



ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE
PROVISIONAL MASTER PLAN FOR
PRINCE ALBERT NATIONAL
PARK SASKATCHEWAN

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by

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General Comments

The overall impression gained from the provisional master plan for Prince Albert National Park is that a sincere effort was made to integrate human use of the park with protection of its resource base. On that basis, there are several flaws in the plan, and it is the purpose of this report to discuss them.

One of the parks greatest assets has been largely ignored. This is the wilderness quality of a major portion of the park. Before any further developments within the park are allowed to proceed it would be well to examine (1) the importance of wilderness preservation in National Parks and (2) the trends of land use in areas surrounding Prince Albert National Park.

Wilderness areas have been defined in many ways and mean different things to different people. Wilderness in a sense of a nature reserve or living museum need only be small undisturbed areas. For wilderness oriented recreation and aesthetic purposes it should be large trackless areas visited by man only to practice the skills and recapture the adventure of pioneers.

To those who are charged with the responsibility of administrating National Parks of Canada it may be well to examine the events in the United States that led up to the establishment by Congress of a Wilderness Act in 1964. The Act defines wilderness areas using these terms: "Where the natural community of life is untrammled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain." This Act, with its strong emphasis on preservation, provides for the establishment and protection of 50 million acres of wilderness areas on United States public lands. No such similar legislative action has

been passed by Canadian Parliament. However the National Parks Act does state that parks should be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. Wilderness, if recognized as a valid form of land use, should be protected in National Parks. Such action becomes particularly critical if the land surrounding the National Parks are extensively developed to meet the material needs and living space of a modern society.

The following land practices have changed the wilderness character of the land around Prince Albert National Park: -

- a) Establishment of community pastures south of the Park.

This is an area where a mosaic of aspen-parkland, native rough fescue prairie have been converted to uniform rangeland. The faunal and floral composition of these pastures have been significantly altered.

- b) Land clearing for mixed farming has modified and is continuing to change the landscape west of the park.

- c) Lakes immediately adjacent to the park (eg. Emma, Christopher and Nesslin lakes) are used as summer resort areas. Other lakes in the area surrounding the park are slated for future development.

- d) A new pulp mill in Prince Albert has placed a special premium on timber resources in areas surrounding the park. A network of roads to resources are being built in areas adjoining the northern portion of the park.

In view of these developments it would seem that the maintainance of a wilderness environment in the park should be the major objective of all

future planning for Prince Albert.

Approximately 85 per cent of the visitors to the park are residents of Saskatchewan. A large percentage of these visitors seek facility-oriented recreation eg. boating, swimming. The provision of such artificial facilities as marinas, supervised beaches etc. has shaped the demands for more. The main criticism of the provisional master plan is that it provides for more of such facilities instead of reducing some existing facilities.

The proposed Kingsmere Lake activity center is an example of the type of undesirable proliferation of facilities.

There is reason to state that the wilderness appeal of this lake will be destroyed if the proposed Kingsmere activity center, as outlined in the plan, becomes a reality. It is unrealistic to talk on the one hand (page 40) about the "wilderness-oriented appeal of the lake" and on the same page propose building of:

- a) Roads
- b) Motor boat launching facilities.
- c) Serviced campgrounds for trailers and tents.
- d) Picnic area.
- e) Parking lots.
- f) Boat livery.
- g) Developed beach facilities.

The plan is to be commended for the setting aside of a canoeing area. In view of developments outside of the National Park it would be appropriate if, in the final master plan for the park, canoeing took precedence over

motor boating. Kingsmere Lake could be included in a larger wilderness canoeing sanctuary which could be called the "Grey Owl Wilderness Area".

The restoration of Grey Owl's Cabin on Lake Ajawaan, which lies just north of Kingsmere Lake, could fit in well with a "wilderness canoeing area" concept. Would it not be more appropriate to visit Grey Owl's Cabin by the traditional canoe than to use the same mode of modern transportation (motor boat) as could be used on Emma, Christopher and scores of other provincial lakes?

