



VUNTUT

NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA

Management Plan



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Canada

Vuntut National Park of Canada

Management Plan

April, 2004



Visit the Vuntut National Park of Canada Website at:
www.pc.gc.ca/vuntut

Cover photo: Old Crow River looking north towards the foothills of the British Mountains.
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Foreword



Canada's national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas represent the soul of Canada. They are a central part of who we are and what we are. They are places of magic and wonder and heritage. Each tells its own story. Together, they connect Canadians to our roots, to our future and to each other.

What we cherish as part of our national identity, we also recognize as part of our national responsibility. All Canadians share the obligation to preserve and protect Canada's unique cultural and natural heritage. Together, we hold our national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas in trust for the benefit of this and future generations. To achieve this, practical action grounded in long-term thinking is needed.

These principles form the foundation of the new management plan for Vuntut National Park of Canada. May I offer my deep appreciation to the vast range of thoughtful Canadians who helped forge this plan. I am especially grateful to our very dedicated team from Parks Canada, the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council, the Vuntut Gwitchin government and to all those local organizations and individuals who have demonstrated such good will, hard work, spirit of co-operation and extraordinary sense of stewardship.

In that same spirit of partnership and responsibility, I am pleased to approve the Vuntut National Park of Canada Management Plan.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David Anderson
Minister of the Environment



Vuntut National Park of Canada Management Plan

This plan has been recommended for approval by:

On behalf of Parks Canada:



Alan Latourelle
Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada



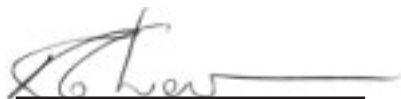
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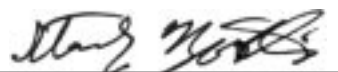


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Acknowledgements

The *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* came into effect in 1995, creating Vuntut National Park of Canada. During the past two years, staff from the Vuntut Gwitchin government, the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council and Parks Canada worked diligently to develop the first management plan for the park.

First, to all those who contributed to the plan -- in particular the Elders, the staff of the Vuntut Gwitchin government, the members of the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council and the Parks Canada staff who actively participated in this planning process -- we recognize and thank you for your input and ideas as they formed the basis for the planning team's success.

We acknowledge the dedication of the management planning team and thank them for their hard work. Throughout the planning process, the team demonstrated thoughtfulness and remarkable vision in putting forth positions for public consideration. They respected each other, listened carefully to the public -- particularly the Elders and youth, to develop a plan that is understood and supported by the widest possible constituency.

The team was led by Anne Landry, Yukon Management Planner for Parks Canada. She developed a process that allowed all participants to contribute fully. She has our thanks and admiration.

We acknowledge William Josie and Dennis Frost for their resolution and strength of vision in helping to create a document that will serve the people of Old Crow and Canada for many years to come. We are profoundly grateful.

Graham Baird, John Joe Kaye, Rhonda Markel, David Henry, Darius Elias, Margret Njootli, and Isaac Anderton provided substantial contributions to the plan based on the diversity of past experiences and assisted to create a document that we can all use with pride.

We are confident the plan will ensure the park will remain healthy to support the Vuntut Gwitchin now and in the future; will be managed as part of the larger ecosystem and offer exceptional opportunities for Canadians to learn about the Vuntut Gwitchin and to experience a remarkable part of Northern Canada.

In the continuing spirit of cooperative management, we now commit ourselves to implement this, the first management plan for Vuntut National Park of Canada.

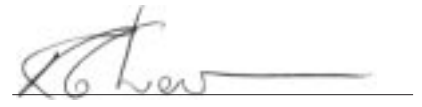
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Executive Summary

Vuntut National Park of Canada was established on February 14, 1995, as part of the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement*. The land claim envisions an integrated approach to the management of the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin, "the people among the lakes". Their entire traditional territory is important to the Vuntut Gwitchin, however, the area within Vuntut National Park is a special and unique part of their ancestral homelands. Vuntut National Park of Canada (4,345 sq. km) is part of a chain of connected protected areas that extends from the Beaufort Sea to the Bering Sea. Part of the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area, the park also shares common borders with Ivvavik National Park to the north and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to the west.

Some of the outstanding attributes of the park include: the northern third of the Old Crow Flats, (the most significant wetlands in the Yukon and the only one designated under the Ramsar Convention); portions of the Porcupine Caribou Herd's spring and fall migration range; the ongoing interdependence of the Vuntut Gwitchin and the land; caribou fences and other significant archaeological sites; internationally significant paleontological sites along the Old Crow River; and the significance of the area as a post-Beringian landscape.

The North Yukon Renewable Resources Council (NYRRC), the Vuntut Gwitchin government and Parks Canada all have management responsibilities related to the national park. The NYRRC, a public board, may make recommendations to the Minister responsible for Parks Canada on all matters pertaining to the development and management of Vuntut National Park. The Vuntut Gwitchin government has responsibility for the protection of the Vuntut Gwitchin lifestyle and for ensuring that the rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin are recognized and maintained. Parks Canada has the overall responsibility for park management and operation.

The purpose of the national park is to: protect for all time a representative area of the Northern Yukon Natural Region; encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the area in a manner that leaves it unimpaired for future generations; and recognize Vuntut Gwitchin history and culture and protect the traditional and current use of the park by the Vuntut Gwitchin.

This is the first management plan for Vuntut National Park of Canada and provides a 15-20 year vision and strategic direction for park management over the next five to ten years. Interim Management Guidelines (approved in 2000) provided the foundation for the development of the management plan. The planning team consisted of representatives from the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council, the Vuntut Gwitchin government and Parks Canada. Partners, stakeholders and interested individuals were consulted during its development.

Ecological integrity is the first priority when considering all aspects of park management. The park currently has a high level of ecological integrity, but the park's top environmental stressors, such as climate change and long-distance transport of contaminants, are national or global in nature. Key actions related to ecological integrity include: develop an ecological monitoring program for the park; recognize the important role of traditional knowledge in ecological integrity and park management; and strengthen regional integration. The entire park is Zone I or Zone II, and 75 per cent of the park will be declared wilderness. Key

actions are also outlined to ensure the protection and presentation of the cultural and paleontological resources of the park.

Due to its remoteness, park visitation is very low and expected to remain low in the foreseeable future. Interpretation will focus on the development of a Visitor Reception Centre in Old Crow, built with partners, to serve the needs of all visitors coming to the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory. Outreach, through tools like the park's Website will also be important.

The management plan outlines key actions related to visitor activities that provide for a range of appropriate opportunities, while respecting the wilderness character of the park. Due to the richness of the cultural heritage in the park, visitors will be encouraged to hire a guide when travelling in the park. Some guided activities will also provide economic opportunities for Vuntut Gwitchin citizens.

A short section on Implementation Priorities outlines priority actions that will be initiated during the first two years of plan implementation. Annual reports describing the progress in implementing the plan will also be produced.

Executive Summary – (in Gwich'in)

Zhat Canada gwizhit February 14, 1995 dai' tr'oochit Jii nan thok natr'iniin'aii aii jii nan eenjit tr'agiikkeh ts'at gwidinidhat'oo lat t'iinch'uu. Aii nan eenjit tr'agiikkeh aii Vuntut Gwitch'in kat nats'oo yeenoo dai' gogwiindai' k'it vaak'aanaatyaa eenjit gigiikkeh. Aii yeenoo dai' gwats'at nats'oo nan kak gogwiindai' aii Vuntut Gwitch'in kat gooveenjit gwiintsii gooveegoo'aii, jii nijin nan thok natr'iniin'aii aii jii Vuntut Gwitch'in kat yeenoo dai' gwats'at giikak ts'at giyeendi' gogwiindai' ts'at gwiintsii veegoo'aii. Jii nan thok natr'iniin'aii chan 4,345 km ahchii ts'at ch'izhii nan thok natr'iniinlii lat t'iinch'uu aii lat chan yeendak nahn kak gwa'an chuu choo gwats'o' nii'ee, ts'at chan Vuntut nan k'anaatii lat chan t'iinch'uu. Aii ch'ineekaii nijin nan thok naganiin'aii ts'at nijin vadzaih eedigii, Alaska gwizhit, ts'at Vuntut nan thok naganiin'aii aii vitLyaan nihLeekkeh niint'aii.

Jii Vuntut nan thok natr'iniin'aii jii kat dee eenjit vik'anaatii, zhat Yukon gwizhit aii nijin nin gwandaii, dhzii tsal, nin tsal, ch'itthaii, ts'at jii nan vakak van ts'at chuu goonlii ts'at jii Ramsar convention vatrahnyuu aii jii nan akoonch'ii kat vik'eehaantyaa eenjitLineegaadal ch'adahn nan kak gwa'an tthak Lineegaadal ts'at zhat Yukon gwizhit jii nan zri' k'eegahaandak ts'at jii nan chan giyahdandaii ts'at vik'eehantyaa nihtsa'ahthat. Ts'at chan zhat dee'an chan vadzaih sreendit ts'at khaiits'o' neehaa'oo ts'at chan Vuntut Gwitch'in kat yeenoo dai' gwats'at nan kak gogwiindai' ts'at nan gwiintl'oo t'iinjahgaachy'aa, ts'at vakak chan tthaL leii goonlii, ts'at Chyahnjik gwinjik chan tth'an, yeenoo dai' gwats'at k'i'deechi' goonch'ii kak shik kagaantii ts'at giik'eehaandak. Aii eenjit tthak dee jii nan thok natr'iniin'aii.

Jii North Yukon Renewable Resource Council, Vuntut Gwitch'in, ts'at jii juu Nan thok natr'iinlii ts'o' kagwaadhat jii tik kat dee jii nan thok natr'iin'aii nats'oo jii nan vik'eehaantyaa ts'at deetr'ahahyaa eenjit goot'it goo'aii. Jii NNRRC jii eenjit zhat gajilk'ii kat jii Minister kat khan nits'oo jii nan k'atr'anahtyaa hah gogwaandak. Jii Vuntut

Gwitch'in kat jii nan thok natr'iniin'aii deetr'ahahyaa ts'o' vak'aanaatyaa ts'at nats'oo Vuntut Gwitch'in gogwiindai' gaheendaii eenjit, ts'at k'eehaantyaa eenjit. Gaa jii Parks Canada aii gwandoo gwats'o' k'agwaadhat.

Jii nan thok natr'iin'aii zhat Yukon deendak k'eehaantyaa eenjit ts'at dinjii kat gwaandoo gaheedandaii ts'at yeendoo k'eejit kat eenjit vik'eehaantyaa ts'at yeenoo dai' gwats'at Vuntut Gwitch'in nats'oo gogwiindai' gaheegadandaii eenjit ts'at juk drin Vuntut Gwitch'in kat jii nan t'eegiyahch'uu jii tthak eenjit jii nan thok naganiin'aii. Jii nan thok natri'iniin'aii jii nats'oo vik'eehaantyaa k'eejit nilii ts'at gwidinathat'oo, jii yeendoo 15 to 20 years tthak geenjit. Jii nats'oo nan vik'eehaantyaa eenjit Łagiljil ts'at gwidigaantl'oo zhat khaii 2000 gwizhit aii k'iikkeh nats'oo vak'atr'aanaatyaa eenjit sriinatr'igwiin'aii. Jii kat dee giyeenjit zhat gajilk'ii ts'at giikkeh, RRC, Vuntut Gwitch'in ts'at Parks Canada ts'at juu geenjit gaa'iishondaii giiniindhan kat hah gagiikkeh aii k'iikkeh dee jii nan vak'anaantii.

Jii nan thok natr'iin'aii aii nats'oo gwiinzii t'aheechy'aa eenjit tr'oochit giiniijah'ahthat gaa jii aii gwandoo giiniinjah'ahdhat , jii nats'oo nagwiin'ee tthak ch'ijuk t'agwinjii ts'at jidii vah datr'ahzhak iizuu ts'at oo'ok nan kak k'eegwiiichy'aa oo'an gihilii goonch'ii kat eenjit gwak'aganahtii ts'at jii k'iikkeh dee dinjii duulee zhat dinjii geenjit natr'ahahchyaa gwak'anahtyaa eenjit ts'at nats'oo yeenoo dai' tr'ahgwiindai' ts'at nats'oo nan k'atr'ahnahtii aii tthak gagiheedandaii eenjit. Jii nan thok natr'iin'aii khaihjii tthak ts'o' vakak ts'at veendi' tr'agwandaii kwaa nin zri' yakak gwandaii ts'at jyaa doochy'ah giiniindhan. Ts'at aii gwidigaantl'oo dai' jii nan nats'oo vik'eehaantyaa ts'at gwandoo geenjit gagiheedandaii ts'at nats'oo tr'agwandaii ts'at nan zhit tth'an goonch'ii kat eenjit gwidigaantl'oo. Dinjii gaheedandaii eenjit.

Jii nan thok natr'aniin'aii chan vakak Łoo dinjii gahnagwii'aii kwaa ts'at yeendoo chan akoo t'agweedeechy'aa giiniindhan. Zhat Old Crow gwizhit chan duulee geenjit zheh natr'igwihee'aa aii ch'adahnan nan kak gwats'at dinjii kat zhat nidjyaa eenjit . Aii jidii Computer vahtr'ahnyuu chan k'iikkeh khan gwandoo giik'ahoondal aii Website vahtr'ahnyuu k'iikkeh.

Jii jidii gwidigaantl'oo chan ch'adahnan nan kak gwats'at dinjii oo'ee nidjyaa aii k'iikkeh chan duulee zhat gwitch'in kat k'iikkeh gwitr'it'ahgwahahyaa. Jii nan thok dha'aii ts'at vakak nin zri' gwandaii ts'at giikak k'eehee'oo ji' gwinzii gwak'aganahtyaa gwizri'. Gaa zhat nan thok natr'iniin'aii gwa'an k'eegiheedal ji' zhat gwats'at dinjii goovah k'eeheedik, aii k'iikkeh duulee zhat gwitch'in duulee gwitr'it ts'an gwagwahahtsyaa.

Jii jidii gwidinathat'oo aii juk khaii neekaii eenjit gwitr'it t'agwahaayaa. Khaii ihŁak gwideetak dageedeh'in dinehtl'eh kat gwidigiheentl'oo ts'at dinjii kat gahiidandaii eenjit.

Introduction



Antlers of a bull caribou in the northeast corner of the park.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Management Plan

On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations.

– Parks Canada's Mandate

The *Canada National Parks Act* requires each national park to have a management plan. These plans reflect the policies and legislation of Parks Canada and comprehensive land claim agreements and are prepared in consultation with Canadians. Management plans are tabled in Parliament and reviewed every five years.

The Interim Management Guidelines for the park, which were approved in 2000, provided the foundation for the development of the management plan. The management plan, the first for Vuntut National Park of Canada (VNP), provides long-term strategic direction for management of the park over the next five to ten years.

The following are examples of key legislation, policies and reports that have been considered in drafting the management plan.

- *Umbrella Final Agreement: Council for Yukon Indians* (1993)
- *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* (1993)
- *Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* (1994)
- *Canada National Parks Act* (2000)
- *Vuntut National Park Interim Management Guidelines* (2000)
- *“Unimpaired for Future Generations”?*, the Report of the Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada’s National Parks (2000)
- *Action Plan on Ecological Integrity* (2000)
- *Parks Canada Guide to Management Planning* (2000)
- *Resource Description and Analysis of Vuntut National Park of Canada* (2001)
- *Northern Parks – A New Way: A Report of the Senate Subcommittee on Aboriginal Economic Development in relation to Northern National Parks* (2001)
- *Engaging Canadians: Parks Canada’s Strategy for External Communications* (2001)

In recognition of the priority of ecological integrity, Ecological Integrity Statements (EIS) have been developed for individual national parks since the mid 1990s. An Interim EIS was prepared for the Vuntut National Park Interim Management Guidelines; it was revised and incorporated into the management plan.

