

## **CPAWS Submission to Transport Canada consultations on the future of the “Pickering Lands”**

July 31, 2013

### Summary:

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) supports the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park (NUP), and the transfer of 5000 acres of federal “Pickering Lands” to Parks Canada for the creation of the park. We note however, that the “remaining” Pickering Lands (ie. lands not currently allocated for either the park or the potential airport) play a critically important role in connecting Lake Ontario, the Rouge National Urban Park and the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM), and supporting the ecological health of the entire Golden Horseshoe region. These important “connectivity” lands are currently designated as part of Ontario’s Greenbelt Natural Heritage System, and the Oak Ridges Moraine because of their important ecological and agricultural values and the societal benefits they provide (see map, Appendix 1).

To maintain these ecological and societal benefits in the long term they need to remain permanently protected, as envisioned by the Greenbelt Act and Oak Ridges Moraine Act, and respective policies. This means they should remain permanently protected from urban and industrial development. A legally binding protective land use framework is needed to assure the permanent protection of these lands. The most straight-forward way to achieve this would be to include these lands in the proposed Rouge National Urban Park.

### About CPAWS

CPAWS is Canada’s voice for parks and wilderness. Since 1963 we’ve been instrumental in creating over two-thirds of Canada’s protected areas. Our vision is that Canada will protect at least half of our public land and water. As a national charity with 13 chapters, 40,000 supporters and hundreds of volunteers, CPAWS works collaboratively with governments, local communities, industry and indigenous peoples to protect our country’s amazing natural places. We’re also on guard to ensure that our parks are managed to protect the nature within them.

CPAWS Wildlands League Chapter has been active in the protection of Ontario’s natural areas since 1968. Our vision is for an Ontario with an unspoiled legacy of wilderness areas, and all

the precious values they hold: biological diversity, renewal of spirit, crystal clean lakes, pristine forests, rushing rivers, sage-sweet grasslands and healthy ecosystems.

### CPAWS' interest in the Rouge and Pickering Lands

CPAWS strongly supports the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park. As one of the best examples of Carolinian forest and one of the last intact watersheds in the Western Lake Ontario basin, the natural heritage of the Rouge is irreplaceable. Over 1,000 species of plants and animals inhabit the Rouge, including 23 species at risk. The area also has a rich cultural heritage, important to Aboriginal peoples and to European settlers whose legacy of farming continues in parts of the Rouge today.

CPAWS has been engaged in public policy discussions related to the Rouge National Urban Park, and has submitted recommendations to the federal government on the proposed Rouge National Urban Park Concept.<sup>1</sup>

The Rouge National Urban Park represents a unique opportunity to conserve an important urban ecosystem connected to the broader landscape, and provide millions of Canadians with a chance to directly experience and connect with nature and to introduce them to Canada's magnificent protected areas system.

### Ecological Connectivity and the Pickering Lands

The visions for the proposed Rouge National Urban Park concept, the Oak Ridges Moraine, and Ontario's Greenbelt all recognize the importance of maintaining landscape level ecological connections in order to maintain the health of the region's ecosystem and the on-going provision of ecosystem services to Ontarians.<sup>2</sup> The lands within the proposed Rouge National Urban Park provide one of the few remaining ecological connections between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine (see map from schedule 4, Greenbelt Plan 2005)<sup>3</sup>. However, the proposed park area does not, on its own, provide an adequate and functional ecological connection to the Oak Ridges Moraine because it abuts the community of Stouffville at its north end, which blocks this connection. To maintain a functional ecological connection between the Rouge and the Oak Ridges Moraine will require the permanent protection of neighbouring Pickering Lands as well.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cpaws.org/uploads/CPAWS\\_Submission\\_on\\_the\\_Rouge\\_Sept\\_7\\_2012.pdf](http://www.cpaws.org/uploads/CPAWS_Submission_on_the_Rouge_Sept_7_2012.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Greenbelt Act (2005), Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act 2001, Rouge National Urban Park Concept (2012)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Asset1290.aspx>

### Provincial Protective Designations:

The “remaining lands” within the federal Pickering Lands lie entirely within Ontario’s Greenbelt, and the northern part of the lands also fall within the Oak Ridges Moraine designation. Both of these designations aim to permanently protect the ecological values and ecosystem services provided by these lands and the broader landscape, including clean water and food production.

