

# Maligne Valley Action Plan

September 2016





## Introduction

In 2013, Parks Canada announced its intention at the Jasper National Park Annual Public Forum to develop an implementation strategy or action plan for the Maligne Valley. At the time, Parks Canada was anticipating the need to make decisions about a potential redevelopment proposal from Maligne Tours and caribou conservation measures in the valley. There was interest in developing an integrated area plan that would advance the vision for the valley set out in the *Jasper National Park Management Plan* (2010). Through the planning process, Parks Canada would review the challenges and opportunities identified in the park management plan, analyze existing information about natural and cultural resources, and visitor experience, and develop detailed actions for all aspects of the Agency's mandate. Parks Canada viewed public and Indigenous involvement as an essential component of this planning exercise.

Since Mary Schäffer first described Maligne Lake in *Old Indian Trails of the Canadian Rockies* in 1911, the Maligne Valley has been a must-see destination for millions of visitors to Jasper National Park and to the mountain national parks. Defined by the jagged peaks of the front ranges, spectacular Medicine and Maligne lakes, and an underground karst system, the valley is home to several rare or sensitive species, most notably woodland caribou and harlequin ducks, and that icon of the Canadian Rockies, the grizzly bear. Trails and facilities developed over the past century support a wide range of summer and winter activities. The valley is an important part of the product offered by many commercial operators in Jasper and the mountain national parks.

The result is the *Maligne Valley Action Plan*, which articulates concrete and detailed actions that will guide Parks Canada's work in the valley over the next 5 to 10 years. It builds on and reconfirms the direction in the park management plan concerning this iconic destination.

## Public and Indigenous Involvement

Two phases of public and Indigenous dialogue about opportunities, challenges and potential solutions to improve ecological integrity, visitor experience, and public understanding and appreciation, contributed to the development of the *Maligne Valley Action Plan*. Summaries of the comments from both engagement phases are available on-line at: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/jasper/plan/maligne.aspx>.



The first step in the planning process was to document the current situation in the valley in a situation analysis. Information was gathered and analyzed for valued components identified in the park management plan, such as caribou, bears, visitors, cultural resources, and environmental stewardship. In November 2013, Parks Canada released the *Maligne Valley Situation Analysis* for public and Indigenous review. There was broad agreement with the findings of the *Situation Analysis* and significant interest in the next steps of the planning process.

The release of Environment Canada's *Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada* in June 2014, and with it, the legal obligation to implement critical habitat protection measures, was a milestone that would have significant implications for the Maligne Valley planning process. The release of *Recovery Strategy* prompted Parks Canada to re-evaluate the actions under consideration for the Maligne Valley to reduce predator access to caribou habitat, and to set aside further discussions about this aspect of caribou conservation, until the evaluation was complete.

In July 2014, Parks Canada publically announced its decision about Maligne Tours' conceptual proposal for redevelopment at Maligne Lake. Although the Maligne Valley planning process was still underway, the information presented in the *Situation Analysis* and the public and Indigenous dialogue influenced decision-making about the conceptual proposal.

In October 2014, Parks Canada released a discussion paper on the Maligne Valley that contained proposed actions to address the opportunities and challenges identified in the first phase of the planning process. Parks Canada received comments on the contents of the *Maligne Valley Implementation Strategy Discussion Paper* that reconfirmed park management plan direction and provided Parks Canada with priorities for changes and improvements to valley facilities, and for conservation or restoration of ecological values. This document—the *Maligne Valley Action Plan*—pulls together these priority actions for implementation.

In December 2014, Parks Canada implemented protection measures for critical caribou habitat in the Maligne Valley, consistent with legal requirements under the *Species at Risk Act*.



