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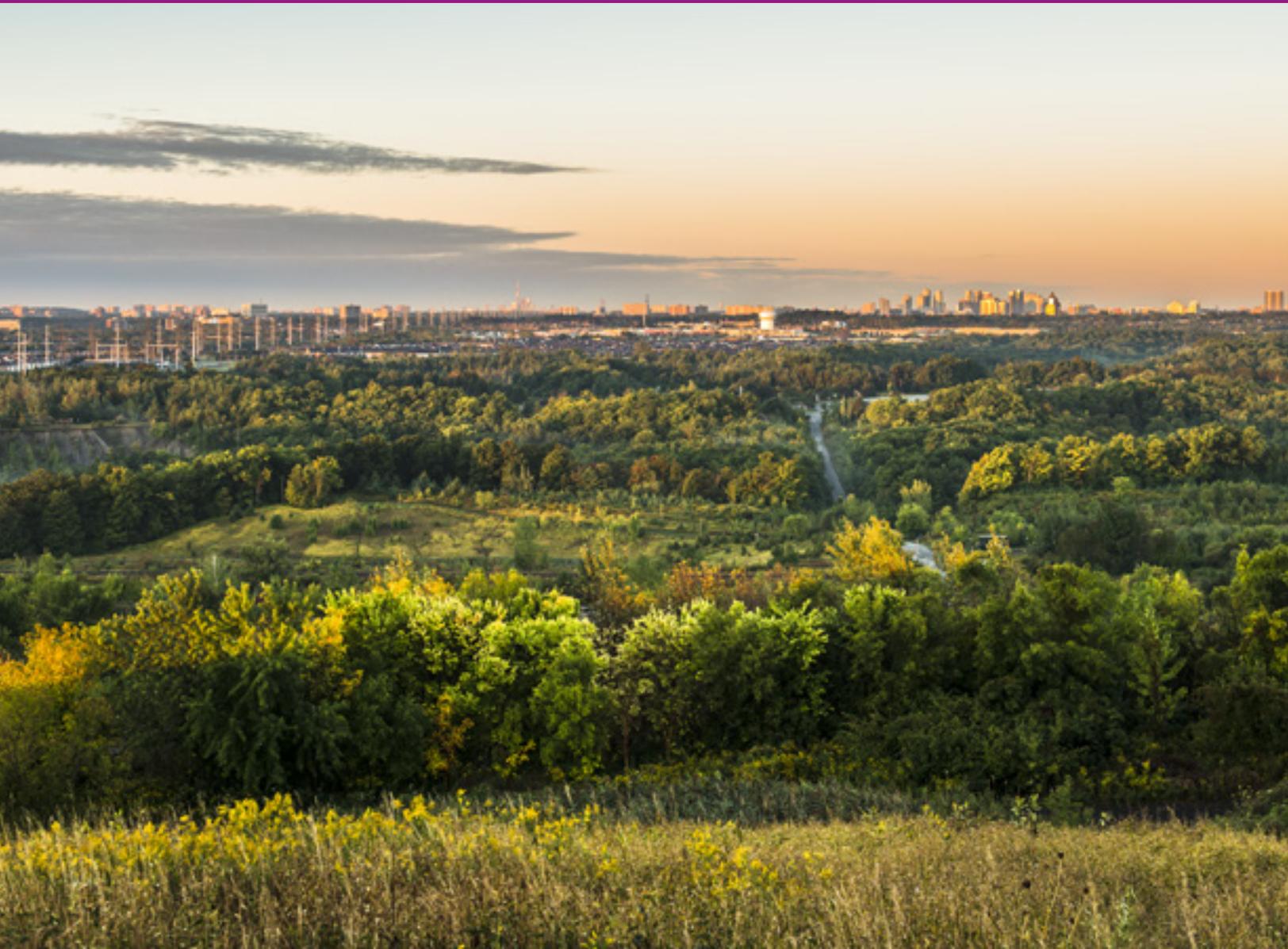


# Rouge

National Urban Park

## Management Plan

2019





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National Urban Park

## Management Plan

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## Foreword



Canada's national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas belong to all Canadians and offer truly Canadian experiences.

These special places make up one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and cultural heritage areas in the world. Added to this remarkable conservation legacy is a new kind of national protected heritage area in the Greater Toronto Area—Rouge National Urban Park.

The Government is committed to preserving our natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places and contributing to the recovery of species at risk. At the same time, we must continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities so that more Canadians can experience Parks Canada places and learn about our environment, history and culture.

This first-ever management plan for Rouge National Urban Park supports this vision. Through this guiding document, the park offers new and exciting opportunities to protect and celebrate a remarkable diversity of nature, agriculture and culture, and to connect visitors and residents in the nation's largest urban region to Canada's environment and heritage. Management plans are developed through extensive consultation and input from various people and organizations, including Indigenous Peoples, local and regional residents, visitors and the dedicated team at Parks Canada.

National parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas are a priority for the Government of Canada. Rouge National Urban Park now takes its place as a contributor to this national network of protected heritage areas. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this plan for their commitment and spirit of co-operation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort, and I am pleased to approve the Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C McKenna', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Catherine McKenna**

*Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
and Minister responsible for Parks Canada*



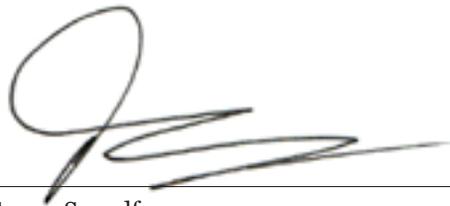
## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*



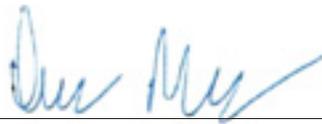
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## Executive Summary

The creation of a new national park—let alone a new model of protected area—is a long-term endeavour. Rouge National Urban Park exists today because of the tireless efforts of many dedicated citizens, organizations and governments over many years to protect and manage this remarkable landscape. Similarly, achieving the vision for the park will be a long-term undertaking.

This first management plan for Rouge National Urban Park is a foundational document. It encompasses a period of heightened activity in the park's formative years—the transfers of land administration to Parks Canada; the building of long-term relationships with Indigenous partners, the park farming community, volunteers, visitors, other governments and countless others; the initiation of resource conservation and ecological restoration programs and cultural heritage research; the construction of many visitor facilities; and the continued development of the park's management organization.

By the end of the management plan's ten-year implementation period, the park will be transformed in many tangible ways:

- The park's ecological integrity will be maintained or restored through a wide range of actions that result in greater native biodiversity, better conditions for cold-water aquatic species, and enhanced ecological connectivity. Restoration projects throughout the park will improve conditions in riparian (shoreline) areas, wetlands, meadows and forests. Populations of targeted species at risk will be stabilized or on their way to recovery. The park will contribute tangibly to the overall health of the watersheds in which it is situated.
- The park farmscape will reflect improved stewardship in cared-for buildings, well-tended lands and in a diverse mix of farms and crops that serve a wide range of local markets. The benefits of long-term security of tenure enjoyed by farm lessees will be reflected in more diverse economic opportunities, investments that improve the condition and viability of their leaseholds, and in significant contributions to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity and the range of visitor experiences facilitated in the park.
- Cultural landscapes and archaeology will be conserved and interpreted, encouraging visitors to learn about the thousands of years of First Nations presence and connection to the land, and how human use has influenced—and been influenced by—the park landscape. Visitors will be able to experience examples of the park's built heritage through restored and conserved buildings made accessible to the public.
- Visitors will have a powerful gateway experience to the park at various welcome areas that will be connected through an extensive and interpreted trail network. A wide range of “learn-to” and visitor activities will cater to the interests of individuals, families and groups from near and far. Through their experiences, visitors will appreciate and value the park; many will be inspired to help achieve the park vision and contribute to the maintenance or restoration of the park's ecological integrity.

- The park will serve as a vital and dynamic meeting place for diverse communities, with activities happening throughout the year. Park farmers, Indigenous partners, volunteers, conservation groups, visitors and a host of other individuals, organizations and levels of government will contribute to this sense of community. Together with Parks Canada team members, this community will share a strong and enduring bond with the park.
- Park monitoring and reporting will indicate improved conditions and positive trends on key natural, cultural, agricultural, visitor experience and external relations indicators.
- And finally, the park will become known throughout the Greater Toronto Area, Canada and beyond as one of the premiere destinations, conserved landscapes and welcoming gateways to the outdoors.

In guiding the park to this future, the management plan provides three areas of guidance.

An **introduction** provides the context for the management plan, and explains the park’s legislative provisions encompassing the park purpose, first management priority for ecological integrity and providing certainty for farmers.

Four **key strategies** provide park-wide guidance for natural heritage, the park’s “living” landscape, connecting Canadians, and collaboration.

Six **management area concepts** cover smaller geographic areas to provide more area- and site-specific direction. They build on and tailor key strategy actions to the unique and varied circumstances within different areas of the park.

The successful implementation of this management plan will mean the park truly connects the hearts and minds of Canadians, newcomers and international visitors to nature, culture and agriculture. In so doing, it will establish Rouge National Urban Park as Canada’s foremost “learn-to” park—an urban gateway for enduring and inspired discovery of Canada’s environment and heritage.

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**PART A**  
Setting The Context



## INTRODUCTION

### A New Park, A New Opportunity

Stretching from the shores of Newfoundland to Vancouver Island, and from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Circle, the Parks Canada family of national protected areas is as vast as it is diverse. No two are alike. Yet within all this variety, Rouge National Urban Park stands out with its diversity of landscapes and activities, and by way of its location in the heart of Canada's largest metropolis, the Greater Toronto Area.

Rouge National Urban Park is a historic undertaking for Canada, Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area. This new protected area model offers an unprecedented opportunity to protect important and unique ecosystems, and to conserve, showcase and share this area's remarkable natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes with Canadians and people from around the world.

### Parks Canada and Rouge National Urban Park

In 2011, Parks Canada started to work with other governments, Indigenous partners and stakeholders towards the establishment of Rouge National Urban Park (see Map 1). Parks Canada is proud to help continue the conservation legacy of those who worked tirelessly to ensure the park landscape would be protected for generations to come. The park's natural and cultural diversity and urban setting pose opportunities and challenges never before encountered in any other place under Parks Canada's protection. Located within Canada's most culturally diverse metropolitan area, the park is well situated to meaningfully reach youth, newcomers and Canada's increasingly urban population.

The park offers tremendous potential to both deliver on and showcase Parks Canada's priorities to protect and restore natural areas, ensuring ecological integrity is the first priority in park management; to enable people to discover and connect with Canada's heritage areas; and to sustain the value of protected areas in fighting climate change, protecting species at risk and generating tourism and economic opportunity.



### Park Vision

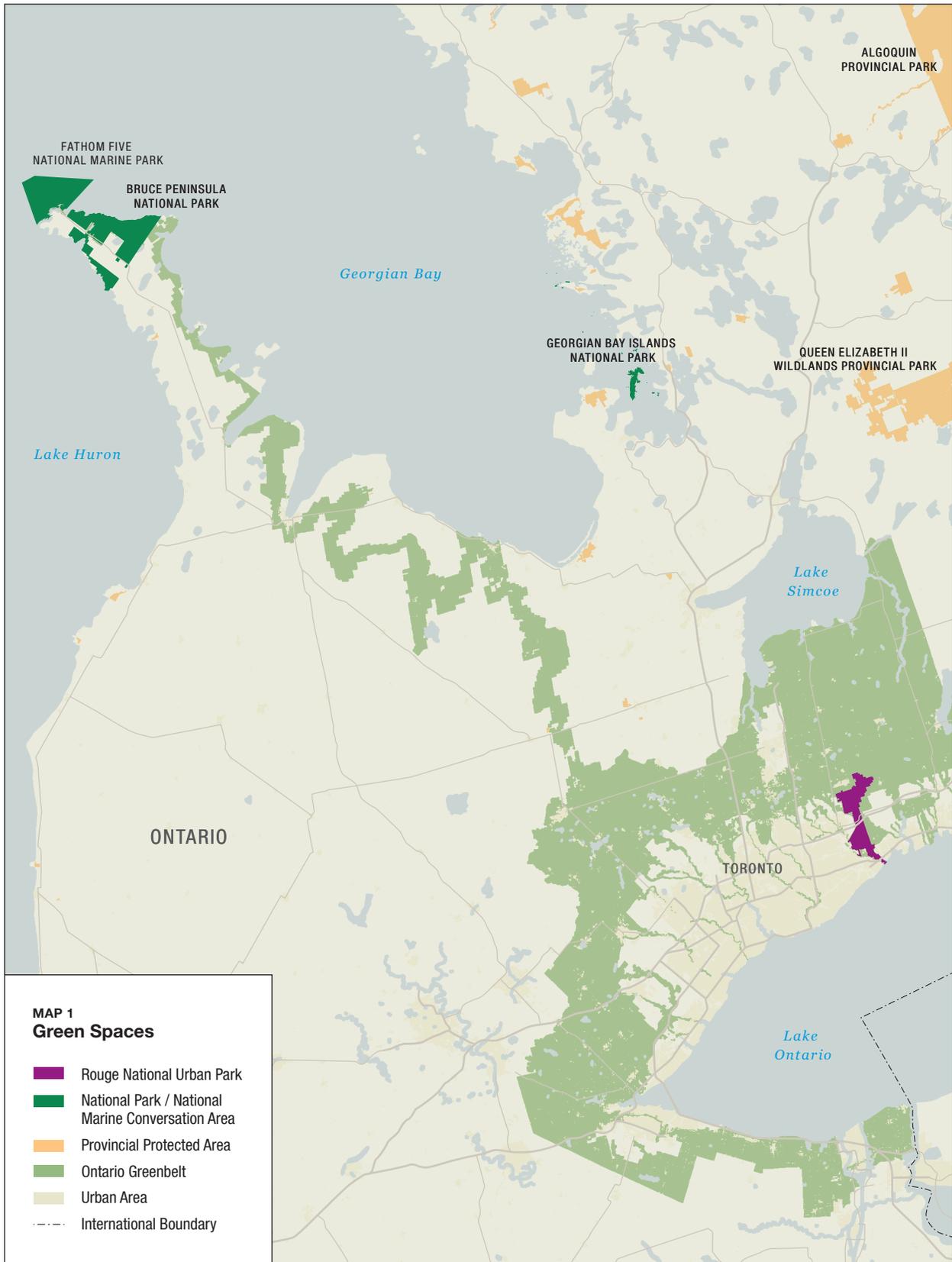
The vision for Rouge National Urban Park encapsulates what makes the park special, and how this uniqueness underpins this park's new and innovative approach to protected area management in an urban setting.

#### PARK VISION

Rouge National Urban Park protects and celebrates, for current and future generations, a diverse landscape in Canada's largest metropolitan area. Linking Lake Ontario with the Oak Ridges Moraine, the park offers engaging and varied experiences, inspires personal connections to its natural beauty and rich history, promotes a vibrant farming community, and encourages us to discover Canada's national treasured places.

Managing the park in an integrated manner will ensure that conservation, visitor experience and educational activities protect and celebrate the park's diverse landscape and contribute to the maintenance or restoration of the park's ecological integrity.

- *Linking Lake Ontario with the Oak Ridges Moraine:* The park will provide the only regional-scale ecological and trail connection of its kind in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The park's protected natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes will contribute a broad range of benefits to the Rouge, Petticoat and West Duffins Creek watersheds, the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine, and to residents of adjacent urban communities.



- *Engaging and varied experiences:* With aspirations to have Rouge National Urban Park serve as the Agency’s premiere “learn-to” park, Parks Canada will facilitate opportunities that bring GTA residents, young people and newcomers to Canada in contact with nature, culture and agriculture. These opportunities will enable visitors to learn about and appreciate the park, and to help to conserve and restore the park’s ecological integrity. Furthermore, as a centre of research excellence, the park will contribute to scientific literature and understanding across a range of subject areas, including ecosystems management in an urban setting, how nature-based and recreational activities contribute to wellness and mental health, and urban environmental restoration.
- *Natural beauty and rich history:* A vast array of archaeological resources, cultural landscapes, built heritage and cultural traditions chart a remarkable 10,000 years of human presence on the landscape that now forms the park. Parks Canada’s work with Indigenous partners and specialists in government and community groups will conserve, communicate and celebrate the living legacy and concept of “place” that has benefited generations upon generations of people who have passed through the Rouge or made it home.
- *A vibrant farming community:* Parks Canada and park farmers will work hand-in-hand to shape a key role for park farming as part of a vital and diverse protected landscape, as a contributor to the maintenance or restoration of the park’s ecological integrity, as a provider of educational opportunities for visitors, and as a supporter of the food sustainability of the larger region.
- *Personal connections:* The experiences of visitors and stewards of the park will inspire personal connections to the park and encourage GTA residents to discover Canada’s national treasured places—right in their own backyard.



### **The Rouge National Urban Park Act**

The *Rouge National Urban Park Act*, enacted in 2015 and amended in 2017, is specifically tailored and dedicated to a new category of protected area—a national urban park.

Section 4 of the *Act* states that the park is *established for the purposes of protecting and presenting, for current and future generations, the natural and cultural heritage of the Park and its diverse landscapes, promoting a vibrant farming community and encouraging Canadians to discover and connect with their national protected heritage areas.*

The 2017 amendments to the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* adopted the definition of ecological integrity as presented in the *Canada National Parks Act*. Section 6 of the amended park legislation states:

**6 (1)** *Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, must be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of the Park.*

**(2)** *For greater certainty, subsection (1) does not prevent the carrying out of agricultural activities as provided for in this Act.*

The *Rouge National Urban Park Act*, as amended, gives Parks Canada the legislative framework it needs to ensure the strongest ever protections in the Rouge’s history for the park’s ecosystems and its vast and diverse array of cultural and agricultural resources.



The *Act* also creates a unique opportunity for this remarkable landscape to serve as a nationally and internationally significant gateway for people to learn about Canada’s environment and heritage. It facilitates ways for people to contribute to the stewardship and the maintenance or restoration of its ecological integrity. By helping to build a culture of conservation, the park can build awareness of and support for Canada’s role in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets; in particular, Target 11—that by 2020 at least 17 percent of terrestrial and inland waters and 10 percent of coastal and marine areas are protected.

#### ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY IN A UNIQUE SETTING

##### Ecological Integrity in the Rouge

The *Rouge National Urban Park Act* defines ecological integrity as “a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes.”

Maintaining or restoring ecological integrity throughout the diverse range of protected natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes in Rouge National Urban Park presents unique opportunities and challenges, as does the park’s urban setting. For example, improvements or declines in ecological

attributes throughout the park’s greater ecosystem will influence Parks Canada’s efforts to maintain or restore the park’s ecological integrity.

During the preparation of this management plan, governments, stakeholders and Indigenous partners were unanimous in their view that for Rouge National Urban Park ecological integrity is not a defined end point, but a continuum (see text box below).

##### Ecological Integrity Quotes from 2018 Management Plan Workshops

“Success is moving in a direction and improving on things.” (Stakeholder)

“[Ecological integrity is] how healthy ecosystems work together, even with human influence. For example, farms can still benefit wild animals; everything is interconnected.” (First Nations partner)

“When we leave the environment better than we find it—then we are achieving ecological integrity.” (First Nations partner)

“A big part of ecological integrity is having people understand the concept of healthy ecosystems, whole intact ecosystems.” (Stakeholder)

“There is no finish line; we can only continuously improve [...] take the steps to achieve it, monitor, and continue with small steps.” (First Nations partner)

The Agency’s efforts with regard to ecological integrity will focus on continuous improvement in natural heritage values, including native species and their connected habitats. Parks Canada will strive to maintain or restore—to the greatest extent possible—functioning, resilient park ecosystems. The park’s heavily modified environment, combined with its urban context, offers extraordinary new opportunities for human activities to positively influence the restoration or maintenance of ecological integrity across the park’s natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes. Parks Canada will also work to reduce carbon emissions through “green” park transportation initiatives, visitor events and park operations.



**Ecological Integrity and Certainty for Farmers**

The *Act* recognizes the practice of agriculture that has long been conducted on the park landscape. The legislation’s encouragement of “sustainable farming practices to support the preservation of agricultural lands in the park” opens the door to exciting new opportunities that demonstrate how the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity and continually improving, leading-edge agricultural best management practices can work together to support farm prosperity, soil and water quality, and the realization of ecological integrity gains on park farmland.

**Testimony from Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development hearings on Bill C-18, including amendments to the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*, December 2016**

“The agriculture community has ... complete confidence in [Parks Canada’s] ability to execute a management plan that will meet the needs and expectations of all the stakeholders and reach a level of ecological integrity for an urban park in an urban setting that has an extensive human footprint, including an agricultural footprint dating back hundreds of years.”

Mike Whittamore,  
 Rouge National Urban Park farmer

**Integrated Park Management and Maintaining or Restoring Ecological Integrity**

Parks Canada’s integrated approach to park management will support a wide range of park objectives and ensure all park objectives contribute to the maintenance or restoration of the park’s ecological integrity. This approach to decision-making will use conservation science, Indigenous knowledge and other approaches to advance the cause of native biodiversity in the park and to respond to the challenges of climate change and urban development surrounding the park.

