

OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN PARKS SOCIETY

AFFILIATED WITH THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA

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February 15, 2012

Summerland, B.C. -- The Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society is adding its voice to the growing protest over the Province of B.C.'s decision to pull support for a national park in the South Okanagan.

"We are disappointed and confused as to why Environment Minister Terry Lake has chosen to withdraw and possibly abandon this project," said OSPS director Sheila White. "We strongly urge the provincial government to reconsider its decision."

"Minister Lake has said there is little local support for the national park, and we vehemently disagree with his conclusion. In fact, there is significant community support for a new national park, most recently from the Okanagan Nation Alliance who affirmed on February 6 that they are committed to partnering with Parks Canada on the proposal," said White.

White also points to a 2010 public opinion poll showing at least 63 per cent of citizens in the Okanagan-Similkameen want a new national park. Eleven of the 12 ranchers in the area are behind the project. The Tourism Association of the Thompson Okanagan and its 3,200 members support the park, recognizing the immense benefits that a park would bring to local communities, businesses and citizens. More than 20,000 individuals – including nearly half from the Okanagan -- signed a petition in 2008 urging the provincial and regional governments to create the park.

The Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society was established in 1966 and was instrumental in securing provincial park status for Cathedral Mountain, Conkle Lake and Okanagan Mountain.

The society has also demonstrated a decades-long interest in wildlife. It purchased 700 acres (283 hectares) of winter rangeland for what is now known as the Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area, and recommended to the Ecological Reserves Committee that a 200-acre reserve (81 hectares) be placed on arid and marsh lands at the head of Osoyoos Lake. The society also participated in the Ashnola Co-ordinated Resource Management Plan.

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