



Immediate Release

Bill to Protect Gatineau Park Tabled in Senate

Ottawa, February 8, 2009 –The New Woodlands Preservation League today commended Senator Mira Spivak for introducing a bill that would give Gatineau Park the legal status needed to ensure its long-term protection.

“Bill S-204 will provide Gatineau Park with the same kind of legal protection and parliamentary oversight enjoyed by national parks throughout Canada,” today said Andrew McDermott, chair of the New Woodlands Preservation League. “Such action is long overdue, and I know environmentalists everywhere will applaud Senator Spivak for tabling this measure,” said Mr. McDermott.

For nearly forty years, concerned citizens and environmental groups have requested that Gatineau Park be given legal status to protect it from unsuitable encroachments, developments and sell offs. In the absence of such protection, the National Capital Commission (NCC), which runs the park, has removed nearly eight square kilometres from the park, while allowing construction of 117 new houses and 5 new roads within its boundaries.

“Gatineau Park is the only large federal park that remains beyond the direct control of Parliament,” said Mr. McDermott. “It’s run more like a private club than a public space, and I believe the time has come to bring it into line with all of Canada’s other federal parks,” he added.

“In the moral sense, Gatineau Park belongs to all Canadians, past, present and future,” said Senator Spivak on February 3, during her speech at second reading of the bill. “We are its temporal custodians. We must make sure that we protect what we inherited and pass it on to future generations. Parliament must be the final arbiter of future changes to Gatineau Park, as it is for our national parks,” she added.

Bill S-204 is Senator Spivak’s third attempt to provide Gatineau Park with protective legislation. Its predecessors, Bills S-210 and S-227 drew widespread support from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club and the NCC Renewal Coalition. Moreover, Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic parliamentarians have openly supported the park’s protection as represented by these measures.

The only opposition to Gatineau Park legislation has come from the Kingsmere Property Owners Association, the Meech Lake Association, and the mayor of Chelsea.

Similar legislative measures have also been tabled in the House of Commons by MPs Ed Broadbent and Paul Dewar.

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Backgrounder

Bill S-204: Amending the National Capital Act

Largely inspired by the National Parks Act,¹ 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.

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