



Gros Morne
National Park

What We Heard II

Building a Vision for the Future

Gros Morne National Park
Management Plan Review
Phase II Consultation Report



Parks Canada
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Canada

Introduction

Between August 2018 and May 2019, Parks Canada provided opportunities for partners, key stakeholders, communities and the general public to contribute to the development of the next Gros Morne National Park (GMNP) Management Plan. Through a two-phase, multi-dimensional consultation process, Parks Canada provided opportunities for engagement at local, regional and national levels. The first phase¹ of consultations engaged Indigenous and other partners, stakeholders and the general public in dialogue on proposed vision elements for the national park and key topics for consideration in the management plan review. Input from the first phase of consultations informed development of a draft management plan for GMNP.

Phase II consultations focused on communicating the draft management plan and providing opportunities for feedback. A variety of methods for public engagement were conducted to ensure the GMNP Management Plan would reflect the priorities of Parks Canada, our partners, stakeholders and the public.

Who We Heard From

Consultation on the draft management plan took place from April 4th to May 27th, 2019. During this period of time, meetings were held with Qalipu and Miawpukek First Nations, the Gros Morne Cooperating Association (GMCA), and other key partners and stakeholders. Community open house sessions, youth workshops and temporary information kiosks were also organised to provide an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the draft management plan in person. An online comment card provided Canadians with an opportunity to participate regardless of their geographic location.

Parks Canada received 2135 responses during Phase II consultations. Of the responses submitted, 311 were gathered in person at Indigenous and stakeholder meetings, public consultations, information kiosks, and a farmer's market; 619 were submitted through the completion of comment cards; and 1205 were received through the Parks Canada consultation email address.

During this phase of the consultation process, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) issued a web-based campaign calling for their membership to voice support for the highest level of protection for Gros Morne National Park including: a buffer to protect the outstanding universal values of GMNP; low impact nature-based experiences as well as education and stewardship programs; no expansion of the park's infrastructure footprint; and a reduced focus on revenue generation for the park and bordering communities in order to discourage increased development in the Gros Morne region. In total, 1192 of the 1205 respondent email submissions were received from these members.

Demographic information collected through the comment cards indicated that Canadians from coast to coast to coast provided feedback with the majority of the respondents residing in Ontario (34%), followed by Quebec (25%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (16%).

People from the ages of 18 to 65+ years took part in the consultation process (see Figure 1.). The level of participation from ages 18-34 years was low during the first phase of consultation. Increased opportunities were provided in Phase II to engage this demographic as well as the youth in the Gros Morne region.

¹ Phase I Consultation (What We Heard I Report) available at <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/nl/grosmorne/info/plan/entendu-heard>

A Youth Forum was held which brought together student representatives from each of the six schools who were engaged in Phase I. During this forum, students brainstormed ways to achieve objectives and targets presented in the draft plan. This full day forum generated ideas for a youth council, trail ambassador program, initiatives to engage with students in research and conservation as well as best practices for visitor management and waste reduction.

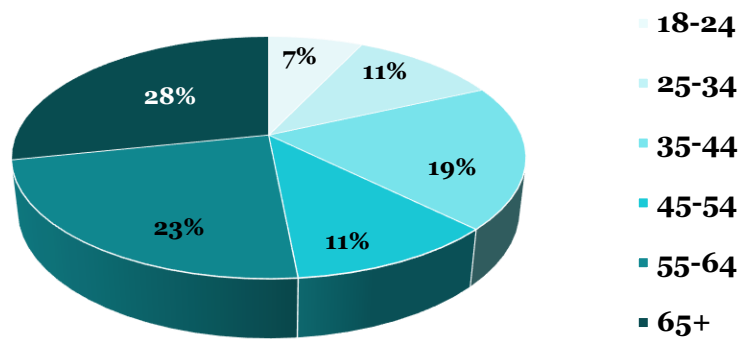


Figure 1. Age Distribution of Participants Engaged During Draft Management Plan Consultations

What We Heard

The following summary reflects the feedback received from the comment cards as well as the comments submitted through email, during partner and public engagement sessions and compiled during the youth forum. While management plans are intended to be written as strategic, results-based documents as opposed to a list of actions, some respondents indicated that they would prefer to see more detail in the plan and provided specific ideas as to how the management plan should be implemented. The passion of stakeholders and partners for GMNP was evident in the extent and tone of responses, a deep understanding and care for the park, willingness to be engaged, and a desire to stay informed. This was particularly evident in the support voiced for the annual implementation update.

