Nature's Keepers: civil society actors and the neoliberalisation of conservation in the Rouge Park

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Nature's Keepers: civil society actors and the neoliberalisation of conservation in the Rouge Park

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This paper examines the roles and actions of civil society actors and state agencies in the establishment and management of the Rouge Park (Ontario, Canada), a large greenspace approximately 46 km^2. This paper takes the stance that neoliberalism is more than just a simple derivative of capitalism, but also a continually evolving process that has explicit links to nature and its management. I use qualitative data to investigate how the governance framework put in place by the province of Ontario amounts to the neoliberalisation of conservation, where a disproportionate amount of the day-to-day management and operation of the park is completed by civil society actors and their respective volunteers. I examine how the management structure of the Rouge Park has resulted in what amounts to neoliberal conservation policy yet, despite its apparent and upfront shortcomings, this governance scheme has also resulted in some notable developments. In particular, it has provided an increase in opportunities for civil society actors to become key agents in both park planning and conservation.

Keywords: civil society; conservation; neoliberalisation; urban greenspaces; political ecology; Rouge Park; Ontario

Introduction

This identification of the importance of civil society has been highlighted by social theorist Manuel Castells (1972, 1983) throughout his career, and has called for individuals as the primary agent or unit for change. His call for "the people" to enact change at the scales most familiar to them namely the households, neighbourhoods, and the city in which they live has served as a central thesis for much scholarship on civil society. Interestingly, the conservation/resource management literature has also placed great importance on increased civil society participation when formulating environmental policy, and negotiating how protected areas are actually governed (Busenberg 2000, Beierle and Konisky 2001, Broderick 2005, Parkins and Mitchell 2005, Wright and Rollins 2009, Smiley *et al.* 2010).

Research examining the various relationships between human and non-human actors within a context of neoliberalism has garnered much recent attention from scholars of critical geography. Moreover, the specific examination of how the effects of neoliberalism are manifested "on the ground" has also been heavily investigated by these same scholars, often in the form of either conservation or resource extraction-based case studies. Work by Castree (2008a) has provided a synopsis of some of the case study-based research that has examined the neoliberalisation of nature and its various outcomes. As a point of

entry, I define neoliberalism not just as a singular homogenous derivative of capitalism, but rather a heterogeneous ongoing process that encompasses the environment, cultural shifts, economic development, and public-private realignments. Further, I accept the position that neoliberalism has direct and explicit links to nature (i.e. non-human actors), an observation further highlighted by Heynen and Robbins (2005) in their commentary on Marx and Engels' materialist method.[1] Issues and debates such as the efforts to privatise water/sanitation, the creation and consumption of genetically modified foods, the patenting of life forms, and access to natural resources are other well-studied examples of how nature can be neoliberalised.

Despite such interest, the direct effects of the neoliberalisation of nature have produced various outcomes, as noted by Castree (2008b) where he identified some key characteristics of neoliberalism by those working to parse out the logics, effects, outcomes, and procedures associated with neoliberal policies. The author explains that two characteristics of neoliberalisation involve deregulation; the rollback of state interference in both environmental and social phenomena, where stakeholders become self-governing, and re-regulation; the deployment and facilitation of state policies which enable further privatisation of environmental and social phenomena. Another characteristic of the neoliberalisation of nature involves marketisation (Castree 2008b) or valuation (Heynen and Robbins 2005), which are both described as allocating tangible prices to historically unpriced or complex ecological phenomena, thus indicating how nature may be commodified. In the developed world, such commodification can have consequences in the manner in which protected areas are created, managed, and ultimately envisioned by the public at large. Even more challenging is the conservation of greenspaces located within urban boundaries or those that are found adjacent/along ex-urban boundaries. Such landscapes can be highly contested, heavily politicised and the commodification of nature becomes evident through the economic analysis and overall valuation of undeveloped or under-developed land. This valuation of particular greenspaces can lay the foundation to further market reforms, an increase and acceptance of private conservation measures, and the aestheticisation of landscapes. Research on the Oak Ridges Moraine[2] in Ontario, has also detailed how specific political/neoliberal processes have becomes a key role in how ex-urban areas are envisaged by private homeowners, marketed by the state, and ultimately gentrified (Bunce 1985, Bocking 2005, Sandberg and Wekerle 2010)

Critics of neoliberalism have long trumpeted the consequences of state decisions to allow increased privatisation of specific environmental sectors and/or phenomena, while pointing to the swift mobilisation of public opposition to such action as an indicator of the severity of the wrongdoing. Castree (2008b) suggests that neoliberalisation also facilitates the further creation and involvement of civil society groups providing services that were once done by the state. This uptake of responsibilities by civil society groups in conservation planning and the day-to-day management of natural resources seems to be one characteristic outcome of nature's neoliberalisation. Heynen and Robbins (2005, p. 6) further identify, "*governance*, the institutionalised political compromises through which capitalist societies are negotiated" is another dominant attribute within the neoliberal agenda. This is noteworthy in that such political and institutional reconfigurations may inevitably present challenges to the general public's understanding of jurisdiction, the specific role of state institutions, and perhaps more importantly how governments actually govern. Policy reforms that call for less state intervention may eventually point to new opportunities for civil society actors to become engaged within the policy formation process.

Therefore, implicit to this neoliberal conservation narrative are questions that revolve around the exact role of both the state and civil society in managing natural resources.

