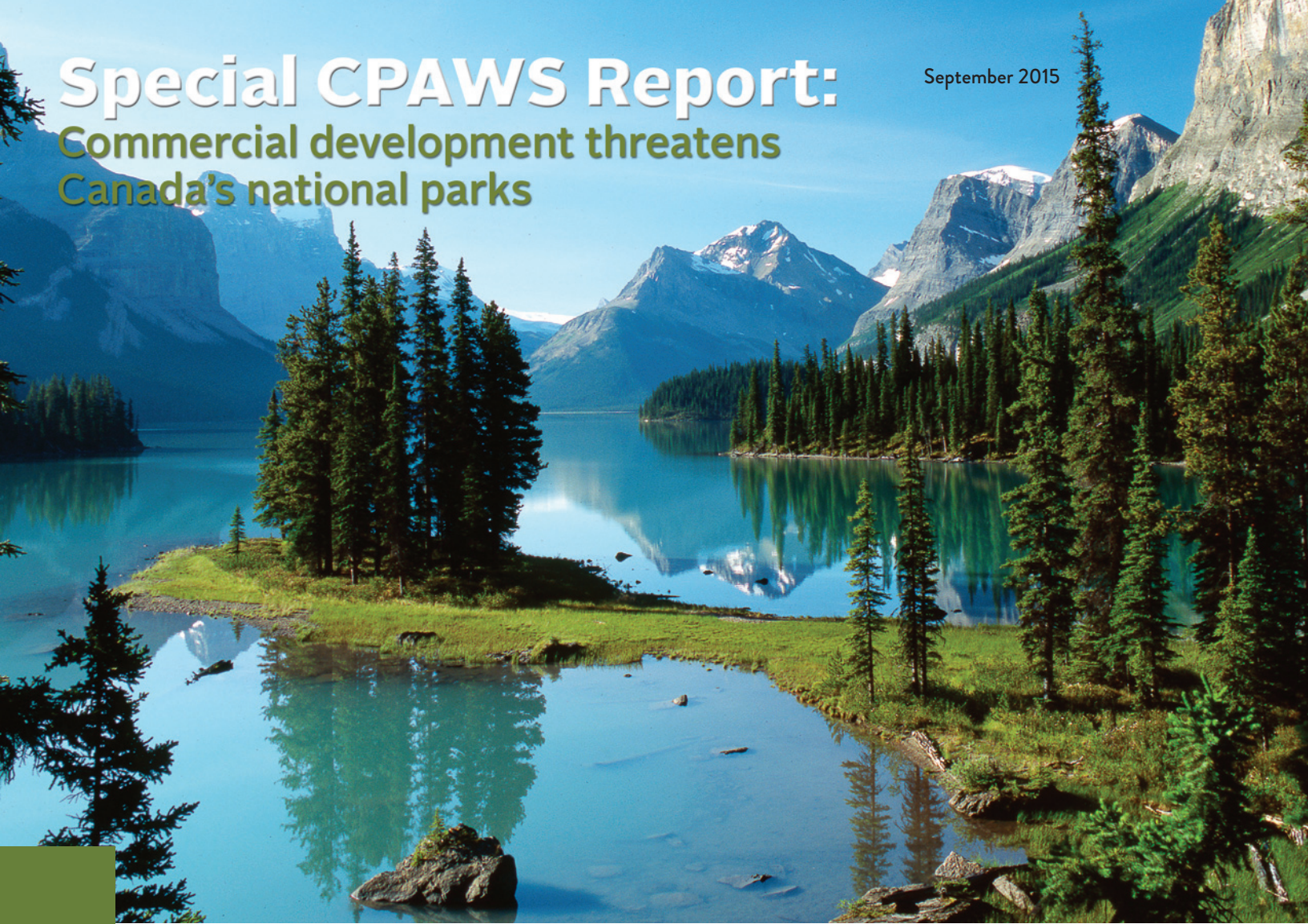


Special CPAWS Report:

Commercial development threatens Canada's national parks

September 2015



There is a crisis in Canada's national parks. A rash of commercial developments have been approved in Banff and Jasper, and similar development pressures are now spilling over into other national parks as well.

