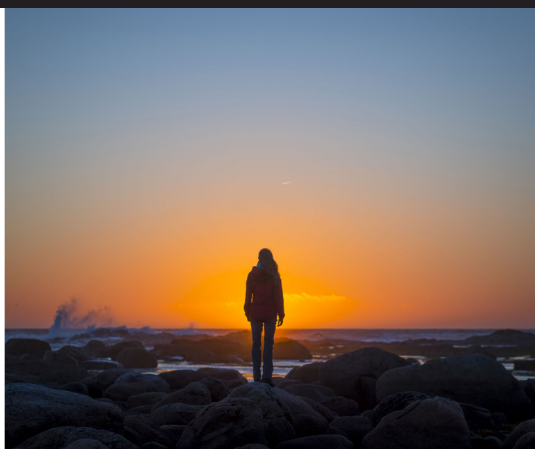
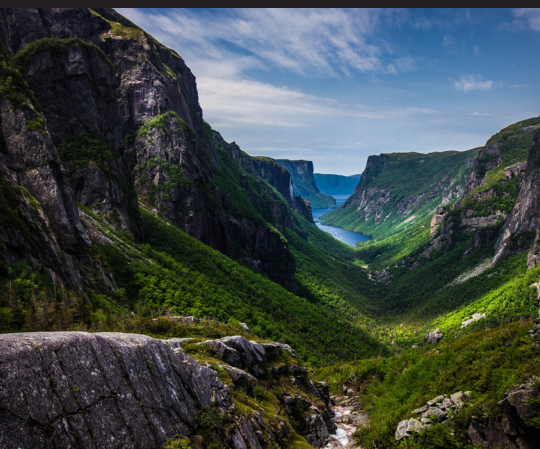




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Gros Morne

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

2019

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2019



March 2019

Gros Morne

National Park of Canada

DRAFT Management Plan

Executive Summary

Established in 1973, Gros Morne National Park protects for all time the ecological integrity of the Western Newfoundland Highlands natural region and an eastern portion of the St. Lawrence Lowlands natural region. It is the only national park to represent the Western Newfoundland Highlands and is the largest protected area within this natural region. The park's UNESCO¹ World Heritage site inscription recognizes its exceptional natural beauty and outstanding examples of major stages in the earth's geological evolution, illustrated by geological formations found within the park.

Tourism is an important contributor to the provincial economy of Newfoundland and Labrador and is a significant driver for the economies of the park's eight enclave communities. As a must-see travel destination and popular bucket-list item, Gros Morne National Park serves as a major draw for visitors to the province with most of the national park's visitors coming from other parts of Canada (nearly 60%) or from elsewhere in the world (29%).

This management plan replaces the 2009 management plan for Gros Morne National Park which provided management direction for maintaining and improving ecological integrity, delivering high quality, meaningful visitor experiences based on ecological and cultural heritage values, and building relationships with Indigenous partners, local residents and stakeholders.

A 2017 State of Park Assessment led to the identification of a number of key priorities that were considered during this plan review. They included actions aimed at improving the ecological integrity of the park through a continued focus on forest health with a sustained moose management program, enhanced efforts to prevent the extirpation of the Trout River salmon population as well as improvements to the condition of trails, privies, and way-finding to address visitor concerns. Continued asset recapitalization through future investments in highways, marine structures, vehicular bridges and visitor facilities (e.g., trail improvements), and an increased focus on integrating Indigenous perspectives into park management through collaboration were also identified as key priorities.

This draft management plan seeks to build upon the successful initiatives and collaborative relationships formed since 2009 while addressing the significant growth in visitation to, awareness of, and support for the park over the past decade. The next ten years will see the national park, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, continue a proactive approach towards sustainable tourism to ensure that future generations can enjoy this iconic Canadian destination without impairing the natural and cultural values that define it. This management direction has been developed through consultation and engagement with Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the general public. The vision, key strategies, objectives and targets reflect what was heard and provide a solid framework to guide future park management.

The three key strategies and area management approach for the 10 year management plan period focus on the following:

Key Strategy 1 – Protecting a Treasured Landscape

The intent of this strategy is to ensure that the natural and cultural values of Gros Morne National Park are protected for the benefit of current and future generations. Ecosystem-based principles will govern all park management decisions, thereby maintaining and improving ecological integrity and protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Collaborative approaches with Indigenous partners,

¹ UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

academic institutions and local communities in conservation and research will lead to an improved understanding of stressors on the national park's ecosystems. This improved knowledge and environmental stewardship will position the national park as a key contributor to the health of the Gros Morne region.

Key Strategy 2 – Achieving Results Together

This strategy recognizes that Gros Morne National Park is vital, not only to the protection of natural and cultural resources within its boundaries, but also to the livelihoods and lifestyles of local communities, and contributes significantly to the prosperity and sustainability of the region. The intent of this strategy is to focus on meaningful and inclusive engagement to build a greater sense of community responsibility, mutual understanding and ownership of problems and solutions, significantly enhancing Parks Canada's ability to deliver on its mandate in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders.

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

This strategy is focused on revitalizing the visitor experience in collaboration with local communities and stakeholders. During the course of this management plan, visitor experience opportunities will be more welcoming with inclusive, accessible, quality facilities and services designed to meet the current and future needs of target markets identified in the park's Visitor Experience Strategy. Visitor facilities will be improved to meet the needs of current and emerging target markets while also incorporating more sustainable, environmentally friendly practices and reduced operation/maintenance costs. The implementation of a Trail Concept Plan will focus on an improved, sustainable trail network that appeals to a wide range of visitors.

Area Management

Area management focuses on specific areas of the national park that have complex management challenges including important natural and/or cultural values, high visitation, public interest, significant infrastructure and multiple visitor experience opportunities. These areas often require careful consideration for maintenance of ecological integrity and to ensure high quality visitor experiences. In the case of Gros Morne National Park, two areas have been identified that require specific management objectives and targets in this management plan: Western Brook Pond Watershed and the Tablelands / Trout River Pond Area.

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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 *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Parks Canada Agency Act* require Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for each national park. The *Gros Morne National Park of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, describes Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how park management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

Parks Canada's many stakeholders and partners, including the Gros Morne Co-operating Association which has been Parks Canada's partner since 1993, as well as the Qalipu First Nation and Miawpukek First Nation, were involved in the preparation of this management plan. These key partners and others helped to shape the future direction of the national park and have demonstrated an interest in continuing to work closely with Parks Canada to fulfill our mandate. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Gros Morne National Park 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 as 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 regarding the management of Gros Morne National Park in years to come.

2.0 Significance of Gros Morne National Park

Established in 1973, Gros Morne National Park protects for all time the ecological integrity of the Western Newfoundland Highlands natural region and an eastern portion of the St. Lawrence Lowlands natural region. It is the only national park to represent the Western Newfoundland Highlands and is the largest protected area within this natural region. The park's UNESCO World Heritage site inscription recognizes its exceptional natural beauty and outstanding examples of major stages in the earth's geological evolution, illustrated by geological formations found within the park.

Gros Morne National Park is dominated by the Long Range Mountains, which rise abruptly from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to a plateau with elevations of over 800 m above sea level. The park includes more than 190 km of diverse coastline, a maritime climate, unique and varied geology, and dramatic topography shaped by periods of glaciation over the last 2 million years. Together these factors have created a remarkable diversity of habitats and physical features, including an arctic-alpine environment on the plateau, boreal forest dominated by balsam fir on the slopes and inland valleys, a large area of serpentine barrens, extensive wetlands, dramatic coastal views, and many significant geological features.

