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# Banff Park Museum

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2018



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## Executive Summary

Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is one of Western Canada's oldest natural history museums. The iconic 1903 building is the best surviving example of the rustic architectural design popularized in early national park buildings. The museum and the zoological collections, ethnographic objects, library and archival collections, photographs, historic artworks and original furnishings housed in the building are a significant cultural attraction located at a high profile location on Banff Avenue.

The last management plan for the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site was approved in 2007. The plan set out a vision and strategic directions, along with strategies and action in three key areas: heritage protection, education and visitor experience. Good progress has been made in implementing direction from the plan especially in the area of building conservation and redevelopment of the exterior landscape.

The new management plan will focus on three key strategies.

### **Key Strategy 1: Ongoing conservation and understanding of the building, collections and historical records**

Wooden elements of the building require ongoing maintenance and the majority of the collection is made up of thousands of natural history specimens, many of which are over 100 years old. Ongoing collection conservation and inventory remains a priority. Historical records on the Banff Park Museum are widely distributed at various locations. An inventory of these records is required so that a systematic research plan can be developed relative to cultural resource management and new programming offers.

### **Key Strategy 2: Enriching the visitor experience through enhanced partnerships, new programming and repurposing of the Discovery and Reading Room spaces adjacent to the main gallery**

This strategy is aimed at enriching the visitor experience by engaging with new partners, and providing flexible spaces for the introduction of contemporary exhibits and activities. As an important cultural attraction in Banff National Park, Banff Park Museum National Historic Site has the potential to play a vital role in connecting visitors with science and conservation activities of the past and present. In this strategy, Parks Canada aims to build a positive and collaborative relationship with Indigenous peoples and reflect Indigenous voices and stories at the site.

### **Key Strategy 3: Improving the sense of place and arrival**

The national historic site is limited to the footprint of the building. This strategy emphasizes the importance of managing land surrounding the site as one management area. The lands directly adjacent to the Banff Park Museum are Parks Canada lands consisting of a combination of green spaces and a public parking lot.





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## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and those national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Banff Park Museum National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

This management plan will replace the 2007 Management Plan for Banff Park Museum National Historic Site which provided direction in the areas of resource protection, visitor experience and heritage presentation. Following plan approval major investments were made to stabilize and improve the condition of the exterior of the building. These projects contributed to the conservation of the character defining elements of the building. Special attention was taken in the 2011 landscape project to ensure that all exterior landscape elements contributed to the aesthetic of the buildings rustic architecture.

This draft plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Banff Park Museum National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of Banff Park Museum National Historic Site in years to come.

Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Banff Park Museum National Historic Site



Note: Yellow boundary indicating Parks Canada property. Red boundary indicating NHS.

## 2.0 Significance of Banff Park Museum National Historic Site

The Victorian era heralded an age of transformation in which momentous changes in the field of natural history coincided with the rise of new visual displays and the public presentation of taxidermy collections. First proposed in 1886, the Banff Park Museum was one of a number of institutions established in Western Canada in the late nineteenth century to curate and display collections from the region.

The Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is an outstanding example of this late nineteenth and twentieth century museological practice offering visitors an opportunity not only to see what was collected, but also to see how it was displayed. Built in 1903 to house exhibit collections and the Superintendent's office, the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is one of the best surviving examples of the rustic architectural design popularized in early national park buildings. The Historic Site and Monuments Board of Canada recommended to the Minister designation of the Banff Park Museum as a national historic site in 1981. The Commemorative Intent is expressed in the following statement: "the Banff Park Museum is of national historic significance because this "museum of museums" developed by Norman Bethune Sanson reflects an early approach to the interpretation of natural history in Canada and because of the architectural style and detailing so characteristic of early federal building in Canada". The designation applies to the 1903 museum building envelope together with a significant portion of the original collection.

