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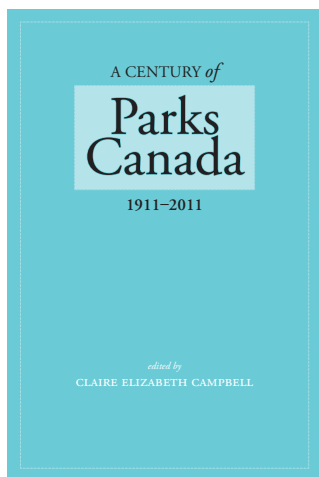
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## A CENTURY OF PARKS CANADA

1911-2011

Edited by Claire Elizabeth Campbell

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# Banff in the 1960s: Divergent Views of the National Park Ideal



C.J. TAYLOR

During the 1960s Banff National Park was at the epicentre of a revolution in thinking about what national parks should or should not be.<sup>1</sup> The National Parks Branch and others in the federal government sought to come to terms with the conflicting aims of a national park as they had been established: as both a protected natural area and a recreation area for public benefit. This dilemma or contradiction had been recognized by the first commissioner of national parks, James B. Harkin, who wrote: “‘Use without abuse’ – how can it be attained? That is the problem which must confront everyone who is responsible for the protection and development of our national parks.”<sup>2</sup> Harkin believed that a middle road could be charted, permitting increased development while protecting those values that make the parks special places. With some variations, this has continued to be the creed of Parks Canada through to the present. At times, however, this balancing act has been difficult to achieve, and one of the most difficult cases occurred at Banff in the 1960s, when overdevelopment threatened the mountain scenery that attracted tourists in the first place.

The number of visitors had been rising through the 1950s, but the pace quickened in the 1960s. Banff had had a half million visitors in 1950; this doubled by 1960 and doubled again, to two million, by 1966. This rapid growth was due to a number of factors: the post-war boom, growing young families, and the increasing popularity of motor tourism. During the 1950s the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta greatly expanded and upgraded their highway systems, making travel by car easier and faster. This was matched by highway improvements through the mountain parks, including the completion of the Trans-Canada Highway through Banff and Yoho and the opening of the improved Icefields Parkway in 1961. Highway tourism changed the way people experienced the mountain parks. As roads brought more visitors, the visitors demanded more facilities: accommodation, gas stations, and then more roads. Here, more than ever before, Harkin's warning from a previous era was in danger of being realized: that development was in danger of destroying "the very thing that distinguished [parks] from the outside world."<sup>3</sup>

But Banff also revealed that increased tourist traffic was not the only reason for the reassessment of the national park ideal. The growing influence of universities on shaping government policy, vested local interests, the increased complexity and size of the Parks Branch and the federal bureaucracy, a more affluent population, and a more critical mindset about environmental issues all shaped approaches to the management of the park. Before the 1960s Banff National Park was managed fairly simply, by an engineering service that managed front-country development and a warden service that looked after the backcountry, while a few commercial resorts such as the Canadian Pacific Railway's Banff Springs Hotel looked after tourist services. During the 1960s this system began to change, as planners and interpretive specialists were added to the mix, affecting the mindset and practices of the larger organization. At the same time academic and environmental interest groups lobbied for what they considered to be more appropriate use in the park. The debate that emerged around Banff National Park in the 1960s would shape the outlook toward all national parks for a generation or more.

When Jim Thorsell came to Banff as a seasonal park interpreter in the summer of 1962, change was in the air. Looking back on that time forty-five years later, he pointed to three milestones that had occurred that year: the completion of the Trans-Canada Highway opened the floodgates to massive

tourist growth, the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* helped inspire the emergence of a North American movement concerned with environmental issues, and the death of Banff pioneer Norman Luxton underlined the significance of a local community with deep cultural ties to the park.<sup>4</sup> A fourth milestone may have been the presence of Mr. Thorsell himself. A recent graduate of the University of Alberta, he was a keen backcountry enthusiast, on the forefront of a resurging interest in wilderness recreation. He also presaged the growing number of youthful idealists who would take up the cause of protecting Banff from the philistines. Amid the massive increase in tourist numbers, an emerging sense of social activism coupled with a strong appreciation of wilderness values, together with a strong sense of community in the town of Banff itself, roiled around the park during the 1960s. Significantly, the participants in much of this drama – the National Parks Branch, the town of Banff, and environmental activists – would themselves be influenced by events of the 1960s.

These were indeed “interesting times.” When Arthur Laing became minister of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources in 1963, he assumed control of a department profoundly invested in the economic boom of the postwar years. Not only was it responsible for overseeing a new interest in the opening of the north and the exploitation of mineral and other resources, but the boom in the tourist industry was bringing visitors to national parks in ever-increasing numbers. National parks, which formed a third component of Laing's department, were likewise seen as a national asset, with great potential value but requiring careful management.

At the same time, the organization that Laing inherited to manage the national parks was itself experiencing change. Professional services such as engineering, architecture, and planning had grown in the late 1950s, reflecting an increased reliance on technical expertise and the growing complexity of the work. Biologists, however, were generally situated in a parallel organization, the Canadian Wildlife Service, so that scientists remained largely outside the park management structure. Influenced by both its own internal studies as well as the 1962 report of the Royal Commission on Government Organization (known as the Glassco Report), the Parks Branch became a somewhat more decentralized organization with powers delegated to a series of regional offices, even as more sophisticated mechanisms for planning and development were implemented at the national level.<sup>5</sup> It was this upgraded

organization that would face the challenges of growth and change in the national parks in the 1960s.

