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# Signal Hill

National Historic Site of Canada

Draft Management Plan  
(For Consultation)

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## Foreword

*To be added following Indigenous, stakeholder and public consultations.*

## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*

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## Executive Summary

Signal Hill National Historic Site (NHS) is one of Canada's most iconic, treasured and visited historic sites. The site's national historic status is due to Signal Hill's vital importance to Canada's defence and communications history. Guarding the "Narrows", the entrance to St. John's harbour, and overlooking the city of St. John's, Signal Hill NHS has historically played a dual role both as a military shield and a communications gateway. While Signal Hill protected St. John's from military attack, it also played a vital communications role, linking St. John's to merchant shipping through flag signalling and linking North America to Europe through wireless telecommunication.

First opened as a National Historic "Park" in 1958, Signal Hill National Historic Site continues to welcome the world and receives approximately 750,000 person visits annually. The site boasts panoramic views, spectacular hiking, immersive history experiences, unique cultural landscapes, and modern visitor facilities. As the steward and manager of this treasured historic site, Parks Canada is responsible for protecting Signal Hill's cultural and natural resources and telling the site's fascinating story.

This management plan replaces the 2007 management plan and outlines the key objectives Parks Canada intends to achieve over the next 10 years:

1. Continued protection of the site's cultural resources and their heritage values through effective cultural resource management practices.
2. Heightened national and international profile through strategic promotions, partnering and outreach activities.
3. An improved visitor experience (VE) offer, featuring more Indigenous stories, through the creation of innovative, audience-specific visitor experience products.
4. Strengthened relationships with Indigenous communities, other key stakeholders, partners and local residents through increased public engagement opportunities.

Throughout the life of this management plan, Parks Canada will continue to work closely with partners and stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, to achieve these objectives and ensure the continued, effective management of Signal Hill NHS.

## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	iii
Recommendations.....	iv
Executive Summary.....	iv
1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Significance of Signal Hill National Historic Site.....	4
3.0 Planning Context.....	5
4.0 Vision.....	7
5.0 Key Strategies.....	8
6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment.....	11

### **Maps**

Map 1: Regional Setting.....	2
Map 2: Signal Hill National Historic Site.....	3

## 1.0 Introduction

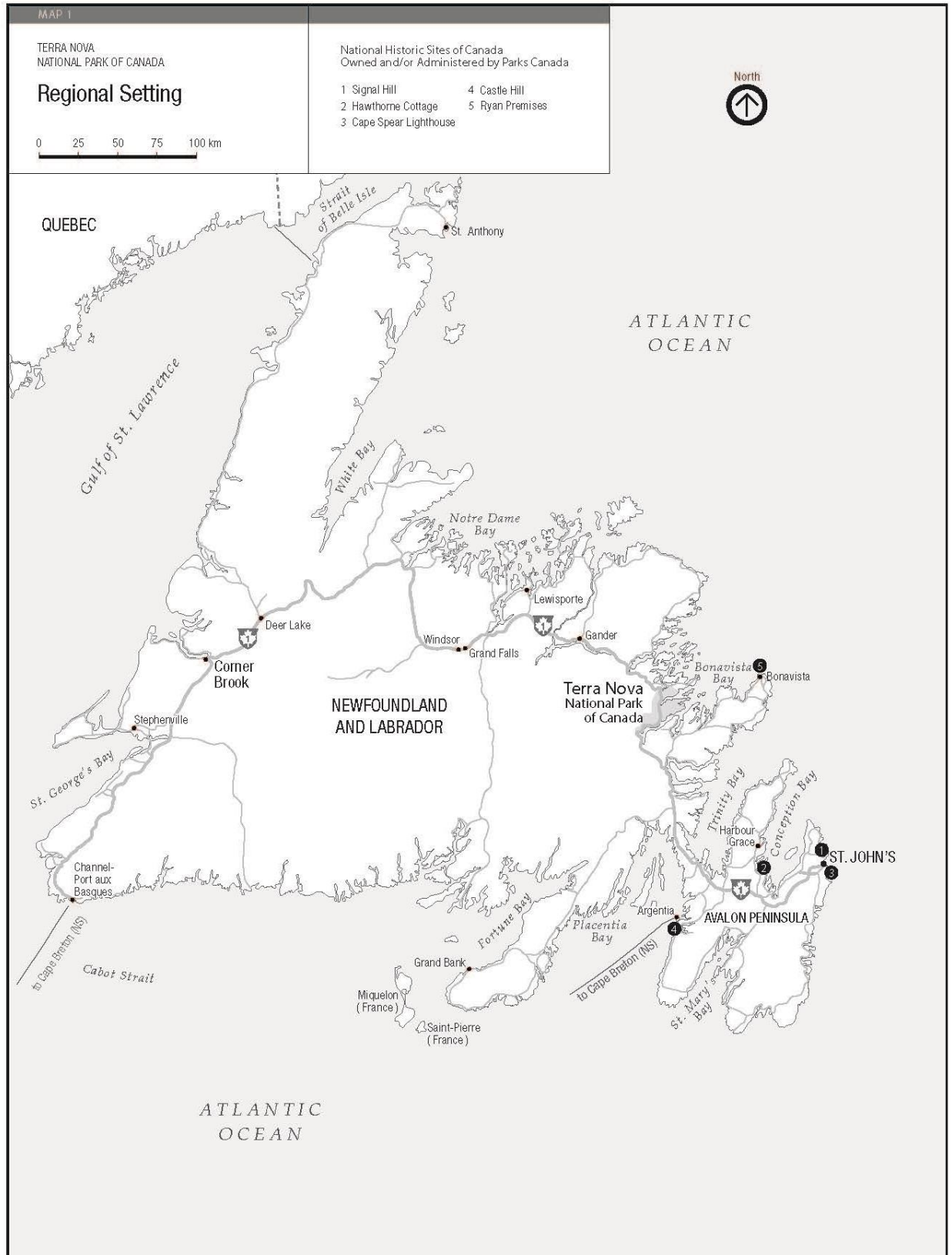
Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and those national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

