



RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION No.: **421-02183**

BY: **MR. CANNINGS (SOUTH OKANAGAN-WEST KOOTENAY)**

DATE: **MARCH 21, 2018**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **The Honourable Catherine McKenna**

Response by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change

SIGNATURE

Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

National parks

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

Our Government is working to protect and expand our nation's world-class system of protected areas, including national parks and marine conservation areas. It is also working to achieve our international commitment to protect at least 17 percent of Canada's land and inland waters, and 10 percent of our marine and coastal areas by 2020.

In October 2017, the Government was pleased to announce a renewed commitment to work with the Syilx/Okanagan Nation and the Government of British Columbia to establish a new national park reserve in the South Okanagan – Similkameen. A new national park reserve will provide an opportunity to protect one of Canada's iconic natural and cultural landscapes and share this unique and inspiring place with Canadians and visitors from around the world.

A new national park reserve will also contribute to Canada's network of protected areas, which plays an important role in helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change by protecting and restoring healthy, resilient ecosystems and contributing to the recovery of species at risk. These protected areas help safeguard Canada's biodiversity and provide exceptional opportunities for Canadians to experience the outdoors and learn about our environment, as well as contribute to sustainable economic development.

The goals of establishing a national park are to protect the diversity of vegetation and landscape features of representative ecosystems; maintain the ecological integrity, including wildlife habitat and plant species; and provide

opportunities for quality visitor experiences, such as recreational activities and the presentation of natural and cultural heritage. Canada's national parks belong to the people of Canada, and Parks Canada encourages people to learn about, experience and appreciate our natural and cultural heritage.

This park would represent the Interior Dry Plateau Natural Region of the national park system, one of 39 regions that constitutes the diversity of Canadian landscapes.

The Okanagan is one of the most ecologically-diverse regions of Canada. By protecting this area, it will help support the recovery of over 60 federally listed species at risk, including American badgers, flammulated owls, yellow breasted chat, desert night snakes, and western rattlesnakes. Under the *Canada National Parks Act*, protection would meet or exceed existing protection mechanisms in the South Okanagan.

As part of the national park establishment process, the Agency seeks dedicated funding for each new national park through the budgetary process; allocated funds are subject to approval by Parliament.

In 2007, a survey of residents of the Similkameen Valley and the South Okanagan Valley, conducted by the Similkameen Valley Planning Society, included questions from Parks Canada in order to better understand how a national park reserve might affect desire to live in the area, and to obtain an indication of public support for a national park reserve. Results of this survey indicated that, overall, support outnumbered opposition by approximately 2:1. Since 2007, there have been several other petitions or surveys by non-governmental groups, many of which supported the establishment of a national park reserve in the South Okanagan.

During the initial feasibility assessment from 2004 to 2010, the Agency also listened to and learned a great deal from First Nations, provincial agencies, communities, ranchers and other stakeholders, through public events, written comments, bilateral meetings and other means. A national park reserve created in this area will be unique and will require innovative approaches that respect and celebrate First Nation values and traditions, ranching culture, local communities and the rich biodiversity and ecosystems that make this region so special.

As discussions continue, the three parties (Syilx/Okanagan Nation, Parks Canada, Province of British Columbia) are now focusing on the geographical areas that were the subject of previous consideration by Parks Canada in 2010, and by the Province of British Columbia in its 2015 protected areas framework proposal for the South Okanagan. The Agency looks forward to continued work with the Province and the Syilx/Okanagan Nation to establish a national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen region.

Parks Canada will undertake meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities, partners, stakeholders, and the public. The governments of Canada and British Columbia, along with our Indigenous partners, will take the necessary time to ensure that all parties are engaged and that the appropriate consideration is given to the comments and perspectives that are shared. In particular, consultations with local communities and local Indigenous groups will play a key role in concluding the park concept and approach to management for a national park reserve in the South Okanagan. These discussions will also take into consideration the continuation of ranching and recreational activities in the region.