



# *E'weewach*

Place where the waters come from



## *Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park Project*



**Provisory Master Plan**

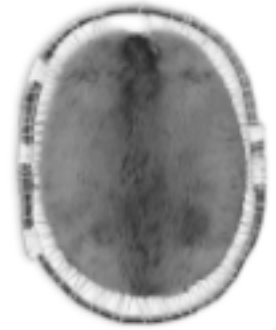


Québec 



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## Foreword

This provisory master plan succinctly presents the Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park project. In addition to the park's proposed boundaries, it describes the area concerned, analyzes the conservation and development status of its natural and cultural heritage, and proposes management guidelines and zoning objectives designed to ensure this heritage's sustainability. This provisory master plan reflects the importance that the Cree Nation of Mistissini attach to the preservation of its cultural heritage, in conjunction with the area's natural heritage, and the influence tallymen will have in developing this vast territory. Historically, the latter have been its guardians and protectors. They must continue to play this role so that future generations can enjoy the rights enshrined in the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) and so that the components of this territory's rich heritage are preserved and developed.

Park management guidelines will seek to do everything possible to support the conservation principle enshrined in the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. It is also critical that the ecological integrity of the area's ecosystems be maintained. In the years to come, the latter will be under pressure from the growing Mistissini population, visitors to the park, and adverse effects from the future park's periphery.

In future, park management will have to harmonize its action plan with that of future border protected areas managed by neighbouring Amerindian Nations, namely the Innu of Mashteuiatsh and the Eeyouch of Oujé-Bougoumou, Waswanipi and Nemaska.

The creation and development of Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park will have positive repercussions for the cities of Chibougamau and Chapais, located along the highway providing access to this protected area, by diversifying economic and tourism activities. For those living in the *Jamésie* region, it is an opportunity to capitalize on these expected spinoffs by offering integrated and complementary services.

In its "project" version, the park borders on the Lacs-Albanel-Mistassini-et-Waconichi Wildlife Reserve. Many shelters, chalets and campsites will automatically become park assets, while allowing diversification of its clientele.

Finally, this park project will offer Mistissini youth ecotourism-related job opportunities. These young people will be given the responsibility and opportunity to safeguard the heritage passed down to them by their ancestors. This is a major challenge that should elicit pride on the part of the leaders of this Nation. Park management will be responsible for defining future developments and activities to be given priority in the medium term. Initially, it will be necessary to consolidate, adapt and improve the services that are currently offered and bring existing facilities up to standard. In the short term, the main developments will be restricted to setting up visitor service centres in Mistissini and the Témiscamie River sector.



## Introduction

In partnership with the Cree Nation of Mistissini, the Government of Québec is planning to create a park that will be representative of the boreal forest: Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park (temporary name). An official toponym will be chosen in cooperation with this community. The proposed territory covers an area of approximately 11,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It will be the first inhabited park in Québec for many families from the Mistissini Cree community will continue to live within its boundaries. This unique situation results from the rights devolving from the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. The project will bring to the fore the natural, cultural and historical heritage of this vast territory.

The project expresses the Government's desire to set up a network of high-calibre protected areas, reflecting Québec's biodiversity, covering all of its natural regions and including 8% of its territory (See Map 1). It comes in the context of the 2004-2007 Government Plan on Biological Diversity and the *Québec's Sustainable Development Plan. Sustainable Development: Because Quality of Life Counts!*

Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park is in the penultimate stage of the creation process prescribed in the Parks Act, that of public hearings on the future park's boundaries. During these public hearings, groups and individuals wishing to express their opinion on the various aspects of the project may do so.

Following the example of other national park networks throughout the world, Québec's National Parks Network respects World Conservation Union (IUCN) conservation criteria, as stipulated in the Parks Act. The network is dedicated to the conservation and permanent protection of areas that are representative of Québec's natural regions, of natural sites of an exceptional character, and of their biodiversity.

The territory proposed for the creation of this park is one of the last bastions of Québec's boreal forest. It has not been touched by forestry, mining or hydroelectric development, and the First Nation that lives here still engages in its ancestral activities. It will, therefore, be crucial to establish measures to ensure the sustainability of this heritage. To this end, and as is the case throughout Québec's National Parks Network, three fundamental principles will be applied:

- Conservation takes precedence over development;
- The integrity of the heritage must be maintained;
- The precautionary principle must be central to all decisions.

The principle of conservation and right to harvest (hunting, fishing and trapping) of the beneficiaries of James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement take precedence over those laid out in the Parks Policy.

This document describes the initial guidelines proposed to operate this first park on the Mistissini Cree trapping grounds.



# 1 *Current situation*

## 1.1

### **Background**

The following are the milestones reached by Government of Québec and the Mistissini Cree Nation in the creation of the first park in the James Bay territory. The adoption of the ministerial orders of 1991 and 1992 (M.O. 91-192 and M.O. 92-170) protected a territory of 6,579 km<sup>2</sup> from mining and forestry operations and reserved it for park purposes. The Morisson report (1997), commissioned by the Grand Council of the Crees, the World Wildlife Fund-Canada and the Direction des parcs, constituted a turning point in the Mistissini Crees' decision to create a park on their traplines. Essentially, this report recommended that the Crees be closely associated with the park creation process and that a holistic approach, linking conservation and, to a certain degree, development of the natural and cultural heritage, be the backdrop to the creation of this first park on their lands.

The Société de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec's 2001-2004 Strategic Plan proposed beginning by conducting field surveys to better define the study area and begin discussions with the authorities of the Cree Nation of Mistissini. On August 21, 2001, Chief John Longchap invited the minister to form a tripartite task force to review the existing boundaries of the Lacs-Albanel-Mistassini-et-Waconichi Wildlife Reserve in order to make it into a conservation area and set up a new structure to manage this territory. On November 29, 2001, the minister agreed to create this task force, chaired by one member of three representatives from the Cree Nation of Mistissini, two Société de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec representatives and the manager of the wildlife reserve, who works for the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SÉPAQ).



