

Mobilizing Support for Canada's National Treasures

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Canada's treasured and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

— *Parks Canada vision statement*

Introduction

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF PROTECTED AREAS is highly dependent upon public support from the citizens of the country entrusted with these special places. As relevance and sustainability are interconnected, Parks Canada is increasingly focused towards ensuring that its conservation efforts are relevant to Canadians. Parks Canada's mandate is to protect and present significant examples of nature and history on behalf of Canadians. However, it must not only do it *for* Canadians, it is committed to doing it *with them* and in ways that are *defined by* them. Parks Canada has strong evidence that we will achieve greater success in protecting, expanding, and effectively managing the national parks, national marine conservation areas, and national historic sites systems for present and future generations if its approach and actions are aligned with Canadians' values, beliefs, and interests.

To successfully fulfill its mandate, Parks Canada acknowledges that it must effectively mobilize more and more Canadians to share the passion and commitment for the conservation of Canada's national treasures (Figure 1).

The purpose of this paper is to provide context and illustrate Parks Canada's current approach to conservation, and its efforts to mobilize Canadians.

Parks Canada context for conservation

On behalf of Canadians, Parks Canada establishes, protects, and maintains a comprehensive network of protected heritage areas representative of Canada's natural and cultural heritage. To deliver on this commitment, system models were developed to provide a framework for the identification, establishment, and management of natural ecosystems and commemoration of historically significant treasures.

The vision behind the national parks system

The framework that has driven the expansion and evolution of Canada's system of national

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Figure 1. Discovering the treasures of Canada at Fundy National Park.

parcs and national marine conservation areas has evolved over the last 125 years. Its focus has evolved from lands in the Rocky Mountains that would protect specific wonders such as the mineral hot springs and help draw tourists along a new national railway, to parks dedicated to conservation of wildlife such as wood buffalo, to parks that were dedicated to protecting large tracts of northern wilderness as part of comprehensive land claim agreements.

Adopted in the early 1970s as the methodology to guide the federal government's direction to create 40 to 60 new national parks, the framework is aimed at creating a representative system that includes examples of Canada's 39 distinct natural regions, dispersed across the country, where living examples of the rich diversity of landscapes, flora, and fauna are protected for all time, unimpaired, for present and future generations. The framework ensures that federal investments benefit a range of rural communities and protect lands of importance to Aboriginal people, whom have supported its expansion through negotiated agreements and land claim settlements.

The system of national parks and national marine conservation areas

National parks are situated in each of Canada's 10 provinces and three territories. To date, Canada possesses 42 national parks and national park reserves that protect over 301,000 square kilometers while representing 28 of the 39 natural regions identified by Parks Canada. Three national marine conservation areas and marine parks protect 11,358 square kilometers, while representing 3 of the 29 marine regions. In addition, another 68,000 square kilometers of land has been reserved for potential future national parks through interim land withdrawals.

On the national parks side, the larger national parks are found in northern Canada and in the Rocky Mountains. On the other hand, through the prairies and settled lands of southern Ontario and Quebec and Atlantic Canada, there are fewer and smaller national parks.

Current plans are to create more national parks, with a priority on the East Arm of Great Slave Lake (NWT), northern Bathurst Island (Nunavut), and Nááts'ihch'oh, which is the headwaters of the South Nahanni River (NWT), all in northern Canada. In addition, Parks Canada continues to work with provincial governments to bring the Mealy Mountains (Labrador), Manitoba Lowlands (Manitoba), and the South Okanagan–Lower Similkameen (British Columbia) into the system. There are eleven gaps in the national park system, and the proposals listed above will fill a larger number of them. From a representation point of view, the big gap will remain in the province of Quebec, where four natural regions remain unrepresented by national parks—and long-standing provincial policy precludes the transfer of lands to the federal government for national park purposes. Also, few national parks are found in close proximity to urban and accessible places, such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg.

