

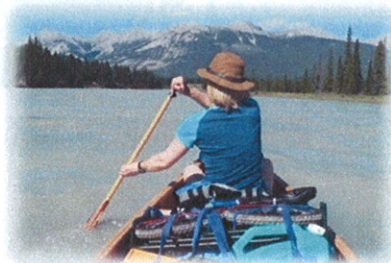
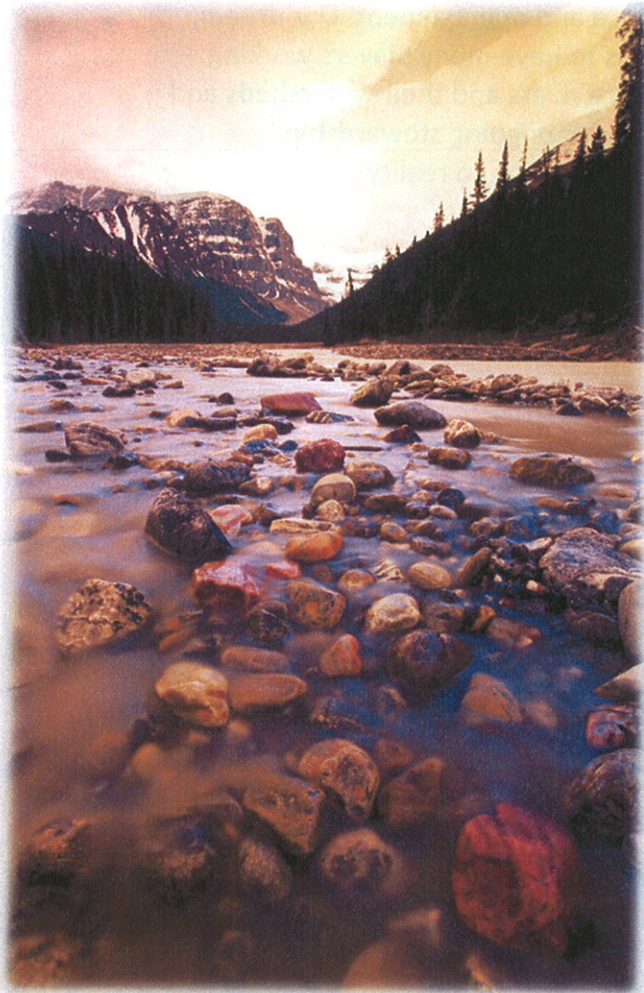


Parks
Canada

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Review of the Guidelines for River Use Management in Jasper National Park of Canada 2010 Report



Canada

CANADA'S RIVER DECLARATION 2009

Canadian Rivers help to define Canada and Canadians: our future, our world identity, our health and heritage and history. Their integrity and sustainability can no longer be taken for granted. Many of our communities, including our growing cities, are situated on mighty rivers that both nurture our survival and reflect our ecological values.

Rivers and human activity, including equitable public access, need to be in better harmony and be truly sustainable for all inhabitants, vegetation, and the environment. People seek out and then cherish rivers when they are drinkable, swimmable, navigable, fishable, life sustaining, beautiful and pristine, and contribute to a quality of life.

As freshwater and rivers become increasingly threatened by climate change and human activity, an important component of our vision for Canada's rivers is effective governance and management. Our dream, needing to become a quick reality, is to have many players working cooperatively and effectively to enhance rivers and their watersheds and to recognize rivers as a priority for ongoing stewardship.

Only then can we bring our vision to reality!

2009 *CANADA'S RIVER DECLARATION*
6th Canadian River Heritage Conference
Ottawa–Gatineau, June 14-17, 2009



THE CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

Message from the Superintendent

I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank the many interested Canadians who participated in the review of the management plan for Jasper National Park of Canada, during which we gathered information and engaged in dialogue on a wide range of topics. This report focuses on river use management specifically. We reviewed the approaches taken since 1998 to provide opportunities for visitors to experience and learn about our rivers that are vivid, relevant and engaging, while ensuring the continued protection of the ecological and heritage values of the headwaters under our care.

