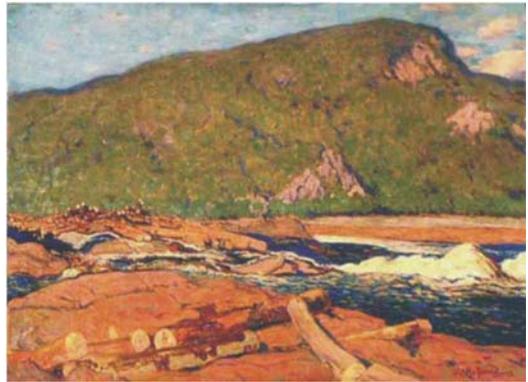


NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The Creation and Early Development of Gatineau Park



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

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Introduction

As the National Capital Region's top recreational destination and a highly valued area for country homes, Gatineau Park has long been a very attractive site. The Park consists of some 36,000 hectares of charming landscapes shared by visiting outdoors enthusiasts and residents with private property within the Park's boundaries. Gatineau Park differs from other provincial and national parks not only in its natural, historical and cultural features, but also in its unique status as a federal park. Unlike other parks, it is managed by the National Capital Commission under the *National Capital Act*, 1985, rather than by Parks Canada.

This special situation is the result of a creation process that was no less exceptional and warrants further examination. The terms of reference for this contract stipulate as follows: "The goal of this study is to prepare a research report on the social and political context surrounding the birth of Gatineau Park, for the period 1903 to 1956, from a different standpoint from the one studied until now. The author will 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." Let us specify from the outset that with regard to the Park's creation, Sparks is generally overshadowed by Prime Minister Mackenzie King who, with an estate bearing his name in the middle of the park, is often presented as the key figure in this respect.

Gatineau Park is a vast entity to explore, certainly physically, but also from the perspective of its history, which remains incomplete. This situation stems largely from the nature of the Park – no pun intended – which does not benefit from the status usually granted to large natural areas under federal or provincial jurisdiction. Generally such parks are defined clearly and permanently in terms of both area and use when they are created. On the contrary, Gatineau Park was not a spontaneous, complete creation, but a piecemeal creation born on the whim of circumstances, events and actions by individuals. Thus, Gatineau Park is not the product of a detailed plan or clearly defined project.

Implicit in this yet-to-be-defined project is the issue of the founding of the Park and, likely more important, that of its ownership. Can the Park's creation be attributed to a single individual? If so, what were that individual's objectives and vision? Has the Park evolved as its promoter(s) hoped it would? Will the project one day be completed? These are but a few of the questions raised by any research on Gatineau Park. For piecing together the Park's past also means addressing its future development.

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1. State of Knowledge

As it stands, our understanding of the process that led to the creation of Gatineau Park is incomplete and, as is often the case in such matters, largely based on preconceived notions.

In this regard, the idea that the Park was created by William Lyon Mackenzie King is often perpetuated, likely because he purchased a country home on Kingsmere Lake in 1903 – a property he later expanded before bequeathing it upon his death to the Government of Canada – and because, as Prime Minister, he gave the Government of Canada the means to create such a park. J. David Andrews is eloquent in this respect: “Many people championed the creation of a national park in the Gatineau Hills, but few were ultimately more influential than William Lyon Mackenzie King. [...] As early as the late 1920s King had decided to bequeath his estate at Kingsmere to the people of Canada as a national park, and he was gravely concerned about the indiscriminate cutting of the forest around his summer home” (Andrews 1994, 46). Greg Gyton (1999), however, ascribes a predominant role to Mackenzie King, Frederick Todd, Herbert Holt, Jacques Gréber, and the chairmen of the Federal District Commission.

Recent studies offer relatively qualified interpretations ranging from the general to the more specific and committed. Chad Gaffield penned *History of the Outaouais*, the only truly recent treatise of regional history, but devotes only a few pages to Gatineau Park, through the presentation of the development plans suggested to the federal government since 1903. In this regard, *History of the Outaouais* also evokes the rural and recreational vocation long ago given to the northern Outaouais region by the federal government. With respect to the interest groups that lobbied for this region, the author limits himself to citing Herbert Marshall’s book (1972) and stating that the Ottawa Ski Club was responsible for putting to use the hills of Gatineau Park (Gaffield et al. 1997, 407), without extrapolating on the creation of the Park, the Park being but one topic among many in this vast, authoritative work.

Alisa Catharine Apostle (1997) wrote a thesis on the emergence of national park culture in Canada during the inter-war period, a culture used for the ideological construction of the national identity. She cites the history of Gatineau Park as an example. “Gatineau Park is a national park located in Quebec, on the other side of the Ottawa River from the nation’s capital. Created throughout the 1920s to 1960s by the government organization, the Federal District Commission (FDC), Gatineau Park is a perfect example of the physical construction of national culture,” she writes (1997, 2). By indicating that the Federal District Commission reported to the Prime Minister’s Office and that the Prime Minister was more than familiar with the national park concept, having notably created

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Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park in 1927, Apostle assigns a dominant role to Mackenzie King:

King also worked to implement his vision of a national park through other channels. In the 1930s he was the patron of an organization called the Federal Woodlands Preservation League. Other members of the League included R.B. Bennett, Sir Robert Borden, and R. Percy Sparks, who was the vice-president. Percy Sparks also owned property in the park, on Meach Lake – a now famous lake that was part of the area in question. This group lobbied the government for the preservation of the Gatineau woodlands through the early 1930s and was instrumental in the development of the Park (Apostle 1997, 71).

In her view, the Prime Minister and the Federal District Commission were the engine behind the project to put nature to the service of burgeoning Canadian nationalism, whereas other actors played a supporting role: “Initiated with the calls for a national park in the Gatineau during the interwar period, the FDC and Mackenzie King's Federal Woodlands Preservation League drew upon the standard language of nature and nationalism to give urgency to the need for ‘preservation’ in the hills across the river” (Apostle 1992, 118).