The arctic-alpine plateau is a significant feature of the Western Newfoundland Highlands natural region and is well represented in the park. This extensive area supports numerous rare Arctic and alpine plants as well as some of the most southerly populations of rock ptarmigan and Arctic hare, and is an important calving ground for woodland caribou.

One of the most striking habitats and geological features in the Western Newfoundland Highlands natural region is the serpentine barrens. These barrens are well represented by the Tablelands in the southern section of the park. This area is underlain by ultramafic bedrock originating in the Earth's mantle many kilometres below the surface. The major rock type, peridotite, has a high magnesium and iron content which is toxic to many plants and low in other nutrients required by most plants. As a result, the barrens are sparsely vegetated, and the plants that do survive there form a unique botanical community comprised of species that can persist in spite of the harsh conditions.

The suite of rocks in Gros Morne is internationally significant and contributes greatly to the scientific community's knowledge and understanding of plate tectonics. The Tablelands are one of the few places on Earth where a complete cross-section of rocks from the ocean's crust and mantle are well exposed, accessible, and protected within a national park. Other features of geological significance include outstanding glacial features such as moraines, troughs and raised beaches, and several fossil sites including a section of cliff at Green Point that has been designated the *Global Stratotype Section and Point* for the base of the Ordovician system. This combination of globally important geological features was one of the key reasons that Gros Morne was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Gros Morne National Park contributes to conservation of the broader region by protecting critical and significant ecosystems. Western Brook is the region's only scheduled salmon river whose watershed lies entirely within a protected area. The park also includes a diversity of wetlands including bogs, fens, salt marsh, alder swales and wet meadows characteristic of boreal ecosystems adapted to high precipitation and cool summers. The region is also home to a significant population of the imperilled Newfoundland marten. The return of a robust marten population in the park depends on maintaining healthy forests and preventing accidental snaring and trapping. Marten recolonized the park from the Main River watershed, a Canadian Heritage River that flows from the mountainous northeastern boundary of the park. The Main River is protected as a provincial waterway park and is important when considering the connectivity of the park to regional ecosystems.

The Gros Morne region has been inhabited by a number of Indigenous and European cultures for at least 4,500 years. The earliest were First Nations referred to as the Maritime Archaic, part of an ancient hunter-gatherer occupation of the Northeast. About 3,000 years ago, entirely new populations arrived from the eastern Arctic, first the Pre-Dorset, followed about a thousand years later by the Dorset. Overlapping for a time with the Dorset were new First Nations who reached the island about 2,000 years ago. These were the ancestors of the Beothuk. The first appearance of Europeans was circa AD 1000, when the Norse sailed these waters. In the 16th century, Spanish and French Basques carried out fisheries here, followed by an extensive French migratory cod fishery from AD 1600 until 1904. Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia began to populate the island in the early European era and their descendants live in the park today along with families of French, English, and Scottish descent. Commercial forestry began in the late 1800s, but cod and other fisheries remain a primary industry, with tourism also an important economic driver.

3.0 Planning Context

Located on the Northern Peninsula (Map 1: Regional Setting), the park encompasses 1805 km² of the mountainous and coastal areas characteristic of Western Newfoundland. Eight communities lie adjacent to the park: Trout River, Woody Point, Glenburnie-Birchy Head-Shoal Brook, Norris Point, Rocky Harbour, Sally's Cove, St. Paul's, and Cow Head (Map 2: Local Setting). They are home to a total population of approximately 3300 people. Deer Lake, the nearest regional service centre, lies 37 km to the south. Working with local communities to build and maintain positive working relationships is a priority for Parks Canada.

Several utility corridors and roads passing through Gros Morne National Park serve these communities as well as many others lying to the north of the park on the Northern Peninsula. In particular, Parks Canada is responsible for highway maintenance, including snow clearing, for 100 kms of Route 431 and Route 430, which run through the national park. Route 430 is the only road access to the Northern Peninsula, linking Newfoundland to Labrador, via the southern Labrador ferry.

Under the *Federal-Provincial Agreement*², traditional harvesting of timber for domestic use and snaring of snowshoe hare continue to be permitted in select areas of the park, and commercial fishing is supported at eight fish landing and staging areas.

Tourism is an important contributor to the provincial economy of Newfoundland and Labrador and is a significant driver for the economies of the park's eight enclave communities. As a must-see travel destination and popular bucket-list item, Gros Morne National Park serves as a major draw for visitors to the province with most of the national park's visitors coming from other parts of Canada (nearly 60%) or from elsewhere in the world (29%).³ In fact, the Western region of province is the second-most popular destination for visitors to the island, second only to St. John's, and Gros Morne National Park is the most popular attraction within the region. Consequently, Parks Canada works closely with Tourism NL, Go Western Newfoundland and the Gros Morne Co-operating Association, as well as local communities, to promote the park and other tourism-related businesses and attractions.

As an anchor attraction in the tourism industry, Gros Morne National Park is featured prominently in provincial advertising and national promotions. It is not surprising, therefore, that visitation to the national park has increased significantly in recent years. In 2018, visitation to the Visitor Centre and Discovery Centre exceeded 35% over the average of the previous 4 years. The increase in visitation is especially evident at the park's iconic locations. For example, between 2014 and 2018, the number of people taking the boat tour at Western Brook Pond went from 24,000 to almost 39,000. Meanwhile the number of people walking the Tablelands Trail went from just over 13,000 to more than 35,000. Respectively, a 62% and 169% increase over 2014 levels.

There are two Mi'kmaq Bands on the Island of Newfoundland, the Miawpukek First Nation and the Qalipu First Nation. The Miawpukek First Nation reserve, the community of Conne River, is located on the south coast of the Island, 400 km from Gros Morne National Park. Miawpukek First Nation includes many off-reserve members as well. Members of Qalipu First Nation are located throughout the province, however its band offices and the majority of members reside on the west coast of the Island. Continuing to grow and improve relationships with Miawpukek First Nation and Qalipu First Nation communities is a priority for Gros Morne National Park and the Parks Canada Agency.