**Integrated Park Management and Ecological Integrity**

Examples of actions that generate multiple benefits for the park, including the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity:

- Restoring riparian vegetation on farmland to improve water quality, farm operations, aquatic connectivity, biodiversity and visitor experience;
- Making investments in trails to improve visitor experience and interpretation and, by closing informal or eroding trails, to reduce habitat fragmentation;
- Working with park residents to protect old stone foundations and barns to support wildlife and cultural heritage protection, and to support “hands-on” learning experiences; and
- Working with park farmers and community organizations to restore farm hedgerows, woodlots and pollinator habitats that support wildlife (including native pollinators essential to farming).

Specifically, actions in this management plan will be implemented in accordance with the following principles:

- The maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity should be the primary consideration in actions that focus on natural heritage. Ecological integrity may not necessarily provide the only impetus; actions can generate multiple benefits such as integrated natural and agricultural gains and integrated visitor experience and natural gains.

- For actions that advance elements of the park purpose not directly associated with maintaining or restoring ecological integrity, “first priority” will guide implementation.
- In applying actions related to farming in the park, agricultural leases will provide the primary means by which “sustainable agricultural practices” as noted in the *Act* will be implemented (e.g., farm plans, best management practices) in support of the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.
- The design and management of visitor facilities such as welcome areas, trails, parking and park operations should demonstrate climate change and native biodiversity benefits and enhance wet weather water flow management.
- Infrastructure proposals that require land, in line with the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*, will demonstrate a net ecological gain prior to Parks Canada approvals and the removal of these lands. As well, Parks Canada will seek to embed design features and operational practices that maintain or restore ecological integrity in external plans, environmental assessments and operations for infrastructure on non-park lands next to or traversing the park.
- Cultural resources will be managed, conserved and restored in such a way as to support the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.
- Ecological integrity-related research priorities will be guided by integrated monitoring and species at risk action plans, among others, and be implemented in collaboration with external parties such as the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Indigenous partners, post-secondary institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and volunteers. These research priorities will be reviewed on an annual basis.

#### Ecosystem Services and Ecological Integrity

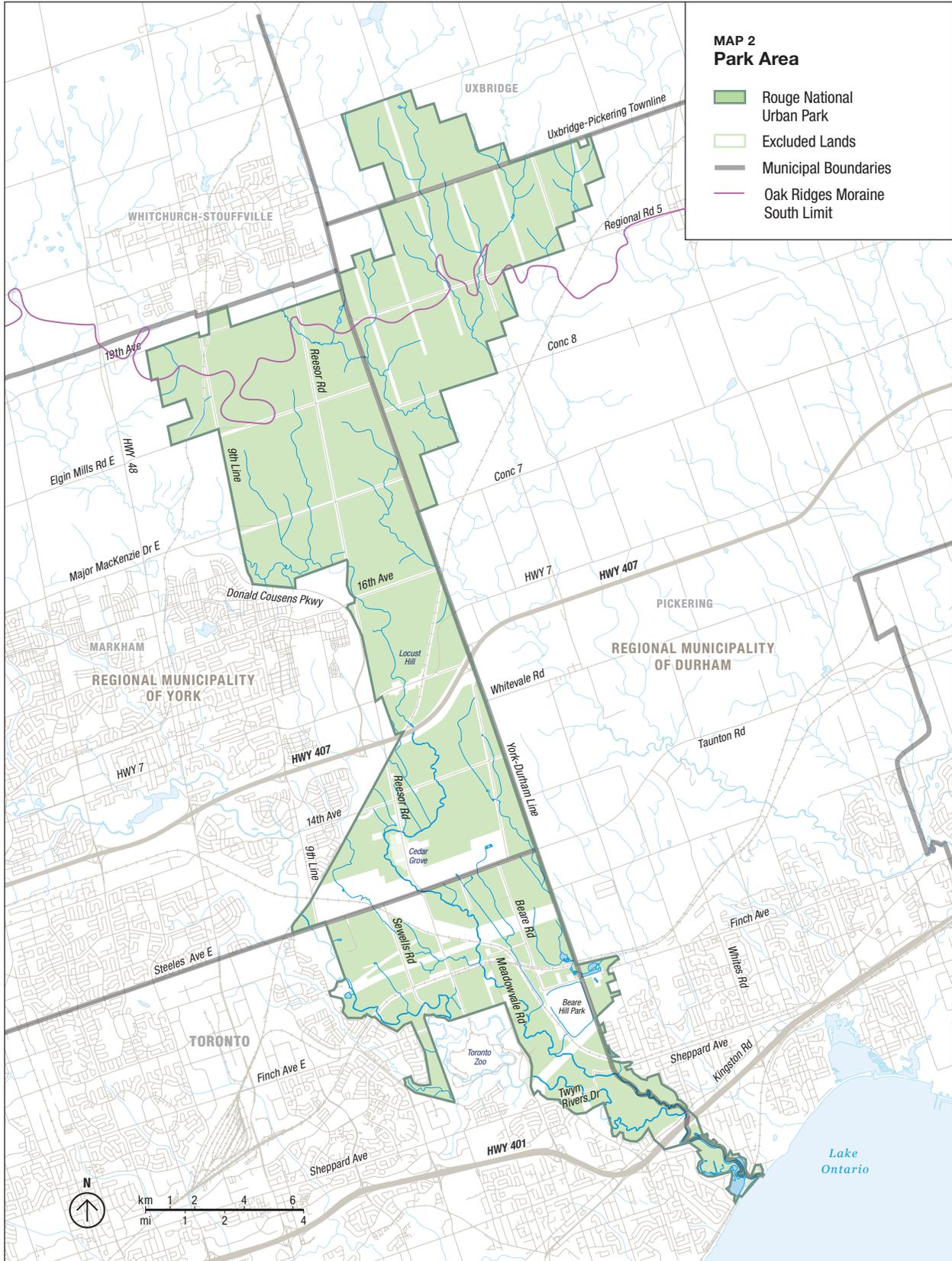
The Rouge’s diverse array of landscapes broadens the range of potential ecosystem services that help to maintain or restore ecological integrity in the park and also benefit nearby communities. These services include locally grown food; flood control, climate moderation, improved water quality and reduced soil erosion; the conservation of cultural heritage resources, traditions and a sense of place; and opportunities for outdoor recreation, education and contemplation.

- Ecological integrity education will be incorporated into visitor experience activities, events, programs and outreach initiatives, in order to promote responsible park use. Programming and event management should incorporate “climate-friendly” principles.
  - Parks Canada will collaborate with Indigenous partners to reflect cultural knowledge in park management initiatives.
- The outer limits of Rouge National Urban Park were initially defined in a “Study Area” established in 2011. The limits of this Study Area were based on recommendations of the Rouge Park Alliance’s landmark 2010 governance report, and through discussions with governments and agencies that administered land within the park area. A “Landholders Table” provided a forum for Parks Canada and public landholders to collectively define and agree on the general park boundaries and the assembly of lands.<sup>1</sup>
- All lands shown in green on Map 2 are already, or will in the future be, administered by Parks Canada and designated under Section 14 (1) of the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE PARK LIMITS

<sup>1</sup> The Landholders Table comprised representatives from Parks Canada, the cities of Toronto, Markham and Pickering, the regional municipalities of York and Durham, the TRCA and the Government of Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> Minor adjustments in park limits are possible prior to the transfer of all lands to Parks Canada administration.



Section 14 (1) of the *Act* also allows for future additions to the park not currently contemplated by way of transfer, negotiated purchase or donation.

#### Land Transfers

The 7,910-hectare area circumscribed by the park's outer limits is 23 times larger than Central Park in New York and more than 49 times larger than High Park in Toronto.

Close to 900 hectares of public and private land within the park's outer limits will remain excluded from the park and not subject to this management plan, including much of the hamlets of Cedar Grove and Locust Hill, privately administered lands, and roads, railway lines and hydro transmission corridors. The provisions of this management plan do not apply to these lands, but through this management plan Parks Canada will work with relevant authorities and land managers to encourage compatible use and management of lands adjacent to or surrounded by the park.

In anticipation of future infrastructure improvements required by other levels of government to support public purposes, Section 16 (1) of the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* permits the transfer of a maximum of 200 hectares of park land to

*a federal or provincial authority, including the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, or to a municipal authority, if the disposal is required for the purposes of the installation or maintenance of public infrastructure, including public utilities or transportation corridors.*

#### THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The *Rouge National Urban Park Act* requires the preparation of a management plan for the park within five years of the park's establishment in 2015, and lays out the framework for the plan's preparation and content.

#### What Is a Management Plan?

A management plan provides a strategic framework to guide park decision-making and for launching initiatives that integrate the delivery of Parks Canada's mandate for protection, education and visitor experience. Built on the principles of accountability, inclusiveness and collaboration, a Parks Canada management plan ensures the wise investment of public funds in a protected heritage area. Parks Canada prepares management plans for all national parks, national marine conservation areas, the majority of its national historic sites and, for the first time, a national urban park.

#### Public Engagement Overview

Since 2011, through four phases, Parks Canada has engaged Indigenous partners, the public, stakeholders, all levels of government and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). By way of an extensive program of meetings, workshops and discussions early in the engagement process, stakeholders collaboratively developed a series of guiding principles for the park (see page 24). These principles have served as the foundation for development of the park vision (2011), the park concept (2012) and now, the park management plan (2019).



This highly collaborative engagement process, coupled with input from municipal, provincial, and federal departments and agencies, formed the basis for a draft management plan, released for public review in June 2014. Thousands of people participated in events, meetings, open houses, presentations and an online survey. Another phase of engagement followed the enactment of park legislation in 2015 and subsequent amendments to the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* in 2017. This latter engagement was held in the winter and spring of 2018 and involved a wide range of stakeholders, Indigenous partners, the TRCA and other levels of government. The extensive feedback was carefully considered by Parks Canada in finalizing the management plan.

Parks Canada has also drawn inspiration and ideas from the individuals and organizations who dedicated their time and energy to make the former, smaller, regional Rouge Park possible. Rouge Park Alliance plans for the former regional park, conservation authority plans, municipal and regional official plans, provincial plans, special area plans and other strategies and initiatives all provided invaluable information that have helped to inform this management plan.

### **Planning in the Rouge**

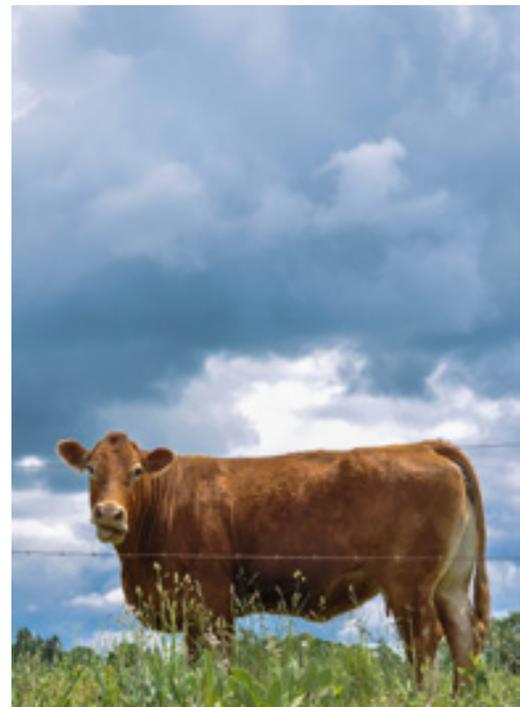
In addition to the park's legislative framework and the results of public engagement, two additional factors greatly influence planning in the Rouge: the park's watershed and bioregional context, and a dynamic surrounding urban and rural environment.

Rouge National Urban Park extends across three watersheds in the east portion of the GTA. The park is situated in the heart of the Rouge River watershed but is an important contributor to the headwaters of the West Duffins Creek watershed and includes a portion of the Petticoat Creek headwaters. It forms a key ecosystem connection within the Greenbelt between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine. The park's farming community relies on and contributes to farm support services, businesses and markets outside the park in the Greenbelt and beyond. Infrastructure such as roads, railroads, GO Transit lines, hydro corridors and regional

water mains and sewers traverse all parts of the park and serve growing urban populations in the eastern portion of the GTA.

These factors offer both opportunities and challenges. For example, the planned expansion of road, transit and cycling networks will offer unparalleled opportunity for "green" transportation access to the park, but at the same time could affect the park's ecological connectivity. A range of national and even global influences such as changing agricultural commodity prices and trade rules and the effects of climate change on native ecosystems, farming, cultural resources and visitor experience, could also affect the park in ways that are not yet fully understood.

To account for opportunities and to reduce risks, this management plan incorporates integrated monitoring and reporting—including community and Indigenous knowledge—to enable park management to adapt to changing circumstances over the life of this management plan. Furthermore, measures to foster environmental leadership throughout this management plan will support the park's first management priority—the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.



### **Parks Canada's Commitment to Working Collaboratively**

This management plan fosters a collaborative approach to support Parks Canada's decision-making for the benefit of those who visit, live in or have an interest in decisions relating to Rouge National Urban Park.

- *For visitors:* The plan facilitates the building of an enduring emotional connection to the park through meaningful experiences, learning and stewardship opportunities;
- *For stakeholders, volunteers and Indigenous partners:* The plan sets out a wealth of opportunities to help develop and participate in park management activities;
- *For park lessees such as farmers:* The plan provides guidance on leasing, outlines future opportunities and describes the important role lessees will play in the long-term success of the park;
- *For those who administer lands surrounded by and abutting the park:* The plan explores areas of potential mutual interest so that the park and abutting lands have a healthy "good neighbour" relationship;
- *For other governments:* The plan encourages planning coordination inside and outside Rouge National Urban Park in relation to infrastructure traversing the park, land use, the city/park interface, trail networks, natural resource conservation, cultural resource management and ecosystem connectivity;
- *For park managers:* The plan provides the framework for decision-making that permits park managers flexibility in how they achieve the targets identified in this management plan; and
- *For the Canadian public at large:* The plan offers an opportunity to inspire residents of the GTA and beyond to discover and meaningfully connect with Canada's environment and heritage.



### **Management Plan Structure**

The remaining sections of this management plan consist of two elements: key strategies and management area concepts.

#### **Key Strategies**

Four key strategies and supporting objectives provide overall direction for protecting and strengthening Rouge National Urban Park. These key strategies, objectives and actions associated with each objective are intended to focus efforts and resources towards achieving the park vision.





Each objective features easily measured targets with specific timetables for achievement.

The four key strategies are:

1. Protect and Restore Natural Heritage Values in Support of a Resilient Park Landscape
2. Sustain a Living Landscape – Past, Present and Future
3. Celebrate Rouge National Urban Park as a National and International Gateway to Discovering Canada’s Environment and Heritage
4. Achieve Success through Collaboration

**Management Area Concepts**

Management area concepts complement the key strategies. They provide more detail for specific areas within the park or for park-wide themes. The management plan features the following six management area concepts:

1. The Heart of Park Biodiversity (*south of Steeles Avenue*)
2. A Dynamic Toronto and Pickering Park Gateway (*Beare Hill Park/Toronto Zoo/Glen Rouge Campground/Rouge Beach areas*)
3. A Markham Gateway to Park Heritage (*Bob Hunter Memorial Park/Highway 7/Reesor cultural heritage areas*)
4. A Growing Park (*Old Finch Avenue north through the Northwest lands*)
5. A Tranquil Escape from the City (*Northeast lands*)
6. The Park Periphery (*neighbourhoods, municipalities, roads and other infrastructure*)

The guidance provided in this section must be read in conjunction with the entire management plan.



**PART B**  
Key Strategies





**KEY STRATEGY 1:  
Protect and Restore Natural Heritage Values in  
Support of a Resilient Park Landscape**

From the northern “sponge” of the Oak Ridges Moraine to the rivers that meander and flow to Lake Ontario, everything in Rouge National Urban Park begins and ends with water. Water has shaped the park’s topography, fostered the conditions for its remarkable ecological diversity and helped to create and sustain the rich soils that have supported human presence on this landscape for millennia.

**A Resilient Park**

For the purposes of this management plan, resilience means the ability of Rouge National Urban Park to adapt to changing conditions in a way that supports the long-term viability of the ecological, cultural and agricultural values for which the park was established.

**Amazing Biodiversity**

A south-to-north orientation extending 25 kilometres and rising more than 180 metres between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine helps to explain the park’s remarkable ecological diversity. In total, more than 1,700 species—including 261 bird, 65 fish, 40 mammal, and 21 reptile and amphibian species—are found in the park. Its 1,000 species of plants range from Carolinian trees in the park’s “deep south” to plants with arctic affinities on north slopes of the moraine in the park’s “far north.”

Key Strategy 1 serves to protect and restore the natural heritage values of Rouge National Urban Park. This key strategy provides the primary guidance for maintaining or restoring ecological integrity as a first priority in park management. It supports the persistence of characteristic natural features and ecological processes, encourages people to connect and contribute to a resilient park landscape, and supports the monitoring of ecological conditions and trends in the park and of

adaptive park management to adjust to and foster positive changes in park conditions.

To this end, the park will be managed to sustain the greatest possible range of native biodiversity in the context of its landscapes and its greater bioregional and urban setting. A mosaic of vibrant ecosystems—including forests, ravines, freshwater, wetlands, meadows and farmscapes—will support healthy and resilient populations of native species and ecosystem functions. This connected landscape mosaic will support the habitat and movement requirements of native flora and fauna within the greater park ecosystem, and support the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

A theme expressed throughout public engagement is the interconnectedness of ecosystems, and how the park offers opportunities for people who visit, live or work in the park to support nature through their own relationship with the park. The park's Indigenous partners expressed this idea as a positively reinforcing circle—healthy water supports healthy soil that in turn supports human health and encourages practices that nurture water, soil and people.

An important element of this key strategy is to support the long-standing vision to ecologically connect Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine. Connectivity will occur at many scales—from the forested valleys of the West Duffins Creek watershed, to restored wetlands, riparian buffers and hedgerows in park farmland, to the dramatic Rouge and Little Rouge valleys that dominate the south end of the park. This broad focus on ecological connectivity across all park landscapes will enhance ecological and climate resilience in support of the maintenance or restoration of the Rouge's ecological integrity, including the provision of refuges for species and the strengthening of east-west ecological connectivity.

Since the creation of Rouge National Urban Park in 2015, Parks Canada continues to expand upon the proud legacy carried out between 1995 and 2015 in the former, smaller regional Rouge Park by involving many people and organizations in ecological restoration and monitoring.

#### **Integrated Ecological Restoration and Farmland Improvement**

When administration of the first lands in northern Markham was transferred in 2015 for inclusion in Rouge National Urban Park, Parks Canada immediately initiated integrated ecological restoration and farmland improvement projects to help maintain or restore the park's ecological integrity. Close collaboration with park farmers, Indigenous partners, primary and secondary schools, universities and colleges, and the TRCA resulted in the completion of 41 restoration projects between 2015 and 2017 that focused on headwater creeks in the Markham area of the park and generated both ecological and agricultural gains. These projects restored 20 hectares of forest habitat and 49 hectares of wetland and riparian habitat; involved the planting of more than 70,000 native trees, shrubs and aquatic plants; and improved farm drainage and the movement of both fish and farm machinery by way of improved culverts.

A strong integrated park monitoring program supported by Indigenous and community knowledge will help to strengthen the park's resilience to such factors as climate change and to facilitate reporting on the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

Four objectives support this key strategy:

**Objective 1:** Protect biodiversity, natural resources and natural processes

**Objective 2:** Enhance ecological connectivity throughout the park and with adjacent natural areas

**Objective 3:** Encourage people to contribute to the maintenance or restoration of the park's ecological integrity

**Objective 4:** Develop a dynamic, adaptive management system based on monitoring that facilitates well-informed decision-making

The **desired outcomes** of this key strategy are:

- Improvements in the functionality, adaptability and resilience of the park's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems;

- The park’s valued partners and stakeholders make tangible contributions to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity; and
- Park-level conservation, education and research programs contribute to the protection and recovery of species at risk and critical habitat that supports these species in the park.

**OBJECTIVE 1: PROTECT BIODIVERSITY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND NATURAL PROCESSES**

**ACTIONS**

- Continue to develop and implement a long-term integrated ecological restoration and farmland enhancement program focused on:
  - restoring ecosystem function via a broad range of target ecosystems and habitats;
  - improving ecological connectivity;
  - conserving and maximizing native genetic and species biodiversity, including species at risk; and
  - improving farm drainage, soil health and water quality.
- Develop operational plans for vegetation management, integrated pest management, invasive species and fire management. As part of these plans, consult adjacent jurisdictions and managers of adjacent lands such as transportation and utility corridors.
- Continue to participate in key initiatives of other agencies relevant to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity in the park, such as the Toronto and Region Remedial Action Plan, TRCA’s Natural Heritage System Strategy and watershed planning, and provincial Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation plans.
- Complete a Multi-Species at Risk Action Plan that:
  - determines which species can benefit most from park-level recovery efforts;
  - determines the level of significance of a site to the recovery of a species;
  - establishes priority conservation actions that will have the biggest benefit for species at risk; and

- recommends methods for managing lands and waters to preserve and protect critical habitat for at-risk plants and animals.
- Continue to participate in on-the-ground species at risk conservation projects with key partners, such as the Blanding’s Turtle Head-Start program with the Toronto Zoo and other partners.

