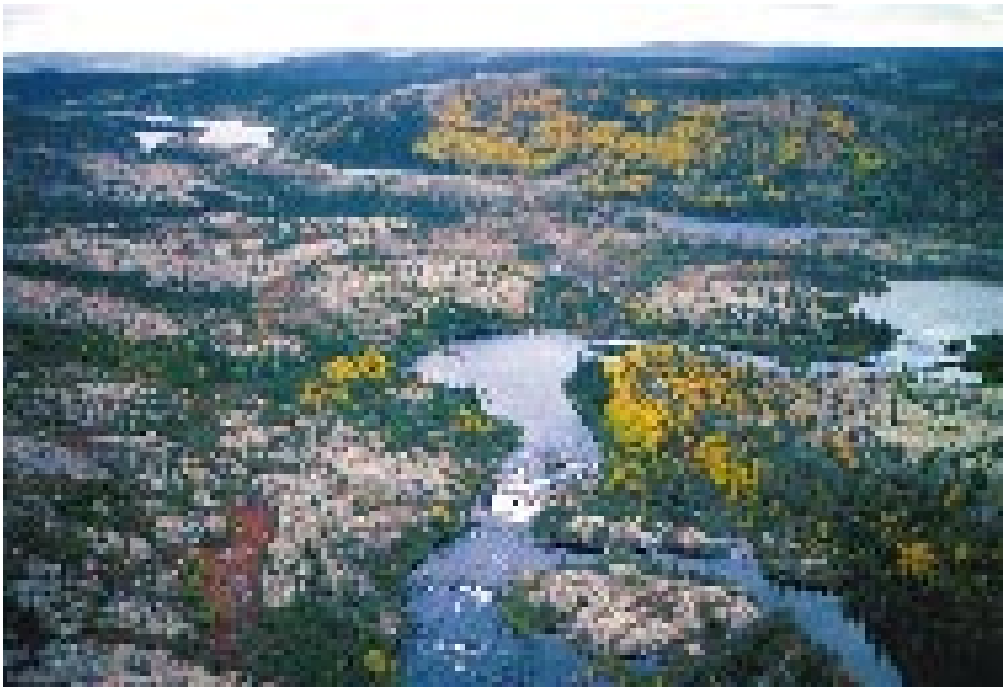
SECTION E: PROTECTED AREAS AND PARTNERSHIPS



The White Bear River in the Mealy Mountains of Labrador, an area being considered for national park status
I. MacNeil/Parks Canada

CHAPTER 8: NATIONAL PARKS IN THE CANADIAN PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

National parks today are one part of a complex network of federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and First Nations protected areas. Private land conservation agreements play an increasing role in southern Canada, and voluntary stewardship is now also an important part of the protected areas mosaic. A well-planned system of protected areas contributes to the maintenance of ecological integrity across the landscape. In Canada, a comprehensive national protected areas strategy that folds in the myriad layers of conservation goals does not yet exist. A prerequisite to such a strategy would entail a nationwide gap analysis, followed by a co-operative implementation plan.

In addition, although Parks Canada strives to provide the best possible representation of each region's biophysical characteristics, the final choice of park candidate areas has often been dictated by factors not related to ecology. Co-operation between the federal, provincial and territorial governments is crucial in establishing national parks and other protected areas. Parks created in conjunction with First Nations' land claims agreements offer models and opportunities for co-operative establishment and management.

Divergent Approaches to Protection

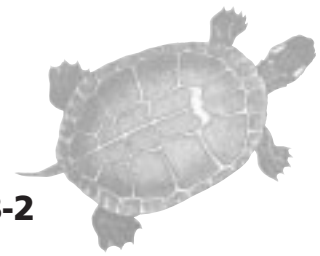
When national and provincial parks, wildlife management areas, heritage rivers, conservation easements, wilderness areas, marine conservation areas, special management areas established under First Nations' land claims, and a host of other conservation tools are meshed together, they make up Canada's national protected areas system. But is it really a "system"? Does it serve the nation's needs for conservation of biodiversity, wilderness, ecological integrity or sacred lands and waters?

Early national and provincial parks were set aside as opportunities arose. These lands were preserved for their scenic beauty, wildlife or other wonders of nature. Growth in the number of parks for the first half of the century was not part of a system plan, and certainly not explicitly linked to protecting biodiversity. Parks Canada devised a systematic approach based on designating at least one national park in each of 39 terrestrial natural regions. Similar approaches were adopted in some of the provinces, but these methods predated many of the modern principles of conservation biology.

Scientists have not resolved how fine the scale of representation should be. We are not challenging the way Parks Canada chooses to represent natural regions with national parks but note that Parks Canada must consider potential choices for national parks in the context of other approaches to ecosystem representation.

