

For Immediate Release  
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## **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.”

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# Speaker's Notes

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## Remarks by Gord Weeden, Chair, Rouge Park Alliance

13 February 2007

### [Check against delivery]

You have heard today how the addition of these lands provides connectivity to other watersheds and the Oak Ridges Moraine, provides a major ecological corridor, protects culture and agriculture, provides green infrastructure important for the growth of our communities, strengthens the north to south corridor, provides restoration opportunities, and provides for the creation of trails.

Rouge Park is a reservoir of biodiversity in Ontario's Greenbelt and this substantial addition of land helps us protect natural areas for healthier animal and plant communities. The continuous show of support from the Ontario government has helped us build the unique and important Rouge Park you see today.

But really it is for future generations. The trees we plant, the animals we protect, the cultural heritage we protect will be seen and experienced by the next generations.

Rouge Park with the addition of these lands will provide the opportunity to:

- Protect and plant trees so they can clean the air that our children breathe
- Protect and create wildlife habitat so our children can see the animals not just in books, but in real life
- Protect and improve our streams so they can swim in them and have clean drinking water
- Protect the land so the next generation has fresh organic food close to their homes
- Protect all our cultural heritages so our children can experience life as it was before them
- Provide a "mental health facility" where people can exist in harmony with nature and enjoy the natural features protected in the Park

Mr. Minister, you and the provincial government have given the Rouge Park Alliance, partners and staff another tool to assist in the building of this valuable legacy that will strive to achieve the goals I have just mentioned. We thank you for this generous dedication of lands for Rouge Park.

Our challenge now is to bring together all of our partners, neighbours and residents of Rouge Park to work together to collectively build the Park in a fashion that respects the environment while ensuring that human activity exists in harmony with the Park.

We will partner with the Region of York, Town of Markham and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to make this happen.

Anwyn, Zack and Steven and their generation thank you for ensuring that they will have Rouge Park to enjoy, protect and enhance. Rouge Park will be a sanctuary for nature and the human spirit. Human activity will exist in harmony with the natural values of Rouge Park.

## Rouge Park Receives New Lands From Ontario Government

### What is Rouge Park?

Rouge Park is Canada's premiere urban wilderness park. Over 11,500 acres (46 km<sup>2</sup>) 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. Rouge Park was created by the Ontario government in 1995 in response to public concerns about the protection of the Rouge River valley. The award-winning Park, and the watershed which is its home, 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 12 km of rustic hiking trails, seasonal riverside camping, a sandy beach and spectacular views. Many areas are accessible by public transit. Visit [www.rougepark.com](http://www.rougepark.com) for details. Go "Wild in the City!"

### Park size and location

The 1,500 acres (6 km<sup>2</sup>) of new land dedicated to Rouge Park in February 2007 by the Ontario government will permanently protect valuable ecological connections to the Park, while helping to improve air and water quality in the Toronto area. The area is located to the east of the Little Rouge Creek corridor section of Rouge Park, and west of the boundary between the regional municipalities of York and Durham, reaching south to Steeles Avenue East and to the north to 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue (see map). This new area of the Park is a 15 per cent increase in parkland, almost three times the size of the Toronto Islands, and makes Rouge Park's total land base 18 times the size of the Downsview 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 into Toronto, through the marshes at Rouge Beach, and empty into Lake Ontario.

### Benefits of New Lands

#### Ecological Connections

Rouge Park is about connections: ecological, cultural and recreational. The new park lands in the Duffins Creek and Petticoat Creek watersheds will connect to important forests, meadows, sensitive areas and valley systems east of the Park. The expansion of Rouge Park enhances the major ecological corridor joining the Oak Ridges Moraine to Lake Ontario, bridging Steeles Avenue East. Planning for transportation in this area can now consider how to best maintain this link for the free and safe passage of people and wildlife.

#### Climate Change

Restoring forests in Rouge Park plays an important role in improving air quality in the Toronto area. Natural lands with healthy vegetation filter pollutants from the air and absorb and store carbon from the atmosphere, helping to reduce the undesirable impacts of climate change.

#### Protecting our Water Resources

The eastward expansion of Rouge Park into the neighbouring Duffins Creek and Petticoat Creek watersheds enhances the protection of these river systems through public ownership and the Park's ongoing ecological restoration work. The newly expanded Park will make a significant contribution to protecting the sources of our drinking water, minimizing negative erosion, and mitigating stream flow and water quality impacts from new growth in the surrounding urban areas.

