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Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW

The Rouge North Management Plan was generated to guide the definition and long-term implementation of the Rouge Park from Steeles Avenue northward to the Oak Ridges Moraine. Although the Plan was developed based on watershed planning principles and makes recommendations for the implementation of watershed wide programs and initiatives, it is first and foremost a plan for the Rouge Park, which is envisioned as a unique entity and the spine of the watershed ecosystem. The Rouge North Management Plan sets out a framework for the creation of a linear park system along the stream corridors within the Rouge River watershed north of Steeles Avenue.

The Rouge North Management Plan was prepared with a recognition of and respect for the intrinsic and interwoven relationship between the health of the watershed and the sustainability of the resources within the park. Consequently, recommendations for stewardship, protection, restoration and enhancement extend beyond the limits of both the study area and the area that will ultimately be designated as Rouge Park.

The Rouge North Management Plan sets out recommendations to guide the management, accessibility and use of Rouge Park North lands. The plan is supported by a process of technical review and consultation, which was focused on characterizing the watershed, formulating a strategic approach to define the park and achieving consensus on the principles, objectives and methodologies explored. The findings of this process of investigations are documented in the Background Technical Appendix, entitled ‘The Status of the Watershed and its Constituents’. This document was the foundation for the Rouge North Management Plan.

1.2 STUDY PROCESS

The Rouge North Management Plan is the product of a five year process of inventory, consultation, planning and design. The initial stage of the study process was focused on identifying opportunities to guide the development of a foundation for the Management Plan. This stage included a review of existing background reports, combined with an overview of the resources of the study area.

The findings of this inventory and review process are summarized in the Background Technical Appendix. This document, entitled ‘Status of the Watershed and its Constituents’, is comprised of 10 chapters describing the environmental, land use and planning context of the Rouge River watershed and the Rouge Park North study area. An overview of aquatic resources, hydrology, stream morphology and terrestrial resources, as well as a summary of all relevant land use, transportation, archaeological, heritage, recreation and open space conditions and policies affecting the Rouge North Management Plan were provided by the natural resource inventory. The Background Technical Appendix provides a basis and a justification for the recommendations of the Management Plan. Consequently, this document, the Rouge North Management Plan, contains only limited base inventory information.

In the initial stage of the study process, the community consultation program was as important as the technical inventory. This program proved to be fundamental in identifying and resolving issues critical to the successful implementation and long-term management of Rouge Park. Highlights of and conclusions drawn from consultations with the community are summarized within this document. A more detailed account of the various events, participants and their comments is provided in the Background Technical Appendix.



The next stage of the study process focused on generating a Conceptual Management Plan based upon the outcome of the inventory and consultation tasks, including the results of the Weekend Park Planning Workshop. The Conceptual Management Plan was presented to the Rouge North Management Plan Committee (RNMP) for discussion and was endorsed as a basic framework on which the Preliminary Management Plan would be generated, resulting in the subsequent preparation of the Draft Management Plan.

The Draft Management Plan was circulated in mid-January of 1997 for review by staff from the municipalities of Markham, Richmond Hill and Whitchurch-Stouffville as well as the Region of York and the Rouge Park Alliance. The Draft Management Plan was presented to the Rouge Park Alliance and the Councils of the municipalities of Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Richmond Hill and the Region of York. The final step in achieving endorsement for the Draft Management Plan was its presentation to the public in late February. The comments and input received from this extensive review directed the refinement of the Final Management Plan.

Subsequently, the process of refining the Preliminary Management Plan into the Rouge North Management Plan became focused on resolving more detailed issues and identifying and testing implementation options. Consequently, the Public Advisory Committee (PAC) was enlisted to address specific components of the plan and to make recommendations related to stewardship, public access and environmental issues. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was also consulted to resolve a number of detailed issues. The recommendations and comments of each of these groups directed the development of the policies and strategies set out in the Rouge North Management Plan.

The Draft Final Plan was released for review in September of 1997. The Draft Final Plan was presented to the public for comment at a public meeting and was subsequently endorsed in principle by the Councils of the towns of Markham, Richmond Hill and Whitchurch-Stouffville. Endorsement of the Draft Final Plan was also obtained from the Rouge Park Alliance and the Council of the Region of York.

A lengthy review period followed the release of the Draft Final Plan. During this period comments and input were received from the province, the municipalities, stakeholder groups and the public-at-large. The Draft Final Plan was revised to address comments received. In addition, the plan was reformatted and updated to respond to political and physical changes that had occurred throughout the watershed.

Throughout the course of generating the Draft Final Plan, consultations with the Ontario Realty Corporation, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and other provincial representatives were initiated. The objective of these consultations was the development of a plan for the Rouge Park through provincially owned lands along the Little Rouge Creek. Representatives of the Rouge Park and the Ontario Realty Corporation worked together to define the limits of the Rouge Park within the Little Rouge Creek corridor based on the objectives and concept plan set out in the Draft Final Plan.

