



Why COP-15 may fail
right here at home

Description

Are Transport Minister Alhabra and ADM against the environment?

By Patrick Barnard

January 14, 2023

Clearly, the climate change crisis is intimately linked to the **dramatic loss of biodiversity around the world**. The advance of human beings is shrinking habitats, and species are dying – it's that brutal. A sense of crisis paralyzes citizens and policymakers, who remain frozen, haunted by the present and afraid of the future.

In 1992, the United Nations created two conventions, themselves products of the environmental crisis. One is on climate change (the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**) with its “parliament,” the **Conference of the Parties (COP)**, which meets annually. And the other treaty – the **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** – holds its COP every two years.

In Montreal in December, the **15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15)** of the CBD, which is not legally binding, just ended in an atmosphere of success. Biodiversity was the word on everyone's lips. But the whole process needs a closer look.

The CBD has its secretariat in Montreal and has issued its own *Global Diversity Outlook 5*, an in-house assessment that shows in detail how the national members of the Convention did not fully achieve their own past 23 targets for the earlier decade of 2010-2020.

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This is the lesson of the last decade. The crisis of the climate and of the diversity of life gets worse, while global leaders remain frozen by their inaction.

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Here in Montreal, right now in fact, we can see a glaring example of the Canadian government already failing to meet the new targets of COP-15, while the authorities bathe in an after-glow of apparent success.

Yes, COP-15 has more parties that have met – 196. And the targets for biodiversity protection for the next decade, until 2030, have increased from 20 to 23. But here on Montreal Island, there is a chilling story of an invaluable natural space rich with biodiversity, owned mainly by the federal government, obviously falling under the new COP targets – that Canada still will not protect!

Before our eyes, we can see a classic example of how biodiversity is being destroyed by officials who claim to protect it.

North of Montreal's airport lies the 215-hectare integrated wetland ecosystem known as “the **Technoparc lands**,” the last remaining area of its type on Montreal Island, an area as large as Mount Royal Park. More than 200 birds visit this rich landscape of fields, marshes, and forest. And Target 12 of the new Montreal COP-15 explicitly states that such sites should be saved as part of the work to “significantly increase the area, quality and connectivity, access and benefits of green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas.”

The Canadian government, through the Ministry of Transport, owns 155 hectares of the Technoparc territory that it leases to the **Aéroports de Montréal (ADM)**. Yet the federal cabinet refuses to use its proprietary authority to protect and conserve this area. Why? Reports indicate that there is a division within the Trudeau cabinet in Ottawa, with Transport Minister, **Omar Alghabra**, defending the commercial ambitions of the ADM, while Environment Minister **Steven Guilbeault** has been arguing for the conservation of the Technoparc ecosystem.

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As is often the case, in the Trudeau cabinet at this time it is clear that economic development trumps the environment, even though 26 Montreal boroughs and municipalities have passed public resolutions urging Canada to preserve the Technoparc wetland system. There is also immense public support for the environmental conservation of this land. And twice in the last two years, the ADM created extremely bad press for itself; first by unsuccessfully attempting to build an industrial plant on fields where monarch butterflies feed and reproduce, and then by razing those same fields in a fit of pique.

The ADM has the willing ear of Minister Alghabra, but the airport authority should not impose its will on a minister – if that is indeed the case – and the Minister of Transport should not be exercising a veto over a needed decision to preserve biodiversity here before our eyes.



For COP-15 to succeed globally, there must be many situations around the world when the environment trumps economic development. Right now, here in Montreal, the reverse is happening: the ADM's development dreams are crushing the environment.

If the federal government's actions over the Technoparc ecosystem are an example of the way that the global game will be played, COP-15 will ultimately fail, starting right here in Montreal where the latest agreement has just been signed.

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Date Created

January 2023