Originally, the park project covered only part of lakes Mistassini and Albanel, the entire Témiscamie River and most of the Otish Mountains massif. When the study area was first presented during the April 15, 2002 regular meeting of the Council of the Cree Nation of Mistissini, two resolutions regarding the future park's perimeter were unanimously adopted and addressed to the minister (resolutions 2002-87A and 2002-88A). On May 22, 2002, the minister accepted both resolutions. The initial project perimeter was expanded to add almost all of lakes Albanel and Mistissini, the upriver portion of the Rupert River, the historic corridor of Coldwater Lake and Lake Témiscamie, and Lake Naococane, north of the Otish Mountains.

A total of four field campaigns were conducted in the company of Cree guides and experts, and a status report summarizing the knowledge gathered was drafted. This status report, which was tabled in April 2005, became the reference document for the preparation of this provisory master plan along with consultations of individuals, experts, organizations and the government departments concerned by the creation of Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park.

## 1.2 Regional context

### 1.2.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

The proposed Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park project covers more than 11,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It is located at the easternmost limit of the Municipality of James Bay, 90 km north of Chibougamau; a city that can be accessed by provincial highway 167 from the Lac-Saint-Jean region and by highway 113, which links Abitibi to the city of Chapais, west of Chibougamau. From there, it takes at least one hour to reach the Cree community of Mistissini on the shores of giant Lake Mistassini, the gateway to the park. In all, it is an approximately seven-hour drive from Québec City and a ten-hour drive from Montréal.

### 1.2.2 PROPOSED BOUNDARIES

In its southern, lake sector, with the exception of Category I lands, from Du Poste Bay and Abatagouche Bay (where the village of Mistissini is located), the park will preserve in its entirety the waters of lakes Albanel and Mistassini as well as

the shoreline around them (See Map 2). It will also include the headwaters of the Rupert River sector, from its source in Lake Mistassini to Lake Bellinger, encompassing Peuverau Island and De l'Est Island. The Témiscamie River sector will also be included, thus protecting a large part of the river's watershed, from its source in the Otish Mountains and along the corridor of the historical canoe route linking Coldwater Lake to Lake Témiscamie, all the way to its outlet at Lake Albanel. The inclusion of the Otish Mountains will make it possible to safeguard virtually the entire massif and its northern spur, which border on the Eastmain River floodplain. Finally, Lake Naococane and its hundreds of islands will also be protected.

A good part of the Lacs-Albanel-Mistassini-et-Waconichi Wildlife Reserve will thus be transformed into parkland. The remaining portions will serve as buffer zones where activities that are complementary to the park project may be offered.

While the park will protect virtually the entire Otish Mountains massif, two territorial units slated for mining exploration in the massif's piedmont will temporarily be left out for a period not to exceed July 7, 2009. At the end of this agreement with the Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, if no significant mining potential has been discovered, these two State reserves will no longer be subject to mining and will be added to the future park.

The village of Mistissini and the Category I lands surrounding it are not included in the park project's perimeter. This sector will play the twofold role of buffer zone and main gateway for visitors to enter the park.

### 1.2.3 NATURAL REGIONS REPRESENTED

The creation of Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park is designed to protect elements that are representative of Québec's main five natural regions. The first is the Lake Mistassini/Lake Albanel drainage basin (natural region B-30), which spans the largest sedimentary rock bed in the Québec portion of the James Bay watershed. The Lake Mistassini spillway stretches westward across the Rupert Plateau (natural region B-29), where this tumultuous river winds its way among large islands and through twisting channels to break through the wall of dozens of eskers blocking its path. Then, in the confines of the boreal Laurentian region (natural region B-17), we turn northwards along the sandy banks of the majestic Témiscamie River to the Otish Mountains massif



(natural region B-31), which constitutes Québec's hydrographic pivot. Here, a topography of *cuestas* (table mountains) presents a front some 200 km in length facing the Eastmain River floodplain. Finally, to the north, we enter Lake Naococane, with its hundreds of islands composed of submerged quaternary deposits so characteristic of the Québec's central lake plateau region (natural region B-32).

#### 1.2.4 REGIONAL RECREATIONAL TOURISM ACTIVITIES

The wildlife reserve encompassing major lakes Albanel, Mistassini and Waconichi was created in 1948 as a game reserve for hunting and fishing. Lake Mistassini is the heart of this wildlife reserve. Over the years, sports fishing facilities were developed around this lake. Among them, the Osprey, Louis-Jolliet and Vieux-Poste fishing lodges earned a reputation far beyond Québec's borders. Recently, Papaskwasati camp was added on this same lake. Pénicouane Bay (Lake Mistassini) and Lake Albanel campgrounds offer access to the region's largest bodies of water.

The village of Mistassini also offers modern reception facilities and activities designed to introduce visitors to the environment and way of life of the Cree people, a progressive nation. Visitors to the area will also be able to stop in Chibougamau and Chapais, cities whose growth is linked to the region's mining potential. These two cities offer a wide range of products and services to visitors travelling further north.

Finally, the community of the Cree Nation of Oujé-Bougoumou, established just south of the Assinica Wildlife Reserve, will surprise visitors by its urban planning, which is so well integrated into the surroundings, and by the unique architecture of its buildings.

The *Jamésie* region is dotted with thousands of lakes inhabited by diverse wildlife species. In winter, it is a paradise for snowmobilers seeking vast tracts and unparalleled snow conditions.

## 1.3 Knowledge synthesis

### 1.3.1 CLIMATE CONDITIONS

The climate in Albnel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park is continental and the ambient air's humidex level is low. Significant daytime/nighttime temperature variations can be observed. In these drier regions, lower winter temperatures and summer heat waves seem less marked than in the St. Lawrence River Valley.

The climate of lakes Mistassini and Albnel is relatively stable, an advantage for those planning a trip to these waters. However, temperatures on the Otish Mountains massif are unpredictable and can change within the same day.

