

Item 7.2



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2018-06-18

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In advance of the Authority meeting on Friday, we have prepared the attached information in consultation with Parks Canada and TRCA staff, which outlines detailed information in order to correct some apparent misinformation on the subject of the changes to the Tripartite Agreement and proposed transfer of lands between the Toronto Zoo and Parks Canada.

Would you please forward this to your Authority Board Members.

Your truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Hale".

Robin D. Hale
Interim Chief Executive Officer

Attch.



INFORMATION ON PROPOSED TRANSFER OF TRCA AND ZOO LANDS TO ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK

In advance of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Board Meeting on Friday, June 22, 2018, the Toronto Zoo has taken the proactive step of preparing this document in consultation with Parks Canada and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The following discussion paper provides context to the proposed boundary changes and the process followed by staff of the City of Toronto, Toronto Zoo, TRCA and Parks Canada.

This document also responds to public statements made by interest groups concerning proposed boundaries of the revised tripartite agreement between the Toronto Zoo, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the City of Toronto, as well as the future transfer of Zoo and TRCA lands to Parks Canada for the Rouge National Urban Park. As a result of some misleading and inaccurate statements, the Zoo felt there was a need and obligation to respond to ensure that accurate information is shared on the proposed boundary changes and land use.

The Toronto Zoo has a long history of ensuring the ongoing survival of endangered species and habitat through many wildlife conservation programs. The Toronto Zoo is committed to fulfilling its vision to be a living centre for education and science, providing compelling guest experiences and inspiring passion to protect wildlife and habitats. One of the largest zoological parks in North America, Toronto Zoo is located next to Rouge National Urban Park and welcomes an average of 1.3 million visitors per year. Toronto Zoo leads a wide range of successful conservation and education programs focused on saving and protecting species at home and abroad. It is important to note that the Toronto Zoo has been occupying, operating and maintaining the lands on the east and west side of Meadowvale Road since before the Zoo even opened to the public over 45 years ago, and the Zoo has always been conscious of the proper stewardship of the lands.

The Toronto Zoo's mission is to be Canada's national leader in saving wildlife to ensure the rich diversity of nature for future generations.

BACKGROUND

The current Tripartite Agreement was established in 1978 between the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the City of Toronto and the Toronto Zoo. The agreement is a license granted to the Zoo and sets out the terms/conditions upon which the Zoo can occupy the TRCA lands and also sets the boundaries of the Zoo lands. With the exception of a parcel of land (~100 acres) that is City owned and includes the main parking lot and front entrance area, the balance of the Zoo site (~600 acres) is on TRCA lands. The Tripartite Agreement works in tandem with a 1961 agreement between the TRCA and the former Metro Toronto government setting out how floodplain regulation is to occur in the City, established as a result of Hurricane Hazel.

In 2013 as part of the City's review of the future of the Toronto Zoo, City Council requested that a revised Tripartite Agreement be prepared. In 2014 City Council required that as a pre-condition of the City of Toronto transferring its City owned lands to Parks Canada for the Rouge National Urban Park, the revised Tripartite Agreement be completed.