In recognition of the important role that Canadian rivers play in conservation and cultural heritage, an attempt was made in the 1970s to address a short-fall in the national park system — namely, preserving heritage rivers, similar to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in the United States. Complex federal-provincial negotiations involving jurisdiction over inland waters and other resources resulted in the Canadian Heritage Rivers program, a co-operative effort to manage rivers for their wilderness, recreation or cultural values. Although the "Heritage River" designation offers no legal protection (unless the river flows through an otherwise protected area) the designation remains a significant tool for conservation.

In the 1980s, the idea of using ecoregions as the building blocks for a representative terrestrial protected areas system gained acceptance. Most scientists now define the Canadian landscape according to large scale ecozones, such as the Prairie Ecozone or the Boreal Shield Ecozone, which are in turn divided into smaller ecoregions. Each ecoregion has characteristic landforms, climate, vegetation and wildlife habitat. The provinces and territories have adopted the ecoregions approach to replace the older "natural regions" classification, which is based on broad physiographic regions. The goal of establishing representative protected areas was based on the notion that an example of each ecoregion could capture the typical range of variability in landforms, vegetation and wildlife, and therefore help conserve the native biodiversity of the region.



In 1989, the national Endangered Spaces Campaign, launched by the World Wildlife Fund and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, had the objective of completing a protected areas system representative of all of the country's 486 ecoregions (as opposed to Parks Canada's use of the much broader "terrestrial natural regions"). The federal, provincial and territorial governments signed on to the campaign principles, leading to the first attempt towards at least one component of a national protected areas strategy.

The Endangered Spaces goal became public policy in 1992, when the "Statement of Commitment to Complete Canada's Network of Protected Areas" was signed by the Tri-Council of Environment, Parks and Wildlife Ministers (federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for environment, wildlife and parks). The Statement committed governments to completing the terrestrial protected areas network by 2000. This has led to doubling the amount of protected land in Canada in the last decade — a remarkable achievement. Yet, Canada still ranks only 36th in the world in terms of area legally protected from industrial development, behind countries such as New Zealand, Venezuela, Guatemala and Chile. The target for completing the protected areas network by 2000 has not been met.

At the scale of ecoregion analysis used by the World Wildlife Fund and many of the provinces, about 27 per cent of Canada's terrestrial ecoregions have representative protected areas. An additional 30 per cent of the ecoregions have some level of protection, for example in a few small parks, but these do not meet basic criteria for representation of habitats. By early 2000, 43 per cent of the ecoregions had no protected habitats (World Wildlife Fund Canada, November, 1999).

The Endangered Spaces Campaign is built on the premise that all jurisdictions can and should contribute to completing a Canadian system of protected areas. The campaign objectives, reflected by provincial and territorial government policies across the country, also acknowledge that areas representing natural regions or ecoregions are only part of the solution.

The modern conservation paradigm assigns several key attributes to a terrestrial protected areas system, including:

- representative core areas in each ecoregion, designed to play a key role in maintaining ecological integrity;
- protection of wildlife habitat and species populations;
- protection of rare and endangered species;
- maintenance of ecological connectivity between protected areas;
- protection of special natural and cultural features and landscapes;
- management of human uses outside of protected areas in such a way as to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem functions, as well as cultural landscapes and special places.

A truly national protected areas strategy would encompass all of these conservation goals, with Parks Canada fulfilling its objectives within a mosaic of other protected areas. Likewise, national marine conservation areas would be part of a series of protected areas and management regimes in Canada's marine regions.

Maintaining populations of wide-ranging species such as caribou requires innovative approaches to ecosystem protection.
W. Lynch/Parks Canada

Within the Endangered Spaces context, protected areas are assessed according to their contribution toward representing the 486 ecoregions, not the 39 natural regions. Canada's 39 natural regions are generally far too large and diverse for a single national park to adequately represent the entire region. Thus, although national parks contribute to the overall goal of representing ecoregions, selection of candidate areas for national parks is not focused on this goal and ecoregions still needing representation remain unprotected.

Most jurisdictions in the country, including Parks Canada, use a variety of methods to identify gaps in the system. In the case of Parks Canada's approach, it is simply a question of meeting the goal of one national park in each natural region. The World Wildlife Fund has completed a national gap analysis of representative protected areas, but this analysis is based on enduring features (landforms). It does not encompass more dynamic features such as movement of barren ground caribou or wide-ranging carnivores. Some jurisdictions, such as Yukon, have a protected areas strategy that assesses gaps by ecoregion representation, while allowing for a complementary system of wildlife habitat protection areas to fill out the system. In spite of these approaches across the country, there are many unaccounted gaps in the protected areas system. For example, what method assesses protection of the boreal forest woodland caribou herds that migrate across vast areas of protected and unprotected lands?