In *Promenades historiques dans le parc de la Gatineau*, Katharine Fletcher adopts a more nuanced view by considering the joint action of several players: “Le Parc a été créé en raison des préoccupations exprimées par de nombreuses personnes et diverses associations ainsi que des pressions exercées en ce sens. Les amateurs de plein air qui profitaient de ces terres en constituèrent les protecteurs les plus dynamiques et les plus ardents,” writes Fletcher (1998, 44), insisting on the role of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, born of the concerted efforts of Ottawa Ski Club members (1988, 45). In her view, however, the high point of this beginning remains the creation of the Federal District Commission “...qui, ayant endossé les rêves de Mackenzie King et d'autres personnes et organismes (comme la *Federal Woodlands Preservation League*), enclencha l'engagement politique qui devait assurer la création du parc de la Gatineau” (Fletcher 1998, 45).

Jean-Paul Murray, vice-president of the New Federal Woodlands Preservation League, strongly opposes the traditional interpretation that identifies Mackenzie King as the Park's founder and that, he believes, purposely obscures the crucial role played by Roderick Percy Sparks: “[...] the key contribution made by Roderick Percy Sparks to the creation of Gatineau Park has been erased from all official and most unofficial histories of the park and his memory has been all but forgotten” (notes from a lecture given at the Gatineau Valley Historical Society on March 17, 2003). Murray cites as evidence the fact that Sparks was president of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League from 1937 to 1947, as well as the half-dozen reports subsequently submitted to the federal government and in which he supports the creation of a national park in the Gatineau Hills. Furthermore, according to Murray, Sparks' appointment as chairman of the Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park of the Federal District Commission in 1947 is further evidence of the value of the dedication shown by Sparks, whose ideas were the basis for the 1952 Master Plan and were taken up by Jacques Gréber (Murray 2004). Sparks was ostracized, mainly on

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account of his steadfast desire to eliminate private property in Gatineau Park, an issue that remains sensitive to this day (Murray 2003).

Sparks or King? Is the debate justified or trivial? As a discipline, social history teaches us that individuals, separately and regardless of their influence, generally hold a power which they wield collectively and that change can only be understood from the flux of social, economic, political and ideological structures, or what can be referred to as the context of emergence and evolution. The pages that follow deal with this context without disregarding the issue of the Park's founding, which, though seemingly simplistic, is nonetheless telling with respect to the project's potential meaning.

2. Our Approach

We began by gathering relevant information, since the historical investigation at hand requires elements of proof, i.e., primary sources (source material) and secondary sources (subsequent analyses), both contemporary and recent. At the outset of the project, the National Capital Commission provided us with essential documentation, which we supplemented with the services of its library and land registry service. This documentation includes reports on Gatineau Park produced for the Government of Canada, as well as memoranda and other documents submitted by individuals and interest groups. To expand this documentation, we naturally turned to the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada, where we found other documents on Gatineau Park and its creation, such as related legislation, House of Commons debates, correspondence, press clippings, Ottawa Ski Club newsletters, etc. Rather than listing all these documents here, we refer readers to the text that follows, where the documents we analyzed are cited one at a time.

We also met with Jean-Paul Murray on April 23, 2004, at Université du Québec. In the course of that interview, Mr. Murray talked about his research findings and shared with us period documents and copies of articles he has written on Roderick Percy Sparks' contribution to the creation of Gatineau Park.

It is understood that this corpus of documents is limited. Among other things, it does not allow us to identify with any certainty the deep-seated motives of actors who sometimes appear to be in contradictory situations, e.g., living in the Gatineau Hills while fighting to abolish private property within the Park's boundaries. In any case, the documents sketch a picture of a project's development from its abstract beginning to its conclusion, although the project is not yet complete.

Our research report begins by situating the Park's initial creation within the historical context of the land's appeal at the subcontinental level and as part of an emerging "conservationist" awareness in the late 19th century, since the Park was invested with symbolic values in building the capital of the young country that was Canada at the time.

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We then address the development of the Gatineau Hills in a series of steps since the Todd Report of 1903.

3. The Context in which Gatineau Park Was Created

Gatineau Park was not a spontaneous creation. Its emergence stemmed from a series of factors that had been falling into place since the late 19th century, some of which related to the general context and others to the region's specific situation.

3.1 The Socio-Economic Context

The early decades of the 20th century saw the continuation of the industrialization process that had had been slow to start in every region of Canada. Despite a few rough spells, the turn of the century was a time of sustained economic growth fuelled by the economy and foreign investment. Modern Canada had yet to take shape and opportunities were so plentiful that Prime Minister Laurier declared that the 20th century would belong to Canada.

At the political level, in the early 20th century governments gradually instituted new regulations governing economic and social life. In Canada, the government continued to pursue the National Policy introduced in the last quarter of the 19th century to stimulate economic development and population growth. The First World War, during which the federal government endowed itself with unprecedented powers (*War Measures Act*, rationing, price and wage controls, the draft, etc.), was an important milestone. However, the concept of the welfare state would not emerge until the Great Depression of the 1930s and would only truly be established after the Second World War. From then on, the federal government would adopt a resolutely interventionist approach.

Since the 19th century, the measures taken to ensure Canada's economic growth had focused primarily on encouraging the development of natural resources by large companies – often foreign – that benefited from considerable privileges at the time. This highly conciliatory attitude respecting American capital provoked intense reactions in nationalist circles, and many individuals, both individually and in groups, began to lobby for the construction of a Canadian identity. Canada's industrialization was characterized by conditions over which Canadians, and French-Canadians in particular, had very little control. This was less true for internal factors such as resources, energy and labour, but flagrant for external factors like capital, technology and markets. In particular, the United States remained the most accessible market and economic ties with that country were strengthened by the tariff policy, which spurred American subsidiaries to set up operation in Canada. This is the context in which Canada became industrialized once and for all at the turn of the century by relying on renewed development of natural resources. The supremacy of pulpwood over lumber is an example of this: the meteoric rise of the pulp

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industry coincides with the depletion of U.S. resources at a time when high-circulation press was expanding.

3.2 The Rise in “Conservationist” Awareness

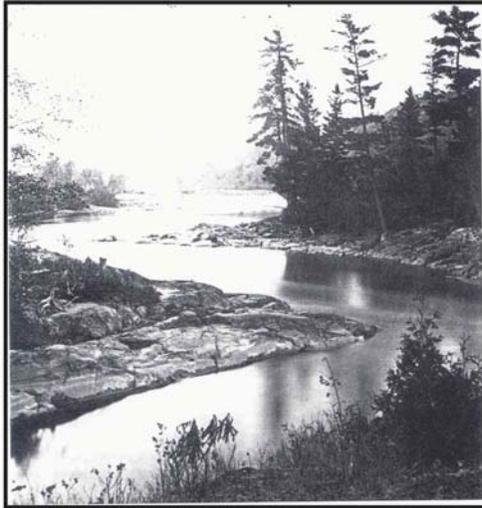
A serious new awareness of the need for public forest protection and conservation arose in the late 19th century in response to accelerated natural resource development. There was a call to exempt public lands from disposition, colonization and commercial resource development. What was the scope of this “ecological” view, when the term had yet to be coined?