## Implementation of the Action Plan

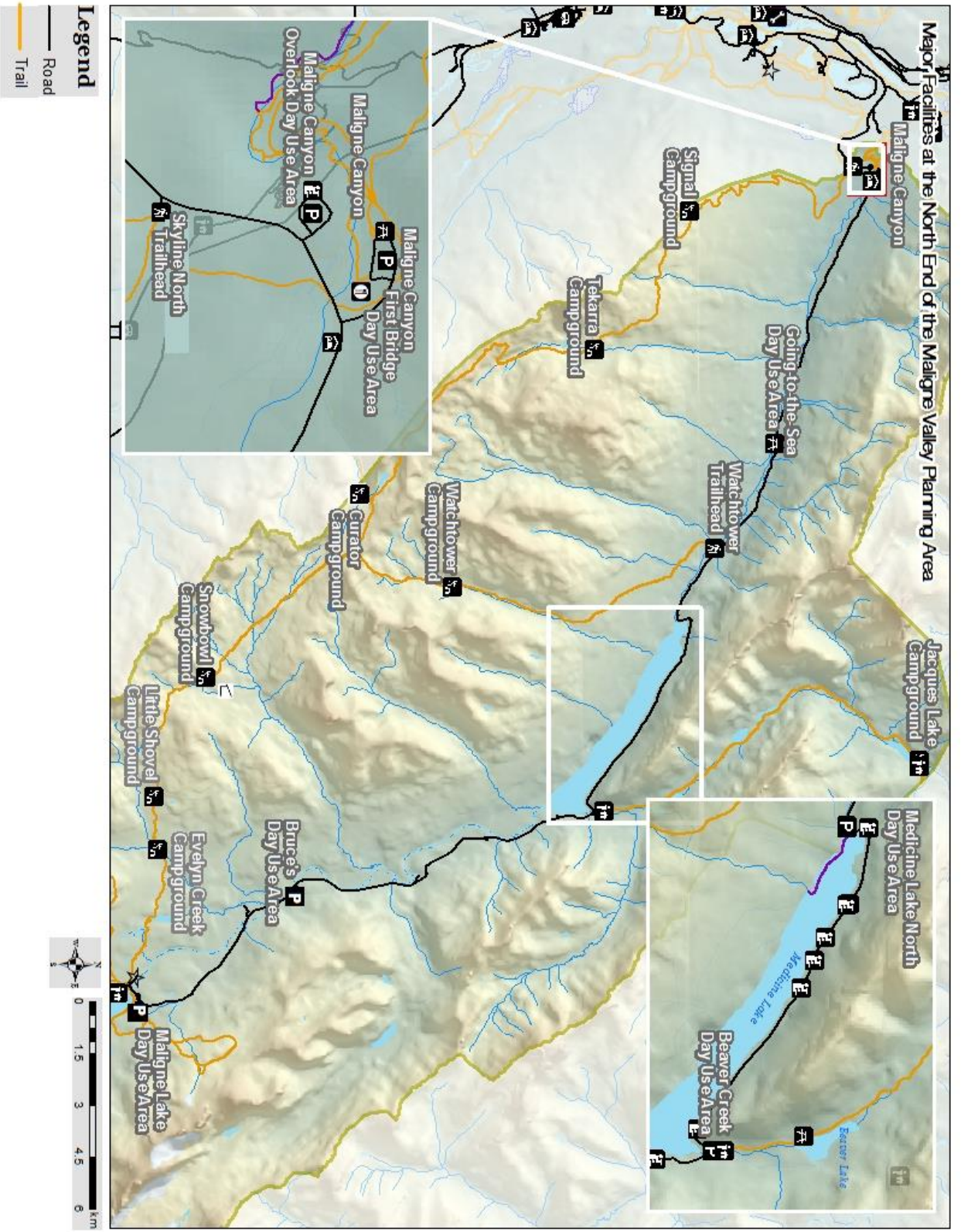
The *Maligne Valley Action Plan* focuses on renewing visitor infrastructure and facilities in the valley, and maintaining and restoring ecological integrity. We considered the feedback we received from the public, Indigenous communities and key stakeholders as we evaluated and refined the proposed actions presented in the *Discussion Paper*.

