



CANADIAN  
PARKS AND  
WILDERNESS  
SOCIETY

**BRITISH COLUMBIA CHAPTER**

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Alan Latourelle  
Chief Executive Officer  
Parks Canada Agency  
25 Eddy Street  
Hull, Quebec  
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Dear Alan

I am responding to your request to advise you of our preferred site in Natural Region 3 for a National Park. For more than 25 years CPAWS has been involved in attempts to establish a national park to represent the dry interior of British Columbia. We are greatly encouraged by the Prime Minister's announcement and your obvious commitment to create such a park.

After careful consideration, and after commissioning two reports within the last year, we are convinced that the most representative area, as well as the one where the greatest conservation gains can be made, is the **South Okanagan – Similkameen**. In choosing this site, we are also building on Dr. George Scotter's 1998 report, commissioned by Parks Canada, which gave top priority in Region 3 to the South Okanagan-Similkameen and identified it as one of the most important places for a national park in Canada. This region is a biodiversity hot-spot, and is home to many rare species. When this biodiversity aspect is considered this region's great importance becomes very apparent.

A considerable opportunity exists to make an outstanding national park here that includes Canada's only representation of three different grassland ecosystems and their associated species-at-risk: (1) shrub-steppe – cold desert ecosystem; (2) antelope brush ecosystems; (3) as well as a superb altitudinal representation moving up through grasslands into open ponderosa, and up to subalpine. Bearing on our choice, too, is the fragility of the ecosystems that are being damaged by livestock grazing, stressed by increasingly hot dry summers, and threatened by agricultural developments.

We believe that with sensitive management planning, the public can enjoy the beauty of these open environments without damaging the ecosystems, for example with trail systems. We are also aware that many of the requisite visitor facilities such as campsites, interpretive center, and road accesses are in place that will provide the infrastructure for regional economic development without further damage to the ecosystems.

Our vision of this national park reserve is as follows:

1) Along with the establishment of the core national park described below, we envision a much larger national park reserve be assembled over time that would encompass the following area:

- west to include Cathedral Provincial Park
- northwest through Keremeos and across to the Cascade Mountains
- north to Okanagan Mountain provincial park.
- east extending through the Migratory Bird Sanctuary abutting Vaseux Lake including Vaseux National Wildlife Area and adjacent ranchlands
- east toward Baldy Mountain.

By including this broader area within the national park reserve, critical migratory corridors and ecological linkages will also be captured, greatly enhancing the ecological integrity of the park.

Together with existing private conservation holdings, for example of the Nature Trust and Land Conservancy, we envision an eventual partnership to make this a **region** of national conservation significance that is a mecca for naturalists and other people interested in nature.

2) We support the notion of a core national park reserve being established now. It should extend across the Similkameen River to Snowy Provincial Park and extend north, into the White Lake Basin and include federal lands there. A satellite area must include the “pocket desert” on the Osoyoos Indian Reserve, by agreement with the local First Nations. We are encouraged that the Osoyoos Indian Band is a co-sponsor of this national park reserve initiative. We recognize the tremendous potential for the Band’s Desert Heritage Cultural Center to be expanded into the park’s interpretive center.

3) There is great interest both in Canada and the United States in having a matching transboundary national park in the state of Washington, which would include extensive grasslands and the Loomis conservation forest. The east-west linkage in both Canada and the United States will extend from dry grasslands and across the Cascade Mountains via existing protected areas, making this a most outstanding region of international cooperation for conservation.

These are exciting ideas that will lead to unparalleled opportunities for economic development, conservation gains, First Nations partnerships, and international cooperation. The full land assembly (as outlined in (1) above) will take time, but will eventually lead to a transboundary national park of global significance.

Although we believe that the rationale for creating a national park reserve in the Similkameen-South Okanagan is irrefutable, our research has also clearly outlined the difficulty of having region 3 represented by only one national park. In our view, the range of biodiversity values and geography in this region will require the establishment of another national park at some point in time. Even though we are expressing our preference at the current time for the Similkameen-South Okanagan, we believe that Churn Creek and/or Douglas Lake still need to be considered as future national parks, in order to fulfill the representation requirements of Region 3 and of Canada's national parks system.

I would be happy to discuss this with you further should you require additional information or clarification.

Yours truly



Bob Peart  
Executive Director

cc. Ross Fitzpatrick  
Paul Genest