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## A CENTURY OF PARKS CANADA

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# Epilogue



LYLE DICK  
PARKS CANADA

National parks are maintained for all the people – for the ill that they may be restored; for the well that they may be fortified and inspired by the sunshine, the fresh air, the beauty, and all the other healing, ennobling agencies of Nature. They exist in order that every citizen of Canada may satisfy his craving for Nature and nature's beauty; that he may absorb the poise and restfulness of their forests; that he may fill his soul with the brilliance of the wild flowers and the sublimity of the mountain peaks; that he may develop the buoyancy, the joy, and the activity that he sees in the wild animals; that he may stock his brain and mind with great thoughts, noble ideals; that he may be made better, be healthier, and happier.

James B. Harkin, quoted in Mabel Williams,  
*The Banff-Jasper Highway: Descriptive Guide*  
(Hamilton, ON: Larson, 1928), 15–16.

I don't think there is an institution in Canada that pays as big a dividend as the Canadian national parks.... National Parks provide the chief means of bringing to Canada a stream of tourists and streams of tourist gold.

James B. Harkin, 1922, quoted in Kevin McNamee, *National Parks in Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1994), 23.

Canada still has vast untouched areas out of which more wilderness parks could be carved. Future generations may wonder at our blindness if we neglect to set them aside before civilization invades them. What is needed today is an informed public opinion which will voice an indignant protest against any vulgarization of the beauty of our national parks or any invasion of their sanctity. Negative or passive good-will that does nothing is of little use. We need "fierce loyalties" to back action. The National Parks of Canada are a source of untold pleasure and pride to our people. Every principle of enlightened patriotism should inspire us to keep them inviolate.

James B. Harkin, "Reflections of a Parks Administrator: From the Papers of James B. Harkin, first Commissioner of the National Parks of Canada from 1911 to 1936," *Park News* (Journal of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada), January 1966, 16.

Surveys suggest that national parks rank among Canadians' most-valued symbols of identity.<sup>1</sup> But what is it about our national parks that we value or identify with? Is it their natural landscapes, opportunities to view wildlife or the chance to commune with nature? Is it their role in protecting ecosystems? Do our highest values for national parks lie in recreational opportunities, such as backcountry hiking, or alpine skiing? Or do we embrace the tamer fare of scenic drive-throughs, golfing, and quasi-urban vacations at tourist resorts? Do we place a premium on the economic or monetary contributions of national parks as revenue generators for tourism and related sectors of the economy? Or are there other values that resonate? Are these assorted values for national parks in some way compatible or, as some have suggested,

incommensurable, the outgrowth of completely different and irreconcilable ideological sets?

The diversity of viewpoints underscores major challenges as we are about to enter the second century of the national parks system. We do not yet know the answers to these questions, but what can be said is that the soundness of national parks programs in future will depend on the success of park administrators in engaging a broad range of constituencies in supporting and sharing the stewardship for these special places. National parks must be seen to work for all groups of Canadians if they are to continue to play an important role in our shared culture and identity.

Public support for the protection of national parks and other protected areas has always been important, but in Canada it lagged historically behind initiatives by administrators to protect and present these protected areas. As Alan MacEachern notes in his essay on M.B. Williams, Canada's national parks system was born in 1911 in relative obscurity, and, as John Sandlos elaborates, most Canadians were not engaged with issues of park establishment and administration in the formative period. Rather, Canada's early policies regarding national parks were largely shaped by James B. Harkin, whose influence is still apparent in the parks system he guided through its first quarter-century. Harkin was fortunate to have the support of a small but dedicated staff, including the remarkable Mabel Williams, who emerges in MacEachern's account as the principal publicist and popularizer of the national parks system in its formative era. However, Harkin knew that the realization of his vision of a country-wide system of national parks depended on more than talented staff – he needed a core of advocates for protected areas from outside the government. He found his essential constituency in a group of committed wilderness enthusiasts centred around the Alpine Club of Canada.<sup>2</sup> Arthur Wheeler, its founder, was an early advocate of banning commercial development within the parks, and he also pushed for the inclusion of the Columbia Icefield within the expanded boundaries of Jasper National Park. Perhaps more importantly, the Alpine Club provided a core preservationist philosophy that helped Harkin make the case for setting aside areas for national parks.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of a broadly based constituency for protected areas, Harkin knew that he needed to muster other arguments in favour of dedicating these lands – some of these are summarized in the passages quoted at the beginning of this epilogue. Prominent among these

