

Canada's First National Urban Park - A Youth Perspective



Youth Workshops Report to Parks Canada

February 24, 2012

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"A national urban park will be an entirely new and different offer to Canadians. There are currently no comparable places in Canada. As a Canadian first, it will require an innovative conservation and management approach that will ultimately lead to a new federal legislation. At the heart of Parks Canada's vision for a national urban park, is the concept of a "people's park" – a gathering place for the diverse communities of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to experience the outdoors on a grand scale."

Parks Canada



executive summary

It is rare in one's lifetime to have the opportunity to influence the future of a place that will become a Canadian first and will be visited by tens of thousands of people. To be able to shape a new concept, something that does not exist anywhere else, and to be able to create it so that it grows with you and future generations. That was the opportunity presented to youth at a workshop to help shape Canada's first national urban park.

A national urban park does not yet exist, but it will in the Greater Toronto Area in the near future. Parks Canada has already begun the exciting challenge of determining what a national urban park looks like, feels like, smells like, and sounds like and what will encourage people to visit, explore, and discover a natural wonder that is in the backyard of approximately 20% of the Canadian population. It was agreed by all the stakeholders involved that a critical step in the planning process was to hear from youth - a unique perspective that could not be overlooked.

Two workshops were held on February 2, 2012 to engage youth in the planning process. Participants came from a variety of organizations located near Rouge Park: University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (which also generously hosted the workshops), 4-H Ontario, Malvern Family Resource Centre, Centennial College, YMCA GTA, East Scarborough Storefront and Dunbarton High School.

The workshops were centered around Gamestorming activities as using games helps break down barriers, and allows people to explore the world in a creative, fun and practical way. Games engage participants in the process and can lead to new and unpredictable results. A variety of games were used to generate ideas, prioritize the importance of some ideas over others and to develop stories to provide insight into what is important to youth in developing a national urban park.

A substantial, but by no means, exhaustive list of ideas were generated focused on the 4 themes of Experience, Discovery, Getting Involved and Other (what else should be considered) and some of these ideas were developed even further into stories. The ideas are valuable in and of themselves, but they are more valuable when we look more carefully at themes that start to emerge. This is where we find what is of importance to youth; this is where we can identify the approach that needs to be considered in moving forward to ensure that the youth perspective is included in the development of this new park concept.

The youth participants said they want to explore nature through technology; they want to learn in non-traditional ways and learn about history as well as innovative concepts; they want to discover all the park has to offer and want to do this with others; and they want to have something unique in their own backyard, something that they can do in this national urban park that they can't do right now.

Most importantly, youth want to be involved. They want to shape the future of Canada's first national urban park so that it will meet their needs, interests and expectations.

overview

Background

The June 2011 Speech from the Throne set the direction for the Government of Canada to work with the Province of Ontario, municipal governments, Aboriginal partners and community stakeholders towards establishing a national urban park in the Rouge Valley.

A theme that emerged during early consultation is the idea of a 'people's park' where connections are forged between the people of this great nation and the elements that make us truly Canadian.

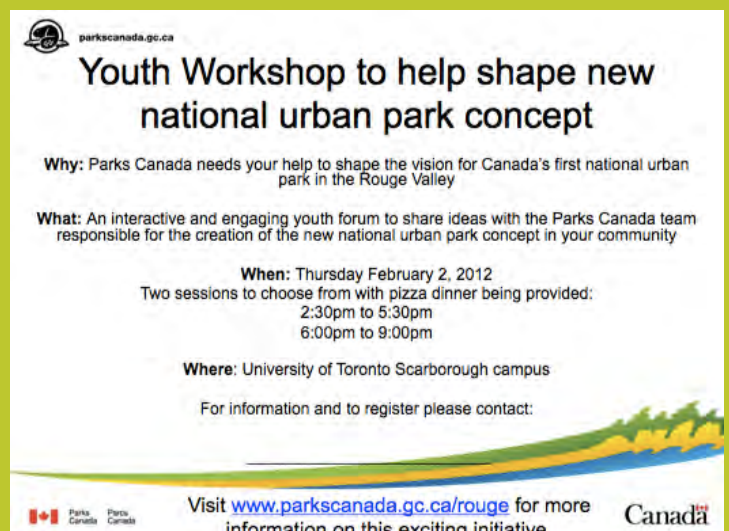
In November 2011, Parks Canada initiated a dialogue with interested First Nations and hosted a visioning workshop with stakeholders to get their views on a concept and vision for Canada's first national urban park. One of the recommendations of the workshop was the need to bring a youth voice to the table and to foster and facilitate youth leadership.

