

# **'Preserving Ottawa's Metropolitan Nature: How the 1970 Gatineau Park Planning Controversy Transformed the National Capital Commission and its Conservation Park**

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## *Abstract*

Although the National Capital Commission claimed to administer Gatineau Park according to a conservation policy, the 1960s saw numerous urban-type developments in the park and NCC planners emphasizing the park's recreation potential. This paper describes how the 1970 Gatineau Park planning controversy sparked by conservationists opposed this policy reversal and forced the NCC to abandon blueprint planning. This paper then examines relations between the NCC conservationists from the time of the planning controversy to the first Gatineau Park master plan. Drawing from Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, it is argued that, during its transition to participatory planning, the NCC placated conservationists, receiving their input but not always influenced by it. Thus, conservationists were disappointed by the first master plan, both its process and content. While they continue to play an important watchdog role in the park's management, and regularly participate in NCC planning exercises, conservationists have been unable to secure protective legislation for Gatineau Park. The status quo remains, such that the NCC can alter park policy without parliamentary oversight. Meanwhile, the park's wilderness character remains threatened by urbanization pressures.

*Keywords:* metropolitan nature, public participation, conservation movement, blueprint planning

## *Résumé*

Bien que la Commission de la capitale nationale (CCN) prétende administrer le Parc de la Gatineau selon une politique de conservation, au cours des années 1960 on constate de nombreux développements de type urbain dans le parc et les planificateurs de la CCN souligne le potentiel récréatif du parc. Cet article décrit comment la polémique de la planification du Parc de la Gatineau au cours des années 1970 fut déclenchée par les conservationnistes qui s'opposaient à ce revirement politique et a contraint la CCN d'abandonner leur Plan directeur. Le présent article examine ensuite les relations entre les conservationnistes de la CCN de l'époque de la controverse de planification jusqu'au premier plan directeur du Parc de la Gatineau. Basée sur l'échelle de la participation citoyenne d'Arnstein, l'analyse démontre que lors de son passage à la planification participative, la CCN a cherché à rassurer les conservationnistes. Or, bien que la CCN a reçu leurs commentaires, elle n'a pas toujours été influencé par ces derniers. Ainsi, les conservationnistes étaient déçus par le premier plan directeur, à la fois par le processus ainsi que par le contenu. Bien que ces derniers continuent de jouer un rôle important de contrôle dans la gestion du parc, et participe régulièrement à des exercices de planification de la CCN, les conservationnistes ont été incapables d'obtenir une législation de protection pour le Parc de la Gatineau. Le statu quo demeure de telles sortes que la CCN peut modifier la politique du parc sans contrôle parlementaire. Entre-temps, le caractère naturel du parc demeure menacé par les pressions de l'urbanisation.

*Mots-cles:* nature métropolitaine, participation du public, conservationnistes conservation, plan directeur

Since 1959, the National Capital Commission (NCC) has been the federal agency responsible for ensuring that Ottawa represents Canada and Canadian values. The NCC wants to make Canada's capital a 'green capital' in order to reflect "the environmental values traditionally held by Canadians" (NCC 1986: 8; see also NCC 1997: 7; 2007: 47). One of the key components of the green capital is the 361km<sup>2</sup> Gatineau Park, which is administered by the NCC (2005) as the 'Capital's Conservation Park'.

This paper shows that the NCC has not always viewed Gatineau Park in conservation terms. Rather, in the 1960s, planners saw the park as the capital's primary recreation area. A conservation group organized to contest this policy reversal and demand public consultations. In addition to describing the 1970 planning controversy and its historical antecedents, this paper traces the relations between conservationists and the NCC until the first Gatineau Park master plan (NCC 1980). It is argued that the NCC placated conservationists, who were disappointed by the plan's contents and the overall planning process. Nonetheless, the NCC abandoned blueprint planning for a more participatory approach. While this achievement is significant, conservationists have still to secure legislation for the park so as to protect this 'wilderness' from urbanization pressures.

## Introduction

Prior to the 1970 Gatineau Park planning controversy, the National Capital Commission administered the park according to a policy of conservation. Readers of a Gatineau Park (NCC 1965) pamphlet were thus informed that: "Consistent with the idea of conserving the wilderness character of this old Algonquin and Iroquois domain, the N.C.C. has laid down clear rules for maintenance of the park, so that generations to come can see a magnificent unchanged, unspoiled section of Canada, still freely roamed by bear, deer and other animals essential to early Canadian settlers and still a delight to the nature lover." Gatineau Park was intended to provide visitors with an opportunity to experience a 'typical' Canadian wilderness. The park's forests and lakes offered 'metropolitan nature', an alternative space to the city which is shaped by urban ideas of wilderness (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 115; Green 1990). Whereas the rural concept equates wilderness with unproductive lands, the urban concept, derived from romanticism and the back to nature movement of the nineteenth century, valorizes the absence of humanization in a 'pristine wilderness' (Oelschlaeger 1991: 110; Cronon 1995).

Since the turn of the century, the Gatineau Hills have been cherished by hikers, skiers, and cottagers, but they were also exploited for resource extraction (timber and mining). In 1913, Canadian geologist John Macoun wrote a letter in the *Ottawa Citizen* calling for the creation of a 100,000-acre national park in the Gatineau Hills adjacent to Canada's capital. The Commissioner of the Dominion Parks Branch, J.B. Harkin, acted on Macoun's proposal, indicating that Gatineau Park would be the first national park east of the Rockies, and the first in a series of near-urban national parks. However, this and subsequent national park proposals for the Gatineau Hills failed to interest the Government of Quebec, which guarded the province's territorial sovereignty from the federal government (Lothian 1987: 132).

The threat of clear-cutting brought on by the Great Depression led to the formation of an Ottawa-based citizen's group, the Federal Woodlands Preservation League; from 1934 to 1938, the League lobbied the federal government to set aside the Gatineau Hills as a protected area, but not as a national park (Apostle 1997; Gagnon et al. 2003). The predecessor to the NCC, the Federal District Commission, began purchasing lands in 1938, and established Gatineau Park's first public facilities at Lac Philippe in 1942. The NCC inherited 57,000 acres and a half-completed 'scenic parkway'. For the automotive public in particular, then, the park was to offer a scenic alternative to the urban, with its attendant conditions of noise, pollution, and crowds.

