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Fathom Five National Marine Park Business Stakeholder Meeting #2

Parks Canada Agency
Fathom Five National Marine Park
Tobermory, Ontario, Canada
Facilitator: John Miller, ICA Associates Inc.

Friday February 14th, 2020



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Business Planning Information and Discussion Session #2: Fathom Five National Marine Park

Introduction and Context

Fathom Five National Marine Park protects a remarkable freshwater ecosystem and islands in the heart of the Great Lakes, while offering world class experiences to connect with nature. Parks Canada recognizes the important economic opportunities that visitation to Fathom Five brings to residents and economy of the Tobermory community. Parks Canada must balance environmental protection with economic interests and is committed to managing Fathom Five on behalf of all Canadians, First Nations, residents, businesses, and the community for a sustainable future.

Parks Canada is currently updating the management plan for Fathom Five National Marine Park which will establish a vision and guide park management for the next 10 years. Throughout the management planning process, Parks Canada is consulting with partners, stakeholders, and visitors to gather valuable input from Canadians on the future of this special place. A vibrant future for Fathom Five includes strategic business partnerships to deliver world class, innovative experiences that enable visitors to connect with this unique freshwater ecosystem in the heart of the Great Lakes. These experiences and the partnerships we count on to deliver them, will be carefully designed and managed using evidence-based tools to ensure the protection and sustainability of the park.

In the summer of 2020 Parks Canada is opening numerous competitive solicitations through Requests for Proposal to award business opportunities for delivering meaningful and innovative visitor experience offers in Fathom Five. Parks Canada wants to ensure the Canadian public has a fair and equitable opportunity to compete for business opportunities, in line with Federal Treasury Board policy.

As the second part in a series, Parks Canada organized a 3 ½ hour meeting on Friday, February 14th, 2020 at the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Tobermory, Ontario, to engage and inform Fathom Five business operators about the upcoming solicitation process and to gain input from the business community to ensure its smooth implementation.

Parks Canada invited all business operators that currently conduct business in Fathom Five, or who had previously expressed interest in conducting business in Fathom Five (see Appendix A for list).

The meeting commenced with opening remarks by John Haselmayer, Park Superintendent. John Miller from ICA Associates was introduced as the meeting Facilitator, who subsequently explained the meeting ground-rules and code-of-conduct for participants; conducted a round table of introductions; and explained how the group would move through the afternoon in a series of segments, allowing for i) questions of clarity; ii) suggestions and recommendations, and iii) insights.

Participation Guidelines:

- Everyone has wisdom
- We need everyone's wisdom to produce the wisest results
- There are no "wrong" answers (or "right", so avoid judging before listening)
- Everyone will hear and be heard (hence the small group discussions are really important)
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Comments made during the meeting will not be attributed to specific individuals.
- Sharing your best thinking does not automatically imply an official endorsement on behalf of your organization.

John Haselmayer proceeded to deliver a presentation that included four goals for the afternoon, including:

1. To report back on "What We Heard" at the December 13, 2019 meeting
2. To share and receive feedback on proposed operational changes for Flowerpot Island and Big Tub Harbour
3. To share details on the new business opportunities being offered through the RFPs
4. To review the Parks Canada RFP process and an example of a Request For Proposal

During the presentation, the group routinely paused for questions and discussion about any of the key policy decisions or areas for input. The questions, suggestions and recommendations, and insights raised by the group were written on sticky notes by Parks Canada staff and placed on flipchart sheets at the front of the room. Photographs of the flipchart sheets are provided in Appendix C.

Following several hours of presentation and discussion around the first three meeting goals, Pamela Hayhurst, Parks Canada Manager of Realty Services for the Ontario Region, delivered a short presentation on the complete Request for Proposals process within Parks Canada, and then led the group through a real example of an RFP.

Presentation and Discussions

In order to manage the time effectively, and to ensure that everyone's thoughts were heard and addressed, participants were encouraged to speak at any time during the presentation. John Miller triaged comments into one of the three groups: questions, suggestions and recommendations, or insights, and ensured a sticky note was placed on the flipchart sheet. The group circled back to the flipcharts at the end of each segment of information for discussion and to ensure thoughts were represented. While compiling the lists of questions, suggestions and recommendations, and insights for this report, some items have been reordered into a

more suitable category (e.g. 'insights' have been moved from the 'questions' category to the 'insights' category) for logical consistency.

Where able and appropriate, Parks Canada provided in-the-moment answers to some of the questions posed by the group; some questions were answered by other participants in the room. To the extent possible, answers to all questions have been summarized and provided below.

