

# THE NEED FOR CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE NATIONAL PARKS

by **J. G. Nelson**, The University of Calgary, Calgary

Canadian citizens need to be more concerned about rapid and large-scale changes in landscape and land use. One way of illustrating the scale and gravity of such problems is simply to cite examples from various parts of Canada. In the Maritimes one need only look at the St. John River, a stream so polluted as to be of little value for fishing or recreation for many tens of miles of its length. In Quebec the city of Montreal illustrates rapid, uneven urban growth very consumptive of rural land, quiet countryside and certain kinds of wildlife. In Ontario we find a variety of problems, for example, the pollution of Lake Erie, difficulties in preserving wildland in Algonquin Provincial Park and the gradual infilling and pollution of Hamilton Bay. Closer to home are the pollution of the South and North Saskatchewan Rivers and impending massive strip-mining in the Crows Nest Pass area, British Columbia without adequate statutory safeguards for rehabilitation of landscape following completion of operations.

Land use and landscape change problems in Banff and other national parks are of special interest to me. The Banff reserve was established in the mid-1880's, after many years of trapping and prospecting and a few years of lumbering, mining, railroad construction and white settlement had seriously reduced wildlife and caused profound changes in vegetation. Numerous forest fires were started deliberately or through carelessness, destroying extensive stands of spruce and fir, the so-called climax forest.

The hand of man remained heavy for the first few decades following the establishment of the park. Fires continued to be frequent, many being caused by sparks thrown from the early wood and coal burning railway

engines. Hunting and poaching were commonplace into the early 1900's. Only at that time were game and fire wardens taken on staff and a policy of landscape protection introduced.

Since about 1910 two policies have been followed by the federal government. One has been protectionism. Fire control has been stringent, allowing extensive stands of fire-following lodgepole pine to replace burned-over spruce-fir forests. Many forms of wildlife have been protected and elk and other animals have become quite numerous. Protectionism also has worked to eliminate lumbering, mining and other activities which formerly caused serious landscape change. The vagaries of the market sometimes seem, however, to have been as important as new national park regulations in removing some of these activities from Banff National Park.

At the same time that this protectionist policy was being pursued, the federal government also developed a recreational policy which led to the introduction of many facilities in Banff Park. The townsite of Banff was established as a spa, originally conceptually distinct from, but eventually geographically and operationally part of, the national park. Banff townsite grew into a good-sized resort by the 1930's. Scenic and transit highways were also constructed through the park, beginning about the time of the first World War, with large areas being opened up through construction of routes such as the Banff-Windermere and the Banff-Jasper highways in the 1920's and 1930's.

After World War II, growing population, rising income, more leisure time and other factors contributed to a rapidly accelerating demand for recreation. To meet this demand, the National and Historic Parks Branch





Geological Survey of Canada Photo, 1886

Cascade Mountain and Bow River, Banff in 1886. Note effects of forest fire and lumbering. Pontoon bridge was used in construction of original Banff Springs Hotel.



Photo by R. C. Seace, 1965

Cascade Mountain and Bow River, Banff in 1965 showing results of protection in the National Park.



has introduced or proposes to introduce a variety of new recreational facilities, including expanded or new service centres, downhill ski runs and associated parking lots and restaurants, and scenic roads, campsites, gas stations and other units for tourists and automobiles.

The introduction of these facilities will cause large-scale changes in Banff National Park. Some of the changes will occur because certain of the proposed developments are large in their own right. A good example is the scenic road programme which will open up many "wilderness" areas to the tourist. The roads will be constructed for the most part in the valleys and will tend to divide the present "wilderness" into a number of smaller units generally mountainous or highland in character. Other proposed changes seem small in themselves but can cumulate and cause considerable change.

In the light of this, many authorities feel that the emphasis in the national parks should be on non-facilities recreation, that is on hiking, "wilderness" camping of several days duration, cross-country skiing and other activities which require a minimum of facilities and cause relatively little landscape change. They feel that the demand for such activities is increasing so rapidly in Canada and elsewhere that areas considerably greater than our present national parks will be needed to provide for the desired experience in future. Other areas, such as the Alberta provincial forests, could be developed for the ever greater number of people who require more downhill ski runs, skidoo trails and other facilities-oriented recreation.

Certain of the proposed changes in Banff Park seem to be based on inadequate study of relevant biological, geological, geographical and historical criteria. An example is the proposed Red Deer road which would run for about 45 miles up the Cascade fire road, north of Lake Minnewanka, then be cut west through about 40 miles of the roadless upper Red Deer valley to

link with the Trans-Canada highway near Lake Louise. Construction through the upper Red Deer would be particularly unfortunate as this probably is the largest of those areas in the park where the landscape is still comparatively close to what it was at the time that the fur trader and the Indian roamed the land. The upper Red Deer largely escaped the fires, mining and lumbering that affected so many other parts of the parks in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. It is therefore covered for the most part with relatively old spruce-fir forest rather than the fire-following lodgepole pine. The upper Red Deer also shelters grizzly bear, mountain goats and other animals not so commonly seen in parts of the park more frequently visited by the automobile and large numbers of people. Its importance as a habitat for these animals certainly merits further study before any road is constructed through the valley: although, to my mind, there is already a considerable body of evidence in support of the idea that this valley should not be open to the automobile as so many other areas have been and will be. Rather it should be preserved for the hiker, the camper, the photo hunter and others who wish to enjoy the so-called "wilderness experience" as well as to spend a few days walking through a valley with a landscape rather like that seen by the first Europeans to come to the Rockies many decades ago.