Specifically, what are the outcomes – either perceived or real – of this reconfiguration of responsibilities? If the neoliberalisation of nature is to be considered an ongoing process, it is important to know how have stakeholders adapted to such changes? What are some of the nuanced alternatives of neoliberalism and what are the outcomes (on a local scale) of such governmental and institutional realignments.

This paper aims to develop insights into the neoliberalisation of nature utilising the Rouge Park (Ontario, Canada), as a case study. Specifically, I examine the neoliberalisation of conservation, while parsing out the roles and actions of civil society actors in the management of a protected area and in light of the changing role of the state. I argue that neoliberalism as a process, has fostered a unique form of conservation that heavily relies on civil society involvement in the overall day-to-day management of the Rouge Park. On a broader level, this case study may also further develop understanding as to how neoliberalisation plays out "on the ground", and how as a process it is challenging existing ideas of the role and efficacy of the state.

This reliance on civil society actors was primarily the result of a reconfiguration and further redefinition of the role of state agencies in conservation management. One result from this realignment of responsibilities is that it has allowed for an increase in public participation in some key aspects of park management. It should be noted that this increase in participation might have been an unintended result of the neoliberal governance structure of the park as opposed to a willful preplanned consequence aimed to foster stakeholder involvement.

The material and data gathered for this report were collected over a 5-year period spanning 2005–2010. I utilise a historical approach, making use of primarily semi-structured face-to-face interviews ($n = 18$) with self-identified actors. These included staff from civil society groups/NGOs, elected officials, provincial bureaucrats, and policymakers. It should be noted that some interviewees requested and were granted anonymity. This interview data were also supplemented with a diverse set of field notes collected as a participant observer during public meetings and forums. At such public symposia, material was also collected from informal interviews with casually involved citizens and their reactions also highlighted, and paralleled the reactions of my interviews with other recognised stakeholders. In addition to the aforementioned primary data, I utilise a historical/archival approach to interrogate and identify how neoliberalism has changed the role and efficacy of both civil society groups and state institutions working in protected area management. Archival research came in the form of sourcing and obtaining numerous scientific/technical studies and planning policy documents produced by both the state officials and civil society groups. Finally, written documents such as newspaper/magazine articles and media releases were collected and analysed as was the information provided on the official websites of both government and civil society actors.

The Rouge River Valley

The Rouge River forms the eastern boundary of the City of Toronto, and is one of six watersheds flowing south through the city and emptying into Lake Ontario (Figure 1).[3] The waterway is situated in one of Canada's most urbanised regions with the Region of Durham to the east, and the Regional Municipality of York to the north. Developmental pressures in the watershed include the construction of tract housing, roads, and sewerage (Macaraig and Sandberg 2009). The area was settled first by First Nation people who utilised the land for centuries, followed by European settlers who logged the forests and constructed mills along different sites along the river. Today, the biodiversity associated with the Rouge River watershed is
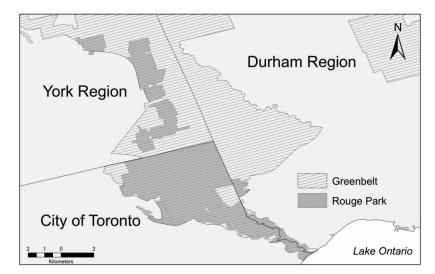
Figure 1.   Location map of the Rouge Park.

considered to be outstanding as it contains provincially significant wetlands, environmental sensitive areas, and encompasses one of 36 critical Carolinian forest cites remaining in Canada (Varga *et al*.1991). The greenspaces within the watershed provide various recreational opportunities that include angling, canoeing, bird watching, and hiking.

The Rouge Park is a large urban greenspace encompassing approximately 46 km^2 of land located on the eastern border of the City of Toronto. The greenspace accommodates a wide variety of land uses, which include residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural, it also provides for numerous outdoor recreational activities. The series of political and social events that lead to the formal establishment of the Rouge Park can be traced back to 15 October 1954 when Hurricane Hazel (a Category 4 storm on the Saffir–Simpson Hurricane Scale) deluged southern Ontario and specifically hit Toronto with 110 km/h and 285 mm of precipitation within a span of 48 h resulting in numerous houses, roadways, and bridges to be washed out and leaving thousands homeless. The official death toll was 81, the majority of which drowned in many areas, which experiencing flash floods. The total cost of the damage was estimated at $100 million, a figure well over 1 billion today (Toronto Region and Conservation Authority 2011a).

In the aftermath of this devastating storm, there was a call for a regional approach to flood control and water management in Ontario, and thus the province amended the Conservation Authorities Act (1946) enabling Conservation Authorities to acquire specific properties for recreation and conservation purposes and to further manage such land for the greater safety of the community. The Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority[4] (TRCA) was formed in 1957 replacing four smaller conservation bodies and in 1959 the Plan for Flood Control and Water Conservation was finalised (Toronto Region and Conservation Authority 2011b).In the following years, the Lands Acquisition Program enabled the TRCA to acquire floodplain lands and transfer the liability of its maintenance and conservation from private owners to the authority, which was the first necessary step in the construction of flood protection works. The next stage of the TRCA flood control plan was the Flood Control Works Program, which called for the construction of necessary infrastructure to address and control future flooding events. The plan enabled the constructions of dams, reservoirs, and channel improvements. Accompanying such infrastructure

projects was the development of provincial flood plain policy and regulations (Toronto Region and Conservation Authority 2011c).These measures were primarily conceived to control future development and seek suitable land use activities in areas where flooding poses a threat.

