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# Sault Ste. Marie Canal

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2019



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National Historic Site of Canada

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## Foreword



Canada's national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas belong to all Canadians and offer truly Canadian experiences.

These special places make up one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and cultural heritage areas in the world.

The Government is committed to preserving our natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places and contributing to the recovery of species-at-risk. At the same time, we must continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities so that more Canadians can experience Parks Canada places and learn about our environment, history and culture.

This new management plan for Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site of Canada supports this vision.

Management plans are developed through extensive consultation and input from various people and organizations, including Indigenous peoples, local and regional residents, visitors and the dedicated team at Parks Canada.

National parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas are a priority for the Government of Canada. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this plan for their commitment and spirit of co-operation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort and I am pleased to approve the Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan.

**Catherine McKenna**

*Minister of Environment and Climate Change and  
Minister responsible for Parks Canada*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommended by:*

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## Executive Summary

The Sault Ste. Marie Canal features historic sandstone buildings, a recreational lock, the world's only remaining Emergency Swing Dam and a network of nature trails located on two picturesque islands in the St. Marys River in downtown Sault Ste. Marie. The St. Marys River rapids were central to the settlement of the area, serving, first as a major trading centre and fishery for Indigenous peoples and later as the means to power steel and pulp and paper mills, which industrialized the city at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Sault Ste. Marie Canal is a favourite recreation spot for city residents and a magnet for tourists who visit the city. The site is beginning to become known as a prime space for community events, and emerging relationships with Indigenous partners present opportunities for collaboration and the presentation of Indigenous cultures and histories. Significant investments in heritage buildings and other site infrastructure will create opportunities for the development of new programs, services and facilities that will enhance the visitor experience at the site.

The three key strategies for the ten year management plan focus on the following:

- rehabilitating and revitalising infrastructure to build the foundation for the site's future;
- strengthening relationships with First Nation and Métis partners to better tell the story of the site; and
- enhancing the experience at the site to increase visitation and create a vibrant community space.

Working with First Nation and Métis partners, local and regional tourism organizations, cultural attractions, the City of Sault Ste. Marie, city businesses and organizations as well as other stakeholders will be key to the success of the site in diversifying the site's offer and broadening its appeal. Infrastructure investment presents the opportunity to transform the Sault Ste. Marie Canal to better serve the needs of visitors, create a more sustainable operation and enhance the tourism offer in both the local community and the region of Northern Ontario.



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## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and those national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

Canadians, including Indigenous peoples, were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of the Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of the Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site in years to come.

## 2.0 Significance of Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site

Sault Ste. Marie Canal was designated a National Historic Site in 1987. Officially opened for traffic in September 1895, the Sault Ste. Marie Ship Canal completed the last link in an all Canadian waterway along the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system. The canal was operated as a commercial facility for over 80 years until 1979 when it was transferred to Parks Canada in recognition of its value as a heritage canal.

The Sault Ste. Marie Canal is a commemoration of the Developing Economies Theme in the National Historic Sites of Canada Systems Plan. The applicable sub-themes are Technology and Engineering; and Communications and Transportation.

Nationally significant cultural resources consist of the Powerhouse, the Emergency Swing Dam, archaeological resources associated with the construction and operation of the Powerhouse and Emergency Swing Dam, and all machinery, templates and drawings associated with these structures under the stewardship of Parks Canada.

The 47.3 hectare site consists of two islands flanking the recreational lock. The park-like grounds include manicured lawns as well as natural areas of mixed shrubs, poplar trees and wetlands which provide habitat for a variety of flora and fauna and a beautiful setting for nature trails on North and South St. Marys Islands.

### 3.0 Planning Context

The Sault Ste. Marie Canal is located in downtown Sault Ste. Marie, a city with a population of 75,000 (Map 1). Located on the international border and between Lakes Superior and Huron, the city is strategically located as the major entry point to Ontario for much of the American Midwest. Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, a city of 14,000 on the American side of the border, features a four-lock canal complex which handles all Great Lakes commercial shipping.

