

Managing Canada's National Parks

Integrating Sustainability, Protection, and Enjoyment

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Introduction

When Bill 85: Respecting Forest Reserves and Parks was introduced in the House of Commons in 1911, it was a low priority policy relative to mining and timber rights (Globe, 1911). The idea of 'parks' was considered a fanciful innovation that did not require much action, other than the appointment of a bureaucrat 'to oversee the forest reserves and to make any decisions necessary for the 'protection, care and management' of public parks' (Campbell, 2011, 2).

However, Alexander Haggart, an MP from Winnipeg, understood the intrinsic worth of parks and the role they could hold for future generations, but questioned how they would be managed under Bill 85. He asked whether it was wise to 'divest ourselves [Canadians] of the power of governing a kingdom', by handing stewardship to an unknown 'hired official' (House of Commons, 1911). He could not have foreseen that what was thought a minor bureaucratic decision would come to 'convince Canadians that in their national parks resided the true wealth of a kingdom ... [and that] we [Canadians] prize our national parks because they are places of physical beauty, snapshots of the incredible diversity of the Canadian landscape' (Campbell, 2011, 2). Despite early debates, Canada became the first country to dedicate a relatively independent office, Dominion Parks Branch within the Department of the Interior, to manage national parks (Hart, 2010).

Haggart's question merits review: has Parks Canada, by virtue of its dedication to conserving Canada's natural heritage, achieved 'mission mystique'? (Goodsell, 2011a, 3). Has it become a veritable public institution? (t'Hart et al., 2021) In broad terms, this chapter defines policy success regarding this policy area in the following manner: a) Parks Canada achieves highly valued social outcomes and enjoys a broad base of public support through accepted processes and costs; and b) it has sustained performance for a long time despite political and economic change. We attribute policy success to several enabling institutional features: its

ability to remain non-partisan; its responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of its various stakeholder communities including Indigenous voice; and its ability to act as an independent steward, enjoying political and bureaucratic commitment to its mission.

Assessing Parks Canada: Policy Success and Mission Mystique

Charles Goodsell (2011b) proposes that some highly regarded public agencies develop *mission mystique* over time, an institutional legitimacy that results both from their clear mission to contribute to the collective good, and from how well they deliver on their mandate. Highly influenced by Selznick's (1957) classic distinction between an organization and an institution, it suggests that the intrinsic value of an institution with *mystique* is recognized both internally and externally, and that there is wide public agreement on the societal importance of its mandate. A *mystique-infused public institution* is a *policy success* because it remains true to its core purpose and consistently achieves its goals, even as it adapts and renews its activities and focus over time ('t Hart et al., 2021). It remains responsive to changing political and societal imperatives, and it is transparent in its operations subject to public scrutiny. It is an enduring success because its organizational culture imbues the institution with a shared sense of purpose, enables receptiveness to challenge, celebrates policy innovation, and supports continuous learning.

There are three main descriptors of success in mission mystique: purpose, energy, vitality. The model is not applied linearly, but rather suggests a framework that in sum identifies key archetypical elements that are needed. The mission mystique framework (Figure 17.1) aligns well with Compton and 't Hart's (2019) PPP framework for identifying policy success, with its emphasis on program, process, and political success, as well as endurance. The PPP model requires a multi-dimensional, multi-perspective, and multi-criteria approach to assessment and presumes that policy success cannot be measured without a detailed examination of its evolution and impact. Evaluating the policy success of Parks Canada benefits from both frameworks because it has a long history with many successes and failures, including that its purpose was not defined or agreed on for some time. But, its journey towards purpose, free in many ways of partisan motivations, allowed the agency to build the arrangements needed to find its place. Throughout its history, Parks Canada has reflected the political and social norms of the times and carefully integrated the needs of people with environmental protection, development, and sustainability (Kopas, 2000, 1–11). It has adapted to shifting public interest in preserving marine and terrestrial ecosystems, while at the same time satisfying economic and social considerations. Early exclusions of Indigenous peoples, and restrictions on their traditional use of national park lands, have given way to recognition of Indigenous rights, active collaboration in interpreting and

	<i>Direction Aspects</i>	<i>Environment Aspects</i>	<i>Time Aspects</i>
<i>Charged with Purpose</i>	1 A Central Mission Purpose Permeates the Agency	2 The Societal Need Met is Seen as Urgent	3 Distinctive Reputation Based on Achievement
<i>Charged with Energy</i>	4 Personnel Are Intrinsically Motivated	5 The Culture Institutionalizes the Belief System	6 Agency History Is Known and Celebrated
<i>Charged with Vitality</i>	7 Beliefs Are Open to Contestation and Opposition	8 Qualified Policy Autonomy to Permit Innovation	9 Agency Renewal and Learning are Ongoing

Fig. 17.1 The Mission Mystique Framework

Source: Goodsell (2011b, 6).

managing cultural, historic, and natural places and co-management of parks. The function of Parks Canada as a national symbol of Canadian identity allows it to integrate heritage aims with commitments to biodiversity and climate sustainability. Its evolving ability to juggle competing imperatives is critical to its mystique and policy success.

