# Two Paths One Direction: Parks Canada and Aboriginal Peoples Working Together<sup>1</sup>

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# Introduction

CANADA'S UNIQUE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP with Aboriginal peoples has been set out and defined by the Royal Proclamation 1763, the Constitution Act 1982, various statutes, and court decisions. Because of this unique relationship, Parks Canada considers Aboriginal peoples as partners and works closely with a wide variety of Aboriginal groups in all regions of the country. However, that has not always been the case.

In Canada, even though the early parks were essentially about economic development, with townsites established in Banff, Jasper, and elsewhere, Aboriginal people, as they had been in the United States, were initially excluded. When Banff Park (then called Rocky Mountain National Park) was created in 1885, the Stoney Indians, who had previously hunted on and travelled over the land, were kept out of the new park. In a report in 1895, the first commissioner recommended that they be kept out permanently. Later, in 1930, when Riding Mountain National Park was being established, government officials forcibly removed the Ojibway people, now the Keeseekoowening First Nation, from their traditional hunting grounds and residential areas in order to include these lands within the park (Kopas 2007).

Parks Canada has since undergone significant corporate culture shifts. This has been driven by societal changes in relation to governments that have helped change the legal land-scape in Canada with respect to Aboriginal rights and title. Further policies recognize that effective management of heritage sites requires working in cooperation with partners, particularly those with a unique perspective stemming from, in some cases, over 50 generations of land stewardship.

Parks Canada presently maintains effective relations with over 130 Aboriginal groups through a wide spectrum of mechanisms encompassing the diverse legal and cultural environments of both Parks Canada and Aboriginal partners. In addition, of all of the extensive lands managed by Parks Canada, a full 68% have come under this stewardship directly as a result of formal agreements with Aboriginal peoples.

The George Wright Forum, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 222–233 (2010).
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# Aboriginal context

The term "Aboriginal peoples" is a name given collectively to the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. The Constitution Act 1982 recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. According to the 2006 Canadian Census, over one million people identified themselves as Aboriginal out of a total population of just over 30 million.

Aboriginal peoples live in communities located in urban, rural, and remote locations across Canada. They also include over 600 First Nations or Indian Bands, generally located on lands called reserves; various Inuit communities located in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec (Nunavik) and Labrador; and finally Métis communities located across Canada. They all have unique languages, histories, cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and relationships with the government of Canada. For example, there are 61 distinct Aboriginal languages in Canada that continue to be spoken today.

Aboriginal civil society is strong, with Aboriginal peoples represented by a large number of associations and groups, ranging from the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada and the National Aboriginal Land Managers Association; to the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatamin which represents the interests of the Inuit; and the Métis National Council representing the Métis people.

The government of Canada has constitutional responsibilities towards Aboriginal peoples to negotiate and implement land claims<sup>2</sup> and self-government agreements. Between 1701 and 1923, the Crown and First Nations signed over 70 historical treaties. Since the Canadian Constitution Act 1982, in which the government of Canada recognized "existing Aboriginal and treaty rights" including "rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired," Canada has been negotiating comprehensive land claims with Aboriginal groups. Since 1975, twenty-two modern treaties have been settled and approximately sixty are under negotiations. Treaty settlement agreements have provided for Aboriginal ownership of over 600,000 square kilometers of land, rights over approximately 40% of Canada's land mass, capital transfer of CDN\$2.8 billion, protection of traditional ways of life, access to future resource development opportunities, participation in land and resources management decisions, and an active role in the cooperative management of national parks in settlement areas.

Beginning with the Supreme Court of Canada's Calder Decision in 1973, whereby Aboriginal title was recognized as a concept in Canadian common law, various landmark rulings from Canadian courts changed the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canada. The *Haida* and *Taku River* decisions further clarified the Crown's relationship and duty towards Aboriginal peoples. The court ruled that government has a legal duty to consult and possibly accommodate the interests of Aboriginal groups where it has real or constructive knowledge of the potential existence of Aboriginal right or title that are claimed but unproven. The court found that this duty to consult flows from the Honour of the Crown<sup>3</sup> and is triggered where there is a possibility that a government activity might adversely affect a potential Aboriginal or treaty right. In the *Mikisew Cree* decision, a decision that directly affected Parks Canada in Wood Buffalo National Park, the judge stated:

The fundamental objective of the modern law of Aboriginal and Treaty rights is the reconciliation of Aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginal peoples and their respective claims, interests and ambitions (*Mikisew Cree First Nation v. Canada*, 2005).