Laing and his staff were confronted with a rising tide of tourist numbers threatening to engulf an already significant building program. The policy then, as now, was for public enterprise to develop hotel and motel units at Lake Louise and Banff, while the Parks Branch undertook the establishment and management of the automobile campgrounds. In 1963 the Banff *Crag and Canyon* announced that two new motels were planned for Banff Avenue, while the Rimrock Hotel (now the Juniper) opened in July of that year. Meanwhile, the park embarked on a bold plan to expand and upgrade its campgrounds. At first park planners aimed to phase out the large and unsightly Tunnel Mountain Campground in the town of Banff and replace it with a series of medium-sized, attractively landscaped campgrounds ring-ing the town. To this end, Two Jack and Johnston Canyon Campgrounds added 400 new units to the Banff area between 1960 and 1965.<sup>6</sup> Even this wasn't enough, and the old Tunnel Mountain campground remained in use, attracting numerous complaints. One visitor wrote: "The crowded, squalid, and unsanitary conditions of the camp are truly beyond belief."<sup>7</sup> At Lake Louise, the old campground was closed without regret and a new one was built between 1963 and 1965, providing space for 221 tents and 189 trailers.<sup>8</sup>

Growth in the tourist industry and the expansion of the park organization also increased the populations of the urban communities within the mountain parks, especially the town of Banff and the village of Lake Louise. While many of the residents of Banff were park employees, some with deep roots in the area, many were also private businessmen, with names like the Brewsters, Harmons, Luxtons, and Whytes – families that went back generations. The Canadian Pacific Railway was also an important component of the park, and its Banff Springs Hotel and Chateau Lake Louise were major tourist centres in themselves. During the 1960s these established forces were joined by new faces relocating to Banff to open motels and restaurants. At the other end of the social spectrum, Banff became a magnet for travelling youth who camped by the museum, sometimes climbed the mountains, or just hung out. While not large, the town was well off and had the amenities of any other prosperous town in Canada: schools, churches, a hospital, department stores, and a supermarket. Residents, however, lacked many of the rights that other municipal citizens took for granted. Properties were owned

through government leases instead of through freehold tenure, so while there were no property taxes, Ottawa decided the rate of land rents. There were no elected municipal officials; the town was run as part of the larger park, and many of the decisions regarding its administration seemed arbitrary and unfair. Some local representation was delegated to the Banff Advisory Council but, as its name implied, it had no real powers. Civic opinion was expressed through the Banff Chamber of Commerce and the *Crag and Canyon*. Naturally enough, much of this opinion was directed against the dictatorial rule of Ottawa. But at the same time, the remoteness of this authority encouraged a certain amount of local autonomy. For Banff, the old Chinese aphorism seemed particularly apt: "The mountains are high and the emperor is far away."

The National Parks Branch was moving toward asserting greater authority over the town's direction even before Laing assumed office. A central planning division, created in 1957, was tasked with establishing policies and guidelines for future development in all the national parks. Park planners were helped by the work of consultants. Two studies of townsite issues in Banff, in 1960 and 1961, had made some wide-ranging recommendations, although very little from these reports had been acted upon.<sup>9</sup> Laing presided over a reorganization of the Branch that devolved much of the routine decisions and research agendas to regional directors,<sup>10</sup> establishing the western regional office in Calgary in 1963. Soon after, the appointment of a Banff townsite manager eased the administration of municipal affairs. But a conflict was brewing between the town and Ottawa over the future identity of the town; a conflict spurred by this bureaucratic reorganization, which generated new discussion within the federal government about the nature of parks management.

The new minister and the freshly reorganized Parks Branch would have collaborated to provide the new national parks policy that Laing presented to Parliament in September 1964. Referring to a "quiet crisis" in the national parks, he articulated broad guidelines for their future development.<sup>11</sup> Since much of this development was occurring in Banff National Park, his remarks had particular significance for that place. Laing proposed regulations to safeguard against unsuitable development, to restrict use to appropriate activities related to outdoor recreation and sightseeing, and to rein in some of the quasi-municipal status accorded to the townsites. In many ways Laing's

statements echoed the earlier sentiments articulated by Harkin in the 1930s: a middle ground would be sought between the extremes of wide-open development and complete protection from use.<sup>12</sup> Approved park plans would guide parks to this middle route, and Laing made reference in his speech to land-zoning systems and design guidelines. But he departed from earlier precedents in his wish to *diminish* the status of the park towns. Townsites with distinctive identities were to be strongly discouraged within the parks, and places like the town of Banff or the village of Lake Louise were described as merely large convenience stores. “In terms of this policy,” Laing told the House of Commons, “the present park townsites can be considered only as visitor services centres. Their only reason for being is that they provide essential services to visitors or services to the national parks and its staff.”<sup>13</sup> He added that his intention was to “eventually exclude private residential occupation.”<sup>14</sup> The debate over seasonal residences had been simmering in other national parks, as Bill Waiser’s chapter on Prince Albert demonstrates, but had slightly different implications at Banff, where many lived year-round.

