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# Planning for Kootenay National Park's Future

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Public Input into  
the 2009-2010  
Kootenay National  
Park Management  
Plan Review

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June 2010

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## THE CONTEXT

### PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS

- By legislation, every national park must have a plan that guides management of the park for public enjoyment and appreciation in ways that leave it unimpaired for future generations. Each park management plan reflects Parks Canada's national direction and provides a park-specific 'road map' for delivering on the core elements of Parks Canada's mandate — visitor experience, public understanding and awareness, and heritage resource protection.
- Park management plans have a 15-year lifespan, with reviews at 5 year intervals.
- Each new and amended park management plan must be approved by the federal minister responsible for national parks and tabled in Parliament.

### PURPOSE OF THE PLAN REVIEW

- In 2009/10, the management plans for the seven mountain national parks (Banff, Glacier, Jasper, Kootenay, Mount Revelstoke, Waterton Lakes, and Yoho) were reviewed at the same time, as they have many common issues which often require co-ordinated responses. These parks are also enjoyed by many of the same visitors.
- Based on ongoing stakeholder dialogue and monitoring of key management indicators, Parks Canada determined that the strategies in the previous plans remained valid and their implementation should continue to be a priority. For that reason, updates to the plans include changes that:
  - integrate previous direction on ecological integrity with new content that identifies opportunities and direction for visitor experience and education;
  - reflect new corporate direction (e.g. new indicators and measures, recovery plans for Species At Risk);
  - incorporate new knowledge (e.g. revised grizzly bear mortality targets, psychographics of target audiences);
  - provide more clarity and context (e.g. common vision, direction for special events and potential new activities);
  - strengthen the existing area approach to achieve integrated delivery of Parks Canada's mandate and ensure that visitor experience, heritage resource protection and learning opportunities are mutually supportive; and



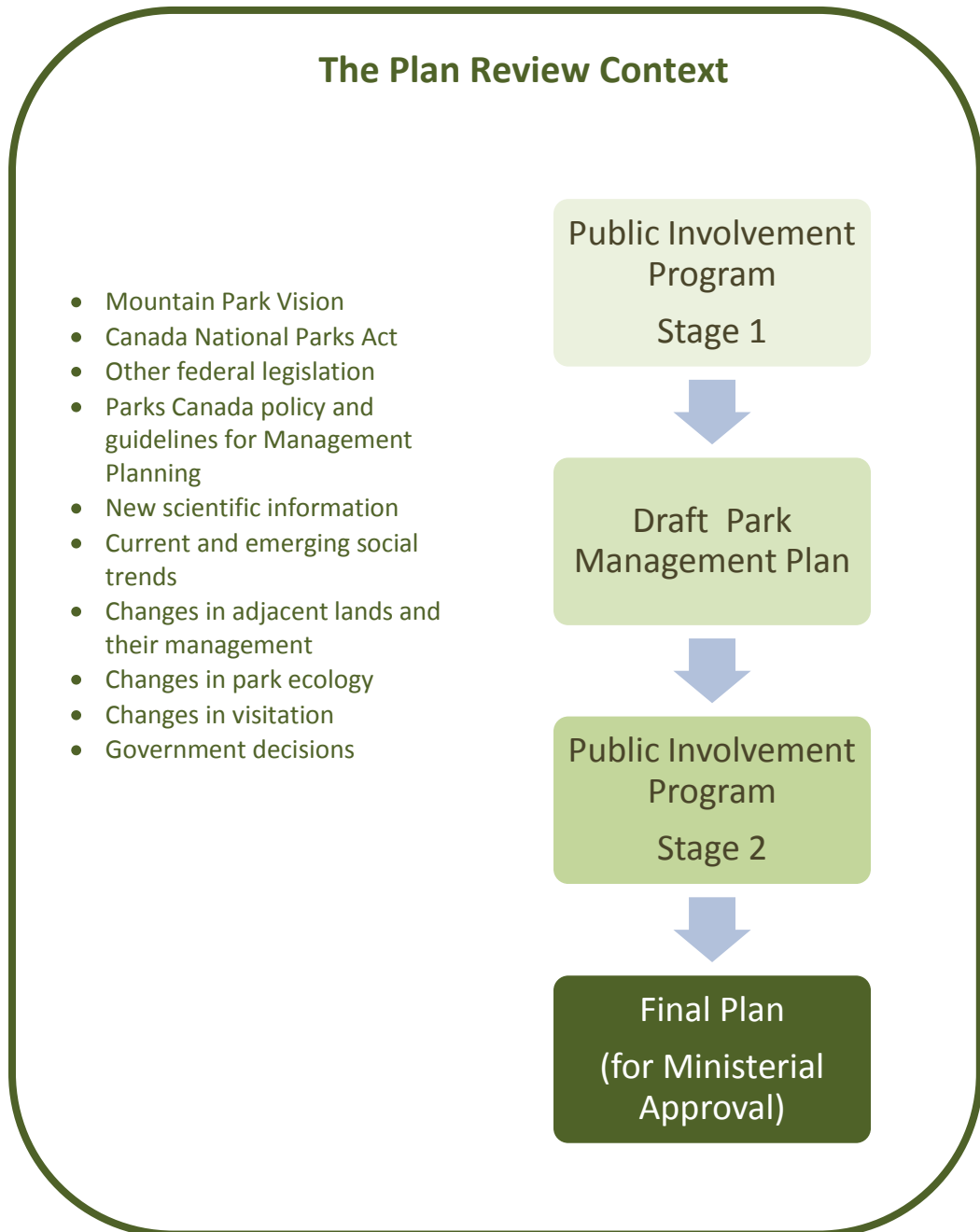
- reflect decisions that have been made or advice developed through other public participation processes since the previous plan reviews.