Widespread and extensive use of motor boats (or any other internal combustion engine) destroy the wilderness character of an area. Such destruction of the wilderness character may only be temporary and can easily be restored by dismantling marinas, and banning the use of these vehicles. However, tradition, public and political pressures make it very difficult to implement and to enforce such management practices once the precedents have been set.

Another major item that should be considered for the final master plan is the sealing off of all public access from the northwest end (specifically from Sturgeon River crossing and Nesslin Lake).

At present, this is only a minor access route into the park. In future, as communities around Big River expand, it can be expected to attract more non-park traffic which will (a) create unnecessary congestion of park roads, therefore impairing the enjoyment by park visitors, (b) create a demand for wider roads which will impair unique natural features (rough fescue and other grasslands), (c) increase the number of wildlife road kills (eg. a number of coyotes are killed along the road each winter, also records of moose, elk and bear hit by cars are available), (d) create law

enforcement problems (poaching, garbage dispersal, etc.). The Cookson Road could be improved to better function as an access road for park visitors from the southwest.

Specific Comments

In the discussion under section headed "Regional Setting" it is suggested that the numerous provincial and regional recreation areas (eg. Emma Lake, Nessling Lake etc.) immediately adjoining the National Park be mentioned. These areas should absorb those visitors who presently are attracted to existing facility-oriented recreation in Prince Albert National Park.

Under the section "National Park Significance" a key feature, as mentioned before, has been omitted. This is the fact that the park has a great potential as a National Wilderness area. In the same section the conflict between "active" and "passive" activities has not been stressed. The plan perpetuates the assumption that both can be tolerated in the same area without great conflict of interests.

Minor corrections on page 11 are: (a) shortest highway route from P.A. N.P. to Elk Island Park is approximately 380 miles and not 485, (b) pelicans are Pelecanus, not Pelanecus, and (c) it is doubtful whether the statement "The occasional western woodland caribou inhabit the park only seasonally" is accurate. Caribou may inhabit the park at all seasons, but further investigations would be required to confirm it.

In the light of the provincial and regional recreational facilities in the area it is unfortunate that beaches and marinas are an important public attraction to this National Park.

Four out of five of the photos on page 13 indicate the extent of misuse of a National Park. If, as indicated on page 19, the attendance figure is to double by 1980, an important question to be considered here is, "Will the final master plan provide similar facilities to these visitors?" Developing Kingsmere Lake (proposed Kingsmere activity center) as stated before is the first step in that direction.

On page 22, it should be pointed out that it is not in the interest of a National park to consider the demands by a "local market." A wise plan would encourage preservation and its related values at the expense of the "local market." This often means taking very unpopular stands with the local communities and can be a considerable strain on park superintendents who are faced with the brunt of the criticisms.

The name of Dr. George La Roi (not Leroy) is misspelled on page 27. A Canadian Wildlife Service report on the grassland areas in the southwest part of the park will be available by May, 1969. This will include an inventory of floral species of that area as is requested on page 28.

On page 29, it should be pointed out that aquatic flora and fauna could become a valuable resource in a far sighted interpretation program. It may be of interest to list the variety of fish life in the lakes. Known species, in addition to the 3 species mentioned are: Yellow Perch, Lake Whitefish, Cisco, White Sucker, Longnose Sucker, Burbot, Nine-Spined Stickleback, Brook Stickleback, Spottail Shiner, Blacknose Shiner, Flathead Minnow, Trout Perch, Longnose Dace, Slimy Sculpin and Iowa Darter. Park planners are to be commended for the statement that "Fish planting program should be reviewed to determine its justification in the future of this park."

Fish planting "to expand the range of a particular species" is a more subtle way of saying "to introduce exotics." In the interest of preservation ("living museum" concept) such programs should be phased out. Any element (fish) introduced into an environment (lake) is an exotic if it does not naturally occur in that environment. Hence, a species transferred by man from one lake into a neighbouring lake, is an exotic.