This chapter mainly follows the mission mystique framework, but inherently considers how this illustrates programmatic, process, and political success. It is organized using the major headings of purpose, energy, and vitality, and concludes with thoughts that integrate the characteristics of policy success, as highlighted in the introduction to this volume.

From Policy Decisions to Institution-Building

Canada’s First National Parks’ Management System: An Economic Purpose

The story of Canada’s first national park set the foundation for park creation and management. The Department of the Interior was established on 1 July 1873 under the Dominion Lands Act 1872 to open settlement in Western Canada, and worked alongside the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to connect the east and west of Canada. While mapping a rail route in 1883, workers for the CPR accidentally discovered hot springs in the rocky foothills of Alberta and tried to establish a claim to profit from commercial development. The federal government denied the claim, and in 1885 established twenty-five square kilometres of protected forest reserve around the springs.

Federal surveyors indicated that the site had 'features of the greatest beauty and was admirably adapted for a national park' (Campbell, 2011, 3). In 1886, the deputy minister of the interior stated that the hot springs were to become, 'the greatest and most successful health resort on the continent' (Lothian, 1976, 23). George Stewart became the first superintendent of Rocky Mountain Forest Park in 1886, reporting directly to the deputy minister, and thus, the Department of the Interior. Few understood what a national park was, nor its purpose, other than to create public wealth (Kopas, 2000, 69–71). The federal government partnered with CPR to build a new railway and hotel on the forest reserve. When the minister wanted to enlarge the hot springs reservation and establish a national park, special legislation was required 'to cope with the complexities of national park administration which ... involved municipal affairs as well as natural resources' (Parks Canada, 2013a). This set the stage for the first national park legislation.

In June 1887, Parliament passed the Rocky Mountain Park Act, creating 'a public park and pleasure ground for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada' (Department of the Interior, 1887; Parks Canada, 2013a). The Act provided authorities to preserve the landscape, protect wildlife, and lease lands for residences and trades. Indigenous communities advocated for a 'natural environment' around the hot springs, but they were largely ignored. Although they were asked to appear at 'Indian Days', an annual festival that called on Indigenous people to perform for the tourists from 1907 to 1976, they were not invited to participate in the establishment of Canada's national parks (Mason, 2008, 226).

Four additional 'dominions', later named 'national' parks, were created under the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act 1911 (replacing the Rocky Mountain Park Act 1887): Yoho, Glacier, Jasper, and Waterton Lake. Elk Island Park, and Buffalo Dominion Park were created in 1913, from former forest or wildlife reserve lands. The Act also created the Dominion Parks Branch in the Department of the Interior, where it would remain until 1921.

Formalizing Management of Parks (1921): A Temporary Home

The first commissioner of the Parks Branch was James Bernard Harkin (1911–1936) who, knowing little about parks, directed his staff of seven people to find out everything about them (MacEachern, 2011, 22). His first task was to reconcile the role of the Forest Branch and the Parks Branch whose roles over the 1910s had overlapped. Eventually, the Canadian National Parks Branch was constituted in 1921, formally separating the responsibilities of the Dominion Parks Branch from the Forest Branch. The Parks Branch set out to consolidate the five parks into a single structure and framed a new management culture around internal and external collaboration to achieve a national purpose (Harkin, 1957). It was a forward-thinking culture for the country, encouraging partnership (MacEachern, 2011, 27).

During his 25 years as commissioner, Harkin built roads and highways throughout the western park system to facilitate the emerging trend of motoring tourists. The roads opened the way for the Banff-Jasper Highway in 1940, and many CPR hotels, trails, and businesses were established in or near parks to support visitors. He advocated for the protection of historic sites, convincing Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior, to create the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1919. Harkin oversaw the expansion of the park system over his tenure, including the creation of Kootenay National Park in 1920 and Vidal's Point in Saskatchewan in 1921. He also created or expanded several wildlife and forest reserves, including Nemiskam Wildlife Park in 1922, Prince Albert National Park (created out of Sturgeon Lake Forest Reserve) in 1927, Georgian Bay Island Park (Ontario) and Riding Mountain Park (Manitoba) in 1929 (MacEachern, 2011, 28).

Several initiatives involved the active collaboration of provinces and territories, with processes established between 1919 and 1930. They required boundary negotiation, and the construction of highways needing provincial/territorial agreement. Agreements, such as completing the Banff-Windermere Highway in 1919 between Canada and British Columbia (i.e. connecting British Columbia and Alberta), spearheaded the harmonization of jurisdiction between the federal and provincial government within the national parks, including the collection of automobile fees, granting liquor licenses in parks, sharing fee revenues with parks residents, and game management (Parks Canada, 2013a).

