

# Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada 2008

The Minister responsible for Parks Canada is required by the *Parks Canada Agency Act* (December 1998) to convene a round table of persons interested in matters for which the Agency is responsible once every two years. This round table is a primary mechanism whereby Canadians can advise the Minister on the performance of the Agency and its responsibilities. The Minister is required to respond to recommendations made at the round table within 180 days.

The most recent Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada was held on February 4, 2008 at Parks Canada's headquarters in Gatineau, Quebec. The participants had the opportunity to make comments directly to the Honourable John Baird, Minister of the Environment, and Alan Latourelle, the Chief Executive Officer of the Parks Canada Agency.

The Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada together with ongoing public management plan consultations and other public engagement activities carried out by Parks Canada with Canadians on issues relating to national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas constitute key mechanisms by which Canadians can contribute to the management of Canada's system of national heritage places.

Public participation in consultative activities enables Parks Canada to better reflect the values and wishes of Canadians in executing its mandate. The comments made at the 2008 Minister's Round Table will influence the Agency's strategic direction and will be considered as part of Parks Canada's 2009/10 corporate planning.

The Minister of the Environment has responded directly to the participants of the Minister's Round Table and his response is published here to ensure public access to the results of this important consultative event.

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## **RESPONSE OF THE MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT TO COMMENTS RECEIVED AT THE MINISTER'S ROUND TABLE ON PARKS CANADA HELD ON FEBRUARY 4, 2008**

Parks Canada manages 42 national parks, 3 national marine conservation areas and 158 national historic sites on behalf of Canadians. Parks Canada is proud of being the steward of these heritage places and protecting and presenting them for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians while ensuring that they remain unspoiled for present and future generations.

There are approximately 22 million visits annually to the heritage places administered by Parks Canada. The Agency supports 38,000 direct jobs for Canadians, in more than 460 communities.

Parks Canada also encourages and supports the protection of the commemorative integrity of the 777 national historic sites owned and managed by third parties.

## 1. Heritage Places Establishment

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- As Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I am personally committed to protecting and presenting the natural and historic heritage of our country.
- This commitment has been demonstrated through a number of initiatives our Government has undertaken, including:
  - The massive expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve
  - The withdrawal of land in the Sahtu region of the Northwest Territories, a major step towards creating Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve
  - The withdrawal of 33,500 km<sup>2</sup> of land near the East Arm of Great Slave Lake, for the establishment of Thaydene Nene National Park
  - A \$5 million fund to ensure the long-term protection of the Sahoyúé - ?ehdacho National Historic Site on Great Bear Lake
  - The creation of the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area
  - \$3 million for the restoration of Stanley Park in Vancouver and Point Pleasant Park in Halifax
  - The withdrawal of 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land for the Ramparts River and Wetlands
  - The protection of the Great Bear Rainforest
  - \$225 million to protect lands through the Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Parks Canada will remain focused on the long-term goals of completing the systems of national parks and national marine conservation areas.
- Parks Canada is committed to streamlining and accelerating the park establishment process wherever possible by providing a clear timeline to partners and the public for the conduct of feasibility studies and by aiming to negotiate agreement(s) over a two-year period.
- Parks Canada will update its establishment process to focus more strategically on milestones such as feasibility studies and negotiating agreements to achieve results.
- Parks Canada will take an integrated approach to developing an understanding of the study area's ecological, social and cultural context.
- Parks Canada will continue to strengthen relationships with other governments, Aboriginal groups, communities, stakeholders and the Canadian public.
- Parks Canada will evaluate public support for each new national park and national marine conservation area proposal, and build positive, enduring relationships to achieve a successful outcome to the feasibility studies and establishment agreement negotiations.
- In the establishment and management of national parks and national marine conservation areas, Parks Canada will continue to take a broad ecosystem-based approach that includes consideration of connectivity; in particular, migratory corridors linking protected areas. The Agency will work in partnership with conservation organizations, provincial/territorial parks agencies and other federal departments to promote connectivity and corridors between protected areas.
- In the marine environment in particular, Parks Canada will work under the Federal Marine Protected Areas Strategy to promote marine networks.
- Parks Canada will enhance its current efforts to consider the role of traditional knowledge in decision making as well as the potential economic benefits, including a representative workforce for Aboriginal people at the regional level of a new national park or national marine conservation area.