The site welcomes approximately 100,000 land-based and 60,000 water-based visitors each year. The recreational lock is open from mid-May to mid-October and is a main focal point of the site, attracting visitors of all ages to watch the boats lock through. A number of events are hosted each year by Parks Canada and the site is beginning to be used by third parties and Indigenous partners for a variety of activities and gatherings. The site is very popular with local residents for recreational activities such as walking, jogging, cycling, picnicking and bird watching and the rapids are a favourite fishing spot for both locals and visitors. The site offers a well-established rental program for wedding photography and ceremonies as well as a variety of education programs for elementary and high school students. With the recent and ongoing investments to the site infrastructure, it is anticipated that programming will only grow in the future as the site becomes more equipped to deal with larger indoor and outdoor activities and events.

North of the canal is an industrial complex which historically included buildings associated with industries such as pulp and paper, and steel production (Map 2). Power generation plants remain to this day and the surrounding industrial area has been undergoing a transformation in recent years with a focus on re-purposing vacant industrial buildings for modern uses like restaurants and concert venues.

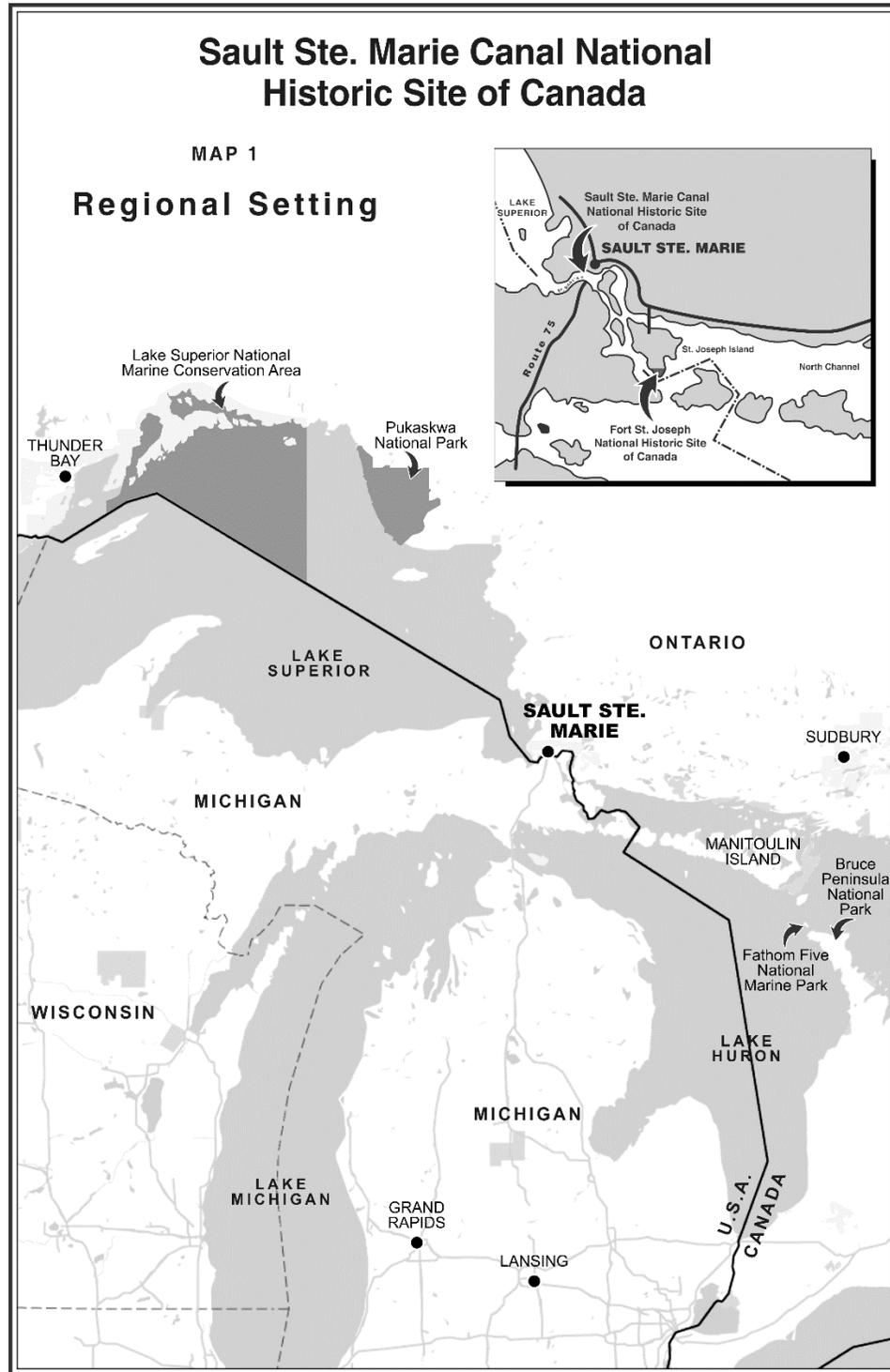
Batchewana First Nation owns, operates and maintains Whitefish Island National Historic Site, an island lying directly south of the canal and connected to the canal lands through a system of trails. The island, which served as a fishing station and settlement for hundreds of years, is currently in the initial stages of a multi-phase plan to present local First Nation history and culture through reconstructions of pre and post-contact villages, interpretive signage and educational programming.