Institutionalizing Collaboration: The 1930 National Parks Act

The most significant shift in forest reserves and parks authorities in the Harkin era was the enactment of the National Parks Act 1930, which expanded the purpose of parks from preserving space for enjoyment to include the preservation of lands and resources for future generations: 'to provide for the benefit, education and enjoyment of the people' (Taylor, 1991, 128). The Act removed the authorities for creating and managing parks from the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act 1911. The Deputy Minister of the Interior, W. W. Cory, recognized in 1919 that this was necessary given conflicting legislative authorities. Between 1926 and 1929, agreements were reached with BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba that paved the way for the National Parks Act 1930. The Act changed the name of dominion parks to national parks (Parks Canada, 2013a; Sandlos, 2011, 56), and made explicit the protection of game, wildlife, and historic sites, prohibiting the granting of new mineral exploration and development rights, and restricting timber harvesting to park use only. Park lands were administered solely by the federal government under a separate agency: the precursor to the current Parks Canada agency regime.

Creation of an Independent Agency: Parks Canada (1995–2000)

In 1994, Parks Canada was moved from Environment Canada to the newly formed Department of Canadian Heritage under Minister Sheila Copps. Thomas Lee, Assistant Deputy Minister of Parks Canada (1993–2002), found that the majority of his employees would not report to him and that budgets were still unstable. However, the reorganization signalled revitalized government interest in Parks Canada's responsibilities, including the launch of new initiatives that would reaffirm its primary mandate, purpose, and responsibilities, provide necessary structure and policy direction, and support flexibility, responsiveness, and grass-roots innovation (Kopas, 2000, 272–288).

Responding to concerns from environmental groups and citizen advocates, particularly those affiliated with Banff National Park, the first initiative set out to reduce commercial development in parks. Minister Sheila Copps launched the Banff-Bow Valley Study in 1994 to improve decision making in the park. An independent task force was launched to consult about federal responsibilities in parks locally and across Canada. The final report (Banff-Bow Valley Task Force, 1996) included more than 500 recommendations, and the resulting Banff Management Plan (Heritage Canada, 1997) and Banff Community Development Plan (1997) reflected many of these. They limited new commercial development, reduced the Banff townsite boundaries and sent a clear signal that the Government intended to honour its commitment to ecological integrity in Banff and elsewhere in its parks system. Permanent limits on commercial development were set for all western national park townsite communities. Environmental groups were pleased (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, 2016), as were the majority of permanent residents of Banff (Eisler, 1997).

Following the launch of the Banff-Bow Valley Study, the Parks Canada Agency was created in 1998, fulfilling a commitment made in the 1996 Federal Budget to transition Parks Canada into a quasi-arm's-length special operating agency. Parks Canada was to have more operational and resource flexibility, as well as stable budgets and resources. The Secretary of State for Parks Canada and the Heritage Minister initiated public consultations on ways to ensure public accountability, financial and human resources flexibility, and strong ministerial oversight.

Consolidating Governance Arrangements: The 2000 National Parks Act

The Canada National Parks Act 2000 (Justice Canada, 2000, Section 4(2)) echoed the dedication in the National Parks Act 1930 by reconfirming the core purpose of national parks: that they be unimpaired for the benefit of future generations. The Parks Canada Agency Act 1998 establishes the management of parks through

the mandate of Parks Canada as ‘ensuring that Canada’s national parks, national historic sites and related heritage areas are protected and presented for this and future generations’ (Justice Canada, 1998, Preamble). It also established that overall broad policy direction for Parks Canada would remain the responsibility of the Minister and Cabinet, while a chief executive officer (CEO) accountable to the Minister would have control over managing and operating the new organization, including providing policy proposals and advice. To allow for innovation, efficiency, and nimbleness in responding to new opportunities, the Agency would have financial, staffing, and organizational flexibility, and be flatter, with field superintendents responsible directly to the CEO (Kopas, 2000, 282–284).

Multiple accountability mechanisms were included through the Minister and Parliament and directly to Canadians. Biennial forums, chaired by the Minister, were mandated, giving individuals and groups the opportunity to evaluate the Agency’s performance and provide input on future priorities. Also, individual park management plans were to be created and reviewed every five years, with input from local stakeholder groups, before final approval by the House of Commons (Kopas, 2000, 283). Park superintendents are expected to develop highly localized plans for the unique needs of their park’s ecosystems, reflecting the knowledge, input, and concerns of local populations. Parks Canada is required to submit an annual plan and annual performance review (internally completed) through the minister to Parliament.

Charged with Purpose: Parks Canada Mission Mystique

Crafting Resilient Success: Policy Adaptation and Responsive Leadership

As of 2020, Parks Canada managed a portfolio of 38 national parks, 10 park reserves, one urban park, five national marine conservation areas, and 171 national historic sites covering 31 of 39 terrestrial regions (Parks Canada, 2020a, 2). This success can be attributed to visionary prime ministers and ministers, dedicated Parks Canada leaders, officials working across the country, tourism operators who respect the value of parks, Indigenous and provincial/territorial partners, and the many volunteers who contribute to the collaborative management of these iconic places. Such commitment did not occur overnight, but rather through a shared sense of value and purpose, and the belief that parks are the ‘soul’ and ‘wealth’ of the nation. Parks Canada leaders struggled to harmonize the competing interests in parks by building the conditions for effective management: mission became linked with management systems and processes, critical relationships with provinces/territories and various publics, and a sense of self as the steward of a valued public good.