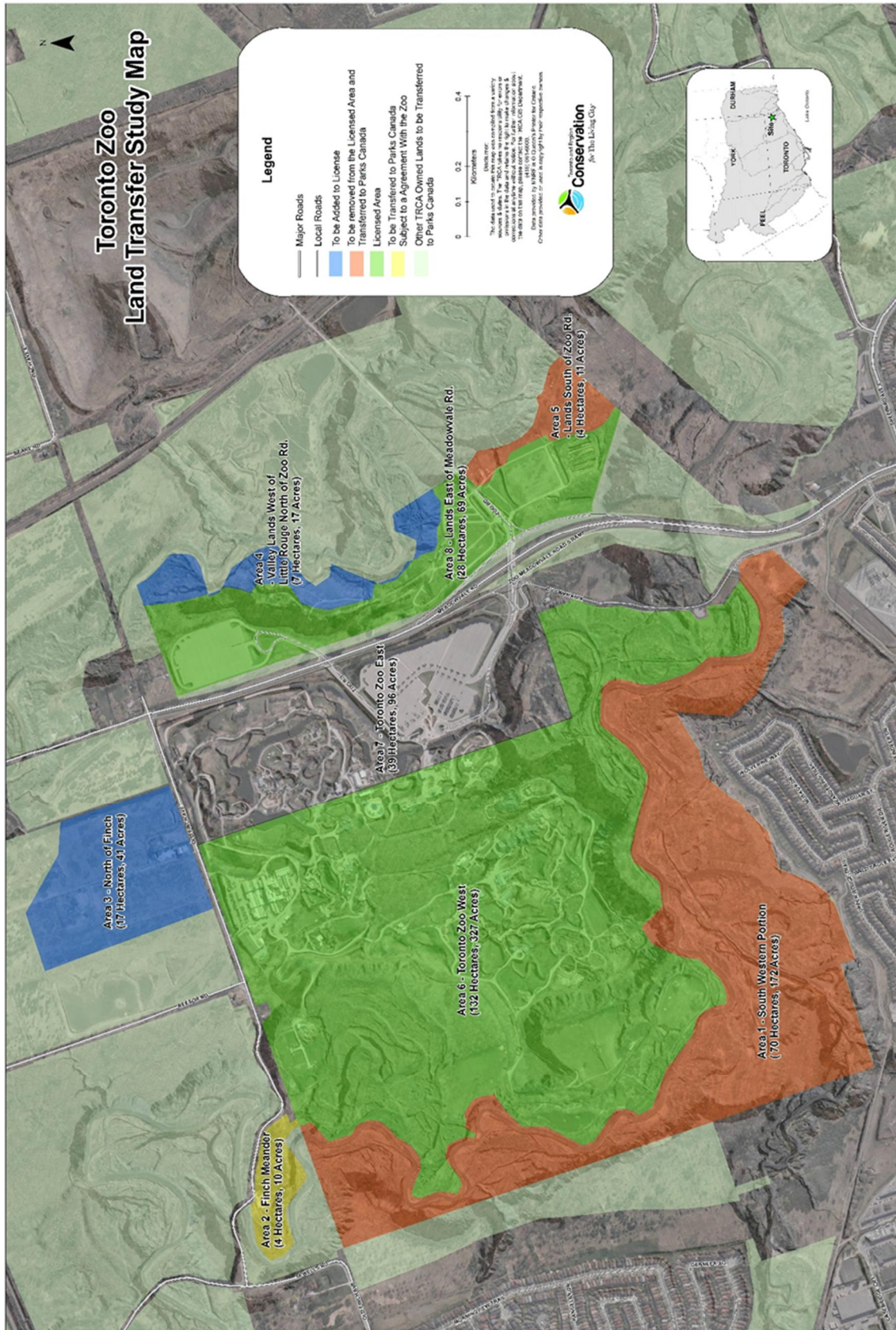
Since then staff from the TRCA, Toronto Zoo, Parks Canada and the City of Toronto have worked closely and collaboratively to negotiate land boundaries for a new agreement. The revised agreement and boundaries benefits both the Toronto Zoo and the Rouge National Urban Park. The Zoo relinquishes valley lands and river courses on the west and south of the Zoo, which include ecologically significant areas that will help to further protect the national urban park's biodiversity, endangered species, and valley and river ecosystems. The Zoo is granted a small parcel of land north of Finch Avenue for browse production and relocated breeding facilities. These lands and their uses were identified in the 2016 Toronto Zoo Master Plan which was approved by the Zoo Board of Management and the TRCA Board.

The land area of the Toronto Zoo is reduced from approximately 700 acres (283 hectares) to 561 acres (227 hectares) in the revised Tripartite Agreement. The lands given up do not affect Zoo operations as they are valley lands/river courses. The control of the valley/river courses will be by Parks Canada.

Federal legislation allows for consistent regulation and enforcement of federal regulations along the valley/river courses by Parks Canada. The resulting transfer of the TRCA lands surrounding the west, east and south edges of the Zoo means the Zoo will be enveloped by the Rouge National Urban Park. The revised boundaries are shown below on Page 3.

Parks Canada will gain control over natural and largely undisturbed river and valley areas to the west, south, and east of the Zoo and the Toronto Zoo will gain a small parcel of land north of Old Finch Avenue for the purpose of creating breeding facilities for endangered species, some of which are found in the Rouge National Urban Park.

The Toronto Zoo is committed to enhancing and improving the existing wildlife habitat areas that are appropriate for native species that call this area home. The lands transferring to the Toronto Zoo will be closely managed and conserved in consultation with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Parks Canada to ensure that native wildlife habitats remain healthy and vibrant for future generations. In fact, the renewed Tripartite Agreement contains specific clauses that ensure long-term protection of these lands – including all previous restoration sites.



