

August 30, 2024

Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks,
Expanding Protected Areas Project Conservation, Policy Section
40 St. Clair Avenue West, 14th Floor, Toronto, ON, M4V 1M2.

Re: Expanding Protected Areas in Ontario – ERO Number: 019-618

Dear Minister / Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks,

Thank you for your initiative to expand Protected Areas in Ontario and follow-through with the 1999 Ontario Living Legacy Land Use Strategy. Friends of the Rouge Watershed (FRW) supports Ontario Nature's detailed submission to the Ontario Government on this initiative.

In this letter, FRW suggests practical ways to expand protected areas around Rouge Park. FRW is a charitable non-partisan NGO. We have worked for decades with citizens, NGOs, and all levels of government to create an ecologically sustainable Rouge Park Protected Area between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine in the eastern GTA.

Thanks to the work of thousands of "Save the Rouge" volunteers and community leaders such as Lois James, Pauline Browes, David Crombie, and Raymond Cho, Rouge Park became an Ontario protected area in 1995; and it has evolved into a 79 km² Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) - the largest protected area in Southern Ontario's endangered Carolinian Forest Zone. RNUP is Canada's first National Urban Park / Protected Area, and it addresses a growing public demand, in Canada and worldwide, for nearby / accessible protected areas.

FRW respectfully asks the Ontario Government to continue its Rouge Park leadership by:

- A. Formally asking the Federal Government to add most of its remaining 36 square kilometres of federal lands in North Pickering to RNUP.
- B. Protecting /adding more provincial lands to RNUP, north and south of Hwy 7, near the pinch point between RNUP and the Duffin's Creek Natural System / Seaton Trail.
- C. Formally asking the Federal Government to follow-through with longstanding "due diligence" plans to restore 60% forest and wetland cover in RNUP to combat pollution, climate change, flooding and biodiversity-loss.
- D. Creating a \$1 Billion Ontario Greenbelt Land Acquisition and Forest and Wetland Restoration Fund to combat pollution, climate change, flooding, and biodiversity-loss.

FRW Patrons

Lois James, "Save the Rouge" founding member and Order of Canada Recipient

Joyce Trimmer, former Mayor of Scarborough, posthumous

Hon. Raymond Cho, MPP Scarborough North

Hon. Gerry Phillips, former MPP Scarborough Agincourt

Hon. Alvin Curling, former MPP Scarborough Rouge River

Hon. David Peterson, former Ontario Premier

Derek Lee, former MP Scarborough Rouge River

Rathika Sitsabaiesan, former MP Scarborough Rouge River

Paul Harpley, "Save the Rouge" founding member.

Bobbi Hunter, founding member of Greenpeace Executive

- E. Acquiring (willing seller / purchaser) and adding to RNUP a few large privately owned, Ontario Greenbelt designated, land blocks on the north side of Steeles Avenue which separate the Toronto and Markham portions of RNUP.

Background:

1. Less than 1% of southern Ontario is protected within provincial and national parks. On a per capita and park area bases, the 12.7 million residents of Southern Ontario have less access to natural environment parks than any other region in Canada.
2. Southern Ontario's Carolinian and mixed woodland forest zones are home to some 20% of Canada's species at risk.
3. The public lands in the Rouge and Duffins Watersheds represent the largest contiguous public land holding in the endangered Carolinian Forest Ecozone and they are home to more than 36 designated "Species at Risk".
4. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and many government and NGO partners are working to restore habitat in Rouge and Duffins streams for trout and salmon, including Atlantic salmon, a species which was extirpated in Lake Ontario.
5. Lake Ontario's historic shoreline, the Iroquois Shoreline, traverses RNUP and the Seaton Natural Heritage System in Pickering. This feature has significant First Nation sites, groundwater flow for trout and salmon spawning, and habitat for species at risk.
6. Since 2013, the GTA has suffered \$Billions in flooding damages to property and infrastructure. Climate change and urban runoff are increasing flooding damages.
7. Many busy highways, roads and railways cross the deep valleys of the Rouge River and Duffins Creek with older bridges which are vulnerable to serious flooding and erosion damages, posing growing public liabilities.
8. Rouge and Duffins Watershed Plans call for a timely increase of forest and wetland cover from approximately 38% to 60% on the public lands in RNUP to: protect water quality, biodiversity and habit for species at risk; and **mitigate the costly pollution and flooding liabilities associated with climate change and urban runoff.**

9. A 2018 Report, sponsored by Canada's Insurance Bureau, highly recommends the protection and restoration of upstream forests and wetlands to cost-effectively combat flooding losses while also improving water and air quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and outdoor education and recreation opportunities. This report also notes that restoration efforts are not occurring at the necessary scale and rate.
10. As Climate Change gathers steam and urban growth intensifies and expands, the Governments of Ontario and Canada risk huge economic losses by failing to implement "due diligence" plans for restoring forest and wetland cover upstream of GTA communities and infrastructure, particularly in RNUP and the Ontario Greenbelt Natural System

We look forward to your positive response to the requests in this letter.

We request an opportunity to meet with you, in person or virtually, to further discuss our requests, answer your questions, and provide additional information and maps.

Sincerely,



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Giving Nature a voice and a helping hand.

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