

## “Hands Off Our National Parks”: The Alpine Club of Canada Hydro-development Controversies in the Canadian Rockies, 1922-1930

PearlAnn Reichwein

Volume 6, numéro 1, 1995

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031091ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/031091ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Reichwein, P. (1995). “Hands Off Our National Parks”: The Alpine Club of Canada Hydro-development Controversies in the Canadian Rockies, 1922-1930. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 6(1), 129–155. <https://doi.org/10.7202/031091ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Au cours des années 1920, plusieurs projets d'irrigation et de canalisation énergétique proposaient d'empiéter sur le terrain des parcs nationaux des montagnes Rocheuses. Le Club alpin du Canada, une association d'alpinisme fondée en 1906, a rallié les opposants aux barrages et combattu pour l'inviolabilité du domaine public. A cette occasion, l'alliance entre J.B. Harkin, commissaire des parcs nationaux, et A.O. Wheeler, directeur du Club alpin, a contribué à faire du club un groupe de pression clef, un mandataire des activités de récréation autour d'une conception particulière des parcs nationaux. Dès lors, on a pu comparer la teneur politique et philosophique des conflits entourant les barrages dans les parcs des Rocheuses et des lacs Waterton à celle de la grande bataille de l'aqueduc californien « Hetch Hetchy ».

# **“Hands Off Our National Parks”: The Alpine Club of Canada and Hydro-development Controversies in the Canadian Rockies, 1922-1930**

**PEARLANN REICHWEIN**

## **Résumé**

*Through the 1920s, hydro development proposals for irrigation and power dams impinged on Canada's national parks in the Rockies. The Alpine Club of Canada — a mountaineering organization formed in 1906 — rallied opposition to dams and insisted that national parks were an inviolable public domain. National Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin and ACC Director A.O. Wheeler created an alliance that highlighted the club's role as a key interest group and recreational stakeholder with a shared vision of the mountain parks. Conflicts over dams in Rocky Mountains and Waterton Lakes national parks were politically and philosophically compared to the great battle of the “Hetch Hetchy” aqueduct in California.*

\* \* \* \*

*Au cours des années 1920, plusieurs projets d'irrigation et de canalisation énergétique proposaient d'empiéter sur le terrain des parcs nationaux des montagnes Rocheuses. Le Club alpin du Canada, une association d'alpinisme fondée en 1906, a rallié les opposants aux barrages et combattu pour l'inviolabilité du domaine public. À cette occasion, l'alliance entre J. B. Harkin, commissaire des parcs nationaux, et A. O. Wheeler, directeur du Club alpin, a contribué à faire du club un groupe de pression clef, un mandataire des activités de récréation autour d'une conception particulière des parcs nationaux. Dès lors, on a pu comparer la teneur politique et philosophique des conflits entourant les barrages dans les parcs des Rocheuses et des lacs Waterton à celle de la grande bataille de l'aqueduc californien « Hetch Hetchy. »*

Throughout the 1920s, the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) opposed proposals for irrigation and power dams infringing on national park lands and waters. As a leading recreational stakeholder in the mountain parks, the club stood firmly against tampering with watersheds in the Rockies, which it feared would ruin the natural environment and set a dangerous precedent for commercial encroachment on national park territory. Several major hydro-development projects were proposed during the 1920s to harness the irrigation and electrical potential of the eastern Rockies. In 1922, the federal Department of Interior's Irrigation Service had its eye on raising the water level of the Waterton Lakes, 270 km southwest of Calgary, to supply drought-stricken prairie farmers in southern Alberta. Through the 1920s, the Calgary Power Company made repeated applications to Ottawa to develop watersheds in the Alberta Rockies to feed

an eager regional market for electricity. National parks in the Rockies were not immune to economic and technological demands from Alberta farms and cities. Controversy over building dams in Canada's national parks sparked a debate comparable to the well-known turn-of-the-century American "battle of the Hetch Hetchy." During stormy conflicts over dams in Waterton Lakes and Rocky Mountains national parks, the Alpine Club and the Dominion Parks Branch enunciated the precedent-setting principles that later characterized federal public policy and legislation governing Canada's national parks. Among these new tenets of management, national park inviolability emerged as a cardinal rule.

The Alpine Club of Canada was a nation-wide organization dedicated to promoting mountaineering and the Canadian "mountain heritage." Founded in 1906 by surveyor Arthur Oliver Wheeler (1860-1945) and journalist Elizabeth Parker (1856-1944), the club developed a program centred around mountain sport, art, literature, education, science and exploration. Quickly growing to 201 members in 1907 and 599 by 1922, ACC men and women were drawn largely from middle- and upper-class, urban professional, Anglo-Saxon backgrounds in Canada, the United States and Britain. The majority of Canadian members were based in the western provinces closest to the mountains. The ACC held annual summer mountaineering camps in the national parks, worked closely with park administrators, and developed a visible profile as a "pioneer" in the mountain parks. The ACC constitution paradoxically embraced the dual objectives of opening up the mountains as a "national playground" while preserving the wildlife, plants, habitat and "natural beauties of the mountain places" – a noteworthy parallel to the dual mandate of national parks.<sup>1</sup>

After World War I, environmental protection and wildlife preservation gained increasing importance in national park policy under Dominion Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin. Prolonged conflicts over resource development during this period ultimately forced conservation closer to the top of the national parks policy agenda. Historian Barry Potyandi argued that conflicts during the 1920s were crucial to the definition of conservationist philosophy in national parks policy:

It would seem...that the process of defining policies that embodied the conservationist philosophy could only be developed fully in time of crisis. Within Rocky Mountains Park, the movement received its greatest impetus from the issue of additional hydro-electrical power development by the Calgary Power Company on Lake Minnewanka and the Spray Lakes.<sup>2</sup>

As a voice of opposition to hydro developments throughout the 1920s period of crisis, the Alpine Club played a critical role in promoting conservationist philosophy in fed-

- 
1. "Constitution" *Canadian Alpine Journal* (hereafter CAJ) (1907), 178; PearlAnn Reichwein, "Beyond the Visionary Mountains: The Alpine Club of Canada and the Canadian National Park Idea, 1906 to 1969," Ph.D. thesis, Carleton University, September 1995, 368; according to the current ACC membership database, there are now over 5000 ACC members.
  2. Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park, 1792-1965: A History* (Parks Canada, 1984), Microfiche Report Series 196, 170-71.

eral public policy, as Alpine Club founder Arthur Wheeler signalled with his emphatic slogan "Hands Off Our National Parks."<sup>3</sup>

### **Protecting the Public Domain – The Waterton Lakes Irrigation Debate**

In March 1922, the Alpine Club of Canada entered a long drawn-out debate over the hydro-development potential of the eastern Rockies. The conflict created a divisive showdown between friends of the national parks and proponents of irrigation and hydro power. The Alpine Club stood onside with preserving scenic beauty in the national parks and forged a cooperative alliance with Canada's National Parks Branch in the face of challenges to Waterton Lakes National Park.

Following World War I, Alberta's burgeoning population, urban growth, and economic development expanded the provincial market for electric power and stimulated irrigation projects on the dry southern prairies. Under the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) through the 1920s and into the 1930s, the Alberta political climate favoured agriculture. In southern regions, irrigation was increasingly instrumental in improving the viability of seed crops and cattle ranching by reducing dependence on inconsistent rainfalls. Three years of severe drought gave rise in 1919 to an irrigation movement supported by farmers, UFA locals, and many small towns situated in southwest Alberta. The Lethbridge Board of Trade convened a meeting that launched the Irrigation Development Association, formalized in March, to rally public support for irrigation. In August, pro-irrigationists, at a mass meeting in Pincher Creek, urged Ottawa to undertake studies relevant to the irrigation potential of the region. The momentum created by these meetings led to several proposed irrigation districts.<sup>4</sup> Federal control over natural resources in Alberta and Saskatchewan continued to irritate westerners through the 1920s.

---

3. *The Gazette* (June 1923), 5.

4. Barry Potyandi, *Where the Rivers Meet: A History of the Upper Oldman River Basin to 1939* (Lethbridge, 1990), 185-7, regarding 1919 Pincher Creek irrigation meeting; Leo G. Denis and J.B. Challies, *Water Powers of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta* (Ottawa, 1916), 166-68, noted the Waterton Lakes Narrows as a potential power site; A.L. Ford and G.H. Whyte, *Hydrometric Surveys in the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan* (Ottawa, 1921), 193-217, for reports on the flow rates of the Waterton River, Belly River, and St. Mary River drainage basins, and diversions on the St. Mary River near Bab, Montana and Kimball, Alberta; Ian A.L. Getty, "A History of the Human Settlement at Waterton Lakes National Park, 1800-1937," M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, March 1971, 136-40, regarding the 1919 survey of Waterton Lake and the 1920 dam recommendation; Department of the Interior, *Annual Report, 1921-22* (Ottawa, 1923), 61, hydrometric surveys in Alberta and Saskatchewan were conducted by the Canadian Irrigation Surveys from 1894 to 1909, from 1909 to 1911 by the Forestry and Irrigation Branch of the Department of the Interior, from 1911 to 1920 by the Irrigation Branch that was transferred with the Reclamation Service to the Dominion Water Power Branch in 1920, and reorganized as the Water Power and Hydrometric Bureau in 1924; E. Alyn Mitchner, "The Development of Western Waters 1885-1930" (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Department of History, 1973), 312, regarding the rise of the irrigation movement and the Lethbridge Southeast proposal.