1. Questions

- **Q. Why do visitors choose to visit only the flowerpots?**
A. The Flowerpots are the iconic destination on Flowerpot Island.
- **Q. Could park staff offer guided activities to spread visitors around to other places?**
A. Parks Canada is committed to improving the visitor experience on Flowerpot Island. This may include having park staff on the island at all times when day visitors are present; improving interpretive programming and ensuring park staff connect with more visitors; and, improving access to popular visitor destinations on the island such as the Flowerpots. Through the RFP process, Parks Canada is considering opportunities for guided experiences that would provide visitors with more intimate, immersive experiences.
- **Q. Why focus just on Flowerpots? (*Editors note: this question was asked in reference to the model used to determine the 650 people at-one-time policy decision for Flowerpot Island*)**
A. In determining the 650 people at-one-time policy decision, Parks Canada considered the three most frequently visited shoreline areas on Flowerpot Island, including the area around the Flowerpots. Parks Canada used time lapsed photo monitoring at the Flowerpots to assess visitor density (e.g. number of people) and correlated this with the number of visitors on the island at the same time. The analysis determined that when there were more than 650 people on the island, visitors became displaced from the Flowerpots into less desirable areas, contributing to trail braiding and vegetation trampling.
- **Q. How long do visitors stay at the Flowerpots?**
A. The length of time visitors stay at the Flowerpots varies and is a function of many factors such as planned length of stay on the island; number of people on the island; desired experience; amount of space available around the Flowerpots; and weather conditions, to name a few.
- **Q. How can we encourage visitors to visit other locations on Flowerpot Island?**
A. Parks Canada is committed to improving the visitor experience on Flowerpot Island. This may include having park staff on the island at all times when day visitors are present; improving interpretive programming; ensuring park staff connect with more visitors; and, improving access to popular visitor destinations on the island such as the Flowerpots. Through the RFP process, Parks Canada is considering opportunities for

guided experiences that would provide visitors with more intimate, immersive experiences.

- **Q. How long does each person stay on the island?**

A. The length of time visitors stay on Flowerpot Island varies and is a function of many factors such as planned length of stay; number of people on the island; desired experience; amount of space available at destinations; and weather conditions, to name a few. Meeting participants estimated the average length of time visitors spent on the island was between 1.5 to 3 hours.

- **Q. Did the closure of the cave and the lighthouse trail affect congestion at the Flowerpots?**

A. Parks Canada does not have adequate information to quantify the effects of the cave or trail closures on congestion at the Flowerpots.

- **Q. What capacity was the trail from the dock to the Flowerpots built for?**

A. The pedestrian trail constructed from the dock to the Flowerpots was not designed with a specific capacity in mind, per se. Rather, the trail was engineered to enable a smooth, safe walking experience for the majority of visitor types, and to accommodate two-way pedestrian traffic.

- **Q. Is the bottleneck the size of the trail itself? (*Editors note: this question was asked in reference to pedestrian congestion along the trail from the main docks to the Flowerpots*)**

A. A participant in the room responded by suggesting that high water levels have reduced the opportunity for visitors to walk to and from the dock to the Flowerpots along the shoreline. As a result, more people are using the trail, which increases congestion. Parks Canada added that the trail is constructed as close to the shoreline as the topography allows, and the trail width is constrained by the lay-of-the-land. Increasing the trail size would be extremely difficult from an engineering perspective, and not desirable from an ecological perspective.

- **Q. Is it possible to land at different locations on Flowerpot Island? Would Parks allow this?**

A. Historically, during periods of low water levels in Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, Parks Canada worked with business operators to enable temporary landing areas at alternate locations on Flowerpot Island when the Beachy Cove docking site was unsafe for vessels. Parks Canada wants to remain adaptable and continue to work with business operators in the future to accommodate for environmental changes such as water level fluctuations. However, at this time Parks Canada is not interested in the development of another formal docking area at another location on Flowerpot Island (e.g. the Flowerpot Lightstation).

- **Q. What are some of the restrictions on these experiences / RFPs?**

A. Through the RFP process, successful bidders will be awarded with time slots for business operations in Big Tub Harbour and / or on Flowerpot Island. The RFPs themselves as well as the associated permits and license agreements granted to

successful bidders, will contain the specific parameters and conditions for business operations (e.g. maximum number of people at-one-time; intervals between vessel landings; and so on).

- **Q. Can the low volume tour boat morning offer, starting at 8 am, visit Big Tub (this could add value to the offer / experience)?**

A. Based on feedback received from the business community and other stakeholders during this series of meetings, Parks Canada will be developing an operational schedule that will define the time slots for business operations in Big Tub Harbour and / or on Flowerpot Island. Some elements of the schedule will include linked Big Tug Harbour and Flowerpot Island tours.