This July, just before the federal election was called, a massive expansion of the Lake Louise Ski Resort was approved, which requires removing land from legally protected wilderness to accommodate the demands of a private business to expand. This is an assault on the very essence of our national parks.

Canada's national parks belong to all Canadians. They are part of our heart and soul. Yet this growing trend of commercial development threatens the natural values our parks are intended to protect, as well as our collective responsibility to pass them on unimpaired to future generations.

From the "Glacier Skywalk", which took a public viewpoint and turned it into a private pay-for-use theme park-like development, to the proposed Maligne Lake resort development in Jasper, to a proposal to build a giant seven story statue in Cape Breton Highlands National Park, the list of inappropriate development proposals in our national

parks is growing. National parks are about people enjoying protected nature, not commercial development and theme parks.

This is not the first time commercial development has threatened our national parks. In the 1960s and 70s, and again in the 1990s, CPAWS and other conservationists fought hard to stop massive commercial development projects in Banff, and won. Twenty years later a similar trend has emerged. It seems that once every generation private commercial interests gain a foothold in our parks.

While development pressures are mounting, opportunities for Canadians to have their say in decisions affecting our national parks are shrinking. Public consultations are getting shorter, and often only held after years of exclusive negotiations between Parks Canada and private developers. In many cases public feedback is being ignored. Together, these symptoms represent a worrying trend of private interests taking precedence over the public interest and conservation in our parks.

While many private tourism operators recognize the privilege and opportunity of operating in a national park and run businesses that respect and support conservation, this trend points to others who continue to push for as much development as they can persuade the federal government to approve.

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Meanwhile, deep funding cuts to Parks Canada's ecosystem science programs, which started in 2012, are hampering the Agency's ability to track the health of park ecosystems and provide the scientific information needed to inform sound management decisions.

The *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Parks Canada Agency Act* both make it clear that park managers must protect nature as the first priority in their decisions. The law also makes it clear that encouraging people to enjoy our parks is important, but visitor use must not jeopardize the integrity of park ecosystems.

For decades experts have highlighted the threat posed to Canada's national park ecosystems from incremental infrastructure development. It's why putting nature first in each and every management decision in our parks is so important, and why the views of Canadians, who polls show value our national parks' natural beauty and wildlife above all else, need to be respected by the federal government.

The following list describes developments that are close to final approval, or have already been completed.

1. Massive expansion of Lake Louise Ski Resort, Banff National Park (2015)

On the 2015 August long weekend, Parks Canada quietly approved a policy that would allow a massive expansion of the Lake Louise Ski Resort. The Lake Louise ski area is located in critical wildlife habitat, home to many sensitive and endangered species like grizzly bears, wolverine, and lynx.

The new approved Ski Area Guidelines would allow the ski resort to almost double its capacity and infrastructure, building more ski runs, lifts, parking, a new lodge and water reservoirs, and expanding into regulated wilderness areas.

Parks Canada approved the Ski Area Guidelines even though they would allow commercial infrastructure development in a regulated wilderness area, where development is currently prohibited by law. This project cannot proceed unless the law is changed to allow development to displace legally protected wilderness and wildlife habitat.



Canadians were given only three weeks in June to comment on over 250 pages of technical documents about this proposal. In spite of the short timeline, once alerted by

CPAWS and other conservation groups, 1,200 people sent comments to Parks Canada, and over 90% opposed the development. Yet no changes were made to the proposal prior to its approval.

Canadians still have a chance to stop this development by urging their parliamentarians to NOT allow this massive ski resort expansion to proceed.



Richardson Ridge would be removed from legally protected wilderness and wildlife habitat.

2. Banff National Park's Mount Norquay opened for large-scale summer use (2013)



Mount Norquay ski hill in Banff National Park is important summer habitat for grizzly bears, and the access road to the ski hill crosses through a critical wildlife corridor. In 2013, Parks Canada approved a proposal for new, large-scale summer visitor use at this site. The decision to allow summer use of the ski hill was particularly troublesome since it reversed a previous agreement between the ski hill operator and Parks Canada to allow for expanded winter use in return for giving up summer use because of its potential impact on grizzly bears and other wildlife.