## 3.0 Planning Context

From its early beginning in 1895, the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site has functioned in part as an interpretive centre and the "University of the Hills", providing an opportunity for visitors to see first-hand much of the flora and fauna of Banff National Park and Western Canada. Visitors to the town of Banff are drawn to the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site as one of the main architectural landmarks on Banff Avenue. The rustic design of the building coupled with its prominent location attracts walk in visitation. The main historic gallery displays the original material collected by Norman Bethune Sanson, including display cases and habitat displays, all of which are original to the collection. Two rooms adjacent to the main historic gallery were rehabilitated in the 1980's and 1990's to provide additional public programming spaces and contain limited original historic fabric

The service offer consist of welcome greetings at the entry and messaging on the historic nature of the fragile interior of the museum. The overall presentation of the museum enables visitors to experience an early approach to collecting artifacts and using them to communicate knowledge in a national park context. The museum also provides a unique opportunity for visitors to see the various animals that roam the park.

The Banff Park Museum National Historic Site designated area is confined to the footprint of the building. Parks Canada owns the two lots that the museum sits on (see Map 2). One of the key values identified in the CIS is "its urban setting, marked by its relationship to the Bow River and Banff Avenue, its trees and pedestrian walkways, and the adjacent open spaces once occupied by the former zoo, a picnic pavilion and the 1910 RNWMP building". The Town of Banff's Central Park to the east, at one time the location

of the museum's zoo and botanical exhibits, contributes to the sense of place, as do parts of the landscape of the Parks Canada owned land that the museum sits on. A section of the Parks Canada owned land directly adjacent to the museum is currently used by the Town of Banff as a public parking lot.

## Key issues and Opportunities

### Research and Cultural Resources

While Banff Park Museum has operated as a public institution for many decades and as a national historic site since 1985, there has been minimal investment in baseline historical research related to the collection and public presentation of main themes and messages. Investment in historical and curatorial research is needed to inform proper collections management as well as the new visitor experience strategy.

In the 2017 Commemorative Integrity Evaluation (CIA), there were 3503 objects listed of national historic significance in the museum collection (zoological, ethnographic and library items, photographs, artworks, and original furnishings). A review of collections records indicates that there are discrepancies between what is listed as objects of national historic value in the 2017 CIA and what is listed as objects of national historic value in the formal Park Canada Artifact Information System. Work is in progress to update the collections inventory.

Over the years there has been an ongoing issue with the accommodation of records and objects stored at the site. Display cabinets in the main gallery have a substantial number of objects housed in drawers and cabinets that are not accessible to the public. A large number of objects and records are stored in the basement. There is a need to do a thorough inventory and evaluation of all of these items and make decisions about whether or not they belong in the museum collection; should be made accessible to the public; and what conditions are required for their long-term storage/conservation.

### Interior and Exterior Risks

The condition of the interior building environment and the objects of national historic site significance on display within the building is a growing concern. Maintenance work is required on aging mechanical systems to improve the interior environment for collections. The building is adjacent to the Bow River. Although no recorded floods have reached the building, potential flooding during a large scale event is a concern.

### Sense of Arrival and Visitor Experience

While exterior landscape work has helped to improve the sense of place and sense of arrival, the building itself does not convey a sense of welcome. Dark UV/light reducing films are applied on all of the museum's windows as a conservation treatment to protect the collection. These films block the view inside the building and create an overall imposing sense that the building is closed. Due to the fragile nature of the collection rigorous pest management protocols are in place which requires that the entrance doors are never propped open. Though sandwich boards and other exterior signs are in use to invite people into the building, more work is required to improve the sense of arrival and welcome. Graphical banners were recently installed to the second story of the building facing Banff Avenue to promote annual temporary exhibits.

Visitors enjoy the rustic architecture of the building, the taxidermy exhibits and habitat displays. Visitors also appreciate that they can relate the wildlife they see on display with the wildlife they know are protected in Banff National Park.

There is a real opportunity through a new visitor experience strategy, to connect the key CI message of “an early approach to the interpretation of natural history” to current science and conservation work taking place in Banff National Park (natural and cultural), and to Indigenous knowledge. Connecting the stories found at the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site with contemporary themes will increase the sense of meaningfulness of the site.