Building relationships with Batchewana First Nation and the Métis in Sault Ste. Marie is a priority for Parks Canada, and Memorandums of Understanding have recently been developed to nurture the relationships and move towards greater collaboration on-site.

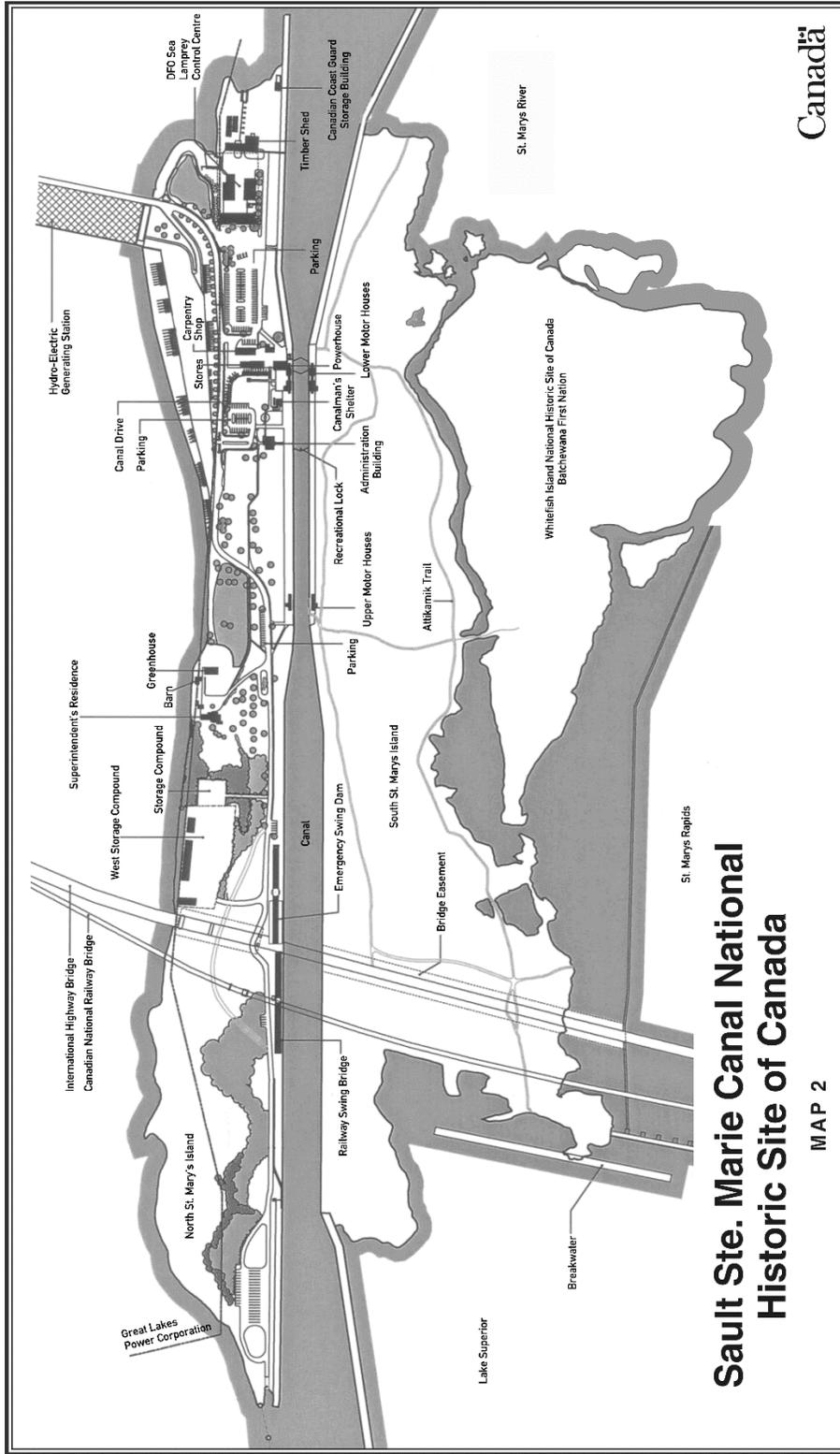
#### **Site Transformation through the Historic Core Concept**

