



Yoho National Park

The Engagement Process

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The first phase of engagement and consultation for scoping the Yoho National Park management plan included a range of opportunities designed to gather input from Indigenous communities, youth, local stakeholders and other Canadians. Stakeholder workshops were held in Field and Golden, British Columbia. In addition, community information events were held at the Kicking Horse Mountain Resort and the Golden Farmer's Market. An online platform called *Let's Talk Mountain Parks* was created with the other mountain parks, enabling interested Canadians to be part of the discussion. One university campus club was engaged using an online presentation and conference call. Newspaper advertisements, postcards and social media posts were used to create awareness of the engagement program. The first phase of engagement and consultation ran from January 30 to May 10, 2019.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

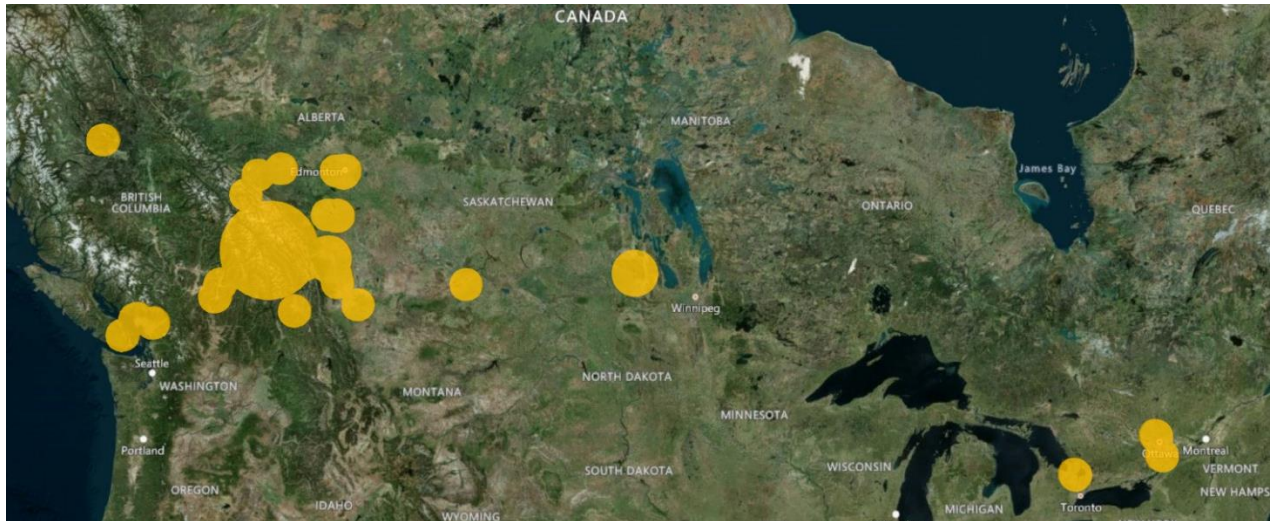
During the three-month engagement and consultation period, there were a total of 686 visits to the Yoho National Park online site. Of this total, 91 people filled out online surveys or posted ideas. An additional 325 people viewed website content and downloaded documents.

A total of 53 people attended in-person workshops. Stakeholders included municipal government, destination marketing organizations, environmental organizations, outdoor recreation interest groups, and local business operators. Parks Canada staff met



separately with representatives of several Indigenous communities and one interest group. Written submissions were received from four organizations.

MAP – Geographical distribution of website participants from Canada



What We Heard

WHAT WE HEARD FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Yoho National Park is located within the traditional territories of the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc First Nations. Discussions are ongoing with representatives of these Indigenous groups to ensure their perspectives are heard and included in the draft management plan.

Indigenous communities who have provided initial responses express a strong desire to feel at home in the park, and to contribute their knowledge and practices to the stewardship of the park.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The following section outlines some of the main themes that emerged during the engagement period, in the categories of park vision, key issues, and planning principles.

Park Vision

Workshop attendees and people who completed online surveys were asked to describe their vision of Yoho National Park at its future best. An analysis of the comments showed the most common theme identified by participants was a desire to see the park protected and its ecological integrity restored. The words *peaceful, intact, undeveloped,*



natural beauty, protected, and wild were frequently mentioned. Environmental stewardship, wilderness protection, and the restoration of healthy ecosystems and ecological processes where species at risk are restored and thriving, were all identified as important goals for the future. Protecting the reasons for the designation of the park as a World Heritage Site was also identified as an important goal. Many participants recognized that ecological protection is crucial to ensuring that the park remains a place for people to connect with nature and experience wilderness in uncrowded settings.

While the protection of healthy ecosystems was viewed as paramount, participants also expressed a strong desire to ensure that these natural landscapes remain accessible. Accessibility was discussed in a broad sense, encompassing elements of individual ability, demographics, socio-economic status, four-season opportunities, facility design, and availability of sustainable transportation options. This theme of accessibility was often discussed together with the need to carefully manage human use to ensure the health of park ecosystems and maintenance of built assets. The terms *balance* and *sustainable* were referenced repeatedly.

Many participants expressed the need to define appropriate human use levels as part of their vision for the park. These included consideration of visitor use quotas or other demand management tools in sensitive or congested areas, such as Emerald Lake and the Yoho Valley. A nuance of this theme was the idea that while the park should be accessible to everyone, it cannot be everything to everybody—there are appropriate activities and standards of behaviour rooted in stewardship of this natural landscape that visitors must respect. A related theme was the perceived lack of fairness of current systems used to allocate limited opportunities such as Lake O’Hara day use passes, or camping reservations throughout the park. Numerous participants suggested that there should be systems to ensure that Canadians have preferential access to these opportunities. Some felt that there should be variable pricing, where international visitors pay a higher fee to use the park.