The Department of the Interior's Irrigation Branch had been conducting hydrometric surveys to assess the power and irrigation potential of rivers in southern Alberta since 1911 and readily came up with several irrigation proposals. During summer 1919, the Irrigation Branch surveyed the Narrows on Waterton Lakes in Waterton Lakes National Park. Subsequently, in 1920, the Commissioner of Irrigation, P.H. Peters, recommended the area as an ideal site for a dam and water-storage reservoir as part of the proposed Lethbridge Southeast irrigation project. The project aimed to establish irrigation districts and supply water to farmers via private canal systems developed by the Canadian Pacific Railway and its subsidiary, the Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company.<sup>5</sup>

National Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin found his branch of the Department of the Interior squared off in an interdepartmental conflict with the Irrigation Branch. To counter Irrigation's claim to water rights in Waterton, Harkin's 1920-21 annual report restated the fundamental precepts of the national parks and enunciated for the first time the principle of inviolability:

The stand taken by the Parks Branch with regard to such applications is that the parks are the property of all the people of Canada and that consequently they should not be developed for the benefit of any one section of the country or of private interests; second, that such development constitutes an invasion of the fundamental principles upon which parks have been established, namely, the conservation of certain areas of primitive landscape with all their original conditions of plant and animal life and other natural features intact.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Harkin challenged irrigation interests and asserted that conservation of the public domain took priority as a management principle for the national parks.

Meanwhile, irrigation was showcased as the only solution to the dry lands question. The Alberta press depicted irrigation as the panacea for dry-belt farmers:

Irrigation is the burning question in the south country...the only remedy for southern Alberta, the only thing that will put it on its feet and transfer a barren waste into a Garden of Eden.<sup>7</sup>

- 
5. The CPR took over the Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company in 1912, thus gaining entry into the Lethbridge-area irrigation market, see James G. MacGregor, *A History of Alberta* (Edmonton, 1972), 202-3; also see E. Alyn Mitchner, "The Development of Western Waters 1885-1930" (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Department of History, 1973), 232-33; for a description of the Lethbridge Southeast project, see Department of the Interior, *Annual Report, 1923-24* (Ottawa, 1925), 90-91.
  6. J.B. Harkin cited in C.J. Taylor, "Legislating Nature: The National Parks Act of 1930," in *To See Ourselves/Two Save Ourselves: Ecology and Culture in Canada*, eds. Rowland Lorimer et al. (Montreal, 1991), 130.
  7. "Farmers In Dry Belt Abandon Their Farms," *Weekly Albertan*, 4 January 1922, 2; also see "Industries for the Irrigation Districts," *Ibid.*, 21 February 1922, 4; "Plan for Carrying Out Irrigation Legislation," *Ibid.*, 30 March 1922, 1.

The feasibility of irrigation was central to settlement and economic development in southern Alberta, as suggested by press coverage of the potential immigration of irrigation farmers from the western United States, provincial legislation destined to facilitate more irrigation works, and Premier Herbert Greenfield's emphasis that "colonization must keep pace with construction of irrigation projects." In some quarters, the construction of dams for irrigation works was also seen as a legitimate means to create work for distressed farmers.<sup>8</sup> The Waterton Lakes dam and Lethbridge Southeast project characterized the many irrigation projects proposed during this era, despite problems associated with finding markets for irrigation agriculture in southern Alberta.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, regional public opinion divided on the issue of constructing an irrigation dam in Waterton Lakes National Park. On January 7, 1922, the *Lethbridge Herald* stated that "little progress had been made thus far in a movement started some time ago to block the converting of Waterton Lake into a storage reservoir for future irrigation purposes." As the *Herald* reported, several petitions were circulating and resolutions had been dispatched to Ottawa by opponents of the dam (unnamed by the paper) requesting the government to preserve the Waterton townsite and "disallow any movement looking to the disfiguring of the national parks" by turning the lake into a reservoir. The *Herald* dismissed this opposition to the dam, insisting that generally southern Albertans believed that water was "needed more on the lands of the prairies in producing crops than in the mountains serving only a few."<sup>10</sup>

Pro-irrigationists mounted a strong offensive campaign to push the Waterton Lakes dam into existence. In February 1922, they paraded their local forces:

The Civic Council of Fort MacLeod, the Lethbridge City Council, the Southern Irrigation District, and the New Dayton Irrigation District all submitted resolutions in favour of the scheme. Other communities that passed resolutions "endorsing the proposed plan of the Reclamation Service of damming the lakes at the Narrows are those from Milk River, Warner, Macleod, Cardston, Magrath, Raymond, Bow Island, Taber, Lucky Strike, Grassy Lake and New Dayton."<sup>11</sup>

- 
8. "Thousands of Irrigation Farmers in Western States Ready to Come to Southern Alberta," *Lethbridge Herald*, 6 January 1922, 7; "Influx of Settlers from Western States is Plainly Forecast," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 4 March 1922, 1; "Colonization Must Keep Pace With Construction of Irrigation Projects," *Ibid.*, 7 March 1922, 1; "Irrigation Projects in Alberta are Enumerated," *Ibid.*, 8 March 1922; "Legislation Aiming to Aid Colonization Where Irrigation is Proposed," *Ibid.*, 9 March 1922; "Interesting Comment on Survey Board Report," *Weekly Albertan*, 9 March 1922, 4.
  9. "Finishing a Big Job," *Lethbridge Herald*, 7 January 1922, 10; "Many Problems Face the Future of Irrigation," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 4 March 1922, 7; "Province Will Back MacLeod Irrigation Plan," *Ibid.*, 4 March 1922, 1; "Are We Irrigation Mad? Markets Great Problem," *Weekly Albertan*, 11 March 1922, 20; "Dominion Will Keep Irrigation Surveys Going," *Ibid.*, 6 March 1922, 2.
  10. "Protest Against Big Reservoir at Waterton Lakes," *Lethbridge Herald*, 7 January 1922, 7.
  11. Getty, "Waterton," 145-46.

The organized irrigation lobby also included certain UFA locals in southern Alberta, the CPR, and the Western Canada Irrigation Association – which named the CPR’s irrigation crusader William Pearce among its executive members. Pearce, a former public land surveyor with the Department of the Interior, was a long time promoter of irrigation in the Canadian West and the “chief architect” of the western waters policy.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the *Lethbridge Herald* and the *Weekly Albertan* – both southern Albertan newspapers – took editorial positions in favour of irrigation. These forces insisted that the dam go ahead. Together, western agrarianism and eastern corporate capitalism formed a powerful coalition intent on irrigation, despite otherwise separate motives.

Oddly enough – although it had been at the center of the 1919 irrigation movement – Pincher Creek actively opposed the Waterton dam proposal. By January 1922, its town council had sent a resolution of protest to the Minister of the Interior.<sup>13</sup> The Pincher Creek local of the UFA also joined the protest and, in March, sent a resolution opposing the Waterton dam to the Acting Commissioner of Irrigation in Calgary. The Commissioner responded that the Waterton Lakes remained the “most economical and practically the only site available” and stated that “its use as a reservoir would not seriously affect the scenic approach to the park.”<sup>14</sup> Dissenting voices, like those from Pincher Creek, found themselves poised on the defensive in a conflict over resource development in the national parks.

Thus, the needs of prairie agriculture encroached on the mountains. Ultimately, the city’s demand for power would also narrow the gap between prairie settlement and the mountain wilderness. With each step toward modernization, the Alpine Club’s breathing space in the mountains was slipping away. The year 1922 was shaping up to be a precedent-setting period for the Canadian national parks.

Federal Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin drew ACC Director Arthur Wheeler’s attention to the irrigation proposals impinging on Waterton Lakes National Park, which bordered on Montana in the extreme southwest corner of Alberta. Wheeler had been unaware of the issue, as he wrote in his response to Harkin in March 1922:

What you say about the clash between Parks and Irrigation interests at Waterton Lakes Park is quite new to me. If you will be so good as to put me wise, and let me know if the Alpine Club can help, I shall be glad to move in the matter. I think you know that our interests and sympathies lie with the parks.<sup>15</sup>

- 
12. William Pearce was a former Department of the Interior senior surveyor who became an outspoken proponent of irrigation in his later career with the CPR, see Mitchner, “The Development of Western Waters,” chap. 2 passim, 374; Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal, 1987), 39-49. UFA locals were quick to react to the irrigation movement in southern Alberta, see Potyandi, *Where the Rivers Meet*, 185-86.
  13. Getty, “Waterton,” 142, 145.
  14. “An Irrigation Dam at Waterton Lakes,” *Weekly Albertan*, 16 March 1922, 6.
  15. Canada, National Archives (NA), RG 84, Records of the National Parks, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 3, A.O. Wheeler to J.B. Harkin, 20 March 1922.

As ACC Director, Wheeler was a great parks advocate and had pushed for the creation of Mt. Robson and Mt. Assiniboine provincial parks in B.C. The “interests and sympathies” of the Alpine Club merged with the Parks Commissioner on the issue of stopping the dam planned for Waterton Lakes National Park.

Harkin’s summary of the Waterton dam proposal followed. A 60-foot (18.3 m) dam at the outlet of Upper Waterton Lake would block the Narrows between the lakes, submerge the existing townsite, and “almost entirely submerge Cameron Falls and do other damage to the lake which the Park Service considers will effectually destroy its beauty as a National Park.”<sup>16</sup> The resulting reservoir was expected to supply irrigation to 75,000 acres (approx. 30,353 ha) of drought-stricken Alberta land under the federal Reclamation Service’s proposed Lethbridge Southeast project.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, the federal Reclamation Service and the National Park Service held divergent views of the proposal – a problem accentuated by the fact that both agencies were housed within the Department of the Interior.