Parks Canada is committed to preserving park resources in a way that integrates ecological, social and economic values and recognizes the rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation with regard to use and management of Vuntut National Park of Canada.

1.2 Management Planning Process

Development of this management plan included significant participation by partners, stakeholders and individuals with an interest in the future of Vuntut National Park of Canada. The planning team consisted of representatives from the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council (NYRRC), the Vuntut Gwitchin government and Parks Canada.

Consultation was carried out in various ways during the development of the plan. A meeting with Old Crow Elders in October 2000, where Elders provided guidance to several planning processes underway in the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory, was particularly important. Consultation also included a series of three newsletters and comment forms; two Open Houses in Old Crow and Whitehorse and one in Inuvik, NWT; input from Old Crow students; and meetings with stakeholders.

1.3 Park Establishment

An agreement to establish Vuntut National Park was signed in 1993 by the Government of Canada, the Vuntut Gwitchin government and the Government of Yukon as part of the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement (VGFNEA)*. Vuntut National Park of Canada was established as a national park on February 14, 1995.

In the 1977 *Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry Report*, Justice Thomas Berger recommended that all the land between the Alaska-Yukon border and the Yukon-Northwest Territories border, from the Porcupine River north to the coast, be included in a wilderness national park. Part of that area now comprises the park.

Vuntut National Park and Ivvavik National Park represent the Northern Yukon Natural Region. The two parks were initially part of one national park proposal (first advanced in 1978), but were eventually established as separate national parks because they were within two land claim areas.

Their entire traditional territory is important to the Vuntut Gwitchin, however, the area within Vuntut National Park is a special and unique part of their ancestral homelands. Including this area in a national park provides a high level of protection and helps ensure that it will be used in a manner that respects the traditional uses and lifestyle of the Vuntut Gwitchin.

1.4 Park Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of Vuntut National Park is as follows:

- to protect for all time a representative natural area of Canadian significance in the Northern Yukon Natural Region and to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the area in a manner which leaves it unimpaired for future generations; and
- to recognize Vuntut Gwitchin history and culture and protect the traditional and current use of the park by the Vuntut Gwitchin.

The park includes a portion of the Old Crow Flats as well as the foothills and some peaks of the British Mountains. There are numerous prominent features within the park and important associations with it, including the following:

- the northern third of the Old Crow Flats, the most significant wetlands in the Yukon (designated as having world importance under the Ramsar Convention, an international protocol on wetland conservation);
- portions of the Porcupine Caribou Herd's spring and fall migration range;
- the ongoing interdependence of the Vuntut Gwitchin and the land;
- caribou fences and other significant archaeological sites;
- internationally significant paleontological sites along the Old Crow River; and
- the area's significance as a post-Beringian landscape.

Vuntut National Park is within the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin. The *VGFNEA* outlines the following objectives for the park:

- to recognize Vuntut Gwitchin history and culture, and the rights provided for in Chapter 10, Schedule A of the *VGFNEA*, in the establishment and operation of the park;
- to recognize and protect the traditional and current use of the park by the Vuntut Gwitchin in the development and management of the park;

- to protect for all time a representative natural area of national significance in the Northern Yukon Natural Region, including representative portions of the Old Crow Flats wetlands and the surrounding foothills which contain important waterfowl habitat, critical parts of the Porcupine Caribou range, and archaeological and paleontological resources of international significance;
- to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the park in a manner which leaves it unimpaired for future generations;
- to provide economic and employment opportunities and participation for Vuntut Gwitchin in the development, operation and management of the park;
- to recognize that oral history is a valid and relevant form of research for establishing the historical significance of the heritage sites and moveable heritage resources in the park directly related to the history of the Vuntut Gwitchin; and
- to recognize the interest of Vuntut Gwitchin in the interpretation of aboriginal place names and heritage resources in the park directly related to their culture.

The park purpose and objectives will be achieved using direction provided by the *Canada National Parks Act*, *Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* and the provisions in the *VGfNEA*.

1.5 Cooperative Management

The *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* and the *National Parks Act* (now the *Canada National Parks Act*) set out mechanisms for park management. The *VGfNEA* states: "Subject to the terms of this schedule [Chapter 10, Schedule A], the park shall be planned and managed according to the *National Parks Act*". The *VGfNEA* or *National Parks Act* specify the following areas of responsibility and authority:

- Parks Canada is responsible for matters related to planning, development, management and operation of the park;
- the Vuntut Gwitchin government represents the collective interests of the Vuntut Gwitchin on matters related to planning, development and management associated with the park and the protection of Vuntut Gwitchin rights in the park; and
- the NYRRC represents the public interests within Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory and provides strategic direction and advice to Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin government on matters related to renewable resources associated with the park.

A revised four-year Cooperation Agreement, entitled *Roles, Responsibilities and Procedures for the Planning and Management of Vuntut National Park*, was signed by the NYRRC, Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin government in 2000. The agreement establishes clear roles, responsibilities and procedures for the management of the park, giving practical effect to provisions in the *VGfNEA*.

As provided for in *Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* and the *VGfNEA*, park planning and management will be integrated with land management by other governments and agencies with broad ecosystem responsibilities. An example is the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area, where an integrated approach is essential for ecosystem-based management.

It is important to continue to develop partnerships with governments, agencies and other bodies, e.g., Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), Government of Yukon, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, which share responsibilities for managing the region's ecosystems and wildlife.

Role of the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council (NYRRC)

As land claims are settled with each Yukon First Nation, a Renewable Resources Council (RRC) is established as a primary instrument for local renewable resources management in the respective traditional territory. Each RRC is comprised of six members: three nominees of the First Nation and three nominees of the Yukon government.

The NYRRC was created in accordance with the *VGFNFA*. Members must have long-term familiarity with the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory and its renewable resources and must live in the traditional territory. The *VGFNFA* gives the NYRRC, in addition to regular RRC duties, the authority to make recommendations to the Minister responsible for Parks Canada "on all matters pertaining to the development and management of Vuntut National Park" (Chapter 10, Schedule A), including the following:

- management of heritage resources within the park;
- routes, methods and modes of access for harvesting within the park;
- harvest limits and seasons for harvesting in the park;
- locations and methods of harvesting within the park;
- matters related to park development or management forwarded to the NYRRC by the Minister;
- proposed park boundary adjustments;
- development of and revisions to the park management plan;
- coordination with the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, any affected Renewable Resources Councils and other responsible agencies, regarding the management of fish and wildlife populations which cross the boundary of the park; and
- existing and proposed legislation relating to the park.

Role of the Vuntut Gwitchin Government

With respect to Vuntut National Park, the Vuntut Gwitchin government is responsible for the protection of the Vuntut Gwitchin lifestyle and for ensuring that the rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin are recognized and maintained. The *VGFNFA* outlines some specific areas of responsibility related to Vuntut National Park. They include but are not limited to the following:

- allocating harvest opportunities for fish and wildlife under quota to the Vuntut Gwitchin;
- collecting, maintaining and reporting harvest information related to harvesting in the park;
- allocating trapping opportunities within the park, and maintaining a register of allocations;
- providing suitable land or facilities to Parks Canada for the establishment of a visitor reception and information centre, park operation centre and park staff housing;
- providing input into the naming or renaming of places or features located within the park;
- exercising a special interest in cultural resource management planning with respect to establishing the value, significance and protection of heritage sites and the control of access;
- playing a lead role in oral history work related to the preparation of management plans;
- reviewing contract notices for which the Vuntut Gwitchin have first right of refusal; and
- reviewing applications which Parks Canada receives for business licences, for which the Vuntut Gwitchin have a pre-emptive option to apply.

Role of Parks Canada

With respect to Vuntut National Park, Parks Canada has overall responsibility for management and operation of the park. Some specific areas of responsibility, outlined in the Cooperation Agreement, are as follows:

- protecting the harvesting rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin;
- enforcing harvest restrictions or terms and conditions which have been established for the purposes of conservation;
- identifying park research needs, issues and priorities in consultation with the NYRRC and the Vuntut Gwitchin government;
- distributing information updates on park-related research projects;
- consulting with the NYRRC and the Vuntut Gwitchin on park planning with regard to the design, content, implementation and revision of the park management plan;
- cultural resource management (CRM) in the park, recognizing that the Vuntut Gwitchin and the NYRRC have a special interest in CRM planning with respect to establishing the value, significance and protection of heritage sites and the control of access;
- collecting and utilizing oral history in the preparation of the park management plan;
- heritage research in the park, in partnership with the Vuntut Gwitchin and through consultation with the NYRRC;
- giving special attention to the control, timing and location of visitor access to the park to avoid conflicts with Vuntut Gwitchin harvesting activities or interference with cultural resources; and
- consulting with the Vuntut Gwitchin on matters related to their economic and employment benefits in the development, operation and management of the park.

Planning Context



Yukon Archives: Chief Zzeh Gittit School Collection #9380

John Joseph Kaye nails muskrat skins to a stretcher board, circa 1970.

2.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 Regional Setting

Vuntut National Park of Canada (4,345 sq. km) is located in the northwestern corner of the Yukon Territory, immediately south of Ivvavik National Park (10,170 sq. km) (Map 1: Regional Setting). The park is bounded at the height-of-land to the north by Ivvavik National Park, on the east by Black Fox Creek to its confluence with the Old Crow River, on the south by the Old Crow River and to the west by Alaska's ANWR (79,000 sq. km). It is part of a chain of 11 connected protected areas that stretch from the northern coast of the Yukon all the way to the western coast of Alaska.

The Old Crow Flats Area (12,116 sq. km) is designated as a Special Management Area (SMA) in the VGFNEA. It is comprised of Vuntut National Park, Vuntut Gwitchin Settlement Land Blocks R-01A and R-10A, and additional land east and west of the Settlement Land Blocks (Map 2: Vuntut National Park). CWS, the NYRRC, the Vuntut Gwitchin government and the Yukon government all have significant responsibilities for various aspects of the management of this SMA outside Vuntut National Park. In 1982, 41 per cent of the SMA was designated as internationally significant under the Ramsar Convention.

The area that makes up Vuntut National Park is part of the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin. The Vuntut Gwitchin are centred in the community of Old Crow, population 300, located 60 km south of the park.

Whitehorse, the closest major centre, is 840 km south of Old Crow. Vuntut National Park is over 200 km from the closest road (the Dempster Highway), adding to its remoteness. Currently, visitors can reach the park by chartered aircraft, boat, on ski, on foot, or by dog sled.

2.2 Land Use History

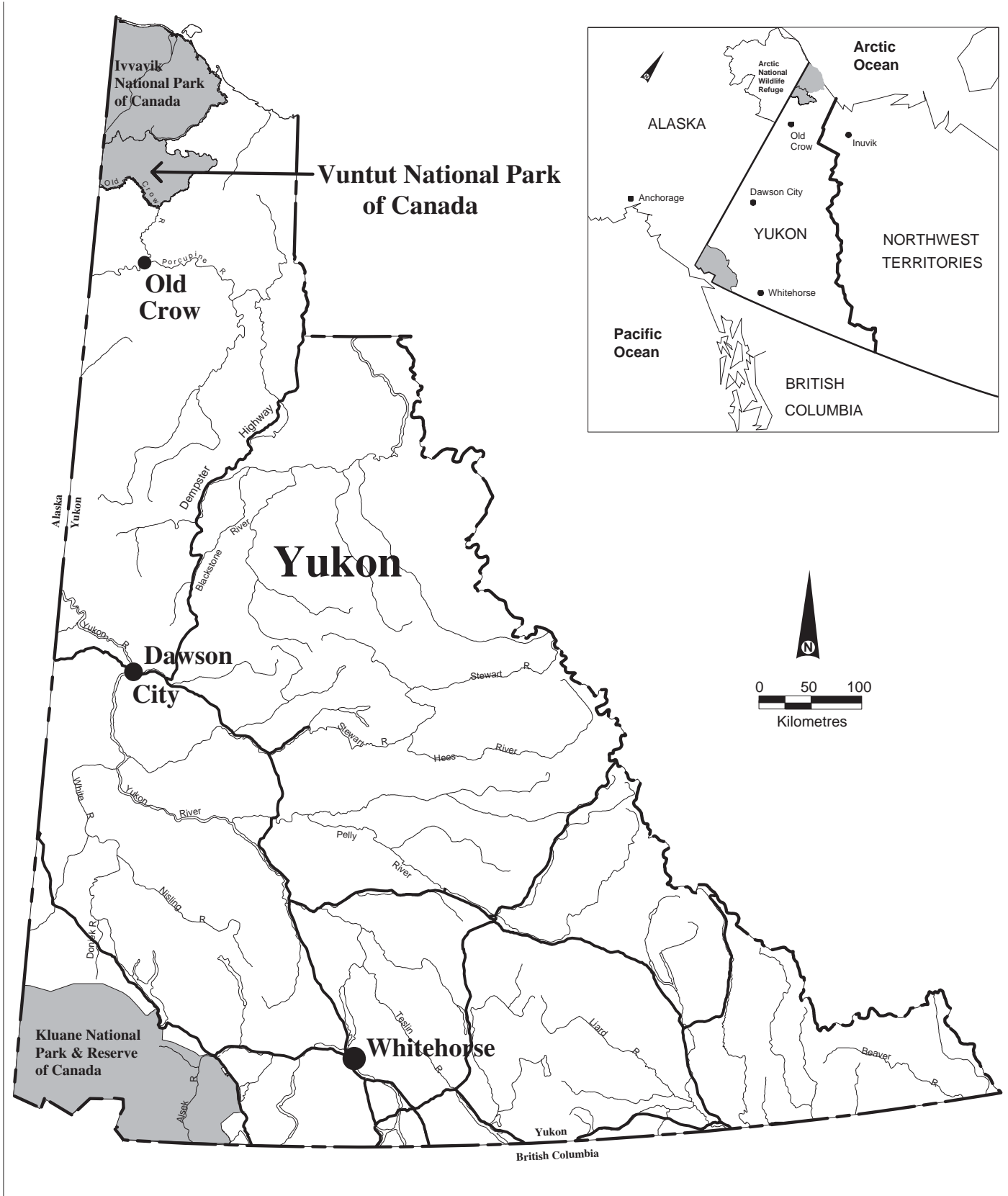
Although Vuntut National Park has been in existence for less than a decade, the area has been part of the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin for countless years. Vuntut Gwitchin means "people among the lakes". Traditionally the Vuntut Gwitchin have utilized a wide variety of plants and animals for food, medicines, clothing, shelter, weapons and tools, as well as for spiritual and cultural purposes. The annual round of activities carried out by the Vuntut Gwitchin during pre-contact times involved spring harvesting of muskrats in Old Crow Flats, spring caribou hunting along the Porcupine River, summer fishing along the Old Crow River and its many tributaries in the Flats, fall caribou hunting at caribou fences around the northern rim of the Flats and winter settlements in sheltered valleys along the southern rim. For the Vuntut Gwitchin the harvesting of Porcupine barren-ground caribou has been and still is of central importance.

Caribou were hunted in a variety of ways through the centuries, depending upon the technology available, terrain, season and grouping. When the caribou were swimming hunters stalked them and then killed them with arrow and spear. The main method for large-scale caribou hunting involved the use of a surround or fence, where the animals were caught in snares or speared. Under favourable conditions, a group hunt using a caribou fence could produce a large harvest for the Vuntut Gwitchin, surpassing even the salmon harvest on rivers in their traditional territory. At least 46 caribou fences have been identified in Alaska, Yukon and Northwest Territories; seven exist within Vuntut National Park and represent important heritage sites. Archaeologists William Irving and Jacques Cinq-Mars feel that these caribou surrounds probably represent the climax of an ancient prehistoric method of resource use, one that involved complex social mechanisms.