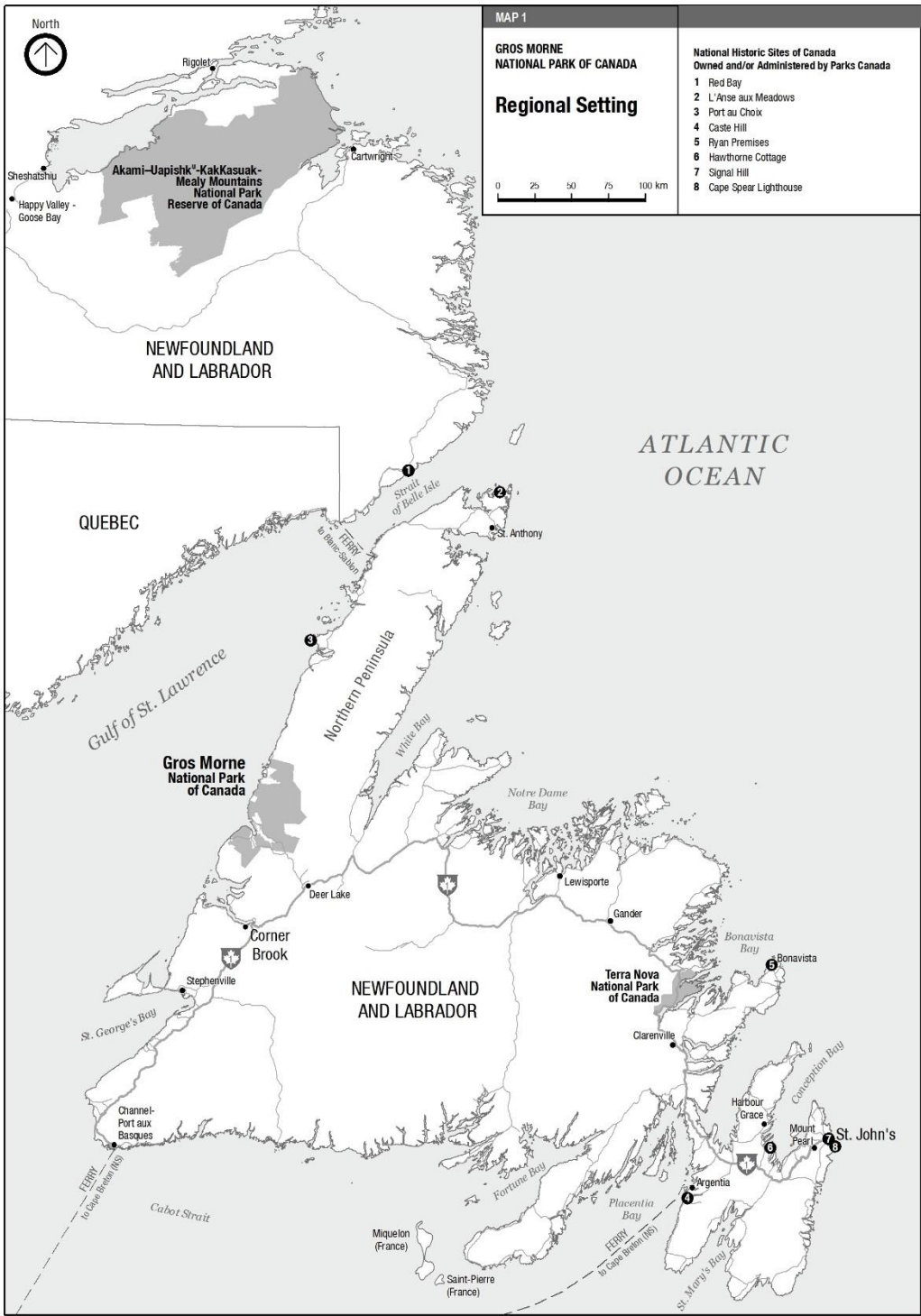
² See Appendix A for eligibility requirements.

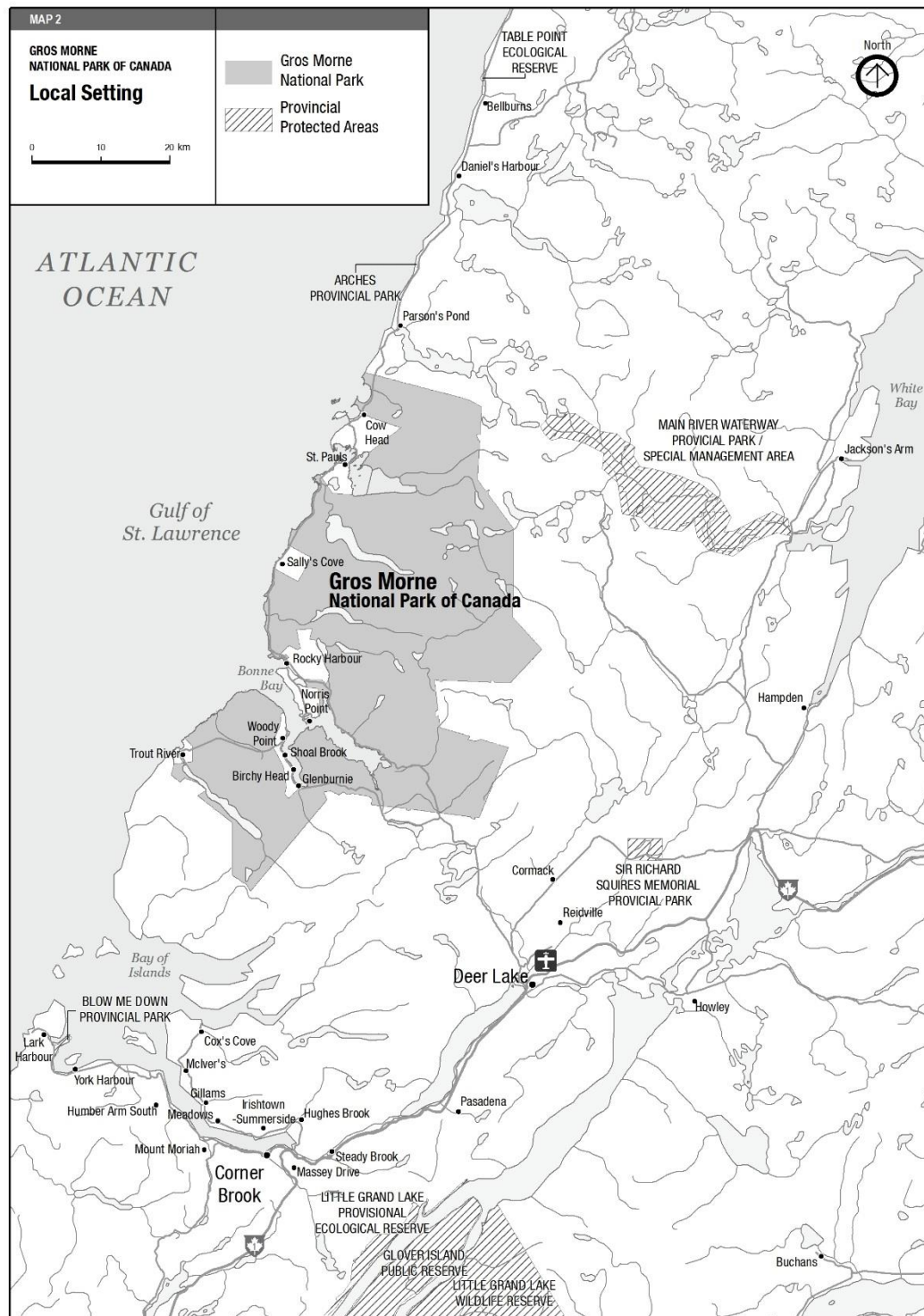
³ Gros Morne National Park Market Analysis, 2018.

This management plan replaces the 2009 management plan for Gros Morne National Park which provided management direction for maintaining and improving ecological integrity, delivering high quality, meaningful visitor experiences based on ecological and cultural heritage values, and building relationships with Indigenous partners, local residents and stakeholders. Since 2009, Gros Morne National Park has improved forest health through the management of a previously hyper-abundant moose population; finalized and implemented the Multi-species Action Plan for Gros Morne National Park of Canada; completed a Memorandum of Understanding with Qalipu First Nation for collaborative initiatives; improved the condition of roads and bridges; upgraded some of the most popular trails; enhanced the camping offer through the introduction of diversified accommodations and addition of serviced sites; and improved the experience at the Discovery Centre with a new exhibit focused on the reasons for the World Heritage site inscription.

A 2017 State of Park Assessment led to the identification of a number of key priorities that were considered during this plan review. They included actions aimed at improving the ecological integrity of the park through a continued focus on forest health with a sustained moose management program, enhanced efforts to prevent the extirpation of the Trout River salmon population as well as improvements to the condition of trails, privies, and way-finding to address visitor concerns. Continued asset recapitalization through future investments in highways, marine structures, vehicular bridges and visitor facilities (e.g., trail improvements), and an increased focus on integrating Indigenous perspectives into park management through collaboration were also identified as key priorities.

