



Member of Parliament  
Pontiac-Kitigan Zibi  
Sophie Chatel

## *Bill S-229 – Gatineau Park*

**IN BRIEF** Gatineau Park is not a “real” park established by law. The only reference to the park in the National Capital Act (NCA) appears in section 16(3) under the provisions for payments in lieu of taxes. The park’s boundaries are not defined in the Act but rather in the Gatineau Park Master Plan of the National Capital Commission (NCC), which has no legal force.

This is why we introduced in the Senate Bill S-229, An Act to amend the National Capital Act (Gatineau Park). Its objective is to grant the park genuine legal status (which it currently lacks), to enshrine its boundaries in law, and to make ecological integrity the core principle guiding the NCC’s management of the park.

The transmission of Bill S-229 to the House of Commons is expected in early 2026.



### **CHRONOLOGY OF KEY STEPS TOWARD CREATING A PARK**

- 2005–2013: Thirteen private members’ bills were introduced (including Bill C-20 of the Harper Government) in either the House of Commons or the Senate to amend the NCA with the goal of protecting Gatineau Park. None received Royal Assent; most died on the Order Paper due to elections or prorogations.
- Since August 2022: MP Sophie Chatel has worked with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), the National Capital Commission, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg community, key conservation actors (CREDDO, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Ottawa Valley Chapter), and regional municipalities to identify effective actions to protect Gatineau Park and to address potential legislative or administrative obstacles.

- Petitions: MP Chatel has tabled four petitions in the House of Commons calling for the park's protection, representing 3,348 signatures, with additional petitions being prepared by CPAWS Ottawa Valley.

- Summer 2024: Sophie Chatel created a working group to draft a bill to protect the park, collaborating with Senator Rosa Galvez's office, the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Nation, environmental organizations, the NCC, resident associations, and neighbouring municipalities. CPAWS Ottawa Valley publicly endorsed and joined the initiative.

- Fall 2024: The MP's office circulated a consultation paper outlining legislative options: incorporating a new chapter into the NCA, prioritizing ecological integrity, defining official park boundaries, and mandating Indigenous consultation in planning.

- October 10, 2024: Senator Galvez introduced Bill S-289, An Act to amend the National Capital Act, which would formally delineate the park, prioritize ecological integrity, regulate the alienation of public lands, and strengthen collaboration with the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation and local municipalities.



- June 12, 2025: The bill was reintroduced as Bill S-229, with two key adjustments: removal of a redundant NCC right-of-first-refusal clause, and updated language on fees to ensure accessibility

- Fall 2025: The bill is now being debated at second reading in the Senate. Senator Burey is expected to speak in November 2025, with the goal of referring the bill to the Senate Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENEV) by the end of the month. The committee is expected to devote four meetings to its study, as the bill is targeted and non-complex. Third reading should follow swiftly to allow the bill's transmission to the House of Commons in early 2026.



## WHY THE PROTECTION OF GATINEAU PARK MATTERS

### 1. A cornerstone of Canada's 2030 climate and conservation goals

High-quality protection of green spaces is essential to achieve Canada's target of conserving 30 per cent of land by 2030. Currently, only 7.6 per cent of the Outaouais region and less than 9 per cent of the Ottawa River watershed are protected.

Although Gatineau Park is included in Canada's and the world's protected-area databases under the 30x30 framework, its "protection" does not meet the standards for protected areas or other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) for the following reasons:

- **Governance issues:** The NCC's authority in conservation and biodiversity is limited; ecological integrity is not prioritized in the NCA, and each action requires a revocable provincial permit from Quebec.
- **Undefined boundaries:** There are no legislated park limits; current approximate boundaries exist only in the NCC Master Plan
- **No statutory protection:** The park's current "protection" is policy-based rather than enshrined in law



Because no external body evaluates whether countries meet COP15 30x30 criteria, Canada's credibility relies on integrity and compliance. Gatineau Park's weak protection is therefore problematic.

To be included in the 30x30 target, the Greenbelt will need to meet the criteria set out in the decision support tool to qualify either as a protected area or, more likely in this case, as an Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM)—either in its entirety or for certain portions within the Greenbelt.

"In November 2018, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted, at the 14th Conference of the Parties, a definition of an 'Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM)' along with guiding principles, common characteristics, and identification criteria (CBD/COP/DEC/14/8). OECMs are sites outside protected areas that deliver effective and longterm in situ biodiversity conservation. Biodiversity conservation may be the site's primary objective, a secondary objective of a site managed for other purposes, or an unintended outcome of the way the site is managed." (IUCN Global Guidance on OECMs; IUCN Identification Tool for OECMs)

## 2. We are losing biodiversity at an accelerating rate in Gatineau Park

The park is home to a wide variety of wildlife species, including many that are at risk, as well as plant species found nowhere else in Quebec. Approximately 90 plant species and 50 animal species within the park are considered threatened or endangered in Quebec or across Canada.

