

THE CONSERVATION PROGRAM Of Parks Canada

by THE HONOURABLE JEAN CHRETIEN*

It's a great pleasure for me to accept your invitation to attend this 25th Annual Conference of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, and to speak briefly about a subject in which we have a mutual interest and common goals.

The Conservation Program of my department, recently renamed "Parks Canada", has an important role to play in recognizing and conserving those historic and natural aspects of Saskatchewan which are of special importance to all Canadians.

One of the special areas in Saskatchewan is Prince Albert National Park, established in 1927. Since then, it has been a major attraction both for visitors and for residents of this province. Recently, I must admit, we have had difficulties in maintaining and developing this park as I would have liked. The establishment of 11 new national parks since 1968 has put a severe strain on our total budget. Also we have been reluctant to take action before the results of last year's public hearings on the provisional master plan for Prince Albert National Park are analysed. I hope we will soon be in a position to call public hearings on a provisional master plan for Waskesiu. With the help of the opinions of all interested groups and individuals, I am confident that an exciting long-range plan can be evolved. I am fully aware that the implementation of such a plan will require both imagination and funds.

As I have already mentioned, Parks Canada is involved in the preservation

of our human heritage, as well as of our natural heritage. At Fort Walsh developments are under way which will make it one of the major National Historic Parks in western Canada. The provincial government is cooperating in various aspects of this endeavour and we hope that important undertakings including access roads and visitors' reception centre can be ready by 1975, Fort Walsh's centennial. This summer we commemorated the Cypress Hills Massacre which was closely related to the founding of the North West Mounted Police whose centennial we are saluting in 1973. Our restoration of the famous Fort Walsh's Trading Post was opened this year as well. Every article from natural gas and salt to whisky is there just as it was in 1873.

At historic sites, our aim is historical authenticity. Only in this way can the true sense of our past be preserved for us and for our children.

In our National Parks, our aim is natural preservation. Only in this way can we ensure that examples of each of Canada's natural regions are allowed to evolve unhindered by man's activities. Many of these regions are not represented in the system. Some are not.

The most important natural region not represented in Canada's National Parks system is the shortgrass prairie of southwestern Saskatchewan. Another is the badlands area to the east. Linked together by a scenic parkway they would make a spectacular National Park.

Of course, this suggestion is not new. The Saskatchewan Natural History Society passed its first resolution in favour of this park in 1951. Negotiations with various provinci-

*Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs,
Centennial Tower,
400 Laurier Ave. West,
Ottawa, Ontario T1A 0H4
Delivered at S.N.H.S. Annual Meeting, Oct. 13,
1973.



Hereford cattle grazing in proposed grassland park, Saskatchewan.

G. W. Seib

governments have taken place sporadically for over 8 years.

The fact that negotiations have not been successful does not diminish the importance of the grasslands area to all Canadians. It is truly unique. The pronghorn antelope, black-tailed prairie dog and prairie dogs are still there, and there is no true prairie National Park in North America. For those of us who are caught up in city life — and that includes most Canadians — the open ranges of the grasslands and the eroded structures of the badlands are both exciting and refreshing.

A new National Park in this or any other part of Canada must not be established to the disadvantage of local residents, whose way of life depends on their traditional use of the land. There would be no expropriation of ranchers for a grasslands National Park near Val Marie. One possibility is that 2 core areas — one in the grasslands and one in the badlands — be set aside immediately by the transfer of provincial crown lands only. At the same time a desirable final boundary would be agreed upon. There would be no compulsion of ranch owners within this ultimate boundary to move. The right of an owner to pass his land on to his heirs would be undisturbed. If and when a rancher chose to sell his property, the government

would be prepared to buy it at a fair market price and to offer its services to assist the rancher to relocate.

Another point of contention in negotiations over the years has been the stipulation that the mineral rights must be transferred by the province to the federal government. On this point, there can be no compromise. Land set aside in National Parks is for conservation not exploitation of its natural resources. There would, of course, be provision in the agreement that if the land was no longer needed for National Parks purposes, the land and subsurface rights would revert to the province.

I am willing to discuss this proposal with the provincial government at any time. I am hopeful that this flexible approach to the grazing problem will be the turning point in our negotiations and that a grasslands National Park will soon become a reality.

There is also another special area of Saskatchewan which is of great concern to your organization, namely, the Churchill River.

