



Riding Mountain
National Park

Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area Strategy

Photo credit: Dene Sinclair



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ESCARPMENT OF RIDING MOUNTAIN AREA STRATEGY

Spectacular vistas, challenging terrain, rich heritage, and diverse vegetation and wildlife make the Escarpment of Riding Mountain a fascinating place for visitors and, potentially, one of Manitoba's premier attractions.

I am very pleased to announce the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area Strategy (Area Strategy) is completed and we have begun to take action.

This Area Strategy is part of Parks Canada's commitments from the 2007 *Riding Mountain National Park of Canada and Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*. Section 7.9 of this plan states the park would involve key stakeholder groups and First Nations in discussions about other opportunities for visitor experiences on the east side of the park, and continue to develop an area plan to implement as resources are available.

In the last three years, Parks Canada has worked with an Advisory Board, experts, plus community leaders and members to develop the Area Strategy. Parks Canada appreciates their insightful guidance, knowledge and commitment and wants to continue to work together to have this Area Strategy evolve and come to life.

The Area Strategy's goal is to ensure visitors have genuine opportunities to discover, experience, and learn about the area while protecting it for future generations. By working towards its vision, objectives and actions, Parks Canada hopes visitors, stakeholders and our neighbouring communities are further inspired by the park and region.



Richard Dupuis
Acting Superintendent, Riding Mountain Field Unit



Mr. Robert Sopuck, Member of Parliament for Dauphin-Swan River-Marquette, officially opens Reeve's Ravine Trail along with (left to right): Jon Hopkins, Park Warden; Deron Ash, President, Manitoba Escarpment Trails Society; Kathy Swann, Executive Director, Parkland Tourism & Member, Escarpment of Riding Mountain Advisory Board; Richard Dupuis, A/Superintendent, Riding Mountain National Park; and Les Campbell, Park Warden



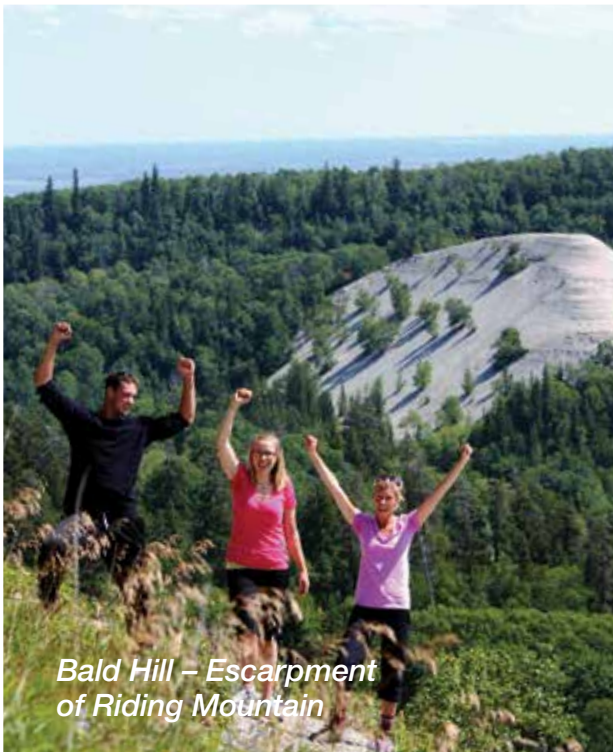
Reeve's Ravine Trail

Challenging Terrain



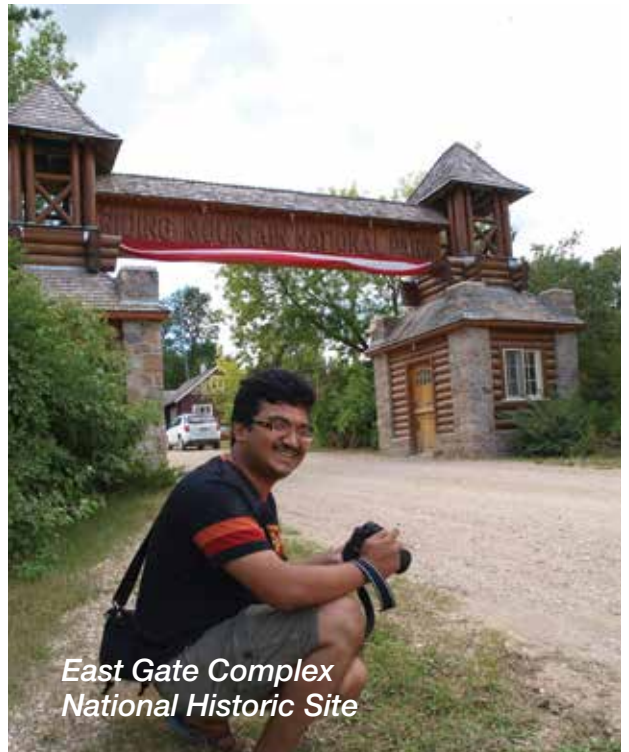
Black bear

Diverse Wildlife



Bald Hill – Escarpment of Riding Mountain

Spectacular Vistas



East Gate Complex National Historic Site

Rich Heritage

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1.0 Introduction

Area Management Strategies focus on areas within a national park or national historic site that need a particular management focus. They set direction for visitor experience, resource protection, education and cooperation for the area. They should serve as a blueprint for getting things done, for maintaining important standards, and for uniting the people who must work together for progress to happen.

1.0

“

One thing I've learned after many years of experience: we can only achieve the kinds of things we are talking about by working together. If we go back to working just in our own organizations, we will not make progress.

– Advisory Board Member

”

Area Management Strategies ultimately become part of management plans, which are approved by the Minister and tabled in Parliament. The next full management plan update for Riding Mountain is scheduled for 2017. Much of this Strategy can be implemented within the direction of the current management plan (2007).

The current management plan identified the need to develop an area strategy for the eastern portion of the park. This recommendation recognized the unique nature of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain, the potential for improved visitor experiences, and the need to protect the area, and thus Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area Strategy (Area Strategy) was developed.

2.0 The Goal of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area Strategy

“The Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area Strategy will ensure visitors have genuine opportunities to discover, experience, and learn about this area while protecting it for future generations. It will outline a vision and series of actions that will inspire visitors, stakeholders and our neighbouring communities about the park and region.”

3.0 Engaging the Public

The Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area Strategy was developed with public input and will continue to be refreshed as new information and insight is gathered in the future. An overview of our efforts to engage the public in thinking about possibilities for the Escarpment of Riding Mountain is attached (see Appendix 2). Parks Canada is hopeful individuals, organizations and groups on the East Side, and beyond, will continue to contribute their ideas and participate in working toward the Vision.