On page 32, it should be pointed out that using plant cover as indicators for material for park construction purposes, should be carefully reviewed and not engaged in without prior consultation with a biologist and/or park naturalist. This practice has resulted in three known gravel pits which have destroyed rough fescue prairie areas. One gravel pit, in particular, is located in an area that would have been otherwise suitable as a grassland nature trail.

On page 36, it is noted that the three large lakes of the park (Waskesiu, Crean and Kingsmere) are within Zones III, IV and V. To safeguard the wilderness features of at least a portion of this lake complex, it is suggested that Kingsmere and Crean lakes be zoned as II and treated as such in all future planning.

It is recommended that in the final master plan, the open and semi-open grassland areas in the southwest corner of the park be granted special protection (Report forthcoming). These areas are floristically and faunistically unique. In this connection as mentioned before, we further recommend that all public access from the west end (Sturgeon River crossing and Nesslin Lake) be closed.

On page 38, under "Kingsmere Activity Centre", I fail to see why and how a "new image" will be created through the proposed development of Kingsmere Lake. The provisional plan very adequately has photographs of quiet lake scenes (pages 9, 50), canoeists paddling along the Waskesiu River (page 43), wildlife photographs (pages 5, 29, 30, 31, 59). Are these not sufficient for a National Park's image? Any plans short of preserving these scenes will create images of resort areas as shown on pages 13, 23, and 24. In addition to noise pollution, motor boating often has other adverse affects. Public pressures may demand that water levels be maintained and manipulated in the lakes. Mention of this is made on page 42 of the plan "It is further proposed that Crean Lake remain a water access lake via the Hanging Heart lakes. The establishment of a suitable dam on the Crean River would help to stabilize water levels in both Crean and Hanging Heart lakes. Should stabilized water levels be lower than other years, channel improvements may become necessary between these two lakes." Such manipulation is not consistent with preservation. Some results of such activities are not immediately measurable (eg. effects on vegetation), others are (eg. effects on shore and marsh birds; islands in Crean Lake are being destroyed due to the Crean River damming etc.). No mention of this aspect is made in the plan.

On the map on page 39 (description on page 41), it should be pointed out that the proposed Waskesiu Parkway is planned for an area that cuts across traditional wolf-denning terrain. Road building activity and subsequent development and large scale human influx could adversely affect wolves in the park.

If left alone, roadside cuts will reseed naturally and it would seem a waste of money to do so artificially as is suggested on page 41. On page 46, under the section entitled "Proposed boundary adjustments," it should be pointed out that the Canadian Wildlife Service suggested the inclusion of an approximately 2 square mile area in the southwest corner of the park. This portion has natural borders and contains small areas of rough fescue prairie. The area south of the Cookson road, that in the plan is designated as an area of possible exchange with the province, contains semi-open areas and is geologically interesting. We suggest that this portion not revert to the province without further study.

In view of the preceding comments it is disconcerting to read the statement as listed in the fly leaf "The implementation of the plan is hereby authorized." This statement is inconsistent with the title "Provisional plan" and the numerous statements made throughout the text that more information should be gathered before the plan is adopted.

Recommendations

- 1.) That Kingsmere and Crean lakes be rezoned from "Natural environment areas" (Class III) to "Wilderness Recreation Area" (Class II.).
- 2.) That the proposed plans for Kingsmere activity center be cancelled.
- 3.) That public access from Sturgeon River crossing and Nesslin Lakes be sealed off as soon as possible.
- 4.) That all further road development on the west side of the park be restricted to narrow scenic roads.

- 5.) That the Cookson highway be widened, improved and classified as a parks access road.
- 6.) That in future motorboating facilities and facility-oriented recreation not be allowed to expand in the park.
- 7.) That closer federal-provincial park liaison be established to provide protection of the wilderness character of the park by encouraging non-wilderness users to use lands outside the park.
- 8.) That in future greater emphasis be placed on interpretation programs. This should include facilities (eg. aquaria, underwater observation tanks, nature trails along fish spawning runs, special display of fish life cycles etc.) to interpret aquatic environments.