#### SHAPING THE PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS

- Ultimately the care, maintenance and future of all national parks rests in the hands of Canadians; consequently their views and values play a key role in shaping each park's management plan. Public perspectives were determined through a two-stage public participation and social research program.
- Stage 1 of the program consisted of reviewing all at-hand information about each park from a wide range of sources including: scientific research, State of the Park reports, marketing analysis and so on. Additionally, public input about possible plan amendments was gathered via online surveys, focus groups, planning forums, stakeholder meetings, correspondence from the public, and an interactive online website. All sources of information were then used to develop the draft plans, which were provided online.
- Stage 2 of the program focused on public review of, and comment on, the draft plans. A wide variety of methods were used to solicit this input including: meetings, workshops, open houses, letters and emails received from the public, and additional surveys. Particular effort was made in each park to reach all of the stakeholder groups with a declared or potential interest in the park's future and its management. This included First Nations groups.
- Along with public comments and social research, the final park management plans were also informed by:
  - The *Canada National Parks Act*, other relevant federal legislation, and Parks Canada policy,
  - new scientific information about natural resources,
  - information about current and emerging social trends,
  - social and environmental changes in adjacent lands and their management,
  - changes in the park ecology and visitation since the last review, and
  - government decisions.



## THE PLAN REVIEW PROCESS





## THE PUBLIC RESPONSE

### THE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARKS

- Public interest in the management plan review was strong, coming from across the country and across the world. By the end of the two-stage program comments from dozens of organizations and thousands of individuals had been read and considered by the planning team.
- This feedback led to a final plan that allows each park to fulfil its potential within Canada's system of protected areas, and continue to be a place where generations of Canadians can connect with each other and with the landscape.

### KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK

- This document summarizes the public participation response and public comment themes received during the management plan review for Kootenay and how these comments influenced the approved management plan.
- Stage 1 of the public participation program for the Kootenay Management Plan occurred from March – September 2009. Most of the input received was from Radium Hot Springs, the Columbia Valley and Bow Valley region, with a small percentage coming from further afield. Comments addressed roughly 30 topics.
- Stage 2 of the public participation program for the Kootenay Management Plan occurred from October 2009 – January 2010. Again, most of the feedback came from Radium Hot Springs, the Columbia Valley and the Bow Valley region.
- Comments addressed roughly 55 topics, with most frequent mention of topics within the following six categories:
  - Environmental protection, stewardship, targets and indicators;
  - Visitor experience, visitation quantity / quality, and target audiences;
  - New recreational activities and special events;
  - Cultural heritage;
  - Commercial development; and
  - Zoning and declared wilderness.



