



**Study of the perceptions, attitudes,  
behaviours and knowledge of La Mauricie  
National Park visitors concerning wolves**

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Summary

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Ce rapport sommaire est aussi disponible en français à l'adresse : <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tpsgc/por-ef/index.html> sous Parcs Canada.

## **REALIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The realization of a study on the wolf such as the one carried out in 2006 with La Mauricie National Park of Canada visitors entails the participation of many people. The individuals mentioned below greatly contributed to the present study through their dedication to and involvement with the national park and its protection and presentation mandate, as well as through the importance they attach to the park's visitors.

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**SOM inc.**, database, weighting, analysis and report

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2006, the Marketing and Program Business Service, Parks Canada, Quebec, conducted a study on the attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of La Mauricie National Park visitors concerning wolves at the park and in the Mauricie region. This study is part of a vast three-year project (2005-2008) aimed at improving the communications and educational components pertaining to the Eastern Wolf's interpretation and conservation, and which are intended for the following target audiences: visitors, school groups, trappers, hunters and residents of the park's region.

The project also aims to provide useful and Eastern Wolf management-relevant information pertaining to the social aspects of these audiences (including current visitors), namely their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours concerning the Eastern Wolf.

Another goal of the project is to cultivate, as far as possible, a standard approach that could be easily incorporated into other similar projects.

The population targeted by this study consists of persons aged 16 and over who visited La Mauricie National Park of Canada on one or more occasions between June 23 and September 5, 2006.

During this period, a total of 406 face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of visitors randomly selected throughout the park's various sites<sup>1</sup>. The response rate was 78.5%.

To ensure a representative sample, a weighting was applied based on the response rate, provenance, the type of group, the number of over-nights, the places visited at La Mauricie National Park and the duration of the stay.

Given the weighting and the design effect, the maximum margin of error for proportions near 50% is 6.6% at the 95% confidence level.

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Selected sites: Shewenegan picnic area parking lot; Mékinac Trail; Wapizagonke North Zone parking lot; Lac Écarté; Lac-Édouard parking lot; Lac Soumire; Rivière-à-la-Pêche parking lot; Lac du Fou; St-Jean-des-Piles reception kiosk; Lac Bouchard; St-Mathieu reception kiosk; Mistagance campground; Lac-du-Caribou; Wapizagonke campground; Chute Waber; Les Falaises Trail; the Lookout; Vieux-Brulis Trail.

## **SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

### **Experience with and feelings about the wolves**

*The visitors have come into contact with the wolves a number of times (having either seen or heard them). They have a positive attitude toward the wolves, but a good proportion of them either don't like or are afraid of the wolves. Thus, for certain visitors fear or negative feelings toward the wolves is a fact.*

- ✓ 40% of visitors say they have previously heard a wolf in the wild, while 12% claimed they had seen one.
- ✓ The majority (62%) of LMNP visitors have positive feelings toward the wolves. However, some of them (14%) express negative feelings, ranging from "I slightly dislike them" to "I strongly dislike them".
- ✓ A not insignificant portion of visitors (30%) say they would be afraid to walk in a forest where there are wolves.
- ✓ Moreover, among the visitors who say they have previously encountered a wolf in the wild (i.e., about 1 out of 10), 17% say they have been afraid or felt uneasy.

### **Sources of information about the wolves**

*Many visitors are uninformed about the wolf*

- ✓ On the whole, the proportion of visitors who have never had, seen or received information about the wolf, i.e., 40%, is fairly significant.
- ✓ Moreover, television is the main source of information through which visitors gain general knowledge about the wolf (32%).
- ✓ Also, two thirds (66%) of visitors have never received information from Parks Canada about the Eastern Wolf.
- ✓ The brochure on this topic (16%) and the orange poster about the wolf (13%) are the main Parks Canada sources of information with which the visitors have come into contact.

### **Factual knowledge about the wolves**

*This lack of information no doubt partly explains why the visitors rarely answer the factual questions correctly and why the answers they provide sometimes vary significantly.*

- ✓ Two thirds (66%) of visitors think there is more than one type of wolf in Quebec. They distinguish them mainly on the basis of colour (49%), size (32%), region of habitat (17%) and coat (13%).
- ✓ One visitor out of ten (10%) think that the wolf is more dangerous than the bear, while more than half (54%) believe otherwise.
- ✓ The vast majority of visitors (86%) believe that a pack of wolves could kill a wild prey one out of ten times or more.