The Historic Core of the site consists of a complex of buildings and infrastructure adjacent to the recreational lock which lends itself to a focused area for future visitor experiences. A number of studies have contributed to the development of a concept for the Historic Core. The concept proposes to re-capitalize and re-purpose the buildings in this area to create new programs, facilities and services; improve the sense of arrival at the Sault Ste. Marie Canal; and, enable the site to work with third parties to both enhance the visitor experience and increase the potential for economic opportunities and revenue generation.

Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site



## 4.0 Vision

The following vision expresses the future desired state of the Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site in 15 years.

Located at the edge of downtown Sault Ste. Marie on the shores of the St. Marys River rapids, lies a place with a long history and deep connections for First Nations and Métis peoples. The rapids served as a major fishery and trading centre dating back thousands of years. Over the centuries, these turbulent waters were navigated by skilled fishermen, intrepid explorers, and hardy fur traders, before being harnessed to provide power to turn a small settlement into an industrial city. The construction of an innovative lock system provided passage for commercial vessels and spurred further development.

The Sault Ste. Marie Canal stands as a testament to Canadian ingenuity and engineering achievements. Once the longest lock in the world, it completed an all-Canadian waterway linking the Atlantic Ocean to the interior of the country and helped facilitate the growth of a nation.

The Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site will be:

- a complex of historic buildings and cultural resources that commemorate the integrity of the site, and provide exceptional opportunities for learning and enjoyment;
- a well-promoted and welcoming destination with a clear sense of arrival and a variety of interpretive elements to engage visitors;
- a place where visitors can participate in innovative programming and interactive displays in revitalized heritage buildings;
- a major regional tourist attraction with diverse experiences for visitors such as food service, accommodation, recreational activities and site rentals;
- a place where the spirit of reconciliation fosters respectful relationships and First Nations and Métis cultures and histories are presented and celebrated;
- a community gathering place that welcomes special events and collaborative opportunities with new and existing partners; and
- a place where visitors connect with nature and history in a park-like setting.

