



Backgrounder

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What is Rouge Park?

Rouge Park is Canada's premier near-urban wilderness park. Over 40 km² (10 000 acres) in size, it is protected park land in the Rouge River, Petticoat Creek and Duffins Creek watersheds in and near Toronto, Canada's largest city. The Park provides diverse wildlife habitats and a countryside landscape of farms and historic hamlets, merging with eastern Toronto. The award-winning Park provides a reservoir of biodiversity in the Greenbelt and the only link to Lake Ontario in the Greenbelt in Toronto.

Rouge Park was created by the Ontario government in response to public concerns about the protection of the Rouge River valley. In 1994, the Province of Ontario developed the *Rouge Park Management Plan* and created Rouge Park in 1995. The Park, and Rouge River watershed, have special recognition in Ontario's Greenbelt Plan (Section 3.2.6) and provide a reservoir of biodiversity in the Greenbelt and the only link to Lake Ontario in the Greenbelt in Toronto.

Rouge Park is open 365 days a year, with unlimited, free access to 16 km of rustic hiking trails, plus riverside camping, a sandy beach and spectacular views. Many areas are accessible by public transit. Visit www.rougepark.com for details. Go "Wild in the City!"

How is Rouge Park Governed?

Rouge Park is a partnership park, with land and funds from the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, municipal governments and other agencies. The board of directors for Rouge Park is the Rouge Park Alliance, a partnership of 12 government organizations and one not-for-profit group.

The Rouge Park Alliance is guided by the *Rouge Park Management Plan* (1994) for the Park area south of Steeles Avenue and the *Rouge North Management Plan* (2001) for the portion of the Park in York Region. There are additional plans guiding the enhancement and protection of the Park.

Rouge Park Alliance:

Organization	Member
CHAIR	Alan Wells (appointed by the Province of Ontario in 2008)
Government of Canada	Michael Chong, MP (Wellington/Halton Hills)
Province of Ontario	Dr. Helena Jaczek, MPP (Oak Ridges-Markham)
Region of Durham	Regional Councillor Peter Rodrigues
Region of York	Deputy Mayor Jack Heath, Town of Markham
Town of Markham	Councillor Logan Kanapathi
City of Pickering	Mayor David Ryan
Town of Richmond Hill	Councillor Castro Liu (Ward 3)
City of Toronto	Councillor Paul Ainslie (Ward 43, Scarborough East) Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker (Ward 38, Scarborough Centre)
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville	Councillor Clyde Smith
Toronto & Region Conservation Authority	Gerri Lynn O'Connor, Chair
Toronto Zoo	John Tracogna, CEO
Waterfront Regeneration Trust Corporation	Hon. Pauline Browes, Director
Save the Rouge Valley System Inc.	Andre Flys, Board Member

Why the Governance Review?

Since its inception, the Park has grown considerably, and continues to evolve. While the goal and vision of the Park remain true today, the Rouge Park Alliance needed to consider its structure, funding and partnerships so that they could continue to strongly lead the Park into the future.

As such, in August 2009, the Rouge Park Alliance retained StrategyCorp Inc. in collaboration with Hemson Consulting Ltd. to undertake this review of Rouge Park. The purpose was to make recommendations on options for its future leadership, financing and organization, with a view to fulfilling the Vision of the Park.

This study is the product of five months of focused effort involving the Rouge Park Alliance and its team of professionals. This study considers how a redesign of park governance and funding arrangements could help make the Park vision come to reality.

Rouge Park Vision

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.

Our Goal

To protect, restore and enhance the natural, scenic and cultural values of the Park in an ecosystem context, and to promote public responsibility, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage.

Natural Heritage

Rouge Park is about connections: ecological, cultural and recreational. The protected park lands in the Rouge, Duffins and Petticoat watersheds connect to important forests, meadows, sensitive areas and valley systems east of the Park. The Rouge Park offers a major ecological corridor joining the Oak Ridges Moraine to Lake Ontario.

Each year, Rouge Park initiates ecological restoration work throughout the Park. These projects vary from tree and shrub planting, to scientific research, to stream bank rehabilitation and wetland creation. Projects are prioritized according to our Natural Heritage Action Plan (currently being developed). Funding is available to community groups and individuals to implement projects which meet Park priorities.

Agricultural Heritage

The Rouge Park Alliance continues to be committed to agriculture in the Park. Farming will remain active on the Agricultural Heritage Reserve lands, as well as on lands that will eventually be restored to natural habitats. The importance of agriculture in the Park has been recognized since the earliest Park plans set aside land as an Agricultural Heritage Reserve. This is not only because of the obvious contribution farmers make to society by growing food but also because Park farmland provides wildlife habitats, scenic rural landscapes for visitors and opportunities to directly supply food for local consumers.

We are committed to the future of farming in the Park recognizing that farmers have had a long history in the area and the Park intends to do what we can to maintain a strong, vibrant farm community centred in the Park.

Visitor Experience

Rouge Park is nestled into the GTA, surrounded by nearly 7 million people. Visitors can be immersed in nature mere steps away from a public transit stop. This thriving natural community is often a first wilderness experience for new Canadians, where they can take a guided hike and discover all that Rouge Park has to offer.

Visitors to Rouge Park can enjoy walking the many trails, basking on the beach and camping in the city, all while surrounded by an extensive nature reserve and ecological restoration zone. Wander along a rustic trail, look up at the autumn sky through a colourful canopy of century-old trees, smell a fragrant meadow on a summer afternoon or spot wildflowers on a spring morning. Let nature be a sanctuary for your spirit! A wilderness experience is waiting for you in Rouge Park!

Cultural Heritage

The human history of Rouge Park goes back over 10,000 years. Palaeolithic nomadic hunters, Iroquoian women farmers, early European explorers, and the multicultural suburban population that you see around the Park today are all part of this history.

Rouge Park is home to one National Historic Site and one National Historic Event, both of First Nations significance. The Rouge River branch of the "Toronto Carrying Place" trail, is designated as a Canadian National Historic Event. This was an original portage route along the Rouge River to the Holland River, linking Lake Ontario in the south to Lake Simcoe in the north. An archaeological site with the remains of a 17th century Seneca Village are part of "Bead Hill", a National Historic Site, designated by the Historical Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1991.

Glen Eagles Vista is one of the most spectacular vista points in Rouge Park; it is also the site of the former Glen Eagles Hotel. Interpretive signs there tell of past human habitation of the property and the Park area.

Park Size and Location:

The Park is in east Toronto and Markham, Ontario, Canada (See www.rougepark.com for maps). At over 40 km² (10 000 acres) in size, Rouge Park is 18 times the size of the City's next largest park, Downsview Park and 20 times the size of the Toronto Islands. Bob Hunter Memorial Park, near 14th Avenue and Reesor Road in Markham is also in Rouge Park.

The headwaters, or source, of the 250 km-long Rouge River system are in the Oak Ridges Moraine, an important geologic feature north of Toronto. The Rouge River and its tributaries flow south through York Region into Toronto, through the marshes at Rouge Beach, and empty into Lake Ontario.

The report also calls for the addition of nearly 5000 acres of federal lands in Markham to the Park, as an agricultural preserve, expanding the total Park area by 1/3 to 15 000 acres (nearly 6100 hectares).

Please see maps included.