



Immediate Release

Senator Spivak Praised as Gatineau Park Champion

Chelsea, May 4, 2009 – Local environmental groups are praising Senator Mira Spivak for her outstanding contribution to protecting Gatineau Park.

“As a result of the vision, dedication and inspiration Senator Spivak has provided on this issue, 86% of the people now want government legislation to protect Gatineau Park,” said Muriel How, chair of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society’s Gatineau Park Committee.

The Independent Manitoba senator was honoured at the annual meeting of CPAWS local chapter on May 4, at the Ottawa Public Library’s Laurier Street Branch, where she was given a framed picture of the park as a token of appreciation for her efforts

“Senator Spivak deserves recognition as the outstanding Gatineau Park builder of the last half century for shining so much light on what needs to be done to protect the park,” said Gatineau Park Protection Committee Co-chair Andrew McDermott. “No one has done more to bring this issue to the attention of Parliament and the public, and no one has devised a better solution to the problem,” he added.

Gatineau Park is the only federal park that isn’t a national park, and in the absence of proper legal protection the National Capital Commission has removed nearly eight square kilometres of its territory, while allowing 118 new houses and 5 new roads to be built inside it. A poll published in *Le Droit* on April 24 confirmed that 86% of local residents want the government to legislate park protection.

In a speech prepared for the occasion, Senator Spivak underlined that a great deal of progress had been made as a result of parliamentary efforts to protect the park. That progress, she said, included creation of park boundaries, purchase of private properties and settling proper ownership of a 62 km² stretch of the park.

“Politics can be more than the art of the possible, said Senator Spivak. “It can put in place what is possible today without losing sight of the dream on the horizon. The important matter is to preserve what we have, to halt the erosion of the past decades and to build the barricades against future development pressures,” she added.

Although the Conservative government has repeatedly committed to giving Gatineau Park legislative protection, it has so far not done so.

Senator Spivak’s speech is attached.

**Speaking Notes for
Senator Mira Spivak**

**Fortieth Anniversary of the
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
Ottawa Valley Chapter**

**Ottawa Public Library
Ottawa, Ontario
May 4, 2009**

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Thank you for your kind words.

Let me congratulate all of you on the fortieth anniversary of the Ottawa Valley Chapter of CPAWS. I'm told it was founded some 40 years ago to protect Gatineau Park in the face of development plans. Plans of that nature are only ever waylaid when people come together, and speak out loudly in defence of wilderness.

My congratulations to your founders and to all of you.

I was asked to say a few words about Bill S-204, the Gatineau Park protection bill that I re-introduced in January. It is essentially the same bill that was examined by a Senate committee two years ago – same bill, different number. CPAWS appeared before the committee and its support went a long way to convince senators on the committee to pass the bill. The committee's nod, however, was not enough. Bill S-210 died on the Order Paper. And here we are again, attempting to guarantee some very basic protection for Gatineau Park.

As I told my colleagues on the committee and in the Senate chamber, the bill is straightforward, simple and modest in scope. It would fix park boundaries in statute, just as boundaries are fixed for National Parks. It would give parliamentary oversight to future boundary changes – as National Parks are protected – should the NCC want to change the park's size. Shrinkage would not be permitted. And it would encourage the NCC over the long term to acquire private property in the park, by giving it right of first refusal when those properties come on the market.

Alas ... Would that we could – with a wave of the hand – make Gatineau Park the national park it was intended to be. That would be my preference, a view I suspect many of you share. For now, however, the obstacles are formidable – private property in the park, political inertia, bureaucratic apathy, and the fact that Parks Canada doesn't want to be its manager and the NCC doesn't want to give it up.

Politics can be more than the art of the possible. It can put in place what is possible today without losing sight of the dream on the horizon. That is what the bill would do. It would chip away at the obstacles, while preserving the natural heritage of Gatineau Park. Who can foretell the political climate decades from now? The important matter, in my opinion, is to preserve what we have, to halt the erosion of the past decades and to build the barricades against future development pressures.

The bill has not passed. The government has used procedural tactics to stall it, and I suspect, will try to keep it at bay. But since its introduction there has been progress.