At first, the town of Banff was inclined to support the minister. After all, his “middle path” merely controlled development; it did not deter it. A year before tabling the national parks policy in Parliament, Laing had travelled to Banff to sound out local opinion. At his meeting with the Banff Advisory Council, the minister struck a reassuring tone: he was not against new development, just unplanned and unregulated growth. “Banff,” he said, “will have controlled expansion.” Regarding the townsite in particular, he added: “there will be reasonable control, but I want to be sure there is not overprotectionism.”<sup>15</sup> He promised that plans for a shopping mall would proceed – with adequate parking, of course. Following this meeting, new lots were opened for residences on Cougar Street and development permits issued for several new commercial ventures in the town. Meanwhile, a complete overhaul of the Lake Louise area provided new sewer and water systems, a large new campground, a shopping centre, and staff residences.

While Minister Laing and his staff were prepared to authorize substantial levels of new development, there was still considerable discomfort within the Branch with the notion of permanent settlement within the park boundaries. In calling them “service centres,” as opposed to towns or villages, the government betrayed a tendency to view them as utilitarian concessions set up to serve park visitors rather than as communities with separate identities



and interests. By 1967 businessmen in Banff began to feel the cold wind of the new policy. In November of that year, a writer for the nationally distributed *Weekend Magazine* wrote an article, reprinted in the *Crag and Canyon*, that would have sent a chill down the spines of the members of the Chamber of Commerce. Titled "Battle for our national parkland," it took aim at urban development in Banff and Jasper. The Banff businessmen would have been further disheartened to see the hand of senior government officials behind the article, which stated that the town of Banff has been allowed to grow too big, citing "government experts" who "hold that the saturation point has been reached." The article then quoted senior assistant deputy minister John MacDonald as describing the lease question in the townsites as "a cancer at the breast of the National Parks Service."<sup>16</sup> Despite his conciliatory message earlier in the decade, it seemed as if the minister was finally taking up the cudgel against private ownership in Banff.

The issue came down to the definition of the leases. Because leases were granted in perpetuity, it was the custom that property could be bought and sold as if they were freehold. Now Laing was trying to impose a system in which leases might not be automatically renewed, so improvements could revert to the crown. Any lease coming up for renewal would have the "in perpetuity" clause removed. Furthermore, only those people who actually worked in the park and their families would be permitted to reside in the town, now known as a service centre (a term chosen in part to undermine claims to municipal status). For the government, this meant that it could assert greater control over towns as components of national park development. For the businessmen, some of whom had spent millions in new building, it boded disaster. They were fearful of the restrictive covenants being placed on what they viewed as their property. The issue was particularly significant at Lake Louise, where the government was trying to attract new investment to develop the new service centre there. This uneasy relationship between Parks Canada and the community of Banff would continue until that community was granted limited municipal status in 1990. Lake Louise, however, has remained as a service centre within Laing's original definition.

Ironically, one area of particular agreement between the minister and the Banff Advisory Council involved ski hills. Since 1960, there had been considerable new development at Norquay, Sunshine, and Lake Louise to accommodate the new craze in downhill skiing that had been precipitated

by the Winter Olympic Games of 1960, held in Squaw Valley, California. Skiing enthusiasts from both Banff and Calgary paid close attention to this event, and representatives from Alberta travelled there to tour the facilities and consult with the organizers. This led to the formation of the Calgary Olympic Development Association (CODA), to organize a proposal for the 1968 games to be held in Banff. At his first meeting with the Banff Advisory Council, Art Laing promised his full support for the idea, suggesting that the Olympic village could be developed beside the Banff School of Fine Arts. When the Games were awarded to Grenoble in 1964, attention refocused on the 1972 Olympics, but the government continued to publicly support developing world-class skiing destinations in Banff. In March Laing told a Calgary audience that he forecast the development of Banff National Park as a year-round resort, adding that “emphasis will be on ski facilities.”<sup>17</sup>

The Parks Branch did not just support ski hill development: for a while it led the way. In 1964 Banff National Park engaged an American ski resort consultant to study the park’s three ski facilities. Based on this report and other internal studies, in 1965 the Branch prepared a document entitled “Winter Recreation and the National Parks: A Management Policy and Development Program.” This report began by acknowledging that ski hills were not always seen as being compatible with the principle of use without impairment (which was the case in the United States national parks system, for example). That said, the report then advanced a position that presumably had the approval and perhaps even the direction of the minister: “A middle course and the one decided upon was to define certain areas of high potential for ski development but of limited scenic value, and, in effect, zone these for intensive development of skiing facilities.” The document formed the basis of a policy that countenanced capital-intensive infrastructure such as chair lifts and lodges and encouraged related resort development such as overnight accommodation and “evening entertainment facilities generally associated with a holiday ski centre.”<sup>18</sup> Subsequently the Branch began preparing development plans for the three sanctioned ski areas – Norquay, Sunshine, and Lake Louise – as well expensive road construction to provide better automobile access to the sites.

