

Reviving Lost Urban Rivers

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Bouchard Creek and Cheonggyecheon as Catalysts for Bilateral Cooperation

Overview

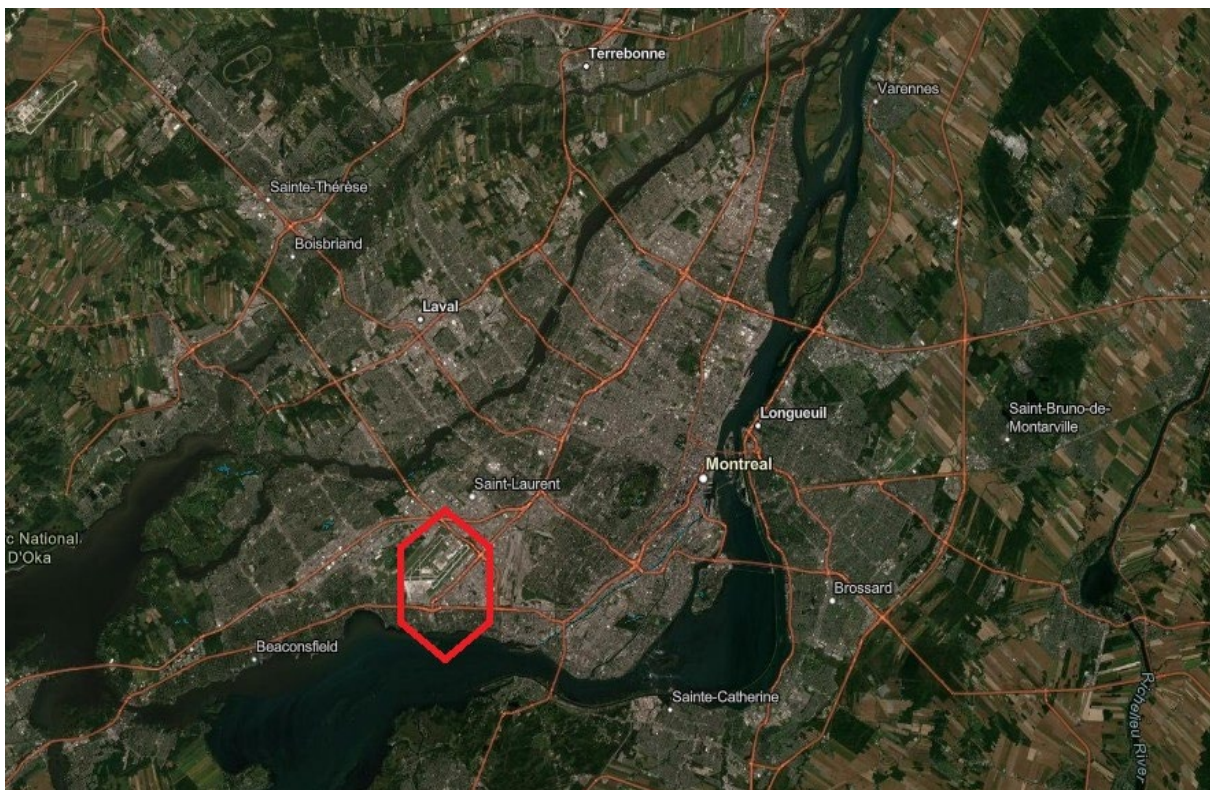
The Island of Montreal once had approximately 337 kilometers of streams and rivers, of which about 82% have been lost, implying a significant number of distinct watercourses. Examples tied to urban development are the Raimbault and Meadowbrook creeks and the lost Otter Lake.

Bouchard Creek, a remnant of this natural heritage, was largely buried beneath what is now Montreal's Pierre Elliot Trudeau Airport (YUL) during WWII. Years of commercial and residential growth have further compromised the remaining visible sections, with several toxic spills contributing to its contamination and that of its downstream Saint Lawrence River.

Founded in 2021 and based in Dorval, Quebec, the Bouchard Creek Foundation (FRB) is dedicated to the restoration and protection of Bouchard Creek. FRB leverages cutting-edge, scalable technological innovative solutions to address urban water body restoration challenges, creating models that can be replicated across Canada. In collaboration with local stakeholders — including private landowners, businesses, and municipalities — FRB aspires to transform Bouchard Creek into a benchmark for environmental sustainability and innovation. Website: <https://fondationruisseaubouchard.org/>

Greater Montreal Region

Red outline shows the location of the Bouchard Creek watershed on the west side of the island.



Current Path of Bouchard Creek

60% above ground but heavily engineered; the remainder diverted underground, much of it under the Montreal Airport — far from a natural creek.



