



**Immediate Release**

### **Senate Clears Way for Gatineau Park Bill**

**Chelsea, February 26, 2009** – “The Senate of Canada is giving environmentalists everywhere a reason to cheer by allowing debate on the Gatineau Park bill to proceed,” today said Andrew McDermott, chair of the New Woodlands Preservation League.

On February 3, Conservative senators tried to derail Bill S-204 by arguing it was a money bill. In Canada, only Cabinet can initiate public expenditures and Parliament’s role in this regard is limited to authorizing spending recommended by the government.

However, Senate Speaker Noel Kinsella ruled on February 24 that Bill S-204 does not require new expenditures, underlining that the direction the bill gives the National Capital Commission (NCC) is in keeping with its broader powers and existing goals.

“Overall, the bill does not appear to involve any evident novel expenses,” said Speaker Kinsella. “ Instead, what it does do is establish Gatineau Park, direct priorities in its management, and allow, but not compel, the commission to purchase land if it comes up for sale,” he added.

Bill S-204 would amend the National Capital Act by clearly establishing Gatineau Park’s boundaries. Any reduction in the park’s size would have to be approved by Act of Parliament, while park expansions could be made by Order in Council.

“Gatineau Park is an administrative nightmare. It’s a provincial game sanctuary, a federal park, and a municipal fiefdom. So no one really knows who’s in charge, where its boundaries are or what’s actually going on there. As a result, and while no one was looking, the NCC allowed 117 new houses and five new roads to be built inside it, while removing 8 square kilometres of its territory,” said Mr. McDermott.

“The minister responsible, Lawrence Cannon, has talked a great deal about protecting Gatineau Park.” Mr. McDermott said. “The minister must stop dithering over Gatineau Park, and he must give it the legislative protection he has repeatedly promised,” he added.

Bill S-204 is the sixth bill tabled to protect Gatineau Park. Over the last 3 years, Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic parliamentarians have supported these measures.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society recently endorsed Bill S-204.

## **Backgrounder**

### **Bill S-204: Amending the National Capital Act**

Largely inspired by the National Parks Act,<sup>1</sup> Bill S-204 would amend various sections of the National Capital Act, and do basically four things:

1) Provide legislated boundaries for Gatineau Park. Changes to reduce the size of the park would have to be approved by Act of Parliament, while changes to expand the park could be made by Order in Council.

2) Prevent removal of any land from Gatineau Park by Order in Council or other administrative means. Bill S-204 provides that only an Act of Parliament could remove properties from the park. This is in the spirit of protection given to our national parks since passage of the 1930 National Parks Act.

3) Create a mechanism for expanding the park should the government choose to do so. Any expansion would require an agreement between the federal government and the Province of Quebec, public consultations and the concurrence of Parliament. Committees from both houses of Parliament would have 30 sitting days to examine the proposal, and it would proceed only with consent from both houses.

4) Recognize that much of Gatineau Park remains in private hands and that one of the duties of the National Capital Commission is to gradually acquire it. The bill provides that all private property owners wishing to sell their holdings in the park must give the NCC a right of first refusal.

### **The New Woodlands Preservation League**

The New Woodlands Preservation League is an association of individuals committed to the welfare of Gatineau Park. Inspired by the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, the group that argued successfully for creation of the park in 1938, the League remains deeply committed to ensuring the public is provided the accurate story about the park's origins and administrative structure. Its members also argue that Gatineau Park should be managed primarily as a public park, and that its ecological integrity should be maintained for the benefit of all Canadians.

Besides getting the NCC to acknowledge Gatineau Park's founder Percy Sparks, the League has also managed to convince parliamentarians in both houses to table protective legislation for the park. The following is a list of those parliamentarians and bills:

- 1) the Honourable Ed Broadbent, PC, Bill C-444, November 2005;
- 2) the Honourable Senator Mira Spivak, Bill S-210, May 2006; Bill S-227, February, 2008; and Bill S-204, January 2009;
- 3) Paul Dewar, MP, Bill C-311, May 2006 and January 2007. Mr. Dewar has also informed us that he intends to reintroduce his Gatineau Park bill.

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<sup>1</sup> More specifically, by various parts of sections 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 16 of the National Parks Act.