

**Environment and Climate Change Canada's Response to  
Environmental Petition No. 388 regarding the protection of the  
Central Experimental Farm as a research facility and as a national historic  
site of Canada**

**Background:** The Central Experimental Farm was designated a national historic site of Canada in 1997, because it is a distinctive evolving farming landscape in the heart of the National Capital Region and a reflection of 19th-century agricultural principles. Today, it remains a rare example of a farm within a city.

The Central Experimental Farm is operated by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. It actively interprets its history through the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum (operated by the Canada Science and Technology Museums Corporation) and complex of historic buildings and gardens, and maintains relations with a charitable organization called the Friends of the Farm. It is one of several active experimental farms in Canada and one of the oldest continuously used agricultural experiment stations.

**Question 1:** Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage (with responsibility for the National Capital Commission) and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada explain why the proposed transfer of the Central Experimental Farm 60 acres has apparently not been subjected to an environmental assessment (or a strategic environmental assessment as required by Cabinet), and why there have been no public hearings on this transfer?

**Response:** Projects that may be subject to an environmental assessment under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012* (CEAA 2012) are “designated projects” that are prescribed in the *Regulations Designating Physical Activities*, more commonly referred to as the Project List. Designated projects are those physical activities (e.g. the construction or expansion of a mine) that are most likely to have significant adverse environmental effects in areas of federal jurisdiction. The transfer of land is not a physical activity or a designated project. Thus, it is not subject to a federal environmental assessment under the Act.

CEAA 2012 also includes provisions that apply to projects (non-designated projects) on federal lands. Under the Act, a “project” is defined as a physical activity in relation to a physical work on federal land. According to section 67 of the Act, a federal authority cannot take any action or make a decision to allow a project to proceed without first determining that the project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects. If the federal authority determines that the project is likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects, then it must not proceed with the project or may refer the project to the Governor in Council for a decision as to whether the effects can be justified.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has published a technical guidance document (Projects on Federal Lands: Making a determination under section 67 of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012*) to assist federal authorities in conducting their analysis. Many federal authorities use the process set out in this document, while others have customized it for their needs.

While I am responsible for the legislative framework of CEAA 2012, other federal authorities are responsible for meeting these requirements under section 67. As such, the National Capital Commission will be required to determine whether or not any hospital construction on federal lands will cause significant adverse environmental effects if an application for federal land-use approval is made in the future under section 12 of the *National Capital Act*. To date, an application has not been made.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage recently asked the National Capital Commission's Board of Directors to undertake a review of the Ottawa Hospital Site Selection Process. This review will include public consultation, and a recommendation regarding the location will be made to the Minister of Canadian Heritage by the end of November 2016. I invite you to consult the proposed review document at [www.ncc-ccn.gc.ca/sites/default/files/pubs/13.0\\_-\\_2016-p06.1e\\_-\\_ottawa\\_hospital\\_site\\_selection\\_process.pdf](http://www.ncc-ccn.gc.ca/sites/default/files/pubs/13.0_-_2016-p06.1e_-_ottawa_hospital_site_selection_process.pdf).

With respect to the protection of the Central Experimental Farm as a national historic site of Canada, Parks Canada will provide guidance to the environmental determination about the protection of this site if the lease of land is officially confirmed. If Parks Canada considers that the construction of the campus represents a risk for the commemorative integrity<sup>1</sup> of the Central Experimental Farm, it will highlight these concerns in its input to the environmental determination.<sup>2</sup> Should it be considered that the commemorative integrity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Commemorative Integrity: Refers to the condition or state of a national historic site of Canada when the site has retained the heritage value for which it was designated. This is the desired state for a national historic site. It possesses commemorative integrity when:

- the resources directly related to the reasons for designation as a national historic site of Canada are not impaired or under threat;
- the reasons for designation as a national historic site of Canada are effectively communicated to the public; and
- the national historic site of Canada's heritage values (including those not related to the reasons for designation as a national historic site) are respected in all decisions and actions affecting the site.

<sup>2</sup> Certain man-made changes can also impair and weaken the commemorative integrity of national historic sites of Canada. When the degree of changes to a national historic site is important, it may be necessary for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to also confirm that the reasons for the designation of the site can still be conveyed, and finally make a recommendation to the Minister about the status of the site.

site has been impaired when the work is completed, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change may request that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada,<sup>3</sup> the Minister's advisory body on historic matters, evaluate whether the Central Experimental Farm has retained its ability to effectively convey the reasons for its designation to the public. Should the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada conclude that the reasons for designation could no longer be effectively conveyed, the Board would likely recommend to the Minister that the Central Experimental Farm be put on the list of sites having lost their commemorative integrity.

Under the Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals, ministers expect a strategic environmental assessment of a policy, plan or program proposal to be conducted when the following two conditions are met: 1) the proposal is submitted to an individual minister or Cabinet for approval; and 2) implementation of the proposal may result in important environmental effects, either positive or negative.

The publication *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals: Guidelines for Implementing the Cabinet Directive* (the Guidelines) outlines the first step in the process is the preliminary scan. It screens proposals for potential, important environmental effects that can be either positive or negative.

If the preliminary scan identifies the potential for important environmental effects, or if there is a high level of uncertainty or risk associated with the outcome, an analysis of the environmental effects should then be conducted through a strategic environmental assessment, which some departments and agencies refer to as a detailed assessment. If the scan does not identify the potential for important environmental effects, no further analysis of environmental effects is required. The focus of the preliminary scan should be on identifying strategic considerations at a relatively general or conceptual level, rather than evaluating quantitative detailed environmental impacts, as in project-level assessment.

