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Considerations for Development of the Rouge National Urban Park

- 1.) In creating this new national urban park model, recognize the unique opportunity to work alongside a diverse group of stakeholders, including farmers, and actively seek to engage these stakeholders in the planning process.
- 2.) Given the important agricultural land resources and significant natural heritage features within the future Rouge National Urban Park area, strive to create park objectives and guiding principles that value the protection of both prime agricultural soils and natural heritage features, and embrace farming activities within the park landscape. The park mandate should include preservation of a whole cultural landscape that sees agricultural heritage and modern farm stewardship celebrated.
- 3.) Farmers should be seen as key partners in park development and management, as ongoing stewards of park agricultural lands. Farm businesses and existing management of agricultural land should be seen as a strong asset in establishment of this new park.
- 4.) Seek to build synergies between conservation of farmland and preservation of natural heritage, and new opportunities for recreation and education (cultural heritage, local food, farming and the environment).
- 5.) Protect prime farmland, Canada Land Inventory soil classes 1-3, for its highest and best use: ongoing agricultural production. Acknowledge the national significance of this strategic land resource, given the limited amount of prime farmland in Canada and its ongoing loss to urbanization.
- 6.) Delineate agricultural areas separately from natural areas with clear boundaries in the park to avoid future conflict between agricultural and conservation goals. Also, provide reasonable protection of agricultural areas from potential trespassing associated with recreational uses. Areas designated for agriculture through park planning should include all areas currently being farmed.
- 7.) Permanent agricultural areas, as delineated, should be suitably defined in mapping and be included within legislation for the new park.

- 8.) Naturalization of prime farmlands and tree planting within designated agricultural areas should be limited, to ensure protection of prime agricultural soils and sustain farming activities on the land.
- 9.) Wherever possible, existing farm tenancies should be permitted to continue within the park area.
- 10.) The new park should not limit size or types of farming operations permitted within delineated agricultural areas, recognizing that farm size and type of production depends largely on changing food demands and global commodity markets. Agricultural businesses are constantly evolving and park policies should not put undue restriction on farm size, type or production practices.
- 11.) Emphasize and encourage innovation in sustainable land use and sustainable farm livelihoods, and work with the farm community to define any sustainability parameters or land use restrictions related to agricultural activities within the park. Engaging farmers in the Environmental Farm Plan process presents a strong foundation for environmental stewardship.
- 12.) Long-term farm leases need to be established with farming tenants, which allow farmers to make substantial investments in land stewardship and their farm businesses, building equity (eg. 60-99 year agreements offered through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park model in the United States).
- 13.) To encourage greater investment from farmers and to limit park expense associated with managing leases and tenants, consider creative partnerships or alternative land ownership arrangements (eg. sale of farm properties to private ownership subject to farmland conservation easements, which would be held by a conservation body such as a land trust or conservation authority and backed by Parks Canada).
- 14.) Consider supporting the creation of an arms-length non-profit organization that acts as a liaison between Parks Canada and farm tenants. This organization could provide technical information and guidance to Parks Canada in developing farm lease agreements and advising staff about sustainable farm practices, support and strengthen relationships with tenants, and promote agriculture in the park through local food and farmers' markets, farm education programs, etc. (eg. the Countryside Conservancy partnership with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park in the United States).
- 15.) Recognize that farmlands and farm infrastructure (farm equipment dealers, farm input suppliers, etc.) adjacent to park boundaries must be protected and maintained. A critical mass of farms and supporting farm businesses adjacent to the park will help to ensure agriculture remains viable within the park. Federally-held Transport Canada lands in Durham Region surplus to what is required for a future airport and related developments should be protected for agriculture and conservation.

- 16.) Attempt to resolve all land use, governance and management issues associated with all federally-owned lands within the GTA East area as expeditiously as possible, including the portion of the federal Pickering Airport Lands in Durham Region (Transport Canada) surplus to what may be needed for future airport developments.
- a. Consider establishing a Stakeholder Advisory Group that can make recommendations about new governance and land ownership structures, management of lands and tenancies, agricultural and natural heritage planning, etc.
 - b. Attempt to expedite coordination of a land use plan that includes the Rouge National Urban Park and the current Transport Canada lands.
 - c. Preserve all surplus airport lands for agriculture and conservation, providing connectivity between farming areas with the Rouge National Urban Park, York Region and Durham Region, as well as connectivity between natural areas from Lake Ontario through the Rouge Valley to headwaters on the Oak Ridges Moraine.
 - d. Acknowledge existing provincial land use designations established through the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt legislation, which prioritize conservation on surplus Transport Canada airport lands. Consider using the Greenbelt boundary as a defining line between lands reserved for conservation and lands remaining available for a potential airport and related developments in the future. Also, respect commitments made by the federal government to protect lands identified in Transport Canada's 2003 Greenspace Master Plan.
 - e. Consider all ownership and management options for these surplus lands, and determine the best and most feasible means to achieving agricultural and conservation objectives. Options may include:
 - i. Inclusion of all surplus airport lands within the new Rouge National Urban Park.
 - ii. Sale of property to private ownership subject to farmland conservation easements, which would be held by a conservation body such as a land trust or conservation authority, and backed by Environment Canada, in a way that upholds the government's conservation objectives.
 - iii. Transfer of lands and management responsibility from Transport Canada to Environment Canada. Administration may be supported by local conservation bodies, such as land trusts or conservation authorities. There would also be advantages to bringing all conservation lands under one governance structure.

- iv. Establish a new federal entity or quasi-independent organization with its own Board of Directors, mission and management responsibilities dedicated to sustaining agriculture and protecting natural heritage, working with local stakeholders.
- v. Establish an arms-length non-profit organization that acts as a liaison between the federal government and farm tenants and supports equitable planning and policy development for agriculture, helps craft long-term lease agreements and encourages private investment in land stewardship and agriculture on federal lands.
- vi. A combination of the above options (eg. some land to be included in the park and some lands placed under easement, creating a Rouge National Urban Park and an adjacent Agricultural Preserve).