

National Park status for Rouge popular: Poll

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Most residents in the GTA's east end would like Rouge Park to go national, a recent survey reveals.

The idea has been on the table for more than a year and, if the federal government agrees with the 88% of residents who want the plan to go forward, Toronto could soon be home to Canada's first urban national park.

"We want to leave a legacy that is permanently here and in good hands and we think Parks Canada is the agency to do that," Rouge Park Alliance chairman Alan Wells said in an interview Friday after releasing the results from a Nanos Research study, which polled 291 random residents around the park.

The 10,000-acre park currently operates under a hodgepodge of volunteers, municipalities and stakeholders who want new funding commitments and a new structure for stronger leadership.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult to run its operations," Wellington-Halton Hills MP Michael Chong said. "We need to simplify and streamline the management of the park by establishing a single organization that would be responsible for its care."

Under the proposed plan, 5,000 acres of federally-owned Markham land would be added to the park, making it the largest urban park in North America, Wells said.

A recent study found it costs \$4 million to \$5 million to fund the park annually and there will be another \$40 million needed in the next decade for tasks like building bridges and maintaining the trail system infrastructure, Wells said.

That's peanuts compared to what Parks Canada spends on other

projects, like those seen in Banff National Park, he said.

With the provincial and municipal governments already on board, Wells said he hopes to get the go-ahead from the feds this year and begin working with the province to transfer the land over the next year.

The entire process would take about five years, he said.

University of Toronto geography PhD candidate Marvin Macaraig, who is studying the park, said the poll results released Friday are “really reflective of how much support the park has as a green space in the area.”

“There’s a growing awareness that there’s something special on the east side of Toronto,” he said.