Another common theme was education, and the opportunity that mountain parks provide for visitors to learn about nature. Many participants expressed a desire to see more educational programming to encourage positive behaviour from park visitors. There was also interest in increasing educational opportunities to highlight the unique natural features, Indigenous history, and cultural heritage of the park.

Key Issues

The first phase of engagement provided opportunities for Parks Canada to hear from interested Canadians about key issues that should be considered in the development of the next national park management plan. The main themes that emerged are discussed below.

Visitor Demand Management

Increasing visitation was identified as a concern by a large number of online respondents and workshop participants. When asked about barriers to connecting with



the park, 56% of online respondents cited overcrowding and accessibility challenges. More than a third of online respondents felt that increasing visitation is one of the most pressing issues affecting the ecological integrity of the park. Future efforts to address this challenge should consider the rapid rate of societal change that is occurring. Participants identified changing demographics, changing modes of travel, and evolving communication and other technologies as factors that may influence visitor patterns and behaviour in the coming decades.

Many participants were concerned about vehicle congestion on the Emerald Lake Road and the Yoho Valley Road (to Takakkaw Falls). It was suggested that restrictions on private vehicle use would be required to avoid exacerbating the crowding problem and shuttle services were identified as a possible solution. Participants were also concerned about safety on the Trans-Canada Highway due to increasing traffic volumes.

Increasing visitation was also a concern for the Town of Field as it may lead to increased demand for services, including local emergency services. Highway construction within and outside of the park may create access challenges for residents and visitors.

Suggested solutions to increasing visitor demand included spreading visitation over less busy seasons, introducing quotas or restricting visitation to specific high-use areas, implementing more reservation systems including lotteries, reducing private vehicle access to some locations, introducing shuttles and limiting development and expansion of commercial tour operations.

Resource Protection/Ecological Integrity

Many participants indicated that elements of the natural ecosystem are key features that make the park unique. When describing changes Parks Canada may encounter over the next ten years, participants cited declining native biodiversity, climate change, and increasing human pressure on natural ecosystems as key challenges. Protecting the ecological integrity of the park and restoring functioning habitat were frequently identified as areas requiring focused effort. A reduction in suitable habitat for wildlife and increased potential for human-wildlife conflict were cited as challenges related to increasing visitation. Participants identified managing increasing visitation as a key challenge related to the maintenance of ecological integrity.

External influences were also identified as challenges to be considered. Changing land use adjacent to the park, including increased logging and commercial tourism, was cited as an issue potentially affecting park wilderness. Increased backcountry use, especially backcountry day-use, was included as an issue affecting the mountain park's ecological integrity.



Visitor Facilities and Activities

The discussion of issues and park vision generated numerous comments about specific park facilities and activities. Several participants felt that facilities and trails need improvement and better maintenance. More than 20% of online respondents identified a lack of well-maintained facilities as a barrier to establishing a connection to the park. Others linked increasing visitation to a critical need for additional investment in well-designed infrastructure that supports visitation while mitigating environmental impacts.

Some participants expressed a desire for more visitor opportunities in the west end of the park. Suggestions included creating or re-establishing a regular camping offer on the west side and improving or re-establishing trails that are not well maintained. Some participants requested more mountain bike trails while others felt there should be no mountain biking permitted in the park.

Indigenous Reconciliation and Heritage

Many people recognized the importance of supporting Indigenous peoples in reconnecting with their traditional territories in the park. Participants shared a desire to have more Indigenous stories told within the park. Some participants recommended that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) should be a foundational element of park management.

Technological Changes and Impacts

Changing technology was identified as an issue that can provide both opportunities and challenges for Parks Canada. Types of changing technology identified include electric and self-driving cars, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones), E-bikes, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and various types of communications and electronic technologies. Social media was identified as both an important influence on visitor use patterns (“selfie culture”), and as a useful tool to connect with visitors. Parks Canada was encouraged to consider evolving technology when developing visitor activities and educational programming, and when encouraging appropriate park behaviour.

Climate Change

Understanding and adapting to the effects of climate change was identified as a key issue. Specific concerns included the increasing risk of wildfires resulting in more smoke, potential for flooding, changes in biodiversity and timing of animal migrations, effects on visitation patterns due to smoke and natural events and potential increases or changes in the types of insects and disease affecting park ecosystems.



Planning Principles

The scoping phase of engagement included discussions about the key principles that should inform the national park management plan and help guide future decision making. Key themes that emerged from these discussions are outlined below.

Transparency

Parks Canada should ensure that management decisions are open and accountable. Decisions should be based on open two-way communication with Indigenous communities, local residents, stakeholders, and other Canadians. Relevant information should be shared prior to any decisions.

Evidence-Based Decisions

Future management decisions should be rooted in scientific information and understanding. All relevant sources of information should be considered objectively. Continued application of this principle over time will support adaptive management.

Integrity and Leadership

Parks Canada should always demonstrate integrity and leadership in conservation when delivering its mandate. Park managers should adhere to the mandate, keep the end goal in mind, and “walk the talk” by taking action and implementing plans. There must be a recognition that sometimes Parks Canada will need to say “No” to meet the end goal.

Landscape-scale Management

Think big. Yoho National Park ecosystem management requires large-scale thinking that encompasses broad landscapes. The park should work with other parks, and across boundaries with neighbouring jurisdictions to tackle important ecological challenges and promote environmental stewardship. This requires long-term thinking and bold, creative action.

Ecological Sustainability

Future decision making should support the sustainability of Yoho National Park. Park managers must understand the consequences of their decisions, and whether or not their decision is reversible. When consequences are poorly understood due to incomplete information or lack of scientific certainty, then the precautionary principle should be used to ensure no loss of ecological integrity.