According to Harkin, the Reclamation Service held the advantage of an organized lobby in favour of the Waterton dam proposal. Yet, as he lamented to Wheeler in spring 1922, there was “practically no publicity with respect to the Parks side” of the debate:

The reason I mentioned this matter in my previous letter to you was that the Alpine Club is so much concerned in the preservation of mountain scenery that I was surprised that, with all the publicity that has been given in the western newspapers to the irrigation side of this project, there was no action, as far as I could see on the part of Alpinists to present the other side publicly. I have some diffidence in writing to anyone upon a subject of this kind. Personally I believe in matters being settled on their merits and not as a result of propaganda.<sup>18</sup>

The Parks Commissioner and Waterton’s Superintendent Bevan wished to turn public opinion in favour of retaining the park in its natural state.<sup>19</sup> Here was an advocacy role for the Alpine Club, and the beginning of a larger, more persistent debate over national park protection.

Quick to pick up on the implications of the irrigation controversy, Sir James Outram – a renowned English mountaineer and senior ACC member – challenged the dam proposal in March 1922, during his address at the Alpine Club’s 16th anniversary banquet in Calgary. Outram gave a speech, accompanied by lantern-slides, as reported in the *Calgary Herald*:

He mentioned that there is a danger of irrigation spoiling some of the beautiful playgrounds of Canada. Irrigation was a thing which must be considered first, but yet he believed that the club could do a great deal in seeing to it that where water could be

---

16. NA, RG 84, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 3, J.B. Harkin to A.O. Wheeler, 6 April 1922.

17. W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. III (Ottawa, 1979), 47.

18. NA, RG 84, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 3, J.B. Harkin to A.O. Wheeler, 6 April 1922.

19. Getty, “Waterton,” 144.



secured from other parts for irrigation purposes that it should not be taken from places where such action would ruin the beauty spots of the country.<sup>20</sup>

Outram recommended that "the Alpine Club must make the people realize that the mountains are the heritage of all." The club subsequently acted on this philosophy.

In March 1922, the international dimension of the Waterton Lakes controversy also came into play. Canada's Waterton Lakes National Park adjoins Glacier National Park, U.S.A., along the Alberta-Montana border. The three inter-connected Waterton Lakes cross the international boundary line. Thus Canadian plans to dam a lake in this system became a cross-border concern relevant to international waters.

American parks officials and conservationists frowned on the proposal. When the U.S. government refused entry to a Canadian irrigation survey crew in March 1922, it defied Canadian actions that might harm Glacier National Park. Prominent American conservationist George Bird Grinnell opposed the Waterton dam; the Ecological Society of America offered its assistance to J.B. Harkin to fight it; and the U.S. National Parks Association decried the project and the potential destruction that flooding could have on Glacier National Park. The National Parks Association in the United States had been established under Robert Yard in 1919 with funding from U.S. National Park Service Director and Sierra Club member Stephen Mather.<sup>21</sup> Canada's Commissioner of National Parks, J.B. Harkin, believed the Waterton issue would set a critical precedent and remarked that there was "the greatest need in Canada for an organization something along the lines of the American National Parks Association which, being independent of the Government is free to actively carry on work in defence of National Parks."<sup>22</sup> As a case in point, the U.S. National Parks Association opposed an irrigation dam similar to the Waterton proposal that was planned for St. Mary's Lake in Glacier National Park. The executive secretary of the American association advised Wheeler on this confrontation in correspondence during March 1922.<sup>23</sup> Thus a well-defined coalition of American conservation interests actively opposed the dam proposals impinging on both national parks.

Meanwhile, the Alpine Club flew into the fray over the dam proposal on the Canadian side of the border. At the ACC's annual general meeting on August 5, 1922, at the

---

20. NA, RG 84, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 3, "Unique Views of Mountains are Exhibited," *Calgary Herald*, 31 March 1922. For biographical background see "James Outram" CAJ (1925), 127-28.

21. Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club 1892-1970* (San Francisco, 1988), 26-27, 50-51; Horace M. Albright, *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913-33* (Salt Lake City, 1985), 106-7, the National Parks Association was modelled after the American Civic Association and included distinguished national leaders and academics on its board.

22. Harkin to A.O. Weese, Ecological Society of America, 1 June 1922, cited in Getty, "Waterton," 146-47, 149-50.

23. *The Gazette* (June 1922), 5.

Palliser Pass Camp in Rocky Mountains Park, the Waterton Lakes issue came before the club. The background of the issue was summarized as follows:

A letter had been received from the Commissioner of National Parks desiring an opinion from the Club on the matter of the raising of the water level of the Waterton lakes. A letter had also been received from the Secretary of the National Parks Association of the United States. It claimed that the beauty of the Park would be utterly spoiled. A circular had been sent to the various Sections enquiring their points of view, which had been very divergent. Some considered that the raising of the water level was an absolute necessity for economic reasons. Others considered the matter outside the jurisdiction of the Club.<sup>24</sup>

When opened to debate before the general membership, the Waterton issue revealed a somewhat fragmented range of opinions within the club. This discourse suggests how the ACC, like any special interest group, was subject to a series of internal cross currents that could shift the allegiance of its members in contrary directions. Despite their apparent homogeneity, alpinists came from various backgrounds, often accommodating an eclectic blend of values in unexpected and sometimes “teeth-gritting” harmony. The friction between these different views was part of the process of democratic consensus building on conservation issues within the group.<sup>25</sup>

Rancher Frederick W. Godsall of Cowley, Alberta, spoke of “the absolute necessity of the dam to keep the southern Alberta farmer from total ruin due to drought.” In the 1890s, Godsall had led a conservationist drive to reserve the Waterton area as a national park, concerned by the effects of increased human population already witnessed in fish and wildlife depletion, and the need to protect the Waterton Lakes headwaters. In 1895, Ottawa responded by creating the Waterton Park Reserve. Commenting on its 139 km<sup>2</sup> area in 1905, he said: “I doubt the reserve is large enough for its purpose.” However, when it came to drought, Godsall the southern Alberta rancher took precedence over Godsall the conservationist. Invoking biblical parables on sharing water, Godsall argued staunchly in favour of the proposed Waterton dam.<sup>26</sup>

Among the opponents of the dam, James Outram rejoined that the Waterton Lakes “would be completely spoiled as a pleasure resort” if the dam went ahead. Arthur Wheeler admitted he thought the scheme would undoubtedly go ahead but maintained that a larger principle was at stake in the issue:

---

24. *The Gazette* (December 1922), 17.

25. For a discussion of similar social tensions, see David Robbins, “Sport Hegemony and the Middle Class: the Victorian Mountaineers,” *Theory, Culture & Society* (1987), 579-601.

26. *The Gazette* (December 1922), 17. When lobbying for the creation of the Waterton Park reserve, Godsall had argued to the Minister of the Interior that “the beauty and grandeur of the scenery there is unsurpassed.... It is therefore very essential that the interest of the public should be properly safeguarded in this ‘beauty spot.’” See W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, vol. I (Ottawa, 1976), 46. For further background on Godsall's role in the creation of Waterton National Park and the current ecological state of the park, see Kevin Van Tighem, “Waterton, Crown of the Continent,” *Borealis* (May/July 1990), 26.

The point is, if the Mountain Parks are set aside for present and future generations they should be preserved untouched. The desire is to prevent the establishment of a precedent which will enable any corporation to go in and take away any part of the parks.<sup>27</sup>

Like Harkin, Wheeler emphasized the principle of inviolability and believed the Waterton dam could set a dangerous precedent for public parks. T.B. Moffat, ACC Calgary Section Chairman, echoed this theme:

We realize the great importance of the scheme to the southern country, but we want to let the Department know that we are very much opposed to any destruction of our parks. The Government must not trespass upon the people's rights.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, a resolution was passed at the 1922 meeting to record the Alpine Club's dissatisfaction with the irrigation proposal:

With regard to the Waterton Lakes Irrigation Scheme, the Alpine Club of Canada, while it recognizes the undoubted economic value of the project, deplors the necessity of the action to be taken if it involves the destruction of the natural beauties of a park which the Government has already decided shall be set aside for the benefit of the public. The Club considers it a necessity to affirm its stand on a principle which involves such a precedent and desires that it may be kept fully informed by the Government of the details of the development of the scheme.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the Alpine Club asserted the primacy of protecting the public domain from corporate exploitation. By joining Commissioner Harkin's campaign to stop the Waterton Lakes project, the club hoped to avoid a precedent threatening the sanctity of the national parks. Despite the club's acknowledgment of prairie agricultural economics, inviolability had emerged as a key principle in the protection of the public domain embodied by the mountain parks. Here the club was not alone, as Alberta Progressive M.P. for Macleod G.G. Coote indicated in the House of Commons:

As regards the case...of the Waterton Lakes, I think just as many people are opposed to the using of Waterton Lakes as an irrigation reservoir as there are who are in favour of that proposition. I hope that the minister will see that the water-powers in our parks are preserved.<sup>30</sup>

By 1923, the Waterton Lakes dam proposal had died on the planning board. Washington's unyielding stance regarding Glacier National Park in Montana deterred Canada's Minister of the Interior from submitting the Waterton scheme to the International Waterways Commission. Under J.B. Harkin, the National Parks Branch summoned extensive arguments against dam construction. The Branch contended that permitting the project within the park boundaries would create an open season on the

---

27. *The Gazette* (December 1922), 18.

