

HEARINGS ON PRINCE ALBERT NATIONAL PARK

I. THE HEARING IN PRINCE ALBERT

What is your opinion on the provisional master plan for Prince Albert National Park, excluding the townsite of Waskesiu? That was the subject of a hearing held in Prince Albert last June. The National and Historic Parks Branch of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development created the plan. Then it conducted the hearings "to inform the public about the provisional master plan for the park, to receive written and oral comments on the proposals, and to hear recommendations for other approaches." These it got.

Copies of the plan are available from the National and Historic Parks Branch, Customs Building, Calgary, for \$1.00—money order or cheque payable to the usual personage, Receiver General of Canada. The plan consists of two booklets and maps. Much interesting background is given about the Park, its geology, vegetation, mammal and bird forms, and its history. An insight is provided into current thinking about parks, their preservation, use and management. The booklet describes what the plan is all about, with reasons for the various steps that would be taken.

Basically the proposal consists of only three things, a zoning scheme, some boundary adjustments, and modifications in certain facilities and programs. The objective is twofold: to provide through park management for the protection and preservation of key, representative and characteristic features for future generations; and to provide facilities and programs for "enjoyment of the attractiveness of the park" (as distinct from things not related to wilderness recreation). To a degree these two objectives conflict. The best any master plan can do is set the stage for a reasonable balance. To aim to cater fully to all human desires would eventually result in substantial modification and destruction of the natural scene—no park; to pitch

for complete exclusion of people, the ultimate in preservation, would also result in no park—because it would be politically (people) unacceptable. The conscientious intent to provide for balance was a point missed by many speakers at the hearing in Prince Albert. Another balance inherent in the scheme also was not appreciated by some commentators. This is with respect to time—the offset of the desires of the users of today against consideration for the users of tomorrow. One might not agree with the Parks Branch in its selection of the balances, and several people took strong exception to the second—wanting the plan cast more in favour of present users than future ones. But not to recognize the need for balancing was to miss the whole thrust of the plan.

Nowhere could I find reference to a legal requirement to have public hearings on the proposals. That they were held, even though in response to the mood of the times, was a forward step. Those individuals and groups who would not otherwise have spoken out have now done so. Likely there will be the usual behind-the-scenes activities leading to the eventual political decision. But as a result of the hearings this will be influenced by a broadened spectrum of views and the many constructive suggestions.

The Zoning Scheme

The plan calls for the zoning of all land and water areas in all national parks into five areas on a descending scale of restrictions on human activity to be permitted. The foundation theme is that the wilderness is the prime consideration. Class I, special areas, would receive the highest order of protection. These would take up 3.6 percent of the Park area and would be the Lavallée Lake district containing a pelican breeding site, historic Grey

Owl's cabin, a wolf denning area and the grasslands area in the southwest corner. Access to these would be controlled. Passage through them would be by hiking or canoe, and vehicles would not be permitted.

In my opinion, those who referred to this part of the plan—and very few mentioned Zone I — supported it. Three speakers firmly endorsed the concept for the special areas. One of them was the daughter of Grey Owl. Another, while agreeing with the idea of special status for Lavallée Lake, the wolf denning area and the small pocket of prairie, voiced a qualification about the last one. Specifically that this vestige of parklands prairie should not be a substitute for a grasslands national park in the south of the Province.

Class II or wilderness recreation areas would be the largest category, 76 percent of the Park. Preservation of a wilderness recreation environment would be the objective for them. Facilities would be restricted to hiking trails, canoe routes and primitive campgrounds. There would be no improved roads and power boats would be prohibited. Kingsmere Lake would be included in this area.

A number of people questioned the selection of Kingsmere for a ban on motorboats. In fact, aside from matters relating to Waskesiu townsite, this aspect drew more attention than any other point in the plan. Most speakers were against the proposal. They either believed priority belonged to the fisherman, that the numbers of canoeists would not warrant excluding powerboats, that other waters in the Park or north of it offered better or safer canoeing, that powerboats and canoes were compatible uses, or that one cannot turn back the clock. Two briefs, while containing negative opinions on the proposal, gave constructive alternatives which in the opinion of the authors made better sense for both groups of users. The six briefs that expressed or implied support did so either as a result of the author's previous experience canoeing on Kingsmere, or on grounds that

true wilderness recreation required the absence of motorboats—or simply that there must be places where one could get away from the noise and other disadvantages of powerboats. The Parks Branch has a difficult problem. Its task of protecting the special area containing Grey Owl's cabin, which area abuts Kingsmere, would no doubt be easier without powerboats on these waters. It wishes to encourage canoeing as a recognized form of wilderness recreation and it wants land areas and contiguous water bodies to be inseparable entities. On the other hand some of the arguments against the proposed ban are cogent.