# Parks Canada and Aboriginal peoples: A brief history of relationships

With the establishment of the Banff Park in 1885, the concept of protected heritage areas in Canada inspired Canadians. Parks were viewed as both instruments of economic development and as instruments that reflected national symbolism and democratic values. They were heritage areas set aside for recreation use by Canadians and they were also national treasures to be protected for future generations. In the early twentieth century, seven national parks were established, mostly in the southern part of Canada. None of these southern parks included the involvement of Aboriginal peoples.

Prior to the 1920s, there were no national parks in northern Canada. In 1922, Wood Buffalo National Park was established to protect the wood bison from extinction. In 1924, the park was expanded to the south and became, at that time, the largest national park in the world. Unlike the southern parks where traditional hunting and gathering activities were prohibited, it was acknowledged that the traditional activities practiced by Aboriginal peoples would not be detrimental to protecting the wood bison and that a prohibition on those activities would have negative impacts on their traditional customs and way of life. As a result, hunting and trapping activities were allowed to continue under a permit system and a hunters' and trappers' association was formed to set permit limits on an annual basis (O'Donnell 1995). The establishment of this association was the beginning of a legacy of cooperative management that is now prevalent throughout the northern Parks Canada system. It was also the first time that Parks Canada involved Aboriginal peoples in decision-making regarding the management of a park.

In 1973, a landmark Supreme Court of Canada ruling, *Calder v. British Columbia*, acknowledged for the first time the concept of Aboriginal title. It was also at this time that public involvement in government policies increased, most specifically in environmental policies.

To be precise, there were two publics. One consisted of the interested Canadian public in general, both those with particular and local interest in individual parks and those with general and national interest in the broader national parks system. The other grouping comprised Aboriginal Canadians. Their interests, initially at least, were not in national parks as such but in maintaining a legal claim to lands that the federal government wished to appropriate for national park purposes (Kopas 2007).

With the beginning of the modern land claims process in northern Canada, significant changes started to take place in Parks Canada with respect to working in a more cooperative manner with Aboriginal peoples. As negotiations took place with northern Aboriginal peoples, it became evident that there were opportunities for a shared vision of protection of resources that permitted the continuation of traditional hunting, trapping, and other cultural activities under the provisions of a modern-day treaty.

The negotiations that took place in the Yukon Territory with the Inuvialuit and in the Nunavut Territory with the Inuit represented a significant step forward in working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples. With the settlement of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement 1993 and the Inuvialuit Final Agreement 1984, for the first time Parks Canada entered into park establishment negotiations that included provision for joint management boards. The term "joint" meant that the signatory Aboriginal groups would participate in making decisions related to the planning and operation of the proposed park. This did not change the fact that ministerial authority over national parks and responsibilities toward Parliament would remain unfettered.

In 1979, Parks Canada policy was altered to reflect both the changing realities of Aboriginal case law in Canada and Parks Canada's new approach toward the establishment and operation of new national parks. The following clause was added to the policy:

Where new national parks are established in conjunction with the settlement of land claims of native people, an agreement will be negotiated between Parks Canada and representatives of local native communities prior to the formal establishment of the national park creating a joint management regime for the planning and management of the national park (Heritage Canada 1979).

Parks Canada's *Guiding Principles and Operating Policies* were amended in 1994 to reflect the following:

In some national parks, traditional activities continue because of land claim agreements and treaties, or agreements negotiated during the process of establishment (Heritage Canada 1994).

Another significant event that occurred earlier in 1994 was the introduction of an amendment to the Canada National Parks Act allowing national parks to be established under a "reserve" status. Essentially, that meant that sections of land would be set aside as park reserves and managed as national parks until such time as land claims pertaining to that land were resolved. In 2002, the Canada National Parks Act was amended to include a standard process for establishing reserves, thus simplifying the process. This has been an effective tool in forging strong relationships and also in protecting lands from development by third parties during land claim negotiations.

### Applying corporate change on the ground

**Legislative actions.** During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Parks Canada underwent significant corporate shifts in relation to working with Aboriginal peoples, partially influenced by the growing number of court rulings, but more importantly from the realization that Aboriginal peoples are unique partners in the protection of natural and cultural resources. As well, it was recognized that the presentation of Aboriginal cultures would greatly enrich visitor experiences in national parks and national historic sites.

Parks Canada's senior management set the tone for this culture shift within the organi-

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zation through legislative changes as illustrated by the following excerpts from the Canada National Parks Act:

10 (1) The Minister may enter into agreements with ... aboriginal governments, bodies established under land claims agreements and other person and organizations.

16 (1) The Governor in Council may make regulations respecting ... the authorization of the use of park lands, and the use or removal of flora and other natural objects, by aboriginal people for traditional, spiritual and ceremonial purposes (Parks Canada 2000).

