

Gatineau Park Parkway Sector Plan

SUMMARY

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Introduction

Gatineau Park, lying between the Ottawa and Gatineau rivers in Western Quebec, covers 36,131 hectares of the Canadian Shield. Triangular in form, the Park is 56 kilometres in length and 24 kilometres across at its widest point.

Gatineau Park is one of the principal features of the National Capital Region. Neither a national nor a provincial park, it is managed by the National Capital Commission (NCC) under the authority of the *National Capital Act*. It enhances the symbolism of the Capital of Canada through its protected natural riches and the opportunities it provides for visitors to appreciate, understand and enjoy its beauty.

Parkway Sector

The *Gatineau Park Master Plan*, completed in 1990, subdivided the Park into five sectors defined by natural characteristics, major uses and activities. The **Parkway Sector** is the area of the Park which combines the greatest intensity and diversity of use with the maintenance of significant natural and cultural values.

The Parkway Sector is a destination of choice for visitors to the Capital and also provides a wide range of recreational opportunities for residents of the National Capital Region. The Parkway Sector encompasses 14 percent of the total area of Gatineau Park, which is 5,200 hectares. At its widest it is approximately 6 kilometres across and it measures 12 kilometres from end to end. The sector begins at the hydro line south of Pink Lake and includes the core of the trail network south of Meech Lake,

the Willson and O'Brien houses and the Parkway Loop (the Gatineau, Fortune and Champlain parkways).

Within this relatively limited area (5,200 hectares) there are 30 kilometres of parkways, approximately 80 kilometres of trails, two residential communities, two beaches and a downhill ski area. The sector also includes an official residence and many historic elements, including Mackenzie King Estate and the first geodetic survey point in Canada. The sector is accessible from Highway 5 via Old Chelsea, from Highway 148 via the Gatineau Parkway and by Notch and Mine roads. Its easy accessibility and proximity to the urban core, and the diversity of recreational opportunities it provides, make it the most intensively used area of the Park, with an estimated 1.4 million visits annually. Despite its intensive use, it is also a place of great natural beauty: even on the busiest Sunday at the height of Fall Rhapsody, there are many places where solitude can be found and nature is undisturbed.

Natural Context

The Parkway Sector is part of the Canadian Shield and thus represents a significant component of Canada's landscape. The southwest boundary of the sector is the ridge of the Eardley Escarpment, which is the axis between two major geological regions, the Canadian Shield and the St. Lawrence Lowlands.

This sector, like all of Gatineau Park, includes geographical features, topography, soil conditions and a hydrographic network which are conducive to the growth of species typical of both northern

and southern zones.

During the past century, the sector has been disrupted by logging, mining, farming and forest fires. Current policies encourage the Park's plant life to evolve naturally, except where the maintenance of cultural landscapes has been identified.

FAUNA

The diversity of ecosystems within the sector supports a wide range of wildlife. Among mammals, such species as white-tailed deer and beaver thrive and can often be observed in their natural habitat. Common avian species include the turkey vulture, pileated woodpecker and the black-capped chickadee. Pink Lake supports the three-spine stickleback, a remnant species from the post-glacial Champlain Sea period. There are 37 known rare animal species in the Park, many of which are present in the Parkway Sector.

Human History

Despite the natural character of the sector, it is not virgin territory. It is often difficult to ignore the influence that people have had on the Park in terms of settlement, recreation, transportation, agriculture, forestry, mining and other types of activity.

Given the demand for the use of both the built and the natural environments, the search for a means to balance use with conservation takes on major significance in the Parkway Sector.

Plan Objectives

This sector plan is part of the planned follow-up to the *Gatineau Park Master Plan*. Its purpose is to refine the general themes of the Master Plan and provide a precise framework to help resolve planning issues and simplify management.

Planning Approach

- Preparation of the plan was based upon:
- discussions with municipalities and resident associations;
 - planning workshops to validate a vision, to establish planning principles and objectives and to prioritize the planning issues of the sector;
 - preparation of preliminary concepts and planning proposals;
 - open-house public consultations and discussions with municipalities, associations, interest groups and individuals; and
 - approval by the NCC's Board of Commissioners.