28. *The Gazette* (December 1922), 18.

29. *The Gazette* (December 1922), 18.

30. *House of Commons Debates*, 1 June 1923, 3442.

national parks, setting a dangerous precedent for invasive commercial exploitation. Finally, just as debate over the dam culminated, the need for expensive irrigation works diminished due to a rise in average precipitation that produced bumper harvests in the southern Alberta districts during the 1920s.<sup>31</sup>

Historian Ian Getty has attributed the victory over the Waterton dam scheme to the strength of American opposition to the proposal more than the protests of Canadian park advocates. While the advanced state of American conservation advocacy benefitted the Canadian national parks as far as the protection of Glacier National Park was concerned, the agency of Harkin and his staff in soliciting public support from interest groups in Canada cannot be overlooked. That national parks administrators turned to the Alpine Club in the face of the well-organized irrigation lobby suggests the department considered the ACC a key park user group whose “interests and sympathies” were loyal to a shared vision of the national parks, a vision wherein the inviolability of the nation’s natural heritage was paramount.

During the Waterton debate, the Alpine Club moved to protect the public domain and made a clear stand for park protection, albeit with a pragmatic awareness of the need for economic growth in western Canada. Despite his professed dislike for “propaganda,” Commissioner Harkin played his hand well during the Waterton debate and succeeded in building an alliance between the federal Parks Branch and the ACC. On the whole, the Alpine Club of Canada found its own advantage in this coalition and moved one step further as a political interest group defending its interest in the public domain. As a lobby group, the club expanded its tactics to include gala banquet speeches, press coverage, formal resolutions, internal contacts within the civil service, and collegial networks. It learned the art of alliance building. Fundamentally, the Alpine Club enhanced its relationship with the Canadian National Parks Branch as a politically mobile, key stakeholder group with a kindred vision of the mountain parks. In the long run, victory over the Waterton dam proved to be effortless compared to the protracted debate over the future of rivers and lakes to the north in Rocky Mountains Park.

### **“Commercial Invasion” — Confronting the Minnewanka and Spray Lakes Dam Proposals, 1922-1930**

The Calgary Power Company saw the watersheds on Alberta’s eastern slopes as the great hydro-power warehouse of the Rockies. During the early 1900s, Calgary Power extended a web of electrical power stations driven by rivers and waterfalls through the mountains and foothills west of Calgary. Here on the advancing technological frontiers of hydro power, the urban needs of prairie towns and cities clashed with a more esoteric vision of the national mountain parks as a public trust, and the corporate goals of Calgary Power conflicted with the Alpine Club of Canada.

---

31. Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. III, 47; Ian Getty, *A History of Human Settlement at Waterton Lakes National Park, 1800-1937* (Ottawa, 1971), 141-51; Potyandi, *Where the Rivers Meet*, 185-87.

In May 1911, Calgary Power's first hydro-electric plant went into operation on the Bow River's Horseshoe Falls, generating a total of 19,000 horsepower. Technology made it possible to combine the production of power from "run-of-the-river" systems with "high head" hydro plants that generated energy as water dropped in elevation through a turbine system, as with the Horseshoe Falls installation. At a rate of \$30 per horsepower, Calgary's electrical supply could now support a new street railway system, urban growth, and industrial investments such as the CPR's regional repair center. Horseshoe Falls was critical to the supply of inexpensive power to the city of Calgary, whose population soared from 4,398 in 1901 to 43,704 in 1911, and continued to grow to 63,305 by 1921.<sup>32</sup>

In 1912, the Calgary Power Company first dammed a storage reservoir on Lake Minnewanka in Rocky Mountains National Park. In 1913, the company brought a dam and generating station at Kananaskis Falls into service, despite alleged infringements on the lands of the Stoney Indian Reservation and Rocky Mountains Park.<sup>33</sup> At this stage, the aggregate capacity of Calgary Power's water-power plants totalled 32,000 horsepower, and served Calgary, the Canada Cement Company at Exshaw, and the village of Cochrane west of Calgary.<sup>34</sup> During the peak of winter, however, flow rates on the Bow River dropped causing Calgary Power's run-of-the-river hydro plants to operate at one-sixth their total capacity. For this reason, engineers turned to the idea of creating water storage reservoirs in the Rocky Mountains to augment the river's flow through high-head electrical plants and run-of-the-river generating stations.<sup>35</sup>

When Nova Scotia financier Izaak Walton Killam took control of Calgary Power in 1919, it was already a profitable monopolistic Alberta utility company. Under the corporate leadership of well-known entrepreneur Max Aitken and Calgary lawyer and politician R.B. Bennett, Calgary Power had experienced rapid growth by 1919 and secured the contract to supply power to Calgary, along with franchises for Edmonton and Medicine Hat.<sup>36</sup> Eagerness to expand the company's power grid and increase its capabilities led inevitably to engineering plans to harness the full electrical potential of

---

32. University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary Power Ltd., *Report* (March 1930), 2-6; for background on Calgary's electrical supply and urban growth, see Max Foran, *Calgary: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, 1978), 79; for Calgary population statistics, see *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Calgary."

33. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, "Competition vs. Convenience: Federal Administration of Bow River Waterpowers, 1906-13," in *The Canadian West: Social Change and Economic Development*, ed. Henry C. Klassen (Calgary, 1977), 163-80; C. Ruth Oltmann, *The Valley of Rumours...the Kananaskis* (Seebe, AB, 1976), 37-50.

34. University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary Power Ltd., *Report* (March 1930), 2-6.

35. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930* (Philadelphia, 1986), 303-9.

36. Sue Andruschuk, *TransAlta Utilities: 75 Years of Progress* (TransAlta Utilities, May 1986), 8; R.B. Bennett served on the Calgary Power board of directors from 1909-1919, and held shares in Calgary Power as well as the Canada Cement Company at Exshaw, see James H. Gray, *R.B. Bennett: The Calgary Years* (Toronto, 1991), 107-8, 136, 191; Aitken and Bennett

hydrological systems in the Rockies. Tributaries to the Bow River were central to these proposals, and Calgary Power doggedly pursued its interests in damming Lake Minnewanka and the Spray Lakes valley as storage reservoirs to boost the dry-season flows through its power plants.<sup>37</sup>

As the federal Water Power Branch of the Department of the Interior reported in 1920, harnessing the full potential of the Bow River promised to generate enough power for the ordinary needs of 300,000 people. With populations escalating across the prairie provinces, manufacturing and industrial growth would “inevitably result in a rapidly increasing demand for cheap and dependable power.” Optimum reliable power capacity was a fundamental requirement in attracting this type of business diversification to prairie cities.<sup>38</sup> In 1923, Calgary Power negotiated a new contract with Calgary to combine the generating capacity of its municipally owned steam plants with the company’s own hydro-electric stations, thus increasing output to carry a much higher load. Following the success of an experimental transmission line to supply smaller centers south of Calgary in 1926, Calgary Power launched a rapid expansion of urban and rural electrification.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, through the 1920s, Calgary Power made repeated proposals to dam lakes in Rocky Mountains Park to generate more power to service Alberta’s growing market for urban and rural electrification. The proximity of the national park did not deter Calgary Power’s plans for developing hydro-power dams on Lake Minnewanka, near the resort town of Banff, and on the Spray Lakes, south of the coal-mining town of Canmore. Reacting strongly in favour of keeping the national park free from heavy industrial exploitation, the Alpine Club of Canada joined the National Parks Branch in resisting Calgary Power’s initiatives for over a decade.

In 1921, Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior, was unreceptive to Calgary Power’s request for permission to raise the water level of Lake Minnewanka beyond the height of the existing 1912 dam.<sup>40</sup> The company claimed that the additional water storage capacity to be gained from a new dam would alleviate the problem of low winter flow rates

---

were business partners who established successful mergers including the Canada Cement Company, the Calgary Light and Power Company, and the Alberta Pacific Grain Company, see Richard Wilbur, *The Bennett Administration, 1930-1935* (Ottawa, 1969), 5.

37. For historical background on Calgary Power’s hydro-power developments on the Bow River and their significance to Alberta’s economic growth, see University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary Power Ltd., *Report* (March 1930), and insert; Calgary Power Ltd., *Alberta: Province of Opportunity* (Calgary, 1958).

38. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report, 1917-18 and 1918-1919* (Ottawa, 1920), 58-60.