James B. Harkin developed and sustained a national parks service that would last more than a century, establishing Parks Canada's role 'to render the best possible services to Canada and Canadians' (Harkin, 1914, 2). He set a *national* purpose for parks and historic sites that informed the leadership of Frank H. H. Williamson, who served as Controller of the National Parks Bureau (equivalent to commissioner) from 1936 to 1941. After serving for many years as Harkin's Assistant Commissioner, he oversaw the expansion of the parks system in the Atlantic region, and developed several historic sites, including the transfer of Green Gables and Dalvay-by-the-Sea in Prince Edward Island to the bureau. He classified several larger historic sites, such as the Fortress of Louisbourg, Fort Chambly, and Prince of Wales Fort as National Historic Parks, thereby stabilizing appropriations to these sites and solidifying Parks Canada's place as the national steward (MacEachern, 2001).

James Smart (1941–1953) led the National Parks Service through the war years, spearheading major construction projects such as the Trans-Canada Highway through Banff National Park, expanding the campground system in Banff, Jasper, and Mt. Revelstoke, and developing golf courses in the three maritime parks, equating protection with enjoyment. J. A. Hutchison (1953–1957) spent considerable effort rebuilding the Historic Sites Program, despite negligible funding for more than two decades. The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Massey Commission) released its report in 1951, and it was Hutchison who advocated for introducing the Historic Sites and Monuments Act in 1953, providing a legislative base for designating and protecting historic sites with architectural significance.

J. R. B. Coleman, director of National Parks Branch (1957–1968) under Indian Affairs and Northern Development, instituted new administrative units in 1959 to promote understanding of the purpose of national parks: 'to preserve for all time areas which contain significant geographical, geological, biological or historic features as a natural heritage ... [for] the people of Canada' (Parks Canada, 2013b, n.p.). Due to Coleman's efforts, visits to national parks and sites increased from 4 million in 1957 to 13 million by the late 1960s, and the annual budget grew from \$17 million to \$37 million (Parks Canada, 2013b). However, such success manifested in park overcrowding, resulting in a growing number of voices from the science community advocating for restricting park access to protect sensitive wildlife, flora, and fauna (Needham et al., 2016, 125). Coleman responded with several park policies, including restrictive zoning to localize human use within parks, but tempered such branch decisions by instituting regular public consultations on park use (Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1964). He streamlined decision processes through a restructuring plan that reduced regional headquarters, led by regional directors, from six to three (Parks Canada, 2013b; Kopas, 2000, 84–108).

In 1975, John I. (Jack) Nicol (1968–1978) mandated consultation with provincial/territorial and local Indigenous governments, and emerging environmental

groups through a renewal plan. The plan adopted the principle of ecological integrity and divided the country into 39 natural regions. It committed to creating at least one national park in each region (Parks Canada, 2013b), stipulating that natural and historic qualities would be protected, that Canadians would be involved and consulted, and that an orderly framework would be provided for adding new heritage areas. The plan called for a renewed emphasis on partnership and co-operation with other levels of government, local and Indigenous communities, and the private sector (Parliament of Canada, 1976), which depoliticized parks creation (Campbell, 2011, 8). The period marked a ‘coming of age’ for Parks Canada, highlighted by greater sophistication and rational management in program development and historic site protection.

Fully incorporating these initiatives into a management policy was the hallmark of Al Davidson’s tenure (1978–1985), who realized Harkin’s vision of a national purpose: ‘to protect for all time those places which are significant examples of Canada’s natural and cultural heritage and also to encourage public understanding, participation, and enjoyment of this heritage, which will leave it unimpaired for future generations’ (Parks Canada History, 2020).

Charged with Energy: Building Relationships

A Passion for Service

This mystique agency has achieved a resilient policy success (McConnell, 2010) through the motivation and dedication of its staff. Goodsell (2011a) notes that an organization ‘charged with energy’ shares common values that guide leaders and employees in creating policies and programs that amplify its core purpose. This starts at the top: whether through serendipity or design, Canada has benefited from a succession of Parks Canada leaders skilled at translating political direction and societal trends, and incorporating emerging ecological and conservation science. Many of its most visionary leaders did not come from a conservation or tourism background yet became ardent champions of Parks Canada and its aims, expanding its reach through establishing new parks, preserving built heritage, strengthening commitment to conservation, and sustainably broadening access to Canadians and tourists alike. Regardless of the many shifts of governance Parks Canada experienced prior to becoming an arm’s-length agency, its public-service professionals remained steadfast to the idea of creating and preserving national parks and historic sites (Taylor, 2011).

Although a mystique agency must first meet a recognized societal need, its ongoing legitimacy is a function of how well its core values are translated into policy, and how they are reflected in the routine actions and commitment of employees. Parks Canada recognized early on the importance of attracting knowledgeable and enthusiastic specialists, creating the position of Chief Park Naturalist in 1959

to lead the hiring of seasonal naturalists who developed nature trails, field excursions, exhibits, and lecture series to explain local wildlife and nature to park visitors.