- ✓ Opinions concerning the number of humans killed by a wolf over the last century are extremely varied; roughly a third of the visitors (31%) answer between 0 and 2.
- ✓ Visitors do tolerably well on the “true or false” questions they are asked:
  - The Eastern Wolf is considered to be species at risk in Canada: 76% correct answers (true);
  - Wolf attacks on people are more frequent in regions where wolves live in proximity to humans: 57% correct answers (false);
  - The area of LMNP is not large enough to assure the subsistence for wolves who currently frequent the park: 35% correct answers (true);
  - In general, wolves in Mauricie region feed on small games, primarily beavers: 26% correct answers (true).

### **Perceptions concerning the number of wolves in the Mauricie region**

*This lack of information also explains why visitors have different perceptions concerning the number of wolves in the Mauricie region, particularly in LMNP*

- ✓ The great majority of visitors (70%) estimate the average number of wolves in a pack, in the Mauricie region, at between 5 and 10.
- ✓ Nearly two thirds (64%) of visitors estimate the number of wolf packs in LMNP at between 1 and 5.
- ✓ Visitors' perceptions concerning the number of wolves in the Mauricie region are extremely varied. Roughly one visitor out of ten (12%) estimate it at between 180 and 280.
- ✓ Four visitors out of ten (41%) estimate the number of wolves in LMNP at between 5 and 25.
- ✓ Nearly half the visitors (48%) believe that the number of wolves in the Mauricie region has gone down over the past three years.
- ✓ Nearly half of them (49%) believe that the number of wolves in LMNP has remained stable over the past three years.

### **Perceptions concerning the protection of the wolf in the Mauricie region**

*Visitors are aware that human activity has a negative impact on the wolves*

- ✓ The main factors visitors cite spontaneously as having a negative impact on the wolves are deforestation (20%), fewer wolf habitats (19%), hunting, trapping and poaching (19%) and human activity in general (19%).
- ✓ When listed successively, logging (85%), trapping (66%) and urban development (63%) are the principal human activities seen as having a negative impact on the wolves.

*The great majority of visitors agree that it is important to maintain or protect wolf populations in the Mauricie region, although far less than the majority say they would like to see number of wolves increase.*

- ✓ 87% of visitors agree that it is important to maintain wolf populations in the Mauricie region for the benefit of future generations.

- ✓ 85% of visitors agree that the Eastern Wolf occupies an important place in LMNP's ecosystem.
- ✓ 83% of visitors agree it is important for the Mauricie region to have wolves, whether they have ever seen a wolf or not.
- ✓ 77% of visitors agree that wolves in the Mauricie region should be fully protected.
- ✓ Nearly all visitors (92%) consider it important that Parks Canada continue its efforts to protect LMNP's wolf population.
- ✓ Yet only slightly more than half the visitors (57%) agree that the number of wolves in the Mauricie region should be increased, while half of them (50%) believe there are too few of them.
- ✓ In addition, more than half the visitors (57%) believe that the current number of wolves in LMNP (two packs of six to eight wolves) is acceptable.
- ✓ A little over half (55%) agree that the number of wolves in LMNP should be increased, while a little less than half (46%) believe there are too few of them.

## **CONCLUSION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION**

Through this study, Parks Canada has given itself the mandate to gain better knowledge of the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of park visitors concerning the wolf, with a view to improving the communications and educational components intended for them. With regard to this objective, it is relevant to emphasize the following points:

- ✓ Upon being intercepted, relatively few visitors have obtained information from Parks Canada about the Eastern Wolf. Can this information be made more accessible?
- ✓ A portion of the visitors have negative feelings about the wolf and/or say they would be afraid to walk in a forest where there are wolves. Can we modify communications and/or educational components in such way as to provide more reassurance to these visitors?
- ✓ Visitors' beliefs and perceptions concerning the wolf are far from reality. Can we modify communications and/or educational components in such way as to provide basic information promptly?
- ✓ Visitors are aware that the Eastern Wolf is an endangered species and support conservation measures aimed at maintaining and protecting wolf populations. However, they are less inclined to support measures to increase the number of wolves. Could we better inform visitors about their precarious situation and explain why Parks Canada seeks to ensure the conservation of the park's Eastern Wolf?

Visitors' perceptions and attitudes concerning wolves can be changed over the long term. By pursuing these communication and educational initiatives, La Mauricie National Park will meet the objectives it has set itself.