

Canada protects its natural heritage for future generations



*Waterton Lakes
National Park*

Canada is unique among western industrialised nations in having such vast areas of unspoiled wilderness. Its huge forests, unending prairies and countless lakes are a priceless asset which gives pleasure to millions. The establishment a century ago of the nation's first national park set an example which ensures that this asset will remain part of Canada's national heritage.

The 4000-square-kilometre Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan is by no means unique. There are national parks in every province and territory from Terra Nova in Newfoundland to Pacific Rim in British Columbia, and from Point Pelee on Lake Erie in southern Ontario to Auyuittuq on Baffin Island inside the Arctic Circle. Together, they constitute the largest national parks system in the world.

The parks cover a total area of more than 130,000 square kilometres – about the size of England – and vary considerably in size. St Lawrence Islands National Park measures a mere 4.1 square kilometres, while Wood Buffalo in Alberta and the Northwest Territories is nearly 45,000 square kilometres in extent.

National Parks: a century of progress

Wood Buffalo is one of those Canadian parks that have been designated World Heritage Sites by UNESCO in view of their exceptional natural value. Others which fall into this category are the Kluane National Park in the Yukon, home of Mount Logan, Canada's highest peak; Nahanni National Park in the Northwest Territories with its hot springs, canyons and waterfalls; and the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site comprising Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay Parks.

Banff has the distinction of being Canada's first national park. In 1883, railroad construction workers in the Rockies came across two natural hot springs at Sulphur Mountain, and two years later the Canadian government decided to set aside a 26 square-kilometre area around the springs for the benefit of the Canadian people. In 1887, the area was extended to encompass an area of 673 square-kilometres; since then, the park has grown tenfold.

By 1900, Canada could boast three more national parks: Yoho and Glacier – both in British