Inspired by Seoul's Restoration Project

The FRB takes inspiration from global success stories, with Seoul's renowned Cheonggyecheon Stream restoration serving as a primary model for improbable and dramatic urban renewal. By adopting key elements of Seoul's approach, the FRB has formed a diverse coalition of partners—Montreal's Water Services, local businesses, universities, schools, and engaged citizens—who are united in their commitment to restoring the ecological health of Bouchard Creek.

Seoul: The Uncovering of Its Lost Downtown Stream



Seoul's Cheonggyecheon restoration showcases how urban centres can successfully reclaim their natural waterways. This transformative project revitalised Seoul's downtown, delivering environmental, economic, and cultural benefits. Similarly, Montreal's Bouchard Creek project aims to replicate this success on a smaller scale, drawing on key lessons from Seoul's expertise in change management, governance, and conflict resolution.

Bouchard Creek: Results Achieved So Far by the Fondation Ruisseau Bouchard (FRB)

2021–2025, led entirely by volunteers:

 **Secured over \$1 million in multi-year federal funding** from Environment and Climate Change Canada — despite having no salaried staff and relying entirely on volunteers and two retired board members to cover core operational expenses.

 **Built trusted, long-term partnerships** with six schools representing more than 4,000 students — securing in-kind management and staff commitments valued at over \$500,000. Two more local schools have just recently expressed interest.

 **Co-developed with GRAME (Groupe de recommandations et d'actions pour un meilleur environnement)** a scalable and practical guide to help business and citizen groups organize annual clean-up operations along Bouchard Creek — making environmental action more accessible and replicable.

 **Completed comprehensive archival research** on the creek's evolution from the 18th century onward — drawing on Dorval's municipal archives and Montreal's BANQ (Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec).

 **Downloaded, analyzed, and validated** over a decade of water quality sampling data (2011–2024) from seven official monitoring stations along the creek, as published by the City of Montreal.

 **Extracted watershed-specific data** from a 2018 island-wide topographic study to map Bouchard Creek's historical perimeter — directly informing a new digital twin and 3D watershed model.

 **Located and engaged** (then in Madagascar) the Université de Montréal professor who led the original 3D mapping of all historical Montreal watersheds — and obtained her team's raw data to isolate the Bouchard basin.

 **Pioneered Canada's first digital twin of an urban creek** — a working prototype built with a Canada Research Chair at Université Laval to integrate ecological, hydrological, and urban data in real time.

📦 **Launched an initiative to integrate all publicly available ownership and administrative data** (municipal, provincial, and federal) at the lot-by-lot level within the Bouchard watershed — laying groundwork for future public engagement and landowner outreach.

👉 **Invited by the City of Montreal** to submit a formal brief to its Commission on Water — a sign of FRB's growing influence in shaping long-term urban water strategies.

📁 **Framed environmental action as a practical investment** for landowners — introducing a business-case approach to encourage site-level improvements on residential, institutional, and commercial properties.

💬 **Earned formal endorsements from a broad cross-section of stakeholders** — including public agencies, private sector leaders, and community organizations — grounded in trust, transparency, and tangible collaboration. Recently named a finalist in the West Island Chamber of Commerce *Accolades* competition, further recognizing FRB's credibility and momentum.

🌱 **Demonstrated a scalable model for business and citizen-led restoration** — showing that with focus, integrity, and aligned partnerships, measurable environmental impact is possible without permanent staff, offices, or traditional NGO infrastructure.

Ongoing restoration and protection of Bouchard Creek by volunteers:



Opportunity to Strengthen Korean-Canadian Relations

Quebec's Korean community, comprising approximately 10,000 individuals, is predominantly based in Montreal, contributing significantly to the region's academic and entrepreneurial sectors. This vibrant presence fosters robust cultural and intellectual exchanges between Montreal and Seoul, further strengthened by the fact that many Korean residents own property within Montreal's remaining watersheds, reflecting a mutual interest in sustainable land management.

On the economic front, this relationship is bolstered by substantial investments from Korean companies, such as Solus Advanced Materials, which is set to establish North America's first battery copper foil production facility near Montreal in Quebec. With the plant slated for completion in 2026 and an initial capacity of 25,000 tons of copper foil annually for electric vehicle batteries—later expanding to 63,000 tons—this partnership aligns with the ecological innovation goals shared by both regions, highlighting the intersection of economic development and environmental stewardship.

Beyond economic ties, collaboration between Korea and Quebec extends to emergency response, exemplified by the deployment of 150 Korean personnel in July 2023 to aid Quebec in containing devastating wildfires. This act of solidarity highlights the deepening bond between the regions. Meanwhile, Seoul's Cheonggyecheon restoration project—a globally recognized model for urban creek revitalization—offers Montreal valuable lessons for its ongoing Bouchard Creek initiative and the potential restoration of Saint Pierre/Otter Lake, both grappling with comparable infrastructure and environmental challenges. The thoroughly documented Cheonggyecheon effort serves as a blueprint for effective governance, change management, and conflict resolution in urban renewal, demonstrating how cities can reclaim their natural heritage while enhancing the quality of urban life.