*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.*

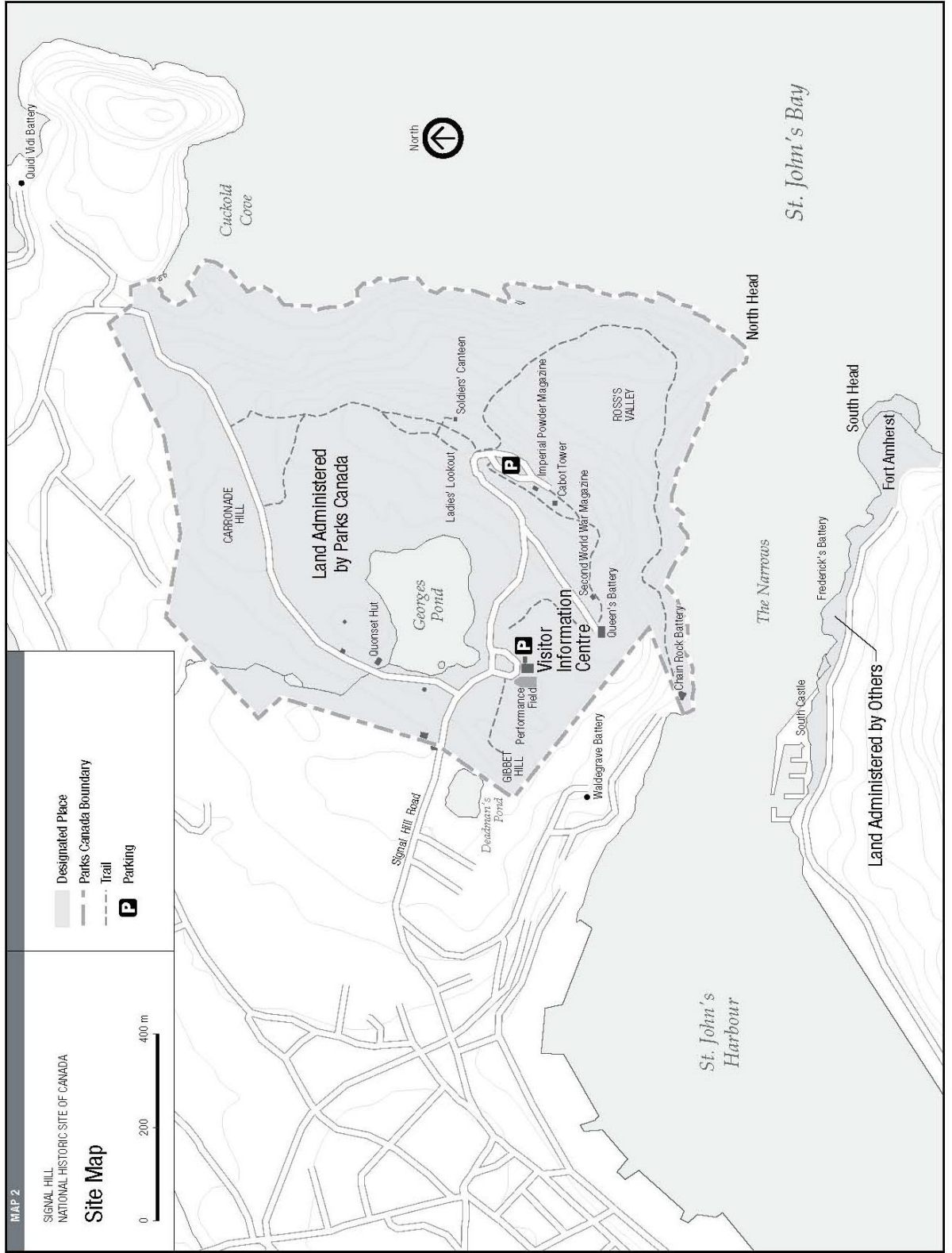
The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Signal Hill National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

