

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK

The following is supplementary information on the Rouge National Urban Park, a Parks Canada park, requested by the Office de Consultation Public de Montréal on May 18, 2017 from Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook, during the presentation of its brief on the “Proposition de Développement du secteur Pierrefonds-Ouest.”

In addition to the documents cited in the bibliography at the end, information in this supplement can be found on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rouge_National_Urban_Park and, unless otherwise noted, quotations in this document are drawn from that source. **We have consulted with Parks Canada staff and they consider the Wikipedia entry to be accurate.**

How did the people of Toronto get Rouge turned into a National Park?

Some of the nearly 7,900 hectares of wilderness, wetlands, cultural landscapes, and farmlands that have been saved and are in the process of being converted into a national park, were slated for development in the mid-1980s. The threat of losing this large ecosystem, started a movement of over 30 years of community leadership and stewardship to urge the three levels of government – municipal, provincial, and federal - to act and to create the park, which is a process that is still ongoing.

What was the process that led to the park’s creation?

(The) “original Rouge Park was established in 1995 by the Province of Ontario in partnership with cities of Toronto, Markham and Pickering, the regional municipalities of York and Durham and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The original park consisted of approximately 40 square kilometres of parkland in Toronto, Markham and Pickering.

Parks Canada first committed to work towards the creation of Rouge National Urban Park in 2011, following a review of the former regional Rouge Park’s governance, organization and finance, which recommended the creation of a national urban park.

In laying the groundwork for the park's establishment, Parks Canada has consulted and collaborated with over 20,000 Canadians and 200 organizations, including Indigenous People, all levels of government, community groups, conservationists, farmers and residents.

The most well-known part of the original Rouge Park, near the Toronto Zoo and Rouge Beach areas, remain open and are managed on an interim basis by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority in partnership with Parks Canada and municipalities. As Rouge National Urban Park becomes fully operational, former Rouge Park lands will transfer to Parks Canada and become part of the much larger (79.1 km²) Rouge National Urban Park. Most remaining 'Rouge Park' lands are expected to transfer to Parks Canada in 2017.

Once fully established, Rouge National Urban Park will be the largest urban protected area in North America. It stretches from Lake Ontario in the south, north to the post-glacial Oak Ridges Moraine in the north.

On April 1, 2015, Transport Canada transferred the first lands that would make up Rouge National Urban Park to Parks Canada - 19.1 km² in the north end of the park in the City of Markham. On May 15, 2015 the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* came into force, formally establishing Rouge National Urban Park.”

Where was the money needed for the park sourced – being total amount broken down by federal, provincial, municipal and other?

Beginning in 2012, the federal government has committed \$170.6 million over 10 years to establish and operate Rouge National Urban Park. The money is being used for a variety of programs – restoration, infrastructure, and community programs - and as the park covers 7,900 hectares, the cost of operating such a park is higher than for a 365 hectare park which is proposed for L’Anse-à-l’Orme.

History and development

Rouge National Urban Park, created on May 15, 2015, will eventually span 79.1 km² (30.5 square miles or 7,900 hectares), and is operated by Parks Canada. The link for the park is <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/on/rouge/index.aspx>

The park, which is still being developed, is located within territories of the cities of Toronto, Markham, and Pickering, and the Township of Uxbridge. This includes the Rouge River, Petticoat Creek, and Duffins Creek watersheds. It should also be noted that the Rouge River “remains the healthiest river that flows through the City of Toronto.”

The 365 hectares of L’Anse-à-l’Orme, which consists of forests, wetlands, wet meadows, rivers and streams, fields, and former farmland reverting to a natural states, is very similar to the protected land at Rouge National Urban Park.

Rouge National Urban Park is a: “rich assembly of natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes, Rouge National Urban Park is home to over 1,700 species of plants and animals, some of the last remaining working farms in the Greater Toronto Area, rare Carolinian ecosystems, Toronto’s only campground, and human history dating back over 10,000 years, including some of Canada’s oldest known Indigenous sites. Since 2011, Parks Canada has been working to nationalize and nearly double the size of the original 'Rouge Park.' In the coming years, Parks Canada is planning to add several new trails, education and orientation centres and improved signage and interpretive panels and displays throughout the park. Parks Canada has also introduced dozens of new educational programs to the park, including Learn-to-Camp, Learn-to-Hike, fire side chats, and other complimentary programming. Once fully established, the park will span 79.1 km².”

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The park's operating hours, it should be noted, are based on ease of use by the public. It is open, with free admission, 365 days annually. It has over 12 kilometres of natural hiking trails and Parks Canada plans to significantly "expand the trail network and provide a contiguous link from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine."

In addition to a rich and varied geological history, it has also been home to humans going back over 10,000 years:

"Palaeolithic nomadic hunters, Iroquoian farmers, early European explorers, and the multicultural suburban population that one can see around the park today are all part of this history. (...) Since humans began living in the area of the present Great Lakes-St Lawrence Lowlands in Ontario, many groups of people made the lands and waters now protected in Rouge Park their home. The river and its valleys, uplands, forests and wetlands, along with the animal and plant species that lived here, sustained small nomadic groups, and later on larger, permanent settlements long before the rapid urbanization of the 20th century altered the landscape dramatically. Inspired by the scenery of the Rouge, F.H. Varley, one of Canada's renowned Group of Seven painters, captured the banks of the Rouge River in Markham on canvas during the 1950s as a lasting memory of their beauty."