In May of 1999 the Province of Ontario announced the dedication of the Little Rouge Creek Corridor, as well as the Parkway Belt Lands south of Milne Park to Rouge Park. This commitment is a significant step in the realization of the vision of a Rouge Park extending from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

1.3 STUDY APPROACH

The vision presented in the Management Plan for Rouge Park (1994) provided the basis and inspiration for the development of a comprehensive Management Plan for Rouge Park North. However, additional objectives were established in recognition of the unique context and linear nature of the park north of Steeles Avenue. These objectives, in combination with those set out in the existing Management Plan, facilitated development of an appropriate, integrated and implementable plan. Accordingly, the following objectives have been addressed within this plan:

- Balance - The Management Plan achieves an effective and responsible balance and synergy between human needs and ecosystem sustainability, and this balance must be appropriate to the ecological and social context.
- Integration - The Management Plan strives to integrate the park as the spine of the community, integrating it with surrounding built form, transportation and services infrastructure, as well as recreational programming and patterns of future growth. The plan is directed at integrating ecosystem objectives within plans for growth and development within the watershed.
- Consensus - The plan is the product of community consultation, collaboration and support. It is designed to reflect the needs and aspirations of the citizens of the watershed, in both urban and rural areas.
- Implementation - The plan is realistic and justifiable, developed with a recognition of the appropriateness and limitations of existing background information. The plan respects the implications of private land ownership, the existing regulatory and legislative framework, as well as the aspirations, resources and objectives of the project partners, the municipalities and the Rouge Park Alliance.
- Inspiration - The Management Plan strives to inspire all residents of the community to become stewards of the Rouge Park North and to adopt and apply the spirit and direction set out in the Management Plan to decisions which will affect the integrity of Rouge Park in perpetuity.

To facilitate the achievement of these objectives, a seven-step work program was established in order to provide the framework to adequately address issues, generate ideas, establish criteria and test recommendations.

The seven steps in the methodology applied to formulate this plan are described below.

- 1) Determination - In this step, the study team, in conjunction with the steering committee, the stakeholders and the community, confirmed the intent of the Rouge North Management Plan, and defined issues and approaches to the development of the plan.
- 2) Consultation - In order to be implementable, it was recognized that this document must have broad community support and that there must be strong stakeholder commitment to the plan. Accordingly, an extensive public consultation program was undertaken, based on a three part approach: (a) to increase community awareness and understanding of the park and its vision; (b) to effectively interact and work with members of the public in a variety of interactive formats; and (c) to garner support and foster partnerships with all parties involved in or affected by Rouge Park North.
- 3) Evaluation - In this step, an evaluation of all of the natural and cultural features within the study area was taken. The Background Technical Appendix, entitled 'Status of the Watershed and Its Constituents', was in part comprised of an inventory of all existing data related to natural and cultural resources, land use, transportation, municipal infrastructure, as well as open space and recreational resources within the watershed.
- 4) Integration - The Preliminary Management Plan document reflected the analysis and integration of the above noted inventoried data and established the preliminary direction for the Management Plan. The focus of the document was the identification of opportunities to achieve parallel social, ecological and recreational objectives while addressing the needs, concerns and aspirations of the public.
- 5) Justification - Future steps in the planning process involved refining and justifying the Management Plan. Park boundary, zoning and land use issues were confirmed and justified. Land ownership, protection of headwater resources, acquisition and compensation measures were issues addressed at this stage of the project.

- 6) Confirmation - This step focused on reviewing and testing the plan and its recommendations from the perspectives of the steering committee, the stakeholders, the Public Advisory Committee, the Technical Advisory Committee and the general public.
- 7) Implementation - It was recognized that the Rouge North Management Plan must be a document which is implementable. This requires that the plan be justifiable, practical and implementable within the existing legislative framework. In response, the Management Plan describes a pathway and sets out a framework for implementation.

1.3.1 Public Participation Process

An extensive public consultation program was initiated in the fall of 1996. This program continued throughout the duration of the process of generating and refining the plan. The consultation process was designed to allow stakeholders and residents to contribute to the plan. The process also heightened public awareness, encouraging the community to become actively involved in the implementation of the Rouge Park as well as the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage resources of the Rouge River watershed. A summary of the events undertaken as part of the public consultation process is provided below.



*Public Participants remove Purple Loosestrife from wetlands.
Source: Rouge Park (1999)*

- Mailings – Approximately 1,500 information packages were distributed to landowners, stakeholders and participants in the planning process.
- Field Walk Events – Field walk events were held in 5 communities within the Rouge North study area.
- Markham Fair Display – Over 500 people visited the information display at the Markham Fair in October of 1996.
- Stakeholder Interviews – Individuals and groups were interviewed throughout the planning process.
- Weekend Park Planning Workshop – A three-day session was held in November of 1996, resulting in the generation of a framework for the plan.
- Markville Mall Information Booth – In January of 1997, a display was visited by approximately 250 people.
- Public Information Meeting – A meeting was held in February of 1997 to present the Preliminary Management Plan.
- Public Advisory Committee Sessions – In April of 1997, a Public Advisory Committee was formed to resolve specific issues and assist in refining the Preliminary Plan.
- Public Information Meeting – A meeting was held in November of 1997 to present the Draft Final Plan and provide an opportunity for review and input.
- Additional Initiatives – In addition to these formal events, a number of initiatives were undertaken to generate interest and involve the community in the planning process. These included the following:

- Providing displays at Rouge Park events and festivals in the various communities within the watershed.
- One-on-one meetings with landowners and stakeholder groups.
- Making copies of the Draft Final Plan available at local libraries.
- Having representatives of the project team or Rouge North Management Plan Committee present at public meetings for related studies in the Rouge River watershed.

The approach and vision for the Rouge North Management Plan was derived largely on the basis of the ideas and input received from the community. The Background Technical Appendix provides a concise summary of the community consultation process, the input received and the methods by which the Management Plan was shaped by the valued contribution from the community.