

Rouge National Park Questions with Background Information

Please answer "Yes" or "No" and then add a few lines of explanation, if you want.

Question 1: If elected, will you support amendments to the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* and draft park management plan to support the implementation of the:

***Greenbelt Act* and Plan;**

***Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) Conservation Act* and Plan;**

Rouge Park Management Plan & Rouge North Management Plan;

Rouge Park Natural Heritage Action Plan;

Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan; and

Rouge & Duffins Watershed Plans and Great Lakes Water Quality Improvement Plans.

Background Information:

The above laws and plans were approved after many years of public and stakeholder consultation. Section 3.2.6 of the Greenbelt Plan extends provincial policy status to the Rouge North Management Plan and other "supporting" plans like the Rouge Park Natural Heritage Action Plan, the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan and the Rouge Watershed Plan.

On January 26, 2013, Ontario and Canada signed a Memorandum of Agreement which states:

"Parks Canada will work with Ontario to develop written policies in respect of the creation, management and administration of the Park that meet or exceed provincial policies ..."

Unfortunately, the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* and draft park management plan fail to meet or exceed the provincial policy framework - a required condition for the transfer of important provincial Rouge Park lands to Parks Canada.

Attachment 1, a letter from Ontario Minister Brad Duguid, indicates that the Province is unwilling to transfer its crucial Rouge Valley and Park lands to the federal government, unless the federal government amends the federal park legislation and plan to "meet or exceed" Ontario policies for protecting and improving the "ecological integrity" of Rouge Park.

Attachment 2 summarizes the existing provincial legislative and policy framework for comparison with the weak *Rouge National Park Act*. Existing Greenbelt, Rouge Park, ORM and Rouge Watershed Plans prioritize the protection, improvement and restoration of "ecological integrity" and watershed health. The federal park legislation merely "takes into consideration the natural ecosystem", providing little, if any, lasting environmental protection.

Question 1 asks whether you will work, if elected as an MP, to amend the federal Rouge Park legislation and management plan to "meet or exceed" existing Ontario Greenbelt and ORM laws, Plans and policies, and approved Rouge Park and Watershed Plans.

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Question 2: If elected, will you support the following amended wording for section 6(1) of the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*?

The Minister must, when considering any aspect of the management of the Park, give priority to the restoration and maintenance of ecological integrity through the protection and restoration of natural resources and natural processes, while also giving consideration to cultural heritage, farming and infrastructure needs.

Background Information:

The amended wording for section 6(1) of the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* comes from a Private Members Bill (**Attachment 3**) tabled in the House of Commons in June 2015 by MP Rathika Sitsabaiesan. This amended wording:

- prioritizes ecological integrity similar to amendments put forward by NDP, Liberal and Green Party MPs during House of Commons committee meetings;
- prioritizes "ecological integrity" similar to existing provincial and national park laws;
- provides for reasonable consideration of farming, infrastructure and cultural needs;
- prioritizes "ecological integrity" as recommended by John Swaigen - one of Canada's most experienced and respected environmental lawyers;
- "meets or exceeds" existing Rouge Park and Greenbelt policies which prioritize the protection and restoration of ecological integrity - the pre-condition for the transfer of provincial Rouge Park lands to Parks Canada;
- prioritizes nature conservation, consistent with the international standard for "protected areas" cited by Parks Canada's former chief scientist (**Attachment 4**).

As **Attachments 1, 2 and 4** highlight, protecting and improving ecological integrity is prioritized within ORM, Greenbelt, Rouge Park and Rouge Watershed Plans, as well as provincial and national park legislation, and standards established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The federal government agreed to "meet or exceed" existing provincial policies, therefore, protecting and improving ecological integrity must continue to be the priority for the scientifically planned and zoned natural habitat system of the Park.

The federal government has tried to excuse its weak park legislation and plan by citing Rouge Park's near-urban setting, infrastructure and agricultural leases. However, many national parks have towns, highways, railways, recreation facilities and leased lands - and all existing national parks prioritize "ecological integrity".

Existing Rouge Park and Federal Green Space Plans identify areas for continued farming and areas for nature and public enjoyment. The Greenbelt and Rouge Park "main ecological corridor" is less than 20% the average park width. Therefore, prioritizing ecological integrity does not mean the re-naturalization of all the leased farmlands in Rouge Park.

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Please answer "Yes" or "No" and then add a few lines of explanation, if you want.

Question 3: If elected, will you support amendments to the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* and management plan to ensure timely implementation of the Greenbelt and Rouge Park North “main ecological corridor” and Environment Canada's science-based recommendations for improving biological diversity and water quality?

Background Information:

In 2013 alone, flooding damage cost Toronto almost \$1 billion. Insurance companies and flood damage victims are increasingly launching and winning law suits against government agencies, particularly if "due diligence" is lacking. To address these growing liabilities, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) analyzed development scenarios and found that as the urban envelope expands:

“meeting water quality targets will become an increasingly distant goal”

“ E. Coli bacteria levels significantly exceed provincial standards”

“middle tributaries would be subject to major hydrological impacts”

After consulting with stakeholders for two years, the Rouge Watershed Plan was developed to control runoff, protect water quality and offset erosion, flooding and climate change impacts. The top priorities of the approved 2007 Rouge Watershed Plan and Implementation Plan are:

Establish an expanded natural heritage system that provides multiple benefits, including biodiversity and habitats, water balance maintenance and restoration,improved quality of life, and greater resilience to urban growth and climate change.