This paper examines conflicting interpretations among NCC planners and conservationists concerning the park's status as a metropolitan nature. Since over 30% of the park's area defines, and is defined by, the urban-wildlands interface (Heintzman 2006; 2010), it is particularly susceptible to urbanization pressures. With this in mind, NCC planners viewed a strict conservation policy to be impractical, and sought to emphasize the park's potential as a recreation area. Conservationists insisted on administering the park along the lines of a protected wilderness area. In seeking to include consideration of "non-citizens" and "non-humans" such as future generations, ecosystems, and wildlife into democratic politics, conservationists of the 1960s and 1970s belonged to Canada's nascent 'green public' (Adkin 2009).

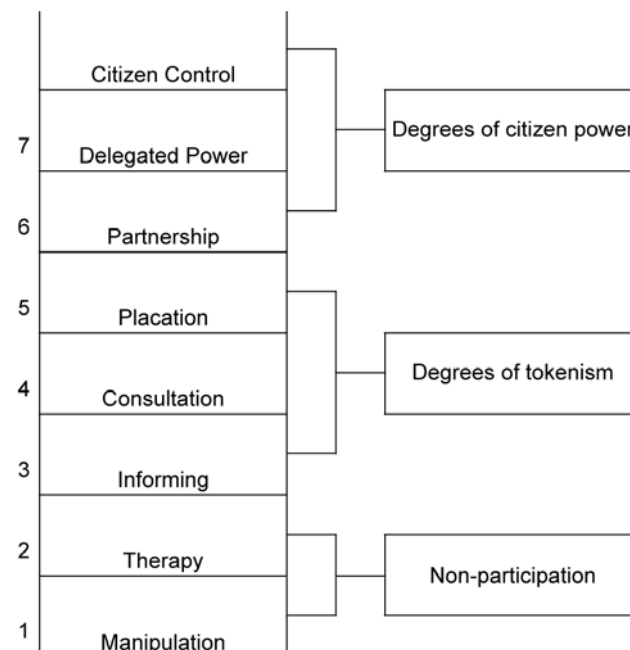
The paper describes the events leading up to the planning controversy, the controversy proper, and its aftermath. Having successfully opposed the 'policy reversal' in the park's administration, conservationists negotiated the subsequent planning of Gatineau Park as well as the Commission's transition from blueprint to

the more participatory synoptic planning. While both planning models share the problematic assumption that planning is an apolitical process wherein the technical expertise of planners reconciles competing interests into the public interest, the synoptic approach is superior to blueprint planning in recognizing that planning processes cannot be carried only by experts alone: public input is necessary for goal setting (Lane 2005: 288). Following other studies on Gatineau Park's planning (Brandenburg 2003; Heintzman 2006; 2010; Nortey 1992), I draw on Sherry Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation to show, that, in the aftermath of the controversy, the NCC placated conservationists throughout its transition to synoptic planning. Even though the NCC was forced to restart its planning process, synoptic planning did not prevent the adoption of a recreation-oriented master plan. Conservationists recognized that the first public hearings on the park were tokenistic exercises rather than genuine participation. They have continued to fulfill an important watchdog role, identifying threats to the park's ecological integrity and criticizing the NCC whenever it allows new developments.

## Research methods

This paper is informed by the approach to 'controversy mapping' advanced by Tommaso Venturini (2010a; 2010b). Its principal aims are to privilege actors' voices over those of the analyst, and to describe as many viewpoints as possible, so as to shed light on "the construction of social life" (Venturini 2010a: 796). Although space does not permit a full discussion of this approach, two central aspects should be noted. First, Venturini is not suggesting that analysts treat all actors equally. In the contestation of controversies, some actors occupy more representative, influential, and interesting positions than others. The task of the analyst is to simplify the complexity and heterogeneity of controversies respectfully. This paper focuses on the relations between central actors in the 1970 Gatineau Park planning controversy: the NCC and conservationists. A more comprehensive study would also describe the role of resident associations and recreation groups; wherever possible and relevant, other groups have been taken into account in the present paper, but conservationists sparked the Gatineau Park planning controversy, and the NCC that reacted to their various 'publicity outbursts'. The second point concerns the methodological minimalism of controversy mapping which "entails no conceptual assumptions and requires no methodological protocols" (Venturini 2010b: 259). Instead, theoretical and methodological openness are encouraged.

Figure 1. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation



In this connection, Sherry Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation is used to characterize the relations between conservationists and the NCC. Since it is argued that, in its shift from blueprint to synoptic planning, the NCC placated conservationists, it is helpful to define placation, and how the highest rung of tokenism differs from adjoining ones. Placation refers to planning and decision-making processes wherein the input of outsiders, while sought out and influential, is not entirely consequential. Consultation is the lower rung of tokenism, and, like placation, involves the collection of input from citizen groups; as opposed to placation, however, consulted groups have no influence on the planning or decision-making process in question. Tokenistic situations are distinguished from degrees of citizen power in terms of citizen's effectiveness on planning outcomes, and the public accountability of officials to stakeholders. The lowest level of citizen power, partnership, arises "[a]fter the groundrules have been established through some form of give-and-take, [and] they are not subject to unilateral change" (Arnstein 1969: 221). Even at a time when discourses celebrating 'partnerships' are ubiquitous, Arnstein's conditions for citizen power remain provocative as cases of genuine partnership remain few and far between—tokenistic participation, however, is routine.

Although Arnstein's ladder can be used to identify gradations in public participation between the NCC and citizen groups, there have been important criticisms of this often-used heuristic device, which prescribes the complete redistribution of power to citizen groups. Painter (1992) and Lane (2005) emphasize that power is not a substance, but the outcome of relations. So, even if citizen groups do not have formal decision-making authority, this does not necessarily mean that institutional relations are always going to be tokenistic. Citizen groups can still yield influence on planning and decision-making processes through informal channels, such as the 'court of public opinion' like television and news media, and more formal channels such as litigation. Arnstein's ladder should be used to evaluate the outcomes of planning, not the context in which it occurs. According to Lane (2005: 297), "[i]t makes little sense to evaluate public participation in terms that are not shared by the planning model itself."

When reconstructing the events and actors involved in the planning controversy, this research has drawn from several primary sources, including newspaper articles, NCC plans, and archival documents (correspondences, staff memoranda, minutes of meetings, etc.). Other official documents, such as annual reports and master plans, were requested from the NCC. The files of the Planning and Design Branch were obtained through access-to-information requests to the NCC and Library and Archives Canada. Internal documents of the Ottawa-Hull chapter of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada (NPPAC-OH) and correspondence with officials were obtained from former members of the conservation group. This archive provides multiple individual and institutional perspectives on the controversy's key events, actors, and outcomes.