This draft management plan seeks to build upon the successful initiatives and collaborative relationships formed since 2009 while addressing the significant growth in visitation to, awareness of, and support for the park over the past decade. The next ten years will see the national park, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, continue a proactive approach towards sustainable tourism to ensure that future generations can enjoy this iconic Canadian destination without impairing the natural and cultural values that define it. This management direction has been developed through consultation and engagement with Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the general public. The vision, key strategies, objectives and targets reflect what was heard and provide a solid framework to guide future park management.





4.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Gros Morne National Park in 15 years.

An internationally recognized icon of protected areas in Canada, Gros Morne National Park continues to emphasize protection of ecological integrity in all aspects of park management. The park welcomes visitors from around the world to explore, recreate and rejuvenate while immersing themselves in the stories, sights and sounds that are found nowhere else. Maintaining and improving ecological integrity are the guiding principles of a sustainable tourism ethic that protects the natural and cultural values of the Gros Morne region while providing an array of enriching experiences to a growing number of visitors. Collaboration with Indigenous partners and local communities is a hallmark of successful park management that is visible in the following ways:

- Forest health continues to improve, caribou conservation is a priority, and imperilled salmon populations are recovering;
- Indigenous partners and local residents collaborate closely with national park staff and share their culture, stories and warm hospitality with visitors;
- Whether hiking, biking, camping, taking photographs or just communing with nature, visitors find a variety of opportunities to make a personal connection to the landscape;
- Youth are engaged in leadership opportunities in science, outdoor recreation and community relations;
- Innovative infrastructure designs and green technology mitigate impacts on the environment and maintain ecological integrity
- Visitors feel welcome and included, and are motivated to stay longer and begin planning their next visit before they have left the park;
- Visitors are empowered to make environmentally friendly decisions that reduce their impact on the natural environment, such as supporting conscious waste management; and
- Ecosystems are protected and high quality visitor experiences are maintained in iconic areas of the national park.

5.0 Key Strategies

Three key strategies frame the management direction for Gros Morne National Park for the next 10 years. The key strategies and corresponding objectives and targets focus on achieving the vision for the park through an integrated approach to park management. Targets have been prioritized with specific dates where feasible. Where no dates have been referenced, the target will be achieved within the period of the plan based on opportunities, annual priorities and capacity of the national park. In addition to the key strategies, which apply to the entire national park, Western Brook Pond and Tablelands / Trout River Pond present complex management scenarios and challenges; detailed objectives and targets for these two areas are presented in section 6.0. Annual implementation updates will be provided to engage partners from Indigenous communities, local communities, stakeholders and the general public.

Key Strategy 1 – Protecting a Treasured Landscape

The intent of this strategy is to ensure that the natural and cultural values of Gros Morne National Park are protected for the benefit of current and future generations. Ecosystem-based principles will govern all park management decisions, thereby maintaining and improving ecological integrity and protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Collaborative approaches with Indigenous partners, academic institutions and local communities in conservation and research will lead to an improved understanding of stressors on the national park's ecosystems. This improved knowledge and environmental stewardship will position the national park as a key contributor to the health of the Gros Morne region.

Objective 1.1

Forest health continues to improve.

Targets

- The forest ecosystem indicator remains in fair condition or improves in the next State of Park Assessment.
- The moose population in the park is actively managed through an annual maintenance hunt, which maintains the target density for ecological integrity.

Objective 1.2

Species at risk protection and recovery targets are achieved through the implementation of the Multi Species Action Plan for Gros Morne National Park of Canada, and research and monitoring contribute to the management of species of conservation concern.

Targets

- Recovery measures and approaches listed in the Multi Species Action Plan for Gros Morne National Park of Canada are fully implemented by 2021.
- Research to understand Arctic hare population decline is initiated by 2024.
- The Trout River salmon population shows an increasing trend in the next State of Park Assessment.
- Stressors affecting caribou are investigated and mitigations implemented where feasible.
- Indigenous partners and local communities participate in species protection and recovery programs.
- Capitalize on opportunities to share stories about successful conservation initiatives, on an annual basis.

Objective 1.3

Fish populations in Gros Morne National Park are managed to maintain ecological integrity.

Targets

- In consultation with stakeholders identify and close representative and unique aquatic ecosystems in highland areas of the national park by 2024.
- Develop a salmonid monitoring program to better understand the distribution of salmonid populations and the impacts of fishing on those populations through the integration of research and traditional ecological knowledge by 2029.
- Indigenous partners, local communities and regional partners participate in conservation and stewardship of fish populations.
- Annual revenue from recreational angling licenses is invested in the conservation of fish populations.

Objective 1.4

Visitor use is managed to ensure protection of ecological integrity.

Targets

- Review visitation patterns and volumes annually to identify potential visitor use impacts to ecological integrity and implement monitoring and mitigation measures where required.
- Develop visitor use monitoring protocols for Western Brook Pond, Tablelands, Gros Morne Mountain by 2021.

Objective 1.5

Over-snow vehicle use is managed to maintain ecological integrity and be compliant with the snowmobile management plan.

Targets

- A snowmobile research and monitoring program continues to address commitments made in response to the snowmobile environmental assessment.
- Ecologically sustainable limits for snowmobile use in the southern area of the park are developed by 2023 to compliment the limits identified for the remainder of the park.
- A snowmobile permit system that ensures the annual number of snowmobile trips in identified areas of the national park does not exceed the limits set for those areas is developed and implemented by 2024.

Objective 1.6

The Outstanding Universal Value upon which Gros Morne's World Heritage site inscription is based are protected and promoted.

Targets

- A Federal-Provincial Land Use Committee meets at least once per year to consider land use activities occurring both inside the national park and outside its boundary that may have an impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the national park.
- UNESCO World Heritage sites in Newfoundland and Labrador are promoted by Parks Canada in collaboration with tourism operators and organizations by 2024.
- Options to define and safeguard the scenic beauty of Gros Morne National Park are identified by 2024.

Objective 1.7

Impacts of climate change are considered in national park management decisions.

Targets

- The ecological integrity monitoring program is evaluated by 2024 to determine if adjustments are required to understand effects of climate change on the park's ecosystems.
- Ecological resources and archaeological sites are assessed in terms of vulnerability to climate change impacts by 2029.
- Through research partnerships, climate change knowledge and projections are incorporated into operational plans (e.g., asset investments, fire management, hyper-abundant species, species at risk, etc.) and impact assessments by 2029.

Objective 1.8

Green technologies are incorporated into national park operations to achieve improvements such as reduced carbon emissions, improved waste management, and increased energy efficiency.

Targets

- Conduct a cross-functional audit of park programs and assets to identify opportunities to reduce environmental impacts of park operations and visitation through asset rationalization, increasing energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions, light pollution, and waste (garbage) production by 2021.
- Park programs are compliant with Western Regional Waste Management's improved 2018 recycling and waste management standards by 2021.
- Electric vehicles and/or plug in hybrid electric vehicles make up at least 10% of new vehicle purchases by 2029.
- Explore partnering opportunities to install public charging stations in key park locations by 2024.

Objective 1.9

The cultural resources of the Gros Morne landscape are identified and protected.

Targets

- All documented archaeological sites are assessed for condition by 2024.
- A Cultural Resources Values Statement is completed by 2029.

Key Strategy 2 – Achieving Results Together

Communication and collaboration are at the heart of this strategy. Parks Canada is committed to building on a foundation of respect and encouraging on-going dialogue with external parties as the relationship between Parks Canada and Indigenous people, other key partners and stakeholders including local communities and youth, has a direct impact on the success of park management and the health of forest, wetland and freshwater ecosystems. This strategy recognizes that Gros Morne National Park is vital, not only to the protection of natural and cultural resources within its boundaries, but also to the livelihoods and lifestyles of local communities, and contributes significantly to the prosperity and sustainability of the region. The intent of this strategy is to focus on meaningful and inclusive engagement to build a greater sense of community responsibility, mutual understanding and ownership of problems and solutions, significantly enhancing Parks Canada's ability to deliver on its mandate in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders.