"adopt policies to protect & restore natural cover ... from 24% to at least 31% of the land"

This approach is supported by Environment Canada's science-based recommendations for improving watershed health and biodiversity within Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement "Areas of Concern", as outlined in the report "How Much Habitat is Enough". Environment Canada recommends increasing forest cover to more than 30% of the watershed and wetland cover to more than 10%. Currently, the Rouge Watershed has only 13% forest cover and 1% wetland cover, leading to a "D" grade in the 2013 TRCA Rouge Watershed Report Card.

In the Rouge Watershed Plan, the areas targeted for forest and wetland restoration include the "main ecological corridor" mandated by the Greenbelt Plan, Rouge North Management Plan (2001), Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan (2007), Rouge Natural Heritage Action Plan (2008) and Markham OPA 140. These plans were approved after many years of consultation.

Shockingly, the flawed federal legislation and plan for *Rouge National Urban Park* ignore these approved plans and priorities, increasing the risk of costly flooding and erosion damage and pollution of our watersheds, our Lake Ontario beaches and our drinking water sources.

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Question 4: If elected, will you support enlarging the National Rouge Park to 100+ km² by including existing Rouge Valley and Park lands in Scarborough and Markham, and 24 km² of additional federal lands in Pickering to shrink the Pickering Airport Zone?

Background Information: Please see the attached **Brochure** for a colour map.

The federal government plans to create a National Rouge Park of approximately 75 km² in size by assuming control of approximately 35 km² of existing provincial and municipal Rouge Park lands and adding 40 km² of adjacent federal public lands in Markham, Pickering and Uxbridge.

Unfortunately, the current federal plan omits existing Rouge Park areas like Milne Park in Markham, important Rouge Valley lands in Scarborough and Markham, and additional federally owned lands in the Greenbelt and ORM in Pickering.

The federal government is reserving a needlessly large 36 km² Pickering Airport Zone which would destroy 15+ km² of public land within the Ontario Greenbelt and ORM. This 36 km² Airport Zone is more than twice the size of Toronto's Pearson Airport and twenty times the size of Markham's Buttonville Airport. Over-sized airports waste land and taxes and increase pollution and environmental damage. Mirabel, Montreal's over-sized second airport, wasted \$Billions and its terminal was demolished last year due to expensive under-use. We do not need and cannot afford another "white elephant" Federal Airport.

To conserve public land and taxes and avoid a needlessly large and expensive Pickering Airport, an additional 25+ km² of public lands should be set-aside for a 100+ km² National Rouge Park. This park will attract investors, entrepreneurs and good jobs to surrounding communities.

Other Relevant Information:

- Pearson and several other southern Ontario Airports have surplus capacity;
- Pearson can increase its capacity to 60 million passengers/year, almost twice the average annual passenger demand over the last decade;
- Pearson is one of the least efficient airports of 150 major airports worldwide, according to the Air Transport Research Society (ATRS);
- The Greater Toronto Airport Authority is already deeply in debt and Pearson's landing fees are among the highest in the world;
- Areas east of Toronto will account for only 11 per cent of the regional population, compared to 45 per cent west of the city by 2022, according to a 2002 Price Waterhouse Coopers Study on Hamilton Airport;
- Steps to avoid carbon pollution and dangerous climate change, and increasing security and cost concerns, will make flying less attractive and air travel is likely to level off;
- Communication technology will continue to improve and some types of air travel will be reduced to save money, time, resources and stress.

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Please answer "Yes" or "No" and then add a few lines of explanation, if you want.

Question 5: If elected, will you support amending the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* to remove the dangerous misnomer "Urban" from the park name?

Background Information:

The name / category of a park influences the expectations and behaviours of decision-makers, park managers and visitors, and the ability to resist privatization and exploitation. The federal government has already used the term "Urban Park" to undermine existing Rouge Park and Watershed policies, and provincial, national and international standards for protected areas.

The danger of the "Urban Park" template is revealed by "Downsview National Urban Park" which has plans to convert public park lands into thousands of private condominium units and artificial landscapes requiring expensive public maintenance.

Unlike "Urban" Parks:

- Rouge Park has greater biological diversity than almost any other Canadian National Park due to its location within the endangered Carolinian habitat zone of southern Ontario - home to 1/3 of Canada's endangered species;
- Rouge Park protects habitat for more than a thousand species of flora and fauna, including some 20 national and provincial species at risk;
- Rouge Park is larger than five existing Canadian national parks and it is more than 20X larger than major "Urban Parks" like Central Park and Stanley Park;
- Rouge Park contains a 25 km long Greenbelt "main ecological corridor" linking Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine;
- Rouge Park can be 100+ km² large and permanently connect with 7,200 km² of Greenbelt lands extending from Lake Ontario to the ORM and then to the Niagara Escarpment, Lake Huron, Lake Simcoe, Lake Scugog and Rice Lake;
- Rouge Park's public lands are rural and natural, not urbanized and manicured.

The designation "Urban Park" is a dangerous misnomer. It belies Rouge Park's national ecological significance and potential, its large size, its natural and rural character, its existing and potential landscape connectivity, and its natural visitor experiences.

Urban Parks try to be all things to all people and they gradually lose their natural values and ecological integrity. Rouge Park needs true national park protection to resist exploitation pressures and forever remain natural, rural and public.