

**ALBERTANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS**

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by:



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# I. Introduction & Summary Highlights

POLLARA is pleased to present Parks Canada with the following report of findings from virtual groups held with residents of Alberta who have visited either Banff or Jasper National Parks in the past two years. The overall research objectives of this research phase are to assess:

- Park-users' connectivity to Canada's national parks;
- Perceptions of who is responsible for the parks, and the role of governments, the public as a whole, and individuals; and,
- Users' understanding of and support for park initiatives.

## **Summary highlights:**

Most respondents expressed strong positive images of both Jasper and Banff national parks as a source of serenity and relaxation, almost in a spiritual sense. It was not perfectly clear that these emotions were specifically associated with one national Park. They are emotionally tied to the attributes of what a National park has to offer but not necessarily to one specific Park. In essence, the affinity to park characteristics such as scenery, relaxation etc. could be felt or experienced in other places as well.

While the two parks evoke emotional feelings for participants, these feelings do not strongly define who they personally are. They see their personal identity as being molded by many other factors such as their own urban community. However, the two national parks do form part of their Canadian identity.

Participants are quite concerned about the issues facing two national parks. The three top concerns were insufficient funding, poor maintenance and visitor overcrowding. When it came to ownership, the responsibility was primarily that of the Government or Parks Canada. The discussion eventually acknowledged that "everyone" was responsible. Very few were able to articulate that it was themselves per se.

The participants were both sympathetic and knowledgeable about the two conservation issues- one pertaining to many elk in urban areas and the other "prescribed burning". They understood the implications and consequences. In most instances they strongly felt that Parks Canada should take an active role in addressing the two issues.

Participants almost unequivocally support the management direction of Parks Canada and they also strongly felt that they would personally abide by the prescribed actions set forth by Parks Canada. The problem lies, as they perceive it, with other park visitors, especially with little or no enforcement. They were also apprehensive to personally intervene when there were any violations by others.

Do the results support the hypothesis that the amount of connection, understanding and responsibility all contribute to support park management actions and a willingness to perform actions congruent with what Parks Canada wants them to do? While only two focus groups were conducted, it would appear that the relationship is rather spurious or not truly causally related. There is some qualified degree of connection and identity to the two parks and there is certainly a very strong feeling of their own personal responsibility and as well a concomitant commitment to Park management principles.

However, the crux of the hypothesis is: "Does one cause another?" Do greater levels of connectivity, understanding and responsibility cause people to support the actions of Park management? It does not appear to be the case. Ironically, there is strong support for Parks Canada management's prescribed actions regardless of the level of connectivity. Perhaps it may be the participants' personal values or self screening among the potential participants. It was obvious that the participants were avid park proponents.

In conclusion, it was not clear that their degree of connectivity and responsibility to a National park instilled specific values and in turn caused greater support for Park management actions. No matter how derived, there is considerable support for their own national park responsibilities and that of Parks Canada actions.

**Introduction :** La société POLLARA est heureuse de présenter à Parcs Canada le présent rapport sur les résultats des groupes virtuels menés auprès des résidents de l'Alberta ayant visité les parcs nationaux de Banff ou de Jasper au cours des 2 dernières années. Les objectifs généraux de ce volet de l'étude visent à évaluer :

- L'attachement des usagers aux parcs nationaux du Canada;
- Les perceptions quant à l'identité des responsables des parcs, le rôle des gouvernements, le public en général et les individus; et
- La compréhension des usagers quant aux initiatives des parcs et l'appui qu'ils y accordent.

**Points saillants du sommaire :**

Pour la plupart des répondants, les parcs nationaux de Jasper et de Banff évoquent des images fortes et positives, sources de sérénité et de relaxation, presque dans un sens spirituel. Il n'était pas parfaitement clair si ces émotions étaient associées à un parc national en particulier. Sur le plan émotif, les répondants sont attachés aux attributs de ce qui est offert par un parc national, mais pas nécessairement à un parc en particulier. Essentiellement, l'attraction des caractéristiques des parcs comme le paysage, la relaxation peut également être ressentie ou vécue autre part.

Bien que les deux parcs soient évocateurs pour les participants, ces émotions ne contribuent pas fortement à définir leur identité personnelle. Les participants estiment que leur identité personnelle est influencée par de nombreux autres facteurs comme leur propre communauté urbaine. Cependant, les deux parcs nationaux font partie de leur identité canadienne.

Les participants sont passablement inquiets quant aux enjeux auxquels les parcs doivent faire face. Les trois inquiétudes principales sont le financement insuffisant, le mauvais entretien et la surabondance de visiteurs. Pour ce qui est de la propriété, ils imputent la responsabilité principalement au gouvernement ou à Parcs Canada. En bout de ligne, les participants à la discussion en sont arrivés à conclure que tout le monde est responsable. Très peu de participants étaient capables d'articuler qu'ils étaient eux-mêmes responsables.

Les participants étaient bien renseignés sur la conservation et sensibles aux deux enjeux – soit le nombre démesuré de cerfs dans les milieux urbains et le brûlage dirigé. Ils en comprenaient la portée et les conséquences. Dans la plupart des cas, ils croyaient fermement que Parcs Canada devrait jouer un rôle actif dans la gestion de ces deux enjeux.