These post Hazel municipal-provincial infrastructure projects and policy measures are an important development in southern Ontario as it effectively laid the groundwork for the creation of many greenspaces in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The areas that were eventually designated to become the Rouge Park were part of these initial lands that were set aside by conservation officials. In 1956, the Rouge Duffins Highland Petticoat Conservation Authority released a highly detailed conservation report calling for the creation of a series of protected areas within the Rouge River Valley. The report was titled the *Rouge Duffins Highland Petticoat Conservation Report* and was lauded for its comprehensiveness and the level of detail it included (Lewis Yeager, Rouge Park Alliance, personal interview, 12 September 2008). One of the chief recommendations derived from the report was a call for governments to protect a variety of greenspace and tablelands associated with the Rouge River watershed. Despite the many conservation and policy recommendations outlined in the report, there was not much movement on the part of government officials until many years later. During the 1960s and early 1970s, various agencies from different levels of government authored a number of both published and unpublished scientific/technical reports, but they resulted in very little state action with regards to creating a new protected area. Such publications covered a diverse set of topics including, archeological and First Nations surveys, geology/aquifer/till studies, and a multitude of flora and fauna reports and surveys.

Civil society involvement

During the 1970s, development pressures along the north-eastern border of the City of Toronto (where the Rouge River watershed is located) were increasing, spurred along by the demand for housing by a rapidly growing population throughout the GTA.[5] Plans to develop land within the watershed into suburban tract housing was being discussed by all three municipal governments that had lands associated with the Rouge River watershed within their respective political jurisdictions (i.e. Toronto, Regional Municipality of Durham, and the Regional Municipality of York). In the early 1970s, other development plans in the area called for a new international airport in the City of Pickering, where the federal government had expropriated approximately 7800 ha of countryside (Transport Canada 1974). Local resident groups, who mounted a vigorous campaign against its construction, challenged plans for the airport. In the following years, federal support for the airport fell through, which ultimately lead to a re-evaluation of urban expansion plans throughout the area, including those associated with the Rouge River Valley.

In the meantime, local citizens recognising a need to protect the habitats within the Rouge River Valley from development began to mobilise and began calling for a protected area that would encompass the Rouge River and its associated watershed. Through such activism, local citizens formed the group Save the Rouge Valley System (SRVS) in the early 1980s and was the first of many groups created to work on issues relevant to the watershed. Bolstered by both state publications and some of their own self-authored reports and studies, citizens carefully lobbied elected officials and worked towards their goal of creating a formal protected area. They began to paint a picture of an ecologically significant greenspace that warranted protection primarily from increasing development pressures. Members of SRVS viewed the Rouge River watershed as a natural corridor that provided a unique

opportunity to link Lake Ontario from the south with the Oak Ridges Moraine to the north. (Jim Robb, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, personal interview, 26 June 2008).

Throughout the 1980s, SRVS members fought numerous battles at all levels of government, calling for formal protection of lands associated with the Rouge River watershed. Their calls for conservation legislation became fully galvanised when the province revealed plans to both widen existing and further construct new roadways crossing the watershed. Members of SRVS saw these specific infrastructure plans as the critical first step that would eventually make way for further development into the watershed. The group countered the city's development plans with their own planning expertise, and published numerous reports and plans outlining their own findings and conclusions which called for the creation of a park, with an immediate moratorium on development (Glenn De Baeremaeker, SRVS, personal interview, 17 September 2008). By challenging and contesting these infrastructure plans, SRVS along with other local civil society groups played a key role in shaping the eventual conservation measures enacted to create the Rouge Park.

Formal political support for the Rouge Park came in March 1990, when the Premier of Ontario, David Peterson (Liberal) announced that the province would establish a 4050 ha protected area encompassing the Rouge River and its associated watershed (Ferguson 1993). Along with the announcement came a promise of $10 million from the federal government, which would form the initial seed money needed to get the park off the ground. Later that year, Peterson's Liberal government was defeated by Bob Rae's New Democratic Party (NDP), and for the next 3 years, the plans to create the park floundered. In 1993, the NDP government took up the cause and convened a multi-stakeholder Rouge Park advisory committee to create a park plan. In May 1994, the *Rouge Park Management Plan* was approved by the provincial cabinet and released by the Ministry of Natural Resources, with the official ceremonies opening the park in April 1995, with a claim that it was the largest urban park in all of North America (Leahy 1996). The formal announcement of the Rouge Park was viewed as a key policy achievement for Rae and the NDP (Taylor 1995a), at a period when the party was severely lagging in the polls and facing a looming election, which eventually happened in June 1995, where the party experienced a major loss of seats and was thus relegated to third party status. Interestingly, during the 1990s, Stewart (1999) explains that the neoliberalisation of nature began under the social democratic NDP government, who while in power implemented some key measures towards ecological modernisation. Upon the defeat of the NDP government in June 1995, the selected management and governance structure of the Rouge Park, was decidedly kept in place by the incoming Progressive Conservative Party, who won a majority and ran a platform based on strict fiscal conservativism and explicit neoliberalism (Keil 2002, Prudham 2004, Young and Keil 2007).