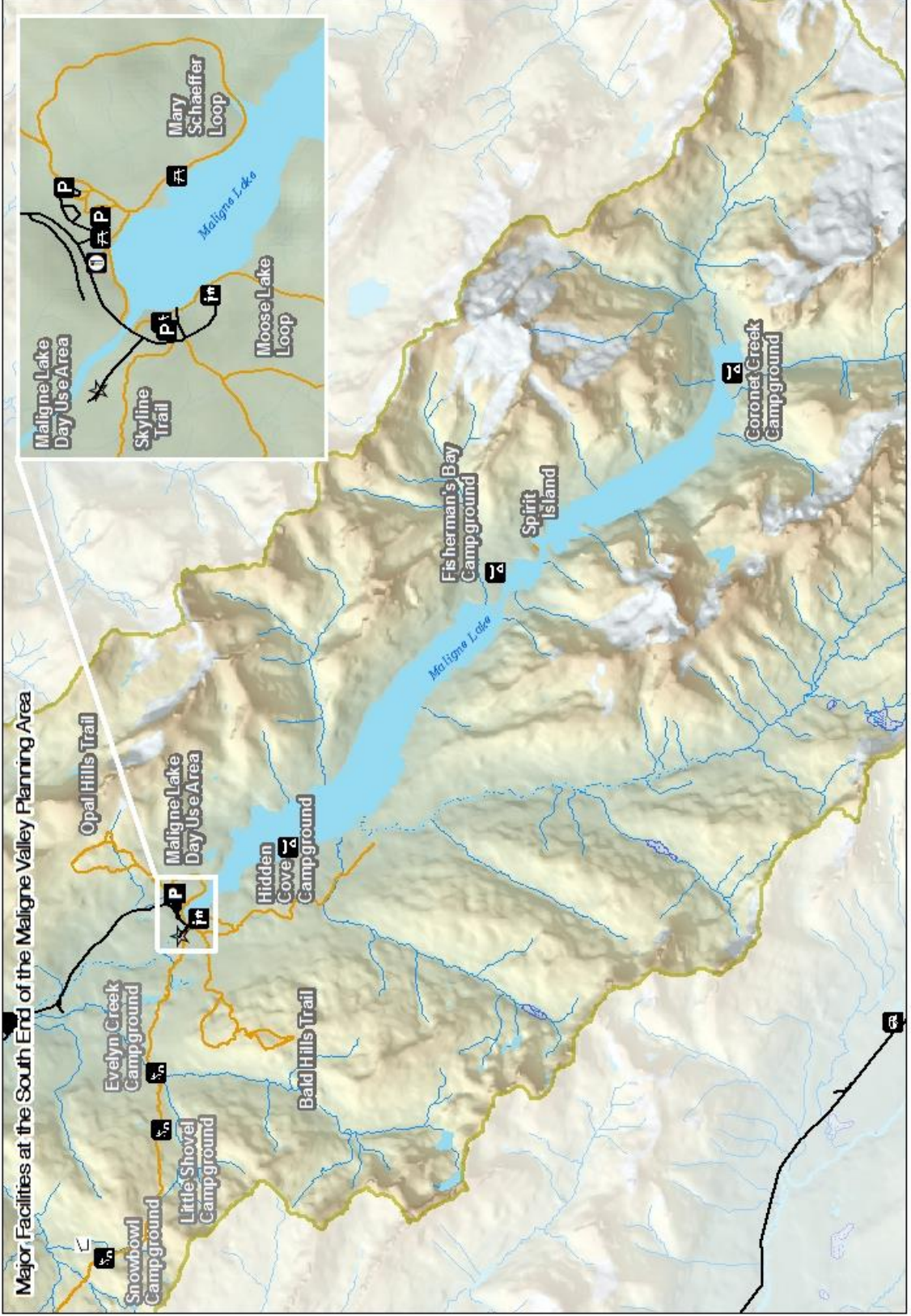
Implementation of some of the actions outlined in this plan has already begun. Federal infrastructure funding will enable Parks Canada to make many of the recommended infrastructure improvements, such as trail upgrades and washroom renovations, in the next three to five years. Other initiatives will be funded as resources become available and will be prioritized in the context of other Jasper National Park facilities, programs and services.

Some topics that were discussed during the public and Indigenous dialogue are not included in the *Maligne Valley Action Plan*, but will be implemented as part of broader park initiatives. For example, one topic of interest was the potential for mass transit in the valley. The *Jasper National Park Management Plan* contains direction to examine, with the Municipality of Jasper and other partners, the potential to offer public transit to reach day-use areas and other facilities within Three Valley Confluence. An evaluation of the feasibility of mass transit in the Maligne Valley would be tied to that larger project.

In conclusion, implementation of the *Maligne Valley Action Plan* will support Parks Canada's role as a world leader in conservation, ensure that Jasper National Park remains a premiere visitor destination, and realize the vision for the valley contained in the park management plan.

All visitors to the Maligne Valley take home vivid memories of a place well cared for that invites exploration and rediscovery in the spirit of Samson Beaver, Mary Schaeffer, Fred Brewster and Curly Phillips (*Jasper National Park Management Plan*, p. 66).







# Improving Visitor Experience along the Maligne Lake Road

## Current Situation

The Maligne Lake Road is a scenic roadway leading into the heart of the Maligne Valley. There are eight pull-outs and viewpoints along the road and seven day use areas. An estimated 380,000 visitors make the trip up the Maligne Lake Road every year.