The park planners proposed other developments to improve visitor facilities in the park. Recognizing that demand for outdoor recreation could rapidly outstrip the supply of suitable wilderness areas, they believed that,

given sufficient information, rational choices could be made to satisfy all of these demands. In particular, they felt the adverse effects of more building in the parks could be mitigated if it was confined to specific areas or development zones. In the 1960s, zoning became the cornerstone of the planning process in parks across North America. Planners surveyed each national park and laid out a system of zones that prescribed an authorized level of development for each. Specific projects were assigned to the appropriate zone, and the scheme was then enshrined in the management or master plan. The advantage of the approach, at least in theory, was that it kept development from sprawling throughout the park and limited the blight of unplanned building along the highway corridors. The first provisional master plans completed by the Branch's planning division in 1967, including the one for Banff, were approved in the spring of 1968 – just after the arrival of Laing's replacement as minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jean Chrétien.

The first Banff provisional master plan delineated five management zones. Two were tagged as wilderness areas; one was a transition zone, allowing limited development but accessible by road; another permitted developed outdoor recreation areas, such as ski hills; and the fifth was for intensive use areas such as a townsite or service centre. While the plan promised to balance protection with visitor use, it was clearly preoccupied with managing more development, not managing natural areas. The planners' creed seemed to be "predict and provide," emphasizing the value of visitor statistics in order to better prepare for future demand. The plan for Banff explained: "This is the start of a systems planning approach. Where possible accent is on long range view of problems such as information management or the saturation of a park's known camping facility."<sup>19</sup>

Also indicative of its concern for accommodating increasing numbers of tourists was the master plan's ambitious program of new construction, especially of scenic roads. It proposed enlarging the old Cascade fire road through wilderness zones north of the town of Banff, as well as extending Alberta's David Thompson Highway west across the Rockies through the Howse Pass wilderness area to connect with the British Columbia highway system. The plan also proposed expanding winter use beyond ski hills, suggesting "[t]hat winter use be further encouraged by allowing over snow vehicles to use selected and marked trails within the park."<sup>20</sup> While these plans called for

further study, they meant further social science research to identify future tourist trends. There was no mention of environmental impact studies.

This proposed development in Banff, from highways to ski hills, became a rallying point for environmental groups in the 1960s, which would argue for curbing growth and focusing on protecting wilderness areas. This emerging environmental lobby, called the second conservation movement by Leslie Bella (to distinguish it from the conservation movement of the early twentieth century<sup>21</sup>), had its roots in a reaction to the pace and scale of post-war development and a growing sense of public advocacy in the universities, themselves infused with a climate of protest by the later 1960s. But this movement shared many ideals of earlier conservationists, including a belief in the importance of preserving wilderness or pristine ecological reserves as protected areas. Roderick Nash's 1967 book *Wilderness and the American Mind* was a landmark articulation of this idea. If national parks might be seen as important islands of wilderness in North America, some people now feared that they were in danger of being paved over. This perception was particularly strong in the United States, where opposition to the National Parks Service's Mission 66 building program became a rallying point for American environmentalists. Many people questioned the need for so much highway building in the American parks, and some even argued that access to parks needed to be restricted if wilderness ideals were to be protected.<sup>22</sup>

Expression of this new awareness in Canada can be traced to the Resources for Tomorrow Conference held in Montreal in 1961, which in turn led to the formation of the National and Provincial Parks Association (later the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society) in 1963. At first, the NPPA (along with similar organizations such as the Canadian Audubon Society) acted almost as the formal constituency of the national parks, advocating greater support from Parliament and encouraging the expansion of the national park system. As the decade progressed, though, it became more radical, becoming at times a fierce critic of park management. Meanwhile, universities began offering courses in aspects of what would later become known as environmental studies; interdisciplinary programs such as the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning and the University of Calgary's Department of Geography were prototypes for later programs. At the University of Calgary, an energetic young professor of geography named Gordon Nelson attracted a small group of graduate

