



Planning for the Future: Completion of the Plan Elk Island National Park of Canada



Credit: Kathy Korner

Management Planning Newsletter #3

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Introduction

After two stages of planning and consultation, the management plan for Elk Island National Park is completed and has been submitted for approval. This newsletter informs you:

- What Parks Canada heard in the second and final stage of consultation to update the Elk Island National Park management plan;
- How this public input helped shape the management plan;
- What the final step is to approving the plan; and
- How to obtain a copy of the plan once approved.

The Planning Process – Status Report

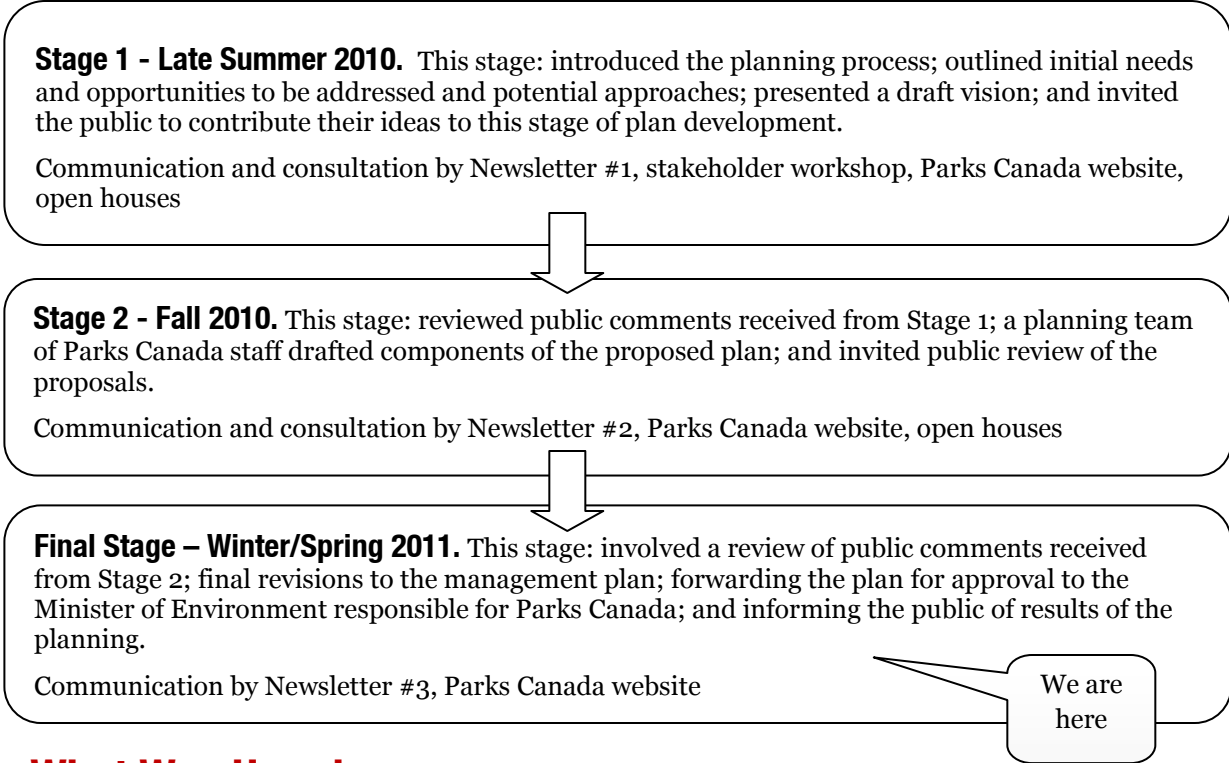
Since the beginning of this process back in August 2010, Parks Canada has made involvement of partners, stakeholders, neighbouring Aboriginal groups, and the interested public a part of the Elk Island National Park management planning.

From December 13, 2010, to January 20, 2011, the second and final stage of consultation was held to gather views on the draft Elk Island management plan. This draft was prepared in October and November. It was then made available on the Elks Island National Park website, through mail and e-mail, at public open houses in Lamont and Edmonton, and at a park staff open house. Through comment forms, written submissions, and people's attendance at open houses, Parks Canada received input on the draft plan from more than sixty individuals and organizations.



*Lamont Open House,
January 12, 2011 (Parks Canada)*





What Was Heard

All input received was considered by the planning team and influenced the final management plan. The following summary is organized by the sections of the plan; comments on ecological integrity relate to the overall plan.

Comments	How Comments Influenced the Plan / Other Changes to the Plan
Ecological Integrity	
<p>A number of comments, including those from Alberta Wilderness Association, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Northern Alberta, and Sierra Club – Edmonton Group, were that ecological integrity is not prominent nor the principal focus in the draft plan, referring to the <i>Canada National Parks Act</i>.</p>	<p>All four key strategies include more recognition of the challenges and Parks Canada’s responsibilities for maintaining and restoring park ecological integrity. The plan directs that Parks Canada consider fully the ecological integrity, species at risk and cultural resources of the park when planning, designing and providing visitor facilities, services and programs.</p>
Park Vision Statement	
<p>Comments specific to the vision were generally in support of it. A few noted that it represents a good balance of priorities; some commented positively on the conservation education role of the park and its continued place in the Beaver Hills Initiative.</p>	<p>The vision has no major changes.</p>

Key Strategies

Welcoming Visitors and Canadians: Concern was expressed that ecological integrity and biodiversity of the park would be impaired by increasing visitation. Several disagreed with the two percent annual visitor increase target. Some commented favourably on the intent to improve accessibility for Canadians who would not typically visit a nature-based park. A few suggested that other commercial and public places in the Beaver Hills should provide recreational opportunities and accommodations viewed as not appropriate to Elk Island National Park (i.e., fixed roof accommodations).