In the second half of the 19th century, the lumber industry was booming. The economic activity spread to regions like the Outaouais, the Laurentians, the Mauricie, and the Saguenay. The “lumber barons,” as they were known then, divided the logging areas amongst themselves and, with the help of the State, organized public lands in the province of Quebec into timber concessions. The “ecological” ideal was thus faced with the development of forest resources. The State would therefore have to control the paths of the lumber companies in order to protect certain natural areas. This was how the large parks were created, e.g., Parc de la Montagne-Tremblante and Parc des Laurentides in 1895. In other words, there was a public will to preserve natural areas, which explains the highly committed, even militant, presence of representatives of the business and industrial bourgeoisie on the committees of the Canadian Commission on Conservation. The Commission, formed in 1909, was modeled on similar organizations in the United States.

Above and beyond natural heritage conservation, the symbolic value associated with romantic investment in some areas rallied the main actors of the day to the cause of conserving representative natural areas. However, this action was limited to specific locations (hunting and fishing grounds and clubs, for example) rather than a wider ranging intervention. The Gatineau Hills are a perfect example of a position that has been preserved and valued based on the esthetics of nature’s forms. They thus become a localized imaginary world (Gagnon 2003) sustained by pictorial representations:

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Figure 1
Gatineau River cascades by J.W Topley 1880



Source: Gyton, G. *A place for Canadians : the History of the National Capital Commission*. Ottawa: National Capital Commission, 1999.

3.3 The Era of Summer Homes and Resort Areas

Summer homes and resort areas in Eastern Canada appeared in the late 18th century, mainly in the Lower St. Lawrence region. From then on, a number of areas in Canada gradually were created and developed as summertime destinations under the auspices of patrons with specific plans to purchase and retain control of areas that were becoming increasingly popular.

At that time, the Ottawa region was thriving, both industrially (tied to logging) and professionally (tied to the growing federal administrative machinery). Not to be outdone, its citizens were also looking in the same direction. The ruling class, which consisted of lumber barons and the political elite, built sprawling country estates in neighbouring rural areas, particularly the Gatineau Hills. As had occurred in Montreal and Quebec City, these commercial and professional bourgeoisies localized forms that brought to life the romantic ideal of nature in contrast with the dust and grime of swelling cities.

Not only were “summering” areas frequented by the bourgeoisie of booming industrial cities like Montreal, Toronto, New York, Boston and Philadelphia, but they were also part of a vast movement extending from the coast of New England to the Maritimes, through the Appalachians (the Green Mountains and the White Mountains), Eastern Ontario, the Outaouais, the Laurentians, the Charlevoix, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé Peninsula. A veritable “tourism belt” had sprung up, and it included Kingsmere and Meech Lake. The tranquillity and beauty of these areas drew tourists and local residents alike. In fact, as Katharine Fletcher writes, “au tournant du siècle, il était à la mode d’avoir

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une résidence d'été. À la fin des années 1800, les chalets surgissaient de terre autour des lacs Meech et Kingsmere " (1998, 31). These were the social, economic and ideological conditions from which sprang the concept of Gatineau Park as a means of enhancing the beauty of the national capital and creating a Canadian symbol.

4. Emergence of the Gatineau Park Project, 1903-1938

As in other fields, the idea that preceded the action, the project to create a park in the Gatineau Hills, was the logical outcome of this culture of national parks, which arose in the 19th century and to which Apostle refers (1997). Though abstract at the beginning, it began to take shape in government reports. However, only in 1938 would concrete measures be taken to appropriate the land that would be developed even later yet.

4.1 The Todd Report, 1903

The Ottawa Improvement Commission, created by Wilfrid Laurier in 1899 to make Ottawa the Washington of the North (Gaffield et al. 1997), hired Frederick G. Todd, an American landscape architect, to recommend ways to improve quality of life for Ottawa area residents, notably by proposing a development plan for green spaces. This naturally led Todd to look beyond that Ottawa River. Note that Todd had already made a name for himself, having worked with celebrated landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed Central Park in New York and Mont Royal in Montreal.

Barely thirty pages long, the Todd Report put forward a general development plan for the city marked by esthetic considerations. For example, he suggested planning for industrial development so as not to detract from the beauty of the capital, which must represent Canada as a whole. In this regard, nature was to be put to use:

The Dominion of Canada is famous over the world for the extent and beauty of her forests, and for this reason it would be appropriate that there should be reserved in close proximity to the Capital, good examples of her forests which once covered a great portion of the country. Not only will those reserves be of inestimable value to the future generations as an example of the original forest, but they will also provide a place where nature may still be enjoyed, unmarred by contact with humanity (Todd 1903, 7).

He thus proposed that a string of suburban parks be created 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: "Another reserve which suggests itself is about Meach Lake, where a large reserve could be made of the land surrounding the whole of the first lake. This has the disadvantage of being at a slightly greater distance from the city, but it makes up for this in added picturesqueness and all those qualities constitute a beautiful natural park" (Todd 1903, 8).

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The Todd Report also suggested building the Gatineau Parkway, which would provide access to the park from Parliament Hill:

Should your Commission decide to take a forest reserve either at Meach Lake or above Wright's Bridge, the present roads on either side of the Gatineau River are sufficient to connect these reserves with the city. But there should be a boulevard constructed through Hull so that this first part of the drive from the Parliament Buildings, or from the centre of the city, to these reserves may be more agreeable than it is at present (Todd 1903, 22).

It is true that industrial Hull of the early 20th century stood in stark contrast with the natural beauty of the surrounding area. In Todd's view, it was a matter of enhancing access to the hills. Furthermore, Todd did not express his views categorically concerning the private property issue, although he suggested the Commission purchase the land over the next 25 years.