**Species at Risk Recovery**

More than 30 species at risk are found in Rouge National Urban Park. The Multi-Species at Risk Action Plan will outline priority measures to improve the conservation status of species at risk and their habitat. Many recovery programs are already under way in the park, including the Blanding’s Turtle Head-Start initiative which between 2014 and 2018 reintroduced 165 juvenile Blanding’s Turtles to the park.

- Develop guidance for managing ground and surface water resources, floodplains, key landforms such as the Lake Iroquois shoreline and glacial features, and erosion and other hazards in support of resilient natural, cultural and agricultural resources, and visitor facilities and visitor safety.<sup>3</sup>
- Adopt dark sky-compliant lighting for Parks Canada facilities, and collaborate with park lessees, external agencies and park-adjacent neighbourhoods in the dark sky lighting of other facilities, roads traversing the park and other infrastructure.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within one year of management plan approval:

- A three-year ecological restoration strategy is developed.
- The first action plan to recover multiple species at risk is prepared.

<sup>3</sup> Supporting documentation includes relevant provincial Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan policies governing surface and groundwater protection and management, provincial source water protection regimes, and TRCA planning guidance for the Rouge, West Duffins and Carruthers watersheds.

**ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIVITY AND ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK**

Parks Canada’s approach to ecological connectivity encompasses a wide range of habitats and landscapes—including farmland.

Parks Canada and other science partners have spent several years assessing ecological connectivity between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine in terms of natural cover, habitat fragmentation, species diversity, interior habitat, extent of land under public administration, linearity and feasibility. This work has clearly demonstrated that in the north of the park, the West Duffins Creek watershed provides the most effective and achievable ecological connection to large areas of protected public lands in the Oak Ridges Moraine.

This updated, broad approach to connectivity offers the following benefits:

- Is most appropriate for a park twice the size of the smaller, former regional Rouge Park.
- Serves a wide range of flora and fauna and habitat needs of species that require open meadows, wetlands and riparian habitat in addition to forest cover.
- Increases the habitat available to species at risk such as the Milksnake and Bobolink that require open meadow habitat to survive.
- Avoids the removal of up to 2,000 hectares of park farmland and the need to displace park farmers, some of whose ancestors began farming here as early as 1799.
- Directs wildlife to areas of less-travelled rural roads away from urban areas.
- Provides strengthened ecological connections into an area of the Oak Ridges Moraine with extensive areas of protected land, including the Goodwood Resource Management Tract.

- Park wardens implement patrol schedules to protect the park’s most at-risk ecosystems.

Within two years:

- Population monitoring and recovery measures are identified and implemented for all species at risk populations where park-level management activities can contribute to recovery.
- All new exterior lighting in the park is dark sky-compliant.

Within three years:

- The condition of critical habitat supporting species at risk in the park is improved.

Within five years:

- All operational plans are completed and implementation is well under way.

**OBJECTIVE 2: ENHANCE ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY THROUGHOUT THE PARK AND WITH ADJACENT NATURAL AREAS**

**ACTIONS**

- Continue the near-term focus on aquatic connectivity improvements in headwater streams flowing from the Oak Ridges Moraine in the Little Rouge and West Duffins watersheds.
- Design and adaptively manage a science-based ecological connectivity strategy to enhance connections between a diversity of natural habitats throughout the park at multiple scales for a wide range of native species (see text box on page 21).



**Science-Based Ecological Connectivity**

The actions in this connectivity objective embrace a science-based approach that:

- Is based on clear connectivity **objectives**, including the species to be served (e.g., native species, area-sensitive species, species that are rare, at risk or of concern).
- **Benefits** from Indigenous, provincial and municipal, TRCA, academic and local knowledge.
- Considers current and future ecological connectivity **performance** in terms of landscape continuity, barriers and habitat fragmentation, and existing wildlife movement patterns; and accounts for the dispersal characteristics of target and invasive species, connectivity opportunities and constraints, and potential positive and negative ecological outcomes stemming from connectivity improvements.
- Is **implemented** by concentrating restoration efforts where connectivity improvements provide the highest return on investment and yield the greatest ecological gains, by integrating visitor experience opportunities and farmland stewardship into implementation, and by contributing to ecological integrity and other targets in the integrated park monitoring program.
- Involves **collaboration** with Indigenous partners, park farmers, the TRCA, community groups and volunteers in on-the-ground restoration opportunities; and with other governments to improve local and regional levels of ecological connectivity beyond the park.

- Focus strategic-level connectivity on tributaries of the West Duffins Creek watershed in the park’s Northeast lands.
- Encourage external parties to incorporate connectivity improvements in the planning, management and operation of roads, highways, rail lines, hydro corridors and other infrastructure that traverses the park.

- Support the improvement of ecological connections extending beyond the park by:
  - encouraging planning policies of other governments that improve regional levels of ecological connectivity (e.g., Seaton National Heritage System, Oak Ridges Moraine);
  - strengthening ecological and trail connections with adjacent natural areas and green spaces in communities such as Beare Hill Park and Morningside Creek in Toronto, and the Goodwood Resource Management Tract in Uxbridge; and
  - including ecological connectivity criteria in the development of land acquisition priorities.
- Provide input into future provincial reviews of the 2017 Ontario Greenbelt Plan to reflect Parks Canada’s connectivity approach and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry’s findings that supported its adoption.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within three years of management plan approval:

- Reforestation of 30 hectares is completed.
- Wetlands and riparian area is increased by 50 hectares.
- Four high-priority aquatic barriers are removed.

**OBJECTIVE 3: ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAINTENANCE OR RESTORATION OF THE PARK’S ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY**

**ACTIONS**

- Develop an educational program to engage governments, visitors, volunteers, lessees and others in helping to maintain or restore ecological integrity in the park through increased awareness and supportive behaviours and actions.

- Incorporate ecological integrity messaging into volunteer programs (e.g., park ambassadors, trail leaders), visitor programming (e.g., signage, events), and external relations activities (e.g., off-site programs, web material, park app) to encourage visitors to understand the importance of maintaining or restoring ecological integrity in the park.
- Involve Indigenous partners in helping to educate the public about park ecology and to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in the management of park natural and cultural resources.
- Encourage collaboration with the public, local stakeholders, community groups, Indigenous partners and the farming community in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem inventory, research and monitoring, and habitat restoration and species at risk recovery.
- Work with the park farming community to maintain or restore ecological integrity through improvements to natural habitat, soil and water conservation activities, and in the management of agricultural activities.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within one year of management plan approval:

- More than 1,500 Canadians are engaged annually in species at risk learning programs and events.

Within three years:

- Annual public involvement in ecological restoration by youth, the public and First Nations Advisory Circle members increases by 25 percent.

Within five years:

- Partner and stakeholder engagement in species at risk recovery efforts doubles what it was at the outset of action planning.
- Signage promoting ways for people to actively contribute to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity in the park is installed at a minimum of eight locations.



**OBJECTIVE 4: DEVELOP A DYNAMIC, ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM BASED ON MONITORING THAT FACILITATES WELL-INFORMED DECISION-MAKING**

**ACTIONS**

**Monitoring**

- Complete a Parks Canada Integrated Monitoring Program to monitor and assess the state of and trends in key parameters related to natural heritage and agriculture.

**Integrated Ecological Integrity Monitoring**

The integrated monitoring program (IMP) involves collecting data and determining conditions and trends, including ecosystem baseline conditions and information on agricultural and cultural resources. The ecological integrity component of the IMP addresses ecosystems such as forests and freshwater/wetland ecosystems.

Conditions and trends associated with these ecosystems are reported via a State of the National Urban Park Assessment, and they assist park managers in making decisions to maintain or improve conditions and trends.

- Collect baseline data and determine the condition and trends of these measures, including ecosystem baseline conditions and information on agricultural and cultural resources.
- Use scientific, Indigenous and community knowledge to support park planning and management.

- Share information and coordinate monitoring with other agencies and governments such as the TRCA, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to leverage interagency resources in support of greater park ecosystem reporting.<sup>4</sup>
- Commission a detailed site climate summary for the park.
- Work with Transport Canada to ensure compatibility between future uses on the Transport Canada Pickering Lands and the park that allows both agencies to achieve their respective legislative obligations and mandated responsibilities.

**Adaptive Management**

- Work with partners within the park and throughout the greater park ecosystem to identify and mitigate risks and threats to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity in the park.
- Collaborate in research with Environment and Climate Change Canada and other organizations to:
  - identify climate change vulnerabilities and risks to park resources, the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, and visitor experience; and
  - better understand the extent and magnitude of carbon sequestration in the park.
- Develop near-term climate change mitigation and adaptation best management practices in areas such as:
  - low-carbon park transportation (e.g., electric vehicle charging stations, transit and active transportation access, park shuttle);
  - carbon sequestration (consider how park farming contributes);



- “climate-friendly” events; and
- reducing the carbon footprint of new park facilities and building retrofits through, for example, improved efficiencies in energy and water use in line with governmental “green” procurement commitments.
- Identify longer-term climate change mitigation and adaptation priorities.
- Use the Land Use and Activity Assessment Framework (see text box on page 24) to evaluate the suitability of potential uses and activities in the park.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within two years of management plan approval:

- An integrated monitoring and reporting framework for monitoring conditions and trends relating to ecological integrity and agriculture is in place.

Within five years:

- The status (poor, fair or good) of all park measures is known or information required for assessing the condition is being collected and is included in state of park reporting.

<sup>4</sup> Regional and watershed targets relevant to park monitoring are found in the following: the *Toronto & Region Remedial Action Plan* (part of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement); Environment and Climate Change Canada’s *How Much Habitat is Enough*; Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry’s draft *Fisheries Management Plan for the Rouge River*; TRCA’s *Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy*; and watershed plans for the Rouge River, Duffins and Carruthers creeks, and Petticoat Creek.

- All applicable datasets supporting ecological integrity, species at risk and restoration effectiveness reporting are contributing to the Government of Canada Open Data initiative.

Within ten years:

- The trend for all measures is known, is included in state of park reporting, and management decisions and actions contribute to their improvement or stabilization.

## LAND USE AND ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Rouge National Urban Park exists in a dynamic environment. About half of its land area is managed by park farmers through agricultural leases; many external parties manage facilities in the park through licenses or other agreements. A Land Use and Activity Assessment Framework will help park managers assess third-party requests for changes to current uses and activities in a consistent manner that advances the park purpose and places first priority on the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

This two-stage framework first establishes the suitability “in principle” of a proposed use or activity. Those deemed suitable in principle are then assessed to ensure implementation can occur in a manner respectful of park values and of the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity. This second stage applies Parks Canada review and assessment processes supported by park data and monitoring information.<sup>5</sup> These tools are applied to the park management principles collaboratively developed by stakeholders early in the engagement process to help identify specific implications of the proposal (see right-hand column).

On the basis of these tools and criteria, a proposal can be rejected at either stage if the concept or its implementation is found to be incompatible with the park; an approval secured through the second stage can include conditions. Some proposals may include public and/or stakeholder engagement and input through Parks Canada’s governance structure for the park.

### FIRST STAGE: Respect legislative and policy direction

In the first stage, proposals should be measured against the following criteria to understand their degree of compatibility with park objectives.

- Meet legislative requirements, regulations, and other obligations and commitments such as those contained in memoranda of understanding with other governments;
- Respect and support the direction of this management plan; and
- Be consistent with Parks Canada’s mandate for protection, education and visitor experience and with related corporate policies, guidelines and practices.

### SECOND STAGE: Respect park values in implementation

- Maintain or restore ecological integrity<sup>6</sup>
- Respect and support sustainable agriculture and other compatible land uses
- Inspire people to experience this park
- Encourage people (especially youth) to learn and connect with nature
- Foster a culture of engagement, respect, partnership and youth volunteering
- Honour diversity, local heritage and cultural inclusiveness—past, present and future
- Collaborate to ensure multi-modal connectivity and access
- Inclusive, progressive governance led by Parks Canada
- Environmental leadership in park operations

<sup>5</sup> Tools Parks Canada uses to assess proposals and interventions include Basic Impact Assessment/ Environmental Impact Assessment, Best Management Practices, Cultural Resource Impact Assessment, Recreational Activity and Special Event Assessment framework, and park monitoring program targets.

<sup>6</sup> This first principle has been amended from the original “Maintain and improve ecological health and scientific integrity” to reflect the amended *Rouge National Urban Park Act*.



**KEY STRATEGY 2:  
Sustain a Living Landscape –  
Past, Present and Future**

The long-standing tradition of the park as a settled and agriculturally productive landscape is now enshrined in the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*.

This key strategy guides how this tradition will be conserved and celebrated—in the form of relationships with Indigenous Peoples, in the management of cultural resources, and in the nurturing of a vibrant park agricultural lessee community.

The encouragement of sustainable farming practices mandated in the park’s legislation provides a strong and positive bridge between park farming and the maintenance or restoration of the park’s ecological integrity.

The relationship between place and people began with the use of the area by Indigenous Peoples for hunting, foraging and, later, for settlement based on agriculture and trade routes.

Two national historic designations are related to Indigenous life in the park landscape—the Toronto Carrying Place National Historic Event, a key overland connection between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe; and Bead Hill National Historic Site, a 17th-century Seneca village archaeological site where trade with French voyageurs was conducted.<sup>7</sup>

Actions in this strategy and throughout this management plan further Parks Canada’s long-standing commitment to build strong, effective and mutually beneficial working relationships with Indigenous partners who have historical and present-day connections with the park—relationships built on principles of inclusiveness, meaningful engagement, trust and respect.

Currently, Indigenous partners engage in park activities such as archaeological work, ecological restoration and park programming.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page\\_nhs\\_eng.aspx?id=1653](https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=1653)  
<https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=16783&pid=0>



The late-1700s arrival of Mennonite settlers from Pennsylvania brought profound changes to the park landscape; many of the buildings and structures erected in the mid-to-late 1800s remain and have heritage value.

While strongly connected to its past, the park's farming community today has increasingly embraced technology and the principles of sustainability.

As of 2019, working farms occupy approximately 50 percent of the park area, primarily in its northern section. Park farmland is largely characterized by Class 1 soils—the richest, rarest and most fertile soil in Canada and the highest quality for growing crops. Many farmers live in the park, leasing agricultural and residential properties.

Park agriculture will increasingly connect with urban markets desiring local food and rural and agricultural experiences.

The park is also home to non-farming residents and small businesses that have long been part of the landscape that is now Rouge National Urban Park. Their presence contributes to the sense of community in the park.

#### **A Vibrant Farming Community in Rouge National Urban Park**

In 2016–2017, the park farming community worked in conjunction with Parks Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the York Region Federation of Agriculture, and the Greater Toronto Agricultural Action Committee to define the environmental, economic and social elements of a vibrant farming community in Rouge National Urban Park.

A vibrant farming community features:

- A healthy natural environment;
- A dedicated and functional agricultural land base with emphasis on producing products to help meet the nutritional needs of the region;
- Opportunities for connecting people with and educating people about agriculture;
- Cultural and historic resources and agricultural landscapes that are conserved and presented;
- A strong sense of community inside and outside of the park, including access to farm support services, businesses and urban markets; and
- A leasing environment that provides opportunities for economically viable farm operations including the ability to diversify and use innovative farming practices.

This broad and integrated strategy opens up a new and exciting era. Traditional and new farming systems, farm and crop diversification, agri-tourism, connections to urban markets and visitor opportunities will be encouraged. A comprehensive leasing framework will provide secure, long-term tenure and support the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, cultural resource conservation and new visitor experiences. Ways in which residential and commercial lessees can contribute to park objectives are also identified.

This key strategy also outlines actions to identify, understand, conserve and communicate the value of the park's rich array of built heritage, cultural landscapes and viewsapes, archaeological resources and historic objects by way of adaptive re-use,

focused investment and innovative partnering with Indigenous partners, park lessees, volunteers, government and local heritage organizations, museums and others.

**Quotes from 2018 Management Plan Workshops**

“Agriculture has been part of this landscape for centuries.” (First Nations partner)  
 “Innovation can also apply in farming practices and cultural resource conservation.” (Stakeholder)  
 “Bring youth into the realm of the Rouge particularly for farm experience.” (Stakeholder)  
 “By making farmland better we’re actually restoring ecosystem function too.” (Stakeholder)  
 “The best result is a convergence of the best ecological and agricultural practices.” (Stakeholder)

Four objectives support this key strategy:

**Objective 1:** Build and maintain mutually beneficial working relationships between Parks Canada and Indigenous communities with direct historical and present-day connections to the park



**Objective 2:** Provide certainty to farmers in support of a vibrant park farming community

**Objective 3:** Develop and implement sustainable farming systems and practices

**Objective 4:** Conserve, celebrate and manage the park’s cultural resources and traditions

The **desired outcomes** of this strategy are:

- Meaningful relationships are built that encourage Indigenous partners to help develop, participate in and meaningfully contribute to park initiatives.
- Community relationships, economic opportunities and environmental stewardship are strengthened through collaboration between the park lessee community and Parks Canada.
- Lands and buildings under lease for agricultural, residential, commercial and utility use support the achievement and integration of park objectives.
- The rich cultural heritage of the park is understood, communicated and conserved.
- Local communities feel engaged in the conservation and celebration of their heritage.

**OBJECTIVE 1: BUILD AND MAINTAIN MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARKS CANADA AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WITH DIRECT HISTORICAL AND PRESENT-DAY CONNECTIONS TO THE PARK**

**ACTIONS, in collaboration with Indigenous communities:**

- Continue to engage Indigenous partners through Rouge National Urban Park’s First Nations Advisory Circle (FNAC) as the primary vehicle to facilitate meaningful relationships and dialogue among Indigenous partners and Parks Canada in park management, programs and operations.
- Continue to engage the FNAC in a wide range of programs, including archaeology, ecological restoration, visitor experience, public outreach and other areas of mutual interest that strengthen historical and current bonds with the park.

- Continue to work with FNAC member communities to develop activities and experiences that present the park's rich Indigenous culture and enable visitors to better understand Indigenous cultures and histories.
- Facilitate use of Rouge National Urban Park by interested Indigenous partners for spiritual, ceremonial and cultural purposes, and for learning opportunities for Indigenous youth.
- Foster Indigenous perspectives in park management decisions, such as:
  - the protection and presentation of cultural information and resources relating to Indigenous heritage within the park;
  - the planning and management of natural, cultural and agricultural resources and the maintenance or restoration of the park's ecological integrity; and
  - the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into park natural heritage databases and ecological integrity monitoring.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within two years:

- Collaboration occurs with interested Indigenous partners on initiatives, activities and programs about Indigenous Peoples' connections to the park.
- The perspectives of the First Nations Advisory Circle are reflected in the locations, names and design elements of new park programs, facilities and trails.



## OBJECTIVE 2: PROVIDE CERTAINTY FOR FARMERS IN SUPPORT OF A VIBRANT PARK FARMING COMMUNITY

### Management Plan Workshops – 2018

Park partners and public stakeholders at management plan workshops held in 2018 felt a comprehensive leasing framework and a park-wide agricultural sustainability initiative were the two most important actions Parks Canada could implement in support of a vibrant farming community.

### ACTIONS

- Implement a comprehensive leasing framework focused on long-term stability, economic viability, the protection of natural, cultural and agricultural resources, a fair return to the Crown, and tenant investment in their leases.
- Develop a park-wide agricultural sustainability approach that identifies opportunities for farm diversification and new farming systems, community-based farming, mentoring, incubator farms, marketing, agri-tourism and agricultural contributions to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.
- Work with the park farming community to develop a Rouge National Urban Park identity for products and services generated in the park.
- Cultivate links with culinary education programs, local chefs/restaurants/farmers' markets and local farm co-operatives to promote food produced in the park.
- Provide opportunities for connecting people with park agriculture and farmers, and provide educational opportunities about the value of near-urban agriculture and how farm practices help to maintain or restore ecological integrity.
- Work with residential tenants to encourage active engagement in park programming and initiatives (e.g., volunteering, stewardship opportunities).

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within two years:

- Agricultural indicators and measures are defined.

Within five years:

- Long-term agricultural leases are in place that support the goals of lessees and the park.

Within ten years:

- An increased diversity of farm types and food is produced in the park.
- A “grown/made in the Rouge” agricultural identity is established.

- Park monitoring indicates actions are positively affecting agricultural conditions and trends.

**OBJECTIVE 3: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE FARMING SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES**

**ACTIONS**

- Through collaboration and continuing, open dialogue with park farmers, use operational procedures such as farm plans and agricultural best management practices to integrate the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity with agriculture (see text box below).

**AGRICULTURAL BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

Agricultural best management practices (BMPs) provide “a practical, affordable approach to conserving a farm’s soil and water resources without sacrificing productivity.”<sup>8</sup> BMPs promote agricultural sustainability, help to maintain or restore ecological integrity, and generate net environmental, economic and social benefits. BMPs also advance aquatic and terrestrial habitat objectives, increase native biodiversity and ecological connectivity, improve the production of ecosystem services, and enhance soil and water quality and conservation.

