



Vuntut National Park of Canada

FIVE-YEAR MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATE



Vuntut Gwitchin Government

NEWSLETTER #1
NOVEMBER 2009



NORTH YUKON
Renewable Resource Council



*Jeffrey Peter and Lydia Thomas at Upper Black
Fox Creek, Vuntut National Park*

© VGFN/Shirleen Smith

INTRODUCTION

This newsletter launches the review of the 2004 Vuntut National Park (VNP) management plan. Every national park in Canada has a management plan that provides long-term strategic direction for the park. The five-year review provides an opportunity to gauge progress on plan implementation and update the plan where necessary.

Building on the 2004 management plan, this review will ensure the updated plan meets new national management planning guidelines that focus on integrated delivery of the Parks Canada mandate, i.e., heritage resource protection, visitor experience opportunities and public outreach education. The new planning guidelines will mean a different look to the management plan, which will include a strengthened park vision, and key strategies to help achieve the vision.

There are a few challenges to deal with over the next five years, e.g., the decline of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and because the park is still quite young, some of the tasks ahead are baseline work for the park, e.g., producing a cultural resource management strategy.

The planning team has representatives from Parks Canada (PC), the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council (NYRRC) and the Vuntut Gwitchin Government (VGG).



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada

Canada

THE REVIEW PROCESS

The plan review has three main stages. The review will happen relatively quickly as there is a national requirement that it be completed by March 2010.

We invite your ideas, concerns and comments as we review and update the management plan.



© Parks Canada/Ian McDonald

WE ARE HERE

STAGE 1

Fall 2009, the current stage, introduces the plan review process, outlines initial thinking about the issues that need addressing and potential approaches, presents a draft vision, and invites the public to identify additional issues and concerns and help shape the draft vision.

STAGE 2

Early winter 2009/10 includes reviewing public comments received, conducting meetings, and drafting proposals to update the management plan. These drafts will then be presented for public review through a newsletter and public open houses.

STAGE 3

Late winter 2009/10 to early spring 2010 incorporates public input on the proposals and involves the drafting of the updated management plan. After final review the management plan will be submitted to the federal Minister of Environment for approval.



Interpreter Dorothy Frost welcomes visitors to the John Tizya Centre

© Parks Canada/Kate Alexander

The Grand Opening of the John Tizya Centre, on July 15, 2008, was the culmination of a major collaborative project between Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin Government, with Government of Yukon involvement. The John Tizya Centre has become a vibrant focal point for visitors and the community of Old Crow; it also houses VGG and PC offices. Open year-round, the centre's exhibits, audio-visual programs, and VGG Heritage Department programs are engaging and interactive. The exhibits, which focus on Vuntut National Park, Ni'iinlii' Njik (Fishing Branch) Protected Area, Living Culture and Vadzaih (caribou) were developed cooperatively. A traditional place-name wall map of the entire Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory and a 3D topographic map model of VNP and the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area assist visitors in better understanding the region.



© Parks Canada/Ian McDonald

REVIEW OF THE 2004 MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Wasn't a management plan review for the park just completed?

Five years goes by quickly and it is time to take stock. The 2004 management plan contained 56 key actions. Progress has been made on many key actions: some are complete, some are ongoing and others are no longer relevant. Eighty percent of the actions identified in the plan have been initiated. Here are some highlights of the work that has been done in the park and surrounding area since 2004:

-
- ✓ Ecological monitoring program revised with community input and approved by National Office in 2008
 - ✓ A multi-year global interdisciplinary study occurring in Van Tat (Old Crow Flats) as part of the International Polar Year program
 - ✓ First State of the Park Report released, 2009
 - ✓ Detailed field recording of five caribou fences
 - ✓ Ongoing collaboration of Parks Canada and VGG in preparing a nomination to commemorate the First Nation's long relationship with the Porcupine Caribou and the related landscape as a national historic site
 - ✓ Collaborative development and opening of the John Tizya Centre in Old Crow
 - ✓ Wilderness Declaration for 75% of the park, the area north of Van Tat (Old Crow Flats) in March, 2009
 - ✓ Completion of VGG Oral History Project and continuation of the ongoing VGG Cultural Technology Project (led by VGG)
 - ✓ Involvement in the North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan (led by the Land Use Planning Commission)
 - ✓ Involvement in the the Old Crow Flats Van Tat K'atr'anahitii Special Management Area Plan (led by VGG and Government of Yukon)
 - ✓ Continuing Parks Canada staff representation on the Porcupine Caribou Management Board and harvest management plan working group
 - ✓ Three year agreement signed between Parks Canada and Air North, to jointly promote visitor experience opportunities in the Yukon
 - ✓ Increased collaboration with the Government of Yukon on tourism initiatives
 - ✓ Increase in youth programming: development of edu-kits for use in Old Crow school, a science activity kit for use at youth camps; plus an on-line Grade 10-12 caribou case study
 - ✓ Youth science camps in 2006, 2008, and 2009 coordinated by VGG with involvement by Parks Canada staff
 - ✓ Annual VNP Community Meetings in Old Crow hosted by Parks Canada
 - ✓ Creation of two posters in 2007: ecological monitoring in VNP; wolverine and weasels in the Old Crow Flats
 - ✓ Helping coordinate VGG's "Big Caribou Days", an annual celebration of the Porcupine Caribou Herd with traditional games and caribou related activities