Is the Frederick Todd report of 1903 the founding element of Gatineau Park, even in its embryonic state? It is difficult to say. David Gordon, who wrote an article on the report, believes it is a preliminary regional development statement rather than a comprehensive, clearly defined plan: "The analysis of the 1903 report demonstrates that it was a preliminary design for a park and open space system rather than a comprehensive plan. However, it will also demonstrate that Todd's Preliminary Report had influence well beyond its modest size and cost, shaping the future approach to open space planning for the Canadian capital for the next seventy years," states Gordon (2002a, 29), adding: "He was not the originator of Gatineau Park: Todd suggested a much smaller reserve in the Gatineau River valley, which was never implemented" (Gordon 2002a, 51). Although we will not take a position with respect to this statement, the Todd Report is nevertheless the first of its kind to include in the capital's plan a part of the Gatineau Hills in order to preserve its nature. Although not a park, the idea was not far removed.

4.2 The Holt Report, 1915

In 1913, the Canadian government led by Robert Borden created the Federal Plan Commission to plan the development of Ottawa and Hull. Herbert S. Holt, a successful Montreal businessman with Conservative Party ties, was appointed chairman. The mayors of both cities sat on the Commission, which worked, in particular, on the capital's natural appeal. Note that Edward Bennett was the main architect of what is commonly referred to as the Holt Report, tabled in 1915. Bennett was a member of the Chicago School, which was behind the City Beautiful movement that advocated integrating the city with the surrounding countryside and whose project was greatly influenced by the pursuit of esthetics.

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While the Holt Report focused on the urban Ottawa-Hull area, for which it proposed a highly detailed development plan (Gordon 1998, 275-300), it also examined the Gatineau Hills, thus aligning itself with the Todd Report:

There remains a last consideration of great importance. One of the attractions of Ottawa is to be found in the slopes on the North side of the river which stretch away to a sky line of distant forest-clad mountains. Nature, which has not made this tract of land fertile, has made it beautiful. Much of it is still covered by forest. Since it has little commercial value, it could be acquired at slight cost and a great tract of it, consisting of 75,000 or 100,000 acres, should be secured as a national park. Here, at the very door of the capital, should be preserved, for all time, a great area in the state of nature. It would include lakes and hill (Holt 1915, 26).

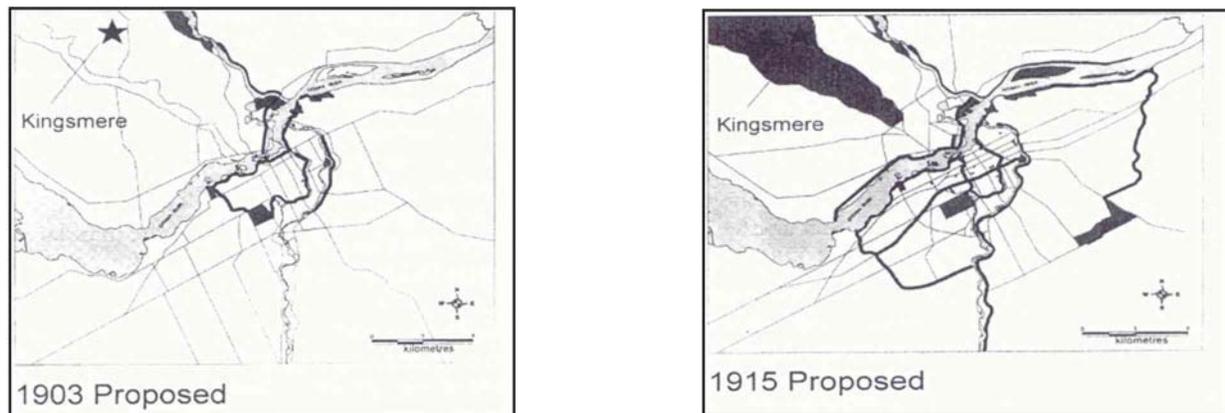
By emphasizing the beauty of the area and the need to preserve it, the Holt Report spoke of a “national park,” without pushing further for a development project and without insisting on the urgency for the federal government to purchase the land. The report nevertheless suggests creating the Federal District Commission, to be endowed with an authority and mandate broader than those of the Improvement Commission as they would include Ottawa, Hull and the vicinity. Mackenzie King would draw from the Holt Report the notion of a Federal District Commission, not to mention that of a national park, which he mentions keeping in mind in his personal diary on April 25, 1926.

With respect to the park’s residents, Holt proposed keeping them to supply vacationers and summer home owners with products and services: “The owners of land who now occupy it, simple farmer or hunter folk for the most part, need be little disturbed, and could be employed as game and timber wardens” (Holt 1915, 26). Moreover, the Holt Report did not oppose a certain amount of logging in the Hills, as long as it was limited and did not mar the park’s picturesque nature: “The interests of commerce should not, of course, be neglected, but this can be done while at the same time making sure that the view of Hull from Ottawa shall be agreeable” (Holt 1915, 27).

The Holt Report, like the Todd Report, thus suggested preserving the Gatineau Hills for their natural beauty and the enjoyment of its users. Note that the spatial layout of the park took shape from one report to the next, a fact that would not escape the notice of interest groups.

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Figure 2
Sectors proposed as a reserve in the Gatineau Hills
by the Todd Report (1903) and the Holt Report (1915)



Source: Gordon, David L.A. 2002. "William Lyon Mackenzie King, planning advocate". *Planning Perspectives*. 17: 103.

4.3 The Ottawa Ski Club

Formed in 1910, the Ottawa Ski Club was first located in Rockliffe Park, where it had built a ski jump. Although the 1903 Todd Report makes no specific mention of the fact, it appears that maintenance of these facilities was not included in the Rockliffe Park development project. This was easily understandable given the pursuit of esthetics that also characterized the Holt Report. In any case, the Ottawa Ski Club broadened its activities to include alpine skiing, using the Fairy [Des Fées] Lake hill in Hull from 1907 on, and cross-country skiing: C.E. Mortureux, president of the club, organized races from the Murphy Boarding House in Kingsmere to Rockliffe Park (Fletcher 1998, 44). It was thus perfectly natural that the Ottawa Ski Club would turn its eye to the Gatineau Hills, where it began by cutting trails and building lodges. The club also bought the land that would become Camp Fortune in 1920 for recreational and conservation purposes. In this respect it also created the Ottawa Ski Club Forest Preservation Society in 1933 in order to raise funds to buy the land neighbouring its facilities: "The Society, as you will see, is actuated by a noble motive, that of saving the few trees that are left around Camp Fortune so that this generation and the following may not have to immigrate to other and better managed countries to see what trees, big or small, look like" (*Ottawa Ski Club News*, December 1, 1933). Nor did the Society oppose selective logging. In line with these efforts, the Society's president, A. George McHugh, stated in 1933 that it was time to create a national park through expropriation: "The expropriation by the Federal government of the entire ridge lying northwest of Old Chelsea as far as the Masham Road embracing many hills, valleys, and lakes of great beauty, has frequently been suggested as a National Park for the use of all citizens for all time." McHugh continued: "When such a park shall have been

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established, the members of the newly formed Ottawa Ski Club Forest Preservation Society will no doubt feel a deep sense of satisfaction in the fact that they have in a measure, contributed to the preservation in its natural state of such an unique national monument” (*Ottawa Ski Club News*, December 1, 1933, Letter to the Editor).