Throughout the planning process, environmental concerns were integrated into the decision-making process. A strategic environmental assessment was prepared in concert with the Plan. In addition, many of the Plan's proposals are directed towards reducing or mitigating the impacts of existing activities.

Gatineau Park Master Plan

The *Gatineau Park Master Plan* (1990) forms the basis for the planning, management and enhancement of the Parkway Sector. The plan identifies the Parkway Sector as "the centre of Park discovery."

The Master Plan identified five primary functions for the Parkway Sector:

- conservation, which is essential to preserving the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park;
- outdoor recreation, as provided for by most of the existing facilities;
- interpretation of the Park's human and natural history;
- a cultural role associated in particular with the Mackenzie King Estate; and
- a political function associated with the Willson and O'Brien houses and the official residence of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Existing Situation

The following statements set the context for the planning and management of the Parkway Sector. They also represent an overview of the existing situation and an indication of the sector's potential.

- The Parkway Sector encompasses 5,200 hectares, or 14 percent, of Gatineau Park.
- The sector supports a variety of ecosystems with diverse flora and fauna, including numerous rare species.
- The sector receives an estimated 1.4 million visitors annually for sightseeing, hiking,

cycling, swimming, boating, picnicking and skiing activities.

- There are 30 kilometres of parkways and approximately 20 kilometres of municipal roads.
- Primary destinations include:
 - Mackenzie King Estate;
 - Champlain Lookout;
 - Pink Lake; and
 - The Gatineau Park Visitor Centre.
- There are two public beaches, one canoe launch, five picnic areas and 17 parking areas.
- An extensive trail network includes 80 of the Park's 200 kilometres of winter trails and 75 percent of the trails that are trackset and patrolled on a regular basis.
- The Parkway Sector is home to the Camp Fortune downhill ski area and a major communications tower and associated facilities.
- There are two residential communities, with a total of 165 cottages and permanent residences, and another 35 residences spread throughout the sector.
- Also located in the sector are a government conference centre, the official residence of the Speaker of the House of Commons and heritage buildings and features.
- The Parkway Sector is the setting for major events such as Fall Rhapsody, special events at Mackenzie King Estate and the Keskinada Loppet.

Regional Context

The Parkway Sector falls within the jurisdiction of two regional governments (Communauté urbaine de l'Outaouais, MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais) and two municipalities (Chelsea and Aylmer). Most of the sector falls within the Municipality of Chelsea (85 percent).

The *Municipality of Chelsea Master Plan* was recently revised (1999). A highlight of the Plan is the new zoning designations for Gatineau Park land. All lands within the boundary of Gatineau Park have an "EN" (natural environment) designation. Within this designation, specific land uses are defined. These include residential communities, Camp Fortune, Willson and O'Brien houses and Mackenzie King Estate.

- Co-operative management concerns or issues which are shared among the NCC and other parties, including municipal and regional governments, private landowners and leaseholders.
- The cumulative impacts of increased diversity and continuous growth of recreational activities on the environment, as well as on the quality of the visitor experience.
- The desire of the Commission to improve welcoming, orienting and information services for visitors.
- Satisfying the wide range of planning and management objectives as well as visitor and resident expectations for the sector.

Planning Issues

The following factors sum up global planning issues for the sector.

- The fragmentation of park-based ecosystems as a result of the limited area of the sector and the numerous features (roads, trails, residential communities, Camp Fortune) which affect the natural dispersal of flora and fauna.
- The preservation of the ecological, cultural and historical integrity of the sector and improvement of awareness and understanding of the natural, cultural and historic elements.
- The extension of sustainable environmental practices to private land within or near Gatineau Park.



VISION, PLANNING CONCEPT AND PROPOSALS

Vision Statement for 2010

The Parkway Sector, through its accessibility and attractions, will play a key role in the interpretation of the National Capital Commission's mandate and will be a primary destination within Gatineau Park and the National Capital Region as a whole. Without compromising its cultural or ecological integrity, the sector accommodates a great diversity of visitors. Through participation in outdoor recreational activities and interpretation programs, visitors will be provided with an opportunity to appreciate the history, culture and environment of Gatineau Park and the Capital, in a natural setting symbolic of Canada. The NCC will realize this vision by working in partnership with Park visitors, local residents and the private and public sectors.