Perhaps the largest gap in Parks Canada's system is in the marine environment. While 15 national parks have a marine component, and 20 have a shoreline, 26 of 29 marine regions remain unrepresented. There are plans to create three additional national marine conservation areas. The situation reflects, in part, the fact that the first national marine park, Fathom Five (Figure 2), was created in 1986, over a century after the first national park, Banff. However, recent progress is being made in expanding Parks Canada's marine system. On January 16, 2010, Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Haida Nation signed the Gwaii Haanas Marine Agreement to share in the planning, operations, and management of Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, a 3,500-square-kilometer marine area situated off the Hecate Strait and the Queen Charlotte Islands, located in British Columbia. And on June 7, 2010, the government of Canada tabled in Parliament an amendment to Canada's National Marine Conservation Areas Act to formally establish the national marine conservation area and Haida heritage site.

Parks Canada is monitoring ecological integrity and actively managing these places to maintain or restore healthy ecosystems and the species (including species at risk) and habitats they support, with the active engagement of stakeholders and partners mobilized to work collectively to enhance connectivity across landscapes and seascapes. These collective actions to achieve a common goal will help ensure Canada's ecosystems and communities are resilient and able to adapt to change.

The vision behind the national historic sites system

Canadians take great pride in the people, places, and events that shape our history and have defined important aspects of Canada's diverse but common heritage and identity. Since 1919, the government of Canada has designated 949 sites, 633 persons, and 407 events as being of national historic significance. Together, they comprise what is known as the system of national historic sites.

National historic sites may be sacred places, battlefields, archaeological sites, structures, or districts, and they are located in more than 400 communities across Canada. The federal



Figure 2. Fathom Five National Marine Park, the oldest marine protected area under the stewardship of Parks Canada.

government's objective is to ensure that the system reflects the country's evolving history and heritage. The system uses a thematic framework that organizes history into five broad themes: "peopling the land," "developing economies," "governing Canada," "building social and community life," and "expressing intellectual and cultural life." As history, and what Canadians view as significant, is a dynamic process, the national historic sites system cannot be considered as finite or complete. In recent years, Parks Canada has placed special efforts to support the commemoration of the historic achievements of under-represented groups,

including Canada's Aboriginal peoples, women, and ethnocultural communities. The government of Canada is committed to working with others to create a representative system—one that truly reflects the rich history and heritage that defines Canada.

Canada's national historic sites are diverse in ownership and management. Many are still used for their original purpose; these places are an integral part of who we are as Canadians, not simply what we were. The large majority of Canada's 949 national historic sites are owned and administered by others, including all levels of government, Aboriginal groups, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, individuals, and other federal departments.

Parks Canada's national historic sites portfolio

Parks Canada has direct responsibility for 167 national historic sites and is entrusted with the stewardship of these places, on behalf of all Canadians. Parks Canada's portfolio of sites includes places such as Fortress of Louisbourg in Cape Breton, the world-renowned Fortifications of Quebec, the unique historical complex of Gold Rush-era buildings in Dawson City, and Rideau Canal—a World Heritage site. The most recent site to join Parks Canada's portfolio is Saoyú-7ehdacho, landscape of cultural and spiritual importance to the Déline First Nation in the Northwest Territories, and the first northern national historic site cooperatively managed by Parks Canada and an Aboriginal group.

The 167 sites in Parks Canada's portfolio do not fully represent the breadth of our country's history, nor does they include some of the places associated with its key defining moments. Parks Canada's current portfolio has been assembled over many decades largely through periodic transfers of heritage properties from other federal departments, such as historic military installations no longer needed for defence purposes, or historic canals. There has never been a strategy governing the composition of the agency's portfolio of national historic sites or a plan for the acquisition of new sites.

The urgency to act

Parks Canada is working to bridge the gaps to present fully representative systems, and the imperative to act now is stronger than ever. Our heritage areas are facing threats that are greatly magnified in both scale and speed of impact by climate change, urban development, and changing Canadian values.

Completing the national parks system—Diminishing opportunities. The urgent need to act to protect representative examples of large landscapes within the national park system has been well documented, as lands and waters continue to be allocated to industrial and urban development. In addition, if opportunities to build collaborative relationships with Aboriginal people during negotiation of, or as the result of, settled land claims are not acted upon, future opportunities may not come to pass. The process of establishing new protected areas is more challenging, costly, and lengthy than ever before.