Objectives 2.1

Effective partner and stakeholder engagement ensures shared stewardship and assists in identifying and working toward the accomplishment of mutual goals and common interests.

Targets

- An engagement strategy is developed to increase communication and collaboration with local communities and stakeholders by 2021.
- The development of a Youth Council that encourages leadership and participation in science, outdoor recreation and community engagement in Gros Morne National Park is pursued by 2022.

Objective 2.2

Indigenous partners are actively involved in park management and presentation of Indigenous history and culture.

Targets

- Collaboration and engagement with Indigenous partners is advanced by 2022.
- Opportunities to incorporate traditional knowledge in park management are identified by 2024.

- Mi'kmaq history and living culture are present within Gros Morne National Park and opportunities for cross-promotion of Indigenous experiences and products are explored with Indigenous partners.

*Objective 2.3**Local culture is celebrated in Gros Morne National Park.*

Targets

- Opportunities to experience the culture and traditions of local communities are identified in collaboration with others, and a strategy is developed to facilitate such experiences in the national park and surrounding communities by 2024.
- Revisit cultural history messaging with community partners and incorporate into interpretive programs and products, as resources become available.

*Objective 2.4**Land use issues adjacent to the national park are identified, understood and addressed through effective partner and community relations.*

Targets

- In consultation with the Provincial government address development in Fish Landing and Staging Areas by 2024.
- Assess the need and develop management approaches for marine resources in St. Paul's Inlet in collaboration with stakeholders by 2029.
- Increased opportunities for dialogue about the impacts of land use adjacent to national park boundaries lead to greater stakeholder collaboration.

*Objective 2.5**Gros Morne National Park is at the centre of a sustainable approach to living in and visiting the region.*

Targets

- Networks and partnerships link Parks Canada, the Gros Morne Co-operating Association, businesses, Indigenous and other communities in an effort to raise awareness of the social, environmental, and economic benefits of a sustainable national park and communities by 2024.
- Requirements and incentives for environmentally and/or socially responsible operations are incorporated into Requests for Proposals and business licenses.
- Parks Canada continues to work in partnership with the Gros Morne Cooperating Association to build and strengthen sustainable tourism in the region through programs such as the Strategic Tourism for Areas and Regions (STAR) initiative and an annual tourism forum.

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

A visit to Gros Morne National Park is full of opportunities to enjoy the natural wonders of a spectacular landscape and the cultural treasures of traditional Newfoundland communities. This strategy is focused on revitalizing the visitor experience in collaboration with local communities and stakeholders. During the course of this management plan, visitor experience opportunities will be more welcoming with inclusive, accessible, quality facilities and services designed to meet the current and future needs of target markets identified in the park's Visitor Experience Strategy. Visitor facilities will be improved to meet the needs of current and emerging target markets while also incorporating more sustainable, environmentally friendly practices and reduced

operation/maintenance costs. The implementation of a Trail Concept Plan will focus on an improved, sustainable trail network that appeals to a wide range of visitors.

Objective 3.1

Visitor experience in Gros Morne National Park is aligned with existing and future target audiences.

Targets

- Attendance at all interpretation programs is stable or increasing while maintaining the quality of an individual's experience.
- An initiative to connect the health of Gros Morne's forest with the personal health of visitors is launched by 2020.
- An assessment of target markets and opportunities for winter experience offers is conducted by 2021.
- Arts, music and other cultural offerings are further integrated into the visitor experience by 2024.
- Visitor satisfaction related to 'value for entry' is maintained or improved in the next State of Park Assessment.
- 'Adventurous Millennials', identified as a target audience to grow, have increased visits to the park by 2029.

Objective 3.2

Improved trail management ensures proper maintenance of the trail network and supports a revitalized, high quality experience for trail users.

Targets

- Sustainable trail designs will reduce annual maintenance costs, minimize environmental impacts and support a more effective trail maintenance program.
- Trail conditions are monitored and communicated through the implementation of Parks Canada's Trail Information Management System (TIMS) by 2020.
- A volunteer trail ambassador program is developed by 2021 to help identify potential concerns related to maintenance, garbage management and visitor safety, and to encourage interaction between volunteers and park visitors on trails.
- The Trail Concept Plan is reviewed and updated in collaboration with trail users, Indigenous and local community representatives by 2024.
- Visitor satisfaction with the condition of trails is rated 85% or higher in the next Visitor Information Program survey.

Objective 3.3

Improved trip planning and visitor experiences are identified in collaboration with tourism partners and the local business community.

Targets

- Visitor satisfaction with 'information prior to arrival' is maintained or improved in the next State of Park Assessment.
- Opportunities are provided for more user generated content to support marketing of experiences to potential visitors.
- "Path to purchase" options for a range of visitor experiences (ex. guided walks, Long Range Traverse, backcountry camping, etc.) are included in Parks Canada's reservation system by 2025.

Objective 3.4

Accessibility and inclusivity continue to improve in national park operations such that the park offers meaningful experiences and opportunities to an increasingly diverse range of visitors.

Targets

- All new and existing stand-alone bathrooms are made gender-neutral by 2020.
- An accessibility and inclusion audit is completed by 2021 and an implementation strategy is in place for 2024.
- Improved information is available to help visitors plan their visit by 2024.
- An open and inclusive atmosphere is created through signage, staff training, and facility design by 2024.

Objective 3.5

Collaborate with local businesses to expand and diversify visitor experience opportunities, services and amenities within, and adjacent to, the park.

Targets

- In partnership with relevant organisations, host a business incubation workshop by 2021.
- A park business license program that creates a fair business environment, establishes visitor experience standards, visitor safety standards, and promotes sustainable practices is launched by 2020.

6.0 Area Management

Area management focuses on specific areas of the national park that have complex management challenges including important natural and/or cultural values, high visitation, public interest, significant infrastructure and multiple visitor experience opportunities. These areas often require careful consideration for maintenance of ecological integrity and to ensure high quality visitor experiences. In the case of Gros Morne National Park, two areas have been identified that require specific management objectives and targets in this management plan: Western Brook Pond Watershed and the Tablelands / Trout River Pond Area.

In the preparation of the area management approach, Parks Canada invited representatives from Indigenous and local communities, as well as the environmental, business, tourism and the arts sectors to discuss the future desired conditions of Western Brook Pond Watershed and the Tablelands / Trout River Pond Area. Discussions identified opportunities and challenges to be addressed over the next 5-10 years in order to achieve the future desired conditions. The outcomes of these discussions informed and strengthened the following management direction.

Western Brook Pond Watershed

The cliffs of Western Brook Pond are formed of 1.25 billion year-old Precambrian rock, the oldest in the park. The cliffs rise 670 m above sea level, buttressing Western Brook Pond and ornamented with high waterfalls spilling from the Long Range highlands. Shallow soils and surface bedrock mean that waters running off the plateau contribute little in terms of sediment or organic matter, so the water in Western Brook Pond is amongst the purest in the world. The watershed is also home to many iconic and culturally important species. Hundreds of Atlantic salmon and sea-run brook trout migrate upstream from the Gulf of St. Lawrence each year, while the river is home to Arctic charr and dense populations of long-lived freshwater mussels and is a breeding site for imperilled harlequin ducks. Caribou also use habitats throughout the watershed, including wetlands, forests, and alpine barrens, and make seasonal migrations between

the watershed's highlands and coastal lowlands. Snow stays late into summer in the Long Range Highlands that form the upper reaches of the watershed, and these areas are home to isolated populations of many northern or alpine species including Arctic hare, rock ptarmigan, white-crowned sparrow, and numerous Arctic plants and mosses.

