



Rouge
National
Urban Park

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK



Parks
Canada

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Canada

Canada



Let's reflect on and celebrate the achievements at Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) over the course of 2021. From gains in conservation to project milestones, Parks Canada staff take pride in the work we do to protect and preserve RNUP for present and future generations of Canadians.

Looking Back – Recap

In 2021, the team at RNUP continued to navigate the unique challenges of carrying out our work and connecting with Canadians within the context of the global pandemic. Visitation was consistently steady in 2021 as community members sought ways to be outdoors in nature to maintain mental and physical wellbeing.

Through new and innovative approaches, the team successfully engaged the public on projects, adapted programming to virtual platforms, and even saw a return to in-person stewardship events in the fall; underscoring how much we have missed seeing our partners, volunteers and visitors in the park!

Ever busy in the park and behind the scenes, we are proud to share some of the year's top highlights made possible by the dedication of the RNUP team, consisting of 92 staff members at the height of the 2021 season.



In 2021, Parks Canada team members proudly:

- Published a final Multi-Species Action Plan on the Species at Risk Public Registry;
- Restored 9.5 ha of wetland, 156 m of stream, and 35 ha of forest, in partnership with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA);
- Planted over 50,000 trees and shrubs in partnership with the TRCA and 10,000 Trees;
- Partnered with tenant farmers to restore habitat in naturally wet areas and along forest edges;
- Constructed new trails to extend and connect the trail network in the central and northern areas of the park;
- Established the RNUP Multi-Stakeholder and Public Advisory Committee to provide recommendations, knowledge and guidance in the responsible management of the park;
- Completed extensive public engagement to determine design and function priorities for the new visitor, learning and community centre;
- Formalized new Incident and Communications protocols to better respond to serious incidents;
- Launched a new ParksNow website to better equip visitors with up-to-date information.



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Park and Project Milestones



Formation of Rouge National Urban Park Advisory Committee

A new Multi-Stakeholder and Public Advisory Committee was established in 2021 for the purpose of providing recommendations, knowledge, guidance and wisdom in the management of RNUP. The committee is comprised of representatives from the RNUP First Nations Advisory Circle (FNAC), surrounding municipalities, and community members who uniquely represent the diversity of the community, and can provide expertise related to ecology and restoration, Indigenous perspectives, agricultural heritage, nature-based education, volunteerism, conservation, cultural heritage, and diversity and equity.

April 27, 2022 marked the first meeting of the Advisory Committee, providing a forum for positive collaboration and relationship-building among committee members, who will serve in these roles for the next four years.



Trail Unveil!

Parks Canada has prioritized connectivity and accessibility of trails and is currently working to build new trail sections to connect and extend existing trails in the central and northern areas of the park. Stay tuned for news around opening in 2022!

Tools of Engagement - Visitor, Learning and Community Centre

In 2021, Parks Canada engaged Toronto-based engagement, research and strategy studio PROCESS to support large-scale public engagement aimed at consulting a broad spectrum of park users and community members to inform the conceptual design and programming of the new visitor, learning and community centre. Over 1,000 community members participated through on-site engagement, workshops, interviews and online surveys.

We've spent the winter months taking what we heard and incorporating it into one hybrid conceptual design with a modest, sustainable approach, making the most of the natural landscape and surroundings as a means of connection. We are excited to share the design with you in summer 2022 and develop a wide range of programs that restore connection, not only to nature, but to oneself and the larger community.



Rouge Beach Improvements Project

The public engagement period for the Rouge Beach Improvements Project was extended in 2021, comprising 15 months of workshops, surveys and presentations. Parks Canada sincerely thanks all those who took the time to comment and share their opinions, ideas and suggestions about the proposed improvements to the area.



Conservation Wins



Multi-Species Action Plan

In 2021, Parks Canada published a Multi-Species Action Plan on the Public Registry for RNUP. This plan identifies species at risk in the park and provides details around strategies and actions to be taken for their recovery and protection. The development of this action plan was strengthened by the meaningful participation and collaboration with representatives from FNAC, partners and stakeholders who contributed to the current understanding of these species in the park.

Turtle Protection

In partnership with the Toronto Zoo, the RNUP Resource Conservation team led a virtual Turtle Nesting Workshop and distributed 15 nest protector kits to the public.

In 2021, staff collected over 200 Painted and Snapping Turtle eggs for incubation and eventual release back into the park. This program began in 2020 and has already resulted in over 400 Painted and Snapping Turtle hatchlings released.

Don't forget – there's a new dedicated Turtle "Shell phone" hotline to report nesting activity in the park. Call us at 416-938-3017. If you report it, we'll protect it! In 2022, we look forward to implementing a volunteer Turtle Monitoring program. Stay tuned for details.



Mentoring Future Leaders in Conservation

Congratulations to Mel Martins, recipient of the 2021 Pauline Browes Future Conservation Leaders Fellowship!