The canal's beautiful red sandstone buildings, now fully revitalized and open to the public, feature interactive displays and innovative programming designed to share the site's unique stories. First Nations and Métis cultures and histories are presented and celebrated, and through strong relationships with a variety of partners, the canal has become a community gathering place. As a major regional tourist attraction, the canal offers diverse experiences for visitors ranging from food and accommodation to rentals and special events.

This is an urban oasis, a place to escape and connect with nature; to walk among historic buildings and century-old trees; and, to discover our nation's rich and diverse heritage. Today, as in the past, this is a place where people come to gather, share experiences, make connections and build lasting memories.

## 5.0 Key Strategies

The strategic direction for the management of the Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site includes three key strategies. The key strategies reflect the opportunities expressed by Indigenous partners and community stakeholders and are consistent with Parks Canada Agency priorities. They describe the management direction for the site over the next ten years in order to achieve the vision. Specific objectives relate to each key strategy, and associated targets aim to measure progress throughout the implementation of the management plan.

### **Key Strategy 1: Infrastructure Improvements - The Foundation for the Future**

This strategy is focused on transforming the site into a more engaging and interesting place for visitors to enjoy and learn about the history of Canada. Significant investments in infrastructure will improve the condition of historic buildings to enhance visitor experience, fulfill corporate priorities for conservation and position the canal as a key attraction, boosting visitation and revenue. The completed site will support efficient visitor circulation and access to buildings, enabling visitors to experience the historic site in new and exciting ways.

#### **Objective 1.1:**

Heritage buildings are rehabilitated, improving their condition rating, and the 'Historic Core' area of the site is transformed for visitor enjoyment.

##### *Targets:*

- Stores Building structural stabilization project is complete by 2019.
- Powerhouse stabilization project is complete by 2028.
- Overall concept for Historic Core is complete by 2019 and design of interior and exterior interpretive elements are undertaken in a phased approach as funding becomes available.
- Interventions to prevent further structural degradation of the Superintendent's Residence, are completed by 2020.

#### **Objective 1.2:**

Rehabilitation of heritage buildings provides visitors with the opportunity to experience site transformation first hand.

##### *Targets:*

- Visitor satisfaction remains high during the construction phase based on data collected through the National Comment Card Program and site visitor logbook.
- Regular familiarization tours are scheduled for media, social media campaigns are developed and restoration information is incorporated into guided tours to keep the community and site visitors up to date on projects.

#### **Objective 1.3:**

Visitors experience a sense of arrival and find their way around SSMC with ease.

##### *Targets:*

- Elements designed to create a formal arrival are installed at site entrance (e.g., banners on light posts leading into site and improved wayfinding signage).

- Enhanced public transportation options are explored for feasibility and potential partners by 2023.
- Fuel transfer/storage tanks and surplus storage sheds are removed and associated remediation activities are completed by 2028 to prepare the space for a potential future interpretive node.

**Objective 1.4:**

On-site historic equipment and artefacts are evaluated, and long term use and storage is determined.

*Targets:*

- Conservation and storage issues related to historic equipment, artefacts and surplus items have been resolved based on the evaluation by 2028.
- Artefacts are evaluated, considered for inclusion as part of new interpretive elements in Powerhouse and Stores Building and receive conservation work as required for display.

**Key Strategy 2: Working Together with First Nations and Métis Partners**

The intent of this strategy is to collaborate with First Nations and Métis partners in the spirit of reconciliation to foster respectful relationships, and support opportunities for economic development. A main objective will be the creation and delivery of new cultural experiences on-site which tell the story and significance of the place before the construction of the canal. It is envisioned that mutual benefits for First Nations, Métis and Parks Canada will result from improved collaboration based on agreements such as the Memorandums of Understanding that have framed a new path forward.

**Objective 2.1:**

Mutual objectives and goals outlined in Memorandums of Understanding are achieved.

*Targets:*

- Collaborative forums that meet the needs of First Nations and Métis partners are established to further the relationship with Parks Canada.
- Progress on implementation of Memorandums of Understanding is measured and reported on in the management plan annual implementation updates.