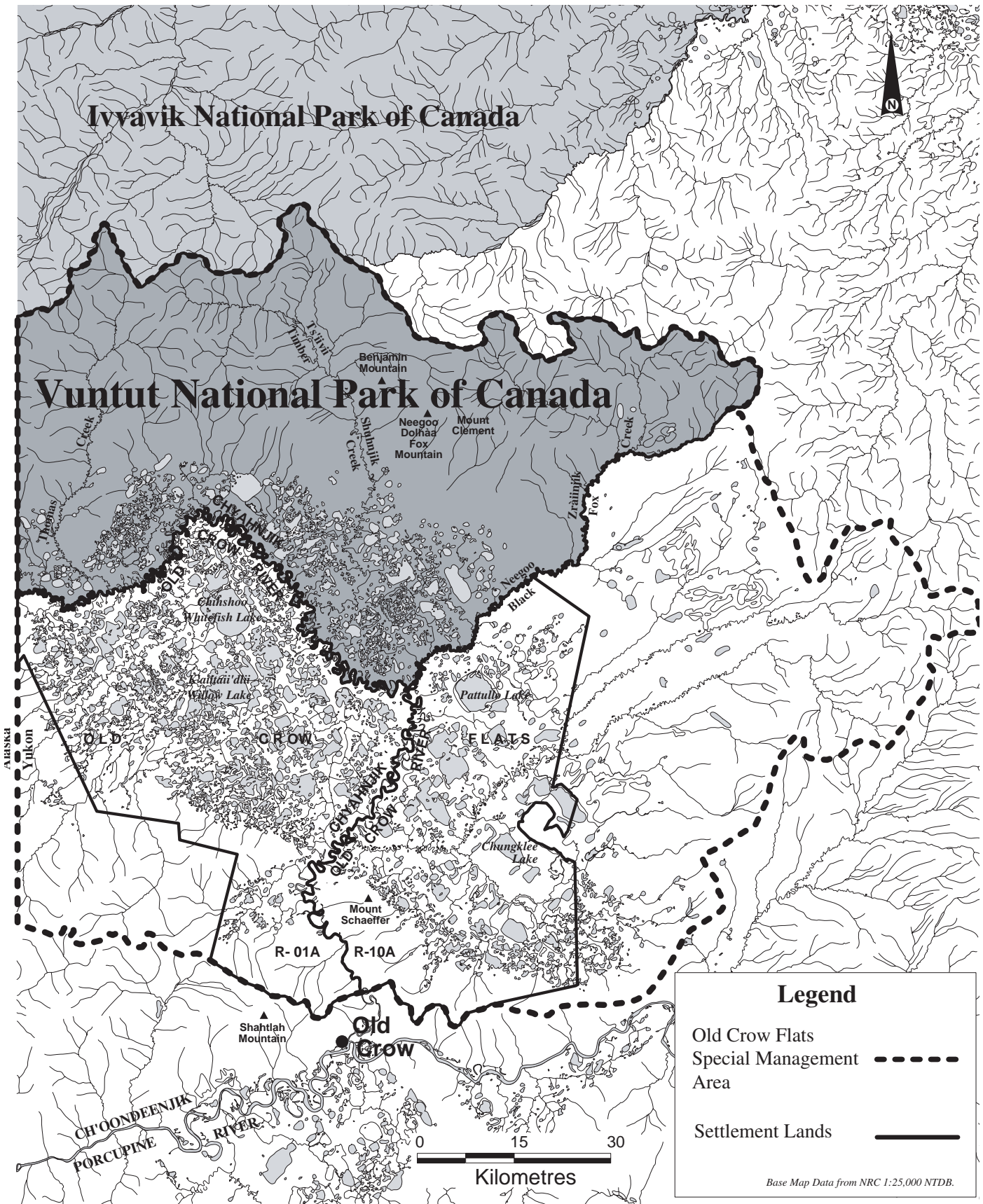
At the time of first contact with Europeans, the Gwich'in were organized into nine regional First Nations, including the Vuntut Gwitchin. The Vuntut Gwitchin occupied the middle reaches of the Porcupine River, its northern tributaries, the Old Crow River (including Old Crow Flats) and the Coleen River area in northeastern Alaska.

There is archaeological evidence of exchange with Russian fur traders (through intermediaries) on the Pacific Coast early in the 1700s, although the first recorded contact between the Gwich'in and Europeans did not occur until 1789. The exploring party led by Alexander Mackenzie encountered several fishing camps on what would later be called the Mackenzie River near the present-day town of Fort McPherson. Several fur-trading posts were established in the Gwich'in area. One of the earliest was LaPierre House, at the mouth of the Waters River, which was active until the Hudson's Bay Company (H.B.Co.) abandoned it in 1891.

Map 1 Regional Setting.



Map 2 Vuntut National Park of Canada.



In 1847 Alexander Murray established Fort Yukon for the H.B.Co. at the confluence of the Yukon and Porcupine rivers in Alaska. After the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, the company moved its operations east of the 141st meridian (the border between the U.S. and Canada), eventually establishing a post called New Rampart House. New Rampart House was temporarily abandoned in 1894, causing trade to shift north to Herschel Island as well as east to the confluence of the Old Crow and Porcupine rivers. The population around the Old Crow trading post further increased around 1911 as people left New Rampart House. They had been quarantined for one winter when a survey crew's doctor suspected them of carrying disease (the disease risk was never adequately substantiated).

Between 1909 and 1912, the International Boundary Commission surveyed, marked and cleared the international boundary between the Yukon River and the Porcupine River, and between the Porcupine River and the arctic coast. Specially constructed riverboats ascended the Old Crow River as far as the boundary to supply materials to the survey parties. The survey's use of horses as far as the arctic coast probably represents the northernmost use of horses as pack animals in Canada. The riverboats on the Old Crow River may have also set a record, for the most northerly paddle-wheeled boats on freshwater in Canada. Boundary monuments, campsites, and triangulation sites established within what is now Vuntut National Park are a lasting legacy of this survey.

There have been considerable changes in the ways the land in the park area has been used within the past 200 years. The Vuntut Gwitchin have gone from living on the land on a full-time basis to being seasonal users of the area, with their home base at Old Crow. Harvesting technology has also changed considerably. Rifles, steel traps, fish nets, canvas tents, snowmobiles, motorized boats and aircraft have replaced caribou surrounds, snares, fish traps, skin tents, dog teams and mooseskin boats. These changes have been gradual, however, and an overall pattern of continuity in land use is evident. This continuity is not just in the land used and the resources harvested, but in the social dimension of life as well. The communal aspect of the important spring muskrat hunt and the sharing of resources, such as moose and caribou meat, is a continuation of long-established traditions.

2.3 Park Description

The park is made up of two contrasting regions, the mountains and the flats. In the northern two thirds of the park are the rolling hills and pediment slopes which surround the Old Crow Basin; farther north and west are the foothills and scattered peaks of the British Mountains. Open stands of white spruce and tamarack predominate, with ground cover of dwarf birch, willow, shrubs, cotton grass, lichen and moss. Tussock tundra vegetation covers most gentle slopes. These slopes provide important relief from insects for the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

The southern third of the park is made up of the wetlands and lakes of the Old Crow Flats. This is an area of low relief approximately 300m above sea level, made up mostly of polygonal peat plateau bogs. The Flats contain the most significant wetlands in the Yukon, which are used by up to half a million waterfowl annually. Members of the Vuntut Gwitchin have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Old Crow Flats as a special place to them, a place that they are willing to share with fellow Canadians and international visitors.

Park wildlife includes caribou, grizzly bear, wolverine, wolf, mink, moose, muskrat, gyrfalcon, peregrine falcon, golden eagle and rock and willow ptarmigan. Chum and Chinook salmon spawn in the Porcupine River and its tributaries. While some species of mammals (e.g., wolverine) and birds (e.g., peregrine falcon) found in the park have been identified nationally by the Committee on

the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as being threatened or of special concern (see section 4.3), the park populations do not appear to be under stress.

The park protects a portion of the seasonal migration routes of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which is made up of approximately 123,000 animals (2001 census). The long-term health of the herd is an important priority for Parks Canada.

Vuntut National Park is part of a huge land mass in Alaska, the Yukon, and northeastern Russia that remained generally ice-free during the time of the last Ice Age. Known as Beringia, the area is now divided by the Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait, and the Bering Sea. Many plants and animals that exist in the area are thought to have survived in Beringia during the last ice age. Some Beringian species survived the ice ages in this glacial refugium and then dispersed outwards; others are not found anywhere else in Canada. The existence of the refugium has had a major impact on the distribution of many life forms, including invertebrates and plants as well as birds and mammals. The area also has a lasting legacy as one of the world's most abundant deposits of ice age fossils.

The Resource Description & Analysis (RD&A) of Vuntut National Park, recently completed, provides a synthesis and analysis of all published information on the park and surrounding areas. The RD&A contains 13 chapters covering many components of the natural history of the park: ecology; history; geology; geomorphology; paleontology; soils; climate; hydrology; aquatic biology; vegetation; birds; mammals; and archeology. The chapters summarize the state of knowledge about the park in each respective area, evaluate the resources in terms of sensitivity to disturbances or external factors, identify important information gaps and provide suggestions for future research. The RD&A is an important resource on the park and can be found in Parks Canada Service Centre libraries across the country.

2.4 Ecosystem-based Management

One of the key challenges facing national parks, including Vuntut National Park, is maintaining a healthy environment and protecting important cultural resources while supporting high-quality visitor experiences and contributing to social and economic needs. To address this challenge, Parks Canada has adopted a system known as ecosystem-based management that will frame management in Vuntut National Park.

Ecosystem-based management is a holistic approach that involves working with other governments, councils and organizations to achieve common goals. Productive, positive, long-term relationships are the key to its success. It is multi-disciplinary in nature and seeks to integrate biological, physical, social, cultural and traditional information, knowledge and perspectives. The goal is to collectively maintain a healthy ecosystem—environmental and cultural—within a wider socio-economic context. This broad-based method is reflected in many of the actions included in this plan. It fosters an interagency and multi-disciplinary approach to conservation issues in the North.

Park Vision



Cottongrass, an important spring food for caribou, common in valley bottoms throughout the park.

3.0 PARK VISION

The vision statement for Vuntut National Park sets out goals to which all parties can aspire. A shared vision helps focus planning, management and operation of the park and will facilitate closer cooperation and working relationships among those who care for and use the area.

In 15–20 years, Vuntut National Park will be as follows:

- a protected area with the same high level of ecological integrity that it had in 2004 where natural processes govern change;
- a protected area where Old Crow Flats shows a high degree of ecosystem health, as demonstrated by abundant waterfowl, migratory moose populations and normally fluctuating muskrat populations;
- a protected area where wildlife populations such as the Porcupine Caribou Herd vary naturally and wildlife movement patterns continue unhindered;
- a protected area which is recognized for its paleontological resources of international significance;
- a protected area where traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge are given full and fair consideration in the protection, management and operation of the park; research and monitoring are ongoing; and the results are used to alert park managers to environmental changes (whether caused locally or globally), leading to appropriate actions;
- a protected area which is managed cooperatively and effectively with the Vuntut Gwitchin, and the management of which is regionally integrated with Old Crow Flats Special Management Area, Ivvavik National Park, ANWR and Vuntut Gwitchin Settlement Lands, as well as the chain of protected areas across northern Yukon and northern Alaska;
- a protected area where the Vuntut Gwitchin continue a subsistence lifestyle and maintain a spiritual connection to the land, and where Vuntut Gwitchin Elders and teachers are on the land, educating the youth so that respectful stewardship of the land will continue;
- a protected area where cultural resources are documented and interpreted through oral history and research, and where those resources are appropriately managed and their meanings understood and shared;
- a protected area where visitors are welcomed by park staff and the Vuntut Gwitchin, and opportunities are provided to learn about the land, the people and Vuntut Gwitchin culture. The health of the land, wildlife and the Gwitchin lifestyle have priority over visitor opportunities;
- a protected area where, through outreach, the Vuntut Gwitchin can, as they feel appropriate, share their wealth of knowledge of the land and their culture with Canadians and international audiences;
- a protected area where the community of Old Crow is the focus for community-based tourism and is a place where visitors can learn about and experience Vuntut Gwitchin culture and history and the area's natural and cultural resources; and
- a protected area where those components of the *VGFNEA* related to Vuntut National Park are being implemented, bringing continued economic benefits to the Vuntut Gwitchin.

Protecting Ecological Integrity



Caribou returning south from the calving grounds in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

4.0 PROTECTING ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

4.1 Introduction

"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

Parks Canada defines ecological integrity as being "... with respect to a park, a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes." (Canada National Parks Act, 2000)

In other words, a national park has ecological integrity if all the plants and animals that naturally occur in the park still thrive there; people use the park and its surroundings in ways that respect the needs of those plants and animals; and fires, insect outbreaks, weather and other natural processes continue, creating natural habitat as they have done over past centuries. An Ecosystem Model (Appendix) illustrates some of the complex relationships found in the ecosystems of Vuntut National Park and surrounding areas.

When managing protected areas, ecological integrity is not a static end-point, but rather a continuum of characteristics that a landscape or area should possess. Ecological integrity is measured in terms of the following:

- ecosystem health, including the ability to evolve, develop and adapt to change;
- biological diversity, including the ecological and evolutionary processes that keep species functioning;
- the ability of plant and animal communities to resist or adapt to stresses and change;
- the ability of plants and animals to sustain healthy populations; and
- the integration of people into the environment in ways that sustain both human quality of life and biological diversity.

4.2 Environmental Stressors

Vuntut National Park currently has a high level of ecological integrity. That said, despite its pristine and isolated location, some major environmental stressors are known or believed to be affecting park ecosystems. Several of these stressors may not be currently affecting the park, but could become serious concerns in the future. As knowledge about these stressors increases, the cumulative effects will be researched and acted upon.

These stressors have been identified by a number of sources, and they guide the development of objectives and key actions for ecosystem management in the park. The sources used to identify these environmental stressors include: the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement*; RD&A of Vuntut National Park of Canada; workshops involving the Elders of Old Crow, members of the Vuntut Gwitchin government and the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council; and researcher workshops and public meetings in Whitehorse. These sources indicate that there is concern about environmental stressors affecting the park and surrounding areas. These stressors are presented in their perceived order of descending importance:

- potential loss of habitat that is critically important to the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Portions of their calving grounds in ANWR may be opened for oil and gas exploration and extraction; and part of the herd's wintering grounds lies outside the park in the Ogilvie Mountains and Eagle Plains area, bisected by the Dempster Highway. These factors expose the herd to increased disturbance by snowmobiles, hunting and possible impacts of oil and gas exploration and development;

- the effects of global climate change on the precipitation, hydrology, permafrost soils and vegetative communities of this region is a serious concern. Climate change may have many effects, including a change in the timing of break-up of ice on the Old Crow and Porcupine rivers, drying of the lakes in the Old Crow Flats, erosion, land slumping, an increased risk of forest fires, change in vegetation species composition, and loss or deterioration of archaeological sites;
- changes in the water levels of lakes, streams and rivers that may be the result of a variety of factors such as climate change or natural cycles; terrain sensitivity to human traffic (e.g., the potential for snowmachine traffic in this sensitive organic terrain to affect the underlying permafrost, allowing lakes to drain); and the impacts of these factors on the vegetation, fish, birds and mammals of the Old Crow Flats;
- long-distance transport of contaminants and other environmental pollutants from elsewhere, and their uptake by plants, animals and humans;
- the exchange of new and endemic diseases and parasites between caribou and muskox as the muskox population increases and their range expands;
- a gradual continent-wide population decline of certain mammals and birds, either at risk or of special conservation concern, e.g., grizzly bears, wolverines, peregrine falcons, short-eared owls, whimbrels and American golden plovers. Declines in these wildlife species are due to a variety of factors, including the cumulative impact of human activities. Because of its isolation, Vuntut National Park is an area where these wildlife populations are abundant and healthy, and the park can play an important role in their conservation;
- changes in wildlife populations due to the decreasing amount of time that people spend hunting and trapping, the concentration of hunting in areas close to the community and the reduced role of traditional activities in people's lifestyles;
- the possibility of poaching and illegal harvesting of wildlife by people gaining access to the park in private aircraft;
- the possible impacts of carrying out scientific research, particularly the effects of capturing, handling and banding birds and mammals; and
- the possible impacts related to the management of food and garbage by park visitors as well as individuals at research camps, harvesting camps and cabins, together with the negative impacts that these activities could have on wildlife populations, particularly bears. The number of bears killed, for whatever reason, needs to be monitored.