Our review found continuing strengths in the integrated approach to managing access and opportunities across river reaches, while ensuring that their ecological values are maintained. Areas for improvement are identified, with follow-up actions to continue our work to enhance experiences, to strengthen presentation and learning opportunities, and to reassess monitoring priorities.

In the course of our review, we listened to perspectives offered by the public, Aboriginal people, partners and stakeholders. We responded to feedback by updating direction in the management plan for river use to support consideration of new ideas, to ensure continuing protection of rivers and wildlife habitat, and to raise the profile of the Athabasca Canadian Heritage River. As we move forward with implementing the 2010 management plan for Jasper National Park of Canadian, I welcome the continued involvement of our valued partners and interested Canadians in celebrating and profiling our river heritage and experiences.



Greg Fenton
Superintendent
Jasper National Park

March, 2010



Review of the Guidelines for River Use Management in Jasper National Park 2009/10

Executive Summary

As part of the 2009-2010 review of the management plan for Jasper National Park of Canada, Parks Canada reviewed the *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management* (the *Guidelines*), with public involvement. The *Guidelines* are a policy tool to manage opportunities for visitors to enjoy five popular rivers in JNPC in ways that respect their critical ecological functions (see map, Figure 1).

This is the second review of the *Guidelines* and the Management Plan for JNPC, which were reviewed with public participation in 2004 and 2005, respectively. The scheduled reviews provide for assessment of results achieved and consideration of any new information and circumstances. In summary, the findings of this review period are that:

- Visitors enjoy opportunities to connect with more than 220 kilometres of navigable river reaches for recreational paddling, land-based viewing, and learning – in the spectacular setting and scenery of a mountain national park of Canada and a World Heritage Site.
- The *Guidelines* support enjoyment of a wide range of opportunities on varied rivers and reaches, from flatwater to whitewater, including access to a *Canadian Heritage River* (Athabasca) and two national historic sites of Canada (*Yellowhead Pass* and *Jasper House*).
- Put-in and take-out sites used for commercial rafting have been improved on the Sunwapta and Athabasca Rivers.
- Measures have been taken to address chronic parking and congestion at Old Fort Point.
- Parks Canada worked with commercial operators to accommodate access adjustments they requested: small commercial crafts can now use the former town water well site adjacent to Old Fort Point to reduce congestion at Old Fort Point, and for safety reasons, the voyageur canoe operation on the Athabasca River was permitted to change their put-in from Old Fort Point to the boat launch at the Maligne River Confluence.
- Parks Canada consulted with experts on harlequin ducks to complete a review of scientific literature published since 1998. The published research emphasizes the importance of managing habitat for breeding success and female recruitment and survival, and reducing additive stress from human sources. No new scientific information has been published that contradicts the basis for the decision restricting use of the mid-Maligne River.
- Members of the public provided perspectives during the management plan review on ecological protection and opportunities to experience JNPC's rivers. Parks Canada took the feedback into account in updating river-use direction in the management plan, which was approved and tabled in Parliament in June 2010:
 - Initiatives are identified to raise the profile of the Athabasca Canadian Heritage River and strengthen monitoring and reporting.

- The *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management* will continue to be implemented. Parks Canada will work with river users and service providers to improve river experiences incorporated.
- The Plan maintains protection of the mid-Maligne River reach and incorporates enabling criteria under which a proposal for its use would be considered: proposals must be scientifically defensible based on the well-documented aspects of harlequin duck ecology that led to the original precautionary closure and enjoy broad-based public support. The approach provides flexibility and a willingness to consider new evidence, supports the original intent to protect ducks and habitat, and establishes clear criteria and a scientific basis for considering alternative management approaches. In the interim, an 18 km section of the mid-Maligne River remains closed to boating.