About 16.7 percent of the Park would be Class III, natural environment areas. These would encompass water as well as land. Crean, Namekus and Sandy would be among the lakes so designated. Strips of land along the south boundary, part way up the east side of the Park and a portion of the foreshore of Upper Waskesiu Lake would be the land areas. "The concept of a wilderness threshold best describes these areas. They serve as buffers between wild areas and more developed areas . . ." That is, they would occur between Class I and II areas on one hand and Class IV and V on the other. Driving and motorboating would be acceptable forms of recreation.

Except for the matter of roads there was little comment about this zone. No definite views on the extent, location or compatible uses were offered, other than those of the Canadian Society of Wildlife and Fisheries Biologists. About roads, which would become scenic drives, raceways or means of access depending on who one listened to, divergent opinion was expressed. Differences focussed on the extent of penetration.

General outdoor recreation areas, Class IV, would be 3.4 percent of the Park. In them would be an increased variety and intensity of uses. These would be in four places, the major one completely surrounding Lower Waskesiu Lake. Essentially this now exists. The principal campgrounds and activity centres would be in this zone. Little

was said on this zoning proposal other than about the premise for the addition of the three smaller parcels. Since the Parks Branch visualizes considerable development for this Class and contemplates increasing the number of parcels accordingly, it obviously is predicting an increase in the number of users. During the hearing officials confirmed that five to six percent annual growth in numbers is being assumed. Some speakers believed the estimate was high and that local people would continue to be the vast majority. Minority opinion agreed with the projection and further averred that local use as a result would be proportionately less in the future—it was a day of disagreement.

Class V intensive-use area, would be 5.2 square miles in extent, or only 0.3 percent of the Park — specifically the townsite of Waskesiu. The plan noted that consideration of this zone was the subject of a separate study. In the preamble it was stated that another hearing would be held about the townsite, and that briefs on it were really not being sought now. But the townsite was what motivated most of the speakers, a few, unfortunately, with considerable heat and some rudeness. The plan, management, policies, personnel, public relations, and the government bureaucracy all came in for criticism, warranted and otherwise. Those so speaking appeared to have personal interests at stake, either as owners of cottages and shack tents or as concession operators and trade associations. The strong feelings had their roots in the Department's move to emphasize wilderness recreation and phase out non-compatible uses. Previously when a scheme for the removal of cottages and shack tents from all parks was announced, a storm of protest resulted and the Department had to modify its position. The altered policy is given in the provisional master plan.

The attitude of those who would be or thought they would be disadvantaged was for maintenance of the status quo. No change. It is our park—leave it alone. Unfortunately per-

sonal concerns tended to cloud other issues.

Boundary Alterations

The second feature of the plan is adjustment of the boundaries to totally include or exclude some things that are currently half in and half out of the Park. These have to do with habitat preservation (pelicans, grassland), or with park management (some lakes and a road) or with recreation (canoeing rivers, campgrounds). In sum, as the areas involved are small, the boundary adjustments would be minor. However some of them have much functional significance.

There is no reference in the material to any studies having been made of the Park in a regional context. The Saskatoon Natural History Society stressed the need for inter-governmental consideration of the nearby Churchill River areas in terms of preservation and wilderness recreation, and that these should not be ignored in an assessment of the future of Prince Albert National Park.

With two exceptions, the few speakers who referred to the proposed boundary alterations spoke in favor of them.

Facilities and Program

The proposals for facilities and program are in line with principles already mentioned: primary consideration for preservation and for the encouragement of wilderness recreation. According to the plan there would be expansion of nature interpretive programs, more activity centres and primitive camping areas, an expanded system of canoe, hiking and riding routes, and a greater amount of research and study of resources for management purposes. The development of non-compatible uses would be encouraged outside of the Park rather than in it. These would be such things as accommodation, services and non-wilderness recreation facilities.