### Creation of NCC and Gatineau Park administration, 1959-1969

In 1956, a joint-parliamentary committee was setup to investigate the implementation of the 1950 Plan for the National Capital, which is popularly known as the Gréber Plan after French planner Jacques Gréber who acted as principal consultant (Gordon 2001). Among other things, the Gréber Plan recommended the expansion of Gatineau Park to 83,000 acres and the construction of a parkway linking the park to Ottawa. Though advocating for increased accessibility and public facilities in the park, the Gréber Plan also endorsed a preservationist policy in order to protect "the forest, fish and game, and to direct control of the use of the land in general" (Gréber 1950: 248). As was the case with Canada's National Parks, the first Gatineau Park planners sought to reconcile preservation and use, supporting the view that the two mandates have been pursued simultaneously, and are not necessarily contradictory with one another (MacEachern 2001: 18; Taylor 1991).

Although the Federal District Commission had made progress on enlarging Gatineau Park, it encountered difficulties implementing several of the other major recommendations in the Gréber Plan, including the extension of the Gatineau Parkway and creation of Ottawa's Greenbelt. As a result, the joint-parliamentary committee sought to increase the powers, jurisdiction, funding of the FDC to ensure the completion of the Gréber Plan regardless of the co-operation (or lack thereof) from provincial and municipal governments (Gordon 2002). On the recommendation of the joint-parliamentary committee, the federal government passed the 1959 *National Capital Act* which reconstituted the FDC as the National Capital Commission.

The newly established NCC retained the preservation policy endorsed by Gréber and other park planners. Nevertheless, they also wanted to develop new public facilities and complete the Gatineau Parkway (see Figure 1). According to the then Gatineau Park Superintendent, even without a connection to the parkway, public use

at Lac Philippe had “reached the point of near saturation” (Ede 1968). When undertaking preparatory work for the parkway extension, NCC work-crews destroyed the ecologically sensitive lakeshore of Mud Lake.

Sheila Thomson, a member of Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (OFNC), witnessed this and other “NCC atrocities.” In the April 1965 OFNC newsletter, she listed the numerous hiking trails ruined by parkway construction. Her contribution to the newsletter also questioned the park's stewardship as television and radio towers had been erected, while park rangers blasted beaver dams, hunted wolves, and leased parkland for a municipal garbage dump—hardly actions in keeping with a preservation policy. Thomson's newsletter contribution was a call-to-action: “the naturalist community must rise up.” Shortly after, OFNC members including Thomson and Dr. Ted Mosquin formed a Gatineau Park Committee. They met with NCC officials, including the Superintendent of Gatineau Park, to discuss proposals such as the hiring of a botanist and cataloguing rare plants. At the request of the NCC, the Gatineau Park Committee began preparing a brief, but it could not be completed before the committee disbanded.

In April 1966, the Gatineau Park Superintendent followed the advice of the naturalists and requested funds for an inventory of the park's “natural and biological features and all locations and improvements of historical interest” (Ede 1966a). Superintendent Ede also suggested that NCC staff consult with relevant experts in the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club and local universities. The NCC Executive did not grant the funds for the biological inventory; rather, in the fall of 1966, the Planning and Civic Design Branch had begun work towards a ‘Gatineau Park Development Plan.’ Thus, by the start of 1967, NCC planners had reviewed previous park plans, which not only included the Gréber Plan but also the 1952 *Report on a Gatineau Park Master Plan* which, though proposing hotel and ski developments inside the park, also subscribed to a preservation policy. Early park planners wrote: “We must preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Any structures or present developments within the area which conflict with this objective should be removed” (GPAC 1952: 4).

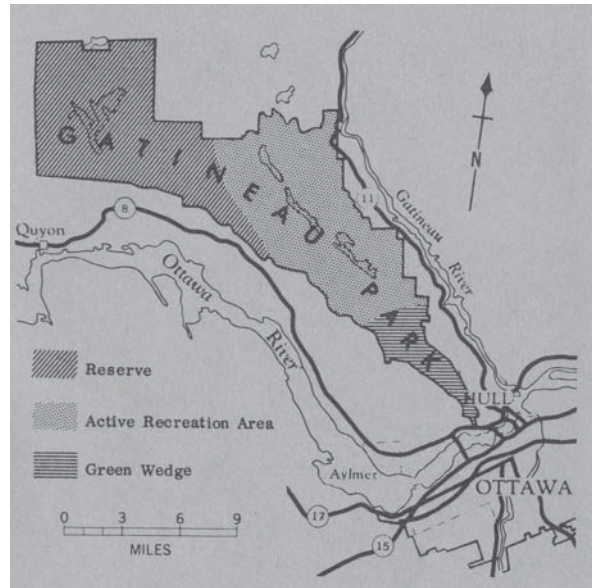
In addition to examining earlier plans, NCC planners acquired aerial maps, formulated planning options, and contemplated setting up an Ad Hoc Committee in order “[t]o arrive at a comprehensive plan for Gatineau Park, which adequately responds to both resource potentialities and demands for park ‘services’...” (Perks 1966). With such a wide portfolio of projects, however, NCC planners did not proceed with an in-house master plan, and the Ad Hoc Committee was never setup. Instead, in January 1968, they released the *Gatineau Park Development Concept*.

This confidential 53-page document set out the objectives from which outside consultants would produce a comprehensive master plan. It was the *Development Concept* which was so vehemently opposed by conservationists, as NCC planners projected the needs of a future “leisure society” (NCC 1968: 1). NCC planners recognized that, with earlier plans, “the dominant concept of Gatineau Park was that of a conservation area” (NCC 1968: 30). But they argued that their predecessors had been “unable to foresee the later establishment of extensive public domains [i.e., other wilderness parks, see Figure 3] surrounding the Capital Region and lying within a radial distance of 100 miles” (NCC 1968: 31). NCC planners concluded that “[t]hese events, together with the great improvements of travel and travel speed have now rendered this dominant theme for Gatineau Park less important for residents of the Capital Region” (NCC 1968: 31). In the coming leisure society, planners could downplay preservation as the park would come to “play a significant role in satisfying both recreational and tourist requirements” (NCC 1968: 23).