The NCC has furnished a legal description of the park boundaries – it need only be attached to legislation. On the private property front, last summer the Government took a significant step. By order-in-council, it allowed the NCC to acquire private land in the park without the need for Treasury Board approval of purchases in excess of \$25,000. The NCC has been pleasantly active in buying up private land – spending some \$3 million on recent

acquisitions, including one that put a halt to a mid-size housing development in the park. Since this campaign began, some 50 hectares of park land have been purchased.

Just as important, in late March a motion before Quebec's Administrative Tribunal put an end to the myth that the province owns 12,500 acres of land surrounding Lac la Pêche. That is a huge victory for the park and for sound management of the land that was traded to the federal government in 1973, in exchange for 67 acres in downtown Hull.

There has been real progress. There is more work to do – not the least of which is to chip away at the culture on Parliament Hill, to make MPs and Senators better attuned to the true values of Canadians and to get more of them onside in the rather eternal struggle to preserve our natural heritage.

When my bill was before the Senate committee, a colleague asked me a most unusual question. “What is a nice lady from Winnipeg doing mixed up in this local issue?” I replied: “I am a Canadian.”

To be fair, to that point he had not heard from witnesses who stressed the importance of the park within the National Capital Region, the importance of preserving its ecological integrity and the rather large number of other heritage resources in the park.

Gatineau Park is minutes away from Parliament Hill but I would venture that the majority of parliamentarians have never set foot in it. And those who have been there have made the short trip to attend functions at the Speakers' residence or Harrington Lake or another of the six official residences in the park. To them, as it was to my colleague, Senator Angus, the preservation of Gatineau Park is a “local issue” fraught with local politics and the mysteries of Quebec politics.

There's another thing that many, many parliamentarians “don't get.” They “don't get” that conservation of wilderness and protection for our natural heritage are deeply-seeded Canadian values. I think of the poll commissioned by the Canadian Boreal Initiative in 2003. Eight in ten Canadians said they are concerned about the loss of wilderness forests in their province. Seven in ten say that conservation should come first. Some 89% value the Boreal ecosystem as a source of “clean air and water and a healthy food chain;” 87% value its habitat for plants and wild animals and 79% want it preserved for future generations.

The poll is one of many that quantify these strong Canadian values. As I said to my colleagues: “I am a Canadian.” And I'm sure that the vast majority of them, if they took time to dig deep would find themselves less sympathetic to residential and industrial development when it means the destruction of a critical piece of natural heritage.

I have been fortunate, fortunate in serving on the Senate environment committee for almost two decades, and in serving as deputy-chair of the Senate sub-committee on the Boreal Forest. My job has allowed me to criss-cross our beautiful country dozens of times. It has taken me to remote areas on fact-finding missions. And it has given me the privilege of hearing hundreds, if not thousands of hours, of testimony from witnesses to our committees.

Truth be told, my involvement in Gatineau Park came about largely because Jean-Paul Murray, whom many of you know, stalked the corridors of the East Block in search of a Gatineau Park champion. He approached another senator who referred him to me. Because of my work on the boreal forest, it took me about two seconds to see what was at stake.

Jean-Paul Murray has made an immense contribution to research on Gatineau Park. He worked with our legislative drafter in the Senate. And he has been a powerful advocate for Gatineau Park. He deserves a great deal of the credit.

I must also pay tribute to my policy advisor, Barbara Robson, who does such outstanding research and writing. She does the work and makes me look good.

My job comes to an end in July. I will continue to be with you in spirit, but it will be up to others to stick-handle a bill – either my bill or Paul Dewar's similar bill. CPAWS Ottawa Valley Chapter is a marvellous advocate for Gatineau Park and a marvellous spokesman on its behalf. If 86% of local residents now want legislative protection for the park, as a poll done for *le Droit* recently confirmed, it's in lark measure thanks to your good work.

You might also want to consider this: As difficult as it is to arrange, given the work weeks of most parliamentarians, it is important to try to have the park speak for itself – in the glory of its fall foliage, in the wonder of a fresh snowfall, in the varied greens of early spring or in the shade of summer. Try to bring Mohammed to the mountain.

The former Senate committee chairman spoke briefly about a park tour. If you can't get a whole committee, conduct mini or individual tours. Work with the NCC. Your guests will be astounded to see the habitat of coyotes not far from the Commons and to drive by at least one of the six official residences in Gatineau Park.

I am convinced that the result will be not only a far greater appreciation of the value of Gatineau Park, but a greater appreciation of natural heritage sites across this nation.

Thank you again. And I wish you every success.