



Media Release – EMBARGOED UNTIL 3:30 p.m.

The incredible shrinking Rouge Park

Friends of the Rouge Watershed tells Federal Legislative Committee new park concept is on the wrong track - the study area is far too small and crucial ecological corridors are omitted

(October 31, 2012, Ottawa, ON) Parks Canada's draft *Rouge National Urban Park Concept* is an unfortunate step backwards for Rouge Park protection. Jim Robb, General Manager of Friends of the Rouge Watershed (FRW), was in Ottawa today to deliver this message to the Federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

Mr. Robb's presentation described the draft *Rouge National Urban Park Concept*, released in June 2012 by the federal government and Parks Canada, as a substandard version of the longstanding Rouge Park Concept created by GTA citizens and the Ontario government over the last twenty five years.

In April 2009, the study area proposed for Rouge National Park was 160 km². This study area was further reduced to 100 km² in 2010. The June 2012 Park Concept shrinks the study area to less than 57 km². This was before the public park planning process had even started.

Mr. Robb observed that FRW was surprised by this Concept given that, "Prime Minister Harper has a laudable record of establishing and expanding new National Parks across Canada."

He continued, "After working on 'Saving the Rouge' for 26 years, we appreciate the significant challenges associated with the creation of a near urban National Park. FRW is committed to working with everyone to ensure an ecologically healthy Rouge National Park."

A major cause for concern is that the ecological backbone of the park is missing from the new National Park Concept. "We were shocked when the June 2012 National Park Concept ignored the 600 metre wide ecological corridor which had already been approved in longstanding Rouge Park Plans and the Provincial Greenbelt Plan. This 600 metre wide ecological corridor is absolutely essential to the creation of a sustainable public parkland, trail and habitat link between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine," stated Mr. Robb.

Mr. Robb quoted FRW President Kevin O'Connor who asked him to deliver this message to the Committee. "Parks Canada and the Federal Government have an incredible opportunity to be true Canadian visionaries and park builders by creating a 100 km² near urban Rouge National Park that will be even more beautiful and biologically diverse 200 years from now than it is today."

Gloria Reszler, a long time Rouge "volunteer" wanted Mr. Robb to deliver a similar message. "The 100 km² public land assembly around the Rouge represents the best, and perhaps the last, opportunity to protect and restore a large natural environment park within the endangered mixed wood and Carolinian forest life zones of southern Ontario."

Mr. Robb noted that southern Ontario is home to almost one third of Canada's population and one third of Canada's endangered species. And yet, at less than 1 percent of total land area, southern Ontario has the smallest proportion of national and provincial parks in Canada. A 100 km² Rouge National Park would help to correct this historic imbalance.

As he addressed the Committee, Mr. Robb highlighted the work of Lois James, a founder of the "Save the Rouge" movement in 1975 and a recipient of the Order of Canada, and the thousands of other volunteers who have dedicated countless hours to help create and restore the existing Rouge Park. Mr. Robb stated, "The federal government would do a great disservice to the ecological health of Rouge Park, the millions of potential park visitors, and the thousands of Rouge volunteers like Lois, if the ecological backbone of Rouge Park is ripped away as the price to pay for creating a National Rouge Park."

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For more information, or to schedule an interview, please contact: Jim Robb, General Manager, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, jimrobb@frw.ca, 647-891-9550

***Friends of the Rouge Watershed (FRW)** works with youth and community to protect, enhance and restore ecosystem beauty, health and integrity. FRW forms productive conservation partnerships with schools, community groups, religious organizations, businesses, landowners, municipalities, government agencies, community leaders, foundations and environmental groups.*

Is the Post-June 2012 Rouge Park Concept superior to the Pre-June 2012 Rouge Park Plan?

Subject	Pre-June 2012 Rouge Park Attributes under existing Provincial Rouge Park Plans	Draft Rouge National Urban Park Concept Attributes Post-June 2012	Is the Post-June 2012 Rouge Park Concept superior to the Pre-June 2012 Plan?
1. Park Vision	<p><i>"Rouge Park will be a special place of outstanding natural features and diverse cultural heritage in an urban-rural setting, protected and flourishing as an ecosystem in perpetuity. Human activities will exist in harmony with the natural values of the park. The park will be a sanctuary for nature and the human spirit. ... The primary focus of the vision centres on the protection and appreciation of the park ecosystem."</i></p>	<p>Fails to respect the purpose of a true Canadian Nation Park by not even mentioning the words "ecosystem" or "ecological health" in the draft National Urban Park Vision.</p> <p>Language used is now "diverse landscape" and "varied uses," which would tempt incremental degradation of the park's natural environment, biological diversity, water quality, and visitor experiences over time due to misuse and over-use.</p>	NO
2. Park Study Area	<p>In 2009 Rouge Park Study Area was 160 km² of public lands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The study area contains nationally endangered Carolinian and mixed-wood plains life zones of Canada—zones with the most biological diversity and endangered species in Canada but fewest national parks. ▪ Currently predominantly within the "natural heritage system" designation of the Provincial Greenbelt Plan. 	<p>Post-May 2012 the study area is reduced to 57 km²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excludes important and existing areas of Rouge Park ▪ Excludes the Rouge Valley and Milne Park in Markham ▪ Excludes 36 km² of federal lands within the Greenbelt ▪ Excludes the 2002 federal Green Space Preserve in Pickering ▪ Fails to plan for long term park health and visitor use 	NO
3. Protection	<p>Lands in the existing Rouge Park and Study Area are currently protected by: Provincial Greenbelt Plan (2005); Rouge Park Plans (1994 & 2001); Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) Protection Plan (2002); Rouge Natural Heritage Action Plan (2008); and Toronto Remedial Action Plan to Improve Lake Ontario Water Quality.</p>	<p>Federal takeover of lands would override existing provincial plans and policies and could actually weaken Park protection</p> <p>The draft National Park concept does not specify that Parks Canada will respect and strengthen the protection in existing Park Plans, the Provincial Greenbelt Plan, and the ORM Plan.</p>	NO
4. Park Ecological Corridor	<p>Provincial Greenbelt Plan (2005): "... identifies a 600 metre wide corridor for the Little Rouge River as the main ecological corridor, between Lake Ontario and the south boundary of Oak Ridges Moraine Area ... Rouge North Management Plan (s. 4.1.1.2) states: "The overriding goal in creating the Little Rouge Creek Corridor is to establish a viable terrestrial corridor with interior forest habitat."</p>	<p>No mention of 600 metre "main ecological corridor" – the ecological backbone of the Park</p> <p>Fails to include the federal Greenbelt lands in Pickering which are necessary to go around the urban blockade of Stouffville and create a sustainable ecological link between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine.</p>	NO