- Virtually every section of the plan was influenced by public comments, contributing to a plan that:
  - has a compelling, inclusive vision of Kootenay’s future within the national park system and the broader landscape;
  - captures the unique role and potential of Kootenay, and provides real strategies for fulfilling that role and potential;
  - truly integrates protection of heritage resources, with visitor experience, and public awareness and education; and
  - defines a clear path to success (with actions) and accountability for progress with clear indicators, measures and actions.

## WHAT WE HEARD

### WHAT WE HEARD:

#### ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, STEWARDSHIP, TARGETS AND INDICATORS ...

- Support for better articulation and integration of environmental protection as an over-riding principle throughout the plan, and for clear indicators for ecosystem restoration and maintenance that are linked to monitoring, reporting, and research.
- Concern regarding the potential effects on the park’s ecosystem of proposals for increased attendance and measures to enhance visitor experience.
- Support for efforts to reduce wildlife mortality on Highway 93 South and concurrent efforts to improve visitor experience.
- Support for ecosystem restoration activities such as at the Redstreak area, particularly efforts aimed at restoring fire to the landscape, and improving aquatic connectivity.
- Support for the protection of the wilderness character and undisturbed natural areas within the park.
- Support for stewardship objectives, with suggestions for: new educational or visitor experience products that focus on stewardship or science, such as a Bighorn sheep common room where knowledge of this iconic species can be shared with visitors; more active promotion of “leave no trace” program in public communications; and stronger leadership by Parks Canada with respect to environmental stewardship.
- Support for the restoration of previously-disturbed areas, such as depleted portions of the Snow Creek and Settlers Road gravel pits, with some



suggestion that Parks Canada could be more ambitious in its restoration efforts.

- Concern about the lack of references to climate change.

#### WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

- Clear references to the *Canada National Parks Act* including the direction that the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity shall be the first priority when considering all aspects of the management of the park.
- Integration of ecological protection measures into visitor experience planning and programs. For example, a comprehensive review of visitor opportunities and ecological issues along Highway 93 South will emphasize wildlife mortality and connectivity on the highway and, at the same time, the needs and expectations of visitors seeking various experiences.
- Continuity of key direction for restoring or maintaining ecological integrity from the previous plan, strengthened with new objectives and actions. Highlights include: continuing with the Redstreak restoration project using periodic, low-intensity burns to maintain open habitat, restoring connectivity of aquatic ecosystems; reducing the impact of park operations through the use of environmental technologies; and reducing wildlife mortality on Highway 93 South.
- The vast majority of the park will continue to be protected in a natural state as a declared wilderness area. For example, specific direction is provided in an area strategy for the Rockwall backcountry, which includes maintaining it as a backpacking wilderness destination.
- A revised performance management framework. The selected measures and indicators are consistent with those used to report on overall corporate performance of the Agency, as well as those that will be used in the next State of the Park Report.
- New direction to increase knowledge of the potential impacts of climate change, and to begin developing adaptation strategies.

#### WHAT WE HEARD:

##### ABOUT VISITOR EXPERIENCE, VISITATION QUANTITY / QUALITY, AND AUDIENCES ...

- Support for efforts to increase the relevance of national parks, for engaging drive-through traffic on Highway 93 South, and for efforts to improve the sense of arrival and welcome in the area of Radium Hot Springs.
- Suggestions that Parks Canada should target families, youth, residents from the Calgary region and the Columbia Valley, former park visitors and persons requiring barrier-free access.