The park protects one national historic event - Toronto Carrying-Place Trail National Historic Event and one national historic site – the Bead Hill National Historic Site:

"Bead Hill is an archaeological site of an intact 17th century Seneca village and was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1991. (...) The site includes the remains of an Archaic campsite, dating about 3,000 years old. Minimal excavations have been carried out, and the site includes a naturally protected midden, which is thought to contain a wealth of material. Because of its sensitive archaeological nature, it is not open to the public nor readily identified in the park. Its national historic site designation was prompted by imminent development plans that could have encroached on the area."

Parks Canada is engaged in several projects and initiatives as part of the Rouge National Urban Park establishment process. These include:

"Indigenous Partnerships - Parks Canada is working with 10 different First Nations with historic and present-day connections to the park through the Rouge National Urban Park First Nations Advisory Circle. Parks Canada's Indigenous partners play a role in and make significant contributions to all aspects of park operations, including helping to restore and enhance park ecosystems and farmland, sharing traditional stories and cuisine at in-park programs and events, and participating in and helping to monitor archaeological work throughout the park.

Blanding's Turtle Conservation - Since 2014, Parks Canada has worked with the Toronto Zoo to rear and release 113 threatened baby Blanding's turtles in the park; prior to this initiative, it's believed that only seven turtles remained in the park.

Farming and Conservation - Since 2015, Parks Canada has partnered with park farmers and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to complete 31 conservation and agricultural enhancements projects in Rouge National Urban Park.

Educational Programming - In 2016, Parks Canada offered over 300 free public events in the park, including Frog Watch, Hoot and Howl, weekly guided walks, Art in the Park, the Fall Walk Festival, BioBlitz, Learn-to-Camp, Taste of the Trail and more.

Future Education and Welcome Facilities - Several education and orientation centres, facilities, signage and interpretive panels are being planned in the Toronto and Markham areas of the park.

Trail Expansion - Parks Canada is planning to significantly expand the park's trail network from 12 kilometres by adding dozens of kilometres of new trails in effort to provide a contiguous connection from Lake Ontario to Oak Ridges Moraine. Plans are also underway to link park trails with regional trails outside the park located in the cities of Toronto, Markham and Pickering and in the Township of Uxbridge.”

Just as L'Anse-à-l'Orme has a rich and varied biodiversity, so is the Rouge Park and, as reported in 2012 and 2013 Ontario Bioblitz surveys, the park:

“has over 1,700 species of plants, animals and fungi (...) 1006 plant species, including 6 which are nationally rare and 92 which are regionally rare; 261 bird species, 5 of which are nationally rare breeding birds and 4 other breeding birds of special concern as well as numerous locally rare, area-sensitive raptor and colonial birds; 65 fish species, 2 of which are nationally vulnerable; 40 mammal species, some are locally rare; [and] 21 reptile and amphibian species, some are locally rare.”

Also like L'Anse-à-l'Orme, the Rouge Park contains some very productive agricultural land:

“People have been farming in the Rouge Valley for thousands of years, including Indigenous People and, later, European settlers. Rouge National Urban Park protects large tracts of Class 1 farmland, the rarest and most fertile soil in Canada.

Since 2015, Parks Canada has partnered with park farmers, Indigenous partners, and conservation groups to complete 31 conservation and agricultural enhancements projects in Rouge National Urban Park. To date, more than 32 hectares of wetland and riparian habitat and 20 hectares of forest have been restored, and over 38,000 native trees and shrubs have been planted.

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Parks Canada has committed to preserving the park's farmland and working farms in a way that contributes to the overall health of the park while also providing unique visitor farm experiences. The park is home to two well known farmers markets, Whittamore's Farm and Reesor's Farm Market.”

Here are some articles and links that provide additional information on Rouge National Urban Park:

- *Benzie, Robert (25 May 012). ["Parks Canada announces funding for Rouge National Urban Park in the Greater Toronto Area". Toronto Star.](#) .*
- *["Parks Canada - News Releases and Backgrounders"](#). [www.pc.gc.ca](#). Retrieved 2017-02-25.*
- [Aurora Huron Ancestral Village](#) in [Whitchurch-Stouffville](#).
- [Bead Hill](#), Directory of Designations of National Historic Significance of Canada
- *["Digging up First Nations history in Rouge Park"](#). CBC News.*
- *Canada, Parks Canada Agency, Government of. ["Parks Canada - Baby turtles released in the future Rouge National Urban Park"](#).*
- [Rouge National Urban Park website](#)
- [Parks Canada website](#)
- [Rouge Valley Conservation Centre](#)
- [Rouge River Watershed Plan Towards a Healthy and Sustainable Future](#) - Report of the Rouge Watershed Task Force