Next Steps for Bilateral Engagement

Montreal and Seoul share a meaningful foundation for collaboration through an established "Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation" signed by the two mayors on April 8, 2015. Building on this relationship, and with the encouragement of Korea's Ambassador Lim Woongsoon, the FRB held a constructive meeting in September 2023 with representatives from the Korean Consulate in Montreal to identify avenues for bilateral knowledge exchange in urban water management. The shared objective is to adapt lessons from Seoul's globally recognized Cheonggyecheon restoration to inform and elevate efforts underway along Bouchard Creek. This collaboration aims to position Bouchard Creek as a Canadian case study in applied urban ecological renewal, drawing directly on Seoul's leadership in large-scale core downtown creek restoration.

How Can Canadian Leaders and the Korean Embassy and Consulate Further Support These Efforts?

Deepen Bilateral Diplomatic Engagement

Canadian and Korean leaders—across government, academia, and civil society—can strengthen ties by organizing targeted exchanges and collaborative initiatives focused on urban environmental innovation. The Korean embassy and consulate can help convene these efforts, while Canadian partners at all levels of government and in major cities like Montreal and Toronto bring local knowledge and urban planning leadership to the table. Together, they can position Bouchard Creek as a symbol of joint action in sustainability diplomacy.

Support Cross-Border Public–Private Innovation

Both Canadian and Korean institutions have a role to play in encouraging joint ventures in green infrastructure, ESG-aligned investment, and digital innovation for watershed management. Korean firms with world-leading environmental technologies and Canadian organizations with deep local networks and field expertise are natural partners for demonstration projects. The embassy and consulate can amplify these efforts by promoting visibility and facilitating introductions across sectors.

Elevate Cultural and Civic Diplomacy

Embassies and consulates are ideal platforms to host public-facing initiatives that blend environmental restoration with cultural exchange. Canadian-led art, education, and technology programs can be matched by Korean storytelling, case studies, and immersive experiences such as exhibitions on Cheonggyecheon. These events can inspire civic pride, deepen diasporic engagement, and spark wider public imagination on how lost rivers—both in Seoul and Montreal—can be rediscovered and renewed.

What Knowledge-Sharing Events Could Advance This Collaboration?

Urban Waterway Renewal Summit

Convene a high-level summit uniting Canadian and Korean urban planners, hydrologists, architects, and policymakers to explore emerging approaches in urban watercourse restoration. Featuring Seoul's Cheonggyecheon and Montreal's Bouchard Creek as case studies, the event would promote cross-cultural exchange, highlight scalable innovations, and spark dialogue on climate resilience in dense urban environments.

Korea–Canada Green Investment Forum

Host a targeted business and investment forum focused on opportunities in environmental restoration, smart infrastructure, and clean technology. Korean and Canadian business leaders would explore

partnership models that align ESG and CSR objectives with tangible, place-based projects — including demonstration initiatives along Bouchard Creek.

Technical Deep-Dive Workshops

Organize a series of practitioner-level workshops led by Korean engineers and ecosystem restoration specialists, designed to share the design principles, engineering challenges, and governance innovations behind the Cheonggyecheon restoration. Canadian municipal and civil society leaders would gain practical insights adaptable to Montreal's watershed context, helping to accelerate local planning and execution.

Call to Action

Reviving urban rivers is no longer a symbolic gesture - it is a strategic imperative. Montreal and Seoul have both witnessed the costs of burying their natural waterways, and both now have a chance to lead in restoring them.

The story of Cheonggyecheon proves that even the most improbable restoration projects can succeed with vision, discipline, and broad-based support. The Bouchard Creek initiative now stands at a similar inflection point—one where policy, innovation, public will, and international cooperation converge.

As Korea deepens its presence in Quebec through trade, investment, and cultural exchange, Bouchard Creek offers a unique platform to extend that partnership into environmental diplomacy. The FRB welcomes the opportunity to work alongside Korean institutions—governmental, academic, corporate, and civic—to co-create a living demonstration of urban sustainability.

We invite the Korean Embassy and Consulate, Canadian officials, Korean and Canadian businesses, and engaged communities to take part in the next chapter. Together, we can transform a buried waterway into a model of bilateral innovation—one that revives not only a lost stream, but also a shared commitment to resilience, regeneration, and responsible urban futures.

[Preview: Bouchard Creek 2006–2025 – Documentary by Kirk Bennett](#)

Bottom Line

The Bouchard Creek initiative presents a distinctive opportunity for Koreans and Canadians to co-champion a project rooted in shared values: environmental sustainability, cultural stewardship, and community-driven renewal. By advancing this collaboration, both nations can deepen their bilateral relationship through tangible, place-based impact—transforming a once-forgotten stream into a lasting symbol of ecological leadership and international partnership between Montreal and Seoul and, indeed, between Canada and Korea.