



Kootenay National Park

The Engagement Process

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The first phase of engagement and consultation for scoping the Kootenay National park management plan included a range of opportunities designed to gather input from Indigenous communities, youth, local stakeholders and other Canadians. Stakeholder workshops were held in Radium, British Columbia. An online platform called *Let's Talk Mountain Parks* was created with the other mountain parks, enabling interested Canadians to be part of the discussion. One university campus club was engaged using an online presentation and conference call. Newspaper advertisements, postcards and social media posts were used to create awareness of the engagement program. The first phase of engagement and consultation ran from January 30 to May 10, 2019.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

During the three-month engagement period, there were a total of 507 visits to the Kootenay National Park online site. Of this total, 60 people filled out online surveys or posted ideas. An additional 233 people viewed website content and downloaded documents.

A total of 35 people attended two workshops. Stakeholders included the municipal government, destination marketing organizations, outdoor recreation groups, and local business operators. Parks Canada staff also met separately with representatives of several Indigenous communities. Written submissions were received from three organizations.



MAP – Geographical distribution of website participants from Canada



What We Heard

WHAT WE HEARD FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Kootenay National Park is located within the traditional territories of the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc First Nations. Discussions are ongoing with representatives of these Indigenous groups to ensure their perspectives are heard and included in the draft management plan.

Indigenous communities who have provided initial responses express a strong desire to feel at home in the park, and to contribute their knowledge and practices to the stewardship of the park.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The following section outlines some of the main themes that emerged during the engagement period, in the categories of park vision, key issues, and planning principles.

Park Vision

Workshop attendees and people who completed online surveys were asked to describe their vision of Kootenay National Park at its future best. An analysis of the comments showed that the most common theme identified by participants was a desire to see the park protected and its ecological integrity restored. The words *undeveloped*, *wild*, *intact*, *rugged*, *pristine*, and *wildlife* were frequently mentioned. For many respondents, this theme included low levels of commercial use and infrastructure, where people can experience unspoiled wilderness. Fire as an ecological process was recognized as an important part of that vision for its role in restoring healthy forest ecosystems.



While the protection of healthy ecosystems was viewed as paramount, participants also expressed a strong desire to ensure that these natural landscapes remain accessible. Providing more or improved opportunities for people to experience and enjoy the park was a common suggestion, although others indicated that the relative lack of developed infrastructure and crowds was central to their vision of the park at its best. Those recommending greater accessibility used the term broadly, describing elements of individual ability, demographics, socio-economic status, and technological connectivity. Many respondents felt that there are more opportunities to engage travelers on Highway 93 South by providing improved or additional places to access the park safely. High quality and accessible roadside day-use areas that incorporate learning opportunities are key to this vision.

Another theme was education and the opportunity that mountain parks provide for visitors to learn about nature and culture. Some of the educational themes that were mentioned include Indigenous history, cultural heritage, fire ecology, wildlife, and climate change.

Key Issues

The first phase of engagement provided opportunities for Parks Canada to hear from interested Canadians about key issues that should be considered in the development of the next national park management plan. The main themes that emerged are discussed below.

Resource Protection/Ecological Integrity

Participants indicated that elements of the natural ecosystem are key features that make the park unique. When describing changes or challenges over the next ten years, 59% of online survey respondents cited ecological protection and habitat restoration as priorities. This was also a common theme expressed by workshop participants. The role of fire on the landscape was the dominant ecological concern. Respondents mentioned the historical lack of fire and the need for more prescribed fires to restore ecosystems and prevent large-scale wildfires. Others suggested that with a warming climate, more wildfires are inevitable. Other specific areas of concern related to ecological integrity include aquatic ecosystem restoration, invasive species, increasing visitation and demand for additional facilities, potential for increased wildlife disturbance and human-wildlife conflict.