In moving forward, Parks Canada will engage river users and other interested Canadians in various initiatives to implement the management plan the *Guidelines*. We will work with partners to celebrate our headwater rivers and their stories, to enhance experiences offered, and to strengthen the understanding and connections of Canadians to these important waters and to the Park. To improve performance measurement, Parks Canada will reassess monitoring needs and research priorities for ecological and social factors related to river use, and will invite interested parties to participate.

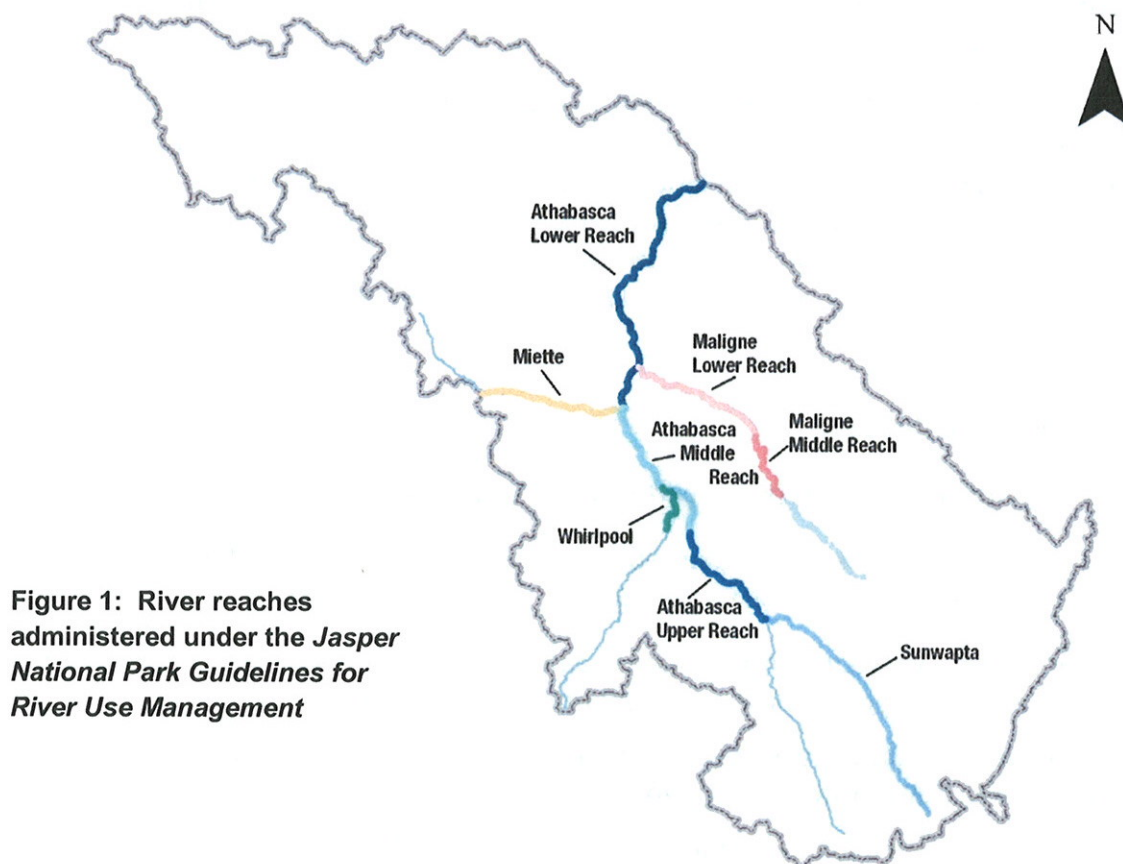


Figure 1: River reaches administered under the *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management*

Introduction

Parks Canada reviewed the *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management* concurrent with the management plan for Jasper National Park of Canada (JNPC). The purpose of the review was to assess progress in achieving results and to consider any new information or circumstances in decision making. The Guidelines were last reviewed in 2004, with public participation (report available on request).