There is a need for new exhibits and programs at the museum. Working with partners on aspects of these new visitor experience offers will result in change in use of some of the internal spaces such as the library and discovery room. Some collections would have to be relocated to accommodate new uses of these spaces. Any changes to the programming and exhibits would be designed and managed to respect the significance of the building, collection and commemorative integrity.

#### 4.0 Vision

The rustic architectural building style of the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is an enduring and iconic landmark on Banff Avenue. As visitors approach the building, they are drawn inside by the informative outdoor exhibits and by the attractiveness of the front entrance and surrounding landscape. Once inside the building, visitors are delighted to find out that the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is not only a window to the past, it is also a gateway venue through which they can connect to contemporary science and research practices of Parks Canada and community partners, as well as Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

In the main gallery visitors step back in time to experience an early approach to interpreting natural history. The adjacent Reading and Discovery Room exhibits and programs function as a bridge between the Victorian/Edwardian era and contemporary forms of science and conservation. Canadians, visitors and Parks Canada team members reflect often on the essence of the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site and how protection, presentation and understanding of all that is old triggers the inception of something that is new, bold and visionary.

#### 5.0 Proposed Key Strategies

The new plan provides strategic direction for the delivery of Parks Canada’s mandate for heritage resource protection, visitor experience and public appreciation and understanding. It proposes three main strategies.

<p><b>Key Strategy 1: Ongoing conservation and understanding of the building, collections and historical records</b></p>
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This strategy will ensure that the building and collections remain in good condition. Wooden elements of the exterior require regular maintenance. The majority of the collection is made up of 100 year old specimens that are delicate and sensitive to light and vibration. Historical records on the Banff Park Museum are widely distributed at various locations.

**Objective 1.1**

The museum's structural condition, heritage character elements, collections and authentic setting are maintained in good condition.

Targets

- By 2019 , a 10 year historic structure maintenance plan is developed based on an update of as-built drawings, a survey to record the elevation of building above river and baseline elevations of building, identification of annual and longer term maintenance procedures and identification of potential flood and fire protection mitigations.
- Continue to ensure that measures are taken to safeguard the condition of the building and collection.

**Objective 1.2**

The interior environment of the museum for collections is improved.

Targets

- By 2020 complete the deferred interior maintenance plan for the building.
- By 2019, a 10 year preventive collections conservation strategy is completed including a risk assessment and internal environment study to determine approaches to improve protection of existing collections.
- By 2022, actions are implemented from the risk assessment and internal environment study.

**Objective 1.3**

Inventory of collections on display and in storage is complete, and collections are well understood.

Targets

- By 2021, an inventory and evaluation of collections stored in exhibit cases and the basement is completed; collections not related to the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site are relocated to other suitable locations.

**Objective 1.4**

The scope of historical records related to the Banff Park Museum is better understood.

Target

- By 2022 a baseline inventory of archival records and information located off-site is created.
- A research plan is developed to gather information in support of cultural resource management and new programming offers.



**Key Strategy 2: Enriching the visitor experience through enhanced partnerships, new programming and repurposing of the Discovery and Reading Room spaces adjacent to the main gallery**

This strategy will help guide the revitalization of the visitor experience for many audiences through engagement with new partners, new research, rehabilitation of main floor exhibit spaces and new programming offers.

**Objective 2.1**

Points of intersection between contemporary interests of visitors to Banff National Park and the themes that the Banff Park Museum represents informs new programming and attracts new and repeat visitation.

Targets

- By 2019, pre-trip information is improved and by 2020, 90% of visitors surveyed through the VIP Survey report are satisfied with their trip planning and arrival information.
- In the first two years of the new plan, develop a volunteer and citizen engagement strategy, supported by the Banff field unit's volunteer program.
- By 2019, a new visitor experience strategy plan is developed with partners based on market research, historical and curatorial research, results from visitor surveys and interpretive planning.

**Objective 2.2**

This objective focuses on working with Indigenous Peoples to build relationships that demonstrate leadership in reconciliation and contribute to collaborative initiatives and opportunities for strengthening diversity and inclusion.

Targets to be developed through discussion with Indigenous nations.

