
ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK TORONTO, ONTARIO

A Park Concept developed by Canadians for Canadians:

The Rouge National Urban Park concept is a vision document that was developed following a robust and inclusive planning process. Parks Canada initiated a broad public engagement program over the summer of 2012 and received thousands of comments from Canadians, near and far, expressing a diversity of perspectives. Overall, survey respondents are supportive of the proposed concept. Public feedback on the park concept will inform the development of recommendations on legislative process, policies and a strategic plan for Rouge National Urban Park.

Significant increase in the size of the Park:

The study area in the concept increases the size of the current park to 5600 hectares, an area 20% bigger than the current Rouge Park. The Study area is more than 13 times the size of Stanley Park in Vancouver.

The study area under consideration was included in the proposal set out in the Rouge Park Alliance governance report and respects the goals and principles that have been established through this past year of discussions with stakeholders.

It is also important to underline that Parks Canada did not arbitrarily set a study area for Rouge National Urban Park but instead has worked closely and respectfully with all public landholders towards establishing this area.

Better, real conservation results:

The park concept clearly states that “accepted, scientific ecological criteria (e.g., naturally reproducing, self-sustaining populations of native species, natural restoration, elimination of invasive species) will be used to assess and prioritize ecosystem restoration. Habitat links between terrestrial and aquatic habitat in the Rouge Valley will be maintained to foster connection between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine.”

Providing specific details as part of the visioning document would be premature. As part of the development of a strategic plan, Parks Canada will further develop this contiguous conservation and restoration approach.

More than 100 stakeholders have been engaged as part of the establishment process to date and helped develop the nine guiding principles for Rouge National Urban Park. Among those principles, all of which are clearly stated in the Park Concept document, Parks Canada has committed to “maintain and improve the ecological health” of the park.

In addition, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, at its World Congress in September 2012, published its first Ecological Restoration Guidelines which was based on the Parks Canada framework for achieving real conservation results.

As an international leader in conservation with a solid track record of real conservation achievements, Parks Canada was bestowed the *Gift to the Earth Award* by World Wildlife Fund International. Parks Canada will deliver on its commitments by respecting the nine guiding principles and meeting the requirements of its Agency mandate of protection, education and visitor experience, and will be used as the basis for work in the Rouge.

A place accessible for Canadians – to learn and enjoy:

Rouge National Urban Park will be a “people’s park”—a place to gather, enjoy, discover and learn about the Rouge Valley’s rich natural and cultural heritage. It will offer the opportunity for meaningful, accessible experiences for all visitors, without entry fees, and these will reflect the national standards of services and products provided by Parks Canada and its partners.

Parks Canada will work to foster a culture which connects to nature through community and youth volunteering, engagement, respect and partnership that will grow and continue once the park has been established.

Rouge National Urban Park’s diverse environments—coastal freshwater marsh, rivers, forest, wetlands, rolling hills and valleys, farm land, etc.—as well as the stories associated with its wide range of past and present human uses— recreational, agricultural, residential, transport corridor for Aboriginal peoples and fur trade—are conducive to a wide array of unique opportunities for visitors and residents alike to experience.

The current visitor experience offer will be maintained or enhanced, additional compatible experiences will be considered, and third-party collaboration will be explored to permit the delivery of unique experiences.

Conclusion:

Parks Canada’s approach recognizes the importance of integrating actions like restoring natural habitat, while providing opportunities for engaging visitors to enjoy themselves and learn about these restoration activities. Fostering this culture of connecting to nature through community engagement and stewardship will be integral to the overall long-term protection and presentation of Rouge National Urban Park.

The Parks Canada approach has been adopted by many countries. In fact, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Society for Ecological Restoration International and the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are endorsing the application of the Parks Canada approach globally to help guide the restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity, and increase public awareness around the world. This extensive experience and expertise will be used in the management of Rouge National Urban Park.

Parks Canada now has the opportunity to implement this philosophy in Rouge National Urban Park, where nature, sustainable agriculture and a rich cultural heritage can all be experienced by Canadians.