Les participants appuient presque unanimement l'orientation de la gestion de Parcs Canada et croient fermement qu'ils respecteraient les actions que Parcs Canada mettrait en œuvre. Selon eux, le problème relève plutôt des autres visiteurs, surtout en raison de la faible présence voire l'absence de mesures de mise en exécution. En outre, ils hésitent à intervenir personnellement lorsqu'ils sont témoins de violations.

Les résultats appuient-ils l'hypothèse selon laquelle le niveau d'attachement, de compréhension et de responsabilité contribue à soutenir les actions de la direction des parcs et à un désir d'agir en accord avec ce que Parcs Canada attend des visiteurs? Bien que seulement deux groupes de discussion aient été menés, il semble que la relation est plutôt fautive et pas réellement causale. Il existe un niveau conditionnel d'attachement et d'identification aux deux parcs, un sentiment très fort quant à leur propre responsabilité de même qu'un engagement concomitant par rapport aux principes de gestion des parcs.

Cependant, le point crucial de l'hypothèse est : « l'un entraîne-t-il l'autre? ». Est-ce que des niveaux plus élevés d'attachement, de compréhension et de responsabilité incitent les gens à appuyer les actions de la direction du parc? Il semblerait que tel n'est pas le cas. Ironiquement, il existe un fort appui pour les actions prescrites par la direction de Parcs Canada, sans égard au niveau d'attachement. Il est possible que ce soit en raison des valeurs personnelles des participants ou de la sélection personnelle parmi les participants potentiels. Il est évident que les participants étaient d'avidés partisans des parcs.

En conclusion, il n'est pas évident que le niveau d'attachement et le sens de responsabilité par rapport à un parc national inculquent certaines valeurs et engendrent un soutien accru par rapport aux actions de la direction du parc. Mais peu importe la source, il existe un appui considérable en faveur de la responsabilité personnelle et des actions de Parcs Canada.

## II. Methodology

POLLARA conducted two (2) virtual focus groups with Albertans who have used Canada's National Parks. The first group took place on Tuesday March 14 at 12 noon (Mountain Time), and involved participants from Edmonton and Calgary. The second group took place on Wednesday March 15 at 12 noon (MT), and involved residents outside of Edmonton and Calgary such as Edson, Drumheller, Red Deer and Rocky Mountain House. Both groups lasted approximately one and a half hours. A slightly modified moderator's guide was used for the Vgroups (virtual focus groups) compared to the physical groups. (See Appendix A)

Participants were recruited randomly by calling residents in the target cities and towns. All participants were required to have visited either Banff and/or Jasper National Parks in the past two years. Groups also included a good mix of gender, age, and employment status as specified in the recruitment screener. (See Appendix B)

### **A Note on the Interpretation of Virtual Focus Group Research**

Given the small sample sizes and qualitative nature of virtual focus group research, the value of the findings detailed in this report lies in the depth of information provided by the respondents, rather than in the proportion of respondents holding each particular view. Only with a much larger random sample can the results be accurately be projected to the total population.

# III. Detailed Findings

## A. Emotional Connectivity

### **Both Jasper and Banff Popular with Participants**

Participants were asked to name their favorite national park and explain why they chose that park. Jasper and Banff were the dominant favorites among both Edmonton/Calgary residents and those living elsewhere in Alberta. Elk Island and Pacific Rim national parks were also mentioned.

Between Jasper and Banff, participants cited a variety of reasons for their preference. Many were drawn to Jasper for the preserved beauty. Several participants in both groups noted that Banff was more “touristy” and “crowded” than Jasper. Others, however, saw this as a drawing feature for Banff. When some have friends and family visit from out of town, they take them there, as it is internationally recognized.

One participant had difficulty even choosing a favorite park: “How do you pick one park you love? We love them all.”

### **Parents Appear Less Likely to Visit Parks as Kids Get Older; Those without Children Enjoy Parks Frequently**

Both groups included a good mix of participants with and without children. Those who do not have any children (both young and old) appear to use Canada’s national parks frequently. Meanwhile, parents’ use of the parks appears to be dependent on their age. As one participant explained, “Our kids are grown up, so we don’t take them anymore, but we are looking forward to taking our grandchildren.” Parents often linked their park experience to experiences with their children.

### **National Parks Instil Feelings of Relaxation, Peace, and Connection with Nature**

Being in either Jasper or Banff evoked very positive feelings from participants, and both parks elicited similar feelings from park-users. Those who mention Jasper cite feelings such as “at ease”, “close to nature”, “relaxed”, “peace”, “in awe”, “excitement”, “Canadian”, and “free from everyday stress”. Similarly, Banff lovers cite feelings such as “re-connected with nature”, “appreciative of what we have in this country”, “relaxed”, “happy”, “in awe”, “feeling of peace”, and “joy”.



Several participants agreed that the feelings that the park they're most drawn to would not be the same somewhere else. Some noted that Banff feels different because it has more traffic and noted that the town of Banff changes the experience of the park. As one participant explains, "Jasper has a feeling of quaintness that you lose during the tourist season in Banff". Meanwhile, another participant is drawn to Banff because of the higher volume of visitors, "Banff has its draws to the town sites...I like the galleries and so forth".

Others felt that Jasper and Banff elicit the same feelings, and that the choice between parks is often based on their proximity to their own home.

*"Banff is more central to most people than other parks."*

*"Being in Calgary, we go to Banff because of its proximity"*

The tourists at Banff do not deter all participants. One foresighted participant shared his strategy for enjoying the beauty of Banff without the crowds: "We enjoy going in the off season – in March or October. There are fewer crowds and better deals for lodging."

