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Rouge North Management Plan *A Strategy to Guide the Realization of the Rouge Park* *from Steeles Avenue to the Oak Ridges Moraine*

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Chairman's Message

A Message from the Chairman of the Rouge Park Alliance

The Rouge Park Alliance is pleased to release the final Rouge North Management Plan as approved by the Rouge Park Alliance.

The Rouge Park North Management plan is based on the vision, goal and objectives as outlined in the Rouge Park Management Plan (1994). The development of the Rouge North Management Plan fulfills the directions set out in the Rouge Park Management Plan (1994) and provides guidelines for the protection, enhancement and restoration of the Rouge Park and watershed.

Based on input and comments received on the Draft Rouge North Management Plan, appropriate revisions have now been made in the final Rouge North Management Plan. This plan provides criteria for the park partners to develop management plans to implement the Rouge Park goal and objectives.

The Rouge Park Alliance wishes to express its appreciation to the Rouge Park North Steering Committee which led the process to develop the plan. We also thank the community groups and the members of the public who spent a great amount of their time and energy on the development and review of this plan. We look forward to implementing the Rouge North Management Plan in partnership with all stakeholders in the Rouge.

Sincerely,

Ron Christie

Chairman, Rouge Park Alliance



Chairman's Message

A Message from the Chairman of the Rouge North Management Plan Committee

On behalf of the Rouge North Management Plan Committee, I am pleased to present **"The Rouge North Management Plan"**. The release of this important document, which is the product of five years of consultation and planning, marks a milestone in the process of realizing the vision of a Rouge Park that extends from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

We are grateful to the consultants on this project for their expertise, creativity and hard work. We are particularly grateful to the lead consultant, Mark Schollen of *Schollen & Company Inc.*, for inspiring community participation and fostering new partnerships, with the objective of generating a plan that achieves the aspirations of the community while maintaining the integrity of the natural and cultural resources of the park.

We acknowledge with thanks the work of many individuals who contributed to the development of the Rouge North Management Plan. In particular, we thank all those who participated in the community and public meetings, those who made presentations and those who reviewed and commented on the previous draft report. We thank the community groups, who inspired and helped us develop community based solutions, and the Public and Technical Advisory Committees, who shared their knowledge and expertise with us. We thank the nearly 2,000 people who we have had the pleasure of involving as we continue our journey to the completion of this significant long-term planning project.

Sincerely,

Don Cousens

Chairman, Rouge North Management Plan Committee
Mayor, Town of Markham



Acknowledgements

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In addition we would like to acknowledge the important contribution of all those who participated in the weekend park planning workshop, public meetings and events. Your ideas provided the foundation for the Rouge North Management Plan.

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Foreword

The process of generating the Rouge North Management Plan was one of evolution and refinement, rooted in the consensus of the partners, the stakeholders and the community. The planning process was comprised of a series of small, well grounded and important steps, with each step tested and refined to form a solid foundation for the one that would follow. This document represents a milestone in the process of consultation and consensus building; it represents the synthesis of the ideas and aspirations of those who live within and beyond the limits of the Rouge River watershed who participated in the planning process. It was conceived as a living document, to be refined in the future in a process parallel to that of the evolution of Rouge Park and the communities of the watershed. As such, the Rouge North Management Plan exists as one further step in the process of realizing the vision of Rouge Park.



Preface

The Rouge North Management Plan was generated to guide the realization of the extension of the Rouge Park northward from Steeles Avenue to the Oak Ridges Moraine. The document was developed as the product of a comprehensive planning and consultation process. The approval of the Rouge North Management Plan by the Rouge Park Alliance is an important step in the process of advancing the vision of the Rouge Park North further toward reality. However, there are four key initiatives that need to be undertaken by the Rouge Park Alliance and its partners to facilitate the implementation of the Rouge North Management Plan. These four key initiatives are described below.

i Comprehensive Implementation Strategy

The Rouge North Management Plan sets out recommendations and provides a general framework to guide the implementation of the Rouge Park North. However, the development of a comprehensive and more detailed implementation strategy is required to define specific roles and responsibilities and address current legislative and policy requirements, as well as financial issues with the goal of expediting the implementation of the Rouge Park North. Both short and long-term implementation priorities will be addressed through the development of the Comprehensive Implementation Strategy. The completion of the Comprehensive Implementation Strategy is a high priority in the process of furthering the Rouge North Management Plan toward reality.

ii Overall Land Acquisition and Funding Program

This high priority initiative will be focused on defining a detailed process to facilitate the acquisition of Rouge Park lands. The confirmation of potential short and long-term funding requirements, the identification and solidification of funding sources and the confirmation of protocols for accessing and acquiring funds are key issues that will be addressed as components of this initiative.

iii Technical Review Process

Key objectives of the Technical Review Process include supporting and supplementing the boundary definition criteria, developing a review process for defining the park boundary, developing ecological criteria for minor tributaries and establishing a watershed wide protocol for defining the park boundary. The process should be undertaken with the goal of enhancing the general understanding of the boundary delineation process and the methodology for applying the ecological criteria. This initiative may include the preparation of a summary reference document to guide practitioners, landowners and municipality and agency staff in the application of the park boundary criteria, as well as the review and approval processes. The undertaking of this initiative is a high priority.

iv Trail and Public Access Strategy

In tandem with the establishment of the Rouge Park North, a comprehensive Trails and Public Access Strategy should be prepared to address potential trail routing, hierarchy of trail types, location of trail heads and access points, wayfinding strategy and requirements for support facilities. This initiative should address the integration of the recommendations of the Rouge Park Interpretive Plan and should define methodology for enabling and guiding the proposed Rouge Park Trails Association.