Parks Canada is working with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, both of which have extensive experience developing agricultural BMPs, to build on the use of these practices in Rouge National Urban Park. This management plan encourages the use, showcasing and piloting of continually evolving practices.

Examples of BMPs include:

- practicing conservation tillage that leaves crop residue;
- isolating farm ponds so that they do not flow into and heat up streams;
- managing agricultural grasslands such as pastures, hay fields, small grain fields and fallow fields to support species at risk and pollinators.

- using crop rotation and cover crops, strip cropping and grassy borders;
- making minor adjustments in harvest timing to support wildlife nesting and other seasonal wildlife needs;
- installing bird and bat boxes and protecting snake hibernacula;
- using strip habitats such as riparian buffers, fencerows, shelterbelts, windbreaks and grassy lane verges;
- expanding and/or restoring woodlots, hedgerows, wetlands and meadows to buffer and connect important natural heritage features;
- restoring hedgerows and associated buffers for pollinators, which benefit nature and are necessary for crop pollination;
- designing culverts to facilitate fish movement;
- employing irrigation practices that conserve water;
- keeping livestock out of watercourses and providing access to alternative water sources;
- managing tile drainage outflows to support wetland creation and improve soil moisture conditions in farmed areas; and
- managing for soil health by minimizing chemical inputs and engaging in nutrient management.

8 <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/bmp/series.htm>

- Work with leaseholders to develop and implement a farm plan for each agricultural leasehold to assess existing farm conditions and identify—using baselines, targets and timelines—each farmer’s contributions to achieving the park vision, including support of sustainable agriculture, the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, the conservation of cultural resources and visitor experience.
- Pursue opportunities for innovative agricultural systems and best management practices research, pilot projects, demonstration projects, and incentives through collaboration with park farmers and farm organizations, universities, colleges and other institutions.
- Incorporate indicators and measures related to agriculture and a vibrant farming community into the Integrated Monitoring Program for the park.
- Implement an annual reporting requirement for each agricultural leaseholder to measure progress made towards sustainable agriculture and a vibrant farming community in the park.
- Work collaboratively with Indigenous partners, governments, lessees and non-governmental organizations to identify and conserve cultural resources and to integrate their conservation with that of other park resources.
- Inventory archaeological and other cultural resources at risk from climate change and other pressures, and develop strategies to conserve them in partnership with Indigenous partners and others where appropriate.

**Target** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within ten years:

- Farm plans are in place for all agricultural lessees and implementation is under way.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: CONSERVE, CELEBRATE AND MANAGE THE PARK’S CULTURAL RESOURCES AND TRADITIONS**

##### **ACTIONS**

###### *Identify and conserve*

- Work to conserve representative structures, cultural landscapes and viewscapes associated with the park’s natural, cultural and agricultural heritage.
- Prepare a Cultural Resource Values Statement that identifies different types of cultural resources such as buildings and engineering works, archaeological sites, historical and archaeological objects, and landscapes and landscape features.

##### **Cultural Resources Defined**

Parks Canada defines a cultural resource as a human work, an object or a place determined, on the basis of its heritage value, to be directly associated with an important aspect, or aspects, of human history and culture. Cultural resources will be managed in an integrated and respectful way throughout the entirety of the park and its cultural landscapes.

##### **Cultural Resource Management**

The objective of cultural resource management is to ensure that the heritage value of cultural resources—including resources that may have heritage value but that have not yet been identified or evaluated—is taken into consideration in all actions that could affect them.

Parks Canada’s Cultural Resource Management Policy and the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* will guide the management of the park’s cultural resources in order to conserve, celebrate and communicate the cultural heritage of the Rouge.<sup>9</sup>

Cultural resources in the park will be managed according to the principles of understanding heritage value, sustainable conservation and benefit to Canadians. A sound understanding of heritage values will support the application of recognized conservation standards that take into account priorities and available resources. The heritage value of the park’s cultural resources will be shared in ways that inspire discovery and facilitate a sense of personal connection with the park.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/docs/pc/poli/grc-crm>  
<http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/standards-normes>



**Communicate**

- Communicate the heritage value of a diversity of cultural resources in the park.
- Seize opportunities to interpret and showcase the heritage value of cultural resources and traditions when developing visitor experience and interpretive programming.
- Create opportunities with Indigenous partners to share knowledge, expertise and practices relating to Indigenous history, traditions and culture.
- Develop working relationships with local museums, archives and other organizations in celebrating, presenting and conserving the park's history and heritage.

**Manage**

- Set cultural resource conservation priorities that take into consideration the heritage value and representativeness of cultural resources, their condition, conservation threats and other park objectives such as adaptive reuse, visitor experience potential and importance to Indigenous partners and local communities.
- Prepare a cultural resource management strategy that builds on the Cultural Resource Values Statement and encompasses the conservation, management and interpretation of buildings and engineering works, cultural landscapes, archaeological sites and historic and archaeological objects.
- Present the Toronto Carrying Place story and prepare a Commemorative Integrity Statement for Bead Hill National Historic Site in collaboration with Indigenous partners.

- Encourage appropriate uses of cultural resources in ways that support public enjoyment where consistent with their long-term conservation.
- Integrate and interpret, where feasible, ecological integrity in the management of cultural resources, such as allowing natural reclamation in old building foundations for snake hibernacula.
- Monitor, assess and report on the condition of cultural resources.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within five years:

- Cultural resources are identified.
- A condition-monitoring protocol is established for heritage buildings, cultural landscapes, archaeological resources, and archaeological and historic objects.
- All factors that threaten the long-term integrity of cultural resources identified as priorities are mitigated or addressed.

Within ten years:

- The condition ratings of priority cultural resources are maintained or improved.
- Threats to archaeological sites identified as priorities are managed.
- A range of built heritage, cultural landscapes, archaeology, objects, and traditions and stories of people and places are interpreted in various areas of the park.



**KEY STRATEGY 3:**  
**Celebrate Rouge National Urban Park as a  
National and International Gateway to Discovering  
Canada's Environment and Heritage**

The presence of Rouge National Urban Park in Canada's most culturally diverse and most populous region presents unique learning and visitor experience opportunities. The park will serve as a gateway for new, urban and young Canadians to experience and learn about Canada's environment and heritage.

Parks Canada is committed to ensuring visitors to Rouge National Urban Park will be able to enjoy and explore its full range of experiences and benefits, regardless of background, economic means or ability, in a manner that supports the protection and conservation of natural, cultural and agricultural resources and the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

Visitors will be able to engage in an array of activities, including individual walks, guided

group activities, educational programs, special events and culinary experiences. The park will provide opportunities—particularly for those unfamiliar with Canada's outdoors—to learn in a “classroom without walls” by way of stimulating, interactive and memorable “learn-to” outdoor activities. Parks Canada will work with partners inside and beyond the park—lessees, Indigenous partners, educational and tourism organizations, and others—to reach the many and diverse visitor and outreach audiences throughout the GTA and elsewhere.

A network of “gateway” welcome areas, public activity areas and trailheads, all connected by a park-wide trail network linking Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine, will facilitate visitor discovery of the park's natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes. Connections with adjacent municipal and regional trails and cycling routes will support region-wide park access.



Parks Canada will design, manage and operate park facilities and visitor activities to be compatible with the maintenance or restoration of the park’s ecological integrity, the park’s vibrant farming community, and the conservation of the park’s rich diversity of natural and cultural resources.

Three objectives support this key strategy:

**Objective 1:** Serve as a gateway connecting Canadians to nature, culture and agriculture

**Objective 2:** Promote the Rouge as Canada’s premiere “learn-to” park

**Objective 3:** Develop a range of infrastructure and supporting services to facilitate memorable experiences in the park’s rich landscapes and features

The **desired outcomes** of this key strategy are:

- The park is one of the GTA’s leading destinations for outdoor learning about nature, culture and agriculture, and for information on national protected heritage places.
- Youth, newcomers to Canada, young families and low- to middle-income Canadians comprise a growing proportion of park visitors and outreach audiences.
- All major areas of the park offer facilities, activities, programs and events in a manner integrated with other park objectives and the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.
- Awareness of, and visits to other national protected heritage places increase as a result of interactions with Rouge National Urban Park.

**OBJECTIVE 1: SERVE AS A GATEWAY  
 CONNECTING CANADIANS TO NATURE,  
 CULTURE AND AGRICULTURE**

**Stakeholder “Gateway” Priorities**

At management plan workshops held in 2018, stakeholders identified the park trail network, welcome areas, park signage, and interpretive and educational programs as fundamental elements of the park’s gateway role.

**ACTIONS**

- Implement a strategy to brand Rouge National Urban Park as a protected area of national significance by:
  - creating a memorable sense of arrival and orientation to the park at all entry points, including gateway welcome areas, public activity areas, trailheads, lookouts, campgrounds, road entrances to the park and other access points;
  - establishing wayfinding and other interpretive signage to and along trails and coordinating wayfinding at connections with external trail networks; and
  - providing wayfinding and other relevant signage at transit stations/ stops in or near the park that are linked to the trail network.
- Introduce and promote Parks Canada national signature activities, events and programs in the GTA (e.g., Xplorer);<sup>10</sup> use the park as a model to showcase Parks Canada initiatives; and promote opportunities available at other national protected heritage places.
- Offer an enhanced range of group programming to diverse communities, with a particular focus on connecting youth, newcomers to Canada and families.

<sup>10</sup> Xplorer is a program aimed at engaging children at Parks Canada protected heritage areas by way of a booklet filled with fun activities that guides their discovery of each unique place they visit.

- Celebrate Rouge National Urban Park's gateway role to the Rouge, Petticoat and West Duffins watersheds, the Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine through trail linkages, park programming, signage and interpretation, and make the park a hub for learning watershed-friendly practices within the greater park ecosystem.
- Work with local hospitals and municipal community services departments to provide 'Mood Walks' and other programs that enhance the social, mental and physical well-being of at-risk youth.
- Continually enhance a user-friendly visitor app for Rouge National Urban Park.
- Translate key park materials into commonly spoken newcomer languages in high-priority and other communities.
- Elevate the park as a signature offering of Ontario's tourism strategy through a diverse range of outreach approaches such as traditional promotions, presence at events across the GTA, social media, and cross-promotions with other GTA attractions and tourism organizations.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within five years of management plan approval:

- Primary identifier signage is in place at major entry points and along major roads.
- At least 60 percent of surveyed park visitors identify the Rouge as a national urban park and a member of Parks Canada's network of protected heritage areas.

Within ten years:

- Rouge National Urban Park increasingly becomes a destination for regional, national and international tourists.
- The numbers of surveyed first-time visitors, return visitors and visitor referrals to other protected heritage places has increased by 30 percent.
- The number of first-time and repeat visitors from high-priority GTA neighbourhoods has grown by 30 percent.

- The number of personal and virtual contacts annually has increased by 40 percent.
- The number of on- and off-site contacts through events, activities and programs focused on youth, new Canadians and young families has increased by 30 percent.

#### **OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTE THE ROUGE AS CANADA'S PREMIERE "LEARN-TO" PARK**

##### **ACTIONS**

- Expand the park's "learn-to" offer to encompass a range of learning opportunities (e.g., hiking, fishing, paddling, farming, gardening).
- Provide "learn-to" opportunities for low-to middle-income Canadians and newcomers through in-park programming and partnerships with libraries, community centres, newcomer and settlement agencies, youth organizations, municipal parks, and GTA events and festivals.

##### **"Learn-to Camp" in Rouge National Urban Park**

Parks Canada first brought its nation-wide Learn-to Camp program to the Rouge in 2014. In early 2017, the program was expanded, with free Learn-to Camp workshops and pop-up activities taking place both in the Rouge and across the GTA, often in local parks, libraries and community centres. In 2017, the 27,000 people engaged by the park's Learn-to Camp team learned essential camping skills such as how to set up a tent, what to pack for a trip, how to have a safe campfire, and what to cook at the campsite.

- Work with youth and educational organizations to facilitate group learning for diverse communities of all ages in the park, including tying park experiences into school curricula and continuing education opportunities for teachers.
- Provide free weekly guided walks that elaborate upon the park's natural, cultural and agricultural resources.
- Expand the number of guided and self-guided educational programs to increase visitors' knowledge and enhance their experience of the park.

## SIX TYPES OF MEMORABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCES TO BE PROMOTED IN ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK

### *Together*

Many visitors to the Rouge come as part of large gatherings of family and friends. This “togetherness” experience can have many dimensions—a visit to Rouge Beach, a family hike, overnight camping at Glen Rouge Campground or learning about and visiting park farms. Washrooms and picnicking facilities support this type of use. Short loop trails, along with specially designed programs and events, give families and larger groups an overview of the Rouge’s story—a taste of what the park has to offer—inspiring them to return.

### *Exploration*

Those that “explore boundaries” take in large sections of the park. They experience the rich diversity of the park landscape, often by hiking the many trails, or sometimes by cycling along bike paths and bike-friendly trails. A rich palette of vistas and facilities along the way encourages them to stop, refresh and take in the beauty of the park. As the number of options increases, these visitors stay for the full day, or eventually several days, staying at campsites or bed and breakfasts and other accommodation inside and outside the park. Some are moved by their experiences to return to the park to help with ecological restoration, trail maintenance or “learn-to” activities.

### *Recreation*

Visitors who come to “recreate in the park” engage in activities that often focus on health and fitness. They come alone, in couples or in small family units. Typical activities include walking, dog walking, jogging and fishing. Many return often to their favourite haunts, such as a fishing spot or a jogging route. They know how and where to get the information they need for an enjoyable and safe visit. From time to time, they take in a program geared to their interests. As more areas become available for recreation, they try new activities in an environmentally responsible manner.

### *Immersion*

The “immersive experience” caters to visitors seeking solitude and communion with nature, culture and agriculture—the sights, sounds and

smells that take them far away from city life. In future, as additional trails open up more areas of the Rouge, visitors lengthen their stays in the park. They are introduced to a wider range of environments extending from the Lake Ontario marshes, to the upper Little Rouge Valley, to the pastoral, quiet and out-of-the-way rolling landscapes of the Oak Ridges Moraine in the Pickering and Uxbridge portions of the park. Overnight, four-season and multi-day experiences allow them to experience the park’s continually changing moods at a new, deeper level than ever before.

### *Learning*

The “learning park” experience is for visitors who want to enrich their knowledge and improve their skills, while learning about the park, the values it protects, and Parks Canada protected heritage places across the country. A wide range of “learn-to” programs fulfills the hungriest of lifelong learners, from young children to senior citizens. These visitors can participate in Parks Canada’s popular signature Learn-to Camp program as well as a diverse range of other “learn-to” activities ranging from fishing, to workshops on farming and food, to guided walks, to programs on cultural heritage, Indigenous history and art, and many other opportunities geared to visitors with a lifelong interest in learning.

### *Volunteering and Stewardship*

The spirit of “volunteerism” has been an essential part of the park’s DNA since its inception. Many people have been so inspired by their park visits that they contribute directly to the park’s stewardship through a wide range of activities. Some roll up their sleeves to help a park farmer plant a windbreak, restore an old building foundation to provide a home for wildlife, or assist in the park ecological monitoring program. Others regularly lead guided walks, help run a community garden or staff a park booth at special events inside the park or in their community. Indigenous representatives deepen visitors’ connection to the park by sharing their knowledge gained from thousands of years of interaction with the park landscape and their current relationships with the park. All leave their stamp on the park and earn the satisfaction of giving back.



- Organize signature educational events such as Taste of the Trail, Fall Walks Festival, Rouge After Dark, Earth Run in the Rouge and other events that profile the park's natural, cultural and agricultural heritage.
- Present cultural activities such as art events, seasonal celebrations, group picnicking and citizenship ceremonies.
- Facilitate learning connections between visitors/local communities and the park farming community through educational programs and agri-tourism experiences.

**Target** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within five years of management plan approval:

- Participation of low- to middle-income Canadians and newcomers in "learn-to" opportunities within and outside the park has increased by 30 percent.

**OBJECTIVE 3: DEVELOP A RANGE OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORTING SERVICES TO FACILITATE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES IN THE PARK'S RICH LANDSCAPES AND FEATURES**

**ACTIONS**

***Facilitate visitor experiences by:***

- Developing plans/strategies for visitor experience, interpretation, attendance modelling, visitor safety and compliance, visitor access (active transportation, transit, parking) and law enforcement.
- Ensuring inclusive and barrier-free access based on universal design principles is generally available in all areas of the park.
- Managing traditional park activities such as hiking, camping, canoeing, kayaking, birdwatching, swimming, fishing, nature observation, golf and snowshoeing in accordance with Parks Canada standards for quality visitor experiences and to maintain or restore ecological integrity.
- Improving basic visitor amenities at visitor entrances such as washroom facilities and signage.
- Assessing new recreational facilities and activities such as family-friendly cycling, geocaching and horseback riding in selected areas of the park using Parks Canada's Recreational Activity and Special Event Assessments framework.

***Develop a hierarchy of park entry points*** to provide a sense of arrival to the park, as follows:

- Gateway welcome areas**, developed in partnership with others, that provide reception and orientation and that are served by park shuttle and, where possible, transit. Located in the following areas:
- *Toronto gateway*: In a location to be determined between Old Finch Avenue and Rouge Beach; this gateway will be the park's largest welcome facility serving visitors from Toronto and beyond.

- *Markham gateway:* Along Highway 7; the primary welcome area serving the northern part of the park and part of a gateway to Markham.
- *Toronto and Pickering gateway:* In the Rouge Beach Area; southern gateway to the park along the Waterfront Trail.
- *Toronto and Pickering gateway:* In the Glen Rouge Campground area.
- *Stouffville gateway:* At a high point on 19th Avenue connected by trail to Stouffville; provides a view across the park to downtown Toronto.
- *Uxbridge gateway:* Situated at the border of Glasgow in Uxbridge Township in the Oak Ridges Moraine; connected to an extensive network of trails north of the park including the Oak Ridges and Great trails.

**Public activity areas and major trailheads, including:**

- Bob Hunter Memorial Park: Ecological restoration, trail and parking investments; links to Markham’s Cedar Grove Hamlet and Cedarena ice skating rink.
- Reesor/Mongolia Area: Interpretation, access to trails in the heart of the park’s farming landscape and a group event area.
- Zoo Road Area: Near the Toronto Zoo and Beare Hill Park, with access to many trails.

**Park trailheads** that provide points of access from municipal neighbourhoods to the park.

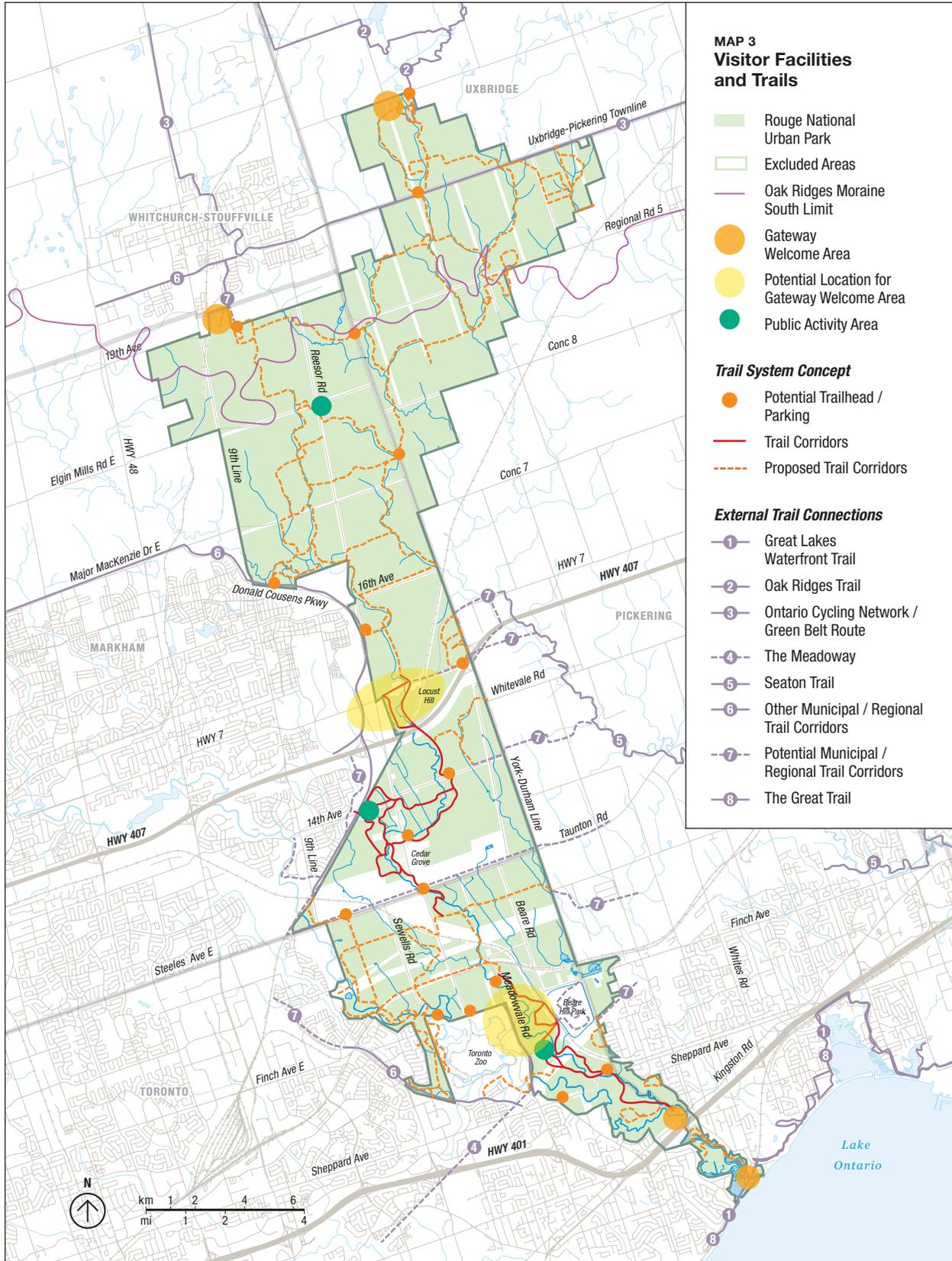
**Develop the park trail system**

(see Map 3) to:

- Meet park user needs and offer different difficulty levels, sustainable four-season use, and single-use and multi-use trail opportunities using Parks Canada’s national trail and other guidelines.
- Showcase the natural, cultural and agricultural attributes of the park, and link to programming opportunities.