Caribou calf on overflow ice
© Parks Canada/Ian McDonald

PARK VISION

A park vision is meant to convey the special character of Vuntut National Park and paint an inspiring picture of the future desired state of the park over the next 15 to 20 years. The planning team reviewed the vision in the 2004 management plan and came up with elements for a revised vision. A draft vision for the new management plan is presented below, also. We invite your input and ideas towards an integrated and profound vision.

Vision Elements

Experiencing Vuntut Gwitchin Country – Vuntut Gwitchin share their culture with Canadians; VG guides take visitors on the land.

Living and Teaching a Traditional Lifestyle – youth and Elders share teachings out on the land; passing on traditions.

Caribou, Way of Life – the Porcupine Caribou Herd remains a vital life force, renewing the landscape, park and people.

Resilient Land – supports the people; the land and water are healthy.

Leaders in Cooperative Management – better decision making through traditional knowledge and science; VG traditional land management; strong, respectful partnerships.

Cultural Resources are valued, monitored and protected; the caribou fences are formally commemorated.

Palaeontology Comes Alive – Beringian fossils are appreciated, protected, monitored and presented.

A Place of Collaborative Research, where university and government scientists work together to inform park management.

John Tizya Centre, a Place of Traditional and Contemporary Teaching – a vibrant gathering place, helping visitors and the community appreciate the VG culture and territory.

The Park Contributes to a Thriving Community – through local employment, guiding opportunities, hunting and trapping by VG citizens; tourism businesses thrive in Old Crow.



Learning traditional harvesting with Jeffrey Peter
© Parks Canada/Leila Sumi

Draft Park Vision Statement

Vuntut National Park, the heart and soul of the Vuntut Gwitchin, is a dynamic and diverse landscape that has existed in harmony with the land and animals for thousands of years. Vuntut is the keeper of the Gwitchin, and the Gwitchin are the keepers of its values. It is a place where a strong, progressive Vuntut Gwitchin culture is shared with those who come to visit and explore this wondrous land.

Vuntut National Park staff and the Vuntut Gwitchin understand the responsibility and honour that comes with being stewards of this land. Together, scientists and traditional knowledge experts strive to retain the priceless information the park has to offer. With this knowledge comes the ability and understanding required to care for the land. The Elders learn from the land, share their values, and pass on their skills, with the hope that the youth of today will pass it down to the grandchildren of tomorrow, a successful system that has survived for thousands of years.

To witness the persistent Porcupine Caribou Herd traversing their ancient routes to and from the calving grounds; to observe the powerful grizzly hunting and foraging for food to sustain them through a long winter sleep; to hear the ‘swoosh’ of the geese as they fly by, or the thousands of waterfowl in the Old Crow Flats; to experience the thrill of seeing mammoth teeth or other fossils eroding from the banks of the river in these Beringian lands, a refuge from the glacial, barren landscape of the last ice age; or to realize the amazing engineering efforts of the Vuntut Gwitchin when you study the massive caribou fences and corrals – is to reach the very essence of the park.

Take off your heavy boots, throw on some mukluks and snowshoe under a veil of northern lights. Jump into a canoe and paddle toward the horizon under the seemingly never-ending midnight sun. Let your ears strain and your eyes squint to fully sense the wonders of the park. Pull yourself from the chaos of civilization and savour the sights, smells and sounds of a natural haven.



Community members at Black Fox Creek caribou fence, VNP.

© Parks Canada/Jeffrey Peter

Do you see yourself in this vision?

We would also like to add some images to make the vision more powerful. Do you have any suggestions?

ISSUES AND PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED DURING THE REVIEW

While much of the 2004 plan remains valid, this review will address key issues facing the park, as well as continuing baseline work required for this relatively new park. Please review the list and provide us with your additions or comments.

