

Expand the Rouge.org

Dear Prime Minister,

Half a century ago, the men of Team Canada were vying for hockey supremacy while Atari released “Pong”, the first commercially successful video game, and Apollo 17, the last manned lunar flight, was launched.

The Canadian government also announced the construction of a new airport for the Toronto area in 1972. And in the process, it expropriated 7,527 hectares of prime, Class 1 agricultural land in North Pickering, Markham and Uxbridge, and habitat for almost 200 rare plant and animal species.

The announcement had immediate, devastating and indelible impacts. And yet—the airport was never built.

Although half the expropriated lands were transferred from Transport Canada to Parks Canada with the creation of Rouge National Urban Park, the threat of an airport on the remaining half of those lands continues to stifle investment in the area and shackles the productive power of some of the finest arable land in North America. Investments in nature are also frozen by the prospect of a future airport, regardless of the long odds of it ever being developed.

Simply put, the landscape is held in limbo by a farfetched and outdated idea.

The Pickering airport remains a government policy that’s wrong in principle and it continues to paralyze progress for people and nature. Today, with climate chaos and a biodiversity crisis threatening our very existence, clinging to a 1970s airport plan is senseless and reckless.

Meanwhile, this area hosts some of the best farmland in the country. It also provides natural climate mitigation solutions and serves as important connecting habitat between wild landscapes that are critical to avert more species extinction in the region where biodiversity loss has hit Canada the hardest. What’s more, the proposed airport site is sacred Indigenous land.

Fifty years ago, the Prime Minister at the time of expropriation was Pierre Elliott Trudeau. His decision in 1972 is glaringly out of step with the needs of today.

In the intervening five decades the world has changed. Today, the possibility of vacations to Mars are in the news, video games like Minecraft allow us to build virtual worlds, and the Canada-US women’s hockey rivalry captures headlines.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, we ask that you release the Pickering Federal Lands and add them to Rouge National Urban Park. It is a decision in step with the times and in line with your government’s incredible commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

It is time - time to release the Federal Lands held in limbo and seize the opportunity to advance reconciliation, protect essential farmland and bring greater ecological security to the GTA.

Prime Minister Trudeau, we call on you to act now. Release the Pickering Federal Lands and add them to Rouge National Urban Park.



Photos: Land Over Landings

Signatories

Ed Beach, President
Durham Region Federation
of Agriculture

Dr. Yannick C. Beaudoin,
Director of Innovation and
for Ontario David Suzuki
Foundation

Pauline Browes, Founder
and Chair, Friends of
Rouge National Urban Park

Don Ciparis, President
National Farmers Union –
Ontario

David Crombie, Chair
Friends of the Greater
Golden Horseshoe

Mary Delaney, Chair,
Land Over Landings

Mary E. Drummond,
Chair, Durham Food Policy
Council

Ali English, Executive
Director, Ecological
Farmers Association of
Ontario

Tim Gray, Executive
Director, Environmental
Defence

Franz Hartmann, Executive
Director, Earthroots

Dave Harvey, Executive
Director, Park People

Janet Horner, Executive
Director, Greater Golden
Horseshoe Food & Farming
Alliance

Katie Krelove, Ontario
Campaigner, Wilderness
Committee

Pat Learmonth, Director,
Farms at Work

Megan Leslie, President
and CEO, WWF-Canada

Gloria Marsh, Executive
Director, York Region
Environmental Alliance

Andrew McCammon,
Executive Director, Ontario
Headwaters Institute

Ian McLaurin, Chair, Save
the Oak Ridges Moraine
Coalition

Dr. Faisal Moola, Associate
Professor, Department of
Geography, University of
Guelph

Bernard Pope, Executive
Director, Ontario Farmland
Preservation

Graham Saul, Executive
Director, Nature Canada

Dianne Saxe,
Last Independent
Environmental
Commissioner of Ontario,
Deputy Leader of the
Ontario Green Party

Caroline Schultz, Executive
Director, Ontario Nature

Sandy Smith, Institute of
Forestry and Conservation,
University of Toronto

Janet Sumner, Executive
Director, Wildlands League

Karren Wallace, Chair,
Food & Water First

Lee Adamson, Vice-Chair, Green
Neighbours Network of Toronto

Lyn Adamson, Co-Chair, ClimateFast

Jacqueline Avanthay Strus, President,
Canadian Association of Nurses for
the Environment

Donna-Marie Batty, StopPlastics

Professor Stephen Bocking, Trent
University, Founding Director
School of the Environment, Creator
of Sustainable Agriculture and
Food Systems Program

Maurice Brenner, Councillor, City
of Pickering

Mike Borie, Environmental
Action Now, Ajax-Pickering

Sandra Campbell, Abundance GTA

Dr. Mark A. Cachia, Dr. Mili Roy &
Harry Wang, Co-Chairs, Canadian
Association of Physicians for the
Environment - Ontario Regional
Committee

Ginny Colling, Scugog Climate
Action Now

Carl Cosack, North Dufferin
Agricultural Community Taskforce

Glenn De Baeremaeker,
Former Scarborough City
Councillor and Deputy Mayor
(East), Toronto

Paul De Campo, Local Food
Activist and Educator

David Donnelly, Partner,
Donnelly Law

Ivan Emke, Honorary Research
Professor, Memorial University

Kathleen ffolliott, Blue Dot
Whitby

Barbara Falby, For Our
Grandchildren

Charles “Doc” Godfrey, Chair
of People or Planes, 1972 -

Joyce Hall, Convenor, JustEarth

Jane Hayes, Director, Urban
Gardens & Permaculture

Jack Heath, Regional Councillor,
City of Markham

Daniel Hoffman, The Cutting
Veg: Owner, Organic Farmer,
Social Worker, Community
Developer

Lisa Kates & Darcy Higgins,
Building Roots

Matthew Kellway, Former MP
and Urban Affairs Critic,
Infrastructure and Deputy
Transport Critic

Cathy Lacroix, Citizens Climate
Lobby

Gail Lawlor, Climate Justice
Durham

Stephen Leahy, Environmental
Author and 2 x SEAL Award-
Winning International
Environmental Journalist

Iain Lovatt, Mayor, Town of
Whitchurch-Stouffville

Claire Malcolmson, Executive
Director, Rescue Lake Simcoe
Coalition

Mary Anne Martin, Durham
Integrated Growers for a
Sustainable Community

John Marsh, Professor Emeritus,
Trent University; IUCN World
Commission on Protected Areas

Burkhard Mausberg, President,
Small Change Fund, Founding
CEO of the Friends of the
Greenbelt Foundation and the
Greenbelt Fund

Theresa A. McClenaghan,
Executive Director and Counsel,
Canadian Environmental Law
Association

Jacinta McDonnell, Toronto 350

Peter Miasek, President, Transport
Action Ontario

Nika Moeini, Executive Director,
Youth Climate Save Canada



Larry Noonan, Altona Forest Stewardship
Committee

Gerri Lynn O’Connor, Former Mayor,
Uxbridge

Margaret Prophet, Executive Director,
Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition

Karen Rea, Councillor, City of Markham

Richard Sandbrook, President,
Science for Peace

Sue Sherban, Councillor, Whitchurch-
Stouffville

Andrea Stephens, Core Team Co-Lead,
Drawdown Toronto

Michael Szego, CEO, Rise to Zero

Rhonda Teitel-Payne, Co-Coordinator,
Toronto Urban Growers

John Wadland, Trent University,
Professor Emeritus, Canadian Studies

Katie Ward, President, National Farmers
Union

Kevin Matthew Wong & Emma Westray,
Broadleaf Theatre