39. University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary Power Ltd., *Report* (1930), 3-4.

40. Charles Stewart was a central Alberta farmer who began his political career as a Liberal member of the Alberta legislature. He stood as the premier of Alberta from 1917 until defeated by Herbert Greenfield’s United Farmers of Alberta in 1921. He then entered King’s federal cabinet as Minister of the Interior. See *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 1988 ed., s.v. “Stewart, Charles,” Carl Betke.

on the Bow River; supply power to the nearby towns of Canmore, Banff, and Bankhead; and improve the scrubby shoreline of the lake. On the other hand, federal parks officials defended the public right to pristine national parks unspoiled by industrial landmarks. Despite his ministerial responsibility for water power resources in the West, Stewart was receptive to advisors within the National Parks Branch and remained unsympathetic to the proposed Minnewanka dam project.<sup>41</sup> As Stewart later explained, he was “keen on scenic beauty” and felt that Lake Minnewanka was an aesthetic attraction within close proximity to Banff townsite that would be marred by changing water levels.<sup>42</sup>

In 1922, hard on the heels of the Minnewanka proposal, Calgary Power renewed a 1920 request to dam the entire chain of Spray Lakes. The plan aimed to engineer a storage reservoir by flooding the Spray Lakes Valley between the Goat and Kananaskis ranges in southeastern Rocky Mountains Park. Squeezed by this corporate power play, the Canadian National Parks Branch suspected the spectre of the huge Spray project was devised to wrest approval of the Minnewanka application from the minister.<sup>43</sup>

Federal policies on resource extraction in the national parks grew less permissive during this period. For example, logging and mining controls were strengthened. In 1912, the Parks Branch had offered little resistance to the construction of dams at Kananaskis Falls and Lake Minnewanka; by 1921, the Branch strongly opposed further hydro plans for Minnewanka and sought to protect Rocky Mountains National Park from excessive resource extraction. Dam proposals in the 1920s thus became a rallying point for Canadian national parks advocates set on the conservation of “scenic beauty.” In many ways, the magnitude and political ramifications of the Minnewanka and Spray Lakes dam projects resembled the turn-of-the-century Hetch Hetchy dam debate in Yosemite National Park, California, which gave rise to organized national parks advocacy in the United States.

A strong lobby of proconservation national parks supporters emerged to oppose the dam proposals. In 1922 and 1923, J.B. Harkin’s office was flooded with letters and telegrams protesting hydro development in Rocky Mountains Park. Tourist groups such as the Calgary Automobile Club voiced concern that the mountain scenery would be marred and the Banff Citizens’ Council opposed “any attempt on [the] part of irrigation or water power interests to invade national parks” and disrupt their natural beauty.<sup>44</sup>

---

41. Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 170-177; Taylor, “Legislating Nature, 129.

42. *House of Commons Debates*, 14 June 1923, 3940.

43. Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 170-177; Taylor, “Legislating Nature, 129.

44. Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 173-74; NA, RG 84, vol. 491, file R39-5-2, Banff Citizens Council to Park Commissioner Harkin, telegram, 12 September 1922; *Ibid.*, “Will Not Permit Minnewanka Levels Changed,” *Morning Albertan*, 29 January 1923; *Ibid.*, “Banff Objects to Lake Minnewanka’s Level Being Raised,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, 27 July 1922.

## "HANDS OFF OUR NATIONAL PARKS"

The Alpine Club of Canada voiced some of the strongest statements in favour of national park preservation. Conditioned by earlier 1920s debates over development in the national parks, the club sprang to the defence of the Spray Lakes. The Toronto ACC Section went on record to defend the national parks:

We are of the opinion that the principle should be laid down and accepted once and for all that our national parks, which belong to the people of Canada, should be preserved for the whole people, and not destroyed or exploited for commercial purposes for the benefit of a few.<sup>45</sup>

Here the Alpine Club was in harmony with J.B. Harkin's populist vision of the national parks as an inviolable public domain.

As in the case of the Waterton irrigation scheme, Arthur Wheeler and Sir James Outram balked at the proposal to dam lakes in the national parks. At the Victoria ACC section's annual dinner in March 1923, Wheeler condemned the Spray Lakes plan, as reported in the *Daily Colonist*:

Such [a] scheme would, in his opinion, completely destroy the beautiful valley, which is a main thoroughfare to many of the most scenic centres of the Southern Canadian Rockies.<sup>46</sup>

Because his Mt. Assiniboine tour business passed through the area, Wheeler was well aware of the dam's potential impact on the environment and on tourism. At the Calgary section's annual dinner in April 1923, Outram emphasized the duty of the club to uphold the preservation of the natural valley and oppose dams on the Spray Lakes, as reported in the club's *Gazette*:

He hoped that every single member would oppose to the last the proposed scheme of turning the Spray Lake district into a reservoir to generate electricity for Calgary, thus ruining a spot of wonderful beauty forever.<sup>47</sup>

These statements to a crowd of 125 – including National Parks Administrator J.C. Campbell – were echoed by the local club secretary T.O. West, who protested "the infraction of the rights of the Canadian people...in the damming up of the Spray Lakes."<sup>48</sup>

Rancher F.W. Godsall was one of the only recorded dam proponents in the Alpine Club. He argued that the needs of the prairie farmer should take precedence over preserving the national parks in their natural state:

I do not consider that it is the business of the Alpine Club.... Considering the vast area of mountains and lakes in Alberta and B.C., it is positively hoggish to trouble about 2

---

45. Cited in Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 173-74.

46. NA, RG 84, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 3, "Alpine Club at Annual Dinner," *Daily Colonist*, 29 March 1913.

47. *The Gazette* (June 1923), 20-21.

48. *The Gazette* (June 1923), 20-21.



or 3 lakes, or half a dozen, and thereby hinder the progress of the chief and main industry of the country, upon which all other wealth depends.<sup>49</sup>

Like many Canadians, Godsall believed in the superabundance of wilderness. As in the case of the Waterton dam, Godsall put his faith in God and hydro with his appeal "to think of the needs of the prairies, whether for water, or for power generated by water...and help Calgary and other towns to prosperity again...as intended by a wise Creator."<sup>50</sup>

Godsall was convinced that ACC members had bowed to Wheeler on the matter of hydro development in the Rockies, a belief he disclosed to William Pearce – a key proponent of hydro development who worked for the CPR. His claim is dubious given the strong-minded individual leaders and members who made a concerted effort to oppose dams in the national parks, including: W.W. Foster, the B.C. Public Works Deputy Minister; Fred Bell, a Vancouver medical doctor; Selby Walker, a Calgary conservationist; and Andrew Sibbald, a Saskatoon lawyer. The ACC was not Wheeler's puppet. It was an active interest group with an independent membership and its strongest leaders emerged as avid national park defenders. Judging by the lack of other dissenters, it appears that Godsall's opinion represented a small minority within the ACC and his internal campaign to persuade the Calgary and Edmonton ACC sections to oppose Wheeler met with little enthusiasm.<sup>51</sup>

Through spring and summer 1923, Arthur Wheeler devoted considerable energy to publicizing the dam controversy in western newspapers and Alpine Club publications, as he laid the ground for the formation of a national parks advocacy association. In response to criticism from former Department of Interior colleague William Pearce, Wheeler stated that his primary concern was to safeguard "the general principle that the mountain parks are reserved for the benefit of all the people and should not be subject to violation" by commercial ventures.<sup>52</sup> With prescient insight regarding Rocky Mountains Park, he warned Pearce against the erosion of the national parks through cumulative demands for development:

As a club, we are opposed to commercial invasion of our National Parks, which are reserved for the people for their especial (sic) benefit. The Spray project is one partic-

---

49. University of Alberta Archives (UAA), accn. 74-169-421, F.W. Godsall to William Pearce, 19 May 1923; regarding the myth of nature's abundance see, George Altmeyer, "Three ideas of nature in Canada, 1893-1914" *Journal of Canadian Studies* (August 1976), 27-31, 34.

50. UAA, accn. 74-169-421, Godsall to T.O. West, Calgary ACC Chair, 29 May 1923; *Ibid.*, Pearce to Godsall, 14 May 1923; *Ibid.*, accn. 74-169-421.2, Godsall to Pearce, 24 June 1923.

51. UAA, accn. 74-169-421, Godsall to T.O. West, Calgary ACC Chair, 29 May 1923; *Ibid.*, Pearce to Godsall, 14 May 1923; *Ibid.*, accn. 74-169-421.2, Godsall to Pearce, 24 June 1923.

52. UAA, accn. 74-169-421, A.O. Wheeler to W. Pearce, 18 May 1923. For background to William Pearce's activities also see Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 13, 40, 51-56; E.A. Mitchner, "William Pearce and Federal Government Activity in the West, 1874-1904," *Canadian Public Administration* (June 1967), 235-43; *Ibid.*, "William Pearce and Federal Government Activity in Western Canada 1882-1904," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1971.

ular case, as also the Waterton Lakes scheme and the Lake Minnewanka scheme, in which you are particularly interested. There will be assuredly, in the course of time, hundreds of other cases of varying types, all of which will have the same general grounds for argument as this particular one, and if not checked the ultimate result will be ruination to the National Parks of Canada. This has been amply proved by the experience of the United States, and the desperate fight that has been waged there for many years to save such public park reserves intact for the people.<sup>53</sup>

Taking issue with Pearce's letters to the *Calgary Daily Herald*, Wheeler refuted the case for the Spray Lakes dam and urged Canadians to guard against the erosion of the national parks by insisting on their inviolability.<sup>54</sup> A public advocacy association would be the watchdog to prevent “commercial invasion” in the national parks.