Historic heritage—A non-renewable resource. Research shows that in the last generation Canada lost 20% of its historic buildings, mainly due to urban core development and loss of rural landscape to suburban development. In addition, the same study concluded that 14.3% of remaining buildings in urban areas and 21% in rural areas were at risk (Heritage Canada Foundation 2001). Adding to the pressures on built heritage is the diminishing his-

torical consciousness among Canadians. Many social and political commentators believe that this leads to a lack of a common memory and national identity. Such a growing “history deficit” among Canadians not only puts pressure on our built heritage but directly impacts Parks Canada’s ability to mobilize Canadians to support conservation.

Conservation benefits for Canadians. Seizing the opportunities to establish new parks and sites presents significant benefits for Canadians. Additional parks and sites help ensure that important natural and cultural resources are protected for the social and economic benefit of Canadians. Large national parks protect Earth’s biological diversity and allow natural processes to continue uninterrupted. They enhance Canadians’ quality of life and contribute to community resilience through the diversification of economic opportunities; the sustainable use of natural resources for subsistence, community development, industry, or innovation; the on-going provision of ecosystems services; and the establishment of collaborative processes that help build social resilience. National historic sites preserve and celebrate significant events and places in our collective history and help all Canadians share a common understanding of our country. The expenditures made by Parks Canada and by visitors have a significant impact on the Canadian economy. Each year, the combined expenditures by Parks Canada and visitors indirectly support over 30,000 tourism-related jobs in the national economy. Unless Parks Canada clearly presents the full range of benefits from protected areas to Canadians in its call to action, it risks not only reducing the chances of new protected areas being created, but even seeing lower support for maintaining existing ones.

Mobilizing Canadians to support conservation—The challenges we face

Parks Canada is continually seeking new and innovative ways to meaningfully engage Canadians. To mobilize support, Parks Canada has been working to get a better sense of Canadians’ views and how they would like to contribute and get involved in safeguarding Canada’s collective heritage.

Challenge: Relevance of our current national parks model in the context of a changing Canada. The current model for Canadian national parks retains some long-standing historical attributes, but has also evolved to embrace new approaches that reflect changing societal priorities. While the Canadian federal government continues to prohibit industrial development and to exercise administration and control over the surface and sub-surface of the lands and waters that constitute a national park, approaches that defined national park establishment programs in the early and mid-part of the 20th century, such as expropriation, no longer exist. Today, the approach is willing seller–willing buyer.

The model has also evolved to incorporate changing perspectives and realities related to the role of government vis-à-vis local communities, land owners, Aboriginal people, and traditional ways of life. The only acceptable model involves Aboriginal people in cooperative relationship during the establishment and management of new national parks (Figure 3). Aboriginal communities now view national parks as important means to protect the lands that they have used for centuries to maintain their spiritual connections and their traditional way of life.

One of the greatest challenges is the adaptability of the model to southern Canada, where land is increasingly fragmented, expensive to acquire, and where the environment is



Figure 3. Working together with Aboriginal peoples, Prince Edward Island National Park.

extremely complex. The current approach responds to international obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity. It has helped direct efforts to bring the first national parks in Labrador into the national park system and federal investments and conservation of Aboriginal homelands to northern communities, to promote internationally and nationally the iconic landscapes of Gwaii Haanas, Nahanni, and Gros Morne, and to bring forward national park proposals in the South Okanagan and Manitoba Lowlands. Large northern landscapes are now protected, much as the Rocky Mountain national parks protected large landscapes in advance of development more than 100 years ago.

At the same time, this model has led some to conclude that a system that is supposed to bring benefits to Canadians has not responded in several ways:

- There are just a few small national parks in southern and near urban areas, limiting Parks Canada's access to large and diverse populations;
- Future plans would suggest that Parks Canada will continue to focus most of its efforts and federal investments in northern areas, where access is far more difficult and increasingly expensive in comparison to southern areas; and
- A number of proposals by individual Canadians and organizations for new parks to be added are not being pursued because such parks would be located in regions already represented by a national park or due to their being in a state that does not conform to the standard model.