Note that in this regard, Katharine Fletcher cites the Ottawa Ski Club as having been the impetus for the creation of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League (Fletcher 1998, 48), which stands to reason. In any case, in 1934 the *Ottawa Ski Club News* encouraged members to join the newly created Federal Woodlands Preservation League.

Although the creation of a park was a long way off, the first decades of the 20th century saw the idea germinate and even begin to materialize in the activities of the Ottawa Ski Club, despite the fact that the club focused primarily on the park’s recreational vocation. These elements would soon develop and become structured with the creation of the Federal District Commission and the emergence of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League.

4.4 The Federal District Commission, 1927-1958

A pivotal period for the creation of Gatineau Park began in 1927 when the Government of Canada founded an organization with the authority to take concrete action in this respect. Mackenzie King, who had been in power since 1921, broadened the mandate of the Ottawa Improvement Commission, as the Holt Report had recommended. This was the genesis of the Federal District Commission, whose name was suggestive of the Commission’s role. The Federal District Commission had greater authority on both sides of the Ottawa River, in particular that of purchasing land in order to create a public park, and reported directly to Cabinet.

Although no land would be purchased until 1938, events in the meantime would increasingly sway in this direction, especially when the Federal Woodlands Preservation League was formed and the Lower Gatineau Woodlands Survey Interim Report was produced.

4.5 The Federal Woodlands Preservation League, 1934-1947

In his personal diary, Mackenzie King recounts his meeting with Harry Baldwin on September 20, 1933, to discuss forming a new association. “We talked of starting a Society ‘to preserve the Natural Beauty of the environs of Ottawa’ – that was the suggested title I gave it,” he wrote. Harry Baldwin became the first president of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League when it was created in 1934.

The league’s name suggested that it was created initially to address the problem of clear cutting in the Gatineau Hills in the 1930s, particularly in the Kingsmere and Meech

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Lake sector. Logging was conducted mainly to supply firewood, an especially important commodity during the Great Depression, but this activity was threatening the forest. However, the opposite argument was also put forward publicly, as private property was sometimes perceived as a guarantee of preservation, as evidenced by an article published in the *Evening Citizen* on November 27, 1934: "Incidentally, it is to Mr. King's credit that he saved a large tract of woodland above the Mountain Road from Kingsmere by buying it a few years ago when it would otherwise have been sold to go down before the woodman's axe." It is true that King was not as affected by the Depression as the farmers of the Gatineau River valley, for whom lumbering was a useful source of income indeed.

Moreover, it appears that the concerns of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League were also – and perhaps more – to preserve the natural beauty of the area, which was consistent with the Todd and Holt Reports. The League's mission was eloquent:

- 1) To attract to its membership all those who are interested in the problem of preserving and protecting the beauty of the woodlands within a radius of twenty-five miles of Ottawa, and more especially such woodlands as contribute to the beauty of the prospect of or from the rivers, lakes, hills and highways immediately surrounding the Capital of Canada;
- 2) To collect and collate facts, figures and plans concerning the problem, and study and discuss them so as to be qualified;
- 3) To formulate a policy of woodlands preservation, and
- 4) To initiate, support, and encourage such a social action as the results of the League's research may indicate as being practical.

Tellingly, the League's mission statement also managed to equate private property with forest preservation, ending as it did with the following plea: "Will you help us devise a plan which will at once benefit the owner of the woodland and save the scenery?" An approach that was not fundamentally contrary to the activities and objectives of the Ottawa Ski Club. Any other approach would have been surprising since many persons, including C.E. Mortureux, J. Ambroise O'Brien and others, were active members of both organizations. The Federal Woodlands Preservation League, whose objectives included developing conservation policy, seemed well versed in the mysterious workings of power, as shown by its solid honorary membership, which included such names as Richard B. Bennett, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Robert Borden and Ernest Lapointe, not to mention the Governor General himself. On May 23, 1935, Mackenzie King spoke enthusiastically about the League in the House of Commons: "A purely voluntary association has been formed in the city, known as the *Federal Woodlands Preservation League*. [...] The body is not a political organization. It is as a matter of fact, a voluntary association of persons interested in the capital of Canada and the preservation of the woodlands of its immediate environments." King even ventured so far as to encourage the Bennett government to support the study in question: "This is work which a voluntary organization could hardly be expected to undertake, but perhaps the government, through its survey department, could give employment to some unemployed surveyors and thereby assist this voluntary association in its work."

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The Federal Woodlands Preservation League also counted among its officers Roderick Percy Sparks, who was a member of a prominent Ottawa family.

The year after it was formed (1935), the Federal Woodlands Preservation League set about convincing the Minister of the Interior to prepare a study on the condition of the Gatineau Hills woodlands. Roderick Percy Sparks was then chairman of the League's Research Committee and it was in this capacity that he lobbied actively for the Minister to look into the matter.

4.6 The Lower Gatineau Woodlands Survey Interim Report, 1935

"In some locations cutting has been so severe that wood supplies have been seriously depleted, and scenic values have been impaired. In view of the possible future inclusion of parts of the Lower Gatineau in a federal district, this devastation has occasioned serious concern. At the request of the Federal District Commission, the Department of the Interior instructed the Forest Services to make a fact-finding survey so that basic data would be available for consideration and analysis in the determination of possible remedial measures," reads the description of goals in the 1935 Lower Gatineau Woodlands Survey Interim Report (p. 1). The area studied was in Quebec, within a 25-mile radius of Ottawa, i.e., the land bordering Mountain Road, Mine Road and Meech Lake Road, for a total of about 15,000 acres. Most of this land was owned by farmers who were hurting from the Great Depression and were thus selling their firewood (pp. 6-7).

