



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Chamber Supportive as South Okanagan National Park Gains Traction

*Kelowna:* The Kelowna Chamber is pleased that the proposed national park in the South Okanagan has inched one step forward this summer. Parks Canada announced July 20 that Sarah Boyle, a conservation biologist, has begun engaging stakeholders in discussions around establishing the park.

Boyle appears well-suited to the task. Long-standing concerns in the local community in the South Okanagan and a lack of support provincially kept progress on the notion of a park at a near standstill for years. The Kelowna Chamber consulted with proponents, local chambers and businesses, and tabled a policy at the BC Chamber in 2014, renewed in 2017, urging multi-level government support.

Some local opposition to the park remains, as the proposal is currently designed, especially from certain business and ranching interests. Boyle's experience in working with stakeholders with a range of strongly held opinions will facilitate her work as she engages with farmers, ranchers and businesses in the local community. Boyle worked on the Rouge National Urban Park in Ontario, which was a non-traditional park separate from the Canada National Parks Act. Her new appointment may indicate that Parks Canada is looking at a similar long-term solution in the South Okanagan.

Richard Cannings, Member of Parliament South Okanagan - West Kootenay, Critic for Natural Resources, has met with Boyle, and calls her "very open-minded. . . keen on talking to people about [issues], and perhaps trying to allay some fears."

Past President of the Kelowna Chamber, Tom Dyas, who was instrumental in working with various stakeholders to create the Chamber policy said he was delighted to hear of Boyle's hiring. "National parks," said Dyas, "represent important economic drivers, creating increased employment, a boost in tourism, and opportunities for First Nations economic participation. The potential impact in 2011 dollars is \$37 million in gross domestic product; \$25 million in annual labour income, and \$49 million in visitor spending."

A 2015 provincial framework paper identified recognition of existing uses and an explicit commitment that existing tenures and business uses continue within the proposed park area as a guiding principle.

"We believe," said Dyas, "that issues over ranchland and other long-standing commercial interests can eventually be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, including businesses which have concerns over the existing plan. We believe that Ms Boyle can resolve those. There are essentially no provincial costs in moving ahead with this federal initiative, and we look forward to the day when we are much closer to showcasing this remarkable region with its unique biosphere found nowhere else in Canada."

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