

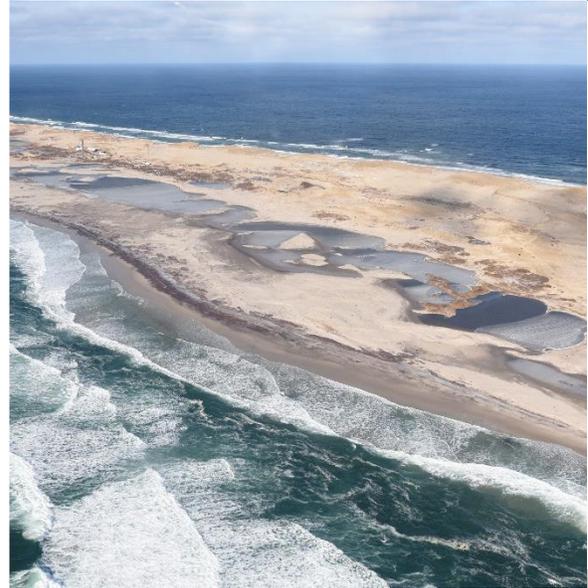


Sable Island
National Park Reserve

What we heard

Summary report from
Sable Island National
Park Reserve's
stakeholder workshop
October 2018

Let's Talk Sable Island!



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Table of Contents

I. Summary of key points.....	3
II. Introduction and background	3
About Parks Canada.....	3
About Sable Island National Park Reserve and its management plan.....	3
Stakeholder workshop overview	4
III. What we heard	4
Ecological health.....	5
Sustainable visitation	6
Sharing Sable Island National Park Reserve’s natural and cultural history	8
Vision.....	9
Appendix 1: Stakeholder workshop agenda	10
Appendix 2: Invited stakeholder organizations.....	11

I. Summary of key points

- Participants envision Sable Island National Park Reserve (NPR) as a place where the protection of the ecosystem is the foundation for all management decisions.
- Its unique biodiversity, connectivity to the surrounding marine environment, and sensitivity to potential human impacts are research topics to be studied and shared with all Canadians.
- There is a desire to develop high-quality experiences for visitors on Sable Island that have minimal environmental impact and that are supported by ongoing monitoring activities for potential or cumulative impacts.
- Collaboration with Sable Island's diverse stakeholder network can help solve complex ecological questions, improve the quality and sustainability of visitor experiences, and enhance the reach of Parks Canada's efforts to connect Canadians with the natural and cultural heritage of this highly-valued and unique site.

II. Introduction and background

About Parks Canada

Parks Canada manages Canada's system of national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas. The mandate of the Parks Canada Agency is:

To protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations.

This includes protecting natural and cultural resources, facilitating inspiring experiences for visitors, and providing public outreach education. Parks Canada plans and manages for the three aspects of its mandate using an integrated approach.

Parks Canada's goal is to make Canada's places and stories more relevant to Canadians as described in its vision statement:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

About Sable Island NPR and its management plan

Sable Island NPR was established as Canada's 43rd national park in 2013. It protects and presents 31km² of land within the Atlantic Coast Uplands Natural Region of the national park system, including the world's largest colony of grey seals, six known

endemic species, and an iconic population of naturalized horses that have been there since the mid-1700s. Prior to park establishment, Sable Island had been stewarded with year-round human presence under the jurisdiction of various government departments for over 200 years.

In accordance with the *Canada National Parks Act*, a management plan must be developed for Sable Island NPR to provide strategic guidance for its management, to outline a vision, key strategies and measurable objectives with targets.

As part of the management planning process, stakeholders and the public will be encouraged to contribute to the development of key issues and opportunities through the *Let's Talk Sable Island!* consultation program, which includes a public discussion forum, the sharing of ideas and stories, a survey, and group discussion kit.

Stakeholder workshop overview

The Sable Island stakeholder workshop brought together participants from a wide range of sectors and communities, including: the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, non-government organizations, industry, academia, tourism, heritage, culture and the arts.

Three objectives were identified for the stakeholder workshop:

1. Provide an update on the operation of Sable Island NPR and discuss challenges and opportunities in the management of Sable Island NPR
2. Collect feedback from stakeholders on key areas for consideration in the management planning process
3. Promote participation in *Let's Talk Sable Island!* consultation program

The results of the workshop will be considered as part of the *Let's Talk Sable Island!* consultation program.