While admitting that the *Development Concept* was “essentially people oriented” NCC (1968: 3) planners did not view recreation and conservation as mutually exclusive. Rather, as objective and impartial experts, NCC planners were reconciling the park's myriad of functions in the public interest. And it was towards these ends that planners zoned the park (see Figure 2), designating 48% as an Active Recreation Area. A ‘Reserve’ or conservation area was to comprise 43% of the park's total area, while the remaining 9% would become a “Green Wedge,” which was to be:

completely contained within the zone of urbanized land by the year 2000 and becomes a positive, integral element within the metropolitan urban fabric. The functional characteristics of the Green Wedge will be such as to facilitate communications between urban areas in Quebec rather than pose a barrier to them. At the same time, the wedge can serve to accommodate a number of socio-cultural and educational establishments. (NCC 1968: 37)

Figure 2. NCC Development Concept – Zoning of Gatineau Park (source: NPPAC-OH 1970: 5)



If one examines a contemporary map, it quickly becomes apparent that this vision of the Green Wedge was prescient. But NCC planners did not have as clear a vision for the Active Recreation Area. This gap in knowledge prevented them from drafting a master plan; when determining future recreational demands, there were inadequate “guidelines” (NCC 1968: 3). Nevertheless, NCC planners still predicted that “the quantity of needed facilities and land resources will be tripled by the year 2000” (NCC 1968: 21). The growing recreational needs of the region’s population were central concerns of NCC planners and served as a teleological justification for new public highways and recreation facilities.

The *Development Concept* was approved by the standing Gatineau Park Advisory Committee and adopted by the NCC Executive. The NCC subsequently awarded its largest contract at the time, \$54,000,<sup>1</sup> to a landscape and town planning consultancy, to produce a master plan based on the *Development Concept*. Rumours about a confidential Gatineau Park planning process prompted Sheila Thomson to write the Minister responsible for the NCC, George McIlraith. She asked the Minister about the current policy for the park, as well as the status of the ongoing planning process.

The Minister of Public Works replied that there was neither written policy nor legislation for Gatineau Park. Rather, “[t]he policy that is followed is contained in a series of staff memoranda representing decisions which have been taken from time to time over the past few years.” As for the planning of the Park, Minister McIlraith wrote that:

In the past few months the Planning Branch of the National Capital Commission has been working on a development concept for the Park and this should be completed in the near future. This concept will form the basis for a long range development plan which, all going well, we hope will be available within the next year. ... However, the development concept is just now being worked out and is not yet in a form which could be released to the public. (McIlraith, 11 March 1968)

The Minister’s response was not only evasive, but misleading: the *Development Concept* was completed in January 1968. Perhaps the NCC officials who helped prepare the Minister’s response anticipated the resistance that the *Development Concept* would provoke among the naturalist community. The park’s first planning process under the NCC was *supposed* to be non-participatory, with the public informed about park plans after the fact. It is a classic example of blueprint planning.

Knowing that a planning process had begun for the park, the Ottawa Field Naturalists’ Club submitted a brief to the NCC in September 1968, with proposals oriented towards conservation and increased—albeit tightly controlled—public access. Their recommendations included: hiring a naturalist or botanist, reserving

Figure 3. Parks and Reserves within 100 mile radius of Gatineau Park (source: NCC 1968: 15)

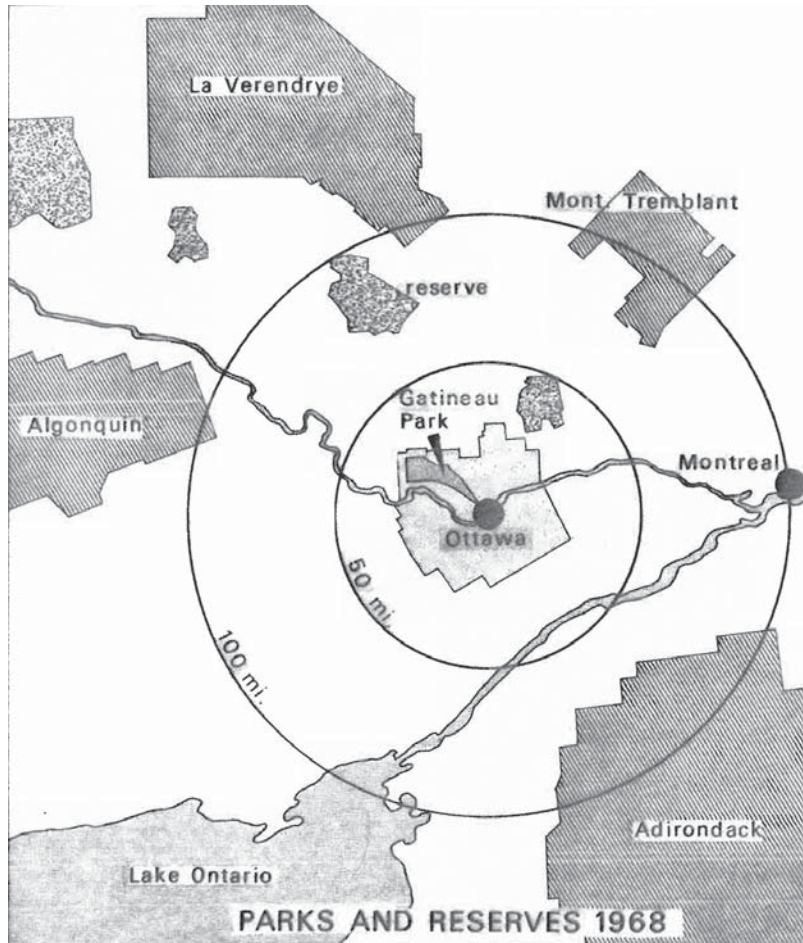
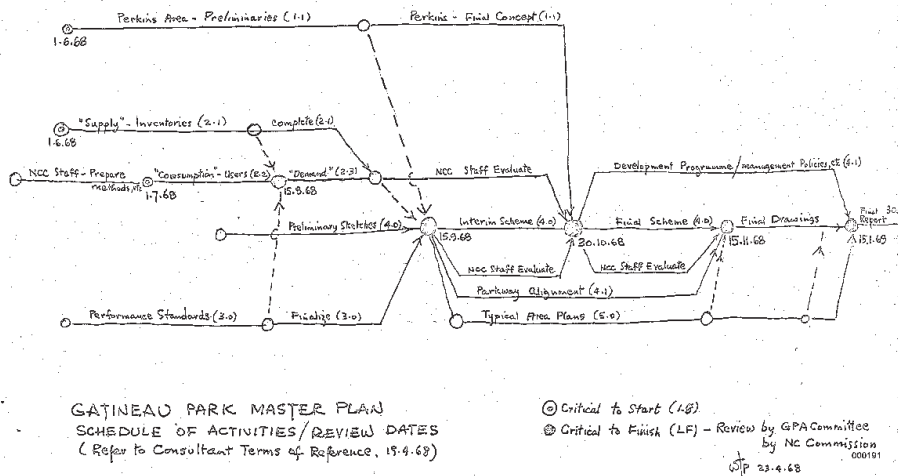


