



Immediate Release

Cannon's Gatineau Park Bill a Failure

Chelsea, June 9, 2009 – The Gatineau Park Protection Committee is giving failing grades to the park bill today tabled by Pontiac MP Lawrence Cannon.

“By denying Gatineau Park the same level of protection given national parks, Mr. Cannon’s bill is dedicating its second-class status through legislation,” today said GPPC co-chair Andrew McDermott. “Without parliamentary oversight of changes to its boundaries and land mass, Gatineau Park remains the poor cousin – the also ran – of all federal parks,” he added.

The GPPC has long argued that any Gatineau Park legislation must set park boundaries in law and that any changes to them must be approved by Act of Parliament – as is the case for all national parks. The GPPC has also said that legislation must prevent all residential development inside the park, as well as recognize Quebec’s territorial integrity.

“Time and again, the NCC has proven it can’t be trusted to administer Gatineau Park without parliamentary oversight: it has sold off park land, destroyed historic buildings, misrepresented park history, and allowed the urbanization of its core,” said Mr. McDermott. “And by Giving the NCC control of the National Interest Land Mass, might as well say Mr. Cannon has put the weasel in charge of the chickens,” Mr. McDermott said

Section 10 of Bill C-37 would give the NCC control over the National Interest Land Mass, allowing it to add or remove lands from the park, while Section 19 would allow its boundaries to be changed behind closed doors. Both these measures fall short of the parliamentary oversight requested by citizens for over 40 years, and which has been part of the National Parks Act for decades.

“Moreover, Bill C-37 is a slap in the face to all Quebecers, since it shows shocking disregard for the province’s territorial integrity,” said Mr. McDermott. “Nowhere does the bill stipulate that Quebec’s permission must be obtained to expand park boundaries, as is done for all national parks,” he added.

“Unless parliamentarians seriously overhaul this proposal in committee, it will remain mere window dressing on the status quo, a bloodless bill drafted by a short-sighted government,” Mr. McDermott said.

Backgrounder

Portrait of an ideal Gatineau Park Bill

To fully address the problems facing Gatineau Park –fragmentation and urbanization – any legislation proposed by Pontiac MP Lawrence Cannon must satisfy the criteria listed below. Otherwise, it runs the risk of being seen as a half measure, “a temple raised up to the cult of mediocrity ...”

1) 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.

2) 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.

3) Ensure the prohibition or severe limitation of any residential construction through means such as giving the NCC a right of first refusal over any property sales/subdivisions, direct purchase and even expropriation if need be.