Table 1 outlines key actions and expected results responding to environmental stressors.

4.3 Monitoring, Species at Risk and Regional Integration

Valuable research on a number of topics has been carried out in Vuntut National Park and the surrounding area. The traditional knowledge of the Vuntut Gwitchin has also made important contributions to understanding the park's wildlife, aquatic ecosystems and vegetation. The RD&A provides valuable information about the park area and outlines priorities for management consideration and potential future research. Another key source of traditional knowledge is the multi-year Oral History Project under the direction of the Vuntut Gwitchin government. These sources have generated the key actions related to research, projects, communication and data management.

Table 1: Key Actions and Expected Results Responding to Environmental Stressors

Environmental Stressor	Expected Results	Key Actions
<p>Potential loss of habitat critically important to the Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1002 lands in ANWR gain permanent protection. • Oil and gas exploration and development activities do not impact critical PCH habitat. • Yukon Conservation Data Centre is developed. • Regional plans incorporate Parks Canada concerns about the PCH. • Through outreach, Canadians learn about the importance of the 1002 lands to the PCH and the Vuntut Gwitchin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to initiatives, processes and programs related to the protection of the 1002 lands. • Contribute to programs of the International Porcupine Caribou Board and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board. • Encourage development and operation of a Yukon Conservation Data Centre. • Participate in regional planning processes. • Identify and assess the importance of early green-up areas in the park. • Take actions that will positively influence policy-makers in relation to the park's ecological integrity. • Use tools like the park's Website to inform Canadians.
<p>Effects of global climate change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators of climate change are documented. • Management actions are taken where possible and appropriate. • Federal policy on climate change supports the park's ecological integrity. • Through outreach, Canadians learn about the affect their actions may have on the park environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in relevant existing national and international monitoring programs concerning climate change. • Develop new, targeted monitoring programs for the park. • Encourage the development and operation of a Yukon Conservation Data Centre. • Take actions that will positively influence policy-makers in relation to the park's ecological integrity. • Use tools like the park's Website to inform Canadians.
<p>Changes in water levels in Old Crow Flats</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in water levels over time are documented and analyzed. • Effects of snowmobile traffic in the Old Crow Flats are monitored. • Community of Old Crow participates in and has an understanding of the results of monitoring and shares their Traditional Knowledge (TK) about changes observed in Old Crow Flats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in relevant existing monitoring programs, e.g., periodic studies by the Canadian Wildlife Service. • With partners, monitor the impact of snowmobile use in the Old Crow Flats. • Communicate results of monitoring to the local community. • Community members have opportunities to share TK with park staff.

Table 1: Key Actions and Expected Results Responding to Environmental Stressors

Environmental Stressor	Expected Results	Key Actions
<p>Long-distance transport and uptake of contaminants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contaminant levels are documented and analyzed. • Community knows of contaminants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in relevant existing monitoring programs concerning contaminants in country foods. • If required, assist in the development of new, targeted monitoring programs for the park. • Communicate results to the local community and to others who might be able to influence events.
<p>Potential exchange of endemic diseases and parasites between caribou and muskox</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence of disease and potential for transfer is understood. • Community is aware of any parasite concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to programs of the International Porcupine Caribou Board and Porcupine Caribou Management Board. • Provide assistance to others in the collection of samples. • Assist in the collection of appropriate samples by community members. • Implement regional muskox plan as it pertains to Vuntut NP. • Continuation of funding to YTG for satellite collars for PCH work. • Communicate results to the local community.
<p>North America-wide gradual population decline of certain mammals and birds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Use Management strategies in place, e.g., food/garbage management plan in place. • Wolverine and other mustelid populations in the Old Crow Flats are monitored and results are communicated to the local community. • Continued active participation in the peregrine falcon survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Bear Management Plan. • Develop methods to monitor wolverines and other mustelids. • Advance national Species at Risk programs as they relate to Vuntut NP. • Implement the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Strategy as it relates to Vuntut NP. • Continue involvement in North America-wide peregrine falcon survey.
<p>Changes in wildlife populations due to changing hunting and trapping patterns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding is identified to assist Vuntut Gwitchin programs. • Parks Canada is supporting the work of Elders and others to teach traditional skills on the land. • Traditional activities on the land are continuing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to opportunities for Elders and others to teach traditional skills on the land. • Contribute to Vuntut Gwitchin government programs to assist Vuntut Gwitchin to carry on traditional activities.

Table 1: Key Actions and Expected Results Responding to Environmental Stressors

Environmental Stressor	Expected Results	Key Actions
Possibility of poaching and illegal harvesting of wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued evaluation of this stressor and appropriate action initiated. Findings communicated to the local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park staff and community members monitor private aircraft and over-snow vehicle activity in the park.
Possible impacts of carrying out scientific research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wildlife treated respectfully while research is undertaken. Community members support research methods used in the park. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use least intrusive methods, avoiding capturing, marking and handling wildlife whenever possible.
Possible impacts related to management of food and garbage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human use strategies are in place. Wildlife, especially bears, do not access human food or garbage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set and enforce strict guidelines about management of food and garbage by all park users.

Ecological Monitoring

Ecological monitoring provides information about complicated and complex systems and the effects of disturbances on them (Ecosystem Model, Appendix), and serves as an early warning mechanism to trigger management responses or further research. Such monitoring can provide information that contributes to regional, national and global knowledge of issues such as climate change and landscape fragmentation. Parks Canada’s work with partners can also help provide benchmark information and record changes over time.

The ecological monitoring program for the park is in its initial stages. Careful attention will be given to developing the objectives for this program so that the best use is made of human and financial resources. Cooperation among the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Cooperative, Ivvavik National Park, CWS and ANWR will include sharing data and choosing monitoring methods. The high expense of carrying out fieldwork in these remote protected areas further supports the importance of a cooperative approach. If all partners use consistent monitoring methods, it will be possible to compare monitoring data across a large northern area. Planning the ecological monitoring program for Vuntut National Park is a high priority and will be pursued early in the implementation of the management plan (for more details, see section 4.5).

Monitoring of human impacts is also important and is discussed under Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Activities, Visitor Activities and Research Management, and Administration and Operations.

Species at Risk and Species of Special Interest

The Species at Risk report, updated annually by COSEWIC, identifies species on a national level. The term "species at risk" includes three categories: endangered, threatened and special concern. Species of special concern are those which are particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events, but which are not extirpated, endangered or threatened. In Vuntut National Park, the

populations of some of these nationally listed species are undisturbed and in some cases, even abundant. This underscores the important value of the park for Canadian wildlife.

Information on plant, invertebrate and fish inventories of Vuntut National Park has been reviewed in the RD&A and inventories will be carried out over time. To date, no endangered, threatened or special concern species of plants, invertebrates or fishes as identified by COSEWIC are known to occur within the park.

Several species of mammals and birds have been listed, however. Three mammals identified by COSEWIC as species at risk are known to occur within the park:

- Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) Status: Special Concern
- Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) Status: Special Concern
- Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) Status: Special Concern

Sightings of polar bears in the park are rare; Vuntut National Park is not within their normal range. Healthy populations of grizzly bears and wolverines are found within the park and adjacent to it. Because both of these species typically inhabit large home ranges (and are characterized by low reproductive rates), Parks Canada will promote their regionally integrated management.

While the park protects a portion of the seasonal migration routes of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, protection of the herd's habitat is not complete however, and is discussed under Environmental Stressors (section 4.2). Parks Canada will contribute to the work of the International Porcupine Caribou Board and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board.

To date, 102 species of birds have been observed within Vuntut National Park; other bird species also occur in areas adjacent to the park. Current information about the birds of this region is summarized in the RD&A. It appears that many of the avian populations within the park area are healthy and not at risk. Certain bird species that occur within the park have been identified nationally by COSEWIC as species at risk:

- Anatum Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) Status: Threatened
- Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*) Status: Endangered (historic range – no undisputed documented sightings)
- Tundra Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*) Status: Special Concern
- Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) Status: Special Concern

The Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan, led by CWS, emphasizes that all arctic-breeding shorebirds are at some risk and in need of conservation measures. The report sets priorities for shorebirds across the north.

The Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan identifies several shorebird species of concern that are found within Vuntut National Park during the breeding season:

Shorebird Species of High Concern	Species of Moderate Concern	
American Golden-Plover	Solitary Sandpiper	Least sandpiper
Whimbrel	Spotted Sandpiper	Semipalmated sandpiper
	Common Snipe	Red-necked Phalarope

Field observations suggest that there are healthy and fairly dense populations of American Golden-Plovers and Whimbrels occurring within Vuntut National Park. Park staff will participate in the Shorebird Conservation Plan and attempt to monitor these shorebird populations.

Regional Integration

Vuntut National Park is part of a chain of connected protected areas that extends from the Beaufort Sea to the Bering Sea. Vuntut and Ivvavik national parks represent core park areas within a network of protected areas. This network can provide unfragmented wildlife habitat, undisturbed migratory routes for caribou and other animals and unaltered breeding grounds for many northern animals. Vuntut National Park shares borders with Ivvavik National Park to the north and with ANWR in northeastern Alaska. The park is part of the larger Old Crow Flats Special Management Area. Much can be accomplished through close cooperation and integrated ecosystem management among these northern protected areas. Vuntut National Park staff will actively participate in future efforts to coordinate ecosystem management and visitor services as the network of protected areas develops.

Working with other governments and agencies (e.g., other federal departments, Yukon government, Vuntut Gwitchin government, the NYRRC and the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Cooperative) is also a key to successful regional integration. Parks Canada will assist in organizing periodic meetings involving other governments and agencies, scientists, land managers from the North, educators and other interested stakeholders to discuss issues of mutual concern and advance integrated cooperative management in these northern ecosystems.

Integrated planning and cooperation among governments and agencies are important tools in these endeavours. Engaging others in Parks Canada's planning processes and having park staff and partners participate in planning processes for the surrounding area help promote ecologically sound and efficient decision-making. Parks Canada will cooperate with the development of a management plan for the rest of the Special Management Area to help ensure the whole area is managed as one ecological unit.

A Regional Land Use Plan for North Yukon is under development; Parks Canada will participate in this process. In addition, a North Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Plan has recently been completed with Parks Canada's participation.

4.3.1 Strategic Goals

The structure and function of the park's ecosystems are governed by natural processes and are unimpaired by stresses from human activities.

Integrated ecological monitoring programs exist for the collection, storage, analysis and interpretation of data.

Integrated planning and management take place in the greater Vuntut ecosystem.

4.3.2 Objectives

1. To base management decisions on the best available traditional knowledge and scientific research.

2. To provide ecological information that leads to early and decisive management actions.
3. To encourage the development of holistic, integrated land use plans and decision-making for the regional ecosystem.

4.3.3 Key Actions

1. Participate in relevant ecological monitoring programs such as the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Cooperative, the monitoring protocols of Ivvavik National Park and others, and the Northern Contaminants Program.
2. Develop an ecological monitoring program for the park in partnership with others, e.g., NYRRC, Vuntut Gwitchin government, Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Cooperative, Ivvavik National Park, CWS and the Yukon government. This monitoring program will relate to the Ecological Integrity Assessment Framework developed by Parks Canada.
3. Continue to contribute to management programs and other projects of the International Porcupine Caribou Board and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board.
4. Develop a Bear Management Plan for the park based on the Proposed Bear Management Strategy for Vuntut National Park.
5. In partnership with others, develop methods to monitor population changes and understand the ecology of wolverines and other mustelids (weasels, mink, marten, river otter) in the park and surrounding areas.
6. In partnership with others, advance the national Species at Risk Program.
7. In partnership with others, encourage the development of a Yukon Conservation Data Centre.
8. Cooperate with the Yukon government and others to implement the pending regional muskox plan, as it relates to Vuntut National Park.
9. Work cooperatively with NYRRC, the Vuntut Gwitchin government, the Yukon government and others to implement those sections of the North Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Plan relevant to Vuntut National Park.
10. Participate in relevant planning processes in the region, such as the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area Plan and the North Yukon Land Use Plan.
11. Participate in the implementation of the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan and efforts to monitor arctic-breeding shorebirds across the North.
12. Continue involvement in the North America-wide peregrine falcon survey that the Yukon government coordinates locally every five years.
13. Identify early green-up areas in the park, investigate their importance to wildlife and assess potential management implications related to human use.
14. As priorities and partnerships permit, conduct research on fish ecology, fish overwintering areas and aquatic ecosystems of the park.

4.4 Vuntut Gwitchin Coexistence with the Land

Traditional knowledge can be defined as the accumulated body of knowledge, observations and understanding about the environment and about the relationships of living beings with one another. This understanding is rooted in the traditional way of life of First Nations or others who have lived on the land for a long time.

One of the goals of Vuntut National Park is fostering awareness of Vuntut Gwitchin traditional knowledge, history and culture, and protecting the traditional, current and evolving uses of the park area by the Vuntut Gwitchin. Enhancing the long established stewardship of the land by the Vuntut Gwitchin and promoting traditional land-based activities are important parts of this mandate.

Discussions with the Vuntut Gwitchin government and the NYRRC have brought to light a concern that Vuntut Gwitchin citizens are less knowledgeable about travelling on the land than previous generations. At the request of the Vuntut Gwitchin government, Parks Canada will contribute to programs designed to assist Vuntut Gwitchin citizens in carrying on traditional activities in their traditional territory.

4.4.1 Strategic Goal

Provide opportunities for the Vuntut Gwitchin to carry out traditional activities on the land, harvest wildlife and other resources, and for Elders to pass on the knowledge and skills of the Vuntut Gwitchin culture to younger generations.

4.4.2 Objectives

1. To use in a full and fair manner the traditional knowledge and experience of the Vuntut Gwitchin and the information gathered by the scientific community in order to understand the ecological and historical significance of natural resources and heritage sites found within Vuntut National Park.
2. To rely largely upon the Vuntut Gwitchin for the interpretation and significance of aboriginal place names associated with Vuntut National Park.

4.4.3 Key Actions

1. Contribute to opportunities for Elders and others to pass on the understanding of the ecological and historical significance of sites and place names and to teach traditional skills both on the land and as part of educational programs in the community of Old Crow.
2. Contribute to Vuntut Gwitchin government sanctioned programs that will assist the Vuntut Gwitchin to carry on traditional activities in their traditional territory.
3. Parks Canada will assist the Vuntut Gwitchin government to prepare and deliver programs to educate Vuntut Gwitchin citizens about appropriate ways of travelling on the land.

4.5 Indicators of Ecological Integrity

As discussed in section 4.3, Vuntut National Park is in the initial stages of developing an ecological monitoring program. Numerical targets for the selected indicators are not always available. In some instances, e.g., a population census of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, other agencies conduct the project and analyze the data. Parks Canada will make use of such analysis to assess the ecological integrity of a population or indicator. In other instances, Parks Canada will carry out the monitoring and share the data with partners and communities.