Neoliberal governance and conservation

The neoliberalisation of nature is a widely studied concept and there are several different avenues of inquiry. Scholars have examined the outcomes that neoliberal measures/policies have had on actual environmental phenomena and the results are as varied as the regions and case studies in which they were examining. A principal commonality of the neoliberalisation of nature most often involves the roll back of state responsibility, with a corresponding "roll forward" of privatised interests, resulting in a wide variety of uncommon outcomes which are dispersed and/or relevant at different temporal and spatial scales (as argued by Castree 2008a, 2008b). In Ontario, over the past two decades, successive provincial governments have implemented several policy measures that are consistent with a

process of environmental neoliberalisation, examples include the de- and re-regulation of drinking water, or the enabling of voluntary conservation measures (Prudham 2004, Young and Keil 2007, Sandberg and Wekerle 2010).

However, despite such charges from scholars, the effects of these neoliberal policy manifestations in some cases were not immediately apparent, but only surfaced years after, long after any public investigation/inquiry. For example, researchers have recently begun to unpack the nuanced methods of how nature can be aestheticised and/or commodified through the establishment of provincial scale environmental/conservation policy, such as the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt Acts/Plans.[6] Both pieces of legislation are marked achievements for those who fought for the protection of greenspace and agricultural land in the province (Edey *et al.* 2006, Hanna and Webber 2010). Previous conservation policy measures such as the establishment of the Rouge Park and the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (1973) have also collectively increased the amount of greenspace within the GTA and throughout southern Ontario. However, in the case of the moraine and the greenbelt, it has been shown that they may in fact be a lubricant for growth, and play a role in promoting privatised conservation measures, and voluntary management schemes, both of which are key factors that further support class privilege and rural gentrification (Wekerle *et al.* 2007, Logan and Wekerle 2008).

In the case of the Rouge Park, when the first park plan was introduced proponents and stakeholders recognised that the governance structure would face many challenges in terms of management and noted;

> The Rouge Park is a large and complex area, consisting of many parcels of land under different ownership having varied sensitivities to human use, a wide range of requirements for ecological restoration and management or cultural management, and differing needs for protection. Its management structure must be able to deal effectively with the whole area and its complexities, while remaining sensitive and responsive to the values for which the park was created in the first place. The park management entity must be able to encourage a high degree of communication and involvement with landowners, agencies, groups and the general public. (Rouge Park Management Plan 1994, p. 49)

With their newly announced park, provincial officials and bureaucrats were facing some key challenges. Issues pertaining to the day-to-day operation of the park, staffing, bylaw enforcement, and the provision of technical/scientific/planning expertise were yet to be determined, and negotiated. Questions were also raised regarding which municipal or provincial agency would be best suited to manage and govern the park.

Simply put, the park as initially announced consists of a sizeable portion of land, with overlapping political, legal and institutional jurisdictions, thus the coordination and management of conservation efforts would present some daunting logistic and perhaps most importantly financial challenges. In the end, the most defining factor in determining the exact management and governance structure of the park were based on the economics. When political support for the park came in 1994, the province's finances and broader economy were in poor condition (Mittelstaedt 1995), and thus allocating additional monies beyond the initial $10 million from the federal government would have been immediately viewed as poor optics. This is especially poignant for a party that faced a looming election during a period of widespread budgetary cutbacks at numerous state agencies, a rapidly expanding provincial deficit, rising taxes, increasing unemployment, and a growing accusations of fiscal mismanagement, all of which was coinciding with a global recession.[7] The beginning of such neoliberal reforms can be traced back to the first park plan where it states;

> With respect to park development and operations, it is *not* intended that the park management entity would necessarily employ sufficient staff to conduct all such operations by itself. Substantial emphasis in doing such work should be placed on involving other agencies, partner groups and volunteers. Some specific functions could be contracted out to private or public sector entities. (Rouge Park Management Plan 1994, p. 50, emphasis by author)

As noted above, the plan suggests that a substantial focus of the conservation work would be placed on civil society actors and volunteers and thus indicates the neoliberal manifestations within the policy framework, and the overall discourse of how the park was to be managed, governed, and ultimately conserved.

Following the official announcement of political support to create a new protected area, while taking into the consideration the recommendations put forth in the initial park plan, the province appointed David Crombie (a former Toronto mayor) as interim park manager, where one of his priorities was to research and present recommendations to the province on the long-term management of the park (Taylor 1995b). In 1995, Crombie recommended that the park be chiefly managed by the TRCA with input from a council of special interest groups. Day-to-day business was to be handled through only a staff of four and a general manager. In the end, Crombie's recommendations were adamantly opposed by those citizens and civil society actors who had fought for the park from the onset (Jim Robb, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, personal interview, 26 June 2008). SRVS also expressed concern that if the conservation authority was to be given control it would inevitably lead to a severe reduction in public participation in all aspects of park planning. Furthermore, they worried that the TRCA would convert portions of the park into recreational areas such as sports fields, and develop concession stands. In response to such speculation, both the SRVS and local citizens immediately proposed and intensely lobbied public officials that the province establishes a separate management team that would serve as the lead for all park-relevant activities (Taylor 1995b).

After much deliberation, while taking into account both the concerns and the proposal for a separate management body put forth by SRVS, the province decided to back the requests of citizens and create a new agency named the Rouge Park Alliance (RPA), as a voluntary partnership organisation to oversee the implementation of the *Rouge Park Management Plan*. The NDP led government at the time believed that the creation of a new agency with a minimum number of staff, in conjunction with the call for an increased role for civil society actors, would provide for the best balance in achieving the goals set out in the plan. It was also the intention of the province that by creating the RPA, it also demonstrated that they had the political knowledge, capacity, and wherewithal to both provide and fund the services required by this new protected area that they had created.

