

# International Engagement: Enhancing the Global Parks Agenda

*Marc Johnson and John Pinkerton*

## Introduction

THIS PAST YEAR HAS BEEN A PRODUCTIVE AND DIVERSE ONE for Parks Canada's international programs, which is indeed appropriate in this International Year of Biodiversity. The agency's international activities have ranged from leading the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in Canada to partnering continentally in the development of a new wilderness agreement and in on-going marine protected area (MPA) network coordination, engaging globally in the hosting of a meeting of park leaders, implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity, participating in the seminal Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress, and working with American colleagues in preparing for the upcoming commemoration of the War of 1812. While all these activities were underway, Parks Canada also adopted a new international strategic plan.

## International programs priorities

Parks Canada's international responsibilities and priorities stem directly from its legislated mandate. The Parks Canada Agency Act states that it is in the national interest for Parks Canada

to carry out Canada's international obligations and agreements to protect, conserve and present [natural and cultural] heritage and to contribute towards the protection and presentation of the global heritage and biodiversity.

To give clarity and focus to this direction, the agency adopted a new strategic plan for its International Program in December 2009. The strategic plan aims to ensure that Parks Canada's international activities contribute to achieving its corporate priorities for establishing, conserving, and presenting Canada's natural and historic places, building on its strengths related to conservation, education, and visitor experience. The plan describes a vision for the agency's future international activities, specific strategic directions, and prior-

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ities, and details how the agency will align its priority activities with broader government of Canada priorities.

Overall, the new strategy provides for Parks Canada to be more targeted and proactive in its international work, including prioritizing its focus on major new international initiatives in the Americas and the circumpolar region.

Parks Canada is pursuing the following strategic directions as it undertakes international activities:

- Focus on delivering Canada's international obligations in key fora, in a way that fully reflects Parks Canada's mandate;
- Better align additional international activities with Parks Canada's corporate priorities and Canada's international agenda;
- Promote organizational learning; and
- Build relationships and communicate the results of Parks Canada's international activities within a government of Canada network, with Canadians, and with an international audience.

New priorities include:

- Demonstrating leadership in working with Aboriginal peoples and integrating visitor experience considerations into national park, national historic site, and national marine conservation area management;
- Developing an exchange program with a francophone country and an exchange program focused on national historic sites to complement existing exchange programs; and
- Identifying and working with global partners to help Parks Canada develop its national marine conservation areas program.

In order to promote the desired consistency and coherence in Parks Canada's international activities, the agency created a new International Programs Branch in 2009.

### **Recent international program activities**

International program activities vary from year to year. Below are some of the activities accomplished over the course of the last year.

**UNESCO's World Heritage Convention.** This past year marked the last year of Canada's four-year term on UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. As Canada's state party representative for the World Heritage Convention, Parks Canada fulfilled these responsibilities on behalf of the government of Canada. During this time, two of Canada's fifteen World Heritage properties were inscribed, the Rideau Canal and the Joggins Fossil Cliffs. Canada also had the opportunity to host the 2008 meeting of the World Heritage Committee on the doorstep of the Historic District of Old Québec. Having left behind the heavy workload associated with membership on the World Heritage Committee, in the coming years Parks Canada will focus its World Heritage efforts closer to home. In particular, there are a number of new World Heritage site nominations being prepared for submission in the coming

years and there are opportunities to improve efforts to raise awareness of the World Heritage Convention in Canada. In all of this work, Parks Canada will need to work with the other levels of government and stakeholders who have responsibility for managing Canada's World Heritage sites.

**World Protected Areas Leadership Forum.** In October 2009, Parks Canada hosted the annual meeting of the heads of a number of the world's park agencies in Victoria, British Columbia. In what is commonly known as the World Protected Areas Leadership Forum (WPALF), participants included the director of the U.S. National Park Service as well as the park agency leaders for Finland, New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, and Australia's state of Victoria. The chair of the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas also attended. Discussions focused on innovative approaches to increasing the relevance of parks and protected areas in response to changing societal demographics, providing leadership on the role of protected areas in climate change adaptation and mitigation, considering business approaches to parks management, and preparing for the tenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). These park leaders have continued to work together in recent months on a variety of matters, including participating in the review of the IUCN's Program on Protected Areas and participating at a November 2009 IUCN workshop in Granada, Spain, on protected areas and climate change that witnessed the release of the related publication *Natural Solutions* ([http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/summary\\_natural\\_solutions\\_english.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/summary_natural_solutions_english.pdf)).

**The 9th World Wilderness Congress (WILD9).** The WILD9 Conference in Merida, Mexico, in September 2009 marked a historic occasion, when representatives of a number of Canadian, American, and Mexican agencies signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on cooperation for wilderness conservation. Parks Canada is the sole Canadian signatory to this agreement, an international first in the area of wilderness protection. The MOU provides a framework for on-going cooperation among the participating government conservation agencies with respect to the commemoration, conservation, and preservation of wilderness areas. The following statement, made by Jim Prentice, Canada's Minister of the Environment, in his presentation at the Conference, embodies the opportunity these agencies have in meeting the spirit of the MOU:

Our generation may be the last to have the options to choose what we do. We have a choice to set aside land where the timber has not been cut, the rock not dynamited, the earth not ploughed. We can choose to protect these lands, and leave to our children and their great grand children the landscape of possibilities.

