

1. INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have witnessed tremendous growth in the urban areas of North America, and the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan area has been no exception. From a base of about 75,000 people fifty years ago, the population of the region has grown by over 200,000, and is now approaching 300,000. With population growth comes the need for new services of all kinds, and recreation is one such service. Most urban areas have been the grateful recipients of parklands dedicated many years ago, such as Halifax's ever popular Point Pleasant Park. However, while the foresight of yesteryear has been greatly appreciated, one must recognize that it will not be adequate to meet the needs of future generations. Some of that same foresight is needed today.

The pressing need to preserve high quality recreational areas to meet the needs of future residents of the growing Halifax-Dartmouth region was first recognized some years ago. In 1971 a report by Paul Dean entitled Natural Environment Survey identified seven sites of regional significance for recreation and environmental protection. Shortly thereafter a second background study was prepared for MAPC. Entitled Growth Through Recreation, this study estimated the amount of land required for regional park purposes, and it proposed a system of seven regional parks. A draft regional development plan was released in 1973, and it included the proposed regional parks system. On the basis of these studies, seven "Regional Parks" were designated in the Halifax-Dartmouth Regional Development Plan of 1975, to satisfy the stated objective: "to protect areas of unique natural significance against adverse effects and to reserve sufficient open space for recreational purposes". The Plan limited use of these areas to recreation, forestry, agriculture, parks and institutions, marinas, and campgrounds.

Soon after approval of the Regional Development Plan it became evident that the regional parks concept required considerable further planning work, and in late 1976 MAPC approved the establishment of a staff-level Parks Advisory Group, whose role would be to carry out planning studies on the regional parks and to report back to MAPC. Represented on this group were the Cities of Halifax and Dartmouth and the Municipality of the County of Halifax, the Departments of Recreation, Lands and Forests, Municipal Affairs, and Environment, the Nova Scotia Housing Commission, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Parks Canada and MAPC.

Principally the Parks Advisory Group was instructed to prepare a report on regional parks which would:

- 1) Indicate conceptual park development plans for each of the seven areas designated as regional parks;
- 2) Based on the conceptual development plans, identify park boundaries with sufficient precision to permit amendment of the Halifax-Dartmouth Regional Development Plan (Map II, Appendix C) to facilitate boundary interpretation; and
- 3) Include estimates of land acquisition, park development, and operation/maintenance costs.

In meeting these terms of reference the Parks Advisory Group has prepared a full report, which provides an introduction to the role of the Regional Park System and an explanation of the planning methodology used to delineate specific park boundaries and to arrive at development concepts. The seven Regional Parks are identified and the general concepts for development are explained. The parks are then described individually, with reference to bio-physical data, proposed development concepts, projected development and acquisition costs, boundary recommendations, and details of present ownership. Estimates of the costs involved for an initial five year development phase are provided. In addition, some options for the administration and operation of the Park System are identified and presented for consideration by MAPC. The report concludes with a suggested implementation approach, the phasing of which is recommended irrespective of the administrative option chosen.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the planning methodology, estimated acquisition, development and operating costs for the regional parks system, and a summary of recommendations.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In completing the study of the proposed Regional Parks System the major conclusions of the Parks Advisory Group were:

- 1) that a number of sizable parks, similar to the proposed Regional Parks System, will be necessary to meet the recreational needs of the expanding Halifax-Dartmouth urban area;
- 2) that the acquisition and development of the proposed Regional Parks System is feasible especially since two-thirds of the lands are already in public or quasi-public ownership; and
- 3) that the immediate acquisition of key privately-held land parcels is important, as such lands are being lost to development or may soon be placed on the market.

The estimated cost for the acquisition of all privately-held lands within the system is about \$4.9 million, and the estimated value of existing public or quasi-public lands is about \$6.5 million. Development cost estimates indicate that a sound park infrastructure (access roads, trails, picnic areas, beach improvements and clean-up) could be put in place for about \$3.2 million.

Based on these major conclusions, the study offers the following recommendations regarding the establishment and continued development of the Regional Parks System.

1. *MAPC should immediately address the task of determining the jurisdictional responsibility(s) for the establishment, funding, and operation of the Regional Parks System.*

With respect to jurisdiction over regional parks, there are several possible alternatives based on various combinations of municipal, regional, provincial, and perhaps even some federal involvement. These could include:

- each municipal unit acquiring, developing, and maintaining those regional parks within its boundaries;
- the creation of a Regional Parks Agency within the Halifax-Dartmouth Metropolitan Authority to take full responsibility for the regional parks; or
- combinations of governmental responsibility, which might even be different for each park.