As you know, I was asked in 1971 by the Saskatchewan government to initiate a study to assess the national park potential of the Churchill River area. As a consequence, a joint federal-provincial study was

organized to undertake this task.

A preliminary report was recently prepared by my department and sent to the province for their comments. I am awaiting Mr. Bowerman's reaction and I am hopeful that he will be as enthusiastic as I am about the prospects.

As a result of this report, we can now affirm that the segment of the Churchill River from Ile-à-la-Crosse to Island Falls encompasses several characteristics of national interest. It includes two distinctive natural regions, the Southern boreal plains and plateaux and the Central boreal uplands. Rare and endangered fauna, such as bald eagles, osprey and woodland caribou can still be found there. In addition, this section possesses great historical significance for it was used from prehistoric times to our days as a transportation, fur

trade and exploration route.

If the province is agreeable, I would like to proceed with the additional studies required to develop a proposal for the inclusion of a segment of the Churchill River in the National Parks system. I look forward to discussions with the province in the near future.

I have mentioned some aspects of Saskatchewan which are of special importance to Parks Canada.

In conclusion, I would like to express my thanks to the Saskatchewan Natural History Society for the opportunity to speak and my congratulations for your perseverance and dedication to the cause of conservation. The support of citizens' organizations such as your own is essential if governments responsible for parks are to fulfill the expectations and needs of Canadian



Energy, Mines and Resources, Canada
Halkett (Sandy) Lake, Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan.

GRASSLAND PARK RESOLUTION

The following resolution was passed at the 25th Annual Meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society on October 13, 1973:

WHEREAS the Government of Canada and the Province of Saskatchewan have in the past expressed a desire to establish a grasslands national park in southwestern Saskatchewan;

and WHEREAS agricultural programs and other developments are resulting in the elimination of natural areas of all kinds in the southern half of Saskatchewan;

and WHEREAS there is in southwestern Saskatchewan a unique area of shortgrass prairie and badlands with associated flora and fauna, many species of which are rare and some are endangered;

and WHEREAS there are so very few tracts of public land not under lease to which the public may have access;

and WHEREAS our country's national parks are intended to preserve all kinds of natural habitat for posterity on behalf of all Canadians;

and WHEREAS an area of prairie is not now included in the national parks system;

and WHEREAS the area proposed for a grasslands national park largely consists of agricultural soils of the lowest rating and not recommended for cultivation;

and WHEREAS most of the parcels in this area are public lands;

and WHEREAS the population density has decreased and is one of the lowest of any in the settled part of Saskatchewan;

and WHEREAS mineral values seem to be marginal;

and WHEREAS it has been demonstrated in other countries that desert, semi-desert and savannah types of national parks are popular attractions, and that the area proposed for a grasslands national park in Saskatchewan has potential for several unique outdoor activities;

and WHEREAS many residents of Saskatchewan are unaware of the uniqueness of the badland prairie in the southwest;

and WHEREAS the conditions proposed by the Province of Saskatchewan in 1972 for a national park or for a provincial park would effectively result in no discernable change from the present uses of the area;

and WHEREAS it is evident that provincial and regional parks which are established primarily for recreational purposes and which operate on a multi-use basis cannot provide adequate protection for a fragile semidesert habitat or guarantee the preservation of viable populations of characteristic species of flora and fauna;

and WHEREAS Saskatchewan has an obligation to Canada and the world to see that areas of significance in natural and human heritage are preserved for all time;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED

that the Saskatchewan Natural History Society urge the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan to re-open negotiations with the sole objective of creating a national prairie grassland park;

AND be it further resolved that the Saskatchewan Natural History Society remind the Saskatchewan Government of its national and international obligation toward the preservation of some portion of this now unique short grass prairie biome;

AND be it further resolved that the Government of Canada be urged in consideration of a grasslands park to protect the interests of ranchers by insuring the present lessees use of the land for ranching purposes as long as they so wish. In addition provisions for generous compensation should be insured to those ranchers who relinquish their lease at the time a park is formed;

AND be it further resolved that the Saskatchewan Natural History Society urge that an advisory council for a national grasslands park be formed which would assure regional, provincial and federal representation.

* * * * *

Members wishing to do their part in making a grassland park a reality should write, phone or visit their MLA's to let their views be known.



Grasslands, Saskatchewan.

G. W. Seib