Indicators for the Vuntut National Park ecological monitoring program (Table 2) have been chosen so that they relate to the Parks Canada's Ecological Integrity Assessment Framework as presented in *The State of Protected Heritage Areas 1999 Report*.

Vuntut National Park's monitoring program utilizes three types of measurements, as indicated by the superscript numbers in Table 2:

1. measurements that provide information and data that are important to national and international monitoring networks;
2. measurements that monitor fundamental ecological processes which influence many plant and animal populations; and
3. measurements providing numerical targets that might guide management actions.

Table 2 provides one or two examples in each category. Other indicators will be added to the program as it develops.

4.6 Communicating About Ecological Integrity

A national park's ecological integrity is dependent on many factors. Environmental stressors can be internal (e.g., management of food and garbage within the park); regional (e.g., potential exchange of endemic diseases and parasites between caribou and muskox); or national/international/global (e.g., long-distance transport of contaminants). Three of Vuntut National Park's top four environmental stressors are national/international/global in nature. Decisions being made thousands of kilometres away are likely to affect the park and the region. *Climate Change and Canada's National Park System* produced by Environment Canada and Parks Canada in 2000 states that "Considering environmental conditions are close to the limits for life in the Arctic, ecosystems in this region are likely to be the most sensitive to global climate change."

To enable Canadians to make informed life-style choices, they need to be informed that their actions and the actions of others impact ecosystems far from their cities and homes. Within government, Parks Canada will seek ways to inform and influence policy makers. Externally, through interpretation and especially outreach, Parks Canada and partners will seek to help Canadians and international visitors to understand the environmental implications of their actions.

Additional messages and actions related to Interpretation and Outreach are found in section 7.1.

Table 2. Indicators of Ecological Integrity for Vuntut National Park of Canada

INDICATOR	ACTIONS	DESIRED MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES OR TARGET
Climate		
Weather patterns	Meteorological Service of Canada weather station at Old Crow has operated since 1951. Explore establishing remote weather station in VNP. Cooperate with Ivvavik NP.	Monitor weather patterns and document significant changes. ^{1,2}
Break-up of Porcupine River	A 35-year database exists and is kept current by Water Resources, DIAND.	Monitor for significant changes in the average break-up date. ¹
Abiotic Disturbances		
Water surface of lakes in the Old Crow Flats	Water surface study was carried out by CWS in 1990s. CWS will periodically update this study.	Document changes in surface area covered by water. ^{2,3}
Permafrost monitoring	Cooperate with Arctic Borderlands on the maintenance of current site and potential new sites.	Document changes in active layer and permafrost extent at permanent monitoring sites. ^{1,2}
Vegetation Communities		
Primary productivity	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) measurements by Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer (AVHRR) monitored by satellite and analyzed annually by Parks Canada.	Monitor significant changes in length of growth season. ^{1,2}
Herbivores		
Porcupine Caribou Herd	Population survey is carried out every three years by CWS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Porcupine Caribou Management Board.	Population dynamics fluctuate within acceptable parameters including population size, calf survival rates and sex ratio. ^{2,3}
Muskox	Yukon government and Ivvavik NP survey, and field observations by VNP and hunters are being used to collect information.	Targets are being developed for the Yukon population, in a regional muskox management plan. ³

Table 2. Indicators of Ecological Integrity for Vuntut National Park of Canada

INDICATOR	ACTIONS	DESIRED MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES OR TARGET
Predators		
Number of Bear Control Actions	VNP will work with government and NYRRC to explore the collection of this information.	No large increase in the number of human/bear conflicts or number of bears destroyed is detected. ³
Peregrine Falcon population	VNP conducts a survey every five years to coincide with the Canadian Peregrine Falcon Survey.	Northern nesting rates remain stable or increase. ^{1,3}
Whimbrel breeding density	Program to monitor selected breeding sites used by Whimbrels will be developed within the next three years.	The number of breeding pairs at permanent monitoring sites remains stable. ^{1,3}
Species Richness		
Bird diversity	Inventory of birds in various areas of the park continues; VNP and CWS databases are kept up-to-date.	Presence of all native species and documentation of exotic species are monitored. ¹
Waterfowl populations	CWS and USFWS carry out annual waterfowl surveys.	Population of each waterfowl species fluctuates within its 55-year range. ^{1,3}
Decomposition		
Decomposition in the forested communities	Decomposition monitoring plots will be established within five years.	Monitor and document significant changes. ²
Human land use patterns		
Pollutants	Parks Canada, working with the Vuntut Gwitchin government, will promote future investigations on this topic.	Contaminant levels in country foods do not significantly increase. ³
Vuntut Gwitchin groups spending time on the land	VNP will cooperate with the Vuntut Gwitchin government to explore if this information can be collected.	Traditional activities on the land continue. ³

Table 2. Indicators of Ecological Integrity for Vuntut National Park of Canada

INDICATOR	ACTIONS	DESIRED MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES OR TARGET
Human land use patterns		
Use by staff, visitors and researchers	Document the extent and nature of use in the park.	Maintain use at levels that do not impair ecological integrity. ³
Harvested animal populations	Work with the Vuntut Gwitchin government to collect information and assist in the implementation of recommendations from the NYRRC and others.	Indicators suggest populations are sustainable. ³

- 1 measurements that provide information and data that are important to national and international monitoring networks.
- 2 measurements that monitor fundamental ecological processes which influence many plant and animal populations.
- 3 measurements providing numerical targets that might guide management actions.

4.6.1 Strategic Goal

Canadians understand the challenges involved in maintaining the ecological integrity of the park, understand how their actions may impact the park and make life-style choices that help maintain the park's ecological integrity.

Objectives

1. To ensure ecological integrity messages are incorporated into all major park communications.
2. To effectively use communication and education to inform and influence the decisions of Canadians to have a positive impact on the park's ecological integrity.

Key Actions

1. Working with other governments and agencies and independently, take actions that will positively influence policy-makers in relation to the park's ecological integrity.
2. Continue to collaborate with local schools to develop curriculum materials based on park research and monitoring programs.
3. Using outreach tools like the park's Website, inform Canadians about the potential impacts of their actions on the park, and offer them life-style choices that will have a positive effect on the park's ecological integrity.

Protecting Cultural and Paleontological Resources



One of the park's seven known caribou fences with shyas (meat caches).

5.0 PROTECTING CULTURAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

5.1 Cultural Resources

Parks Canada defines a cultural resource as a human work or a place which gives evidence of human activity or that has spiritual or cultural meaning, and which has been determined to have historic value. Cultural resources will be managed in accordance with the principles and practices of *Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy*.

The *VGFNFA* also gives direction on cultural resources. Objectives involving cultural resources for the park include the following (Chapter 10, Schedule A):

- to recognize that oral history is a valid and relevant form of research for establishing the historical significance of the heritage sites and moveable heritage resources in the park directly related to the history of the Vuntut Gwitchin; and
- to recognize the interests of the Vuntut Gwitchin in the interpretation of aboriginal place names and heritage resources in the park directly related to the culture of the Vuntut Gwitchin.

In 1976 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recognized the importance of the Bering-Yukon refugium "in peopling of the New World". This event was declared to be of national significance.

Over 100 archaeological sites have been recorded within Vuntut National Park. They include important historic sites such as the seven caribou fences, in various stages of deterioration, in the park. Other sites include traditional camps, cabins, trails, place names, and caches and blinds. Access by park visitors to Vuntut Gwitchin burial sites in the park is not allowed without the express written consent of the Vuntut Gwitchin government. Two heritage routes identified in the land claim pass through the park in a north-south direction. There is local interest in using these trails more in future. The Vuntut Gwitchin government will be consulted about the naming or renaming of features located within the park.

The RD&A, with chapters on history and archaeology, has information about the area, and the Oral History Project is adding to knowledge and understanding of the area's cultural resources. Future research may have an important role in revealing the history of this significant region.

The Vuntut Gwitchin government and the NYRRC will review all research permits and make recommendations to Parks Canada before a permit is approved. The results of research in the area are compiled in the Yukon government's Archaeological Site Record Forms and Parks Canada's Archaeological Services Cultural Resource Management Database and are updated as required. Sites are monitored during the course of regular park field work.

Considerable information and artifacts were gathered from the traditional territory before the park was established. These collections are currently dispersed at a variety of institutions, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the University of Toronto and the University of Alberta. The Vuntut Gwitchin government is interested, over time, in repatriating cultural resources from outside institutions. All artifacts collected within the park since its establishment are ultimately held by Parks Canada.

Due to the significance of the caribou fences, cultural resource management (CRM) work will concentrate on them over the next five years. The recommended key actions outline a step-by-step approach to documenting the caribou fences and determining their particular values. The reconstruction of a caribou fence will not be undertaken in the park during the span of this management plan, to ensure that the necessary research is completed before long-term decisions are made.

5.1.1 Strategic Goal

The enduring human presence in the ecosystem is acknowledged, fostered and respected by protecting and presenting the cultural resources of Vuntut National Park.

5.1.2 Objectives

1. To cooperatively manage heritage research within Vuntut National Park.
2. To recognize and take into account the cultural and heritage significance of heritage routes and sites within the park in park management and operations.

5.1.3 Key Actions

1. Complete the community-based Oral History Project that the Vuntut Gwitchin government, Parks Canada and others have undertaken.
2. Continue to record new archaeological sites and keep the existing database up-to-date.

Caribou Fences

3. Conduct discussions with families who have affinities to the areas where the fences are located.
4. Carry out extant recording of the caribou fences in the park.
5. Conduct community-based CRM workshops in Old Crow to determine the particular values associated with the caribou fences.
6. Interpret the caribou fences in the Old Crow Visitor Centre, e.g., model of a caribou fence, video, pamphlet.
7. Due to their vulnerable nature and until research on the caribou fences is completed, access to the caribou fences and associated structures by visitors and researchers requires the permission of the Superintendent.
8. During the span of this management plan, develop appropriate visitor guidelines for visiting the caribou fences.

5.2 Paleontological Resources

The entire park area was part of Beringia, the huge non-glaciated refugium for plants and animals during the Pleistocene ice age. During the height of the Wisconsin glaciation (approximately 18,000 years ago), the northern portion of the Yukon Territory, most of northern Alaska and the northeastern portion of Siberia remained ice-free. Fauna that existed for thousands of years in much of Beringia included species that are now extinct, such as the American mastodon, woolly mammoth, long-horned bison, steppe horse, western camel, giant beaver, scimitar cat and American lion. Other Beringian mammals, such as barren-ground caribou, moose, muskox, beaver, muskrat, arctic fox, grey wolf and wolverine, continue to inhabit the area today.

There are more ice-age vertebrate fossils in non-glaciated parts of the Yukon than in any other place in Canada. The Old Crow Basin is the richest area for finding Pleistocene vertebrate remains in the

country, and it is considered to have international significance. Nearly the whole span of Pleistocene time, which began about 1.8 million years ago, is represented in the fossil record in the Old Crow Basin. The eroding banks of the Old Crow and Porcupine rivers, which have yielded large quantities of Pleistocene vertebrate fossils, have been the focus of much scientific research over the past 30 years. Since the Old Crow River forms the southern boundary of the park, some fossils are found within the park and others are on Vuntut Gwitchin Settlement Land to the south. One of the major challenges faced by researchers is establishing a chronology for the various remains, as most have eroded out of the riverbanks away from their original stratified locations. There is considerable potential for further paleontological research in the park and surrounding area. The Yukon government has good regional paleontological expertise and Parks Canada will work with them to facilitate future research in the park.

5.2.1 Strategic Goal

The paleontological resources of Vuntut National Park are protected and presented.

5.2.2 Objective

1. To cooperatively manage heritage research within Vuntut National Park.

5.2.3 Key Actions

1. Collect baseline information on significant paleontological resources, monitor on an on-going basis and take appropriate action as required.
2. Coordinate with the Yukon government and others to facilitate any proposed paleontological research in the park.

Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Activities



Lydia Thomas and her grandchildren continuing their traditional lifestyle at their spring camp in the Flats portion of the park.

6.0 VUNTUT GWITCHIN TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Vuntut Gwitchin have had a relationship with the park area for centuries, a relationship which continues today. They have depended on the area and its resources to provide a subsistence lifestyle. Some of the traditional uses of the park include hunting, trapping, fishing and berry picking. While some of the harvest methods have changed, the attachment to the land has endured.

The land and resources of the Old Crow Flats are used continuously in the traditional activities of the Vuntut Gwitchin. The Vuntut Gwitchin have an emotional and spiritual attachment to the land. It "has a cultural significance that goes beyond the use of its physical and natural resources to uses for healing and spiritual purposes" (Impacts and Benefits Plan, Part B). Many people still venture out on to the land today for spiritual rejuvenation.

The rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin to carry on subsistence activities in the park, using traditional and current methods, are clearly outlined in the *VGFNEA*. The NYRRC is the primary instrument for local renewable resources management within the park, and may make recommendations on subsistence activities in the park including routes, methods, modes of access, etc. Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin government also have responsibilities in this area; for example, the Vuntut Gwitchin government will record harvesting and trapping activities. This information will aid managers in maintaining ecological integrity.

The following sections on harvesting and trapping are adapted from the *VGFNEA*, which should be consulted for more details or clarification:

Harvesting

- The Vuntut Gwitchin shall have the exclusive right to harvest for subsistence within the park all species of fish and wildlife and edible plant products, for themselves and their families in all seasons of the year and in any number, subject only to limitations provided in legislation enacted for purposes of conservation, public health or public safety, and subject to recommendations by the NYRRC.
- The Vuntut Gwitchin shall have the right to employ traditional and current methods of, and equipment for, harvesting, subject to recommendations by the NYRRC.
- The Vuntut Gwitchin government shall establish and maintain a register of harvest information relating to harvesting in the park, which shall be made available to the Superintendent.
- The Vuntut Gwitchin have the right to retain and maintain existing cabins, and to retain the use of and maintain camps, caches and trails in the park that are necessary for, and are to be used incidental to, exercising their harvesting rights within the park.
- Subject to review by the NYRRC, the Vuntut Gwitchin shall have the right to establish or expand cabins, camps, caches and trails in the park that are necessary for, and are to be used incidental to, the exercise of their harvesting rights.

Trapping

- The Vuntut Gwitchin shall have the exclusive right to harvest furbearers within the park in accordance with the *VGFNEA*, for the purpose of selling the pelts.
- The Vuntut Gwitchin government shall be responsible for allocating trapping opportunities in the park to the Vuntut Gwitchin beneficiaries, and for the alignment, realignment and grouping of individual traplines.
- The Vuntut Gwitchin government shall maintain a register of the allocation of trapping opportunities in the park and shall provide a copy of it to the Superintendent.
- The NYRRC may make recommendations to the Minister responsible for Parks Canada on the management of furbearers and on seasons, quotas and other matters related to trapping in the park.

Role of North Yukon Renewable Resources Council (NYRRC)

- The NYRRC may make recommendations to the Minister on all matters pertaining to the development and management of the park including: routes, methods of access for harvesting within the park; harvest limits and seasons for harvesting in the park; locations and methods of harvesting within the park.

6.0.1 Strategic Goal

Vuntut Gwitchin rights within the park are recognized, protected, understood and supported by park staff, visitors and other Canadians.

6.0.2 Key Action

1. Parks Canada will work collaboratively with the NYRRC and Vuntut Gwitchin government in implementing the provisions of the VGFNEA related to Vuntut National Park.

Visitor Activities and Research Management



Camping in Vuntut National Park.

7.0 VISITOR ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

7.1 Interpretation and Outreach

"It is in the national interest... to present [our national] heritage through interpretive and educational programs for public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment, both for international visitors and the Canadian public, thereby enhancing pride and giving expression to our identity as Canadians."

