



DIA determination – Rouge Beach Improvements Project

This notice of determination is being issued by Parks Canada under the *Impact Assessment Act*.

An extensive assessment was conducted of the proposed project, the predicted interactions with valued components, potential adverse effects resulting from those interactions, and the mitigation measures identified to reduce or eliminate predicted effects. Parks Canada has determined that the proposed project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects.

Located in Rouge National Urban Park, Rouge Beach and Marsh is home to one of Toronto's last remaining Great Lakes coastal wetlands, numerous species at risk, a swimmable beach and a densely populated suburban residential community. As such, the area receives a high volume of visitors and is the busiest area of the park in the summer months.

The Rouge Beach and Marsh area is experiencing a continual and incremental degradation of wildlife habitat and is at serious risk of flooding and erosion. Rampant invasive species threaten the local biodiversity. Uncontrolled access to the area by way of numerous informal trails is adversely affecting the area's species at risk and rare ecosystems through trampling of vegetation and pervasive dumping. The beach area's infrastructure is also failing, including the flood-prone lower parking lot that poses risks to aquatic habitats through run-off of salt and other toxins. Doing nothing will accelerate degradation of this sensitive area.

The Rouge Beach Improvements Project will renew and adapt existing visitor infrastructure to reduce the human footprint on the landscape. Mitigating the impacts of climate change is an important aspect of the project to ensure the long-term resiliency of infrastructure. In addition to restoring ecosystems and improving ecological integrity, Parks Canada seeks to improve access to greenspace for people with mobility or accessibility challenges.

The project proposes to formalize 2.3 km of new trail with sections of boardwalk and pedestrian bridges raised above the landscape.

Parks Canada used the Detailed Impact Assessment (DIA) pathway for the assessment of this proposal due to the potential sensitivity of natural and cultural resources in this area of the park, the scale of work proposed, and the recognition that there is a high level of interest by the public, residents, and park visitors on this proposal.

Parks Canada explored several alternatives for this project, including maintaining the status quo, limiting access, providing a ferry service, and building a boardwalk following different route options. Given that a primary objective of this project is to create



resilient and durable infrastructure capable of sustaining long-term visitor use while reducing the overall human footprint in the area, the preferred option is directing visitors along a single trail. The three proposed routes were evaluated based on potential impacts to local residents, cultural resources and the natural environment including wetlands. The suitable placement of river crossings and sections of boardwalk, public safety and technical feasibility were also considered in the design and routing options.

The final route was chosen based on the results of the 15-month public engagement period and overall stakeholder preferences.

A draft DIA was produced and made available to the public for review for a 30-day period ending on Wednesday, March 2, 2022. During the draft DIA's public review period, Parks Canada received almost 200 comments from individuals and community groups, as well as non-profit and regional government organizations.

There were comments in support of the project affirming that the draft DIA satisfied questions about potential adverse effects and environmental benefits for the river, marsh, and beach habitats. Conversely, there were concerns, questions, and suggestions recorded on the following topics: the construction of the boardwalk in the marsh, wildlife protection, ecological integrity, climate change, floodplain policy, long term shoreline erosion, parking and traffic congestion and opportunities for engagement. In response to the almost 200 comments received, the DIA has undergone substantive changes to maximize mitigation and minimize impacts. A summary of the feedback received and the changes made to the DIA as a result are posted on the Rouge Beach Improvements Project [web page](#).

In addition to the draft DIA engagement, Parks Canada undertook a 15-month community and public engagement program from February 1, 2020 to May 1, 2021, seeking feedback on the proposed concept for the Rouge Beach Improvements Project. A summary of this engagement can be found in Parks Canada's [What We Heard Report](#).

Additionally, Parks Canada undertook a multi-year parallel engagement process with Indigenous partners through the Rouge National Urban Park First Nations Advisory Circle. There was concern expressed around a range of issues and environmental impacts currently occurring in the area including trampling, erosion, pollution, dumping and perceived threats to natural and cultural heritage. This resulted in broad support for the project's objectives and environmental and restoration goals.

In general, there is strong support to see the Rouge Beach and Marsh protected and restored and for Parks Canada to improve accessibility and visitor enjoyment. This project is broadly supported by partners, including the Rouge National Urban Park First Nations Advisory Circle.



The DIA defined the level of risk for various valued components from project activities, starting from site preparation and construction, through to long-term operation and visitor use following construction. In cases where project valued component interactions were known, understood, and easily mitigated, these tended to be low-risk and can be managed through standard mitigation measures that are used routinely for projects in the park. There were no valued components identified in the high-risk category, but there were some medium-risk concerns identified for Blanding's turtle and least bittern. A residual effects analysis was carried out for these two species at risk.

To minimize potential adverse environmental effects, mitigation measures will be implemented for the following valued components: wildlife, species at risk, vegetation, water and aquatic ecosystems, birds, soil, migratory birds, visitor experience and safety and cultural resources.

Specific targeted mitigation measures were identified in the residual effects analysis to be implemented during and after construction to reduce potential impacts on Blanding's turtle and least bittern including avoiding certain activities during sensitive windows, implementing adequate erosion and sediment control measures, conducting ongoing monitoring by Environmental Surveillance Officers and implementing a long-term ecological monitoring program. Other specific mitigations were integrated in the project design as a result of public feedback including improvement of construction methods, access roads, and staging areas to minimize impacts on wildlife and aquatic habitats. With the implementation of these mitigations the residual effects on these Valued Components are anticipated to be minor and manageable.

Ultimately, the Rouge Beach Improvements Project will provide a positive overall benefit to the ecosystem while still allowing visitors to enjoy nature and learn to value wetland ecosystems. For every square metre of new infrastructure built, Parks Canada will restore four metres of highly degraded wetland and forest habitat.

Taking into account the low to moderate potential for residual adverse effects on valued components and the proposed mitigation measures outlined in the DIA to manage them, Parks Canada has determined that the project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects.

To request a copy of the final version of the DIA and supporting document summarizing Parks Canada's review of public feedback and all changes made to the DIA as a result, please send an email to projetsrouge-rougeprojects@pc.gc.ca.



IMPACT ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATION AND APPROVAL

Project: Rouge Beach Improvements Project

Reference document: AECOM (2022). Rouge Beach Improvements Project – Detailed Impact Assessment

Decision:

Taking into account implementation of mitigation measures outlined in the assessment, the project is:

- ☒ Not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects.
- ☐ Likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects.

Recommended by: Viviane Paquin, A/Resource Conservation Manager	Date : June 13 2023
Recommended by: Cheryl Redman, Project Manager	Date : June 13 2023
Approval signature: Jennifer Duquette, A/Field Unit Superintendant Rouge National Urban Park	Date : June 23 2023
Signature : 	