

## The Management of Natural Resources and the Environment in Canada: Historical and Transnational Perspectives



### What is Nature?: The Rise and Fall of Moncton's Petitcodiac Causeway

#### Abstract

In 1968, a causeway was constructed across the Petitcodiac River, splitting in two the river that runs through Moncton on its way to the Bay of Fundy. The project was carried out by the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Administration (MMRA), a federal agency tasked twenty years earlier with protecting land that would have otherwise been flooded by the tides of the Bay of Fundy, the largest in the world, in the process creating marshland. With the arrival of settlers in the seventeenth century, protective structures were constructed to drain the marshland so it might be farmed.

By the 1940s those structures had badly deteriorated, leading Ottawa to create the MMRA, but the agency went further than reconstructing existing dykes, as it also constructed dams across five major rivers, significantly altering the environment; but nowhere was this more dramatically visible than on the Petitcodiac, where the causeway provided a highway connecting Moncton with suburbs on the other side. Fish stocks were destroyed, the river downstream from the dam became narrower and shallower due to the accumulation of silt that was now deposited just below the structure, and upstream a headpond was created, where a new lakefront community was created.

In response to these environmental changes, bitter controversy ensued that lasted for over 40 years, until opening the gates in the causeway structure in 2010 and removal of much of that structure altogether in 2021. This presentation will focus on that debate and how it highlighted different conceptions of what constituted "nature."

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