

The Next Century of the World's First National Park Service

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THE FUTURE OF PROTECTED AREAS IS DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE PREMISE THAT OUR COLLECTIVE objective is to preserve not just the places and the things that remind us of who we are, but also the chance for our children to connect to those legacies in truly meaningful ways, and that in a more crowded world there will be even greater need for places of refuge and reflection—in the future, National Parks and National Historic Sites will become more important, not less. Wallace Stegner described wilderness as the “geography of hope.” My fundamental belief is that hope matters—that future generations will need hope even more than those alive today.

Today we worry about nature and historic deficit in young people, the leaders of tomorrow, we worry about endangered species and their endangered habitats, and we are concerned about what will happen to our economies, ecologies, and stories in the face of rapid climate change.

In a mobile and urbanizing world, many people live where they were not born, are not as connected as we once were to the deep idea of home place, and defining moments of our country. We all know that mobility and urbanization are trends that will only increase. So what is the antidote to all this forgetfulness and all these worries?

We, the Parks Canada team, know what it is—the antidote is to keep, for all time unimpaired, the world's finest examples of its diverse ecosystems and its cultural heritage, and to use those national treasures to awaken wonder, inspire hope, build understanding, renew collective memory, and contribute to nation building.

This is a monumental task and challenge, but one that this generation of Parks Canada leaders are better equipped than ever before to take on, and show real, effective leadership. It will not be easy, but it will be rewarding, and our biggest reward will be the sense of accomplishment of having given our great, great grandchildren a future of hope, inspiration, and collective duty to protect the defining moments and iconic places that define who we are as a country.

National Parks and National Historic Sites are not just arks of conservation, keeping the world's living possibilities alive in the face of massive landscape change. They are places for people to find themselves, and one another, through inspiring experiences and shared endeavor.

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These are places of healthy physical activity, of mental stimulation, of spiritual and historical reawakening, and of renewal of our fundamental human-ness. They are places of hope.

I don't think this is new thinking to anyone in Parks Canada. But the challenge we share is this: what if we have what everyone needs, but nobody knows or cares? The days when we could count on most citizens being aware of their national parks and historic sites, and being inclined to experience them, are behind us. It is entirely possible to live out one's whole life today without ever once contemplating a visit to a park or historic site.

So are parks and sites heading for oblivion? The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines "oblivion" as "the state of being forgotten or disregarded." For me, there is no doubt that parks and sites are headed that way, from an ecological, historical and societal perspective, unless we act decisively.

The reason they could be headed for oblivion is simply that our distracted, busy world is losing sight of them. It seems obvious to me that the case for conservation and investment in conservation will be harder to argue in the future as increasingly, population growth and resource depletion shift our sense of the world from a place of abundance to a place of shortages. The un-cut forests, un-dammed rivers, un-mined ore, and un-farmed soils of protected areas could, and I underline could, increasingly look like easy resource solutions in an ever-hungrier world.

In the same way, our heritage buildings and historic places could increasingly look like wasted real estate in a more-crowded world.

There are those who sit back and breathe sighs of relief once park or historic site legislation is passed, or a new national park is formally signed off on—but they fool themselves. Because they can be as easily unmade as they are made—they are, after all, only the result of a society's choices. Society's choices can change.

In the long run, the only real protection we can offer to these special places is a passionately engaged citizenry—people who have found, experienced, and bonded to their heritage, and see these places as being as essential as the family heirlooms they would never part with, no matter how dire their circumstances.

So it's a feedback loop: people need parks, and parks and sites need people. If people don't value them, then those parks and sites could eventually be decommissioned, and put to other uses. So is that just fear mongering? I say no.

Just look back at our history in Parks Canada. For example where four national parks were abolished in the 1930s and 1940s because it was felt at that time that they had met their objective of increasing bison populations. Also, during the last generation, we have lost 20 percent of Canada's pre-1910 heritage buildings.

