The James Bay region of northern Quebec will jeopardize two candidate parks in the Chilcotin area of B.C. and for hydroelectric development in the parks system since the policy was adopted in 1971 reflects a dismal national parks in B.C., two in Manitoba, four in Quebec, two in Labrador and seven in the Northwest Territories. Completion of the national parks system requires three new national parks in B.C., two in Manitoba, four in Quebec, two in Labrador and seven in the Northwest Territories. The fact that candidate sites have not been confirmed for a quarter of the parks system since the policy was adopted in 1971 reflects a dismal lack of political commitment to new parks. Meanwhile, proposals for logging in the Chilcotin area of B.C. and for hydroelectric development in the James Bay region of northern Quebec will jeopardize two candidate sites for national park status. The Canadian Parks Service warned the Standing Committee on Environment in May 1990 that "without action, it will become increasingly difficult to establish national parks within unrepresented regions" in southern B.C., Manitoba and Quebec. Other land-use decisions will affect the federal government's ability to establish new parks. For example, the settlement of aboriginal land claims presents a very significant opportunity for the federal government to pursue candidate parks. Northern Yukon National Park was established in 1984 through federal legislation that approved the Inuvialuit Final Agreement for the western Arctic. But, if the government fails to declare its interest in candidate national parks during negotiations, aboriginal people may become owners of potential parks.

A systematic approach to national park creation was first suggested by Arthur Laing, the federal Parks Minister in the Pearson government. Laing pointed out in 1967 that "it will require 40 to 60 new national parks to round out the system and achieve adequate representation of Canada's heritage." The minister suggested that two to three national parks should be established each year to complete the system by 1985, the centennial year of national parks in Canada. Jean Chretien set a precedent by creating 10 new national parks in less than four years. His resolve produced the first national parks in Quebec (La Mauricie and Forillon) and the first parks in northern Canada (Kluane, Nahanni and Auyuittuq). It also brought the government into conflict with local and aboriginal people.

Strong objections over the expropriation of land in Kouchibougac National Park in New Brunswick and Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland brought a change in parks policy that now requires the government to secure the support of local communities before establishing new parks. Communities such as Snowdrift, Pond Inlet, Sachs Harbor and Churchill are now playing a role in shaping new parks.

Lucien Bouchard was quick to make the commitment. "I share the conviction of those who contend that Canada should, by the year 2000, complete the national parks system," he said. Nearly a year later, Bouchard's personal commitment became government policy with the release of Canada's Green Plan in December 1990. While it was 25 years in the making, the commitment to complete the national parks system was enthusiastically endorsed by the environmental community. But despite the Green Plan's lofty goals, the national parks systems is still only half complete. No new national parks have been created since Grasslands in 1988. And governments continue to allocate large tracts of wilderness for industrial exploitation.

To prompt more aggressive federal action, environmentalists have produced Action Plan, which calls on the federal government to accelerate the process in 1992. And the prospects for three new national parks in 1992, including Banks Island and North Baffin Island in the N.W.T., appear excellent. Negotiations to establish three new national parks in B.C. have finally begun. And the Newfoundland government is interested in assessing the prospects for two new parks in Labrador.

Lucien Bouchard reminds us why we need to complete the national parks system: "The very fragility of the planet compels the expansion of the national parks system. We are among the last generations with an opportunity to preserve intact examples of our nation's threatened natural resources."