## Management Plan Direction

- Visitors are welcomed at three key nodes that showcase the defining elements and opportunities of the Maligne Valley: Maligne Canyon, Medicine Lake, and Maligne Lake.
- Orientation and circulation are improved at the Maligne Lake hub.
- Partners like Maligne Tours and other operators collaborate with Parks Canada to enrich visitor experiences in the Maligne Valley and ensure activities contribute to the area’s high conservation values and wilderness character.

## Actions

### *Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure*

1. Make the following improvements at five primary day use areas:
  - Provide basic facilities (e.g. renovate existing or install new washrooms, garbage bins).
  - Improve picnicking facilities (e.g. cluster tables for larger groups, provide three- or four-season picnic shelters).
  - Provide short walks or hikes (e.g. new short trail at Bruce’s Day Use Area).

<b>Primary Day Use Areas</b>	<b>Secondary Day Use Areas</b>
Maligne Canyon Overlook Day Use Area	Beaver Creek / Jacques Lake Trailhead
Maligne Canyon First Bridge Day Use Area	Going-to-the-Sea Day Use Area
Medicine Lake North Day Use Area	
Bruce’s Day Use Area	
Maligne Lake Day Use Area	



2. Maintain other valley day use areas (e.g. replace picnic tables and garbage bins as required, brush vegetation and remove hazardous trees).
3. Expand the recycling program from the Maligne Lake Day Use Area and Maligne Canyon First Parking Lot to other areas in the valley.

#### *Orientation, Safety and Congestion*

1. Develop and implement a road sign plan for the valley; install a welcome sign at the valley entrance, major signs at the five day use areas and minor signs at trailheads and other valley facilities.
2. Maintain the Maligne Lake Road according to industry standards for visitor safety and the protection of the asset.
3. Monitor traffic patterns at the intersection of the Maligne Lake Road and Highway 16; use the results to design and implement a solution to summer congestion.
4. Adjust the following parking areas to improve circulation and increase parking capacity:
  - Maligne Canyon First Bridge Parking Lot;
  - Medicine Lake North Pull-out (with stairs to lake's edge);
  - Bruce's Day Use Area; and
  - Maligne Lake West Parking Lot (boat launch parking lot).
5. Retain Watchtower parking lot for the interim and, if the opportunity arises in future, close and re-vegetate.
6. Expand Skyline North Trailhead parking area to provide 4 to 6 additional parking spaces.
7. Develop an Emergency Response Plan to ensure that Parks Canada is prepared to manage the effects of a wildfire or debris slide along the road.
8. Improve the Maligne Lake public boat launch area (including the access to the launch and the launch facilities) to reduce congestion.

#### *Communication, Interpretation and Services*

1. Install new interpretive panels at the five main day use areas.
2. Develop a digital or print Maligne Valley product to highlight main points-of-interest and provide key messages.
3. Install orientation kiosks with basic park information at the Maligne Lake Day Use Area.





4. Allow groups to book Maligne Canyon Overlook to avoid overlap of events, such as weddings and family reunions, while maintaining public access to the Day Use Area during private functions.

## Improving Visitor Experience in Wilderness Areas

### Current Situation

92% of the Maligne Valley is wilderness, with 99 km of maintained trails, 10 wilderness campgrounds and valuable habitat for a variety of sensitive wildlife species. Parks Canada manages these areas, providing a range of opportunities to enjoy the valley's wilderness. Large areas of the valley do not contain any facilities and receive low levels of human use, ensuring that natural processes and ecological integrity are maintained.

The Skyline Trail is Jasper's best-known and most popular wilderness destination, providing a variety of options for an extended trip above treeline, from completely self-sufficient to fully-catered.

The Maligne Lake boat-accessible campgrounds are a close second in terms of visitor popularity; a new family campground at Hidden Cove has diversified what Parks Canada offers lake visitors.

A third opportunity, the Jacques Lake Trail, provides day or overnight trail users seeking more solitude or an early season adventure with the chance to explore a lush, subalpine forest and camp by a lake.

### Management Plan Direction

- Nodes for wilderness access (e.g. Skyline, Jacques Lake trailheads) are informative, current and welcoming.
- A wide range of wilderness experiences are available, from gentle immersion on day trails to overnight adventures and longer expeditions.
- Parks Canada and partners promote a menu of opportunities that fit visitors' interests, and profiling Jasper's unique wilderness landscapes and heritage.
- Sustainable levels of service are established to support high quality visitor experiences.
- Wilderness trip planning and orientation products and services are timely, inspiring and informative and, and promote wilderness etiquette practices and safety.