The wind factor decisively affects snow accumulation in these two sectors. The boreal forest, which borders the lakes' floodplain, receives major snowfalls. Often more than 1 m high on the ground, this makes for extremely pleasant cross-country

skiing and snowshoeing. The high winds regularly sweeping the upper peaks of the Otish Mountains prevent snow from accumulating, restricting skiers to mid-slopes or valleys in the winter. In the summer, morning mist often clouds these summits well after daybreak.

### 1.3.2 NATURAL HERITAGE

From Lake Mistassini to the Otish Mountains, three of Québec's main vegetation zones (boreal forest, taiga and tundra) are represented. First, bordering on lakes Mistassini and Albnel and the Témiscamie River is the northernmost limit of the great boreal forest. At the foot of the Otish Mountains, this forest gradually gives way to taiga, an open forest dominated by black spruce, lichens and shrubs. Finally, the high plateaus of the Otish Mountains are characterized by vast stretches of tundra. This one park will contain several of northern Québec's biophysical components.

The area's geomorphology is characterized by the presence of one of the largest sedimentary rock deposits north of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel in Québec. It is easy to observe geomorphologi-





cal phenomena of spectacular dimensions dating from the last Ice Age. Eskers spanning several dozens of kilometres stand parallel to one another on the Eastmain River floodplain and through the course of the Rupert River. Great stretches of dead-ice moraine mould the landscape of giant Lake Naococane's floodplain. Drumlins surround Lake Albanel.

Located at the geographical centre of Québec, the Otish Mountains massif encompasses several peaks over 1,000 m in height, including Mount Yapeitso (1,135 m). These hills are characterized by Proterozoic sedimentary formations with *cuesta* topography. The massif was one of the last regions of Québec to emerge from the ice after the Wisconsin continental glaciation, about 7,000 years ago. The fragile tundra of the mountain tops, with its lichens, mosses and ground-hugging shrubs, is characteristic of landscapes of arctic Québec. A number of slopes with southern exposure, located at high altitude, are home to mature white spruce forests, more than a century old—most unusual at this latitude. Some of the large lakes perched high remain frozen almost year-round. Along some mountain streams grows the rare orange agoseris, a plant whose primary habitat is on the west of the North American continent. The massif is the source of the rivers emptying into the Québec's three major watersheds: Ungava (Caniapiscou River), James Bay and Hudson's Bay (La Grande, Eastmain and Rupert rivers) and St. Lawrence River (Péribonka River, via Lake St. John, the Manicouagan and Aux Outardes rivers). The Crees of Mistissini have given this land the evocative name "*E'weewach*", which means "place where the waters come from".

The majestic Témiscamie River originates in the Otish Mountains massif. More than 175 km long, it is one of Lake Albanel's main tributaries. In places, it has countless light-golden sandy beaches, and its rapids make it one of Québec's finest canoeing rivers. Along its entire length stand sentinels of century-old white spruce and old-growth black spruce forests that, for the last few centuries, have been spared from the cycle of fire. These old ecosystems form a refuge for woodland caribou and other species, especially along the southern part of the historical canoe route leading to Coldwater Lake.

With a surface area of 2,336 km<sup>2</sup>, Lake Mistassini is the largest natural lake in Québec and the source of the Rupert River. The region of lakes Mistassini and Albanel is characterized by large calcareous formations isolated in the interior of

the Canadian Shield. The great lacustrine plain of lakes Albanel and Mistassini lies on sedimentary bedrock, on which thrives calcicolous flora that is unusual in the boreal forest. This rather special geology also explains the presence of numerous species of plants, bryophytes and lichens whose status is precarious in Québec. Around the southern part of Lake Mistassini and at the mouth of the Témiscamie River, several vascular plants are in the northern limit of their distribution in Québec. Notable examples are the royal fern and Canada yew. Conversely, certain arctic plants that are characteristic of the calcareous habitats exposed along the rim of these lakes reach their southern limit here. Some of the plants for which the sector is known were first described by French botanist and explorer André Michaux when he visited Lake Mistassini in 1792. One example is the Mistassini primrose, which thrives on the lake's calcareous substrata. These inland seas of boundless horizons also constitute the habitat of several large fish species such as lake trout, brook trout, walleye and northern pike. Lake Mistassini is home to two genetically different populations of speckled trout. To the south of the lake, are the traces of a meteoroid impact on the rocks bordering Rouleau Island, which the Cree have named "*Mintinikus*".

Where it empties into the Rupert River, Lake Mistassini's shores present a barrier of islands, points, narrows, peninsulas and countless sharp reefs, all of which impede the waters' flow. Here, the river begins its lengthy course toward James Bay, dividing into three branches, creating immense islands between them and strewing the way with braided streams and rapids, sometimes calm, sometimes churning and rather unpredictable. Eskers cut through the river and continue over the central islands. A few rare hills tower above the landscape, more often than not bearing evidence of the passage of fire in the form of sun-bleached skeletons of trunks of black spruce.

Bordering the northern part of the park, in the vicinity of the Caniapiscou Reservoir, the ill-defined contours of Lake Naococane encompass countless islands of all sizes, the remnants of glacial deposits. The area presents as much water as dry land, and the open forest characteristic of the taiga is dominated by black spruce, shrubs, lichens and mosses.

### 1.3.3 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Since Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park will be the first inhabited park in Québec, it is important that this dimension receive special attention. The cultural heritage of the Mistassins living here is rich with the authenticity of an ancient culture. This wealth will be promoted through the activities and services offered. Already the magnificent Mistissini Lodge can serve as model, given the visual elements and historical texts adorning its walls. With the help and support of the tallymen, park employees—taken mainly from the ranks of the Mistissini Cree Nation—too will become the guardians and living witnesses of this ancient culture.

There is also the vast potential of the numerous archeological sites discovered on park territory. With the collective duty incumbent on us to protect and explore them, the few sites opened to the public will be visited only under the supervision of competent guides. Special precautions will be taken in the development of these sites, which will take place under the supervision of archeologists mandated by park management.

The Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park project comes with a historical and archeological heritage that is unique among protected areas in eastern North America for the number and concentration of its archeological sites, vestiges of a longstanding human presence on this territory. The “*Wapushakamikw*” or “*Antre du Lièvre*” site was visited by Father Laure in 1730. In 1976, under the name “*Colline Blanche*”, this was the first archeological site in Québec to be classified “cultural property”. The mouth of the Témiscamie River encompasses a number of other archeological sites bearing numerous artefacts from both Paleo-Indian and historical periods. Regarding the latter, the Témiscamie River sector (with Coldwater Lake and Lake Témiscamie) is part of the canoe route that linked Québec to James Bay during the New France era. For several centuries, the Lake Mistassini sector formed a contact zone for three Nations: the Cree, who inhabited the whole of the territory; the French, who came from the St. Lawrence River plain; and the English, who operated the fur-trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company on James Bay. Nowadays, the tallymen and their families continue to live on the land of their ancestors “*Eeyou Istchee*” and remain the privileged witnesses and guardians of this rich tradition.

The history of fur trading to the North Sea was written here and people still remember the brigades of canoers in their long bark canoes travelling inland up the Rupert and Eastmain rivers to trap beaver, harvesting the most beautiful pelts in the world.

### 1.3.4 LANDSCAPE HERITAGE

The most typical geographical aspects of the territory involved in the creation of Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park are: the immensity of Lake Mistassini, which covers 2,336 km<sup>2</sup>; the archipelago of islands comprising the upstream portion of the Rupert River; the long, sandy beaches along the Témiscamie River; the *cuesta* topography of the Otish Mountain peaks and the myriad islands composing giant Lake Naococane.





## 1.4

### Heritage status

Essentially, the landscape heritage has remained intact. The same is true for the natural and cultural heritages, with the exception of recent traces of logging in forests along the historical canoe route between Coldwater Lake and Lake Témiscamie, and the bed of the winter road recently used for mining exploration activities on the west shore of the downstream portion of the Témiscamie River.

## 1.5

### Development outlook

The village of the Cree Nation of Mistissini, gateway to the park, already offers visitors modern reception structures and activities designed to introduce them to the environment and the Cree way of life. Mistissini Lodge has 20 rooms and restaurant services for visitors.

Currently, the Osprey, Vieux-Poste, Louis-Jolliet and Papaskwasati fishing lodges can accommodate approximately one hundred visitors daily. Lake Albanel campground, located at the end of highway 167, has 45 campsites and Pénicouane Bay campground, south of Lake Mistassini, has 27. In the Otish Mountains, three shelters provide accommodation for a total of 22 cross-country skiers and hikers, making it easier to discover the highest peaks in the northeastern sector.

In short, once it is operational, the park will be able to welcome and offer accommodation to many national park enthusiasts.





## 2 Analysis and diagnosis



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### 2.1

#### Conservation threats

The wildlife reserve status that currently applies to most of the study area cannot guarantee sustainable conservation of the elements that are representative of the natural regions targeted, the exceptional sites or the biodiversity found there. In a wildlife reserve, any form of natural resource use may be authorized. The territory proposed for this park is one of the last bastions of the boreal forest in Québec. As yet untouched by development (forestry, mining, hydroelectric), it is one of the rare areas where a Native nation still practices traditional activities under the same conditions as its ancestors.

Resource use on the park's periphery could have quantifiable adverse effects within the park. Moreover, global phenomena,

such as long-distance pollutant transport and climatic warming, may also have a negative impact.

These threats to the conservation of the area's natural and cultural heritage can be reduced by creating a protected area of vast dimensions and giving it internationally recognized conservation status.

Once the park's status has been attributed, the building of facilities and increased human activity in certain, more attractive sectors will also constitute threats that could significantly impact on the natural heritage. Measures will be applied to limit such impacts to a minimum, acceptable level, so as not to jeopardize these heritage elements.

## 2.2 Development potential and constraints

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“Come explore a vast land of boundless horizons and pristine landscapes! Answer the call of the inland seas—lakes Mistassini and Albanel. Let yourself be rocked by the majestic, rolling Témiscamie River or brave the tumultuous Rupert River! Come climb the breathtaking peaks of the Otish Mountains. Travel to the heart and soul of the land of the Cree and discover an authentic Native culture that continues to honour its roots!”

This is the invitation to be extended to ecotourism lovers the world over, once the park has been created. In addition to the exceptional sites found in this transition zone between the boreal forest and Québec’s Far North, the area boasts impressive biodiversity, explained by the changes in altitude and latitude and the presence of one of the biggest landlocked sedimentary rock basins in the heart of the Canadian Shield.

Most of the structures required for the territory’s initial development already exist. Those designed for secondary sectors will be implemented in locations presenting few environmental constraints.

The presence of Cree trappers, who are active a great deal of the year, could, at times, constitute a considerable constraint on the supply of activities and services. However, the fact that some trappers will participate in offering visitors discovery experiences could help turn it into an advantage.

## 2.3 Challenges

Population growth in the community of Mistissini could eventually pose a problem due to the increased pressure resulting from hunting, fishing and trapping activities guaranteed by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. Ensuring the sustainability of this harvesting right notwithstanding the related principle of conservation and the overall national parks mission constitutes a significant challenge.

Preserving the authenticity and wealth of the Cree Nation’s cultural heritage is another major challenge. Increased numbers of visitors coming to the area in the medium term could considerably affect this community’s traditions and values. Measures will have to be adopted to ensure this heritage’s sustainability.



## 3 Conservation and development concept



### 3.1

## Management guidelines

### 3.1.1 CONSERVATION

Once the park has been created, a natural heritage management plan will be developed to apply the conservation principle on land governed by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. Community interests will be associated with this process, with the help of the Government of Québec and renowned university researchers.

#### 3.1.1.1 Research

Given the area's extremely diversified natural and cultural heritage, it is not surprising that for several centuries, explorers, scientists and archeologists have flocked here in such great numbers and that they have discovered so many natural phenomena concentrated in one spot. Clearly, universities and research institutions will be interested in pursuing scientific studies. However, all research projects will have to be authorized by park management and comply with the park's conservation and development mission. Management will draw up a

research program with a list of priorities for work most likely to increase fundamental knowledge and enhance conservation of the park's ecosystems. Subsequently, establishments wishing to form partnerships with park management could invest in conducting the studies. The same would be true for archeological sites where scientific research would be carried out.