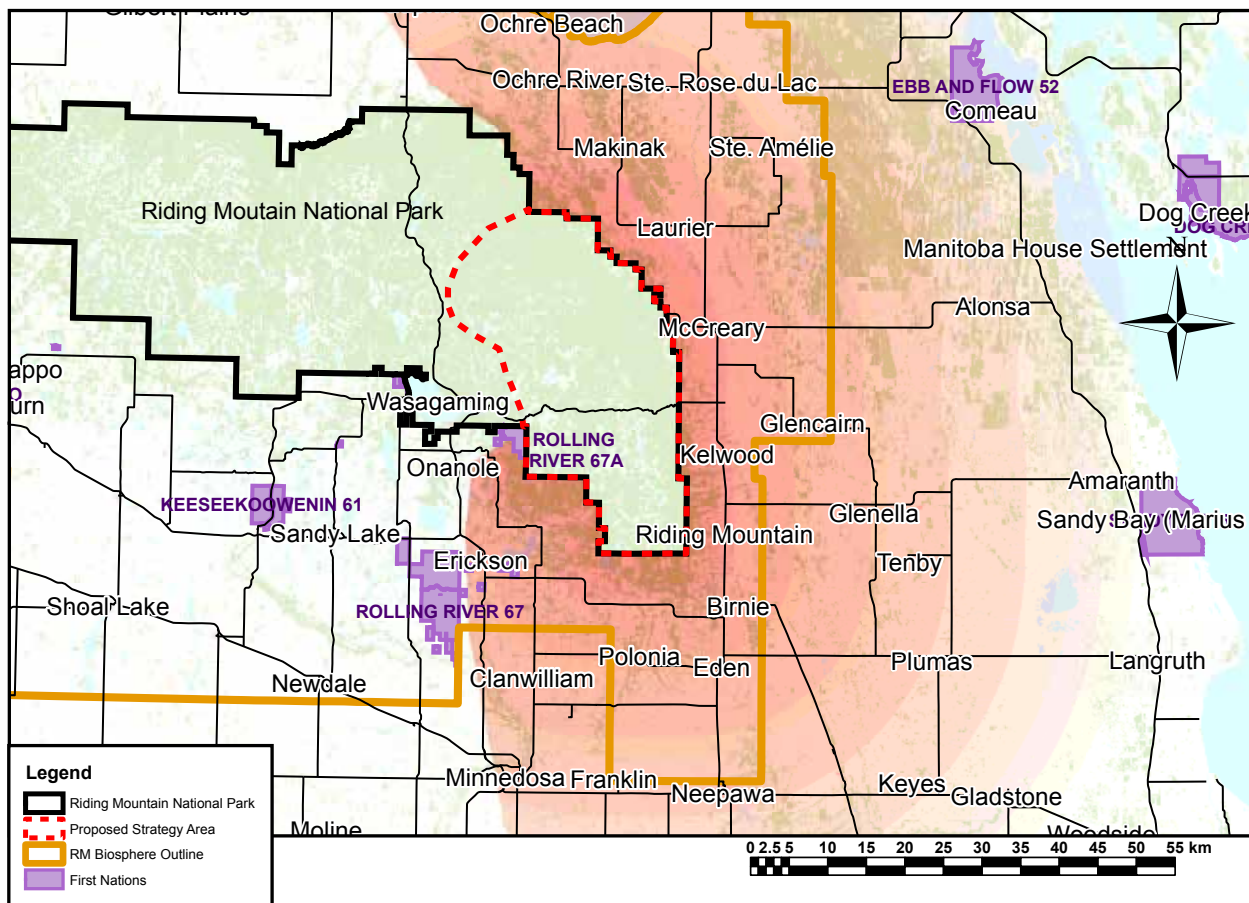


Figure One: Regional Setting

4.0 The Scope

The particular geographic scope of the Area Strategy is an area within the park (see Figure Two). This is the fundamental focus. However, the area of desired influence extends beyond the park. The premise for the broad scope is twofold:

First, visitor experience does not stop at the park boundaries. There are many complementary experiences that exist or can be developed in the surrounding municipalities. It is our hope that area “champions” will drive actions in the areas outside the park. **Second**, Parks Canada can work with others to provide services in the park that facilitate visitor experience.

An ambitious hope for this Area Strategy is that it can be a catalyst for collective action in the escarpment area – both in the park and beyond.

Parks Canada’s responsibilities to the Area Strategy will be limited to its jurisdiction, which is the national park land as recognized in the *Canada National Parks Act*. Thus the Area Strategy cannot imply committed funding by Parks Canada outside the park.

Parks Canada will annually review and report on this Area Strategy’s implementation, in cooperation with stakeholders.

“

We can’t do it all by ourselves... nor can our partners. By working together we all can win. What we do is for Canadians—with Canadians—and defined by Canadians. By building and maintaining strong partnerships, the park can create new and expanded opportunities that will enhance its ability to provide quality visitor experiences, effectively engage and connect with others, and ensure the park is protected.

- Parks Canada

”

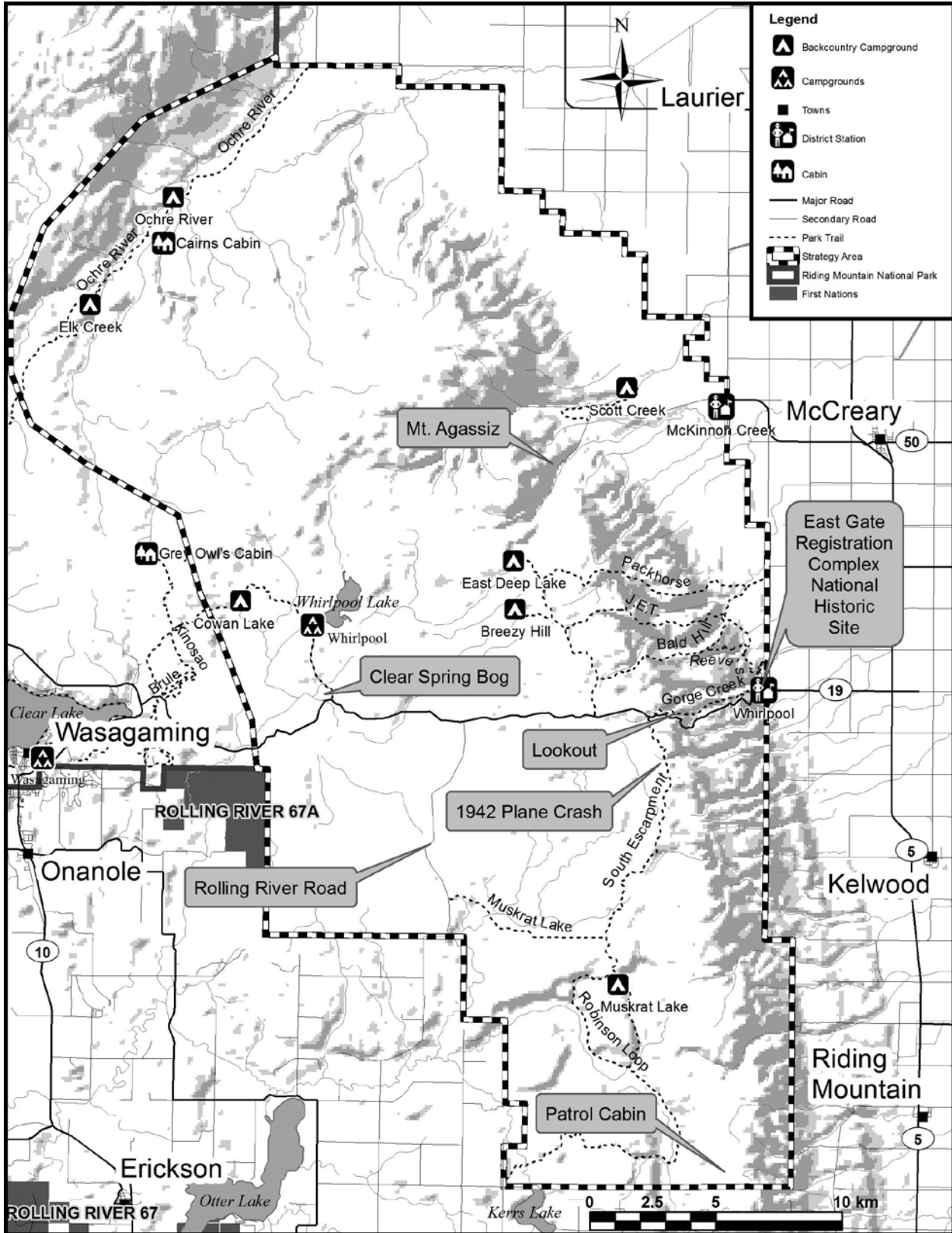


Figure Two: Example of Some of the Features in the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area

