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# Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

## DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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### **Bill No. 62 – The Parks Amendment Act, 2012**

**Mr. Forbes:** Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 62, An Act to Amend the Parks Act, and I hope everyone stays to listen to this because I think this is an important bill and it is one that we should be having some conversations about.

I think that, you know, it is interesting. I believe it was in the 2007 campaign. This government had promised at that point to put into place two new parks. One of course would be a wilderness park. They wanted to give the appearance of being closer to nature, and yet we have not seen that park. This is the first new one.

So you know, Mr. Speaker, we have 34 provincial parks in our province, and they are a wonderful, wonderful part of who we are in Saskatchewan. They range from the Far North to the South, some of the older parks like Moose Mountain or Cypress Hills, heritage parks, recreation parks, wilderness parks. And I hope I have some time to review some of those other 34 parks because they are truly, truly beautiful.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I remember in 2005 when we were celebrating our centennial that along with several regional parks, I had actually got to visit I think it was close to 30 — somewhere like 26, 28 — provincial parks over the course of that summer. It was truly an amazing experience because I think our parks are a wonderful, wonderful part of our province.

And of course they go back a long history. Many were created prior to the 1930s. But I remember that we've just recently celebrated our 75th anniversary, so I would believe that we're probably up to our 80th anniversary or pretty close to it, maybe our 78th anniversary. But at any rate, it is a beautiful thing, and it's what makes us so special — our province and our provincial parks.

And it isn't surprising that so many people stay home, stay in the province to go to our provincial parks because they really do offer a wonderful experience not only in the summer, when we typically think of going to the beach and going camping and spending

time at the lake, but also those parks in the winter where you can go cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, all those kinds of things. And they're truly, truly a gem. And so it is good that we take time to reflect on our legislation that talks about our provincial parks and what we can do to better improve those parks.

But as I said, this government has promised two parks and we're only reading about one today. Now if I'm missing something I'd sure like to hear about it, but their one that they are going to be talking about is one by Emma and Anglin Lake, and in fact it will be called Anglin-Emma Lakes Provincial Park as an interim name. And I understand that that's because they're holding a bit of a contest to get a better name.

But it's a beautiful part of the province too, and I know that people seem to like the idea. The minister talked about how they . . . He says over the last two years they've held two open houses, three trade show events, consulted with 25 various interest groups, five local First Nation/Métis groups and various other folks. They did an online survey. Now there were 5,500 surveys were distributed; 721 came back that were specific to Anglin-Emma Lakes region, and the response was 87 per cent support from the general public. So it's a very, very high support for this. And I think that speaks volumes about that this was a natural choice. And of course this will be a good addition to the park, and it's interesting because of course it will result in an additional 12 821 hectares of Crown lands being protected in a park.

Now it's really interesting, of course, we know about the . . . We've had many debates about wildlife habitat areas and protecting environmentally sensitive areas, ecologically sensitive areas, and this will go up. I'm not sure if it was already environmentally protected lands but, you know, I think that we have, I think there's seven different standards of protection in the province. And of course the lowest is if you're on Crown land and really, essentially, there's limited protection.

The second highest is the provincial park being designated a provincial park land because clearly there should be very little, very little disturbance to that land. And of course the highest is we did a few years ago around the Great Sand Hills where it's very specifically designated as ecologically sensitive areas. And that's the highest level of protection where the only way to remove lands out of the Great Sand Hills is through legislation. And that's very important. So I'm delighted to see that this will create in a sense a park that's over 16 000 hectares because it will amalgamate or absorb the existing Anglin Lake and Emma Lake recreation sites. So this is a good, good thing. And I think that this is, as I said, it will be protecting land in the mid-boreal upland eco region of Saskatchewan, so that's a very, very important area that's of concern.

Part of the Act that he talks about is removing 31 hectares of land from the Coteau Bay area in the Danielson Provincial Park. They're going to do some cottage lot development. I hope we can see some maps about that when we go into committee, that we can actually see what we're talking about. And hopefully that's an appropriate thing. We hope that what's happening with the cottage lot development is a transparent and fair process. I know that when you develop a . . . when you're removing Crown land — and in fact we had those questions in question period today around the fairness and accountability

processes — clearly that we need to make sure that that's the case.

Now the minister does go on to say that this will offset a reduction in Danielson Provincial Park, and the amendment also adds 65 hectares of other lands which contain native prairie grassland to the park. So it looks like again, from 31 going out to 65 coming in, a net gain of 34 hectares. This should be an appropriate thing.

But you know, when we're talking about those small gains, I just want to take a moment here to flag that we are deeply concerned about the track record of this government when it comes to wildlife habitat and protected areas. And we're having a discussion, an ongoing discussion about the community pastures and what does that mean, because they are a significant contributor to the RAN [representative area network] system or the wildlife habitat protected areas. And while we can celebrate 34 hectares going in, we know there are thousands at risk, thousands of hectares at risk in the province as we speak.

It also talks about improving visitor safety while they're in the parks and reducing risks to wildlife. I did find this interesting that the minister did have some stats that dangerous wildlife attractants can include such items as improperly stored food, greasy pots left for cleaning later, or waste improperly disposed of. In 2011, Mr. Speaker, I understand they had close to 1,000 calls regarding nuisance bears and 850 of these were occurring in the parks. So clearly we have to do something about that.

The other one is some amendments regarding Steele Narrows Provincial Park, whereby the description of the park is being adjusted because of some mapping issues, and we always need to make sure we're as accurate as can be.