There are only about 60 grizzly bears left in Banff National Park. These bears have the lowest reproductive rate of any population in North America, making them particularly vulnerable. With bears dying each year on the railway and highway that run through the park, ensuring that the rest of the bears' habitat remains secure is of the utmost importance. Currently, the home ranges of bears living in and around Mount Norquay are already too fragmented by roads, railways and the town

of Banff to ensure their security. Given the area's importance for wildlife, CPAWS believes that the decision to allow new large-scale summer use at the ski hill was inconsistent with Parks Canada's responsibility to prioritize ecological integrity in park management decisions.

The public consultations about this development proposal were also problematic. They were led by the private developer which we believe resulted in biased and limited communications about the project, and were scheduled over the Christmas holiday season of 2012, making it difficult for the public to get involved.

When they approved the Mount Norquay plan, Parks Canada committed to monitoring the access road to ensure there was no increase in traffic. Two years later, no data has been released to the public to show that these commitments are being kept.

3. Proposed new commercial accommodation at Maligne Lake, Jasper National Park (2014)

CPAWS and the Jasper Environmental Association, represented by Ecojustice, are taking Parks Canada to court in October to fight a problematic development proposal for Maligne Lake. In 2014, the commercial tour operator that runs daytime operations at Maligne Lake proposed building an overnight resort along the shores of the iconic lake, even though park policy prohibits new commercial accommodation outside the park townsite.

After the release of an open letter by former senior Parks Canada staff opposing the proposal, and considerable opposition from CPAWS, Jasper Environmental Association and the public, Parks Canada rejected the proposed hotel but approved 13 other elements of the resort, including commercial tent cabin accommodations. The proposal still contravenes park policy, and overnight use could put local wildlife, including a struggling caribou herd and grizzly bears, at unnecessary risk.

We are concerned that this development could be the “thin edge of the wedge”, opening the door to more commercial development at Maligne Lake and elsewhere. Many hotels in Jasper and Banff started out as cabins and gradually grew into large hotels. We need to make sure Parks Canada respects its own policies which were put in place specifically to limit further commercial development.

4. Jasper National Park’s massive “Glacier Skywalk” opens (2014)

In 2012, in spite of enormous public opposition, the federal government allowed Brewster Travel Canada, a US-based multi-national corporation, to build a massive, glass-bottomed viewing platform along the Icefields Parkway in Jasper National Park. This project turned a free public viewpoint into a private pay-for-use theme park-like operation.



The “Glacier Skywalk” (similar to a controversial project that was built outside the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona) flies in the face of Canada’s national park policy limiting recreational activities to those requiring minimal infrastructure. The decision was made in spite of the inadequate scientific information about its impact on wildlife, and with no evidence that Canadians want this kind of development in their national parks.

The Skywalk started operating last year, and is receiving decidedly mixed reviews on TripAdvisor.

5. Proposed widening of Bow Valley Parkway, Banff National Park (2015)



As part of their program to repair and upgrade national park roads and other infrastructure, the federal government recently announced that the scenic Bow Valley Parkway, which winds through the valley bottom between Banff and Lake Louise, will be widened to add bike lanes.

While this may seem like a good idea, the Bow Valley Parkway runs through some of Banff's most important wildlife habitat, in a busy valley already dissected by the town, the Trans-Canada highway, and a railway. Expanding the narrow, winding Parkway would encourage more and faster bike and car traffic, further disturbing sensitive

wildlife like grizzly bears, and could lead to more conflict between people and wildlife.

This surprise announcement undermines Parks Canada's own action plan for managing the Bow Valley Parkway, which was developed through years of collaboration with conservation groups like CPAWS and tourism operators. The existing plan does not include any mention of widening the road.