The RPA consists of board members each representing a provincially determined stakeholder group that is involved with the park. Board members are appointed by their own respective organisations and represent all three levels of government, state agencies, and a not-for-profit group. Currently, the RPA consists of a representative from the following; the federal government, the province of Ontario, Regional Municipality of Durham, Regional Municipality of York, Town of Markham, City of Pickering, Town of Richmond Hill, City of Toronto, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, TRCA, Toronto Zoo, Waterfront Regeneration Trust Corporation, and SRVS. Despite such cooperation between members, to this day, the RPA has never been incorporated and is not a legal entity, thus it cannot receive monies. Hence, the original $10 million granted by the federal government was actually deposited with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, which is an "arms-length"

agency of the province which was created to coordinate waterfront (re)-development along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River.

This decision to create the RPA specifically to manage and govern the park is notable on a few fronts and raises questions as to what factors were considered by NDP in deciding that a new agency was deemed necessary. Firstly, the establishment of the RPA is unique in that there was already a very well-established state agency in place (i.e. the TRCA) that for the most part was sufficiently capable in completely managing the park on both a long-term and day-to-day basis. In fact, the TRCA was created and empowered by the province explicitly to direct, organise, and oversee floodplain and valley lands such as those included within the Rouge Park. Perhaps more importantly, the TRCA has the funding resources, and the required staff, with watershed planning, scientific, and technical expertise that is needed to manage such a greenspace. Secondly, the creation of a special management body by the province to both govern and manage a specific greenspace is simply an uncommon occurrence in Ontario. Provincially created commissions and "arms-length" management agencies have been formed and utilised in the past to serve a wide variety of functions and duties often dealing with issues on a regional scale, however, the creation of such agencies by the province is usually contingent on whether or not there is a capable and existing state agency that can fulfil the duties, and in this case the Rouge Park would have fit well with the TRCA's own existing mandate and jurisdiction.

Lessons learned for civil society actors

Mayer (2000) has argued that the shift from "government" to "governance" as a notable trend in local urban politics, and more specifically the expansion of the urban political system. Savitch and Vogel (2000, p. 161)explain that there is an appreciable difference between both government and governance, where government is "formal institutions and elections and established decision-making processes, and administrative structures" and a "fairly encompassing form of organisation; a legitimate monopoly that takes responsibility for both providing and producing public services". Governance on the other hand, calls for the utilisation of existing institutions in new ways, where services are delivered ultimately through the cooperation between other governments, civil society groups, and even the private sector. This observation on the role of civil society in governance is further complicated when one considers how neoliberal reforms and policy manifestations can be advanced by the state.

This observation brings to light the underpinnings of the explicitly neoliberal policies/politics put forth by Ontario's Progressive Conservative (Tory) government lead by Mike Harris who was elected in 1995, immediately after the Rouge Park was established.[8] The governance structure, lays parallel to some fundamental characteristics of neoliberal policies of the Tory government, primarily related to the installation of the provincially appointed member-based RPA to govern and manage the park, as opposed to a recognised state agency it has effectively rolled back its own responsibilities over administration of a protected area. This current arrangement severely limits the overall efficacy of the RPA as an agency to manage a large protected area and presents some unique challenges to both itself and the civil society organisations it relies on. The primary constraints to this governance structure are directly linked to the neoliberal framework of governance and include the following:

Firstly, this particular governance scheme presents both distinct and obvious financial challenges to the civil society groups working in the park. The RPA's primary source of funding comes from grants from various state agencies, and the interest gained from the

initial $10 million provided by the federal government, and although it has continually managed to balance its budget, civil society groups must apply for RPA funding on a year-by-year basis. This current arrangement was identified as a principal constraint and stumbling block by interviewees from civil society groups working in the park, who state that the establishment of an ongoing funding commitment from the RPA would help with their overall long-term planning, staffing, and resource allocation goals. Furthermore, over the last decade as the park has become more visible to the general public, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of groups interested and applying for RPA funding, and as a result some organisations have turned to other public, corporate, and private sources to ensure that they can continue their work in the Rouge Park.

In addition, such financial constraints have also limited the RPA to expand its staffing levels and thus its in-house expertise to a level that reflects the park's growth through recent land acquisitions. Currently, the staff consists of various managerial positions and outreach/education positions. Inevitably, the plans that govern the overall direction of the park are certainly both broad and comprehensive, especially considering the amount of land included within the park. Thus, to achieve these conservation goals/mandates, often specialised technical and scientific expertise are required, including foresters, ecologists, biologists, hydrologists, planners, archeologists, etc., such expertise is not fully met by the current Rouge Park staff, and as a result civil society organisations working within the park are left to find, fund and source such expertise on their own. Dealing with and negotiating this lack of expertise has been identified by interviewees as another hurdle, primarily due to the limited finances of such groups. Colin Creasey of 10,000 Trees for the Rouge states that in order to secure funding from the RPA and outside sources, the site plans for all plantings require the approval of a certified forester. Such a requirement is another significant cost and potential liability for civil society organisations to deal with (Colin Creasey, 10,000 Trees for the Rouge, personal interview, 8 August 2008)

Secondly, there is an issue of undefined responsibility and jurisdictional gaps of the RPA. One such example can be witnessed in the recent campaign by park officials to eliminate and reduce numerous unlawful activities occurring within the park such as poaching, illegal dumping, and other activities such as snowmobiling on the river itself. To address such issues, the RPA has recognised the need to establish a conservation officer or ranger programme that would help prevent such activities within park boundaries. Yet, the RPA does not have the legal authority to create such a programme, and thus must rely on the existing jurisdictional powers of its member groups (i.e. the police) to curtail such activities which can prove difficult considering these activities most often occur well within park boundaries and thus far from any police officer.