III. What we heard

Three group discussion topics were facilitated throughout the day, consistent with the discussion topics available through the *Let's Talk Sable Island!* consultation program: i) ecosystem health; ii) sustainable visitation, and; iii) sharing its natural and cultural heritage. For each topic, the following format was used to introduce and facilitate discussion:

- Introduction to each topic by a Parks Canada expert
- Small group discussions at tables
- Large group discussion: key points shared from each table during plenary discussion

This report is based on small group discussions recorded by participants and plenary discussions recorded by the workshop facilitator.

Ecological health

Parks Canada presentation: Update on Ecosystem Health by Dan Kehler, Ecologist, Sable Island NPR

Discussion topic: What do you value about the natural environment of Sable Island and what would you like to see Parks Canada prioritise when making decisions on managing for the health of the ecosystem?

What we heard: Five themes emerged from the discussion on ecosystem health: i) minimizing human impacts; ii) Sable Island's unique biodiversity; iii) connectivity and adopting a holistic approach to ecosystem management; iv) importance of monitoring and long-term research; v) public outreach education.

i) Minimizing human impacts

Participants identified human impacts on Sable Island- both historic and ongoing- as a top concern for ecosystem health. There was recognition that historic impacts, including the existing asset footprint and dependence on fossil fuels, will be challenging and costly to mitigate; however a reduced footprint and transition to renewable energy would support the overall vision for Sable Island NPR. The potential for ongoing or new impacts to emerge as a result of tourism was also raised, in discussions of both 'Ecosystem Health' as well as 'Sustainable Visitation'. Specific concerns are elaborated upon in the 'Sustainable Visitation' topic summary.

ii) Sable Island's unique biodiversity

Understanding and protecting Sable Island's biodiversity, from its insects to its horses, was a top priority identified by participants for Parks Canada's management of the ecosystem. The value of endemic species (those found nowhere else) and their contribution to Sable Island's overall species diversity was repeatedly recognized. While Sable Island's horses were often referenced as being a cherished and unique population, they were also discussed in the context of being one of many species of value. The concept of 'biodiversity' was expressed differently amongst individuals and groups, relating to varying levels of understanding and expertise; for example, the need to understand and preserve genetic diversity of Sable Island's horses, and recognition of the island's "many unique and different species". Biodiversity was also valued for different reasons amongst participants, ranging from the contribution that Sable Island's species diversity makes to Canada's overall biodiversity, to recognizing that biodiversity is one of the features that makes Sable Island attractive to visitors.

iii) Connectivity and adopting a holistic approach to ecosystem management

Participants discussed the need to manage the health of Sable Island's ecosystem as a whole, rather than managing for components individually. The interaction of biotic and abiotic components was recognized (e.g. the interaction of species with climate, and of various populations with freshwater), as well as the connectivity between Sable Island and its surrounding marine environment (e.g. marine derived nutrients that support terrestrial life).

iv) Importance of monitoring and long-term research

There was widespread support for ongoing ecological monitoring of anthropogenic impacts, as well as the continuation or development of new long-term research programs. A variety of knowledge gaps were identified by participants that could be addressed through continued or further research, including: climate trends, the management of invasive species, and population dynamics studies targeting seals, seabirds, and horses. How research priorities would be established and ensuring funding for these programs were of interest to participants.

v) Public outreach education

The desire for public education on topics relating to Sable Island's ecosystem emerged as a theme, both in terms of on-island visitor education to mitigate human impacts, and outreach (off-island) education to share and connect the public to Sable Island's unique biodiversity. Specific ideas for how to reach the public are described in the topic discussion 'Sharing Sable Island NPR's natural and cultural history'.

Sustainable visitation

Parks Canada presentation: Update on Visitor Experience by Tony Loring, Partnering, Engagement and Communications Officer, Sable Island NPR

Discussion topic: What do you believe are the most important factors to consider when Parks Canada is making decisions about opportunities for visitors to experience Sable Island National Park Reserve?