Approvals to Date and Public Meetings

Toronto City Council's motions on the Tripartite Agreement were adopted at Council Meetings in 2013 and 2014:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.EX34.7>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.EX38.4>

In accordance with these directions, plans for the renewed Tripartite Agreement and boundary changes have been the subject of discussion at public Toronto Zoo Board of Management, City Executive Committee, and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority meetings. These meetings were publicly announced by the Zoo, TRCA and City Clerk's Office and members of the public and interest groups have had the opportunity to make deputations at these meetings.

The Toronto Zoo 2016 Master Plan, which contemplates the transfer of some lands and shared use with the Rouge National Urban Park, was presented and approved at a public meeting of the Zoo Board of Management on November 30, 2016. The Master Plan was presented to and approved by the TRCA public board meeting on January 27, 2017. The Zoo's Master Plan can be found on the Zoo's website.

<http://www.torontozoo.com/ExploreTheZoo/Vision/?pg=Master>.

The Toronto Zoo Board of Management approved the entering into of a revised Tripartite Agreement at its meeting of 2017-10-25.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.ZB17.1>

The City's Executive Committee received a report from the City Manager transmitting the report and the approval of the Toronto Zoo Board of Management at its meeting of 2018-03-19.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.EX32.6>

The Tripartite Agreement was then submitted for approval by the TRCA. The Tripartite Agreement was considered by the TRCA Executive Committee on April 6, 2018 and, at the request of the Committee, follow-up meetings were held with representatives from the Toronto Zoo, Parks Canada, TRCA, and a number of interested parties, including Friends of the Rouge National Urban Park, Friends of the Rouge Watershed and the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre.

The item is scheduled to be considered again at the next meeting of the TRCA Board on June 22, 2018.

LAND TRANSFER AND USE

The boundary changes discussed at length between staff from TRCA, Parks Canada and the Zoo will move the Zoo's boundaries to the edge of the Rouge River on the west side and to the edge of the Little Rouge Creek on the east side of the Zoo. The revised boundaries encompass several important concepts:

- Relinquishing valley lands directly adjacent to the Rouge River abutting the Zoo Lands which are of limited operational use to the Toronto Zoo, but ecologically beneficial to Parks Canada as part of the RNUP;
- Providing access to Parks Canada to the Rouge River for the purposes of monitoring and enforcement, and access to the trail head on the east side adjacent to the Little Rouge Creek for related Parks' facilities and programs;
- The principle of using the watercourses as a natural barrier to access to sensitive Zoo areas, by non-authorized persons;
- Providing land north of Old Finch Avenue, for the use of the Toronto Zoo for the future endangered species breeding facilities.

The revised boundaries will result in a net gain in lands for the Rouge National Urban Park, as approximately 135 additional acres (55 hectares) of ecologically significant land will be added to the Park.

Proposed Relocation of Toronto Zoo Conservation Breeding Facilities

The proposed new site north of Old Finch Avenue for the Breeding facility is located on a well screened 41 acres (16 ha) parcel of land. This specific piece of land and the intended use is outlined in the Zoo's 2016 Master Plan. (The land north of Finch is shown on Page 7)

The proposed site for the breeding facility is within the footprint of the existing farm building area of approximately 3 acres (1.2 ha). This is sufficient area to allow for expanded endangered species conservation breeding programs. It has been used for farm operations for many years and has not been planted. The new breeding facility would be no more than 30,000 sq. ft., including outdoor holding areas.

There will be minimal impact on the existing plantings and the area will stay as natural as possible. Any construction impact will be mitigated with a full restoration plan which includes native plantings.

Rationale for New Breeding Facility and Location

With the increasing decline of Canadian species which was documented in the World Wildlife Fund Canada Living Planet Report (released September 2017), to achieve its mission, the Zoo will need facilities that can accommodate other species-at-risk (SAR) and that require assurance populations and/or breeding and release programs for many other species over time (bats, birds, turtles, frogs). The Toronto Zoo places a major emphasis on breeding various SAR to increase the worldwide population of endangered species (see information on some of our breeding programs in Appendix I).

The existing breeding facilities on the east side of Meadowvale are poorly situated, inadequate, and too small for proper breeding techniques. With the establishment of the Rouge National

Urban Park and also the future Beare Road Park, the current location of the conservation breeding facilities will be subjected to much more public traffic. The overflow parking lots will also be used on a much more frequent basis. This traffic and the associated disturbance can seriously jeopardize these important programs during critical breeding and weaning times.