### **Parks Important, But Not Necessarily Part of Personal Identity**

Park-users strongly agreed that either Banff or Jasper National Park means a lot to them. Agreement ranged from a 6 to 10 on the 10-point scale (where 1 means strongly disagree and 10 means strongly agree. This pattern is apparent for all participants: men, women, young, old, and parents alike.

*"It's an opportunity to see wildlife that you don't normally see, like an elk going down the road."*

While these parks are perceived as important, participants were reluctant to link the parks to their own identity. Very few strongly supported the idea that "Visiting Banff/Jasper National Park says a lot about who I am" using the 10-point agreement scale. Responses ranged from as low as 3 to as high as 10. Agreement that "Banff/Jasper National Park is part of me" was equally modest, with a low of 4 and a high of 10.

*"The park itself doesn't define who I am...we have the same lifestyle inside and outside the park. I don't view myself as being part of the park."*

*"While I appreciate the park, I do not feel that it is a part of me or that I am that connected to it."*

*“I live in the city, and nature isn’t really a big part of living in the city.”*

While participants did not equate the parks with their personal identity, they did see parks as part of being Canadian. Several participants explained that the international recognition of the parks is very important and provides them with a sense of identity as Canadians and Albertans:

*“I think it is a part of our identity as Canadians.”*

*“The reason why it means a lot to me is because it represents Canada and me to the world. It shows how much we respect our natural possessions and shows this to the world.”*

*“Some of my best times growing up or my most memorable moments or the best times with my children now happened in a national park. It’s a part of me through the memories and the good times.”*

Although participants were reluctant to associate the parks with their personal identity, most were decisive about their pride for what Banff and Jasper offer. Agreement ranged from a low of 6 to a high of 10 on the 10-point agreement scale.

*“It lets people see how rugged and rough it is. That also pertains to we as Albertans to show what we’ve overcome to prosper and survive”*

*“I’m an advocate of the parks for other people who I meet”*

*“We are blessed to have these huge unspoiled areas”*

For the single participant who provided a lower rating (6 on the 10-point scale), he explained that his pride was lower because of his perceptions that national parks are not very accessible to lower income residents, compared to other types of parks: “I’m not sure that (National Parks) do a good job letting people know what is out for them, especially for low income residents.”

## **B. Responsibility**

### **Ideal National Park Full of Activities and Memories; Unspoiled Surroundings Main Attraction**

When asked to describe their ideal national park, participants' descriptions are similar to their perceptions of Banff or Jasper.

*“Completely natural, nothing changed by mankind”*

*“Sensitive to the environment, thoughtful design and meets users needs”*

*“Activities that have appeal for different ages and interests – interactive interpretive activities hosted by employees and volunteer groups”*

*“Hiking, backpacking, biking, canoeing, skiing”*

*“Able to hike/explore nature and take advantage of the peace and beauty”*

*“Natural settings, wildlife, solitude”*

*“Experiencing nature on all different levels”*

*“To me it is a place that everybody should enjoy”*

### **Insufficient Funding, Poor Maintenance, and Overcrowding Top Concerns**

When asked what concerns they have about existing national parks, insufficient funding, poor maintenance, and overcrowding emerged as top concerns. Other concerns brought forward include rising costs, more development, wildlife sustainability, and the pine beetle.

While both groups expressed similar concerns, participants from outside of Edmonton/Calgary appeared to be more concerned about overcrowding, tourists, increased development, and commercialization. To follow are some concerns mentioned by this group:

*“I don't want to see our parks being destroyed by over development”*

*“What affect tourists, pollution, etc. has on the park”*

*“Overcrowding with people most times”*

*“Stress on the environment and wildlife from large numbers of park visitors”*

*“We have to measure the impact of any development on the environment”*

Edmonton/Calgary residents’ concerns were more focused on the cost of sustaining the parks:

*“I feel that greater funds need to be put into the parks to maintain signage and facilities in general. Some of these are ageing and need to be replaced”*

*“Costs to citizens of Canada”*

*“Overcrowding, high cost to maintain”*

*“Making use of parks less expensive for citizens”*

*“Economic pressures may force more commercialization. Canadians (locals) may use them less either because they don’t have a deep enough appreciation for it or because they are becoming increasingly crowded with tourists who don’t want to miss out.”*

### **“Everybody” Should Be Responsible for Protecting Parks**

When asked who is responsible for protecting parks against their concerns, the Government/Parks Canada was the top-of-mind answer for most participants.

*“The National Government (is responsible for) primary care. Provincial governments that benefit should have some shared responsibility as well (i.e. Alberta could assist due to tourist benefits that accrue to province)”*

*“The government (unfortunately)”*

*“Parks Canada, with direction from the people of Canada”*

*“I feel that the government is ultimately responsible. I am concerned that private individuals involved in the parks may have ulterior economic motives”*

*“The Canadian Government needs to set standards and ensure they are maintained”*

*“The government needs to set standards to ensure that the parks are maintained”*

*“[Parks Canada] are the ones we have entrusted with these parks. They are the ones who are there day-in and day-out. They are the ones who would see the changes and what is happening”*

One park-user spoke up about the role of park rangers, highlighting how he feels “Natural parks are going towards a bureaucratic style rather than rangers, who live and breath what we like about the parks”. His belief is that rangers should have more responsibility than governments, since they are the authority that has the most connection to the parks.