In the June 1923 edition of the club's national newsletter *The Gazette*, Wheeler primed club members to form a Canadian National Parks Association in order to play the watchdog role. The U.S. National Parks Association was his model for a non-government national parks advocacy group. It followed a tradition set by the Sierra Club, created in 1892 as the “guardian for the Yosemite.” Proposals to construct a water reservoir for San Francisco by damming the Tuolumne River in Yosemite National Park's Hetch Hetchy Valley, launched the Sierra Club's most famous conservation battle. Faced with a divisive issue, Sierra Club leaders John Muir and William Colby created the Society for the Preservation of National Parks to preserve national parks from “destructive invasion.” This group formed a national alliance with support from several alpine clubs, walking clubs, women's clubs, and civic societies. Notably, it shared the Sierra Club's directors and San Francisco offices. Its successor, the National Parks Association, aimed “to defend the National Parks and National Monuments fearlessly against the assaults of private interests and aggressive commercialism” as irrigation and dam proposals continued to challenge American parks into the 1920s.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Wheeler thought a Canadian parks association would ensure that power companies kept their “Hands Off Our National Parks”:

All lovers of Nature as found amidst the Great Hills of Canada, and especially mountain enthusiasts, are deeply concerned to prevent the invasion of the National Parks of Canada by commercial interests, to their destruction. In creating these reservations for

---

53. UAA, accn. 74-169-421, A.O. Wheeler to W. Pearce, 24 May 1923.

54. UAA, accn. 74-169-421, Wheeler to *Calgary Daily Herald*, 8 June 1923.

55. Holway R. Jones, *John Muir and the Sierra Club; the Battle for Yosemite* (San Francisco, 1965), 11, 94-99, 119-121, 182; Stephen R. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison, 1985), 144, groups that supported the creation of the Society included the Boston Appalachian Mountain Club, the Seattle Mountaineers, the Portland Mazamas club, the American Civic Association, the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs; Albright, *The Birth of the National Parks Service*, 106-7; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln, 1979), 86-87, 102-3.

the joy and lasting benefit of millions of people, the Government of Canada has followed a wise policy, not alone for the present generation but for generations to come. In the recent past commercial interests have endeavoured to encroach upon our park reserves, and utilize their scenic beauties to pay dividends to power companies. The greatest good to the greatest number is a universal law, and in this case particularly it applies. When one thinks of the undiluted joy and happiness that is given yearly by our scenic parks to thousands of workers of Canada and from other lands...interest in dividend paying stocks sinks into insignificance. The slogan "Hands Off Our National Parks" is a good one to adopt and to take measures to maintain.<sup>56</sup>

Based on these arguments, Wheeler proposed that the Alpine Club form a Canadian association dedicated to parks advocacy at its upcoming summer camp. Wheeler's instinct to build a lobby machine and follow up with publicity campaigns and slogans displayed a shrewd sense of political tactics. The ACC, meanwhile, would carry on promoting Canadian alpinism as its main focus.

The Alpine Club's annual general meeting held in Larch Valley on August 2, 1923, devoted considerable time to the formation of a national parks advocacy organization. National Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin attended, along with Chief Park Engineer J.M. Wardle. Since the Waterton dam crisis, Harkin had seen a need for the formation of a Canadian national parks association like that in the U.S.A. The Commissioner's attendance at the meeting suggests Harkin wished to encourage the Alpine Club's initiative, and, one speculates, he may have explored the idea of an advocacy body with Wheeler leading up to the 1923 summer camp since they knew each other as colleagues in the Department of the Interior.

True to its origins, the ACC stood for the Canadian "mountain heritage." ACC President William Foster appealed to posterity in his call for the club to take action to protect the "scenic assets" of the Rocky Mountain parks:

The National Parks were for the perpetual benefit of the people and no encroachments, merely benefitting a small minority should be allowed.... Science may some day solve the problem of utilities, but the great scenic assets can never be improved upon and must be preserved for all time. If the Club takes part in this conservation and resistance to encroachment, it will be doing something of real national value and will be known for its vision – it should look ahead.<sup>57</sup>

Foster urged the Alpine Club to resist hydro development and promote a populist vision of the national parks as Canada's scenic natural playgrounds preserved for the good of the people and generations to come.

Arthur Wheeler proposed that the ACC form the Canadian National Parks Association, as the club was "vitaly interested in defending the entire system of national parks from commercial encroachment and despoliation of their beautiful scenery."<sup>58</sup> He called

---

56. *The Gazette* (June 1923), 4-5.

57. *The Gazette* (Dec. 1923), 17-18.

58. *The Gazette* (Dec. 1923), 21-22.

on Commissioner Harkin to explain the government's policy on national parks, as publicized in the 1923 *Gazette*:

Mr. Harkin said the policy of the parks was the policy of the Alpine Club of Canada, the preservation of the natural beauties of Canada for the people of Canada, free from all monopolies and special privileges. The general opinion was that the parks were a sort of frill, of no especial value. From a commercial standpoint, however, they were a great asset to the nation, bringing enormous amounts of money into the country and paying a huge dividend on the outlay. In 1921 the revenue that the National Parks brought into Canada was at least \$15,000,000. The output that year was \$850,000.... There were also the human dividends to be considered...greater mental, physical and spiritual efficiency.<sup>59</sup>

Harkin's statements about the the importance of the parks bore a striking similarity to the philosophy expressed by the ACC. Parks bureaucrats and alpinists shared a common vision of parks as a public domain and allied in support of mutual goals, despite their otherwise distinct vested interests.

ACC section representatives from Vancouver Island, Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Toronto then spoke out “against the spoliation of the parks,” which they saw inherent in the Spray Lakes hydro proposals, and threw their support behind the motion to form a national parks conservation body. Andrew Sibbald moved the proposal be accepted, seconded by Fred C. Bell, thus creating the Canadian National Parks Association (CNPA).

During its early years, the ACC parent organization fostered development of the nascent CNPA behind the scenes while maintaining its formal role as Canada's national mountaineering group. Just as the Society for the Preservation of National Parks had shared its directorship and offices with the American Sierra Club during the Hetch Hetchy debate, the ACC's executive and membership overlapped with that of the CNPA, and the ACC offered the CNPA organizational and financial assistance during the Spray Lakes and Minnewanka controversies. In 1924, all but one of the CNPA officers were ACC leaders: W.W. Foster was the CNPA president; A.A. McCoubrey, central vice president; Selby Walker, western vice president; A.O. Wheeler, secretary; and Andrew Sibbald, treasurer. The ACC was also well-represented on the 1924 CNPA executive committee with members such as Dr. W.J. Hickson of Montreal, H.E. Sampson of Regina, and Julia Henshaw, Dr. Fred Bell and Major F.V. Longstaff of Vancouver. In 1930, only four members of the CNPA executive were not members of the Alpine Club.<sup>60</sup> In 1934, ACC President A.A. McCoubrey ran for the position of CNPA vice president. In the same year, the ACC was allowed five votes in the CNPA elections.<sup>61</sup> With these

---

59. *The Gazette* (Dec. 1923), 21-22.

60. *The Gazette* (December 1923), 8. In 1924, conservationist Charles Hanbury-Williams, the CNPA eastern vice president, was an exception in that he did not belong to the ACC. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives (hereafter WMCR), AC 00M/008, Tweedy to Moffat, 27 May 1930.

61. WMCR, AC 00M/017, Tweedy to McCoubrey, 6 February 1934.

overlaps, it was practical to hold the first CNPA general meetings at the annual Alpine Club summer camps in the Rockies and Selkirks.

The goals and constitution of the Canadian National Parks Association (CNPA) were set in 1923 by members of the Alpine Club; therefore, it is not surprising to notice certain similarities between the goals and structure of the CNPA and its parent organization. The CNPA constitution set forth three major objectives:

- a) The preservation of the National Parks of Canada in their entirety for the use of the people of Canada and of the world, and the prevention of detriment to them through the invasion of commercial interests.
- b) The spreading abroad of propaganda with the object of attracting people to them.
- c) The preservation of their natural beauties for the benefit of mankind, and of the fauna and the flora intact, for educational, scientific, artistic and recreational purposes. To maintain them inviolate as symbols of the great heritage we possess in this wide-spreading Dominion of Canada.<sup>62</sup>

The last objective bore striking similarity to the objectives of the Alpine Club's 1906 constitution, which reflected the all-embracing Victorian philosophy of alpinism as envisioned by ACC founders Elizabeth Parker and Arthur Wheeler.

Major J.W. Selby Walker (1879-1952) – the Calgary conservationist who founded Inglewood Bird Sanctuary on the banks of the Bow River – became the CNPA's long-standing executive secretary and most vocal member.<sup>63</sup> As the predominant figure in the CNPA; some critics suggested that the group was a "one-man show" under Walker's leadership.<sup>64</sup> To his credit, Walker raised consistent opposition to industrial encroachments in the national parks and would keep the CNPA going through the Great Depression. Emphasizing the advanced policies of the U.S. national parks in CNPA bulletins, Walker recommended similar public policies be adopted in Canada. In contrast to the

---

62. *The Gazette* (Dec. 1923), 6-11.

63. "Major W.J. Selby Walker," CAJ(1953), 128; "W.J. Selby Walker, Sanctuary Founder Dies," *The Calgary Herald*, 22 July 1952, 1-2; Canadian Hostelling Association, *Fifty Years of Canadian Hostelling* (Calgary, 1988), 20, 31-39, 52, 60; Grant MacEwan, *Colonel James Walker: Man of the Western Frontier* (Saskatoon, 1989), 159. As an ACC founding member, Walker held various leadership roles in the club, notably the honorary treasurership from 1914 to 1922 and a position on the clubhouse management committee. He was also involved in the formative years of the Canadian Youth Hostels Association.

64. NA, RG 84, vol. 189, file U36-1, part 1, H.S. Robinson to J. Smart, 23 August 1948. Robinson claimed that the CNPA had not held a meeting since 1923 and Selby Walker was a one-man show. Although his claim was not factually correct, he nonetheless believed the ACC should distance itself from the CNPA because they no longer shared the same views. NA, RG 84, vol. 171, file U125-17, part 1, H. Robinson to J. Smart, 9 December 1946. Clearly as federal Supt. of Parks and Resources Information, Robinson held a jaundiced impression of Walker: "Mr. Walker seems to have been running an almost 'one-man' show for some years largely devoted to criticising Canada's National Parks administration because it does not equal that of the United States."