Planning Principles and Objectives

The following statements are the basic planning principles for the Parkway Sector. Following each principle is a series of objectives. Together, they anchor the vision statement and are the basis for the planning and enhancement of the sector. Each principle and its objectives are organized thematically.

ENVIRONMENT

Given the diversity of ecosystems within a relatively limited area and the already high level of use, a cautious and balanced approach to management is warranted, with a primary emphasis on conservation and the preservation of ecological integrity.

Environmental objectives promote the maintenance (and, wherever possible, the enhancement) of the integrity of ecosystems. They emphasize the quality of the visitor experience over growth in visitor opportunities and the encouragement of non-motorized visitor activities to explore the sector.

VISITORS

The Parkway Sector attracts and supports a great diversity of visitors; however, it does so within the context of a protected natural area. Visitor opportunities are based on the provision of a variety of outdoor recreational activities, the capacity of the environment to support these activities and the quality of the experience which the Commission wishes and is able to provide.

Visitor objectives stress the provision of basic and appropriate services for recreational activities, fostering an appreciation and enjoyment of the natural environment and the recognition that there are periods of peak visitation which require a variety of management approaches.

COMMUNICATION

Awareness and understanding of conservation issues and historic and cultural themes will play a key role in the messages communicated to visitors.

Communication objectives stress the encouragement of a dialogue with Park users, the provision of opportunities for public input and the delivery of natural and cultural interpretation messages to the public.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Partnerships and strategic alliances at many different levels are essential elements in achieving Park protection, providing visitor services and realizing regional economic benefits.

Regional context objectives emphasize the participation of the NCC in regional and municipal planning exercises and in ensuring that Park services enhance the visitor experience and complement what is offered in surrounding communities.

PARK SERVICES

Given the sector's intensive use and the capacities of its facilities, it cannot be all things to all people. Consequently, the National Capital Commission will clearly define and communicate, via the Sector Plan, its management philosophy and objectives.

Park services objectives promote protection of the environment over development of facilities and activities and the adoption of a balanced approach for revenue generation that is consistent with that of national and provincial parks and public sites.

Planning Concept

The concept for the Parkway Sector is based on the sector's vision statement, planning principles and objectives. Its goal is to support a Park discovery experience for visitors. The concept is based on sustainable principles and an ecosystem planning approach. It increases the level of environmental protection for a significant proportion of the sector and outlines proposals to increase visitors' awareness and understanding of its natural components. The concept stresses the need for greater collaboration and involvement, among visitors, local communities and municipal and regional governments, in planning. The concept also reflects the seasonal patterns of use of the sector, corresponding to the operation of the parkways.

The concept is organized around:

Natural Attributes

- With an emphasis on **conservation** and the **protection of species**.

Linear Features

- **The Parkway system** (Gatineau, Fortune and Champlain parkways).
- **The summer and winter trail network**.

Destinations

- **Natural and cultural attractions** (Pink Lake, Mackenzie King Estate, Champlain Lookout).
- **Trailheads** for hiking and mountain biking.
- **Beaches** and **picnic areas**.

A Reception Area

- The Gatineau Park Visitor Centre, located in Old Chelsea, provides **visitor information, orientation** and **services**.

The concept seeks to:

- preserve the integrity of ecosystems while offering high-quality outdoor recreational and cultural opportunities;
- protect the natural environment with particular emphasis on sensitive habitats and rare or endangered species;
- provide visitors with outdoor experiences which respect the natural environment and contribute to a "green Capital" visit;
- re-distribute use to other areas of the Park and the region during peak-use periods;
- fine-tune the supply of activities and services to support current and future needs of both local users and visitors to the Capital;
- support universal access to a range of opportunities within the sector;
- enhance representative elements of the sector's historical and cultural environment;
- encourage collaboration with partners from the public and private sector, interest groups, associations and residents in achieving the proposed goals; and
- include the existing destinations and activities of the sector in the region's recreation-tourism attractions.

