

Mrs. Cordeau Parent at the ceremony honouring her ecological donation, held on the bank of the Rivière des Mille Îles in 2005.

Photo: © Robert Bisson



MARCELLE CORDEAU PARENT

The ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

Part of the Great Marsh of the Rivière des Mille Îles is Protected Forever



Photo: © Jean Lauzon

The donated property (in red) has expanded the Parc de la Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, one of the last bastions for wildlife in the Greater Montréal metropolitan area.

This river does not contain a thousand islands, as its name suggests, but there are still around a hundred islands and islets, whose number varies with water levels. Starting from the Lac des Deux Montagnes, the river makes its way over 40 kilometres, through nine municipalities, and then flows into the Rivière des Prairies. The banks of the river are largely urbanized, but many of the islands remain uninhabited and are among some of the last bastions for wildlife in the Greater Montreal metropolitan area. Around thirty islands and a few shore sites are protected and make up the Parc de la Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

In November 2004, this 990-acre park was extended by 15 acres (6 hectares) thanks to an ecological gift made by Marcelle Cordeau Parent to Éco-Nature de Laval¹, a non-governmental organization that protects and manages the park. For this Laval citizen, the gesture was a hugely significant one, as it meant she was giving up her family assets. “My mother was born and grew up in Sainte-Rose, a neighbourhood of Laval, in a nice house that was built by my great-grandparents near the river. I never lived there personally—I was brought up in Montréal—but I spent part of my childhood there and have many happy memories of the times with

all my cousins. We could leave the house to swim and take a sloop out among the islands and onto a property that my grandfather called “the islet.” When we sailed through the flooded woodlands in the spring, we could imagine that we were in the Louisiana bayous,” Mrs. Cordeau Parent remembers. “When they passed away, my maternal grandparents bequeathed part of the land to each of their four children and one of my grandmother’s cousins. My mother inherited one-twelfth of the land, which she left to me in the 1960s. Over the years, I managed to buy the eleven other parts. I wanted to keep a connection with this place. I am just as fond of Sainte-Rose as my mother was and I want to be buried there with my husband, who passed away two years ago.”

Mrs. Cordeau Parent hoped to leave the piece of land to her children and her grandchildren in their turn. However, as it is a floodplain and cannot be reached by road, one of her sons suggested that she should rather give it to an organization that would be able to protect it. She was very interested in this idea, as she didn’t want to sell her property off or divide it up. Her two other children also agreed to the plan. After a few years of mulling the idea over, she made



her decision. Her accountant put her in touch with Éco-Nature de Laval, to whom Mrs. Cordeau Parent donated her land as part of Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program. This Program has enabled her to protect forever the place that is so dear to her, while also receiving some tax benefits.



Photo: © Rodolph Balej

The Silver Maple grows in wet habitats and tolerates flooding. This tree species dominates the floodplain in this sector of the Rivière des Mille Îles.

The flood land is covered with huge aquatic grass beds and swamp forests, where one can find cattails, lilies, rushes, willows, and Silver Maples. It also includes an islet, two ponds, and a small stream, known locally as the Ruisseau du Diable (Devil's Stream). In the spring, when

the level of the river rises by two or three metres, the grass beds, the islet and the ponds are submerged, and only the maples and the willows can still be seen above the water. The area is of great ecological value and doesn't house any devils, but rather various animal species such as the Longnose Gar—the last representative of a large family of fossil fish—the Snapping Turtle, the Mink, various species of ducks, the Common Tern, the Osprey and the Red-shouldered Hawk, a bird of prey that is a species of special concern in Canada. As with all wetlands, the marsh acts as a sponge and a natural filter. Most of these habitats have been filled in or drained in the Montréal region, which makes the ecological value of this particular great marsh all the more important.

Mrs. Cordeau Parent recently visited the Rivière des Mille Îles for the first time in many years. Accompanied by her great granddaughter and other children, she rediscovered her river and her marsh. "Along with naturalists, we sailed among the waterlilies in a rabascaw



Photo: © Louis Bernatchez*

The Longnose Gar lives in grassy, shallow areas of the lakes and large rivers of southwestern Quebec. Its ability to breathe by gulping air at the surface allows it to survive in warm, stagnant waters.

and we observed "prehistoric" fish, turtles and a large variety of birds. When I saw all this natural beauty so close to Montréal, and canoeists who were enjoying it, I knew that now everyone, not just my children and my grandchildren, could learn about nature thanks to my marsh. I hope that my gift will allow future generations to enjoy all the beauty that nature holds."

For more information on ecological gifts, please contact:

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* L. Bernatchez and M. Giroux. 2000. *Les poissons d'eau douce du Québec et leur répartition dans l'est du Canada*. Éditions Broquet. 350 pp.

Ce document est également disponible en français

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