The worst possible conservation strategy for parks and sites, then, is to keep people from them, or to fail to reach out and find the people who currently aren't involved with them. In the last century, we often heard about the conflict between protection and use. In this century, it is absolutely critical that we embrace the unity of protection and use... so that in the next century, when we need parks and sites more than ever, the biodiversity, cultural heritage, inspiration, and hope that collectively sit at the heart of the national park and sites idea, will persist. It is vital work, because a world that surrenders its protected places, is a world that has surrendered hope. My friends, if we surrender hope, we are cheating future generations of the best gift we can bequest to them.

Parks Canada team members are proud to have celebrated the 125th anniversary of the creation of Banff National Park last year. And we are equally proud to be celebrating the centennial of the Dominion Parks Service, as Parks Canada was originally called, this year. As we enter our second century of service to Canadians, our vision is clear: "Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada."

The Parks Canada team is delivering on our mandate, and implementing our vision through a three pronged strategy that has really challenged us to take a very serious look at our organization and our programs. The three elements are the following:

1. Protecting our parks and sites.
2. Connecting Canadians to their parks and sites on their terms.
3. Bringing our parks and sites to Canadians where they live.

In terms of protection, there are three tenets to our actions: protect, connect, restore. We are working to protect large, intact landscapes by creating large-scale protected areas, and then protecting the flora and fauna within them. We are protecting our level one cultural resources and their stories. We are working to connect landscapes by working with adjacent landowners, conservation organizations, and recreationalists to improve wildlife mobility and protect the sense of place of our National Historic Sites.

And we are restoring ecosystems and species through concrete, action on the ground activities. The restoration of the Garry oak ecosystem, and the reintroduction of the bison and the black-footed ferret on the Canadian prairie, in collaboration with Canadian and U.S. partners, is something that we can all celebrate. We have embarked on the most significant restoration program ever seen in our history. We currently have big scale restoration initiatives in 50 percent of our national parks through a \$90 million investment over a five-year period. We have recently made multi-million-dollar investments to restore our national historic sites and those of our partners.

All of these initiatives are strongly supported by quality science, and citizen engagement programs that will allow us to measure the ecological and historical return on investment, and demonstrate the benefits of restoration. To give you a sense of the magnitude of our protection results, our partnerships with aboriginal peoples and other levels of government has allowed the Government of Canada to increase the area of lands and waters to be managed by Parks Canada by 48 percent since 2006, through legislation and signed agreements. To put it in perspective, this represents an area fifteen times the size of Yellowstone National Park in the USA, and twenty times the size of Banff National Park in Canada.

Our recent establishment achievements, to name a few, include the following:

- The six-fold expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve, referred to by some as the greatest conservation achievement in a generation in Canada.
- The establishment of Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Cultural Site, one of the first protected areas in the world that protects an ecosystem from mountain top to ocean floor.
- The creation of Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, the largest fresh water protected area in the world.
- A federal-provincial agreement to create a national park in the Mealy Mountains of Newfoundland and Labrador, an undertaking that will protect a massive swath of Canada's boreal forest, and help ensure the survival of traditional aboriginal knowledge and culture.
- Measures to protect and create Lancaster Sound, the most biologically productive area of Canada's arctic, and truly the Serengeti of the Arctic.
- And the protection of Sayou Edacho National Historic Site, the largest protected cultural landscape in the world.

I am very proud of the Parks Canada team's recent accomplishments. However, our job is still not done and we will do more in the years ahead. Because at Parks Canada, we are protecting these places with, and for, Canadians. Not from Canadians.

Indeed, virtually every national park that has been created in the past forty years has been achieved in direct collaboration with First Nations, aboriginal communities, and in partnership with diverse groups of interested parties. The same is true of our species recovery strategies and our national historic site cost-share program.

The second part of our strategy is to connect Canadians to their parks and sites, on their terms. Much can and has been said on the subject of connection, but I would like to refer specifically to the new generation, sometimes called “Generation Me,” which must be a priority for us to ensure our parks and sites are not forgotten.

Much has been written about Generation Me’s demand for services and products that are very specific to their individual desires. It is not a coincidence that the corporate world, in response, has given rise to names like iTunes, MySpace, Facebook where they chose their friends, and YouTube; and those companies provide the opportunity for consumers to alter products to their specific individual tastes.

