

The Canadian National Parks Association: Volunteer Advocates Trying to Form the Parks in Their Image

Susan E. Markham
School of Recreation Management and Kinesiology
Acadia University
Wolfville, Nova Scotia B0P 1X0, Canada

Introduction

Born in 1923 and disintegrated in 1952 - thus could read the obituary for the Canadian National Parks Association.

The Canadian National Parks Association (C.N.P.A.) began as an advocacy group with strong ties to the Alpine Club of Canada which attempted to protect a national park in the Rocky Mountains against development and resource extraction. However, when its first issue was resolved, the group changed its mandate to promote recreation in the out-of-doors. The organisation, through its executive, individual members and member organisations worked throughout the 1930's to promote government involvement in recreation, citing the various benefits to individual and community health and using as a proposed model the German "out into the open" movement. In the late 1930's the mandate changed again to promote recreational travel with issues of parks, highways and the preservation of scenery. The C.N.P.A. limped through the war years, again picked up its interest in parks and active outdoor recreation, then disappeared after 1952. This paper includes the investigation of the Association's materials including

its publications and correspondence to determine its view of parks and recreation, the role of its Executive Secretary, W.J.S. Walker, the make-up of its membership, the impact of the executive on the policies of the Association and the influence of the Association on national parks in Canada. The analysis to determine the role and impact of the C.N.P.A. uses an interpretive framework drawn from theories of pressure groups and policy developed primarily from Higgins (1986) and Pross (1992). The paper concludes with a brief overview of the successors to the C.N.P.A. This research is viewed as being useful in assisting proponents of recreation and parks to understand the historical context of our current policies and the role of advocates in the development of the field, regardless of nation.

The research has been carried out using historical methods, including the collection of secondary and primary source materials relevant to the time period. The primary source materials, either documents about issues or accounts by those directly involved in the issues, in the form of correspondence, reports, manuals, minutes, legislation, etc. were reviewed and formed the basis of the preparation of

the descriptive study of the influence of the C.N.P.A. on parks and recreation. Internal criticism of the documents or accounts was carried out through cross referencing source materials (both primary and secondary) with other authors' work and with other sources as was appropriate. External criticism was done in consultation with the archivists at the various institutions.

The Canadian National Parks Association

The Canadian National Parks Association (C.N.P.A.) was formed at the 1923 Annual Meeting of the Alpine Club of Canada at Larch Valley. Similar in spirit to the National Parks Association in the United States, the C.N.P.A.'s objects were:

- (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 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 flora intact, for educational, scientific, artistic and recreational purposes (Canadian National Parks Association 1923: 7).

The Association did not spring forth at that meeting without any advance planning. Minutes of the executive of

the Alpine Club of Canada indicated that the matter had been discussed in advance at the executive level. The A.C.C. executive not only offered the facilities of its 1923 camp for the organizational meeting, it also provided a suggested list of directors from Central and Western Canada and suggestions about contacting at least one national group who might be interested in the same objects.

Making sure that all bases were covered, the Alpine Club invited Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin to the annual camp, thus ensuring that he would be at the founding meeting of the C.N.P.A. Harkin sympathised with the objects of the Association, and its first project - opposition to the damming of the Spray Lakes for hydro-electric power for the City of Calgary.

The Association's membership was composed of individual and club members. Through club memberships the C.N.P.A. was able to spread its 'propaganda' to all members of a given club, such as a Rotary Club, Canadian Club, Council of Women or Automobile Association, anywhere in the country. Its individual members lived not only in Canada, but also in the United States, England and Scotland (*Constitution and List of Members* 1925). Because of the club memberships, by mid 1926, after only three years of existence, it was able to claim that it represented a membership of over 100,000 (*Bulletin* #3 1 June 1926).

While the first mandate of the Association was to oppose a proposed dam in Banff National Park in Alberta, its mandate changed several times over its 29 year life. Through the 1920's the Association was to 'support the preservation of our national parks';

through the 1930's and early 1940's it promoted 'an hour a day in the open air' and billed itself as being an organisation of 'patriotic Canadians from coast to coast in support of national parks and tributary highways,' then 'patriotic Canadians in support of national parks, tributary highways and forestry,' then after a slight change of name, 'a non-political organisation...supporting national parks, tributary highways, recreational travel and modern forestry" (*Bulletins and Newsletters* 1928, 1935, 1937, 1943).

