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Statement by major environmental groups applauds Ontario's refusal to transfer Rouge Park lands to Parks Canada until proposed Rouge National Urban Park Act is strengthened; *Draft federal legislation is inadequate to protect the park*

Toronto, ON - The Ontario government did the right thing yesterday by deciding not to transfer its substantial Rouge Park lands to Parks Canada until the federal legislation and management plan for Rouge Park are significantly strengthened.

The draft federal legislation (Bill C-40) fails to offer the protection Rouge Park deserves. Contrary to existing provincial Rouge Park policies, the draft federal legislation does not prioritize ecological integrity in park management. And it does not honour a January 2013 Memorandum of Agreement signed between Parks Canada and the Ontario government requiring written park policies that "meet or exceed provincial policies."

We call on the federal government to uphold its commitment in the Memorandum of Agreement. As it stands now, the draft federal legislation threatens to undermine 25 years of consultation, scientific study and provincial policy development that made ecological integrity the main purpose of the park and the top priority for park management.

A recent legal review by Ecojustice, commissioned the groups below, concluded that Bill C-40 affords significantly weaker natural environment protection than either the *Canada National Parks Act* or Ontario's *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*. For instance, unlike these Acts which prioritize ecological integrity, Bill C-40 only requires that the Minister "*take into consideration* the protection of its natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and of the health of those ecosystems."

Rouge Park deserves better. The proposed Rouge National Urban Park should provide protection and restoration of forest and wetland areas to soften the impacts of urban growth, improve the quality of water entering Lake Ontario, reduce the risks of climate change related flooding, erosion and property damage, and improve habitat for rare and endangered species.

Rouge Park is the largest remaining tract of public park land within Canada's endangered Carolinian Forest Zone and most populous region. Rouge Park offers nature education, trail walks, sandy beaches, camping, kayaking and other outdoor recreation opportunities at our doorstep. A high quality Rouge Park will help to improve our environment and health and provide a national park accessible to millions of Canadians.

The groups issuing this statement are: Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature, Friends of the Rouge Watershed (FRW), the David Suzuki Foundation, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Wildlands League, Nature Canada, Sierra Club Canada, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition.

For background information, (and further information about the legal review) please click [here](#).

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For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

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