The proposed area north of Old Finch Avenue is isolated and easier for staff to monitor and oversee given its close proximity to the new Wildlife Health Centre and the Zoo's Operations Complex. Also, the trees surrounding the facility will serve as protection from noise and movement.

As Canada's largest zoo and a leading conservation, education and research facility, the Toronto Zoo needs to be able to take the lead and act fast to save species at risk, particularly Canadian species and expanded facilities are required to facilitate this.



Browse Plantation

At the Toronto Zoo, browse (vegetation, such as twigs and young shoots, eaten by animals) is recognized as an essential dietary and welfare item for many wildlife species. The daily access to browse and the consumption of the edible parts of this has, for wildlife, significant health benefits and allows for a better expression of unique and natural feeding, and other behaviours and in some cases (e.g. some invertebrates) is the sole source of nutrition. Besides consuming parts of it, many wildlife species play with browse or use it for additional nesting or perching materials, thus making this engagement with browse a key component of animal wellbeing. Toronto Zoo has incorporated this significance in its recent Master Plan.

Some browse products are purposely farmed outdoors and some are preserved for winter feeding. Others are collected from lawns and/or forested areas or grown in gardens or greenhouses, pavilions, or staff office areas and some are purchased. It includes over 70 acceptable products from either deciduous, coniferous or herbaceous plant species. These are fed at variable rates and often on a daily basis at approximately 500 kg/week to over 60 different wildlife species. The demand for browse is high and variable, but for some wildlife species, particularly invertebrate and mammalian browsers, more and more specialized species of browse and areas to grow these are required.

The use of browse offers some important educational opportunities:

- 1- It is animal welfare oriented and could promote visitors engagement and learning through visitor assisted browse feeding and/or demonstrations.
- 2- Browse management needs to be efficient and sustainable. Therefore, combinations of resources into production cycles are key to its success and, as such, offer an important educational opportunity. For example: the propagation of specialized browse using heat from zoo-poo recycling into biogas digest in a greenhouse, and purposed browse plantations in berms of parking areas and other strategic locations visible and recognizable to visitors.

The Toronto Zoo is committed to working with Parks Canada and TRCA to identify a new browse location in close proximity of the Zoo.

ITEMS RAISED BY INTEREST GROUPS

Environmentally Sensitive Lands North of Finch:

The Friends of the Rouge Watershed maintains that the 41 acres (16 ha) of land on the north side of Old Finch Avenue proposed for Zoo browse and breeding facilities is too environmentally valuable and should remain untouched.

It is important to note, however, the lands in question, are disturbed by former farm use (farm buildings), and the following clauses will be contained in the Tripartite Agreement to help ensure the lands are used sensitively:

- 1. The Zoo recognizes these lands were partially restored to serve as a wildlife corridor and buffer area along the northern and western sections of the lands adjacent to the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP). In order to ensure compatibility with TRCA and PC [Parks Canada] conservation objectives and minimal impact on the movement of wildlife, the Zoo will discuss details of its intended use and development of the lands, including any proposed facilities and their location, with both the TRCA and PC prior to proceeding with its development.*
- 2. TRCA and Parks Canada staff will be allowed access to the lands as required in order to undertake environmental monitoring and restoration activities in conjunction with their activities on adjoining RNUP lands. Prior to undertaking either of these activities, TRCA and PC will provide the Zoo with 48 hours' notice of their intention to access the lands, provided such access is subject to the Zoo's animal breeding and husbandry requirements.*
- 3. The Zoo will not make any major changes to land use without first seeking the approval of the TRCA. Prior to granting that approval, TRCA will seek input from PC to ensure compatibility with both TRCA's and PC's conservation objectives for the adjoining RNUP lands.*

A plan for the browse and breeding facility, as contained in the TRCA and Zoo Board approved Masterplan. It shows that only a small portion of the lands Friends of the Rouge Watershed are concerned about, are affected.

The proposed land transfer will not "fragment and degrade Rouge Park wildlife habitat" as was stated by Friends of the Rouge Watershed, nor will the effects be "devastating". In fact, it will enhance and improve the existing wildlife habitat areas and will be more appropriate for native species that call that area home. Nevertheless, as an alternative to the location for the browse area designated in the Zoo's Master Plan, the Toronto Zoo and Parks Canada are currently jointly reviewing other suitable locations nearby.