**BANFF NATIONAL PARK**  
**ALBERTA**  
**OUTDOOR ACTIVITY**

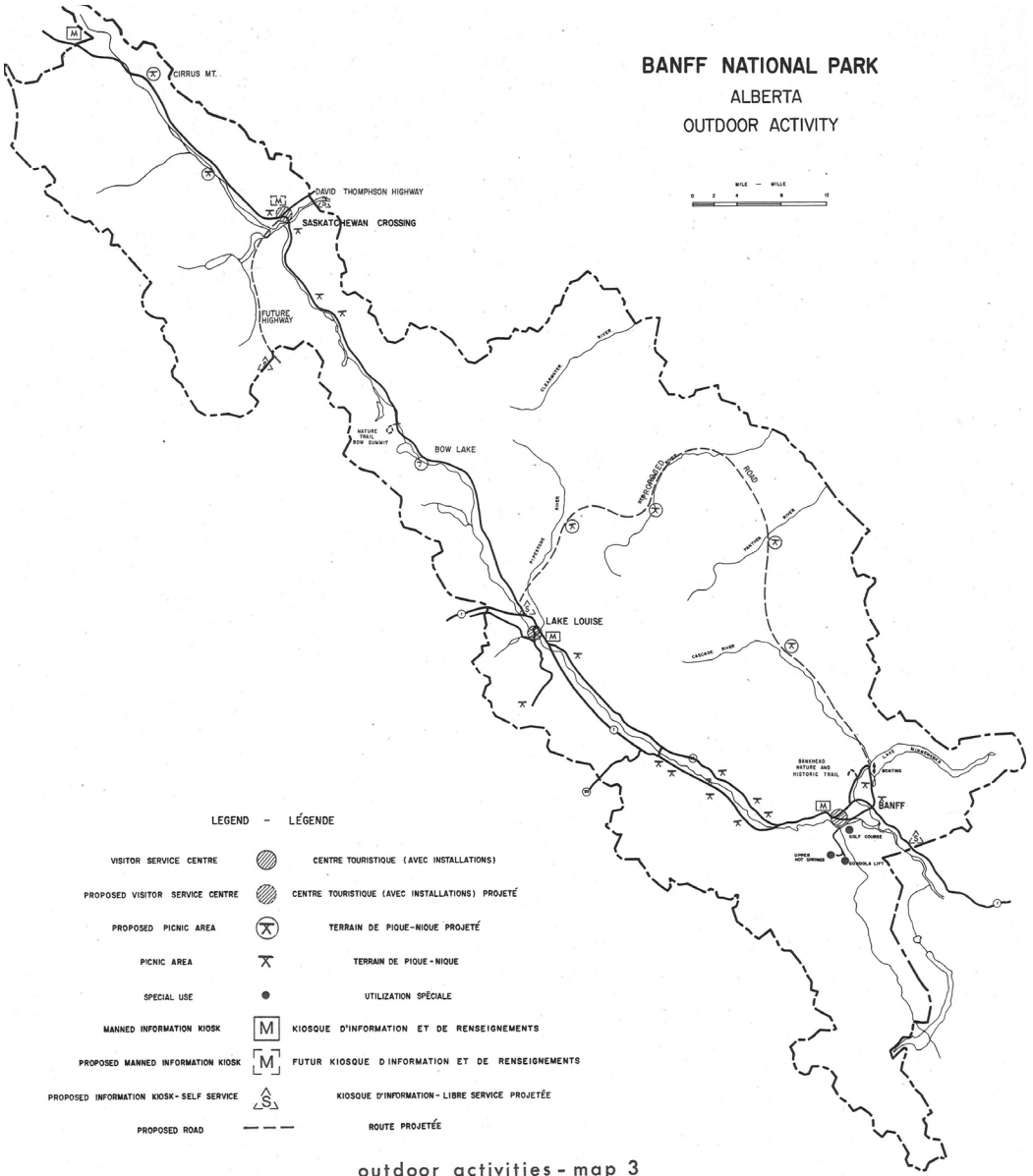


FIG. 1. *BANFF NATIONAL PARK, ALBERTA, OUTDOOR ACTIVITY MAP*, BANFF NATIONAL PARK PROVISIONAL MASTER PLAN/PLAN DIRECTEUR PROVISIOIRE. [OTTAWA: NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE, PLANNING, 1968, 61.]

students studying national park topics, who clearly possessed a sense of political engagement in parks questions. One of Nelson's graduate students, Bob Scace, helped form the Calgary-Banff chapter of the National and Provincial Parks Association.<sup>23</sup> There was also an emerging group of university scientists interested in ecological studies such as Ian McTaggart-Cowan at UBC, who likewise became engaged in public issues and occasionally advised on government policy. It was this growing interest in national parks as a means of protecting the environment that led the National and Provincial and Parks Association and the University of Calgary to organize the first "Canadian National Parks: Today and Tomorrow" conference in 1968, with Nelson as the principal agent.

Not surprisingly, the Banff provisional master plan became a hot button topic for much of the conference. Many of the plan's proposals for park development were attacked by Nelson in his paper, "Man and Landscape Change in Banff National Park: A National Park Problem in Perspective." He focused his criticism on the proposed scenic roads: "These roads seem to be intended to provide access by auto, rather than by foot or horse, to areas of outstanding beauty as well as to ease heavy automobile tourist pressure in Banff Townsite and other congested areas by spreading traffic and visitors over large 'undeveloped' areas of the park."<sup>24</sup> Nelson also attacked the planning process that produced the master plan itself. In a few instances he referred to the lack of public consultation that excluded outside expert views, and he objected to the lack of balance that favoured automobile tourists over the protection of wilderness areas. But he saved his harshest comments about planners for later in the conference. Adopting a deliberately combative tone, Nelson said: "I have been appalled at the way in which planning has been carried out in the past few years. I would hesitate to use the word 'planning' in any sense for what has been done as far as Banff National Park is concerned."<sup>25</sup>

Another articulate critic at the conference was McTaggart-Cowan, one of the first trained ecologists in Canada, then professor of zoology and dean of Graduate Studies at UBC. He had a very good knowledge of both Banff and Jasper, having carried out or directed several research projects in the mountain parks during the 1940s, and having provided occasional advice to the program's headquarters. His paper, entitled "The Role of Ecology in the National Parks," was also harshly critical of the national parks' existing