This change of name from the Canadian National Parks Association to the National Parks Association of Canada was attributed in some circles to the desire to not be confused with the Canadian National Railway - the C.N.R. There was also a desire to not be seen as part of the entrenched political system. This latter point can also be noted in that declaration in 1943 that the Association was 'a non political organisation founded in 1923.' The Association may not have viewed itself as part of the political system, but it certainly operated in a political fashion to try to have an impact on the political system.

The changing mandate can be attributed to both the external environment of the Association and its internal political structure. As the situation which the C.N.P.A. was formed to oppose changed, so did the Association. In 1930 the National Parks Act was changed to amend the boundary of Banff National Park, thus the proposed dam and reservoir were no longer in the Park. The first major issue was resolved - what next? The Association could dissolve, or it could find new objectives - it chose the latter

and morphed to fit the issues of the day.

As the Depression of the 1930's proceeded, the C.N.P.A. focused on several related topics: the role of leisure in the life of the unemployed, the fledgling travel industry, the need for highways to bring visitors to the national parks, and the possibility of using those highways as public works projects to provide relief work for the unemployed. Forestry became part of the Association's concerns as it advocated modern forestry practices which would make wise use of the resource, while maintaining the relatively pristine scenery adjacent to the highways - what we now refer to as "multiple use of resources." After World War Two the Association continued to integrate the potentially conflicting ideologies of protection and use by promoting both conservation of national parks and national park holidays (*Bulletin* #155 30 December 1950).

During the 1930's and 1940's one theme runs through the Association's correspondence and publications - that theme includes leisure, recreation and fitness. The variations on the theme can be seen in cartoons from the Association's *Bulletin*. In 1930 the cartoon noted that "walking has always been a popular recreation." In 1937, readers were urged to "hike for health." In 1940, the Association was promoting "an hour a day in the open air." The German "out into the open" movement was modified to suit the Canadian situation with support for a 1937 attempt to establish a Federal Ministry of Recreation; support for national health and physical fitness; and recognition of the need to deal with the post war population increase (*Circular* #34 15 January

1937; *Bulletin* #150, 31 December 1949).

The Association's internal political structure included both the periodically elected executive and the long serving Executive Secretary, W.J.S. Walker. Walker, a realtor by trade and a committed environmentalist in his volunteer activities, served as Executive Secretary from 1927 until his death in 1952. For much of this time, the Association was essentially a one-person volunteer operation. Walker did most of its correspondence to both supporters and opponents of the Association. He lobbied appropriate government departments. He produced all of its publications including a newsletter and bulletin service. I have reconstructed most of the Association's publication record and it appears that there were over 150 publications over the 29 year life of the Association - almost all of them produced by Walker. His intense commitment to the mandate of the Association as explained by his daughter was that "he did it because he felt it was terribly, terribly necessary" (Interview with Mary Lynas). When he died, the Association disintegrated.

While Walker was the stable force in the Association for 25 years, the executive changed periodically. The executive positions were often held by officials of allied organisations, for example, the Alpine Club, the National Council of Women, and the Canadian Automobile Association. In the early years, from 1923 to the late 1920's, representation from the Alpine Club focused the Association on the protection of national parks - their domain in Western Canada. The National Council of Women's representation, through the early and

mid 1930's, brought attention to the wise use of both human and natural resources, and thus a focus on leisure and the unemployed in addition to parks. At one point Henrietta Tuzo (Mrs J.A.) Wilson, herself a mountaineer of distinction in her youth, was president of both the National Council of Women of Canada and the Canadian National Parks Association. The long tenure of representatives from the Automobile Association through the late 1930's, 1940's and early 1950's coincided with the increasing interest in travel and tourism and the attendant concern about scenery that characterised much of the later years of the Association.

Discussion

Work by Higgins (1986) and Pross (1992) can assist our understanding of the role and impact of the Canadian National Parks Association. Higgins considers interest groups to be 'either attempting to change some element of the status quo or trying to preserve some element of it in the face of a perceived threat' (258). Pross views pressure groups as having five functions: interest promotion, communication, legitimation, regulation and administration.