Before a bike path between Banff and Lake Louise is considered, much more public discussion and research are needed to make sure it would not harm park wildlife and is compatible with the existing action plan for the Parkway

6. Will Jasper National Park's Marmot Basin Ski Resort be next?

Marmot Basin Ski Resort is located beside Jasper's spectacular, wild Whistler Creek Valley. This magnificent valley is home to mountain goats, wolverine, lynx, and a struggling caribou population, and offers one of the last intact corridors for wildlife to travel between the Athabasca Valley and British Columbia. In 1981, Parks Canada decided not to allow any development in Whistler Creek Valley because of its importance for wildlife.

In 2008, however, Parks Canada reversed that decision and opened the door to development in and around the Valley, when it approved new development guidelines for Marmot Basin Ski Resort. In 2014, Marmot Basin Ski resort put forward the first of two detailed long term development plans for public review. The first plan focuses largely on the already developed areas of the ski hill. The second plan, expected to be publicly released soon, will focus on proposed expansion into wild areas adjacent to the ski hill, and could include the unspoiled Whistler Creek Valley.

Parks Canada and Marmot Basin Ski Resort have commissioned independent studies on caribou and mountain goat use of the Valley, both of which reinforce the importance of keeping the Valley intact to protect wildlife. We will be watching closely to make sure development plans do not encroach into Whistler Creek Valley or adjacent slopes.

7. “Mother Canada” statue proposed for Cape Breton Highlands National Park (2015)

Parks Canada has approved, in principle, construction of a giant seven-story statue on the shores of Green Cove in Cape Breton Highlands National Park, pending the outcome of a

limited environmental review. In addition to a massive “Mother Canada” statue, the project would also include a large parking lot, gift shop and interpretive centre, as well as a “We See Thee Rise Observation Deck” and “Commemorative Ring of True Patriot Love”. The website for the Never Forgotten National Memorial Foundation, which is proposing the project, says the memorial “will offer ongoing marketing opportunities for individuals and corporate



partners”. The federal government contributed \$100,000 to the project despite indicating that the project will be privately funded. This controversial private venture in the national park, while intended to honour Canadian soldiers who died overseas, is causing much public consternation.

Many believe the project is inappropriate in a national park, that Parks Canada’s two week public review process was too limited, and that the giant statue is badly designed. An editorial in the Globe and Mail concluded that the “Mother Canada statue is hubristic, ugly and just plain wrong”. Twenty-eight retired senior Parks Canada officials, including a former CEO and three directors general, sent an open letter to the Environment Minister opposing the proposal. An independent study on “Mi’kmaq use at Green Cove” raises major objections to the project. Much of the feedback CPAWS has received describes the proposed statue as grotesque, a monstrosity, too big, too alienating and just plain ugly.

Furthermore, there is already a memorial to Canadians who lost their lives in war in Cape Breton Highlands National Park. It reads:

They will never know the beauty of this place, see the seasons change, enjoy nature’s chorus. All we enjoy we owe to them, men and women who lie buried in the earth of foreign lands and in the seven seas. Dedicated to the memory of Canadians who died overseas in the service of their country and so preserved our heritage.

In our view, this memorial is more touching and more poignant than anything we’ve seen associated with “Mother Canada”, which, however well-intentioned, is not aligned with the primary purpose of our national parks.

Conclusion

The recent onslaught of commercial development in Banff and Jasper threatens the very essence of Canada's beloved national parks. Every generation is called upon to stand up for the public good that our national parks represent to prevent them being degraded by private interests for profit.

To ensure that our parks are protected as a public good, and passed on unimpaired to future generations, we need to stand up for our parks and stop this trend. Our forebears did this for us, and it is now our responsibility to do it for future generations.

We have fought this fight before and won. Our goal is to do so again. Please join us.

Find out how you can get involved at: <http://bit.ly/1EVd5Cn>

ABOUT CPAWS

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) is Canada's only nationwide charity dedicated solely to the protection of our public land and water, and ensuring our parks are managed to protect the nature within them. In the past 50+ years, we've played a lead role in protecting over half a million square kilometres – an area bigger than the entire Yukon Territory! Our vision is to protect at least half of our public land and water so that future generations can experience Canada's irreplaceable wilderness.

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