- Support from many for the proposed 3% annual increase in park visitation, and queries from others regarding the rationale for the (3%) number.
- Concerns that more visitors may: stress the park environment both directly and indirectly, detract from the experience of those already visiting, and be difficult to reconcile with ecological objectives.
- Encouragement to focus efforts on updating and renewing existing infrastructure in order to enhance the visitor experiences, particularly on Highway 93 South. There was also support for the concept of clustering recreational opportunities at key staging areas such as the Marble Canyon/Paint Pots area and Vermilion Crossing. Many diverse suggestions for improving trails and trail opportunities, day use areas, road side information along Highway 93 South, campgrounds and paddling opportunities on the Kootenay River.
- Support for improving trail connections between the Village of Radium Hot Springs, the Radium Hot Springs pools and the Redstreak campground area.

#### WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

- Public awareness, understanding and support for national parks is critical to achieving Parks Canada's environmental goals. This awareness and support is most effectively achieved by encouraging Canadians to visit national parks and to form personal connections with them. The Canadian population is changing, with young urban Canadians and new Canadians representing growing segments of the population who may be less familiar with national parks than previous generations. The plan sets the stage for the introduction of new recreational activities in order to meet changing visitor expectations and attract a wider range of Canadians to the park.
- A targeted annual 3% increase in visitation for five years is in the plan, with particular emphasis on encouraging visits by residents of the Southern Interior, the Columbia Valley, the Bow Valley and Calgary. Efforts to attract new visitors will be targeted to key segments, such as youth, urban and new Canadians, and regular drive-through motorists. Promotional efforts will include educational messages aimed at fostering stewardship and enabling visitors to make informed decisions.
- The plan emphasizes opportunities for personal involvement (e.g. to assist with reducing wildlife mortality on Highway 93 South) and enhanced interpretation at places like the Paint Pots.
- A strong focus on Highway 93 South, and a commitment to the development of a detailed planning strategy for the Kootenay Corridor.
- Parks Canada will work to improve the sense of arrival and welcome to Kootenay including new and enhanced reception and orientation facilities in the Sinclair Canyon area and at the north entrance to Kootenay. A detailed



planning strategy for the Sinclair Canyon area will take an integrated approach, incorporating all aspects of the mandate.

- The plan also outlines 5 types of visitor experience and describes where and how these will be delivered, while keeping in mind the distinct characteristics and ecological imperatives of each area. New visitor and outreach programs will be developed accordingly.
- Specific strategies and actions to enhance visitor experience while reducing the potential for disturbance of sensitive ecosystems. Examples include enhanced 'view from the edge' experiences in the Marble Canyon/Paint Pots area as an introduction to the park and an invitation to explore further, and consideration of new recreational activities. It also contains direction to consider enhanced trail options in the Kootenay Valley and paddling opportunities on the Kootenay River, for both visitor experience and ecological benefits.

#### WHAT WE HEARD:

##### ABOUT NEW RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND SPECIAL EVENTS ...

- Support from many for the willingness to consider new activities and special events as a means of generating new visits and connecting with non-traditional audiences.
- General support for small or medium-sized events, and long-standing recreational activities that: are deemed consistent with the park's historical uses, protect the environment, do not detract from the experience of non-participants or other visitors, and enhance both visitor experience and learning.
- Concern about potential new activities with respect to their authenticity (for a national park), potential development requirements, impacts on the experience of non-participants, and potential (or lack of) to create meaningful, authentic park experiences.
- Support for improved access, opportunities and facilities for recreationalists engaging in currently approved activities (i.e. paddlers, trail riding groups and cyclists of all sorts) before considering new activities.

#### WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

- Clear direction setting the stage for exceptional experiences by offering a comprehensive range of opportunities based on five types of visitor experience. Considering the distinct characteristics and ecological imperatives of each area in the park (eg. Kootenay Corridor, Sinclair Canyon), the plan also contains descriptions of how and where these programs and products will be best delivered.