## 3. Protecting Gatineau Park's ecosystem is vital for regional well-being, stable employment, and climate adaptation and mitigation

Parks and protected areas are sound investments that strengthen communities across Canada. In 2017–2018 alone, national parks generated approximately 28,000 direct jobs, contributed \$2.6 billion to Canada's GDP, and provided \$449 million in tax revenue to the federal government.

Although Gatineau Park is not a national park, it attracts about 2.6 million visitors each year who, according to the NCC, spend \$184 million on local goods and services in nearby communities, support approximately 4,828 jobs, and contribute roughly \$241 million to the region's GDP.

## 4. The need for strong legislative safeguards for the park's public lands

Legal protection for Gatineau Park is particularly important given the current status of the federal lands it comprises. Under the National Capital Act, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement (PSPC) has the authority to transfer federal lands by simple Order in Council, without any prior parliamentary review. This mechanism was used recently—such as in the transfer of lands at the Asticou Centre—highlighting the park's vulnerability to administrative decisions made without public consultation or clear legislative oversight.

While Bill S-229 maintains the ability to transfer lands to other levels of government (for example, to enable public infrastructure projects such as Quebec's proposed hospital), it introduces essential safeguards for other types of transfers. At present, nothing prevents the federal government from transferring park lands to third parties, offering no assurance of long-term protection.

That is why the bill proposes to make any boundary modification or major land transfer subject to parliamentary review, ensuring democratic oversight over decisions affecting the park.

Strengthening the legal framework, accountability, and transparency in the park's land management is crucial to guarantee that any future changes respect its conservation mission and preserve this shared national heritage for generations to come.



## STAKEHOLDERS' POSITION

### 1. National Capital Commission (NCC)

In its Gatineau Park Master Plan, the National Capital Commission (NCC) states that the park must be managed first and foremost as a protected natural area whose primary mission is the conservation of ecosystems. Although the park's current management is governed by the National Capital Act (NCA), the NCC acknowledges that the park does not benefit from specific statutory protection equivalent to that of national parks. It suggests that additional legislative powers are needed to ensure the park's long-term protection. The NCC emphasizes the importance of limiting any fragmentation of the territory through new roads or developments and of requiring federal approval for any interventions, in order to preserve the park's ecological integrity and its emblematic role within the National Capital Region.



### 2. Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)

PSPC also supports amending the National Capital Act to make Gatineau Park a truly protected park. However, there are concerns that opening the NCA to include a chapter on Gatineau Park could allow opposition parties to reopen the "Pandora's box" on other unrelated issues, such as Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) on federal lands or the composition of the NCC's Board of Directors.

That said, any issue raised that is not directly related to the creation of the park should be deemed irrelevant to the bill. Moreover, questions relating to PILT or NCC governance primarily concern the municipalities of Gatineau and Ottawa rather than federal MPs. The City of Gatineau has written to the Minister formally requesting legislative protection for Gatineau Park.

### 3. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

The department fully supports granting Gatineau Park legal protection. One option considered was to designate the park as a national park under the Canada National Parks Act. However, this approach posed several administrative and institutional challenges, since the park's management currently falls under the NCC, which has long been responsible for its maintenance, planning, and development.

After careful analysis—and given the NCC's preference to retain direct governance over the park—both departments concerned, Environment and Climate Change Canada and Public Services and Procurement Canada (which administers the National Capital Act), agreed that the best approach would be to incorporate into the NCA a specific chapter dedicated to Gatineau Park. This chapter would enshrine protection principles and obligations inspired by the Canada National Parks Act.

This approach, adopted through Bill S-229, would grant the park a level of legal protection equivalent to that of a national park while preserving its management under the NCC, thereby ensuring administrative continuity and coherence with its role in the National Capital Region.



### 4. Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation

In a letter dated October 2, 2024, Chief Jean-Guy Whiteduck and the Band Council of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation expressed their official support for the bill to protect Gatineau Park. The community considers this initiative essential to prevent the degradation of ecosystems within the park, which is located on the traditional, current, and unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation.

They particularly welcomed the bill's provisions that:

- recognize these lands in the preamble;
- require the NCC to collaborate closely with the community and report publicly on this collaboration;
- allow the transfer of certain public lands for the benefit of the Nation;
- ensure respect for inherent rights; and
- encourage the participation of Algonquin businesses and workers in conservation efforts.

Kitigan Zibi emphasized that this initiative reflects shared values of respect, responsibility, and protection of the land for future generations.

The Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg **land claim** concerns the recognition of historic and constitutional rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and does not address the management or protection of Gatineau Park. Bill S-229, for its part, is limited to strengthening the legislative framework governing the park by enshrining its boundaries and making ecological integrity the primary management objective; it does not resolve, define, or affect questions of land ownership or Aboriginal title. These two processes are legally distinct and fully compatible. **Nothing in Bill S-229 prejudices or prejudices the outcome of the land claim, which remains before the courts.** The Kitigan Zibi community has expressed its support for protecting the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park. The letter of support from Chief Jean-Guy Whiteduck on behalf of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Band Council underscore the community's engagement in the process of protecting Gatineau Park's ecological integrity



## 5. Environmental Organizations

Several regional and national environmental organizations strongly support the creation of a legislative framework to ensure the permanent protection of Gatineau Park. Among the most active are the Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable de l'Outaouais (CREDDO) and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Ottawa Valley Chapter (CPAWS-OV).