The concept is organized around the following themes:

- natural and cultural environment;
- recreational activities;
- regional and local partnerships;
- residential communities;
- visitor access;
- visitor information and orientation; and
- special management zones.

Natural and Cultural Environment

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The environmental sensitivity map synthesizes the information contained on a series of 10 base maps. It identifies constraints including the degree of human presence, slopes, drainage and the presence of environmentally sensitive features, and guides present and future land uses within the sector.

The natural environment proposals are based on environmental planning principles and objectives. They focus on three areas:

- acquiring a better understanding of the present health of the ecosystems of the sector and identifying the stresses they face;
- supporting research related to specific concerns which have been identified in this plan; and
- where possible, applying the results of research to Park management activities such as the development of policies and regulations and the restoration of ecosystems.



CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The primary objective for the cultural heritage of the sector is to develop and implement a strategy to identify, promote and interpret cultural resources (notably the built heritage, cultural heritage and archaeological resources). In particular, there are resources which are at risk (e.g., O'Brien House, Carbide Willson Ruins) and historical themes which have yet to be interpreted (logging and mining, the fur trade).

Recreational Activities

The Commission recognizes the importance of the Parkway Sector as a location for recreational activities; however, it is also well aware of the limited area of the sector and the growth in demand for recreational opportunities. Therefore, a primary objective of this concept is to maintain (and where possible enhance) the quality of the visitor experience without expanding existing facilities or developing new facilities.

For many activities the Commission should be able to accomplish this objective with improved management; however, for others, peak demands are already close to exceeding the capacity of the resources upon which they are based, and both the environment and the quality of the experience suffers. For these activities, the Park will have to apply measures such as re-distribution of the clientele to ensure that the sustainability of the resource and the quality of the visitor experience are maintained.

The Parkway Sector supports a spectrum of opportunities, from enjoying the scenery while touring the parkways by car, to hiking backcountry trails. Within this spectrum, two specific client segments have been identified: parkway tour and destination/activity participants.

PARKWAY TOUR VISITORS

From May to November, the parkway tour clientele includes many first-time Park visitors from outside the region. Using the parkway network, they discover the Park by visits to its key attractions, including Mackenzie King Estate and Champlain Lookout.

Parkway Tour Proposals

The parkway tour proposals focus on achieving the following objectives:

- improve the structure of a visit through upgraded orientation and information;
- ensure that Park conservation messages are a significant element in the visitor experience;
- promote the discovery of the sector through non-motorized activities such as walking;
- introduce alternative means for managing peak-use periods; and
- enhance and promote underutilized sites which offer significant interpretive potential (e.g., Carbide Willson Ruins), in order to relieve pressure on the most popular destinations, such as Champlain Lookout.

DESTINATION/ACTIVITY PARTICIPANTS

The Destination/Activity clientele is the Park's core constituency and is made up of regular users who take advantage of the sector's many recreational opportunities, including beach activities, boating and hiking in summer and cross-country skiing in winter.

Overall objectives for the Destination/Activity clientele

- Emphasize Park conservation messages as a component of each visit (e.g., beach use, trail activities, boating, fishing, skiing and snowshoeing).
- Continue to develop the means to offset operating costs, as well as enhance existing services.
- Strengthen communication between the Commission and Park users and provide opportunities for public input.
- Maintain existing levels of service for most activities and, at the same time, improve the management of those activities which are causing visitor conflicts or environmental impacts.
- Improve the functioning and structure of the trail network without an increase in the total number of kilometres.
- Increase the profile of trail activities through completion and promotion of the Trans Canada Trail and cross-sector trails.
- Work in partnership with Park users and local communities to manage shared resources, such as Meech Lake.

Regional and Local Partnerships

The Parkway Sector fits into a regional and municipal context, which offers many partnership opportunities. The location and recreational opportunities of the Parkway Sector make it a key element in the planning framework for the Outaouais, especially in terms of tourism.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIP PROPOSALS

- Collaborate with local municipalities in the development of solutions to traffic-management issues as they relate to roads used to access the Parkway Sector.
- Collaborate with regional and local governments in the preparation of their regional and municipal plans with the goal of ensuring the compatibility of activities on the periphery of the Park.