- In the first years of the new plan, Parks Canada works with Indigenous groups to determine best approaches for ongoing dialogue, relationship building and how to build Indigenous stories into the visitor experience.
- Within three years, regular dialogue with Indigenous partners is an ongoing part of the work done at the museum.

**Objective 2.3**

Parks Canada staff work with partners to collaboratively develop and deliver high quality interpretive programs and events.

Target

- All site staff take part in annual skills development and training workshops.
- All visitor programs are evaluated on an annual basis.

#### **Objective 2.4**

Visitors are inspired to explore connections between the past and the present.

##### Targets

- By 2022, repurposing of the Discovery Room and Library Spaces on the main floor of the Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is completed based on direction in the visitor experience strategy, experience gained from temporary exhibits including the recently installed bison exhibit and a cultural resource impact assessment including involvement from the federal heritage review office and other specialists.

#### **Objective 2.4**

Banff Park Museum National Historic Site is a treasured community gathering place and contributor to the cultural heritage of Banff National Park.

##### Targets

- Parks Canada staff work with partners to co-curate one temporary exhibit and/or special event annually.
- By 2021 an annual “behind the scenes” event, or “meet the experts” is hosted at the site.

#### **Objective 2.5**

Visitors are inspired by relevant and engaging experiences in an authentic historic setting.

##### Targets

- Within ten years, at least 90% of visitors enjoy their visit
- Within ten years, 90% of visitors are satisfied and/or very satisfied with their overall visit.
- Visitation increases by 20% by 2028 based on 2016/17 visitation numbers.
- Revenue increases by 10% based on 2016/17 numbers.

<b>Key Strategy 3: Improving the sense of place and arrival.</b>
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Parks Canada owns the two lots that the museum sits on. These lots are prominently located at the corner of Banff Avenue and Buffalo Street and are primarily used as public parking lot. The parking lot is the location of the former 1910 Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) building. Green areas for interpretive signage and walkways to the national historic site are located in prominent locations around the site. There is a strong historical relationship between the museum and the lands that surround the building that goes back over 100 years.

#### **Objective 3.1**

Development and use on the two adjoining Parks Canada lots is managed in ways that ensure the commemorative integrity of the national historic site and contribute to the sense of place and arrival to the national historic site. The design strategy for the surrounding land enhances the sense of place and improves welcome and accessibility.

### Targets

- By 2021, a landscape plan for the outdoor interpretive media, pedestrian flow, vegetation management and hazard tree assessment is completed. Expertise is sought on strategies to address congestion at the front entrance during busy periods (e.g., staging protocols).
- By 2024, a refresh of the outdoor media and pedestrian related elements in need of repair and a planting plan are implemented.

## 6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was conducted for Banff Park Museum National Historic Site Management Plan pursuant to the 2010 “Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals” (CEA Agency/Privy Council Office 2010). Strategic Environmental Assessment provides an opportunity to identify broad and unintended impacts of proposed management actions resulting from a proposed policy, plan or program, including the cumulative environmental impacts of multiple activities. Strategic environmental assessment also informs the subsequent assessment of related projects.

The spatial scope of the SEA includes areas within the boundary of Banff Park Museum National Historic Site, and the temporal scope of ten years from the date of plan approval. The resources considered to be Valued Components are mainly the cultural resources associated with the site, as well as well as visitor experience resources including the various ancillary visitor facilities and green space adjacent to the site.

The management plan calls for the development of a Visitor Experience Strategy. The strategy will attempt to find opportunities where the contemporary interests of visitors intersect with the historic themes of the national historic site. Planners will need to ensure that the new strategy holds paramount the reasons for commemoration of the site, and that the commemorative integrity of Banff Park Museum National Historic Site remains at the core of future visitor experience planning. Actions such as the repurposing of the Discovery Room and Library spaces will require further assessment using the tools identified (e.g. cultural resource impact assessment).

It is anticipated that project-level impact assessment will be able to mitigate any potential adverse impacts from individual projects resulting from this plan.

If the appropriate mitigation measures are applied, there are no important adverse environmental effects anticipated from implementation of this management plan. The overall environmental effects of the strategies, objectives and targets of the plan are expected to be positive.