arguments were his assertions that national parks had the potential to be major drivers of commercial activity, economic development, and generators of wealth for the country. The simultaneous promotion of conservation and recreational tourism was certainly paradoxical and, in Sandlos's interpretation, it embodied "contradictory philosophies," giving rise to recurrent debates between its different constituencies as to whether to extend or restrict development, promote visitation or set limits on park use.

It was Harkin's genius that he was able to incorporate both idealistic and pragmatic strains in his vision and approach, a reflection in microcosm of the larger forces bearing on the country's national parks. Further, he was able to articulate a range of compelling arguments in favour of national parks drawn from notions of both intrinsic and instrumental value. Harkin's hybrid vision expressed the pressures under which the parks system was then operating, but also his sensitive understanding of his audiences, especially the parliamentary representatives and governments to whom he directed his appeals for funding the new system. Harkin was keenly aware that in order to develop a broadly based constituency for national parks, it would be necessary to expand the system across the country so that people in all regions of Canada could experience wilderness areas and their values first-hand. During his tenure, the National Parks Branch also made it a priority to develop roads, tourist attractions, and commercial facilities within the national parks, especially in Banff and Jasper, but also in younger national parks such as Riding Mountain, Prince Albert, and others featuring townsites offering a wide range of quasi-urban amenities for visitors. By 1930 his success was evident in the addition of twelve new national parks in eight of Canada's provinces, effectively transforming the country's national parks into a national system. Further success came with his establishment of Canada's national commemorative program through the inauguration of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1919. Since that date, more than two thousand persons, places, and events of national historic significance have been commemorated across the country.<sup>4</sup> Harkin thereby was the architect of two national systems for the protection and presentation of Canada's heritage – both natural and cultural.

Harkin also presided over drafting the first comprehensive legislation governing the establishment and management of Canada's national parks, including the well-known words from Section 4 of the 1930 *National Parks*

*Act*, asserting that national parks “are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada, for their benefit, education and enjoyment.”<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding numerous amendments over time, this phrase still encapsulates the guiding philosophy of national parks and its dual mandate of protection and presentation, predicated on the belief that each is unattainable without the other. Harkin knew that, unless the natural values of national parks were protected, they could lose the special qualities most valued by many Canadians. What he strongly also believed was that without the values of “benefit, education and enjoyment,” national parks could not build a constituency of support among the Canadian public for continued protection. In his view, then, the dual mandate was not only integral but indispensable to the continued success and survival of the national parks system.

The dialectic between the different strains of intrinsic and instrumental value is well represented in successive stages of development at Canada’s first and most famous national park. Thirty years ago, in a thoughtful essay surveying the history of Banff’s first century, the landscape architect Roger Todhunter discerned that the cultural landscape of its townsite displays evidence of three different eras of national park philosophy and practice. In the initial era, 1885–1910, the town developed around the hot springs as a spa, accessed primarily via rail transportation by an elite clientele and isolated from the larger park. The amenities of Banff National Park were largely the product of joint marketing and development by the Government of Canada and the Canadian Pacific Railway. In that era, the park’s natural areas were little more than spectacular scenery to be viewed from within the safe, tame confines of the town. In the second phase of development, 1910–1945, Banff developed into a full-fledged resort. Largely corresponding to Harkin’s tenure as commissioner, in this phase Banff was positioned to take advantage of automobile access, an expanding regional population, and the emergence of middle-class tourism as the town and park developed into a major international resort. In the third phase, between the Second World War and ca. 1980, Banff expanded exponentially following the building of the Trans-Canada Highway, major ski resorts, and a full range of urban facilities in the town, including hotels and restaurants.<sup>6</sup>