Goals of the Forum

1. Engage youth in the planning for a national urban park in the Rouge Valley in a fun and interactive way.
2. Understand youth thinking about a national urban park, what's important to them and what will make it useful to them and future generations.
3. Identify broad ideas and concepts by youth for Parks Canada to consider.
4. Identify youth that may want to continue to be involved in the planning and the future management of a national urban park in the Rouge Valley.

Agenda

Registration
Welcome
Administrative items
Introduction
Activity 1: Trading Cards (Icebreaker/Introductions)
Activity 2: Grow a Tree (Visioning and idea-generation)
BREAK
Activity 3: Dotmocracy (Prioritization)
Activity 4: Storyboard with Image-ination
Thank you and closing remarks



The poster is titled "Youth Workshop to help shape new national urban park concept". It features the Parks Canada logo at the top left. The text is organized into sections: "Why", "What", "When", "Where", and contact information. At the bottom, there are logos for the Canadian flag, Parks Canada, and the word "Canada".

Why: Parks Canada needs your help to shape the vision for Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge Valley

What: An interactive and engaging youth forum to share ideas with the Parks Canada team responsible for the creation of the new national urban park concept in your community

When: Thursday February 2, 2012
Two sessions to choose from with pizza dinner being provided:
2:30pm to 5:30pm
6:00pm to 9:00pm

Where: University of Toronto Scarborough campus

For information and to register please contact:

Visit www.parksCanada.gc.ca/rouge for more information on this exciting initiative

gamestorming - a unique process

Why Games?

Any number of facilitation approaches could have been chosen in an effort to engage youth and gain insight into what is important to them in developing a national urban park concept.

Playing a game is a way of exploring the world and, in addition to being fun and entertaining, games can be practical too. Games are used to engage people in the process and help them unleash their creative and innovative thinking to develop unpredictable and breakthrough results. Visualization helps teams unravel complex challenges, develop solutions and implement change. Overall, it was felt that Gamestorming would be the best approach to ensure an engaging environment in a very short amount of time.

Peer facilitators helped participants work through the game activities ensuring that all youth were able to participate and that the games were engaging as well as informative. These peer facilitators were youth from University of Toronto Scarborough who generously volunteered to support the Gamestorming process to ensure the best possible results.



results

Participants developed dozens of ideas that they believe Parks Canada should consider in the park planning process. Some of the ideas are listed in the pages that follow:

trading cards

This was used as the icebreaker activity. It's a fun way to not only do introductions but to also get participants "warmed up" and tapping into their creativity.

Participants were asked to create a personal "trading card"—one that included a self-portrait, their interests and one thing about themselves that people in the workshop would likely not know. Once the participants were in their smaller groups they passed around their trading cards to each other. Each participant chose a card and read it out loud. They then asked that person a question related to the little-known fact on their card. The "player" answered the question asked and then they asked the person whose card they were holding a question.

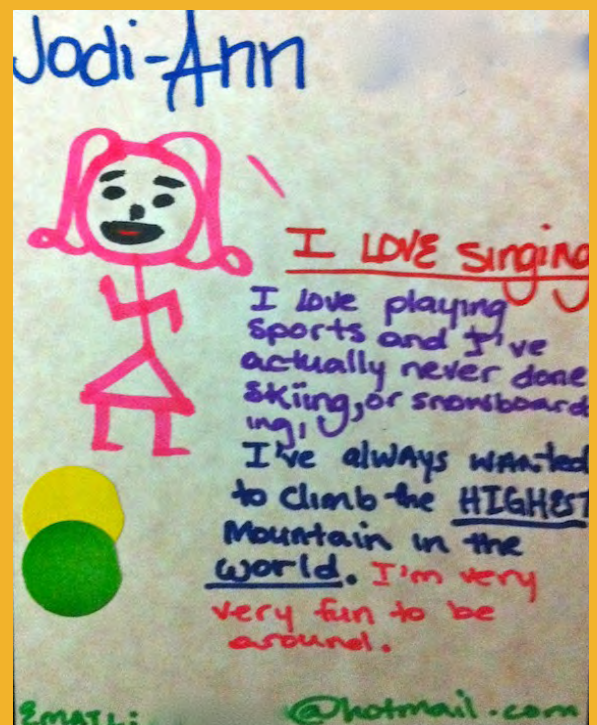
As part of the workshop icebreaker activity, participants were asked to identify their interests. Youth identified 182 interests with almost 100 unique ideas. Below are some of the most common interests:

Most Common Interests

Music	11
Sports	11
Reading	8
Basketball	7
Biking	6
Travel	6
Animals	6
Camping	5
Soccer	5
Environment	4
Art	4

Grouped by Category

Sports-related Activities	45
Arts-related Activities	32
Outdoors (environment, nature, etc.)	13



grow a tree



discovery

What youth want to learn:

- Aboriginal culture, history, sports, etc.
- Different cultures & ethnicities
- Archeology
- Culture & performing arts
- Arts & crafts
- Nature
 - Rocks, fossils, crystals
 - Animals (petting zoo, aquarium, bird migration)
 - Plants & trees (invasive species)
 - Insects (bees & honey making)
- Environmental awareness
 - Water conservation
 - Land conservation
- Farming & agriculture
 - Maple sugaring
 - Food preservation
- Gardening
- Outdoor sports & activities
 - Snowshoeing
 - Skating
 - Rock climbing
 - Outdoor survival strategies
 - Zip-lining
 - High ropes
 - Outdoor cooking
 - Camping
 - Ice fishing



How youth want to learn:

- Technology (smart phone applications, barcodes)
- Summer camps
- Outdoor educational games
- Outdoor theatres
- Outdoor museums
- GPS-enabled tour guide application
- Girl Guides & Boy Scouts programs
- School programs (outdoor classroom)

experience

What experiences are important to youth:

Accessibility

- Transit
- Local food
- Equipment for sports & recreational activities

Agriculture

- Animal calling
- Farmer's markets
- Gardening
- "Cottage in the city"
- Dog park

School field trips

- "The underground" - caves & rock formations

"Nature in the city"

Lounging area

Build an igloo

History

- Aboriginal
- Pioneers

Water activities

- Boating
- Swimming

Nature

- Tree planting
- Building bird houses

Arts & culture

- Concerts
- Plays
- Nature painting
- Photography

Sports & fitness

- Basketball
- Football
- Soccer
- Lacrosse
- Tennis
- Yoga

Outdoor recreation

- Biking & inline skating
- Hiking & camping
- Skiing
- Bonfires
- Fishing
- Grass skiing
- Horse riding
- Hang gliding
- Outdoor cooking
- Skating
- Snowman making
- Tobogganing
- Triathlons

Extreme activities

- Paintball (environmentally friendly)
- Rock climbing
- Sky diving
- Snowmobiling
- Zip-lining
- High ropes course



getting involved

How youth want to become and stay involved:

Training, internships & jobs

- Program planning & delivery

- Management

- Security

- Conservation

- Publicity

- Research

- Sports

- Stewardship

- Arborist

Junior Ranger programs

Volunteering (40 hours)

Clean up & conservation

Supporting & facilitating community involvement

Clubs (gardening, photography, art, conservation)

Lessons (art, cooking, photography)

Competitions (photography)

Certification programs

Planning panels (local youth involved in on-going planning of park)

University credit for stewardship/live on-site



other

What else is important to youth:

Animal friends program

Animal shelter

Archery programs

Bird migration program

Cooling stations

Digital survival guide (built in noises)

Fish ponds

Free WiFi

Use industrial waste (e.g. tires) to create playgrounds

Information booklets in trees (recycled materials)

Laughing area

Mechanical plugs in trees for iPod

Space for graffiti

Underground terrarium



dotmocracy

This activity allows participants the opportunity to prioritize their ideas so that they can further delve into a few ideas more deeply. The ideas to pursue are chosen through a voting process with every participant being given a certain number of dots with which to vote. Each participant votes for the ideas that resonate the most with them.



