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Comité Consultatif de l'environnement Kativik
Kativik Environmental Advisory Committee

KEAC Position Paper
concerning the Kuururjuaq Park Project

April 25, 2007

Background

The Québec government has proposed the creation of a new park in Nunavik, to be named Kuururjuaq (meaning great valley). The park will cover 4273 km² and comprise a Torngat Mountains sector, including Mount D'Iberville, the valleys of the Koroc River and its tributaries, and a coastal sector, immediately north of the category I lands of the village of Kangiqsualujjuaq. The Kuururjuaq park project is provided for in the *Partnership Agreement on Economic and Community Development in Nunavik* (Sanarrutik) signed on April 9, 2002, by the Québec government, the Makivik Corporation and the Kativik Regional Government (KRG), as well as in an agreement concerning park creation studies and research signed by the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec (wildlife and parks) and the KRG in June 2002. Under this latter agreement, the KRG undertook to complete fieldwork for the Kuururjuaq park project as well as to produce a related status report (September 2005) and environmental and social impact study (February 2007).

Further to community consultations carried out with the Kuururjuaq Park Project Working Committee, the parks branch of the Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs (sustainable development, environment and parks) released in January 2007 a provisional master plan for the Kuururjuaq national park. The draft master plan describes the proposed boundaries of the park, conservation and management orientations, a development concept for visitors, as well as preservation, ambience and service zones. The plan was examined at a public hearing held jointly on March 14 and 15, 2007, in Kangiqsualujjuaq by the representative of the Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks, Johnny Adams, and by the President of the Kativik Environmental Quality Commission, Peter Jacobs.

This position paper presents certain observations and recommendations prepared by the Kativik Environmental Advisory Committee for the Minister.

The creation of the Kuururjuaq national park raises the following issues:

Inuit hunting, fishing and trapping rights

Section 24 of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* (JBNQA) assigns to the Inuit of Kangiqsualujjuaq category II lands on which they have exclusive hunting, fishing and trapping rights. A section of these category II lands (1413 km² representing 33% of the community's category II lands) falls within the proposed boundaries of the Kuururjuaq park project, in the valley of the Koroc River and in the coastal sector. The draft master plan takes into account Inuit rights and recognizes that Inuit may continue to practise their hunting, fishing and trapping activities throughout the year. The creation of the park should therefore not effect any change in Inuit rights. Inuit are furthermore enabled to maintain their existing camps and, as needed, construct new ones.

Notwithstanding, two constraints could arise following the creation of the Kuururjuaq national park on category II lands. First, visitors to the territory wishing to take full advantage of their wilderness discovery excursion will create pressure for Inuit to voluntarily restrict their hunting, fishing and trapping activities to periods and places that are less frequented by visitors. The second constraint relates to the principle of conservation, which although already contained in Section 24 of the JBNQA, is interpreted more strictly in a national park.

On the other hand, only Inuit will be permitted to practise their hunting, fishing and trapping activities on the category III lands of the Kuururjuaq national park, thus expanding the territory reserved exclusively for their harvesting activities. For these reasons, the Inuit have decided that it is not necessary to request additional category II lands to replace their category II lands included in the park project.

The juxtaposition of visitor activities and Inuit activities will pose a major challenge for park managers. Some visitors will consider the practice of traditional activities to be an important attraction, representing a genuine Northern experience and glimpse into the Inuit way of life. For other visitors, the practice of traditional activities will be perceived as contrary to the kind of wilderness experience normally delivered in a national park. Consequently, the draft master plan provides for the creation of a harmonization committee to contemplate Inuit harvesting activities and visitor activities and to prepare a development concept that meets the needs and expectations of both groups.

Recommendation (1)

Given that Inuit have exclusive hunting, fishing and trapping rights on the category II lands within the proposed boundaries of the Kuururjuaq park project and that it will be important to strike a balance between these rights and visitor expectations, the KEAC recommends that the harmonization committee provided for in the draft master plan be formed as quickly as possible and that Inuit hunters and other members of the community be permitted to play a role and, as much as possible, to participate in decisions concerning the promotion, development and restriction, if necessary, of traditional and visitor activities.

Visitor activity support

Visitors to this area will not only be visiting a national park of Québec, but also an ancestral land of the Inuit. For this reason, visitors will have to be made aware that the Inuit continue to exercise their hunting, fishing and trapping rights and that park discovery excursions will bring them into contact with the Inuit way of life and culture. From a conservation point of view, visitors will have to be informed that Inuit hunting, fishing and trapping activities are carried out in a conscientious manner and that they do not endanger the abundance or diversity of the national park's wildlife and flora.