There are a number of trails of varying degrees of difficulty around Western Brook Pond. The Western Brook Pond trail is the most heavily used in the park with an excess of 40,000 users annually. Recently, the trail has been enhanced to improve safety, accessibility and long term sustainability. The trail provides access to the increasingly popular boat tour which provides visitors an opportunity to experience the glacially carved fiord. This trail and boat tour provide access to the Hike up Western Brook Gorge, the Long Range Traverse, and the Northern Traverse. These challenging, single and/or multi-day unmarked hiking routes provide seasoned backpackers with an opportunity to experience the spectacular scenery of the Long Range Mountains.

The Long Range Traverse is the most popular of the backcountry traverses and visitor numbers in recent years have increased steadily from 335 in 2013 to 759 in 2017, and is now operating at or near capacity during July and August. The hiking route offers visitors an opportunity to experience true wilderness, solitude and self-reliance in an Arctic-alpine landscape with views of Gros Morne's famous fiord lakes. This experience allows the visitor to be immersed in iconic elements of the park and provides opportunities to view native plants and wildlife characteristic of this eco-region with few encounters with other people. In order to maintain the sense of solitude, safeguard the wilderness character of the place, and protect highland ecosystems, daily limits are placed on the number of hikers on the Long Range and they are accommodated at five designated primitive backcountry campsites along this route.

Recent investments at Western Brook Pond have been largely focused on supporting visitor experiences associated with the boat tour. Enhanced parking capacity and trail, wharf and boathouse upgrades have addressed long-standing deficiencies. Future investments will focus on the provision of a diverse visitor experience offer that includes opportunities to enjoy a refreshed interpretation program and a well-maintained trail system, while ensuring that the ecological integrity and wilderness character of the area are being safeguarded. Use of personal vehicles and tour buses will not be permitted on Western Brook Pond trail, nor will proposals for large-scale commercial development (i.e., hotels, restaurants, shops) or increased parking capacity be entertained. Activities outside the scope of the current boat tour contract will not be considered. When the contract expires in 2027, options for an eco-friendly operation that is responsive to the interests of the park's target markets will be explored.

Objective 1

Visitor use management in the Western Brook Pond Watershed ensures that national park resources are protected.

Targets

- Annual engagement with the boat tour operator and backcountry guides to identify and mitigate visitor use issues related to maintaining ecological integrity, safety, satisfaction, and/or maintenance of facilities.
- As part of the ecological integrity monitoring program, establish a park-wide water quality measure that includes Western Brook Pond by 2021 to complement existing measures that track salmon and harlequin duck populations in Western Brook. Use this measure to monitor the impacts of visitor use and trigger appropriate mitigations as required.
- Replicate the 1999 sediment contaminants study by 2021, and then again at 5 year intervals until no longer warranted, to evaluate management effectiveness.

*Objective 2**An integrated visitor experience is created through the entire journey at Western Brook Pond.*

Targets

- The interpretation program is assessed in collaboration with the boat tour operator by 2020 to identify potential improvements that match the interests of target markets.
- The visitor experience (e.g., traffic flow, rest stops, interpretive signage, etc.) along the trail is enhanced and updated by 2022.
- Visitor satisfaction is rated 85% or higher in the next Visitor Information Program survey.

*Objective 3**Environmentally sustainable tourism practices are implemented by Parks Canada and third party operators.*

Targets

- A human waste and garbage management strategy for backcountry experiences is developed in collaboration with third party operators and incorporated into business licensing requirements by 2024.
- Electric and/or hybrid propulsion technology is investigated and, if feasible, incorporated into the boat tour License of Occupation in 2027.

*Objective 4**The Western Brook Pond area continues to be an iconic destination for visitors to Newfoundland and Labrador.*

Targets

- As part of the accessibility audit for the park, opportunities are identified to further support accessibility for visitors to Western Brook Pond by 2021.
- A strategy is developed to ensure the wilderness experience and mitigate potential impacts of visitation to Western Brook Gorge by 2021.
- The loop trail, Snug Harbour and North Rim trails are returned to good condition with the crossing over Western Brook re-instated, subject to available funding.

Tablelands / Trout River Pond Area

Attracting both geologists and visitors from around the world, the Tablelands are the largest and most prominent geologic feature in the park and one of its most striking and unique natural landscapes. The Tablelands was once the lower most layer of an ancient ocean floor (or lithosphere). Composed of an igneous rock called peridotite, it was a piece of the Earth's upper mantle until pushed onto the Earth's surface as continents collided 500 million years ago. Today, it is one of the few places in the world where a sample of the Earth's mantle is well exposed, preserved and accessible. The iron in the rock turns rusty as it weathers, giving the barren landscape its distinctive orange-brown colour.

Adjacent to the Tablelands, Trout River Pond and its surrounding cliffs expose the upper layers of the ancient ocean floor. Together, the Tablelands and these cliffs provide a rare exposure of a complete slice of an ancient ocean floor for geologic study. First recognized as ocean floor in the 1960's, it became important evidence of plate tectonics and a reason for the park's World Heritage designation.

Today, both the Tablelands and Trout River Pond offer opportunities to hike, explore, discover, or just enjoy the scenic beauty of a truly unique landscape. Nestled in this landscape, Trout River Pond offers opportunities for boating, camping, boat tours, and

other aquatic activities. A campground and day use area are also located at Trout River Pond.

Objective 1

Shared objectives for the future of the Trout River Pond area of the park are developed with the community.

Targets

- A joint strategic planning session is organized in 2020 with national park staff, Trout River town council, and local stakeholders.
- An investment strategy that considers infrastructure and visitor experiences is developed for the Trout River Pond area by 2021.
- The community of Trout River and other stakeholders are engaged in salmon restoration efforts.

Objective 2

The area around the Tablelands trail is carefully managed to accommodate visitation while protecting natural resources, minimizing crowding and parking congestion, and maintaining a safe, high quality visitor experience.

Targets

- Third party proposals for alternative transportation options such as shuttles and buses, ride sharing, bicycles, and e-bikes are considered.
- Appropriate parking, a short accessible trail, washroom facilities and non-personal interpretation are enhanced as resources permit.

Objective 3

Visitor experience opportunities at the Tablelands are diversified to meet the growing demand.

Targets

- Opportunities for a bike lane and additional viewpoints are considered when Route 431 between the Discovery Centre and Trout River is recapitalized.
- Opportunities for additional hiking and mountain biking trails are considered as part of the Trail Concept Plan.

7.0 Zoning Plan

Parks Canada uses a zoning system to classify land and water areas according to protection needs and the opportunities they offer park visitors. These zones ensure a range of visitor opportunities is provided in areas best suited for those activities, while protecting the attributes essential to a memorable visitor experience. The land-use zoning map (Map 3: Zoning Plan) illustrates the area zone designations.