From the preamble of the Parks Canada Agency Act, 1998

One of the key objectives of the national park is to provide Canadians, and others from abroad, opportunities to appreciate and understand the national significance of Vuntut National Park of Canada, its natural and cultural resources, and its role within a national system of protected areas.

Seven audiences have been identified for Vuntut National Park:

- local community members in Old Crow;
- park visitors;
- Yukon residents;
- school groups;
- the public, both in Canada and abroad;
- researchers; and
- commercial operators.



Major Park Messages

A system of protected areas: Vuntut National Park of Canada is one of a family of national parks, protecting and presenting significant Canadian heritage; the park is one of a series of protected areas in the Yukon, Alaska and the NWT; and the park represents the Northern Yukon Natural Region.

Ecological integrity: the role of the park within a larger regional ecosystem; the threats and challenges to maintaining ecological integrity, what is being done and the role of monitoring; the fact that stewardship of the park is a shared responsibility; and the significant contributions that traditional knowledge brings to park management.

Vuntut Gwitchin culture and stewardship of the land: Vuntut National Park is within the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin and they have been stewards of this land since time immemorial, a relationship that continues to this day. The park was established in 1995 as part of the *VGNEFA*, is cooperatively managed and the Vuntut Gwitchin have ongoing subsistence rights in the park, including hunting and trapping.

A sense of place: the special character and unique features of Vuntut National Park including: the Old Crow Flats wetlands; the importance of the park to the Porcupine Caribou Herd; the ongoing interdependence of the Vuntut Gwitchin and the land; the caribou fences and other significant archaeological sites; the internationally significant paleontological sites along the Old Crow River; and the significance of the area as a post-Beringian landscape.

Interpretation and Outreach

Interpretation is public education that takes place inside a national park, like a guided walk or on-site exhibit. Outreach is public education that occurs outside a park, such as a program at a local school or the park website read by someone in southern Canada. Due to Vuntut National Park's isolation and low number of visitors, outreach will form an important part of its presentation program. The website is an important tool for reaching Yukon residents, Canadians across the country and people outside Canada.

One of the unique stories about this part of Canada is the life of the Vuntut Gwitchin. The Vuntut Gwitchin continue their direct ties to the land, whether hunting or trapping or travelling on the land for spiritual reasons. The ongoing interdependence between the Vuntut Gwitchin and the land is an important and engaging story for the Vuntut Gwitchin to share with other Canadians.

Important messages such as the potential affects of climate change on the park will also be delivered, and they are discussed in section 4.6.

As per the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement*, Parks Canada will develop a Visitor Reception Centre (VRC) in Old Crow. The VRC is envisioned as the main source for visitor reception and information in Old Crow, providing orientation, information and interpretation to visitors about Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory. Through partnerships, development of the VRC will provide opportunities for the Vuntut Gwitchin to present their culture, and for other governments and agencies to provide visitors information and interpretation, e.g., Ni'iinlii'Njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve and Rampart House Historic Site.

For Parks Canada, the VRC will be a major focus of interpretive and outreach efforts for the national park. Visitors will learn about the park and what it has to offer. The VRC will also incorporate technology that will facilitate outreach opportunities, bringing the park to Canadians across the country. Canadians can learn from community members in Old Crow about the park and Vuntut Gwitchin culture.

The Vuntut Gwitchin will be consulted in all matters concerning the interpretation of their culture. Park staff will ask the Vuntut Gwitchin Heritage Committee to review interpretation products about the Vuntut Gwitchin culture. In addition, the Gwich'in language will be included, where practical, in interpretive displays and signs about the history and culture of the Vuntut Gwitchin related to the park.

The local Old Crow community is an important audience. Public programs will be offered in the community to ensure that residents are aware of activities such as research taking place in the park.

A recently completed edu-kit is being used in the local school. Discussions will follow about its wider distribution to schools throughout the territory. Work will continue with teachers and educators in Old Crow and the Yukon.

The primary contact with researchers and commercial operators will be on a one-to-one basis and through the internet, to ensure that they are aware of current park rules and regulations and sensitive to doing work in Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory.

Focusing on the delivery of the major park messages to key audiences, using the techniques outlined above, will enable the park to deliver on commitments related to the recent strategy *Engaging Canadians: Parks Canada's Strategy for External Communications*.

7.1.1 Strategic Goal

Visitors, Yukoners and other Canadians appreciate and understand the national significance of Vuntut National Park, its natural and cultural heritage, and its role within a national system of protected areas.

7.1.2 Objectives

1. To offer visitors to Old Crow and Vuntut National Park opportunities to learn about and appreciate the park.
2. To offer Canadians who do not visit Vuntut National Park opportunities to learn about and appreciate the park.
3. To make research results widely available in a timely fashion.

7.1.3 Key Actions

1. As per the VGFNEA, and with partners, develop a VRC in Old Crow.
2. Deliver community-based activities, e.g., school edu-kit, public programs for local residents.
3. Maintain an active park website, informing Canadians about the natural and cultural resources of the park.
4. Broadly distribute the results and implications of research conducted in the park, using the internet and other methods.
5. Regularly measure visitor awareness of key park messages and make changes as appropriate.

7.2 Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism focuses on the experience of visiting a place with historic, cultural or natural significance. Along with other national parks and national historic sites in the Yukon, Vuntut National Park plays a role in the territory's tourism industry.

From 1996 to 1998, an Impacts and Benefits Plan for Vuntut National Park was prepared for Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin government. The plan examined potential tourism opportunities, taking into consideration community concerns.

In summary, the key tourism opportunities for the park and surrounding area focus on the combination of the natural resources and cultural experiences offered by the Old Crow community. The research indicates that there is a strong demand for travellers to learn about the destination that they are visiting. For visitors to Vuntut National Park it is the culture of the Vuntut people and how they live off the land, which is of key interest to them. The remoteness of the community and the natural setting of the Old Crow Flats and Vuntut National Park create a unique product offering where visitors to the area can go out onto the land to experience the traditional activities of the Vuntut people. However the key concern with this focus is the sensitivity and the concerns of the Vuntut people to having additional people come into their community. Very close management is required so that the integrity of the area and the people are not negatively impacted.

Vuntut National Park Impacts and Benefits Plan, Part A

In addition to the cultural experiences that visitors can enjoy in the area, the park offers pristine wilderness for seasoned, self-sufficient travellers. To date, park visitors have primarily sought a wilderness experience.

Recent research by the Yukon government confirms that potential visitors to the area are interested in the area's natural and cultural features. There is interest among some Old Crow residents in starting or expanding tourism-related businesses. These include tourist accommodation in Old Crow, day trips near the community, and guiding extended backcountry trips by boat, snowmobile, dog sled, etc. The Vuntut Gwitchin Development Corporation is considering taking a lead in tourism development in the traditional territory by assisting in the establishment of a tour company that would aid with marketing and coordination of tourism activities by Vuntut Gwitchin citizens.

Vuntut National Park offers both natural and cultural opportunities to visitors. The park image that will be promoted is that of an intact wilderness area, a combination of wetlands, foothills and mountains, containing the Old Crow Flats, internationally significant wetlands that attract hundreds of thousands of waterfowl. Grizzly bears and wolverines thrive, the Porcupine Caribou Herd migrate annually, and the Vuntut Gwitchin, the "people among the lakes"—stewards of this area—continue to be physically and spiritually sustained by the land.

The VRC planned for Old Crow (section 7.1) is intended to be a place where all visitors to Old Crow can learn about Vuntut Gwitchin culture, the natural and cultural history of the traditional territory, and visitor opportunities in the area, both inside and outside the national park.

Parks Canada staff will work with the Vuntut Gwitchin government, Tourism Yukon and others to promote appropriate activities associated with the national park. Based on the concerns of Elders and others in the community of Old Crow, a long-term approach will be taken, to ensure that tourism develops at a pace that matches the needs and values of the community.

7.2.1 Strategic Goal

Tourism opportunities related to Vuntut National Park are based on national park values and develop at a pace that is compatible with the community values of the Vuntut Gwitchin.

7.2.2 Objective

1. To promote Vuntut National Park within a regional context.

7.2.3 Key Actions

1. Work with governments and businesses to ensure that marketing efforts related to the park incorporate ecological integrity messages and create the right visitor expectations by highlighting appropriate uses and behaviours.
2. Continue to work with the tourism industry to provide accurate information to visitors about the park.
3. Parks Canada will work with others such as Tourism Yukon and the Vuntut Gwitchin Development Corporation to support tourism efforts related to Vuntut National Park, such as funding for guide training.

4. Continue to use the Film and Video Guidelines, Parks Canada – Yukon Field Unit, which complement the national Parks Canada standards, to review applications for commercial filming in the park.

7.3 Visitor Services and Facilities

To date, only a handful of visitors have been to the park, due in part to its remote location and the high cost of travelling there. Visitors generally have been wilderness travellers who are self-sufficient and skilled in backcountry travel. It is anticipated that the number of visitors will remain low (less than 50 visitors annually) for the next few years. Potential visitors can learn about the park, either in person, by telephone, on the internet or in writing, from Parks Canada staff in Old Crow or Whitehorse.

In keeping with its wilderness character, there are no operational or visitor facilities within the park. Trails will not be built in the park, and travel will continue without established trails or designated campsites. Appropriate wilderness area facilities, such as outhouses and bear poles, will be provided as required. Visitors must register before travelling in the park and can reach the park on their own by boat, ski, dog sled and on foot or by air.

At high water, people can travel by motorboat along the Old Crow River and the portion of Black Fox Creek that forms the park boundary. As these waters are outside the park, Vuntut National Park does not restrict use of motorboats on them. Motorized water access and use will not be permitted within the park. In addition, motorized modes of access by visitors will not be permitted in the park, except for aircraft landings, guided snowmobile trips and guided snowmobile-supported dog sled trips.

The following are considered appropriate recreational activities in Vuntut National Park (both day trips and overnight trips): hiking; camping; canoeing; kayaking; ski-touring; snowshoeing; dog sledding; wildlife viewing; photography; and cultural activities. Visitor activities will be monitored for impacts and modified as required. Little is known about the potential impact of recreational fishing on the aquatic resources of the park; as a result, a precautionary approach will be taken and recreational fishing will not be permitted until such effects can be assessed.

In line with Parks Canada's policy on user fees, Backcountry Use Permit fees will be harmonized with those charged in Western Arctic national parks.

Principles for Recreational Use Management

To help ensure that recreational activities are compatible with park values, the following principles will be used to guide recreational use management within Vuntut National Park.

- Recreational activities must maintain ecological integrity and be consistent with the direction provided through the *VGFNFA*. Activities will be controllable, compatible, and reversible, and will maintain and protect critical wildlife habitat and movement corridors as well as key cultural resources.
- The management of recreational activities will be based on the principles of precaution and adaptive management.
- Subsistence activities will take priority over recreational activities.
- Scientific and traditional knowledge will be utilized to guide recreational use management decisions.

In keeping with the principles above, a range of management tools will be implemented as required, to help ensure ecological integrity, the protection of cultural resources and high quality visitor experiences. These tools include Leave No Trace camping practices; area or seasonal closures; use of bear canisters; restrictions on campfires; and quotas. In addition, food caches will not be permitted in the park.

- **Compatible** means park use and management actions will be compatible (sympathetic and complementary) with the wilderness nature of the park and the sensitivity of its resources;
- **Controllable** means Parks Canada will ensure that control is maintained with respect to the means, timing, and frequency of a particular park use or management action; and
- **Reversible** means that Parks Canada will monitor the effects of park use and management, and adjust actions, if required, in order to minimize impacts or completely remove a use of a facility or activity, if necessary.

7.3.1 Commercial Visitor Services

The *VGFNFA* sets out certain requirements to be followed in relation to economic opportunities in the park:

- The Vuntut Gwitchin shall have the exclusive opportunity to provide commercial dog sled trips that may be permitted in the park.
- Where a non-Vuntut Gwitchin makes an application to Parks Canada for a licence to operate a business in the park that is permitted under the Park Management Plan, the Vuntut Gwitchin shall have, in accordance with procedures set out in the *VGFNFA* (10.2 to 10.10), the pre-emptive option to apply for and acquire a licence to operate a business substantially similar to that described in the non-Vuntut Gwitchin application.
- Parks Canada shall consult with the NYRRC in deciding whether a quota, and if so, what quota, should be established for licences to operate a business within the park, and on any terms and conditions that should apply to those licences.

Due to the remoteness of the park, its wilderness character and the attachment to the land by the Vuntut Gwitchin, visitors will be encouraged to hire a licenced guide when visiting the park. This can enrich a visit to the park as well as providing for added safety. There may be certain ecologically or culturally sensitive sites where a licenced guide will be mandatory.

All commercial (profit and non-profit) services provided in the park require a business plan related to park activities and an environmental assessment prior to a business licence being issued. Operators providing guided visitor services in the park will be required to obtain a Parks Canada business licence and meet the standards and operating guidelines set out in the *Yukon Wilderness Tourism Licencing Act*.

In the *VGFNFA*, one of the objectives for the park is to provide economic and employment opportunities and participation for Vuntut Gwitchin in developing, operating and managing the park. This issue is important to the people of Old Crow. Parks Canada, the Vuntut Gwitchin government and the NYRRC recognize that current regulations, which prohibit licenced guides

(including Vuntut Gwitchin) from carrying firearms in national parks, may be seen to compromise the Vuntut Gwitchin's ability to pursue economic opportunities in the park. A regulation change is being pursued to enable Vuntut Gwitchin licenced guides to carry firearms when guiding in the park. Restrictions on use will be described in individual business licences. The *VGFNEA* states that Vuntut Gwitchin guides cannot exercise their harvesting rights while guiding in the park.

Use of Subsistence Trapper Cabins for Tourism

Under the *VGFNEA*, the Vuntut Gwitchin have the right to establish cabins and camps in the park necessary for carrying out subsistence activities. Three such cabins currently exist in the park. Cabins cannot be built or expanded for the sole purpose of commercial visitor accommodation, but such secondary use will be permitted. This means that subsistence trapper cabins can be used in support of tourism for cooking and eating, gathering of visitors, food storage and other secondary support activities, but not for overnight accommodation.

In addition, temporary tent frame accommodation for visitors will be permitted in the park, either associated with a subsistence trapper cabin or on its own.

Guided Commercial Snowmobile and Commercial and Private Dog Sled Trips

Due to the isolated nature of Vuntut National Park and in consideration of potential economic benefits, limited and controlled guided commercial snowmobile access to the park will be permitted.

Guided commercial snowmobile access will be permitted in the southern section of the park, the Old Crow Flats area (Map 3, chapter 9.0). Most travel will be on lake surfaces, which have greater snow cover than more northern areas of the park. This should reduce environmental impact. Snowmobiles will be permitted for commercial guided trips to get visitors to a base camp, with visitors riding on or driving the snowmobile. From the base camp, visitors can explore the area on snowshoes or skis. Visitors cannot tour from the base camp by snowmobile.

Commercial dog sled trips may be permitted throughout the park. The *VGFNEA* states that the Vuntut Gwitchin have the exclusive opportunity to provide commercial dog sled trips in the park. Snowmobiles will be permitted to support dog sledding trips in the southern part of the park. In this case, visitors can ride on or drive the dog sleds, not the snowmobiles. The snowmobiles can be used for support, i.e., carrying excess gear, food, etc. between camps. Private dog sled trips without snowmobile support may be permitted throughout the park.

The following restrictions will apply to all commercial snowmobile access: only commercial guided trips; an approved business plan related to the park is required; an environmental assessment is required before the activity is approved; and the area of use is restricted to the southern section of the park (Map 3, chapter 9.0). Criteria will be developed related to time of year, wildlife movement, area restrictions, quotas on number of machines, visitors and number of trips, and travel through family areas and camps. All activity will be monitored and actions taken as required. Over time, the use of cleaner, quieter snowmobile technology will be encouraged.

