

1.4.2 National parks

Canada's national parks are the visible evidence of the federal government's efforts to preserve natural areas of outstanding scenic and biological interest for the benefit of the public. The national park concept, which began with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in the United States in 1872, was soon afterwards applied in Canada. In 1885, the Canadian government reserved from private ownership the mineral hot springs of Sulphur Mountain in what is now Banff National Park. Two years later, this ten-sq-mile reserve was extended to 200 sq miles and named Rocky Mountains Park, the first federal park in Canada. In the same year, Queen Victoria Niagara Falls Park, the first provincial park, was established by the Ontario government to protect the public's right to view the great natural wonder of Niagara Falls. Two land reserves in southern British Columbia — Yoho and Glacier — were made by the federal government in 1886, a reserve of 54 sq miles in the Waterton Lakes area of southern Alberta in 1895, and an area of 5,000 sq miles around Jasper, Alta., in 1907. These four reserves, all in the western mountain ranges, together with Rocky Mountains Park, formed the nucleus of the national park system after the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act was passed by Parliament in May 1911. Concurrently, a distinct National Parks Branch was created in the federal government to protect, administer and develop the parks.

National parks are now under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and are administered by the National and Historic Parks Branch under the National Parks Act, 1930 (RSC 1970, c.N-13) and various park regulations. The purpose of the parks and the objectives of their management are set out in the Act, which dedicates the parks to the people of Canada for their "benefit, education and enjoyment" and states that they are to be maintained and used so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

By 1930, nine more national parks had been established. Three of these were in Ontario and consisted of federally owned Crown land or land held in trust for Indians — St. Lawrence Islands National Park (1914), Point Pelee National Park (1918) and Georgian Bay Islands National Park (1929). One in Saskatchewan — Prince Albert National Park (1927), and one in Manitoba — Riding Mountain National Park (1929), were former federal forest reserves. Elk Island National Park near Edmonton was established in 1913 as a preserve for buffalo and in 1922 Wood Buffalo National Park, a 17,300-sq-mile area straddling the Alberta - Northwest Territories border, was established as a refuge for the largest surviving herd of buffalo in North America. In British Columbia, through agreement between federal and provincial governments, two scenic areas were established as national parks — Mount Revelstoke National Park (1914) and Kootenay National Park (1920).

Between 1930 and 1972, the following were added to the chain of Canada's national parks: Northwest Territories — Nahanni (1972) and Baffin Island (1972); Yukon Territory — Kluane (1972); British Columbia — Pacific Rim (1970); Ontario — Pukaskwa (1971); Quebec — La Mauricie (1970) and Forillon (1970); New Brunswick — Kouchibouguac (1969) and Fundy (1947); Nova Scotia — Cape Breton Highlands (1936) and Kejimikujik (1968); Prince Edward Island — Prince Edward Island National Park (1937); Newfoundland — Terra Nova (1957) and Gros Morne (1970).

In the case of parks in the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories, lands have been reserved from all alternative disposition by Order in Council. Within provinces, land is acquired by the province acting within a federal-provincial agreement to establish a national park. These lands are transferred to Canada and the establishment of the park is formalized by Parliament, adding the boundary description in a schedule to the National Parks Act.

In 1971 *The national parks system planning manual* was published, in recognition that new and comprehensive measures are needed to preserve Canada's natural heritage. With a view to protecting not only unique and outstanding areas of the Canadian landscape, but also those representative of its physical and biological characteristics, 41 distinctive natural regions were identified within which natural history themes have been defined.

The establishment of four new parks representing several of these natural regions, which was announced in 1972, brought the total number of parks to 28. Encompassing 49,900 sq miles, the system is now the largest and most rapidly expanding in the world. It is intended that there will be 40 to 60 national parks in Canada's national parks system by the year 2000.

A detailed list of national parks was included in the 1972 *Canada Year Book*, pp. 60-62.