This enabled Aboriginal groups to take part in activities that help them reconnect with traditionally used lands and re-establish their cultural links with the land and pass on their knowledge and traditions to the younger generations. This amendment is particularly important for Aboriginal peoples who live close to parks established prior to the modern land claim process and who were removed from their lands and forbidden to continue their traditional way of life.

Accountability instruments. As a government agency, Parks Canada is accountable to Parliament and to Canadians. The agency uses a corporate plan as well as park and site management plans as its primary vehicles of accountability.

The corporate plan establishes the foundation for setting direction within the agency. As such, references to Aboriginal peoples are very important; they set the organizational direction as well as managerial accountabilities. The following text from the corporate plan illustrates the importance Parks Canada places in this area:

Parks Canada will develop a framework to engage Aboriginal peoples in the planning and management of heritage places it administers. As part of this framework, Parks Canada will establish Aboriginal advisory relationships in various locations across the organization, guided by the unique legal and cultural contexts of the different Aboriginal groups, by 2013 (Parks Canada 2010).

The significance of this statement makes clear the agency's desire to build strong and long-term relationships with Aboriginal peoples that go beyond legal requirements. Managers are empowered to take concrete steps to ensure that Aboriginal voices and perspectives meaningfully inform management decisions on an on-going basis.

The second instrument, the management plans, represents the key vehicle between senior managers responsible for parks, sites, and marine conservation areas and the minister responsible for Parks Canada. The management plans, tabled by the minister in Parliament every five years, establish through consultation with partners and stakeholders the key issues and opportunities pursued over the life of the plan.

The management planning process starts with an exercise to report on the overall state of the park, site, or marine conservation area based on indicators related to ecological integrity, commemorative integrity, visitor experiences, and public appreciation and understanding. Historically, Aboriginal peoples would have been "consulted" at the end of the process

as part of a broad public consultation. Recently, Parks Canada modified the process to include an opportunity for Aboriginal peoples to express their perspectives at the very beginning. The "Aboriginal Perspective" chapter presents the Aboriginal context, the state of the Aboriginal advisory relationships, and the state of the land, as viewed from Aboriginal perspectives. This chapter provides a holistic Aboriginal worldview and Aboriginal traditional knowledge is incorporated thought the report.

This process promotes the engagement of Aboriginal communities by allowing their perspectives to influence the identification of key issues, challenges, and opportunities to be considered in the scoping documents and in the management plans.

**Organizational considerations.** As a result of the legislative policy and corporate changes that have occurred over the last 30 years, the agency is very different place. Getting to this point has required a lot of adaptation and clear direction from the executive leadership of Parks Canada. In addition to the accountabilities held by senior managers within the organization, a number of other significant initiatives have been implemented that are reflective of the agency's desire to build and maintain positive relationships with Aboriginal peoples.

One key initiative was the establishment of the Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (AAS) in 1999. This small unit is tasked with providing overall leadership with respect to building meaningful relationships with Aboriginal peoples. The secretariat is led by a member of the Parks Canada executive cadre, reporting directly to the chief executive officer (CEO). The AAS supports the development of policies, guidelines, frameworks, strategies, tools, and training in order to advance relationship-building with Aboriginal peoples. Since its establishment, the secretariat has focused on specific priority areas related to relationship-building, economic development and tourism opportunities, commemoration and presentation of Aboriginal themes, and employment.

Another important initiative is the establishment of the CEO's Aboriginal Consultative Committee (ACC; Figure 1). This committee was formed in 2000 as a mechanism for the CEO to have meaningful dialogue with Aboriginal leaders who have a direct association with heritage places administered by Parks Canada. There are twelve members appointed by the CEO and the committee meets three times per year. The committee provides open and frank dialogue between Parks Canada's leadership and Aboriginal partners on a wide range of issues. Other federal departments recognize it as an innovative way to share information and seek input from Aboriginal peoples.

At the moment, Aboriginals represent 8.3% of Parks Canada staff. There are a number of employment programs specifically designed to recruit and retain Aboriginal peoples into specific career streams and to meet clearly identified employment targets. Parks Canada has developed the Aboriginal Leadership Development Program (ALDP; Figure 2) and supports the Aboriginal Working Group (AWG), an employment equity group. The ALDP is a four-year program where Aboriginal employees gather annually to learn skills ranging from management principles to communications and community interaction based on Aboriginal values. The intent of the program is to establish a strong skill base to allow participants to achieve their career ambitions. The AWG is a national committee of employees who advise the agency on all aspects of Aboriginal employment.