Were the effects of this practice irreversible? "One of the most encouraging aspects of the situation in the region under consideration is the fact that cutting is immediately followed by profile regeneration of hardwoods, particularly hard maple," (p. 11) says the report. Its authors, however, deplored the effects on the area's scenic value: "From the standpoint of scenic values, the disfiguration due to clear cutting over extensive areas is temporary in character so far as the observation of the tourist traversing highways is concerned" (p. 11). The 1935 report suggested corrective measures to preserve only those areas that were visible, which finally amounted to the entire area of the study (pp. 13-14). These measures were wide ranging and included education or the "bonus method" for those who practiced selective cutting. More specifically, within the framework of this paper, the report recommended purchasing the land: "This would involve purchase, parcel by parcel, of land necessary for protection of scenic values with the object of ultimately securing all the lands suitable for inclusion in a federal district" (p. 16). The report stated that \$100,000 should be sufficient to buy the threatened land, which did not include the land belonging to the Ottawa Ski Club (p. 19). Finally, the authors of the report contemplated creating a national park (the "National Park Method"), but deemed the project too costly and perilous: "This would involve purchase by arbitration or expropriation of the entire area. [...] Such a scheme would involve a large immediate expenditure, and it may be assumed that following the announcement of such policy there would be a rush of owners to remove as much timber as possible before disposing of the land" (p. 17).

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5. The Project Materializes, 1938-1956

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, yet it remained quite abstract. 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 and oriented the project, but in order to be protected, federal woodlands would first have to be created in the Gatineau Hills. The first lands were taken over in 1938, although the goals were not necessarily set out clearly.

5.1 The Movement to Purchase Land Begins

In the wake of the Lower Gatineau Woodlands Survey Interim Report, pressure was exerted on the government. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister King on June 12, 1936, C.E. Mortureux, president of the Ottawa Ski Club, called for government action in this respect: "Knowing your interest in the trees and hills which should belong to the Capital of Canada, we hope that the excellent survey made during the last administration may enable the present government to arrest the destruction of the Woodlands, at least those of the immediate environs of Ottawa" (National Archives of Canada, RG 34, Vol. 265).

For its part, the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, of which Sparks was now president, proposed a more fleshed out plan. In the League's Memorandum of Activities addressed to Prime Minister King's secretary on December 13, 1937, Sparks reported on his organization's activities, which included a meeting with Finance Minister Dunning, during which Sparks introduced an action plan for the next Parliamentary session. At the same time, he offered to give a conference on Ottawa and its woodlands at the Château Laurier and to encourage *Canadian Geographical Magazine* to take an interest in the subject – all to convince members of Parliament to vote a budget of \$120,000 for the purchase of land.

Mackenzie King was leaning in favour of the project, but because of his public office, he was unable to express overtly his views on the park's development. Were he to

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do so, he might have been accused of conflict of interest given his ownership of Kingsmere. He said as much in veiled terms in his personal diary on December 20, 1937:

I had a short talk with Dunning who [...] spoke to me about the Improvement Commission's desire to go on with preserving some of the Gatineau wood toward Meach Lake for a National Park purposes. He wanted to know what I wished to have done. I told him that the matter had stood over last year because of my feeling that people might think I was seeking to improve property around Kingsmere. I have come to the conclusion this year that I should let possible misunderstanding of my ownership at Kingsmere stand in the way of a much needed preservation of the forest. I told him I wished them to go ahead with the work, though personally it meant less in the way of seclusion for myself on the way to and from Kingsmere to have even the Meach Lake district opened up to tourists. I believe that we owe it to the capital of Canada to save that part of its environment. I think he will agree to the \$100,000 being appropriated for that purpose.

At the session of June 29, 1938, the Mackenzie King government passed a budget of \$100,000 for the purchase of land for specific purposes: "To provide for acquisition of land and surveys in connection with the National Parkway in the Gatineau Valley adjacent to Ottawa." It was surprising that this sum was also allotted to build a road, especially since the project apparently had not been on the agenda since Todd's proposal in 1903. Perhaps the archival documents are incomplete, but no mention to this effect was found in the archives of the Ottawa Ski Club or in those of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League. One exception is the 1937 memorandum mentioned earlier in which Sparks states that he attended a meeting of the Federal District Commission at the request of its chairman, Mr. Bronson, during which there had been no question of including a road plan in the funding request to be sent to Finance Minister Dunning: "As a result of the discussion with the Commission, they decided to write Mr. Dunning suggesting the purchase of the area under consideration without at this time suggesting any plans for access by way of a parkway" (p. 2). The annual report of the Federal District Commission is clearer in this regard: "Parliament, in the fiscal year 1938-1939, appropriated \$100,000 as an initial vote to purchase the more important woodlands from the point of view of forest conservation and to provide funds for surveys to determine the feasibility and cost of constructing a scenic driveway through the park and connecting with the present terminus of the driveway system at the Aylmer road" (Federal District Commission, Annual Report, 1938-1939).

The passing of a budget in 1938 initiated the movement to purchase land. The government renewed the measure in 1939, in reference to which Mackenzie King expressed his pleasure at confirming the acquisitions in Gatineau Park: "After getting through a number of orders in Council, including several which gave me much pleasure relating to the acquisition of land in the Gatineau region, and for other improvements of driveways and parks [...]," he wrote in his personal diary on June 28, 1939. In spite of this, the purchase of land was soon curbed by the outbreak of the Second World War. The federal government nevertheless bought some 16,000 acres whose administration fell to the Federal District Commission. Moreover, Prime Minister King even considered the full cooperation of the Premier of Quebec, Adélard Godbout, to create a provincial park. As he recorded in his personal diary on November 22, 1939: "I found Godbout a very quiet, agreeable man, pleasant man. Thoughtful, of good judgment. He will give the province

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honest administration. I was particularly delighted with his intention to develop a national park in the Gatineau region and urged him strongly to proceed with it rapidly.” The project would proceed no further, likely because Godbout turned power over to Duplessis in 1944. The federal government’s movement to purchase land resumed after the conflict.