5.0 A Vision for the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area

5.0



In 10 to 15 years time:

Greater collaboration among Parks Canada, partners and stakeholders has led to increased numbers of opportunities for visitors to discover, experience and learn about the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area of the park, and beyond.

The number of visitors to this area of the park and beyond has increased significantly.

The Area Strategy has been a catalyst for greater collaboration among those who are responsible for this area, and those who can champion actions that lead to fulfilling this Vision.

“

Experiences and activities are what people pay attention to. Promote dreams, rather than people, places and things.

– Local Business Owner

”

“

Perhaps the greatest value of the strategy is that it is a catalyst for collective thinking and action in an environment where working in isolation would have limited results.

– Parks Canada Employee

”

6.0 Objectives and Actions

OBJECTIVE ONE: Work collaboratively with area stakeholders and partners so that they may bring their knowledge into developing opportunities, and to develop partnerships in service delivery where such partnerships make sense.

Action 1:

Parks Canada is willing to participate with others to realize opportunities. Bring together an “Action Group” of motivated individuals and organizations that can further focus on opportunities, and champion the development of visitor experiences in line with the Vision.

The Action Group should:

- identify appropriate recreational opportunities in consultation with the interested public, and
- build a clear working relationship with Parks Canada to ensure shared expectations.

Parks Canada should:

- clearly communicate the Action Group’s parameters for planning and action, and
- provide a Parks Canada representative to participate on the Group.

Action 2:

Parks Canada will develop and implement a communication plan to raise public/private sector awareness of possibilities and progress on the East Side. The plan will outline a range of public products or activities such as:

- a “Pathfinder” document that helps the public understand how they can provide services and experiences in the park , provides market information, and provides information on Parks Canada needs; and
- events to mark major milestones, celebrate successes, and build an ongoing sense of connection among stakeholders, partners and Parks Canada.

How We Create Quality Visitor Experiences

- We must know our **MARKETS** and respond to their **NEEDS**.
- We must identify **OPPORTUNITIES** and build a **RETURN ON INVESTMENT** that has financial, social and ecological value.
- We will achieve **RESULTS** by working **TOGETHER** to create value.
- We will define a **QUALITY EXPERIENCE**.

OBJECTIVE TWO: Continue to identify and develop opportunities for visitors to discover, experience, and learn about the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area inside the park.

Action 1:

Define the market segments that exist within the five-hour-driving-range market that are aligned with Parks Canada's and Manitoba's tourism priorities (see Appendix 3).

Action 2:

Identify realistic service/product match opportunities (based on Action 1 above) and the associated investment requirements.

Action 3:

Align visitor activity hubs with appropriate product-market match opportunities. For instance:

- Continue to invest in the redevelopment of the trail system on the east side. Focus on Reeves Ravine, improvements to Gorge Creek Trail, a Seven Gorges traverse, and a re-engineering of the South Escarpment trail system. The trail system should improve access to Muskrat Lake, broaden user groups, provide a future Trans-Canada connection, and meet the needs of adjacent communities.
- Create a meaningful, quality visitor experience at the East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site. Consider options such as displays that describe the site's significance, a bird watching hub, a mountain biking hub, a tea house, a trailhead, etc.
- Adapt the former McKinnon Creek District Station for a new visitor experience. Possibilities are use as a back country cabin, a cross-country ski warming hut, a hiking hub, etc.
- Consider proposals from the private sector for the redevelopment of the Mt. Agassiz Ski Area for downhill skiing, and other multi-season recreation uses.
- Continue to invest in the experience at Whirlpool Lake Campground, including improving the dam structure, constructing a new bridge and fish way, and installing interpretive signs.

Action 4:

Explore opportunities for collaborative development of new experiential travel programming from Riding Mountain National Park and private sector operators to engage guests, and bring people and the park together using innovative programming (see definition of "experiential travel" following).

Action 5:

When considering all new developments, demonstrate leadership and innovation in sustainable use, including new infrastructure, new visitor experiences, and the redevelopment of Mount Agassiz Ski Area.

Action 6:

Continue to undertake scientific research and monitoring to support the maintenance of ecological and commemorative integrity, and the protection of natural and cultural resources. Seek ways to effectively communicate research and management actions with visitors.



What is Experiential Travel?

Experiential travel engages visitors in a series of memorable travel activities that are inherently personal. It involves all senses, and makes connections on a physical, emotional, spiritual, social or intellectual level. It is travel designed to engage visitors with the locals, set the stage for conversations, tap the senses, and celebrate what is unique in Canada.

— *Canadian Tourism Commission*

7.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Area Strategy was subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as its implementation could significantly effect environmental and cultural resources (positively or negatively). This action is in accordance with The Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 2010).

The SEA was completed in June 2013. It focussed on potential cumulative effects of a number of environmental factors considered to be critical in sustaining ecological and cultural resources, as well visitor appreciation, connection and understanding.

The assessed critical factors included soil, landforms, vegetation, wildlife, creeks and waterways, fish habitat, footprint of facilities and trails, sensitive sites, archaeological resources, sites important to First Nations, sites of local historical significance, and the heritage values of the Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site. Critical factors to visitor appreciation, understanding and connection were also assessed, this included potential effects on viewsapes, aesthetics, wildlife viewing, visitor disturbance and displacement, and facility maintenance.

To meet Parks Canada's policy and obligations under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (2012)* many of the Area Strategy's proposed actions will require a specific environmental impact assessment. The SEA provides guidance to an individual project's environmental impact analysis when its details are being developed and assessed.

The Area Strategy's SEA determined the potential adverse environmental effects from proposed actions can be mitigated to *insignificance*, with the application of proper tools and processes. In addition, a number of significant positive environmental effects were identified in the actions proposed by the Area Strategy.

The Advisory Board has been involved in reviewing the SEA. In the future, the public will continue to be involved in the environmental impact analysis for individual projects flowing from this strategy.

A copy of the SEA is available upon request to the park.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The Story of the Development of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain



This Area Strategy is the culmination of many months of hard work and creative thinking of many people.

The Advisory Board provided a great level of expertise and effort throughout the development of the Area Strategy.

This Area Strategy is the culmination of many months of hard work and creative thinking of many people. All involved shared at least two things: deep appreciation for the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area, and a desire to be a part of shaping its future.