After further deliberation, both groups acknowledge that while the Government is primarily responsible for determining the rules and enforcing them, “everybody” has some responsibility. By “everybody” the groups both acknowledge that they themselves are part of this group.

*“The people that use the parks [are responsible]: Not littering, not destroying things”*

*“We as Albertans have to not take things for granted”*

*“Everybody who visits the park should be responsible”*

*“Everybody should be helping out by their example”*

Although the groups felt a personal sense of responsibility for addressing concerns themselves, there was an acknowledged roll for Parks Canada.

*“Everybody is responsible, but it needs to be policed”.*

*“Everybody needs to be responsible, but there needs to be someone with primary responsibility”*

*“Responsibility is a national policy, but they have to do it in conjunction with the provinces and municipalities, especially when you have people living within the park – it’s not just a place to visit, it’s a home. We have to approach it on different levels. There has to be a national policy towards reserves and how to maintain them, but it has to be done in consultation with municipalities and the public.”*

## C. Understanding & Support

### Park-Users Understanding of Conservation Issues Facing National Parks

Participants were read statements about two conservation issues facing Jasper and Banff National Parks: Elk populations outnumbering wolves and forest fire management. After providing information and deliberating on the two issues, it became clear that most park users showed a degree of understanding for the two conservation issues.

In terms of the elk population issue, most participants were able to express the unhealthy conditions that may result. Some of the unhealthy conditions park-users identified include:

- Unhealthy animals not culled naturally from herds
- Overgrazing
- People intervening with natural selection
- Imbalance in nature
- Danger to the public on highways

Participants generally believe that it is important that Parks Canada should be more active in managing the elk population.

*“Something needs to be done...it can’t be pleasant for the people living in the towns and it is dangerous for the visitors. Whether it will work is another matter entirely”*

*“We have established the park’s boundaries and created these mythological lines that the animals have to follow. We have to intervene to control the elk population, since they won’t do it themselves”*

*“It is going to necessitate more control and intervention by the humans”*

*“It is an unnatural situation for the elk. Without intervention by people, we’re going to have a situation where the population gets out of control”*

*“With a higher concentration in smaller areas, there are also higher chances of diseases. With that happening, it could annihilate the herd entirely”*

*“You have to create the balance – even if it is artificial – because we have taken away some of the natural predators”*

While participants agreed that it is important for Park Canada to control the elk population, participants raised some concerns regarding the specific initiatives of placing dead carcasses.

*“If you return carcasses from the environment, it may take away from animals being predators”*

*“Once [a dead carcass] has been handled by humans, it may not be consumed by a predator”*

*“The idea of just dropping food for predators may have long term implications”*

In terms of prescribed burning, some of the unhealthy or unsafe conditions caused by fire prevention in parks identified by participants include:

- Re-growth cycle does not occur
- Park is not refreshed/renewed
- The tree/pine beetle population is not controlled
- Plant disease will spread
- An interference with nature

Participants were virtually unanimous that prescribed burning/controlled burns are appropriate tools for addressing the unsafe conditions caused by not letting natural fires burn.

*“It is part of the natural lifecycle of the park”*

*“Fire is one of the natural ways to prevent [tree beetles] from spreading”*

*“It should be a central policy for all parks, because fire is a natural phenomena”*

*“Stopping fires is artificial”*

*“I think we need to get aggressive with these issues, and that may mean selective logging”*

Participants were unanimous in saying that the positives of prescribed burning outweigh the negatives.

*“It’s a short term inconvenience to have to put up with the smoke and what not. Of course, it’s human nature and people will complain. But the fact is that give it a year and it will be forgotten.”*

*“The long-term benefits far outweigh the short-term inconvenience”*

*“[The forests] come back so fast. St. Helens has taught us that”*

*“Things seem to come back so quickly...I don’t think that it detracts from the scenery”*

*“When you see the charred wood... it reinforces that you don’t want to be the cause of any unnecessary fires. It is a good visual”*

*“The damage of natural fires would be considerably less”*

While participants agreed that prescribed burning is important, participants were clear that when it comes to fire management, human life and property trump nature.

*“The parts of the parks that are inhabited by humans or frequently traveled through it becomes difficult”*

*“Loss of human life is definitely a priority. If people are in danger, then precautions need to be taken. The same with property to the same extent”*

### **Park-Users Report Being Willing to Make a Difference**

Participants almost unanimously agreed that they would partake in the many activities that would help make a difference, including:

- Staying out of certain parts of the park at all times
- Staying out of certain parts of the park during special times
- Taking advantage of opportunities to learn
- Lowering driving speed across the park
- Participating in park volunteer programs



- Staying on established trails
- Observing wildlife from a distance
- Picking up litter
- Refraining from feeding the wildlife
- Finding alternative trails if there is a bear warning
- Keeping pets on a leash
- Taking time to voice my concerns

The majority of participants provided a rating of an 8 or higher on the 10-point agreement scale for all of the above issues.

*“I think that the group of people who have agreed to participate have an interest. The group who is here today are interested”*

*“I was told many, many years ago that when you are visiting a national park, it is like visiting a person’s home. That means that you respect the wishes of the people who reside there. You don’t make a mess. You leave it the way you found it”*

That said, there are a few respondents who admit that they do not agree with adhering to all the actions listed –

*“I don’t agree with having to keep a dog on the leash...it depends on the pet”*

*“I don’t put my dog on a leash”*

Respondent were doubtful that all park-users would follow rules due to various circumstances, including a lack of awareness/education, lack of enforcement, and the extra time required to follow some of the rules.