Background

The *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management* (the *Guidelines*) were developed with public involvement in 1998 to establish policies for managing access to five rivers in JNPC: the Athabasca, Maligne, Miette, Sunwapta and Whirlpool rivers. These mountain rivers are important headwaters that arise along the spine of the continental divide in JNPC, and are of high ecological and cultural significance. The *Guidelines* provide for a range of opportunities for visitors to experience and enjoy these rivers, in ways that respect and support their critical ecological functions and resources.

Under the *Guidelines* and the approved management plan for JNPC (2000), visitors enjoy more than 220 kilometres of navigable river reaches that are open and accessible by road for recreational paddling. An 18 kilometre stretch of the mid-Maligne river is closed to in-stream use as precautionary measure to protect an important harlequin duck population from disturbance during their breeding period.

The *Guidelines* were reviewed in 2004 with public participation. The management plan for JNPC was reviewed as scheduled in 2005, with an assessment of progress to achieve results (State of the Park Report), and with consideration of new information and public feedback received since the plan was approved. No changes for river use management were made as a result of the review in 2005 given that the key management objectives were being met and a wide range of river use recreation opportunities are being provided in appropriate settings.

The 2009/10 Review Process

The key steps and opportunities for public participation in the process were as follows:

- The review of the *Guidelines* was announced at the Jasper Public Planning Forum on March 14, 2009, with background documents provided;
- Letters were sent on March 25, 2009 to parties and stakeholders known to be interested in river use issues, advising of the process and inviting participation;
- Public comments on river use were invited on the OPRIMA system (web-based consultation) from March through July, 2009;
- Information and an invitation to comment was posted on the Jasper National Park Internet site from July 2009 to present (http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ab/jasper/plan/plan1_e.asp);

- In presentations to the Jasper Aboriginal Forums and during five Aboriginal community, the *Guidelines* were included as a management plan review topic of potential interest;
- Meetings were held with members of the Jasper National Park Professional River Outfitters Association (JNPPROA);
- The Alberta Recreational Paddlers Association was invited to review and comment on the *Guidelines*, and the Association executive provided comments ;
- A literature review was completed to update information on harlequin ducks (attached), with the involvement of external harlequin duck experts;
- The draft *Guidelines* review report and the draft management plan for Jasper National Park were provided for public comment during late November 2009 – January 2010;
- Adjustments were made to the draft management plan in response to public feedback. The management plan for Jasper National Park was finalised and tabled in parliament. The final plan and a report on public feedback are available at <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/jasper/plan.aspx>.

Results

A summary of the status of implementation of the *Guidelines* is provided in Table 1. Key results of implementation are as follows:

- Implementation of the *Guidelines* continues to support enjoyment of a wide range of paddling opportunities on varied rivers and reaches, from flatwater to mild or challenging whitewater.
- More than 220 kilometres of navigable river opportunities are open and accessible by road for recreational paddling learning – in the spectacular setting of a national park of Canada and a World Heritage Site.
- Visitors experience first-hand a *Canadian Heritage River* (Athabasca) and two national historic sites of Canada (*Yellowhead Pass* and *Jasper House*) through paddling or shore-based opportunities.
- Put-in and take-out sites used for commercial rafting have been improved on the Sunwapta and Athabasca Rivers.
- Chronic parking and congestion problems at Old Fort Point have been addressed with minor footprint adjustments, allocation of bus parking, pathway delineation and creation of a pedestrian viewing area. Some progress has been made toward restoration of vegetation; progress has yet to be made to increase interpretation of the *Canadian Heritage River* and historic themes at Old Fort Point.
- The permitted route for voyageur canoe operations on the Athabasca River was adjusted for safety reasons – to put in at Maligne Confluence and take out at 12 mile bridge. The voyageur canoe operations are grandfathered as the only commercial use permitted below Old Fort Point. Requests by members of the JNPPROA for commercial use downstream of

Old Fort Point have not been supported as per the intent of the guidelines to focus on private recreational access and experiences for this reach.