The Escarpment of Riding Mountain Advisory Board

On October 7, 2010, at the invitation of Parks Canada, 15 people representing more than 17 organizations gathered in the village of McCreary. At this meeting, Parks Canada

“
In terms of getting things done, the establishment of this Board is the most important thing that has happened in this area in many years.
”

– Advisory Board Member

proposed the establishment of a Board that would provide advice in developing a strategy for the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area of Riding Mountain National Park.

The proposition was straightforward. “There is potential for facilitating exciting experiences for many more people in this beautiful and under-utilized area of the park and region. Parks Canada cannot move ahead alone. The attractions, knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit that can bring this area to life extend far beyond the park boundary. Can we all work together to develop a strategy for this area that sets out a clear path to make this happen?”

The answer was a resounding “yes”. Everyone knew as a basic fact that the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area holds phenomenal potential for discovery and recreation. Tapping this potential would require the concerted effort of all present. Working in isolation was not a viable option – it never had been. The group sensed the unfolding of a new era and real possibility. The Escarpment of Riding Mountain Advisory Board (Board) was formed.

For success, the members identified three principles to be considered in their thinking:

First, the approach must be regional rather than park-specific. The attractions of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain, and the people who will play key roles, extend well beyond the park boundary.

“

I have lived in this area for thirty years and learned things through our Board activities that I never knew existed. This has been a journey of discovery for me.

– Advisory Board Member

”

Second, the possibility of redeveloping a ski hill at Mount Agassiz Ski Area must be placed in proper context among the many other attractions and possibilities of the area. Mount Agassiz has garnered much attention, but is only a small part of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain.

Third, creativity will be needed to reach the broader public and motivate involvement. With these principles in mind, the Board set out on a process to deliberate, to engage the broader public (along with Parks Canada), and to help devise a strategy.

The Board met several times to generate ideas, provide advice to Parks Canada, and

help develop the Area Strategy. Most meetings were held in various communities and venues in the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area. Most members describe the process in extremely positive terms. All members are in agreement on one point: the chance to meet and work together on important things is rare and should happen more often.

Discussions have generally focussed around three questions:

1. What are the strengths of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area to build upon. What is unique about the area?
2. What is the mix of activities and attractions that would appeal to visitors?
3. What will it take for the Area Strategy to be successful?

Parks Canada's Involvement

Parks Canada is the leader of the planning process and ultimately responsible for the content of the Area Strategy.

The park superintendent, as the Board chair, oversees meetings and helps the group function so it can achieve its objectives. As well, he or she directs the planning program and staff involvement, and liaises with senior Parks Canada Agency employees.

Parks Canada staff participate through various functions like External Relations, Visitor Experience, Planning, Public Consultation, and Resource Conservation.

Analysis of Options for Mt. Agassiz Ski Area

Early in the process, Parks Canada retained the SE Group consulting firm to prepare a feasibility study that would examine multi-season recreational opportunities for this former ski hill (see Appendix 4). The consultants met with the Board on two occasions and the general public on five occasions to discuss their findings, and submitted their final report to Parks Canada in January 2012. Parks Canada will use these findings to make decisions about future activities at the site. The study is also a resource that can be used by the Board and the public.

Engaging Others

Parks Canada has engaged many individuals, groups and governments in thinking about the future of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area. This engagement has consisted of the following:

February 2011: Parks Canada launched a survey and new web pages to increase awareness of the Area Strategy and gather public feedback through an on-line survey.

July 2011: Parks Canada and Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) worked together to hold two workshops with invited community representatives from across the Escarpment of Riding Mountain. Workshops were held in the Town of Ste. Rose du Lac and the Village of Riding Mountain.

July 2011: Parks Canada, in conjunction with SE Consultants, met with targeted stakeholders and held three open houses to build awareness of the Mount Agassiz Feasibility Study, and to gather ideas and opinions on the future of the Mount Agassiz site.

September 2011: Parks Canada hosted a public open house at the Mount Agassiz site to provide an update on the site as well as the McKinnon Creek restoration and the Area Strategy.

November 2011: Parks Canada held a public open house to discuss the status of the planning process.

January – February 2012: Parks Canada initiated public consultation on a proposed amendment to the *2007 Riding Mountain National Park of Canada and Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*. The amendment allows Parks Canada to consider proposals to potentially reopen Agassiz for a sustainable winter or multi-season operation. In addition, a series of meetings were held to update the public on the proposed Park Management Plan amendment, key findings of the Mount Agassiz Feasibility Study, and the Area Strategy.

June 2012: *The Riding Mountain National Park of Canada and Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan 2012 Amendment* was approved. Parks Canada can now consider proposals to re-open Mount Agassiz Ski Area operation with possible multi-season recreational activities.

June 2012: Advisory Board completed its final review of the area strategy.

November 2012: Parks Canada began a series of public meetings to review the Area Strategy and gain final feedback from communities, other stakeholders and partners. The communities include: Laurier, Ste Rose du Lac, Riding Mountain, McCreary, Kelwood, Dauphin and Neepawa.

Spring and Summer 2013: Area strategy is being finalized and some of the action items are coming to life.

August 2013: Mount Agassiz Request for Proposals is released.

November 2012: Parks Canada began a series of public meetings to review the Area Strategy and gain final feedback from communities, other stakeholders and partners. The communities included: Laurier, Ste Rose du Lac, Riding Mountain, McCreary, Kelwood, Dauphin and Neepawa.

Ongoing: Parks Canada will continue to meet with stakeholders throughout the process to provide updates and gather feedback.

Appendix 2

Key Findings from Public Engagement



Engaging large groups, individuals, organizations and the advisory board through a number of processes was key to gaining critical expertise and perspectives needed to develop the Area Strategy.

A representative sample of the findings that emerged from public engagement efforts are presented below. Engagement consisted of public workshops, meetings, an on-line survey and other methods detailed in Appendix 1.

1. Strengths and Uniqueness of the Area

Natural Landscape

- The beauty and uniqueness of the Manitoba Escarpment and its associated geography, diversity and scenic potential were consistently mentioned. This includes the elevation, lakes, water quality, wildlife (specifically birds), vistas and starscapes, tranquility and lack of pollution.
- The UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- The prairie mountain.
- The prairie vistas as seen from Highway 19.
- The geology (alluvial fan), geography, palaeontology and archaeology.
- Wildlife viewing (moose, elk) and birding.
- Mount Agassiz.

Range of Existing and Potential Activities:

- There is “something for everyone”, including a multitude of attractions available over four seasons.
- Opportunities for families; the challenging and diverse terrain is an attraction for youth.
- Cultural experiences such as history, stories, agri-tourism, maple syrup, “living” museums, and interpretive sites.

- Downhill skiing potential.
- Cross-country skiing potential.
- The beach, back country, touring or agri-tourism.
- Activities and opportunities include: trails, bike, hike, run, snowshoe, horse, snowmobile, hunt, fish, arts, photography, birding, hang-gliding, zip lining.
- Existing infrastructure is available e.g., pools, skateboard parks, campground, golf courses, race tracks (horse) and interpretive centre. There is a potential to host conventions.
- Possible observation tower at top of chair lift (Mt. Agassiz).
- Special events and competitions.

Local Culture & Traditions:

- The local and diverse culture and traditions in the broad area are a draw.
- There is a unique heritage and “way of life”, with deep family routes. Specific examples include: local cuisine, agriculture (“Cattle Capital of Manitoba” at Ste. Rose du Lac, “Hoof n’ Holler Festival” at Ste. Rose, “Cowboy Country”, “Maple Syrup and Skiing Capital of Manitoba” at McCreary, First Nations (spiritual healing, wintering history), Amish, Polonia area, and local customs (quilting, wine and jam making from local berries, canning).