## Actions

### *Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure*

1. Upgrade the Mary Schäffer Loop to the Maligne Lake vista viewpoint and other portions of the Lakeshore Trail; harden the area around the point to reduce trail braiding and erosion.
2. Assess other day trails and adjust as required to ensure trails are well-defined, minimize most risks or natural hazards, and reduce the need for self-orientation or way-finding.
3. Assess overnight trails and campgrounds and adjust as required to ensure trails are well-defined and some risks or natural hazards are minimized, while fostering increased decision-making, self-reliance, and way-finding.

<b>Day Trails</b>	<b>Overnight Trails</b>
Mary Schäffer Loop	Skyline Trail (from Evelyn Creek to the top of Signal Fire Road) Jacques Lake Trail (from Summit Lakes to Jacques Lake)
Moose Lake Loop	
Opal Hills	
Bald Hills	
Skyline Trail from Maligne Lake to Evelyn Creek	
Signal Fire Road	
Jacques Lake Trail to Summit Lakes	

4. Upgrade signage, tent pads, food lockers, etc. at Fisherman’s and Coronet Creek campgrounds.
5. Upgrade toilets at the nine wilderness campgrounds in the valley.
6. Evaluate alternative locations in Snowbowl Valley for a wilderness campground; relocate the existing campground if a suitable location is identified.
7. Decommission Evelyn Creek and Watchtower Campgrounds and reallocate the eight campsites contained in those two campgrounds among the remaining Skyline campgrounds (e.g. Tekarra, Snowbowl). Permit random camping in Watchtower Valley.
8. Explore adding a new overnight visitor facility near the beginning of the Jacques Lake Trail (e.g. Beaver Lake, Beaver Creek).
9. Explore options for a group wilderness campground on Maligne Lake (either by establishing a new campground or designating group sites at an existing campground).



10. Remove all campground facilities along the Maligne Pass Trail, with the exception of Avalanche Campground, and permit random camping.
11. Improve winter opportunities outside of critical caribou habitat:
  - Adjust the boundaries of the Delayed Recreational Access area at Maligne Lake so that recreational users can snowshoe and ski Moose Lake Loop and a section of trail to Trapper's Creek. Review the boundaries annually to ensure that there are no impacts on caribou conservation objectives.
  - Construct a four-season picnic shelter at Maligne Lake and investigate other potential sites (e.g. Medicine Lake) to support winter activities outside of critical caribou habitat.
  - Promote snowshoeing, skiing and winter walking at the north end of Medicine Lake.
  - Improve the Jacques Lake Trail (to Beaver and Summit lakes) for snowshoeing, skiing and winter walking.



## Maintaining and Restoring Ecological and Commemorative Integrity

### Current Situation

The Maligne Valley is home to a number of sensitive species, including woodland caribou, grizzly bears, harlequin ducks and black swifts.

The future of woodland caribou is the most pressing resource conservation issue in the Maligne Valley. Of the four herds that live in the park, the Maligne Valley herd is the smallest.

On June 3, 2014, the federal *Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada* was released. Parks Canada now has a legal obligation to implement critical habitat protection measures.

Since the *Maligne Valley Implementation Strategy Discussion Paper* was released for public review in October 2014, Parks Canada has implemented delayed winter recreational access on the west side of the valley from November 1 to February 28 to reduce facilitated predator access to caribou habitat.

It is estimated that between 5 and 10 grizzly bears use the valley every year.

The harlequin duck is listed as a sensitive species in Alberta, reflecting declining regional populations. In 1998, Parks Canada closed the mid-Maligne River to all commercial and public watercraft use to reduce the potential for in-stream disturbance and improve habitat for ducks on the river.

The Maligne Valley is a popular destination for wildlife viewing with grizzly bears, black bears, bighorn sheep, moose, deer and, formerly, caribou commonly seen right along the road. Wildlife jams (traffic jams caused when motorists stop to view wildlife along the road) are common in the summer months.

A number of heritage buildings and cultural resources are testimonials to the Maligne Valley's lengthy and colourful human history. The Maligne Lake Chalet and Guest House, built by Fred Brewster between 1935 and 1942, were designated a National Historic Site in March 2015, for their association with the early history of Jasper and the development of tourism within the park.

### Management Plan Direction

- Habitat needs and security requirements are met for harlequin ducks, caribou and grizzly bears.
- Profile the stories and experiences associated with the park's national historic sites. Relate the sites to the broader park and provide a range of innovative and engaging opportunities to keep their stories alive and relevant.



