



HIGHLIGHTS

KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Celebrating the Past, Embracing Tomorrow's Possibilities

Background

Kootenay National Park encompasses 1,406 km² of the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia. The park shares a border with Banff National Park and Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park to the east and Yoho National Park to the north, and is part of the 23,069 km² Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.

Throughout 2009 and early 2010, Parks Canada conducted the second five-year review of the Kootenay National Park Management Plan. The review provided an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the past decade, and look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead. In particular, this management plan review brought a renewed focus on connecting Canadians to their protected mountain heritage through outstanding visitor experiences, while continuing the strong direction on ecological integrity from the previous plan.

The 2010 management plan replaces the 2000 version, and provides a road map for how Parks Canada will deliver its integrated mandate of protection, experience, and education in Kootenay National Park for the next 10-15 years.

Planning in Partnership

The management plan review benefited from the involvement of many stakeholders, park visitors, park employees, and individuals who took the time to get involved and voice their thoughts and ideas related to Kootenay National Park. The public participation program included planning workshops, community open houses, staff discussion sessions, in-park visitor surveys, and web surveys. An online discussion forum was also available where individuals could share their perspectives on particular topics during the preparation of the plan.

Some of the organizations and groups who were involved in the management plan review include: the Ktunaxa Nation, the Shuswap Indian Band, the Village of Radium Hot Springs Council, the Golden Town Council, the Radium Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the Association for Mountain Park Protection and Enjoyment, the Bow Valley Naturalists, and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.





PROTECTION

Current Situation:

- Kootenay National Park protects a diverse mountain landscape ranging from glacier-capped mountains on the Continental Divide, to semi-arid open forest grassland on the edge of the Columbia Valley. The Vermilion River and part of the Kootenay River follow broad, wide valleys through the park.
- Fire plays an important role as a natural ecosystem disturbance in Kootenay, particularly in the montane ecoregion. In 2003 the Tokumm – Verendrye wildfire burned 17,409 hectares of forest in the northern part of the park.
- Highway 93 South bisects the park and is used by park visitors and a growing number of commuters travelling between the Columbia Valley and the Bow Valley and southern Alberta. Wildlife mortality due to vehicle collisions is a primary concern.

Key Achievements:

- Recent prescribed fires in the Kootenay Valley have begun to show a positive impact on park ecosystems. These fires have restored important wildlife habitat and established fuel breaks designed to contain wildfires within park boundaries.
- Over the last 15 years, Parks Canada has been working with partners to restore increasingly rare open forest and grassland ecosystems in the Columbia Valley. The Redstreak Restoration Project has used forest thinning followed by frequent low-intensity prescribed fires to reverse the impact of decades of fire suppression and forest in-growth. Bighorn sheep and other grassland-dependent species are benefitting from this work.
- Research conducted into wildlife mortality along Highway 93 South has identified mortality hotspots and potential mitigation options. A complete mitigation plan for the highway has been prepared.
- A recent inventory of culverts along park roadways found that the majority were blocking or partially blocking fish movement. Recent funding has helped identify which culvert repairs would reap the greatest benefits for fish and other aquatic species in the park.

Action Plan:

- Wildlife mortality will be reduced using innovative measures such as roadway design, highway fencing, crossing structures and reduced speed zones. Awareness will be built of the potential impacts of roads on natural ecosystems, encouraging support for efforts to reduce wildlife mortality on the highway,





and inviting travelers to make a brief stop at a revitalized day use area that explains how visitors can help.

- Work will continue on the Redstreak Restoration Project, including a prescribed burn on Redstreak Mountain to restore habitat connectivity, and continued monitoring of bighorn sheep response to restoration work.
- Repairs and restoration will be conducted on priority culverts to improve aquatic connectivity.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Current Situation:

- Over the past decade visitation to Kootenay has fluctuated between approximately 390,000 and 455,000 visitors annually. Popular visitor attractions include the Radium hot pools, Marble Canyon and the Paint Pots day use areas, and hiking trails such as Stanley Glacier and Floe Lake. The Rockwall provides a classic day and multi-day backpacking opportunity.
- Although visitor satisfaction is generally very high, it is recognized that many of the park facilities are in poor condition. The sense of arrival and welcome is poor.

Key Achievements:

- The Marble Canyon trail was rehabilitated after the destructive wildfires of 2003, and re-opened to the public in late 2007.
- Improvements to the Redstreak Campground are currently underway to provide more serviced sites capable of accommodating larger recreational vehicles.
- The Redstreak Restoration Trail was developed to provide a new learning experience near the Redstreak Campground focused on the restoration of open forest grassland ecosystems.

Action Plan:

- A stronger connection with visitors will be encouraged by facilitating a variety of visit types based on their needs and expectations. A wide variety of 'ideal park experiences' will be developed through market research and focusing on the complete trip cycle including wishing, visiting and remembering.
- A major review will be conducted of facilities and visitor experience opportunities on Highway 93 South and an area plan prepared to guide the revitalization of this corridor. A primary focus of this





work will be on enhancing opportunities for visitors to connect to the park through a 'View from the Edge' or a 'Step into the Wild' experience.

- Parks Canada will develop a detailed area plan for the Radium – Sinclair area in order to improve the sense of welcome and arrival to the park and the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.
- Parks Canada will work with trail and river users to better understand their needs and expectations, and to determine what, if any improvements might be made to enhance the trail system and recreational paddling opportunities.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Current situation:

- Parks Canada is an active partner in the Wild Voices for Kids program coordinated through the Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network, which delivers educational programming to schools in the Columbia Valley and provides funding for school groups to come to the park. The park website contains educational information on park programs such as the Redstreak Restoration Project and endangered species such as the American Badger.
- Parks Canada needs to make efforts to engage the large number of commuters travelling between Alberta and the Columbia Valley through the park who do not stop to connect with the park.

Key Achievements:

- Forest health communications have helped to raise awareness of the ecological role of fire, and increased awareness and understanding of prescribed burns in restoring wildlife habitat, managing Mountain Pine Beetle, and increasing facility protection and human safety.
- Extensive outreach and education efforts have profiled Parks Canada's efforts to restore open forest and grassland habitat with partners in the Rocky Mountain Trench, particularly with a focus on the Redstreak Restoration. Parks Canada's Teachers' Corner hosts curriculum-based lesson plans on the endangered American Badger, a unique grassland carnivore.
- Parks Canada has worked closely with the local community and Friends of Kootenay to profile and celebrate the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep herd whose home range at the south end of the park includes both park and provincial lands.





Action Plan:

- Virtual connections will engage travelers commuting between Alberta and the Columbia Valleys in order to increase their sense of place and connection to Kootenay National Park.
- Results of ongoing research, monitoring, restoration and stewardship projects will be shared with park visitors, students and educators, and others in the region through Internet and new media. The communication focus will be on the Redstreak Restoration Project and the bighorn sheep monitoring program and, as work progresses, on the Highway 93 South mitigation project.
- Outreach programming will build awareness of road ecology and encourage support for efforts to reduce wildlife mortality, increase public safety and restore terrestrial and aquatic habitat connectivity across the highway.

Next Steps

Parks Canada reports annually to the public on progress in implementing the park management plan. Every five years, Parks Canada reports on the condition of resource protection, visitor experience and public appreciation and understanding through the State of the Park Report.

Information: Please contact: Parks Canada, Lake Louise, Yoho & Kootenay Field Unit
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