development and any proposals for further development. But whereas Nelson had focused on social issues, McTaggart-Cowan emphasized the lack of scientific understanding behind the proposed projects. His paper began with the blunt statement that “ecological considerations had almost no part in the establishment or design of any of the Canadian National Parks.”<sup>26</sup> He went on to make a number of observations that, while they may seem commonplace now, were highly original at the time. By focusing on ecological zones rather than scenery or bits of wilderness, he revealed a fundamental flaw in the planners’ approach: that the parks’ high use or frontcountry zones often occupied river valleys or montane areas that were also important habitat for wildlife. McTaggart-Cowan made a number of other important new observations: the protection of forests from fire was allowing forests to spread into natural grassland, and increased public use of sensitive grazing areas was further threatening the environmental health of the parks. While not directly critical of park planners, he did take aim at the engineering culture present in the Parks Branch, saying: “After thirty-eight years spent in our parks I have become progressively depressed by the complete failure of the highway engineers to respond to the unique demands inherent in the national park roadways.” Like Nelson, McTaggart-Cowan decried the proposals for scenic roads, asking rhetorically, “is this any longer the best way of taking people quietly into the right environment to see the things we want them to see?”<sup>27</sup> Such a scientifically informed, ecological perspective was still rare at this time. Most advocates for saving “wilderness” were really arguing for the protection of scenic or aesthetic values, as had Harkin some decades before, or were simply taking a moral stand against automobiles in natural areas. But McTaggart-Cowan’s views suggested the new thinking that would begin to reinterpret national park values in an ecological context – a way of thinking recognized by the Parks Branch in its National Park Systems Plan two years later, as Olivier Craig-Dupont discusses in his essay.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the nature of the conference, the Banff Advisory Council also made a presentation here. But the Council saw which way the wind was blowing and adapted to the tenor of the times. G.A. Leroy, Council chairman, argued that by calling Banff a “service centre” and imposing strictly utilitarian guidelines for development, the government was encouraging unattractive development. Besides reiterating the long-standing complaints about lack of municipal status and the lease arrangements, Leroy

made a telling argument against the service centre planning: “The proposed asphalt-concrete jungle, with buildings designed for maximum use during the period of a short lease, seems a tragic incongruity in a natural setting such as the Banff area presents.”<sup>28</sup>

The Parks Branch could not fail to take notice of the mood of the conference; after all, both Minister Chrétien and his senior managers were in attendance. Moreover, profound changes in attitude were underway within the Branch itself. Two examples serve to indicate the changing climate of opinion in the 1960s: the creation of a reinvigorated Interpretive Service in the mid-1960s and new attitudes toward predator control. When Jim Thorsell was hired as a seasonal park naturalist at Lake Louise in 1962, he was one of the very few working in that role in Canada’s national parks. The park naturalist program really only became recognized as a dedicated function in the 1950s and even then was fairly rudimentary, with only three or four employees. But within a decade, park naturalists were being recognized as a formal component in all national parks. Much of the credit for legitimizing and expanding the role of the park naturalist rests with Winston Mair, who became director of the national parks interpretive division in 1964. A biologist by training, Mair had been chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service; articulate and energetic, he referred to natural history interpretation as the “key to the future of national parks.”<sup>29</sup> Like Harkin before him, Mair argued that a better understanding of the ideals of national parks would foster greater support for their preservation. He saw young, idealistic, university-trained naturalists as an important strategy in countering the malignant effects of commercial development in the parks. Echoing American John Muir from the turn of the century, Mair believed that, if people could see the spiritual importance of nature and backcountry, they would be less inclined to want to pave over it. He saw the park naturalists as missionaries of this philosophy, and, as the largest park, Banff soon possessed a large and influential interpretive service. Many of its members further influenced the growth of local organizations such as the Bow Valley Naturalists, and while many of these young people, like Jim Thorsell, went on to other things, the “University of Banff” continued to influence their future outlook and nurture an abiding interest in the park.

In March 1968 the *Crag and Canyon* printed a frontpage article describing – in a humorous tone – how twenty coyotes had been killed by



local park wardens, in response to that newspaper's campaign to eliminate nuisance animals in the town.<sup>30</sup> Although the animals had evidently been dispatched with community support, the response to the article indicates the growing environmental awareness within both the Parks Branch and the town of Banff. Local response came in the form of a letter to the editor from the Bow Valley Naturalists. It began by saying: "Your front page article entitled 'Carolling Coyotes Kapowed' in the March 20 edition of the *Crag* was nothing less than disgusting," and closed with the reprimand that "We sincerely hope that your attitude does not reflect that of the warden service."<sup>31</sup> In fact, the coyote cull *did* reflect the position of park wardens at that time: all wardens had the authority to shoot predators on sight and were happy to oblige calls from residents to dispose of nuisance animals. (Chief Park Warden Bob Hand was "old school," and would retire later that year.) But in Ottawa, park officials were disturbed by the *Crag and Canyon* article and its implication that the wardens were complicit in the destruction of these indigenous animals. Park planner Gerry Lee wrote: "If the Warden's Service, Banff, gave their consent or approval to this article on the coyotes ... then it would seem that we're further in the woods than ever before."<sup>32</sup> Lee's memo prompted queries from Ottawa to the regional director in Calgary and the park superintendent, and, following some discussion, the regional directive authorizing the shooting of predators was rescinded.<sup>33</sup> As George Colpitts's chapter demonstrates, revising public attitudes toward wildlife in the mountain parks became a major preoccupation for the Branch in this period.

While the end of the 1960s ushered in a new outlook in national parks generally, and Banff in particular, there was by no means consensus about the ideal way that a national park should be maintained or developed. Despite the new interest in ecology and wildlife, the scales were still tipped in favour of more rather than less development. As late as 1971 there were still no scientists officially working within the Parks Branch. The head of resource conservation in the western regional office was a former park warden with only a high school diploma. The head of engineering, by contrast, was a university-trained professional.

