

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL PARKS REPORTS 2015

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Preface

In the conclusion to my 2013 Parks report I wrote "If we are ever to return to the hopeful era when our governments were creating parks and protected areas with the intent of preserving land for the responsible use and pleasure of future generations of people and the survival of future generations of the species which need wild lands to exist, we are going to have to work a lot harder to elect politicians who appreciate the inherent values, not just the commercial economic and recreational potential, of our land and biodiversity."

Now that, hopefully, that has happened, it is our opportunity to help them resolve the problems caused by past mismanagement. However, because both governments have so many urgent problems in so many areas of governance, we will need to keep pressure on them, knowing that at last we have a chance of being listened to.

NATIONAL PARKS—2015

Our National Parks are now in the Department of the Environment and Climate Change. The Minister is lawyer Catherine McKenna whose previous work was in social justice and international trade. As promised, Prime Minister Trudeau has made public the mandate for each department. The mandate for this department as it applies to Parks and protected areas includes :

- 1) Improve watershed protection and water treatment. [this should influence the regulation of the uses allowed in our Eastern Slopes.]
- 2) Endangered Species. Take scientific advice and respond quickly to complete robust species at risk recovery plans. [There is a backlog of 4 years & over 100 species].
- 3) Develop Canada's National Parks system. Expand and manage National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries
- 4) Develop Parks programs & services so more Canadians can experience National Parks and learn more about our environment and heritage.
- 5) In 2017 i.e. the 150th. anniversary of Confederation. Admission will be free for all visitors to National Parks.
- 6) From 2018 on - free admission for children under 18 and 1 year's free admission for new Canadians.
- 7) Expand the 'Learn to Camp' program to ensure low and middle income families have the opportunity to experience Canada's outdoors.
- 8) Protect National Parks by limiting development within them and, where possible, work with nearby communities to help grow local eco-tourism industries and create jobs.
- 9) Work with the Ontario Government to enhance our first urban National Park, the Rouge Urban National Park, by improving legislation to protect this important ecosystem and to

guide how the Park will be managed.

10) Collaborate with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to renew our commitment to protect the Great lakes, the St. Lawrence River Basin and the Lake Winnipeg Basin.

11) Work with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Canada Coast Guard and the Minister of Science to examine the implications of Climate Change on Arctic Marine Ecosystems.

12) Work with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard to increase the proportion of Canada's Marine and coastal areas that are protected to 5% by 2017 and to 10% by 2020 supported by new investments, community consultations and science.

This would comply with the International Convention on Biological Diversity that Canada signed in 2010. [currently only 1% are protected].

Mountain National Parks: Problems That Need to be Addressed

Bow Valley Parkway

Because of the number of young animals being killed, the Parkway was wisely closed at night in the Spring. The decision has now been made to widen this winding scenic route which many fear will encourage an increase in the amount and speed of traffic.

Jasper Park

Maligne Lake Development: The permit to build a hotel on the lake was not granted but the installation of 15 permanent roofed tent cabins has been granted although it does not comply with the Jasper Park Plan which allows no permanent commercial accommodation outside the Jasper townsite. This decision is being contested in court by CPAWS and the Jasper Environmental Association.

Banff Park

Proposed Lake Louise Ski Area Expansion: This proposal for the massive expansion of the ski area was developed in private between the lease owner and Parks Canada with no input from agencies or organizations representing other stakeholders. They and the public were given only 3 weeks in the spring to comment on the 256 page proposal which would double the skier capacity, the parking and the number of ski lifts and increase the developed area by 30%. Most people who might have objected had no idea this was happening.

When challenged, the Parks Canada Agency acknowledged the proposal would be in violation of the National Parks Act because it would expand into legally-designated wilderness areas outside the current lease. The Act would have to be changed to allow it.

In June eleven former senior Parks staff wrote a letter strongly opposing the development, pointing out among other things, that because of the reduction in the Park's science capacity, the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposal was based on outdated and incomplete science.