Finch Meander:

A comment made by Friends of the Rouge National Urban Park focused on the Tripartite Agreement proposed boundary change affecting the Finch Meander at the northwest limit of the Zoo.

The parties to the Agreement agree that in order to provide better buffer security to the Zoo lands, the area south of Old Finch Avenue should be transferred to the Zoo. This area is contiguous with Zoo lands on the east side of the Rouge River and would ensure that all land on the west

boundary of the Zoo remains secure from trespassers. This is of the utmost concern for the safety of its animals in the Zoo's care (see Appendix II).

Boundary Changes East Side of Meadowvale:

Friends of the Rouge National Urban Park are also not in agreement with the boundaries on the east side of Meadowvale Road. They want the boundary extended west to Meadowvale Road to encompass Zoo parking lots 3 and 4 thereby becoming part of the Rouge National Urban Park. The Zoo regularly requires this area for overflow parking on busy days. Transferring this area to the Park would take the parking lots out of the Zoo's control, constraining Zoo operations and attendance.

In addition, Friends of the Rouge National Urban Park has also stated that the eastern boundary of the Zoo lands east of Meadowvale should be limited to "top of bank". Creation of a "top of bank" based boundary could make Parks Canada responsible for erosion control which is inconsistent with how the other valley/river courses have been treated within the mandate of the TRCA. Under the proposed transfer TRCA will still be responsible for erosion and flood control.

Further, the Friends of the National Urban Rouge proposes that Valley Halla (a building used and maintained by the Zoo) should be included in the Park and used as a public tour facility. The Zoo has spent significant funds maintaining Valley Halla over the years, and is currently renovating the building for use by the new Zoo fundraising entity. Parks Canada has indicated that given they are inheriting 114 historic buildings throughout the Park and that they already have a full slate of cultural resources and recapitalization work to undertake in the national urban park, they do not want more responsibility by assuming Valley Halla into the Park.

Conformity Review of Proposed Transfer of Lands

More recently the Friends of the Rouge Watershed have suggested that the proposed boundary changes are not in compliance with Federal and Provincial legislation, plans and policies. However, a comprehensive Zoo Tripartite and License Conformity Review was undertaken by TRCA and City Planning and their conclusions are as follows:

- *The proposed use of Areas 1, 2, and 3 are in conformity with the Greenbelt Plan and the Official Plan (Site and Area Specific Policy 141) and are consistent with the TRCA Living City Policies and the Draft Rouge National Urban Park Plan provided the Tripartite Agreement is amended to provide TRCA and PCA access to carry out monitoring and management in Areas 1 and 3 (in addition to Area 2 which is already provided for).*
- *Together the Tripartite Agreement, the Greenbelt Plan and the Official Plan that will ensure that any proposed development or site alteration in the Zoo license area will protect the features and functions of the Natural Heritage System of the Park.*

Rouge Park – Toronto Zoo shared Education Facility

Lastly, an area of discussion with the interested parties is related to the Toronto Zoo - Rouge National Urban Park Orientation / Education Centre Study conducted jointly by staff of Parks Canada and the Toronto Zoo. This is a separate topic and we are in the process of discussing the rationale for the locations chosen in the study with the interested parties. We also understand Parks Canada will be initiating further studies on this specific topic.

Details on the process and findings of the joint Parks Canada and Toronto Zoo Needs Assessment Study appear in Appendix III.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Toronto Zoo wants to emphasize that the proposed plans were developed by working collaboratively with Parks Canada and the TRCA over the past number of years. All parties spent a significant amount of time thoroughly and thoughtfully reviewing the boundaries and proposed land use and we feel confident these proposals are in the best interests of Parks Canada, TRCA and the Toronto Zoo.

INFORMATION ON TORONTO ZOO CONSERVATION BREEDING FACILITIES

Current Endangered Species Breeding Programs

The Toronto Zoo is involved in conservation breeding programs for threatened, endangered and critically endangered species. The Toronto Zoo has three existing facilities for conservation breeding programs that combined are approximately 15,000 sq. ft. The facilities needed for these conservation breeding programs have high quarantine requirements to keep the animals isolated from rest of the Zoo's animals and to prevent disease spread to wild populations. In addition, minimum human disturbance is essential as animals are nervous and can be highly stressed and as a result can abandon nests, not come into estrus, and/or neglect offspring.

