Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts of

KAREN KALYNKA

BA (Dalhousie University, 2011)

“Tracking Change in the Canadian National Parks: From One Crisis to Another”

School of Environmental Studies

Tuesday, May 19, 2020
11:30 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jessica Dempsey, School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Michael M’Gonigle, Faculty of Law, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Elizabeth Lunstrum, School of Public Service, Boise State University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Andrew Schloss, School of Music, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This research assesses changes in Canada’s national park system between the years 2000-2015 and places these changes within the broad social, political, and economic context in Canada, as well as within trends in international conservation policy and practice. The animating research questions include: how did Parks Canada respond in the fifteen years following the report of the 2000 Panel on Environmental Integrity? What political, economic, and cultural factors influenced Parks Canada Agency in this period? A further research question emerged from my findings: Why has it been so hard for Parks Canada to lead with ecological integrity as its first priority?

Through a political ecological lens, the research utilizes a mixed methods approach. Using semi-formal interviews with retired Parks Canada managers, I was able to establish what had changed and how these changes were interpreted by these former employees. I also interviewed environmental NGOs to gather information on how those outside the Agency viewed the changes taking place within Parks Canada. I then collected and reviewed primary Parks Canada documents to establish the main changes, including of policy, as well as budgets and expenditures.

My research found that in this period, despite efforts to shift the culture of the organization of Parks Canada to ecological integrity (EI) the Agency deepened its emphasis on visitor experience. The most recent "decade of change" in Canadian national parks policy and practice is thus reminiscent of the century-long struggle to determine whom or what parks are for and the role that Parks Canada plays in the production of Canadian identity. Although we are tempted to conclude that the decades repeat themselves like a pendulum swinging between “use” and “preservation,” this analysis suggests that this decade of change is distinct from the previous decades, with the institution increasingly emphasizing its role as nation-builder and tourism provider. This research purposes that a kind of Polanyian “double movement” is playing out on a new foundational terrain characterized by neoliberal solutions for conservation, a terrain influenced by a broader, global neoliberal transformation within state institutions.