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Community Consultation and Conceptual Planning Framework

3.1 THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS

Upon initiation of the planning process, it was recognized that the process of generating the Rouge North Management Plan must be the product of consultation and consensus for the Management Plan to be successful. In response, the work program, especially in the initial stages of the project, was focused on providing opportunities for public input and involvement, aimed at residents of the Rouge River watershed and those living beyond its boundaries. The consultation program included events held within the six watershed communities. These events were intended to generate interest in, and heighten awareness of, the project while soliciting public opinion through the distribution of response questionnaires. A complete list and summary of these events is provided in the Background Technical Appendix.

The following provides a summary of the key issues and ideas identified through the consultation process, which served as a basis for the Rouge North Management Plan.

- There is widespread public support for the extension of the Rouge Park northward from Steeles Avenue.
- There are concerns about the rate and impact of urban development within the watershed.
- There is a recognized need to protect the resources of the watershed.
- There are concerns about the rights of private landowners, and in particular, concerns related to the issue of public access on privately owned lands.
- There is a need to establish a set of incentives to encourage private landowners to participate in the implementation of the Rouge Park.
- The preferred approach to bringing privately owned lands into the park is communication and negotiation, not legislation.
- The study area is very diverse and the delineation of the park boundary must address this diversity.
- There is a need to utilize specific ecological functions as the key determinants to define the park boundary.
- The communities of the watershed must take ownership of the vision for the park in order to ensure its long-term implementation and sustainability.

These key issues and ideas directed the establishment of a conceptual approach as the basis for the generation of the Final Rouge North Management Plan; a document inspired by community contribution and rooted in consensus.



*Public participants aid in the planting of new habitats.
Source: Rouge Park (1999)*



3.2 THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH - THE FOUNDATION FOR THE ROUGE NORTH MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Conceptual Approach, which would establish a foundation for the development of the Rouge North Management Plan, was generated as a synthesis of ideas explored throughout the consultation process. The Conceptual Approach set out a suite of strategies and techniques to address key issues related to the protection of natural and cultural heritage resources, private land ownership, as well as the interim and long-term implementation of the Rouge Park. The following provides a description of the key elements of the Conceptual Approach related to these fundamental issues.

3.2.1 Boundary Definition

Each river or stream corridor within the Rouge North study area is unique in form and function in response to a range of factors. These include ecological sensitivity and potential, status of existing natural and cultural heritage resources, as well as context, in terms of patterns of use, adjacent land use and future growth and development. Through the course of completing the technical inventory component of the study process, the following conclusions were drawn which directed the formulation of the Conceptual Approach.

- The catalogue of the existing natural heritage resources within the watershed is incomplete and of insufficient detail to define an appropriate and justifiable park boundary based on ecological criteria. Therefore, the Management Plan must recommend a strategy for acquiring better inventory information to facilitate the delineation of an appropriate park boundary.
- Little Rouge Creek presents the only opportunity within the study area to establish a functional wildlife corridor that will sustain interior forest habitat conditions and provide a linkage between Rouge Park and the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- The headwaters of the Rouge River and its tributaries require special consideration in the plan to ensure that the quality and quantity of the water sustaining the river system are maintained.
- Other tributaries are constrained in terms of width and potential function as a consequence of historic patterns of settlement and development within the watershed. The Management Plan recommends strategies to achieve ecological and cultural objectives in these areas.
- The Management Plan must recommend strategies to achieve ecological restoration and public access objectives on lands held in private ownership.

On the basis of these conclusions, the Conceptual Approach outlined a set of definitions and strategies to achieve park objectives and ultimately realize the implementation of the Rouge Park over the long term.

Patterns of land ownership and urban development were recognized as the two dominant factors that would determine the staging, as well as the interim and long term form of the Rouge Park north of Steeles Avenue. Consequently, strategies to define the park and achieve objectives related to land ownership, development and growth characteristics were developed. The following subsections provide a description of the Conceptual Approach adopted for each area classified by common land ownership, land use and development and growth characteristics.

3.2.1.1 Existing Developed Areas

The delineation of the park and achievement of park objectives within the context of existing developed areas, including urban and rural lands within the study area, were addressed through the development of two strategies.

