



The St. Pierre River
must be protected

Description

An appropriate and permanent solution to the contamination problem is needed

By **Louise Legault**, director, Les Amis du parc Meadowbrook with 8 co-signatories*

Since early summer, there has been concern about the fate of the **St. Pierre River** where it runs through **Meadowbrook Golf Course** to Lachine. This is one of the rare locations in Montreal where one can still see this **historic river** which used to flow from the mountain to Verdun, joining the Little St. Pierre River which finally emptied into the St. Lawrence at Pointe-à-Callière, the birthplace of the City of Montreal.

The Supreme Court's laudable June 2018 decision required the City of Montreal to stop polluting the river, but the issue remained complex.

The City of Montreal knew as early as 2002 that the stream was contaminated, thanks to studies conducted by the Réseau de suivi des milieux aquatiques (RSMA). It was found that the pollution came from the Toe Blake collector that runs from the Town of Mount Royal through Côte Saint-Luc, Montreal and Montreal West and into the Meadowbrook Golf Course at Toe Blake Park in Montreal West. The collector is contaminated by crossed connections in Côte Saint-Luc and Montreal West.

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In 2014, the City of Montreal also conducted a thorough study of the collector, case by case (for a total of 160 manholes) and identified 167 crossed connections in Côte Saint-Luc and 51 in Montreal West. Using this report, the Société pour vaincre la pollution (SVP) located the sectors where the crossed connections were found, as well as the addresses of affected properties. We gave these addresses to the three municipalities involved.



St. Pierre River at Meadowbrook before diversion –
Image: courtesy of Deanne Delaney

We called for action from the Cities of Montreal, Côte Saint-Luc and Montreal West, as well as the Agglomeration, but received only partial responses. In order to comply with the Supreme Court's directive giving it until the end of 2019 to stop the pollution, the City of Montreal decided to temporarily deviate the Toe Blake collector upstream from the river, until the crossed connections could be corrected. We are gravely concerned that this solution will become permanent and will cause the river to disappear.

This diversion of the collector during dry periods is a concern for several reasons. It clearly reduces pollution in the stream, but it causes the river to run dry during heatwaves, which we see more frequently because of climate change. This measure causes significant damage to the flora that has established itself along the riverbank since the owner has stopped mowing the grass in this area. The fauna on the river bottom, at the base of the food chain, also struggle to survive under dry conditions. In addition, the entire hydrographic system will be affected, because the river drains the area's vernal ponds that provide a stopping place for migratory birds on their annual flight. This is a rare and special sight in the heart of Montreal.

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We must save the river while there is a movement to daylight watercourses that have been buried over the years. This will reduce flooding of storm sewers and water treatment costs, while also lowering the temperature in heat islands. Corrections therefore need to be made to the crossed connections and the collector reconnected so that the St. Pierre river can resume its normal course. If we have learned anything from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the urgent need to care for our environment for the benefit of all.



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Feature image: the St. Pierre River as it crosses Meadowbrook Golf Course, by Andy Dodge

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Louise Legault is a member of the Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook steering committee. The group has defended the St. Pierre River and the Meadowbrook golf course from residential development for 30 years in order to create a nature park linked to the Falaise Saint-Jacques and the Sud-Ouest through the dalle-parc.

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