As we move forward with recovery efforts for species at risk, more breeding space is required to reach recovery goals.

It is important to note that the Toronto Zoo's proposed conservation breeding facilities would be used specifically for endangered species (Canadian species like the Vancouver Island marmot, black-footed ferret and Eastern loggerhead shrike). These facilities are currently located adjacent to one of our overflow parking lots. The noise and distraction of the higher anticipated use when both the National Park and the Beare Road Park are in full operation would not be conducive to effective breeding for these and other vulnerable and endangered species. The new facilities will be built on land that was occupied by the former farm buildings that has not been planted. This quiet area is screened by the surrounding vegetation and will be most suitable for our breeding programs.

The Toronto Zoo hopes that the Friends of the Rouge would support the efforts being made to ensure these species are given the best opportunities for ongoing survival so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

Furthermore, we would like to reiterate that the land the Zoo hopes to acquire will be used only for browse and conservation breeding programs. Contrary to the claims voiced by the Friends of the Rouge Watershed to the CBC, it will not be used to "further enhance the visitor experience at the Zoo". The plans to enhance the visitor experience are outlined separately in the Zoo's Master Plan and you can see that any new experiences will occur within the existing Zoo property boundaries that are currently accessible to our guests.

Black-footed Ferrets

Since 1992, the Toronto Zoo has been part of the conservation breeding program for the black-footed ferret (BFF). Hundreds of babies (kits) have been bred for reintroduction to the wild in USA, Mexico, and Canada, where the ferret was listed as extirpated in 1978. This program helped re-establish this species back into the prairies and brought the wild population up to approximately 300 animals. The BFF conservation breeding program continues to be important as the ferrets continue to face threats, such as habitat loss and disease.

Once thought to be extinct, the Toronto Zoo is the only Canadian facility breeding BFFs. However, due to the extensive efforts of the Toronto Zoo, our breeding program has resulted in 419 BFF kits, with most sent for release into the USA, Mexico and Canada.

Vancouver Island Marmots

The Vancouver Island marmot (VIM), is one of the most critically endangered animals in the world, and is Canada's most endangered mammal. One of two facilities breeding Vancouver Island Marmots, the Toronto Zoo has been participating in the captive breeding program since 1997, when it was first approached by the Marmot Recovery Foundation to begin a captive breeding and release program.

This marmot species is only one of six mammals endemic to Canada and was North America's most endangered mammal in 2003, when there were only 30 individuals left in the wild.

Because of significant captive breeding efforts, including the Toronto Zoo's, the wild population has steadily grown. The Toronto Zoo has also been involved in many research projects to help increase our understanding of this unique mammal and has spearheaded studies on mating behaviour, pup development and hormone analysis for monitoring reproductive cycles of breeding females. This research has been vital to ensure that the VIM experiences a triumphant return to the wild.

The Toronto Zoo has bred 127 pups that have been sent for release on Vancouver Island, thereby raising the population on the island to between 200 - 300 marmots.

Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes

In 1997, the wild population of Eastern loggerhead shrikes in Canada had decreased to only 18 known pairs. At that time, 43 nestlings were collected from wild nests in Ontario to found a captive population and rebuild the population of this species at risk.

As part of a joint shrike breeding program, the Toronto Zoo breeds an average of 50 shrikes per year and over 700 birds have been released into the wild. This program continues to successfully see members of this imperiled species released into the wild and the Toronto Zoo is proud to partner with Wildlife Preservation Canada and other local breeding facilities on such an important conservation initiative. Various specialists at the Toronto Zoo, including Wildlife Health and Wildlife Nutrition staff, work together on this program and commit hours of care and observations to support the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Breeding Program.

**INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED BOUNDARY CHANGE/
TRANSFER OF FINCH MEANDER**

The current proposed boundary change between the Rouge River and the Little Rouge Creek will use the watercourses as a natural barrier to reduce access to the Zoo property. It would be the Zoo's intention to continue its fence line along the south side of Old Finch Avenue to the bridge in order to provide additional protection to this sensitive area. The fence will be secure and consistent with modern standards for accredited zoos.

The boundary is established back from the river's edge in order to provide access to the Park for river management and enforcement of federal laws by their Parks Canada Wardens. According to Parks Canada, although their Park Wardens will be able to enforce both Federal and Provincial trespass laws on this land if it is under their management, they will be unable to be on site at this location of the Park to conduct 24 hour patrols of the Finch Meander area.

