

## 2016 Mid-Year Update

### **Parks Canada connecting with GTA communities**

From healthy walks and learning to camp in the park, to making connections in neighbourhoods surrounding the Rouge, Parks Canada has been very busy in recent months collaborating with its various community partners to develop and deliver some exciting initiatives for Rouge National Urban Park visitors and GTA residents.

Among these new initiatives, Parks Canada has partnered with the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) to present Mood Walks in the Scarborough area. The program, which launched in May and runs until this fall, consists of 10 guided walks led by Parks Canada staff and volunteers. The walks are targeted to youth aged 13 to 24 that are interested in improving their physical and mental health, as well as their social skills by getting outdoors, learning new things, and meeting fun and interesting people.

Mood Walks explore the walking trails around the RVHS grounds as well as in Rouge National Urban Park, where participants learn more about wildlife, forests, wetlands and farms. Going out for a walk to enjoy nature not only benefits program participants, but has been proven to help reduce stress and anxiety levels for everyone.

“The Mood Walks initiative is going very well and early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive,” says Sheryl Santos, Partnering and Engagement Officer. “In terms of getting participants outdoors and into the community, the program has definitely delivered on that front. We’ve even seen some program participants take it upon themselves to get out and independently visit the Rouge on their own time.”

Another exciting community initiative is Parks Canada’s collaboration with the East Scarborough Storefront, which serves residents from the Kingston-Galloway and Orton Park neighbourhoods in East Toronto.

Parks Canada staff have been providing tours of the Rouge for various Storefront groups, such as their Ecoclub, gardening group and the “Understanding your Environment Program” in partnership with the University of Toronto Scarborough. We are also proud to be a new organization participating in the Storefront’s annual WaterWise Event this fall, which is a festival to learn about and celebrate water.

In addition to these new initiatives, Parks Canada continues to work with long-time community partners, like the Markham Museum and Markham Library, on their summer camps and programs for youth. This summer, Parks Canada outreach staff participated in the museum’s Senior Superhero Science Camp in which participants learned more about science through their favourite comic book characters. The Parks Canada team also partnered with the library to deliver an environmental educational workshop for their Summer Reading Club at various library

branches throughout York Region.

“Whether it’s bringing guests in for a tour of the park or getting out in the community to talk about and showcase the park,” adds Santos, “our goal is to help visitors connect with the incredible experiences the Rouge has to offer.”

## **A MESSAGE FROM PARKS CANADA**

Greetings from Parks Canada and Rouge National Urban Park.

This year has already been filled with many exciting developments in the ongoing establishment of Canada’s first national urban park in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). We also continue to collaborate with our First Nations and community partners and stakeholders to provide opportunities for visitors to connect with the park through events, educational programming, stewardship, volunteerism and citizen engagement.

Parks Canada has made many new connections in the community, which have resulted in new and innovative programming for visitors to the national urban park. I’m also happy to report that as we expand our offerings in the Rouge, we are now staging our popular programs and events in more areas of the park, including our Reesor North and Zoo Road Welcome Areas, Bob Hunter Memorial Park, the Glen Rouge Campground, Rouge Beach and more.

As we look back on a very busy and exciting spring and summer, we are also looking ahead to this upcoming fall and the spectacular autumn colours that will be on full display in the Rouge. We’re extremely fortunate to have a national urban park in our backyards that is accessible all year round.

For the latest and most-up-to-date information on what’s happening in Canada’s first national urban park, I encourage you to visit our website – [parksCanada.ca/rouge](http://parksCanada.ca/rouge) – and check our social media channels.

There’s no better season than right now to get outdoors and enjoy the park. See you on the trails!

*-Pamela L. Veinotte Field Unit Superintendent, Rouge National Urban Park*

## **LATEST NEWS: Rouge National Urban Park**

Here are some highlights from the first half of 2016:

- On **Feb. 9, 2016**, Canada’s Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, the Honourable Catherine McKenna, announced Parks Canada was making a contribution of \$150,000 to the Toronto Zoo to help re-establish a healthy, local population of Blanding’s turtles in Rouge National Urban Park.
- On **June 9, 2016**, the Government of Canada tabled amendments to the Rouge National Urban Park Act that will protect the Rouge’s important ecosystems and heritage as well as ensure that the ecological integrity of the park is the first priority in the park’s management. The amendments also provide greater certainty for park farmers. Farmers can continue

carrying out agricultural activities within the park and provide an important source of locally-grown food to the Greater Toronto Area.

- On **June 18, 2016**, the Ontario Government reaffirmed its commitment to transfer approx. 6.5 km<sup>2</sup> (1,600 acres) of land to Parks Canada as well as relinquish reversionary rights to approx. 15 km<sup>2</sup> (3,700 acres) of additional lands managed by the Toronto & Region Conservation Authority.
- On **June 21, 2016**, Parks Canada and the Toronto Zoo partnered, for the third year in a row, to release 36 more baby Blanding's turtles – a nationally and provincially-threatened species – in the Rouge. To date, 67 baby Blanding's turtles have been released in Rouge National Urban Park. More releases are to come. Caption: The Honourable Catherine McKenna, Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

### **Parks Canada's welcome areas – Your doorway to the Rouge!**

This is the first full summer season for the national urban park's first two welcome areas, which are located at the corner of Reesor and Elgin Mills Roads in Markham, and on Zoo Road (also known as Park Road) near the Toronto Zoo. And as Parks Canada staff start to become "familiar faces" in the community, the welcome areas are drawing in a wide variety of park visitors.

Whether visitors are stopping by for directions, up-to-date info or even first aid assistance, Parks Canada staff are available at these locations to help out. Welcome area staff can also assist with planning your day in the park or providing more information about other Parks Canada places across the country.

The two Rouge welcome areas also feature picnic areas, washrooms, interpretive displays, books and take-away activities, such as scavenger hunts and Xplorer! booklets for kids, just to name a few. Also new this year, the Zoo Road Welcome Area location now sells official Parks Canada merchandise!

As for upcoming events, there's always something special going on at the Zoo Road Welcome Area on holiday long weekends, including free airbrush Parks Canada temporary tattoos. Be sure to stop by over Thanksgiving weekend (Oct. 8-10) when the popular Fall Walk Series will be happening in the Rouge and the incredible fall colours will be on full display.

After Labour Day weekend both welcome areas will switch from a seven-day to a five-day schedule and will be open from Wednesday to Sunday 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. until they close for the season after Thanksgiving.

### **Toronto school wins Canada's Coolest School Trip contest**

In April 2016, a split Grade 7/8 class from Toronto's Duke of Connaught Junior and Senior Public School beat out some tough competition from across the country to win the Canada's

Coollest School Trip contest with a video entry that highlighted the natural and cultural significance of Rouge National Urban Park.

Check out their [video](#)!

For their video, the class won a five-day trip to Jasper National Park this past June. For many of the students it was their first time visiting the Canadian Rockies.

The trip included white water rafting on the Athabasca River, a visit to the Columbia Icefield aboard the giant Ice Explorer and a stop at the historic Palisades Centre, to name a few of their educational and fun activities. A big congratulations to all of the students and staff at Duke of Connaught School for a job well done!