Vision

Participants were asked to agree, disagree, or stay neutral with Parks Canada’s vision for Gros Morne National Park. From the responses 82% indicated support for the proposed vision.

Many participants were excited to see a focus on engagement with youth and visitors as well as initiatives around waste reduction and green technology that will mitigate impacts on the environment or improve ecological integrity. Others suggested more green choices need to be available for visitors in the region and, that they would like to see more emphasis placed on the conservation of dark skies. Some indicated support for the establishment of a more robust four-season offer.

Objectives

Participants were asked to indicate their level of support for the proposed objectives in the draft management plan. Overall, the majority of respondents supported all of the objectives in the plan. Detailed results are in Appendix A.

Key Strategy 1- Protecting a Treasured Landscape

There was a positive response to protecting our treasured landscape. Incorporation of green technology to reduce carbon emissions, improvement of waste management and energy efficiency received strong support. Indigenous partners indicated support and interest in research on caribou, salmon and other important ecological indicators in the park. Recommended updates for the final plan included a desire for clearer language and shorter timelines around efforts to reduce light pollution through a dark sky preserve and overall protection of ecological integrity and conservation of sensitive flora and fauna within the park. A commitment was requested to increase evidence-based decision-making and application of the precautionary principle, by building a peer-reviewed science and monitoring programs, and connecting it with Indigenous traditional knowledge. Other suggestions focused on strengthening the language regarding snowmobiling activity to ensure impacts were mitigated in a more efficient and effective manner.

Key Strategy 2-Achieving Results Together

Collaboration to achieve results together in the Gros Morne region was a strategy that had strong support, particularly the objective of working with others to create a sustainable approach to living and visiting western Newfoundland. Participants supported references to working with Indigenous peoples, local communities, and stakeholders as well as the commitment to connect with youth in the region. Suggested improvements to this key strategy focused on visitor experiences including traditional Newfoundland as well as historic and living Indigenous cultures. It was suggested that experiences be authentic with stories told by staff and Indigenous peoples connected to the area who are knowledgeable about changes from past to present.

Key Strategy 3-Revitalizing Visitor Experience in Gros Morne National Park

Participants supported the objective to improve trails. The Trail Information Management System and development of a volunteer trail ambassador program to increase effective trail maintenance were noted to be vital. Indigenous partners and the GMCA felt business licences were a great step forward, stating the process should ensure businesses operate in a way that aligns with the park's values for protection and presentation of natural and cultural resources. Students that participated in the youth forum were excited about this strategy and provided many ideas for experiences in the park including the idea of creating an 'app' to provide information for visitors to the area.

A large group of respondents, including the email submissions from CPAWS members, emphasized the desire for the park to remain focused on low-impact, nature-based experiences, education, and stewardship programs. Outdoor enthusiasts expressed the desire to see more emphasis on creation of a winter offer throughout the management plan and recommended creation of a regional strategy to work with others and collectively prepare for safe, fun winter experiences. Indigenous partners also recommended highlighting traditional Indigenous routes in addition to other trails and experiences within GMNP.

Many stakeholders and partners agreed that while visitor management is a positive challenge in rural Newfoundland, tourism and protection of GMNP need to be considered together. In relation to this, some expressed a strong desire for a plan to identify and mitigate possible impacts from increased visitation. Ideas included the creation of interpretive programs that help the public understand the connections between their experience and the need to protect GMNP. Safety was also something participants felt required greater emphasis within the plan, particularly as it relates to backcountry multi-day experiences during all four seasons. Suggestions ranged from improving backcountry orientation from parks staff to increasing permit checks at popular trail entry points for the multi-day excursions.

Clarification of the park's "Target Audience" was noted as important, as well as keeping the environment as the top priority over other priorities like accessibility or inclusion if there is a conflict. Respondents were hesitant to support targets on new infrastructure and requested minimal development take place within the park, indicating support to keep the development and infrastructure footprint in GMNP as minimal as possible especially in ecologically sensitive areas.