If the Finch Meander is transferred to the Zoo, its Safety & Security team (20 staff) would be able to provide regular patrols of the fence line in this area. Zoo staff are there to enforce the trespass laws and are responsible and motivated to protect the Zoo's assets including our most important asset – the animals in our care. As is now the case, the Zoo will continue to perform fence line inspections on a regular (seasonal) basis around our boundary and complete bi-annual fence repairs as required

This specific area is currently accessible to the public and the Zoo has many examples of cases where Zoo property and the fence lines have been breached and people have accessed the Zoo site for non-legal purposes, including trespassers to the Zoo proper (without payment), marijuana cultivation, illegal fishing, dumping, etc.

Informal trails have been established along the river and beside animal exhibit areas (e.g. alarmingly beside the bear and moose enclosures). This is a potential danger to the animals in our care and possibly to the trespassers themselves. One of the major means of access is from the area at the northwest corner of our site (the area of the Finch Meander).

Following the stakeholder meetings, the parties to the Agreement propose that this area be transferred to Parks Canada and licenced to the Zoo for protection and enforcement.

INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED TORONTO ZOO–ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK ORIENTATION / EDUCATION CENTRE

The Toronto Zoo and Parks Canada for the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) are both in need of new and expanded public education, orientation and staff facilities. With both parties located adjacent to each other, it was deemed to be mutually viable to assess the needs for each party to determine if a shared facility in the Meadowvale Road area is feasible. As adjacent neighbours with aligned interests, the Collaboration Agreement requires the Toronto Zoo and Parks Canada to engage in areas of shared interest and value, such as shared events, programs and marketing where appropriate. The agreement also requires the Zoo and Parks Canada to complete a feasibility study for a shared facility.

Before a concept design of the proposed shared facility is undertaken, a needs assessment was required in order to fully assess the spatial requirements to use in any future design. The objective of the Shared Facility Needs Assessment study was to produce a report detailing the needs of the TZ and RNUP, as well as to identify potential synergies and opportunities for complimentary third party organizations in on-site facilities.

Diamond Schmitt Architects was retained by Parks Canada and the Toronto Zoo to complete the study. The joint study took more than one year to complete and it looked at potential locations for the facility at the Toronto Zoo and at Rouge National Urban Park. The study also looked at the functional and building space required based on shared needs.

The completed “Needs Assessment for an Orientation/Education Centre for the Toronto Zoo and Rouge National Urban Park” is built upon the 2014 Rouge Park Draft Management Plan and the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and Vision for the Zoo. The Zoo’s 2016 Master Plan provides a conceptual framework to guide Zoo staff in the program development for a shared education/orientation facility in partnership with Parks Canada.

The Needs Assessment envisions three nodes:

Node 1 - Shared Education Centre

A shared Orientation/Education facility could act as the primary welcome area for the entire Rouge National Urban Park within the City of Toronto, and could feature Parks Canada staff/volunteers, interpretive media, activity booking, program delivery, and serve as a vital community asset. The primary area could also offer a multipurpose theatre/multimedia exhibits, educational classrooms and labs, meeting/gathering space, park offices and storage. For the Zoo, a shared facility could be the centre for the Toronto Zoo’s conservation education and volunteer programs. Areas of importance are meeting rooms, classrooms, research facilities, public education and display spaces, (both indoors and outdoors) as well as storage and office space.

The proposed Education Centre would also educate the general public, including students, about the importance and substance of wildlife conservation. More work is needed to refine the project and make it a reality. The University of Toronto, Scarborough (UTSC) also expressed interest in partnering with Parks Canada and the Toronto Zoo and is now currently engaged in the discussions about possible involvement in the Centre. Individually and jointly, all three organizations have aligned missions regarding conservation education to further public awareness and action.

Node 2 – Zoo Group Entry

This a gathering place for Zoo school and other education program participants and will provide a separate entry area to the Zoo that would facilitate direct access for these sometimes large groups that would not affect the regular visitor entrance.

Node 3 – Park Trailhead Orientation and Entry

The final area is located on the east side of Meadowvale Road, south of the current Rouge Valley Conservation Centre (Pearse House). These RNUP facilities would serve as a trailhead orientation area, and would provide indoor washrooms, outdoor classrooms, covered eating areas and a Park Information area.