Once completed, these four initiatives will provide the Rouge Park Alliance and its partners with specific directions related to their respective roles in the implementation of the Rouge North Management Plan. The successful completion of these tasks is the next significant step for the Rouge Park Alliance in the process of realizing the vision of the Rouge Park North.



Executive Summary

The Rouge North Management Plan is envisioned as a blueprint to guide the implementation of Rouge Park North, an extension to Rouge Park south of Steeles Avenue. This will result in the creation of a continuous park along the corridors of the Rouge River progressing from Lake Ontario in the south to the Oak Ridges Moraine in the north. The plan is the product of a process focused on meaningful public consultation with residents of watershed communities, representatives of stakeholder groups, private landowners and representatives of the agencies that would be partially responsible for its implementation.

A comprehensive review of existing background information forms the foundation of the Management Plan. This information was catalogued and verified through consultations with the community and relevant agencies in the early stages of the planning process. Supplementary work was subsequently undertaken where discrepancies were identified or additional information was required. Field investigations or further background research were performed to assist in the identification of issues to be addressed and opportunities which could be capitalized upon in the process of generating the Management Plan.

At the same time, a comprehensive public consultation process was being undertaken. This process included the following events:

- A start up event at Toogood Pond in Unionville;
- A display at the Markham Fair;
- Stakeholder consultation meetings;
- A weekend long Park Planning Workshop;
- A display at Markville Shopping Centre;
- A public meeting to review the Preliminary Management Plan;
- Additional stakeholder consultation meetings;
- The Public Advisory Committee process;
- Technical Advisory Committee review meetings;
- Consultations with the Ontario Realty Corporation; and
- A public meeting to review the Draft Final Management Plan.
- Endorsement of the Draft Final Management Plan from the Councils of the towns of Markham, Richmond Hill, Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Region of York.

The consultation process formed the basis for a multi-dimensional management plan designed to direct the implementation of Rouge Park North over the span of a number of decades. The Rouge North Management Plan takes context, patterns of land ownership, as well as status of natural and cultural resources into consideration to remain relevant throughout the evolution of the Rouge Park North.

The core goal, principles and objectives of the plan are adapted from those defined in the Rouge Park Management Plan (1994). However, fundamental differences in context, configuration and land ownership patterns exist between the Rouge Park and the study area for Rouge Park North. Therefore, the Rouge North Management Plan sets out a process for defining boundaries, patterns of park zoning and use, as well as a long-term scenario for implementation and management distinct from its counterpart to the south.

The study area for Rouge Park North was defined in the Rouge Park Management Plan. Subsequently, as the product of background and field investigations, three tributaries were added to the study area: Exhibition Creek, Robinson Creek and East Beaver Creek. Each presented unique opportunities to achieve objectives related to the preservation of natural and cultural resources, recreation or restoration.



Executive Summary

The Management Plan uses a number of definitions and strategies aimed at realizing Rouge Park North over time. These were developed in response to the input received through the consultation process, the nature of the resources of the study area, the patterns of land ownership as well as the timeline for implementation, and include the following:

- Rouge Park North - Publicly owned lands situated along or proximate to the river corridors, which will be re-designated as 'Rouge Park'.
- Rouge Park Partnership Program - A program aimed at achieving park objectives on lands held in public, semi-public or corporate ownership, situated along or proximate to the river corridors, which possess the potential to support recreational, ecological and public access initiatives to the benefit of the park. Participation in this designation is at the discretion of the landowner.
- Rouge Park Stewardship Program - A program aimed at achieving park objectives on lands held in private ownership along the river corridors and throughout the watershed. If managed appropriately, these lands could provide significant benefits to the health of the Rouge River ecosystem and to the achievement of other park objectives. Participation in this designation is at the discretion of the landowner.
- Rouge Park Study Areas - The Rouge Park Study Area is an area in which additional environmental studies are required to be undertaken to facilitate the delineation of the Rouge Park in the future. The Study Area designation encompasses privately owned lands along the river corridors and sets out an area defining the actual boundary of the park. The catalyst for the activation of the process of defining the park boundary within the Study Area is the application for development of lands that fall within the limits of the Study Area. The Study Area process mimics the typical development approval process employed by municipalities in the Rouge River watershed. Specific criteria are set out to facilitate the determination of the park boundary based on ecological objectives.

The resources of individual corridors are unique, as are the specific objectives related to each corridor. Consequently, three distinct Study Areas are defined, each with specific criteria for determining the final park boundary within its limits. The three Study Areas are:

- The Little Rouge Creek Study Area;
- The Middle Reaches Study Area; and
- The Headwaters Study Area.

The Management Plan also defines a number of programs and recommendations to guide the long-term implementation of Rouge Park North. These include:

- The Trails and Public Access Program, which describes a methodology for achieving recreational trail objectives on lands held in public as well as private ownership;
- The Natural and Cultural Heritage Program, which provides a blueprint to guide the restoration of degraded natural resources and systems in Rouge Park North;
- The Monitoring Program, which defines a methodology for gauging the health of the resources of the park;
- A strategy for managing heritage resources within the park;
- A recommended program for community based management of Rouge Park North; and

Executive Summary

- A mechanism to facilitate the cyclical review and updating of the Rouge North Management Plan.

The successful implementation of Rouge Park North will only be realized with the full support of the residents of the watershed communities. The Rouge North Management Plan, as a product of extensive consultation, provides a long-term strategy to facilitate the establishment and evolution of Rouge Park North in partnership with the community.