

- For Immediate Release -
CPAWS Ottawa Valley Response to
NCC’s Gatineau Park Visitor and Economic Impact Study Final Report (March 2017)

The Ottawa Valley Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS-OV) commends the National Capital Commission (NCC) for having undertaken a broad study of the visitors of Gatineau Park and their impact on the economy of the region. The results of the study show the extent to which the park is important to local residents and tourists. The proximity of Gatineau Park (and other NCC lands, including those in the Greenbelt) provide a host of ecological goods and services, recreational opportunities and help define the landscape of the capital region – contributing to the high quality of life enjoyed by residents of Ottawa-Gatineau - perennially listed as one of the best places to live in the world.

Not surprisingly, the park generates significant economic benefits in terms of its close proximity to the urban core. The park is easily accessed and provides a number of recreational opportunities in all seasons, which support local businesses and creates jobs. It has been estimated that for every \$1.00 invested by a government in a park or protected area, the region will generate another \$6.00 through tourism and related investment and expenses. These benefits are seen in all of the municipalities surrounding the park and include jobs for local youth, investment in community businesses and profile for the entire region, which in turn attracts new residents for the high quality of life.

This survey confirms CPAWS-OV’s assessment of the value of the park to our region and underscores the need to provide the park with strong legal protection to ensure that future generations can benefit from all it has to offer, including jobs and economic opportunities. Specifically, the report provides an encouraging figure, indicating over 95% of visitors as agreeing with the statement “It is important that Gatineau Park is protected for current and future generations of Canadians”.

However, it may be a surprise for most park visitors that Gatineau Park benefits from very few protections under the law. Its status as an NCC managed property and not a national or provincial park means that its boundaries may be amended and parts of the park lost to development without Parliamentary approval. Moreover, the high level of visitation, as illustrated in the survey, is putting incredible pressure on park ecosystems and infrastructure. Unofficial trails and roads fragment the park and parking lots are often overflowing as most people access the park in personal vehicles. The report shows that more work needs to be done to make sustainable transportation available to park visitors and encouraged.

Recreational use and ecological conservation are not mutually exclusive concepts, but natural areas cannot sustain heavy visitation on their own. A 2016 report* by Parks Canada indicated almost half of the ecosystems in the country's national parks are only in fair to poor condition. Gatineau Park’s ecosystems cannot be allowed to degrade to these levels.

Facing ever-increasing visitation, Gatineau Park requires protection and management such that its health can be maintained for the visitors and communities that receive its benefits. CPAWS-OV continues to work with user

groups to develop solutions that enable human connection to the park while maintaining its ecological integrity. But promotion of responsible park use is not enough. Gatineau Park and its caretaker, the NCC, need the tools and investment required to properly manage this national treasure.

The bottom line is that Gatineau Park is an ecological jewel, a home to countless species of plants and animals and, at the same time, a major economic driver for our region. Both will be compromised without strong legislation providing Gatineau Park with the protections it deserves.

**Source: The State of Canada's Natural and Historic Places 2016 Report – Parks Canada
<http://www.pc.gc.ca/en/docs/pc/rpts/elnhc-scnhp/>*

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