Decline of the Porcupine Caribou Herd

The protection of the Porcupine Caribou and their habitat was one of the reasons for creating VNP. The last accurate census occurred in 2001, when the population was estimated at 123,000 animals. In 2008, models estimated the population had declined to below 100,000. The decline is of utmost concern to the Vuntut Gwitchin whose lifestyle is closely tied to the health of the herd. Parks Canada is one of several government agencies and First Nations concerned about the population loss. In the Vuntut NP State of the Park Report (2009) the Herd's condition was rated as red (poor) and declining. During the life of the next plan, PC, with others, will determine, and then implement, actions that can realistically be taken to assist with the recovery of the herd.

Building on the Success of the John Tizya Centre

Already a focal point for the community of Old Crow, the Centre has increased Parks Canada's profile in the community. PC and VGG jointly fund a receptionist/interpreter position. The interpreter provides guided tours of the exhibits and coordinates "Little Caribou Days," a summer youth program. VGG offers adult programming such as snowshoe and basket making. The next five years provide an opportunity to further define the role of the Centre within the community and for visitors to Old Crow.

Low Visitation

Very few visitors have travelled to Vuntut National Park. Its remote location, high cost of access and undeveloped visitor opportunities are all factors. Efforts have been made to find suitable landing areas for fixed-wing aircraft in the park, to date

unsuccessful. The 2004 management plan sets out parameters for commercially-guided park visitors, e.g., being allowed to travel on a snowmachine to a base camp, but not between camps. The plan review



© Parks Canada/Ian McDonald

will reconsider these guidelines, as well as continuing to explore ways to improve visitor access and opportunities.

More Fully Incorporating Traditional Knowledge into Park Management

Both traditional and scientific knowledge are used for assessing the condition of the park. VGG's Oral History, Cultural Geography and Cultural Technology projects assist in the recording, compilation and use of traditional knowledge. Next steps are needed to more fully incorporate this wealth of knowledge into the ecological monitoring program and management actions in the park.

Cultural Resource Management

The cultural resources of Vuntut National Park encompass the rich history of human occupation and activity from as early as 12,000 years ago or earlier. Much effort has gone into the intensive recording and documentation of five of the seven caribou fences in the park, with the involvement of the VGG, Old Crow community members and the Yukon government. Significant oral history work has been undertaken by VGG, partially supported by Parks Canada, to articulate the values of the fences. A comprehensive cultural resource strategy for the park is still needed, however.

Part of Beringia, the Old Crow Basin is one of the richest sources of Pleistocene fossils in the world. In VNP, three locations along the Crow River have produced a myriad of fossils. The Yukon government currently catalogues and curates the park's fossils as PC has no palaeontologists on staff. More could be done to highlight these important resources.

Ecological Integrity (EI) Monitoring

Ecological monitoring allows PC to report on the ecological condition of the park over time, and to track how management actions lead to improvements in EI. As VNP is a recently established park, in many cases baseline data is lacking. A cooperatively-developed monitoring plan was approved by Parks Canada in March 2008, with revised measures and an emphasis on data collected inside the park. A priority over the next five years is the continued development of the park's EI monitoring program and further integration of traditional knowledge in the program. It is hoped that the monitoring program will continue to incorporate selected programs initiated by International Polar Year in 2007.

Declining Salmon Populations

It is a high priority for the VGG to learn more about salmon populations in VNP. Chinook salmon are declining in the Yukon and further south, and chum salmon populations are also unstable. Radio

tracking has shown Chinook to be at the northern limit of their range in VNP, and that an established run returns to the Crow River watershed. While Parks Canada's current priority is to complete the EI monitoring program for the park (including measuring aquatic health), PC is interested in exploring options to assist VGG and others in investigating this population.



*Vuntut National Park Bear Program at Old Crow School
© Parks Canada/Jeffrey Peter*

Being Relevant to the Local Community and Canadians Across the Country

Youth in Old Crow are reached via VNP school programs and through PC involvement in science and culture camps. Several educational resource kits facilitate these programs. Parks Canada's annual community meetings and newsletters help keep Old Crow informed about the park. PC will continue to work to engage the community. Parks Canada's VNP website informs national audiences. Schools across Canada are offered new web-based senior secondary lesson plans about the Porcupine Caribou Herd. However, a March 2009 survey found that only 7% of Yukon residents were aware of VNP. Discussions during the plan review will explore ways of increasing the park's relevance to regional and national audiences.

Key Strategies



© Parks Canada/Ian McDonald

Key strategies describe an integrated, focused approach of how the park will be managed in the coming years. Four draft strategies follow, which try to achieve the park vision while addressing the park's issues and priorities. Comments are welcome.

