

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE

ONTARIO NATURE

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Victory Today in Pickering Environmental Battle: Province stands up for easements in Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve and across Ontario

Toronto, Ontario – A coalition of environmental and ratepayer groups hailed today's introduction of the McGuinty government's legislation to protect the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve and restore the long-term viability of conservation easements province-wide.

Local conservationists signed an agreement in 1999 with the provincial government's Ontario Realty Corporation, plus Durham Region and the City of Pickering, with the clear expectation that the easements placed on lands in the Preserve would be held by the city "in perpetuity." The easements were adopted by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) at a hearing in May 1999.

The legislation introduced today became necessary when the OMB rejected the coalition's June 2005 appeal of the City of Pickering's unilateral decision to remove the easements. Real estate speculators who own land in the Preserve stood to reap a multi-million-dollar windfall if the easements were removed and the land was allowed to be urbanized.

"It seems like every few years, Pickering Council tries to resurrect the idea of urbanizing the Agricultural Preserve from the dead," said David Donnelly, legal counsel for Environmental Defence, and lawyer for the coalition that appealed to the OMB. "It's fitting that Minister of Natural Resources David Ramsay chose Halloween to drive a stake through the heart of this ongoing land use nightmare."

The coalition consists of Ontario Nature, Environmental Defence, the Green Door Alliance and Sandy Rider, President of the Whitevale and District Resident's Association. Also carrying the torch for protection of the preserve over the years has been the Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition.

"The bill tabled today etches in stone a 30-year-old promise – kept by Ontario governments formed by all three political parties – to protect the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve for agriculture and conservation," said Linda Pim, Ontario Nature's conservation policy analyst. "Not only is the Pickering environment the winner today, but so are conservation lands across Ontario, since Queen's Park has moved to protect easements by closing a loophole to truly ensure that easements are retained 'in perpetuity.'"

"It's been such a struggle to defend this agricultural preserve from more car-oriented urban sprawl. I can hardly believe that we've won!" said Bonnie Littley, spokesperson for the Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition and long-time Pickering resident. "Countless people in Pickering who have worked so hard for the preserve for so many years can see today that their voices have been heard."

About 800 hectares of prime agricultural lands in Pickering are affected by the legislation. Although the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve is subject to other land use restrictions, including the Ontario government's new Greenbelt Plan and a Minister of Municipal Affairs Zoning Order, none of the restrictions are permanent, whereas the easements are.

About Environmental Defence: Environmental Defence protects the environment and human health. We research. We educate. We go to court when we have to.

All in order to ensure clean air, safe food and thriving ecosystems.

Nationwide. www.environmentaldefence.ca

About Ontario Nature: Ontario Nature protects and restores nature through research, education and conservation action. It represents 25,000 members and 140 member groups across the province. www.ontarionature.org

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