- **Q. What about 4-6 hour premium offer – would Parks Canada consider?**

A. Based on feedback received from the business community and other stakeholders during this series of meetings, Parks Canada will be developing an operational schedule that will define the time slots for business operations in Big Tub Harbour and / or on Flowerpot Island. Parks Canada is open to the experience and suggestions of business operators in crafting the details of the operational schedule to ensure that business opportunities are sustainable while meeting the desired conditions established for Big Tub Harbour and Flowerpot Island.

- **Q. What impact will this have on businesses, financially (e.g. that have invested in an existing fleet of vessels and infrastructure)?**

A. Parks Canada acknowledges the importance that local tour boat operations have in supporting tourism and the local economy. This RFP process will ensure on-going sustainable business opportunities in Fathom Five.

- **Q. How will Parks Canada enforce the requirements of the successful bidders (e.g. ensure they are truly qualified)?**

A. Parks Canada will be developing evaluation criteria to determine the qualification of bidders and will manage the agreement throughout its term to ensure that any required qualifications and / or certifications are maintained throughout the life of the agreement.

- **Q. Can bids be submitted with other companies (e.g. partnerships)?**

A. Yes, individuals or companies can jointly submit responses to the RFPs.

- **Q. How broadly are the RFPs being made available? Just locally? Or can anyone in Canada bid on them?**

A. The RFPs will be made available to any Canadian citizen to ensure an open and fair opportunity to transact with the Government of Canada. Parks Canada will consider the geographical scope of the advertisements for the RFPs to ensure that individuals who may be interested in the opportunities are aware of the upcoming RFP.

- **Q. What if I don't win? How can I find out how I did?**

A. Parks Canada will offer de-briefing sessions for all proponents who submit a proposal to review the results of their evaluation(s) in order to improve submissions on future opportunities.

- **Q. Who is on the evaluation committee for the RFPs?**

A. The evaluation committee(s) have not yet been created. Committees typically consist of a representative from the local park, stakeholders / partners, and other industry professionals (e.g. business analyst, certified accountant, tourism professional).

2. Suggestions and Recommendations

- Use incentives to encourage folks to go to other parts of Flowerpot Island
- Transition plan – add activities for people turned away
- Parks Canada can train operators to be interpreters (+ key rules and safety)
- Staff can help train private operators
- More off-the-cuff interpretation around the Flowerpots needed i.e. 5 minute talks
- Facilitate kayakers landing – not at main dock, maybe by campsites
- Have interpreters at the Flowerpots
- More time for tour boats in Big Tub in afternoon and less time for diving
- Smaller tours = quality, intimate, guided. Test assumptions - can larger boats provide same
- Direct kayaks to other spots away from main dock (signage)
- Big Tub Harbour not great kayak in am (morning) – would take group to Russel Island instead, but, sunset – moonlight in Big Tub Harbour is good
- Safety issues with sit-on-tops kayaks – dangerous going across Harbour (Tobermory) to Big Tub Harbour
- Sit-on-top kayaks only meant to use Little Tub and Big Tub (not outside North Point)
- Guided kayak tours in Big Tub Harbour not necessary
- Could do just one hour snorkel in “quiet” morning time. 9-10 am (not 11)
- Smaller boats may not be able to see shipwreck well in Big Tub Harbour – height issue
- Clarify where the 30m shore area is in Big Tub restricted area (may need to mark it)
- In practice 2 boats at a time can work as both don’t spin – one backs out so 21m concept not correct in practice
- Mooring buoy – dive boat ties off – they get blown into 30m area
- Some interest in speed limit in Little Tub Harbour to slow private vessels
- Try one day/week test for low volume tours vs everyday – is market there?
- Dive charters waiting for 4 pm access to Big Tub Harbour, after other parts of afternoon schedule
- The low volume Big Tub Harbour experience doesn’t sound like it will work. It doesn’t take long to see the wrecks.
- Morning dive / snorkel can be a shorter time (need 2 hours)
- Paddling over the wrecks is not the best way to see them – better view from a bigger boat
- Unfair to reduce high volume Big Tub Harbour offer to such a short afternoon window
- Dive tours need to start at 4pm to make their schedule work in Big Tub Harbour