*“There are some who oppose it, but they need to deal with the consequences. You shouldn’t expect a lot of sympathy if something happens when you don’t follow the rules”*

*“You can make up all the rules and regulations you want, but you need to enforce them to be successful”*

*“Time and paperwork [may prevent people from adhering to the rules]”*

*“Some people just have a problem with authority”*

### **Some, but not All, Comfortable with Confronting Fellow Park-Users’ About Park Violations**

A few participants agreed that they would speak up to fellow park-users if they were not respecting the rules of a park.

*“I would tell them it’s for their own safety”*

*“I wouldn’t have any problem approaching someone and reminding them of the safety guidelines. I wouldn’t get in an argument, but I would remind them.*

*“I would have a qualm. Some people aren’t very nice, and would say ‘what’s the difference to you”*

*“Those who follow the rules are those who understand”*

*“It is just a matter of what your values are”*

*“You change their values through education“*

*“When you do as much as you can...and that’s not enough, you need to close down an area to preserve the area”*

*“Disrespectful people are disrespectful”*

*“We have spoken to people and asked them to do or not to do certain things and have only gotten lip”*

### **Education Important Element of Park Use & Enjoyment**

Park-users agree that education and learning plays an important role in addressing their concerns about national parks.

*“It is education...when you go camping or using the trails you see a lot of people who don’t have a clue about what proper behaviour is”*

*“I’d like the hikes to be more interactive and have questions answered....something informal and affordable. As far as interactive hikes, my son and all of us enjoy learning”*

*“Indoctrinate the youth of tomorrow”*

*“Lead by example”*

*“There is education, but there is also enforcement”*

*“When closing an area, make sure that people know why”*

*“Education allows people to know why rules are there”*

When asked about the target age group for educational tools in parks, parents agreed that educational initiatives should be both kid and adult friendly.

*“I think learning should be for everybody [adults and children]...aiming everything at children leaves out a huge segment of the population who are interested in learning in our later years”*

*“I don’t think my kids see it as a classroom...I think they enjoy learning about the bears and why you shouldn’t feed them”*

*“I want to teach my son how to be responsible”*

### **Participants Don’t Necessarily want to Feel Close or Connected to Park**

When asked how close they want to feel to their parks, participants did not appear to want to be any closer or more connected than they already are.

*“I don’t want to feel close to the park. I just want to feel assured it will be there for future generations”*

*“I don’t like that question...it isn’t about feeling close. I want to respect it and for others to respect it”*

*“It’s a feeling of responsibility – it is our parks, we want to feel that it is our parks, so we feel responsible for the parks”*

Although participants don’t want to feel close or connected to the parks, they do express feelings of responsibility while in the parks. This sense of responsibility appears to cause users to follow the rules of the park and encourage other users to do the same.

*“I feel a respect for the park as an entity”*

*“If you feel someone doing something then speak up”*

## **Park-Users Committed to Parks, but Not All Willing to Get Involved**

When asked if they would become involved in Canada's national parks or take part in deciding what conservation priorities should be, participants were reluctant to say they would step forward for these types of initiatives.

*"Opportunities have to be available on a regular basis, and that there are regular efforts to seek opinions from the public"*

*"When you ask consumers for opinions, decision makers need to evaluate critically. The decision makers have the greater knowledge and information"*

*"An hour per week is a big commitment"*

*"As long as it's not running the gift shop...that doesn't interest me"*

*"The only way you get people to volunteer and participate only works if they think that they are affecting change"*

*"There are experts who know a lot more than I do about the parks. I have no problem following those rules"*

# A. Moderator's Guide

**March 10, 2006**

**Introduction & Warm-up:  
10 minutes**

- Introduce self and function of a moderator;
- Name sponsor of study: **Parks Canada;**
- Explain today's topic: **visiting one of Canada's national parks;**
- Explain role/process of focus groups: round table discussion, not a Q&A period; all opinions are important; look for a variety of opinions; important to understand how you agree/disagree;
- Explain room set-up; taping, confidentiality, not reporting names, mirrored glass, government observers from Parks Canada;
- Participant introduction: **name, who lives in your house (probe for # and age of kids), and national parks visited.**

**Park Experiences  
10 minutes**

To begin, I am interested in learning a little more about your experience visiting national parks.

Probe, as a group:

How often do you typically visit Canada's national parks?

Do you visit the same park more than once or do you go to different parks?

When was the last time?

What park did you last visit?

Why that park?

How long did you stay?

Who did you go with?

What was the purpose of your visit?

What are other reasons you have visited national parks?

<b>Emotional Connectivity</b> <b>45 minutes</b>
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I would like you to complete an exercise to better understand how you felt about your experiences when visiting (*name of park*). Think of how you felt when visiting (*name of park*). What kind of emotions you felt. Based on that, on your individual exercise sheet (*Exercise #1*), complete the sentence: “Being in (*name of park*) makes me feel...” as many times as you can. I will give you a moment to complete the exercise. Any questions?

Before we talk about your experience of the park, I would like you to complete another exercise (*Exercise #2*). On your exercise sheet, there are a number of statements listed. I would like to know to what extent you personally agree or disagree with each of those statements, using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 10 means you strongly agree. I will give you a moment to do so.