Many Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples, were invited to participate in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Signal Hill National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of Signal Hill National Historic Site in years to come.







## 2.0 Significance of Signal Hill National Historic Site

Located in St. John's – Newfoundland and Labrador's capital city – Signal Hill National Historic Site (NHS) is one of Canada's most distinctive landmarks and received national historic designation in 1951.

Administered by Parks Canada, Newfoundland East Field Unit (NEFU), the site is 106 hectares and consists of the major portion of the Signal Hill peninsula. The ribbon of shoreline on the south side of the Narrows that completed the designated place in 1998 contains Fort Amherst National Historic Site of Canada and two historic sites recognised by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador: Frederick's Battery and South Castle. Although this land and its resources are included in the Designated Place, Parks Canada does not own or administer them. This responsibility is divided amongst the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the City of St. John's, private landowners, the St. John's Port Authority, the Fort Amherst Small Boat Basin Corporation and various agencies of the Federal government, including Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada.

Signal Hill's Messages of National Significance convey the site's importance and are communicated through interpretation panels, partially-restored archaeological sites, unique cultural landscapes, interpretive programming and multi-media exhibits.

Signal Hill is a national historic site because of its important association with Canada's defence and communications history. This primary message of national historic significance is supported by several context messages:

- Signal Hill and the south side of the Narrows were integral parts of the St. John's defence systems and played an important role in the defence of Canada from the 1640s to the Second World War.
- Signal Hill played an important role in military signalling ca.1704-1870. Flags were used to announce the arrival of ships, and cannons and muskets were fired to regulate daily military activities and notify mariners during periods of fog.
- Apart from its commemorative purpose, Cabot Tower was built to be a flag signalling tower and served that function from 1900 to 1958.
- In 1901, Guglielmo Marconi received the world's first transatlantic wireless signal on Signal Hill.
- In 1909, the site received its first transatlantic cable, which was landed at Cuckhold's Cove and provided the first direct telegraph link from Ireland to St. John's and New York.
- In an early demonstration of voice wireless technology, the Canadian Marconi Company successfully transmitted the human voice a distance of 1200 km across the Atlantic Ocean via wireless telephone in 1920.

Today, Signal Hill NHS is an iconic heritage attraction that receives approximately 750,000 person visits annually, making it one of the most visited national historic sites in Canada. Signal Hill is crowned by Cabot

Tower, one of Canada's most recognizable heritage landmarks and an instantly recognizable symbol of Newfoundland and Labrador. The site features a wide variety of visitor experience opportunities, including immersive interpretation programs, costumed military demonstrations, culinary experiences, music and theatre programs, spectacular hiking trails and a modern visitor centre complete with multi-media theatre and exhibits.

The richness of Signal Hill NHS's history is matched by its incredible natural features and rugged beauty. Although located within an urban setting and adjacent to the downtown core of St. John's, Signal Hill NHS is truly a world apart, providing visitors the opportunity for spectacular hiking experiences atop exposed ocean headlands, along centuries-old footpaths, and through dense forested areas. Given the breadth and variety of its natural landscapes, Signal Hill NHS offers a rugged park experience in an urban setting, making it an accessible option for local residents who wish to connect with nature and culture in a Parks Canada place, but may not have the opportunity to visit a national park.

