



The Monarch Fields  
must not be sacrificed

## Description

# Another less environmentally costly choice can and must be made

By David Fletcher

August 19, 2021

The other fork of the road – the one “less travelled by” – offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth.

– Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962

A public consultation about a development project on federal lands leased by the **Aéroport de Montréal (ADM)** from the federal government is now underway. **Meltech Innovation Canada**, an affiliate of the **Medicom Group**, plans the construction of a surgical-grade mask material production facility at the northern limit of the site. Domestic production of the personal protection masks we have been wearing since the COVID-19 pandemic began is an indisputable need.



Milkweed is plentiful in the Monarch Fields – Image: [Fritz Flohr Reynolds](#) via [StockPholio.net](#)

However, while the plant’s purpose is laudable, its location in the “**Monarch Fields**,” now recovering and rewilding after decades as golf links, is terribly misguided. Another less environmentally costly choice can and must be made.

No one can be unaware of our troubled environmental times. Ironically, the need for Meltec’s product, a future bulwark against COVID-like pandemics, has arisen out of human engendered habitat degradation and ecological insouciance. Zoonotic disease occurrence worldwide can only be expected to become more frequent, its spread born on the wings of growth economics and environmental sacrifice.

No land where wild species now persist and thrive, even in our city, can be dismissed as expendable. The linkages between climate change and biodiversity-biomass decline are becoming ever more starkly apparent. We must prioritize the return of damaged lands to a natural state for the sake of both struggling wildlife and vulnerable people. This, both the ongoing international process at the United Nations and the overwhelming scientific consensus makes clear.

‘Ironically, the need for Meltec’s product, a future bulwark against COVID-like pandemics, has arisen out of human engendered habitat degradation and ecological insouciance.’

“We need transformational change operating on processes and behaviours at all levels: individual, communities, business, institutions and governments.” “We must redefine our way of life and consumption.” Among contributors to Earth’s shattered equilibrium are “losses of habitat and resilience” and “overexploitation.” These are among the conclusions of a very recent 4,000-page draft report by the **United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**, released prematurely to Agence France-Presse. Business and institutions



---

mean Medicom, Meltech Innovations, the Aéroport de Montréal (ADM) AND the Government of Canada must prioritize and contribute to solutions not exacerbate the problem.

Local governments have an essential role to play in protecting and reviving biodiversity. At the **10th Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD)**, held in Aichi-Nagoya in 2010, cities and local authorities recognized that “Cities... are responsible for a disproportionately large ecological footprint, which threatens the health of the planet’s ecosystems.” The Aichi/Nagoya Declaration of the City Biodiversity Summit 2010 appealed “to all local governments and their citizens, as well as the CBD Parties and the international community, to support us in this endeavour.”

The word “citizens” would refer, of course, to all local actors, and include corporate ones such as those now planning to develop the Monarch Fields. No responsible, nor responsive, organization can claim a pass on this commitment, nor claim ignorance of it. It is a key part of the sustainable development ethos, a federal government obligation, that will help secure us a viable future.

‘... Medicom, Meltech Innovations, the Aéroport de Montréal (ADM) AND the Government of Canada must prioritize and contribute to solutions not exacerbate the problem.’

Montreal needs the choice of a different site. The following quotation from the recent, 10-year budget document **Montréal PDI 2021 – 2030 – Programme décennal d’immobilisations Fiches détaillées**, page 75, is Montreal’s most recent acknowledgement of this international obligation: « *Afin d’atteindre son objectif de protection de milieux naturels, la Ville de Montréal doit multiplier ses efforts et ses investissements afin de saisir les opportunités de pérenniser des milieux pour les générations futures. La protection de la biodiversité est un enjeu mondial et les villes sont appelées à jouer un rôle majeur dans la protection des milieux naturels d’intérêt écologique de leur territoire.* » <sup>1</sup>



Red-tailed hawks are frequently seen above the Monarch Fields – Image: [Greg Hume \(Greg5030\)](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Our urban landscape, like many worldwide, has become depleted of nature, as amply demonstrated by any aerial view of the Montreal Agglomeration. After World War II, the indiscriminate infrastructuralization of our urban islands ravaged what could have been a magnificent natural endowment for its citizens as well as for its wildlife. And Montreal lies at the heart of one of the most heavily transformed and ecologically degraded regions in Canada.

Again, referring to the above cited budget document, Montreal records the least endowment in natural spaces of any large urban area in Canada: « *L'objectif de 10 % de milieux naturels protégés terrestres nécessite des investissements pour la protection sur l'ensemble du territoire. Ces initiatives sont également motivées par une volonté de rattraper les autres grandes villes canadiennes en termes d'espaces verts par habitant (230 ha/100 000 habitants vs une médiane de 473 ha/100 000 habitants pour les autres grandes villes).* » <sup>2</sup>

Ecologically impoverished Montreal has a mere **6.3%** of its territory conserved to date. It would need another 3.7%, or 1847 hectares to reach its currently unrealistic target of **10%**, and an utterly impossible 5342 hectares to reach the international benchmark of **17%** set at Aichi in 2010.

Sadly, the response of myopic political leadership at all levels has been vacillation. The addition of the Monarch Fields that Meltech intends to develop, along with all the adjoining, undeveloped federal land, would contribute importantly to redressing Montreal's shortfall.