**Probe, as a group after the exercise:**

- Prior to your visits, what did you expect from (name of park)?  
Why?
  - Probe for: experience, learning
- (Low priority) How would you describe your experience at (name of park)?
  - What did you like most about your experience?  
What would you consider your best memory of the park?
  - And what did you like least? What would be your biggest disappointment?
  - How did your experience compare to your expectations?
- (High priority) How did you feel when you visited (name of park)? What did you jot down on your exercise sheet (*Exercise #1*)?
  - What made you feel that way?
- Based on your experience, how do the national parks you have visited compare? What differentiates them?  
Where are they similar?
- (High priority) How engaged or connected to (name of park) do you feel?

- What kind of ratings did you give to statements listed under Exercise #2? Why do you feel that way?
- (Middle priority) How involved, if at all, have you remained with (name of park) since you last visited?
  - (If applicable) Why did you remain involved?
  - How has that changed over time?
- (Low priority) What kind of information, if any, have you looked for about national parks:
  - Prior to your visits?
  - During your visit?
  - Following your visits?
- (Low priority) Where did you get this information? Why there?
  - Where else is it available?
- (Low priority) Does opportunities exist outside of the park to learn more about national parks? If so, where/how so? Probe for: formal vs. informal ways to learn
  - How did you become aware of these initiatives?
  - Which ones have you taken part in? Why those? What were you looking for? What did you get out of them? How, if at all, has participating changed your perception of the park?

**Ideal National Park**  
**25 minutes**

Now that you have described the parks based on your experience, I am interested in knowing what you consider an ideal national park. Take a moment to describe your ideal national park on your individual exercise sheet (Exercise #3). Include your comments under one of the four boxes: 1) the type of things you would like to experience (that could include feelings felt when visiting the park); 2) the types of memories you want to bring back home; 3) the activities you would like to take part in while visiting or the type of park offerings, and 4) anything else that would define your ideal national park. I will give you a few minutes to complete this exercise.

Probe, as a group:

- Tell me about your ideal national park.
  - What would it include? Probe for: activities/offerings
  - What would it be like to visit? Probe for: experience
  - How would it make you feel to visit this ideal park?
- What's most important? Why?
- What information would you like to have available within the park? Probe for: education opportunities, interpretative panels/programs, education-related activities
- And what kind of learning experiences would appeal to you, if any? Probe for: preferred topics (culture, park nature, ecosystem health, sustainability); ways of learning about those topics (formal activities vs. informal).
- Which ones would be relevant to you as a park user? A Canadian? A parent?
- What do you want to get out of those activities/learning experiences?
  - What do you want to learn about the park? About nature in general?
- What role does learning play in a national park experience? Why?
  - What impact does it have on park visitors? Any one kind of visitor most likely to benefit from learning opportunities? Why?

(High priority) Probe, as a group:

- What concerns, if any, do you have for existing national parks? Why?
- Who is responsible for the management of Canada's national parks?
  - For each mention: What is their role?
- Whose role is it to protect Canada's national parks?
  - What about the role of Government?
  - The role of the public in general?
  - What about the role you personally play?



- And the role of users or visitors in general? How if at all does it differ based on frequency of visit? Where does the role of government end and yours begin?
- Who else should be responsible? Why?

<b>Conservation priorities</b>
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<b>30 minutes</b>
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Parks Canada undertakes a number of actions to ensure national parks' sustainability. I am interested in getting your opinion on two of the conservation issues faced Parks Canada as it relates to Canada's national parks. We will look at them one at a time.

**The Elk Issue:**

***(Banff and Jasper National Park)*** Elk populations far outnumber wolves in national parks. Although it is normal to have more preys than predators, the elk population has reached a level that is creating an unbalance in the ecosystem and is affecting other species' habitat. Many elk also appear to be using the town sites close to the parks as a safe refuge where predators, especially wolves, are unlikely to follow. A high concentration of elk i creates an unhealthy situation for many components of the ecosystem.

- What are some of the “unhealthy” conditions created by this situation?
  - ***Probe for:*** impact on: other wildlife (who have to compete with elk for food); predators' food source (wolves don't have food if elk are all in town); human health; human/animal interactions (if wolves and cougars and bears start coming into town to eat elk, and concern about aggressive elk);

With this in mind, Parks Canada foresees a need to address this issue in three distinct ways over the next few years. I am interested in knowing to what extent you agree or disagree with each of those initiatives by completing an individual exercise (***Exercise #4***). Indicate to what extent you consider each initiative important in resolving the Elk issue by circling the number of the scale (1 being not at all important and 4 being critically important) that best represents your opinion.

**Probe, as a group following the exercise:**

- Based on what you know, is there a need to be more active in managing the elk population within national parks?
- Should humans interfere in the current situation? Why/why not?
- What do you think of the three initiatives proposed by Parks Canada? **Ask for ratings**
  - What impact will this have on the national park? **Probe for:** negative vs. positive

**The Fire Issue:**

Another element of park management is fire. Fire has been an important process in shaping mountain national park ecosystems for several thousands of years. Many typical trees are adapted to frequent, low intensity fires and many park animals benefit from the lush plant growth after a fire. Over the past century, park wardens worked hard to prevent and put out fires in the park to protect people's safety, property, and views. However, this has resulted in some unhealthy and unsafe ecosystem conditions.