Capacity – People & Infrastructure:

- There is a sense of community with strong and resilient people who are inviting and willing to share.
- There is a strong spirit of volunteerism.
- There is a labour force of farmers and First Nations who are looking for opportunities and have a spirit of volunteerism.
- Development costs are low and some development already exists.
- Available services include: health services, VIA Rail and bus service.
- There are unexplored business opportunities.
- Arenas, pools and golf courses exist.

Regional Attractions:

- There are a number of attractions within the region: Riding Mountain National Park, Riding Mountain Park East Gate National Historic Site, micro-brewery in Neepawa, grotto in Ste. Rose, Mount Agassiz Ski Area and Country Church tours (Sunville, Glen Hope).
- There are also a number of fairs and festivals like Harvest Sun, Lily Festival, Country Fest, Manitoba Maple Syrup Festival, and Hoof n’ Holler.
- Bison producers
- Need to avoid competing with each other by coordinating dates more efficiently.
- Need to get visitors to travel outside of the park to regional attractions.

Working Together:

- Collaboration among different areas and communities is starting and there is a potential for partnerships. This should be recognized and celebrated.
- Many new initiatives are starting (e.g., bed and breakfasts and artisans), and they need to be able to connect with each other so we can work together.

Location:

- This is a good and accessible location.
- It is connected with and in the proximity of lakes, rural areas and major centres.
- Its “centre” location draws on both sides. This is the sunbelt and this is country.

Accessibility & Accommodation:

- Accessibility issues were pointed out, like the need to fix the road (#10 and #19) and make the experiences more accessible.
- A limiting factor has always been accommodations.

2. The mix of activities and attractions that would appeal to visitors.

- There is appeal for everybody in the family, with family packages and ways to get kids involved.
- There are new markets to consider: new Canadians, new use demand, and the “tourist in your own backyard”. Markets may include clubs, elder hostels, youth camps, and “hoods in the woods”. Mount Agassiz area holds potential.
- Include hands-on learning experiences, and appeal to one’s physical, spiritual, and mental well being.
- Offer unique and diverse activities and services with quality memorable experiences (“Manitoba Best”).
- Show linkages between activities and providers (anchor tenant and services), and match activities within and outside Riding Mountain National Park.
- Entrepreneurs need to take ownership of packages.
- Consider food and accommodation packages as well as a total package from arrival to departure.
A package may offer trail, yurts and other services, as well as equipment (i.e. gear, rentals).
- Ecotourism.

Suggested Activities:

- Trail use: hiking, guided walks, biking, linked with an observation tower at top of chair lift (at Mount Agassiz).

- Extreme adventure sports: zip lining, tree canopy touring, mountain biking (at Mount Agassiz Ski Area).
- Water use: canoeing, kayaking and fishing.
- Winter activities: skiing (cross-country and downhill), and snowboarding.
- Events: amphitheatre for concerts at the Mount Agassiz Ski Area; outdoor films e.g. Banff Film Festival could be held at Mount Agassiz.
- Mixed: social activities, golfing, horseback riding, horse-drawn wagon rides, and rail service.

Regional Attractions:

- The elevator in McCreary, the East Gate National Historic Site, Skane’s Crossing, Kreiser Point, Wilson Creek Research Station, north gate “magnetic hill”, Turtle River, Ochre River, Parkland Paddling Club and fishing.

Accommodation/Camping/Cottages:

- Offer a range of accommodations to meet multiple needs: hotels, multi-season cottages and camping (e.g. Molgat Campground).

Access:

- Make things accessible and affordable. It should be easy from arrival to departure, and not too expensive for a family.
- Consider outfitters, guides and hospitality.

Food:

- Local food holds considerable appeal.

3. For the Area Strategy to be successful, what is it going to take?

People:

- Need motivated and enthusiastic entrepreneurs with initiative, creativity and a sense of ownership.
- Champions and/or leaders are needed to bring it all together.
- Greater collaboration is needed.
- Volunteers cannot do it all; we will need resource staff as well to assist/coordinate.
- Need to build capacity in order to undertake initiatives.
- There are concerns about apathy in the area, whether people are going to be friendly to tourists, and if communities are ready.
- People need to see their role in realizing positive change/results.
- People need to work together. The first steps would be to know what other businesses and initiatives are going on so we can work together.

Money/ Funding:

- Both private (community, investors) and public (federal, provincial, and municipal) funding is needed. Money will be needed for small business start-ups that are financially stable.

Infrastructure:

- Need to provide linkages (roads) between attractions and communities
- Amenities need to be upgraded (visitors are needed to warrant upgrades).

Offerings:

- Focus on the unique aspects and only support certain opportunities. Examples mentioned: world class multi-million dollar trail network and the ski hill, UNESCO Geopark, bike route(s), accessibility, highway routes and safety.

Visitors:

- Need to retain residents and attract more visitor/users, especially young people. Provide a positive first experience. A successful real estate market was mentioned.

Steps Involved:

- First gather information, develop an inventory of what is available, document to prove the need, and diversify knowledge on how to proceed.
- Then implement: need “doers” and “shovels in the dirt”. People need to buy into the process.
- There will be economic development like the realization of opportunities and attractions, business and new assessment revenues.
- Then let people know, using a market and branding strategy, what is available for them, and that “we are open for business”. Provide information for visitors through signage and kiosks (e.g. Travel Alberta outlets).

Partnerships and Cooperation:

- Cooperation and collaboration are important. Everyone needs to have the same vision, working towards the same thing, so at the end everyone can say “we did it”.
- Government should facilitate rather than lead the process.
- Parks Canada should be in a lead, cooperative role.
- Creative partnerships and the sharing of resources (e.g. intellectual capacity) are key.
- Need cooperation instead of competing with each other; there can be quality experiences and economies of scale when working together, plus better understanding and buy-in. Some people are sitting back waiting for things to happen.

Marketing Consistency:

- There needs to be a consistent market message. Joint marketing efforts like MOUs between communities that promote attractions together (as done in Alberta), will avoid duplication. An example of a joint marketing package is fly fishing.

Values:

- Consider cultural sensitivities and value what we have, such as Ukrainian and Métis culture and cooking.

Sustainability:

- The Strategy has to be environmentally sustainable, with a long-term sustainable development focus.

Regional Outlook:

- Need to think regionally and for the “greater good”.
- Consider an anchor attraction/destination e.g. Mt. Agassiz Ski Area.

4. How Parks Canada can work with local communities to achieve common goals.

- Residents and businesses in local communities need to partner together and with Parks Canada to improve and develop tourism infrastructure, generate employment opportunities, attract funding, and promote the area.
- Bus tours, vacation packages, carriage rides to the park and a shuttle bus service are examples of improving road access and connecting community and park trails.
- Protect the area and do not overdevelop.
- Re-instate warden presence at the Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site.
- Develop a shared vision before developing.
- No ATVs and snowmobiles. While others believe ATVs and snowmobile use should be considered.
- There is a need for long-term sustainable planning and promotion of sustainable activities.
- Parks Canada needs to take action now, to give back to the area (not just take), and stay open to ideas.
- Develop a shared vision before any development. Consider sustainable tourism.
- Would like to see activity in the area for benefit of visitors and local businesses (economic benefits). Keep tourism revenue in Manitoba.
- Re-open the ski hill. Consider a non-profit volunteer model for the hill if there is no business interest.