The Parks Canada Agency Act 1998 furthered empowered employees at all levels. Recognizing that Parks Canada staff were disheartened after years of staff and budget cuts in the 1990s, a top priority of CEO Thomas Lee (1993–2002) was to establish a decentralized and inclusive management structure. Widely regarded as an inspirational and effective leader, Lee infused new energy into Parks Canada, creating a corporate culture (Parks Canada History, 2020) reflected in its statement of values enshrining competence, fairness, and mutual respect (Parks Canada, 2017c). Today, drawing on the expertise of local staff, individuals working for Parks Canada are encouraged to create innovative programs to engage Canadians and enhance ecological integrity at their respective parks. For example, the popular Red Chair program, which places red Adirondack chairs at scenic locations, was conceived by staff in one park and then spread to others.

In the 2019 Public Service Employee Survey, a high percentage of Parks Canada staff consistently report liking their job (86 per cent) and taking pride in their work (88 per cent), higher than the average for the federal public service often by three to five percentage points. In addition, more than 71 per cent of employees believe Parks Canada communicates its mission, vision, and goals clearly, and 83 per cent understand how their work contributes to these objectives (TBS, 2020: Parks Canada). This is a remarkable level of cohesiveness, given that so many of the agency's employees are seasonal and stationed across the country.

A Rocky History: Indigenous Participation Contested

Part of Parks Canada history was not always exemplary: public demands for environmental protection, and increased interest in Canada's North coincided when the Trudeau Liberals were elected in 1968. However, the government's commitment to creating 40 to 60 national parks by 1985 meant that park boundaries increasingly encroached on Indigenous communities and conflicted with land claims. This included the creation of Forillon (Quebec in 1970) and Kouchibouguac (New Brunswick in 1969), leading to significant outcry from Indigenous communities and the public. In response, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Jean Chrétien announced in 1971 that all future park management plans would be developed through public consultation and giving formal voice to local communities by instituting regular Indigenous consultations on major policy changes with the aim of balancing power relations—a major shift in protocols and ultimately organizational culture that led to successful consultations with Indigenous groups to establish Kluane National Park Reserve (1972), Nahanni (1974), and Auyuittuq (1974).

The National Parks Act 1974 further provided the basis for protecting traditional hunting and fishing practices and embedded requirements to negotiate settlements with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments when creating future parks, particularly in disputed areas with unresolved land claims. A major policy innovation, developed with Indigenous input, was the option to create park reserves: land set aside for a future national park pending settlement of land claims. For the first time, Parks Canada recognized the role of people in shaping the design of national parks, how their environments would be designated, and the land's cultural significance (Neufeld, 2011). These initial steps to recognize the input of Indigenous voice was central to building policy success in its relationships with Indigenous communities.

The 1999 *Gwaii Haanas National Park and Haida Heritage Site: Management Plan for the Terrestrial Area*, followed on from the historic 1993 Gwaii Haanas National Park Act and reflected a further step-change in Canada–First Nations collaboration. It showed how both parties could work together for a common purpose, even without resolving disagreements on sovereignty and rights to the lands themselves. Featuring parallel statements of purpose, objectives, and process, and a commitment to consensus decision-making, the Management Plan was a policy innovation, informed by multiple sources of information, including traditional Haida knowledge and scientific data (Canada and Council of Haida Nation, 1999, par 1.6). Since 1999, the agreement has been a template for collaborating with Indigenous communities to create or amend legislation on national parks or national park reserves through formalized management processes. Agreements are now in place for all parks located in Canada's three territories. The template was also adapted for federal-provincial co-management in areas such as the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park in Quebec.

Improving relations between Parks Canada and Indigenous people was formally institutionalized by Thomas Lee, who established the Aboriginal Consultative Committee, consisting of 12 chiefs and elders from across Canada each providing unfiltered advice to the CEO. To further embed the importance of Indigenous relations, Lee established an Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat and held executives to account for ensuring meaningful progress in Indigenous representation at all levels in their management plans, and the development of the Parks Canada Agency charter in 1998.

These commitments were consolidated by Alan Latourelle (2002–2015), who entrenched a culture of openness, particularly with Indigenous communities. Working with Parks Canada has become synonymous with respect and transparency, reflected in designating Canada's largest historic site, Sahoyúé-šehdacho and creating Torngat Mountains National Park with Indigenous peoples. Today, 20 national parks are co-managed collaboratively with First Nations or Inuit partners, up from 10 in 1998, and all have individualized impact and benefit agreements in place based on indicators identified by Indigenous partners (Brown-John, 2006).

In addition, the Indigenous Guardians and Watchmen initiative 'provides training and career opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to work as equal partners with government and industry on the protection and management of land and resources' (Parks Canada, 2017b, n.p.). As of 2017, four Watchmen/Guardian programs were in place (Parks Canada, 2017b).