- What might be some of those unhealthy or unsafe conditions?
  - **Probe for:** more open forest habitat might impact wildlife (positive impact – by opening up the forest canopy, there is an increase in plant growth and diversity which increases wildlife population and diversity); potential for high intensity fires (due to fuel build up, wall to wall forests ready to burn) threatening human safety and ecosystem health (negative impact); proliferation of plant or tree diseases/harmful insects (insects and diseases are natural agents of renewal like fire but which cause problems with neighbouring parks).
- What, if anything, is Parks Canada currently doing to address those issues? **Probe for:** prescribed burning

On the same exercise sheet (**Exercise #4**) you will see a blank line underneath the title "The Fire Issue". Please jot down "prescribed burning" and rate to what extent you believe it is an appropriate tool to address some of the issues we just discussed.

**Probe, after the exercise:**

- To what extent do you consider prescribed burning a useful tool in managing the parks? Why/why not?
- In which parks should it apply?
- How do you feel about fire, smoke, and burned landscapes?
  - What long-term benefits do you associate with prescribed burning?
  - Are the short-term costs of prescribed burning worth the long-term benefits?  
(Costs include risk, smoke, decreased access, and aesthetics / benefits = rejuvenated forests and meadows, more food and habitat for certain wildlife species, more diversity of landscapes and wildlife)
- Where else should Parks Canada focus its attention when it comes to the conservation of national parks?

I would like you to complete one last exercise individually. On your exercise sheet (**Exercise #5**), you will see a list of statements and that same scale used in an earlier exercise (1-10 scale). Imagine for a moment that you could help make a difference. Think about what you or others like you could do to help with the sustainability of national parks for future generations. For each statement listed, circle the number on the scale that best represents the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. I will give you a few minutes. Any questions?

**Probe, as a group:**

- How much do you want to get involved in Canada's national parks? Why?
  - In what ways do you want to engage yourself? Why?
  - What role should consumers like you play in deciding what conservation priorities should be?
- (**High priority**) What kind of scores did you give to each statement?
  - Why did you score some areas lower than others?
  - What prevents you from committing to some of those rules?  
**Probe for:** competence, desire, opposition
- What kind of compromises are you willing to make in using national parks to ensure future generations can also enjoy the parks? Why those? Do you feel social pressure to adopt these behaviors?
- What kind of impact will users' compromises have on the parks' future? Will it make a difference?

- How close do you want to feel to your national parks?
  - What would make you feel closer or more connected? **Probe for:** education, information, hands-on participation/volunteering, decision-making on priorities, etc.
- Any other suggestions?

<b>Thanks &amp; Closure:</b>
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On behalf of Parks Canada, I would like to thank each of you for your input. Please see the assistant on your way out for a more tangible appreciation of your time.

# Individual Exercise Sheet

## Exercise #1

Being in **Banff** National Park makes me feel

\_\_\_\_\_.

Being in **Banff** National Park makes me feel

\_\_\_\_\_.

Being in **Banff** National Park makes me feel

\_\_\_\_\_.

Being in **Banff** National Park makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

## Individual Exercise Sheet    Exercise #2

**Strongly  
Disagree**

**Strongly  
Agree**

Banff National Park								
Banff National Park means a lot to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Visiting Banff National Park says a lot about who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I feel Banff National Park is a part of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I am proud of what Banff National Park offers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Jasper National Park								
Jasper National Park means a lot to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Visiting Jasper National Park says a lot about who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I feel Jasper National Park is a part of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I am proud of what Jasper National Park offers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Canada's National Parks in General								
Visiting Canada's national parks provides me with a special experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Canada's national parks are an important component of our Canadian identity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
National parks let me discover who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
National parks give all things in nature a place to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

exist.	
National parks ensure that delicate ecosystems are sustained.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

## Individual Exercise Sheet Exercise #3

<u>Experience while visiting</u>	<u>Memories</u>



<u>Activities/Offerings</u>	<u>Other</u>

# Individual Exercise Sheet

## Exercise #4

but

Not at all  
Critically  
not critical

Not very  
important  
important

Important  
important  
important

<b>The Elk Issue</b>			
Parks Canada's continued efforts to haze elk out of the town sites and disperse them throughout the national parks.	1	2	3
Parks Canada's efforts to remove some elk from the population (those who resist repeated efforts to keep them out of the town sites, for example) to keep their populations and impact on the rest of the ecosystem in check.	1	2	3
Parks Canada's efforts to place the carcasses of the culled elk in places (away from the town sites) where they may be returned to the ecosystem's nutrient cycle.	1	2	3
<b>The Fire Issue</b>			
	1	2	3



Picking up litter I may come across while traveling the park.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Refrain from feeding wildlife, directly or by intentionally leaving food out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Keeping pets on a leash at all time while in the park.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Finding another trail to hike, or alternative activity, if there is a Bear Warning in the area I want to visit.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Taking time to voice my concerns about the park by writing letters, completing surveys or participating to an on-line forum.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

# B. Participant Recruitment Screening Questionnaire

## Final Screener – Focus Groups

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel. (H): \_\_\_\_\_ ..... Tel.