Alpine Club’s social focus on mountaineering and recreation, the CNPA was dedicated to a politicized focus on national parks advocacy and preservation and brought this focus to bear on hydro-development controversies over the next 20 years.

Following the 1923 ACC camp, the CNPA publicly announced its stand against the proposed power developments. Calgaryians Selby Walker and Thomas Moffat proclaimed the creation of the CNPA and its manifesto in the Alberta press:

There are those who look enviously upon our parks and who believe that any enterprise profitable to themselves should be allowed in the parks, while the members of the National Parks Association believe that when a park is once set aside for the recreation of the Canadian nation, the Park Act should not be tampered with and no individual or community should obtain rights within these parks to the detriment of the remainder of the people of Canada.<sup>65</sup>

Like Commissioner Harkin, the CNPA voiced a combination of economic arguments against the proposals, which stressed the tourism potential of the national parks. The CNPA advised: “The Dominion government has nothing to gain by granting a concession within one of the National parks, which by the precedent established jeopardizes all of the parks.”

In August 1923, Andrew Sibbald notified the Minister of the Interior of the formation of the CNPA and corresponded with Commissioner Harkin as to how the new association could best assist the Parks Branch. A barrage of form letters to the minister from CNPA supporters followed – many from Sibbald’s hometown of Saskatoon and all opposed to the Calgary Power application.<sup>66</sup> The CNPA’s battle against power development in Canada’s national parks attracted the support of many other groups: the Banff Citizen’s Council; the Calgary Good Roads Association; the Edmonton Automobile and Good Roads Association; the Women’s Canadian Club; the National Council of Women; the American Association for the Advancement of Science; boards of trade; the Alberta Provincial Liberal Association; and various clubs devoted to natural history, fishing, and community service.<sup>67</sup> Together, they formed a broad-based coalition, much like the union of national park supporters that had gathered around the Sierra Club’s Society for the

---

65. UAA, William Pearce Collection, accn. 74-169-421.2, W.J.S. Walker and T.B. Moffat, “National Parks And Power Sites,” newsclipping, n.d.

66. NA, RG 84, vol. 107, file U125, part 1, A. Sibbald to Minister of the Interior, 14 August 1923; *Ibid.*, Sibbald to Harkin, 9 August 1923; *Ibid.*, W.J. Campbell to Minister, 29 August 1923; *Ibid.*, Harold Parr to Minister, 30 August 1923; *Ibid.*, A. McKay to Minister, n.d.; D.J.M. McGeary to Minister, 10 October 1923; *Ibid.*, E.J. MacKenzie to Minister, 8 November 1923; *Ibid.*, Christina E. Henry, 21 November 1923; *Ibid.*, Rupert Reid to Minister, n.d. Among these CNPA correspondents, Campbell, Henry, and McGeary were also ACC members. See WMCR, *Constitution and List of Members* (1920-1922) and (1924-1926).

67. Leslie Bella and Susan Markham, “Parks First: Patriotic Canadians from Coast to Coast in Support of National Parks,” *Canadian Parks/Recreation Association* (December 1984), 15-16; Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 54.

Preservation of National Parks in attempts to stop the Hetch Hetchy dam. Emulating American examples, Wheeler and Harkin integrated a workable interest-group model for national parks advocacy into the process of Canadian public policy formation.

In June 1923, Ottawa had rejected Calgary Power's Cascade Power project and application to raise the water level of Lake Minnewanka. Noting that the Water Powers Branch and the Parks Branch were "widely at variance" on this issue, Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart provided the following rationale for his decision:

After looking it over I came to the conclusion that it would absolutely destroy the scenic properties of that particular lake. It was very close to where all sightseers of the park come, and obviously if we are to get any return for our investment in our national parks we must keep them attractive enough to draw tourists, and on these grounds, I refused the application of the company.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time, the Spray Lakes application remained before the department, and Stewart intended to visit the Spray valley during the summer of 1923 in order to make his assessment:

I am not an engineer and cannot tell from a study of the maps just what the effect of raising the level of the Spray lakes would be. However, it is rather an expensive undertaking, and in fact would cost a great deal more than the company would feel warranted in expending at the moment in view of the amount of power they could sell.<sup>69</sup>

The leader of the Progressive Party, M.P. Robert Forke, called the minister's attention to the fact that the issue of power applications affecting the national parks was a "very lively question in the prairie provinces" and he had received telegrams protesting against "granting any further power privileges."<sup>70</sup> Aware of the potential political fallout of seeming to cater to business tycoons in Calgary and Montreal in the face of scrutiny from the western Progressives, the federal Liberals continued to move carefully on the issue.

In June 1923, the Minnewanka proposal was turned down but victory for conservationists opposed to the dams was short-lived. Calgary Power merely withdrew its proposals until a more opportune time. The company could afford to play a waiting game knowing that the demand for power was growing just as certainly as political factors would shift with time.

In 1922, federal-provincial negotiations over the transfer of natural resources to the western provinces had started anew, this time between Prime Minister King and Alberta's Premier Greenfield. The political context of decisions made by the Department

---

68. *House of Commons Debates*, 14 June 1923, 3940; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1923, 3442.

69. *House of Commons Debates*, 14 June 1923, 3939-40.

70. *House of Commons Debates*, 14 June 1923, 3939; W.L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1950), 161, 164, 171, 188.

of the Interior was coloured by these negotiations.<sup>71</sup> The Spray Lakes question was held in abeyance until the matter of resource allocation along the eastern slopes of the Rockies was determined. In any case, Calgary Power's application for the Spray Lakes project may well have been premature in the 1920s, considering market demands for power, slow industrial growth in the West, and competition with the flourishing oil and gas sector for energy provision.

Following the Lake Minnewanka victory, Wheeler continued to publicly promote the National Parks Association.<sup>72</sup> Gradually, however, he succumbed to the belief that Calgary Power would win out in the long run. The long-term interests of big business were entrenched in the Spray Lakes Valley and thus augured the transfer of this area to the province. Minister Stewart visited the Spray Lakes in summer 1923, and by April 1924 he seemed to view Calgary Power's need to supply power to Calgary in a more sympathetic light. By 1924, the Progressive threat in Ottawa had eased as the party began to disintegrate. At the same time, the national and regional economy began to accelerate. By now, the Province of Alberta had also applied to develop the Spray Lakes as a storage basin and commenced hydrological studies hoping to block private development of a key water power resource.<sup>73</sup> The Minister of the Interior publicly stated in April 1924 that that he was keeping "a perfectly open mind" on the issue: "I do not think the development would interfere very materially with the park as such, in view of the fact that it comprises so many hundreds of thousands of acres." M.P.s from Saskatoon and Vancouver cautioned the minister to deal with the issue carefully. Saskatoon Progressive M.P. John Evans lobbied directly on behalf of the ACC:

I should like to inform the minister that the whole Alpine Club of Canada is watching this application with jealous eyes. They believe there should be no interference with Spray river park such as would detract in any way from the attractive and pleasurable features which make these national parks so desirable as playgrounds for the people. I think the government should formulate a policy respecting the national parks so that no unfortunate precedent would be created for the future.<sup>74</sup>

"Jealous eyes" were everywhere and the minister stated that the issue was of such importance he would not deal with it hastily.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, intergovernmental negotiations over natural resource transfers continued.

---

71. "King Offers Natural Resources to Prairie Provinces," *Weekly Albertan*, 1 March 1922, 1; "Take the Resources, Give Up Subsidies, Offer of Dominion," *Ibid.*, 2 March 1922, 1; "Legislators Will Talk over the Policy of the Resources," *Ibid.*, 7 March 1922, 1; "Debate Tame on Question of Transfer of Resources," *Ibid.*, 9 March 1922, 1, 5; E. Alyn Mitchner, "The Development of Western Waters," 104-6, 170.

72. NA, RG 84, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 3, "Alpine Club of Canada Plans to Climb Mt. Logan," *Calgary Herald*, 5 February 1924, on promoting CNPA.

73. E. Alyn Mitchner, "The Development of Western Waters," 104-6.

74. *House of Commons Debates*, 10 April 1924, 1260.

75. *House of Commons Debates*, 10 April 1924, 1259.



As a good tactician, Arthur Wheeler read the board and knew when to change his game. In March 1925, Wheeler shifted direction and advised J.B. Harkin to withdraw territory from the park rather than risk setting a precedent for the commercial violation of the national parks:

I am in hopes that the franchise will not be given, but it is possible that the pressure may be too strong to overcome. Should it be decided to grant the franchise and withdraw the area from the Banff National Park, as I think would be wise to avoid the precedent, then, in such case also, a good road should be insisted upon in order to maintain access to the Assiniboine area.<sup>76</sup>

As in the case of the 1922 Waterton debate, Wheeler was conscious of avoiding precedents for "commercial invasion" of the parks. He argued for a vision of parks based on the principle of inviolability, preserving the national parks unimpaired for present and future generations. Maintaining inviolability, in this case, justified the alienation of certain national park lands to prevent setting a precedent for commercial development within their boundaries.

