

For Immediate Release
February 13, 2007

EXPANDING GREENSPACE TO BENEFIT FAMILIES FOR YEARS TO COME

McGuinty Government Dedicates 5,500 Acres To Rouge Park

MARKHAM —The McGuinty government is protecting greenspace and curbing urban sprawl by dedicating an additional 1,500 acres of significant natural land to expand its total contribution to Rouge Park to 5,500 acres (22.3 square kilometres), Gerry Phillips, Minister of Government Services announced today. This will add an additional 15 per cent more land to Rouge Park, making it one of the largest natural preserves in an urban area in North America.

“Ontarians want to know their communities will be healthy and clean — that local natural areas will be protected and accessible,” said Phillips. “By expanding greenspace and preserving natural areas, we’re creating a legacy for families to enjoy for years to come.”

The Ontario government is delivering 1,500 acres of significant land, which is equivalent to almost four times the size of Toronto’s High Park, on the condition that this land remains protected. The park’s ecological and recreational benefits will be important amenities for the Greater Toronto Area as Southern Ontario’s population continues to grow.

The Ontario government previously donated more than 3,500 acres to Rouge Park. It has been designated part of the provincial Greenbelt, 1.8 million acres of permanently protected greenspace in Ontario.

Rouge Park, now over 11,500 acres (46 square kilometres) in size, protects natural areas, national historic sites, and greenspace that stretch from the Oak Ridges Moraine to Lake Ontario. It offers visitors hiking, camping, a beach and spectacular views.

“Our government is committed to protecting Ontario’s natural heritage, and conserving and restoring healthy and diverse natural areas across southern Ontario,” said David Ramsay, Minister of Natural Resources. “Adding this important land to the already impressive Rouge Park is another step in ensuring that future generations can enjoy clean air and water, abundant natural spaces, plentiful habitat for wildlife and all the benefits of a healthy environment.”

The addition of these lands to Rouge Park creates a strong link between the parts of the park above and below Steeles Avenue. Future planning can now consider how to best maintain the north-south park connections to allow the free and safe passage of people and wildlife. This park expansion will also enable better integration between regional trail systems, such as the Oak Ridges Trail and Trans-Canada Trail and Rouge Park’s planned trails.

“I am thrilled at the dedication of this land to expand the park,” said Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti. “Rouge Park is an important part of Markham’s natural heritage.”

“Rouge Park is a reservoir of biodiversity in Ontario’s Greenbelt, and this substantial addition of land helps us protect large natural areas for healthier animal and plant communities,” observed Gord Weeden, Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, the park’s board of directors. “The continuous show of support from the Ontario Government has helped us build the unique and important park you see today.”

”The transfer of these lands to the Rouge Park is an exciting decision,” said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director, Environmental Defence. “The protection of this amount of southern Ontario greenspace is a tremendous gift to Ontarians and builds in a very positive way on the significant achievement of the Greenbelt.”

Protecting environmentally sensitive land in the Province, like today’s announcement in Rouge Park, is just one of the ways the McGuinty government is working on the side of Ontario families. Other initiatives include:

- Creating Ontario’s Greenbelt, which protects 1.8 million acres of greenspace for families to enjoy for years to come
- Protecting 500 acres of ecologically significant land in the Town of Markham with the new Bob Hunter Memorial Park, part of the Rouge Park family
- Delivering 650 acres of ecologically significant lands in the Town of Oakville into the care of Conservation Halton
- Protecting 180 acres of provincially significant natural heritage lands to create Hamilton’s newest conservation area – Eramosa Karst
- Expanding city parks in Hamilton and Oakville by close to 50 acres.
- Providing tools to encourage voluntary efforts to conserve and restore natural areas on private land through the Natural Spaces program.

“Protecting greenspace in Ontario gives families more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors,” said Phillips. “And it also ensures that our children and our grandchildren have a healthy, vibrant and beautiful natural environment for generations to come.”

- 30 -

Contacts:

Amy Tang
Minister’s Office
416-325-4048
Disponible en français

Maryam Nassar
Rouge Park
905-713-6007

ontario.ca/pir