storyboard and image-ination

This is a storytelling activity that allowed participants to tell a story about the national urban park concept through pictures and images. Participants were asked to build their stories based on one of four ideas that were chosen as the ones that resonated the most with youth. The choices were based on the Dotmocracy activity. The groups were asked to outline the different components of their story including the characters and the plot but to also ensure that they convey the feelings and emotions of the story. The participants used images from magazines as well as their artistic talents and then reported their stories back to the larger group.



storyboard examples

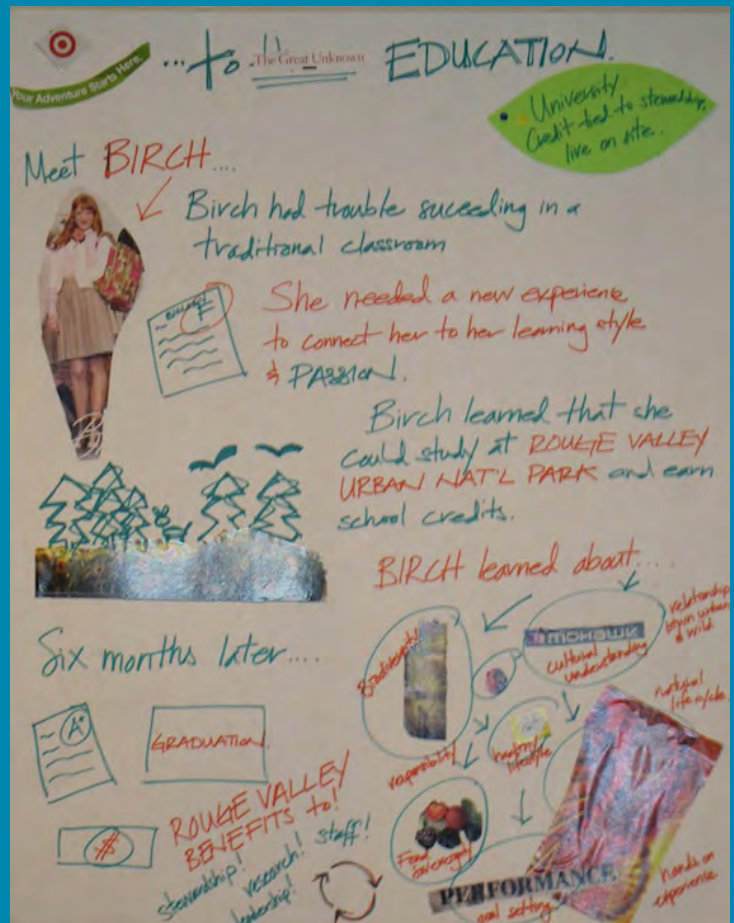
A Different Kind of Movie

- Outdoor theatre
- Engaging different senses
- Interactive
- Inclusive
- Locally grown food
- Romance
 - Of the forest
 - Of the animals, plants & flowers
 - Birds and the Bees
- Suspense
 - Star-gazing
 - Carbon Emissions – Global Warming
- Drama
 - Beaver dam building



To the Great Unknown Education

- Non-traditional classroom
- Connecting learning style & passion
- Outdoor classroom
- Biodiversity
- Cultural understanding
- Relationship between urban & wild
- Natural lifecycle
- Healthy lifestyle
- Food sovereignty
- Goal setting & performance
- Hands-on experience
- Stewardship
- Research
- Staff
- Leadership



The Legends of Rouge Park

Aboriginal storytelling
Medicine & plants – history & teaching
Intrigued, inspired, interested & proud
Fire tribal dancing
Aboriginal village
Aboriginal culture, arts & crafts
Togetherness
Lacrosse – teaching & playing
“simply breathtaking”



Stay the Night

Learn about and experience
Aboriginal culture for a day
Fly a kite
Play with kids
Horseback riding
Enjoy nature
Gathering food
Bed time under a tree



themes

There are an infinite number of activities that could possibly become part of a national urban park concept but the goal for the youth workshops was not to create a list of what activities youth want to do. That type of an exercise is too limited for the kind of rare opportunity that was presented to these youth. Instead, the goal was to understand youth thinking about what's important to them and what will make the park useful to them and future generations. The goal was really to see beyond what activities are currently interesting and to a certain extent, trendy, but to get at the heart of what would inspire and motivate youth to visit, explore, steward, and discover a national wonder that is right in their backyard. It is these broader ideas, or themes, that Parks Canada should consider - these themes more accurately reflect the voice of youth in what they envision as Canada's first national urban park.