Finally, since the RPA consists of a board representing multiple state agencies and all three levels of government, the organisation is often in a position of trying to convince, negotiate, and justify its various conservation and policy goals to all of its members. This position is further exacerbated by the fact that the RPA as an agency has no real legal decision-making power. Despite the establishment of the RPA, the management and governance structure that was installed by state officials was inherently different as compared with the management models of other protected areas, such as provincial or national parks where specific state institutions have a clear jurisdiction and decision-making power. (i.e. Ontario Provincial Parks fall under the direct command and control of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources) The fundamental difference in the case of the governance of the Rouge Park is that since the RPA is not a legal entity it is unable to own or have jurisdictional powers over the land that it is set out to protect (Rouge Park 2010a).For example, the RPA could never purchase a property it was interested in,

but rather it would have to do so through the appropriate agency such as the TRCA. In the end, the RPA relies on the powers, abilities, and jurisdiction of its volunteer board members and their related agencies to both manage and govern the park. This management structure, where conservation tasks are doled out to the various member agencies, has inevitably led to both overlaps and gaps in terms of park responsibilities.

Despite such constraints, groups working within the park have achieved some significant conservation goals while working within the broader mandate of the RPA. Notable examples include: the reclamation of the Beare Landfill and the creation of the Beare Wetland by Friends of the Rouge Watershed; the planting of 145,000 trees and the reclamation of 60 ha of land by 10,000 Trees for the Rouge; the restoration of a 19th century farmhouse within the park by the Rouge Valley Foundation, which was established as the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre; and the training of volunteers by Citizen Scientists, in the implementation of a certified government protocol in order to accurately monitor stream parameters aiding in the creation of a specialised database (Table 1). It should be noted that the majority of the work and activities done by civil society actors is not directly replicated in any extensive manner by the RPA or any one of its stakeholder members. Thus, if a given civil society group falls out of favour with the RPA or decides to no longer support the mandate, objectives, or goals of the RPA, it seems likely that the park would be affected.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined how the governance structure of the Rouge Park has resulted in what amounts to neoliberal conservation policy yet, despite its apparent and upfront shortcomings, this case study can provide some important lessons. Firstly, it is evident that the participatory nature of the park's governance structure has provided numerous opportunities for civil society to play a critical role in the all facets of park management. In addition, this greenspace governance model has opened up spaces for participation for many types of environmentally oriented civil society groups. This arrangement also provides these groups and their volunteers' higher levels of stewardship over their respective projects. In this case study, numerous civil society actors are actively involved in a wide range of activities related to park management and work alongside the limited number of Rouge Park staff in working towards the achievement of conservation goals.

The participation of civil society actors within the park may be traced back to when concerned citizens formed SRVS in the 1970s and the level of civil society involvement was further facilitated by the character of the initial *Rouge Park Management Plan*, which specifically called for the participation of volunteers and other third party agencies. The degree of involvement of civil society organisations is made possible primarily through various RPA funding initiatives, which encourage organisations to submit proposals for project funding on a year-by-year basis. It is through such funding the RPA has both helped foster the development of and attract some exceptional organisations into the park. The activities undertaken by civil society actors are key factors in achieving the broader conservation goals of the park and include; tree and wildflower plantings; rehabilitation and reclamation of park land; stream monitoring; biodiversity surveys; visitor engagement; and heritage education.

Secondly, this case study highlights how park governance models are grounded locally and should be thought of as being historically contingent, and are continually evolving with respect to the given political/economic climate and the given political parties in power. The Rouge Park's governance structure was finalised during a period in the mid-1990s, where a

Table 1.   Civil society actors working within the Rouge Park.

Group information	No. of staff	Primary activities	Activity replicated by Rouge Park or any other state agency
Rouge Park Established in 1995	7–9	Serves as chief liaison of the Rouge Park. Primary goals include the protection and enhancement of the natural, cultural, and scenic values of the Rouge Park. Objectives include protection of natural heritage, identification of cultural heritage, land use planning, provide recreation opportunities, promote interpretation, and general park management (Rouge Park 2010c)	n/a
10,000 Trees for the Rouge Established in 1989 Not-for-profit	2–5	Organised one-day tree planting during Earth Week which attracts 1500–2000 volunteers. Other activities include watershed restoration and hands-on education and stewardship. The group is an offshoot of Save the Rouge Valley. Key achievements include the planting of 145,000 trees covering an area of 60 ha (Colin Creasey, 10,000 Trees for the Rouge, personal interview, 8 August 2008)	No
Citizen scientists Established in 2001 Not-for-profit	2–5	Provides long-term ecological/habitat monitoring and stream surveys, environmental training and education. Established a provincially certified government protocol to monitor various stream parameters at numerous sites along the Rouge River. Volunteers are trained in the Ontario Stream Assessment Protocol (OSAP), a program created by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Key achievements include the establishment of long-term data trends that help provide a more detailed understanding of stream ecology and overall health of its associated ecosystem (Citizen Scientists 2010)	No
Friends of the Rouge Watershed Established in 1991 Not-for-profit	3–5	Contributes to cultural heritage conservation, habitat enhancement and restoration, and watershed and park planning. Organises a wide variety of planting events with community groups, schools, and other private sector organisations. Key achievements include the creation of the Beare Wetland and the Ressor Wetland (Friends of the Rouge Watershed 2010)	No
Rouge-Duffins-Greenspace Coalition Established in 2003 Not-for-profit	1–2	Activities include advocating for the protection of greenspace/farmland resources and sensible urban planning	Yes
Rouge Valley Foundation Established in 1984 Not-for-profit	2–4	Primary activities include environmental education and trail rehabilitation. The group also helped in establishing The Upper Rouge Network which provides conservation and local history tours. Key achievements include the maintenance and restoration of the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre located as the James Pearse Jr. House, which serves as an information center, and provides office space for other groups (Rouge Valley Foundation 2010)	No

