Canadian National Parks Essay, Research Paper

In the 1960s, Canada embarked on a vast social experiment to find a way to coexistence and tolerance. Long before the first European settlers arrived, Canada was a multicultural society. The country was home to hundreds of different tribes of Aboriginal people speaking many different languages. Some tribes got along with each other well, some were at each other’s throats. Whatever the state of their relationships, Canada was certainly multicultural and multilingual. However, many centuries passed before it was felt necessary to enshrine multiculturalism in the law. At the start of the 20th century, Canada was overwhelmingly peopled by members of its three founding cultures — Native (First Nations), French, and English. As waves of immigrants from other cultures began to arrive, Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier outlined the idea of multiculturalism that was to come much later. He described visiting a magnificent cathedral in England that was “made of marble, oak, and granite. It is the image of the nation I would like to see Canada become. For here, I want the marble to remain the marble; the granite to remain the granite; the oak to remain the oak; and out of all these elements I would build a nation great among the nations of the world.” Fifty years later, another Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, used different imagery to express a similar idea. He said that Canada is not “a melting pot in which the individuality of each element is destroyed in order to produce a new and totally different element. It is rather a garden into which have been transplanted the hardiest and brightest flowers from many lands, each retaining in its new environment the best of the qualities for which it was loved and prized in its native land.” During the time that Lester Pearson was Prime Minister (1963-68), Canadians were as preoccupied as ever with a debate over national unity. In 1963, Mr. Pearson set up the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism to examine ways in which to counter the growing separatist movement in Quebec.Six years later, the Bi and Bi Commission, as it was popularly known, brought down its report. Its major recommendation was that French and English be declared the official languages of the Parliament of Canada, of the federal courts, and of the federal government. The proclamation of an Official Languages Act (1969) would be a rock-solid guarantee of what was already general, but unofficial, practice. While it concentrated on relations between the English and French, the Bi and Bi Commission also looked at where other ethnic groups would fit into the Canadian mosaic. These groups were now growing rapidly in number and joining the Ukrainians, Italians, Poles, and others already here. Was a bicultural society going to make these Canadians feel like second-class citizens? It was a tricky point and one that then Secretary of State Gerard Pelletier tackled in 1970: “We are talking about the development in Canada of a multicultural society. The government refuses to sacrifice, in the name of unity through conformity, any of the cultures that are represented in our population.” In 1971, the concept of multiculturalism was proclaimed as government policy by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and subsequently by a number of provinces. All his life, Mr. Trudeau had been a foe of nationalism; he saw it as a force that created division, not unity. In the minds of nationalists an us-and-them mentality develops; “Us” equals good, “Them” equals bad. Multiculturalism was to be a weapon to overcome the aggression and division of nationalism. Ierre Trudeau outlined this idealistic view in a speech to a Ukrainian group in 1972: “Our image is of a land of people with many differences — but many contributions, many variations in view — but a single desire to live in harmony…On a planet of finite size, the most desirable of all characteristics is the ability and desire to cohabit with persons of differing backgrounds, and to benefit from the opportunities which this offers.” In 1982, multiculturalism was guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Mr. Trudeau said multiculturalism meant, “…encouraging cultural diversification within a bilingual framework.”

Canada’s first conservationists were its native peoples, who for centuries lived off the land with little apparent destruction. Such practices as clearing areas or driving game by lighting fires would have affected forests, but there is little evidence that these activities caused any long- term damage. Furthermore, Indian bands and Inuit family groups often moved their settlements to new areas for better hunting, allowing the regions left to grow back and repopulate with wildlife. Hence there was no need for concern about conservation problems before the first permanent European settlement in the 17th century. In Canada since that time, attitudes towards the conservation of nature and natural resources have developed in 5 overlapping but distinct periods. The first period, from about the 1670s to 1860, has been called the “Tree Reserves Period.” In this period the French and English tried to ensure a steady supply of ship timber. During the second, the “Land Reserves Period” (1860-1885), land was reserved by church and state for schools, universities and railways. A sale of land and land taxes were the only sources of wealth for governments. The first Canadian naturalist club was established in Ontario in this period (1863). A wide variety of parks, forest reserves, bird sanctuaries and wildlife preserves were created during the third period, the “Resource Reserve Period” (1880- present). Emphasis was placed on using wildlife wisely, rather than merely preserving or protecting it. During the fourth period, called the “Recreation Reserves Period” (1885-present), recreation facilities such as parks, historic sites and fish and game reserves were established, especially near urban areas. The “Nature and Wilderness Reserves Period” dates from about 1960, when Canadians began to see value in setting aside areas of wild country. Emphasis is less on resource use or recreation than on retaining areas where only the forces of nature are allowed to shape the environment.