It's interesting that Highway 699 carved off what they describe as a narrow, as a sliver of land separated from the main park. I hope it's not too big of a piece of land. We're not sure how much. Again it would be interesting to know the exact area, and it would be helpful to see maps regarding that. So this seems to be relatively straightforward, but as I said that we are looking anxiously for the other park. You know, it's been five years and they need to keep their promise.

You know, I've advocated, I would like to see a wilderness park actually in the south part. I know that one area that many people have talked about and have raised the area that's around, actually just north of the Great Sand Hills on the Saskatchewan River, the South Saskatchewan River, where it comes into the province and it adjoins with the Red Deer River. And there's an area called the Chesterfield flats. The forks there, it's an amazing part where you're seeing some hoodoos and just wild nature. It's incredible.

We went through a canoeing trip there one summer. We actually were able to, when we beached the canoes, we went up for a hike in the hills, came across a couple of rattlesnakes. Luckily we heard these rattlesnakes and we were able to watch them from just a couple of feet away. We actually kept a good distance away, but it was interesting to see rattlesnakes in the distance. It was in the fall and they weren't moving too much. They were sunning themselves and just trying to get some extra energy for the winter

ahead.

But this is a beautiful part of the . . . You know, our province is so blessed with the wide range of the ecological regions that we have. And that part of the province, you know, it's often referred to as the Saskatchewan breaks. Now many of us have heard of the Missouri Breaks. But the local folks apparently refer to it as the Saskatchewan breaks because you have the Saskatchewan prairie, that level, and you're going up to the next level of the Alberta prairies, and it causes some interesting land formations. And if you've ever had a chance to visit it, it's one that you will remember and it's an amazing, an amazing place. And not far from there, of course, are the Great Sand Hills and how they're protected. And it would be a very worthwhile area for us to develop, take some time as a province to take a look at the worth of a wilderness park.

Often we think of wilderness parks of having to be in the Far North, in the forests, and they are wonderful as well. They're absolutely wonderful.

But clearly it would be . . . There is a lot to be said for southern Saskatchewan and the unique land features that the prairies and near desert conditions can bring, you know. In fact we had just some writing about this in terms of Candace Savage writing about how it's a little south of there. But that whole area — the Cypress Hills, south Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan forks area, are just, you know, and the Grasslands Park, national park there — it's an amazing part of our province.

And I think that there should be much more done in terms of promoting ecological tourism, environmental tourism in that area. We don't want to see it overdone. We don't want to see, you know, cottages along in that area. But boy, we could do some neat tourism.

And the heritage for the First Nations there is an amazing story to tell, you know. Candace Savage talked about the struggles, the First Nations and the Métis and the fur trading that happened in Eastend and in that area close to Cypress Hills, in the Nekaneeet. But if you go further north, that's even more interesting, I believe. But from what I've been able to understand and gather, that we should do something about that. And clearly I think if we were to do a survey across the province, so we all have our own local favourite parks. And so it's interesting when we can add one more, and we have now 35 provincial parks. But I think we could do better. I think that would be interesting.

I recognize the challenges though, Mr. Speaker. And I did speak at length the other night about provincial interests, and again we have to look at this. And we hope that they have done the correct amount of consultations on this, because it's clearly important that when you do a provincial park, you would think that everybody would be happy and supportive. But sometimes that's not the case because there are the unintended consequences of creating provincial parks, taking significant land out of the normal marketplace, and in this case some 16 000 hectares, I believe.

So we have to be careful and we have to take some time and really think about the unintended consequences, make sure people have been consulted, and that it meets a

niche in terms of what we want to have in terms of our family of provincial parks, you know, as I mentioned before, that there really are four categories: the wilderness parks, recreational parks, the natural environment, and historic parks. And if you go through the list, they are an amazing, amazing collection of provincial parks. And I'm sure this one, Emma-Anglin Lake Park, will do well, but it won't be something that will be done overnight and will have to be done correctly. And it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

In the past, provincial parks have played a key role in terms of the ecological protection of sensitive lands in the province and the interconnections of people. And that's how people can learn more about those areas, whether they're talking about the Cypress Hills or whether you're talking about the northern parks — Crooked Lake or Moose Mountain Park; Narrow Hills Provincial Park, a beautiful park; or some of the historic parks. It's a way for people to learn more about their natural environment. And it's important that we do this right and people support them in just an amazing way.

And so I think we have . . . We think this is a good idea, but as I said, I think that the government has one more part that they need to deliver. That was their campaign promise, and we're looking forward to reading more about that. This seems relatively straightforward. It has been awhile in the coming because we know this was a 2007 campaign promise. And so we're looking forward for the other ones, but I do understand it does take some time.

I am concerned about some of the other implications federally, like Bill C-45 and the implication it has for some of the other river systems in Saskatchewan, about what it means for Cumberland House area, what it means for the Churchill River system, what it means for the Clearwater River system.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I know that many of us will have some things to say about this in a few minutes because I think this is an important bill and I know people will want to talk to this bill. And so, Mr. Speaker, I can go on about the different parks and some of my experiences. And I've said, Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park is an amazing park, and we really, really support that, but I think that . . . I know many of my colleagues will want to speak about these bills . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. And so, Mr. Speaker, I can go on about these other ones, provincial parks that are of interest to us. And I think that we can take a look at what the minister has to say. And so with that, Mr. Speaker, I know that many of us will want to gather in on this, and so I would like to move adjournment now of Bill No. 62, An Act to amend The Parks Act. Thank you very much.



