

CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY (CPAWS)
SPEAKING NOTES ON Bill C-40
TO THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
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Introduction:

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to share with the Committee our thoughts on Bill C-40, An Act Respecting the Rouge National Urban Park.

My name is Éric Hébert-Daly, National Executive Director at CPAWS.

Since our creation 50 years ago, CPAWS has played a key role in the establishment of over two-thirds of Canada's protected areas. We have 13 regional chapters in nearly every province and territory, including CPAWS Wildlands League chapter in Toronto, as well as a national office here in Ottawa, and over 60,000 supporters across the country. We work collaboratively with governments, industry, First Nations and others to conserve Canada's natural heritage.

Over the past five years CPAWS has celebrated and welcomed several new federal park initiatives, most notably the six-fold expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve in 2009, and the creation of Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area in BC in 2010.

Today we are here to discuss a different kind of park -- the creation of Canada's first National Urban Park in the Greater Toronto Area. CPAWS has been supportive of the idea of the Rouge National Urban Park from its inception. We see it as a remarkable opportunity to better protect a very special natural valley right in Canada's biggest urban area and to engage and connect people with nature.

Let me also be clear that CPAWS has recognized from the very beginning that farming is, and will continue to be, an important aspect of this park. We believe that farming can

contribute to nature conservation, and at the same time nature conservation can contribute to farming. And that we, as conservationists, share a common interest with farmers – that of keeping urban development from these lands. We often remark that the opportunity to create this national urban park is due to the farmers and farms which have kept urban development at bay and to the local grassroots groups who have championed the Rouge for decades.

In our view the two most significant threats to the long-term ecological health of the Rouge are urban sprawl and crushing visitor numbers that could result in the park being “loved to death”. Farmers are not the enemy of nature conservation in the Rouge.

In recent months we have listened with interest to debates about the appropriate management framework for the Rouge. Should it focus on ecological integrity or ecosystem health? We think there are valid arguments being made for both and that either approach could work. For several years Parks Canada has expressed a preference for managing the Rouge National Urban Park under an ecosystem health framework, rather than an ecological integrity framework, to distinguish national urban parks from other national parks. In the spirit of being solutions-oriented we developed and submitted constructive recommendations that focus on ecosystem health. Those recommendations have been tabled with you for the record.

However, CPAWS believes there is a much more fundamental issue that needs to be addressed in the legislation– **that nature conservation be clearly identified as the overarching priority for managing the park.** This gets to the very essence of what a park is. Without it, we do not have a park. We have something else -- perhaps a multi-use zone. International standards and guidelines for protected areas require that nature conservation be prioritized, and existing federal and Ontario provincial legislation for parks and protected areas meet this standard. This same standard can, and should, be reflected in the Rouge legislation too. Yet it is absent from the current Bill, which only requires that the Minister “take into consideration” nature and wildlife in managing the park.

We are recommending that the legislation be amended to clearly identify nature conservation as the overarching management goal for the Rouge. This would mean that language in the Bill would meet international and Canadian standards for protected areas. It would give park managers a clear mandate and stronger tools to protect the park's existing natural values, and to improve the health of its ecosystems as much as possible given its urban and agricultural context. It would make Parks Canada accountable for improving the health of the ecosystem over time, while not giving the impression that they must achieve an endpoint of full ecological integrity.

This is not about farmers and conservationists as winners and losers. It is about empowering people to work together to achieve a common goal of protecting the amazing natural values of this special place – park managers, farmers, community members, park visitors, conservation organizations. It is about getting it right for the Rouge – and for all future National Urban Parks that follow. We must not forget that we are creating an important precedent here with Canada's first National Urban Park.

We have also identified several other areas where the Bill could be strengthened, by including more detailed requirements for management planning; requiring that a State of the Park report be tabled in Parliament every five years as is the case for national parks; and by tightening up requirements related to public infrastructure with more stringent criteria. We can provide more detail about these recommendations on request.

In summary CPAWS urges Committee members to work together to strengthen Bill C-40 to ensure that the Rouge National Urban Park effectively protects this natural treasure in the long term, while also supporting a healthy farming community and encouraging people to connect with nature. The single most important amendment you could make to achieve this is to strengthen Section 6 to prioritize nature conservation in park management.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views. We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.