



WHAT WE HEARD (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY):

# LAKE LOUISE AREA VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT

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PHASE 1: VALIDATING DESIRED CONDITIONS

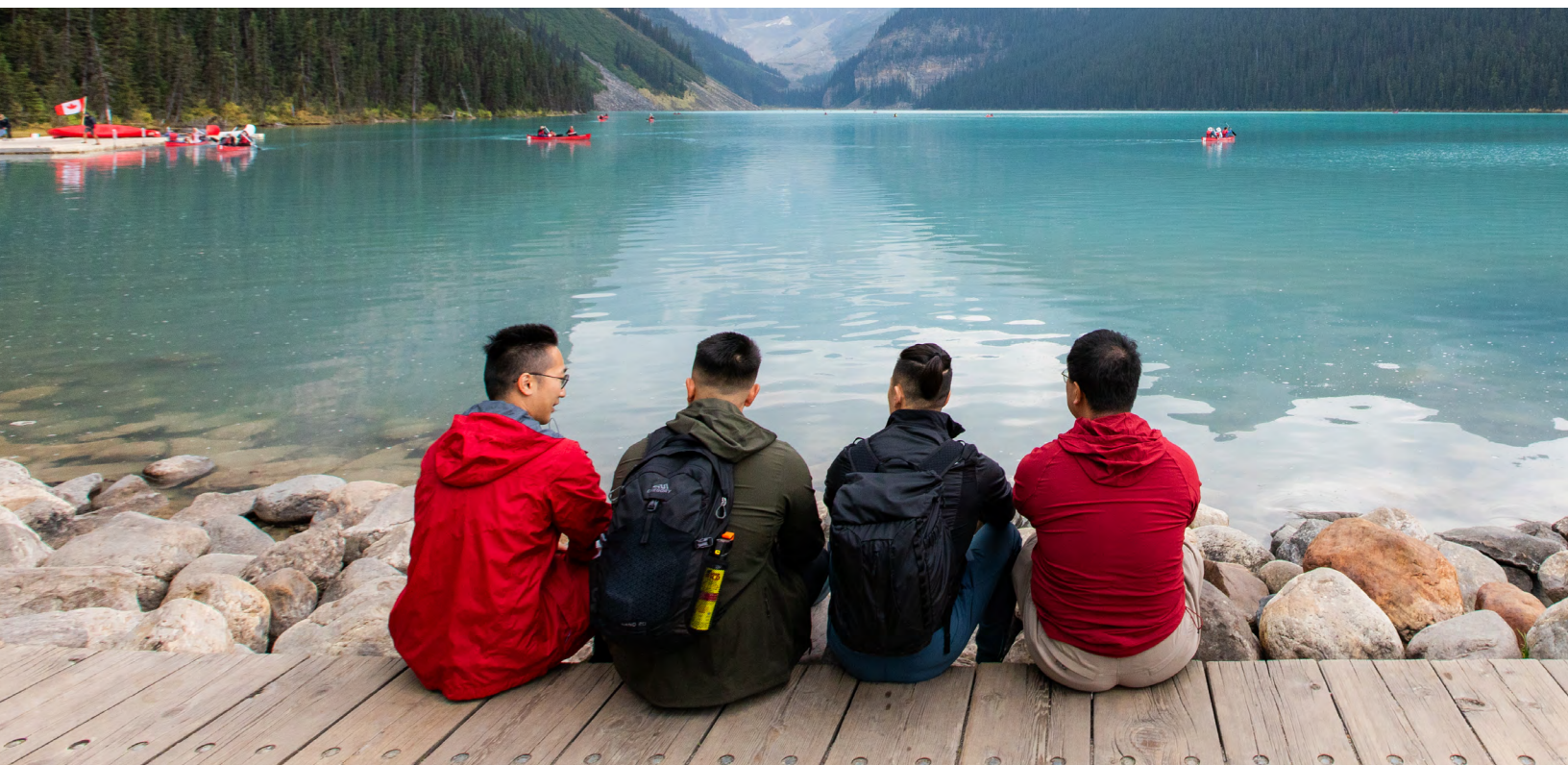
# CONTEXT

In spring 2023, Parks Canada engaged with staff and local stakeholders to create draft desired conditions for key visitor nodes in the Lake Louise area. In total, **34 draft desired conditions** (also referred to as “goals” throughout this document) were created across four categories: visitor experience (15); facilities & operations (5); natural & cultural resources (11); staff & visitor safety (3).

From June 17 to July 28, 2024, Parks Canada asked the public for feedback on the draft desired conditions on the **[‘Let’s Talk Mountain Parks’](#)** website. The survey included a combination of both rating system (0-5) and open-ended questions. No multiple-choice questions were asked. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Responses were optional for all questions.