7.4 Researchers

Prior to the creation of Vuntut National Park, important research spanning many disciplines was conducted in the area. Research included work on waterfowl, the Porcupine Caribou Herd, moose, wolves, archaeology and paleontology. This research is summarized in the RD&A. The encouragement of research and monitoring in the area is important as new and independent research may offer insights and interpretations in a range of disciplines. All researchers are required

to have a Vuntut National Park research permit before conducting any work in the park. Community members are concerned about the handling of wildlife and as a result, the least intrusive methods, avoiding capturing, marking and handling wildlife, will be encouraged whenever possible.

7.5 Air Access

There are no defined landing sites in the park. A landing permit is required for aircraft landings by visitors and researchers in the park; requests for permits will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. To determine if designated landing sites should be established, further research will be undertaken on factors such as rotary wing versus fixed wing aircraft, potential landings on water, land and snow, and directing visitors to areas of high-quality experience potential with minimal environmental impacts or disturbance to subsistence users. Aircraft operators providing access services to the park are required to have a park business licence. Guidelines for the management and control of air access will be developed as required to minimize the impact of this activity.

7.5.1 Strategic Goal

Visitors enjoy high-quality experiences in the park, while ensuring that the ecological integrity and cultural heritage of the park are maintained and the rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin within the park are respected.

7.5.2 Objectives

1. To provide for a variety of recreational activities that are compatible with park values.
2. To foster those activities that contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the park's heritage resources.
3. To manage access and recreational use in a manner compatible with or complimentary to traditional activities of the Vuntut Gwitchin.

7.5.3 Key Actions

1. Conduct further research to assess park areas for potential visitor use.
2. Compile route descriptions and make them available to visitors.
3. Monitor visitor use for potential impacts and take action as required.
4. Harmonize the introduction of Backcountry Use Permit fees with those charged in Western Arctic national parks.

Commercial Visitor Services

5. Pursue a regulation amendment that would enable Vuntut Gwitchin licenced guides in Vuntut National Park to carry firearms when guiding in the park.

Air Access

6. Assess potential landing sites and designate suitable sites.

7.6 Risk Assessment and Public Safety

Vuntut National Park is a remote wilderness park and has many natural hazards, most of which are common to other mountainous and northern areas in the Yukon. There are no developed trails or facilities in the park. The geographic isolation of the park can compound the severity of any incident. Extreme winter temperatures, unpredictable weather, varied terrain, biting insects, lack of shelter and wildlife encounters are all potential hazards for the unprepared visitor.

Public safety is a shared responsibility. Visitors will be made aware of the hazards and risks that they may encounter while travelling in the park, and of their responsibility to consider this information in planning their activities. Parks Canada will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that visitors are aware of the skills and preparation necessary to exercise self-reliance and self-sufficiency while in Vuntut National Park. Visitors are required to be able to handle medical or wildlife related emergencies on their own. Pre-trip information will include the current types and levels of search and rescue services available.

Parks Canada has developed a Preliminary Hazard Assessment/Public Safety Plan for Vuntut National Park. Parks Canada will develop and maintain rescue capability consistent with the level of service that has been identified in the plan, with a priority on prevention, education and information. Parks Canada will work with regional and national organizations involved in emergency response to ensure that the park's public safety program is integrated into the regional and national safety response network.

7.6.1 Strategic Goal

The park's public safety program is based on prevention, readiness, response and shared responsibility.

7.6.2 Key Actions

1. Develop and maintain rescue capability consistent with the level of service identified in the Hazard Assessment/Public Safety Plan. Priority will be placed on prevention, education and information.
2. Work with regional and national organizations involved in search and rescue and emergency response, e.g., Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Old Crow Rangers, Old Crow Nursing Station, Ivvavik National Park and other authorities in Old Crow, Dawson and Inuvik, to ensure that the park's public safety program is integrated into the regional and national safety response network.

Administration and Operations



On-going documentation and management of cultural and natural features in the park.

8.0 ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

The community of Old Crow provides land access to the park. Aircraft charters fly to the park from Dawson and Inuvik; no charter company currently operates out of Old Crow. At present, two full-time staff live in Old Crow, working with the Vuntut Gwitchin and community members on park projects and greeting visitors. Over time, full-time and seasonal staff will be located in Old Crow where the operational headquarters for the park will be established. Associated with the VRC discussed in section 7.1, a park operation centre will be established in Old Crow.

There is a need to provide for operational communication in the park. Various methods will be investigated, including satellite phones, and the least intrusive, reliable method will be implemented, which may include the installation of one or two radio towers (the only potential park operational infrastructure anticipated at this time).

Environmental Stewardship

As part of an initiative to minimize environmental impacts, the Canadian government requires all federal departments and agencies to develop and implement a sustainable development strategy and environmental management strategy (EMS). High-priority areas for Vuntut National Park are hazardous materials management, waste management, air emissions and green procurement (the use of environmentally friendly products). Since much of the travel in the park is by park staff, it will be important to monitor park operations and mitigate as necessary.

Protecting Resources: Law Enforcement and Compliance

Parks Canada's responsibilities for law enforcement in Vuntut National Park centre on the provisions of the *Canada National Parks Act* and the National Park regulations pertaining to resource conservation. In conjunction with management strategies arising from the *VGFNFA*, this helps ensure the park's ecological integrity is maintained, cultural resources are protected and First Nation rights are safeguarded.

Contracts and Employment

The following section is adapted from the *VGFNFA*, which should be consulted for more details or clarification:

- Maintain the objective of having at least 50 per cent of the public service employment positions in the park filled by qualified Vuntut Gwitchin citizens.
- Provide timely notice to the Vuntut Gwitchin government on any invitation by Parks Canada respecting contracts for the provision of goods and services in the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory for the development, operation and management of the park.
- Provide the Vuntut Gwitchin government with a right of first refusal for any contract offer by Parks Canada for the construction or maintenance of trails or facilities in or related to the park within the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory.

Plan Implementation

To ensure public involvement during the implementation of the management plan, an annual report on the plan's implementation will be produced and meetings held as required. In addition, the new five-year *State of the Park Report* and Parks Canada's biennial *State of Protected Heritage Areas Report* will report on the state of the park's ecological integrity.

8.0.1 Strategic Goals

Park administration and operations meet the three basic accountabilities: ensuring the ecological integrity of the park; providing services to clients; and expending public funds wisely and efficiently.

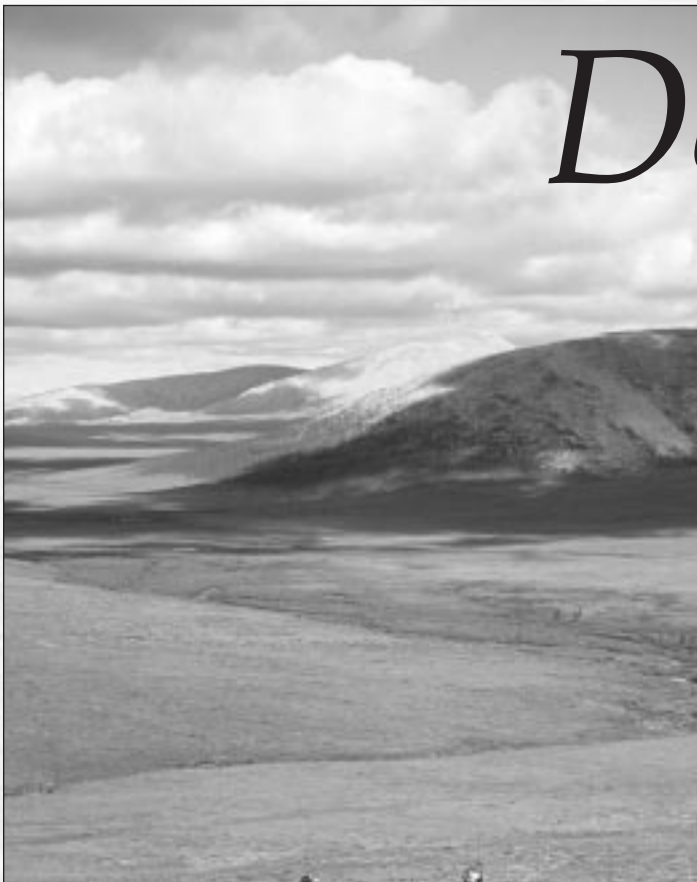
Parks Canada demonstrates sound environmental practices in all of its activities, services and products.

Park resources are protected based on the provisions of the Canada National Parks Act, National Park regulations, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement and other applicable legislation.

8.0.2 Key Actions

1. Establish a park operation centre in Old Crow as part of the VRC.
2. Evaluate available methods for providing operational communications in the park and implement the most appropriate system.
3. Implement an environmental management system for the park that emphasizes hazardous materials management, waste management, air emissions and green procurement (the use of environmentally friendly products).
4. Monitor park operations and ensure that they have minimal impact on the park's ecological integrity.
5. Modify the draft Law Enforcement Plan to meet the new national direction on law enforcement.
6. Provide annual reports on the implementation of the management plan.
7. Use the new five-year *State of the Park Report* and Parks Canada's biennial *State of Protected Heritage Areas Report* to report on the state of the park's ecological integrity.

Park Zoning and Wilderness Area Declaration



Hiking opportunities in the northeastern part of Vuntut National Park.

9.0 PARK ZONING AND WILDERNESS AREA DECLARATION

9.1 National Park Zoning System

Parks Canada's zoning system comprises five categories, which are based on the need for protection. The suitability of areas for visitor activities is also a consideration in zoning decisions. The zoning system does not preclude resource harvesting activities and subsistence use by the Vuntut Gwitchin. The five categories are as follows:

Zone I- **Special Preservation** is a zone where public use may be controlled to protect especially important or fragile resources. No motorized access is permitted, including visitor air access.

Zone II – **Wilderness** covers large areas that are good representations of the ecosystems of the park and will be maintained in a wilderness state. Motorized use is not permitted, except for strictly controlled air access in remote northern areas.

Zone III – **Natural Environment** is an area that is maintained in a natural state, although with more use than is allowed in Zone II. Zone III allows for limited motorized access, usually by public transport.

Zone IV – **Outdoor Recreation** is an area capable of accommodating a broad range of opportunities for education, outdoor recreation and related facilities for visitor enjoyment, in ways that respect the natural landscape and the park environment. Motorized access is permitted.

Zone V – **Park Service** is for a park community such as Banff and Jasper or a major service or park administration centre.

9.2 Zone I – Special Preservation

Zone I areas deserve special preservation because they contain or support unique, threatened or endangered natural or cultural features, or are among the best examples of the features that represent a natural region. Preservation is the key consideration. The seven caribou fence complexes within the park are identified as Zone I areas (for more information on the caribou fences, see section 5.1). Spot zoning will ensure that the caribou fences and associated structures are included in Zone I, while enabling aircraft landings nearby in Zone II areas. Aircraft landings will be controlled to ensure the protection of the cultural resources.

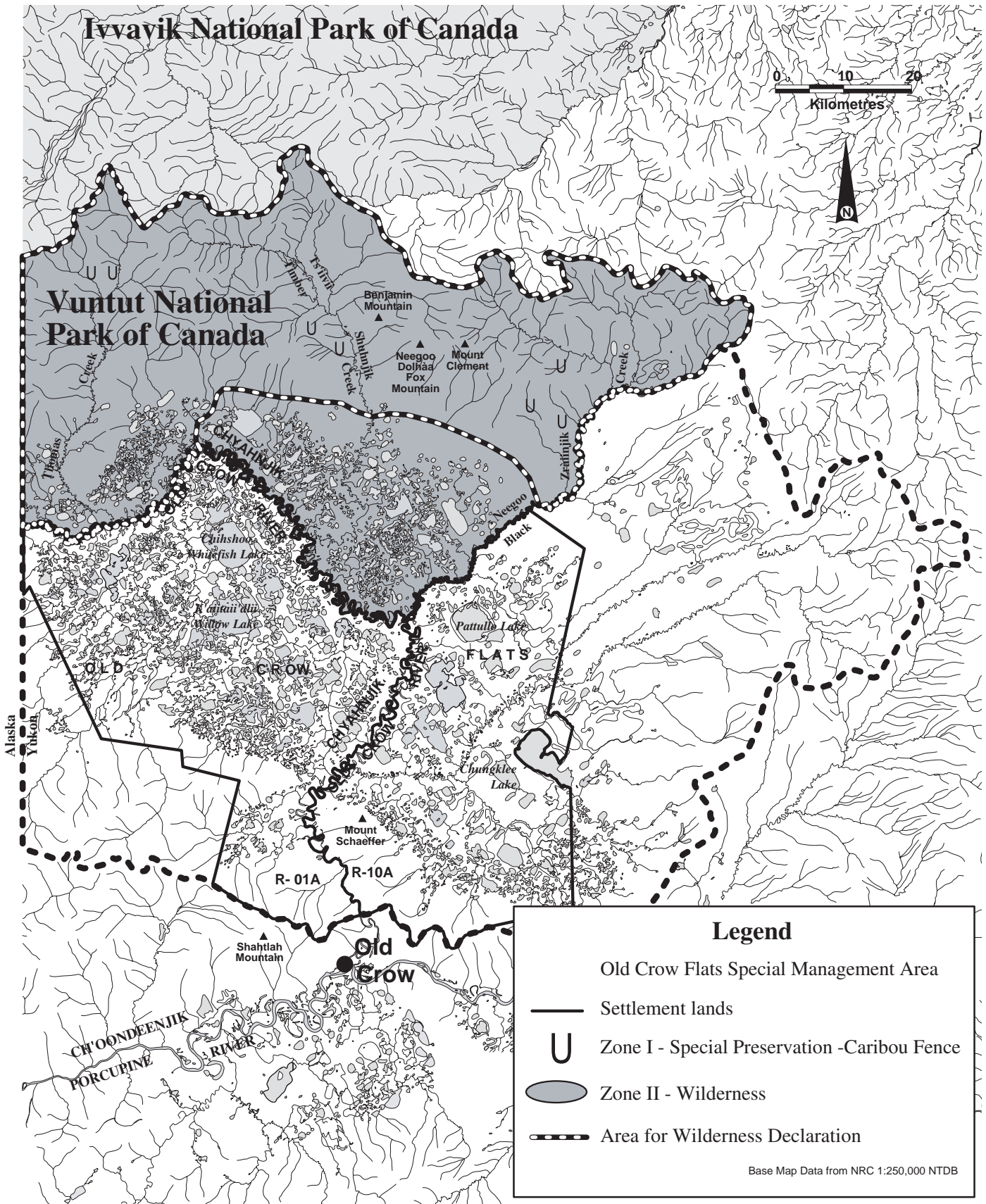
9.3 Zone II – Wilderness and Wilderness Area Declaration

Zone II

Zone II contains extensive areas that are good representations of a natural region and are conserved in a wilderness state. The perpetuation of ecosystems with minimal human interference is the key consideration. Zone II areas offer opportunities for visitors to experience first-hand the park's ecosystems and they require few, if any, services and facilities. Motorized access is not permitted except for strictly controlled air access in remote areas. This plan identifies the entire park, outside the Zone I areas, as Zone II.

During the winter months when the lakes in Old Crow Flats are frozen and waterfowl are absent, the southeast portion of the park (Zoning map) will be a temporal Zone III and guided commercial snowmobile trips and snowmobile-supported commercial dog sled trips (section 7.3.1) will be permitted. These are the only motorized activities that will be permitted and this portion of the park will not be declared wilderness (see below). During the next management plan review, the snowmobile activity and zoning will be reviewed and Zone III corridors or areas may be considered.

Map 3. Park Zoning.