Recognition of systemic barriers. Invariably, in institutions that span over 125 years, Volume 27 • Number 2 (2010) 227

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**Figure 1.** CEO's Aboriginal Consultative Committee (ACC). First row: Reg Sylliboy, AAS. Second row: Dwayne Blackbird, Kseekoowenin Ojibway First Nation, Manitoba; Chief Vern Jacks, Tseycum First Nation, British Columbia; Nathalie Gagnon, AAS; Elder Stewart King, Wasauksing First Nation, Ontario; Michel Boivin, Director, Quebec Service Centre; Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho, Innu First Nation of Ekuanitshit, Quebec; Chief Diane Strand, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Yukon; Alan Latourelle, CEO; Rita Mestokosho, Innu First Nation of Ekuanitshit, Quebec; Peter Rudyck, Métis Nation, Saskatchewan; Pam Ward, Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq Nation, New Brunswick; Cristina Martinez, Field Unit Superintendent, Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve of Canada, Quebec.



**Figure 2.** Aboriginal Leadership Development Program. Shirley Oldfield, Heritage Presenter, Motherwell Homestead, Saskatchewan; Les Campbell, Patrolman, Mt. Revelstoke, and Glacier national parks, Alberta; Penny McIsaac, Interpretation, Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland and Labrad;, Katie Hodson, Resourse Conservation, St. Lawrence Islands National Park, Ontario; Leah Huber, Visitor Experience, Elk Island National Park, Alberta; Christine Bentley, Patrolman, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, British Columbia; Laurie Cherneski, Park Warden, Pukaskwa National Park, Ontario; Laura Frank, Cultural Resource Management Advisor, Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territories; Derek Burton, Information Technology, Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba; Tyrone Mulrooney, Resource Conservation Technician, Terra Nova National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador; Grant Sikkes, Visitor Experience, Jasper National Park, Alberta.

systemic barriers exist and hinder the advancement of new concepts and ideas, particularly when dealing with belief systems and values. One example has been the recognition of Aboriginal traditional knowledge (ATK) as a valuable knowledge system that can influence decision-making in the protection of heritage places.

ATK is a unique and complex knowledge system build by generations of people who live close to the land. It is transmitted through oral tradition and embodied in a distinct culture and way of life. Traditional knowledge systems require the conduct of traditional activities for the maintenance and transfer of knowledge. This aspect continues to present a challenge for Parks Canada, where the cessation of traditional activities often represents a barrier to the retention and use of traditional knowledge. Within the changes in corporate culture, working with Aboriginal peoples is now seen as a means of forging stronger relationships and facilitating re-connection to traditionally used lands and activities and contributing to management decision-making.

Parks Canada has many examples of cooperative work with traditional knowledge holders, such as studies on northern Ellesmere Island related to people, caribou, and muskoxen (Manseau and Mouland 2009) or the on-going research in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve on bivalves as part of a traditional harvest study. Another example is the five-year Inuit Knowledge Project (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit) involving three national parks in Nunavut (Figure 3). With the vastness and remoteness of the northern territory and the lack of existing baseline data, ecological monitoring in northern Canada presents distinctive challenges. One way to overcome this barrier is to encourage Inuit to share their ATK pertaining to their natural and cultural environments. Its primary goal is to increase knowledge of the

**Figure 3.** Inuit Elder Qapik and Kataisee Attagutsiak, Inuktitut language specialist, Winnipeg Service Centre, Parks Canada.



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parks while allowing Parks Canada to gain a better appreciation and understanding of Inuit knowledge. Elders, students, hunters, and trappers as well as Parks Canada staff take part in this project. Inuit knowledge working groups help guide the project and create an environment of sharing and cooperation that has not only strengthened the level of understanding about the natural environment and cultural landscape but has also solidified long-term relationships.

**Cooperative management structures.** Cooperative management with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples has become a common practice within Parks Canada. At present, there are eighteen formal cooperative management agreements (with several others under development), twelve formal cooperative structures, and numerous other project-specific or informal cooperative arrangements in place across the system.

The choice of the word "cooperative" is deliberate insofar as the authority of the minister to make final decisions, and his or her responsibilities to Parliament, remain unfettered. More specifically, bodies created under these legislative tools are advisory in nature.

Cooperative management can take many forms. In the Parks Canada context, it is best described as a spectrum of decision-making influences. Cooperative bodies range from informal structures that provide *ad hoc* advice to those that are established through formal agreements such as park establishment agreements. The actual structure of the various types of cooperative bodies also varies greatly and is highly dependent upon the legal, political, or policy context under which they were established. Although there is no common structure in terms of membership, frequency of meeting, or roles and responsibilities, common elements and themes include:

- Ensuring equal Aboriginal and government representation;
- Providing advice to the minister on cultural matters and other issues of importance to the Aboriginal partners; and
- Providing input into park, site, or national marine conservation area management plans.