#### 3.1.1.2 Impact monitoring

Setting quotas on visitor numbers will be an ongoing concern when park management defines its annual operating plan. These quotas will be based on each site's support capacity and will respect the practice of traditional activities by the Crees of Mistissini. For service zones and areas that are frequented, an environmental monitoring plan will be set up using predefined indicators to ensure that the mitigation measures implemented are adequate. Problems noted will be carefully documented and corrective measures, such as restoration work, will be taken in order to return the disturbed ecosystems to normal.

#### 3.1.1.3 Participative management

This first inhabited park in Québec is being created in an area where each trapline constitutes the living space of a Cree family. Visitors staying in the park will have to respect its inhabitants and their way of life. The community of Mistissini, and in particular the tallymen occupying the land, will be closely involved in managing Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park. They will receive visitors and be their hosts. The active participation of all of these people, in close collaboration with park staff, will help ensure the preservation and enhancement of this heritage in its entirety.

#### 3.1.1.4 Peripheral stress

In the coming years, stresses from areas bordering on the park will grow significantly. More roads will be built for logging operations, mining prospecting and diversion of the Rupert River towards the Eastmain River, giving the public greater access to the territory. This situation will increase the pressure on the natural environment and its biodiversity, and could result in conflicts as to their use.



Over time, it will be important to measure the potential impact of the Rupert River diversion, especially on speckled trout reproduction. It will also be important to continue studying the annual movement patterns of the woodland caribou in the Témiscamie River sector, which has been particularly hard hit in recent by forest fires and felling.

Global warming may also have a notable influence on plant species composition and on moose range. The effects of long-range contaminant transport must also be considered.

### 3.1.2 NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE (DEVELOPMENT)

So that all of the park's assets may be shown to their best advantage, park management will be innovative, ensuring visitors of memorable experiences and the opportunity to learn how closely nature and culture are linked. The global approach advocated here will ensure that visitors discover both the area's natural and cultural heritage. This inhabited park is a very special place, one best discovered through the participation of the Cree, a people that has always considered itself an integral part of Nature. The symbolic values this nation attributes to the forest and the animals inhabiting it originate in the oral tradition passed on by the elders.

It will also be essential that park development be reflected in the supply of activities and services that take the tourism products offered by the neighbouring communities of Oujé-Bougoumou, Chibougamau and Chapais into consideration. In this regard, the formation of strategic alliances and partnerships between Native and non-Native promoters is desirable so that the products offered in the region are both unique and complementary.

## 3.2 Zoning

The park's zoning plan constitutes the primary tool for defining sites requiring special protection (See Map 3). This plan introduces an innovation to the existing parks network, namely the preservation of areas considered sacred by the Mistissini elders. In so doing, a value with spiritual, social and cultural dimensions is given to sites having special importance in the eyes of the Cree Nation of Mistissini. The decision to designate sacred areas in this interim zoning plan follows on recommendation No. 13 of the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress held in Durban, South Africa in September 2003, to the effect that henceforth protected areas be able to ensure that sacred sites designated by the Native people concerned remain intact.



### 3.2.1 MAXIMUM PRESERVATION ZONES

In a territory of such size and such exceptional biodiversity, certain sectors require protection from any and all human impact. By defining maximum preservation zones, ancient forests and the habitats of threatened or vulnerable plant and animal species can be protected. The same will be done for certain other sites located on the islands in the middle of Lake Mistassini. Unusual Mount Chicouté, as well as a portion of the Agoséris Valley, and parts of Mount Yapeitso and Mount Lagopède (northern slope) will also be included in this category. No visitor will have access to these sectors, with the exception of the tallymen, as beneficiaries of the JBNQA, and a few researchers. The rare individuals so authorized will be granted entry to these zones to study the natural evolution of these environments, which are genuine reference areas.

### 3.2.2 PRESERVATION ZONES

Certain zones, representing over 60% of the land surface of the proposed park, will ensure the preservation of fragile sites in the Témiscamie River watershed and the peaks in the Otish Mountains. Archaeological sites will also be given this zoning category.

### 3.2.3 AMBIENCE ZONES

Since over 50% of the park consists of water, lakes and rivers will be classified ambience zones and continue to serve as connecting corridors between camping areas for modern travellers retracing journeys of the ancestors of the Crees and the explorers of the New World. In the Otish Mountains, these access zones will be in the wooded valleys along marked trails, so that routes can be developed for both short-and long-distance trips. These zones will also include accommodation sites.

### 3.2.4 SERVICE ZONES

Service zones are areas corresponding to the location of existing facilities and those to be developed in the medium term, as defined above: the Osprey, Vieux-Poste, Louis-Jolliet and Papaskwasati fishing camps and lodges, the Lake Albanel and Pénicouane Bay campgrounds and the Otish Mountains foothills.

### 3.2.5 SACRED AREAS

Following consultation of the Mistissini elders, and guided by the existing literature, the following places will be designated sacred areas: *Colline Blanche (Wapushakamikw)*, the big rock from which Lake Mistassini takes its name, the northern tip of Manitounouc Island on the same lake, Mount Wepaasiu at the west end of the Otish Mountains, and the old cemeteries and forest burial places bordering the principal lakes and rivers. No non-Native person will be allowed to visit these places without prior authorization from park management and the trapping families concerned.



### 3.3

## Conservation-related (development)

Initially, the capital construction plan for visitor facilities will bring wastewater processing facilities up to environmental standards. Work is needed on the chalets and shelters of the four fishing camps and both existing campgrounds. This will maintain the purity of the waters of Lake Mistassini and, among other things, provide favourable conditions for the lake trout and brook trout populations living there.

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This work will make all existing facilities—some of which date from more than forty years ago—comply with environmental standards. No pollutant waste from these facilities will affect the quality of the waters of the lakes on which they are situated. Furthermore, existing structures used to store liquid fuels near these facilities will be overhauled to comply with environmental standards, particularly those designed to avoid spills.