## QUESTIONS WERE DESIGNED TO:

- provide details about experiences respondents felt were important and what barriers they faced when visiting and enjoying the Lake Louise area,
  - measure levels of support for the draft desired conditions rated from 0 to 5, where 5 was highly supportive (respondents were presented each set of draft conditions by category),
  - explain their reasons for their indicated level of support, and
  - solicit suggestions from respondents for how access and experience for visitors can be improved, while maintaining safe spaces for wildlife and people.
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# WHO WE HEARD FROM

1,016 people responded on the draft desired conditions through the online survey with an additional 19 submissions by email. 79% of survey respondents were from Alberta including Lake

Louise, Banff, Canmore and Exshaw. 18% of respondents were from elsewhere in Canada and 2% reside in another country.

## WHAT WE HEARD

### WHICH EXPERIENCES MATTER MOST?

Respondents shared a wide variety of experiences that are important to them when visiting the Lake Louise area. The most frequently mentioned activities are listed below. Other important experiences were mentioned but received less than 5% from total respondents, (n=1,016).

- Trail-related experiences such as hiking and walking (63%)
- Scenery and enjoyment of nature (28%)
- Visiting lakes and rivers, and enjoyment of watersports (20%)

- Mountain climbing/mountaineering (8%)
- Skiing/downhill skiing/snowboarding (6%)
- Cross-country skiing (5%)
- Wildlife viewing (5%)

Many respondents also expressed support for managing the area to sustainably support outdoor activities even if they did not directly participate in those activities. Participants also identified the Lake Louise area as a significant place for Indigenous Peoples, and important to Canadian identities.

### WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND ENJOYMENT?

We asked, “What prevents you from visiting and enjoying the Lake Louise area.” Many respondents (62%) mentioned overcrowding as a barrier to visiting and enjoying the area. This was followed by a lack of available parking (28%) and challenges with the Parks Canada shuttle service, including the volume of visitors it facilitates.

Some respondents offered suggestions for shuttle improvements including expanded hours, frequency, or volume of shuttle service, as well as the desire for a better variety of shuttle

routes (e.g. shuttles going to different locations or making more frequent stops). Others disliked the service altogether, inferring that the shuttle service was contributing to the overcrowding.

Other barriers mentioned include the overall cost of the area in general, the loss of spontaneity when visiting and poor or disrespectful visitor behaviours. Only 2% reported no barriers to accessing or enjoying the Lake Louise area.

## WAS THERE SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED DESIRED CONDITIONS?

Overall, support for the draft desired conditions was reasonably high at 62-75%. Reasons for support varied but were often driven by the opinion that these goals are generally important and may help improve current park conditions or issues.

Detractors of the desired conditions often indicated a dislike for shuttles and had strong preferences for parking and personal vehicle use. Others were dissatisfied with current park conditions and told us the desired conditions did not reflect current realities. This may come from a lack of clarity that the support scale was about desired future conditions and not current conditions. Lower levels of support also tended to relate to how these desired conditions would be achieved (e.g. strategies, actions, implementation).

When asked follow-up questions, respondents often suggested strategies and actions to achieve the desired conditions and/or asked how Parks Canada plans to achieve the desired conditions. Strategies and actions will be engaged on in phase 2.

Very few participants, even those unsupportive of these goals, told us that the desired conditions are unnecessary. Responses were passionate, strongly opinionated, and had varying degrees of nuance. Most people who responded, whether Canadian or not, have an impactful story or personal experience that makes them feel connected to the Lake Louise area

