Overpasses to create ecosystem connectivity and reduce human wildlife conflicts (collisions) © Parks Canada

# PARKS CANADA COMMENTS ON THE 'REVISITING LEOPOLD' REPORT

**Alan Latourelle, CEO**

**Parks Canada Agency**

## INTRODUCTION

In our rapidly transforming world, the "Revisiting Leopold: Resource Stewardship in the National Parks" report provides a reflection of the need for a new approach to policy, planning, and management of resources to confront the widespread, complex, accelerating, and volatile changes and challenges facing the National Park Service (NPS), and protected area agencies worldwide. The report has opened opportunities to re-vision, and to identify ways to achieve the greatest conservation gains for natural and cultural heritage for the people of America through their national park system.

Most of the challenges identified in this report have a striking similarity with those we are grappling with at Parks Canada, the Agency mandated, on behalf of the people of Canada, to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and to foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations (Parks Canada, 2000).

The Parks Canada Agency (PCA) manages Canada's heritage places comprising national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. The Rouge Urban National Park is being established and will create a new category of federally protected area in the Greater Toronto Area. It is within easy reach of 20 per cent of the Canadian population.

As in the USA, managing protected areas in Canada is becoming more challenging due to increasing threats from invasive species, wildlife diseases, pollution, fragmented habitats, changing land use and climate change. In addition, the Canadian society is becoming more diverse, urban, and technologically oriented, with people increasingly not being as connected with nature and history due to changing lifestyles, value systems, leisure patterns and economic trends (Jager, 2010).

The *Revisiting Leopold Report* addresses three issues: 1) what the goals of resource management in the US National Park System should be; 2) the policies for resource management necessary to achieve these goals; and 3) the actions required to implement these policies.

This review looks at some of the issues raised in the report, the recommendations made to the NPS and, where applicable, provides comments on how PCA has addressed similar issues.

## PARKS CANADA AND THE NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE

In reviewing the issues and recommendations of the Revisiting Leopold Report, I must state that the NPS and PCA have a unique relationship: a partnership forged by shared geography, comparable mandates and challenges, similar values, and deep conservation ties. This partnership leads to joint initiatives including the protection of transboundary ecosystems and protected areas such as Waterton-Glacier National Parks, and Kluane / Wrangell-St. Elias / Glacier Bay / Tatshenshini-Alsek system, two UNESCO World Heritage Sites that protect the largest non-polar icefield in the world and contain examples of some of the world's longest and most spectacular glaciers.

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GOALS

The Report identifies the overarching goal for park resource management as "to steward NPS resources for continuous change that is not yet fully understood, in order to preserve ecological integrity and cultural and historical authenticity, provide visitors with transformative experiences, and form the core of a national conservation land- and seascape". This goal resonates with Parks Canada mandate, vision and strategic outcome. The need to manage for change is reflected in Parks Canada's definition of ecological integrity, which recognizes that ecosystems have dynamic elements that change in time and space. Further, the Revisiting Leopold Report observes that many if not most parks include both natural and cultural resources, and recommends that the management of these resources must occur simultaneously and, in general, interdependently. This approach recognizes that the wildlife, the wetlands, lakes and rivers, and the forests, grasslands and tundra – the entire protected landscape and its components has both natural and cultural values.

In the past 30 years, Parks Canada has moved towards incorporating the broad spectrum of Canadian values related to nature and culture in the establishment and management of national parks and other heritage places. In a historic event, the government signed an agreement with the Inuvialuit people of Yukon in 1984 to establish Ivvavik NP and laid out the structure for an enduring co-operative conservation regime composed of joint Inuvialuit and government management committees. This co-operative management team draw on both scientific and traditional knowledge, benefiting from Inuvialuit skills and knowledge accumulated over thousands of years. The result is a cooperative management system that protects both Inuvialuit subsistence and cultural practices, and the ecological integrity (EI) of the park. Since then, 12 parks have been established and managed under similar arrangements. Recently, the Agency has worked with the Dehcho First Nation and other partners to expand six fold the Nahanni NPR and with the Naha Dehé to establish Nááts'ihch'oh NPR, further increasing the area protected within the Nahanni ecosystem seven-fold. Working closely with Aboriginal people and other groups, we have taken action that will result in a 58 per cent increase in the land we manage since 2006.

To facilitate, enhance and broaden the role of Aboriginal partners in natural and cultural resource management, Parks Canada established the Aboriginal Secretariat in 1999. Reporting directly to the CEO of the Agency, the Secretariat promotes the development of meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities and ensures that traditional knowledge and voices inform all aspects of resource management (Langdon at al., 2010).

