws half-heartedly enforced; lack of vigilance and lax responses towards developers who break the laws; a culture of indifference in the ministries charged with protecting the environment; dealings in which municipal administrations favour the interests of promoters, to both of which the government is increasingly transferring the responsibility of land conservation; the dubious tendency of certain consulting firms who are quite happy to undervalue the ecological significance of properties desired by the promoters who are hiring them.

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Member Groups of the Green Front: Sauvons nos boisés et milieux humides, Projet Rescousse, Green Coalition, Nature-Action Boucherville, Fondation Rivières, Committee for a Healthy Environment in Dollard-Des-Ormeaux/Roxboro, Le Centre d'Information sur l'Environnement de Longueuil, Enviro Mille-Iles, Comité de citoyens de Deux-Montagnes, La corporation pour la mise en valeur du Bois de l'Équerre (Laval), Patrimoine bâti et naturel de Verdun, Les amis de la rivière Saint-Jacques, Coalition des amis de la forêt du Grand Côteau, Le Comité Protection Patrimoine-Île des Sœurs, Le Regroupement pour la protection des espaces verts St-Lambert, Saraguay Citizens Group, Association for the Protection of Angell Woods...