- Connect to:
  - park welcome areas, visitor facilities, campgrounds and viewpoints;
  - nearby attractions and green spaces (e.g., Toronto Zoo, Beare Hill Park, hamlets of Cedar Grove and Locust Hill);
  - local trail networks, bike lanes and equestrian circuits; and
  - regional trail and cycling networks (e.g., Waterfront/Great Lakes Trail, The Great Trail, Greenbelt Route, Oak Ridges Trail, the Ontario Cycling Network and TRCA trails, including The Meadoway).
- Help maintain or restore ecological integrity by assessing existing formal and informal trails and ensure natural, cultural and agricultural resources are protected and conserved.
- Potentially include the lower portion of the Rouge River as part of the TRCA “Blue Trails” network.
- Include the possible theming of park trails to reflect the diverse range of values represented in the park.



**Provide other visitor experience-related facilities by:**

- Promoting overnight accommodation opportunities in and near the park that encourage multi-day experiences and showcase accommodations available across the national parks system, including:
  - recapitalizing Glen Rouge Campground;
  - considering other types of camping opportunities, such as backcountry and special event camping;
  - providing accessible accommodation opportunities for people with disabilities; and
  - facilitating farm stays and bed and breakfasts in the park, and encouraging small-scale accommodation in the park hamlet of Altona and in neighbouring communities such as Cedar Grove and Locust Hill hamlets.
- Seek commercial uses that provide services and educational opportunities for park visitors (e.g., ‘cottage industry’ type operations such as bed and breakfasts, farm stays, artisan studios and cafés).



**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within five years of management plan approval:

- Visitor experience-related plans/strategies are completed.
- Approximately 50 kilometres of trails connect the Waterfront and Oak Ridges trails, and connect with neighbouring municipal trails.

Within ten years:

- On average, 85 percent of visitors are satisfied with the availability and quality of park services.
- All gateway welcome areas are completed.
- Partnerships are developed to support continued expansion of the park trail network.



**KEY STRATEGY 4:**  
**Achieve Success through Collaboration**

Rouge National Urban Park builds on four decades of committed involvement by organizations, volunteers, communities and government leadership, and on Indigenous Peoples' early stewardship of this land for millennia. Collaboration helped create the park and now forms the foundation for its future.

This key strategy outlines a collaborative approach to park governance, management and operations. Activities, services and initiatives will embrace the energy and enthusiasm of many people and organizations.

An inclusive and transparent park governance structure will enable Parks Canada (and by extension the park) to benefit from a broad range of perspectives through the sharing of advice, knowledge and experience.

The volunteer community has contributed significantly to the park over many years in countless ways, through restoration activities, citizen science, guided trail walks, participation at events throughout the GTA, among others.

Incredible potential exists to forge new relationships in stewardship, community engagement and volunteerism that not only benefits the park, but protected heritage areas across Ontario and Canada.

Research and innovation are key ingredients in the park's "learn-to" philosophy.

Parks Canada will collaborate in research and innovation with other jurisdictions, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and park farmers to generate, share and benefit from new ideas in integrated landscape management.

In operating the park, Parks Canada will continue the past tradition of municipal and TRCA provision of day-to-day services such as trail maintenance, garbage collection, campground operation and beach lifeguarding. These arrangements will help support the local economy and forge connections with surrounding communities and organizations.

The presence of transportation and utility corridors in the park makes infrastructure a critical area for environmental leadership and collaboration. Parks Canada will work with

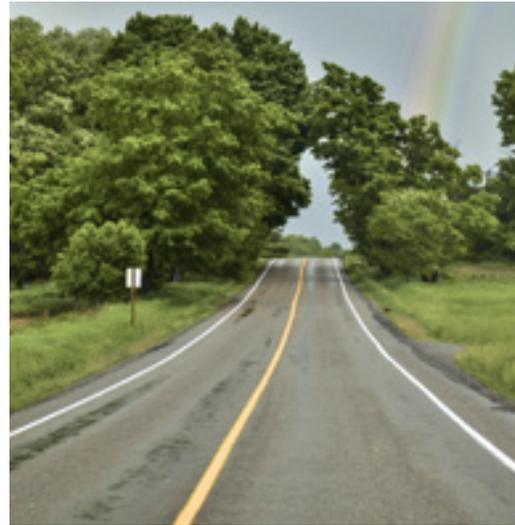
provincial, regional and municipal authorities to ensure their planned investments in transit, roads and pathway networks improve access to the park. A strong emphasis on transit, bicycle, park shuttle and foot access will promote sustainable transport as well as visitor health and wellness. This approach received strong support during the extensive engagement program on the management plan. Collaboration with governments, transit organizations and other transportation providers is key to achieving this “green” transportation future.

Parks Canada will engage managers of existing and future infrastructure within and crossing the park to ensure compatibility with the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, visitor experience, agriculture and cultural heritage, including cases requiring the exercise of Section 16 (1) of the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* permitting up to 200 hectares of park land to be removed and given back to municipalities, the province or the TRCA for public infrastructure.

**Road Ecology in Rouge National Urban Park**

Intergovernmental co-operation is essential to improvements in ecological connectivity and wildlife movement in the park. A positive start was made in 2015 when three new and two modified small wildlife culverts were installed under Sewells Road near a restored wetland as part of a City of Toronto road resurfacing project. This management plan encourages further improvements to wildlife passage across roads throughout the park.

And finally, participation in watershed and land use planning to encourage compatible land uses next to and upstream of the park will further park objectives, including the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.



Three objectives support this key strategy:

**Objective 1:** Foster strong, transparent, inclusive and responsive governance

**Objective 2:** Facilitate opportunities for volunteering, research and innovation that benefit the park and that strengthen community involvement

**Objective 3:** Collaborate with partners and stakeholders in park operations, access, infrastructure and planning

The **desired outcomes** of this key strategy are:

- Participants in park governance feel they are meaningfully involved.
- A wide range of people and organizations collaborate with Parks Canada through a diversity of mechanisms.
- Visitors have a choice of convenient travel options to and through the park.
- The park is recognized as a leader in landscape research and innovation, particularly in integrated urban park management.
- Park-friendly protocols and provisions are regularly incorporated into infrastructure projects of external agencies.

### OBJECTIVE 1: FOSTER STRONG, TRANSPARENT, INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE

#### ACTIONS

- Establish the following advisory bodies, with associated terms of reference:
  - a **First Nations Advisory Circle** to provide Parks Canada with input on park planning, presentation and management.
  - a **Youth Council** that encourages participation and leadership in civic engagement through legacy projects and community service.
  - subject to ministerial discretion as per the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*, manage a **Park Advisory Committee** comprising representatives of local government, the TRCA, the park's First Nations Advisory Circle, stakeholder groups and citizens at large.
  - **working groups** to engage partners, stakeholders and community residents in the implementation of the management plan. (A working group may provide input on a continuing basis, or be program- or project-specific with a defined duration and scope of work.)

**Target** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within five years of management plan approval:

- The park's advisory bodies and councils are established with clearly identified terms of references and mandates.

### OBJECTIVE 2: FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION THAT BENEFIT THE PARK AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

#### ACTIONS

- Manage a Rouge National Urban Park volunteering program with a focus on youth-related and educational organizations.
- Provide opportunities for other organizations with volunteer programs that are compatible with park objectives.
- Develop an outreach and partnering action plan to build awareness of the park throughout the GTA.
- Promote volunteering in the following priority areas: park stewardship, ecological restoration, and visitor experience and outreach.
- Create an “adopt-a-trail” program with volunteer trail captains and teams assigned to all park areas to help prevent and remove litter, act as park ambassadors and assist with minor trail maintenance.
- Promote the park as a centre of research and innovation that generates applied, implementable and replicable results relevant to the park.
- Continue to work with academic institutions such as the University of Toronto Scarborough and Centennial College on programs of mutual interest.
- Use research to develop demographic knowledge to better understand and serve park visitors and outreach audiences.



- Work with a wide range of interests, including farmers and farm associations, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, government departments, heritage organizations, Indigenous partners and entrepreneurs, to develop park research priorities.
- Pursue collaborative pilot and demonstration projects with outside parties and agricultural lessees that generate new knowledge that benefits the park and beyond.
- Engage and involve youth in research and innovation in areas such as communications technology and other areas that link to academic curricula.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within two years of management plan approval:

- Park research priorities have been developed in collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

Within five years:

- Volunteer participation in the delivery of park programming has increased by 20 percent.
- The results of research contribute to management decision-making and park operations.

Within ten years:

- At least two new collaborative arrangements are added each year over a ten-year period.

**OBJECTIVE 3: COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN PARK OPERATIONS, ACCESS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING**

**ACTIONS**

*Park Operations*

- Enter into service agreements with third parties (e.g., other governments, not-for-profit and private sectors) for the provision of park services such as garbage collection and trail maintenance.

- Retain public, private and/or non-governmental sectors including commercial lessees in the park to provide services such as food concessions; canoe, kayak, bicycle and snowshoe rentals; public programming; and delivery of services at Glen Rouge Campground and Rouge Beach.
- Include environmental provisions in all third-party service agreements.

*Park Access*

- In collaboration with partners, provide low cost or free shuttle bus service to the park from downtown Toronto, key GTA communities and municipal transit hubs.
- Work with others to facilitate convenient, affordable and sustainable local and GTA-wide park access, including:
  - wayfinding and free 'how to get there' mobile applications;
  - links to bus stops, commuter parking lots, and future rapid and GO transit stations as per Metrolinx's Big Move plan;
  - local and regional trails; and
  - carpooling options at Rouge National Urban Park parking lots.

*Compatible Infrastructure*

- Engage managers and governments responsible for roads and other infrastructure crossing the park and participate in planning and environmental assessments to ensure infrastructure maintenance, operations and improvements are compatible with the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity and park objectives for natural and cultural heritage, visitor experience and agriculture.
- Ensure proponents identify and mitigate any cumulative effects resulting from planned infrastructure projects, including those that require lands from the 200-hectare limit provided for in the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*.
- Monitor commitments made by external agencies in environmental assessments.
- Encourage other levels of government to develop paved shoulders and cycling lanes on or next to roads in the park.



- Work with municipalities to develop a trail/road crossing protocol that provides a consistent level of safety and familiarity.
- Collaboratively develop a model to guide the maintenance, operation and improvement of roads crossing the park that promotes compatibility with the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity and park objectives for natural and cultural heritage, agriculture and visitor experience (see text box).
- Add any rights-of-way to the park that have been abandoned as a result of infrastructure improvements such as the elimination of roadway jogs at intersections.
- Ensure that the recapitalization or addition of other utility infrastructure such as communications towers respects park objectives.

#### **Considerations Relating to Road Planning, Design, Management and Operations in the Park**

- Road ecology (e.g., ecological connectivity, culverts, lighting, right-of-way management);
- Farm operations (e.g., farm vehicle movement, roadside farm sales, tile drainage/salt spray);
- Drainage (stormwater management, water quality, quantity and temperature, de-icing);
- Visitor experience (e.g., trail crossings, visitor pull-offs/parking, access to park facilities, park signage);
- Park character (e.g., grading and landscape treatment, plantings, lighting, street furniture such as guardrails, sign and light supports and right-of-way landscaping and management); and
- Operations (e.g., speed limits).



**Planning Coordination**

- Promote secondary uses and management of utility corridor lands (including park land under easement and licence) that support park objectives.
- Participate in external land use and related planning exercises to promote policy compatibility, the identification and reduction of cumulative effects and the protection of significant view corridors beyond the park. Examples include participation in/commenting on:
  - future provincial reviews of the Places to Grow, Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation plans, Metrolinx’s Big Move plan, and any other provincial planning initiatives relevant to the park;
  - TRCA watershed and sub-watershed planning—particularly upstream of the park;
  - regional and municipal planning exercises such as official plan reviews, transportation and infrastructure master plans, secondary plans, trail plans and special studies; and
  - circulated Ontario *Planning Act* applications such as official plan and zoning amendments, and subdivision and site plans.

- Engage municipalities, other relevant agencies and stakeholders in Parks Canada planning exercises related to the park.

**Targets** to measure progress towards desired outcomes:

Within five years of management plan approval:

- Provisions intended to improve park conditions are regularly incorporated into proponents’ plans for transportation and other infrastructure upgrades.

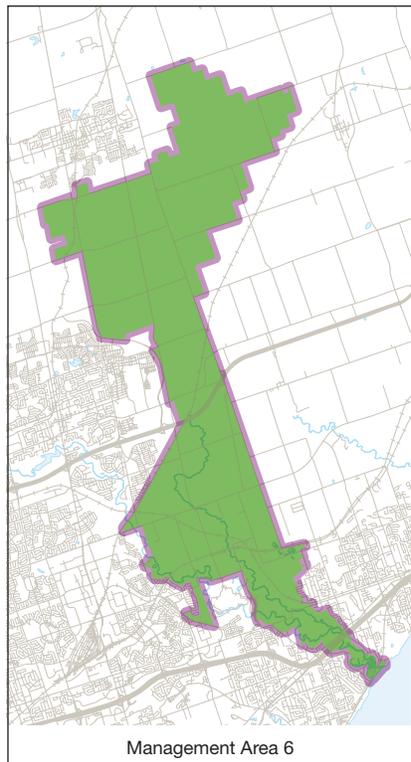
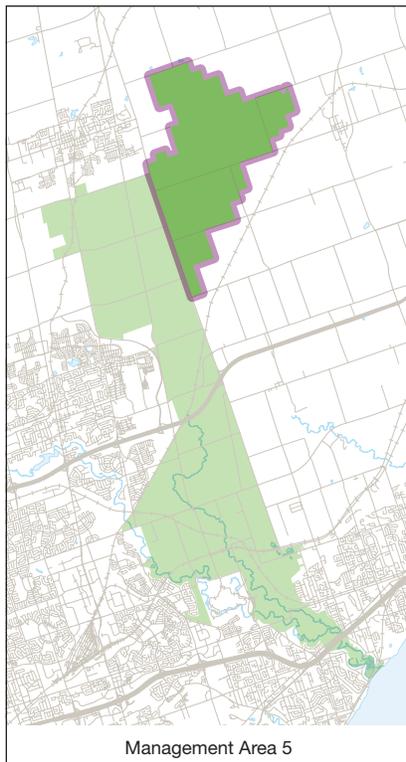
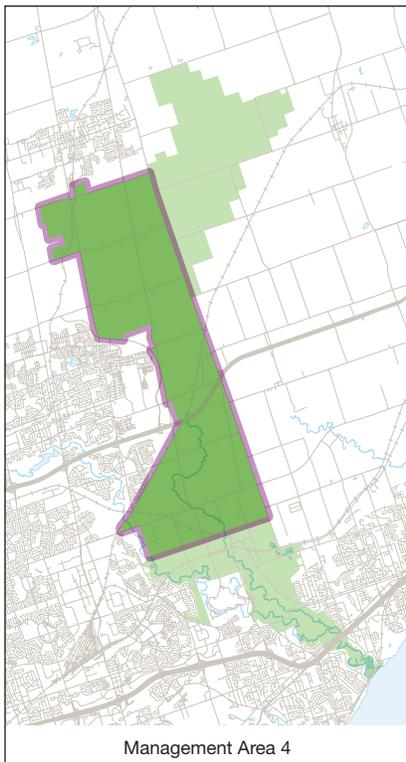
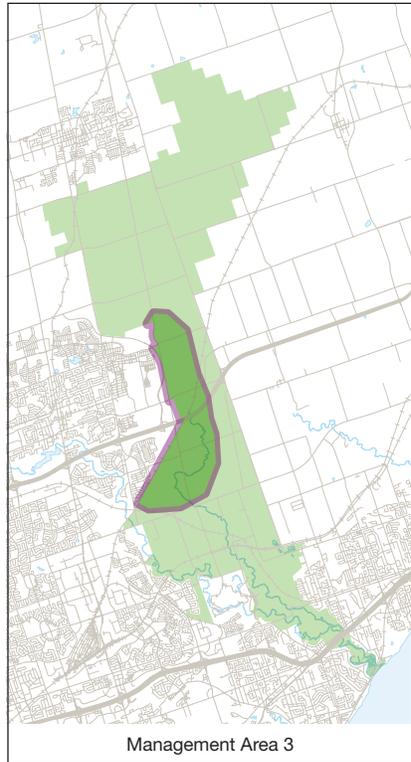
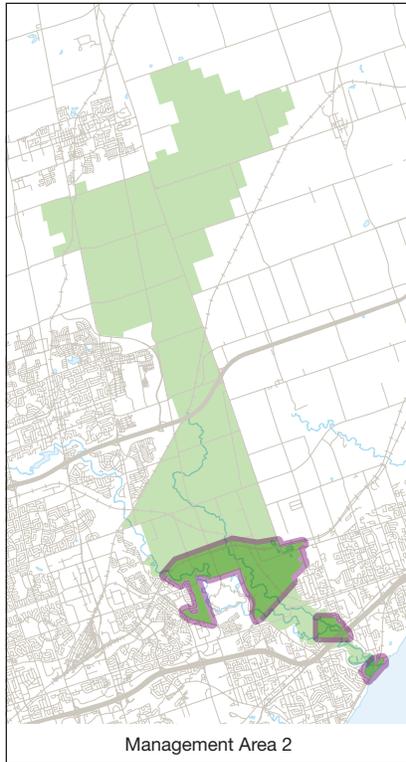
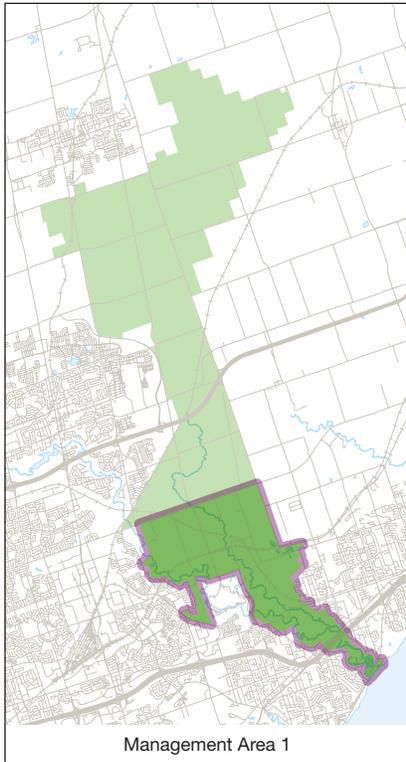
Within ten years:

- The proportion of park visitors arriving at park welcome areas by non-automobile means increases by 15 percent.



**PART C**  
Management Area Concepts

**Map 4: Management Areas**



## INTRODUCTION TO MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPTS

PART C of this management plan presents park management area concepts. Section 9 (2) of the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* states:

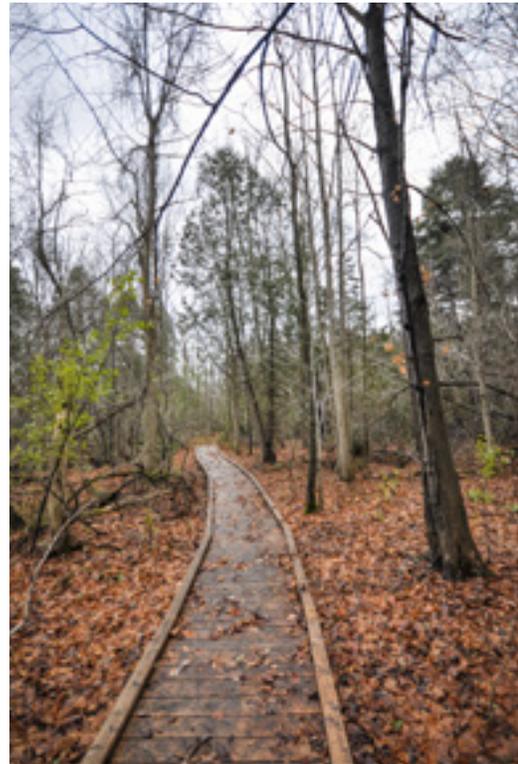
- (2) *The management plan must set out a management approach, by area, that includes the following:*
- a) *the protection and presentation of natural and cultural heritage;*
  - b) *the presentation of agricultural heritage and the encouragement of sustainable farming practices; and*
  - c) *the installation and maintenance of infrastructure, buildings and other improvements.*

This section fulfills this legislative requirement by providing detailed guidance for integrated management within specific areas of Rouge National Urban Park. It also highlights area-specific actions to maintain or restore ecological integrity as a first priority in park management.