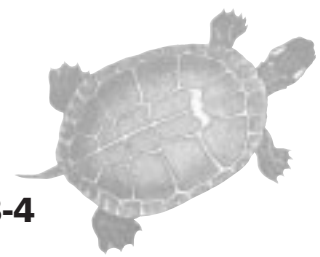
A comprehensive national protected areas system plan that folds in the myriad layers of conservation goals does not yet exist. A prerequisite to such a strategy would entail a nation-wide gap analysis, followed by a co-operative implementation plan.

The National Parks System

The National Parks System Plan provides for a five-step process for establishing new parks:

- identify representative natural areas within the natural region;
- select potential park areas, known as "Natural Areas of Canadian Significance;"
- assess park feasibility;
- negotiate a new park agreement;
- establish a new national park in legislation.

Parks Canada has proposed a feasibility study for the Wolf Lake area in Yukon
J. Peepre



Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site
H. Quan

In 1991, the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council (CEAC) characterized the problem in this way: *"Establishing protected areas in isolation from regional planning and decision-making processes is not an effective way to ensure the maintenance of their long-term ecological integrity. Past experience has shown that surrounding communities, landowners and commercial developers systematically encircle and encroach on protected areas. The result is often the loss of protected area values and demands for inappropriate uses of these resources."*

A Protected Areas Vision for Canada, CEAC (1991)

Since the 1980s, many new national parks have been established through land claims agreements with First Nations. These agreements provide a good opportunity to integrate park management objectives with those of neighbouring jurisdictions within a traditional territory. For example, where land claims agreements have been settled, regionally- and locally-mandated boards and councils have a direct say in land and water management both inside and outside park boundaries.

Many of the current challenges in maintaining the ecological integrity of southern national parks are the result of inappropriate boundaries or park agreements established many decades ago. Today, although science has led to a better understanding of factors affecting ecological integrity, optimum national park boundaries continue to be compromised during the park establishment phase, due to competing economic and land use interests. National park boundaries and management arrangements with neighbouring jurisdictions can have a profound effect on the future ecological integrity of the park and the "greater park ecosystem" (ecosystems that extend beyond park boundaries). Parks Canada strives to establish boundaries that will help sustain ecological integrity.

Establishing New National Parks

The Canadian federal government is committed to extending the national park system as part of a broader package of environmental initiatives. Partnerships and community development are key parts of these commitments. In combination with the renewed focus on ecological integrity, this presents Parks Canada with a renewed opportunity to establish new parks within a greater ecosystem context.

New national parks must be established with the co-operation of the provinces and territories. Provinces manage the land and natural resources before the formal transfer to federal jurisdiction, and retain full management authority over land and resources around national parks, once the parks are established. First Nations governments also have a key role to play in negotiating new parks within traditional territories.

The Panel found that in spite of the best efforts of park planners, conservation science often does not play a key role in final negotiations for new park boundaries or in the terms of agreement with neighbouring jurisdictions. In many cases, the ability of Parks Canada to maintain the future ecological integrity of new national parks is uncertain due to compromises in park size, boundary configuration and adjacent land uses.

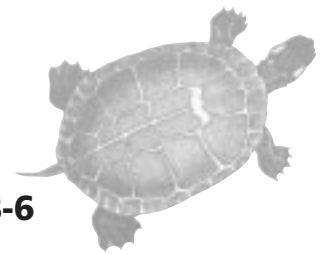
The Palmer River area of Labrador's Torngat Mountains, another area being considered for national park status
I. MacNeil/Parks Canada

Auditor General's Report

In 1996, the Auditor General of Canada noted that failure to secure provincial and local support for new national parks leaves candidate sites open to other land use decisions that could prevent the creation of a new national park. The report states:

By simply waiting for other governments and local communities to adopt favourable positions, Parks Canada is reducing the likelihood of achieving representation in several natural regions and maintaining ecological integrity.

A number of candidate sites for national parks remain open to industrial development activities. We are concerned that these activities could harm the ecosystems and wildlife habitat that national parks are trying to protect, and impair their value as wilderness reserves.