The recommendation that MAPC undertake to determine the appropriate jurisdictional responsibility for regional parks is the most important recommendation of this study. Clearly the provincial government is unlikely to take full responsibility for the system, as the parks are designed primarily for the residents of the Halifax-Dartmouth region. At the same time the municipalities are asking for direction on the regional park issue, although they have continued their own parkland acquisition programs in the interim. This study provides the basic site planning and costing information, but MAPC must focus on the intergovernmental cooperation necessary to carry the Regional Parks System forward. The importance to this recommendation cannot be over emphasized, as the credibility of the whole regional parks concept, and the other recommendations in the report, depend upon resolution of the confusion surrounding jurisdiction and responsibility. As an example, there are possibilities of land dedications by private individuals, but at present there is no identified body to accept a dedication, and no guarantee that the parks will eventually exist.

Funding options must of course be considered by MAPC when dealing with the jurisdictional matters. Options might include:

- joint provincial-municipal capital funding based on an appropriate cost-sharing formula;
- some funds through Parks Canada and the Agreements for Recreation and Conservation (ARC) Program in one or more parks; and
- a levy on municipal tax rates or utility bills (e.g., an increase of two cents on both commercial and residential property tax rates would generate additional annual revenues of \$700,000, an amount adequate to amortize an initial capital investment in land and facilities of about \$7 million).

2. *In considering jurisdiction over regional parks as per recommendation No. 1, MAPC should attempt to ensure that all planning efforts relative to the regional park system will be coordinated.*

A coordinated approach is necessary to ensure that a full range of recreational opportunities will be available to residents of the Halifax-Dartmouth region and that the potential of each park will be realized, but also that unnecessary duplication will be avoided.

3. *To resolve a limited number of hardship cases and to secure land parcels either currently on the market or as they become available, a short-term land acquisition policy should be formulated. As the implementation of recommendation No. 1 may take a considerable period of time, MAPC should seek to establish an interim land acquisition and management program. This short-term acquisition procedure should continue until a clear implementation strategy has been identified for the overall system.*

Since 1975 the lack of any regional parks land acquisition program has been a major problem, and has repeatedly been the subject of complaint, especially by owners of properties within designated regional parks. It is not possible to predict exactly which properties may be available, and therefore the capital requirements of such a program cannot be estimated with certainty, but recent experience would indicate that a first-year budget of at least \$200,000 is necessary for a meaningful program.

4. *Land acquisition for the regional parks should be carried out through a process of open negotiation with property owners based on market value of the lands involved.*
5. *The primary purposes of the Regional Parks System should be recognized as the protection and preservation of significant natural resources and the provision of recreational opportunities, and any park development should respect the natural environment. Following resolution of the jurisdictional issues as per recommendation No. 1, initial funding should be primarily oriented toward land acquisition. However, at this time basic park infrastructure development should begin, in order that the regional parks may become available for public use as soon as possible.*
6. *A five year time frame should be established after the jurisdictional arrangements have been determined as per recommendation No. 1, as a base reference for initial land acquisition and park development as recommended in this report. Ultimate acquisition and further development would then be accomplished over a longer period, depending upon the willingness of landowners to sell land parcels, recreational demand, and sources of funds.*

7. *The conceptual plan for the Cole Harbour/Lawrencetown Shore regional park should not be considered as a fixed development strategy, as there is on-going planning work in these communities.*

The conceptual plan in this report reflects the "Porter Plan" as far as this has evolved in meetings with the residents and the Porter Plan Advisory Committee. However, this plan has not been fully accepted by the residents, and the above recommendation indicates that changes may be necessary.

8. *MAPC should request that the municipalities, in their municipal planning processes, give careful consideration to future development in the portions of regional park watersheds which lie outside park boundaries, especially those areas identified as "buffer zones" on the conceptual development maps.*

Both the visual impact of development and the impact on water quality in the parks should be considered in terms of possible effects on recreational use and on the integrity of the natural systems which the parks were designated to preserve. Reports could be prepared by the municipalities to deal with the adequacy of controls on land use intensity, storm drainage, visual factors, and other matters which might affect the regional parks.

