

# A new kind of NIMBY: Nature in My Backyard

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*By David Suzuki with contributions from Jode Roberts*

On reading about the growing resistance to a [mega-quarry](#) being proposed for southern Ontario, I had an epiphany about the media's use of the term NIMBY, for "not in my backyard." It's normally used to describe grassroots efforts to block everything from landfills and windmills to big box stores and bike lanes. NIMBYism has taken on a negative association, often implying naive or parochial resistance to projects that challenge the status quo in a community.

But NIMBYism isn't always bad. Although it can arise out of fear of something new or different in a community, it can also be the result of genuine concern for the local environment. I'd like to propose a new kind of NIMBY, one that is positive and reflects a true sense of caring for our communities. Let's go green and say yes to Nature in My Backyard.

A good place to start recognizing this new NIMBYism would be literally in our backyards. That means encouraging more home veggie and herb gardens, more native plants that support birds, bees, and butterflies, and more backyard composters for fruit and veggie scraps and yard clippings.

Next, we can bring Nature in My Backyard-ism to the neighbourhood. Our municipal parks are undoubtedly important green spaces, but they are often seen as an afterthought, especially when overzealous municipal leaders want to cut spending. Let's rethink urban parks as places that provide more than just a space to play sports or sit on a bench.

Our local parks provide a variety of essential services that we take for granted. For instance, trees clean and cool our air, absorb pollutants, store and filter rainwater, reduce noise, add colour, absorb and store carbon, and are home to many species of insects, birds, and other critters. Add up the benefits that local parks provide. You might be surprised. The City of [Philadelphia](#) found that investment in its park system returned a net increase in economic wealth of more than \$700 million each year.

At the regional level, the new NIMBYism could be directed toward wrapping "greenbelts" around our sprawling urban areas. Protecting the farms, fields, forests, and wetlands around our urban areas is an investment that will pay huge dividends. The internationally renowned 1.8-million-hectare [Ontario Greenbelt](#) is estimated to [provide](#) the Golden Horseshoe region with more than \$2.6 billion in economic benefits each year, and it serves as a bright green example of how we can protect and restore nature in the backyards of an entire region.

But perhaps the most exciting Nature in My Backyard campaign is an effort to establish Canada's first urban National Park in the Rouge Valley, at the east end of Toronto. [Parks Canada](#) is celebrating the 100th year of our magnificent National Parks system. I can think of no better way to commemorate this milestone than to bring nature to urbanites in the [Rouge](#). Imagine a National Park that is accessible by public transit for millions of city dwellers, including huge and diverse populations of new Canadians.

Despite being in the heart of one of the densest urban areas in North America, the [Rouge Valley](#) is a surprisingly intact chunk of forests, fields, and waterways that meanders from the Oak Ridges Moraine in Markham to the shoreline of Lake Ontario in Scarborough. After more than two decades of tireless advocacy and political horse-trading, the [Rouge](#) is now poised to become the first and largest urban National Park in North America — something the federal government made a commitment to pursue in this past week's throne speech.

Although significant work remains before the prime minister arrives for a ribbon-cutting ceremony, these are heady days for a green space that most Canadians, and [Torontonians](#) for that matter, have likely never heard of. Adding a National Park in the Rouge will permanently protect a vital green space and provide a much-needed opportunity for residents throughout the GTA to take pride and get outside.

I encourage citizens across the country to join me in celebrating the new NIMBY and saying yes to nature in our backyards, neighbourhoods, and communities. It will be an important reminder that nature isn't a destination; it is literally in our backyard.