Listening to Local Government in Parks: A Challenging Journey to Process Success

Early on, Parks Canada was noted for its lack of consultation with parks' residents. Because national parks are under federal jurisdiction, towns in them were not afforded the delegated authorities afforded provincially chartered municipalities. Instead, they were administered by local and regional Parks Canada officials. Recognizing that residents should have a voice in matters of local jurisdiction, in 1921 the Minister of the Interior created a *citizen advisory council* for Banff residents. The Banff Citizens Association of nine elected representatives, met annually with the Minister or Commissioner of National Parks to discuss routine matters like traffic control, local employment, appointment of local magistrate, and camping regulations.

Given this experience, the policy innovation was extended to Jasper (1924) and Waterton Park (1959). Today, modern municipal arrangements, including taxation powers, are in place in Banff and Jasper, although governance is shared, and limits are placed on growth and development. Governance remains a highly contested issue in many national parks.

Charged with Vitality: Integrating Emergent Values

Managing Change: A Bifurcated Mandate

Implementing the core mandate of Parks Canada requires integrating two conflicting priorities: balancing public enjoyment of parks along with limiting overuse and preserving important ecosystems. The 1960s witnessed the emergence of an 'era of public participation' (Kopas, 2008, ch. 3), including the establishment of influential environmental lobby groups such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society in 1963. At 'Parks for Tomorrow', its first conference in 1968, 'scholars leveled pointed criticism at user-oriented development' (Campbell, 2011, 8). Lobby groups grew in influence after 1970, with the 'second wave' (Taylor, 2011, 139) of activism attracting university students with ties to wilderness advocacy groups. Today, various environmental groups are regularly and formally included in policy-making processes.

Creating Parks Canada as a stand-alone agency provided the opportunity to reform the National Parks Act 1930, in response to criticism from environmental and Indigenous groups about the tension between Parks Canada's bifurcated mandates. Key objectives of the revised Canada National Parks Act 2000 included streamlining the Parliamentary process for creating and enlarging parks, strengthening the ecological integrity clause, extending measures to protect wildlife and other park resources, adding several new parks and park reserves to the Act, and establishing legislative limits on development for the seven communities located in the national parks system (Parliamentary Research Branch, 2000).

In 2000, the Expert Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada (2000b) consulted extensively with diverse stakeholder groups, producing a two-volume report and recommendations (2000a). It confirmed that many park ecosystems were under serious threat. In response to the report and agency advice, Minister Copps modernized the national parks legislation and endorsed the Action Plan developed by Thomas Lee.

A third related legislative initiative was launched in response to global concerns about protecting marine biodiversity and resources. The National Marine Conservation Act 2002 provided the policy framework to establish and manage national marine parks. Together, the three new pieces of legislation strengthened the Government of Canada's capacity to preserve and protect the ecological integrity of its natural heritage.

Policy Learning and Ongoing Agency Renewal

The Parks Canada Agency Act 1998, Canada National Parks Act 2000, and National Marine Conservation Act 2002 consolidated the ongoing learning processes concerning the interconnectedness between ecological integrity and human enjoyment. The Acts empowered Parks Canada to develop detailed management plans to address the government's policy priorities: healing broken connections with Indigenous peoples; increasing visits to parks outside the Rocky Mountain corridor; establishing at least one park in each of Canada's 39 terrestrial regions; creating marine protected areas in all 29 marine regions; improving ecological integrity within each park; and conserving, protecting, and interpreting cultural heritage assets. Parks Canada also leads on delivering Canada's international commitments concerning biodiversity and the preservation of natural heritage, key components addressing climate change.

Successfully delivering on these priorities posed a major challenge, made more difficult by competing federal budget priorities and the chronic underfunding of maintenance and conservation of established parks and heritage sites. Thomas Lee fearlessly pointed out the challenges hindering fulfilment of Parks Canada's legislated mandate. Despite the agency's new ability to retain revenues generated from

its activities and to use proceeds from gifts, endowments, and the sale of excess assets to create new parks, funding became a critical issue. In a remarkable *Globe and Mail* interview in 2001, Lee highlighted that two-thirds of Parks Canada infrastructure was in fair or poor condition, and an immediate investment of \$1 billion was needed to bring physical and ecological assets into acceptable condition (Mitchell, 2001). By 2019, a consultant reported that 40 per cent of built assets remained in poor or very poor condition, requiring an estimated initial investment of \$9.5 billion, and subsequently, \$825–\$900 million annually to maintain assets once restored (Parks Canada, 2020b).

Insufficient budget for maintaining Parks Canada's assets (natural and cultural heritage and built infrastructure) has been a common theme in audit and consultant reports, regardless of whether Liberal or Conservative governments were in power. Notwithstanding, both parties made significant budget allocations to address the backlog of critical maintenance and support ecological integrity. For example, Liberal Prime Minister Chrétien announced a \$75 million annual investment in 2003 to improve ecological integrity; in 2014 Conservative Prime Minister Harper announced a five-year, \$3.2 billion capital investment for infrastructure in parks and heritage sites.