Amendments from the 2009 management plan include:

- The Zone I around Heather Pond contains one of the most significant botanical sites in the park. Through ecological integrity monitoring (2003, 2005, 2017), new Mountain Fern locations have been identified. As a result, the proposed area of Zone I has been increased by approximately 1km².
- Some saltwater estuaries and intertidal areas were not included in previous zoning plans. The following areas are proposed for Zone 3 designation which is consistent with the adjacent land zoning:
 - Intertidal Area between Shallow Bay and Belldowns Islands

- A small cove east of The Barachois on the north side of St. Paul's Inlet
- Deer Arm Estuary
- Southeast Arm Estuary
- Lomond River Estuary
- Glenburnie Estuary
- The inner (eastern) portion of St. Paul's Inlet is within the national park. In the spirit and intent of the *Federal-Provincial Agreement*, St. Paul's Inlet will not be zoned until such time as the area is no longer used for commercial fishing.
- Portions of zoning boundaries were spatially inaccurate and have been adjusted to reflect the spirit and intent of original zoning boundaries and align with Domestic Harvest boundaries. No significant change in the zoning areas has occurred through this exercise.
- Visitor nodes and facilities have been identified on the zoning map (Map 3: Zoning Plan) and in the accompanying text descriptions for clarity.

Zone I - Special Preservation Areas (6% of the park)

Zone I preserves areas of the park which contain or support unique, threatened or endangered natural or cultural features or are among the best examples of the features that represent a natural region. Preservation is the key consideration. Motorized access is not permitted. In cases where the fragility of the area precludes any public access, every effort will be made to provide visitors with off-site programs and exhibits interpreting the special characteristics of the zone. The Zone I areas in the park include:

- 1) *Shallow Bay – Lower Head* – the best example of one of the park's unique shoreline features, a sandy beach with extensive coastal sand dunes that are preserved in a natural state.
- 2) *Stearin Island and White Rock Islets (Belldowns Island)* – small, sparsely vegetated, and exposed coastal islands that are extremely important to breeding seabirds. The island has been recognized as a traditional nesting area for common terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Arctic terns (*Sterna paradiseae*) and supports a large nesting population of common eider ducks and a variety of gulls and other seabirds.
- 3) *St. Paul's Inlet Salt Marsh* – the park's largest example of a distinct mixture of temperate and Arctic saltmarsh plant species and important shorebird and waterfowl habitat.
- 4) *Heather Pond (Island Pond)* – the pond's western shore contains the only eastern North American colony of the rare mountain fern (*Thelypteris quelpaertensis*) and is considered to be one of the most significant botanical sites in the park. The pond is a large, deep, ultra-oligotrophic lake that is low in nutrients and does not support fish but has a relatively high diversity of invertebrates. It is the best example of this type of ecosystem on the park's alpine plateau.
- 5) *Frontal Slope Southwest of Western Brook Pond* – supports a rare successional community of white birch scrub-dwarf heath shrub of fire origin, and a rock barren community consisting of plants having arctic-alpine affinities.
- 6) *Big Level* – at an elevation of 700 to 800 m, this large arctic-alpine plateau with snow bed habitats supports numerous rare plants, woodland caribou calving grounds, and a number of Arctic hare, rock ptarmigan, horned larks and American pipits.
- 7) *Killdevil Mountain* – supports a high diversity of uncommon and rare plants, while a community of pioneer heath shrubs and even-aged white birch, both of fire origin, colonizes the talus slopes.
- 8) *Summit of the Tablelands* – internationally significant, the unusual geology of this formation is largely responsible for its unique physiographic and botanical characteristics. The area is home to disjunct plant species characteristic of this

formation, and contains an outstanding example of string fens, which is an important nesting area for greater yellowlegs in the park.

Zone II - Wilderness (60% of the park)

Zone II contains extensive areas that are good representations of the natural region's mountain plateaus, steep mountain slopes, and lakes, which are conserved in a wilderness state. These areas offer opportunities for visitors to experience, first hand, the park's ecosystems and require few, if any, services and facilities. Motorized access is not permitted. In much of Zone II, visitors have the opportunity to experience remoteness and solitude. Facilities are restricted to short trails, two ski-in cabins, primitive backcountry campsites and a research cabin. Visitor activities include hiking along the Long Range Traverse and the Northern Traverse, the Lookout Hills, Tablelands, and Stanleyville trails and backcountry snowshoeing and skiing.

The Zone II areas in the park include:

- 1) The *Alpine Plateau of the Long Range Mountains* - composed of granite and gneiss. Heath-lichen tundra, balsam fir forest and tuckamore are the prominent plant communities. Small ponds and streams are numerous over the area. Rocky rubble is abundant beneath the numerous talus slopes of the fiord lakes and glacially carved valleys.
- 2) The *Lomond Peninsula* - a steep-sided rugged area, composed of sedimentary rocks such as limestone, dolomite, shale and sandstone. The plateau supports sedge bogs and fens, as well as balsam fir forest and heath lichen tundra.
- 3) The *Lookout Hills* - are a magnificent highland area composed of peridotite, gabbro and granite with precipitous cliffs descending to the waters of Bonne Bay. Forested slopes and expansive sedge fens dominate the plateau.
- 4) The *Tablelands* - have unique physiographic and botanical characteristics with disjunct plant species characteristic of this formation. This wilderness zone completely surrounds the Zone I area of the same name.

Zone III - Natural Environment (33% of the national park)

The Zone III designation is intended to maintain the natural character of specified areas while encouraging the appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural heritage values through outdoor recreational activities requiring minimal services and facilities of a rustic nature. While motorized access may be allowed, it will be controlled.

The park's Zone III areas include most of the coastal lowlands, representative of the Gulf of St. Lawrence Lowlands natural region; the steep frontal slopes of the Long Range Mountains around Bonne Bay; and the valleys south of Bonne Bay, Southeast Hills, and Western Brook Pond. Visitor facilities within this area include almost all of the park trail system, the boat tour on Western Brook Pond, and groomed cross-country ski trails.

Zone IV - Outdoor Recreation (1% of the national park)

Zone IV areas are capable of accommodating a broad range of opportunities for understanding, appreciating and enjoying the park's heritage values. Visitor opportunities and related essential services and facilities will be provided in ways that place minimal impact on the ecological integrity of the park. The defining feature of this zone is direct access by motorized vehicles.

In Gros Morne National Park, Zone IV areas include front country facilities, rights-of-way along roads (including pull off and parking lots), and Trout River Pond.

Zone IV visitor nodes include:

- 1) Five campgrounds: Shallow Bay, Green Point, Berry Hill, Lomond, and Trout River.
- 2) Ten day-use facilities: Shallow Bay, Western Brook, Western Brook Pond (Dockside), Bakers Brook, Deer Arm (Mattie Mitchell Trail), Mill Brook, Southeast Hills, Lomond, McKenzie Brook and Trout River Pond (Dockside).

- 3) Three major interpretive facilities: Broom Point, Lobster Cove Head, and the Visitor Reception Centre near Rocky Harbour.
- 4) The swimming pool at Rocky Harbour.
- 5) Killdevil Camp at Lomond.

Zone V: Park Services

Zone V is applied to major park operation and administrative functions. The boathouse at Western Brook Pond is in Zone V. The Discovery Centre, Gateway Kiosk, and Administration buildings are outside the national park boundaries and therefore are not included in the zoning.