Since Todhunter’s essay appeared in 1981, we have witnessed two further phases in the evolution of national parks. The first of these was a period of ecosystem-oriented programming following the placement of Parks Canada

within the Department of the Environment in 1979, a public outcry following years of unconstrained development at Banff, efforts by park administrators to address a range of concerns relating to threatened or endangered species, and the continued degradation of ecosystems across the country. By the late twentieth century, national parks were primarily focussed on ensuring ecological integrity within national parks as recommended by the Panel on Ecological Integrity. More generally, Parks Canada confronted challenges of working with other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other constituencies to protect the biological diversity of the larger ecosystems of which our national parks form a part. The areas of concern, as enumerated in a recent compilation of Canadian environmental policy, extended beyond federal stewardship and included a collective responsibility of Canada's provincial and federal governments to protect 12 per cent of the country's natural environment, which as of 2003, still lagged at 10 per cent. In 2000, the Panel on Ecological Integrity reported that thirty-eight of Canada's thirty-nine parks established to that point were under serious ecological stress. Indeed, several national parks among Canada's World Heritage Sites were reportedly in danger of losing their World Heritage commemorative status if unconstrained development of these parks were to continue.<sup>7</sup> Such concerns were reflected in the stress placed on ecological values in the *Parks Canada Agency Act* of 2000.<sup>8</sup>

The ecosystem-based model, strongly influenced by the American environmental movement, combined the ethics and ideologies of intrinsic value with an aversion and opposition to most forms of instrumental use. It moved beyond conservationist notions of wise use of natural resources to a preservationist model emphasizing that nature should be "left alone and untouched."<sup>9</sup> In the assessment of one observer, a problem was that it tended to separate humans from nature: "people and their impacts are perceived as foreign influences on the environment."<sup>10</sup> In this paradigm people were often viewed as the problem, virtually an alien invader intruding upon and negatively affecting the ecosystems of protected areas.<sup>11</sup> While successful in influencing Parks Canada to promulgate ecological integrity as its primary mandate and focus for national parks in the late twentieth century, it was less apparent that wilderness conservationists had succeeded in connecting with the Canadian public, whose support they needed to build a broadly based constituency for ecological preservation.<sup>12</sup> In a comparative study of wilderness and nature

conservation in Canada, the United States, and Britain, the historian Norman Henderson argued that in Canada, “there has never been a powerful national conservation design.”<sup>13</sup>

A shortcoming of earlier concepts was that protection of the natural environment was sometimes accorded greater value than either the cultural resources documenting the human imprint on the land or the people whose histories are written in this heritage. Fortunately, the policy framework for national parks has evolved beyond notions of privileging nature at the expense of culture. Today, Parks Canada’s *Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* and its current integrated mandate requires park managers to address the values of both heritage realms in the delivery of their programs.<sup>14</sup> Ronald Rudin has provided a particularly instructive example of this evolution in Kouchibouguac National Park, where the histories of the Acadian people who lived and worked in the park before expropriation of their properties were previously ignored. Concepts of the park’s values changed following issuance of the 1981 report of a Special Inquiry into the expropriations, and more recent films documenting this history have influenced Parks Canada to seek to more fully engage the Acadian community. Despite past injustices, Rudin discerns both good will on the part of park administrators and an emerging willingness of members of the Acadian community to explore ways of reclaiming their history through integration of their stories into Kouchibouguac’s programs. In his essay on Kluane National Park Reserve, David Neufeld identifies a similar change of attitudes and values arising from political action by Yukon First Nations, contributing to a greater awareness by park administrators of the value and importance of cultural pluralism as an organizing principle of national parks establishment and administration. Also in Yukon, Brad Martin gives a valuable account of how through land claims negotiations concerning Ivavik National Park of Canada, the Inuvialuit succeeded in shaping the park’s establishment into a tool for their own cultural survival, with positive results for both the Inuvialuit and the national parks system.