There are plans to have guiding services delivered by Inuit outfitters or partner organizations. In connection with these activities, it might be appropriate to make available special fishing permits on category II lands that could be issued by park managers further to an agreement with the Qiniqtiq Landholding Corporation of Kangiqsualujjuaq and the Epigituk Landholding Corporation of Killiniq.

Recommendation (2)

Given that the Kuururjuaq national park is to be situated on an ancestral land of the Inuit, the KEAC recommends that visitors be informed prior to their visit that the Inuit continue to practise traditional hunting, fishing and trapping activities in a conscientious manner. To allow visitors an opportunity to try their hand at fishing, the KEAC recommends that park managers be enabled to issue special permits further to an agreement with the Qiniqtiq Landholding Corporation of Kangiqsualujjuaq and the Epigituk Landholding Corporation of Killiniq.

Conservation of the natural environment (wildlife and flora)

The valley of the Koroc River constitutes an exceptional forest, wildlife and flora environment. It nurtures a pocket of boreal forest at the northern limit of its range and a stand of white birch protected under the draft master plan in a maximum preservation zone. For its part, the wildlife in the territory of the park project is also diverse. It includes a herd of mountain caribou that ranges through the valley of the Koroc River and the Torngat Mountains foothills and that is genetically distinct from the massive George River herd. Since the Torngat Mountains caribou herd remains relatively unknown, it should receive special protection. With respect to the flora of the park project, it comprises mosses, lichens and other very rare plant species that are also to be protected in maximum preservation zones.

The draft master plan proposes that visitors be provided adequate information to allow them to actively participate in the protection of wildlife and flora resources in the valley of the Koroc River and on neighbouring plateaux. Inuit should also be closely involved in the assessment and protection of these resources. To this end, park managers through the harmonization committee should consult with Inuit hunters and other members of Kangiqsualujjuaq about the best way to protect the local herd of mountain caribou and the various wildlife species found in the valley of the Koroc River.

Recommendation (3)

Given that the territory of the park project constitutes an exceptional environment (with reference to its forest stands as well as its wildlife and plant species, some of which are considered rare or unique at this latitude), the KEAC recommends that visitors be invited to play an active role in its protection and that park managers through the harmonization committee consult with Inuit hunters and other members of Kangiqsualujjuaq about the best way to protect the local herd of mountain caribou and the various wildlife species found in the valley of the Koroc River.

Cultural heritage preservation (archaeological sites)

The valley of the Koroc River contains many archaeological sites, several of which have not yet been studied. The same can be said about the park project's coastal sector, where several sites provide evidence of long-time occupation. For thousands of years, the valley of the Koroc River served as a route between Ungava Bay and the fjords of Labrador. The area also has special significance in the myths and legends of the Inuit as well as their spiritual beliefs (even the Naskapi consider as sacred a section of the valley known as "caribou paradise"). This heritage resource should be preserved and developed for the Inuit (and the Naskapi) as well as for visitors.

A partnership between park managers and the Ulluriaq School could be established to allow Inuit youth an opportunity to contribute to the preservation of this heritage. For this purpose, youth could be invited to harmonization committee meetings in order to express their expectations.

Recommendation (4)

Given that the territory of the park project contains considerable heritage potential for Inuit, Naskapi and visitors alike, the KEAC recommends that further archaeological research be carried out in the valley of the Koroc River and along the Ungava coast (including Keglo Bay). In the territory of the park project, identified sites should be incorporated into an appropriate preservation zone and developed accordingly. Outside of the territory of the park project, identified archaeological sites should receive protection under the *Cultural Property Act* (R.S.Q., c. B-4). As well, the KEAC recommends that a partnership be developed between park managers and the Ulluriaq School to allow Inuit youth an opportunity to contribute to the preservation of Inuit heritage and that, for this purpose, youth be invited to harmonization committee meetings to express their expectations.

Mineral exploration activities next to the park project

Pursuant to a Québec government order-in-council adopted in 1992, no mineral titles have been granted within the proposed boundaries of the park project. Nonetheless, mineral titles have been granted both to the north and the south mainly for uranium exploration and mining, in the event that any discoveries prove to be economically viable. While the titles granted (to Azimut Exploration in partnership with Northwestern Mineral Venture in the south and to Uranor in the north) do not directly abut the proposed boundaries of the park project, they are nonetheless sufficiently close to raise concerns about the impacts of exploration and mining activities on the park. The economic spin-offs that could be generated by these activities for the community of Kangiqsualujjuaq must also be taken into consideration.