The management area concepts are centred on a geographically distinct landscape or an important theme that is common across the entire park or portions thereof. As such, sections of two or more management areas may overlap.

The management area concepts are (see Map 4):

1. The Heart of Park Biodiversity (*south of Steeles Avenue*)
2. A Dynamic Toronto and Pickering Park Gateway (*Bear Hill Park/Toronto Zoo/Glen Rouge Campground/Rouge Beach areas*)
3. A Markham Gateway to Park Heritage (*Bob Hunter Memorial Park/Highway 7/Reesor cultural heritage areas*)
4. A Growing Park (*Old Finch Avenue north through the Northwest lands*)
5. A Tranquil Escape from the City (*Northeast lands*)
6. The Park Periphery (*neighbourhoods, municipalities, roads and other infrastructure*)



Each management area concept describes the following:

- Intended future condition (what the public can expect to see and experience).
- Actions (how the current situation will be transformed to the intended future condition).
- Highlights that are displayed in text boxes on a map of the management area.

Each management area concept complements and elaborates the plan's key strategies and objectives in ways tailored to its unique conditions. Opportunities are also identified.

The management area concepts must be read in conjunction with the entire management plan.



**MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPT 1 –  
THE HEART OF PARK BIODIVERSITY  
(south of Steeles Avenue)**

**INTENDED FUTURE CONDITION**

This spectacular nature-dominated part of the park features a high level of native biodiversity not found elsewhere in Toronto, one reflected in and nurtured by dramatic river valleys and majestic forests, wetlands, the Lake Ontario shoreline and the highest concentration of species at risk in the park. This core block of habitat serves as the park’s major reservoir of native biodiversity and is connected to other natural habitats in the park and the GTA, thus supporting regional wildlife populations.

In addition, abundant cultural resources are concentrated in the valleys, including Bead Hill National Historic Site and the remains of many mills and homesteads from early European settlement. In the north of this management area, visitors experience the most southerly examples of park agriculture and the last remaining working farms in the City of Toronto.

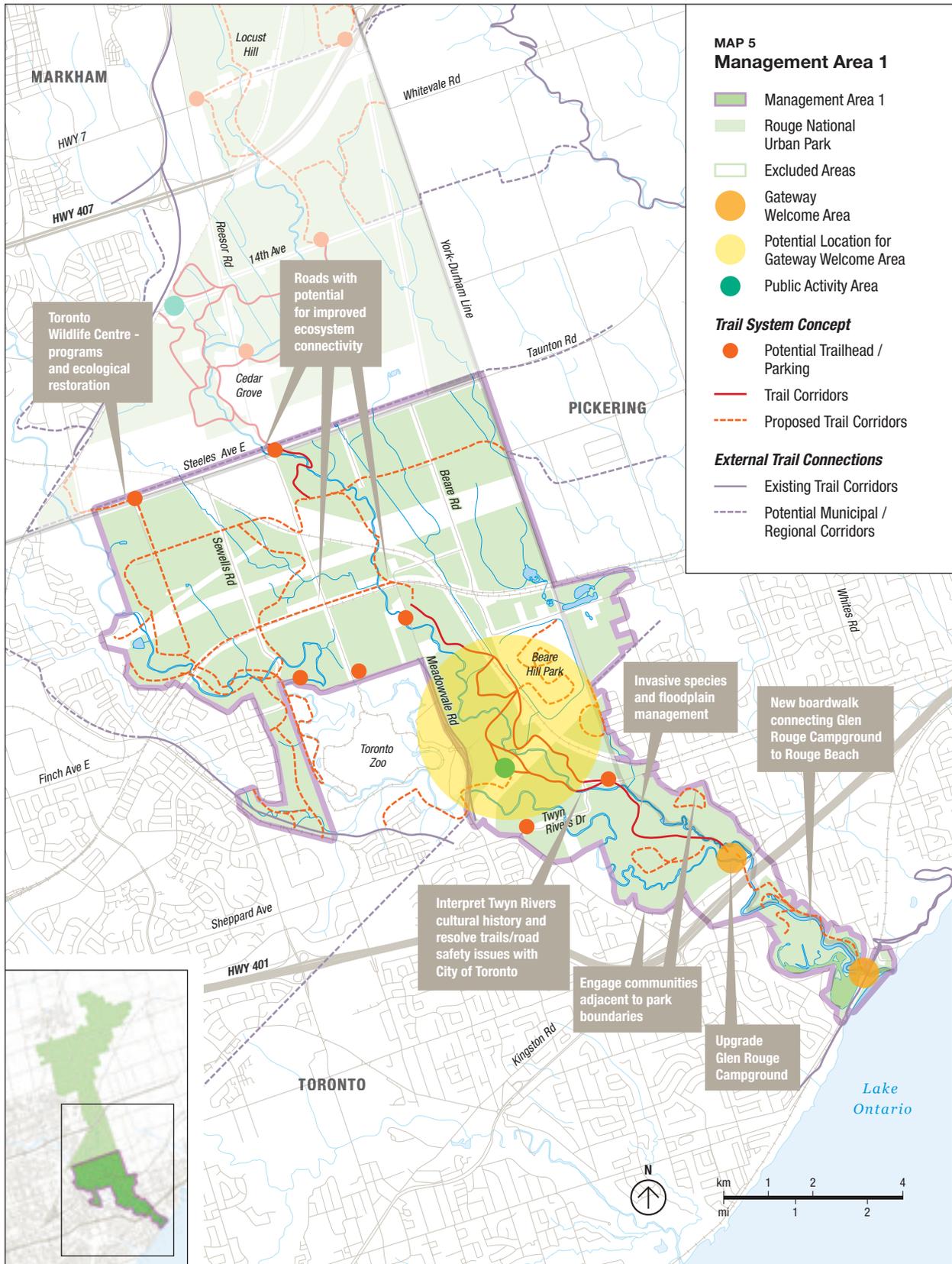
Here, visitors experience the quiet contemplation of nature and learn about the area’s remarkable natural features, native species and natural processes. Visitors can also learn about fascinating cultural histories encompassing Indigenous Peoples’ use of the valley and their current connections to the land, the mill ruins of early European settlement and the recreational hub that was once Twyn Rivers. At Glen Eagles Lookout, visitors are awed by the dramatic valley landscapes of the Rouge.

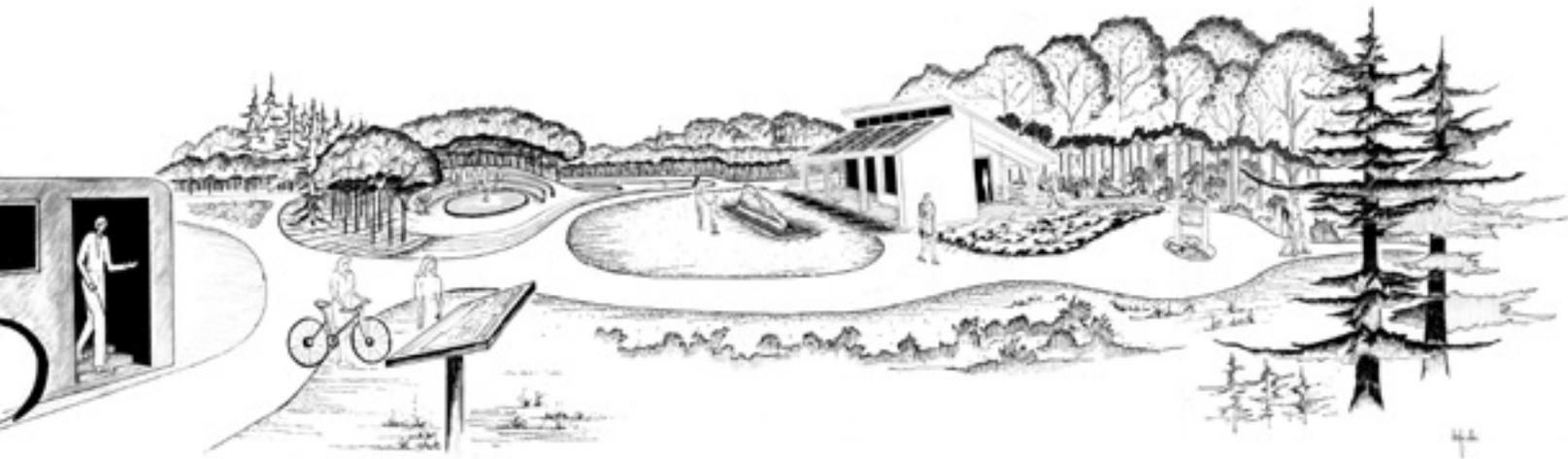
Visitors arrive by transit, tread lightly, and help steward the park’s remarkable natural resources and the many cultural resources associated with the area’s early use. In the north of this management area, vistas across the mélange of nature and agriculture provide a sample of the diverse landscape tapestry that nature and human activity has created. Programs, facilities and park staff welcome visitors to this special place—Rouge National Urban Park.



**ACTIONS**

- Concentrate the park’s efforts to control invasive species that pose a major challenge for native biodiversity.
  - Focus guidance for managing floodplains, hazard lands and erosion in the following areas as required:
    - naturally dynamic river systems and unstable banks of the Rouge River and Little Rouge Creek valleys; and
    - key landforms such as the former Lake Iroquois shoreline and glacial features.
  - Work to maintain or restore Carolinian vegetation communities.
  - Mitigate the effects of park infrastructure (e.g., through sustainable trail design) and the effects of roads and other non-park infrastructure to reduce the level of fragmentation in the park and improve ecosystem connectivity.
- Reduce the presence of unofficial trails to increase the amount of undisturbed natural area in support of the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, and to improve visitor experience and safety.
  - Engage local community associations to encourage park-friendly boundary management (e.g., fencing, access, lighting, enforcement) that reduces urban edge effects.
  - Conserve and interpret the cultural history of the Twyn Rivers area.
  - Connect the trail network between Rouge Beach and the north end of the management area in an environmentally sensitive manner, including:
    - a boardwalk and trail between Rouge Beach and Glen Rouge Campground; and
    - addressing public safety issues along Twyn Rivers Drive in collaboration with the cities of Toronto and Pickering.
  - Upgrade Glen Rouge Campground to meet current Parks Canada standards, to address erosion issues and to cater to current markets.
  - Work with Metrolinx to manage its expansion of the GO Transit Lakeshore East corridor to minimize effects on natural and cultural resources and visitor experience at the Rouge Beach/Marsh area.





**MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPT 2 –  
 A DYNAMIC TORONTO AND  
 PICKERING PARK GATEWAY  
 (Beare Hill Park/Toronto Zoo/Glen Rouge  
 Campground/Rouge Beach areas)**

**INTENDED FUTURE CONDITION**

Toronto’s gateways to Rouge National Urban Park are centred around the Toronto Zoo, Glen Rouge Campground and Rouge Beach. Here, visitors can experience the park’s primary learning and orientation facility of leading-edge environmental design, participate in a popular Learn-to Camp event at Glen Rouge Campground, or fish, swim and take in commanding views of Lake Ontario at Rouge Beach.

Situated near the Rouge and Little Rouge valleys, the park’s signature gateway welcome area serves as the hub of the park’s southern trail network, leading visitors to the dramatic valleys and forests to the south, or the more pastoral landscapes of the park’s central section. The latter two areas also serve as the main park gateways for Pickering residents.

Collaboration with local colleges, universities, conservation and educational organizations, Indigenous partners and the Toronto Zoo<sup>11</sup> characterizes this management

area—in species research and recovery, interpretation and education programming.

Municipal and other facilities and open spaces facilitate a wide range of complementary experiences to enhance the park gateway experience. The City of Toronto’s Beare Hill Park offers outstanding views of Rouge National Urban Park and the eastern GTA, and provides habitat for species at risk such as the Bobolink and Eastern Milksnake. Coordinated planning with the cities and the zoo for trail connections, parking and species at risk conservation helps to reduce facility and parking footprints and to maintain or restore ecological integrity.

A rich legacy of cultural heritage is present in the form of Pearse House and the former Tyrrell apple orchard on the west side of the Toronto Zoo.

Trails bordering the dramatic Rouge River valley lands on the west and south sides of the zoo provide local residents opportunities to experience the park.

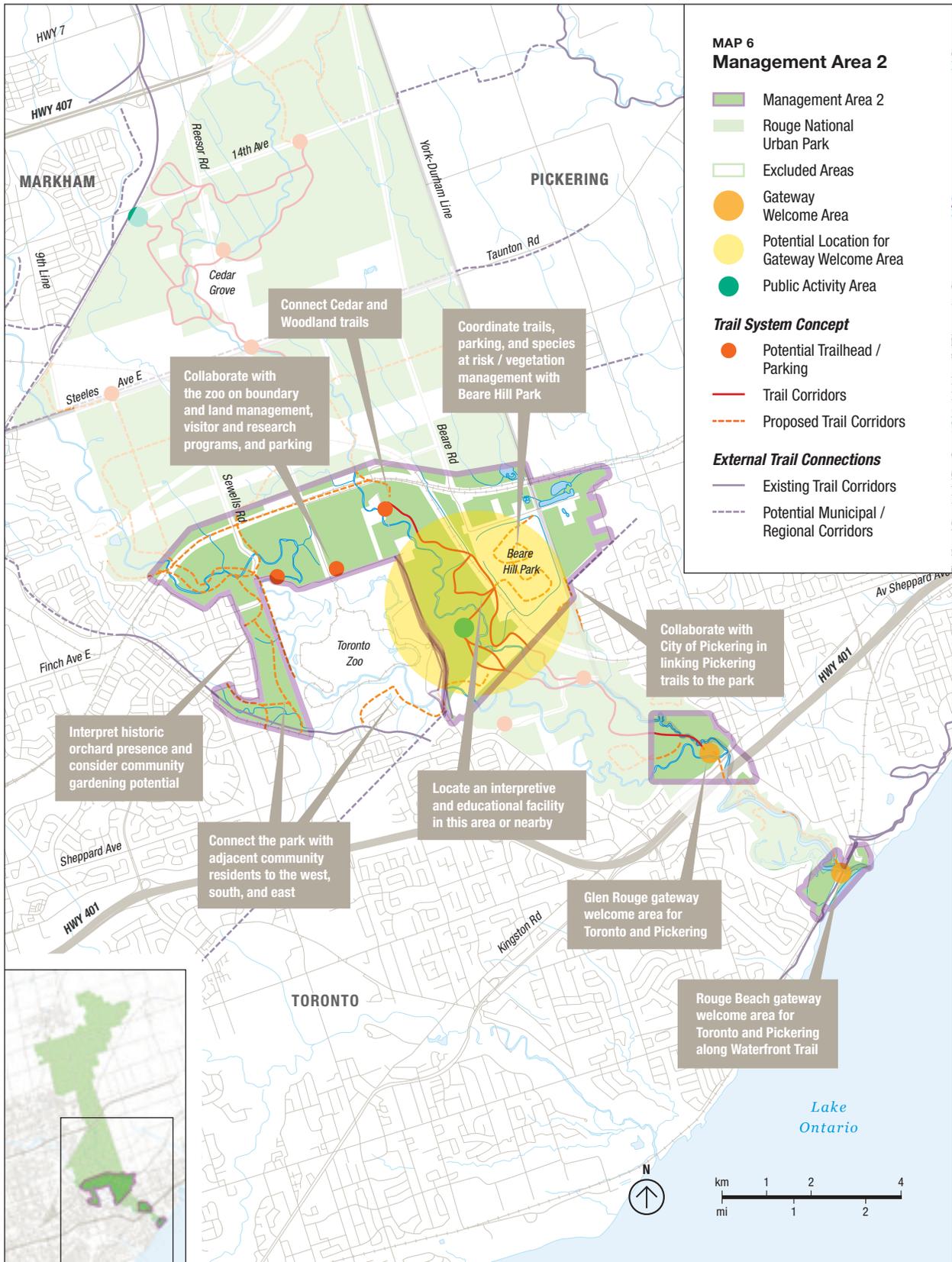
Thanks to interagency and partner collaboration, visitors can arrive at all three gateway welcome areas by many modes of transport—including transit, bicycle, walking and shuttle bus. “Green” transport access is greatly enhanced by connection to The Meadowway project extending through Scarborough to the Don Valley and beyond.

<sup>11</sup> Parks Canada and the Toronto Zoo have a long history of collaboration across Canada, such as the Black-footed Ferret reintroduction program in Grasslands National Park, and more recently the Blanding’s Turtle Head-Start reintroduction program in Rouge National Urban Park.



#### **ACTIONS**

- Continue to work with the Toronto Zoo on joint conservation initiatives such as the Blanding's Turtle Head-Start program.
- Coordinate the planning of park facilities, parking and access, trails, vegetation management, ecological restoration, species at risk and educational programming with that undertaken by the Toronto Zoo, TRCA and City of Toronto for the zoo, Beare Hill Park, The Meadowway and other areas as required.
- Identify a location for and build a learning and orientation facility within the general area denoted by the yellow-shaded area on Map 6 to serve as the park's primary gateway welcome area in Toronto. Include the following elements:
  - opportunities for co-location and collaborative programming with other institutions in, for example, conservation, education, research, marketing and special events;
  - visitor programming coordinated with other nearby facilities and attractions such as public event areas, Beare Hill Park, Pearse House and the park trail network; and
  - leading-edge "green" design in welcome area buildings, grounds, parking and transportation.
- Work with the cities of Toronto and Pickering and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to integrate the east-west connections of the Waterfront Trail into a unique park welcome area experience.
- Consider community gardening opportunities on the Tyrrell lands in a manner that restores and interprets the former apple orchard and involves community residents.
- Provide continuous trail connections by connecting Cedar and Woodland trails and providing trail access through the park to local communities south, east and west of the zoo.
- Collaborate with and support the work of the Rouge Valley Foundation and its educational programming at the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre.
- Work with the cities of Toronto and Pickering on trail connections to and through Beare Hill Park.





**MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPT 3 –  
A MARKHAM GATEWAY TO PARK HERITAGE  
(Bob Hunter Memorial Park/Highway 7/Reesor  
cultural heritage areas)**

**INTENDED FUTURE CONDITION**

A rich array of cultural resources combines with the hamlets of Locust Hill and Cedar Grove to create a dynamic, culturally themed Markham park gateway. Extending back thousands of years, this heritage embraces the use of the Toronto Carrying Place by Indigenous Peoples and European settlement of this area for agriculture more than two centuries ago.

Coordinated planning with the City of Markham has transformed boundary conditions in this part of the park and in the growing community of Cornell Centre, producing a gateway to the park and to Markham focused along the Highway 7 corridor. Visitors' gateway experience is enhanced by interpretive exhibits, programs and events. Complementary uses and a public realm extending west into Cornell Centre attract park visitors and create synergies between the park and a dynamic, growing community.

The park gateway experience continues along Highway 7 as it passes through the historic hamlet of Locust Hill. Here—and in nearby Cedar Grove hamlet—visitor-oriented services blend into the tranquil and distinct rural setting. Landscaped pathways enable

visitors to walk or cycle to both hamlets and to connect with the dramatic Little Rouge Valley and from there explore the entirety of the park from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Built heritage and cultural landscapes including heritage schoolhouses and farms, old cemeteries, and fields centred by the hamlets of Cedar Grove and Locust Hill are closely tied to Markham's historical patterns of settlement and growth. Parks Canada, Indigenous partners, the local farming community, heritage organizations and all levels of government come together as a "community of communities" to celebrate the long history of cultures and settlement in this central section of the park. Interpretation of the Toronto Carrying Place provides visitors a fascinating window into thousands of years of stewardship and use of this landscape by Indigenous Peoples.

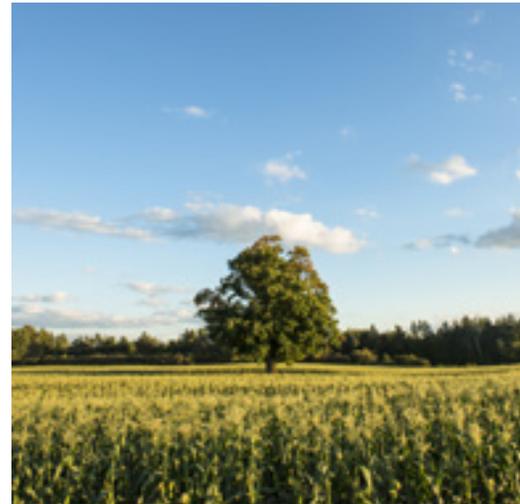
Agricultural best management and stewardship practices implemented by the park farming community help to connect natural features such as wetlands, woodlots and hedgerows with the Little Rouge valley and contribute to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

After spending the day in the park and in the quaint hamlets of Cedar Grove and Locust Hill, visitors can stop for refreshments at a small café, purchase local crafts at an artisan shop, or stay overnight on a farm or in a local bed and breakfast.