### 3.0 Planning Context

Signal Hill NHS enjoys a prominent public profile, both locally and nationally. The site is cherished by local residents and marvelled at by visitors. Visible to all in the St. John's area, Signal Hill is never far away from the public eye and often features in both traditional and new media channels. Recent visitor experience initiatives stemming from the previous Signal Hill NHS Management Plan - particularly in visitor experience product development, promotions, partnering and new media /social media – have strengthened connections between the site and key audiences. In addition, Signal Hill NHS has played a significant role in recent Government of Canada priority initiatives, such as War of 1812 commemorations, Road to 2017 activities, and World Wars commemorations projects. Building on Signal Hill's prominence and growing contribution to national initiatives, there are opportunities for the Agency to benefit more from Signal Hill's high profile as a national icon and its current and potential connections to priority audience segments.

Specific achievements stemming from the previous Signal Hill NHS management plan (2007) include:

- A refurbished visitor centre featuring a multi-media theatre, exhibits and café.
- Rejuvenated collaborative relationships with key onsite partners, including the Signal Hill Tattoo, the Society of Newfoundland Radio Amateurs, and the Historic Sites Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, to achieve shared strategic objectives and expand the presentation of the full scope of Signal Hill's military and communications history.
- Strong and dynamic social media presence for Signal Hill NHS, through Facebook, YouTube and Twitter social media platforms.
- Improved visitor experience through renewed on-site directional and interpretation signage, particularly at the North Head and Ladies' Lookout Trails

- New collaborative relationships within the tourism and service sectors to encourage increased visitation and new visitor experience offers.
- Renewal of on-site interpretive programs with a focus on immersive, interactive experiences.
- Significant increase in overall paid visitation and participation in revenue-generating visitor experience programs.
- Archaeological excavations completed in the Chain Rock area, along The Narrows.
- Significant repair, conservation and historical restoration work completed at Cabot Tower.
- Upgrades to the Visitor Center Annex to create new service-offer and revenue-generation opportunities.
- Significant repairs to the reconstructed Queen's Battery Barracks.
- Re-routing of Signal Hill Road and the installation of sidewalks for improved public safety.
- Renewal of the Signal Hill Tattoo performance field, including landscaping and the installation of a new viewing area.
- Repair and repaving of the summit parking area and the installation of new walkways.

Overall capital investment in facilities, infrastructure, visitor experience programs and non-personal media since the previous management plan totals approximately \$15 million.

This current management plan outlines how Parks Canada seeks to build upon achievements realized since the previous management plan, particularly in terms of pursuing more opportunities for partnering and engagement, reaching out to new market segments, further enhancing the visitor experience offer, and continuing to ensure the protection of the site's cultural and natural resources. Based on what has been accomplished since the 2007 management plan, combined with current management practices and direction, Signal Hill NHS is well positioned to achieve successes in all of these areas moving forward.

Any anticipated achievements must be considered alongside the consistently significant challenge that Signal Hill NHS receives a high number of annual person visits (approximately 750,000) but relatively little paid visitation (approximately 12,000), thereby generating minimal revenue to invest in visitor facilities, services and assets. Visitors to the site are not required to pay an entry fee unless they enter the Visitor Centre or Queen's Battery Barracks, visit the site as part of a commercial tour, or participate in a fee-based special event or program. By developing new fee-based visitor experience programming, enhancing the food service offer at the Visitor Centre café, and increasing commercial tour fee compliance, we have begun to create new opportunities for revenue generation to support our continued high quality visitor services, facilities and assets.

These efforts will be further enhanced by revenue-generation opportunities linked to the newly-renovated Signal Hill Visitor Centre Annex. The Annex is a multi-purpose facility, attached to the Visitor Centre, with capacity for 100+ people. Featuring spectacular views of St. John's harbour and the summit of Signal Hill, the Annex is used for announcements, meetings and other public events, in addition to its primary use as a training space for the Signal Hill Tattoo. The Annex has

recently undergone significant renovations and now features a fully-equipped commercial kitchen, new washroom facilities, and a large outdoor deck. Through these improvements, the Annex is ideally equipped to host a wider variety of private and public functions.

These improvements to the Annex come at an opportune time. Memorial University of Newfoundland is in the process of renovating the former Battery Hotel, adjacent to Signal Hill NHS, to become a multi-purpose facility and conference centre. The combination of this facility alongside the newly-renovated facilities at Signal Hill NHS as well as the Johnson Geo Centre creates opportunities for the three institutions to jointly serve the convention/conference sector, which should continue to see significant growth in St. John's over the coming years.