The next generation of conservation leaders in Canada are being fostered in RNUP for the third year in a row, thanks to the legacy of a community leader who helped to save and protect the Rouge Valley in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Established in 2019, the fellowship provides mentoring and skills development through a paid summer position at RNUP.

Currently working towards a Master's of Science in Ecology at York University, Mel's summer highlights at the park included taking part in chimney swift surveys as well as caring for turtle eggs as part of the Blanding's turtle reintroduction project. We wish Mel all the best in her studies and future career!



Launch of Wildlife Emergency Response Team, first program of its kind in Parks Canada

Each year, RNUP staff respond to many incidents of injured, orphaned and displaced wildlife prompting the launch of the Wildlife Emergency Response Team (WERT). The program functions as a temporary wildlife emergency triage and stabilization centre where wildlife can be housed and receive emergency treatment before being transferred to an authorized wildlife custodian.

In 2021 alone, the team triaged 16 wildlife patients – two cliff swallows, four turtles, a Canada goose gosling, a ring-billed gull, an eastern chipmunk, two opossums, a groundhog and three baby skunks, many of which recovered and were returned to the wild. Hats off to the WERT team, whose tireless efforts and dedication have made this great work possible!



Making Roads Safer for Wildlife

Did you know that roughly 80% of wildlife killed on roads are amphibians and reptiles, including species at risk turtles and snakes? In 2021, Parks Canada conducted road surveys in the northern area of the park to identify potential hotspots for future mitigations to protect wildlife. This study will build on work previously completed in 2019 that saw the installation of protective fencing and dedicated eco-passages and culverts underneath roads that bisect wetlands.

In the News

Parks Canada also partnered with the City of Pickering in 2021 on the 'Give Me A Brake' signage campaign to educate motorists about wildlife and turtle crossings, and to encourage motorists to slow down.

Parks Canada is committed to increasing the connectivity of the natural areas of RNUP and will continue to implement measures to improve safety for wildlife.

Marsh Madness!

Phragmites australis is an invasive species that grows in dense masses that choke out native plants and push out wildlife. In 2021, more than five hectares of invasive Phragmites were removed from wetlands in the park south of the 401 with the help of a cool machine, affectionately called the “Marsh Muncher”. This machine munches and mows the invasive plant under water to drown the stems and reduce their spread.

2021 marked year two and counting of this important initiative to restore healthy wetlands. A special thank you goes to Indigenous partners from Curve Lake who offered up their skills to help manage removals on the ground. Planned invasive species removals in the coming years will increase habitat for critical life stages of species at risk and other wildlife. Stay tuned for more information on how you can get involved!



Indigenous Partnerships and Leadership

Indigenous Participation – Rouge Visitor, Learning and Community Centre

Indigenous leadership and participation plays a key role in co-defining the design, building and program elements of the new visitor, learning and community centre. During the public engagement period, members of FNAC and members of the urban Indigenous community participated in workshops and engagement sessions to gather ideas around not only the design and conceptual features of the physical space, but also ideas for collaboration on art, culture, food, landscape design, partnering opportunities and more. Indigenous creation, co-design and procurement opportunities will ensure that Indigenous perspectives and voices are self-represented in the design and programming of the space.

Archaeology

Between April and November, representatives from four First Nations participated in 25 weeks of archeological field work consisting of over 700 hours! This included work on projects such as Glen Rouge Campground, Twyn Rivers, trail realignments and new trail routes.

Blanding's Turtle Release

2021 marked the 8th year of the Blanding's Turtle Head Start and Recovery program, in partnership with the Toronto Zoo. The release of 48 turtles commemorated National Indigenous Peoples Day, and was attended both virtually and in-person by members of Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations.

Since 2014, over 800 turtles have been released in the park through the program.



Endangered Butternut Recovery Actions

Parks Canada has entered into a Contribution Agreement with the Forest Gene Conservation Association to archive a disease-resistant pure butternut tree with the goal of producing pure offspring resistant to butternut canker. An Indigenous Leadership in Conservation fund enabled a contractor from the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation to carry out the removal of hybrid and non-retainable butternut trees as part of the project. Restoration tree planting will be completed in 2022.



First Nations Advisory Circle

Parks Canada proudly works with 10 First Nations with respect to the planning and operations of the park that form the First Nations Advisory Circle (FNAC). In 2021, Parks Canada and FNAC held the first ever virtual meeting. It was the best attended meeting in the park's history, bringing together representatives from seven First Nations communities to discuss opportunities for leadership and collaboration on stewardship, archeology, projects and more.

