



Immediate Release

Government Must Amend Gatineau Park Bill

Chelsea, October 26, 2009 – The Gatineau Park Protection Committee today urged members of the Commons Transport Committee to amend the government’s Gatineau Park legislation.

“Bill C-37 falls short of meeting basic park protection criteria and fails to reflect the consensus on Gatineau Park,” said GPPC co-chair Andrew McDermott. “Unless properly amended, it will allow boundary changes, inholding development and road building to continue impairing the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park,” he added.

A consensus on the park has emerged over several decades, according to which legislation is needed to protect the park’s boundaries and ecology. Moreover, recent opinion polls provide compelling evidence of this consensus. For instance, an online poll conducted by *Le Droit* last April found that 86% of respondents wanted the federal government to give Gatineau Park legislative protection. As well, in 2006, a *Decima-Ottawa Citizen* poll confirmed that 82% of the population wanted Gatineau Park to become a national park.

“To be effective, Gatineau Park legislation must mandate conservation and ecological integrity as top management priorities, enshrine boundaries in legislation and respect Quebec’s territorial integrity. It must also eliminate private property development and dedicate Gatineau Park to future generations,” said Mr. McDermott.

“However, careful analysis of Bill C-37 reveals it satisfies none of these basic criteria and fails to reflect any consensus on Gatineau Park. And contrary to what the Conservative government has claimed, Bill C-37 doesn’t respond to concerns stakeholders and the public expressed before the NCC Mandate Review Panel, and ignores several key recommendations made by that panel,” said Mr. McDermott.

In the absence of parliamentary oversight, the NCC has removed 1,842 acres from the park, or nearly three square miles. As well, since 1992, the NCC has allowed 119 new houses to be built in Gatineau Park, along with a new superstore, coffee shop, gas station, fire hall, municipal pumping station and five new roads.

“Stronger parliamentary oversight is urgently needed, and unless Bill C-37 is amended as we suggest, Gatineau Park will continue to suffer “death by a thousand cuts,” said Mr. McDermott.

“It’s really too bad Hull-Aylmer Marcel Proulx cheapened the debate by falsely insinuating we were property speculators, instead of focussing on the NCC’s utter mismanagement of Gatineau Park,” said GPPC co-chair Jean-Paul Murray.

Backgrounder

Five Pillars for a Gatineau Park Bill

To fully address the problems facing Gatineau Park – fragmentation, urbanization and ecological impairment – park legislation should respect the five criteria listed below which represent the broad consensus on the issue.

i) Dedicate the park to the people of Canada for their education and enjoyment, mandating that it be maintained and used so that it be left unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

ii) Make the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through protection of natural resources and natural processes, the first priority in all aspects of Gatineau Park management

iii) Provide legislated boundaries for Gatineau Park. Changes to reduce the size of the park must be approved by Act of Parliament, while changes to expand the park must be made only with approval from the Quebec government to ensure respect for the province's territorial integrity.

iv) Prevent removal of any land from Gatineau Park by Order in Council or other administrative means. Properties must only be removed from the park through Act of Parliament – in the spirit of protection given national parks since passage of the 1930 National Parks Act.

v) Prohibit new residential construction, and equip the NCC to further its master plan obligation to acquire all Gatineau Park inholdings – e.g., by giving the NCC right of first refusal over any property sales/subdivisions, etc.