Figure 4. Gatineau Park Master Plan – Schedule of Activities (source: NCC 1968b)



the park's north-west sector as a natural area, protecting areas of special biological interest (bogs, marshes, and wildlife areas), preparing a long-term plan for the construction of parkways and other facilities, prohibiting motor-boats, eliminating private property, and restricting the growth and size of campsites. The brief also requested more transparency in the planning process: “[w]hen there are firm long-term plans for the future of Gatineau Park, they should be published widely, thoroughly, and repeatedly” (MacKenzie 1969: 80). In addition to these proposals, the OFNC offered the volunteer services of its members:

The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club has previously offered to assist the NCC in the development of Gatineau Park in any feasible way. This offer is repeated now. The Club has among its members many botanists, zoologists and ecologists. Other amateur members are very knowledgeable in their specialties. We can make much of this expertise available from time to time, and will, if it is wanted. (MacKenzie 1969: 80)

Although one NCC planner (Perks 1968) found it “regrettable” that the expertise of the OFNC had not been consulted in the preparation of the *Development Concept*, there is no indication that NCC planners ever considered altering the consultants' terms of reference to include public input (NCC 1968b). Thus, the NCC remained committed to a blueprint planning approach despite a clear interest from the OFNC. Though NCC planners did consult recreation and tourism officials from Quebec (Nemeth 1967), they ignored the proposals from the naturalist community. The OFNC President, Dr. Mosquin (1970), would later ask NCC Chairman Douglas Fullerton:

[...] why have there not been any public hearings on the future of the Park before the development plan was launched in the first place? Why, back in 1967, did not the NCC seek an independent survey of public opinion on the future of the Park? Why have civic organizations not been invited to express their views on this important question? Why has this *Development Concept* been kept secret for 3 years?

Although some NCC officials, like Superintendent Ede, were sympathetic to conserving Gatineau Park as a wilderness park, NCC officials in the Planning and Civic Design branch, as evinced in the *Development Concept*, had different ideas, intending the park to be developed as a regional recreation hub for the coming leisure society; not a metropolitan nature for city-dwellers to escape to (and be educated by), but a summer and winter playground required by a leisure society.

### The Gatineau Park planning controversy

NCC officials were perhaps aware of the looming public controversy over Gatineau Park planning. In January 1970, Superintendent Ede circulated a 13-page brief to NCC staff, *Gatineau Park: Which way are we going?* indicating that preservation remained the primary concern of Operations Branch. He emphasized, further, that the planning process was only partly complete: “[s]hortly, the consultants will be coming up with development proposed based solely on the recreation possibilities of the park and on public demand. ... *Before we go any further, we must have a clear statement of policy and intent*” (NCC 1970: 2, emphasis in original). The park's biological inventory, which Superintendent Ede had requested four years earlier, had yet to be undertaken, let alone considered.

This oversight lends further support to the view of NCC Assistant General Manager (Operations), who argued that “[p]lanning has usurped the responsibility of the design and operational elements of the Commission.” In a letter to NCC Chairman Fullerton, GM-OPS MacNiven (1970) wrote: “I believe that the consultants are completely on the wrong track as far as Gatineau Park is concerned. I am greatly disturbed that the majority of these development norms are related to recreation, which I do not believe Gatineau Park is or should be.” Park Superintendent Ede also found the consultants' work to be “deficient in its recommendations dealing with the ecology in the Park and is overly-prejudiced in favour of recreation” (in McDonald 1970). There would be considerable negotiation between the consultants' initial proposals and the final version of *Overall Development Plan* (Lambert, Bussière, and Aubry 1970), but it is not within the scope of a controversy study to detail the divergent viewpoints between NCC staff and the planning consultants. Rather, the discussion now turns to



the public dimensions of the planning controversy, as conservationists opposed the *Development Concept* and demanded public hearings ahead of any master plan.

One of the first actions undertaken by conservationists was the publication of *On the Future of Gatineau Park*. Copies of the 20-page brief were sent to the NCC, politicians, and Prime Minister P.E. Trudeau. Its authors expressed grave concern that NCC planners' recreation-oriented proposals would permanently damage the park's wilderness character: "Of all the lands acquired by the National Capital Commission, the most precious is Gatineau Park. It is also the most vulnerable because its character, once disturbed, cannot be regained within a lifetime" (Roots, Mosquin, and Merriam 1970). Next, conservationists established a formal organization. Sheila Thomson, Dr. Ted Mosquin, and Dr. H. Gray Merriam were among the core organizers of the Ottawa-Hull chapter of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada (NPPAC-OH). The chapter's executive included several university professors and government researchers.

Early in the summer of 1970, the NPPAC-OH held a public meeting at the National Library of Canada in Ottawa, on "Protective Legislation for Gatineau Park" which was attended by 200 people. The meeting's public notice acknowledged that:

The pressure is on to alter large segments of the Park for outdoor sport complexes and for other activities requiring artificial development. Outside the Park, there are still thousands of acres of Gatineau woods, hills, lakes and shorelines suitable for such developments. Can we convince the sports-minded public that the people of the National Capital Region want, and can have both a wilderness park and large outdoor recreation areas, but only if the latter are located outside the Park?

Later that summer, the NPPAC-OH published a 20-page brief, *The Crisis in Gatineau Park*, which advocated protective legislation and pointed out instances where the NCC had compromised park preservation (e.g. television and radio towers, municipal garbage dump, road construction, etc). Members also contributed articles on the park's mismanagement to *Park News*, the main publication of the NPPAC. On 15 August 1970, conservationists held a press conference which received extensive coverage by radio, newspaper, and television networks. Taken together, these actions made the Gatineau Park planning controversy public. Newspaper headlines read: "Gatineau Park plan attacked" (No author 1970a), "Gatineau Defence League: Group vows to stall NCC park plans" (Josey 1970).