Visitor Access

There are two main access routes to the sector: the Gatineau Parkway from Taché Boulevard in Hull and from Highway 5 through the village of Old Chelsea. The parkway network is the most prominent visitor facility in Gatineau Park and is a structuring element of the sector. While the importance of the parkways is acknowledged, the Commission does not wish to encourage continuous growth in motor-vehicle use.

PARKWAY SECTOR ACCESS PROPOSALS

- Reduce the impact of motor vehicles through

the redistribution of visitors, the use of alternative forms of transportation on peak-use days and the development of access points on the Park periphery.

- Examine existing user-fee programs with the goal of developing a more equitable approach to revenue generation.

Visitor Information and Orientation

The new Gatineau Park Visitor Centre on Scott Road (which opened in the fall of 1999) is the main reception centre for Parkway Sector visitors. It is an ideal location from which to gain an overview of the Park and an appreciation of its history, mission and themes — and to use as a starting point for the trail network, including the Discovery Trail and the Trans Canada Trail. Discovery of the Park should remain the focus for visitors to the Parkway Sector. In accordance with the Interpretation Plan, visitors will be able to learn about Canadian values: notably the preservation of the natural environment, the promotion of the cultural elements which distinguish Gatineau Park from other parks in Canada and the history of Gatineau Park.

The objectives of the visitor information and orientation proposals are to:

- promote the new visitor centre in Old Chelsea as the focal point for communication with Park visitors. This includes a new role as the location for interpretation programs, educational courses, conferences, workshops and films,

and as a place to learn about, or prepare for, a sporting activity;

- complete and apply the strategies of the Interpretation Plan for Gatineau Park which are applicable to the sector;
- enhance the road signage system to better address the needs of the Gatineau Park clientele; and
- develop tools to regularly communicate information to Park users concerning Park plans and programs.

Special Management Zones

Special management zones are areas within Gatineau Park where there are unique functions or, because of activities that predate the existence of the Park, there are facilities which do not entirely conform to the zoning of the surrounding areas.

MEECH LAKE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY

The Commission recognizes the importance of treating the Meech Lake sector and its watershed as an entity. It is through the co-operation of all its stakeholders (NCC, residents, Municipality of Chelsea, Park users) that environmental quality, the quality of life of residents and the quality of the visitor experience can be sustained and enhanced.

The objectives for the Meech Lake sector include:

- improve knowledge of the status of the natural environment of the Meech Lake area;
- maintain existing recreational opportunities, including the two beaches, the canoe launch

and the three trailheads, without increasing the size of the beach areas or the number of parking spots available; and

- improve management of the peak-use periods (with the goal of reducing vehicular traffic on Meech Lake Road and maintaining the quality of the visitor experience).

KINGSMERE LAKE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY

The key planning concerns related to Kingsmere are visitor accessibility to Mackenzie King Estate and the impacts of Park-related vehicular traffic on local roads and residents.

The proposals for the Meech Lake and Kingsmere Lake residential communities emphasize collaborating with the Municipality of Chelsea and the residents of the communities to find solutions to the challenges posed by the growth and development of the communities and vehicular traffic on local roads.

CAMP FORTUNE

The Camp Fortune downhill ski area is one of the principal winter destinations of the Parkway Sector. The proposals for Camp Fortune emphasize improving the integration of the ski area with the Parkway Sector.

WILLSON AND O'BRIEN HOUSES

Willson House will continue to be managed by Public Works and Government Services Canada for use as a government conference centre. In 2000, the Commission solicited proposals from the private sector for the conversion of O'Brien House into a

facility oriented towards health services, hospitality or training.

Park Zoning

The zoning system provides a framework for the management of the Parkway Sector. The system has two elements:

- four principal zoning classifications for the sector based on preservation objectives and intensity of human use (high to low); and
- special management zones which are areas within the sector where there are unique functions or, because of activities that predate the existence of the Park, there are facilities which do not entirely conform to the zoning of the surrounding areas.

