



SUMMARY REPORT

Jasper National Park of Canada Annual Public Forum

Jasper: November 15, 2011

Edmonton: November 17, 2011

Background

Every year, Parks Canada employees meet with Canadians in Jasper and Edmonton to discuss implementation of the management plan for Jasper National Park. The Annual Public Forum for Jasper National Park provides Parks Canada with an opportunity to report on progress made over the past year and allows Canadians to offer feedback on park initiatives and future priorities.



Jasper National Park Superintendent, Greg Fenton, discusses some of the noteworthy projects and events of 2011.

Forum Proceedings

Edmonton

An open house at the University of Alberta, hosted by both Elk Island and Jasper National Parks, attracted over 100 people. Stephen Fleming, Superintendent of Elk Island National Park, presented his vision for a volunteer program in Elk Island National Park. Greg Fenton, Superintendent of Jasper National Park, reviewed major accomplishments in 2011, such as the designation of the park as a Dark Sky Preserve and the restoration of the Maligne Lake Chalet. Their presentations were followed by a question and answer session. Topics addressed included:

- Mechanisms for feedback in between park forums
- Establishing thresholds for park visitation (ecological and social)
- Reductions in Resource Conservation funding, increases in Internal Services funding and the financial outlook for Parks Canada
- General approach to development at Marmot Basin
- Opportunities for public comment on the Brewster Glacier Discovery Walk proposal
- Update on new recreational activities
- Examples of Parks Canada's partners in Jasper National Park
- Role of Elk Island National Park in bison reintroduction



Jasper

Approximately 30 people attended the Annual Public Forum in Jasper. The Forum began with group discussion sessions on four different topics. Two rounds of discussions were held, which allowed participants to participate in two out of four topics.

Three topics were determined in advance by Parks Canada: new recreational activities, strengthening Aboriginal relationships and the Jasper Ambassadors program. The topic of the fourth session was left open until the actual forum. Participants were asked to nominate a topic for discussion as they entered the room. Only one topic was suggested, Brewster Travel Canada's proposed Glacier Discovery Walk, which became the topic for the fourth session. The main points of each session are summarized starting on page three.

Following the discussion sessions, the Superintendent presented the Year in Review, which was followed by a question and answer session. Points raised during the question and answer session included:

- Jasper residents would like to receive more regular communications about major initiatives like the wildlife studies at Marmot Basin
- How can we obtain more information about the goat study at Marmot Basin?
- Concern about the use of invasive methods like collaring to study mountain goats, instead of non-invasive methods (e.g. scat collection and DNA sampling)
- Does Parks Canada require researchers to give public presentations about their research?

Update on Goat Study

The following update about the Marmot Basin Goat Study was provided at the Jasper forum:

The first field season of a three year study was completed in the fall of 2011. Four traps were set over the summer to capture goats for collaring. The objective was to collar 16 goats, however only four goats were successfully captured and collared (two billies and two nannies). The researcher now receives movement data from their collars by e-mail every three weeks. He will try to collar more goats next summer.



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Group Discussion Sessions

Topic 1: Strengthening Aboriginal Relationships

Parks Canada is working on two cultural initiatives with Aboriginal groups with historic connections to Jasper National Park:

- 1) The development of an Aboriginal reconciliation “pavilion” within the Jasper townsite that will tell the stories of their communities.
- 2) The development of a cultural use area, where Aboriginal people can practice ceremonies, carry out traditional activities and reconnect with the park.

Participants discussed three questions. Interest expressed during this session resulted in a follow-up workshop in January 2012 that explored Aboriginal interpretation and was well attended by many different Jasper businesses, non-profit organizations and institutions.

1. What are the benefits to the park and the community of engaging in these two initiatives with Aboriginal people?

- Responds to a need to hear stories from Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal youth need opportunities to learn more about their own culture and connection to traditional territories
- Local schools are actively seeking educational opportunities; teaches local children traditional perspectives
- Helps to fulfill Parks Canada’s educational mandate and complements Palisades educational model
- Traditional knowledge in the management of natural resources
- Offers unique learning opportunities for adults (e.g. New Canadians meet pre-Canadians!)
- Site users are traditional stewards of the land, which may mitigate environmental impact
- Fulfills commitments of Parks Canada (i.e. management plan)

2. What are the most significant challenges that will need to be addressed in the development of these two projects?

- Some Aboriginal communities believe an Aboriginal cultural centre/museum is needed, not just an outdoor gathering place
- Many different groups with many different expectations
- Sites may require site managers
- Cultural use area could be political, difficult to manage
- Licensing and permitting
- Park imposed limitations on experiential learning opportunities
- Balancing each group’s degree of preparedness to tell their own story
- Appropriateness of project—why not focus on transforming Moberly Homestead into a working homestead?



Topic 1: Strengthening Aboriginal Relationships

3. How might the Jasper community (e.g. schools, institutions, businesses) support these initiatives and expand on this work?