The MOU established an intergovernmental North America Wilderness Committee to guide implementation of cooperative activities under the agreement, and Parks Canada had the honor to host the committee's first meeting on May 10, 2010, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. During its meeting, the North America Wilderness Committee discussed and agreed upon elements of a multi-year workplan that will focus on:

- Marine wilderness;
- Wilderness area manager networking, mentoring, training, and exchange;

- Transboundary areas involving public land with wilderness characteristics;
- Valuing ecosystem services from wilderness and payment mechanisms; and
- Ecological monitoring.

**Convention on Biological Diversity.** In this International Year of Biodiversity, Parks Canada is also actively involved in the government of Canada's participation in the upcoming 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan. As Canada's national focal point for the CBD's Program of Work on Protected Areas, Parks Canada's staff attended the May 2010 meeting of the convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in Nairobi in preparation for the 10th Conference of the Parties. Its efforts in Nairobi will be repeated in Nagoya, focusing on protected areas matters. In Nagoya, however, the meeting will also adopt an important new strategic plan and associated targets for the convention and recommendations related to the linkages between climate change and biodiversity conservation, all of which are particularly relevant to Parks Canada.

**Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress.** In April 2010, Parks Canada staff had the occasion to participate in the Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress hosted by Parks Victoria in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. The Congress brought together 1,200 delegates from 38 countries to discuss how human health and well-being are inextricably linked with the health of the planet's ecosystems, and the role of parks and park agencies in fostering these connections. Of important note was the diverse representation from various park agencies, indigenous groups, nongovernmental organizations, the health sector, academia, and the private sector from all over the world. Consistent with the strategic directions and priorities outlined in the new strategic plan described above, Parks Canada staff made presentations at the Congress on its work in a number of areas, including on cooperative partnerships with Aboriginal peoples in park establishment and management; Prince Edward Island National Park's innovative stakeholder engagement in developing new, memorable visitor experience opportunities that contribute to improved ecosystem and visitor health; engaging citizens in improving park ecological integrity; innovative measures to connect Canadians to nature; and the value of cultural heritage to healthy communities.

**World Commission on Protected Areas.** Canada played host to the June 2010 meeting of the steering committee of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas in Hinton, Alberta, adjacent to Jasper National Park. As Canada's state member for IUCN, Parks Canada provided financial and logistical support for this meeting. The meeting was a good opportunity for Parks Canada to introduce itself to international protected areas professionals from around the world, both during the meeting in Hinton and during a field trip to Jasper.

**North American Marine Protected Areas Network (NAMPAN).** Canada is among the many maritime nations that share the global commitments to establish networks of marine protected areas that were made at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and in the 2004 CBD's Program of Work on Protected Areas. In order to deliver on this commitment and successfully achieve shared marine conservation objectives at regional scales, it is incumbent that national marine protected area agencies work with similar agencies in other countries. Accordingly, Parks Canada is among the founding organizations in the North

American Marine Protected Areas Network (NAMPAN), an initiative under the biodiversity conservation program of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation in North America. Working within NAMPAN, Parks Canada is collaborating with marine protected agencies and academic and non-governmental organization partners in Canada, the United States and Mexico on a number of projects. More details on this initiative are provided elsewhere in this issue by Doug Yurick.

**Bicentennial Commemoration of the War of 1812.** Two hundred years ago, the War of 1812 rallied citizens together in defense of what would later become Canada and helped to unite a collection of colonies and define a sovereign Canadian identity. The War of 1812 is also an important event in the history of the United States and is sometimes referred to as “the second War of Independence,” which affirmed U.S. independence from Britain and ushered it onto the world stage. Of importance to both nations, the War of 1812 set the course for two hundred years of peace, respectful recognition of national interests, and peaceful resolution of differences. Canada and the United States are now jointly planning events, activities, and projects to commemorate the bicentennial of the War of 1812. The Parks Canada Agency and the U.S. National Park Service are working together to develop interpretation and educational materials to encourage visitation and enhance visitor experience at historic sites associated with the War of 1812 in both countries. Commemoration of the bicentennial provides opportunities in both countries to foster greater awareness of our shared history, peace, and friendship.

### **Conclusion**

Looking back at the past year of international activities for Parks Canada, a common thread that emerges is the ever-growing recognition of the increasing role of the world’s parks and protected areas in addressing multiple societal benefits—providing ecological goods and services such as clean drinking water, fostering healthy communities, connecting citizens with their natural and cultural heritage, supporting local jobs and livelihoods, and of course providing wild spaces for wildlife. Through its current and future international activities, guided by its new strategic plan, Parks Canada aims to contribute to the important global efforts to protect, conserve, present, celebrate, and experience our natural and cultural heritage, and to ensure that these efforts build a strong sense of connection and relevance between people and the heritage they share.

**Marc Johnson**, Parks Canada, International Programs Branch, 25 Eddy Street, 5th Floor, Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0M5 Canada; marc.johnson@pc.gc.ca

**John Pinkerton**, Parks Canada, International Programs Branch, 25 Eddy Street, 5th Floor, Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0M5 Canada; john.pinkerton@pc.gc.ca