These organizations have long pointed out that Gatineau Park remains the only large federal park in Canada not protected by specific legislation, leaving it vulnerable to fragmentation and habitat loss. They 5 advocate for Parliament to adopt a law conferring on the park a status equivalent to that of national parks, ensuring the primacy of ecological conservation over any other use.

CREDDO and CPAWS-OV believe that such a legal framework, as proposed in Bill S-229, would:

- safeguard the park's exceptional biodiversity over the long term;
- ensure transparency in its management; and
- meet the expectations of Outaouais residents, who view the park as a collective natural heritage to be passed on to future generations.

## 6. National Capital Region (NCR) Liberal Caucus

The twelve federal MPs of the NCR Liberal Caucus have unanimously expressed their support for stronger legal protection of Gatineau Park through amendments to the National Capital Act. They recognize the park as both an ecological treasure and a defining symbol of regional identity, deserving a status equivalent to that of national parks while remaining under NCC management.

The caucus believes this approach would strengthen ecosystem conservation, ensure transparency in planning, and provide lasting oversight of recreational and development activities within the park's boundaries. Accordingly, all twelve members have publicly endorsed Bill S-229, which specifically aims to embed these protections in the NCA.

The caucus further notes that this initiative aligns with the will of residents on both sides of the Ottawa River to preserve this emblematic landscape for generations to come.



## 7. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons

The Honourable Steven MacKinnon, MP for Gatineau and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, has also expressed his support for Bill S-229, recognizing its importance for the region and for the conservation of Canada's natural heritage. He emphasized that Gatineau Park—the true “green lung” of the capital—must benefit from a modern, clear legislative framework ensuring its long-term protection.



## 8. City of Gatineau and Surrounding Municipalities

The **City of Gatineau** reaffirmed its commitment to protecting Gatineau Park by adopting, at its regular meeting of November 14, 2023, an official resolution calling on the federal government to adopt legislation guaranteeing the park's permanence and the integrity of its boundaries.

The resolution recognizes the park as an emblematic natural space of the National Capital Region and a pillar of Gatineau's ecological heritage. The City also sent this resolution by letter to the Minister responsible for the National Capital Act, Jean-Yves Duclos, on February 14, 2024, reiterating its support for durable legislative protection to ensure the park's conservation and enhancement for future generations.

The Municipality of Chelsea, for its part, has included in its 2040 Strategic Plan a clear commitment to the protection of natural areas and biodiversity under its Nature and Environment pillar. A significant portion of Gatineau Park lies within its territory and is recognized as an exceptionally rich ecosystem hosting a great diversity of plant and animal species. Chelsea views the consolidation of the park's legal status as a key tool to balance sustainable local development with the preservation of the natural ecosystems that underpin the region's reputation and quality of life.

However, Chelsea has expressed concerns about revenue loss when the NCC acquires municipal lands within its territory, as these acquisitions remove properties from the local tax base.



## 9. Citizens of the Outaouais and the National Capital Region

Since her election as MP for Pontiac, Sophie Chatel has tabled several petitions in the House of Commons calling for stronger legal protection of Gatineau Park, representing a total of 4,553 signatures from residents of the region and across Canada. These petitions demonstrate broad public support for adopting a legislative framework that ensures the park's longevity and preserves its unique ecosystems.

The protection of Gatineau Park, and other green spaces in the National Capital Region, remains a priority for many residents, who regard this territory as a common good essential to quality of life, public health, and the fight against climate change. This widespread public mobilization reinforces the legitimacy of Bill S-229, which directly responds to the expectations expressed by citizens.

## 10. Residents within Gatineau Park

Between October and December 2024, MP Sophie Chatel held several meetings with representatives of the residents' associations of Meech Lake and Kingsmere Lake, as well as a public town hall attended by more than 50 residents living within the boundaries of Gatineau Park. A follow-up meeting with their representatives was held on November 12, 2024.

These consultations addressed local concerns and clarified specific aspects of the bill. Residents were reassured to learn that the NCC would not be granted a right of first refusal on private properties within the park, an issue they had particularly feared.



The discussions also brought to light the normal tensions that can arise between the NCC and property owners regarding land-use management and development rules. While some residents expressed a wish for their properties to be excluded from the park's official limits, it was emphasized that, as in other urban parks in Canada, such as Rouge National Urban Park in Toronto, harmonious coexistence between residents and a protected area is entirely compatible with a conservation mandate, provided it is guided by transparency and mutual respect.

Residents of Gatineau Park have indicated that they may propose amendments to the bill at the Senate Environment Committee to explicitly exclude private properties from the official description of Gatineau Park. While we would prefer not to make such exclusions, we would not oppose them if they align with precedents established for other federal or urban parks. Private lands represent less than 2% of the park's total area, meaning that the vast majority of Gatineau Park is already publicly owned and managed by the NCC.