

**Notes for Remarks by the Hon. Tommy Banks, OC
Annual General Meeting
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
Ottawa Valley Chapter
Library and Archives Canada, Room 156
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I'd like to thank Ms. How for that kind introduction, and to thank the Ottawa Valley Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society for inviting me to be guest speaker at their Annual General Meeting.

Since the evening's theme is Gatineau Park, let me begin by commending your Ottawa Valley chapter for its energy, vision and persistence in continuing to advocate for the park's protection through legislation. Founded in 1970 by a group of local citizens alarmed over major development plans for Gatineau Park, your organization has consistently pressured the powers that be to manage the park in a rational, ecological and clear manner.

I believe your group was the first to fully and clearly argue that Gatineau Park should be given legislative protection in its 1970 document: *Crisis in Gatineau Park*. I'd like to read a passage from that document, one which could have been written this morning:

“Why,” the report asks, “were protective measures not written into the National Capital Act of 1958? Perhaps the writers of the act failed to learn or were not informed about the reasons for purchasing the park in the first place (...) But because historical precedent was not taken into account in drafting the act, Gatineau Park today may succumb to the very forces that founders of the park foresaw – economic pressures and private ambition of a few individuals in position to influence policy. In the meantime, the public is not being told what is going on.”

Though written in 1970, those words underscore the problems that continue to plague the park today: namely, lack of legislated boundaries and the absence of a transparent land management policy. The current controversy over the 18-house residential development on Carman Road is only the latest example confirming that action is needed on this front now. Moreover, it is clear proof that CPAWS must continue pressuring politicians and officials to secure the protection the park sorely needs.

I remind you that all four Gatineau Park bills tabled in Parliament so far were largely inspired by your 1990 document *Legislative Protection for Gatineau Park*. You should take great pride in this, and you should let that pride inspire you to press on until you reach your objective.

So, why does Gatineau Park continue to face these challenges, and why does the government continue to deny it the protection given our national parks since 1930? The answer, I believe, begins with an understanding of the park's history and origins.

Although a park in the Gatineau Hills was initially advocated by urban planner Frederick Todd in his 1903 report, the first real attempts to create it were made in 1912 by James Harkin, the father of Canada's national parks. On December 3, 1912, Mr. Harkin wrote to Deputy Minister of the Interior William Cory, arguing for the creation of

a nation-wide system of parks, the first of which was to be Gatineau Park. In his memo, Harkin said:

The East has no national parks like those in the Rockies, and it is proposed that the country develop a broader scheme of parks than exists in any other country [...] Bringing into effect the proposed Gatineau Park [...] would, I think, most easily commence this scheme.¹

So Gatineau Park was not only the first national park advocated for Quebec, it was also the first national park advocated for creation outside the Rocky Mountains of the West, and the first national park advocated for creation by the first parks service in the world, the Dominion Parks Branch. Yet it remains the poor cousin, the orphan, the also-ran, among national parks—the only federal park that is not a national park. Why is that?

Well, a variety of factors explain this. For starters, the First World War took attention away from domestic issues precisely as the idea for a Gatineau Park was beginning to get off the ground. Then, with the economic depression of the twenties and thirties, the government had other issues to deal with. But, in my view, the most convincing reason explaining why Gatineau Park is not a national park rests with MacKenzie King.

The former prime minister had a personal interest in the matter: he owned a sizeable estate located right in the middle of the area advocated as a park. When presented with the *Lower Gatineau Woodlands Survey*, in essence the Gatineau Park's founding charter, in October of 1935, King hesitated to create a national park, which was one of the survey's recommendations. The survey had outlined eight options to control excessive wood cutting in the area, including public education, gradual land purchase and creation of a national park.

King, however, had been reluctant to create a national park ever since Conservative MP John Edwards wrongly accused him in 1927 of wanting to build a national parkway to ease access to his summer residence at Kingsmere. Moreover, King's journal entry of December 20, 1937 clearly indicates that he continued to fear this criticism. The entry relates a conversation King had with Finance Minister Charles Dunning concerning the creation of a national park in the Gatineau Hills:

“I told him that the matter had stood over the last year because of my feeling that people might think I was seeking to improve property around Kingsmere. I have come to the conclusion this year that I should not let possible misunderstanding of my ownership at Kingsmere stand in the way of a much-needed preservation of the forest. I told him I wished them to go ahead with the work, though personally it meant less in the way of seclusion for myself on the way to and from Kingsmere to have even the Meach Lake district open to tourists.”