The proposed zoning for the Park does not supplant the municipal zoning for areas within the Park. At the same time, municipal and Park zoning have been harmonized wherever possible.¹

Classes and Prescriptions

The proposed zoning for the Parkway Sector is based on the existing zoning of the *Gatineau Park Master Plan*. However, through the present planning exercise a refinement of the management parameters and use criteria has been undertaken. The Parkway Sector is composed of four principal zones:

- **reception** (0.3 percent, Gatineau Park Visitor Centre in Old Chelsea);
- **intensive use** (26.1 percent, high level of human activity);
- **discovery** (29.1 percent, balance between preservation and use); and
- **natural environment** (44.5 percent, high level of environmental protection).

A series of 16 parameters has been drawn up to guide the management of the individual zones.

The special management zones include:

- Camp Fortune;
- Willson and O'Brien houses;
- private residential properties; and
- the Crawley maintenance building.

The special management zones are subsets of the intensive use zone and represent 5.3 percent of the total area of the Parkway Sector.

¹ The example of the Municipality of Chelsea, which undertook the revision of its Municipal Master Plan and zoning by-laws in 1999, shows that this objective can be met.

Follow-Up

The *Gatineau Park Parkway Sector Plan*, as it is implemented over a 10-year period, will guide land-use decisions and provide a frame of reference for new land-use or management proposals.

The implementation of the Plan will be the responsibility of the Parks Services and Land Management Branch of the Commission. Collaboration with regional and municipal partners and recognition of the planning processes of local governments will be essential elements in the implementation of the plan.

As per the NCC planning process,² a commissioning plan has been prepared to guide the implementation of the *Gatineau Park Parkway Sector Plan*. The commissioning plan lists each of the individual proposals of the plan, identifies who is responsible and who is a stakeholder, the priority of the proposals and the estimated cost of implementation.

If you would like to consult the full *Gatineau Park Parkway Sector Plan* report, please contact the National Capital Commission.

National Capital Commission

Library
202–40 Elgin Street
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You can obtain additional information in writing or by telephone at:

The Capital Infocentre

(613) 239-5000
Toll-free: 1 800 465-1867
Fax: (613) 952-8520
E-mail: info@ncc-ccn.ca

The Gatineau Park Visitor Centre

Old Chelsea
(819) 827-2020
Toll-free: 1 800 465-1867
Fax: (819) 827-6048
E-mail: gpvisito@ncc-ccn.ca

