

Minister of Environment  
Ottawa

Re: Airplanes in Parks

I can't let this issue pass without making some observations and recommendations. From Parks perspective, they see decreasing dollars allotted for an ever increasing number of parks, and growing demands on those parks already in existence. Within Parks Canada, like in all levels and branches of government, the administration increases and draws needed staff away from "field" positions. This can add to the frustration of those in both the protection end of the Park business and those in the tourism. The fundamental dilemma in Parks Canada is that the mandate is to both "PROTECT and at the same time develop and "ENJOY". (You can find this right in their mission statement.) Parks internal structure is set up this way. The resulting institutional schizophrenia can cause actions that seem irrational when viewed from outside.

In the case of proposed airstrip closures and flight restrictions, for Parks Canada these acts do satisfy the need to do "something", and perhaps more importantly, to be seen doing something. As Superintendent of one of the largest and most remote National Parks in Canada for several years I witnessed that the threat to parks was loss of species through climate change, global transport of pollutants, and migration of species into "unprotected" areas. Pollution and poor waste handling practices are the largest killers in National Parks by a significant margin, after road kills. It is not from aircraft flying over, landing in, or taking off from Parks. It was also not from the activities of pilots or passengers who otherwise comply with existing Park rules. If anyone could actually quantitatively measure the impact of aircraft flying over, or landing in protected areas there would

be no aircraft issue. This is especially true when compared to other forms of access, including highway traffic.

After nearly thirty years employment in wildlife management I have actually witnessed the effect of aircraft flying over wildlife. I will go one on one with any biologist in the country and will demonstrate that this impact too is exaggerated and the arguments supporting it are based on popularly encouraged perceptions.

Within the bureaucracy I have also witnessed a decrease in the staff's ability to travel and monitor the very wilderness they were mandated to protect. In some cases certain members of the public had better access to remote regions than Parks staff and a mild resentment has developed. I think we can all sympathize with them at least a little.

The simple fact is that out of the tens of millions of acres of habitat, the return to pristine (?) condition of five acres of rarely used grass airstrip, located directly adjacent to four paved lanes of very very busy highway and two major rail lines, will achieve nothing but a symbolic act. Perhaps this is partly the point, these days we witness all government bureaucracies making cuts where visibility is highest and the public backlash will be loudest and most effective in forcing politicians to loosen purse strings.

In any event, all pilots and all those in the aviation field have our work cut out. We must work to educate both the politicians and the public to prevent actions based on perceptions rather than on fact. We also shouldn't forget to focus our education on those within the government bureaucracy too. Much of the time that is where such problems are actually rooted.

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