Inviting Participation for Enjoyment, Learning and Advocacy: Most comments about this strategy expressed agreement with the outcomes and actions. Support was expressed for the advisory process.

Several suggested using the challenges of maintaining ecological integrity in the face of major development pressures around the park as a focus for education programming.

Visitor number targets for each national park and historic site are set each year according to Parks Canada Agency direction. More visits reflects the Agency's direction to be relevant and connected to Canadians by seeking out their own experience in their national parks. The continued success of Elk Island as a protected heritage area is reliant on Canadians who are aware of, understand and support its significance. Increasing visitor use will be accommodated in the Astotin Lake Area and in promoting visitor activities in shoulder seasons.

The plan identifies that the park will encourage partnering opportunities to develop a range of new and enhanced visitor experience opportunities for the greater Beaver Hills ecosystem that includes the park. Fixed roof accommodation is not planned for Elk Island.

The Elk Island Parkway is important part of the visitor experience. More learning opportunities will be provided along the parkway, Bison Loop Road and trails.

A park advisory process will be established within one year of the management plan's approval.

This strategy is about using the park as a living classroom on conservation, stewardship, and the ecological integrity of the Beaver Hills ecosystem. This would include the challenges facing conservation and ecological integrity.



Edmonton Open House, January 13, 2011 (Parks Canada)

Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in

Conservation: For the most part, comments were generally positive as to the outcomes and actions for this strategy. Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-Northern Alberta recommended that that the strategy be split in two, one focussed on “Showcasing Leadership in Conservation” and the other on “Managing for Ecological Integrity”. Such an approach would allow for greater discussion and focus on the five ecological indicators used for reporting on the state of the park.

The Alberta Wilderness Association noted that the plan gives no indication of how the effects of climate change will be mitigated.



*Lamont Open House, January 12, 2011
(Parks Canada)*

Beyond the Fence: Working with Others in Support of Ecological Integrity and

Sustainability: Responses generally agreed with the strategy, its outcomes and actions.

One objective has been restated as “The park landscape, representative of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region, is preserved by ensuring that the key ecological processes of this landscape are maintained or restored and the park has the means to identify and report on the health of the park ecosystem”.

Targets for vegetation cover and ungulate numbers are being reset and refined in terms of ecological processes and drivers to understand better park ecological integrity.

New actions have been identified, as follows:

- 1) develop an overarching vegetation management strategy that considers fire, herbivory, flooding and other ecological processes to achieve vegetation targets;
- 2) continually identify ecological and cultural knowledge gaps and investigate opportunities to gather information and address these gaps;
- 3) maintain ungulate populations at target levels and continue to implement measures to achieve them;
- 4) implement the ecological monitoring plan and revise as protocols are tested and refined.

Mitigating impacts in the park from climate change is not a direction in this plan. The park will adapt management and operations where possible, notably in response to hydrology and water levels (for example, strategic trail placement in relation to lake levels).

With advice from the archaeologist for the park, the plan has additional direction on management of the cultural resources.

No major changes are made to this strategy.

Area Management Approaches

Welcome Area: All comments were in agreement with the proposals, including use of the heritage horse barn for interpretation.

No major changes are made.

Astotin Lake Area: Some responses were specific ideas to improve visitor opportunities (e.g., Saturday night communal bonfire, shade near the beach). Comments on the golf course ranged from closing to expanding it.

The golf course will continue as a nine-hole golf course.

Area South of the Yellowhead Highway: The proposal to maintain this area for backcountry experience and managing the wood bison recovery herd was highly supported. One respondent did not agree with connecting the wood bison trail with the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area.

No major changes are made; opportunities to connect the trail systems will be explored.

Partnering & Public Engagement, Administration & Operation, Environmental Stewardship, and Zoning

The few comments for these sections were overall positive.

No major changes are made.

What Happens Next

This newsletter brings consultation for the management plan development to a close. The Field Unit Superintendent has recommended the management plan to Parks Canada's Chief Executive Officer who, in turn, will recommend it for approval by the Minister of Environment responsible for Parks Canada. Once the plan is approved by the Minister and tabled in Parliament, copies of the plan will be available from the park office at Elk Island National Park and on the Parks Canada website.

Parks Canada thanks all who participated in the management planning program for Elk Island National Park, and looks forward to working with its partners and interested Canadians in implementing the new management plan.

If you would like to have a copy of the management plan when approved, and/or stay informed on its implementation, please let us know by mailing, e-mailing or phoning the Partnering, Engagement and Communications Officer at:

Elk Island National Park of Canada
Site R.R.#1, Fort Saskatchewan, AB T8L 2N7

Phone: (780) 992-2964
E-mail : maureen.shenher@pc.gc.ca

Let us know if you would like a print copy of the plan or PDF, and in which language (English or French).

Aussi disponible en français