For those of us in the business of conservation and presentation, we must ask ourselves how can we take that thinking and apply it to our business. Where is “MySpace” in a national park or national historic site? Where’s the “iCanoe” or “iRe-ennact” experience that I have individually tailored to my needs? Where’s the “YouExplore” opportunity? As we strive to ensure that more Canadians experience their national parks and national historic sites, we have moved from providing services, to facilitating memorable experiences as defined by our clients.

Accordingly, our visitor experience strategy is as follows:

- Identify target markets—identify the segments with long-term potential, giving special consideration to new Canadians, young families, young adults (18-34) and school-aged children.
- Diversify and renew—diversify and renew visitor experience opportunities to attract and grow target market segments (e.g. My Parks Pass, Xplorers program, renewal of our accommodation service offer, concert in NHS, etc.).
- Promote—promote visitor experience opportunities to target market segments through an increasing profile in national and regional media.

All of these new programs are based on solid social science knowledge. So why is increasing visitation so critical? I will just share with you one statistic from our recent national poll: the majority of Canadian national park and sites visitors (86 percent) would miss national parks and sites if they were gone, compared to just 39 percent of Canadians who have not visited. So, connecting the hearts and minds of Canadians to our national parks and sites starts with a physical connection, on site.

The third element of our strategy, to bring our parks and sites to Canadians where they live, includes the following goals:

- Increase awareness and reach, visibility, and initial connection. Expand Parks Canada’s reach, increase its visibility, and provide relevant opportunities for Canadians’ initial connection with Parks Canada, with a particular focus on urban and new Canadian audiences in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.
- Increase interactions with younger Canadians. Provide increased opportunities for Canadians to interact with Parks Canada in their homes, schools and places of leisure, with a particular focus on youth (8-17), and young adults (18-34) in Canada’s largest urban areas.
- Grow and diversify base of support. Grow and diversify Parks Canada’s base of support by providing a range of relevant opportunities for the engagement of stakeholders and

partners in Parks Canada's activities in all program areas, in a manner that is aligned with their interests.

Programs we have developed to fulfill those goals include the following:

- My Parks Pass: A special entry pass provided to grade eight students across Canada that permits them free access to our parks and sites, a My Parks Pass website, classroom material, and class trips to parks and sites.
- Canada's Greatest Summer Job: A national initiative designed to immerse youth in parks, sites, or marine areas over the summer, and in turn have them engage with other youth. In 2010, the initiative involved hiring 32 budding student videographers to produce videos for Parks Canada's YouTube channel and website. A new format is forthcoming for 2011.
- Centennial Celebrations: A concert Series, 100th Anniversary Launch, in the heart of Toronto.
- Parks Canada: Experience camping.
- Cultural Access Pass. New Canadian citizens will be offered a Cultural Access Pass which offers them free entry into over 100 cultural attractions. This collaboration will give new Canadian citizens the opportunity to visit Parks Canada free of charge for one year.
- Contribute to development of Urban Natural Playgrounds.
- National Broadcast Initiatives: Broadcast initiatives featuring Parks Canada that are national in scope, covering multiple places across the country, or focusing on the mandate and responsibilities of the agency as a whole (e.g., A Park for All Seasons, National Parks Project, 15-part series on World Heritage Sites in Canada, etc.).
- Use of Social Media: Use of national social media channels (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) or park- or site-specific channels (e.g., Point Pelee tweeting for the birds) to reach specific audiences that use these platforms.

In closing, during discussions with our team members about leadership, I often say that my definition of leadership is "someone who has the courage to dream and the ability to engrain that dream in the heart and mind of others." Through the leadership that I see firsthand, at all levels and in all functions of the agency, we are collectively assuming the leadership required by this generation of Parks Canada team members to ensure a future of hope for the yet unborn generations of Canadians. We are all individually doing so with passion, pride, and professionalism through our "one team, one vision" approach to our daily activities. As we start our second century, we should all take great pride in our historical accomplishments, as they were described in a recent Globe and Mail article: "Parks Canada oversees one of the most extensive, best managed, and highly respected park systems in the world ... It should be a fantastic source of pride for all Canadians."