This imbalance in outlook was one reason that the organization was ambushed by the negative public reaction to the Lake Louise ski hill plan. The plan, which followed established policy and had been further approved by the regional office, proposed accommodation and venues for evening

entertainment, creating the same kind of atmosphere that had been developed at Aspen, Colorado, and would later occur at Whistler, British Columbia. The new Lake Louise proposal gathered steam after 1969 when it got approval from the Parks Branch and backing from Imperial Oil in Toronto. However, when taken to public hearings in 1971, the plan attracted widespread criticism.<sup>34</sup> Ski hill development had long evoked criticism from the environmental lobby; for instance, the *Crag and Canyon* had blamed environmentalists for derailing the 1968 Olympic proposal.<sup>35</sup> But in 1971 the response from environmentalists was especially fierce, both locally in Calgary and across the country. Not only were the promoters roundly criticized for wanting to overdevelop a wilderness setting, but the Branch itself was vilified for allowing the plan to proceed as far as it had. The environmentalists won the day: the next year, Minister Chrétien stepped in and overturned the project's approval. As a result of this debacle, the western regional office hired its first university-trained ecologist.<sup>36</sup>

Incremental as it may have been, and as incomplete as some argue it still is, the National Parks Branch underwent a sea change in attitude over the course of the 1960s. At the second Canadian National Parks Conference held in Banff in 1978, the head of the national parks program, Al Davidson, summed up the changes of the past decade:

In 1968, we were about to start the public hearings programme on park master plans. That programme had a profound impact on our planning emphasis and public participation leading to decision making. Look back at some of the provisional master plans, at the emphasis on road building, at the catering to the *arm chair* tourists, and compare them with our present emphasis on programmes which will provide park experiences uniquely attuned to the natural environment.<sup>37</sup>

Although Davidson's comments are still oriented toward public use rather than ecological suitability, acknowledging the role of public participation and the importance of "park experiences" in a natural setting would not be out of place in Parks Canada materials today. Indeed, the degree to which this new way of thinking affected development in the mountain parks can be seen in the next two management plans, produced almost twenty years

later. *In Trust for Tomorrow: A Management Framework for Four Mountain Parks* (1986) was the culmination of five years of research and consultation. Recognizing that park ecosystems ranged beyond park boundaries, the plan attempted to engage larger issues by looking at the four-park block of Banff, Jasper, Yoho, and Kootenay as a single entity. Though it sought to reconcile the two opposing objectives of national parks of preservation and use, it too proposed a “middle path.” Given the vocal opposition to earlier park development, it was remarkably sanguine on the subject. There was no attempt to limit visitor numbers; indeed, the plan encouraged the improvement of visitor services and transportation networks, though it did recommend keeping these confined to existing corridors in the parks, and not expanding development outward.

However, even the durable concept of the middle path was about to be profoundly altered. In 1988, the same year that a new *National Parks Act* established ecological integrity as the paramount value guiding park management, Parks Canada approved a new management plan for Banff, which articulated this new philosophy of national parks:

Resource protection will take precedence over visitor use and facility development where conflicts occur. Visitor use will be managed to safeguard natural and cultural resources, as well as the aesthetics of the park. Park resources will be managed on an ecological basis; cooperating and coordinating resource management with the other parks in the four mountain park block, and with provincial and private interests managing adjacent lands.<sup>38</sup>

The document retained the planners’ optimism about the ability of planning to adequately deal with threats caused by overuse, but for the first time a national parks document indicated that ecological principles would direct parks management.

The issues fomenting in Banff in the 1960s influenced a subsequent generation of managers, planners, and environmental activists. The culture of the National Parks Branch shifted away from an engineer-dominated ethos to one that gave greater voice to biologists. The degree to which this shift is reflected within the agency is still contentious. Rick Searle, for example,

has concluded that national park policy is still governed by a development mentality.<sup>39</sup> Still, there was a paradigm shift in thinking about national park ideals in the 1960s. While the Branch continued to heed the needs and objectives of sophisticated business interests in Banff, a democratization of the decision-making process caused it to pay attention to other sectors of the Canadian public, including an increasingly militant environmental movement. Planners tried to reconcile these varying viewpoints in drafting their management plans, but the decision to incorporate public consultation was itself a result of the debates of the 1960s. The controversy over development at Banff energized the crusading mission of organizations such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and they inspired people like Jim Thorsell to pursue careers advocating the benefits of protected heritage areas around the world.