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, insisted on the national capital’s unique opportunity to create an exceptional park: “The possibilities of this area present an opportunity for developing one of the finest scenic natural Parks in the world” (p. 2). In addition to recommending that the federal government purchase the land, the League insisted on the need to enhance access for Canadians and visitors of every social class: “Most of the National Parks in Canada are not available to people of low or medium income. Gatineau Park, being close to large centres of population would offer all the natural beauties, spiritual values, and healthful recreation of the outdoors, which generally speaking, are only available to a privileged few, who can afford to visit our National Parks” (p. 3). The report also suggested establishing a hotel, cabins, restaurants, holiday camps, and other such attractions in the park.

In a three-page memorandum tabled in May 1946 on behalf of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, Roderick Percy Sparks reiterated much the same suggestions to the Standing Committee of the Senate of Canada Dealing with Tourist Traffic. Chairman F. E. Bronson of the Federal District Commission expressed to the same committee the Commission’s intention to continue expanding the park. In its annual reports, the Federal District Commission equated the purchase of these lands with nature conservation in the public interest. What, exactly, is the “public interest”? What does the expression mean when applied to property? This issue was increasingly topical as events rapidly unfolded.

5.2 The *Kingsmere Park Act*, 1951

Until then, the acquisition movement had consisted of a series of land parcels that had been either bought or expropriated. The *Kingsmere Park Act* changed all that. For the first time, a block of land in the form of an estate was given to the Government of Canada by an illustrious donor: Mackenzie King, who died in 1950. In as concrete a gesture as can be, former Prime Minister King, in his last will and testament “I hereby bequeath to the Government of Canada as public park in trust for the citizens of Canada, subject to certain reservations hereinafter referred to, my several properties at Kingsmere, in the Province of Quebec, amounting in all to nearly Five Hundred (500) acres, and the houses and other buildings erected thereon” (*Kingsmere Park Act*, 1951). This was a major acquisition for Gatineau Park, not so much in terms of area as in symbolic value, as the most famous resident of the park posthumously transformed his private property into public property by giving it to Canadians and foreign visitors. As important as the event was, it would not have an immediate ripple effect on the status of the park as a whole.

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5.3 The Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park

The Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park was formed in 1947 under the aegis of the Federal District Commission, and Roderick Percy Sparks was appointed committee chairman, an office he would fill until 1954. Note that in 1947, Sparks was freed from his responsibilities as president of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, which ceased its activities. Its members and president certainly deemed that they now had a sufficiently sound position from which to be heard by the federal government, although the Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park served only in an advisory capacity and was required to submit the result of its work directly to the secretary of the Federal District Commission on a strictly confidential basis.

In May 1949, the Advisory Committee submitted a report to the Federal District Commission; the report was consistent with the proposals made by the Federal Woodlands Preservation League in its report of October 1945, which announced the Master Plan that would be created in 1952. The 1949 report highlighted the importance of adopting a development plan for the park, in particular by enhancing park access with the construction of a road. Note that such a project had been on the agenda since Jacques Gréber had proposed its construction; in July 1947, Roderick Percy Sparks wrote: “We have noted that the general plan prepared by Mr. Greber shows a parkway beginning at the Aylmer road on the outskirts of Hull and running north practically through the middle of the strip of land under consideration and continuing to some place in the vicinity of Kingsmere Lake” (National Archives of Canada, RG 34, National Capital Commission Documents, Vol. 272, record 140-6, Letter from Roderick P. Sparks addressed to Frederic Bronson). In 1936 Prime Minister Mackenzie King had invited Jacques Gréber to visit from France in order to create a development plan for the national capital region.

The Advisory Committee revisited the parkway idea in its 1949 report: “Our understanding is that it is now contemplated to build a Federal Parkway leaving the Aylmer Road in the vicinity of Tetreauville, proceeding past Fairy Lake [...]. From this point the parkway should proceed through the wooded area in the vicinity of Pink Lake to Kingsmere” (p. 4). The Committee recommended that the road be considered primarily for its scenic value: “A winding road is more attractive to tourists and visitors than a straight road and its scenic possibilities should be the sole determining factor in regard to the location of the parkway” (p. 4). Further, the 1949 report by the Advisory Committee suggested, in particular, developing a hotel, beaches, a sugarhouse, a nature museum, and other points of interest for visitors.

The work of the Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park culminated in 1952 when it tabled the “Report on Master Plan for the Development of Gatineau Park”. This 13-page document (not including appendices) describes the desired development and activities for the park: parking lots, buildings, trails, nature museum, park reception, etc. Most of these elements were raised in previous reports. The key element of the plan, a scenic parkway some 80 kilometres in length, had also been suggested before: “This parkway is the most

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important single feature in the development of the whole park project. The exact route should be planned to give access to the main points of interest now existing or to be developed. [...] Scenic values must have first consideration” (1952 Master Plan, 4).

In addition to the matter of development, which had been addressed in previous years, the 1952 Master Plan presented as never before the issue – now an apparently thorny one – of private property within the Park’s boundaries: “Whether or not any privately owned property should be permitted within the boundaries of Gatineau Park and if so to what extent, has been a subject of discussion by this Committee almost since it was appointed four years ago” (1952 Master Plan, p. 13). Despite all these discussions, it seems that Advisory Committee members failed to arrive at a consensus. Aptly entitled “Private Ownership of Land in Gatineau Park”, Appendix B of the document set forth the divergent positions of Committee members in this regard. Roderick Percy Sparks leaned openly toward public property: “Ultimately all private property within Gatineau Park should be taken over by the Commission,” he stated, specifying the Meech Lake and Kingsmere sectors. Note that Sparks was one of the main proponents of building a scenic route in what he referred to as a “national park.” The other Committee members – who were residents of the park – were less keen on the idea: Herbert Marshall opposed the elimination of private property in agreement, he wrote, with the 2,000 members of the Ottawa Ski Club (of which he was president until 1952) who feared they would lose control of their recreational area if the federal government became the owner. General E.L.M. Burns, on the other hand, supported Sparks’ position, but recommended that private properties be acquired gradually, without necessarily resorting to expropriations. Finally, John J. Connolly stated he was not opposed to private property but, undoubtedly sensitive to the need to conserve the park’s natural beauty, suggested that the Federal District Commission establish standards for maintaining and improving residences, some of which, he wrote, were in a sorry state. With respect to the key principle of public property, the 1952 Master Plan showed a lack of consensus among the members of the Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park, its authors, and likely among the residents of the Gatineau Hills as well.