Appendix 3

Future Consideration: Four Key Questions in Presenting the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area as a Destination

Destination marketing of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain will require a good understanding of strengths of the area, which features and services may be of interest, product development and then communicating with potential visitors. Four questions need to be answered and reviewed into the future to do this effectively. Much of the Board's work and thinking has been invested in answering these questions.

Question 1: What is the Selling Position?

A destination marketing and promotions strategy is built on the foundation of a focused vision of why one should visit a place i.e. how it is positioned for its target market. This selling position should emotionally connect with target visitors and serve to motivate action from a potential visitor to have them make a destination choice. This emotional connection should be evident in the messaging used to reach potential visitors. It must fundamentally capture peoples' attention and imagination, and trigger their desires.

A strong selling position will incorporate these qualities:

- It clearly portrays the area's uniqueness and what makes it special from other areas (differentiation).
- It is an experience-based view of visitor value as opposed to place- or infrastructure-based.
- It has a distinct focus that drives action and encourages innovation.

Selling Position for the Riding Mountain National Park Escarpment of Riding Mountain:

- **"Explore the spectacular wild mountains of the prairies, in a National Park."**
- **Where?** The Escarpment of Riding Mountain National Park, and adjacent areas outside the park.
- **Features:** Access to a spectacular wilderness setting; a unique mountain on the prairies. There are many high quality pursuits in this environment, such as hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, solitude and scenery. The landscapes, cultures and communities of the adjacent area outside the park are unique and welcoming. Local cuisine and friendly people round out a uniquely Canadian experience.

Question 2:**What are the complementary (secondary) activities that complete the destination package?**

A complementary activity is any activity that a visitor will partake in while they are visiting a destination. A tourism experience cannot be complete without these activities because they are, in combination with the narrow focus of the selling position, what make the entire visit feel rewarding, worthwhile and complete. Often, complementary activities comprise 80% of a person's visit, with the remaining 20% around the narrow focus of the selling position.

EXISTING COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES		
In Park	Both in Park and Outside Park	Outside Park
<input type="checkbox"/> Mountain biking <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-country skiing <input type="checkbox"/> Highway 19 scenic drive <input type="checkbox"/> Birding and other wildlife viewing <input type="checkbox"/> Astronomy and star gazing <input type="checkbox"/> Nature photography <input type="checkbox"/> East Gate NHS visit <input type="checkbox"/> Wasagaming (Clear Lake) visit <input type="checkbox"/> Snowshoeing	<input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian: wagon trail rides, horseback rides, guided and non-guided sleigh rides <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-country skiing <input type="checkbox"/> Skateboarding <input type="checkbox"/> Campgrounds <input type="checkbox"/> Snowmobiling	<input type="checkbox"/> Kelwood Music Festival <input type="checkbox"/> The Culinary Trail (promotion of area restaurants) <input type="checkbox"/> Culture experience: First Nations, Métis, Ukrainian, pioneers <input type="checkbox"/> Yurts and spiritual retreat <input type="checkbox"/> Hotels <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurants <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting and fishing <input type="checkbox"/> Pools, swimming <input type="checkbox"/> Horse race tracks

NOT EXISTING BUT IDENTIFIED AS POSSIBILITIES

In Park	Both in Park and Outside Park	Outside Park
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain biking: hut-to-hut (“carry little with you and hike and bike lots”) <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking: hut-to-hut; Trans-Canada Trail <input type="checkbox"/> Cliff climbing <input type="checkbox"/> Downhill skiing <input type="checkbox"/> Ski joring <input type="checkbox"/> East Gate NHS: B&B; weddings; gift/tea shop (featuring local entrepreneurs); culture interpretation and storytelling (stories ranging from logging culture, crashed plane, Wilson Creek hydrology project) <input type="checkbox"/> Hands-on experiential tourism e.g. tourist participation in monitoring and research <input type="checkbox"/> Yurts and or huts for backcountry accommodation <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodation at McKinnon Creek District Station; build on history of Warden Service <input type="checkbox"/> Public archaeology i.e. on-site demonstrations and hands-on research <input type="checkbox"/> Wilderness camping adventures or guided adventure tours – e.g. cycle, hike and horseback <input type="checkbox"/> Backcountry log cabin accommodation along an epic trail <input type="checkbox"/> Scenic viewing from tree canopy platforms <input type="checkbox"/> Hawk migration viewing platform <input type="checkbox"/> Nature learning centre <input type="checkbox"/> Children’s activity centre <input type="checkbox"/> Youth outdoor adventure centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Geological interpretation (concept of “Geo-park”) <input type="checkbox"/> Exploring shale beds for “dinosaurs” <input type="checkbox"/> Fossil discovery tours <input type="checkbox"/> Campgrounds <input type="checkbox"/> Art classes <input type="checkbox"/> Hang-gliding <input type="checkbox"/> Snowmobiles and ATVs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Accommodations: B&Bs and hotels <input type="checkbox"/> Additional restaurants <input type="checkbox"/> Additional shops <input type="checkbox"/> Community visits: “experience the flavour of the communities” <input type="checkbox"/> Agri-tourism <input type="checkbox"/> Off-road vehicle use <input type="checkbox"/> Golf courses <input type="checkbox"/> Skane’s Crossing <input type="checkbox"/> Wilson Creek Former Research Station <input type="checkbox"/> Zip-lining

Question 3: What is the competitive advantage?

A competitive advantage is a result of an attribute(s) that gives a product or service provider an advantage over the competition. The competition is comprised of any service or activity that draws a potential visitor's time away from the area, either partially or in its entirety. Without a competitive advantage, success is unlikely from a destination tourism perspective. An attribute that leads to a competitive advantage can be a resource (e.g. scenery) or an ability (e.g. a motivated labour force), or an experience (e.g. bannock making on traditional grounds). For instance, if a tourism product provider had a particularly skilled staff with special knowledge or skills that nobody else has (e.g. First Nations medicine), that would give that provider a competitive advantage. The terrain of the Escarpment itself could also be considered a competitive advantage.

Not all competitive advantages need to be pre-existing. They can be created if the right opportunities exist.

Possible competitive advantages (in no particular order) for the Escarpment of Riding Mountain are:

- **Escarpment landscape and geomorphology:** The 300 meter relief, deep ravines, fast-flowing streams, shale hills and landscapes are more visually striking, wild, and accessible here than anywhere else in Manitoba.
- **Escarpment ecosystem:** The three life zones that converge here (see Appendix 4) create a high level of biodiversity and abundance of plant and animal species. Possibly the highest densities of wildlife in North America are found within the park, creating world class opportunities for viewing. The chances to see black bears, moose and beavers are consistently identified by visitors as highly appealing. Fall migration of bears to oak forests for acorn feeding in the Ochre River area is a significant viewing opportunity. Avian hawks and eastern deciduous forest passerines (perching birds) unique to the Manitoba Escarpment and uniquely located here in Manitoba, offer opportunities to view spring and fall hawk migrations, observe nesting golden-winged warblers, and other deciduous forest species (tanagers). These species are seasonal in distribution, and are considered world class, attracting birdwatchers from the UK and other European countries. The annual hawk migration creates opportunities for local school area trips. A world class hawk migration tower could be a key feature of the area. This makes the area different from Prince Albert National Park, Point Pelee National Park, or Cape Breton Highlands National Park.
- **National Park status:** As the only National Park in southern Manitoba, Riding Mountain has a unique brand, reputation and promise to visitors and potential visitors.