The history of Aboriginal peoples reminds us that the human presence in our national parks is very deep, often extending back to remote antiquity. Gwyn Langemann’s essay on archaeology in the Rocky Mountains reveals that our national parks contain numerous archaeological sites documenting a remarkable time depth, some extending as far back as 10,700 Before the

Present, or earlier. These sites, coupled with many post-contact archaeological sites, buildings, landscapes, and other cultural resources, are among the important heritage values of our national parks and must continue to receive the highest level of protection alongside safeguarding their natural environments. In his essay, I.S. MacLaren suggests that the time depth can pose its own problems, as approved uses of national parks may privilege some users over others, or some groups or cultures over other groups. He poses some very interesting reflections and ideas as to how the participation and presence of Aboriginal peoples might be reintegrated into programs at Jasper and other national parks.

In 2006, as Parks Canada approached the centenary of the national parks system, it embarked on a further phase – a major new initiative focussed on marketing and visitor experience. In part, this development was prompted by declining visitor numbers, a trend discernible over the last decade in museums, historic sites, and natural parks programs across the continent. This initiative apparently also reflected a recognition by Parks Canada's senior managers that its programs would soon not be sustainable without a concerted effort to connect more tangibly with the country's diverse constituencies. The larger context bearing on visitor experience included major demographic changes in Canada over the previous two decades, including the burgeoning populations of communities of new Canadians, many with little prior experience or awareness of national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas of Canada. As well, the concentration of Canada's population in urban communities has continued to accelerate, while national parks are almost invariably situated in rural and sometimes very remote areas. These demographic changes posed further challenges for Parks Canada to find ways to reach and deliver programs to the great mass of Canadians, which visitor experience and marketing initiatives are now being designed to do. It is to be hoped that the visitor experience initiative will encourage Canada's diverse citizenry to encounter more directly our natural and cultural heritage, learn about its many values, support its continued protection and presentation, and actively join in its stewardship.

The point to draw from this historical progression is that, viewed in the long term over a 125-year span, no single approach to national parks policy seeking to supersede other core aspects of mandate was able to do so indefinitely. After a period within which certain policies were emphasized,

the national parks agency recurrently sought to rebalance park programs by addressing other, less well represented aspects of the mandate. Claire Campbell's perceptive comment in the introduction to this volume that "state initiative" and "public participation" cannot be neatly divided seems particularly apt. However paradoxical or unsatisfying from some perspectives, the national parks system more or less reflects the different interests that have weighed in regarding park development and conservation over the course of its first century.

It is also true, as the contributors to this volume have shown, that over the last century Canada's national parks did not enjoy an unproblematic evolution but rather manifested a recurrent and ongoing struggle between diverging interests and viewpoints, centred on competing notions of instrumental and intrinsic use.<sup>15</sup> Ben Bradley shows how politics played out in the unsuccessful quest to integrate Hamber Provincial Park in British Columbia's Big Bend Country into the federal system. Hamber was one of several would-be national parks; others, such as the former Buffalo National Park in Alberta, set up to aid in the renewal of buffalo and antelope populations on the prairies, were short-lived, withdrawn from the system after only a few years: victims of the political climate of the 1920s. In his cogent examination of the portable cabin issue in Prince Albert National Park, Bill Waiser suggests that powerful local interests sometimes exerted an inordinate influence on park administration beyond the expressed will or interests of the larger Canadian population. At the same time, we must recognize that the dialectic between different interests has also generated positive results for the national parks system and the country. Jim Taylor's essay on Banff in the 1960s shows that different visions of the national park ideal came to a head in that decade, in the process energizing a new generation of environmental advocates devoted to ecological preservation by 1970.

Perhaps it might appropriately be acknowledged that political dynamics are integral to the establishment of national parks, an element with the potential for either negative or positive consequences, but an unavoidable part of the process nevertheless. As in other liberal democracies, public policy in Canada has generally been shaped through the interplay between the executive branch, parliamentary representatives, non-governmental interests, and the public service – and the policies and practices adopted for national parks are no exception. It was these diverse players, animated by diverging ideologies

and interests, who influenced the evolution and development of this country's national parks system. The system we have today is the result of park authorities' efforts to steer between these competing interests, and the degree to which they have succeeded continues to be debated.