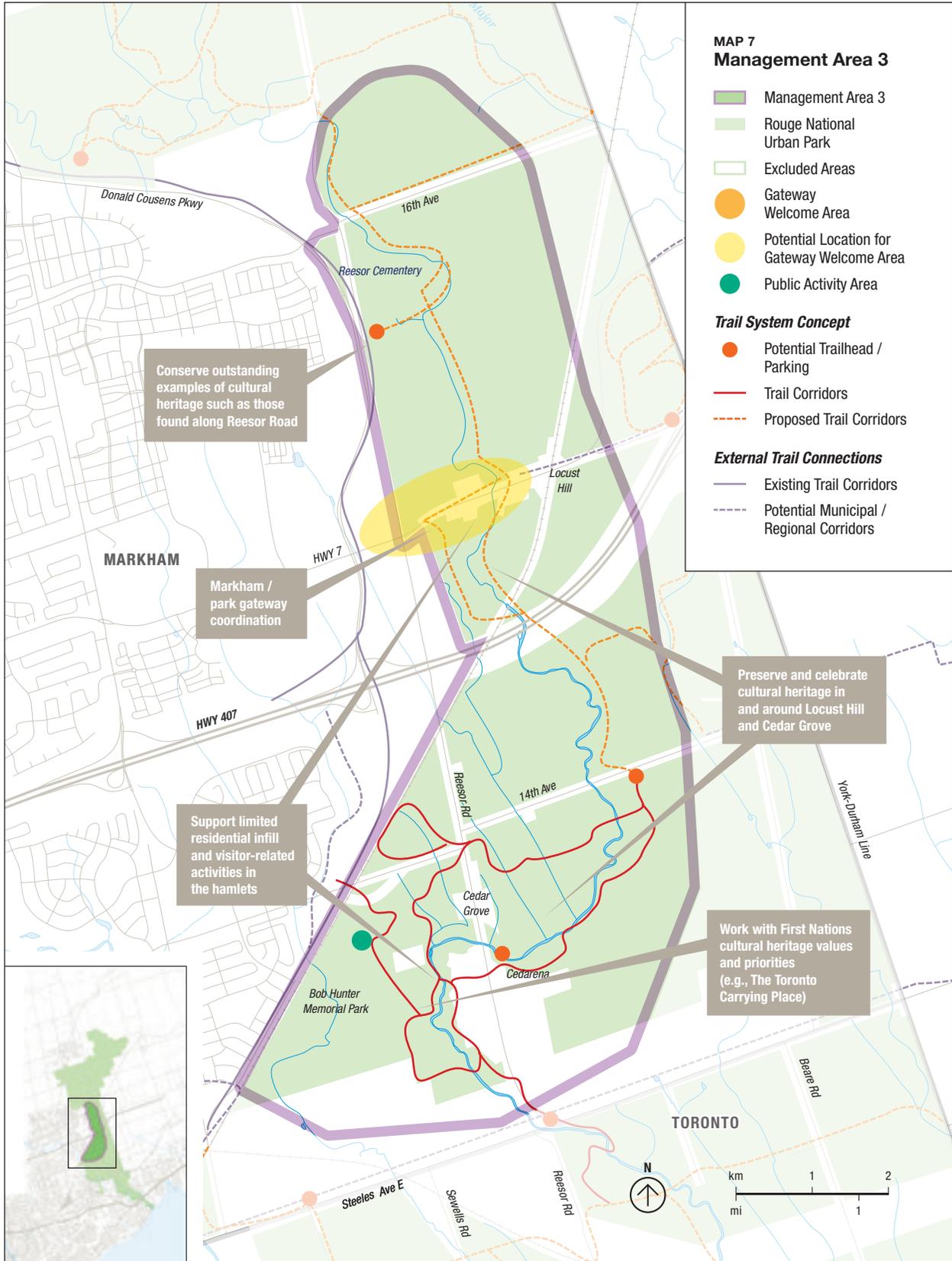
Past and current traditions meet here—brought alive through interaction with Indigenous partners, park farmers and local residents.

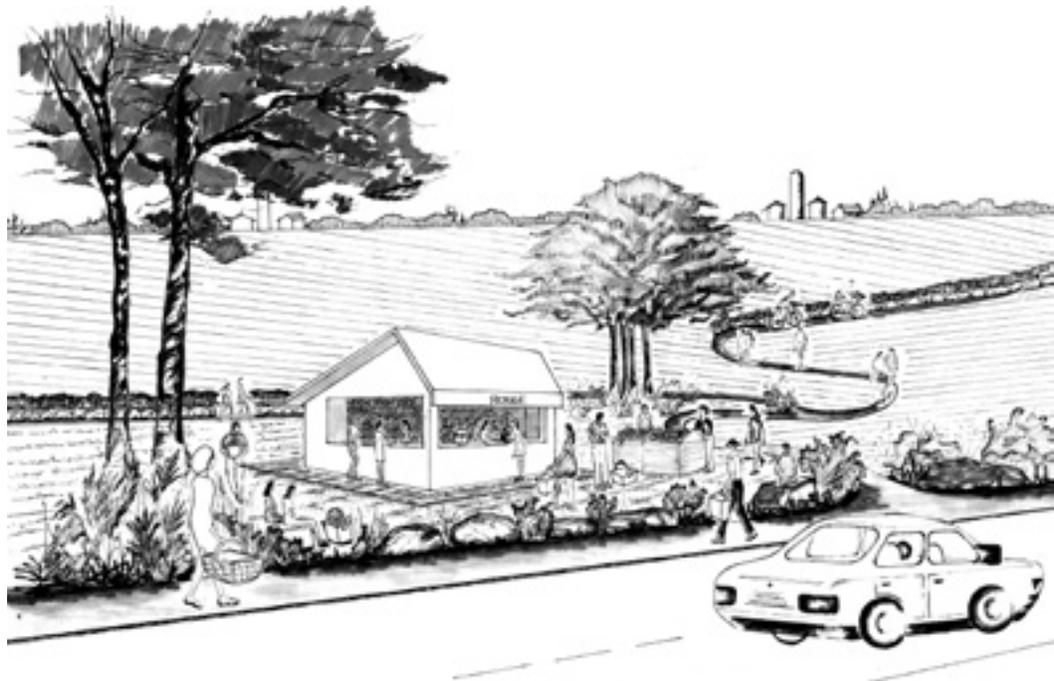
**ACTIONS**

- Strengthen ecological connectivity in collaboration with park farmers through the implementation of best agricultural management practices and other measures such as wetland, riparian, forest and hedgerow restoration, and improved ecological connections to isolated woodlots.
- Establish the precise location of the Markham gateway welcome area within the general area denoted by the yellow-shaded area on Map 7.
- Participate in Markham planning and urban design studies to:
  - coordinate the gateway role and features of the Highway 7 corridor, including the physical and visual separation of Locust Hill from the Cornell Centre urban area;
  - identify the nature of sustainable transportation access (e.g., transit, trails, park shuttle, parking) that capitalizes on the proximity of Markham’s Cornell Centre development; and
  - ensure municipal upgrades to Reesor Road through Cornell Centre and along the park boundary complement rural segments of this road to the north and south, provide a clear boundary between urban areas and the park, and provide for walking and cycling connections into the park.
- Provide trail connections from the Cornell Centre/welcome area to the park north-south trail.
- Work collaboratively with the City of Markham to advance the shared goal of preserving and celebrating the important cultural heritage in and around Locust Hill and Cedar Grove, and support limited hamlet residential infill to encourage visitor-related activities and services such as cottage industries, small-scale accommodations and recreation.



- Work with others to revitalize Cedarena as a public venue for skating and other activities.
- Work with administrators of lands to the south of Highway 7 and east of Reesor Road to encourage a compatible edge with the park and the Little Rouge Valley, including dark sky-compliant lighting, the retention of heritage properties wherever possible, and the provision of connections to the park trail network.
- Work with Markham, York Region, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, and 407 ETR to encourage the 407/ Donald Cousens Drive interchange and Donald Cousens Drive north and south of Highway 7 to be signed and themed as a regional gateway to the park, to the park welcome area and to Cornell Centre.
- Work with Indigenous partners and heritage organizations to identify cultural values in this area and to seek advice on cultural heritage priorities.
- Strategically conserve representative and outstanding examples of built heritage in collaboration with the City of Markham and community associations.
- Identify locations and opportunities for group picnicking, camping (potentially in Bob Hunter Memorial Park), and community, cultural, artistic and recreational events.
- Identify and create opportunities for small-scale, community-oriented agriculture in this area.





**MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPT 4 –  
 A GROWING PARK  
 (Old Finch Avenue north through the  
 Northwest lands)**

**INTENDED FUTURE CONDITION**

In this part of the park, a cultural landscape of traditional Ontario farmsteads and field patterns, hedgerows and woodlots, and river and stream corridors predominates. Through restoration efforts, this landscape increasingly supports coldwater fish communities, ecological connectivity and the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity. Commanding views across the park, the City of Markham, and beyond to Scarborough and Toronto enrich the visitor’s impression of this distinctive landscape.

The stability provided by long-term leases has spurred diversification and farmer-led improvements that incorporate sustainable farming and land stewardship practices. New farmers are attracted to the park through a mentoring program, incubator farms and community gardens.

Significant natural features, wildlife habitats, healthy hydrological functions, and improved water quality in the park’s watercourses and wetlands reflect continuing efforts in integrated ecological restoration and farmland enhancement, and improvement in the amount and range of ecosystem services generated in the park.

Trails that weave through this pastoral landscape bring visitors from Markham, Stouffville and further east from the growing Pickering community of Seaton. Trails and programs clustered around welcome areas enable visitors to observe and learn about park farming and how a robust and functioning natural heritage system is visibly woven into the agricultural landscape.

Visitors may follow the route that once carried the Toronto Carrying Place, the field patterns and farmsteads characteristic of early Mennonite settlement, the industrial heritage of mills along rivers, or may pass through Bob Hunter Memorial Park, which continues to play a showcase role in leading-edge ecological restoration.

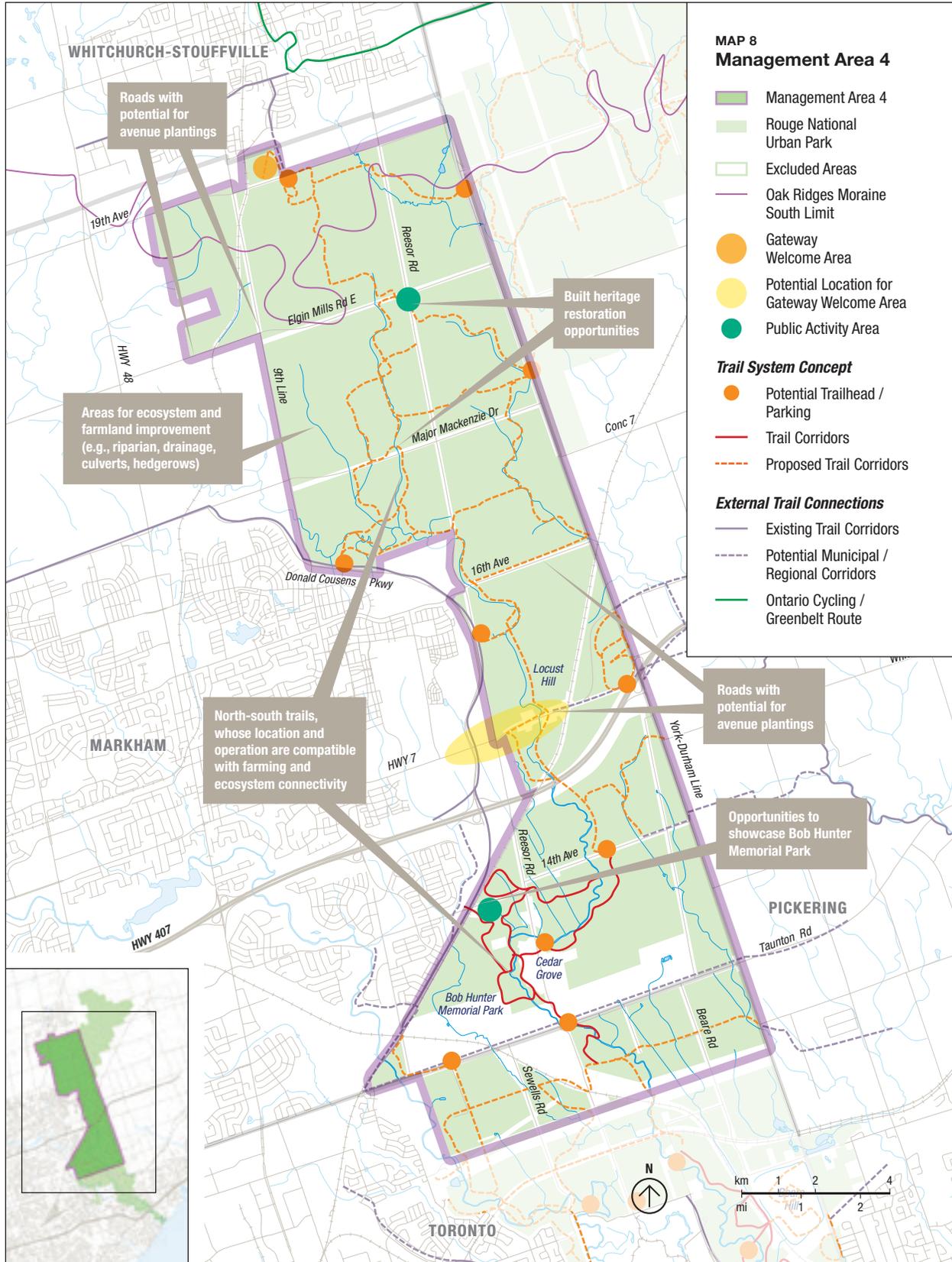


Markham residents, as well as those in Whitchurch-Stouffville and Uxbridge, celebrate close cultural ties with the nearby park farming community, the establishment of which two centuries ago supported early community growth.

Small-scale businesses throughout the area provide visitor-oriented services such as cafés and overnight accommodation. Complementary visitor services in the historic communities of Cedar Grove and Locust Hill hamlets and in downtown Whitchurch-Stouffville help to enhance visitor enjoyment, local economic activity, and area residents' awareness and support of the park.

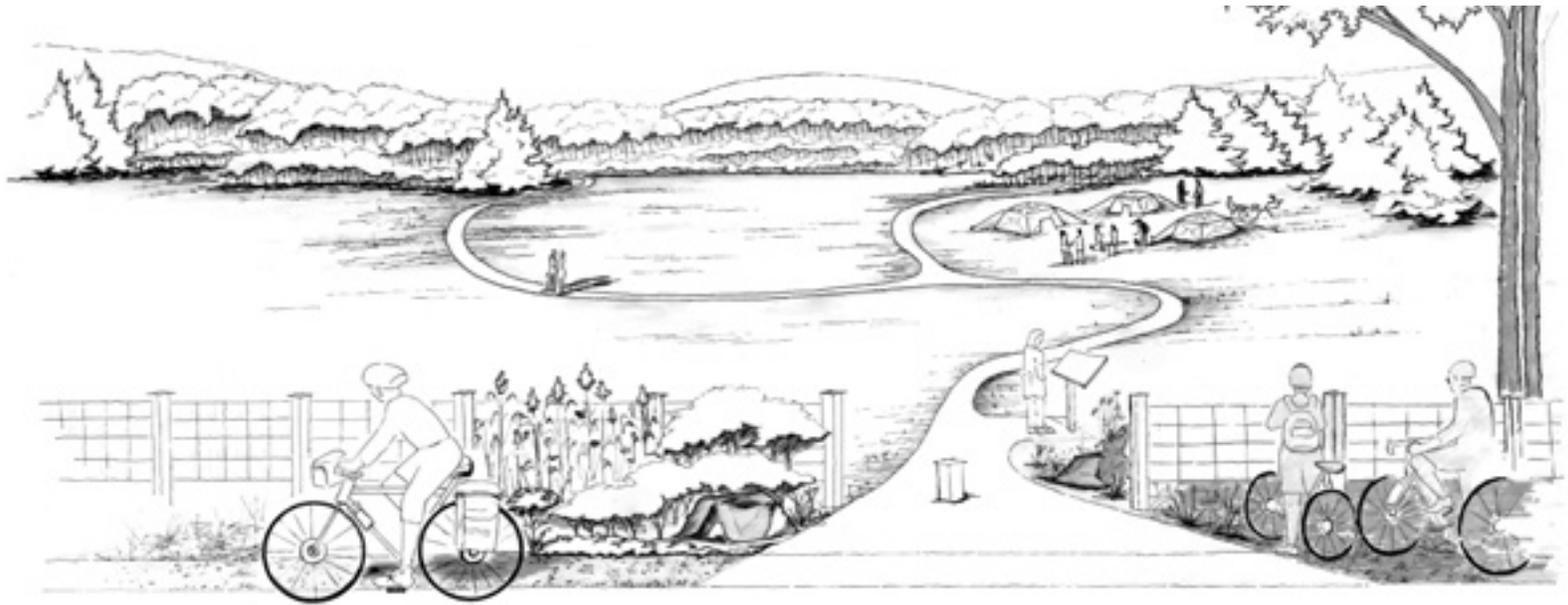
#### **ACTIONS**

- Work with park farmers to restore the health and cultural landscape value of traditional hedgerows, and to better connect isolated woodlots with nearby natural cover in a way that maintains or restores the park's ecological integrity.
- Identify new farming opportunities (e.g., mentoring opportunities, incubator farms, public-oriented farms, educational opportunities) in this management area.
- Conserve representative examples of significant built heritage (e.g., houses, barns), including those with reuse potential for visitor-oriented, small-scale commercial or park administrative uses.
- Showcase Bob Hunter Memorial Park for its achievements in ecological restoration.
- Promote agriculturally-related experiences as part of the range of visitor activities available in this management area.
- Coordinate trail planning, design, construction and operation with park lessees and natural and cultural resource management.
- Work with other levels of government to enhance the visual identity of the park through, for example, boundary, welcome and wayfinding signage, avenue plantings, roadside lookouts and technology.



**MAP 8**  
**Management Area 4**

- Management Area 4
  - Rouge National Urban Park
  - Excluded Areas
  - Oak Ridges Moraine South Limit
  - Gateway Welcome Area
  - Potential Location for Gateway Welcome Area
  - Public Activity Area
- Trail System Concept**
- Potential Trailhead / Parking
  - Trail Corridors
  - Proposed Trail Corridors
- External Trail Connections**
- Existing Trail Corridors
  - Potential Municipal / Regional Corridors
  - Ontario Cycling / Greenbelt Route



**MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPT 5 –  
A TRANQUIL ESCAPE FROM THE CITY  
(Northeast lands)**

**INTENDED FUTURE CONDITION**

With its natural river valleys, rich biodiversity, and pastoral medley of farmland, wetlands and woodlots, this management area provides an experience like none other in the park. Here, deep in the heart of the Oak Ridges Moraine, park visitors experience sights and sounds that feel far removed from city life.

These lands encompass most of the headwaters of West Duffins Creek, one of the healthiest watersheds in the Greater Toronto Area. Reesor Creek extends within the west limits of this management area, and Mitchell Creek in the eastern part forms part of the headwaters of East Duffins Creek.

Building on ecological restoration and best farm management practices, this management area serves as a model of headwaters conservation. The continued reintroduction of Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout highlights the potential of this area for restoring natural processes and populations of these historically important fish. Important ecological research also has a home here in the long-standing research forest managed by Natural Resources Canada where visitors can learn about a variety of forest-related topics.