Wilderness Declaration

The *Canada National Parks Act* provides for the designation, by regulation, of wilderness areas of the park. The intent of wilderness declaration is to assist in ensuring a high level of ecological integrity by preventing activities likely to impair wilderness character. Only those facilities and activities required for essential services and the protection of park resources will be permitted in declared wilderness areas. The major difference between park zoning and wilderness declaration is as follows:

- park zoning is a planning tool—with ecological integrity as its primary consideration; it determines areas and sets limits on what and where uses can occur in a park. It can be amended every five years through the management plan review process.
- wilderness declaration regulations are a legislative tool; they guarantee the public will have the highest degree of assurance that development and uses inconsistent with wilderness character will not occur. Consequently, they provide long-term natural-state protection for the park. Boundaries of a declared wilderness area can be changed only through the formal process of regulation amendment (which requires an Order in Council).

The area north of Old Crow Flats, approximately 75 per cent of the national park, is recommended for wilderness declaration. The Zone I areas surrounded by Zone II areas in this part of the park will be included in the wilderness declaration.

Key Action

1. Within one year of the tabling of the management plan, the area of the park north of Old Crow Flats (Map 3) will be declared wilderness.

Implementation Priorities



Joe Kyikavichik in skin boat, approaching dead caribou on the shore.

Yukon Archives. Father Mouchet Collection. Acc#97/51 #34

10.0 IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

The management plan provides long-term strategic direction for the management and operation of Vuntut National Park. The park superintendent, working cooperatively with the NYRRC and the Vuntut Gwitchin government, is responsible for implementing the plan. The Field Unit Business Plan, updated annually, is used to determine the implementation strategy for the management plan and allocates resources according to management plan priorities.

Annual fall meetings of the NYRRC, the Vuntut Gwitchin government and Parks Canada assist in the development of the Field Unit Business Plan. The ability to implement the plan's key actions is

partially dependent on resources being available. In addition, the successful implementation of many of the key actions will involve working with partners and stakeholders.

Progress will be determined through public annual reports on management plan implementation, annual reporting on business plan performance and through the biennial *State of Protected Heritage Areas Report* and the new five-year *State of the Park Report*.

The list below indicates the priority actions that will be initiated during the first two years of plan implementation. They are grouped according to the Parks Canada protocol in the Field Unit Business Plan.

Heritage Resource Protection

- Develop and participate in various ecological monitoring programs.
- Continue to contribute to the work of the International Porcupine Caribou Board and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board.
- Develop a Bear Management Plan for the park.
- Undertake a study of wolverines and other mustelids in the park and surrounding area.
- Help advance the national Species at Risk Program.
- Encourage the development of a Yukon Conservation Data Centre.
- Work cooperatively to implement relevant actions from regional plans, e.g., the North Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Plan, the regional muskox plan (pending).
- Participate in relevant regional planning processes.
- Contribute to opportunities for Elders and others to pass on traditional knowledge and skills.
- Complete the community-based Oral History Project.
- Record new archaeological sites and keep database up to date.
- Conduct work related to the caribou fences, including interviews, extant recording and community-based workshops on the values associated with the caribou fences.
- Implement an environmental management system for the park.
- Monitor park operations, visitor use and subsistence use (with NYRRC) and take action as required.
- Establish declared wilderness area through regulation for the northern part of the park.
- Modify the draft Law Enforcement Plan to meet the new national direction on law enforcement.
- Use the *State of Protected Heritage Areas Report* to report on the state of the park's ecological integrity.

Heritage Presentation

- With partners, undertake the development of a VRC/Park Operations Centre in Old Crow.
- Deliver community-based activities e.g., school edu-kit, public programs for local residents.
- Maintain an active park website, informing Canadians about the natural and cultural resources of the park.
- Distribute the results of park research via the internet and other tools.

Visitor Services

- Ensure that marketing efforts by the park and others provide accurate information and create the right visitor expectations.
- Work with others to support tourism efforts related to the park, e.g., fund training for guides.
- Pursue a regulation amendment to enable Vuntut Gwitchin licenced guides in Vuntut National Park to carry firearms when guiding in the park.
- Develop and maintain rescue capability consistent with the level of service identified in the Hazard Assessment/Public Safety Plan.

Management of Parks Canada (includes land claims)

- Work collaboratively with the NYRRC and Vuntut Gwitchin government in implementing the provisions of the VGFNEA related to Vuntut National Park.
- Prepare and present annual reports on the implementation of the management plan.

Summary of the Environmental Assessment



Arctic ground squirrel

11.0 SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

11.1 Overview

The Vuntut National Park of Canada management plan underwent strategic environmental assessment review in accordance with the Environmental Assessment Process for Policy and Program Proposals Cabinet directive. Screening was conducted early in the management planning process to ensure that the environmental effects of plan initiatives were considered before irrevocable decisions were made. This provided an opportunity to adjust the plan. Results of the assessment are discussed briefly below. Please consult the Strategic

Environmental Assessment of the Management Plan for detailed environmental assessment documentation.

This is the first management plan for Vuntut National Park of Canada. The plan is based largely on the Vuntut National Park Interim Management Guidelines approved in 2000. The key actions in the plan respond to stressors threatening park ecological integrity, the need to recognize First Nation rights defined in the *VGFNEA*, and the need to enhance visitor services and park operations. Many key actions are refinements of existing management approaches in use at Vuntut National Park. Few new activities or facilities are proposed. Some actions are expected to generate employment and economic benefits for local and regional businesses. Consistent with land claim provisions, socio-economic benefits are expected for the Vuntut Gwitchin.

11.2 Impact Analysis and Evaluation

Principles

The precautionary principle, adaptive management, and other conservation biology approaches were employed while developing the Ecological Integrity Statement (EIS) and key actions in the management plan. In order for activities or projects to be approved three evaluation criteria will guide park management decision-making. They must be compatible (sympathetic and complimentary with the wilderness nature of park and resource sensitivities); controllable (timing and frequency of use) and reversible (monitor effects and adjust as required to minimize impacts or eliminate facility or use if needed). In cases where little empirical data is available or there is uncertainty about predicting impact, decision-making will be cautious, giving ecological integrity precedence over socio-economic, visitor use or other considerations. The approach taken in the management plan is precautionary and expected to ensure the long-term ecological integrity of Vuntut National Park.

Stressors

Ecological monitoring goals and the EIS have been incorporated into the management plan. The EIS outlines the steps necessary to maintain ecological integrity and the means to monitor the status of ecological integrity in the park. Major stressors acting on park and regional ecosystems have been identified. Appropriate indicators of ecological integrity have been established and targets prescribed.

Ecological Integrity

Significant visitor facility development within Vuntut National Park is not proposed in the management plan. Designated trails and campsites will not be constructed. Wilderness facilities such as outhouses or bear poles will be established if necessary. The proposals in the management plan are not expected to result in any direct loss of habitat or significant loss of habitat function. No significant impacts to park ecological integrity are anticipated. The pristine wilderness character of the park will be maintained.

Light fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters are used in the park to support backcountry travel, park operations and research. Aircraft use can have a negative effect on wildlife and visitors' wilderness experience. Aircraft guidelines that restrict flight frequency, route, take-off and landing sites are in place to manage aircraft use within the park. Significantly increased aircraft use above present levels is not expected.

Park operations, visitor use and research may result in the introduction and establishment of non-

native plants within Vuntut National Park. Plant seeds may be transported and deposited by various means including aircraft landings, snowmobile travel, or contaminated clothing or equipment. The probability of significant non-native seed transmission into the park is limited by the very low levels of human use at the present time. And while the impacts of non-native species in temperate climates are significant and well documented, the remoteness and harsh climate characteristic of northern latitudes have restricted opportunities for exotic plant establishment in the past. As reported in the 1999 *State of the Yukon Report*, though, non-native weedy plant species may become a significant problem in the Yukon if warmer climate conditions continue.

No mammal species in Vuntut are listed as endangered or threatened by COSEWIC, but grizzly bear, wolverine, and polar bear are ranked as species of Special Concern. Anatum Peregrine Falcon is listed as threatened, Tundra Peregrine Falcon and Short-eared Owl as being of Special Concern. The Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan lists several species not recognized by COSEWIC; these include American Golden Plover, Whimbrel, several species of Sandpiper, Common Snipe and Red-necked Phalarope. Vuntut National Park will continue to participate in monitoring and management efforts directed at these species.

Recreational fishing is not allowed within Vuntut National Park. The management plan proposes research to investigate the likely impacts of fishing on the park's aquatic resources. This will help determine if a recreational fishery is feasible or desirable. The RD&A notes that Arctic Grayling populations subject to recreational fishing must be very prudently managed. Grayling is a popular sport fishing species that is easy to catch and has a low rate of growth; this makes it particularly vulnerable to over-exploitation.

Cultural Resources

Vuntut National Park contains no Classified Federal Heritage Buildings. Significant cultural resources such as caribou fences are found within Vuntut National Park. Actions proposed in the management plan are not expected to result in direct negative effects on these resources. An increased level of Vuntut Gwitchin participation in heritage and cultural resource management initiatives at the park is anticipated, and an enhanced working relationship between Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin is expected.

Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Activities

The *VGFNFA* records in detail specific harvesting and traditional use rights. These rights have been incorporated into the Vuntut National Park management plan. Traditional activities include berry-picking, fishing, hunting, fur-bearer trapping and spiritual sojourns. Expected results of management plan actions include the following: an increased role for the NYRRC and Vuntut Gwitchin government in management of the park; continued access to traditional territories and rights; an increased level of cooperative management; and positive social, and economic benefits to the Vuntut Gwitchin. Enhanced opportunities to undertake traditional activities are expected to increase the level of cultural continuity for the Vuntut Gwitchin.

Cabins, caches and other structures have been used by the Vuntut Gwitchin for generations while undertaking traditional activities. The primary use of these facilities will be traditional activities, although cabins can be used secondarily for guided tourist activities. Use for tourist accommodation is not permitted, but ancillary uses such as cooking, social gatherings or food storage are permitted.

The NYRRC provides strategic direction and advice to Parks Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin government on matters related to renewable resources associated with the park. Anecdotal evidence suggests the volume of resources currently consumed is low relative to present levels of

abundance. This level of harvest is likely sustainable and does not appear to have a negative impact on the ecological integrity of Vuntut National Park. Impacts from access to and use of harvest camp facilities are insignificant given the low level of use. The potential for conflict between First Nation harvesters and park visitors is minor given the very low number of recreational visitors. The impact of traditional harvesting will be assessed in greater detail to ensure the long-term viability of individual populations and to maintain the ecological integrity of the greater Vuntut ecosystem. Current trends appear to indicate reduced traditional hunting and trapping within Vuntut National Park since the Vuntut Gwitchin spend less time on these activities than in the past. The harvest register to be established by the Vuntut Gwitchin government should help to quantify changes in traditional harvest effort and success. This will assist the NYRRC in making recommendations for traditional harvest levels within the park.

Visitor Activities Management

Vuntut National Park is not accessible by road. The present number of visitors is extremely low, due partly to the cost and distance of getting to Vuntut National Park. The management plan prescribes key actions to manage modes of visitor access and to restrict access to culturally or ecologically sensitive sites. Recreational use of snowmobiles within Vuntut National Park is prohibited but the public may travel as drivers and/or passengers on snowmobiles to and from base camps within the southern quarter of the park when taking part in commercially guided snowmobile trips. The use of licenced guides is encouraged. All guides must undergo a business plan review and obtain a business licence prior to operating within Vuntut National Park. Acquisition of a business licence triggers the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA)*, which requires an environmental assessment of proposed guiding activities. Assessment results will be factored into decision-making related to business licences. Business licence terms and conditions can be used to assign measures for protecting the environment and visitor enjoyment. The management plan prescribes adequate visitor use controls to maintain ecological integrity and high-quality wilderness experiences.

Administration and Operations

Section 8.0 of the management plan (Administration and Operations) contains key actions focused on minimizing Parks Canada's operational impacts. Park operations will be monitored for impacts to ecological integrity. Park administration and visitor reception functions have minimal direct impacts on Vuntut National Park. The park administration office/staff housing is located in the community of Old Crow, 60 km south of the park. The proposed VRC and park operation centre will also be located there.

Key actions in the management plan commit Parks Canada to develop an Environmental Management System (EMS) Action Plan that addresses Parks Canada's priority environmental aspects. The intent is to minimize the environmental impacts of park operation and administration. The EMS will emphasize green procurement, hazardous material management, waste management, and air emissions.

Wilderness Area Declaration

Section 14 (1) of the *Canada National Parks Act (CNPA)* enables the Governor in Council to declare any area of a park that exists in a natural state or that is capable of returning to a natural state to be a wilderness area. Three quarters of Vuntut National Park is scheduled to be a declared wilderness area within one year of management plan approval. This will provide an enhanced level of protection to that portion of the park.

11.3 Cumulative Effects

Key actions proposed in the management plan are not expected to result in significant negative effects to the environment. Projects and activities expected to affect the environment can, in most instances, be mitigated with known technology. Wilderness declaration of a portion of Vuntut National Park, as well as the park's location adjacent to other large protected areas, provides a high level of protection against significant cumulative environmental effects being generated at the local scale. Although there is a high level of local control over the landscape within and around the park, Vuntut National Park remains vulnerable to cumulative environmental effects beyond its direct control. These include some of the key stressors identified in section 4.2, such as climate change and long-range transport of persistent chemicals. The impacts of these stressors should be factored into all future environmental assessments and project decisions.

11.4 Determination

Key actions proposed in the Vuntut National Park of Canada management plan are consistent with the policies of Parks Canada and the federal government. An EIS has been incorporated into the management plan, and identifies key stressors affecting Vuntut National Park. Numerous actions are proposed to address these threats. The EIS includes indicators, targets, and monitoring protocols that will be used to determine the state of ecological integrity in the park. Results will be reported on a regular basis in the *State of Protected Heritage Areas Report* and in annual reports detailing progress implementing the management plan.

Many of the key actions in the management plan propose a comprehensive, interagency approach to resource management issues. Use of a greater ecosystem management approach increases the probability for success. Enhanced levels of understanding, collaboration, and cooperation between neighboring agencies and individuals involved in land management activities are anticipated. Adequate public review occurred during the management planning process. Implementation of the Vuntut National Park of Canada management plan is not expected to cause significant negative environmental effects, and the present high levels of ecological integrity in the park are expected to persist. Socio-economic benefits to the Vuntut Gwitchin are anticipated.

Many proposals described in the management plan are concepts only at this point. It is not possible to fully evaluate their environmental effects at this time. As more detailed information becomes available, projects will be assessed pursuant to the provisions of the *CEAA*, the *Development Assessment Process/Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (DAP/YESAA)* or other successor legislation. The Parks Canada Agency is a Responsible Authority under the *CEAA*. The Agency will not undertake any project prior to preparing an environmental assessment and deciding on a course of action to approve, not approve, or refer the project for additional EA review.

Appendix – An Ecosystem Model for Vuntut National Park

This ecosystem model identifies some of the important living and non-living components of Vuntut National Park. It illustrates some of the important ecological relationships found in the park ecosystems.

Each box in the model represents an important level in the ecosystem. Examples of some plant communities and a few animals characteristic of that level are provided. It also illustrates relationships; for example, local weather can change the water level in lakes or the frequency of forest fires. Bears and wolves can change a caribou population but over time a caribou population can in turn affect bear and wolf populations. Those factors at the top, such as Climate, Local Weather, Water Regime and Abiotic Disturbances and Processes, can cause changes to all the levels found below them.

Many other relationships could be represented by this model. If different arrows connect boxes only indirectly, assume that there is still a relationship between them. For example, predators can cause changes to vegetation communities and decomposers can have an effect on population cycles.

Figure 1 - Park Ecosystem Model