9. *Map II, Appendix "C" (Urban Form Policy) of the Halifax-Dartmouth Regional Development Plan, should be formally amended to ratify the final park boundaries as proposed in this report.*

3. PLANNING METHODOLOGY

The study analysed the Regional Parks System as a whole, relative to demand for recreation, the function and size of each park, and the accessibility of the system from various parts of the region. The results of this analysis were used to formulate general park development guidelines for the whole Regional Parks System. These guidelines were then used in the more detailed planning of park sites, to ensure that the development concepts for each park would be consistent with the overall goals for the system. As part of these guidelines, a key concept was the division of park areas into Park Development Units using four categories to indicate the degree of development recommended (See Appendix).

At the level of the individual parks, site inventories were carried out, analyzed, and development concepts formulated. Boundaries were delineated and property appraisals were undertaken. The development concepts for individual parks are based upon the criteria that all physical improvements must be compatible with the natural systems being protected, and should serve to enhance the natural recreational capability of the particular feature. The development concepts are intended to facilitate immediate use by the public and are seen as initial requirements to provide public access, and consequently to take advantage of the most readily utilized natural features of the parks.

4. ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT COSTS

A striking feature of the acreage proposed for inclusion in the Regional Park System is the proportion of land owned by various levels of government, through one public agency or another. Fully 2/3 of the land, over 5,000 acres, is "publicly owned". As shown in Table 4.1, this ownership is vested in a variety of government departments at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. While these groups undoubtedly see their responsibility for regional parks in diverse terms, it is hoped that they will cooperate in the use and disposal of lands designated for park purposes. This does not necessarily imply any particular cost-sharing arrangements in the land acquisition program. However, it is hoped that this cooperation will effectively implement the very necessary land banking function, allowing the initial thrust of fund allocation to be directed toward securing the other one-third of the acreage which is now held by private interests. This private land is more susceptible to urban development pressures, and also the private landowners deserve compensation for their lands which are required for park use.

Depending on the eventual jurisdictional arrangement, it may be necessary to compensate public and quasi-public landowners for the use of their properties within the Regional Parks System. However, this need not mean acquisition, and in some cases the landowner involved may not wish to give up title to the lands. A leasing situation could be a very satisfactory solution, whereby present owners would retain ownership while the capital burden of land acquisition for the regional parks would be lessened.

PARK	APPROXIMATE TOTAL AREA (ac.)	PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC LANDS		AMOUNT IN PUBLIC OWNERSHIP
		Owner	Area (ac.)	
Admiral Cove	184	Road R.O.W.	1.5	58 %
		Bedford Service Commission	4.5	
		D.N.D.	100.0	
Canal Lakes	1148	Highways	29.5	33 %
		Lands & Forests	62.0	
		City of Dartmouth	285.4	
Cole Harbour/ Lawrencetown Shore	1420	County of Halifax	185.0	39 %
		Lands & Forests	362.8	
Hemlock Ravine	287	Road allowance	7.7	48 %
		City of Halifax	131.3	
McNab Island	1230	Province of N.S.	546.0	100 %
		D.N.D. & Parks, Canada	684.0	
Sackville River	1290	N.S.H.C. & C.M.H.C.	184.6	47 %
		D.N.D.	329.0	
		N.S.P.C.	89.0	
Watershed Lakes	2036	P.S.C.	2036.0	100 %
Total Acreage	7595	Total Publicly Owned Acreage	5038.3	66 %

Estimated market value associated with the land in the various parks is outlined in Table 4.2. These values were reached with the aid of the opinions of professional appraisers. They do not necessarily represent the final price that would be paid for the properties but are considered to be sufficiently accurate to plan an acquisition program. The estimated total value of the private holdings within the system is about \$5 million. The large number of separate land parcels, and the considerable acquisition cost involved, suggest an acquisition program extending over a period of years.

TABLE 4.2 — ESTIMATED LAND ACQUISITION COSTS*

LAND OWNERSHIP AND LAND VALUES (\$000, 1977)			
REGIONAL PARK	PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Admiral Cove	Road R.O.W.	10.0	
	Bedford Service Commission	34.0	
	D.N.D.	300.0	
		344.0	500.0
			844.0
Canal Lakes	Highways	117.5	
	Lands & Forests	15.5	
	City of Dartmouth	370.8	
		503.8	1,378.9
			1,882.7
Cole Harbour/ Lawrencetown Shore	County of Halifax	301.5	
	Lands & Forests	81.8	
	Lands & Forests	150.0	
		533.3	1,360.4
			1,893.7
Hemlock Ravine	Road Allowance	18.8	
	City of Halifax	245.0	
		263.8	374.2
			638.0
McNab Island	Province of N.S.	546.0	
	D.N.D. & Parks Canada	684.0	
		1,230.0	0
			1,230.0
Sackville River	N.S.H.C. & C.M.H.C.	90.0	
	D.N.D.	730.0	
		820.0	1,290.0
			2,110.0
Watershed Lakes	P.S.C.	2,782.1	
		2,782.1	0
			2,782.1
TOTAL (\$000)		\$6,477.0	\$4,903.5
			\$11,380.5