Visitor Safety

RNUP's Visitor Experience and Law Enforcement teams worked tirelessly to ensure smooth operations in what was a very busy 2021 season. The teams logged a whopping 10,225 hours in the park engaging with and relaying messages to the public around safety and stewardship. Another 1,888 hours were dedicated to managing traffic. A big shout out to the trail crew who clocked 1,800 hours of maintenance work to remove hazard trees, manage invasive species, and to ensure trails were safe and well-maintained. Some other notable highlights include:

Successful Poaching-Reduction Campaign

In 2021, RNUP staff ramped up efforts to reduce incidents of illegal poaching of crayfish in the park. Through increased engagement with visitors, new multilingual signage, media outreach and social media posts, the park saw an 82% reduction in crayfish poaching incidents!



Trail Counters

New motion-detecting pedestrian and vehicle counters are in the process of being set up and calibrated at various locations in the park. Trail counter data is being used to support upcoming projects and to gather information about trail and parking use. These handy devices will inform improvements to services and facilities.

At Your Disposal – Moloks, Haul-Alls and Fishing Line Recycling

Park visitors may have noticed some shiny new waste management upgrades in the form of Moloks and Haul-Alls in 2021. Moloks are deep waste containers designed to contain more than 50% of waste below ground, using gravity to compress the waste below for maximum efficiency and minimum odour.

A new fishing hook and line recycling program called Clear Your Gear was launched. For this pilot project, four receptacles were installed at common fishing areas around Rouge Beach with the goal of reducing the amount of fishing line that ends up in Rouge Marsh and Rouge River. We are pleased to report a significant reduction! Help us combat illegal dumping by reporting incidents to the Dumping Hotline at 416-282-1019.





Promoting a Vibrant Farming Community

Parks Canada continues to work collaboratively with the park's farming community on farmland enhancement, ecological restoration and trail-building projects, to promote farming and its contributions to the overall health of the park and to promote biosecurity and local sources of food for the GTA. Did you know that the park's Class 1 farmland is the richest, rarest and most fertile in the country and its protection is enshrined in the park's legislation and management plan?

In partnership with the York Soil and Crop Improvements Association, Parks Canada dedicated approximately 50 acres of farmland to growing soybean crops for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank that meets emergency food needs and works on long-term solutions to end world hunger. With the support from the park farming community, a new community garden was constructed and recently opened in Bob Hunter Memorial Park. A big thank you to park farmers for assisting Parks Canada with this initiative.

Agricultural Leasing Opportunities Coming Soon to Rouge National Urban Park

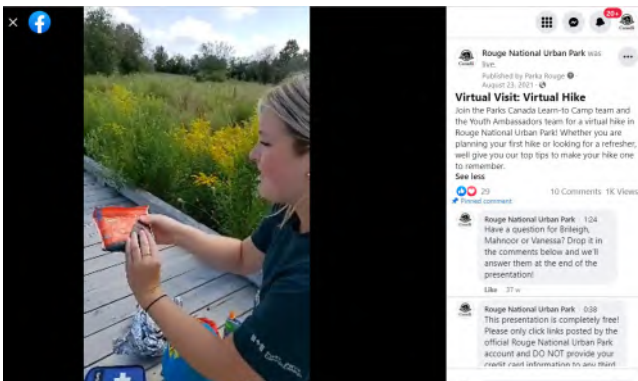
Parks Canada has been working diligently behind the scenes to prepare vacant properties for agricultural leasing opportunities. These opportunities will appear on the Government of Canada's procurement website (buyandsell.gc.ca) for individuals, groups or organizations who have an interest in living and farming in the park. Vacant residential properties will also be posted. For more information, including notification of these opportunities, contact realty-rouge@pc.gc.ca.



Events and Outreach

Learn-to Camp

Parks Canada adapted the popular Learn-to Camp workshop to a virtual platform, and was able to reach across the GTA and beyond to offer online workshops through the summer months as more Canadians explored this pastime as a way to enjoy the outdoors during the pandemic.



PC: Gary James



Virtual Visits

In 2021, RNUP continued to adapt park programming to virtual platforms to enable visitors from far and wide to discover and enjoy the park from the safety and comfort of home. Highlights included a farm tour of Judy's Tropical Garden, virtual Mood Walks, a spotlight on Archeology, and Spooky Campfire Stories – a little something for everyone!

Volunteer Stewardship in the Park

Fall of 2021 saw an enthusiastic return to some volunteer stewardship events in RNUP! Together in partnership with 10,000 Trees, volunteers successfully planted 1,600 native trees and shrubs in the span of four days along the new trail south of the 19th Avenue Day Use Area. Volunteers also mobilized to help remove roughly 1,300 invasive LDD (spongy) moth egg masses from trees in the park. We've missed working with volunteers in the park and are so grateful for the hard work of this dedicated bunch!

Stay Connected by Following Our Social Media Channels!

We love to post about all the amazing things happening in RNUP and interacting with over 9,000 subscribers on Facebook and Twitter. In 2021 we became verified on Twitter and engaged with over 20,000 visitors on our social media pages and posts. Thank you for following us! We hope you'll share your own RNUP 2021 highlights with us!

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