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From:

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Carolinian Canada Coalition

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To:

Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources

The Senate of Canada

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A4 VIA

enev@sen.parl.gc.ca

Honourable Members of the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources,

Re: Bill C-248 - An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (Ojibway National Urban Park of Canada)

Dear Members of the Environment Committee,

Carolinian Canada represents a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Carolinian life zone in southern Ontario. Our mission is rooted in safeguarding the biodiversity and ecological integrity of this unique and endangered ecosystem for present and future generations. Given this commitment, we strongly support the establishment of the Ojibway National Urban Park (ONUP) and urge you to pass Bill C-248 to ensure the formal, firm, and permanent protection of this vital natural area.

We respect and appreciate the diligent efforts of Parks Canada and partners in advancing plans for the ONUP; however, the current policy process within Parks Canada does not guarantee the creation or permanence of this park, as policy initiatives can change, whether or not there is a change of government. This uncertainty is why Carolinian Canada strongly and urgently supports the passing of Bill C-248 to formally, firmly, and permanently establish the ONUP.

In our connections with the public in Windsor-Essex and beyond, as well as with local First Nations, we have seen overwhelming support for creating the Ojibway National Urban Park (ONUP). This area is widely recognized as having exceptional biodiversity and natural value, warranting the highest level of protection. The Ojibway Prairie Complex is crucial for biodiversity and home to numerous rare and endangered species found nowhere else in Canada. To ensure its long-term preservation amid changing government policies and priorities, the ONUP deserves the strongest possible measures of protection.

We urge the government and Parks Canada to ensure that ONUP is co-managed with local First Nations in a meaningful way by supporting the principle of ONUP co-management (and all national parks) with First Nations. We propose that 50% of the federal budget allocation be dedicated to local First Nations to plan and implement their vision for the park in partnership with Parks Canada and other stakeholders. We urge the government and Parks Canada to take this principle beyond symbolism and translate it effectively into practice.

The ONUP also offers a significant opportunity to restore ecological connections in southern Ontario. As a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to restoring severely damaged ecological connections and repairing human-environment relationships, Carolinian Canada strongly supports Parks Canada's focus on Lake Erie's north shore and advocates for planning a greater ONUP that reconnects Ojibway through effective ecological corridors to Lake Erie, Point Pelee National Park, and beyond. We urge Parks Canada and other stakeholders to immediately begin this planning to enhance ecological connectivity and support our vision for a revitalized landscape.

Learning from Rouge National Urban Park, Canada's first national urban park, which exemplifies significant ecological connectivity by stretching from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine, we stress the importance of landscape-scale connectivity for the ONUP. If Ojibway is to be equally worthy of National Park designation, it should be based on a similar vision of effective connectivity across the landscape. The ONUP must not become an isolated enclave; it should be part of a broader vision of ecological restoration and connectivity. Allowing the ONUP to remain disconnected from the larger landscape would represent a historic missed opportunity and could jeopardize the long-term protection of the area's unique biodiversity.

Finally, we emphasize the need to pass the legislation quickly to legally establish the ONUP, even if it initially includes only federally owned lands and those currently offered for transfer. Concerning which lands are ready to be included, it is most critical to establish the National Park promptly, and less important to finalize all potential lands at this initial phase. We suggest that the minimum area to be included in the legislation should be the existing federally owned lands, including the port lands, and any provincial, municipal, or private lands that have been offered for unconditional transfer to the National Park at this time. Establishing the ONUP is the priority, with the possibility to expand boundaries later.

Carolinian Canada has long been at the forefront of efforts to protect and restore habitat in the Carolinian region, collaborating with Indigenous partners, local communities, and government agencies to ensure these landscapes continue to thrive. We believe the establishment of ONUP under Bill C-248 represents a pivotal step toward preserving this Carolinian biodiversity hotspot.

Thank you for your consideration and dedication to the conservation of Canada's natural heritage.

Sincerely,



Michelle Kanter

Executive Director



Carolinian Canada is a network of leaders growing healthy landscapes in the spirit and practice of reconciliation in Ontario's extraordinary far south on the traditional territories of many nations including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Lunaapeew, the Wendat and the Mississauga. We are accountable to work together in the true practice of reconciliation to create a just and equitable future for all living beings of this land. Explore your place CarolinianCanada.ca (Canadian Registered Charity 83559 4722).