ONE: EXPERIENCING VUNTUT GWITCHIN COUNTRY

This key strategy focuses on three main areas where PC and VGG will work in close cooperation: development of tourism capacity in Old Crow to work towards a range of visitor experiences in the park; strengthening learning experiences at the John Tizya Centre; and defining and implementing an outreach education program for local residents and targeted Canadian audiences.

The planning process will explore how to assist VGG build tourism capacity, in order to increase regional tourism, improve the local economy, and ultimately support a range of visitor experience opportunities in VNP. The John Tizya Centre has already become a focal point for both visitors and community members. In the next plan cycle, PC and VGG will work together to develop a wider range of programming for these audiences. Through development of an outreach plan, PC staff will continue to connect with the Old Crow community and especially its youth, for example through school programs and participation in camps and community events. Discussions during the plan review will explore ways of increasing relevance to regional and national audiences. The Parks Canada website enables “virtual visits” to the park where Canadians learn key natural and cultural messages. On-line curriculum-linked resources about VNP

allow teachers to deliver these messages to students from across Canada. Marketing activities, such as PC's partnership with Air North, will further improve public awareness of the park.

TWO: LOOKING AFTER THE LAND AND ANIMALS FOR THE FUTURE

The main objective of this strategy is to maintain a healthy, resilient park for future generations, incorporating traditional knowledge and working collaboratively with others.

VNP is a relatively young park and as a result some baseline information is lacking. Development and implementation of additional protocols will assist in the completion of the EI monitoring program. The continuation of established relationships (e.g., VGG, NYRRC, Environment Yukon, Canadian Wildlife Service, and IPY) are integral to achieving this objective. This strategy emphasizes the need for management decisions to be based on the best available traditional knowledge and scientific research. Some of the many factors that affect the health of the park's natural resources lie outside park boundaries. Coordinated efforts to assist in the recovery of the Porcupine Caribou Herd further illustrate the need for integrated decision-making within the regional ecosystem. This strategy also seeks to foster a culture of stewardship through educating audiences about changes occurring on the

land and the effects of the changes on the Vuntut Gwitchin.

THREE: LIVING AND TEACHING A TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE

The main objective of this strategy is supporting the continuance of a strong traditional Vuntut Gwitchin lifestyle, with Elders passing teachings to youth in the community and out on the land.

VNP is located within the major cultural and subsistence area of the Vuntut Gwitchin. The park was established in part to protect this area and its associated cultural and subsistence uses. The continuance of VG presence on the land is important for understanding changes that are occurring on the land and providing guidance for park management. The VGG has conducted intensive culture-related research projects on the land since 1995. While the majority of this strategy will be led by VGG, PC support for this strategy is fundamental for the management of the park. This key strategy will seek ways to actively support opportunities for Old Crow residents, in particular youth and Elders, to spend time on the land, to facilitate the sharing of knowledge. A range of approaches will be explored with VGG and NYRRC such as: experiential learning with staff, Elders, youth and/or researchers on the land; involvement in EI monitoring; and assistance with guide training. This key strategy will ensure that Vuntut Gwitchin rights within the park are supported. It ties in with the other key strategies, e.g., by linking traditional activities with guiding, and by building on the Vuntut Gwitchin's understanding of the health of the park based on generations of observations.

FOUR: YOUR PAST SHAPES YOUR FUTURE

The main objective of this strategy is to honour the enduring human presence in the ecosystem, by protecting and presenting the cultural resources of VNP. It also addresses the wealth of Pleistocene fossils in the park.

Cultural resources found in Vuntut are both tangible – such as caribou fences and seasonal campsites – and intangible, such as traditional place names and oral history. There are 127 formally recorded cultural sites in the park. Some actions that will be considered in this strategy are: development of a cultural resource management strategy; reassessing the condition of sites originally located in the 1970s and '80s; continuing to pursue commemoration of the caribou fences as a national historic site, and developing school programming based on the fences.

Outreach programming about the park's fossils and about Beringia could be developed, to make palaeontology come alive. This, and other work related to the park's palaeontological resources will be done in cooperation with VGG and YG. The new Arctic Research Facility being built in Old Crow will improve VGG's ability to work with fossils, and may enable displays in the John Tizya Centre.