When Alan Latourelle replaced Thomas Lee in 2002, he focused initially on engaging Parks Canada employees and external stakeholders to develop a strategic plan. The plan aimed to: restore ecological integrity within the parks; meet Species at Risk obligations; establish a leading-edge ecological program to monitor ecosystems health; and, oversee the development of results-oriented accountability mechanisms. Management plans for each park were established, and Latourelle focused on his 'One Team—One Vision' approach to meet system-wide objectives. As a result, the footprint of land and water areas protected under Parks Canada stewardship grew by 50 per cent. He also developed strategies to increase Parks Canada's relevancy to an increasingly urban and immigrant population (Parks Canada History, 2020).

In 2005, Environment Minister Stephane Dion hosted the bi-annual multi-stakeholder ministerial roundtable required by legislation. Visitor numbers were falling with independent national surveys showing that 73 per cent of Canadians in 2000 who valued national parks as important to national identity fell to 62 per cent in 2003. Roundtable participants made several recommendations to improve public appreciation of Canada's iconic spaces and highlighted the need for new visitor programming to respond to changing demographics, Canadian diversity, and evolving tourism trends (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development 2005). An extensive program of visitor research was launched to determine the expectations and behaviours of current and potential visitors, identify key markets, and effectively target visitor opportunities. The research informed the creation of new outreach programs, participatory experiences, and activities that steadily and sustainably boosted visitor numbers and encouraged discovery of

sites outside of the Rocky Mountain parks corridor. By 2018–19, annual visits had increased to 25.1 million, up from 21.6 million in 2006–07 (Parks Canada, 2020b).

Progress on other key federal commitments, particularly increasing the number of parks and establishing at least one park or park reserve in each of Canada's 39 terrestrial regions and 29 marine regions, lagged despite repeated promises. In the mid 1990s, the federal government promised that almost all terrestrial regions would be represented by parks or reserves by the year 2000. At the 2002 United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, Prime Minister Chretien pledged to create ten new national parks, increase the size of the national park system by 50 per cent, and create five new marine conservation areas, all within five years (Chase, 2002). Parks Canada's Corporate Plan for 2005/06 to 2009/10 included the goal that 34 out of 39 terrestrial regions and 8 out of 29 marine regions would be represented by national parks or marine conservation areas. The current government continues to set 'stretch' goals for Parks Canada. Its 2020–21 Departmental Plan includes a commitment by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to protect and conserve 25 per cent of Canada's land and 25 per cent of Canada's oceans by 2025, working towards protecting 30 per cent of each by 2030 (Parks Canada, 2020b).

Haggart's early concerns about placing parks' management in the hands of public officials have been largely disproved, as has been the fear that granting agency status would diminish Parks Canada's legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness to Canadians (Senate of Canada, 1998). Parks Canada has consistently worked with local residents and stakeholder groups to develop *idiosyncratic policy networks* (Brown-John, 2006) that inform each park management plan. The agency reports on its activities and progress publicly and regularly conducts internal performance audits. It is responsive to new Cabinet directives, including requiring environmental impact assessments in all new policies. Although the political preferences of the government of the day still influence Parks Canada's activities, these tend to be limited to few instances such as the 2012 approval of the Glacier Skywalk project (a private venture in Jasper National Park) and providing free admission to all parks and historic sites during Canada's 150th birthday celebrations in 2017 (Parks Canada, 2017a).

Concerns that the agency would become overtly entrepreneurial, prioritizing revenue generation over conservation and ecological integrity, have also been largely unfounded. For example, despite a \$30 million annual budget cut imposed by the Conservative government in 2012 and 600 staff being declared surplus, Latourelle preserved Parks Canada's most critical and high priority functions: the ecological restoration, fire management, and Species at Risk programs were spared from budget cuts. In 2013, the Auditor General concluded that the agency honoured its obligations for maintaining or restoring ecological integrity in national parks 'through a solid framework of policies, directives and guidelines for fulfilling its responsibilities' (OAG, 2013, par 7.75).

One significant outcome of agency status is the emergence of an organizational culture of experimentation that has resulted in innovative solutions for improving operational and service outcomes in parks (Parks Canada, 2020b). For example, the Learn to Camp program, initiated as a pilot program in 2011, proved a popular and effective way to introduce urban dwellers and new Canadians to the Parks experience and to build appreciation for Canada's natural environment. This program attracted 111,000 participants in 2019. A 2019 survey found 80 per cent of youth respondents aged 18–34 supported Parks Canada's mandate (Parks Canada, 2020b). In 2020–21, Parks Canada used 'internal crowdsourcing' to identify, design, and implement novel conservation projects to accelerate ecological improvements in its parks (Parks Canada, 2020a).

Policy Legitimacy and Agency Reputation

Parks Canada has earned a reputation as a global leader in parks' management, advising governments in China, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia on effective management policies and practices. It is known for effective consultation with critical stakeholders and jurisdictions to identify, create, and co-manage parks, particularly with Indigenous communities. In 1978, two Parks Canada sites (L'Anse aux Meadows and Nahanni) were among the first 12 in the world to be designated UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage sites. In 1986, UNESCO invited Canada (CEO J. D. Collinson) to chair the World Commission on Protected Areas of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Parks Canada is also well known for its ability to balance the various purposes for parks, something few jurisdictions do well. In the 2016 *National Geographic Guide to the National Parks of Canada* (Locke, 2017, 382–383), the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas member Harvey Locke identified Parks Canada as a pioneer in endangered species and landscape conservation, and in applying the principles of ecological integrity to parks' management.