What we heard: Three themes emerged from the discussion on sustainable visitation: i) monitoring and mitigating visitor impacts; ii) collaboration with tourism industry; iii) developing the visitor experience offer.

i) Monitoring and mitigating visitor impacts

In general, the monitoring and mitigation of potential visitor impacts was raised as the most important factor to consider when Parks Canada is making decisions on visitation and visitor experience at Sable Island NPR. In particular, the need for ongoing monitoring of

cumulative impacts and the need for further development of biosecurity protocols were raised. The determination of an island ‘carrying capacity’ was discussed as a mitigation of potential visitor impacts with enough frequency to warrant specific description.

- Carrying capacity: The term ‘carrying capacity’ was frequently used by participants, though a definition was neither stated nor discussed. The term was also variously expressed as ‘caps’ on visitation, determining a ‘threshold for visitors’, and determining the ‘maximum number’ of visitors that could be supported by the island. In all cases, the intent was to limit visitation in order to protect Sable Island’s ecosystem. There were a number of suggestions for how visitation could be limited, including: limiting ‘streams’ of visitors to (e.g.) artists and researchers; limiting repeat visitors; limiting visitors seasonally.

ii) Collaboration with tourism industry

There was broad recognition of the experience and expertise held by the tourism industry. Ongoing and further collaboration with the tourism industry could help support the management of sustainable visitation on Sable Island by Parks Canada. For example, applying an industry standard for the training (and potentially certifying) guides could help to ensure that visitor impacts are minimized. As well, best practises developed within one segment could be shared with others, as is Parks Canada’s intent; for example biosecurity protocols currently used by the cruise industry could be expanded to visitors arriving by flight. To help support the tourism industry in developing and providing a sustainable and high-quality offer, Parks Canada could prescribe longer-term contracts for (e.g.) the provision of island access.

iii) Visitor experience offer

Several opportunities and challenges were recognized by participants in terms of the development of Sable Island’s visitor experience. The overall theme of ‘high quality’ visitor experiences emerged as a top priority, given the inherent expense of travel to the island. Challenges to developing a quality visitor experience that were discussed included washroom facilities and waste removal. There is a desire to explore and consider the feasibility of overnight visits, with recognition that a variety of perspectives would need to be considered including visitor safety, environmental impacts, and the overnight offer itself (e.g. tent pad vs roofed accommodations). Fairness in terms of who can afford to visit was a topic of interest, and several suggestions were made on how fairness could be achieved, ranging from the development of internship programs to a lottery system, or a subsidy generated from other visitors. Entry fees were also discussed both in terms of the cost, as well as a means to fund various programs (e.g. subsidizing access for lower income visitors, or research priorities).

Sharing Sable Island NPR's natural and cultural history

Parks Canada presentation: Cultural Resource Management update by Charles Burke, Terrestrial Archaeologist; overview of external relations by Tony Loring.

Discussion topic: What could Parks Canada do on its own, or in cooperation with others, to better share Sable Island's natural and cultural heritage with diverse and urban populations, including youth?

What we heard: Three themes emerged in discussions around how best to share the natural and cultural history of Sable Island NPR, recognizing that most people will not have an opportunity to physically travel to the island: i) bring Sable Island NPR to mainland Nova Scotia; ii) virtual experiences; iii) ambassadors, partners and collaborators.

i) Bring Sable Island NPR to mainland Nova Scotia

Most stakeholders expressed their desire to have opportunities for the public to connect with Sable Island NPR in Halifax or at other Nova Scotian/Canadian locations. The desire for a physical presence off-island was attributed to the benefit of hands-on/tactile experiences, especially for engaging youth; for example touching Sable Island sand or artefacts. While a Sable-specific visitor centre or pavilion was suggested, the development of a physical presence on the mainland was not limited to a dedicated facility, or a facility operated by Parks Canada. The majority of suggestions involved collaboration with third parties, for example permanent or travelling exhibits at local museums, galleries, and discovery centres. Bringing Sable Island to the classroom was repeatedly discussed through the integration of Sable Island NPR content into curriculum, development of classroom resource kits for teachers, or classroom visits by staff from PCA or partnering organizations.

ii) Virtual experiences

The value of sharing Sable Island NPR's natural and cultural heritage through the development of online or virtual experiences was discussed as a means to connect large and diverse audiences, including youth and urban populations. Examples include the use of different social media platforms, connecting remotely with an on-island host (e.g. biologist) through Skype or blogging, and the use of webcams for specific events/features of interest (e.g. horse-cam).

iii) Ambassadors, partners, and collaborators

A reoccurring message from participants was that the reach and impact of Parks Canada's efforts to connect with Canadians can be enhanced through engagement with partners and collaborators. Examples include working with specific partner organizations, other government departments, universities, artists, etc. The power of nurturing champions or ambassadors from various sectors was repeatedly raised. Overall, the value

of stakeholders in helping to both shape and share Sable Island's stories emerged as an underlying theme to this and all topic discussions.