- Immersion in traditional, cultural experience recognized as very important
- Hands-on, experiential engagement preferred
- Presenting indigenous culture supports museum mandate
- Opportunity for National Aboriginal Day promotion and deeper community partnership; event is good for regional visitation, but there is room for growth
- Participants were sensitive to the difference between traditional reconnection and enhanced visitor experience
- Tourism industry can weave in an indigenous component for special events
- Host venues need to know what they are supporting; they need to be advised by Aboriginal partners how much groups are prepared to share
- Awareness required of which groups work amicably together and which do not
- Identification of key representatives—who speaks on their behalf?

For more information about this session, please contact: Sherrill Meropoulis, Aboriginal Liaison for Jasper National Park.

Topic 2: Jasper Ambassadors Program

This session, co-hosted by the Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce, looked at the newly-launched Jasper Ambassador Program. The program is a collaborative effort involving Tourism Jasper, the Jasper Adult Learning Council, Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce and Parks Canada. The program aims to: increase residents' ability to be good ambassadors both on and off the job, and recognize Jasperites who have made outstanding contributions to visitor service. Training sessions teach customer service techniques and offer an orientation to the town and park. A monthly recognition program culminates in an annual awards evening. A passport program that encourages employees of the hospitality industry to visit different attractions and areas of the park is also being developed.

Program organizers were seeking feedback on how to increase the participation of businesses and residents, both new and old, in the program. Participants in the group discussion were generally supportive of the program, but its cost (\$50) and length (a full-day) may be barriers to participation. Participants also liked the idea of a passport program, however it is more likely to be successful if it is free. More thought needs to go into how to get residents without their own transportation to different locations.

For more information about this session, please contact: Gloria Keyes-Brady, Interpretation Coordinator for Jasper National Park.



Topic 3: New Recreational Activities

Provisional guidelines for new recreational activities in Jasper National Park were released for public review at the forum. The guidelines cover four recreational activities: aerial adventure parks, non-motorized hang gliding and paragliding, traction kiting and mountain biking. The deadline for public comment on the guidelines was January 31, 2012. An overview of the provisional guidelines was provided to initiate the discussion.

The main points of discussion were:

- The process through which the guidelines were developed—first at the national level and then at the local level
- Reasons why some activities (e.g. downhill biking and stand-alone zip lines) were not approved nationally
- Reasons why some nationally-approved activities (e.g. via ferrata, canopy tours) are not being considered for Jasper National Park
- Concern that the guidelines signal a change in direction for Parks Canada. If an activity is not approved, is it prohibited? The guidelines place constraints on where some unstructured activities (activities that do not require any infrastructure), such as kite surfing, can occur.
- Potential environmental and social effects of individual activities (e.g. impacts to eagles and nesting birds associated with paragliding and hang gliding, visual impacts of paragliding and kiting)
- The zoning system and how it applies to specific activities, such as traction kiting.
- The process for considering commercial applications of these activities and commercial requirements.
- Information regarding specific activities (e.g. other areas outside the park where activities are currently happening, certification requirements for hang gliding and paragliding)
- Terminology (i.e. what is meant by *stand-alone zip line* and *aerial park*?)
- Liability issues, insurance requirements and visitor safety issues related to high-risk activities (e.g. search and rescue implications)
- Appeal of these activities to various groups of visitors and broader markets—should we focus on activities that appeal to a narrow group of visitors?
- Mechanisms for enforcing guidelines

For more information about this session, please contact: Pam Clark, Visitor Experience Manager, Jasper National Park.



Topic 4: Glacier Discovery Walk

This session focused on Brewster Travel Canada's proposal to build a walkway and viewing platform at the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint on the Icefields Parkway. Parks Canada was anticipating the release of the environmental assessment for the project for public review in the weeks following the forum. Dave McKenna, Vice-President, Attractions for Brewster Travel Canada participated actively in the discussion.

Points raised and discussed included:

- Brewster's reasons for considering the project, its appeal to visitors and its financial viability
- Alternatives to the projects (e.g. alternate locations like Wilcox Pass, offering something similar at Icefield Centre)
- Concerns about increased litter at the site and road congestion
- Parks Canada's reasons for considering the project and concern that this consideration signals a shift in Parks Canada's philosophy
- Parks Canada's financial stake in the project (i.e. proportion of revenue Parks Canada is likely to receive from the project) and potential for conflict of interest (Parks Canada has the authority to approve a project that it could benefit from financially)
- The manner in which the concept was first presented to Parks Canada
- The commercial nature of the attraction
- Questions about the design, such as the location of the amphitheatre
- Linking the project to the Tangle Falls area or Wilcox Pass trail (e.g. through a shuttle service)
- Other suggestions, such as installing a bike lane on the Icefields Parkway

For more information about this session, please contact: Shawn Cardiff, Manager of Planning & Policy for Jasper National Park.

Need More Information? Contact us by phone or e-mail.

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