- Flexibility to consider the introduction of new recreational activities and special events to Kootenay National Park in order to respond to the changing demographics of Canada. Providing opportunities for Canadians to connect to their mountain heritage is fundamental to building support for the long-term protection of these special places.
- Proposals for events or recreational activities may originate from within Parks Canada or from an external proponent. New activities will first be assessed at a national level.
- Provisions for considering new activities and events that support all elements of the Parks Canada mandate and align with Parks Canada's brand and management plan objectives. New activities and events will be subject to local assessment prior to decisions about their introduction.

**WHAT WE HEARD:**  
**ABOUT CULTURAL HERITAGE ...**

- Strong support for efforts to protect and present the cultural heritage of the park. There was particular interest in Aboriginal cultural heritage, and in strengthening the involvement of Aboriginal people in the park.
- Concern related to a perceived lack of Aboriginal content in the plan, and the importance of communicating this unique heritage.

**WHAT'S IN THE PLAN**

- Clear direction to enhance promotion of cultural heritage in the park. The focus has been broadened to include reference to the park's role in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.
- Additional references to working with Aboriginal people, in order to document and present their culture and relationship to the land. Examples include an annual special event with the Ktunaxa Nation, and installation of enhanced Stoney and Ktunaxa interpretive material at the Paint Pots.
- Direction to support access to the park for traditional spiritual and ceremonial purposes.

**WHAT WE HEARD:**  
**ABOUT COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT ...**

- Support for additional, well-planned facilities in some specific locations of the park if they support the Agency's mandate and park goals.
- Caution that the montane habitat, where most development occurs, is also the most critical wildlife habitat. There is widespread support for maintaining the undeveloped wilderness character of the park.



#### WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

- The plan emphasizes the importance of carefully managed growth and development. Developments to support new recreational activities that help to deliver the mandate will be considered where negative impacts can be avoided or mitigated. New developments on park land may be at least partially offset by restoration of previously disturbed areas.
- Direction to avoid new developments in critical habitat, and to demonstrate environmental leadership and sensitivity to the surrounding natural and cultural heritage in the design of any new infrastructure.
- Direction to continue with improvements to wildlife movement through the Sinclair Canyon area.

#### WHAT WE HEARD:

##### ABOUT ZONING AND DECLARED WILDERNESS ...

- Widespread support for the protection of large wilderness areas in the park, and for recognition of sensitive sites and special preservation areas.
- Concern about cell towers, new facilities in the backcountry, gravel extraction, or any other action that requires altering the designated wilderness area boundaries. Suggestions that any proposed changes to declared wilderness areas should be consulted upon specifically and separately, so the public can respond to the detailed proposals rather than the notional concepts.
- Support for the development of cell towers in order to improve visitor safety.
- Some support for alternate energy if used on a small scale to reduce environmental impacts of energy generation.

#### WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

- As part of its stewardship commitment, Parks Canada will look at the benefits and disadvantages of reducing energy consumption, in both public and commercial facilities, including those in the backcountry; however any proposals must preserve the wilderness aesthetic and the experiences of visitors. Further, public consultation will be conducted if any changes to Declared Wilderness Area boundaries are considered during the life of the plan.
- The potential for using technology to enhance visitor experiences is recognized in the plan – such as educational messages for visitors travelling through the park and the capability for contact in emergencies, but any potential changes must also provide environmental benefits and aesthetic improvements.



- A long term gravel supply plan will be developed for the park.

#### WHAT WE HEARD:

##### ABOUT PARTNERSHIP AND TRANS-BOUNDARY MATTERS ...

- Support for stronger references to how Kootenay National Park is positioned within the broader landscape, its regional role, and how Parks Canada will work with communities and agencies outside its boundaries to achieve its goals and demonstrate leadership in key areas.
- Specific suggestions regarding potential partnership opportunities and projects for Parks Canada with various organizations.

#### WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

- Strengthened references to the park's role as part of a regional ecosystem and to the park's many partners.
- Specific mention of Parks Canada's commitment to regional initiatives and partners such the community of Radium Hot Springs, Friends of Kootenay, and the Columbia Valley Environmental Education Network.