The *Revisiting Leopold Report* observes that the 21st century conservation challenges require an expansion in the spatial, temporal, and social scales of resource stewardship, and recommends that NPS management strategies should be expanded to encompass a geographic scope beyond park boundaries. This recommendation echoes a similar realisation that the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystems in national parks in Canada are dependent on conservation and stewardship actions, including on working landscapes and seascapes. This approach requires the support and co-operation of diverse partners. Parks Canada realizes that the challenge of safeguarding part of what defines us as Canadians, our nature, our cultural heritage, our protected lands and wild places, will not be achieved by any single agency. Consequently, Parks Canada works closely with surrounding land owners, Aboriginal communities, local and regional governments, and other partners to promote conservation at landscape levels.

Aware that it is not possible to protect every significant natural or cultural feature within the protected area system, the Government of Canada has developed a National Parks System Plan to guide the identification and establishment of a representative system of national parks that includes examples of Canada's 39 distinct natural regions (Parks Canada, 2009). Using this framework, Parks Canada has established 44 national parks covering an area of 306,706 km$^2$ and representing 28 of Canada's 39 terrestrial regions. Efforts to create parks in the unrepresented natural regions are on-going, and there are prospects for a significant addition in the coming years.

Reintroduction of bison in Grasslands NP © Parks Canada

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICIES

With regard to policy, the *Revisiting Leopold Report* recommends that the preservation of EI and cultural and historical authenticity be the central NPS resource policy for resource management, and to have these terms clearly defined in policy. This is a road that Parks Canada has trended. Both EI of national parks and commemorative integrity of national historic sites are embedded in the Agency mandate, policy and legislation. EI, for example, was introduced in the Canada's national park policy in 1979 and into the *Canadian National Parks Act* in 1988 to legally require "maintenance of EI through the protection of natural resources" be Parks Canada's first priority when considering park zoning and visitor use in a management plan (Government of Canada, 1988). In 2000, the *Canadian National Parks Act* was amended to make maintenance or restoration of EI through the protection of natural resources and natural processes the first priority of Parks Canada when considering all aspects of the management of national parks (Parks Canada, 2000b). EI was legally defined in the *Act* in a manner that made the concept useful to scientists and managers, applicable to field situation, and rooted in scientific understanding of ecology.

The *Revisiting Leopold Report* recommendation for the preservation of EI should go beyond preservation of EI to include its restoration in order to compel managers to take action to restore degraded areas and to re-establish the ecological values of impaired ecosystems. Parks Canada has embarked on the most aggressive ecological restoration programme in its history; managing invasive species, helping the recovery of endangered species, restoring damaged habitats, managing wildlife diseases, increasing ecological connectivity, reintroducing the role of fire in ecosystems, managing the impacts of hyperabundant wildlife populations, and reintroducing native species. For example, after a 120-year absence from the prairies, the plains bison was reintroduced to Grassland National Park in 2006, restoring the grazing process to the grassland ecosystem and enabling Canadians to once again have the opportunity to view these symbols of the wild prairie. Similarly, the black-footed ferret, once considered North America's rarest mammal, was reintroduced to Grasslands National Park in 2010 after being extinct in Canada for 70 years. Recent examples of ecological restoration initiatives have been documented in a series of publications (Parks Canada, 2005; 2008; 2013). From these experiences, Parks Canada pioneered the development of *Principles and Guidelines for Ecological Restoration in Canada's Protected Natural Areas* (Parks Canada, 2008) and led in the development of the IUCN's *Ecological Restoration for Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines, and Best Practices* (Keenleyside at al., 2012).

Another issue highlighted in the *Revisiting Leopold Report* is the need to make national parks relevant to the American people. The PCA is also faced with the challenge of remaining relevant to Canadians in a changing social, cultural, economic and demographic context. Scientific research has shown that experiencing national parks through visitation is a powerful way of inspiring, engaging, and connecting people to these amazing places, and ensuring support for their long term protection (Parks Canada, 2010). The question for Parks Canada as it strives to be more relevant to Canadians is how to integrate its mandate into decisions that allow Canadians to see themselves in these special places; to enhance their appreciation of their natural and cultural heritage; to inspire them to see the world around them with new eyes; to connect with nature and the cultural stories of place; to embrace the values of protected areas; to participate in a range of activities from canoeing to photography; and to discover how nature looks, feels and smells. We are also promoting protected areas as natural solutions to societal challenges, demonstrating their role in climate change adaptation, in food security, in social and economic development, as areas that can provide Canadians with spiritual inspiration and physical renewal, serve as centres for research; and as areas that provide ecological services such as nutrient cycling, clean water, flood control, fish spawning grounds, pollination and natural pest control.

The importance of enhancing the relevance of protected areas led Parks Canada, along with many partners, to carry out this mission globally. Its motion that called on the IUCN conservation community to strengthen its commitment to connecting people with nature was adopted as an IUCN Resolution at the 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress. As a follow-up, Parks Canada is leading a Stream during the 2014 World Parks Congress that aims at empowering the growth of an enduring global initiative for a new generation to experience, connect with, be inspired by, value, and conserve nature.