(W): \_\_\_\_\_

Group      1      2      3      4      5      6

<b>VI. SPECIFICATIONS SUMMARY</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 groups, 3 locations</li> <li>• Groups 1, 3 &amp; 5 – Participants who have visited a National Park (within their province) 1–2 times in the past 2 years</li> <li>• Groups 2, 4 &amp; 6 – Participants who have visited a National Park (within their province) 3+ times in the past 2 years</li> <li>• Mix of age 19–64</li> <li>• Mix of gender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In each group 50% employed, max 3 homemaker, max 1 retired, max 1 unemployed, max 3 students</li> <li>• Not employed in marketing sector/PR/Media/Parks or related</li> <li>• Not been to focus group in last 6 months</li> <li>• Never been to 3 or more focus groups</li> <li>• Able to take part in written/visual exercises</li> <li>• Comfortable sharing opinion</li> </ul>

Intro ...

**Gender (By Observation):**

Female..... 1      Recruit Mix

Male..... 2

**To begin:**

1. Are you or anyone in your household currently employed in any of the following types of industries...?

Marketing/market research ..... 1

Public relations..... 2

Advertising ..... 3

Media (TV, Radio, Newspaper)..... 4

National Parks or related ..... 5

**~ IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, THANK AND TERMINATE ~**

2. Into which of the following age groups do you fall? Are you...?

- Less than 19 ..... 1 **Thank and terminate**
- 19-34 ..... 2
- 35-54 ..... 3 **Recruit Mix for each Group**
- 55-64 ..... 4
- 65+ ..... 5 **Thank and terminate**

**ASK ALBERTA ONLY:**

3. a) Have you visited Banff National Park in the past two years?

- Yes ..... 1
- No ..... 2

3. b) Have you visited Jasper National Park in the past two years?

- Yes ..... 1
- No ..... 2

**QUOTA for Q3 – If No to both a & b – Thank & Terminate**

- Recruit mix of those who have visited either Banff and/or Jasper
- Minimum of 6 participants in each group **must** have visited Banff

**ASK MONCTON ONLY:**

4. Have you visited Fundy National Park in the past two years?

- Yes ..... 1
- No ..... 2 **Thank and terminate**

5. In the last two years, how many times have you visited (*insert answer from Q3a & 3b Alberta or Q4 Moncton*)? **DO NOT READ**

- 1-2 times ..... 1 **Consider for GR 1, 3 or 5**
- 3 or more times ..... 2 **Consider for GR 2, 4 or 6**

6. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? Are you...?

- Employed full time ..... 1 **Minimum of 7 employed**
- .....

- Employed part-time..... 2
- Homemaker ..... 3
- Unemployed..... 4
- Student..... 5
- Retired..... 6

If employed, ask...

What is your current occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

**TERMINATE IF SENSITIVE OCCUPATIONS IN Q1**

■ .. REQUIRE MIX OF OCCUPATIONS –



■ ..What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Elementary..... 1 **THANK AND TERMINATE**
- Some High School .....2
- Completed High School .....3
- Some College .....4
- Mix**
- Completed College .....5
- Some University.....6
- Completed university .....7

} **Require**

7. Have you ever attended a focus group discussion for which you received a sum of money?

- Yes ..... 1 **Continue**
- No ..... 2 **Go To Invitation**

8. What was the subject of the group? \_\_\_\_\_

9. When was the last time you attended a focus group?  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. How many focus groups have you attended? \_\_\_\_\_

**IF THEY HAVE BEEN TO A GROUP IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS, THANK & TERMINATE,  
IF THEY HAVE BEEN TO 3 OR MORE GROUPS, THANK & TERMINATE,  
IF THEY HAVE ATTENDED ONE RELATED TO NATIONAL PARKS, THANK AND TERMINATE.**

**INVITATION**

I would like to invite you to participate in the discussion group we are holding at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_. As you may know, a focus group is a research tool, which uses an informal meeting to gather information on a particular subject matter, in this case National Parks in Canada.

The discussion will consist of 8 to 10 people and will be very informal. This group will last approximately 1 1/2 hours. You will receive \$50 as a thank you for your time. Would you be interested in attending? *If no, Thank and terminate*

The discussion in which you will be participating will be audio recorded. These measures are being undertaken for research purposes only. Would this be a problem for you? **(IF YES, THANK AND TERMINATE)**

Participants are sometimes asked to view a tape, read materials, or write out responses. Would it be possible for you to take part in these activities in English if they are part of the discussion? **(IF NO, THANK AND TERMINATE)**

Since participants in focus groups are asked to express their thoughts and opinions freely in an informal setting with others, we'd like to know how comfortable you are with such an exercise? Would you say you are...?

- Very comfortable ..... 1 **CONTINUE**
- Comfortable..... 3 **CONTINUE**
- Not very comfortable ..... 4 **THANK AND TERMINATE**
- Not at all comfortable ..... 5 **THANK AND TERMINATE**

As these are small groups and with even one person missing, the overall success of the group may be affected, I would ask that once you have decided to attend that you make every effort. In the event you are unable to attend, please call \_\_\_\_\_ (collect) at \_\_\_\_\_ as soon as possible in order that a replacement may be found.

**ATTENTION RECRUITERS**

- 1. Recruit **12-15** participants for each group
- 2. Ensure participant has a good speaking & written ability (If in doubt, DO NOT INVITE)
- 3. Do not put names on profile sheet unless you have a firm commitment.
- 4. Repeat the date, time and location before hanging up.
- 5. Verify key information when confirming.
  - 1. Confirm at the **beginning of the day** prior to the day of the groups
  - 2. Confirm all key qualifying questions