## Ontario's Greenbelt

Rouge Park is home to a variety of landscapes: forests, meadows, wetlands, river valleys and upland areas and provides a major reservoir of biodiversity in the most urbanized portion of Ontario's Greenbelt. The only working farms in the City of Toronto are also within the Park. With the addition of these new lands, Rouge Park will also ensure essential ecological restoration is completed, and encourage long-term, sustainable farming in York Region. Increasing the size of Rouge Park ensures that biodiversity and rural landscapes are protected over the long term. Rich in cultural heritage, Rouge Park is committed to protecting its legacy of human history that represents thousands of years of continuous habitation, and ethnically diverse neighbouring communities.

Rouge Park's leadership and success in ecological restoration has been recognized by many, including The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, which is funding restoration planning work, to enable Rouge Park to evaluate lands for priority ecological restoration and enhancement projects. This demonstrates the Park's ongoing efforts to protect this important mosaic of sustainable, natural, cultural and agricultural heritage.

## Infrastructure

This significant increase to Rouge Park's land base by the Ontario Government demonstrates a new view: that "green infrastructure" is as important for Ontario as conventional infrastructure of transportation, water and sewage servicing. Rouge Park's ecological and recreational benefits will be important amenities for Toronto as the area's population continues to grow. This park expansion will enable better connections between regional trail systems such as the Oak Ridges Trail and Trans-Canada Trail systems and Rouge Park's planned trails.

## Our 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.

## 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) and the *Rouge North Management Plan* (2001). Plans were created in 2006 for two areas of the Park which required special consideration: the Little Rouge Creek Corridor and Bob Hunter Memorial Park.

## Rouge Park Alliance

Organization	Member
Government of Canada	Derek Lee, MP (Scarborough-Rouge River)
Province of Ontario	Brad Duguid, MPP (Scarborough Centre)
Region of Durham	Regional Councillor Bonnie Littley
Region of York	Regional Councillor Jack Heath
Town of Markham	Councillor Erin Shapero
City of Pickering	Councillor Jennifer O'Connell
Town of Richmond Hill	Councillor David Cohen
City of Toronto	Councillor Raymond Cho; Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville	Councillor Clyde Smith
Toronto & Region Conservation Authority	Dick O'Brien, Chair
Toronto Zoo	Calvin White, General Manager
Waterfront Regeneration Trust Corporation	Honourable Pauline Browes, Director
Save the Rouge Valley System Inc.	André Flys
CHAIR	Gord Weeden (appointed by the Province of Ontario in 2005)

### Some Interesting Facts about Rouge Park

1. Rouge Park is Toronto's largest park, and is already 13 times as big as New York's Central Park, or 33 times the size of London, England's Hyde Park.
2. Outcrops of rock formed during the last glacial period are found in Rouge Park and are important to geologists studying seismic activity, in particular the risk of earthquakes in the Toronto area. Faults are visible indicating significant earthquake activity between 80,000 and 13,000 years ago.
3. Rouge Park is home to the eastern arm of the Nationally Historic "Carrying Place" trail, which was an original portage route between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe.
4. An active farming community is part of the legacy that Rouge Park preserves, protecting the only rural landscape and working farms in the City of Toronto.
5. The mouth of the Rouge River stays frost-free one month longer than northern areas of the river system on the Oak Ridges Moraine.
6. Rouge Park has the largest and best examples of Canada's rare Carolinian habitat in Toronto and is the only officially recognized site in the Toronto area.
7. Inspired by the scenery during the 1950s, FH Varley, one of Canada's renowned Group of Seven painters, captured the banks of the Rouge River in Markham on canvas as a lasting memory of their beauty.
8. Rouge Park's natural setting has provided filming locations for decades, posing as a backdrop for an array of landscapes, from the far north to the bayous of Mississippi. A Canadian filmmaker had a studio in the Park for many years, filming underwater beaver activity and simulating birds in flight.
9. Rouge Park is the only place where the Ontario Greenbelt reaches Lake Ontario in the City of Toronto.

### Heritage Project Funding

Two programmes provide start-up funds to groups for projects which protect, restore and enhance Rouge Park and the Rouge River watershed. The Natural and Cultural Heritage Project Fund is intended for larger projects, which are reviewed by a panel of experts to assess and prioritize a project's merits for funding. The Small Grants Programme helps groups conducting smaller scale projects. Both funds require the applicants to solicit partner funding.

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# Backgrounder/ Document d'information



Ministry of Public  
Infrastructure Renewal

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de l'infrastructure publique

