

Dear Sir:

The cuts planned for Parks Canada and other federal agencies and departments responsible for Canadian heritage, such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Library and Archives Canada, are shameful. The fact that Parks and other heritage institutions have suffered personnel cuts far out of proportion to their small share of the federal budget suggests that this transformation of the Canadian cultural landscape is motivated as much by a wish to curtail and control understanding of our historical and archaeological heritage as by any rational plan to trim operating budgets. The planned centralization of Parks Canada's curatorial activity in the Ottawa region is a concrete example suggesting that the motivation here is not simply economic. How will it ever be possible to lease storage space more cheaply near Ottawa than near Halifax, for example? Heritage interpretation is in some ways like Search and Rescue: it is done most effectively on a local or regional level.

The claim has been made that federal agencies and departments will be able to care adequately for Canada's rich heritage and to offer Canadians the opportunity to share in it, as they have done in the past. This claim is implausible, given the scale of the cuts proposed. The rapidity of the down-sizing means that within Parks Canada there is no opportunity for knowledge to be passed on, so that the coincidence of staff down-sizing with consolidation of collections will inevitably result in wholesale obliteration of scientific and historical knowledge. This unneeded loss of information parallels that unfolding at Statistics Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Canadians might see a pattern here: a government less interested in sustaining an informed population and more inclined to control information in all spheres of life.

Most Canadians share a tacit understanding about how an open society should function, about how information can be shared so that our society can function democratically, about how our heritage is something plural not something that can be captured in a single authoritative narrative. The government that abandons these tacit understandings, inevitably calls into question its own legitimacy.

There are many angry Canadian these days. Some are angry about what happened to Statistics Canada. Some are angry about what happened to CBC. Some about the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, some about Search and Rescue. All of these policy blunders have bothered me, but I am a Professor of Archaeology and felt that I ought to say plainly how the cuts to Parks Canada will irrevocably damage Canadians' access to their own heritage. Like most letters to authority this one will evoke a form letter and likely little else. If, by chance, a fellow Canadian follows this letter to this point, I would ask you to join those who would retrieve our sense of community, our sense of fairness and our sense that it is one of government's duties to citizens remain informed about our present, our past and our future.

Sincerely,

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