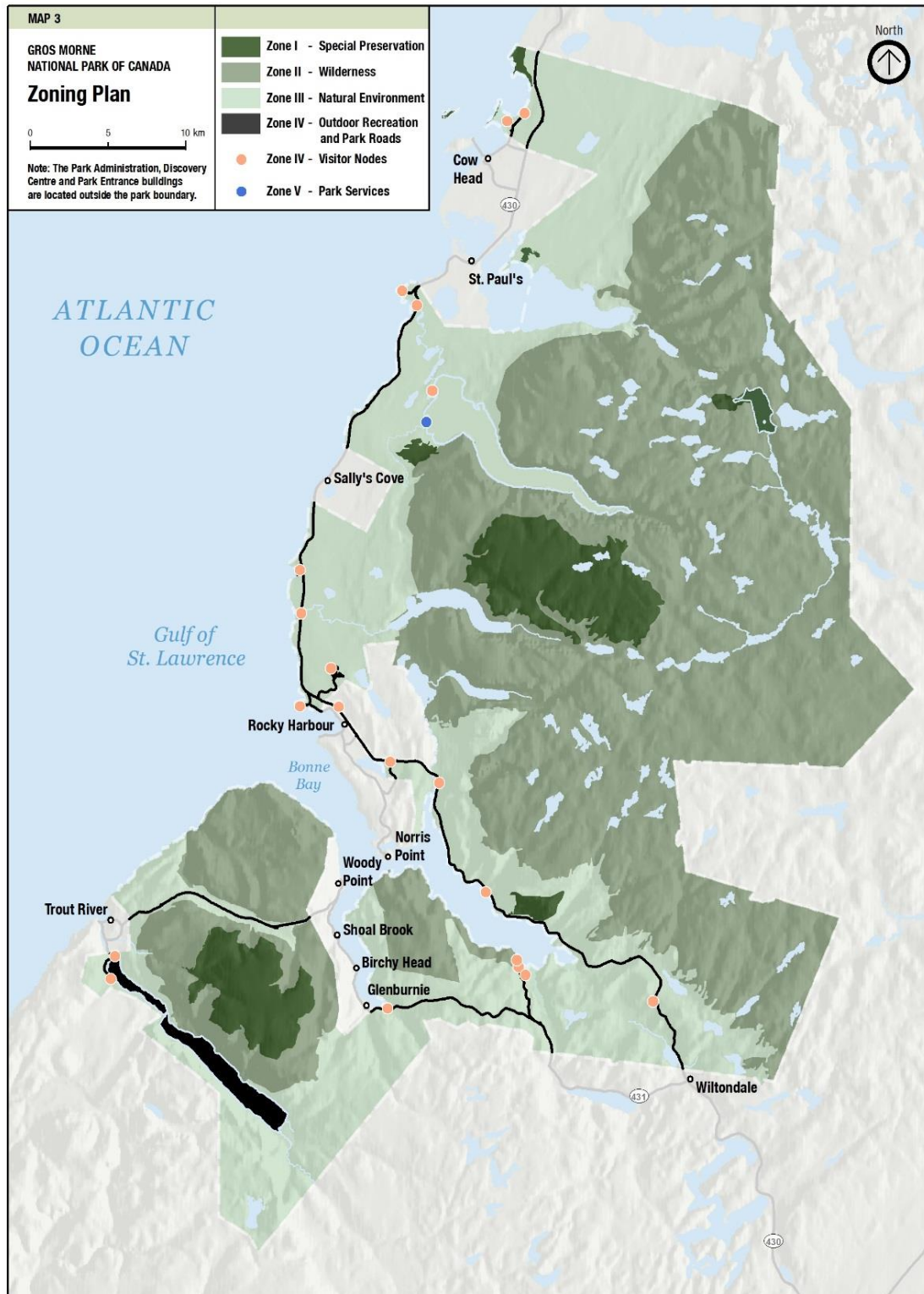
Non-conforming Uses

Due to considerations which were included in the *Federal-Provincial Agreement* to establish Gros Morne National Park, some zones support uses or activities that do not conform with the spirit and intentions of their zoning.

Facilities and activities not consistent with park zoning for specific areas include:

- Utility corridors serving the park area and Northern Peninsula.
- Designated areas for domestic timber harvest and snaring of snowshoe hare.
- Areas for aggregate extraction.
- Forest access roads at Trout River and McKenzie's Brook.
- Snowmobiling.

The Park Superintendent may authorize motorized access in any zone for administrative and operational purposes.



8.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

In accordance with *The Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals (2010)*, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is conducted on all management plans. The purpose of SEA is to incorporate environmental considerations into the development of public policies, plans, and program proposals to support environmentally-sound decision making. Individual projects undertaken to implement management statement objectives at the site will be evaluated to determine if an impact assessment is required under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act 2012*, or successor legislation.

The scope of the assessment included the area within the boundary of Gros Morne National Park and considered influences from potential external local and regional stressors outside of the park. The time frame considered in the assessment was ten years from the date of the plan, at which time the plan will be reviewed. Valued components evaluated in the SEA included marine and coastal habitat, Piping plover, seabirds, freshwater, Atlantic salmon, other salmonids, wetlands, forest vegetation, American marten, Woodland caribou, Arctic hare, Rock ptarmigan, and alpine vegetation and terrain.

The draft management plan identifies various objectives to address cumulative effects to marine and coastal habitat, Atlantic salmon, other salmonids, American marten, Piping plover, seabirds, Rock ptarmigan and alpine vegetation. These include objectives for implementation of the Multi-Species Action Plan (Objective 1.2) and consideration of climate change impacts (Objective 1.7). For fish, the management plan includes a target to achieve an increasing trend for the Trout River salmon population (Objective 1.2), and monitoring of salmonid populations and fisheries to manage ecological integrity (Objective 1.3). For marine and coastal habitat, management approaches for marine resources within St. Paul's Inlet will be developed (Objective 2.4). Other mitigation strategies are identified in the SEA as required. For alpine vegetation and terrain this includes planning to mitigate impacts from increasing visitation.

The forest ecosystem has been altered by hyper-abundant moose. Measures of forest health are improving with management of the moose population. For forest vegetation, Objective 1.1 identifies that the moose population will be actively managed for the purpose of maintaining or improving the ecological integrity of the forest ecosystem. An annual maintenance hunt will be used to maintain the target density of moose in Gros Morne National Park.

The Newfoundland population of Woodland caribou has declined more than 60% since 2001, and is impacted by range-wide direct and indirect impacts from human activity. Objective 1.2 identifies that stressors affecting caribou will be researched and mitigations implemented where feasible. Other mitigations identified in the SEA include collaboration with neighbouring land managers to prioritize conservation actions across caribou range through landscape planning.

For Arctic hare, further information is needed on the factors influencing recent declines in the Gros Morne National Park population including predation, climate change, snowmobiling, and winter visitor access to determine effective management approaches. Objective 1.2 identifies a timeline for initiating research on the decline of the Arctic hare population.

Parts of the Lomond River, Trout River and Eastern Arm watersheds in Gros Morne National Park originate outside the park in areas with forestry and cabin development. The SEA identifies that these activities are predicted to be a low risk to freshwater quality

in Gros Morne National Park over the next 10 years with continued management of these activities outside the park. Within Gros Morne National Park, impacts from water use, discharge to the receiving environment, and recreational activities on water are expected to be minimal. The management plan identifies that a park-wide water quality measure will be added to Gros Morne National Park's ecological integrity monitoring program (Western Brook Pond Watershed Objective 1).

For wetlands, infrastructure footprint is not near a level where cumulative effects to wetland vegetation need to be considered, however project impact assessment will examine project design to minimize footprint and impacts to rare plants and communities.

The SEA also considers the two Outstanding Universal Value criteria for which Gros Morne National Park was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987, to ensure these are adequately protected by the management plan. Limited threats to the Outstanding Universal Value were identified. Objective 1.6 identifies targets for working collaboratively to manage potential impacts to Outstanding Universal Value, and for exploring options to define and safeguard the scenic beauty of Gros Morne National Park.

The public, stakeholders and Indigenous partners will be consulted on the draft management plan and draft SEA. Feedback will be considered and incorporated into the SEA and management plan as appropriate.