

Presentation to the Federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Topic: Urban Nature Conservation

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Thank you Committee Chair Mark Warawa and members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

My name is Dr. Faisal Moola. I am the Director General for Ontario and Northern Canada, with the David Suzuki Foundation. I am also an Adjunct Professor of Forestry at the University of Toronto. Through science and education, the David Suzuki Foundation's vision is that within a generation, Canadians act on the understanding that we are all interconnected and interdependent with nature.

I welcome the opportunity to address the committee this afternoon on conserving and providing access to nature in urbanized regions of Canada, and the positive role that the federal government can play, such as the establishment of new federal protected areas like the proposed Rouge National Park in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe – one of the fastest growing urban regions in all of North America.

Despite being a vast nation of forests, mountains and ice, Canada has quickly become an urbanized nation. According to statistics published in 2011 by the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, almost 82 per cent of Canadians now live in urbanized communities, and we rank in the top fifty nations in terms of the relative dominance of our urban populations at home (i.e. the proportion of the total Canadian population that resides in urban areas) – ahead of the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and many other western European countries.¹ As a result, opportunities to experience nature are becoming increasingly limited for tens of millions of Canadians, as the growth and spread of our urban communities continues to consume the best of the natural world closest to home.

For example, recent analyses by Ducks Unlimited have found that over seventy-

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2012). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision, CD-ROM Edition.

two percent of the original wetlands in southern Ontario have now been developed², and as a result the region is now home to approximately 1/3 of the province's species at risk³. The same holds true for other urbanized regions of the country as well, such as the British Columbia Lower Mainland and the Greater Montreal Area. For example, according to the BC government's Conservation Data Center, over 100 plants and animals that are at risk in the province are found in the Metro Vancouver region alone.⁴

Protecting remaining natural areas in urbanized regions of Canada is vitally important, since remnant wetlands, forests, grasslands and other ecosystems not only provide critical habitat for Canadian wildlife, such as threatened songbirds and rare plants, these ecosystems also help sustain the health and social wellbeing of Canadian families and communities as well.

We often take for granted the astonishing array of natural benefits that green space and farmland provides for us. Trees produce oxygen and improve urban air quality by absorbing pollution and airborne particles, including nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and carbon monoxide.

Wetlands act as green living infrastructure by filtering and regulating water.

Forests and rich agricultural soils remove and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby acting as a "hedge" against rising greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

And green urban spaces cool our communities and protect us from dangerous storms, by providing protection against flooding and erosion and ensuring the stability of steep slopes.

And this doesn't even account for the physical, psychological and social benefits that Canadians enjoy from proximity to and time spent in nature, such as stress relief from a walk in a local park over lunch break, or going for a family hike or camping on the weekend.

The ecosystems that provide these benefits are often referred to as *natural capital*

² Ducks Unlimited Canada. 2010. Southern Ontario Wetland Conversion Analysis. Ontario, Canada.

http://www.ducks.ca/assets/2010/10/duc_ontariowca_optimized.pdf?9d7bd4

³ Biodiversity in Ontario's Greenbelt. 2011. Ontario Nature and David Suzuki Foundation. http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2011/REPORT-GB_Habitat-Dec2011.pdf

⁴ Metro Vancouver Sustainability Report. 2009. Page 33.

<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/SustainabilityReport2009.pdf>

by the experts – the fields, forests, farmlands, wetlands, rivers, estuaries and other natural and managed ecosystems within and surrounding our urban communities.

Natural capital and their ecosystem services are undervalued in market economies, despite being worth trillions of dollars per year, globally, and contributing tens of millions in non-market benefits to communities, annually, at the local level in Canada and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the economic and societal benefits we receive from nature are often taken for granted by policy-makers, partly due to a lack of knowledge regarding what they are and what they're truly worth. Yet, published science by the David Suzuki Foundation, university researchers such as Dr. Nancy Olewiler at Simon Fraser University, Dr. Ray Tomalty at McGill University, and others has shown that these services are extremely valuable in monetary terms, and in some cases are truly priceless⁵.

For example, the David Suzuki Foundation recently released a study that for the first time estimates the non-market economic benefits provided by farmland and green space within the proposed Rouge National Park and its surrounding watersheds in Scarborough, Markham, and Pickering. You have been provided with copies of this study's executive summary and can access its full version online.

The report documents that the Rouge region provides essential ecosystem services that, conservatively, benefit residents of the Greater Toronto Area to the tune of more than \$115 million each year in direct benefits that clean the air, filter water, and provide important habitat for agricultural pollinators and other wildlife. The proposed Rouge National Park itself is the ecological engine of the region and provides more than \$12 million annually in critical ecosystem benefits for communities in the region⁶.

By establishing Rouge National Park, the Government of Canada will protect a critical bank of natural capital that will provide benefits for generations to come. While protecting, restoring and managing this wild gem will not come cheaply these costs should be weighed against the huge dividends that this investment in creating Canada's first Urban National Park will reap for millions of Canadians.

⁵ Wilson, S.J. 2008. Ontario's Wealth, Canada's Future: Appreciating the Value of the Greenbelt's Eco-Services. Greenbelt Foundation and David Suzuki Foundation. <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2008/DSF-Greenbelt-web.pdf>

⁶ Canada's Wealth of Natural Capital: Rouge National Park. 2012. David Suzuki Foundation. http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2012/report_Rouge_Natural_Capital_web.pdf

Furthermore, this innovative step will create a model for connecting Canadians with nature in their own back yards in other urban regions of our country.

