

2017 Year in Review

A big year for Canada's national urban park

2017 was a watershed year for Rouge National Urban Park in the Greater Toronto Area.

Not only did the park host the official national launch of Parks Canada's monumental 2017 season, but it also engaged with a record number of Canadians, offering more than 400 free events, educational programs, workshops and learn-to sessions inside and outside the park.

In collaboration with Indigenous partners, park farmers, volunteers, various levels of government, conservation groups and community organizations, Parks Canada also achieved a number of important legislative and land assembly milestones in conjunction with Canada's national urban park.

On top of that, Parks Canada continued to work with its partners to enhance and protect the Rouge's incredible natural, cultural and agricultural heritage, and to provide quality experiences for its visitors.

Significant highlights included:

- **April 1, 2017** – Transport Canada transferred an additional 21 km² of lands in Pickering and Uxbridge (Durham region) to Parks Canada for Rouge National Urban Park.
- **June 19, 2017** – Bill C-18 received Royal Assent. Bill C-18 amended the Rouge National Urban Park Act to ensure the park has the strongest possible ecological protections, while also providing additional certainty for park farmers.
- **Oct. 21, 2017** – The Government of Ontario transferred and released its interest in 22.8 km² of lands to Parks Canada for the national urban park.

As we look ahead to another exciting year in the Rouge in 2018, Parks Canada now manages or has an interest in nearly 80 per cent of the 79.1 km² of lands identified for the national urban park – from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

A MESSAGE FROM PARKS CANADA

Last year was the busiest one yet for Canada's national urban park.

In addition to celebrating the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, Rouge National Urban Park also welcomed numerous visitors and hosted many in-park and community events, including signature national events such as BioBlitz, Canada Day, Illuminations and more.

In collaboration with our partners, we also completed several restoration projects in the park, and continued to work with our community and Indigenous partners on initiatives to meaningfully connect with Canadians and visitors.

Rouge National Urban Park also took a big leap forward in October when the Government of Ontario transferred and released its interest in lands to Parks Canada to help complete the park.

Officially established in 2015, the Rouge is now well past the halfway mark to becoming the largest urban park in North America!

No matter if you're a long-time visitor, or have yet to venture out into the national urban park, the Rouge has something for everyone. All of us at Parks Canada are excited for the year ahead, and we look forward to seeing you in the park, on the trails, or in the community in 2018.

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

Conservation Success Stories

In 2017, Parks Canada continued to work with its partners on important ecological restoration and farmland enhancement projects throughout the national urban park. A total of 10 new projects were initiated in the Little Rouge watershed and, for the first time since Parks Canada started managing land here, the West Duffins watershed.

The focus of these new restoration projects included stream bank and upland forest restoration, water quality improvements through wetland construction, as well as wetland habitat improvement for birds, amphibians and other small mammals – all of which contribute to restoring habitat suitable for important cool and cold water fish species that historically existed in the park.

As part of this work in 2017, more than 20 hectares of wetlands and riparian and forest habitat were restored in the Rouge. Additionally, in collaboration with our partners, more than 33,000 native trees, perennials, shrubs and aquatic plants were planted in the park. This brings the total number of restoration projects initiated and completed in Rouge National Urban Park to 41 since 2015.

Other conservation highlights include:

- The release of 49 baby Blanding's turtles, bringing the total number of Blanding's turtles reintroduced in the Rouge by Parks Canada and the Toronto Zoo to more than 150 since 2014.
- The stabilisation and initial recapitalization of cultural heritage assets located in the park, such as the Locust Hill schoolhouse, the David Burke House, the Wellington Wideman House and the John B. Miller House.

Visitor Experience Highlights

Last year was a blockbuster year for Parks Canada's Visitor Experience team in Rouge National Urban Park.

In addition to seeing an almost fourfold increase in visits to our welcome areas, we also welcomed more than 15,000 guests and participants at our 25 in-park events throughout 2017.

Welcome areas staff also helped people to plan their visits to other Parks Canada places across

the country, distributing more than 15,000 free 2017 Parks Canada Discovery Passes throughout the season.

Other visitor highpoints from 2017 include:

- The return of several of our marquee park events, including WinterRouge, Taste of the Trail, Art Day and the Fall Walks Festival. Many of these events grew significantly in popularity, attracting a record number of visitors, as well as community and Indigenous partners to collaborate on program delivery.
- Welcoming more than 50 new Canadians at our very first in-park citizenship ceremony in the Bob Hunter Memorial area of the park, in partnership with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.
- In addition to our existing welcome areas in the Toronto and Markham areas of the park, introducing roving pop-up welcome areas in various parts of the park to better serve our visitors.
- Opening five new signature Parks Canada oTENTik accommodations at the Glen Rouge Campground, which are now available for booking through the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority website: camping.trca.on.ca

First Nations Advisory Circle

Rouge National Urban Park's First Nations Advisory Circle is comprised of representatives from 10 First Nations with an expressed interest and historic and cultural connection to the park.

To date, Parks Canada has worked collaboratively with Advisory Circle members on a number of important park initiatives, including archaeological assessments, restoration projects and visitor experience initiatives such as Taste of the Trail, Learn-to Camp and others.

Parks Canada looks forward to continuing to work on Rouge initiatives and programs with our Indigenous partners through the Circle and our meaningful and positive relationship, which we deeply value and respect.

Parks Canada in the Community

In 2017, Parks Canada staff made more than 75,000 contacts at over 100 festivals, libraries, community events and public spaces throughout the Greater Toronto Area. Here's a sample of community outreach highlights from 2017:

- **Canada 150 Rouge Express:** Parkbus, TD, MEC and Parks Canada provided a free shuttle service for 2500 people from downtown Toronto to the Rouge, with 90 per cent of riders being first-time visitors!
- **Learn-to Camp:** More than 26,500 GTA residents took part in our Learn-to Camp programming, largely through partnerships with public libraries, YMCA chapters,

community centres and municipal parks.

- **The Rouge App:** Developed in partnership with University of Toronto Scarborough, the park's first ever app was launched in the fall of 2017. The app uses GPS technology to transform a visitor's phone into a virtual tour guide. Users can explore a detailed info guide, report sightings and track their hikes. The app is free to download on iOS (Apple App Store) and Android (Google Play Store) devices.
- **Photographer-in-Residence:** Parks Canada hired the Rouge's second ever OCAD University photographer-in-residence, Cassandra Smyth, whose images are featured throughout this newsletter. She also staged two well-received photo exhibitions of her work in the park, entitled The Rouge: An Urban Wilderness.
- **Mood Walks:** This partnership with the Scarborough and Rouge Hospital promotes activity in nature to improve physical and mental health through guided walks for youth experiencing mental health challenges.