Flexibility and self-assessment are two of the guiding principles identified in the Guidelines. Departments and agencies have discretion in determining how they

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<sup>3</sup> The mandate of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada ([www.pc.gc.ca/clmhc-hsmbc/index.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/clmhc-hsmbc/index.aspx)) is to advise the Government of Canada, through the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, on the commemoration of nationally significant aspects of Canada's history. Since 1919, the Board has been mandated to provide advice to the Canadian government on the designation of places, persons and events that have marked and shaped Canada. Every year, new subjects are added to its list of designations. The nominated subject must have a historical significance from a national perspective, and not only from a local or regional standpoint.

conduct strategic environmental assessments. Each department and agency is responsible for applying strategic environmental assessment to its proposed policies, plans and programs as appropriate, and for determining how the strategic environmental assessment should be conducted. They are also responsible for carrying out the strategic environmental assessment and reporting on the findings.

**Question 2:** Has the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada been consulted on the modifications to the Central Experimental Farm's status as a National Historic Site and whether the proposal puts into jeopardy its status as a national treasure? If the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and the CEO of Parks Canada have been consulted, what were the results of this consultation?

**Response:** The Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, under the responsibility of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, was not consulted during the identification of the site. Subsequent to the public announcement made on November 3, 2014, the National Capital Commission requested a meeting with Parks Canada to discuss possible mitigation measures to manage the construction impacts on the Central Experimental Farm property. This preliminary meeting, which took place in Gatineau on August 11, 2015, was general in nature. It was an opportunity to provide information on national historic site designations and the concept of commemorative integrity, and to discuss the Commission's vision for the new campus.

**Question 3:** Has the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change determined that the closing down of environmental and climate change science studies as conducted at the Central Experimental Farm is acceptable, and if so, what is the justification?

**Response:** This assessment is based on a list of studies that are currently being carried out and those that are planned to occur on the portion of the Central Experimental Farm where the health center would be built, including any studies conducted by scientists at Environment and Climate Change Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The list was provided by the latter federal department.

Although there is almost always an environmental component to field studies in agriculture, not all agriculture studies have a specific objective related to the environment or climate change. In keeping with the scope of your question, only studies with specific environmental or climate change objectives were considered.

For the purpose of this review, particular attention was given to identifying studies where the environment and/or climate component are unique to this particular site, or the historic treatment of this site. Such studies are presumably more difficult to replicate, since their design relies on a combination of site-specific characteristics that directly results from management history. Two such studies were identified that meet this criterion. However, these studies are still in the planning stage and are described below.

Eight studies are currently under way on the site that were identified as having environmental or climate change components. Two studies were completed in March 2016, one study is scheduled to be completed in March 2017, and the other five studies in March 2018. In addition, three other studies having environmental or climate change components are planned for the site, but work has not yet begun.

The knowledge generated from the two studies completed in March 2016 will not be affected by the decision to transfer the land from the Central Experimental Farm.

The study scheduled to be completed in March 2017 will provide input into an Ontario-wide database. As such, the loss of one year of data on one site is unlikely to significantly impact the overall objectives of that more broadly based project.

Of the five studies to be completed in March 2018, three are related to the selection of genetic traits in crops (soybean and canola) to sustain productivity and one study examines the response of plant productivity to fertilizer additions. In these four cases, the hypotheses tested in the experiments are related to the plants themselves or specific management actions and not the site, or the historic treatment of the site. Furthermore, the conclusions of these studies mainly pertain to agricultural productivity and economy. The fifth study is looking at a serious soil-borne disease (fusarium) that has important economic impacts on Canadian wheat production. This experiment takes advantage of a unique situation in which the disease occurs on the long-term rotation plots that were established to study soil organic matter. It is recognized that it would be difficult to find another experimental site in which these conditions occurred. However, again the main impacts of the spread of this disease are on the agricultural economy.

The three additional studies planned for the site are intended to create knowledge on soil carbon storage, soil nutrient dynamics, and greenhouse gas emissions related to long-term land management strategies. One of these three studies on corn-based rotations relies on existing knowledge about the soils that exist on that site, but not on the characteristics of the soil that result

from the historic experimental design. Based on the information provided, the study could be implemented on an alternative site. However, it appears that two of these planned studies were designed based on the characteristics of the soil that have been created over time due to the way that the land was historically managed, hence some of the knowledge that could result from these studies would be unique to this site.

Overall, the impact of closing down ongoing studies on the site are more relevant to scientific knowledge supporting the agricultural productivity and economy than scientific knowledge on environment and climate change. Not proceeding with two of the planned studies on this site could impact the range of knowledge about ways to improve the sustainability of agricultural production. While similar studies could be carried out on other long-term research plots in Canada, such studies would not incorporate the unique combination of management history and environmental conditions found at this particular site. At this point, the value of this foregone knowledge cannot be assessed, nor the acceptability of this knowledge not being created.

**Question 5:** Has the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change reconciled the negative impacts to the science conducted at the Central Experimental Farm with her mandate letters and with Canada's commitment to the Paris Conference on Climate Change? If yes, what is the justification?

**Response:** The most likely impact of the land transfer at the Central Experimental Farm on environment and climate change science is foregoing two studies and the knowledge they would create, which would be unique to this particular site (refer to response to Question 3 for further detail). Since these two studies are in the planning stage, it is difficult to assess in concrete terms the impact of not pursuing the work.

**Question 6:** Will the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, the Minister for Canadian Heritage (with responsibility for the National Capital Commission), and the Minister for Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada make available to the general public the basis of the decisions that led to the choice of the Central Experimental Farm by releasing the criteria used and the other sites considered. What was the role of these Ministries in the determination of the site?

**Response:** The Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, under the responsibility of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, was not consulted about the identification of the site.