The conservationists found an articulate spokesperson in Sheila Thomson, who explained to the newspaper-reading public that "[t]here is reason to believe that the NCC will seek approval of Gatineau Park development plans before the public is informed that a change of policy is being considered" (cited in Josey 1970). Thomson added that, "[i]n the face of conflicting evidence, we are concerned that the commission may proceed with a program of development, which would destroy the natural state of the park, before protective legislation is obtained" (cited in No author 1970b). Journalists attempted to reach NCC Chairman Fullerton, but he was away on vacation. Nevertheless, the *Montreal Star* quoted an NCC spokesperson on the conservationists' campaign: "They're off half-cocked over the whole thing. It's a tempest in a teapot. I think it's foolish to print anything on the subject" (cited in Poronovich 1970). Meanwhile, the *Ottawa Citizen* (No author 1970c) quoted an NCC official saying that the NPPAC-OH was "both misrepresenting NCC policy and jumping the gun in its concern over the future development of the park." For their part, journalists overwhelmingly sided with conservationists. One wrote: "To hear the Gatineau Defence League representatives talk, the beauty and quiet of Gatineau Park is lost" (No author 1970c). The article went on to reinforce the growing demand for public hearings: "The commission should now release at least the intent of its study report so that it may be discussed in greater knowledge. *The public has some right to know when such important matters are being considered, rather than told after it is all decided*" (No author 1970c, emphasis added). At the time in Canada, criticism of the blueprint model was just entering the mainstream, with Parks Canada and other federal agencies beginning to experiment with public consultation and citizen engagement (Dubasak 1990; Dearden and Dempsey 2004).

Chairman Fullerton's return from vacation was to a rather dire overall situation for the NCC. In addition to criticism coming from conservationists over Gatineau Park planning, a multi-partisan group of parliamentarian was publicly questioning the NCC and its leadership (No author 1970f). The most vocal critic was M.P. Lloyd Francis, the Liberal M.P. for Ottawa-West. Francis informed the local media that "[i]t is his desire the parliamentary committee come up with recommendations to solve problems of the national capital, the NCC

and related difficulties such as pollution in Gatineau Park” (No author 1970e). The Ottawa M.P. thought that: “In view of controversy about the NCC and its chairman Douglas Fullerton, the committee should study the role of the commission and chairman” (Connolley 1970).

The pressure was on Chairman Fullerton to address the mounting criticisms. He agreed to the talks proposed by the NPPAC-OH, which were intended to “to clear up the misunderstandings which have occurred and maintain a dialogue with you [NCC] concerning possible future developments of Gatineau Park. It is our hope that our organization and the NCC can establish a constructive working relationship” (Ingraham 1970). On 25 September 1970, a meeting between Sheila Thomson, Dr. Ted Mosquin and Chairman Fullerton yielded the following outcomes:

- 1) The NCC promised public hearings ahead of any Gatineau Park master plan;
- 2) The NCC imposed a ban on snowmobiles on all NCC lands, e.g., Gatineau Park and Ottawa’s Greenbelt;

At the following meeting of the NPPAC-OH Executive, Thomson recounted the experience: “She felt that some good came out of the meeting but also felt that many things were left unsaid” (Highlights of Executive Meeting, 1 Oct. 1970). As shown in the next section, the working relationship between the conservationists and NCC was continually underpinned by hostility.

In the meantime, Thomson (1970) attempted to smooth relations with NCC Chairman Fullerton. Citing past correspondences on Gatineau Park with him and other officials, Thomson insisted that every opportunity had been given to the NCC through advance notice of the group’s activities. Indeed, in that very letter, Thomson indicated that the NPPAC-OH had begun preparing a national petition for Gatineau Park legislation (which collected 12,000 signatures from across Canada, and was submitted to the federal government). Further, she indicated that conservationists were preparing a brief on Gatineau Park to submit to the parliamentary Committee which Lloyd Francis was then advocating (NPPAC-OH 1976). Fullerton angrily responded that the NPPAC-OH had embarrassed the NCC, and insisted that the consultants plan was only under consideration. As indicated by the criticism of the consultants’ work from officials in the Operations Branch, it is possible that, even had the planning controversy not transpired, the NCC might have never adopted the *Overall Development Plan*. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the planning controversy played an important role in ensuring that this recreation-oriented master plan was never endorsed, with the NCC forever abandoning the blueprint approach to include public consultations.

### NCC – NPPAC-OH relations to the first master plan, 1970-1980

Throughout the 1970s, relations between conservationists and the National Capital Commission shifted considerably but remained mostly hostile. Immediately following the Gatineau Park planning controversy, the former adversaries became allies in the controversy contemporaneously known as the ‘Fullerton ban’. Snowmobile associations from Quebec and Ontario protested the snowmobile ban on NCC lands, specifically Gatineau Park and the Greenbelt. Despite the vocal support of the NPPAC-OH, the snowmobile ban was eventually rescinded on account of the public campaign and political pressure mounted by the snowmobile associations (NCC 1971: 29).

As indicated in earlier letters, NCC Chairman Fullerton strongly disagreed with the conservationists’ criticism of the Commission’s planning procedure. In letters to M.P.s and the public, the NCC Chairman routinely discredited the NPPAC-OH. For NPPAC-OH President Sheila Thomson, these were “undeserved attacks” which necessitated a reevaluation of relations with the NCC. In anticipation of the promised consultations, the technical and scientific expertise of the NPPAC-OH membership was pooled to prepare a Gatineau Park ‘master plan’ which would include a biological inventory and impose a strong conservation policy. It is ironic that conservationists prepared their ‘master plan’ without consulting the NCC. The illustrated 54-page *Gatineau Park: A Proposal for its Conservation and Use* was published in 1972 in both official languages; known to conservationists as the ‘Green Brief’, they printed 2000 copies at a cost of \$5,000, and obtained a \$2000 grant from White Owl Conservation Awards to help offset printing costs.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘Green Brief’ was far more comprehensive than any previous park plan, with sections on the park’s geology, ecology, wildlife, human history, and political context. Like other plans, it also included a map showing

park zoning proposals and boundary changes. 95% of the park's area was zoned for conservation, and modified the park's boundaries to better correspond with the conservation policy. Thus, the park's undeveloped northwest sector was to be expanded, while the southeast section—the 'Green Wedge' or urban-wildlands interface—was to be removed from the park. The Green Wedge had too many "irreversible developments" (roads, residences, power lines, mines, etc.) for it to be considered a 'wilderness park'. The NPPAC-OH recognized that the proposed removal was radical: "[t]he ceding of the southeast end of the park should be considered to result from extraordinary circumstances and should never be repeated" (NPPAC-OH 1972: 36).

