

Travelling down the road in the late spring or the early summer a person can see herds of 30 to 40 bison along or across the road every few miles, particularly in the early morning. Peace Point itself is one of the most beautiful areas in the park, with white poplar stands overlooking the Peace River and a panoramic view of sloping banks on the other side, with its forest of pine showing green and black against the usual blue sky. The Embarass Portage is located in the southeast corner of the park.

Wood Buffalo National Park was established in 1922 to protect what remained of the wood bison, which is slightly larger and darker than the plains bison. Later on in the 1920s, beginning in about 1925, plains bison were transplanted in the park where they mixed freely with the wood bison, producing large and vigorous specimens. Since 1967 natural factors such as drownings, severe winters, predators and disease have controlled the herd sizes.

The present bison population is approximately 9,000 to 10,000, down somewhat from just a few years ago. It is estimated that Wood Buffalo Park could at present maintain 30,000 to 40,000 bison under natural feeding conditions. The park presently covers 17,300 square miles.

The land will be removed from park status by transferring it to the province of Alberta, which in turn will transfer it back to the federal government as an Indian reserve. This transaction will require an amendment to be passed to existing parks legislation by the federal government. In addition, alternate methods to transfer this land cannot be discounted.

A spokesman for the Alberta Indian Association has stated publicly that the band eventually intends to strip mine the gypsum at Peace Point and carry on wildlife ranching and agricultural pursuits in the centre of this park.

Under these circumstances it is inevitable that sooner or later additional roads as well as barge traffic, heavy machinery, housing and domestic cattle will find their way into what used to be a park. It is not difficult to determine the events to follow this proposed plunder. Information has also been received from reliable sources that development interests have been encouraging native people for over a year to pressure for the land at the Peace Point gypsum deposit.

This land is being transferred unilaterally without a public hearing and will set a precedent for all such transfers in national parks. It is of concern that this land is being transferred from park status without the general public across Canada being made aware of what is happening, with all the attendant ramifications.

On February 3, 1975, during a television interview on the CBC program "Hourglass" the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs (Mr. Buchanan) again confirmed his department's intention to transfer the 41,824 acres of land out of park status in Wood Buffalo National Park.

The struggle to establish and maintain the integrity of Canada's national parks is difficult at the best of times without this dangerous precedent. The transfer of land from a national park for this purpose is clearly not acceptable. Land in our national parks has been set aside by law to be preserved unimpaired, for the benefit of future generations. The obligation to ensure this natural heritage

Adjournment Debate

for the present as well as the future rests in the hands of all Canadians.

Yet the government does not want public hearings to be held to give the Canadian people an opportunity to voice their wishes. Our Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said the other day that the people would govern Canada. Is this the type of governing he is talking about?

On December 16, I asked the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs the following question:

Has the minister's department approved the turn-over of approximately 40,000 acres of land within the Wood Buffalo National Park...

He stated:

Mr. Speaker, a request has been made for this land, but no decision has yet been made on this request.

In a supplementary I asked the minister why is it that his Edmonton regional office confirmed that the land was to be turned over. He replied that he was not aware of it but that he would be happy to look into the matter.

This leads me to believe one of two things. Either the minister does not know what is going on in his department, or he does not want the public to know. I believe that he does not want the public to know that truly a conflict of interest exists within the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs which has jurisdiction over Parks Canada, for what is good for the department can be disastrous for Parks Canada. This is tantamount to self negotiation, and therefore the dispute is primarily focused upon this department, and this should be corrected.

In closing let me state that I believe that our treaty agreements with our native people must be lived up to, but not at the expense of our national parks.

● (2230)

Mrs. Iona Campagnolo (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, in responding to the question of the hon. member for Pembina (Mr. Elzinga) I feel it would be helpful to get a sense of perspective in the matter. I refer to the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development of December 18, 1973, at which the then minister, now the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien), is on record as stating the following:

I would like to inform members of the Committee that in Wood Buffalo National Park we had the same problem. There is a group of Indians living in the park and I have told them that their rights to the land there will supersede the parks control of the land and these Chipewyan in Fort Chipewyan at this time are trying to identify the land that will remain their land even if it is within the park. We recognize that their rights were prior to the establishment of the national park.

In addition he said that:

... under the Expropriation Act, if we sometime need land for parks, we will take the negotiation route with the Indians.

Returning to the current situation which has prompted this question, under treaty No. 8 the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Buchanan) has a responsibility to ensure that the Indian people of Fort Chipewyan are provided with 97,280 acres of land. The people of Fort Chipewyan have asked that 40,000 Acres of these lands be selected from lands in Wood Buffalo Na-