Rouge Valley Naturalists Established in 1994 Not-for-profit	2–4	Preservation and restoring the natural heritage of the Rouge River watershed. Provides environmental education and interpretive nature trail walks. Works with community/school groups (Rouge Valley Naturalists 2010)	No
Save the Rouge Valley System Established in 1975 Not-for-profit	3–5	Initial civil society group formed advocating for the protection of land in the Rouge Valley watershed from development. Rehabilitation and restoration of wildlife habitat. SRVS also aided in establishment of the Friends of the Rouge Watershed. Key achievements include the official recognition and establishment of the Rouge Park (Glenn De Baeremaeker, Save the Rouge Valley System, personal interview, 18 September 2008)	No
Ontario Streams Established in 1995 Not-for-profit	5	Conservation and rehabilitation of streams and wetlands. Aquatic ecosystem rehabilitation throughout a variety of waterways throughout the GTA. Projects include tree planting, stream clean-up, bioengineering, biological monitoring, mitigating fish barriers, and wetland restoration/creation (Ontario Streams 2010)	No

newly elected provincial conservative government immediately began reducing ministry budgets, in response to the worsening recession in Ontario. Such developments must be fully considered when evaluating how this particular greenspace was managed. The chosen governance structure amounts to low-cost conservation, where the primary activities related to achieving both the short and long-term management goals of the park are dutifully completed by civil society organisations and their volunteers.

In this case study, the shortcomings in the overall governance structure is further highlighted when compared with two other more recent environmental protection initiatives announced in Ontario, beginning with the establishment of the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act* in 2001, followed by the *Greenbelt Act* in 2005. Lands covered by the *Greenbelt Act* actually encompass much of the Rouge Park, but in practice, the legislation is specific only to land use planning, as opposed to how individual protected, wilderness, or conservation areas are to be managed at the local scale. In granting protection for both the Oak Ridges Moraine and the larger Greenbelt, the province has chosen a more powerful governance structure compared with the Rouge Park. The primary difference is that the Moraine and the Greenbelt are backed by specific legislation and empower a ministry to roll-out and administer the legislation while making use of ministerial experts, such as lawyers, planners, conservation managers, foresters, technicians, and scientists.[9]

Taken together, both pieces of legislation provide powerful tools in directing and ultimately shaping greenspace planning in the province. Sandberg and Wekerle (2010) and Fung and Conway (2007) have commented that both pieces of legislation, along with the passing of the *Places to Grow Act* in 2005, as noteworthy and "constitutes a strong roll out of provincial command and control approach that provides municipal governments with strict measures on the type, extent, and location of development". Sandberg and Wekerle (2010) also highlight that the state has implemented uniquely "neoliberal policy actions and discourses that permeate and surround the Moraine legislation". Other studies have highlighted the neoliberal policy arrangements that have been actualised through implementation of the Greenbelt and Moraine legislation, and how the policies have facilitated growth/rural gentrification through landform anesthetisation and privatised/voluntary forms of conservation (Wekerle *et al.* 2007, Logan and Wekerle 2008, Sandberg and Wekerle 2010).

In recognition of the growing need to address its lack of legal powers and the constraints related to the overall finances and funding of the activities of its civil society partners, the RPA commissioned a private report in 2010 to specifically examine its governance structure.[10]One of the key recommendations put forth was for the park to be transitioned into Canada's first "near urban" national park (Rouge Park 2010b). This recommendation, although accepted by the RPA and supported by SRVS and several other civil society groups, has not gained the required federal support and thus the proposal remains in its infancy. The proposal is also telling in that the civil society groups who initially fought for more involvement and participation in park planning/management from the onset, have come to the realisation that the park would be in a more favourable future position within the purview of higher-level state agency. Many of these groups have expressed their support for a national park along with the backing of individual RPA board members, and other current/former bureaucrats (National Park Now Committee 2010). It should be noted that this proposition would represent a complete reversal to civil society's original position, of calling for less state control, at the onset of when the park was created.

If granted, such a change would most likely reduce the amount of local level government control over the park, since national parks/reserves are administered at the

federal level, solely by Parks Canada within the Department of Canadian Heritage. The desire and call from within the RPA and key civil society groups to transition the park into federal control also reveals that despite some notable achievements and a heightened level of public participation, their activities still require appropriate government support primarily in the form of funding and technical expertise. More importantly, such a change would distinctly alter the overall governance structure and perhaps provide for more accountability in the state's actions. The creation of a new national park presents some formidable challenges and would require substantial monetary support at the federal level during a period of increased fiscal scrutiny. It would mainly, require negotiating with numerous public and private landowners and substantial financial backing to purchase the land. Perhaps most importantly, a new "near urban" park would require corresponding federal legislation and thus create a precedent with regard to other Canadian cities to pursue the establishment of other near urban parks within their respective jurisdictions.

