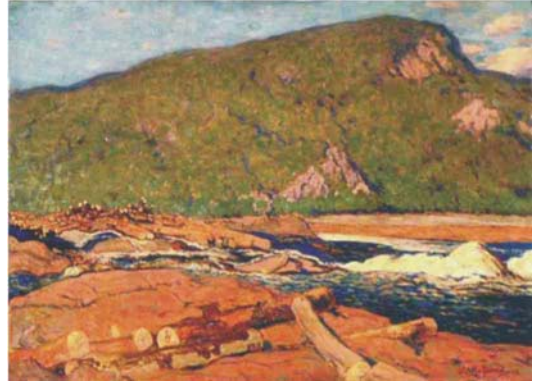


The Creation and Early Development of Gatineau Park



A study on the influence of local interest groups and
the sociopolitical context of the Park's creation
from 1903 to 1956

Executive Summary

**This study was conducted for the
National Capital Commission by**

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The goal of this study was to prepare a research report on the social and political context surrounding the creation of Gatineau Park, for the period 1903 to 1956, from a different standpoint from the one studied until now. The researchers would examine the history and concrete actions of Gatineau Hills citizens' and residents' groups concerned about the degradation of their natural environment and the impact of these pressure groups on the political decision makers, with a particular emphasis on the *Federal Woodlands Preservation League* and one of its presidents, Roderick Percy Sparks.

The approach consisted of supplementing the documentation provided initially by the NCC with that found at the National Library of Canada and the National Archives of Canada. An analysis of these documents leads to assert that a series of factors led to the Park's creation, including the emergence of a serious awareness of the need to protect and preserve public forests and the pursuit of a symbolic ideal related to the creation of an identity for the National Capital.

The project of a park first arose in the 1903 *Todd Report*, which proposed a general development plan for the city of Ottawa marked by esthetic considerations, since the capital's beauty was to represent Canada as a whole. The report suggested creating a string of suburban parks from Rockcliffe to the north shore of the Ottawa River, as well as "reserves" in the southern part of the Gatineau River valley and, more specifically, at Meech Lake. The Gatineau Parkway would provide access to these parks and reserves from Parliament Hill. Todd suggested that the Ottawa Improvement Commission purchase the land necessary to implement this plan over the next 25 years.

In 1913, the government led by Robert Borden created the **Federal Plan Commission** and appointed Herbert S. Holt as the Commission's chairman. While the 1915 *Holt Report* focused on the urban Ottawa-Hull area, for which it proposed a highly detailed development plan, it also examined the Gatineau Hills and mentioned a national park, without pushing the project any further. The report nevertheless suggests creating a commission with a wider-ranging authority and mandate. A pivotal period began in 1927 when the government of Mackenzie King created the **Federal District Commission**, which reported directly to Cabinet and had greater authority on both sides of the Ottawa River, including the power to purchase land in order to create a public park.

Citizens also organized actions. Formed in 1910, the **Ottawa Ski Club** eventually turned its eye to the Gatineau Hills, where it cut trails and built lodges, and proceeded with the purchase of the property that would become Camp Fortune in 1920. Moreover, the **Federal Woodlands Preservation League** was created in 1934 to address the problem of clear cutting, particularly in the Kingsmere and Meech Lake sector. The League was well versed in the workings of power: in 1935, Mackenzie King spoke enthusiastically about it in the House of Commons. Roderick Percy Sparks was among the League's officers and chaired the League's Research Committee. It was in this capacity that he lobbied for the Minister of the Interior to prepare the *Lower Gatineau Woodlands Survey Interim Report*. Most of the lands in question belonged to farmers who, suffering from the effects of the Depression, were clearing their lands to produce firewood in order to

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increase their income. Although the Interim Report suggested purchasing those lands to create a national park, the authors of the report deemed the project too costly and perilous.

It is practically impossible to assign a specific, definitive date to the creation of Gatineau Park, since possible dates vary depending on the criteria selected. The Todd Report put forward the idea in 1903. Purchases made by the Ottawa Ski Club in 1920 began a move toward developing the park, although for mainly recreational purposes and based on club ownership. The creation of the Federal District Commission in 1927 gave the government a means of intervention, but it would be a long time before these means took shape. Finally, the actions of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League sustained the project, but in order to be protected, federal woodlands would first have to be created in the Gatineau Hills.

