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NEWS

Anti and pro national park petitions wrap up

 By Vanessa - [March 28, 2018](#)  309  2

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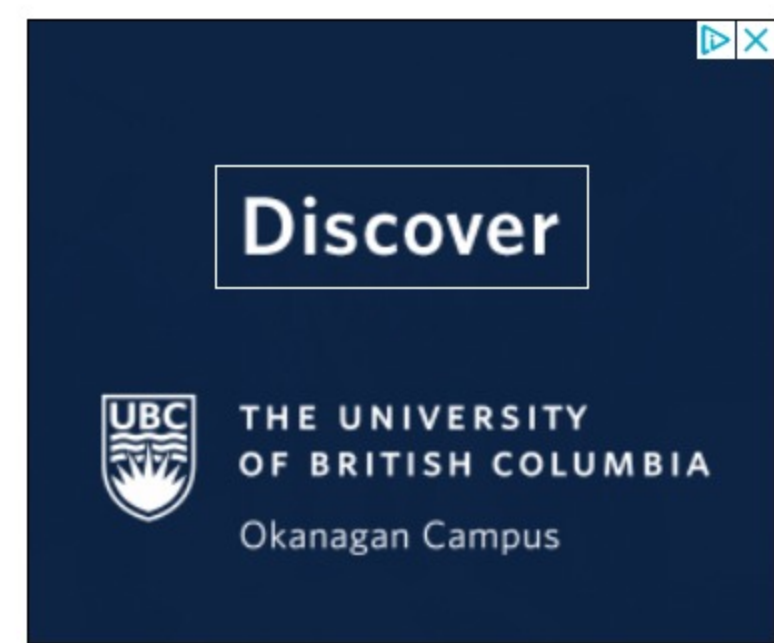


Doreen Olson, of the South Okanagan Similkameen National Park Network spoke to the Rotary Club of Osoyoos on Thursday about the benefits a national park would bring to the region. Although Rotary doesn't take positions on political issues, she received a very supportive response. Some Rotarians expressed frustration with the opposition to the park that they believe comes from a minority who have managed to sway MLA Linda Larson. (Richard McGuire file photo)

By Richard McGuire

Special to the Chronicle

Competing electronic petitions both against and for a national park reserve in the South Okanagan are wrapping up, but there is no clear winner.



A petition calling for the ending of the process to establish the park and for a referendum to be held gathered 902 signatures before its March 16 deadline.

That petition was started by Oliver-area resident Tony Iannella, the owner of T&T Arms Inc. and a gun enthusiast.

The *Osoyoos Times* sought comment from Iannella by email and phone, but he did not respond.

Iannella's petition, which was numbered E-1360, was started on Nov. 16, 2017 through the House of Commons.

MP Richard Cannings, South Okanagan-West Kootenay, presented Iannella's petition in the House of Commons last Tuesday. Cannings has said he would present petitions from either side of this controversial debate.

Of the signatures on Iannella's petition, 861 were from B.C. and most of the rest from other provinces, mainly Alberta. There was one signature from outside Canada.

The competing petition, E-1390, was started by Kaleden-area resident Doreen Olson, the coordinator of the South Okanagan Similkameen National Park Network (SOSNPN).

Its closing date for signatures is this Friday, March 30 because it was started two weeks later than Iannella's.

As of Saturday, it had 1,247 signatures, of which 1,146 were from B.C. and most of the rest were from other provinces, mainly Ontario and Alberta. It had four signatures from out of Canada.

"I think these petitions are just one of many ways people are able to show their support or not for the park," said Olson in an emailed response to the *Osoyoos Times*. "Having a little over 1,000 signatures on the SOSNPN petition doesn't mean there are only 1,000 people who want the park."

Olson added that a paper-based poll in 2009, which was more heavily promoted, gathered more than 20,000 signatures, of which more than 60 per cent were from the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS).

"The long history of grassroots support for this park, as well as the formal support from the RDOS, local municipalities, chambers of commerce, the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, the Okanagan Basin Water Board, etc. is a much stronger reflection of the support throughout local communities," Olson said.

She noted that the most recent government process, the consultation on the B.C. government's 2015 Intentions Paper, saw responses overwhelmingly in support of creating a contiguous, connected national park reserve that included Mount Kobau.

Olson said her group has been collecting petition signatures for more than 10 years and many people who signed earlier petitions chose not to sign another one.

"Signing e-petitions isn't even in the same league as scientific polling by a professional pollster, which is far more accurate," she said.

A 2015 scientific poll by McAllister Opinion Research found 70 per cent local support for a national park.

Olson believes the "no" side was probably "really motivated" following the Oct. 27 announcement by federal, provincial and First Nations governments that they were moving forward to establish a national park reserve.

"The reasons people have given for not supporting the park are rooted in a misunderstanding of the facts and rumour," said Olson.

She said she knows people have a lot of questions, but the process is only just now getting formally restarted and the answers will be a bit further down the road.

"It's really important to have patience as governments prepare for the next steps so that when it comes time for public consultation, there will be answers instead of the vague responses people are receiving right now," said Olson.

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