The first Canadians to study the natural environment were probably the amateurs (doctors, diviners, etc) who began to catalogue the natural history of the country (eg, flora, fauna, rocks, fossils) and laid the bases of the sciences of biology, botany, geology, paleontology, entomology and zoology in Canada. The view they took of nature and the environment was shaped initially by European art and scientific traditions. European experiences of forestry and game preserves also had an effect. Writers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth and Lord Byron influenced Canadians, as did the writings of Grey Owl (A.S.BELANEY), an Englishman who settled in Canada.American thinkers had an even greater effect. These included the eminent ornithologist John James Audubon, who visited Canada in the 1830s, and the writers James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The American conservationists John Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club (1892), and Gifford Pinchot, who with President Theodore Roosevelt launched the American conservation movement in the early 1900s, were also significant. Americans were generally ahead of Canadians in concern for the conservation of resources. This concern probably resulted from the more extensive settlement in the US, which demonstrated the harm that civilization could do. In Canada a pioneer mentality of “unlimited” forests, lakes and wildlife persisted longer. The development of national parks clearly illustrates the difference between early American and Canadian conservation action. The first North American national park was Yellowstone, created in the US in 1872. >From the beginning, such parks were intended to protect scenic attractions.

In Canada the first national parks were established in the Rocky Mountains (BANFF in 1885, YOHO and GLACIER in 1886), but their purpose was economic: to produce revenue from forest reserves and tourist travel. Parks were not conceived as wilderness preserves at this stage. In 1916 the US passed the National Park Service Act, which stated that parks were to be “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” This wording was not used in the Canadian National Parks Act until 1930. In this respect, 1930 is a kind of turning point in Canadian conservation thought. In the area of wildlife conservation, however, Canada did react to some emergency situations quite early. The first bird sanctuary was created in Saskatchewan in 1887. By 1889 the plains bison had been reduced from about 60 million to less than 2000 animals. In 1907 and 1909 the government purchased about 700 bison and placed them in national parks. Between 1910 and 1920, 3 areas were set aside as reserves for antelope in Alberta and Saskatchewan; these were later abolished as unnecessary. In 1911 Canada formally established a parks branch; James Harkin was appointed Dominion parks commissioner. Harkin, probably the first leading Canadian to argue for protection of wilderness for its own sake was deeply influenced by the American conservation movement. Canada’s first significant international conservation effort was a treaty with the US (1916) for the protection of migratory birds. Until 1945 conservation in Canada focused on establishing national and provincial parks in remote areas. After WWII emphasis was on park expansion for recreational purposes. National and provincial park systems grew slowly during this period. The 1960s marked a different era for conservation and the environmental movement in Canada. Conservationist attitudes were no longer restricted primarily to naturalist groups. A growing number of Canadians became concerned not only about using resources wisely but also about the effects of human activity on the environment.

During the 1960s, concern about pollution became a major public issue. Specialized groups such as the Society for the Promotion of Environmental Conservation (in the West), Pollution Probe (in the East) and the Ecology Action Centre (in the Maritimes) were born. These groups were led by scientists such as Donald Chant, who was deeply concerned about issues such as air pollution and water pollution, hazardous wastes and the careless use of pesticides (documented by American conservationist Rachel Carson in her 1962 book “Silent Spring”).

Preservation of the natural environment had come to be seen as more than a question of recreation or preserving scenic beauty, but as being important to human survival. The nature conservation moveme nt received a boost from the environmental interest of the 1960s. The National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada was established in 1963, the Sierra Club in Canada in 1970 and, in 1971, the Canadian Audubon Society, and several of its affiliates established the Canadian Nature Federation, a national assembly of naturalist groups from across the country. Scientific biological associations and groups traditionally less active in conservation issues, such as game and fish associations, also increased their emphasis on environmental issues. During this period, the concern for nature conservation centered on preserving wilderness and protecting unique areas or ecosystems as ecological reserves. Each province experienced a burst in the growth of local groups focusing on local conservation and environmental issues, and provincial naturalist and conservation federations became increasingly active and vocal. In a single decade, federal and provincial governments established ministries or departments of the environment, environmental protection Acts and environmental assessment legislation.Acts to protect endangered species, such as that passed in Ontario in 1971, were unique in the world because they sought to protect rare or endangered species of all plants and animals (including insects). In 1978 the intergovernmental Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada began to define a national list of species at risk. In 1972 the United Nations convened in Stockholm an international Conference on the Human Environment. Canada was well represented and, as a result, Canadian conservation concern became increasingly international through participation in agencies such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Environmental concerns are now seen in a global context as awareness grows that all people depend on clean air and water and healthy ecosystems.