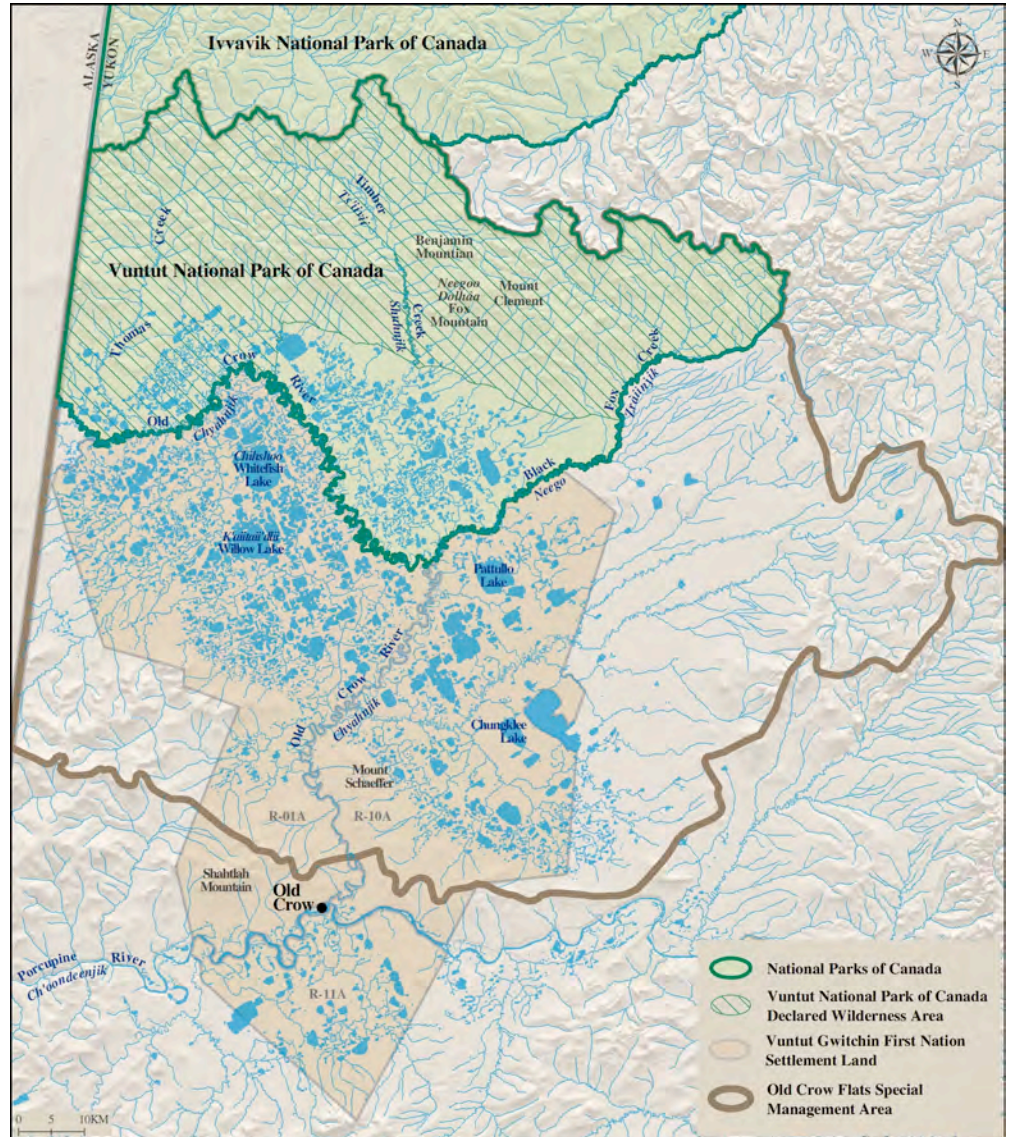


Vuntut National Park – Regional Setting

How Do I Get Involved?

This newsletter outlines the planning team's current thinking about the issues and future direction for the management of Vuntut National Park. We are looking for your comments and suggestions. Do you agree with the suggestions about what needs updating in the management plan? Does the draft vision evoke a future you support? Are there additional issues that should be considered during the review? Do you have any other comments or suggestions concerning Vuntut National Park?

Map of Vuntut National Park of Canada showing the Declared Wilderness Area, VGFN Settlement Lands and the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area



PLEASE SEND COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS TO:

Rhonda Markel — A/Planner

Parks Canada

Suite 205 - 300 Main Street

Whitehorse, Yukon

Y1A 2B5

Email : Rhonda.Markel@pc.gc.ca

Phone: (867) 667-3915

Fax: (867) 393-6701

Please send comments by:

January 10, 2010

You can review the 2004 management plan at:

<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/yt/vuntut/plan.aspx>

or call the Parks Canada Whitehorse office

(867)-667-3910 for a copy.

Aussi disponible en français