### 3.4

## Utilization-related (development)

When setting up and developing the future Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park, existing facilities used for the current wildlife reserve's activities will have to be taken into account. Work done in the first few years of the park's operations will be designed to consolidate and improve these facilities. Then, a visitor service centre will be added in Mistissini. Subsequently, a second reception area will be developed near the Témiscamie River bridge. Other developments are planned for the future along roads built in and around the park. This development will undergo more in-depth consultations and studies in order to draw up a detailed park development plan.

#### 3.4.1 PARK ACCESS

This vast northern territory is easy to access by land routes from Montréal and Québec City, making it possible to envisage the potential for rapid development at acceptable cost. Currently, two highways provide access to the park from Chibougamau. Highway 167 north, which was paved recently, provides access to the village of Mistissini. This same thoroughfare continues in gravel form up to the Lake Albanel campground, approximately 1 hour down the road. The campground is located 8 km north of the Témiscamie River bridge, where the second service centre is to be built.

Also, from Chibougamau, from the beginning of the Northern highway, it is possible to reach the southernmost tip of Lake Mistassini, where the Pénicouane Bay campground is located, in less than 45 minutes. This highway takes visitors through the *Jamésie* region as far as the La Grande complex, via the Cree village of Nemaska.

The mouth of the Rupert River is accessible by aircraft or boat from Mistissini, while the Otish Mountains massif and Lake Naococane are accessible by airplane only. Currently bush plane bases exist in Mistissini and near the Témiscamie River bridge. In winter, bush planes fitted with skis are the only means of transport for reaching the park's most isolated areas. However, in winter, among the activities offered by the park, visitors will be able to use snowmobiles to travel the same trails the trappers have been using for decades to reach their traplines.

As long as there is no land route to the Otish Mountains massif, access to the sites offering accommodation will be something of a hit-or-miss proposition. The area's changing weather conditions can, in many cases, prevent aircraft from landing on schedule. The most philosophical visitors would say that these adversities are part and parcel of adventures in an outlying area. However, this constraint, and the related safety considerations, must be taken into account in developing activities and services.

There is currently a project to build a multipurpose road linking the Lake Albanel sector to the southwest Otish Mountains, where prospecting for diamantiferous deposits continues. This road, a good portion of which would run parallel to the Témiscamie River, would promote less expensive canoeing-camping experiences and offer access by land route to the southwest Otish Mountains sector. The road would offer new possibilities for activities and services.



The same is true of logging roads, which will be built in the Lake Témiscamie sector. They will allow a new boat-launching ramp to be built here for canoers wishing to travel the historical route linking the Lake St. John region to the lands of the Mistassins (Coldwater Lake and Lake Témiscamie sector).

### **3.4.2 ACTIVITIES**

Discovery and enjoyment of this vast territory's rich heritage will be associated with all activities available to visitors during their stay. This park is inhabited by a Nation that is proud of its ancestral customs and wishes to teach others about them.

#### **3.4.2.1 EDUCATION**

Guidelines will be adopted to define target objectives, themes and means for educational activities. Like all of Québec's national parks, the educational activities offered in Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park will be designed to promote close, meaningful contact between participants and the heritage. Visitors will discover the different components of this heritage and the role and value of this diversity. The educational activities will promote visitor involvement in order to achieve the park's conservation mission.

One specific objective will target safeguarding traditions. Educational activities will spotlight the Cree Nation's traditional knowledge of the territory, thereby helping to safeguard invaluable knowledge and know-how.

Among the focal themes, the wealth of the area's natural heritage will be highlighted through educational activities. Through such activities and in their travels, visitors will discover the biophysical characteristics specific to each site, in addition to being encouraged to appreciate the beauty of various ecosystems and understanding the importance of protecting them.

Cultural heritage will definitely play an important role in educational activities, which will focus on the authenticity of the Mistassin cultural legacy. It will testify to the existing symbiosis, within the Cree culture, of intangible spiritual values and nature. Activities involving the senses and emotions will provide visitors with memorable experiences in which they will discover that nature and culture are closely linked. Further, the Crees, who have lived here since time immemorial, could tell true stories about the portages and secular camps, thereby reviving the legends told by the elders.



Clearly, visitors will be able to discover this inhabited park—Québec's first—through the participation of the Cree Nation. This Nation feels that it is part of Nature, which has ensured its survival over the ages.

Finally, educational means will include setting up an exhibition gallery in the park's main reception centre in Mistissini. Presentation of visual elements and artefacts in each site providing visitor accommodation is also planned. One example is the exhibition on the history of the area's main trapping families. Related images and artefacts can be admired in Mistissini Lodge.

When visitors leave on an excursion, an effort will have to be made so that at all times, and in a wide variety of ways, the guides introduce them to the territory's natural and cultural heritage. Through the help and support of the tallymen, park staff will be living witnesses of an ancient culture. When travelling or carrying out activities in the presence of a guide, visitors will be able to consult interpretation panels, brochures, theme maps, audioguides, etc. They will be encouraged to discover the wealth of this heritage even during recreational tourism activities.

The community radio could also help by broadcasting shows designed to provide information about the park and its educational program. Finally, park management will have to develop an educational program specifically for school groups in close association with the village's teachers.

#### 3.4.2.2 *Hiking*

To begin with, park management will encourage the development of short hiking trails between a campground proposed by the Mistissini Cree on the Chalifour River and the village of Mistissini for visitors seeking a first experience of immersion in the boreal forest. Moreover, near sites offering accommodation, short, looping interpretation trails will provide information on the natural heritage specific to this area.

The next priority will be the development of trails in a sector to which tourists have had access for more than 20 years, namely the eastern portion of the Otish Mountains. Visitors will be able to travel between three existing shelters. In phase two, primitive campsites could be developed along recommended routes. In winter, this sector could be explored on skis or snowshoes. In most cases, a baggage transport service to strategic points will be offered.

