

PM announces the expansion of Rouge National Urban Park

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Pickering, Ontario
11 July 2015

Thank you very much everybody.

Hello, everybody.

Thank you Chris for that very kind introduction, also Peter and Colin for serving as our emcees.

I think I was saying to Peter, I think he's done that anchoring thing before.

Greetings also to all my colleagues from the Parliament of Canada.

I'm delighted that so many of you have been able to join us today.

I also want to give my thanks here to the Pickering...all the people at the Pickering Recreational Centre for hosting us and also to Mayor Ryan, Regional Chair Anderson for joining us as well, as well as all municipal officials who've come from across the region.

Give them all a big hand.

As well, greetings to representatives of some tremendous groups who are with us, Alan Latourelle of...CEO of Parks Canada is here, Peter Kendall, executive director of the Earth Rangers and of course the Honourable Pauline Browes, director of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust and Chair of the Friends of the Rouge National Park.

So, welcome one and all.

Another big hand for them.

Now ladies and gentlemen, during the last federal election our Government promised Canadians that we would create a park in Durham Region for families from across the GTA.

It would be Canada's first national urban park, one of the largest urban parks in the world.

And so, we did that just a few months ago.

Now, before I go further, let me also provide some historical context, although Chris already mentioned some of this.

Forty years ago of course Pierre Trudeau's government expropriated nearly 20,000 acres of the most fertile farmland in the province.

That decision, as we know, crippled vibrant communities in this region.

Economic development and infrastructure investments were largely put on hold, and farming families who had worked this land for generations became casual tenants.

Our Government vowed to reverse this injustice, to resolve the decades of uncertainty, and to begin to return the land to the people and families who call this region home.

That's why our Government created the Rouge National Urban Park using 5,000 acres of those expropriated lands.

Our newest national park was conceived for the benefit and recreation of the millions of Canadians who live in the greater GTA.

But, ladies and gentlemen, the good news doesn't stop there.

I'm delighted to announce today that our Government will double our initial contribution by adding 5,200 more acres.

Five-thousand two-hundred more acres will be included in the Rouge National Urban Park.

The Rouge National Urban Park, this park with all of these lands will have an extensive network of new trails.

It will have new campgrounds.

It will be used by...that will be used by school groups, recreational camps and families, and it will have plenty of spots for bird watching, recreational fishing, and educational activities.

In short, today's announcement will give families from across the GTA and visitors from across the country more opportunities to enjoy Canada's great outdoors.

Today's announcement also means that our Government has now given back to the community more than half of the land the Trudeau government expropriated 40 years ago.

And I want to say just one more thing about that.

There is a remaining parcel of the expropriated lands north of the 407 in Pickering.

I'm happy to tell you that our Government intends to use those lands to create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for Durham Region, for the whole of the GTA.

To this end, Transport Minister Lisa Raitt will continue to consult with all stakeholders to identify the best use for this land.

But let there be no doubt.

Our Government will only support projects on these lands, including an airport, if they are backed by a sound business plan and if they are in the best interests of this community.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me just take this opportunity to address a claim made in some circles that this park will not receive adequate environmental protection.

That is simply not true.

The new Rouge National Urban Park will have the highest level of environmental protection.

It will also allow the farmers who have been responsible stewards here for more than a century to continue to work this land as is only fair.

So friends, there is no excuse for anyone not to get behind the Rouge National Urban Park because that is what the people of the GTA want.

Ladies and gentlemen, Canada's natural heritage matters.

It matters for Canadian families today, but it matters especially for future generations.

That's why our Government has developed a strategy to protect and preserve our rich and diverse environment.

Our Government's environmental strategy is focused on real action.

It's balanced and it utilizes meaningful partnerships.

Let me briefly speak to each one of those things.

Real action, be it reducing greenhouse gas emissions, safeguarding species at risk, protecting biodiversity, or monitoring environmental health, our Government has set realistic goals where few if any goals existed before.

And rather than vague promises or punitive carbon taxes, this government has made real progress towards achieving our goals for the environment of this country.

Second, our Government's approach is balanced.

We understand that any conservation strategy that fails to take into account the legitimate economic aspirations of local residents is destined to fail.

The reverse, by the way, is also true.

Canadians do not have to choose between a strong economy and a healthy environment.

A strong economy enables strong environmental stewardship.

It's worth pointing out that the strongest environmental protections in the world are found in prosperous countries like Canada, for we are the countries who can make these investments.

It's imperative therefore that we continue to implement strong conservation policies while also staying focused on building a strong economy.

Finally, protecting the environment is everyone's business.

People are as much a part of ecological communities as the plant and animal species.

And everyone has a role to play.

That's why our environmental strategy focuses on building partnerships.

Many have seized the opportunity with both hands, tremendous partners who share our vision for a healthy environment.

I'm speaking of course of partners such as the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the Friends of the Rouge National Park, the Earth Rangers, also Ducks Unlimited, the Trans Canada Trail, the Nature Conservancy, and of course everyday Canadians who love this beautiful and diverse land and for whom our Government designed our national conservation plan.

The plan does more than just create parks.

Our plan assists Canadians in their own efforts to restore and protect ecologically sensitive spaces on private lands and waters in their communities.

This is critical, ladies and gentlemen, because it provides all Canadians with the tools and opportunities to become true stewards of this country.

We've also, since 2006, established six new national parks under Canada's *National Parks Act*.

We've significantly expanded the Nahanni National Park Reserve.

We're close to completing a national park reserve in the Mealy Mountains of Labrador.

We've protected the Gwaii Haanas Marine Area in the Haida Heritage Site.

We recently passed legislation to legally protect the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area.

When you put all that together, this is an environmental record of which this country can be very proud.

All of this is in addition to the more than 40 national parks, four national marine conservation areas, and over 165 national historic sites that Parks Canada already does a tremendous job of conserving for all of us.

Of course, Parks Canada will also manage our new Rouge National Urban Park, and we're very confident that their dedicated employees will make it something truly wonderful.

Now ladies and gentlemen, in the spirit of today's announcement I just wish to close by sharing with you what I see when I look at the landscape of this country.

And I get to travel this country more than most people.

I see early explorers pressing inward through ice and fog and forests.

I see their Aboriginal guides and trading partners leading the way.

I see settlers who built great cities in the wilderness, and brave soldiers who struggled and sacrificed at places like Queenston Heights and Chrysler's Farm to keep us free.

I see a miraculous ribbon of steel suddenly stretching across a united dominion.

I see farmers and foresters, fishermen and hunters, miners and rig workers whose livelihood ties them to this land.

I see frozen ponds ready for a game of pickup hockey.

I see campgrounds and hiking trails, and I see healthy, happy, prosperous families spending time together.

When I look at Canada's landscape I see basically the story of this country.

And ladies and gentlemen, today's announcement means that Canadians for generations to come here in the GTA and across our country will have the opportunity to learn more about Canada's story.

They will be able to experience the greatness of this country that begins with nature with this incredible land, the land upon which they will build their own dreams and add their own chapters to our story.

So once again, I want to thank you all for being here today. Thank you very much.

- See more at: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/07/11/pm-announces-expansion-rouge-national-urban-park#sthash.ygpL3EI5.dpuf>