Important ecological connections to large blocks of protected conservation lands in the Oak Ridges Moraine north and east of the park help to fulfill the park vision of connecting Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine, and reinforce this management area's contributions to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

Highly productive farmland provides the park's most pastoral settings that speak to the essence of rural Ontario. Historically significant properties associated with the long tradition of farming in this area include the Monkhouse-Reesor House and the Bentley-Carruthers House. The richness of the soils reflects this area's archaeological significance: a large late 15th- to early 16th-century Ancestral Wendat (Huron) village thrived in this area because of the surrounding agricultural and wildlife resources of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The Uxbridge gateway welcome area near the park's north limits at Glasgow provides a base for day and multi-day park exploration with the potential for camping opportunities. To the south, the quaint hamlet of Altona serves as a reminder of the early European settlement of this part of Pickering and Durham Region. Park trails connect these two areas and weave through quiet rural landscapes, following river valleys, bordering

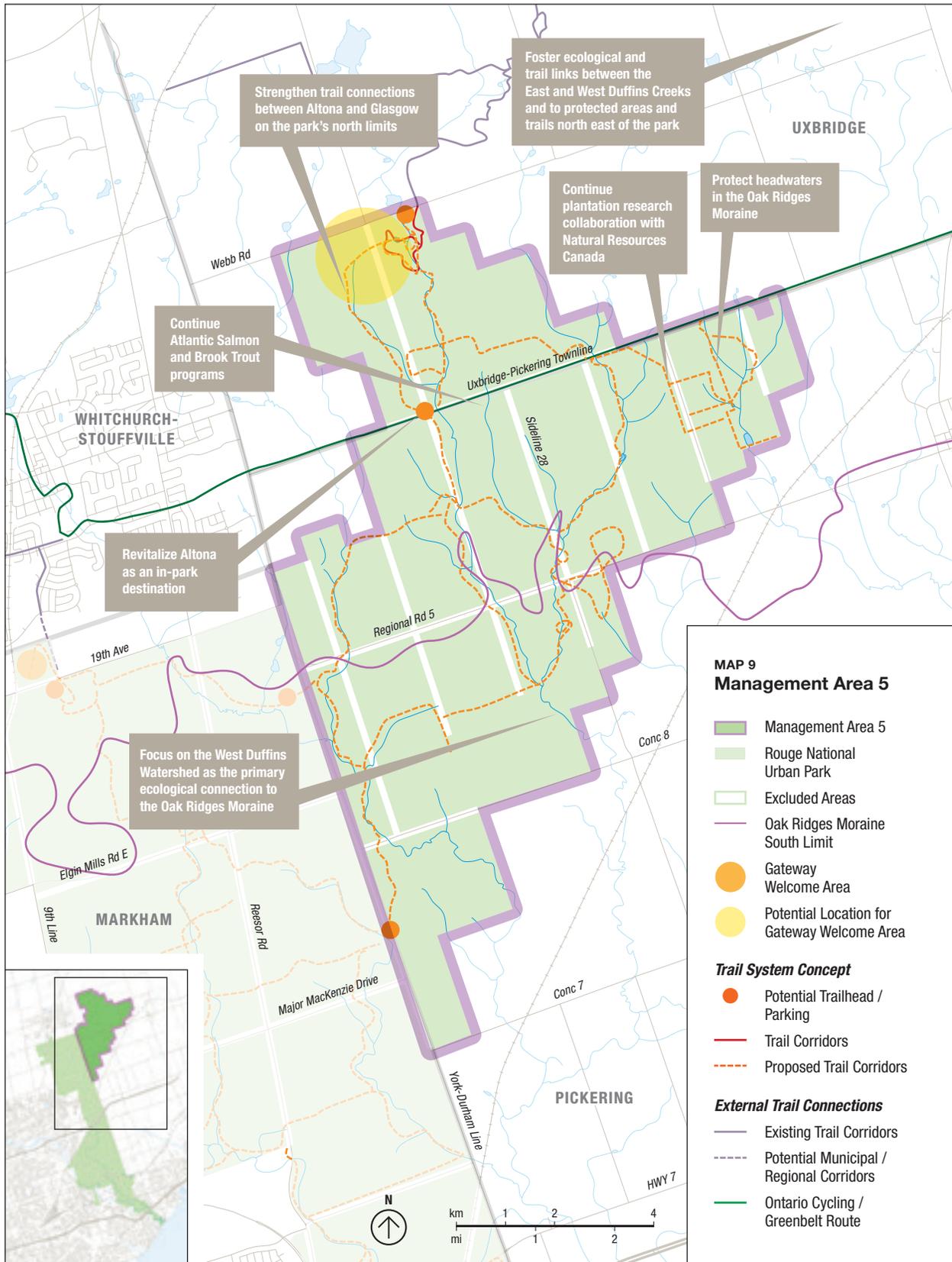
farm fields, and offering views of rolling terrain.

Connected to the Goodwood Resource Management Tract just north of the park, this management area provides a gateway to extensive hiking, mountain biking and equestrian trail systems, including the Oak Ridges Trail and The Great Trail in nearby protected conservation lands in Uxbridge. Equestrian trails in portions of this management area link to these larger networks. Reinforcing this area's gateway role is its access to the Greenbelt Route/Ontario Cycling Network networks.

#### **ACTIONS**

- Work with the TRCA, the Township of Uxbridge and the City of Pickering on headwaters protection within the Oak Ridges Moraine and in the portion of the management area south of the moraine that plays a role in headwaters management.
- Focus ecological and trail connections in this part of the park between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine on the tributaries of West Duffins Creek.
- Continue to work with governmental and non-governmental partners to advance the Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout programs in West Duffins Creek.
- Collaborate with park farmers and the TRCA on agricultural best management practices to support the maintenance or restoration of ecological connectivity, Oak Ridges Moraine headwaters protection, and agricultural sustainability.
- Continue the agreement with Natural Resources Canada to support the long-term presence of its research nursery, and collaborate on expanding interpretive opportunities related to this place.
- Foster ecological and trail connections with the protected conservation, forest and wildlife areas north and east of the park, including gateway facilities that focus on joint trail experience opportunities.
- Explore the possibility of mountain biking and equestrian trail opportunities in this part of the park that connect with systems in other nearby protected lands.
- Coordinate the development of an Uxbridge gateway welcome area in the Glasgow area of the park with the trail development plans of the TRCA for the Goodwood Resource Management Tract.
- Explore the potential to revitalize and enhance the Hamlet of Altona as an in-park destination, including the conservation and restoration of buildings for leasing, overnight visitor accommodation, food services and other visitor-oriented services.
- Work collaboratively with Ontario, regional and Indigenous tourism organizations, and with other non-governmental organizations to cross-promote the park and the Greenbelt Route/Ontario Cycling Network, The Great Trail and Oak Ridges Trail.
- Investigate the potential demand for camping facilities in this management area, including locations and types of facilities, potentially as part of the Uxbridge gateway welcome area.







**MANAGEMENT AREA CONCEPT 6 –  
 THE PARK PERIPHERY**  
 (neighbourhoods, municipalities,  
 roads and other infrastructure)

**INTENDED FUTURE CONDITION**

By way of its location in Canada’s most populous metropolitan area, Rouge National Urban Park is bordered by an increasing number of neighbourhoods and is traversed by roads, highways, railways and other infrastructure serving the GTA’s ever-growing population.

Parks Canada works closely with other governments and land managers to manage the interface between the park and its neighbours—be it a residential neighbourhood, hydro corridor, major roadway or open space. Through these co-operative efforts, the park continues to thrive, its ecological integrity is maintained or restored, and adjacent uses and infrastructure are compatible with park objectives.

Active relationships with adjacent communities cultivate awareness, understanding and support of park values by park neighbours. Within this mix of adjacent urban and rural areas, the park remains a distinct landscape with which residents,

commuters and visitors easily identify by way of signage, landscaping and access points.

Park edge management varies with the different types of landscape that border it. In the southern part of the park in Toronto and Pickering where long-established residential areas directly abut the park alongside steep valley slopes, Parks Canada encourages a sense of stewardship amongst park neighbours.

In newer developments along the west side of the park in Markham, roads and the Little Rouge Valley provide a strong definition between built-up areas and predominantly agricultural lands in the park. Here, signage and coordinated trail planning provides safe visitor entry into the park.

Extensive areas of rural lands border the north section of the park in west Markham, southern Uxbridge, and north Pickering. Here, boundary and identification signage, landscape treatments, and trailheads help to define the park edge to ensure those visiting from adjacent areas know they are entering the distinct landscape of a national protected area.

Coordinated trail connections through nearby urban natural areas, green spaces and conservation lands enable visitors to easily travel to the park from Markham, Toronto, Pickering, Whitchurch-Stouffville and



Uxbridge via a wide range of local and regional trails, including the Waterfront Trail, The Meadoway and Oak Ridges Trail.

Parks Canada's participation in proponents' planning and environmental assessment processes helps to ensure infrastructure improvements are planned, designed, maintained and operated to be compatible with park objectives and the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.

#### **ACTIONS – MUNICIPAL EDGES**

*Work with Toronto, Pickering, Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Uxbridge in their planning along the park periphery to:*

- Facilitate direct trail links and better transit service to park access points, most particularly park welcome areas.
- Identify natural area and green space opportunities and facilities that can connect Toronto, Pickering, Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Uxbridge with the park and can reinforce the park's east-west connections with adjacent communities.
- Support the inclusion of visitor-related services such as food and accommodation adjacent to the park in municipal land use planning policies—such as official plans and secondary plans.

- Encourage the use of leading-edge stormwater management strategies in new developments and in retrofitted older developments that abut the park.
- Develop guidelines that identify desired edge conditions for different types of abutting urban and rural land uses.
- Develop and implement a community engagement strategy that promotes “good neighbour” relations and property management with abutting homeowners and businesses; address such topics as access, fencing, encroachment, unofficial trails, invasive species, lighting and law enforcement.
- Work with other agencies to promote a dark sky approach to lighting in and around the park through the use of minimally intrusive and shielded lighting.

*Work with the City of Markham and the Regional Municipality of York to:*

- Strengthen trail, ecological and interpretive connections with municipal green spaces (including Milne Dam Conservation Park) that connect adjacent communities to the park.
- Support limited residential infill and other visitor-related activities and services in Cedar Grove and Locust Hill hamlets, where appropriate.
- Create a distinct park edge in the areas around Locust Hill and Cedar Grove hamlets.
- Enhance park-edge locations which now or could in future feature farmer's markets and/or community gardens.

*Work with the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Regional Municipality of York to:*

- Facilitate trail and programming connections between the Stouffville gateway welcome area on 19th Avenue, the town's historic downtown Main Street, and the Ontario Cycling/Greenbelt Route along Hoover Park Drive.
- Identify how trail access to the park can be improved from the Stouffville GO Transit station, and from further east in Stouffville.

*Work with the Township of Uxbridge and the Regional Municipality of Durham to:*

- Connect park ecosystems and trails with other protected conservation areas and trail systems in the Oak Ridges Moraine, including the Oak Ridges Trail, the Greenbelt/Ontario Cycling Route, and Uxbridge-area trails including those in the Goodwood Resource Management Tract.
- Engage municipal authorities in the planning and operation of the Uxbridge gateway welcome area along the park border at Glasgow.
- Coordinate promotion of the park through improved signage and wayfinding from Lincolnville GO station via roads and trails to and from the park.

*Work with the City of Pickering and the Regional Municipality of Durham to:*

- Better welcome visitors entering the park at Rouge Beach from Pickering, and strengthen connections to the nearby Glen Rouge and Toronto gateway welcome areas.
- Connect the park with planned natural heritage systems and trail networks near the park, including Seaton-area trails.
- Continue to forge programming links with educational institutions in Pickering and Durham such as the Pickering Museum and Durham College.
- Participate in the municipal planning of urban design improvements along Kingston Road to reinforce this corridor's role as an easterly Pickering/Durham gateway into the park.

*Work with the City of Toronto to:*

- Improve the safety and quality of visitor and pedestrian access along Twyn Rivers Drive to trailheads and trails in the Twyn Rivers corridor.
- Identify opportunities for local trail connections to better connect communities west of the park.

**ACTIONS – INFRASTRUCTURE**

*The following actions must be read in concert with those described in Key Strategy 4, Objective 3 under Infrastructure Compatibility.*

- Work with York Region and the cities of Markham and Toronto to facilitate trail access beneath Steeles Avenue at the Woodlands trailhead/Reesor Road intersection.

*Work with the City of Markham and the Regional Municipality of York to:*

- Facilitate the use of commuter parking areas and rapid transit stations planned by York Region for weekend parking/shuttle bus service to the park.
- Carry forward the commitments in the 2016 York Region Transportation Master Plan for planned two-to-four-lane widening of the following roads that traverse Rouge National Urban Park:
  - Highway 7 (MTO) – Donald Cousens Parkway to York-Durham Line (2027 to 2031): Implement pedestrian, visitor access and roadside character improvements to support the Cornell Centre Gateway/Parks Canada's Markham gateway welcome area.
  - Ninth Line – Steeles Avenue to Box Grove Area (2022 to 2026): Protect for north-south trail connections beside Ninth Line where it crosses beneath the railroad overpass.
  - 14th Avenue – Donald Cousens Parkway to York-Durham Line (2032 to 2041):
    - i) Ensure municipal environmental assessments fully examine alternatives to road widening.
    - ii) Maintain rural road character with special attention to park functions, values and character.



*Work with the City of Pickering and the Regional Municipality of Durham to:*

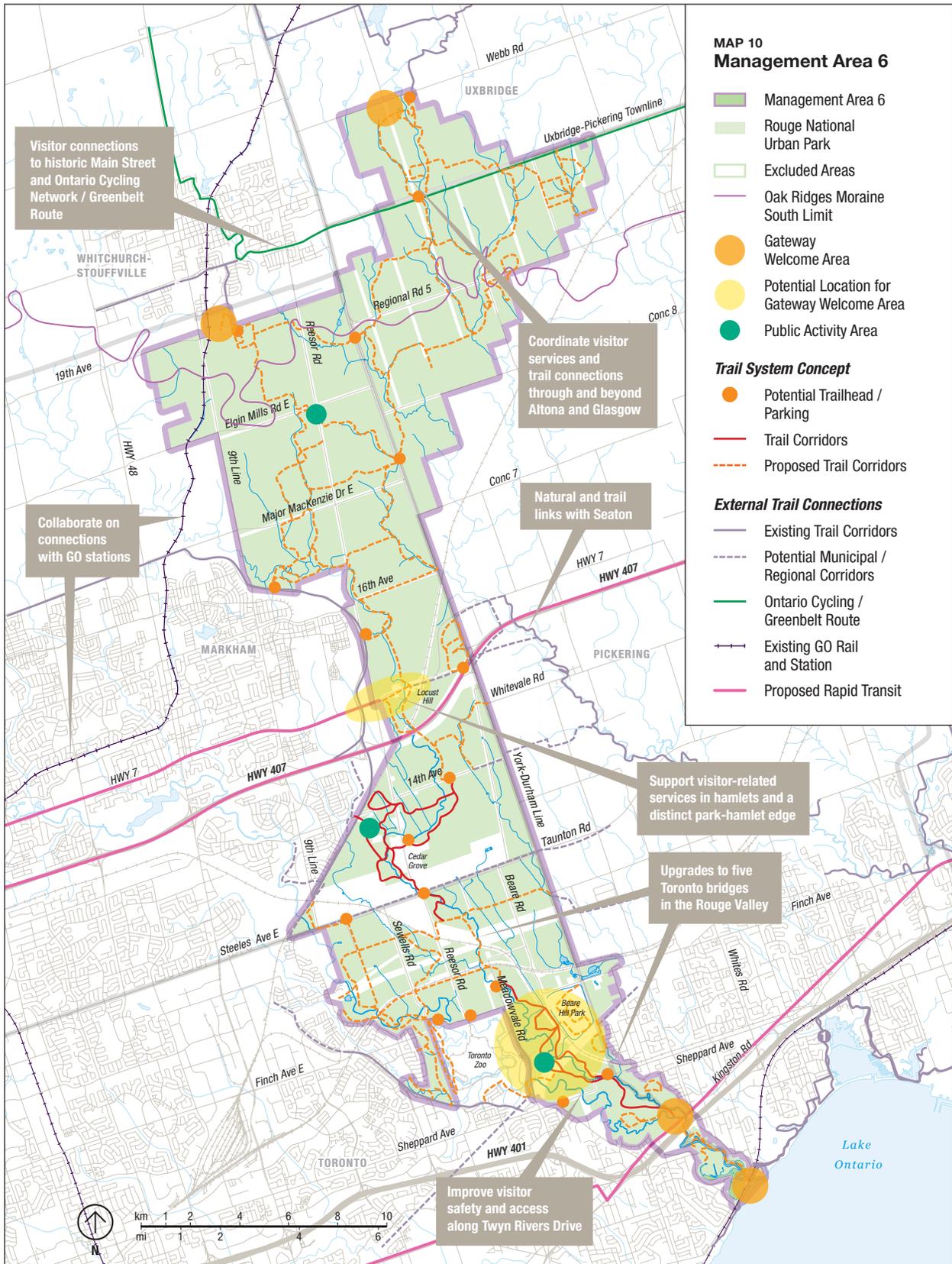
- Sign an alternative on-road cycling route around the park between Rouge Beach, Kingston Road and Beare Hill Park to avoid an ecologically sensitive and rugged part of the park.
- Link the park with Pickering and Durham transit hubs, such as GO Transit stations, and through new transit stops.

*Work with the Township of Uxbridge and the Regional Municipality of Durham to:*

- Coordinate the provision of park promotional material at the Lincolnville GO Station (in association with Metrolinx).

*Work with the City of Toronto to:*

- Ensure any planned upgrades to one-lane bridges in the park (Twyn Rivers, Meadowvale, Old Finch and Sewells) are sensitive to the river environments, aid trail user access either beneath or along the bridge, and do not serve to significantly expand the capacity of the road network in this part of the park.
- Work with the Toronto Transit Commission and Metrolinx to develop convenient transit access to the park at the Toronto Zoo, Twyn Rivers Drive area and Rouge Beach area.





**ACHIEVING THE PARK VISION**

The development of this management plan—the first for Rouge National Urban Park—constitutes an initial step in the long-term program to achieve the vision for Rouge Urban National Park. The implementation of this plan will set the stage for the park’s long-term management.

Parks Canada invites the continued engagement of those touched by the park—visitors, Indigenous partners, park inhabitants past and present, volunteers, stakeholders, partners and others—to help bring about the exciting vision for the park through the implementation of this management plan.

## Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was completed for the Rouge National Urban Park management plan in accordance with the 2010 Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals. The SEA was carried out in an integrated and iterative way during the management planning process with a goal of enhancing positive effects and avoiding or reducing potential negative effects.

The analysis of effects focused on four key groups of valued components that together form the basis of the Rouge National Urban Park purpose: natural resources, cultural resources, the vibrant farming community (including agricultural resources) and components of importance to visitor experience.

Being an agency with a conservation mandate, Parks Canada management plans are developed with the intent to produce positive environmental effects and to avoid or reduce negative environmental effects. However, between intention and implementation there are possibilities for unplanned or inadvertent outcomes.

To ensure such possibilities are identified and averted, the SEA examines planned management actions at a high level by analyzing the various circumstances that could generate negative effects. Strategies to mitigate these potential effects are identified when warranted.

The SEA also provides a better broad-scale view of the entire park within its surroundings, facilitating the identification of potential cumulative effects that could be overlooked when impact analysis is scoped only at the project level.

Finally, the SEA is used to confirm that the management plan is aligned with the overall guidance for the Government of Canada provided in the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy.

The management plan comprises four key strategies and a section on management area concepts. The strategic environmental assessment of the Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan concluded that its strategies, objectives, actions and management area concepts will generate predominantly positive environmental impacts.

Some of the actions have the potential to cause negative environmental impacts, most of which can be addressed by applying good planning and review practices and by standardizing guidance materials and tools already in development or referenced in the management plan. Some potential effects will be addressed through project-level impact assessment when the concepts have advanced to the point of becoming proposals with sufficient detail to evaluate. It is anticipated that realization of the objectives in the management plan could result in some minor negative residual effects to natural resources, cultural resources, visitor experience or agricultural resources; however, the net result will be overwhelmingly positive, and the significance of residual negative effects is predicted to be minor.

The SEA has recommended strategies to maximize the positive effects and minimize the negative effects as concepts identified in the management plan advance, including the completion of cumulative effects analysis and consideration of alternatives for larger projects, and the development of best management practices for events and activities.

The Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan aligns with the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS), with clear contributions to six of the 13 FSDS goals.

For a full summary of the SEA analysis, visit [www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/on/rouge](http://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/on/rouge).



## Acknowledgments

The creation of this first-ever management plan for Rouge National Urban Park reflects the dedication and hard work of countless people both within Parks Canada and beyond the agency. Parks Canada acknowledges the contributions of the following organizations and individuals that were instrumental to the plan's development:

The park's First Nations Advisory Circle, whose advice reflects a deep relationship with the park landscape that collectively extends back thousands of years. The Circle's counsel and wisdom, particularly regarding the cultural significance of the park and its members' perspectives on ecological integrity, have immeasurably enriched the plan's guidance for nature, culture, agriculture and visitor experience.

The conservationists who worked tirelessly beginning 35 years ago to help protect the valley and contributed to the conservation of the former regional park. Rouge National Urban Park—and this management plan—would not exist without the early visionary leadership and persistence of such figures as Lois James, Glen deBaeremaeker, Pauline Browes, Alan Wells, Heather and Ron Moeser, Jim Robb, and others. The current-day conservation community continues to contribute its knowledge and experience across a wide spectrum of subjects that have added both depth and clarity to the plan.

The park farming community, which after decades of uncertainty has embraced Parks Canada's efforts to nurture a sustainable farming community as a critical component of the national urban park. Throughout the process of building a positive and mutually respectful relationship with Parks Canada, the farming community has freely shared

its experience, knowledge of the land and perspectives on farming in the park—all contributing greatly to the integrated approach to farming embodied in this management plan.

The different levels of government and agencies whose extensive and thoughtful input embodies the knowledge and experience gained in managing the former regional park. Their roles in watershed, land use and infrastructure planning—combined with their participation on the park "Landholders Table" that established the framework for the transfer of land administration—have also ensured the management plan accounts for and contributes to the larger environment of which the park is a part.

The thousands of individual Canadians who participated in the plan's development. Their enthusiasm for the park and a belief that a visit to the Rouge could change lives and communities provided constant inspiration throughout the drafting of the plan.

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