During the cold winter months, long-distance cross-country skiing trips could begin at Mistissini, on the frozen surface of the shores of giant Lake Mistassini. Visitors could sleep in tents in areas designated for this purpose.

For long-distance hiking, it will be strongly recommended to use a guide's services. Hikers wishing to travel on their own will have to prove to authorities that they are physically able to complete the trip, that they possess the skills and equipment required for their journey and that they are competent to deal with an emergency.

Due to the fragility of the arctic flora carpeting the bare peaks of the Otish Mountains, no permanent trail will be built there. Park management will suggest that hikers stick to pre-mapped trails that can be programmed on a GPS device. This way, visitors will not systematically take the same circuits on these heights. Guides will instruct hikers crossing these areas to fan out in order to minimize the effects of trampling the sparse vegetation. Use of GPS will also allow hikers to find their bearings when thick fog covers the peaks. Trails built and marked in keeping with the standards used in southern parks will only be found in the wooded sectors of valleys and foothills, and in areas where campsites are located.

#### 3.4.2.3 *Dogsled excursions*

The Mistissini Cree trappers have long used dog teams pulling long sleds to carry their provisions and baggage. This unique means of transportation could be reinstated in order to make sustainable use of a traditional transport mode combined with long trips on skis or snowshoes. Specific conditions will be envisaged to ensure that this activity does not adversely affect the park's natural heritage.

#### 3.4.2.4 *Canoeing and kayaking*

Kayak enthusiasts will find Lake Mistassini to be a veritable inland sea replete with considerable challenges. On vast surfaces like this, winds can change quickly, making conditions hazardous. Nevertheless, this form of travel, which has never yet been offered to tourists visiting the region, should be extremely popular. The Rupert River, with its many rapids, could provide thrills and discoveries for river kayakers.



Canoers could take the routes used by the Mistissini elders for decades now, notably those joining the village to the Mistassini River or to Waskaganish, on the shores of James Bay. Die-hard adventurers could explore the Rupert River archipelago, downstream of the Louis-Jolliet fishing camp, beginning and ending their trip here.

The lazy Témiscamie River provides an ideal venue for families to canoe safely. Vacationers could enjoy the many golden sandy beaches bordering the river downstream of Lake Béthoulat. The upstream portion offers daring sportspersons whitewater sections with rapids, as of Lake Indicateur.

Finally, the Otish Mountains massif, a veritable hydrographic hub, could become the starting point for long canoeing expeditions heading for Lake St. John or the St. Lawrence River via the source of the Péribonka, Aux Outardes and Manicouagan rivers or destined for James Bay, from the Eastmain and La Grande rivers. Those undertaking this type of expedition will have to be totally independent and have adequate equipment to deal with emergency situations.

#### **3.4.2.5 Sports fishing**

The area to be protected for the future park is, for the most part, the same as that of the existing Lacs-Albanel-Mistassini-et-Waconichi Wildlife Reserve, whose sports fishing reputation has extended far beyond Québec's borders for many years. Thousands of sports fishers have frequented lakes Mistassini and Albanel for several decades. Every summer, these anglers come to catch huge trout, enormous northern pike and delicate walleye. This activity generates substantial revenues for the Mistissini community, notably for Cree outfitting operations, their guides and their support staff.

As stipulated in the Parks Act, sports fishing could continue after the park has been created. Park management will ensure that fishing regulations comply with the conservation principle, as defined in the Parks Policy. Supervised fishing in parks is intended to ensure sustainable harvesting of this resource. Achieving this objective requires inventories and monitoring to continually assess population levels, reproduction rates and mortality of the species fished. Some years ago, researchers from Université Laval began precisely describing the status of each sports fishing species sought in this territory. This makes





it possible to adjust harvesting accordingly. Persons who are not beneficiaries under the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement will be able to fish only the lakes and rivers located in service zones, intensive recreation zones and ambience zones, designated by the park manager.

It is in this context, but also by respecting the rights of JBNQA beneficiaries that sports fishing will continue to be offered to park visitors. Park management will ensure that fishing goes hand-in-hand with natural and cultural heritage discovery activities.

It seems desirable to keep the remaining sections of the Lacs-Albanel-Mistassini-et-Waconichi Wildlife Reserve outside the park in order to better control sports fishing on lakes Albanel and Mistissini. This will also make it possible to offer visitors a more diversified range of tourism products.

#### **3.4.2.6 Hunting and trapping**

Generally speaking, the Parks Act prohibits hunting and trapping. By virtue of the rights granted them, Cree beneficiaries of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement will be able to continue practicing these activities in the park. The harvesting rights (hunting, fishing and trapping) defined in the JBNQA take precedence over the Parks Act.

#### **3.4.2.7 Other activities**

As this immense park is developed, other activities that are compatible with its mission will be made available to a growing, diversified clientele. For instance, older persons could organize mini-cruises on Lake Mistassini aboard boats chartered specially for this purpose. All of these activities will have to respect the guidelines and requirements of the Parks Policy and ensure visitor safety.

### **3.4.3 SERVICES**

#### **3.4.3.1 Reception and related services**

Given the tourism infrastructures already in place in Mistissini, visitor reception priorities will be restricted to the construction of a multipurpose building that will serve as a visitor reception centre, house the park's administrative services and constitute an interpretation centre. Subsequently, investments will be used to set up a visitor services centre in the Témiscamie River sector, which has a seaplane base.

Should the highway leading to diamantiferous exploration sites be built, other visitor services centres could be established in the Lake Béthoulat sector, where the road could cross the Témiscamie River, and in the southwestern Otish Mountains sector.



### **3.4.3.2 Accommodations**

A future reception centre will be added to existing sites in the Osprey, Vieux-Poste, Louis-Jolliet and Papaskwasati fishing camps and the Lake Albanel and Pénicouane Bay campgrounds, near the Témiscamie River bridge, close to the Lake Albanel campground.

Visitors will reach the Otish Mountains from the base camp built on Lake Arthur-Genest, on the southern slope of Mount Yapeitso. The same type of facility, including campsites, will gradually be established in the other easy-to-reach sectors of this mountain massif.