According to Compton and 't Hart (2019), a key feature of the political success of a policy is legitimacy, such that the policy enjoys high levels of social and political support. Regarding conserving and protecting natural spaces, a 2017 National Conservation Survey found that 88 per cent of Canadians polled believed environmental protection was 'very important' and 79 per cent supported increased federal funding for new national parks and protected areas (Earnscliffe, 2017). Similarly, an Environics *Focus Canada* Survey found that 'the beauty of the land' ranked fourth out of nine reasons for pride in being Canadian (Environics Institute, 2012).

Due to its dedication to conservation, sustainability, and protection, Parks Canada has been identified by Canadians as one of the top three most trusted

government agencies (*Reader's Digest Canada*, 2012). A 2018 public opinion survey found that 9 out of 10 Canadians supported its mandate (Parks Canada, 2019), and a 2017 Dalhousie University survey of 1,641 Canadians on dimensions of Social License to Operate, found that Parks Canada placed third amongst 17 Canadian government departments and agencies, ranking high on trust and environmental responsibility (Howard et al., 2017).

The reputation and history of Parks Canada is also celebrated amongst Canadians and internationally largely because it is kept alive by both current and former employees, and by important conservation and ecological organizations. Many books, articles, and web resources celebrate and disseminate Parks Canada's history and achievements, including a comprehensive historical e-library developed and maintained by friends of the agency (e.g. Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and the Canadian Parks Council), and a Canadian National Parks Wardens alumni group that commemorates and maintains oral histories, journals, and achievements.

Conclusions: Ingredients for Effective Policy Success

Canadian national parks governance is a policy and agency success, facilitated by decades of experimentation and strong commitment from political decision-makers to the bifurcated aims inherent in creating and maintaining parks and historic sites. At least four key factors have contributed to this success. First, federal parks policy has been constituted with non-partisan and non-political aims since the Dominion Parks Branch was created in 1911. Although there has always been politics when creating and implementing policies, partisan aims have largely been avoided, thereby minimizing pet projects and capture by special interests. Led by strong Parks Canada leaders and key partners, the interpretation of the Parks Canada mandate (2018) has evolved over time, integrating enjoyment, environmental protection, and economic sustainability (Theberge et al., 2016). Room to allow strong vision and leadership to develop in the institution has been fiercely defended and championed by ministers, supported by strong civil-society and Indigenous advocates who stand with Parks Canada leaders.

Second, national parks policy-making has been highly responsive and flexible to the needs and demands of various external users and stakeholder groups and communities. Mechanisms were constructed in legislation and conventional management practice to ensure ongoing consultation and collaboration with provinces/territories, Indigenous peoples, parks-based communities, and myriad non-profit and advocacy organizations. The Parks Canada Agency now provides a forum for environmental and conservationist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to participate in creating ecological best practices, and has built-in mechanisms to actively engage local groups, especially Indigenous communities,

regarding the creation and delivery of park management plans. National dialogues and legislated minister-led roundtables engage much more widely on various topics including the designation and establishment of new protected sites. Many Indigenous leaders are highly supportive of parks' management processes because they are actively included in decision-making through formalized management agreements and internal Parks Canada decision-making arrangements. Such regular consultation endows the agency with a prevailing legitimacy that is unparalleled in other federal departments, reflecting a legacy of high confidence in management processes that emphasize openness and transparency.

Third, Parks Canada enjoys considerable independence in its day-to-day operations, human resources, and financial management. Effective and ongoing independent oversight of its operations is provided by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG). The OAG has robust internal management processes, including high degrees of coordination with its regional operations: a feature Harkin wanted but did not get in his mandate. The value of this independence, both in legislation and by the commitment of political decision-makers, cannot be understated. It is an indicator and a product of *mission mystique* that the Agency has earned a reputation for fair and representative decision-making with various stakeholder groups. The Agency has established a culture of results-based management, whereby key indicators of policy success, such as ecological integrity, have been ingrained in management decision-making (OAG, 2013, par 7.35).

Finally, Parks Canada has long enjoyed the strong commitment of its staff to its mission mystique. Its culture reaffirms and reinforces its core mandate to ensure that national parks, historic sites, heritage and marine conservation areas are protected and presented for current and future generations. This passionate defence of parks and historic sites is rooted in its history traced to James B. Harkin, who created the public-good orientation staunchly defended by all leaders since. A culture of strong leadership permeates the agency and is celebrated in its various programs, visitor centres, websites, and routine maintenance of parks. The uniform of Parks Canada employees is well known: a symbol of trust and integrity, and a reputation that places the agency in a leadership position worldwide. There is no better testimony of the agency's enduring success than the commitment to its mission by its people and unwavering national support by citizens.

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