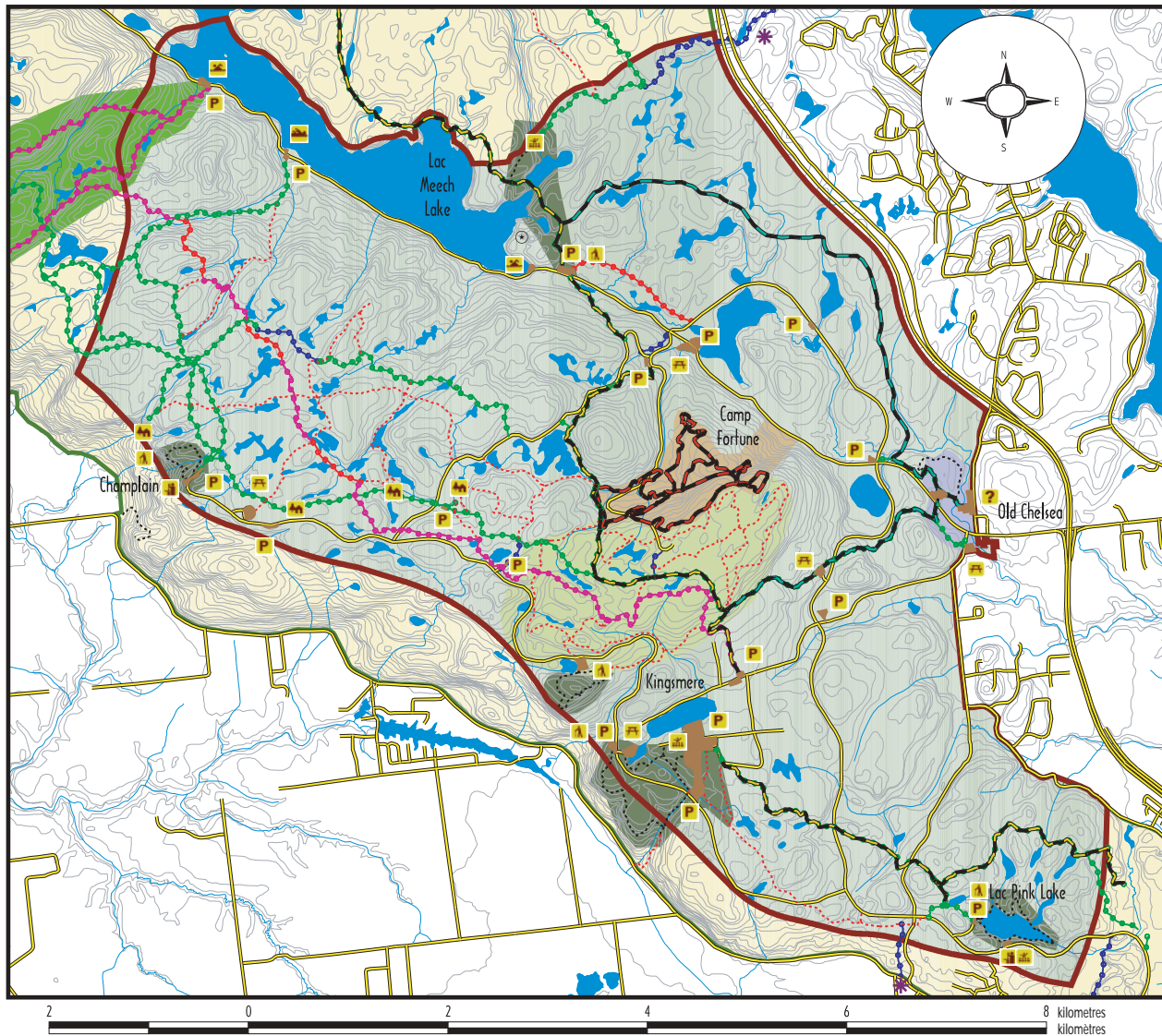
The NCC's Capital Website

www.canadascapital.gc.ca

² For more information on this subject, consult *Planning Canada's Capital Region*, NCC, 2000.

Parc de la Gatineau / Gatineau Park Secteur des promenades / Parkway Sector

Concept d'été et d'automne Summer/Fall Concept



Destinations

- Plage / Beach
- Débarcadère / Boat Launch
- Relais / Shelter
- Site d'interprétation / Interpretive Site
- Belvédère / Lookout
- Stationnement / Parking
- Aire de pique-nique / Picnic Area
- Sentier de promenade / Walking Trail
- Centre des visiteurs / Visitor Centre
- Maisons Willson/O'Brien Houses
- Point d'accès municipal potentiel / Potential Municipal Access Point
- Sites aménagés / Developed Sites

Sentiers de randonnée pédestre et de promenade / Hiking and Walking Trails

- Randonnée pédestre / Hiking
- Promenade / Walking
- Sentiers proposés de randonnée / Proposed Hiking Trails

Sentier de randonnée transsectoriel / Cross-Sector Hiking Trail

- Trajet proposé / Proposed Route

Sentiers partagés / Shared Trails

- Pédestre et vélo de montagne / Hiking and Mountain Biking
- Proposés / Proposed
- Vélo de montagne / Mountain Biking (Camp Fortune)

Sentier transcanadien / Trans Canada Trail

- Existant / Existing
- Proposé / Proposed

Secteurs thématiques / Thematic Sectors

- Introduction au parc / Park Introduction
- Promenade / Parkway Tour
- Randonnée – Adeptes de plein air / Discovery Hiking
- Randonnée – Adeptes sportifs / Challenge Hiking
- Vélo de montagne – Adeptes sportifs / Challenge Mountain Biking

Limites du secteur des promenades / Parkway Sector Boundary

- Limites du secteur des promenades / Parkway Sector Boundary
- Territoires à l'extérieur du secteur / Areas Outside the Sector