## **2. Heritage Resources Conservation**

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- Parks Canada will continue to work towards federal legislation to protect all federally owned national historic sites of Canada.
- Parks Canada will look at options for a program to conserve historic places, and will assess the need for and feasibility of further fiscal incentives for built heritage.

## **3. Public Appreciation and Understanding**

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- Parks Canada will promote the role that heritage places can play in the community. By collaborating with heritage and environmental organizations, the arts and culture community, and other stakeholders, Parks Canada will provide opportunities for Canadians to learn and develop a sense of connection with respect to their natural and historical heritage places.
- In addition, Parks Canada will reach out to new Canadians as part of citizenship and settlement processes, and will engage ethnocultural communities and stakeholders in new commemorations for national historic persons, places or events.
- Parks Canada will develop a framework that enables Aboriginal traditional knowledge to meaningfully inform all aspects of park planning and management and that encourages Aboriginal peoples to reconnect with traditional cultural landscapes.
- As part of this framework, Parks Canada will engage Aboriginal peoples by establishing, within five years from now, Aboriginal advisory relationships for each national park. These advisory relationships will span the spectrum of possible collaborative structures guided by the unique legal and cultural contexts of each Aboriginal group.

## **4. Visitor Experience**

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- National parks and national historic sites belong to all Canadians. Parks Canada facilitates opportunities for Canadians to have meaningful experiences at truly remarkable places, in a way that ensures ecological and commemorative integrity is maintained.
- Parks Canada will increase awareness of Canada's national heritage places through the definition of a clear brand positioning, and the implementation of a broad national communications plan and national marketing plan.
- Parks Canada will develop and implement a comprehensive suite of tools to provide the best opportunities possible for visitors to learn, enjoy and connect to Parks Canada places. These opportunities will be developed to meet visitors' social values, desires, expectations and needs.
- Parks Canada will improve existing and develop new visitor products, services and facilities. This will include, in collaboration with a broad range of partners, improving and diversifying the accommodation offer, investing in frontcountry trails and increasing the number of relevant interpretive products available for visitors.
- Parks Canada will foster Aboriginal economic and tourism opportunities related to authentic Aboriginal cultural experiences.
- In order to support the implementation of the visitor experience concept, Parks Canada will provide staff with targeted training. Hiring and organizational tools will also be improved to better support the visitor experience.

## **5. Townsite and Throughway Infrastructure**

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- It is recognized that Parks Canada's infrastructure is aging, just as other municipal, provincial and federal assets do. Parks Canada will continue to incorporate a broad range of factors including health and safety, visitor experience, and ecological and commemorative integrity when making investment decisions in support of the Parks Canada mandate.
- The Agency's capital planning process includes project screening criteria based on risk assessment such as health and safety, financial and legal liability and investment urgency as well as an impact assessment that ensures a proper balance between these screening criteria and visitor experience.
- Parks Canada will continue to solicit infrastructure funds from all available sources to maintain and improve the throughway infrastructure.
- Parks Canada is committed to managing its operations in an exemplary manner to promote clean air, clean water and sustainable land use. This commitment also extends to our partners and operators within protected heritage area boundaries. Lease agreements with third-party operators now require that operators adhere to the same level of compliance with federal environmental laws, policies, directives and procedures as Parks Canada. Parks Canada will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to improve environmental performance and to implement sustainable tourism approaches.

## **International**

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- Parks Canada is currently developing an Agency-wide strategic plan to guide its international activities. It is also in the process of establishing a small international programs secretariat to co-ordinate and facilitate these activities.
- The strategy and the secretariat will result in a strategic and focused level of international engagement that meets the needs of Parks Canada and contributes to the federal government's international agenda.
- Parks Canada is renewing its 1998/2003 Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. National Park Service related to "Cooperation in Management, Research, Protection, Conservation, and Presentation of National Parks and National Historic Sites" and will continue to pursue opportunities for collaboration in this context.