To the furthest extent possible, the NPPAC-OH wanted the wilderness park preserved as "a living classroom" or "theatre of nature" (NPPAC-OH 1972: 40). Thus, they repeated earlier calls that the NCC hire a professional biologist or naturalist, and made suggestions for a biological inventory, environmental education program, laboratory facility, bird-observation area, and "a theatre for lectures on natural history and modern environmental films..." (NPPAC-OH 1972: 41). As opposed to NCC planners who envisioned the park as a recreation centre for the coming leisure society, conservationists stressed the park's educational value. They understood it as a metropolitan nature, albeit not one intended exclusively as a recreational escape from the urban. Rather, this 'wilderness park'—for conservationists debated whether Gatineau Park could legitimately be called such—was to provide a remedy to the increasing urban-centrism of planners: "More and more, the people who make the decisions about land and environment are city dwellers ... If Gatineau Park is preserved as a wilderness, it could be used to increase the public's understanding and appreciation of the natural environment" (NPPAC-OH 1972: 32).

Upon receipt of the Green Brief, NCC Chairman Fullerton wrote yet another angry letter to the conservationists in which he argued that they were engaged in opportunistic historical revisionism. He argued that earlier planners (e.g., Holt 1915, Gréber 1950) were more "concerned about preserving a "balanced" approach. Gatineau Park is simply too close to a large city to be turned completely into a wilderness area, and the NCC and its predecessor bodies have had to shape their policies to take this into account" (Fullerton 1972). Fullerton claimed that, since taking office, the NCC had embraced park conservation principles, such as the suspension of the parkway construction program and the snowmobile ban. Fullerton's letter also criticized conservationists for their "arresting procedure" as the NCC had yet to formally request briefs. But the conservationists were responding to promises made by the NCC, which had been reiterated in the local media (see Karon 1971; No author 1971). Indeed, accompanying Fullerton's letter was a copy of the House of Commons debates, with M.P. Lloyd Francis questioning—no doubt following his receipt of the Green brief—the Minister responsible for the NCC, Ron Basford, about the park's planning. Minister Basford responded:

Mr. Speaker, the plan is for the National Capital Commission, later in the year [1972], to issue a set of general principles relating to park policy. The Chairman is anxious, and I for the government am insistent, that those principles should be commented upon by all people with knowledge or who are interested in that policy, out of which will come the long-term policy for Gatineau Park. (Hansard 1972: 360)

Following the Green Brief, NCC planners circulated the *Proposed Development Concept of Gatineau Park* which "aimed at the establishment of a recreation network in the National Capital Region" (NCC 1972: 2). According to NCC planners, "[i]n spite of a potential which has hardly been tapped, Gatineau Park is found lacking in certain activities of increasing popularity such as water sports, summer camps, long-term outdoor camping, etc..." (NCC 1972: 4). A zoning scheme similar to the one used in the *1968 Development Concept* was then re-introduced, before NCC officials set out the rest of the planning process for Gatineau Park, which now included public consultations (NCC 1972: 33). The shift from blue-print to synoptic planning was piecemeal, however, as NCC planners would then study the proposals put forward by citizen groups. NCC planners were explicit that any final decisions concerning the Park's administration and future use rested with them alone.

Fullerton resigned at the start of 1973, prompting a restart of the planning process and a reassessment of relations between conservationists and the NCC. On 30 January 1974, the incumbent NCC Chairman, Edgar Gallant, spoke at a meeting of the NPPAC-OH Executive, emphasizing the Commission's adherence to conservation policy. Gallant (NCC 1974: 2) told conservationists: "We believe that Gatineau Park should provide only those recreation activities which require a natural environment and which will not damage or destroy that

environment.” To that end, the NCC Chairman, with the enthusiastic support of Gatineau Park Superintendent Ede, commissioned an ecological inventory of Gatineau Park. Following this, a steering committee was setup with “a mandate to establish the guidelines which would orient the NCC in matters relating to the planning, development and future management of Gatineau Park” (NCC 1976b: 5). Composed of officials from Parks Canada, Environment Canada, and the NCC, this committee set the parameters for the planning team, which then prepared an analysis of the park’s recreation, conservation, and interpretation potentials. This preliminary process culminated in the 1976 *Conceptual Plan*, a document which was “the first step in a planning process which will determine the future role and use of this extensive natural area” (NCC 1976a: i).

The *Conceptual Plan* subscribed to “a general philosophy of conservation” (NCC 1976a: 1). It directly carried over many of the proposals found in the Green Brief. Thus, NCC planners now wanted to minimize road circulation and cluster recreation at the urban fringes of the park, preferably keeping intensive activities outside of it altogether (NCC 1976a: 24). They defined the park’s role in terms of metropolitan nature: “to provide, for man, a park that is unique and complementary, as a natural milieu in the context of an urbanized area” (NCC 1976a: 24). The *Conceptual Plan* elaborates: “[t]he natural milieu is one in which the evolution and balance of the resources are not altered by their use, and where the natural regeneration of plant and animal communities is maintained. This implies conservation of the environment by management that minimizes man’s impact on the resources” (NCC 1976a: 24). Gatineau Park was still planned for ‘man’ but special consideration was also given to the non-human: plants, rocks, animals, etc. Further, the *Conceptual Plan* also proposed to enlarge park boundaries to be contiguous with natural ecosystems, which would then be monitored, managed, and protected by NCC staff (NCC 1976a: 67). The creation of ecological corridors was even suggested (NCC 1976a, 69). Overall, the conservation philosophy declared that:

Disturbance of the Park’s physical features, flora and fauna should be minimized. Motorized vehicles such as snowmobiles and motorboats should be prohibited in the Park, except where they are used for patrol and maintenance; access by automobile should be restricted to a few, easily-controlled entrance points. These measures would protect the natural character of the Park, and minimize disturbance and danger to wildlife. (NCC 1976a: 70)

In October 1976, the NCC held its very first public consultations, marking its transition to synoptic planning, as officials received public input and feedback on the *Conceptual Plan*. As indicated in Nortey’s analysis of the Commission’s very first participatory planning exercise, the consultations suffered from “inadequate publicity and technical difficulties” (Nortey 1992: 114). As can be expected, the proposals in the *Conceptual Plan* received the strong support of conservation and naturalist groups, while snowmobile associations and park residents rejected the conservation policy, which deemed human occupation and motorized vehicles as “incompatible” uses of the wilderness park.