From Harkin to the present, the central question for parks administrators has not been a matter of choosing which components of the mandate to address, but rather: how to strike the right balance. A complicating factor, as pointed out in several essays in this book, was the periodic politicization of the national parks establishment in the twentieth century. It underscores the complexity of setting aside protected areas, a process that may take years and which must often be supported by different levels of government, non-governmental agencies, First Nations, and assorted other constituencies. In our political system, politicians must face the voters every four to five years, or even more often in a minority parliament. Governments understandably desire new initiatives to report to voters, so it is to be expected that political factors will continue to enter into the creation of new parks. However, the issues are now so urgent that citizens must assume a greater role in helping ensure that national parks respect the natural environment while serving the needs of Canadians to experience these magnificent places and icons of Canadian identity. Given the diverse mandates and expectations of the twenty-first century, the continued health and survival of the national parks system will depend on a much more broadly based dialogue in the public sphere than we have witnessed to date. Canada's success in meeting these challenges will depend in large measure on the effectiveness of national parks administration in encouraging a broadly based engagement with diverse constituencies in the public sphere, while building a general ethos of stewardship for the national parks system.

Fulfilling Parks Canada's mandates for national parks will also depend on successful integration of the wide range of professional inputs available to the agency since the professionalization of its research and planning units in the 1960s and 1970s. A major milestone was the production of the first National Parks System Plan in 1970, which established a systematic process for classification of Canada's natural regions and for identifying candidate areas for protection within each of the thirty-nine identified regions.<sup>16</sup> This plan established a basis for much of the research on the natural and cultural heritage of national parks carried out since its inauguration. The System Plan

has found support among major non-governmental heritage agencies, such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club. Its publication and widespread dissemination perhaps has done more to mitigate the politicization of park establishment than any other factor because governments are aware than any major departure from the established process could well be subject to public censure from influential advocates of national parks conservation. This is not to suggest that the National Parks System Plan cannot be critiqued or that other methodologies of classification are not relevant to the establishment or administration of national parks. In his essay in this volume, Olivier Craig-Dupont makes several cogent observations regarding the System Plan and argues that these ecological regions are cultural rather than natural constructs.

In the past, issues arising from controversies were often addressed in a reactive way, such as the Banff–Bow Valley study, which launched the Panel on Ecological Integrity and prompted extensive public discussion of important issues confronting Banff National Park and the wildlife for which its serves as steward. In the past the national parks agency was sometimes less successful in taking proactive measures, that is, anticipating the future needs of protection and presentation, putting in place plans to implement these goals, and maintaining a clear focus through changing administrations and shifting governmental priorities. A notable exception appears to be the current “visitor experience” initiative, a multi-year program that promises to reshape the development of Parks Canada’s brand and vision for many years to come. The new emphasis on outreach and engagement – offering Canadians the opportunity to participate in biological research in national parks or archaeological projects at national historic sites, for example – is designed to win champions or supporters for the continued dedication of protected areas. For public agencies such as Parks Canada, dependent on governmental appropriations, enlisting the support of parliamentary representatives has always been important, but equally critical in the current context will be the support of the citizens who elect the parliamentarians. Achieving their support will require sustained leadership in the years ahead.

In an increasingly complex political environment, addressing its mandate will require Parks Canada to build broadly based constituencies for the protection and presentation of national parks and other protected areas and to navigate between these different constituencies in ongoing dialogue

and problem-solving. In an emerging paradigm people might more usefully be viewed not as the problem but as the solution to the myriad challenges confronting Canada's national parks and national marine conservation areas programs today. In this regard, James B. Harkin's goal of fostering an "informed public opinion" seems all the more pressing and critical to ensuring the sustainability and continued health of Canada's national parks system over its second century.

