

SPEAKING NOTES

FOR

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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
LAUNCH OF THE WORLD CANALS CONFERENCE 2008**

**KINGSTON, ONTARIO
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Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen, **Bonjour**

Je suis heureux d'être avec vous aujourd'hui pour vous souhaiter la bienvenue au Colloque international sur les canaux 2008.

Quand on m'a invité à vous parler de Parcs Canada et de notre programme de gestion des canaux, j'étais à la fois flatté et heureux de saisir cette occasion de vous rencontrer.

Of course, you'd expect someone like me – born and raised in the region to be positively biased towards the Rideau Canal... And of course, you'd be right.

I think that Canadians, and especially those who live along the Rideau, from Ottawa all the way through Kingston, are very fortunate to have access to this oasis of nature. The Rideau Canal is a lot more than a nice place: it is a key element in the history of our country and a key element in the development of cities such as Kingston and Ottawa, Canada's former and present capitals.

Recently, Canadians have had many reasons to celebrate the Rideau Canal. Last year the waterway celebrated its 175th anniversary of uninterrupted service, making it North America's oldest continuously operating waterway.

During its anniversary year, the canal also received the highest distinction a site can achieve, becoming Canada's 14th UNESCO World Heritage Site and the second canal in the world to be awarded this prestigious title.

Le Canal Rideau, désigné site du patrimoine mondial par l'UNESCO en 2007, est le canal à plan d'eau le mieux préservé d'Amérique du Nord. Il illustre l'utilisation à grande échelle d'une

technologie européenne. Il est le seul canal datant de la grande époque de la construction de canaux en Amérique du Nord au début du XIX^e siècle qui soit encore opérationnel tout le long de son tracé initial. Autre caractéristique impressionnante : ses structures d'origine sont pour la plupart intactes.

The historic significance of the Rideau Canal makes it that much more special.

Canada's historic canals were originally constructed for military or commercial transportation routes.

They have always been used for different local activities such as [La fête des Mitaines](#) at Chambly, or [le Canal en musique](#) at St. Ours. But today they set the stage for memorable visitor experiences. But, after the designation of the Rideau Canal as a World Heritage Site and the success of Rideau 175, I was hopeful that Canadians would rediscover the importance of Canada's historic canals...

And this is exactly what happened. A few weeks ago, I had the privilege to attend a new festival that was launched in Ottawa to celebrate the Rideau Canal. This newly created event became the first festival to be made carbon neutral through Zerofootprint, an environmental not-for-profit organization.

I also know that other communities are celebrating their historic waterways. This year marked the 175th anniversary of the construction of the Tay Canal and the anniversary of the

Bobcaygeon lock on the Trent—Severn Waterway. These are all great examples of local pride and stewardship.

Historic canals all around the world are extensive cultural and natural heritage corridors linking cities and towns, offering a great number of outdoor recreation opportunities, and connecting people with their own history. They offer a unique and complete cultural experience.

Parks Canada is responsible - to the government, and to Canadians - for managing national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas. Canada has the oldest parks service in the world.

L'histoire de Parcs Canada débute, il y a plus d'un siècle, avec quelques 26 kilomètres carrés en Alberta. Ce petit espace, faisant aujourd'hui partie du parc national du Canada Banff, a été le noyau des réseaux de parcs nationaux, de lieux historiques nationaux et d'aires marines nationales de conservation.

Malgré les nombreux changements qui ont secoué Parcs Canada au cours des 100 dernières années, notre objectif central n'a pas changé : protéger et préserver les aires patrimoniales uniques et particulières du Canada.

In its stewardship of Canada's treasured historic and natural heritage places, Parks Canada must carry out a unique, challenging and exciting mission: we have the dual responsibility of protecting environments and heritage places so that they will be preserved for future

generations, and presenting them to Canadians so that they provide memorable experiences and learning opportunities.

This year's conference theme "Managing Canal Corridors in the 21st Century" is very apropos for today's reality. The protection of our environment and heritage has become a high priority for most of our visitors and stakeholders.

It is our role not only to ensure the sustainability and integrity of the historic resources in our care, but also to manage visitor use so that these special places can be enjoyed by future generations.

To minimize impact, we need to ensure that services and facilities contribute to the understanding and appreciation as much as possible, while maintaining healthy natural and cultural environments.

Public support and involvement is essential to ensure that our canals have a future.

The Rideau Canal, for example, benefits from an extensive network of non-governmental groups active in cultural resource management, land protection, education and research. These include organizations such as the Rideau Canal Advisory Committee, the Rideau Waterway Land Trust, Friends of the Rideau, and the Centre for sustainable watersheds, municipal heritage committees, and residents' and lake associations.

It is also essential that we work closely with tourism industry partners to renew and enhance opportunities for visitor experience, to make visits more pleasant, more fulfilling and more personal for our guests.

The more our visitors and stakeholders know about our canals, the more they will support their heritage values and the protection of their ecology. When local residents care enough about a place to get involved, and when they bring passion and commitment to the preservation of their communities, they can play a major role in helping protect the natural and cultural features of our historic canals. I truly believe that our success will depend on our ability to share our passion and leadership.

As our success depends on the involvement of all Canadians, Parks Canada wants to inspire and engage more and more stakeholders from an increasingly diversified Canadian society. To do so, we listen closely to the opinions of Canadians and co-operate with them to better answer their needs.

An extensive network of non-governmental groups is active in cultural resource management, land protection, education and research, including Aboriginal peoples, local communities, stakeholders and Friends organizations. These allies serve as powerful tools in protecting, preserving and presenting Canada's natural and cultural heritage for current and future generations.

Aboriginal people are becoming increasingly involved in the protection and co-operative management of national historic sites and national parks. Parks Canada values the involvement of Aboriginal people in presenting the public with a balanced perspective of Canadian and Aboriginal history.

Long before the Europeans traveled on the rivers and lakes that now form the Rideau Canal, the Algonquins used the Rideau waterway for traveling and fishing. The relationship between Parks

Canada and the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn will lead to a partnership related to the integration of traditional knowledge with resource management, visitor experience and education programming at the Rideau Canal.

Through such partnerships, through sustainable management and through shared leadership, Parks Canada manages to meet visitors, partners and stakeholders needs and go beyond expectations. And I dare say that not only has this become part of our corporate identity, but it is being noticed.

In 2007, Parks Canada won the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's Business of the Year Award and Ottawa Tourism's Outstanding Tourism Achievement Award.

These awards are proof that our work as guardians, storytellers and guides of historic places are valued by our visitors and the tourism industry. Parks Canada is lucky to rely on a diverse group of tourism partners who all share the common goal of highlighting mutually beneficial activities and initiatives. And we are lucky to rely on an international group of experts and I intend to make the most of my conversation with you in this 2008 World Canal Conference.

Everywhere in the world, canals are regional economic drivers. They provide jobs, tourism investments, developmental grants and marketing opportunities, but above all they create pride for local residents.

Along a canal, city noises are muted, city lights are dimmed, city-life takes a pause. And passers-by – even though they may be running to work – seem to breathe deeper...

I am delighted to meet you today along the shores of the Rideau Canal. I hope you get a chance to know this important waterway and its place in history. And I invite you to discover

the many historic canals that meander across Canada as well as our spectacular national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas... You're here for a few months, right?!?

Thank you. *Je vous remercie et comme il me reste quelques minutes, il me fera plaisir de répondre à vos questions.* I'd be delighted to answer any questions you may have...

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