The difficulty in establishing new park boundaries and regional co-operative management arrangements that reflect ecological integrity goals stems from a variety of influences on the five-step park establishment process:

- the ecological integrity of potential new parks in the remaining un-represented terrestrial natural regions in southern Canada is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve due to the degree of landscape fragmentation, urbanization and resource development;
- Parks Canada lacks the financial resources to carry out adequate biophysical inventories and ecosystem analyses of new park candidates. This means that Parks Canada begins negotiations for new parks without the conservation science needed to identify and advocate optimum park boundaries. In contrast, in the northern territories, Parks Canada spends ten times as much money on identifying potential mineral resources under the Mineral and Energy Resources Assessment (MERA) process as on basic wildlife, vegetation or ecosystem work. Biophysical inventories rely heavily on secondary resources, thereby constraining Parks Canada to a weak starting point on ecological integrity goals for park establishment agreements.

The Panel found that problems outlined by the Auditor General in 1996 still exist to a significant extent today and may result in part from Parks Canada's approach to establishing new parks. By formally proposing new park study area boundaries too early in the process, and in the absence of local understanding of ecological integrity protection goals, Parks Canada may be encouraging other jurisdictions to adopt a defensive position at the outset. Parks Canada may be curtailing the ability to achieve a common vision with the relevant province or territory for the greater park ecosystem within which a new national park could be embedded. Interim protection measures meant to ensure that park conservation values will not be lost during negotiations (for example, withdrawal of mining claims) are often slow, cumbersome and ineffective.

Candidate national park sites today are still vulnerable to degradation of ecological integrity during the park establishment process. New park boundaries and regional co-operation arrangements (where they exist) are modified to accommodate competing local and regional economic interests, compromising the future ability of park managers to maintain ecological integrity. While trade-offs are inevitable in negotiations, Parks Canada is hampered by lacking the defensible conservation science and economic analysis needed to justify the best park boundaries. The focus of park establishment negotiations becomes the art of the possible, where early compromises may become entrenched positions at the expense of future ecological integrity.

A Proposed National Park vs. A Proposed Road

Etagaulet River Falls, Mealy Mountains
I. MacNeil/Parks Canada

The Mealy Mountain area of Labrador (the area called Akamiuapishku by the Innu) has been proposed since the 1970s as a candidate national park, representing the East Coast Boreal Region. The area is part of an Innu land claim and the Innu Nation supports the establishment of this park. Although the provincial government pledged to take action to establish the park in its 1992 Speech from the Throne, the park feasibility study has still not been initiated.

Meanwhile, Phase III of the Trans-Labrador Highway is slated to traverse the proposed Mealy Mountains national park, funded largely from federal sources. The Innu Nation is strongly opposed to the routing of the road through the proposed park, as are several environmental non-governmental organizations. If the road is built through the proposed park area prior to completion of the park feasibility study, it is obvious that resource users will gain access and legal rights to the lands. These rights may also affect the land claim negotiations with the Innu Nation.

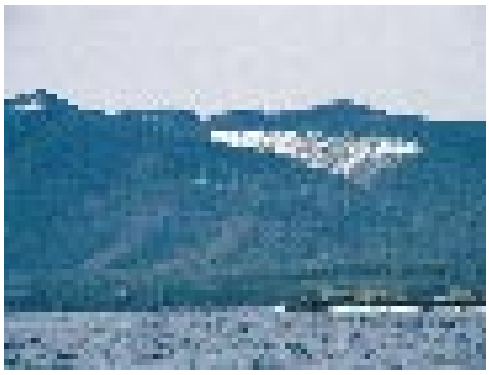
Conservation scientists are generally not present at the new park establishment negotiating table to provide evidence in support of park boundaries that would be based on the maintenance of ecological integrity.

The Panel observed that national parks established through land claims agreements, such as the creation of Ivvavik through the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, are managed in a way that takes into account the greater park ecosystem along with Aboriginal interests in the traditional territory. In the case of Ivvavik, local hunter and trapper committees, the Yukon's north-slope Wildlife Management Advisory Committee, and other mandated boards and councils all play a role in regional integration of the park.

The Parks Canada goal of establishing a national park in each terrestrial natural region is laudable, but insufficient to meet the complex conservation challenges facing the country. Once established, national parks must continue to function and survive as part of a mosaic of connected protected areas and conservation lands. We contend that establishing a comprehensive and linked network of protected areas with the involvement of all jurisdictions, of which national parks are a key part, is the best way to conserve ecological integrity within greater ecosystems and the Canadian landscape as a whole. In addition, new national parks should not be established without the full involvement and consent of First Nations.

We are concerned about the current practice of diverting operating funds for new parks from Parks Canada's budget for existing parks, thereby limiting Parks Canada's ability to protect the ecological integrity of both existing and new parks. We elaborate upon this concern in Chapter 13 of this report.