The Canadian National Parks Association was formed as an effort to *preserve* an aspect of the status quo. Through its mandate to preserve parks and natural beauties, it attempted to preserve and protect the mountain parks in the face of efforts to dam a river and to extract resources. The Association's mandate continued in a 'preservation' mode throughout the C.N.P.A.'s life. However, when the first crisis was over, the Association's work expanded to include the promotion of outdoor recreation,

health, fitness, tourism, forestry and planning concerns - all efforts to *change* the status quo.

Most of Pross' five functions of pressure groups are exemplified in the activities of the C.N.P.A. The fundamental function, interest promotion, was part of the original objects of the C.N.P.A., as in addition to the preservation of parks and natural beauties, the Association was committed to 'the spreading of propaganda.' Interest promotion was not limited to the self interest of the Association's members, but also included the public interest for what we would now term 'environmental awareness' and 'wellness' concerns. The communication function was certainly part of the propaganda spreading, but this function also involves communication both to and from government as well as between various government agencies and between various interest groups. All four communication types were evident in the correspondence and publications of the C.N.P.A., as the Association communicated with government and served as a splendid conduit for information between member groups with, at times, diverse interests such as forestry and highway promotion. Legitimation, that is acknowledging and supporting the efforts of government, was part of the C.N.P.A.'s work. Although the Association was often critical of government, it was also a determined supporter and promoter of the need for national parks for all of the reasons that the National Parks Service was espousing. However, the C.N.P.A. did not operate on behalf of government to either regulate its members or to administer government programs. It operated outside of government, focussing on communication and, by extension,

conveying legitimacy upon the federal government's work to establish and preserve the national parks system, the national recreation and fitness programs.

The Association's influence on parks was not a direct one. It is difficult to pinpoint precise policy changes that came about as the result of pressure from the Association. However, the files of several key federal government departments indicate that the C.N.P.A., its executive secretary, and its individual and organisation members made the C.N.P.A.'s presence known through various forms of propaganda. These grassroots advocates worked for policies which eventually came into effect, both changing and preserving recreation and parks services. Unfortunately, with the death of the Executive Director, came the demise of the Association.

Successors to the Canadian National Parks Association

What organisation now carries the torch for the ideology of protection and conservation of Canada's national parks? That role has been played by three organisations since the demise of the C.N.P.A.

In 1961, at the 'Resources for Tomorrow' conference considerable discussion took place about multiple use in parks. Reacting to the perceived threat that this concept could bring to national parks, one workshop reported that:

... there is a need for an informed, organised, non-governmental association to promote the interests of park development and perform as a 'watchdog' over the areas now

reserved for parks purposes.'
(Bella 1987: 113)

This report is viewed by most researchers as the event that began the development of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada - the first successor to the Canadian National Parks Association.

In the mid 1980's the N.P.P.A.C. changed its name to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. Many would agree that this action was more than just a name change, it was a change to a more activist organisation. Today C.P.A.W.S. describes itself as being:

Canada's national grassroots voice for wilderness. We are built from the ground up by people who care passionately about wild lands and wildlife, and we get results.

Over the years, CPAWS has helped protect more than 200,000 square kilometres of Canada's magnificent natural heritage.

We focus on establishing new protected areas, improving the management of existing parks and on conservation-related legislative and policy reform. We are a progressive, solutions-oriented group and we uphold ecological integrity as our bottom line.

CPAWS works cooperatively to achieve its goals. We link up with other environmental groups, governments, First Nations, scientists, business, and local communities to develop ecologically sound solutions that are broadly

supported.

<<http://www.cpaws.org/about/background.html>>

In addition to the activist oriented C.P.A.W.S., a third successor to the C.N.P.A. exists. The Friends of Banff National Park describes itself as being: a non-profit society of individuals, organizations, and businesses dedicated to the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural resources of Canada's oldest National Park. A member of the Canadian Parks Partnership, the Friends of Banff National Park share in a network of over 45 volunteer co-operating associations which provide project support and financial assistance to National Parks and National Historic Sites.

We are committed to the protection of places which are significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage. We believe that this is best achieved by promoting public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.
<<http://www.canadianrockies.net/friendsofbanff/index.html>>

Those who are familiar with both of the current organisations, suggest that Friends is a much less strident organisation - perhaps in keeping with the spirit of W.J.S. Walker and his view of the C.N.P.A.

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