**Objective 2.2:**

Initiatives with First Nation and Métis communities are developed in the spirit of reconciliation through the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

*Targets:*

- The presentation and commemoration of First Nations and Métis histories and cultures are improved through the inclusion of Indigenous voices and a shared desire to educate visitors on the broad history of the area that includes the canal lands.
- New co-created experiences are developed with First Nations and Métis partners within the first five years of plan implementation.
- First Nations and Métis culture experiences are jointly promoted to identified target markets.

### **Key Strategy 3: The Gathering Place for History and Culture in Sault Ste. Marie**

The canal will be a destination of choice for vacationers and a special gathering place for local and regional residents. New ways for visitors to enjoy and connect with the site through a mix of educational, recreational, leisure and Indigenous cultural activities will draw people back again and again. Diverse visitor experience opportunities will be supported through collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Canadian Coast Guard and other partners with an interest in highlighting the natural resources on the site. Raising awareness of the site and attracting new visitors will be achieved through collaboration with local tourism groups and other promotional and outreach activities.

#### **Objective 3.1:**

Expanded promotion efforts attract a larger and more diverse audience.

##### *Targets:*

- Initiatives are in place with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie and the City of Sault Ste. Marie to enhance and promote local attractions, including the canal, in the city's cultural corridor.
- A relationship with Michigan Visitor and Convention Bureau is established within the first year of plan approval to promote the canal and encourage visitors to cross the border.
- An increase of 5% in family visits and a 2% increase in international target markets are achieved at Sault Ste. Marie Canal by 2024.
- An increase in overall visitation (baseline of 2018-19) and a positive trend in repeat visitors at Sault Ste. Marie Canal are achieved by 2024.

#### **Objective 3.2:**

Economic development and revenue opportunities are pursued through strategic use of built assets.

##### *Targets:*

- Potential new program fees for the site are determined and rental/leasing arrangements for heritage buildings are explored by 2023.
- Options for on-site accommodations are identified and assessed by 2021.
- A study of the feasibility of mooring and docks is prepared by 2021.

#### **Objective 3.3:**

Revitalised visitor programs in an authentic and engaging setting improves learning and enjoyment of the site.

##### *Targets:*

- Visitor Information Program measures for enjoyment, learning and satisfaction that were in decline, have improved.
- The number of visitors who come to the site as their main destination has increased.
- Educational opportunities for visitors are established through partnership agreements with on-site federal partners by 2021.
- Visitors learn about the site's natural resources through interpretation.
- Species at risk benefit from preservation of habitat on-site by 2020.

**Objective 3.4:**

Sault Ste. Marie Canal is known as a safe and enjoyable gathering place for special events and activities.

*Targets:*

- Indigenous and community events and activities hosted at the canal increase from 2018-19.
- New opportunities to engage partners are explored and volunteer activities are promoted to increase community involvement at the site.
- Security and safety measures are improved through cooperation with site stakeholders and partners.

## 6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

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

The scope of this assessment includes the area within the boundary of the historic site and the time frame considered is ten years from the date of the plan, at which time the plan will be reviewed. In addition to the cultural resources, environmental components of note at this site are the species at risk. The biggest positive effect of this plan will be to improve the cultural heritage values which will contribute to a positive visitor experience.

Strategies, objectives, and targets identified in the management plan that could potentially result in negative environmental effects include work required for infrastructure and site improvements. However, these effects can be minimized by following existing guidelines and conducting project-level impact assessments when necessary.

Consultation on the draft management plan and SEA took place in summer 2018. Feedback from public and Indigenous engagement contributed to the development of the final management plan.

The plan supports the 2016-2019 *Federal Sustainable Development Strategies* 12<sup>th</sup> goal: “Connecting Canadians with Nature”. Other goals may be considered during project development or in day-to-day operations.

There are no significant negative environmental effects anticipated from implementation of the management plan.