

2 February 2021

Dear Mayor Plante,

We write to express our concern for the impending destruction of the woodlands adjacent to the Fairview Mall known as the Fairview Forest.

As reported in *The Globe and Mail* (8 December 2020), Cadillac Fairview has described the area as ‘empty land’. The description is not only inaccurate, but it perpetuates the all-too-common impression that land not under commercial development is ‘empty’ or ‘vacant’. This heavily wooded area contains over 400 mature hardwood trees, some over 100 years old (Duval 2005). The forest hosts at one or another season many different species of birds, along with a variety of mammalian and reptilian life. It is a small but integral part of a rapidly disappearing area of undeveloped, natural lands in the West Island. It is far from empty or vacant. According to eBird data (ebird.org; a citizen science platform for birdwatchers to record their observations), 335 species of birds have been recorded in Montreal (<https://ebird.org/region/CA-QC-MR?yr=all>). In the nearby Terra Cotta Park, 113 bird species have been recorded (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3684644>), and we suspect that a similar bird biodiversity can be found in Fairview Forest.

Despite the heroic efforts of the Plante administration in saving L’Anse à l’Orme from development, connection of the REM to Trudeau Airport will bring further destruction to the unique Technoparc wetlands, while the completion of the Turcot Interchange threatens to cut an additional 400 or so mature trees on the Falaise Saint-Jacques. Though Montreal may boast the largest urban park in Canada, there is relatively little untouched forested space left, and any remaining forest on the island of Montreal should be preserved.

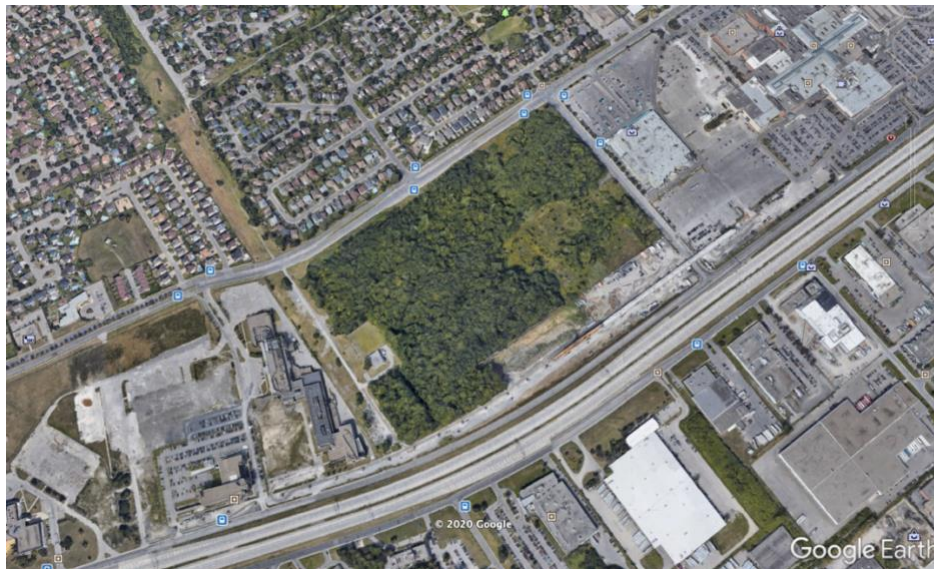


Figure 1: Aerial view of the forest from Google Earth

A healthy woodland has a diversity of species, so that if one species contracts a disease like the emerald ash beetle, others may still thrive. Its trees are mostly native species which naturally adapt best to the local conditions, and they are of various ages so that the forest is constantly being replenished. A healthy forest also has ample ground cover and shrubbery which provides additional shelter and food for birds and animals. Its older trees have cavities which shelter avian species like owls, woodpeckers, and nuthatches along with chipmunks, squirrels and raccoons. When the old trees die and are left on the ground to decay, they provide nourishment for insects, birds, mammals and the soil itself. Finally, a healthy woodland has few paths or edges cut through it, as these pathways make it easier for predators to find their prey.

By these criteria many of Montreal's remaining woodlands do poorly. The ash borer has destroyed, or caused the cutting, of thousands of ash trees throughout the Island, especially in popular woodlands like Parc-nature du Bois-de-Liesse and Parc-nature du Cap-Saint-Jacques. The beech bark disease has destroyed most of the beeches in the Morgan Arboretum and elsewhere. Hydro-Québec has cut wide swathes through woodlands like Bois-de-Liesse to facilitate access to power lines. Numerous developments have created new edges, exposing birds and mammals to predation.

Perhaps most visibly of all, non-native, invasive plant species have taken over the forest floor of much of our woodlands and rendered them largely unusable to many plants and animals. Phragmites – those thick, fuzzy fronds carpeting the roadside – crowd out all other plants and are inhospitable and impenetrable to most wildlife. The large woodland tracts at, e.g., Cap-Saint-Jacques, Bois-de-Liesse, and L'Île Bizard are now heavily carpeted with buckthorn shrubs and Norway maple seedlings. Non-native invasive species are generally detrimental to ecosystems and diminish biodiversity by crowding out native species.

In its undeveloped state, the Fairview Forest is of the few remaining woodlands on the entire Island. Since it is untouched, it hosts a wide and useful diversity of native plants, birds and other wildlife; it has not been 'managed' by civic authorities or developers.

Woodlands in or near urban areas remain essential for a region's environmental health. In an annual cycle in the Montreal area, woodlands host and shelter many species of birds, along with numerous kinds of mammals, reptiles and amphibians, butterflies, and bees. Woodlands help control flooding. They replenish the air by taking in CO₂ and producing oxygen. They serve as essential windbreaks and noise barriers to the major highways which now surround them. They help mitigate heat in the summer in an otherwise developed area. Their welcoming spaces offer so much benefit to human physical and mental health and should be designated essential going forward. The Fairview woodland also hosts a wetland that increases its ability to provide ecosystem services, such as further improving flood mitigation.

Bird Protection Quebec is a non-profit organization over 100 years old with three major goals: bird conservation, educating the public about the importance of birds, and observing birds. In many cases, bird conservation means protecting the land that birds need to fulfil their needs, such as feeding and breeding, as is the case with the proposed development of the Fairview Forest. We recognize that Pointe-Claire has done a lot to preserve natural areas and encourage biodiversity within the City, and we believe that there is more to be done.

Ironically, the more the region grows, the more it needs its woodlands. We ask that you recognize the value of this forest and protect it from all future development.

With thanks for your attention,



President
Bird Protection Quebec



Chair, Conservation Committee
Bird Protection Quebec

Reference

Duval, Pierre. 2005. Annexe 2 : Inventaire forestier. Ville de Pointe-Claire. https://www.pointe-claire.ca/content/uploads/2016/04/PC-2787_Reglement_sur_les_PIIA_Annexe_2-6.pdf