Nonetheless, Parks Canada is well positioned, through strategic partnerships, coopera-

tive arrangements, and other collaborative efforts to work with Canadians in more fragmented southern landscapes to build resilience to change through conservation efforts that focus on restoration and reconnection of ecosystems, habitats, landscapes, and seascapes.

Challenge: Ensuring the relevance of Parks Canada's national historic sites portfolio. To remain relevant, Parks Canada needs to protect examples of history that connect Canadians to their country's essence and, most importantly, resonate with Canadians from all parts of the country and all backgrounds. These national treasures must be representative of a quickly changing, multicultural, and urban Canada, while speaking to the hearts and minds of Canadians. The analysis of Parks Canada's current portfolio of national historic sites points towards significant gaps in representation. Thematically, over two-thirds of the agency's sites fall within the themes of "governing Canada" and "developing economies." Within Parks Canada's portfolio, there is only one national historic site commemorating women's history and only three commemorating the history of ethnocultural communities. Additionally, most of Parks Canada's national historic sites are associated with 18th- and 19th-century history; very few speak to aspects of 20th-century history. These gaps dramatically limit the opportunities for historic sites to bridge experiences across generations.

The gaps in representation that currently exist may point to some of the reasons for low awareness, waning visitation, and declining relevance. With changing demographics, the national historic sites system needs to be relevant to all Canadians. Reaching and engaging urban Canadians poses a special challenge for Parks Canada, given that it does not operate national historic sites in several large urban centers.

In response to the above challenges, Parks Canada is currently examining how it can renew the national historic sites program in order to effectively engage Canadians in their heritage and to mobilize their on-going support. But to be truly relevant, it is essential to recognize the stories and places they believe are the most important. These views should inform the selection of historic places held in trust for them by the federal government.

Challenge: Canadians' level of awareness and understanding of Parks Canada. For Canadians to support Parks Canada's conservation efforts, they need to be aware of and understand the agency's role and the benefits protected heritage areas provide to our country. According to Parks Canada's 2009 *National Survey of Canadians*, 8 out of 10 (78%) indicated that they had heard of Parks Canada, but only 1 in 4 (24%) could name Parks Canada as the organization responsible for national parks and national historic sites (Parks Canada 2009a; 2009b). In addition, Canadians' perception of Parks Canada's mandate is dominated by park-related responsibilities. Knowledge that Parks Canada manages historic sites is quite low (5%) compared with recognition that Parks Canada manages national parks (63%) (Parks Canada 2009a). Similarly, those surveyed had very little awareness of Parks Canada's responsibilities related to national marine conservation areas.

An additional challenge to enhancing Canadians' support for protection of their national treasures lies with improving their understanding of these places' significance. While it is recognized that some places have been established for other reasons, the underlying thread that connects the system of national parks is that they represent important examples of Canada's geography and ecology, and the underlying thread for national historic sites is that they represent important events, people, and places in Canada's history. In Parks Canada's

2009 *National Survey of Canadians*, only 1 in 5 (21%) were knowledgeable about the reasons national parks are created, and only 1 in 3 (32%) were knowledgeable about the reasons for historic sites (Parks Canada 2009a). In both cases, the majority of those surveyed felt that establishment of parks and historic sites were primarily instigated by an impending threat of loss due to human activity.

Not only do Canadians have a low level of knowledge of the reasons why their protected places are established, but also have difficulty distinguishing Parks Canada's administered places from those operated by other levels of government (Parks Canada 2007; 2009a). For example, of those that visited national parks and historic sites in the past three years, 51% correctly named a Parks Canada national park and only 25% correctly identified one of Parks Canada's national historic sites. These results clearly highlight a significant challenge for Parks Canada, and in an effort to address it, in 2009 Parks Canada launched a national media awareness campaign that focused on special moments in national parks and national historic sites. This campaign featured television ads on major national networks, as well as on-line material.