Meetings operate on a consensus basis and do not generally meet standards for formal consultation.

An example of an agreement that truly exhibits the importance of meeting the interests of both parties is the Canada–Haida Agreement 1993, which lays the foundation for the Archipelago Management Board (AMB). Through that agreement, the parameters for the involvement of the Council of the Haida Nation in the planning, management, and operation of the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site are established. The agreement itself is structured in such a way that there is an acknowledgment that both parties agree to disagree over the ownership of the land. Notwithstanding this disagreement, there are a number of areas where the two parties agree to cooperate. These include:

- Maintaining and making use of the archipelago so as to leave it unimpaired for the benefit, education, and enjoyment of future generations;
- Sustaining the continuity of Haida culture within the protected area;

- Ensuring that no extraction or harvesting by anyone of the resources of the lands and non-tidal waters of the archipelago is done for or in support of commercial enterprise; and
- Establishing a management board for sharing and cooperating on planning, operations, and management.

In addition to the "agree to disagree" aspects of this agreement, two of the distinguishing features are the structure and operation of the cooperative management body, the AMB. It has a simple structure of four representatives, two from the Council of the Haida Nation, one of whom is a co-chair, and two from Parks Canada, with the park superintendent acting as the other co-chair. In this example, every management decision affecting the planning and operation of the park is deliberated on by the AMB, and if consensus is not reached, the decision is put aside until an agreement can be reached. The AMB meets on a regular basis.

This cooperative management arrangement has been very effective and has withstood the test of time. A dispute resolution mechanism is built into the agreement, but since the agreement came into effect in 1993 the process has never been triggered. The fact that a similar agreement was reached in January 2010 between Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation for the management, planning, and operation of a proposed national marine conservation area in the waters surrounding the national park is a testament to the success that has been enjoyed by both the federal and the First Nation governments.

## Conclusion

Parks Canada has come a long way over the past 30 years in terms of working in a positive and respectful manner with Aboriginal peoples. This change has been driven in part by legal precedents, but more importantly by the desire of Parks Canada and Aboriginal peoples to work together toward common goals. Our system of national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas will only grow with the support of Aboriginal peoples, and a significant portion of the existing national park land base is in place due to their strong cooperation, support, and contribution.

However, we also recognize that there are still issues such as outstanding land claims, consultation and accommodation requirements, and treaty recognition that are often beyond the scope of Parks Canada's mandate. Despite these challenges, the organization has strong corporate direction that not only encourages but also supports building and maintaining relationships with Aboriginal peoples.

This has marked Parks Canada as a leader with respect to cooperative management and innovative working relationship approaches in Canada. The development and operation of management agreements have been a valuable learning experience for both the agency and our Aboriginal partners. Most noteworthy is the fact that, despite sometimes differing views, we have found a way to develop a common vision and to work together for the protection of special places that can allow both parties to meet their interests.

The Parks Canada Agency is looking forward to the next 125 years. We believe that if we keep to the two paths one direction course, together we will protect our natural and cultural heritage for the next seven generations.

# Endnotes

- 1. "The *Two Row Wampum treaty*, also known as *Guswhenta* or *Kaswehnta*, is an agreement made between representatives of the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and representatives of the Dutch government in 1613 in what is now upstate New York. The pattern of the belt consists of two rows of purple wampum beads against a background of white beads. The purple beads signify the courses of two vessels—a Haudenosaunee canoe and a European ship—traveling down the river of life together, parallel but never touching. The three white stripes denote peace and friendship. This wampum records the meaning of the agreement, which declared peaceful coexistence between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch settlers in the area" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guswhenta\_(Two\_Row\_Wampum\_Treaty).
- 2. There are two types of land claims: comprehensive claims, which deal with Aboriginal land rights that have not been dealt with in past treaties or through other legal means, and specific claims, which deal with past grievances of First Nations related to Canada's obligations under historical treaties or the way it managed First Nations' funds or other assets.
- 3. "The Supreme Court of Canada has adapted these ... law concepts to the context of Crown-Aboriginal relations. In the 1950s, the Court observed that the *Indian Act* 'embodie[d] the accepted view that these aborigines are ... wards of the state, whose care and welfare are a political trust of the highest obligation.... [T]he honour of the Crown is at stake in dealings with aboriginal peoples. The special trust relationship and the responsibility of the government vis-à-vis aboriginals must be the first consideration in determining whether the [infringing] legislation or action in question can be justified" (Hurley 2002).

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