National park:

An area set-aside by a national government for the preservation of the natural environment. A national park may be set aside for purposes of public recreation and enjoyment or because of its historical or scientific interest. Most of the landscapes and their accompanying plants and animals in a national park are kept in there natural state. The national parks in the United States and Canada tend to focus on the protection of both land and wildlife, those in Great Britain focus mainly on the land, and those in Africa primarily exist to conserve animals. Several other countries have large areas reserved in national parks, notably Brazil, Japan, India, and Australia.

The concept of a park or nature reserve under state ownership originated in the United States in 1870, and legislation creating the world’s first such park, Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, was signed by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1872. Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant national parks were established in 1890, and during this time the idea of protecting outstanding scenic natural areas for their own sake grew into a concept of American national policy. The national park system was expanded during the following decades, and the National Park Service was created in 1916 to administer the parks. By the late 20th century the American (U.S.) national park system administered more than 350 separate areas comprising about 80 million acres (32 million hectares). In addition to national parks, the system included national preserves, national monuments, national recreation areas, national seashores, lakeshores, historic parks and sites, parkways, scenic trails, and battlefields.

Partly inspired by the American example, movements in favour of national parks sprang up in many other countries, beginning with Canada, which established its first three national parks in the mid-1880s. Nature reserves had been maintained in Europe for centuries to protect hunting grounds for use by kings and nobles, but the establishment of modern national parks and nature reserves gained momentum only after World War I or, in some cases, after World War II. Great Britain established the administrative machinery for both national parks and nature reserves in 1949. It also began establishing national parks in India and its African colonies after the war, and this practice was continued and expanded by those new nations after reaching independence. Japan and Mexico established their first national parks in the 1930s, but interest in parks generally came later in Asia and Latin America than it did in the Anglo-American countries and Europe. The national parks of various countries differ greatly in their effectiveness in protecting their resources. Some governments provide their park systems with large enough budgets to make possible strict enforcement of regulations; others do not. Most national parks have a built-in paradox: although they often depend for their existence on tourism stimulated by public interest in nature, the preservation of their wildlife depends on its not being molested. This paradox is usually resolved by allowing visitors to travel only within limited areas in the park. This lets them see the park while it minimizes their contact with the wildlife. Canadians live in a land rich in natural beauty. The diversity of landscapes and seascapes and of the flora and fauna inhabiting them is part of a natural heritage preserved in national parks.

Protected and Preserved:

The goal of Canada’s national parks is to represent and protect examples of the diversity of Canada’s natural heritage and to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this natural heritage so as to leave it unimpaired for future generations. National parks are an essential element in strategies for conserving the nation’s biodiversity. They are a source of pride for Canadians and symbols of the country for international visitors. A wealth of educational opportunities flow from the national parks, ranging from hands-on visitor experiences to research programs. In addition, national parks have important economic benefits to local communities and the tourism industry in Canada.

Beginnings:

The Canadian national parks system began in November 1885, when an area of approximately 26 km? on the northern slope of Sulphur Mountain was set aside for public use. This area, the Cave and Basin Hot Springs, was the beginning of what is now Banff National Park. The hot springs were discovered in 1883 by 2 railway employees working on the construction of the first transcontinental railway through the Rocky Mountains. Knowledge of the discovery (and its potential asa tourist attraction) spread rapidly among the railway workers, and several conflicting claims were addressed to the minister of the interior. The government chose not to grant private title to the lands; instead, it was decided that they should be preserved for the benefit of all Canadians. In 1886 a Dominion land surveyor was hired to undertake a legal survey of the Hot Springs Reserve. This work resulted in a report by the commissioner of Dominion Lands that “a large tract of country lying outside of the original reservation presented features of the greatest beauty, and was admirably adapted for a national park.” A bill to establish the first national park in Canada was introduced in the House of Commons in April 1887. The Rocky Mountains Park Act, establishing what is now Banff National Park, was passed on 23 June 1887. The world’s first distinct bureau of national parks, the Dominion Parks Branch, was formed in Canada in 1911 under the authority of the Department of the Interior. J.B. Harkin, the first commissioner, served from 1911-36. During his tenure, 9 national parks were established: Elk Island (1913), Mount Revelstoke (1914), Point Peleee (1918), Kootenay (1920), Wood Bufalo (1922), Prince Albert (1927), Riding Mountain (1929), Georgian Bay Islands (1929) and Cape Breten Highlands (1936). Harkin, who emphasized protection of the natural resources of the new parks directed the passage of the National Parks Act in 1930. Section 4 of the Act sets the guiding philosophy for the management of national parks, which “are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada, for their benefit, education and enjoyment;” This Act still provides the legislative protection for national parklands. Further establishment of national parks was sporadic until, in 1961, John I. Nicol became director of the National and Historic Parks Branch. Under his administration, 10 new national parks were created. Nicol also oversaw the preparation of the first Parks Policy in 1964. The present Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies (1994) continues to show his influence, as it emphasizes the preservation of natural ecological processes above all else. National parks are one component of a federal system of heritage sites, which includes national historic parks, national historic sites, heritage canals, heritage rivers and national Marine Conservation Areas.