Calgary Power's hydro-development plans for the Rockies were rekindled as federal-provincial negotiations over the transfer of natural resources picked up in 1928. At the same time, the western economy was hitting a prosperous stride again as wheat sales regained the levels of the Laurier boom. Urban and rural demand for power surged. Again, the Spray Lakes dam proposal came to the fore. Bolstered by opposition to dams in the national parks from Western cities as far away from the Rockies as Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Vancouver, the Minister of the Interior refused to acquiesce to Calgary Power's pressure to allow the Spray Lakes proposal to go ahead. Planning under way in the Parks Branch, however, suggests that J.B. Harkin suspected as early as 1927 that the *size* of Rocky Mountains Park would ultimately have to be sacrificed to safeguard the principle of national park inviolability.<sup>77</sup> Here was a crucial tactical shift in keeping with Arthur Wheeler's 1925 strategy to protect the park from hydro development.

Anticipating provincial demands for the excision of resource-rich areas from the national parks, the Parks Branch prepared for an alienation of lands. The 1929 R.W. Cautley Report suggested new boundaries for Rocky Mountains Park that included new territory around Malloch Mountain and Jasper National Park and excluded areas ripe for resource extraction, primarily the Spray Lakes, Kananaskis, Exshaw, and Canmore.<sup>78</sup>

---

76. NA, RG 84, vol. 102, file U36-1, part 4, A.O. Wheeler to J.B. Harkin, 23 March 1925. The request for a road to the Assiniboine area was likely pertinent to A.O. Wheeler's Mt. Assiniboine tour business.

77. Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 177-80.

78. Taylor, "Legislating Nature," 131-32; Great Plains Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 182. New area added to Rocky Mountains Park included 268 km<sup>2</sup> around Malloch Mountain, and a 2538 km<sup>2</sup> chunk of Jasper National Park.

In 1930, the natural resources transfer acts were decreed, along with the new *National Parks Act*. The new federal park legislation changed the name of Rocky Mountains Park to Banff National Park, formalized Banff’s boundary changes, and enshrined the principle of national parks inviolability. The Act stated:

The Parks are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment, subject to the provisions of this Act and Regulations, and such Parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.<sup>79</sup>

The new area of Rocky Mountains Park totalled 6695 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>80</sup> Despite its Faustian quality, Harkin’s boundary surgery proved effective in warding off immediate industrial encroachment on Banff National Park and placed the principle of inviolability firmly in legislation. In the long run, the principle of inviolability would prove to be a far more pragmatically-defined concept than national parks supporters like the Alpine Club and the CNPA first hoped.

### **The Vision of National Parks – Ideals and Realities**

Friction between western economic development and the established mandate of Canadian alpinists during the 1920s brought the Alpine Club’s vision of national parks into sharper focus. Rapid settlement, the growth of regional consciousness, and technological change in western Canada meant the mountain parks were no longer an isolated wilderness far from the reach of economic growth. As development pressures increased, the club rallied support for its vision of the national parks as a public domain to be preserved in a natural state for the benefit of future generations, rather than exploited for private corporate gain. Middle-class tourism was central to the club’s vision and underscored the “Hands Off Our National Parks” lobby. Although the club espoused a populist vision of the parks, the word “our” in this slogan had a proprietary middle-class ring. Conservation leadership emerged from the urban, professional middle class that treasured the mountain parks as the wilderness playgrounds of the cities.

Through most of the 20th century, the ACC shared an operative partnership with the Parks Branch and a common vision of the national mountain parks. Due to escalating crisis over hydro developments in the Rockies, conservation rose to a higher priority on the club’s agenda. As outside threats heightened an awareness of the need to safeguard the public domain, the club’s internal discourse weighed in favour of park protection. In this atmosphere, Arthur Wheeler proved to be a shrewd and adept political tactician. Wheeler argued pragmatically that the potential precedent for “commercial invasion” of the national parks put the “general principle” of public parks at stake. As a committed group of longstanding park users, the ACC was a ready ally to the

---

79. *The National Parks Act*, May 30, 1930, ch. 33, sec. 4.

80. Great Plains Research Consultants, *Banff National Park*, 183. The area of Banff National Park is currently 6641 km<sup>2</sup>.

National Parks Branch in a coalition of bureaucratic and private recreational stakeholder interests promoting public parks. Strong leaders in the Alpine Club managed to make hydro controversies in the Rockies into a national political issue and to energize a national coalition of broadly-based interest groups that supported the national park ideal of inviolability.

The National Parks Act (1930) was Ottawa's response to calls to protect the public domain and strengthened the principle of inviolability in national parks legislation. Under the new legislation several changes were highlighted: national park lands could be created or amended only by an act of Parliament, wildlife was fully protected, and commercial mineral and timber exploitation was to be phased out.<sup>81</sup> Although the national parks were better protected under this act, resolution came at the expense of alienating sizable tracts of park lands. Realistically, this resolution to resource-use conflicts was only one of the many tradeoffs that would continue to trouble Canada's national parks administration. Calgary Power's foothold in Banff National Park opened the way to future disputes over utilities, later seen in the case of the Lake Minnewanka dam that proceeded during World War II under the War Measures Act – in clear violation of the National Parks Act – and, as a result, perpetuated the enduring TransAlta Utilities' right of way through Banff National Park.<sup>82</sup>

Following the 1920s dam conflicts, the Alpine Club lost its federal funding. Although it had friends in the Parks Branch, the ACC had also acquired enemies in Ottawa's higher corridors of power. In 1930, the federal Conservatives swept to power, led by the favourite son of Calgary capitalism. As Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett was slow to forget the ACC's opposition to Calgary Power and purportedly had "no use for the Alpine Club."<sup>83</sup> To Bennett, the Alpine Club was an impediment to corporations – such as Calgary Power, the CPR, and the Canada Cement Plant – in which he held substantial personal investments. Bennett was a friend of business, not of maverick conservationists who put obstacles in the path of "progress"; this reality was made clear when the ACC's federal funding was terminated after Bennett became prime minister. ACC members held that Bennett penalized the club for its political activism.<sup>84</sup>

---

81. Taylor, "Legislating Nature," 131-34; W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, vol. II (Ottawa, 1977), 10-17. The Act also authorized the establishment of National Historic Parks by order in council.

82. Calgary Power became TransAlta Utilities in 1981, see Andruschuk, *TransAlta*, 44; Reichwein, "Beyond the Visionary Mountains," 303-18, by 1942, the new dam on Lake Minnewanka had raised the water level 19.8 m (65 feet), transformed the shoreline contours, submerged the village of Minnewanka Landing and increased the estimated depth to over 91.4 m (300 feet). As a reservoir, Minnewanka became the largest and deepest lake in Banff National Park.

83. WMCR, AC 00M/010, Mitchell to Sampson, 18 October 1930.

84. *Auditor General's Report* 1928, 222; *Auditor General's Report* 1931-32, 175. It appears that the ACC was a specific target of funding cutbacks. Funding allocated to the Department of the Interior for loans, subsidies and grants actually increased from \$134,255.75 in fiscal 1928 to \$158,708.41 in 1931. Other organizations continued to receive funding, while the ACC totally lost its \$1000 grant, less than one percent of the total 1928 grant budget.

During the 1930s, the Alpine Club shifted away from active national parks conservation advocacy toward a narrowly-defined focus on mountain recreation. As it looked ahead to expanding recreational tourism in the Rockies, the ACC seemed unaware that the forces of urbanization, commercial agriculture, industry and technological change were inexorable and would return in other guises. In its own way, mass tourism would eventually jeopardize park values and the inviolability of the public domain, just as irrigation and dam projects had done in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

As the great-grandparent of an organizational family tree of national parks advocacy groups, the Alpine Club of Canada fostered the growth of Canada's 20th-century parks and conservation movement through its successors. The Canadian National Parks Association formed by the ACC in 1923, gave way to the National and Provincial Parks Association (NPPAC) in 1963, which was revitalized as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) in 1986.<sup>85</sup> These specialized agencies played a key leadership and advocacy role for parks and wilderness, and continued to pursue the conservation and parks ethic that first motivated the Alpine Club of Canada's own battle of the Hetch Hetchy.

Today, managing the detrimental effects of popularity is the greatest challenge facing Canada's national parks, with a total visitation rate of approximately 22 million people a year<sup>86</sup> Hydro dams have moved off the drawing board only to be replaced by unceasing demands to twin highways, build golf courses, expand ski resorts, increase tourism and urbanize wilderness. Simultaneously, national parks are increasingly isolated as islands of habitat in the midst of habitat loss outside their boundaries. The current state of siege cannot support ecological integrity long beyond the 20th century. Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin once said that "the battle for the establishment of national parks is long since over but the battle to keep them inviolate is never won. Claims for the violation of their sanctity are always being put forward under the plausible plea of national or local needs."<sup>87</sup> Since the first Canadian national park was created, safeguarding the public domain has been an ongoing uphill struggle. As the federal government struggles to maintain its existing national parks in a 1990s climate of environmental degradation, government downsizing, budgetary drought, staff reduction, user fees and privatization, and to meet its commitment to create new national parks representing each ecological region of Canada, the survival of the public domain still hangs in the balance. Current calls for vigilance echo Arthur Wheeler's battle cry.

---

85. Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 112-13, 155.

86. Canada, *1996 Information for Local Tour Guides & Other Nature Interpreters* (Banff, 1996), s.v. Parks Canada Fact Sheet.

87. J.B. Harkin, *The History and Meaning of the National Parks of Canada* (Saskatoon, 1957), 14.