NOTES

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 40th anniversary of the Canadian National Parks: Today and Tomorrow conference, University of Calgary, June 2008. The author is indebted to the advice of Dr. Robert Scace, one of the organizers of the earlier conference, for his account of the outlook of that time.
- 2 J.B. Harkin, *The Origin and Meaning of the National Parks of Canada* (Ottawa: National Parks Branch, 1957), 12.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 “Jim Thorsell Speaks at Banff Centre, May 2007,” <http://www.banffcommunityfoundation.org>.
- 5 Walter Hildebrandt, “Historical Analysis of Parks Canada and Banff National Park 1968–1995,” unpublished report prepared for the Banff–Bow Valley Study, Dec. 1995, Parks Canada library, Calgary, 40–41; Paul Kopas, *Taking the Air: Ideas and Change in Canada’s National Parks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 46–47.
- 6 C.J. Taylor, “A History of Automobile Campgrounds in the Mountain National Parks of Canada,” unpublished report, Calgary, Parks Canada, 2001, 62.
- 7 LAC, RG 84, vol. 538, B36 Tunnel Mountain, Herman Edelberg M.D. to National Parks Branch, 5 July 1964.
- 8 C.J. Taylor, “A History of Automobile Campgrounds,” 62–63.
- 9 K.G. Crawford et al., *Banff, Jasper and Waterton Lakes National Parks: A Report prepared for the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources respecting certain aspects of the operation of these National Parks and the Townsites therein* (Kingston: Institute of Local Government, Queen’s University, 1960); Peter H. Oberlander, *Urban*

- development plan: Banff, Alberta* (Ottawa: National Parks Branch, Dept. of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 1961); Walter Hildebrandt, "Historical Analysis of Parks Canada and Banff National Park 1968–1995," unpublished report prepared for the Banff–Bow Valley Study, Dec. 1995, Parks Canada library, Calgary, 47.
- 10 Kopas, *Taking the Air*, 47.
  - 11 Canada. House of Commons, *Debates*, Session 1964, vol. VIII, 8192.
  - 12 "The objectives of national park policy must be to help Canadians gain the greatest long term recreational benefits from their national parks and at the same time provided safeguards against excessive or unsuitable types of development and use." *Ibid.*, 8192.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 8193.
  - 14 Canada. House of Commons, *Debates*, Session 1964, vol. VIII, 8194.
  - 15 *Banff Crag and Canyon*, 25 September 1963, 1.
  - 16 Robert McKeown, "Battle for our National Parkland," *Banff Crag and Canyon*, 1 Nov. 1967, 11.
  - 17 "All National Parks in Nation Encouraged to Boost Skiing," *Banff Crag and Canyon*, 17 March 1965, 1.
  - 18 Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, National Parks Branch, "Winter Recreation and the National Parks: A Management Policy and a Development Program," unpublished manuscript, March 1965.
  - 19 Canada. National Parks Service. "Banff National Park Provisional Master Plan" 1967, 3.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, 4.
  - 21 Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1987), 110–12.
  - 22 Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), describes the Mission 66 building program and the reaction it sparked. Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), argues that highway building programs in U.S. national parks stimulated the organization of the modern wilderness movement to curtail what it saw as inappropriate development.
  - 23 Bob Scace, personal communication, 24 April 2008.
  - 24 J.G. Nelson, "Man and Landscape Change in Banff National Park: A National Park Problem in Perspective," in *The Canadian National Parks; today and tomorrow, proceedings of a conference organized by the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada and the University of Calgary October 9–15, 1968*, ed. J.G. Nelson and R.C. Scace, vol. 1, 138 (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1969).
  - 25 "Summaries and Discussion," in *The Canadian National Parks*, ed. Nelson and Scace, vol. II, 969.
  - 26 Ian McTaggart Cowan, "The Role of Ecology in the National Park," in *The Canadian National Parks*, ed. Nelson and Scace, II:931.
  - 27 "Summaries and Discussion," in *The Canadian National Parks*, ed. Nelson and Scace, II:976.
  - 28 G.A. Leroy, "A Paper Submitted by Banff Advisory Council," in *The Canadian National Parks*, ed. Nelson and Scace, II:801.

- 29 W.W. Mair, "Natural History Interpretation: Key to the Future of the National Parks," in "Fifth Annual Naturalists Workshop: Palisades National Parks Training Centre, Jasper National Park, Jasper, Alberta, July 3, 4, 5 1964." Unpublished manuscript, Parks Canada library, Calgary.
- 30 "Carolling Coyotes Ka-Powed," *Banff Crag and Canyon*, 20 March 1968, 1.
- 31 Letter to the editor, *Banff Crag and Canyon*, 3 April 1968, 4.
- 32 Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, vol. 974, file B262, pt.1, Gerry Lee to L. Brooks, 27 March 1968.
- 33 Ibid., B.I.M. Strong to superintendent, Banff, 8 Dec. 1959.
- 34 Rodney Touche, *Brown Cows, Sacred Cows: A True Story of Lake Louise* (Hanna, AB: Gorman and Gorman, 1990), 131–47; Chic Scott, *Powder Pioneers: Ski Stories from the Canadian Rockies and Columbia Mountains* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2005), 109.
- 35 *Banff Crag and Canyon*, editorial, 4.
- 36 Dr. Bruce Leeson, personal communication, May 2008.
- 37 A.T. Davidson, "Canada's National Parks: Past and Future," in *The Canadian National Parks: Today and Tomorrow Conference II* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 1979), 1:23.
- 38 Canadian Parks Service, *Banff National Park Management Plan, 1988* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1988), 16.
- 39 "Part of the problem is that the dominant culture of Parks Canada does not consider itself science based. The tendency is to place a low priority on ecological research and a higher priority on the provision of facilities for the benefit and safety of visitors." Rick Searle, *Phantom Parks: The Struggle to Save Canada's National Parks* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2000), 128.