Technology in Nature

Throughout the various activities we heard that youth want the conveniences of technology to be integrated into what the park would offer. Some examples given included plug-in stations (hidden in nature), WiFi, digital information signs, GPS-guided tours through smartphones and iPads. Technology is ever-changing so the specific ideas may only serve as a launching point for what should be considered. More importantly for youth is the integration of technology within a natural environment and the importance of preserving and conserving the environment - the use of technology should not be at the expense of the environment.

Outdoor Classroom

The importance of learning opportunities was clear as learning surfaced in both the Grow a Tree and the Storyboard activities. The participants chose to explore learning more deeply in voting for ideas such as learning and experiencing Aboriginal culture and a Different Kind of Movie Theatre. In almost all the stories that the youth developed they incorporated some learning opportunity and really focused on how the park could offer unique opportunities for learning. The ideas ranged from survival training to beaver dam building, from star-gazing to the history of the First Peoples that once inhabited the area, from how to horseback ride to romance between the birds and the bees. The topics were as wide-ranging as the ways that the participants want to learn; through an outdoor "walk-in" theatre nestled in the canopies of the trees only showing movies about nature or through an app on their smartphones as they tour the park on their bikes or walk through the underground terrarium. Again, the possibilities are endless but what's important is that youth would like to learn in a unique, fun, and integrated way outside of a traditional classroom.

Group Discovery

It should come as no surprise that for the most part the participants identified activities that they could do with other people. The majority of the stories were about groups, or at least a couple of people, exploring and discovering together what the park has to offer. Almost all the stories talked of discovery and exploration and learning about the park with others and some ideas were specifically geared at discovery from a different perspective. For instance, there was an idea about having art competitions with groups of artists, photographers, etc. exploring together to see the park from a different perspective than one of nature, trees and the environment. Discovery went well beyond the traditional park experiences to incorporate history, culture, arts, crafts, sports - limitless possibilities - but with a strong emphasis on togetherness and collaboration.

You Did That Where?

There was a lot of discussion about activities and ideas that would draw youth to the park because they could not have those experiences anywhere else. Some activities are available in other cities and countries, but there was a definite appeal to the youth participants in having unique opportunities in their own backyard. They identified a number of unique activities they would be interested in doing such as zip-lining, bungee jumping and biodegradable paintball but also unique learning opportunities to explore nature, history, culture and scientific discoveries like carbon initiatives. This also ties into another important concern for youth, which is accessibility. This refers to both being able to access the park through public transportation and also being able to experience activities that are not cost-prohibitive or in any other way not inclusive of youth (e.g. timing, supervision required, etc). The appeal of being able to participate in opportunities that others have and these youth may not have was quite evident. They hear about and see fun and exciting activities - sports, adventures and even cottage activities - but many cannot participate. The possibility of having something unique and adventurous that they can easily access is of great importance to youth.

conclusion

Today's youth will not only be visitors to the national urban park in the Rouge Valley but will also work and volunteer there, they will explore and learn and share these experiences with others and they will care for the park so that it continues to be protected for all to enjoy. In order for this to happen, the park needs to meet their needs, their interests and their expectations to encourage the next generation of stewards. The first step in ensuring this was to capture their insights by hosting a youth forum that saw the participation of over 60 participants at the workshop to help shape the future of Canada's first national urban park. The ideas generated by the youth during these workshops will not only contribute to the shaping of the national urban park vision and concept but also inspire new and innovative ideas moving forward.

These workshops were simply a first step to launch youth involvement and they proved to be successful in engaging them in this planning process. The overwhelming majority of participants want to remain involved in the park planning and in the future management of Rouge National Urban Park.

integration

discovery

inclusive

technology

unique

outdoor classroom

accessible

history and culture