Mineral exploration activities are not automatically subject to environmental assessment. Exploration companies are simply expected to follow a code of good practices and comply with Québec's environmental laws and policies (for example, buffer strips along the shores of lakes and water courses, the proper disposal of waste and used oil, the collection of wastewater). Notwithstanding, the presence of a park next to these mining claims should prompt mining company and park managers to practise extra care.

For their part, mining activities are automatically subject to environmental assessment, pursuant to the Section 23 of the JBNQA and the *Environment Quality Act* (R.S.Q., c. Q-2). Such assessments would study the consequences of possible mining activities near the boundaries of the Kuururjuaq national park: the risks related to changes in the quality of water in the Koroc River and its tributaries due to mine seepage, the aesthetic impact of tailing piles, and the impacts on wildlife species that inhabit the park and surrounding areas.

Mining activities to the north and the south of the park project would also rule out the desirable extension of the proposed boundaries of the park project to cover the coastal zone of Keglo Bay and the significant geographical feature known as Mount Nuvulialuk.

Finally from an economic point of view, it must be determined whether the economic spin-offs of mining activities hoped for by a few members of the community can be balanced with the economic spin-offs expected from the Kuururjuaq national park, without instead weakening them. It should also be recalled that 27% of the existing mineral titles in the area are staked on category II lands, which could eventually affect Inuit hunting, fishing and trapping rights.

Recommendation (5)

Given that mineral exploration and especially mining activities next to the proposed boundaries of the park project could impact on the natural environment of the valley of the Koroc River and the coastal sector, the KEAC recommends that a watchdog and monitoring committee be created to focus the attention of mining companies, governments and community representatives on the risks posed by these kinds of activities and on precautionary measures to ensure the integrity of the park and the protection of present wildlife species.

Moreover, given that it is desirable to join Keglo Bay and the Mount Nuvulialuk region to the Kuururjuaq national park, the KEAC recommends that mineral titles granted in these two areas not be renewed on expiry.

Proposed boundaries

The goal of creating the Kuururjuaq national park is to establish a protected natural area encompassing the Koroc River watershed. Along its eastern border, the park project abuts Labrador and the Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve of Canada. Along its western border, downstream from the mouth of the André-Grenier River, the proposed boundaries of the park project abut or are close to areas currently staked by mineral titles.

For its part, the coastal sector of the park project encompasses the area around Qarlituranga Bay, but not the area around Keglo Bay due to existing mineral titles.

In this context, the currently proposed boundaries should be considered minimal boundaries. The size of the park project can not be reduced without endangering the integrity of the natural environment that is to be protected.

Indeed, conditions to expand the park boundaries should be fostered to provide coverage over more than the Koroc River watershed and beyond the proposed boundaries in the coastal sector of the park project. This latter extension would provide more protection for coastal areas that have been occupied by Inuit for thousands of years and that contain important archaeological sites. The Inuit of Kangiqsualujjuaq continue to extensively occupy these areas, which, for a large part, are designated category II lands under the JBNQA.

Recommendation 6

Given that the currently proposed boundaries should be considered minimal boundaries for the future Kuururjuaq national park, the KEAC recommends that they be adopted for the time being and that they eventually be expanded to provide increased protection of the natural environments of the Koroc River, Mount Nuvulialuk, as well as Keglo Bay and its tributaries.

Conclusion

The KEAC feels that the future Kuururjuaq national park will be a major and unique addition to the Québec network of parks and protected areas. The management framework proposed in the draft master plan is flexible enough to protect Inuit hunting, fishing and trapping rights and to enable visitors to take full advantage of available eco-tourism activities. The contribution of the harmonization committee and the joint parks committee (Kuururjuaq national park and Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve of Canada) will be essential in this respect. Furthermore, a watchdog and monitoring committee could serve to minimize the risks posed to the natural environment by mining activities near the park. In this regard, the proposed boundaries should be considered minimal. The KEAC recommends that these boundaries be expanded in the near future to include the regions of Mount Nuvulialuk as well as Keglo Bay and its tributaries. In brief, the creation of the Kuururjuaq national park will serve to safeguard the rich natural and cultural heritage of this exceptional area of the Torngat Mountains, for present and future generations.