- Small commercial rafts were permitted to use the former town water well site adjacent to Old Fort Point on a trial basis in 2009, and again in 2010, to contribute to reducing congestion at Old Fort Point.
- An 18 km section of the mid-Maligne River remains closed to boating. The Maligne Lake Outlet environmentally sensitive site is interpreted to visitors at the outlet bridge, which is a popular viewing area enjoyed by visitors.

Several recommendations made in the 2003/04 review require follow-up, and are addressed in the proposed “next steps”:

- There is a need for river stakeholders and Parks Canada to identify a manageable set of indicators for ecological and social factors, and to collaborate on tracking these indicators through monitoring. Monitoring should include the delivery of park messages around themes of ecological and commemorative integrity.
- Changes to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* introduced a trigger for business licenses for outdoor recreational activities, including commercial boating. This requirement underscores the value of developing meaningful ecological and social monitoring programs as discussed above, and to maintain regular (annual) reporting of commercial boating statistics to accurately measure and monitor levels of use.
- Cost recovery for provision and management of access points and other costs related to commercial river use needs to be strengthened.

The Mid-Maligne River

Parks Canada received a number of responses concerning the circumstances of mid-Maligne River, which was closed to all in-stream use in 1999 to protect important harlequin duck habitat disturbance. The decision was contentious with some users that were affected, including representatives of commercial rafting companies that historically operated on the river, and who have made a number of submissions requesting a review of the decision. Other responses were received that express strong support for the decision and continuing protection of this river reach.

The *Guidelines* and the management plan were reviewed in 2004 and 2005 as previously indicated. The reviews did not result in changes to river use management in general, or for the Maligne River in particular, as available information supported the basis for the decisions, and no information arose that indicated a change in policy was warranted.

Parks Canada also received feedback concerning JNPC’s discontinuation of monitoring of harlequin ducks in 2005. In the 2004 *Guidelines* review, Parks Canada reported that the value of the existing harlequin duck monitoring program was limited to maintaining an inventory of duck numbers, and that the monitoring was not expected to determine whether cessation of boating activity had a numerical effect on the local population.

To clarify expectations for monitoring, the precautionary closure of the mid-Maligne River is not predicated on a numerical response in the local harlequin duck population. This matter was addressed in a federal court challenge. In his decision upholding Parks Canada's decision-making process, Justice Teitelbaum stated that:

"The expert's evidence was analyzed by the Minister who concluded that there is reasonable evidence that the Harlequin ducks are vulnerable to disturbance and strong scientific evidence that watercraft use disturbs birds during courtship and foraging, reducing their feeding time and increasing their energy expenditure. The applicants demand solid scientific proof of a causal connection between rafting and the decline of the birds' population in the River. I am satisfied that what the applicants demand is impossibility. I am satisfied that there are no absolute certainties in science, only probabilities and it was reasonable for the Minister to conclude that on the evidence, as a whole, the Harlequin ducks are vulnerable to disturbance."

The *Guidelines* are intended to be implemented with a monitoring component, although Parks Canada made no specific commitment to monitoring harlequin ducks. Parks Canada will involve interested parties in re-examining potential ecological and social science monitoring programs related to river use, for consideration in the broader process of implementation and priority-setting of the updated management plan for JNPC (see Proposed Next Steps, item 4). This process will consider the merits of monitoring a wide range of factors, which may include harlequin ducks, for baseline ecological and visitor experience information and improving management results.

Toward considering potential new information about harlequin ducks in the 2009 review of the *Guidelines*, Parks Canada reviewed the scientific literature published on this species since 1998. The literature review report is available on request. Key findings include:

- Surveys and research have improved knowledge of the distribution and population status of harlequin ducks in Alberta, together with aspects of ecology related to feeding, predation, and survival rates.
- Management actions expected to have the most influence on harlequin duck population trends are those directed at increasing recruitment and survival of females during the breeding season, such as maintaining nesting habitat, measuring predator trends, and reducing additive mortality and stress from anthropogenic sources.
- No new scientific research has been published concerning harlequin duck ecology and vulnerability to disturbance that contradicts the basis for the decision restricting use of the mid-Maligne River.