Area Management: Western Brook Pond Watershed

Strong support was expressed for most of the management direction for the Western Brook Pond watershed, with suggestions to improve the Western Brook Pond experience for those with mobility challenges. Participants supported the idea of developing a strategy to ensure the wilderness experience would not be impacted from increased visitation to Western Brook Pond Gorge and encouraged maintenance on Snug Harbour trail and the North Rim route. Others suggested stronger targets for greening of the boat tour operation and addressing issues around human waste management in backcountry areas.

While the introduction for the Western Brook Pond Area Management section in the management plan states that no personal vehicles, buses, large-scale commercial development or, increased parking, etc. will be entertained, many participants requested clarification on what 'integrated visitor experiences' would entail. With regard to the zoning section of the draft management plan there were questions about the zoning of Western Brook Pond shoreline, dock area, and boathouse.

Area Management: Tablelands and Trout River Pond Area

Many of the comments in this section focused on "how" to achieve the objectives and spoke to specific improvements at the Trout River Pond day use area, campground, washrooms, road to the pond and trail. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the upgrades to the Discovery Centre and the educational benefit it provides for visitors to the area. They also supported enhancements to the overall experience at the Tablelands and Trout River Pond areas but stressed the importance of making sure it remains a "natural park" experience and recommended GMNP develop parameters to ensure growth in visitation did not impact ecological integrity. In relation to this, there were recommendations for more experiences that showcase this area as an iconic UNESCO World Heritage site.

Participants highlighted the need to create a target like the one for Western Brook Pond to reduce carbon emissions from the boat tour operation on Trout River Pond. Stakeholders and community members from the south side of the park requested that all communities in close proximity to Trout River Pond area be involved in the development of a joint strategic plan. Many participants requested clarification on the definition of "diversified visitor experiences" while others questioned the use of mountain bikes and snowmobiles on the Tablelands,

recognizing that a major portion of this site is a zone I protected area with sensitive flora and fauna.

Conclusion

Extensive feedback received during consultation on the draft management plan has been reviewed and incorporated in the final plan. The following amendments have been incorporated into the final management plan in response to the priorities that we heard throughout the planning process:

Key Strategy 1 – Protecting a Treasured Landscape

- Increased emphasis on improving ecological integrity and research and monitoring in regards to species at risk and impacts of activities like snowmobiling.
- Targets for increased Indigenous involvement in monitoring fish populations and boreal felt lichen and opportunities for youth involvement in the forest health program.
- Targets for climate change research partnerships and designation of GMNP as a dark sky preserve.

Key Strategy 3 – Revitalizing Visitor Experience in Gros Morne National Park

- The description of this strategy has been amended to clarify that visitor experience is focused on meaningful connections to nature and the necessity to revitalize facilities and programming in the national park for existing and emerging audiences.
- The target for assessing a winter offer has been adjusted to focus on an assessment of sustainable non-motorized winter offers in collaboration with tourism operators and winter users of the park.

Area Management

- Clarification of terms like ‘integrated visitor experience’ and more detail in targets aimed at sustainable tourism practices like, human waste and garbage management, decreasing carbon emissions and providing accessibility options.
- The target for an investment strategy in Trout River Pond has been adjusted to consider infrastructure to support the boat tour and day use area. Also, improved Parks Canada orientation signage in the community of Trout River has been included as a target.

Zoning

- The zoning map and text were reviewed and the final plan confirms that the Western Brook Pond dockside day use facility remains in Zone IV from the previous management plan (2009). Text has been added to clarify that unlike the other day use facilities, there is no private motorized access to the dockside Zone IV area.
- The boathouse which was identified as Zone V in the draft management plan has been removed from the zoning map and is considered an administrative use in Zone III to support the boat tour.