## NOTES

- 1 See, for example, the Environics poll, "Patriotism and Canadian Identity," which showed that in 2003, 62 per cent of Canadians polled ranked national parks as important symbols of national identity, exceeded only by the Canadian flag, at 68 per cent. A similar poll in 2000 showed national parks and the flag tied at the top of the poll, both garnering the support of 73 per cent of respondents. See: <http://www.acs-aec.ca/oldsite/Polls/Poll40.pdf>.
- 2 See the discussion in PearlAnn Reichwein, "Beyond the Visionary Mountains: The Alpine Club of Canada and the Canadian National Park Idea, 1906 to 1969," PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1995.
- 3 As in Canada, the early conservation movement in the United States was initially driven by dedicated amateur naturalists, especially its central figure and leading philosopher, John Muir. See Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 333–57.
- 4 See C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).
- 5 For a useful discussion of the evolution of the 1930 Act, see C.J. Taylor, "Legislating Nature: The National Parks Act of 1930," in *To See Ourselves / To Save Ourselves: Ecology and Culture in Canada*, ed. Rowland Lorimer et al., 125–37 (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1991).
- 6 Roger Todhunter, "Banff and the National Park Idea," *Landscape* 25, no. 2 (1981): 33–39. On the evolution of the townsite, see also Robert C. Scace, "Banff Town Site: A Historical-Geographical View of Urban Development in a Canadian National Park," in *Canadian Parks in Perspective*, ed. J.G. Nelson, 197–208 (Montreal: Harvest House).
- 7 David R. Boyd, *Unnatural Law: Rethinking Canadian Environmental Law and Policy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 168–69.
- 8 C. Lloyd Brown-John, "Canada's National Parks Policy: From Bureaucrats to Collaborative Managers," Unpublished paper, Canadian Political Science Association Conference, York University, Toronto, 2006; <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Brown-John.pdf>; accessed 18 October 2009.

- 9 Joseph Petulla, *American Environmental History: The Exploitation and Conservation of Natural Resources* (San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser, 1977), 219. Quoted in PearlAnn Reichwein, "Beyond the Visionary Mountains: The Alpine Club of Canada and the Canadian National Park Idea, 1906 to 1969," 26. On the problematic character of traditional notions of wilderness, see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, 69–90 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).
- 10 Norman Henderson, "Wilderness and the Nature Conservation Ideal: A Comparative Analysis, Britain, Canada and the United States" CSERGE Working paper GEC 92-22, University College, London, United Kingdom, n.d.
- 11 For example, Parks Canada's Chief Scientist has argued: "In an ideal world, protected areas would be very large and managed with no human interference." Stephen Woodley, "Planning and Managing for Ecological Integrity in Canada's National Parks," in *Parks and Protected Areas in Canada: Planning and Management*, 3d ed., ed. Philip Dearden and Rick Rollins (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009), 129.
- 12 Parks Canada's policy of ecological integrity has recently been critiqued by scientists arguing that it conforms to a "wilderness-normative" concept that does not include humans. See Douglas A. Clark, Shaun Fluker, and Lee Risby, "Deconstructing Ecological Integrity in Canadian National Parks," in *Transforming Parks and Protected Areas: Policy and Governance in a Changing World*, ed. Kevin S. Hanna, Douglas A. Clark, and D. Scott Slocombe, 54–68 (New York: Routledge, 2008).
- 13 Norman Henderson, "Wilderness and the Nature Conservation Ideal: A Comparative Analysis, Britain, Canada, and the United States," CSERGE Working Paper GEC 92-22, University College, London, United Kingdom, n.d.
- 14 Parks Canada, *Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* (Ottawa, 1994); <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/policy/index.aspx>; accessed 4 July 2010.
- 15 See Rosalind Warner, "A Comparison of Ideas in the Development and Governance of National Parks and Protected Areas in the US and Canada," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 37 (2008): 13–40.
- 16 For the current iteration, i.e., the third edition of the National Parks System Plan, see: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/v-g/nation/nation1.aspx>; accessed 4 July 2010.