- Hiking, biking and cross-country skiing:** The landscapes along the escarpment potentially offer a variety of exceptionally wild and scenic routes. A competitive advantage could be developed by increasing the number and quality of trails and use designations, and improving the variety, experience, accessibility and safety. The several existing hiking trails will be upgraded over the next several years. Bike-ability in the area is currently low, with only one trail to be opened in 2012, dedicated to mountain biking. The potential for biking has been assessed as world class. Existing cross-country ski trails and possible backcountry accommodation, such as yurts, will add to the quality and accessibility of the area for trail use.
- Local cultures and traditions:** The heritage and way of life in this area hold appeal for those interested in experiencing traditional and contemporary cultures. Examples are Métis, Ukrainian and Anishinabe cultures, including food, festivals, pow-wows, and community visits. One of the seven communities that recognize Riding Mountain National Park as part of their traditional territory holds land adjacent to Clear Lake, affording a unique access point in the park from Reserve land.
- Potential for collaborative community participation (i.e. teamwork effort to achieve a goal):** Local communities have a tradition of working together, in the spirit of community, to achieve goals. The experience of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Advisory Board is a strong indication of the potential for collaboration. Managed well, these collaborations can be a competitive advantage.

“
Our jaws dropped when we saw the beauty of this area, the terrain, and its unspoiled nature. The potential for low impact hiking and biking is right up there with the best.
 ”

– Trail Designer,
 International Hiking Association

Question 4: Who is the market?

A viable “market” can be differentiated into multiple segments such as geographic (e.g. Brandon), demographic (e.g. baby boomer) and behavioural (e.g. cultural enthusiast). Given the early stage of planning for the Escarpment of Riding Mountain, it is reasonable to use a geographic focus as the initial market focus. **Areas within a five hour drive of the area will be considered as the market.** This includes major urban centres of Winnipeg and Brandon, smaller centres and rural populations in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Many market segments exist within the five hour range. Segment analysis should be aligned with existing segments, such as those used by Travel Manitoba. The Canadian Tourism Commission uses Experience Quotients (EQ) which is a proven model for market analysis and segment identification. Seven target markets for Riding Mountain have been identified in initial analyses:

- Hikers and backcountry enthusiasts
- The recharge and relax crowd
- Campers
- Generational mixers (young and old generational households)
- Boomers
- Lifestyle climbers (active families and middle-aged achievers)
- Recreational cyclists and mountain bikers

A concurrent step is to define the mix of experiences and attractions of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area (the “product” in tourism terms). This step has been partially completed through answering the three previous questions. In the case of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain there is not a large inventory of pre-existing service offers.

To summarize, the next steps for gaining a better sense of the market, and the desirable attractions, features and experiences of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain are:

- Confirm the market segments that exist within the five hour driving range market.
- Further identify a desired, realistic service offer and product, both within and outside the park.
- Identify investment needs.
- Develop the service offer or “product”.

Appendix 4

Area Description

Ecology

The eastern slopes of the Manitoba Escarpment within Riding Mountain National Park stand 300 metres above the adjacent prairie. Over several thousand years the shale has been sculpted by water erosion into hills and deep ravines with rapidly flowing streams. It is dramatic relief and offers some of the most spectacular vistas in Manitoba.

All of the area was once buried beneath the Late Wisconsin continental ice sheet. As the atmosphere warmed, the glacial sheet retreated, leaving glacial Lake Agassiz behind. Over several thousand years, the lake drained northward, leaving sedimentary shale deposits which form the exposed area of the Escarpment.

“

So many things come together here — the prairies and the escarpment, and four different life zones. You can feel the richness of this environment.

– Parks Canada Employee

”

The shape and elevation of the Escarpment of Riding Mountain area provide a unique eco-climatic zone within and adjacent to the park. Temperatures at the base of the escarpment are warmer on average. There is also a greater range of temperature and precipitation in the area when compared to adjacent areas.

Located in the centre of North America, the Boreal Forest, AspenParkland, and the Eastern Deciduous Biomes come together. These three zones create a mosaic of flourishing ecosystems with a large diversity of plant and animal species.

Lush mixed wood forests dominate the area within the park. Unique communities of bur oak forest cling to the drier slopes of the

escarpment. Trembling aspen occur in surrounding depressions to the mid-slopes, being replaced by grasses as the elevation increases. Balsam poplar is common in moister locations such as the creek channels. On alluvial soils, the white elm, green ash and Manitoba maple are common. Fire plays a key role in the ecological integrity of the ecosystem. The oak forest community of the escarpment is particularly dependent on burns for its continued vitality, through a 5-10 year natural fire cycle.

Moose, elk, deer, beaver, river otter, porcupine, grey wolf, lynx, cougar, common loon, white pelican, great grey owl and Canada goose are just a few of the animal and bird inhabitants of the park. One of the largest populations of black bears in North America is found here.

First Nations Connection to the Area

There is evidence of initial inhabitants in the area as long ago as 7000 B.C. These residents are thought to have hunted bison in the area, which has been determined through archaeological finds such as arrow tips and stone tools. Assiniboine and Cree people, followed in the early 1800s by the Anishinabe people, lived in the area that is now the park. Anecdotal information suggests that traditional travel routes lead to the base of the escarpment and established encampment areas. These base camps were then used to access eastern areas of what is now the park for hunting, gathering and spiritual quests. Today there are seven Anishinabe communities with interests in the park, with a total registered population of approximately 12,800.

First Nations in the area who have an interest in the Escarpment of Riding Mountain Area are:

- Ebb and Flow First Nation
- Rolling River First Nation
- Gambler First Nation
- Keeseekowenin First Nation
- Waywayseecappo First Nation
- Sandy Bay First Nation
- Tootinaowaziibeeng First Nation

Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site of Canada (East Gate National Historic Site)

The East Gate National Historic Site is located along Highway #19 at the park's eastern boundary. It was built in 1933-34 and was one of three gate entry points to the park. The site was recommended for designation by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1992, with the unveiling of a plaque in 1995. The East Gate National Historic Site is the only original park entrance from the early 1930s remaining in any of Canada's national parks. It remains a place where visitors can learn about the log design, the government's work program during the Depression, and auto tourism development.

The 2010 Evaluation of the Commemorative Integrity of the East Gate National Historic Site noted several challenges: maintaining the on-going occupancy of the Gatekeeper's Cottage

and the Warden's Residence which are crucial to the protection of the site, improving the messages and communications of national significance of the site, and the need for increased funding to implement landscape and communications plans for the site.

Municipalities

Historically, the Riding Mountains have strong connections to many of its adjacent rural communities. Riding across the mountain to access timber, game and other commodities was common when the park was a federal game preserve and then federal forest reserve.

Access to the park by area residents continues along age old trails. This type of use is common along the Escarpment of Riding Mountain and provides Parks Canada with a natural and deep connection to neighbouring communities and families. Today there are many rural municipalities, towns and villages that have an interest in the future of this area.