C.E. Mortureux, president of the Ottawa Ski Club, called for action by the Mackenzie King government in June 1936. For its part, the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, of which Sparks was now president, proposed a more fleshed out plan in the *Memorandum of League Activities* addressed to the Prime Minister in December 1937. Mackenzie King was clearly in favour of the project; at the session of June 29, 1938, his government passed a budget of \$100,000 for the purchase of land for a specific purpose: "To provide for acquisition of land and surveys in connection with the National Parkway in the Gatineau Valley adjacent to Ottawa." The government renewed the measure in 1939, but the purchase of land was soon curbed when the war broke out. The federal government owned 16,000 hectares of land at the time.

In October 1945, the Federal Woodlands Preservation League submitted the *Memorandum re The Enlargement and Development of Gatineau Park* to the Federal District Commission. In that memorandum, the League's president, Roderick Percy Sparks, suggested establishing a hotel, cabins, restaurants, holiday camps, and other such attractions in the park. Sparks reiterated much the same suggestions to the Standing Committee of the Senate of Canada Dealing with Tourist Traffic in a three-page memorandum tabled in May 1946 on the League's behalf. To this same committee, Federal District Commission Chairman F. E. Bronson expressed the intention to pursue expansion of the Park. In its annual reports, the Federal District Commission associated these land purchases with nature conservation in the public interest.

The movement to acquire land by buying or expropriating a series of land parcels peaked in 1951 when the *Kingsmere Park Act* made official a considerable donation by Mackenzie King, who bequeathed his estate to the Government of Canada upon his death in 1950. As important as the event was, it would not have an immediate ripple effect on the status of the Park as a whole.

The **Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park** was formed in 1947, a sub-committee of the National Capital Planning Committee under the Federal District Commission, and Roderick Percy Sparks was appointed committee chairman, an office he

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would fill until 1954. In May 1949, the Advisory Committee submitted a report that stressed the importance of adopting a development plan for the Park, in particular by enhancing park access with the construction of a road. The work of the Advisory Committee culminated in 1952 when it tabled the ***Report on Master Plan for the Development of Gatineau Park***. In addition to the matter of its development, which had been addressed in previous years, the 1952 Master Plan presented as never before the issue of private property within the Park's boundaries, but apparently without reaching a consensus. Sparks leaned openly toward public ownership, but the other Committee members were less keen on the idea. Given these conditions, it is therefore not surprising that mixed ownership would be difficult to contest. Based on the criterion of population density, Jacques Gréber also adopted a position of compromise in his 1952 ***Report on Gatineau Park***. Gréber nevertheless supported the gradual purchase of lands by the Federal District Commission.

In 1955, Roderick Percy Sparks tabled the ***Memorandum Prepared for Submission to a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Federal District Commission***. It was the ultimate plea to eliminate private property through purchase or expropriation, which influential residents, he said, would oppose vehemently. The response to the memorandum published in the *Ottawa Journal* on May 17, 1955, was definitive: "The Federal District Commission today reaffirmed its policy that no effort has been made or will be made to expropriate property in Gatineau Park except in the construction of driveways or other essential works."

What to conclude further to this study? The beautification of the national capital and its vicinity is a powerful engine of development. However, the creation of Gatineau Park is more than just a well thought-out effort to develop and conserve flora and fauna near the city. Although some stakeholders lobbied for a national park, it was not the chosen path, hence Gatineau Park's special status as a federal park. Yet the Park was not a "creation" in the strictest sense, for which we can provide the date of founding and the name of the founder, be it an individual or a group. Certain influential citizens and politicians such as C.E. Mortureux, Roderick Percy Sparks and William Lyon Mackenzie King were particularly sympathetic to the idea, and through their actions and militancy, they helped stimulate and nourish the debate leading to the establishment of Gatineau Park.

All human construction is based on a more or less stated series of motivations and interests that are sometimes very difficult to understand since they do not always leave concrete evidence. Moreover, history is built on the traces of the past, and in this sense, the reconstitution of the history of Gatineau Park calls for additional research. In view of its unique status and the important role it plays in defining the federal capital, Gatineau Park deserves to be studied as much for its origins as for its future.