



environmental
defence
INSPIRING CHANGE



December 13, 2012

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty,
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier,

Re: Important Conditions for Rouge Park Land Transfer to Federal Government

We are writing to urge your government to attach strong conditions to the transfer of provincial Rouge Park lands to the federal government and Parks Canada for Rouge National Park.

We recommend five conditions to ensure the new National Park adequately protects the critical Rouge Park ecological corridor(s) between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine, as envisioned in both the Greenbelt Plan (s. 3.2.6) and the Rouge North Management Plan (4.1.1.2).

Southern Ontario has one third of Canada's population, one third of Canada's species at risk, and less than one percent of its land protected by provincial and national parks. Rouge Park may be the last large natural parkland opportunity in the endangered Carolinian and mixed woodland plain eco-zones of southern Ontario. Within this context, the ecological significance and potential of Rouge Park cannot be overstated.

The creation of Rouge National Park represents a unique opportunity and responsibility to advance the Province's recently announced implementation plan for conserving biodiversity. Given the growth projections and development pressures in the Greater Toronto region, the government should seize this opportunity to expand the system of protected areas and park lands, to promote landscape-level conservation planning, and to reduce urban sprawl – all key actions identified in *Biodiversity: It's In Our Nature*.

The history of the Rouge Park dates back to Premier David Peterson, who, on March 26, 1990, announced plans to create a Rouge Park linking Lake Ontario to the Oak

Ridges Moraine. Four years later, the Rouge Park Management Plan was approved by the Ontario Government after thorough public and stakeholder consultation. As stated in the 1994 Rouge Park Management Plan, the vision for the park "centres on the protection and appreciation of the park ecosystem."

In 2005, your government created the widely acclaimed Greenbelt Plan which similarly identifies and protects Rouge Park ecological corridors in *section 3.2.6*:

*"This Plan identifies a **600 metre wide corridor for the Little Rouge River as the main ecological corridor**, between Lake Ontario and the southerly boundary of Oak Ridges Moraine Area, as well as several other Rouge River tributaries, in recognition of the longstanding commitment to establishing the Rouge Park. ... In the case of a conflict between this Plan and the Rouge North Management Plan, the more restrictive policies apply."*

Despite this longstanding commitment, the federal government's Rouge National Urban Park Concept (June 2012) proposes a Rouge Park vision that does not even mention the word ecosystem or the Greenbelt Plan's "main ecological corridor". Thus, the draft National Park Concept is critically inconsistent with the public vision, planning, scientific and legislative framework developed over the last 23 years through exhaustive public, stakeholder and agency consultation, and provincial leadership.

We understand that Minister Bob Chiarelli is negotiating with the federal government to develop a memorandum of understanding to guide the transfer of priceless provincial Rouge Park lands to the federal government. We respectfully ask the Provincial Government to secure a binding legal agreement requiring that the federal planning process, legislation and strategic plan for Rouge National Park will:

1. Incorporate, strengthen and implement the vision, goal and objectives of approved Rouge Park Plans (1994 and 2001), the provincial Greenbelt Plan (2005), the Rouge Natural Heritage Action Plan (2008), the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2002), the Toronto Remedial Action Plan and Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and associated watershed, fisheries and natural heritage system plans.
2. Protect and restore the ecological corridor outlined in the Greenbelt Plan (s.3.2.6), Rouge North Management Plan (4.1.1.2), and Rouge Natural Heritage Action Plan (2008) to create a large mixed-wood and Carolinian forest habitat system linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine with public parkland.
3. Expand the current 57 km² study area to approximately 100+ km² by including all of the existing contiguous Rouge Park lands and the adjacent federal lands within the Provincial Greenbelt natural heritage system in order to facilitate good long term planning for the Park's ecological health and

resilience, biological diversity, visitor potential and sustainable community supported agriculture;

4. Include First Nations, Friends of the Rouge Watershed and other conservation organizations on the Rouge National Park Advisory Board to ensure that the deep community roots of Rouge Park continue to inform and influence Park planning, protection and implementation.
5. Ensure that agricultural operations within the park are sustainable and compatible with the protection of water quality, biological diversity and ecological health.

Your government has a number of opportunities to ensure that the transfer of Rouge Park lands maximizes this unique biodiversity conservation opportunity. Please require the above conditions to protect the Province's priceless Greenbelt and Rouge Park legacies and deliver on Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy.

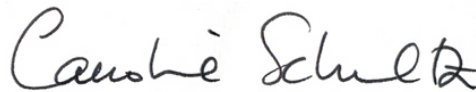
We trust that you will discuss these recommendations with Minister Chiarelli, your colleagues and Cabinet.

We look forward to your favourable response.

Yours truly,



Dr. Rick Smith
Executive Director
Environmental Defence



Caroline Schultz
Executive Director
Ontario Nature



Jim Robb
General Manager
Friends of the
Rouge Watershed

Cc. The Honourable Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable Michael Gravelle, Minister of Natural Resources