- Public Lands - Boundaries of Rouge Park North will be defined as the corridors of the Rouge River, Bruce Creek, Berczy Creek, Robinson Creek, Exhibition Creek, the Morningside Tributary and East Beaver Creek within the limits of public land ownership. Publicly owned lands adjacent to the corridors may be included in the Rouge Park North through agreements with the public agency and the Rouge Park Alliance.
- Private Lands - Two programs are proposed to facilitate the achievement of park objectives on lands situated along or adjacent to the river corridors that are held in private ownership.
 - The Rouge Park Stewardship Program is aimed at encouraging and assisting landowners in the implementation of projects and management programs on their properties to protect and enhance the ecological integrity of the river system.
 - The Rouge Park Partnership Program is focused on encouraging large tract landowners such as utilities, corporations and golf courses as well as schools, to enter into an agreement to allow public access and restoration initiatives to be undertaken on their lands. Although lands encompassed within the Partnership Program would not be designated as Rouge Park, they may accommodate park uses and complement the Rouge Park lands.

3.2.1.2 Emerging Development Areas – Approved Areas

Areas within this classification include lands where development is proposed and has been approved by municipal councils. These lands are generally located within the designated urban areas of the towns of Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Richmond Hill.

In the areas identified as Emerging Development Areas, the limits of development along the stream corridors have been defined as set out in approved Official Plan Amendments, Secondary Plans, Draft Plans, or Site Plans. Notwithstanding this, where draft plan approvals or site plan approvals have not been granted or when existing approvals are renewed, that the Rouge Park Alliance request municipalities to apply the ecological criteria to those areas within their Emerging Development Areas, with the objective that the boundaries of the Rouge Park in the Emerging Development Areas be based on the ecological criteria contained in the Rouge North Management Plan. Where ecological criteria do not exist, they will be developed in the future. Where built form has not been approved, the plan will set out recommendations aimed at establishing an appropriate interface between the community and the river corridor. A set of guidelines for development and servicing on lands adjacent to the park are recommended as part of the Rouge North Management Plan, and are related to:

- Ecosystem function;
- Aesthetics;
- Access; and
- Impact mitigation.

The implementation of guidelines may require the exploration of innovative design solutions for roads, infrastructure and stormwater management in order to resolve competing objectives.

Lands situated along the river corridors designated for conveyance into public ownership will be included in the Rouge Park.

3.2.1.3 Emerging Development Areas - Future

Areas encompassed within this classification are located outside the urban expansion areas of the municipalities. These areas are not presently approved for development, but will likely be subject to development at some time in the future.

For these areas, the public proposed the endorsement of a 'Block' or 'Secondary Planning' approach. The undertaking of environmental studies within a predetermined study area boundary would be required to establish an appropriate park boundary based on ecological criteria, while considering other objectives such as those related to recreation and culture. The need for this approach is rooted in the present lack of available detailed inventory data. The Secondary Plan approach is imperative in order to determine the value and sensitivity of resources prior to defining the park boundary. The benefits of this strategy include:

- The potential to build a standardized inventory of the resources of the park.
- A means to identify and protect valuable resources that might otherwise be lost through the application of a standard setback method of boundary definition.

This Conceptual Approach is necessary, since the scope and level of detail of existing inventory information is not adequate to determine an exact and appropriate park boundary. The Rouge River tributaries, which would require the undertaking of additional studies to determine the boundary of Rouge Park North through a Secondary Planning process, would be designated as the 'Rouge Park Study Area'.

Within this classification the delineation of a standard boundary based upon a minimum setback from the top of bank is not preferred, since any minimum standard is likely to establish a precedent as the recognized standard for this park boundary.

3.3 SUMMARY OF CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

This Management Plan was developed based on a Conceptual Approach that recognizes the unique characteristics of the study area. The approach sets out a strategy for defining the park boundary based upon ecological principles with the objective of protecting natural and cultural heritage features and ecological functions by encompassing them within the proposed park. In recognition of the fact that the realization of the Rouge Park North will take many decades, strategies to encourage landowners to protect and enhance natural features and their function on lands held in private ownership are a fundamental component of the Conceptual Approach.