Scholars of critical geography have recently explored and linked the process of neoliberalisation with the concept of a "shadow state", where NGOs and their volunteers with government funding are increasingly responsible for doing the work that was once exclusive to the state (Wolch 1990, Perkins 2009). Examples may include the delivery and execution of social programmes or the management of greenspaces by civil society actors or other quasi-state "partnership" bodies. In Ontario, the province has a history of creating and relying on such partnerships to help manage its greenspaces. The formation of the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation are examples of not-for-profit quasi-state institutions responsible for dispensing millions in government funds to a wide variety of organisations. These groups then rely on the active citizenship of their volunteers, to fulfil the mandates and goals of their granting institutions. This scenario is further complicated with the established need of conservation managers to increase both local level decision-making and participation. However, simply deferring to such a position may serve to mask a neoliberal hegemony of relying on volunteer labour to achieve the long-term conservation goals of the state.

If the RPA were to be successful in establishing a national park and further "upload" some of its responsibility of its management, such a scenario would perhaps represent a process where neoliberalisation has been scaled back. If successful, such marketisation of the greenspace as a new national park serves to further aestheticise both its real and perceived value(s), further branding the landform as a "good" that can ultimately pay dividends to the adjacent communities. The park is further imagined and promoted by the RPA as providing a north–south biological corridor bridging both the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt from the north, to Lake Ontario to the south. This branding of the Rouge Park as a significant bio-regional landform and a potential future national park is pervasive throughout the organisation and evident through its motto "Wild in the City!", which is heavily promoted on its website, extensive roadside signage, publications, and media releases. Taken as a whole, this marketisation of the park echoes the observations of Laidley (2007) regarding the ongoing re-development and planning of Toronto's waterfront. Specifically, the usage of nature as a distinct tool, which may ultimately serve and mobilise development and investment, and raise the city's regional and global competitiveness.

Despite present and future challenges, the original management structure of the park is still in operation. This case study reveals that the governance structure chosen for the Rouge Park was successful for its broad inclusion of civil society actors and these groups provided tangible benefits at the onset, all at a relatively low cost. However, as the park continues to

grow both in size and in the number of visitors, a careful re-evaluation of its relative dependence on its civil society partners will be required. It is evident that civil society groups can provide distinct benefits to the management and improvement of greenspaces, however, like any institution, their overall efficacy may be limited by the financial, jurisdictional, and perhaps most importantly the legal decision-making powers of the lead institution chosen/created to coordinate their efforts. In this case study, the lack of formal legal powers of the RPA presents a notable constraint. Furthermore, both the province and their municipal counterparts should look for new opportunities to support and sustain the work of its partners. Changes such as, streamlining the funding application process and establishing a stable multi-year funding strategy to groups who are involved in the day-to-day operation of the park, would surely help plan for and achieve the long-term goals of key groups. This case study reveals a neoliberalisation of conservation – a unique state created institution with no legal powers – to serve as the lead agency for civil society groups who do a disproportionate amount of the restoration, monitoring, and visitor engagement. In the end, this case study presents an opportunity to learn about the changing ideas of how urban greenspaces can be managed through unique public-state partnerships.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. For a discussion into why neoliberalism is inherently an environmental project see Bakker (2005), Castree (2008a), Heynen and Robbins (2005), and a Geoforum 35 (3) special issue dedicated to the nature of neoliberalisation.
2. The Oak Ridges Moraine is hilly geological formation consisting of mostly sand and gravel deposited during the last Ice Age. It extends from Rice Lake in the east, to the Niagara Escarpment in the west, and a length of over 160 km (Paterson and Cheel 1997).
3. The other watershed includes Etobicoke Creek, Mimico Creek, the Humber River, Highland Creek, and the Don River.
4. After amalgamation of the City of Toronto in 1998, the former Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority was renamed the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). The TRCA is the lead agency in coordinating watershed management in the GTA.
5. The eastern border of the City of Toronto consisted of the former City of Scarborough. The City of Toronto was amalgamated on 1 January 1998. The six municipalities of the former Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto included Toronto, York, East York, North York, Etobicoke, and Scarborough. For an explanation of Toronto's amalgamation history and its past two-tier model of municipal governance see Keil (2000) and Sancton (2005).
6. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act was passed in 2001, and its main purpose was to protect both the ecological and hydrological integrity of the moraine. The Greenbelt Act was passed in 2005, and protects a much larger area (approximately 700,000 ha) from further development, and sprawl (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2011).
7. The NDP were defeated in June 1995, and replaced by the Conservative's who ran on a platform called the "Common Sense Revolution" promising immediate deficit reduction in the form of lower taxes and cuts to social spending.
8. See Keil (2002) and Keil and Boudreau (2005) for a synopsis of the effects and outcomes of amalgamation in Toronto.
9. In the case of the Greenbelt and the Moraine, both acts and their related plans and policies are administered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, which is the lead institution chiefly involved in land-use planning in the province of Ontario.

10. The RPA board unanimously carried a motion that the Organization and Finance Review Steering Committee examine possible governance and financing models for the creation of a National Park (RPA Minutes – Meeting #2/09 2009).

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