Visitor Facilities and Activities

The state and availability of park facilities was an important issue for many participants. When asked about barriers to connecting to the park, 45% of online respondents cited lack of facilities or activities, or the poor and outdated nature of facilities. In particular, people referenced a need for more low elevation hiking trails, more backcountry trails,



better trail maintenance, more accessible facilities, more camping opportunities including river use sites, and more roadside pullouts/day-use areas. Others felt that there is already enough, or too much infrastructure, and too many people in places such as Stanley Glacier, resulting in a lack of opportunity to connect with nature.

Traffic on Highway 93 South is viewed as an issue for some. In particular, summer traffic volumes and excessive driving speeds are a concern. Commercial truck traffic was identified as a barrier to enjoyment of an otherwise peaceful natural setting. Reducing the impact of ore trucks on the highway and visitor experience was also referenced.

Changing visitor demographics and patterns of use were also identified as important considerations. Participants referenced an increase in international tourists, spill-over visitation from the Bow Valley, an aging and more culturally diverse population, increasing winter use (ski touring, snowshoeing, Nordic skiing), changing transportation options, and evolving recreational and communications technologies as important considerations for park management over the coming decade.

Increasing Visitation/ Demand Management

Many participants value the relatively limited infrastructure and lower numbers of visitors in Kootenay National Park compared to neighbouring parks. Some respondents suggested the need to impose limits on development and visitor numbers in order to maintain this experience, while others emphasized the importance of addressing the needs of wildlife and park ecosystems over the demands of park visitors. Increasing human-use pressure originating from land adjacent to the park was also identified as an important threat. Motorized recreation, including helicopter-supported activities, mountain biking, and hunting were identified as concerns.

Indigenous Reconciliation and Heritage

Many people recognized the importance of supporting Indigenous peoples in reconnecting to their traditional territories in the park. Participants shared a desire to have more Indigenous stories told within the park. Some participants felt that there is a need to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into park management.

Technological Changes and Impacts

Changing technology was identified as an issue that can provide both opportunities and challenges for Parks Canada. Types of changing technology identified include electric and self-driving cars, E-bikes, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones), artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and various types of communications and electronic technologies. Social media was identified as both an important influence on visitor use patterns (“selfie culture”), and as a useful tool to connect with visitors travelling through the park on Highway 93 South. The lack of cell service on 93 South was identified as a



constraint. Parks Canada was encouraged to consider evolving technology when developing visitor activities and educational programming, and when encouraging appropriate park behaviour.

Climate Change

Understanding and adapting to the effects of climate change was identified as a key issue. Specific concerns included the increasing risk of wildfires and associated smoke which in turn could affect visitation; impacts on wildlife and park ecosystems; impacts on park assets; decreasing winter snowpack; and drought. Studying the effects of climate change in the park is seen as a way to develop adaptation strategies, and to support climate change education for park visitors.

Principles

The scoping phase of engagement included discussions about the key principles that should inform the national park management plan and help guide future decision making. Key themes that emerged from these discussions are outlined below.

Transparency

Parks Canada should ensure that management decisions are open and accountable. Decisions should be based on open two-way communication with Indigenous communities, local residents, stakeholders, and other Canadians. Relevant information should be shared prior to any decisions.

Evidence-Based Decisions

Future management decisions should be rooted in scientific information and understanding. All relevant sources of information should be considered objectively. Continued application of this principle over time will support adaptive management.

Integrity and Leadership

Parks Canada should always demonstrate integrity and leadership in conservation when delivering its mandate. Parks Canada should remain focused on the legislated mandate to maintain or restore ecological integrity. The Parks Canada *Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* (1994) continue to provide good direction and the advice of Parks Canada professional staff should be trusted. There should be a recognition that the park cannot satisfy all expectations and still adhere to its mandate.



Sustainability

Future decision making should support the sustainability of Kootenay National Park. This applies both to ecological and fiscal sustainability related to the maintenance of park assets. Increasing the amount of park infrastructure may not be sustainable in the long-term.

