

2017

Gitwagak Battle Hill
National Historic Site of Canada

Management Statement

DRAFT

Introduction

The Parks Canada Agency manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic areas in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. This management statement outlines Parks Canada's management approach and objectives for Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site for the next 10 years.

Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site was designated a national historic site in 1971 to commemorate the significance of the eighteenth century Gitwangak hill top fort, and for the site's association with Gitwangak *adaawa* (history) which recalls the epic battles of the legendary warrior Chief Nekt who fought to gain control of the network of lucrative trading trails from the Nass to the Kitimat Rivers. According to Gitwangak *adaawaḱ*, the defensive fortifications were constructed by Chief Nekt. The battle hill fortification contained five cedar-planked longhouses, constructed on the summit of a hill and enclosed by a palisade. Archaeological research suggests that the site was occupied for at least a century when, around 1835, it was burned and abandoned.

In 1981 the National Historic Site designation was expanded to recognize the national historic significance of the Gitwangak *Xwtsaan* (totem poles) located about five kilometres south, in the First Nations community of Gitwangak, British Columbia. The poles are owned by the Gitwangak Band Council.

Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site is located in Kitwanga, British Columbia adjacent to *Xdi Dax* (Kitwanga River), about five kilometres north of Gitwangak. It is a self-interpreted site, including a trail and tri-lingual interpretive panels that were developed with members of the Gitwangak First Nation and representatives of the Nekt family.

Originally, the site was recommended to the Minister for designation as "Fort Kitwanga" by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. In 2006, the site was officially renamed "Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site" at the request of the Gitwangak Band Council, the main point of contact for the first nation at that time.

This current management statement has been developed with input and support from an advisory committee comprised of members of the Simgiget'm Gitwangak Society (hereditary leaders). The Simgiget'm Gitwangak Society was established in 2015 and is responsible for management of all lands, waters and resources within Gitwangak traditional territory outside the boundaries of the Gitwangak Reserve.

During the development of this management statement, the advisory committee requested the official name "Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site" be revised to "Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site". The change reflects the substitution of the Gitxsan word (*ta'awdzep*) for the English version (battle hill). While the process for renaming a national historic site is outside the authority of Parks Canada and this management statement, "Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site" will be used through the remainder of this document to reflect the intent for this process to be undertaken.

Management Objectives

The following section outlines the strategic direction for the management of Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site over the next 10 years. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of this management statement, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful.

Parks Canada will meet annually with the Simgiget'm Gitwangak Society to seek input on work plans that will achieve the objectives of this management statement.

Building Relationships with the Gitwangak First Nation: Parks Canada respects Indigenous rights and building mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities is a priority for the Agency.

For the Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site, Parks Canada works with the Gitwangak First Nation to incorporate traditional knowledge, values and cultural heritage, and to ensure:

- The site is suitably protected.
- The reasons for the national significance of the Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site and the site's role in Canadian history are effectively communicated to the public.
- The site's heritage values are respected by all whose decisions or actions affect the site.
- The Gitwangak First Nation's *adaawak* associated with the national historic site is accurately and respectfully commemorated.

Parks Canada offers technical advice to the Gitwangak First Nation on the protection and presentation of the Gitwangak *Xwtsaan* (totem poles) located in Gitwangak.

Maintaining Relationships with Local Partners: Parks Canada works with the Simgiget'm Gitwangak Society, Gitwangak Band Council and Kitwanga community association in the maintenance, presentation, and promotion of the site.

Cultural Resource Conservation: Parks Canada protects cultural resources at its heritage places in accordance with its *Cultural Resource Management Policy* (2013) and the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (2010). This includes basic monitoring of the state of cultural resources, and documentation of interventions at the national historic site. At Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site, management efforts also ensure:

- The open character of the historical landscape surrounding Ta'awdzep as well as the viewscape to and from the summit of Ta'awdzep is maintained.
- The natural and cultural resources of the designated place are not lost, impaired or threatened by human actions within or outside the site.
- All decisions concerning the protection and maintenance of the designated place are made in accordance with the principles of cultural resource management including:
 - understanding heritage value
 - sustainable conservation
 - benefits to Canadians

Site Maintenance: Parks Canada maintains the property it administers so as to respect the site's heritage values and present a positive image to the public. Parks Canada provides annual site maintenance with a focus on visitor facilities and safety. Parks Canada works with the Simgiget'm Gitwangak Society and local residents to ensure the site and its facilities are safe, clean and welcoming during the visitor season.

Public Appreciation and Promotion: Parks Canada provides information about the significance of Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site on its website, and on the Canadian Register of Historic Places. In addition, Parks Canada offers a visitor brochure to complement tri-lingual interpretive panels located throughout the site, describing the traditional *adaawak* associated with the site.

Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on ecosystems and on cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* (2010) prepared by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, requires a strategic environmental assessment of all plans and policy submitted to the federal Cabinet or to a Minister for approval deemed to have important positive or negative environmental effects.

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was undertaken on this management statement, and the management direction found within has been adjusted to respond to findings. The following is a summary of the environmental assessment:

SEA methods were used to evaluate the environmental effects likely to arise from implementing the October 2016 draft management statement for Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site. The management statement outlines Parks Canada's management approach and objectives for the site which support fulfilment of the Parks Canada Agency's mandate. The results of the SEA are briefly summarised here.

Objectives in the management statement focus on building relationships with the Gitwangak First Nation whose history and culture is central to the site; maintaining relationships with local partners; protecting the cultural resources and heritage places at the site; maintaining the site amenities and facilities; and promoting the site so the public better understands and appreciates the traditional stories and history associated with the site. Implementation of actions to fulfil the objectives in the management statement are expected to increase the level of cultural resource protection and commemorative integrity at Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada. There are no important negative environmental effects anticipated from management statement implementation. All objectives proposed in the October 2016 draft management statement for Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site are consistent with Parks Canada policy, and the Kitwanga Fort National Historic Site Commemorative Integrity Statement (2000).

Individual projects undertaken to implement management statement objectives at the site will be evaluated to determine if an impact assessment is required under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act 2012* (CEAA 2012), or successor legislation. In instances where an impact assessment is required, no project work will be undertaken until the impact assessment is completed and Parks Canada has made a decision to proceed with the project. A more detailed SEA was undertaken for the 2005 Kitwanga Fort National Historic Site (now known as Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site) Management Plan. The SEA identified environmental effects sources as well as suggested means to mitigate these effects. That document should be consulted prior to undertaking vegetation management activities that may result in expansion of invasive weed species populations at the site.