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The actions proposed for implementing policies include to "undertake a major, systematic, and comprehensive review of NPS policies" to align them with the goals for resource management. A key strategy to implement the resource management goals and policies, according to the *Revisiting Leopold Report*, is to "significantly expand the role of science in the Agency by investing in scientific capacity, establishing a standing Science Advisory Board, and to require NPS professionals, and especially park superintendents, to possess and maintain significant scientific literacy". Parks Canada equally recognizes the role of science in resource management, and requires management decisions to be made using the best available science. However, science in Parks Canada is used in an inclusive sense, and includes natural, social and archaeological sciences. Science in Parks Canada is also needed to help raise public awareness and appreciation, achieve conservation gains, and connect or re-connect Canadians to their heritage places. In addition, the Agency places high value on the role of Aboriginal and community experiential knowledge in providing valuable information on historic and current ecosystem conditions, and long-term human ecological interactions stemming from generations of land stewardship.

In addition to science capacity (in its broadest sense), Parks Canada has found that the incorporation of traditional or community experiential knowledge, a strong ecological monitoring and reporting system and an adaptive management approach have been key to advancing the conservation of natural and cultural resources in national parks. In addition to scientists, the views of diverse constituents representing the face of America should be sought during policy review, and incorporated in the revised policies.

It is important to accept that maintaining parks forever "unimpaired for future generations" will remain a daunting challenge. Implicit in managing for change is an understanding that an "unimpaired" state may no longer be realistic or achievable in many national parks. The *Revisiting Leopold Report* itself seems captive to the traditional resource management approach. It calls upon the NPS to develop policies that "formally embrace the need to manage for change" and in the same sentence states "and to the maximum extent possible to maintain or increase current restrictions on impairment of park resources".

We have come to understand that the future of conservation and the health of our planet depend on the way we can act together to produce and manage change. Protection and conservation of natural areas must be about new approaches. It is less about protecting the past and more about protecting the future. With this understanding, we can develop policies and take actions that will help us leave our children a legacy of healthy, vibrant ecosystems and protected habitats, and inspire a new generation of conservation leaders. We can bequeath to them not only the indispensable ecological benefits of iconic native wildlife and clean water, but also magnificent natural and cultural landscapes to experience.

## REFERENCES


Canadian Heritage (1994). *Guiding Principles and Operational Policies*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Government of Canada (1988). An Act to Amend the National Parks Act Bill C-30. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Jager, E. and Sanche, A. (2010). Setting the Stage for Visitor Experiences in Canada's National Heritage Places. *The GWS Journal of Parks, Protected Areas and Cultural Sites*. Vol 27 # 1 (2010). Book Concern Printers, Hancock, Michigan http://www.georgewright.org/node/3142

Keenleyside, K.A., N. Dudley, S. Cairns, C.M. Hall, and S. Stolton (2012). *Ecological Restoration for Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Best Practices*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. [data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-018.pdf]

Langdon, S., Prosper, R. and N. Gagnon (2010). Two Paths One Direction: Parks Canada and Aboriginal Peoples Working Together. *The GWS Journal of Parks, Protected Areas and Cultural Sites*. Vol 27 # 1 (2010). Book Concern Printers, Hancock, Michigan [www.georgewright.org/node/3142]

Latourelle, A. (2010). Parks Canada: Building on our strengths to achieve new heights. *The GWS Journal of Parks, Protected Areas and Cultural Sites*. Vol 27 # 1 (2010). Book Concern Printers, Hancock, Michigan [www.georgewright.org/node/3142]

Parks Canada (2000). *Parks Canada Agency Act*. [www.infosource.gc.ca/inst/cap/fed00-eng.asp]

Parks Canada (2000b). Canada National Parks Act. Ottawa: Minister of Justice. [www.infosource.gc.ca/inst/cap/fed00-eng.asp]

Parks Canada (2005). *Action on the Ground. Ecological Integrity in Canadian Parks*. [www.pc.gc.ca.]

Parks Canada (2008). *Principles and Guidelines for Ecological Restoration in Canada's Protected Natural Areas*. [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/progs/np-pn/re-er/pag-pel.aspx]

Parks Canada (2008). *Action on the Ground II: Working with Canadians to Improve Ecological Integrity in National Parks*. [www.pc.gc.ca]

Parks Canada (2009). *National Parks System Plan*, 3rd Edition. [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/v-g/nation/index.aspx]

Parks Canada (2013). *Action on the Ground*: Volume 3. [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/v-g/ie-ei/at-ag/index.aspx]

Waithaka, J. (2010). Parks Canada Science: Providing knowledge for better service to Canadians. *The GWS Journal of Parks, Protected Areas and Cultural Sites*. Vol 27 # 1 (2010). Book Concern Printers, Hancock, Michigan [www.georgewright.org/node/3142]