¹ See NAC, Department of the Interior, Dominion Parks Branch, File US-14, volumes 1,2,5, and 6, and Lothian W.F., *ibid.*, p. 132.

So, Mackenzie King's decision to opt for gradual property acquisition would make completing Gatineau Park a prolonged and difficult process. Since its creation in embryonic form in 1938, the park has grown to 88,000 acres stretching some 50 miles northwards between the Ottawa and Gatineau Rivers. Nearly 300 private properties including over 2,000 acres remain in Gatineau Park – many of which may still fall prey to major urban developments.

In practical terms, the park's uncertain status has had dire effects. Since 1992, 1,842 acres – or nearly three square miles – have been removed from the park as a result of boundary rationalizations, sell-offs, exchanges, and the building of five new roads. As well, 115 new residences have been built in the park since then, along with a new superstore, coffee shop, gas station, fire hall and pressure boosting station. None of this would have happened had Gatineau Park been a national park.

I realize that the solution CPAWS advocates in its just released booklet on the state of the park is to make Gatineau Park into a national park, a solution supported by 82% of local residents according to an Ottawa Citizen-Decima poll. However, as popular and worthy as that option may be, I believe it is not likely to be implemented in the near future. For a variety of reasons

First, Parks Canada has said that bringing Gatineau Park into the family of Canada's national parks is not part of the action plan it adopted in 2002 to create 10 new national parks by the end of 2008.² Among other reasons given for this, the government has said that Gatineau Park is located in the St. Lawrence Precambrian Natural Region, which is already represented by St. Lawrence Islands and Mauricie national parks.³

Second, the legislation and policies prohibiting private property in national parks are significant obstacles preventing Gatineau from being transformed into a national park. The presence of 296 private properties in Gatineau Park would contravene the National Parks Act, which says that the federal government must have "clear title to or an unencumbered right of ownership in the lands to be included in the park."

For the reasons mentioned, converting Gatineau Park into a national park is not likely to occur in the short term. Yet the problem of protecting Gatineau Park remains. It is a nagging, pressing and recurring one. So what should be done to achieve that goal? Well, if there are obstacles to making Gatineau Park into a national park, then the next best thing would be to give it protection similar to that given our national parks. And that is exactly what Senator Mira Spivak is proposing to do with her Bill S-227.

That legislation, I must underline, was inspired by the National Parks Act which, as you know, was written by James Harkin. It contains language taken directly from the

² Parks Canada Media Lines, May 10, 2004, obtained under Access to Information request #332-ATI-05/06-027, p. 1.

³ Letter signed by the Hon. Stéphane Dion, dated March 29, 2005, obtained under Access to Information request #332-ATI-05/06-027, p. 80.

National Parks Act⁴ and places it within the National Capital Act. It would enshrine its boundaries in law, prevent land removal save by Act of Parliament, and encourage the NCC to implement its longstanding policy of acquiring private lands in the park.

Many have argued that Bill S-227 provides the greatest possibility of creating consensus among the various parties. Stephen Hazell of the Sierra Club called its approach “elegant” when he appeared before the Senate Environment Committee last year. And I agree, because it would give force of law to NCC commitments, respect existing structures, and provide the legislative status requested by environmental groups and concerned citizens for nearly four decades.

The letter and spirit of the bill have been widely supported, both by participants in the NCC mandate review, and by witnesses who appeared before the Senate Environment Committee.

Last week, as you may know, Bill S-227 was given second reading in the Senate and referred to our Energy and Environment Committee, which I have the honour to chair. The government has said it supports the bill with conditions, and I very much look forward to our committee deliberations, and to reaching a compromise that will be satisfactory to all, one that will draw widespread public support. And I look forward to hearing the views of your Gatineau Park Committee once again.

Before I conclude, I will reiterate that Bill S-227 was inspired by James Harkin, the Father of Canada’s national parks. And I would add that you and your organization, in your continuing efforts to secure legislative protection for Gatineau Park, are worthy heirs of Harkin’s vision and legacy.

The best protection for our parks, Harkin once argued, is through public involvement in protesting all invasions of their sanctity. He said, and I quote:

“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.”

I commend your fierce loyalty to Gatineau Park and your outstanding record of action in urging its protection. And I leave you with a few words from a song called *The Last Resort*, words that convey the essence of the problems facing Gatineau Park:

Who will provide the grand design,
 What is yours and what is mine?
 Because there is no more New Frontier,
 We have got to make it here.

Madame Chair.

⁴ More specifically, by various parts of sections 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 16.