* The figures were obtained from professional appraisers in "Letters of opinion of value".

The study also undertook to estimate park development costs, using as a guiding principle that in the first few years the majority of funds should be allocated to land acquisition, to place the proposed Regional Parks System fully in public ownership. While the majority of the lands are already publicly owned, it is important that much of the private lands be acquired, as many of the private parcels are critical to eventual park development. Although it is recommended that land acquisition be the priority in the short-term, it is recognized that some development should take place immediately to allow access to and use of the proposed regional parks. Initial development proposed is that which would open the parks for use as much as possible without complete development. Based on this concept a considerable proportion of the development cost within the initial five-year phase is allotted to the construction of park access roads and walking trail systems. Also, some additional physical improvements are necessary to properly utilize Park System resources while protecting them from the detrimental effects of user impact. Estimated costs are for basic park facilities. If properly designed and implemented, these facilities should provide a park infrastructure upon which the long-term development of the Regional Park System can take place. Table 4.3 shows the estimated total acquisition and development costs for an initial five-year phase. These costs are based on the park development concepts as presented in the Appendix to this Executive Summary. For a more detailed cost breakdown refer to the full report.

TABLE 4.3 — ESTIMATED COSTS OF ACQUISITION, AND FIVE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT, OF REGIONAL PARKS SYSTEM			
REGIONAL PARKS	ACQUISITION (in \$000)	DEVELOPMENT (in \$000)	TOTAL (in \$000)
Admiral Cove	844	158	702
Canal Lakes	1,883	535	2,418
Cole Harbour/ Lawrencetown Shore	1,894	1,094	2,988
Hemlock Ravine	638	153	791
McNab Island	1,230	200	1,430
Sackville River	2,110	574	2,684
Watershed Lakes	2,782	495	3,277
TOTAL SYSTEM	\$11,381*	\$3,209	\$14,590*

* Publicly owned property represents approximately 60 % of the total acquisition cost quoted above. It is hoped that these lands may be made available for regional park use at costs considerably below market value, and therefore the total acquisition costs should be substantially less than \$11,381,000. Land leases on favourable terms would be one method of obtaining park use of public lands at a cost below market value for actual acquisition, which would enable the reduction of total acquisition and development costs to below \$10 million. Also much of the publicly-owned property has been acquired specifically for park uses.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to land acquisition and park development, implementation of the Regional Parks System will require other efforts and will generate operating costs and administrative expenses, which will vary depending upon the jurisdictional arrangement eventually selected. On the assumption that land acquisition and basic development would be carried out over a five-year period, year five operating costs and administration expenses were estimated to be approximately \$300,000 and \$150,000, for the regional parks agency option with high levels of service.

Other implementation matters which will require attention are as follows:

1. Responsibility for Implementation

Jurisdiction over regional parks must be addressed immediately, and this is perhaps the most important concern facing MAPC in its consideration of this report (see Recommendation No. 1 in Section 2), as the Regional Parks Systems will only achieve credibility after this responsibility is assigned.

2. Short-Term Land Acquisition Agency

Land acquisition opportunities may be expected to arise in the immediate future, before decisions are made regarding overall implementation. In the interim, some agency should be empowered to act in order to monitor market conditions and acquire land parcels which become available. MAPC or the Halifax-Dartmouth Metropolitan Authority could carry out this function.

3. Amendments

Map II, Appendix 'C', Urban Form Policy, of the Halifax-Dartmouth Regional Development Plan should be amended to ratify the revisions to Park boundaries which have been proposed in the current report. These amendments should also be incorporated in the appropriate Municipal Development Plans if necessary.

4. Surveys

The amendments of the Plan will be based upon approximations of the boundaries; surveys should subsequently be undertaken to establish exact boundary lines at the time of land acquisition.