PROVINCIAL PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS – 2015

Proposal to Re-introduce Bison in Banff Park This is proving to be a contentious issue. The only point of agreement seems to be that, for the safety of people, the bison will have to be fenced in - an extremely expensive necessity which would inhibit the movement of some other species which currently roam freely in the Park and prevent the human use of trails in the area. Because the bison would not be free to move out to the prairie in winter as they would naturally do, they would have to be fed, with the possibility of the introduction of invasive plant species.

Bison populations are known to double in about 5 years so once the carrying capacity of their confined area is reached, the surplus would have to be culled or, as some biologists advocate, used to start herds elsewhere.

No progress on the establishment of new Parks in the South Okanagan or the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

OTHER ISSUES

Site C dam on the Peace River in British Columbia. In 2014 B.C. Hydro was given a permit to proceed but is still being protested by 8 First Nations communities, nearby municipalities and conservation groups. Cost is estimated at \$8.75 billion, height 60 metres, flooding over 100km. land, much of it agricultural and ecologically important.. Some protesters occupying land near the site have recently been arrested.

Diamond Mining in northern Ontario: The big De Beers Victor diamond mine in the boreal peatlands of the Hudson Bay Lowlands west of the Cree community of Attawapiskat was started 7 years ago but is only expected to be productive for another 4 years. They are now looking at other areas to mine. This peatland ecosystem is one of the largest carbon-storage areas in the world and a recent study by Y2Y revealed an abundance of rare and unique flora and fauna that should be protected.

The Peel River Watershed: An excellent plan for the protection of this beautiful and ecologically important area had been drawn up but was rejected by the Yukon Government. Ecojustice, on behalf of CPAWS & other groups, took the Yukon Government to court. They were represented by Thomas Berger and won their case.

Nova Scotia has a new Protected Areas Plan. 14% of the Province's land is now protected.

Endangered Species: In April, Nature Canada and local naturalist groups won an Ontario Court of Appeal decision to stop a wind energy project that would "cause irreversible harm to the endangered Blanding's Turtle". In addition the court ruled that in future wind energy companies must consider how their projects will affect turtles, birds, bats and other wildlife species.

It was previously reported that our Parks and Protected Areas Division is now in the previous Department of Sustainable Resource Development and Environment. The Minister is Shannon Phillips, an economist who previously worked on energy and environmental issues.

The Alberta Wildlife Act has a section on Species at Risk and has an Endangered Species Conservation Committee [which includes members representing industry and hunters] but no obligation to act on their recommendations. Some scientific reports have suggested the need for habitat protection and recovery plans but few are ever acted upon, even when a species is one of the 24 also listed by the Federal Government. This is because the Alberta law includes no mandatory protection for habitat, even though loss of habitat is recognised as the primary cause of species being put at risk. When the Greater Sage Grouse population got down to only 14 males in Alberta, the Provincial Government took no action so in 2013 conservation groups obtained a Federal Emergency Order to protect the remaining grouse and their habitat. The City of Medicine Hat and the LGL Oil Company claimed it was unconstitutional. Nature Canada and Ecojustice took them to court in support of the order. There has since been some increase in the numbers of grouse.

It should be noted that Nature Canada has recently put more emphasis on conservation and is willing to take action in its defense.

The new Alberta Government is, of necessity, mainly preoccupied with matters of climate change.

It has stated that it will continue with the Land Use Framework program and has already issued welcome amendments to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan regarding protection of the Castle Special Place. With a much increased area in the proposed Wildland Park and a new Provincial Park, the whole Castle area will now be administered by the Parks Division. The issue not addressed in the amendments is that of mechanized recreational use.

There has been no word on more hearings on the North Saskatchewan Region Plan. We hope that when they resume we will be able to get better protection for the Bighorn and for headwaters in other areas of the Eastern Slopes.

There is increasing concern over declining wild fish stocks in Alberta with Cutthroat Trout being of particular concern and the Province's decreasing caribou herds need rapid action to protect their remaining habitat.

An enforceable Biodiversity Management Plan would also be a good step forward.