'Ecologically impoverished Montreal has a mere 6.3% of its territory conserved to date. It would need another 3.7%, or 1847 hectares to reach its currently unrealistic target of 10%, and an utterly impossible 5342 hectares to reach the international benchmark of 17% set at Aichi in 2010.'

Well-informed citizens have taken on the vision otherwise lacking in those vested with the power to act. They understand the ecological merits of the site in question, born of their lifetime experiences in nature. The name they have conferred, Monarch Fields, is well deserved. The iconic butterflies in these fields, drawn in significant numbers by the **plentiful milkweed** their caterpillars must feed on, is testament to the site's indisputable value. They are, clearly, getting their needs met there.



Meadow voles are abundant in the Monarch Fields –  
Image: [John J. Mosesso](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

But monarchs are in serious decline. According to the Washington D.C.-based **Center for Biological Diversity**, in a press release dated February 25, 2021: "Overall eastern monarchs have declined by more than 80% over the past two decades." In that release, **Tierra Curry**, a senior scientist at the Center stated: "Monarchs are the face of the wildlife extinction crisis where even once common species could now disappear. They need us because if we don't act now to save them, monarch migrations will collapse and that would be morally unforgivable."

[The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada \(COSEWIC\)](#), an independent advisory panel to the **Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada**, in a press release dated December 5, 2016, declared monarch butterflies among "Canada's iconic migrants at grave risk," and conferred on them the status "Endangered."

In 2014, Canada had already recognized the monarch as a "species of special concern" and signed an international agreement with the United States and Mexico for its conservation. A Canadian Government species at risk fact sheet entitled **Monarch Butterfly: profile of a species at risk** declares: "It is also important

to keep native milkweed levels from declining. The removal of existing milkweed can reduce habitat availability for Monarchs.” No moral person nor organization, neither Canada nor the ADM, can seriously consider the destruction of important habitat that Meltec’s mask material plant would bring.

The ADM claims to be environmentally responsible, promising to compensate for the losses in the Monarch Fields by planting milkweed in the Des Sources Ecological Park nearby. But there can be no justification in those sorts of zero-sum game trading off a good deed in one place for a misguided one in another. Other available conservation or restoration sites should be protected in their own rights and not used as recompense for a wrong done elsewhere.

The fields at risk would still deserve to be protected were the Monarchs not present. **Raptorial birds**, both **owls** and **hawks**, as well as **foxes**, are drawn to the Monarch Fields by **meadow voles** present in high numbers throughout. These small rodents are active year-round hidden in their tunnels under the thatch cover created by winter snow pressing tall grasses to the ground.



Snow imprint made by owl hunting voles – Image: Marian McNair

**The Nature Conservancy of Canada’s** profile on the **Short-eared Owl**, listed by COSEWIC as threatened, states that “Habitat loss and degradation on its wintering grounds and some breeding sites are a major threat to short-eared owl populations.” It claims a population loss of nearly 30% in the last 10 to 12 years, a serious decline. This owl, present in the fields, gets a major part of its diet met by the voles, which they detect and capture even under the cover of snow.

The time has come for us on our beleaguered planet to start paying back the huge debt our economy has incurred. Given the enormous impact of human activity on natural systems, particularly within recent history, restoration of transformed lands has now become an urgent international priority. However large or small, every measure of healing, in every place where nature might thrive, is now needed.

Members of the environmental community have been portrayed for decades by economic interests as unnecessarily obstructionist and irrational. Yet our views are fully in concert with that expert community advising the UN on the most rational course ahead. The stakes have become existential, an assessment that no amount



---

of prevarication will change.

Let the Monarch Fields be spared the assault now being prepared for them. Wiser heads must prevail. Let's make Montrealers proud.

'We are all astronauts on a little spaceship called Earth.'

– R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, 1963

'There are no passengers on spaceship earth. We are all crew.'

– Marshall McLuhan, 1965

## ADM Consultations

Contributions can be made to the ADM Consultations **until August 24** at [consultation-projets@admtl.com](mailto:consultation-projets@admtl.com)

---

## Translations from French into English of Montreal Budget citations

1. In order to achieve its objective of protecting natural environments, the city of Montréal must multiply its efforts and investments in order to seize opportunities to preserve environments for future generations. The protection of biodiversity is a global issue and cities are called upon to play a major role in the protection of natural environments of ecological interest on their territory.
  2. The objective of 10% of natural environments protected on land requires investments for protection throughout the territory. These initiatives are also motivated by a desire to catch up with other large Canadian cities in terms of green space per capita (230 ha/100,000 inhabitants vs. a median of 473 ha/100,000 inhabitants for other large cities).
- 

**Disclaimer:** *The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of WestmountMag.ca or its publishers.*

Feature image: Red fox cubs [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters](#) [CC BY 2.0](#) via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Sign-up to our newsletter  
and get email notification  
of our most recent articles

**Sign up**

*Read*

[other articles about the environment](#)

---



*David Fletcher is the Vice President of the Green Coalition.*



**Category**

- 1. Article | Environment
- 2. Opinion

**Tags**

- 1. Aéroport de Montréal (ADM)
- 2. Center for Biological Diversity
- 3. David Fletcher
- 4. Green Coalition
- 5. IPCC report
- 6. Meltech Innovation Canada
- 7. Monarch Fields
- 8. Nature Conservancy of Canada

**Date Created**

August 2021