

Against a timeless background of mountain peaks, lakes, forests and sea coast, the management of the national parks is engaged on the practical level in large-scale outdoor housekeeping. There are, for example, 787 miles of motor roads to be maintained, including the world-famous Banff-Jasper Highway and the Cabot Trail, sections of the Trans-Canada Highway, where this route traverses the national parks, and secondary roads. There are 625 miles of fire roads, 2,404 miles of riding and hiking trails, 996 miles of hard surfaced and secondary roads. To patrol the larger parks, wardens must move with the seasons as well as the times, using trucks, tracked vehicles, canoes, launches, saddle horses, skis, snowshoes, ski-dos and even a motor scooter.

By the terms of the National Parks Act, the parks are "dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education, and enjoyment". It is the responsibility of the National Parks Branch of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources to plan their use and development so as to leave them unimpaired for future generations. To shape their future wisely and with imagination calls for some far-reaching decisions. It is recognized, for example, that by 1975 the population of Canada may have grown to, or beyond, 25,000,000 and that possibly 10,000,000 visitors may be using the national parks.

To provide for future variations in use without lowering the quality of the national park experience offered to visitors calls for long-range planning and systematic development. Careful examination of all relevant factors is made, before an area is developed or redeveloped, to make sure that the changes will agree with the master plan of that particular park.

Description

From east to west, the national parks extend from Newfoundland to the mountain peaks of Alberta and British Columbia - Banff, Jasper, Waterton Lakes, Yoho, Glacier, Kootenay and Mount Revelstoke. Though dissimilar in size and character, all have in common significant qualities that make them worthy of national preservation.

Wood Buffalo National Park, lying half within northern Alberta, half in the Northwest Territories, comprises 17,300 square miles of still largely undeveloped wildlife habitat. Wood Buffalo - home of the largest herd of bison on the North American continent and nesting ground of the whooping crane - is easily the biggest of the parks.

It is the only national park not administered by the National Parks Service. As yet fairly difficult for the average Canadian to visit, Wood Buffalo serves mainly as a wildlife preserve and the Northern Administration Branch, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, allows some commercial use of natural resources.

In contrast to wide-ranging Wood Buffalo is Point Pelee National Park on Lake Erie, the smallest (6.04 square miles) and the most southerly in the system. Point Pelee lies on the Mississippi flyway and is a favourite resting place for millions of migratory birds. Point Pelee, like other national parks, is a natural museum, and nothing that will harm its animals or natural features, even the picking of wild flowers, is permitted.

The great scenic and recreational parks that lie among the Rockies claim almost a third of all visitors: Banff, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes along the east slope of the Rockies in Alberta; Kootenay and Yoho on the west slope of British Columbia; Glacier and Mount Revelstoke in the Selkirk Mountains in the same province.