Park Establishment Agreements Affect Long-term Ecological Integrity: Pacific Rim



Logging near Pacific Rim National Park Reserve
P. Wilkinson

Pacific Rim National Park Reserve in British Columbia is a relatively small linear park bounded by water on one side and intensive industrial forestry along its forested perimeter. In 1970, Pacific Rim was established primarily for recreation rather than for ecosystem representation values or ecological integrity. At the time, the provincial government was not prepared to remove more lands from timber production, resulting in the narrow coastal strip that is now the park. Park boundaries that were not based on the principles of conservation biology, coupled with a lack of consideration given to regional land use integration in the original park establishment agreement, led to a park that is now vulnerable to many external stresses. The park's small size also makes it more susceptible to internal human disturbance from increased tourism and recreational use.

Pacific Rim's ecological integrity was ranked as among the most stressed of all national parks, in the State of the Parks 1997 Report. The park itself contributes to ecological integrity in a greater ecosystem that has declined although more recent trends are not altogether negative. New protected areas have been designated nearby and the Clayoquot region has received status as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Biosphere Reserve.

In spite of these initiatives, 37 new proposed logging cut-blocks along the park boundaries continue to raise strong public concerns — five of these either directly abut park boundaries or are within 75 metres of the boundary. The park's small size makes internally-oriented management strategies ineffective, and the park is now working on a monitoring strategy as a first step to integrate park management within the greater park ecosystem

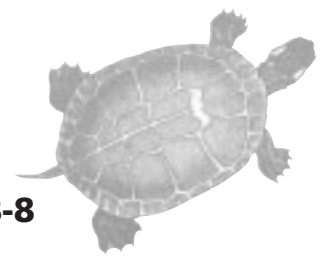
Pacific Rim illustrates the importance of ensuring that ecological integrity and regional integration are paramount concerns at the time of park boundary negotiations and establishment agreements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8-1. We recommend that the Minister seek provincial and territorial co-operation on finishing, by the end of 2003, the implementation of the Statement of Commitment to Complete Canada's Networks of Protected Areas, endorsed by the Tri-Council of Environment, Parks and Wildlife Ministers in 1992; work towards a comprehensive national protected areas system plan based on co-operation between the Government of Canada, provinces and territories.

The Panel has not identified costs associated with this multi-jurisdictional recommendation.

8-2. We recommend that Parks Canada, in co-operation with other jurisdictions, complete a nation-wide protected areas gap analysis that will guide completion of the national protected areas system, of which national parks represent an essential component. Base the gap analysis on the principles of conservation biology and the maintenance of ecological integrity (Recommendation 3-4).



8-3. We recommend that the Minister expand the national park system to include ecological representation of all 39 natural regions as defined by Parks Canada. We recommend that the Minister ensure sufficient funds are allocated for new park establishment, and that new parks have sufficient funds for planning, operations and ecosystem management, without reducing funds of existing parks (Recommendation 13-4).

8-4. We recommend that Parks Canada negotiate park establishment agreements that give the highest priority to maintaining ecological integrity by seeking boundaries that meet ecological integrity objectives. Ensure regional co-operation measures are in place to support ecological integrity objectives.

8-5. We recommend that Parks Canada improve local support and future regional co-operation for candidate park sites by:

- promoting a common vision, with the province or territory, for land use in the prospective greater park ecosystem, within which a new national park will play a key role;
- facilitating agreement on a common greater ecosystem vision and park ecological integrity goals among its negotiating partners and the public;
- showing how complementary conservation objectives for surrounding lands can assist other jurisdictions in meeting their mandates;
- demonstrating how maintaining ecological integrity and appropriate visitor use will support diversified local economies;
- directing more human and financial resources toward First Nations and local communities to help them assess the impacts and secure the benefits of new national parks.

8-6. We recommend that Parks Canada increase the resources available to conduct biophysical inventories and greater park ecosystem analyses, to ensure that proposed park boundaries are based on the best available conservation science (Recommendation 6-2 and 13-2).

8-7. We recommend that Parks Canada appoint conservation scientists to new park establishment negotiating teams in order to help provide convincing arguments for boundaries based on ecological integrity criteria. Ensure that park planners and conservation scientists who participated in the park establishment phases are available to take part in new park management planning efforts (Recommendation 3-3).

8-8. We recommend that Parks Canada reach agreement with the provinces, territories and other federal departments to use their legislative powers to withdraw candidate national park sites from development as early as possible to preserve their ecological integrity during the planning process. For example, with respect to the boreal forest, urge the responsible governments not to issue timber or other development permits in candidate park sites on federal lands (as recommended by the Senate Subcommittee on the Boreal Forest in Competing Realities: The Boreal Forest at Risk, 1999).