



**Animal Alliance
of Canada**



**Animal Alliance
Environment Voters
Party of Canada**



October 3, 2012

**Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, MPs and Parks
Canada:**

We are writing to thank you for your vision in establishing the Rouge National Park.

Parks Canada's spokesperson, Catherine Grenier highlighted the importance of the park "as a gateway to connect the entire network of wilderness, marine and historic attractions."

This letter includes our comments on the draft Rouge National Park Concept released by the federal government and Parks Canada in May 2012 and on general issues regarding the future of the park.

We ask that the Park Concept adopt the long-established Rouge Park vision which states that *"The 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."*

Therefore, in keeping with the vision statement, we seek the inclusion of all of the 100 km² public land assembly surrounding the Rouge River watershed as part of Rouge National Park. This will build on and re-enforce the provincial Greenbelt Plan initiative because the majority of these lands are also designated as a natural heritage system.

Establishing the Rouge National Park would allow for "the protection and restoration of Carolinian and mixed woodland habitats in a sustainable natural heritage system linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine". In addition, it would provide protection for the animal species who reside there, recognizing them as an integral part of a healthy Carolinian ecosystem.

There has already been a significant investment of public resources and community involvement that has led to the creation of the existing Rouge Park plans including the 1994 Rouge Park Management Plan, the Provincial Greenbelt Plan, Rouge Watershed Strategy, Rouge Natural Heritage Action Plan and the TRCA's Targeted Natural Heritage System.

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Any legislative or regulatory changes, or modifications to management plans for Rouge National Park should strengthen the vision, goal and objectives as set out in the above reports and facilitate the implementation of those plans.

Incorporating all 100 km² as part of the park is critical to meet federal and provincial scientific minimums of 30% forest cover and 10% wetland cover needed to protect watershed health and native species diversity. At the present time, only 13 percent forest cover and 2 percent wetland cover of the Rouge Watershed does not come close to meeting the science based ecosystem targets.

In order to achieve this, we ask that you provide Parks Canada and Environment Canada with the necessary tools to restore forests and wetlands on the public lands within and beyond the Rouge Park to meet and exceed the scientific minimums for forest and wetland cover and to protect and restore the water quality and aquatic health of the rivers that flow through the park.

We are concerned because at the present time approximately 70% of the public Rouge Park lands in Markham are in fact leased for industrial cash-crop farming of primarily corn and soy beans.

This industrial type farming uses pesticides, chemicals and genetically modified crops which are inconsistent with the values of a wilderness urban park and may very well compromise the very wildlife the Park is meant to protect.

In addition, large cash-crop farms distort wild populations because of food attractants and result in increased human/wildlife conflicts. Alternatively, smaller farms which utilize a diversity of crops, modern organic methods, wildlife corridors and peaceful coexistence with wildlife would fit more naturally into a urban wilderness park. These farms produce a variety of healthy local food, jobs and revenues for the local economy.

We urge you to ensure that Parks Canada take this unique opportunity and create a spectacular Rouge National Park including the entire 100 km² land base. Thank you in advance for your support and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Barry MacKay
Canadian Representative
Born Free USA



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