To parties advocating for reconsidering use of the mid-Maligne River, Parks Canada has responded that proposals would be considered for alternative management approaches that are (1) consistent with national park legislation and policies, (2) are scientifically defensible based on the well-documented aspects of harlequin duck ecology that led to the original precautionary

closure, and (3) enjoy broad-based public support. This policy was conveyed in the 2004 review, and to all inquiries raised through correspondence and the Jasper Planning Forum.

In the interests of adaptive management and fairness to parties wishing to develop a proposal for consideration regarding use of the mid-Maligne River, Parks Canada incorporated the stated criteria into the 2010 management plan (see Proposed Next Steps, item 5.). If an acceptable proposal is received that meets the criteria including scientific rigor, Parks Canada will establish a decision-making process with the participation of the public and any interested Aboriginal groups.

Table 1: Status of Implementation

Summary of Visitor River Use Activities and Enhancement Opportunities

River Reach	Private Use	Commercial Use	Key Interpretive Themes	Key Restoration and Enhancement opportunities	Status of implementation November 2009
Miette	Yes	No	Wetland ecology, lowland moraine, mountain pass significance, riparian species, wildlife viewing	Downstream of the wetland, permit non-commercial paddling and angling	Implemented. The lower-most reach has grown in popularity for introductory river kayak training for youth.
				Clean up and rehabilitate Parks Canada woodlot	Implemented
				Improve put in and picnic sites	Not implemented
Maligne Maligne Lake outlet (MLO) to Medicine Lake	No	No	Fast water stream ecology and dependent wildlife. Harlequin Duck ecology, fish spawning and rearing, inlets outlets and confluences as sensitive areas,	Restore riparian willow and upland vegetation communities at MLO	Implemented
				Install interpretive signage at MLO bridge	Completed
				Close the mid-Maligne River to all in-stream use;	Implemented - annual regulatory closure to boating is implemented
				Close the MLO to all use during may and June to protect the harlequin duck "club site"	Completed – regulatory closure implemented annually
				Rehabilitate Big bend take-out and disused Medicine Lake teahouse sites	Incomplete
				Zone MLO an Environmentally Sensitive Site (Management Plan Action)	Completed
Maligne Canyon to Athabasca River	Yes	Yes – interpretative hikes; no commercial boating	Formation of Maligne Canyon, park geology, mountain building, canyon dependent wildlife	Maintain and upgrade as needed present interpretive signage and trails.	Completed
				Rehabilitate warden office 6 th bridge site.	Nearly complete
Sunwapta	Yes	Yes	Genesis of a	In cooperation with users,	Completed. Commercial

River Reach	Private Use	Commercial Use	Key Interpretive Themes	Key Restoration and Enhancement opportunities	Status of implementation November 2009
			mountain river from glacier to canyon, Caribou ecology	improve parking areas, put in and take out locations	rafting occurs from above Bubbling Springs to 500m above Sunwapta Falls
Whirlpool Moab L – Athabasca R.	Yes	No	Importance of mountain passes; Athabasca Pass NHS and related fur trade stories (new – not in 1998 RUG)	In cooperation with users, improve parking area, put-in and take-out site facilities, install river orientation kiosk.	Some improvements made to parking area. <i>Meeting of the Waters</i> take out site was reviewed with users and no adjustments were needed at the time.
Athabasca (Upper)	Yes	Yes	Lower subalpine ecosystem themes. CHR themes	In cooperation with user groups, investigate opportunities to improve commercial and private access.	Complete – improvements made to launch and take out areas.
				Develop CHRS interpretive vehicle (this applies to the entire Athabasca River).	Not implemented
Athabasca (Middle)	Yes	Yes	Waterfall and canyon formation, structure and ecological role. Montane ecosystem features, historical themes, fur trade, early exploration. CHR themes.	Improve Old Fort Point take-out site	Implemented. Also used the former water well site on a trial basis in 2009 as a take out for small commercial rafts.
				improve Alpine Village access site.	Not implemented. Investigated but no actions were proposed.
Athabasca (Lower)	Yes	Voyageur canoes only (a grandfathered use)	Highlight historical interpretation, voyageurs, Fur Trade, Early Settlement of Valley, wildlife, aquatic and montane system issues, CHR themes	Improve Old Fort Point Put-in / Take – out	Improvements implemented. Note: The permitted route for voyageur canoe operations was adjusted for safety reasons – to put in at Maligne Confluence and take out at 12 mile bridge.
				improve overnight river campsites	Not implemented
				Provide interpretive opportunities	- Deliver of land and road-based personal interpretation is strengthened by licensed guides (eg. <i>Interpretive Guides Association Accreditation</i> . - A new river guide was produced by the Alberta Recreational Canoeing Association that improved the quality of information and interpretation available to river runners.