3. Insights

- Concern: May lose “eco” in eco-tourism. E.g. small offer paddle tours
- Analogy between current 4 pm dive time and quiet time in Big Tub mornings
- Extending hours on Flowerpot would need to have more staff – already hard to hire for full days
- Morning snorkel. Good for dive-snorkel companies
- Won’t be demand from visitors for early morning trips – tour company used to offer “early bird” pricing – poor response from visitors
- The overlap when low volume meets high volume may not be favorable to the low volume visitors
- Night paddling experience over wreck with headlamps is very cool. Moonlight paddles.
- Bruce Anchor – looked at # of visitors who came back early – re: duration of time on Flowerpot Island
- Not a lot of shoreline trail provided for visitors at Flowerpot – mainly inland
- Do people really want that low volume offer in the morning? 160 at one time seems low
- 2 hours is more than enough for “guided” experience, could be less and allow time for other activities
- Don’t understand why only one boat at a time in Big Tub – can be safe at 2 boats but not sure about 30m area
- Why 1 boat in restricted area at one time? We can safely do 2.
- It’s better to stay open later on Flowerpot – more demand for evening.
- Increase the day on Flowerpot in evening not morning
- More Parks Canada interpretive offer – supervise visitors
- Average current stay is 3 hours
- On busy weekends when we maximize turnover, more people miss their boat.
- Need 10 minutes to load and unload boats.
- Larger VORR area boundary helpful – consensus perhaps
- A bigger restricted area would be better with better signage to notify other vessels
- 1.5 hour length of time on Flowerpot Island possible but folks may miss the return boat
- Visitor perspectives – “enjoy watching the other boat!” So not a negative visitor experience
- Visitors like to see the other tour boats in the shipwreck area
- Everyone wants to go to the flowerpots

Next Steps

At the end of the meeting Parks Canada confirmed the ‘Next Steps’ that would follow, including:

- Parks Canada will produce a ‘What we Heard’ report detailing the information provided by the meeting attendees

- Parks Canada will compile and publish the materials provided and collected at the meeting (e.g. post on a public website for others to access)
- Parks Canada extended offers for bilateral meetings between Parks Canada and interested business operators prior to the launch of the RFPs
- Parks Canada indicated a third, follow-up meeting (i.e. bidders conference) would be held after the release of the RFPs

Appendix A - List of Invitees and Parks Canada Representatives

The following tables list the different businesses that were invited to participate at the meeting, as well as the Parks Canada representatives. Some businesses were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts, however Parks Canada committed to providing these businesses with copies of all materials shared at the meetings, and a copy of the 'What we heard' report.

Invitee Business Name	Attendance at Meeting
Blue Heron Company	Yes
Blue World Marine Adventures Ltd.	No
Bruce Anchor Cruises / Big Tub Harbour Resort	Yes
C-View Charters	No
Dawn Light	Yes
Divers Den	Yes
Explorer's Tread	Yes
Fathom Five Paddling	No
Thorncrest Outfitters	No
Tobermory Cruise Lines	Yes
Tobermory Wave	No

Parks Canada Employee Name	Organizational Role
Katherine Patterson	Field Unit Superintendent
John Haselmayer	Park Superintendent
Annique Maheu	Field Unit External Relations Manager
Pamela Hayhurst	Manager Realty Services
Jeff Truscott	Strategic Advisor
Brian McHattie	Partnering and Engagement Officer
Ethan Meleg	Visitor Experience Manager
Sheila Peacock	Administrative Assistant

Appendix B – Letter of Invitation



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Recipient

Contact

Info Here

Re: Invitation to Business Planning Information and Discussion Session: Fathom Five National Marine Park

Dear *Enter Name Here*,

On Friday December 13th Parks Canada held a meeting with the Fathom Five business community at the Visitor Centre in Tobermory. At the meeting we provided information on business opportunities and upcoming processes for issuing business agreements in Fathom Five. We sought to learn from the industry to ensure that, in designing these processes, we understand the realities of your operations.

We committed to several next steps and communications to ensure everyone interested in the Fathom Five business community has open and fair access to this information, including:

- i) 'What We Heard' report
- ii) 'Questions and Answers' summary
- iii) Website
- iv) Follow-up meeting in February 2020

To that end, we are pleased to invite you to a **Business Planning Information and Discussion Session at the Parks Canada Visitor Center in Tobermory, Ontario, on Friday February 14th from 1pm – 4:30pm.**

If you plan to attend this meeting, please RSVP to Sheila.peacock@canada.ca by **Friday January 17th**. Remote attendance will be made available via telecom and WebEx.

If you have questions about this meeting, please feel free to reach out to me directly at 519-596-2444x234 or john.haselmayer@canada.ca.

Sincerely,

John Haselmayer
Superintendent
Bruce Peninsula National Park and Fathom Five National Marine Park

cc

Katherine Patterson, Field Unit Superintendent, Georgian Bay and Ontario East Field Unit, Parks Canada