Community Resources

The following organizations play key roles in the economic and environmental health of the area:

- Parkland Tourism
- Province of Manitoba: Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (MAFRD)
- Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve
- Neepawa Economic Development: manages various initiatives and projects aimed at stimulating economic development in the Neepawa area
- Parkland Community Futures Development Corporation: identifies, develops and supports long-term job creation and economic development in the region
- McCreary District Economic Development Board / Community Development Corporation: manages various initiatives and projects aimed at stimulating economic development in the McCreary area
- Agassiz Planning District (includes the Village of McCreary and the R.M. of McCreary)
- Ste. Rose Planning District (includes the Rural Municipality of Ste. Rose and the Town of Ste. Rose du Lac)
- Turtle River Watershed Conservation District: serves as a coordinating and educating body for the management of natural resources
- Parks Canada

Appendix 5

Mount Agassiz Ski Area



Mount Agassiz Ski Area has a long history of providing downhill skiing within the Escarpment of Riding Mountain. The site was first utilized in the late 1950s by local skiers hiking up the McKinnon Creek drainage to access the vertical drop and snowfall that the area offered.

In 1958, Parks Canada leased approximately 142 hectares to a private operator for the development of a ski area in Riding Mountain National Park.

In 1961, Mount Agassiz Ski Area (Mount Agassiz) opened with a few ski runs.

The ski area grew during the 1970s, with the addition of more ski trails, two T-Bar lifts, snowmaking equipment and an expanded day lodge. The most significant expansion occurred in 1979 when a double chairlift was added and additional ski trails were developed.

In 2000, the ski area went out of business. The buildings and other assets were left at the site.

The 2007 Riding Mountain National Park Management Plan indicated additional leases would not be granted for the purposes of downhill skiing in the park and the Mount Agassiz area would be rehabilitated.

Following the decision, regional stakeholders brought new information and perspectives to Parks Canada regarding the future of the Mount Agassiz site. Parks Canada committed to examining the matter further, including commissioning a feasibility study.

The feasibility study suggests that reopening Mount Agassiz Ski Area would be a challenge due to limited markets, competition from existing ski hills, and high capital and operating costs. Some stakeholders continue to express a strong interest in reopening the site and would like the chance to assess the opportunities, risks and requirements to develop and operate a sustainable operation at Mount Agassiz.

Parks Canada decided to re-examine the Mount Agassiz decision and proposed an amendment to the national park management plan to allow entrepreneurs an opportunity to develop a proposal for a multi-season operation at Mount Agassiz. In January 2012, Parks Canada conducted extensive public consultation of the management plan amendment. Overall, public support for the amendment was strong.

In June 2012, an approved management plan amendment was tabled in Parliament which states that Parks Canada will “consider financially sustainable proposals for the redevelopment of a ski hill operation at the Mount Agassiz Ski Area, including multi-season recreational activities.”

In August 2013 Parks Canada launched a Request For Proposals process to invite potential submissions to reopen the Mount Agassiz Ski Area in Riding Mountain National Park for a sustainable winter or multi-season operation.

Mount Agassiz Ski Area continues to be listed as a Commercial Ski Area pursuant to the *Canada National Parks Act*, S.C. 2000, c. 32, in Schedule 5, section 36.

Appendix 6

Parks Canada Principles of Management

These principles will be considered during planning and implementation of the Area Strategy.

Parks Canada Strategic Outcome

Canadians have a strong sense of connection, through meaningful experiences, to their national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas, and these protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.

Commemorative Integrity

Describes the health or wholeness of a national historic site. A national historic site possesses commemorative integrity when:

- the resources that symbolize or represent its importance are not impaired or under threat;
- the reasons for the site's national historic significance are effectively communicated to the public; and
- the site's heritage values, including those not related to national significance, are respected by all whose decisions or actions affect the site.

Ecological Integrity

The “maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks” (*Canada National Parks Act, 2000: 8(2)*).

Engagement

Partner and Stakeholder engagement activities ensure Canadians' needs and priorities are clearly expressed to the Parks Canada Agency and their interests and knowledge help inform and influence the Agency's actions and direction.

Environmental Stewardship

Parks Canada protected heritage places will be managed in a manner that minimizes negative environmental impacts, and encourages innovative approaches employing environmentally sound technologies and practices.

Monitoring and Reporting

Parks Canada systematically monitors a protected heritage place's condition and trends in terms of resource protection, public appreciation and understanding and visitor experience. These are reported every five years at the local level in a State of Report and every two years at the national level.

Outreach

Given an increasingly urbanized and diverse population located far from national parks, Parks Canada is reassessing its relevance to Canadians. Through public outreach/external communications activities, Parks Canada will promote Canadians' understanding of and appreciation for Parks Canada's mandate and conservation work, and encourage them to support and contribute to the protection and presentation of Parks Canada protected heritage places.

Partnering

By building and maintaining strong partnerships, Parks Canada can create new and expanded opportunities to enhance its ability to provide quality visitor experiences, effectively engage and connect with others, and ensure its parks and sites are protected. Parks Canada cannot do it all by ourselves... nor can our partners. By working together we all can win.

Respect for Aboriginal Peoples

Parks Canada respects Aboriginal rights and land claim agreements. In managing protected heritage places, Parks Canada will work collaboratively with Aboriginal peoples to incorporate traditional knowledge, values and cultural heritage. Building mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal communities is a priority for Parks Canada.

Sustainable Tourism

Parks Canada is the largest provider of natural and historic tourism products in Canada. Its iconic destinations form the cornerstones of the Canadian tourism industry. Parks Canada supports sustainable tourism and works in collaboration with tourism providers.

Visitor Experience Opportunities

The lifestyles and values of Canadians are changing as a result of significant demographic shifts, as are their attitudes towards travel and leisure. Travellers have more choice, are better informed, and want a bigger role in choosing and creating their travel experiences. Parks Canada will increase and continually update its understanding of the needs and expectations of travellers, and will offer unique, authentic, interactive, personalized and diverse experiences that respond to Canadian interests and reflect their stories.

Appendix 7

Escarpment of Riding Mountain Advisory Board Members

Bill Baker – Board Member, Friends of Riding Mountain National Park

Bobby Bennett – Manager, Turtle River Conservation District (St. Rose)

Wayne Copet – Director, Industry Development, Travel Manitoba

Ann Dandeneau – Business Development Specialist, Community Development, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (MAFRD)

Celes Davar – President, Earth Rhythms Inc.

Rick Donaldson – Economic Development Officer and **Amanda Cathcart**,
Leisure Services Manager, Town of Neepawa

Derm English – Regional Manager, Manitoba Local Government

Andrew Flett – Elder, Ebb and Flow First Nation

Richard Gaywish – Economic Development Officer, Titibinaysiibiing Economic
Development Group (Rolling River First Nation)

Daymon Guillas – Asessippi Ski Hill

Pam Little – McCreary Economic Development Board

Val Pankratz – Chair, Biosphere Reserve

Kathy Swann – Director, Parkland Tourism

Karen Walker-Tibble – Business Development Specialist, Direct Farm Marketing, Manitoba
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (MAFRD)

Parks Canada



Have an idea?

Like to know more, or get involved?

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