5.4 Jacques Gréber’s Report on Gatineau Park, 1952

Given these conditions, it is therefore not surprising that mixed ownership, i.e., the status quo, 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:

It is true and most desirable that the enjoyment of a public park should not be hampered by private encroachments, and that the ultimate conditions of the ideal achievement of the park is the elimination of all private property within its limits, but such condition is undoubtedly more essential in a park of moderate size, where the great number of people who use it reaches a certain point of congestion. In a park of 80 000 to 100 000 acres, the conditions are rather different. The size of the free space is sufficiently abundant to reconcile the maintenance of privately owned grounds, and the needs of free land for public enjoyment (Gréber 1952, 5).

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Gréber supported the gradual purchase of lands by the Federal District Commission, a process that was continuously expanding the park's boundaries. Gréber spoke of the primacy of public interest over individual rights and, in citing Roderick Percy Sparks, he also emphasized the importance of Meech Lake and the need 'to eliminate any obstacles that would prevent the public from enjoying the Park in a perfectly structured manner' (Gréber 1952, 6).

5.5 The Memorandum Prepared for Submission to a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Federal District Commission, 1955

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 Federal District Commission has never had a land policy in respect to this project. I am convinced that the reason for this is that certain influential people, owning property in the area covered by Gatineau Park, have objected to its development in a manner which will make it what it should be – 'the show place of Canada'" (p. 1). In a series of letters that make up the main part of the memorandum, Sparks appealed to the Federal District Commission to exercise the full extent of its authority, particularly in the Kingsmere and Meech Lake sectors, which are the true central core for the entire park development:

My own conception of Gatineau Park has always been that it was much more than a place of recreation for people living in this locality. It should be developed as an outstanding part of a National Capital in which all Canadians would take pride, and in a manner which would impress on visitors from foreign countries that Canada is a great nation, not only because of her great natural resources and industrial achievements but whose people have an appreciation of esthetic and cultural values (p. 22).

The reply to this romantic vision, not far removed from that of Mackenzie King, was biting and crystal clear: "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"(article published in the *Ottawa Journal* on May 17, 1955, and included in the appendix to the memorandum).

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Conclusion

What to conclude further to this study? First and foremost, we wish to specify that the creation of Gatineau Park is the result of a complex process that cannot be reduced to a single factor. In fact, the context of its creation calls for several explanations.

As elsewhere in the world, the beautification of the national capital and its surrounding areas is a powerful engine of development. It can even be said that this phenomenon was especially true in Canada, a young country marked by the quest for an identity and an affirmation that were as yet uncertain. It was therefore hardly surprising that in 1903, the Todd Report put forward a plan to give the Gatineau Hills a status greater than simply the backyard to Parliament Hill: rather, Todd proposed treating the area as a natural gem perfectly characteristic of Canada's wide open spaces, as yet untouched by the ravages of unbridled industrialization, and retaining this objective to guide any future actions. Moreover, the area's fine state of conservation made it ideal for ecological development, although the term "ecological" had not yet acquired its modern meaning. It was less a matter of conserving natural resources than endowing nature with a symbolic value to which authorities were not insensitive, as witnessed by the fact that national parks had been created in Canada since 1885. It was under these conditions that in 1927 the Federal District Commission understood the importance of giving the Gatineau Hills a special status.

Nor is it astonishing that users and residents fought to preserve the area from any development that would alter it. The 1934 creation of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, whose name suggests its mission, aimed precisely to conserve the area's natural state, just as the activities of the Ottawa Ski Club focused on enjoyment of an idyllic, hilly landscape, perfect for alpine skiing.

But the creation of Gatineau Park represents more than just a well thought-out effort to develop the flora and conserve the fauna close to the city. Further, it appears that the Federal Woodlands Preservation League did not extend its ecological concerns beyond the immediate area. Never did the League mention developing the Upper Gatineau region, for example. Other concerns emerged for the League as well as for the Ottawa Ski Club, since both organizations lobbied for the future park to be used for both recreational and residential purposes, a fact that certainly influenced the project's definition. Only the views of Roderick Percy Sparks ran counter to their approach. A "national park," as was understood in Canada at the time, means a clearly delimited territory accompanied by complete expropriation of its residents and strict control of permitted activities. Although some stakeholders lobbied for this project – and some continue to do so – it was not the chosen path, hence the special status as a federal park. The federal government's purchase of land parcels as of 1938 and adoption of the *Kingsmere Park Act*, 1952, after Mackenzie King bequeathed his Kingsmere estate – as concrete an action as can be – were in fact the beginning of a public appropriation movement, but one that did not call

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private property into question. Nor did the construction of a scenic drive – for which Roderick Percy Sparks lobbied very actively – change the Park’s status by enhancing access for visitors and residents.

Gatineau Park thus appears to be the product of a series of circumstances, from the idea introduced by Todd and taken up by Holt and Gréber to the Government of Canada’s concrete actions with the cooperation of, and sometimes under pressure from, the “greater” bourgeoisie. But it was not a “creation” in the strictest sense, for which we can provide the date of founding and the name of the founder, whether an individual or a group: Gatineau Park is an effort to preserve nature on the one hand, but also a compromise on shared public–private use. Canadian history records other examples of this type of compromise, whether in broadcasting, railway transport, or natural resource development.

When we began, we hoped to find definitive answers about the process that led to the creation of Gatineau Park, but several chapters of this history remain elusive. That said, a review of the documentation gathered for the study allows us to state that the creation and early development of Gatineau Park is the result of a series of actions by various players, interest groups and individuals, whose efforts have made it possible to preserve the natural state of the Gatineau Hills and to create a Canadian emblematic landscape (Domon et al. 2000, 17-18) close to the national capital. These efforts have resulted in the coexistence of the public (the park) and the private (residences), although many argued, and continue to lobby, for the creation of a national park, that is, a space free of any and all private property.

Our research shows the danger of reducing this creation to a single linear phenomenon of cause and effect. Any human construction is based on a series of more or less admitted motives and interests that can be difficult to grasp as no irrefutable evidence remains. In fact, history is built on the traces of the past and, in this regard, the piecing together of Gatineau Park’s creation calls for further research in vast document collections like the correspondence of the key actors and the administrative documents produced by the federal government, to name but a few. By virtue of its unique status and its important role in defining the national capital, Gatineau Park deserves that as much attention be paid to its origins as to its future condition.

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