It took NCC planners another three years to produce and approve the *Master Plan* (NCC 1980), which, like its predecessors, advanced three objectives for Gatineau Park: conservation, recreation, and interpretation. Even at a most superficial level, the NCC had ceded to recreation pressures between the public consultations and master plan, as “[u]nder the plan, approximately 70% of the area of the Park is to be devoted to the various forms of conservation, while the remaining 30% is to be used for recreational purposes, intensive and non-intensive” (NCC 1980: 14). In the Commission’s administration of the Park, conservation was the primary concern and, to that end, the master plan proposed limiting the circulation of motor vehicles, establishing ecological corridors, and working with municipalities to close and re-naturalize unused roads (NCC 1980: 28, 29, 60).

But NCC planners also advanced several recreation-oriented proposals, such as increasing the number of campgrounds and constructing a zoo (NCC 1980: 8). In order to accommodate increasing visitor numbers and improve public access, it recommended an expanded regional highway system. Finally, to leave open further planning opportunities, NCC planners suggested that the 1980 *Master Plan* was really only another “Development Concept” (see NCC 1980: 11, 12fn). In the conclusion of the *Master Plan*, NCC planners reasoned that: “The optimum reconciliation of roles and objectives and the rational application of the Plan cannot be achieved unless a comprehensive plan is drawn up for the management of the Park’s resources, facilities, activities, and services” (NCC 1980: 60).

With the first planning cycle brought to a rather ambiguous end, conservationists voluntarily submitted a

brief to the NCC criticizing several aspects of the 'master plan' and planning process. While their brief conveyed general agreement with the prioritization of conservation, the NPPAC-OH (1980) nevertheless opposed the parking lots, camping and beach facilities proposed in the master plan. They questioned road realignment proposals and offered the expertise of their membership, which included a road engineer, Henning Von Mirbach. But the counter-proposals of the NPPAC-OH would not be taken into account by the NCC. Instead, the Commission adopted its first *Master Plan* with conservationists complaining that there was no "feed-back" between the public consultation and adoption of the *Master Plan* (Woodley 1980). The Commission's second planning process reveals the tokenism of the synoptic approach, as citizen groups are consulted but their input is either mostly ignored (consultation) or only somewhat influential (placation). Some recommendations of the NPPAC-OH were acted upon, but other important proposals were left out. Conservationists were placated in the NCC planning process.

## Conclusion

Since 1938, Gatineau Park has endowed Canada's capital with a metropolitan nature, that is, an alternative to the urban that is nevertheless conditioned by urban ideas of wilderness. Though the park's governing body, the National Capital Commission, now recognizes it as the capital's conservation park, this paper showed that planners in the 1960s departed from previous policy to emphasize the park's recreational use. The prioritization of use over preservation was opposed by conservationists, who not only took issue with the policy change but also NCC planning. This paper described the organization of the Ottawa-Hull chapter of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada and its struggles to ensure that Gatineau Park was conserved as a wilderness park for future generations. The 1970 Gatineau Park planning controversy yielded important results: first, the NCC never adopted the master plan based on the recreation-oriented *Development Concept*; and, second, it brought about institutional change as the NCC abandoned blueprint planning in favor of the synoptic approach, which is more participatory but, like its predecessor, continues to treat planning as an apolitical process.

This paper then examined relations between the NCC and NPPAC-OH following the planning controversy to the adoption of the first Gatineau Park master plan. While NCC Chairman Fullerton remained in office, relations were hostile, and conservationists proceeded to produce a comprehensive master plan on their own. Recognizing that the NCC can change its park policy without parliamentary oversight, the conservationists circulated a petition calling for park legislation which collected 12,000 signatures. With the arrival of Chairman Edgar Gallant, relations between conservationists and the NCC improved: a biological inventory was commissioned and the NCC released, ahead of the first public consultations on the park, the conservation-oriented *Conceptual Plan*. NCC planners seemed to align themselves with the conservationists understanding of the park as a living classroom, one set aside for public education more than recreation.

Even as the NCC embraced a participatory planning approach, conservationists did not really influence the resultant master plan. Thus, in addition to contesting some of the contents of the plan, conservationists complained that there was no feed-back after the consultations. NCC planners were not prepared to relinquish control over the final outcomes, as they still believed that, in determining the park's future, only their expertise could unproblematically determine *the* public interest. The initial transition to participatory planning was ultimately tokenistic, but on this point it is important to note that the NCC has since embraced citizen engagement to an ever greater degree than before (Heintzman 2010; Donhoe and Gilmore 2012). But, even though there are deeper and more meaningful opportunities for public consultation, the NCC still retains final decision-making authority. Although the 1970 Gatineau Park planning controversy brought about institutional change, the *status quo* remains the same today: the NCC can modify its park policy at any time, without public consultation or even parliamentary oversight.

Through all this controversy and tokenistic planning, the park itself has been transformed. For over four decades, conservationists have been trying to protect this near-urban wilderness from urbanization and development pressures. As one activist recently observed, "the park has been hacked to pieces over the last 15 years: five new roads and 115 new houses have been built in the park, while 8 square kilometres of land has been removed from it. Add to this a new superstore, coffee shop, gas station, fire hall, pumping station and the picture becomes even bleaker" (Murray 2008). Having witnessed numerous occasions of NCC mismanagement and the increasing number of urban-type developments, conservationists now characterize the park as a "semi-wilderness" (CPAWS 2007). Clearly, they fulfill an important watchdog role, ensuring that the NCC remains a responsible

steward of the park, whatever its stated policy. Indeed, with “Gatineau Park: Yours to Protect” as its contemporary slogan, the NCC has perhaps abdicated responsibility for the capital’s ‘conservation park.’ Next to the planning controversy, the passage of protective legislation will be a defining moment in the park’s contested history. Legislation can serve multiple ends (e.g., formalizing park boundaries, establishing policy on private lands), but the foremost concern of conservationists is to enshrine ecological integrity as the park’s foremost management principle, thus bringing the park’s administration closer in line with Canada’s National Parks.

### Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the two anonymous referees for their helpful and insightful comments. He also thanks Patricia Ballamingie, William Walters, and Bruce Curtis for comments on an earlier draft of this article. Access to important files and documents were kindly provided by Sheila Thomson, Bill Gard, Lorna McCrae, John McDonnell and Jean-Paul Murray. The assistance of Lindsay Stephenson and Judy Booth, both at the National Capital Commission, and Marc Robillard at Library Archives Canada is gratefully acknowledged. This research was supported through the Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator, this amount translates to \$389,965.91 (CDN) in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator, this translates to \$28,497.76 (CDN) in 2015.

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