Canada has 39 national parks and 2 national marine parks. These areas are protected and managed by the Ministry of Heritage. The Parks Canada mandate is to “…protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada’s natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations.” Of the 41 national parks, six were created in the earliest period of 1886 to 1906. Glacier National Park in BC was the first in Canada. Banff and Yoho, first named together as Rocky Mountain Park, were created shortly after. In the period of 1907 to 1927, six more national parks were created including the Point Pelee National Park, the southern most point in Canada. During 1928 to 1948, seven national parks were created. Most of these are in Eastern Canada. From 1949 to 1969, only two national parks were created, both in the Maritime provinces. 1970 to 1990 saw the creation of twelve national parks, many of these in the North and given names that were traditionally used by the first inhabitants of the area. This is evidence of the Canadian Government’s increased recognition and appreciation of aboriginal culture and heritage. From 1991 to the present, eight new national parks have been created. Most of these are in the North but two are national marine parks in Eastern Canada: Sagueneay-St. Lawrence and Fathom Five.

Perhaps surprising about Canadian national parks is that, though Canada was settled by Europeans in an east to west pattern, the park creation pattern follows a west to east pattern. The oldest parks in Canada are those in the Rocky Mountains of BC and Alberta. Maybe this is because settlers of the west were more inclined to protect the striking beauty of the Rockies than the plains and shield to the east.

Creating national parks today is a much more complicated process than it was thirty years ago. In 1976, Jean Chretien, then the Minister Responsible for Parks, created Auyuittuq National Park by looking out the window of a plane and proclaiming it in parliament soon after. Today, national park creation is a complicated and bureaucratic six-stage process that takes many years. The Canadian Government has plans to create ten national parks and five marine conservation areas over the next five years. One proposed area for a new park is the Gulf Islands on the west coast of BC. Many more are proposed for Labrador and the North, areas that have traditionally been under-represented and ignored in terms of their natural beauty and value.

Sources:
- Parks Canada website <http://www2.parkscanada.gc.ca/parks/main_e.htm>