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# ***Alternative Energy and Communications Infrastructure in Declared Wilderness Areas***

Background: Mountain National Parks

## ***A Need for Change***

Management plans need to provide clear direction on the types of alternative energy and communications infrastructure that will be allowed in declared wilderness areas in the mountain national parks.

## **Background**

- Some licensees, including the Alpine Club of Canada and Skoki Lodge, have proposed the development of alternative energy and communications infrastructure in designated wilderness areas.
- The Minister may not authorise any activity in a declared wilderness that is likely to impair its character. The Minister may authorise activities that support park administration, public safety, and “the provision of basic user facilities including trails and rudimentary campsites.” (*National Parks Act*)
- Wilderness areas “require few, if any, rudimentary services and facilities.” (*Parks Canada Policy*)
- In declared wilderness areas “the public will have a high degree of assurance that development and use inconsistent with wilderness character will not occur.” (*Parks Canada’s Guide to Management Planning, 2008*)

## ***Existing Management Plan Direction***

Existing management plans contain no specific direction about infrastructure for communications or alternative energy in the backcountry. Most plans prohibit expansion of backcountry facilities and allow for minor improvements that yield environmental benefits.

## ***Considerations***

- Some alternative energy proposals could have long-term environmental benefits, including less consumption of firewood and fossil fuels and a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- The noise and visual impact associated with wind generators and cell towers could disturb visitors.
- Proposals for communications infrastructure may or may not be directly linked to the operation of backcountry facilities.
- New infrastructure may detract from the heritage character of backcountry facilities such as national historic sites or federal heritage buildings.

## ***Future Directions***

*Parks Canada welcomes public comments on the following proposed direction for the revised management plan.*

- Develop clear and consistent policies on the location of communication and alternative energy infrastructure in the backcountry.
- Ensure improvements preserve the wilderness environment and the experience of visitors.
- Avoid any increase in the development footprint in wilderness areas.

**Questions**

1. What conditions could make wind generators, solar panels, or micro-hydro energy systems appropriate technologies for use in backcountry wilderness areas?
2. How would alternative energy infrastructure or the availability of electricity at backcountry facilities affect your wilderness experience?
3. Under what conditions, if at all, would you support new communication infrastructure, such as cell towers or satellite dishes, in wilderness areas?