To Protect for All Time:

The first national parks policy, produced in 1964, drew attention to the importance of protecting natural resources in the parks. The current Guiding Principles and Operational Policies emphasize that, in order to protect resources, natural ecological processes must be allowed to function in parks with minimal interference from people. The policy also provides a framework for the long-range planning of new parks and for the provision of quality visitor services and appropriate recreational opportunities. In 1986, a separate policy for national marine parks was approved. National parks are protected by federal legislation from all forms of extractive resource use such as mining, forestry, agriculture and sport hunting. Only activities consistent with the protection of park resources are allowed. Efforts are directed at maintaining the physical environment in as natural a state as possible. If this can be done by allowing natural ecological processes to function with minimal interference, the perpetuation of naturally evolving land and water environments and their associated species is assured. Under certain conditions, however, active manipulation of natural ecological processes does take place. Active manipulation is necessary if the balance of park ecosystems has been so altered by human activities that a natural environment cannot be restored through natural ecological processes, or if park visitors, facilities or neighboring lands are threatened. If active interference becomes necessary, techniques duplicate natural processes as closely as possible. Sport hunting is prohibited in national parks, but in most parks, sportfishing is permitted in designated areas. Many national parks, particularly in the north, are in areas in which First Nations continue to rely on natural resources and in which native cultures reflect a close relationship to the land. Traditional subsistence-level harvesting by First Nations continues in many national parks, subject to conservation of the resource and co-operative management approaches through management boards with strong representation by First Nations. The effective protection and management of national parks requires an intimate understanding of park resources, the ecological processes controlling and influencing them and the human impact influencing change in natural processes. Parks Canada has developed several tools to help achieve this understanding ? eg, the natural resource management process, the basic component of which is a comprehensive natural resources database, regularly updated for all parks. This information allows a park’s capabilities and limitations for visitor use to be evaluated, problems identified and specific plans for the protection of fragile resources or features made. National parks are also protected through the Environmental Impact Assessment and review process, which ensures that all the possible adverse effects of any project or activity proposed for lands or waters in national parks are identified and evaluated. Measures that can be taken to reduce impacts are identified or the project may be canceled if its impacts are deemed unacceptable.

Establishing New National Parks:

By 1970, 20 national parks had either been established or agreements leading towards their establishments had been signed. Up to that time, the national parks system was not developed in any systematic way; rather, it represented a collection of special places, created in some cases by political opportunism, accidents of geography or heroic efforts of dedicated citizens. They were also created for a variety of purposes (eg, to protect outstanding scenic areas, to provide regional recreation areas, to create wildlife sanctuaries, or to stimulate flagging economies in areas of chronic underemployment). There was no vision or long-term goal. This vision was provided in the early 1970s by the National Park System Plan. This document provided a guide to the development of a finite system of national parks using the principle of “representativeness.” It divides Canada into 39 national park natural regions. A natural region is an area containing a unique set of geological, biological and ecological characteristics. If you were blindfolded and kidnapped and taken away in an airplane and then set down somewhere in Canada, you should be able to tell which region you are in by the physiography of the land and the vegetation. The goal is to represent each natural region in the national parks system. By mid-1997, 24 natural regions were represented by the 38 national parks and national parks reserves (some natural regions include more than one park). Clearly, the park system is far from complete. Identifying, selecting and establishing new national parks can be a long and complex process. It involves 1) identifying areas that best represent a natural region; 2) selecting potential national park areas from this list; 3) assessing the feasibility of park establishment through consultation with the provincial or territorial government, local communities, First Nations, nongovernmental organizations, relevant industries, other federal government departments, the interested public and other stakeholders; 4) negotiating a new park agreement, and; 5) establishing a new park in legislation. Since 1985, the centennial of national parks in Canada, the following new national parks or national park reserves have been created: Ellesmere Island (reserve) (NWT), Vuntut (YT), Gwaii Haanas (BC), Aulavik (NWT), Bruce Peninsula (Ontario) and most recently, Wapsuk (Manitoba) and Tuktut Nogait (NWT). Lands have been set aside for the following future national parks: the east arm of Great Slave Lake (NWT) and Northern Baffin Island (NWT).

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