### **Ontario’s Greenbelt**

*Protecting nearly 2 million acres of valuable lands from development, the Greenbelt supports healthy communities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe by curbing urban sprawl and preserving our natural heritage. Its woodlands are a natural carbon sink that clean our air and fight climate change. Its wetlands and moraine support our clean water systems. In addition, the farmlands on the Greenbelt supply dairy, pork, beef and poultry products, as well as fresh fruit and vegetables.*

*Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing website<sup>4</sup>*

Ontario’s Greenbelt was put in place to support the long-term environmental, economic and social well-being of the “Golden Horseshoe” area of southern Ontario. The ecological goods and services provided by the Greenbelt are valued at \$2.7 Billion per year<sup>5</sup>. The federal “Pickering Lands” within the Greenbelt play an important role in maintaining the overall integrity of the Greenbelt. To maintain this integrity the federal government needs to respect the Greenbelt designation and land management framework over the long term.

The “remaining” lands within the federal Pickering Lands lie within the “Natural Heritage System” of Ontario’s Greenbelt. The lands designated within the Natural Heritage System are the areas with the most sensitive and/or significant natural features and functions. According to the Greenbelt Plan (2005) *“these areas need to be managed as a connected and integrated natural heritage system given the functional inter-relationships between them, and the fact that*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page187.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> *Ontario’s Wealth, Canada’s Future: Appreciating the Value of the Greenbelt’s Eco-Services. 2008.*  
<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/reports/2008/ontarios-wealth-canadas-future-appreciating-the-value-of-the-greenbelts-eco-serv/>

*this system builds upon the natural systems contained in the NEP [Niagara Escarpment Plan] and the ORMCP [Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan].<sup>6</sup>*

The proposed Rouge National Urban Park and the northern part of the Pickering Lands together form a particularly important part of the Greenbelt “Natural Heritage System” in that they maintain one of the last ecological connections between the ORM and Lake Ontario. The Pickering Lands include important food producing agricultural lands and natural riparian corridors along streams and rivers that provide essential cover for wildlife moving from Lake Ontario through the Rouge to the core natural areas of the Oak Ridges Moraine. To maintain these important values the Park and adjacent federal Pickering Lands in the Greenbelt need to be protected and managed in an integrated way, and remain permanently free from urban or industrial development.

We note that the Greenbelt Council, the advisory body to the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, has also expressed concern about development on the Pickering Lands. In 2010 they advised the Minister that the proposed Pickering Airport “may render the Greenbelt unsustainable in the northeast part of the GTA”<sup>7</sup>. They noted that an airport would not only directly impact on the Greenbelt, but would result in long-term pressure for industrial development and infrastructure that would undermine the very concept of the Greenbelt.

### ***Oak Ridges Moraine:***

Ontario’s vision for the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) is that of *“a continuous band of green rolling hills that provides form and structure to south-central Ontario, while protecting the ecological and hydrological features and functions that support the health and well-being of the region’s residents and ecosystems”*.<sup>8</sup>

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act (2001) outlines objectives for the management of the ORM, focused on protecting the ecological and hydrological integrity of the ORM area, and ensuring that land use is compatible with this protection. It also aims to ensure that the ORM

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page189.aspx#3.2>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page9418.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page1707.aspx>

area is maintained as a “continuous natural landform and environment for the benefit of present and future generations.”<sup>9</sup>

The northern area of the Pickering Lands lies within the Oak Ridges Moraine (see Map 1) and includes lands designated as “countryside” transected by lands designated as “natural linkage areas”. These “natural linkage areas” protect “*critical natural and open space linkages between Natural Core Areas and along rivers and streams*”<sup>10</sup>.

The ORM natural linkage areas that cross the federal Pickering Lands protect essential riparian and other corridors that maintain a functional ecological connection between the core natural areas of the Oak Ridges Moraine further north, the Rouge National Urban Park, and Lake Ontario to the south. Maintaining this as a functional ecological connection requires that these lands remain free from urban and industrial development.

CPAWS Recommendations:

1. The federal Pickering Lands should be managed in a way that respects the Ontario Greenbelt Act and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act and respective Plans. This means that the portion of the federal Pickering Lands that lie within the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine should be permanently protected and free of urban and industrial development.
2. The management framework for these lands should include an explicit goal of maintaining and restoring a long-term functional ecological connection between Lake Ontario, the Rouge National Urban Park and the Oak Ridges Moraine.
3. The most straight-forward way to achieve this would be to add these important connectivity lands to the proposed Rouge National Urban Park and manage them under the federal legislation that is being developed for the park.

For more information please contact:

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<sup>9</sup> Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act 2001

[http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws\\_statutes\\_01o31\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_01o31_e.htm)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page1707.aspx>



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## Appendix 1: Map of proposed Rouge National Urban Park and adjacent federal Pickering Lands