Citizens can help prevent undesirable landscape change in a number of ways. First, they can inform one another of problems, particularly through journals like the *Blue Jay*. Second, they can write to responsible people in government or the civil service and express their views. Third, they can demand public hearings on land use plans and ensure themselves that all alternative courses of action have been considered and a sound decision made.

Finally, they should join at least some of the various citizens' organizations that are forming to deal with the increasingly numerous land use

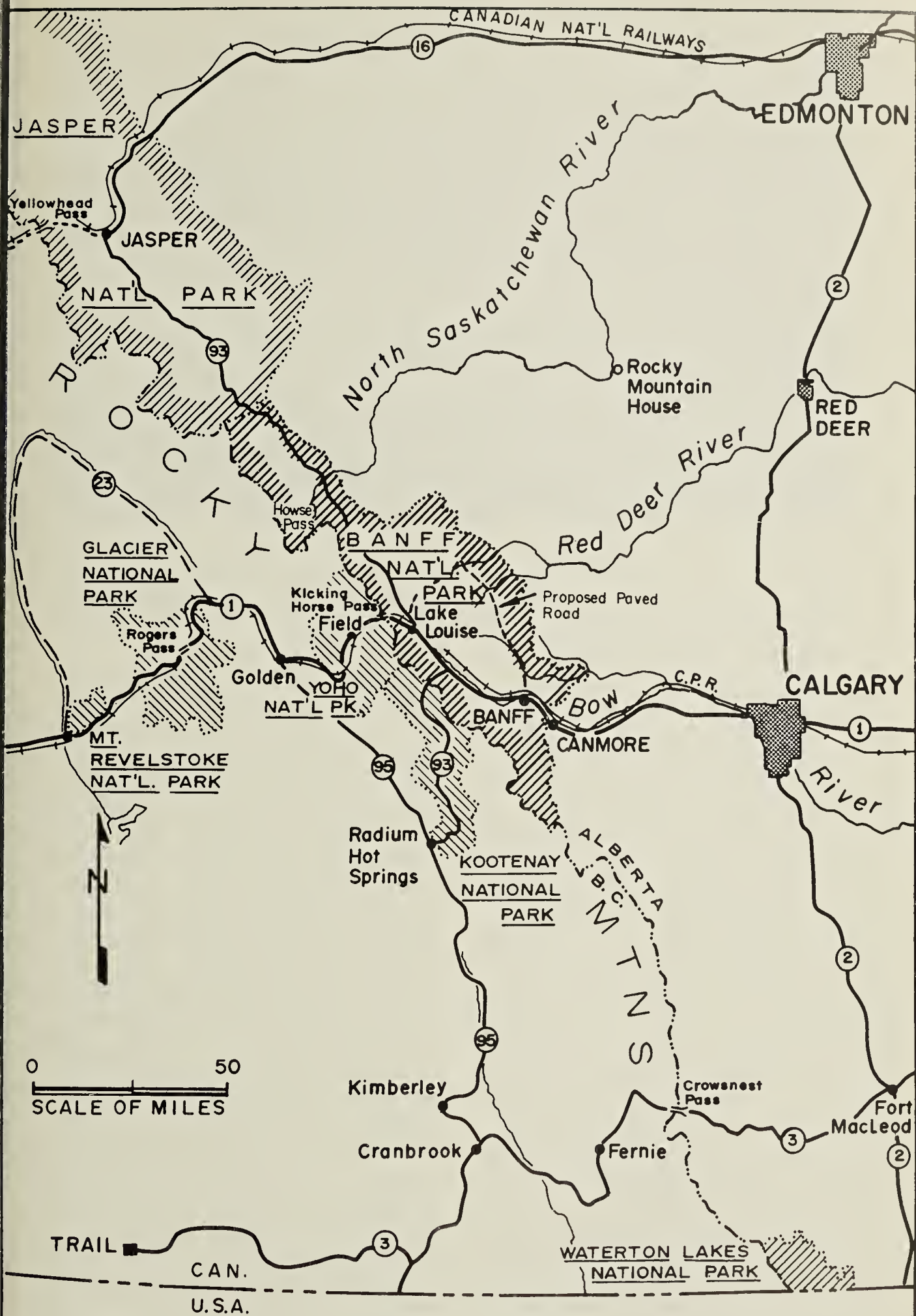






Photo by R. C. Scaee, 1965

Aerial oblique of Banff townsite, 1965, showing extensive tree cover especially along the banks of the Bow River. Note the distinct landscape modification caused by the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway during the 1950's.

and landscape change problems in Canada. Granted there are a number of these organizations, but many of them are important avenues to information and to co-operative work on problems of mutual interest. One such organization, of particular interest to me, is the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada (43, Victoria Street, Toronto 1, Ontario, membership fee of \$5.00 per year, "Park News" issued quarterly). This organization is directly concerned with the proper management and development of national and provincial parks. As a consequence, it is also indirectly concerned with strip-mining, lumbering and other activities which can affect present and potential parkland. For years administrators and citizens called for such an organization; for example, in the proceedings of the *Resources for Tomorrow Conference*, held in Montreal in 1961, it was also recognized that: "There is a need for an informed . . . non-government organization to promote the interest of park development and per-

form a watchdog role over those areas now reserved for parks purposes." Yet, since its formation a few years ago, the Association has not attracted the citizen response it deserves. Without adequate citizen and corporate support it cannot achieve the financial base necessary to improve its journal and its awareness and coverage of parks problems. Nor is it sufficiently often in a position to send representatives to relevant meetings or to talk to responsible or influential corporate or government personnel. Citizens must surely be more concerned about the present and future importance of organizations such as the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada. As the scale and frequency of land use and landscape problems increases, it is more and more desirable that we contribute our funds, energies and interest to such organizations if we are to work together effectively to provide better parks and landscape for ourselves and our children.