A Plan for the Future

The Gros Morne National Park Management Plan, 2019 takes into consideration all of the comments and suggestions received through consultation with Indigenous and regional partners, stakeholders, local community members and the general public. Language around

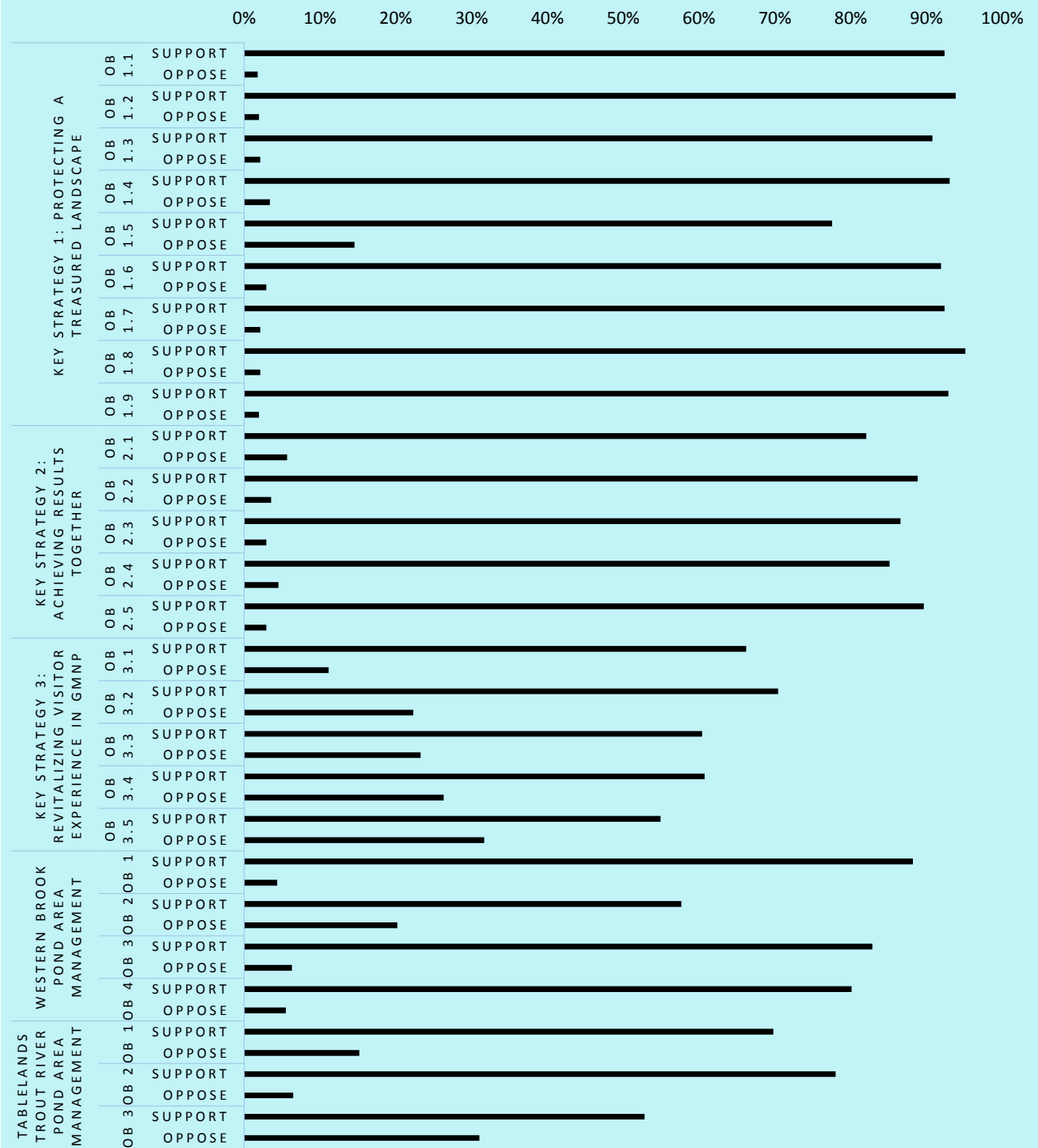
objectives, targets and zoning have been updated to reflect the feedback and support submitted by many Canadians.

Our shared vision will guide park management for the next 10 years as we work together to implement the key strategies, continue to maintain and/or improve ecological integrity, visitor experience, our relationships with local communities and public outreach activities.

While the management planning process is complete, Parks Canada will be providing annual implementation updates to partners, stakeholders and the general public and, is always open to receiving feedback and suggestions for ways we can work with others to achieve shared objectives.

APPENDIX A

OVERALL SUPPORT FOR THE 2019 GROS MORNE NATIONAL PARK DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES (OB) (N=619)



² Participants could also choose “neutral” support for each objective.