Challenge: Canadians' perceptions and support towards our conservation efforts.

Despite low public awareness of Parks Canada, and low understanding of our roles and responsibilities, Canadians do support and place value in the concept of a protected system of parks and sites (Parks Canada 2009a). Canadians strongly agree that national parks (85%) and national historic sites (85%) are meant to be enjoyed by future generations as much as by people today. Even if they cannot personally visit these places, the majority consider it important that national parks (76%) and national historic sites (70%) exist, and for many of them, national parks (72%) and national historic sites (66%) evoke a strong sense of pride.

Support is strongly linked to connection to place. For Parks Canada to mobilize support of Canadians, it needs to understand why these places are special to them. The most recent national survey showed that approximately 1 in 3 Canadians (31%) had a favorite national park and approximately 1 in 10 (11%) had a favorite national historic site (Parks Canada 2009), for reasons as varied as Canadians themselves. For some, it is the natural beauty of the environment, and the serenity that comes with being close to nature, that makes these places special (Figure 4). For others, it is their significance and the deeper meaning of the place. And for many others, it is the people Canadians experience these places with and the fond memories of their shared experiences that have left a lasting impression on them (Parks Canada 2009a).

In the current economic context, while Canadians value their national treasures, they are more likely to strongly support the use of their tax dollars to maintain the existing national parks (71%) and national historic sites (57%), rather than create new national parks (47%) and acquire new national historic sites (34%) (Parks Canada 2009a). Such results are consistent with their lack of understanding as to why these places are established. Knowing this, Parks Canada needs to strengthen people's connection to these protected places, and mobilize Canadians to support them.

Conclusion

To mobilize a greater number of Canadians to support its conservation efforts, Parks Canada



Figure 4. Experiencing the beauty of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.

has increasingly been working in collaboration with a broad range of partners and stakeholders. The recent expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve was realized in collaboration with the Dehcho First Nation and benefited from strong public support motivated by a high-profile public campaign led by stakeholders. Parks Canada's reintroduction of the black-footed ferret into its native habitat in Grasslands National Park (Figure 5) was an international collaborative conservation effort, supported by outreach education programs at the Toronto, Calgary, and Saskatoon zoos, raising awareness of conservation among urban youth.

On the cultural side, Parks Canada recently revitalized its National Historic Sites Cost-Sharing Program, an important vehicle by which the federal government directly engages Canadians in supporting the protection and presentation of national historic sites administered by others.

To better increase public support, Parks Canada is expanding its public outreach education efforts through a variety of innovative approaches. Parks Canada is enthusiastically adopting technology and social media to keep pace with our changing times and meet the needs of Canadians. A YouTube channel was created in 2009, where Canadians are posting multimedia creations of their experiences of heritage places online. Microblogging on Parks Canada's Twitter channel is constantly on the rise. Using hand-held devices, GPS, and multimedia capabilities, visitors can be simultaneously guided and educated as they explore parts of historic sites such as Signal Hill National Historic Site (Newfoundland) or natural places such as Kejimikujik National Park (Nova Scotia). Connecting remote parks and historic sites with classrooms in real time, for a memorable learning experience, has become reality for students and educators. Reaching out to Canadians in their living rooms to increase their awareness of place is facilitated by access to diverse, rich-broadcast HDTV



Figure 5. Blacked-footed ferret reintroduced in Grasslands National Park.

series available on general television and specialized channels. Parks Canada recently launched the My Parks Pass program, providing free entry for 400,000 Grade 8 students, and engages Canada's youth in filming and sharing their experience of Canada's national treasures on-line through the Canada's Greatest Summer Job videography project.

To truly mobilize Canadians from diverse backgrounds and all walks of life, more needs to be done—the conservation of Parks Canada's special places needs to be linked with the values and aspirations of Canadians. This connection to hearts and minds is essential for the agency to remain relevant and to build that strong connection that is crucial to long-term sustainability of Canada's treasured places.

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