Outcomes and Next Steps:

1. The Jasper National Park of Canada Management Plan has been updated and approved, and incorporates the following direction for river use, in four areas of the plan:
 - Welcoming Visitors to Mountains of Opportunity (page 25, Action 12)
“Continue to implement the *Guidelines for River Use Management in Jasper National Park*, and work with river users and service providers to improve river experiences (see also section 5.4, Maligne Valley).”
 - Celebrating History, Culture and the World Heritage Site (page 27, Action 7), “Raise the profile of the Athabasca Canadian Heritage River, and strengthen monitoring and reporting.”
 - Maligne Valley Area Concept (page 69, Action 5)
“Continue to implement the *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management*.
 - Consider alternatives for use of the mid-Maligne River, which is currently closed to in-stream use.
 - Proposals for use of the mid-Maligne River must be scientifically defensible based on the well-documented aspects of harlequin duck ecology that led to the original precautionary closure, and enjoy broad-based public support.
 - In the interim, continue the existing closure to protect harlequin ducks before and during the breeding season (i.e. close the mid-Maligne River to all in-stream use; close the Maligne Lake outlet to all use during May and June).”
 - Five Year Priorities (page 99): “Implement the *Jasper National Park Guidelines for River Use Management*.”
2. In our ongoing work to implement the 2010 Management Plan and the *Guidelines*, Parks Canada will collaborate with river users, land-based guides, and other partners on priority areas. Actions will be integrated with the implementation of area concepts in the updated (2010) management plan. Areas for future collaboration include:
 - a. Strengthening delivery of interpretation:
 - highlighting the Canadian Heritage River System and the Athabasca River;
 - fostering “headwaters” theme;
 - presenting the unique attributes of the individual river reaches;
 - developing informative background material for use by partners and Parks Canada; and,
 - strengthening presentation of Jasper’s rivers and their stories at key visitor nodes.
 - b. Exploring ways to enhance experiences offered under the *Guidelines* for paddlers and for non-boaters; and reassessing specific actions that have not yet been implemented to determine future priorities:
 - Miette River - designate a trail at the picnic site pull-off and rehabilitate the associated riparian zone; harden trails and rehabilitate riparian areas at bridge sites. Clarify the boundaries of the wetland and downstream paddling opportunities.
 - Reorient the information kiosk at the Moab Lake trailhead to highlight the area's outstanding historical attributes.

- c. Reassessing monitoring and research needs and priorities for ecological and social factors related to river use, with the participation of interested parties.
 - Consider social factors such as market segments, user needs and expectations, quality of experiences, and user satisfaction.
 - Review the merits and costs of monitoring harlequin ducks in the park.
 - Integrate any future river use monitoring and reporting programs into the sustainable, long term park monitoring and reporting program.
- d. Increasing data collection for commercial use reporting and private recreational use (eg. obtain estimates and trends for recreational use of the lower Athabasca River and use of the two river campgrounds).

