

Federal Lands

Green Durham's key priority on the Federal Lands is to encourage Government to permanently protect the lands between the Rouge National Urban Park ["Rouge Park"] and the 8700-acre airport site. Our objective is to protect these lands for agriculture, establish appropriate environmental buffers and a nature/trail corridor linking the Oak Ridges Moraine with the Rouge Park and urban areas to the south, and to ensure environmental regulations and open space uses are consistent with Provincial policies as reflected in the Moraine and Greenbelt Plans. We have urged Government to follow up on that commitment, and in consultation with stakeholders, develop a Management Plan for these lands.

In August Transport Minister Lisa Raitt invited Green Durham, Land Over Landings, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust to present our views on the Federal Lands. Immigration Minister Chris Alexander and M.P.'s Erin O'Toole, Collin Carrie, and Corneliu Chisu were also in attendance. For more detail see *the submission* which was well received.

We continue to pursue this strategy, however, in recent weeks a number of environmental groups including Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature, David Suzuki Foundation, and Friends of the Rouge Watershed have written the Federal Environment Minister expressing their concern that Bill C-40, the draft Federal legislation for the proposed Rouge Park, does not provide adequate environmental protection. Provincial Economic Development Minister Brad Duguid has stated he will not approve the transfer of Provincial land to Rouge Park until environmental protection is strengthened.

York Region Federation of Agriculture has also written to Mr. Duguid urging him not to hold up the transfer, along with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture urging that farmland in the park be protected.

Parks Canada has just completed a series of open houses requesting comment on their Draft Park Management Plan. The Park's draft vision focuses on a number of elements including environmental and cultural protection fostering a 'vibrant farm community', providing visitors with 'engaging and varied experiences, and 'linking Lake Ontario with to the Moraine'. Discussion at the open houses reflected a variety of differing opinions with a lot of the discussion focused on whether environmental protection should be given greater primacy over agriculture.

GDA has not taken a specific position on the appropriate balance between agriculture and environment. We strongly support environmental protection but also strongly believe prime farmland close to urban areas should remain as food land unless there are very strong arguments against it. We hope that in the months to come the sometimes heated rhetoric will subside and a compromise can be worked out making it more likely that government will be prepared address our key priority that being permanent protection of the non-airport lands east of the Park.