This feature received considerable criticism. However, it seemed to be largely linked with the comment regarding the townsite. Again a commonly expressed feeling was in favour



Saskatchewan Government Photo

Wilderness recreation

of leaving things as they are—with some saying that the contemplated investment in facilities and program would be a waste of money. Apparently this view was in part the result of objections to the phasing out of non-compatible programs that has already occurred.

A position favoring the proposal was taken by a few speakers, but in so doing they raised questions on aspects not mentioned in the plan. Was sufficient consideration given to the elderly and to the economically disadvantaged? Would the Parks Branch have sufficient, properly-trained help to man the nature programs? Was the programming to include education of the public-at-large on the place of parks? Would the Branch see to an improvement in its public relations? Did the entire plan have sufficient regard for the ecosystem?

Conclusions

One must be wary in drawing conclusions about the hearing in Prince

Albert. In the first place briefs could be written or oral. If written the sponsor could speak to it or not as he or they wished, and if he so elected he did not necessarily dwell on the same subjects on which he wrote. That is, without the written statements one does not have all the views or an accurate picture on the direction they point. By sitting in on the hearing one perceived only part of the picture. My opinions are to be taken in this context.

The Parks Branch has a thorny problem. The private cottages and shack tents are there in fact. Inescapable is the resultant: the owners have a right something analogous to a squatter's right, even though they have term leases. On the other hand there are two views, that a national park is not the place for these things, and that the taxpayers-at-large should not have to subsidize them. The same points apply in general with respect to services and non-wilderness recreational facilities and programs most of which were, are or would be in the townsite.

Further, the Department was found wanting in the manner in which it implemented its housing policy. Its public relations and procedures on some of the changes made in services do not appear to have been the best. This then was the background for the hearing in Prince Albert. One could feel an undercurrent against the plan, against the Parks Branch, against change.

This was unfortunate because most of the reaction was about the townsite and what happens in it. But the townsite takes up only 0.3 percent of the area, and itself was not supposed to be a subject for the hearing. As for all the rest of the plan and all the rest

of the Park, with the single major exception of the proposal about Kingsmere Lake, the reactions I sensed either non-existent, neutral, conditionally favourable or outright endorsements.

The lessons to be had from the hearing in Prince Albert are two. One, the explaining of and the manner of implementing a scheme are at least as important as the plan itself, especially for parks. Two, the users of plans, and the makers of plans for parks still have much to learn, not only about the natural scene but also about each other—and it is getting late.—*J. A. Wedgwood, Saskatoon.*

2. THE HEARING IN REGINA

Immediately preceding the hearing in Prince Albert, the Parks Branch held a public hearing in Regina where an equally encouraging number and variety were presented. Regina is farther removed geographically and psychologically from the problems of the park, and there were naturally fewer users among those who spoke at the hearing. Perhaps for this reason, the Regina hearing was characterized by a high percentage of presentations reflecting general support for the protection of the natural quality of the area and an increased use of the park for canoeing, hiking, etc.

Various organizations supported this view—the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, the Saskatchewan Natural History Society (seconded by the local Moose Jaw and Regina natural history societies), the National and Provincial Parks Association, and the Saskatchewan Camping Association. But there were also many briefs presented by individual citizens who favoured development consistent with the natural environment, and it was significant that these individuals did not come from any one interest group, but represented a broad range of people—canoers, natural history society members, university biologists, collegiate

students with a conscious concern for the environment, housewives and family holidayers. Opposed to the new plan were certain park users and cottage owners who would prefer to have the *status quo* maintained, as well as the spokesman for the Saskatchewan Tourist Association.

It was of special interest that the Federation of Ontario Naturalists should appear in Saskatchewan to speak on the provisional plan for Prince Albert National Park. The Federation has appeared at each of the park hearings held by the Parks Branch and, by doing so, hopes to emphasize the *national* character of these parks. Gerald McKeating, who spoke for the Federation, made it clear that he spoke as a Canadian citizen, and that everyone participating in the discussions in Saskatchewan should also try to see the implications for a national parks policy of actions taken in Saskatchewan. It was in this broad context that McKeating placed the need for the preservation of native grassland areas which are at present not represented in the national parks system, and he urged that the protection of a small grassland area in Prince Albert Park not be a substitute for the establishment of a prairie park.