In order to give visitors the opportunity to live in a genuine traditional Cree camp regardless of the season, a number of traditional dwellings serving as shelters will be built here with strict respect for authenticity. A few visitors will be able to stay with families living on the trapping grounds, and through this close contact will have a chance to speak with the elders and tallymen, learning their way of life and the ancestral customs which continue to this day. By offering accommodation on sites traditionally used by the Crees of Mistissini, the carrying capacity of the park will be increased, thus avoiding the proliferation of structures.

The community of Mistissini plans to develop areas for caravans and trailers and to build a number of chalets at the entrance to the village, on the shores of the Chalifour River. Park visitors could also stay in Chibougamau or Chapais, cities whose economy was formerly almost entirely dependent on mining and forestry activities. Through the greater visitor numbers generated by the park, these two cities will be able to offer complementary services, thereby giving visitors an opportunity to extend their stay.

### **3.4.4 ACTIVITY POLE**

#### **3.4.4.1 Primary pole**

The main visitor reception area will be located in the village of Mistissini in a multipurpose building containing administrative services and an interpretation centre (See Map 4). This building will be adjacent to the existing lodge. Here, visitors will be able to plan their stay and reserve the services, equipment and facilities they require. They will be able to reserve a campsite or boat, sign up for an educational or recreational activity, and even reserve a seaplane. In the village, visitors will also be able to get the equipment generally needed for outdoor activities.





The other primary activity centres will be located in the lake sector, which already offers the facilities of four existing fishing camps and campgrounds (Pénicouane Bay and Lake Albanel) serving as a gateway to lakes Mistassini and Albanel.

#### 3.4.4.2 Secondary pole

Secondary visitor reception centres with boat ramps will be built along the future multipurpose road linking the existing Témiscamie-Albanel road to the southwestern sectors of the Otish Mountains. This road will provide access to the northern part of the park and the vast Eastmain River floodplain.

Outside the lake sector, access to the park is more difficult, necessitating the use of bush planes, especially to get to the mouth of the Rupert River. The same is true for the northeast part of the Otish Mountains, which has bunkhouses and a hiking trail that wilderness hiking enthusiasts have enjoyed for many years. Since the massif is difficult to access by air due to poor weather conditions, a seaplane base and lodging infrastructure will be built at Lake Arthur-Genest, just south of Mount Yapeitso. At the heart of the massif, Camp Boucane, on

the shores of Lake Shikapio, will also constitute a secondary centre and be linked by a network of trails connecting it to the sector's other secondary hubs: Lake Conflans and Lake Lagopède, where there are camps already.

#### 3.4.4.3 Tertiary pole

Once the consolidation of existing facilities has been completed and the development plan begun for the secondary hubs, park management will examine the development potential of Lake Naococane and the central part of the Otish Mountains, near Pluto and Indicateur Lakes. Shelters and campsites will ultimately be added to open up the sector. The same type of facility will be found on the shores of lakes Mistassini and Albanel, and along the Témiscamie and Rupert rivers.



## Conclusion



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The territory involved in this project will constitute Québec's first inhabited national park, on lands occupied by a Native nation. Here, many visitors will experience their first contact with the Cree population of Mistissini. This nation has been able to safeguard its culture, with undeniable authenticity, and its traditional way of life, which it continues to practice proudly. The inhabitants of the village will receive visitors enthusiastically with their word of welcome: "Watchya!".

As recommended by the Morrison report (1997), the future Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park will be managed

holistically, reflecting the philosophy of conservationist Sigurd F. Olson (1899-1982), who invites the reader to discover nature's intangible value in his book *Reflections from the North Country*. The following is a quote from a speech Olson gave to the Sierra Club in 1965: "I have discovered in a lifetime of travelling in primitive regions, a lifetime of seeing people living in the wilderness and using it, that there is a hard core of wilderness need in everyone, a core that makes its spiritual values a basic human necessity. There is no hiding it.... Unless we can preserve places where the endless spiritual needs of man can be fulfilled and nourished, we will destroy our culture and ourselves."

The immense hunting, fishing and trapping territory of the Mistassins will allow visitors to discover diverse plant and animal species that are characteristic of Québec's vast northern spaces, along with specific natural areas: Lake Naococane and its hundreds of islands, the Otish Mountains and their boundless vistas, the Témiscamie River and its sandy banks, giants lakes Albanel and Mistassini, and, finally, the Rupert River archipelago and its many rapids.

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Larger than life, this region offers opportunities for major expeditions and beautiful discoveries. Because the park already has basic visitor reception services, new accommodation infrastructures will be developed only once the existing facilities have been consolidated in keeping with the views of the Cree community of Mistissini, which will play the leading role in the daily management of the activities and services offered in the park. The park will be developed at the rate acceptable to this community in harmony with the traditional use its members make of their trapping grounds. Proposed developments will foster innovative tourism activities centred on ecotourism, thereby resulting in new economic spinoffs for the entire region.

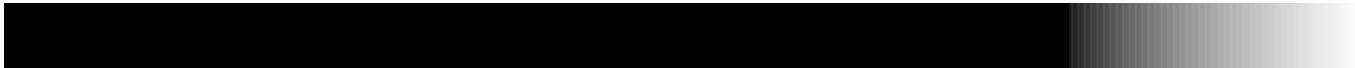
The people of Chibougamau and Chapais, who have been cohabiting with the Cree Nation of Mistissini for more than a half century, will also benefit from this new clientele. They will be able to offer tourism products complementing those of the park, thereby diversifying the local economy.

This far-reaching park project, an important link in the Québec Strategy for Protected Areas, is also significant in terms of protecting Québec's boreal forest, although planet-wide much remains to be done. Safeguarding this heritage will be central to the future park's mission. This provisory master plan advocates caution in developing this area. The opinions and comments gathered in the public hearings held for this purpose will be used to improve its contents. Subsequently, a final proposal will be forwarded to James Bay Advisory Committee on the Environment for approval. After this, the process culminating in the legal creation of Québec's first national park in the boreal forest can be initiated.



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