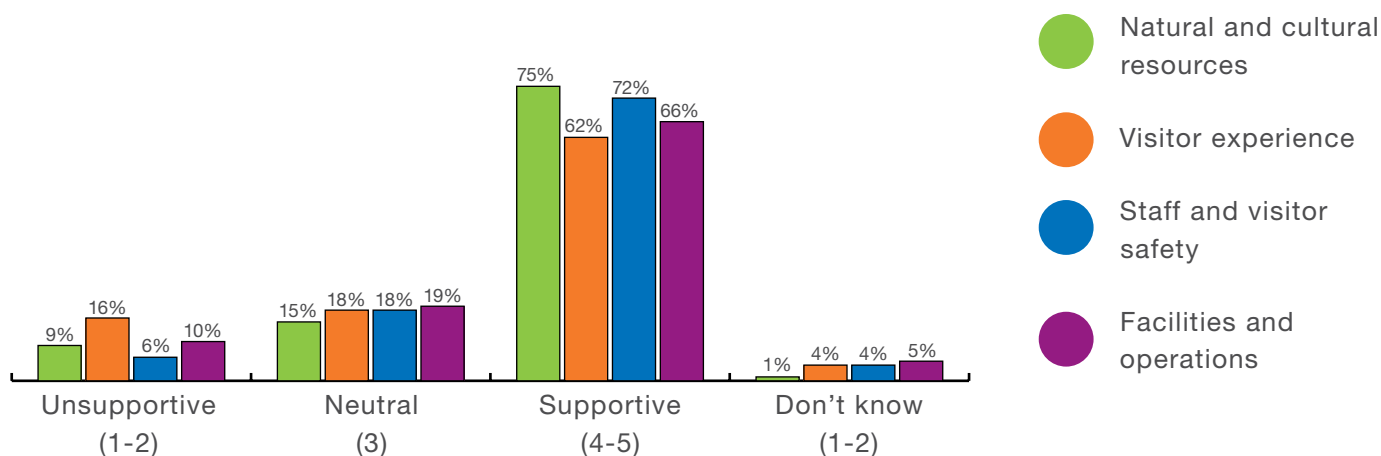


Figure 1: Summary of support for each of the four desired conditions categories.

## NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES: 75% SUPPORT

Respondents, regardless of level of support for these desired conditions, frequently told us that the preservation of natural and cultural resources is of high importance. 40% of supporters mentioned that Parks Canada needs to do more to manage natural areas, and that

these goals support that priority. Those who were neutral or unsupportive emphasized these desired conditions would be hard to achieve without changing current levels of visitation. 2% of respondents mentioned that the desired conditions restrict visitor access too severely.

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## VISITOR EXPERIENCE: 62% SUPPORT

Supporters of these desired conditions told us the area is overcrowded and expressed hope that the goals would support reductions in crowds and a move towards mass/public transportation as the main mode of transportation in the area. Those who were unsupportive or neutral also

mentioned overcrowding as an issue and feel the goals will be hard to meet without reducing visitation. They were often either skeptical about the desired conditions addressing that issue or misunderstood that these are desired conditions and not a measure of current conditions.

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## STAFF AND VISITOR SAFETY: 72% SUPPORT

Those who were unsupportive told us that overcrowding would make the desired conditions unachievable. In contrast, supporters mentioned that the area is currently too overcrowded, and thus, supported these desired conditions. Those who were unsupportive or neutral tended to

express support for prioritising the protection of wildlife over human safety. Across all levels of support, a desire for greater public education and enforcement of park rules was requested to effectively reach these goals.

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## FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS: 66% SUPPORT

Many supportive respondents did not state a reason for their support. Those who did, most often stated simply that these desired conditions would be an improvement compared to current conditions. Similar to previous categories, unsupportive respondents mentioned the area is overcrowded, and these goals do not address

the need to reduce visitation and/or crowds. Respondents wanted to know whether Parks Canada would reduce infrastructure to keep the area as natural as possible or build more of it to accommodate increasing visitation.

# WHAT COULD PARKS CANADA DO DIFFERENTLY?

We asked, “What could Parks Canada do differently to improve access for all visitors to the Lake Louise area including Moraine Lake, while maintaining safety for wildlife and people?”

Respondents reiterated that there is a need to limit or reduce the number of daily visitors to the Lake Louise and Moraine Lake area. Others also stressed that there are changes that could be made to improve overall access or improve shuttle services. Many also suggested limitations to personal vehicle access – a theme that conflicted with advocates of personal vehicle use in prior sections. Some proposed actions or strategies to achieve the desired conditions.

## MOVING FORWARD...

The visitor use management planning process is well underway for the Lake Louise area. Updated desired conditions will be shared during the next phase of engagement, anticipated in spring 2025. That phase of engagement will focus on potential strategies and actions that could be implemented over the next 5 years to close any gaps between current and desired conditions. The list of potential actions will be assessed for feasibility, viability and desirability. Additional in-person engagement sessions took place with

stakeholders and First Nations with ties to the Lake Louise area. The results from these sessions are not presented in this report. Parks Canada will continue to engage with Indigenous partners throughout this process.

Visitor use management planning must align with the direction of the Banff National Park Management Plan, the Lake Louise Area Plan and the Canada National Parks Act, which are the primary accountability tools for Parks Canada. It will consider alignment with the Moving People Sustainably Framework currently in development. The visitor use management process is iterative and adaptive. The final Lake Louise Area Visitor Use Management Plan will also include monitoring and evaluation plans.

Parks Canada thanks the more than 1,000+ Canadians who took the time to participate and we look forward to continued participation and feedback in the next round of engagement. Please see [letstalkmountainparks.ca/lakelouisevum](http://letstalkmountainparks.ca/lakelouisevum) for project updates.