## Actions

### *Wildlife and Wildlife Viewing*

1. Actions to recover caribou will be determined through the next steps of the recovery strategy<sup>1</sup> process, which involve the preparation of an action plan under the *Species at Risk Act*.
2. Actions to conserve other species-at-risk, such as the black swift, will be determined through future recovery strategies and action plans prepared under the *Species at Risk Act*.
3. Implement a warning for Opal Hills (hikers should travel in groups of four, carry bear spray and avoid the trail at dawn and dusk).
4. Carry out risk assessments of the valley's trail network; adjust trail segments and campgrounds (as required) to reduce the risk of bear-human conflict.
5. Decommission:
  - Beaver Creek Patrol Cabin and adjacent horse facilities;
  - Scout Camp at Maligne Lake;
  - Maligne Lake Public Horse Corrals and Parks Canada pasture; and
  - The man-made dam structure at Beaver Lake.

Retain hitching rails to support day riding opportunities.

6. Maintain the Wildlife Guardians program; explore options for expanding the program.
7. Implement an FM radio pilot to deliver messages to motorists approaching wildlife jams on the Maligne Lake Road.

### *Cultural Resources*

Prepare a management statement for the Maligne Lake Chalet and Guest House National Historic Site that outlines the current management approach and management objectives for the Site.

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<sup>1</sup> Environment Canada. 2014. Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou Southern Mountain population (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in Canada. Environment Canada, Ottawa, Canada. p. viii + 103 pp.



## Working with Indigenous Peoples and Partners

### Current Situation

Over 20 Indigenous communities have historic ties to Jasper National Park; some of them also have connections to the Maligne Valley. Several Indigenous communities have identified cultural areas and activities within the valley and it is likely that Indigenous people harvested in the area from time to time.

Many different commercial operators, non-profit organizations and individuals deliver programs and services to promote public appreciation and understanding of the Maligne Valley, and to protect its cultural and natural resources. While Parks Canada provides the majority of facilities and infrastructure in the valley, some organizations, such as Maligne Tours and Hostelling International, provide major visitor facilities as well.

### Management Plan Direction

- Identify and facilitate opportunities for Indigenous people to present their culture, history and perspectives to park visitors, and to participate in the economic activity of the park.
- Partners like Maligne Tours and other operators collaborate with Parks Canada to enrich visitor experiences in the Maligne Valley and ensure activities contribute to the area's high conservation values and wilderness character.

### Actions

#### *Working with Indigenous Partners*

1. Carry out an oral history project to collect stories about the Maligne Valley with the Stoney First Nation.
2. Work with Indigenous communities to incorporate Indigenous traditional knowledge and language into new interpretive media and programming.
3. Facilitate opportunities for Indigenous programming with commercial operators.



### *Working with Commercial Operators and Non-Profit Organizations*

1. Improvements to visitor facilities and infrastructure at the north end of Maligne Lake are described on pages 7 and 8 (e.g. updating picnic areas, adjusting the west parking lot and public boat launch area to improve circulation). In addition to these actions, Parks Canada will:
  - In the short-term, work collaboratively with the leaseholder to make improvements to existing and essential visitor infrastructure and facilities (e.g. signage and pathways both on- and off-leasehold) at the Maligne Lake Day Use Area.
  - Explore opportunities to work collaboratively with the leaseholder and others to improve the provision of basic park information and interpretation at the Maligne Lake Day Use Area.
  - Over the long-term, collaborate with the leaseholder to improve sense of arrival, orientation, circulation and visitor opportunities at the Maligne Lake Day Use Area.
  - Review more detailed proposals, should the leaseholder decide to advance some or all of the approved elements contained in Maligne Tours' Conceptual Proposal.
2. Consider proposals from commercial operators and non-profit organizations for new:
  - Self-guided products, such as apps, podcasts or geocaching;
  - Road-based interpretive tours (e.g. photography tours);
  - Dark Sky viewing programs, especially those that involve bus transportation;
  - Trail-based guided activities on day and overnight trails; and
  - Guided day and overnight paddling on Maligne Lake.
3. Work with the Maligne Lake Ski Club to identify a long-term approach for continuing to provide wilderness experiences to the public and stewardship opportunities.
4. Explore opportunities for the maintenance of trails in the Maligne Valley with interested partners (e.g. Friends of Jasper National Park, Maligne Lake Ski Club).