We welcome the fact that the federal government has announced \$144 million dollars in funding for the creation of Rouge National Park over the next 10 years and has launched a planning process for the creation of the Park. We hope that the planning process will result in well-defined stand-alone legislation and management plans for the Park that ensures the protection of its ecological health, in the face of growing urbanization and other pressures, such as infrastructure projects that put the Park's sensitive biodiversity at risk, such as expanding energy transport (e.g. proposed Line 9 oil pipeline).

The David Suzuki Foundation would like to make the following recommendations to the Committee to consider in the creation and management of Rouge National Park, as well as future candidate near-urban federal protected areas, such as the proposed Bowen Island National Park close to Vancouver.

Governance and Management

1. Given the significant economic and ecological values of the Rouge and its surrounding watersheds, we urge the Government of Canada to quickly establish Rouge National Park under stand-alone legislation.
2. The legislation and management plans governing Rouge National Park must:
 - a) give priority to the protection and restoration of ecological health and water quality;
 - b) ensure that existing and new development activities that impact natural capital, such as infrastructure (e.g., pipelines, roads), are minimized and managed to the highest standards of sustainability and public safety;
 - c) mandate the achievement of a "net gain" in natural capital (e.g., biodiversity) as a result of any activity that degrades the ecological health of the Park;
 - d) ensure that resource extraction in the Park is prohibited.
3. The close interrelationships between First Nations peoples and the lands and waters of Rouge National Park must be recognized and First Nations engaged as keepers of traditional ecological knowledge, including in public education and interpretive programming. First Nations must be fully involved in the establishment and management of the new National Park.
4. Parks Canada should work collaboratively with the Government of Ontario, First Nations, municipalities and regional conservation authorities to protect natural capital outside of the proposed National Park boundaries through the establishment of special management zones (i.e., protected buffers and connected corridors contiguous to the park), expanding the surrounding Greenbelt to protect vulnerable farmland, and identifying and protecting

sensitive hydrological and natural heritage features within the surrounding Rouge River, Petticoat Creek and Duffins Creek watersheds.

Stewardship

5. Programs and incentives that support farm and land stewardship should be made available to farmers to support local food production and promote sustainable agricultural practices that restore and enhance ecosystem services (e.g. carbon storage, habitat for pollinators) in the new Rouge National Park and surrounding lands. Examples of innovative programs that could be applied in the Rouge include payment for ecosystem services programs.

Monitoring

6. Programs should be established to identify, measure and monitor wildlife habitats, forests, wetlands, farmlands etc. in the new Rouge National Park and its primary supporting watersheds on a regular basis.
7. Detailed land cover data for the new Rouge National Park and its primary watersheds should be updated on an annual basis to ensure that a rigorous set of metrics guide the management and decision making processes.
8. The results of monitoring programs should be reported to the public and monitoring data should be made publicly available.

Education and Public Awareness

1. It is important that all levels of Government, as well as regional conservation authorities and non-governmental organizations, continue to support and deliver public education programs that build awareness of natural capital and its role in providing clean air, clean water, healthy local food and wildlife protection.

The establishment of Canada's first Urban National Park in the Rouge is precedent setting and we hope will be indicative of a new interest on the part of federal politicians and agencies, such as Parks Canada, of the critical need to help re-connect Canadians with our natural heritage; and provide opportunities for "green time over screen time".

The data suggests that individuals, particularly children, who spend time in nature have improved memory, problem solving, and creativity — and they're physically healthier too^{7,8,9}. Yet research by the David Suzuki Foundation shows that 70% of

⁷ Strife, S., & Downey, L. (2009). Childhood Development and Access to Nature A New Direction for Environmental Inequality Research. *Organization and Environment*, 22(1), 99–122. doi:10.1177/1086026609333340

Canadian kids spend an hour or less outside each day¹⁰. In comparison, an American survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found young people spend an average of seven and a half hours a day on entertainment media¹¹.

Thus, we believe that federal programs that support getting kids out in nature can compliment the creation of Canada's first Urban National Park as well as other urban conservation efforts across the country.

To conclude, we urge the Government of Canada to expedite the establishment of Rouge National Park in legislation and bring forward rigorous management plans that protect and restore the region's unique and sensitive ecosystems and biodiversity. This plan must respect and strengthen earlier plans for the region, including the Provincial Greenbelt Plan (2005), the Rouge Natural Heritage Action Plan (2008) and others.

Canadians have always celebrated the spectacular natural bounty that makes ours one of the most beautiful and prosperous nations on Earth — from oceans and coastlines to mountains and foothills to prairies and grasslands – to urban wilderness areas – such as the proposed Rouge National Park. Conserving our land and waters is a gift to the planet. If we continue to work together, we can ensure that we and our children and grandchildren will have much to celebrate long into the future.

Thank You

⁸ Flom, B., Johnson, C., Hubbard, J., & Reidt, D. (2011). The Natural School Counselor: Using Nature to Promote Mental Health in Schools. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 6(2), 118–131.

⁹ Dashwood, E. 2012. The impact of urban green space on public health: analysis of reviews to determine the state of the evidence. Masters Thesis in Public Health Capstone. Simon Fraser University.

¹⁰ Youth Engagement with Nature and the Outdoors. 2012. David Suzuki Foundation <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2012/youth%20survey%20findings%20summary.pdf>

¹¹ Generation M²: Media in the lives of 8 - to 18 – Year-Olds 2012. Kaiser Family Foundation. <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/8010.pdf>