Vision

Participants were asked to rank the following vision elements using two dots for their first priority and one dot for their second highest priority. Number of responses are shown in brackets (x).

- A place where the protection of the ecosystem is a top priority; where Parks Canada is trusted to manage natural and cultural heritage through thoughtful consideration of a variety of perspectives and knowledge bases (38).
- A centre for research in the off-shore, where government, non-government organizations, and academic pursuits contribute to the advancement of science and conservation issues on Sable Island and globally (16).
- A bucket list destination for visitors, where once in a lifetime experiences can lead to a sense of wonder and inspiration; where well-managed visitation is supported by partners and stakeholders and contributes to the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the island (12).
- A place for virtual exploration and discovery, where captivating natural and cultural heritage content inspires imagination and is innovative in its use of technology (3).
- A small and remote national park that demonstrates a commitment to innovation in its use of green technology to ensure an efficient operation in a dynamic offshore environment (3).

Participants were also given an opportunity to suggest additional vision elements. The prevailing view was that the vision must reflect the protection of Sable Island NPR's ecosystem. The importance of fostering a network of collaborators and partners was discussed as a means to problem solve on complex issues, share best practises, and to share its natural and cultural history with Canadians. The concept of nurturing 'ambassadors' to help promote support of Sable Island NPR was specifically referenced by several participants as an extension of the benefit of engaging collaborators.

AGENDA

Sable Island National Park Reserve (SINPR)

Stakeholder Workshop

Thursday, October 25, 9:00am – 2:30pm

Halifax Citadel National Historic Site: Garrison Room, North Magazine

Meeting Objectives

1. Provide an update on the operation of SINPR and discuss challenges and opportunities in the management of SINPR
2. Collect feedback from stakeholders on key areas for consideration in the management planning process
3. Promote participation in *Let's Talk Sable Island!* consultation program

Agenda

- 9:05 **Meet and Greet**
- 9:10 **Welcome and opening remarks** - Julie Tompa, Field Unit Superintendent
- 9:15 **SINPR Operations Update** - Alannah Phillips, Park Manager
- 9:20 **Overview of management planning and consultation** - Livia Goodbrand, Senior Planner
- 9:30 **SINPR Ecosystem Health** - Dan Kehler, Park Ecologist
- 9:45 **Discussion forum: Managing Sable Island NPR for a healthy ecosystem**
- 10:40 **Health Break – light refreshments provided**
- 11:00 **Connecting Canadians to SINPR** - Tony Loring, Partnering & Communications Officer
- 11:10 **Discussion forum: Managing sustainable visitation**
- 12:00 **Lunch (provided) - Visit the 'Vision Board'**
- 12:45 **Cultural resource management** - Charles Burke, Archaeologist
- 12:55 **Discussion forum: Sharing Sable Island's natural and cultural heritage**
- 1:45 **Revisit the 'Vision Board'**
- 2:15 **Wrap up and closing remarks**
- 2:30 **Thanks for your participation.** There are more ways to have your say at www.LetstalkSableIsland.ca

Appendix 2: Invited stakeholder organizations (Participants in blue)

A for Adventure, Adventure Canada, Advisory committee for Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, Art Gallery of NS, Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board, Canadian Armed Forces, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Centre of Geographic Sciences, Nova Scotia Community College, Canadian Wildlife Services, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Discovery Centre, Ecology Action Centre, Encana, ExxonMobil, Friends of Sable Island, Kattuk Expeditions, Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn Negotiation Office, Lidgard Photography, Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, Mi'kmaq Conservation Group, Museum of Natural History, Meteorological Services Canada, Nova Scotia Archaeology Society, Nova Scotia Parks, One Ocean Expeditions Inc., Parks Canada Youth Advisory Panel, Picture Perfect Tours, Sable Aviation, Sable Island Institute, Students on Ice, The Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society, Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia, Tourism Nova Scotia, University of Saskatchewan, Vision Air Services Inc., various independent artists.