Partnering and engagement activities for Signal Hill NHS are not solely focused on organizations in St. John's. The NEFU has had a memorandum of understanding with Miawpukek First Nation (MFN) since 2014 and with Qalipu First Nation (QFN) since 2017 to cooperate in a number of areas including employment, career development and training, tourism management, and cross-promotion. Additionally, the NEFU works with MFN, QFN and other Indigenous organizations in the development and delivery of visitor experience and outreach programs, as well as special events. Given Signal Hill NHS's high profile and prominence, there is significant potential for the site to be a focal point for Indigenous reconciliation initiatives in Newfoundland through, for example, the development and delivery of on-site programs and public events in partnership with Newfoundland and Labrador's Indigenous communities.

Special events at Signal Hill NHS, such as the annual Canada Day sunrise event, consistently bring hundreds of visitors and nation-wide attention to the site. To build on Signal Hill's popularity as a venue for public events, Parks Canada is developing new, high-profile events to engage local residents and visitors in new ways. One such example is the inaugural Star Gala event, held in December 2015, during which we unveiled a new holiday star affixed to Cabot Tower. This event was very well attended and generated local and national media attention, building on the local population's connection to the Cabot Tower star as a decades-long holiday tradition in St. John's.

Parks Canada's focus on high-profile special events, enhanced visitor experiences and increased public and stakeholder engagement is paired with an unwavering commitment to cultural resource protection. The most recent Commemorative Integrity Evaluation for Signal Hill NHS, completed in 2011, rated archaeology sites as stable. Parks Canada continues to monitor these sites to insure any threats to cultural resources are identified and mitigated. Concerns raised in the Commemorative Integrity Evaluation regarding damage to Cabot Tower due to water infiltration have been addressed.

## 4.0 Vision

In 20 years, Signal Hill National Historic Site will be a showcase site in Parks Canada's family of national historic sites and a place where Canadians feel a strong sense of connection to their shared heritage as a

result of high quality visitor experiences, meaningful community engagement and effective partnerships. The site will feature a diverse range of innovative and immersive visitor experience opportunities that tell the story of this unique place and its important role in global communications history, particularly as the reception point for the first trans-Atlantic wireless signal, and in global military history as an important military installation over three centuries and the site of the last military engagement between France and Great Britain in the Seven Years War. The stories of Indigenous Peoples on the Island of Newfoundland will be woven into the stories of the site and its natural and cultural heritage resources will be protected, understood, valued and accessible. Signal Hill National Historic Site will continue to be one of Newfoundland and Labrador's top tourism attractions based on visitor statistics and satisfaction surveys. Local residents and Canadians across the country will feel a strong sense of connection to the site as a result of increased opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement and greater public awareness of Parks Canada's role and visitor experience offer.

## 5.0 Key Strategies

The planning priorities for Signal Hill National Historic Site will be achieved through a results based management framework consisting of four (4) Key Strategies and associated objectives and targets designed to measure progress.

These key strategies are designed to be achievable given the current planning context. Parks Canada, working alongside our partners, stakeholders, and the public, will implement these strategies in order to realize the Vision outlined above for Signal Hill NHS.

### **Key Strategy 1: Preserving Signal Hill National Historic Site's cultural and natural resources and their heritage values.**

This strategy ensures the sites' cultural resources including cultural landscapes and their associated views, buildings, archaeological sites, historical and archaeological objects, and their heritage values are not lost or impaired due to natural processes or human actions within or outside the site. Parks Canada will continue to inventory, document and monitor the site's cultural resources, to take action when necessary to protect these resources, and will base all management decisions on adequate and sound information, in accordance with Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy.

Likewise, Signal Hill will continue to be valued for its rugged natural beauty, landscapes and expansive views of the Atlantic Ocean, the Narrows and St. John's. Natural resources, including landscapes and their characteristic features, will be protected and remain accessible to all visitors.

Objective: Cultural and natural resources and associated heritage values are identified, monitored and protected.

Target:

- By 2026, an updated Commemorative Integrity Assessment is completed.
- By 2027, the condition of cultural resources is stable or improved through ongoing monitoring, regular maintenance and specific interventions where required.
- By 2027, an updated natural resources inventory of Signal Hill NHS will be completed and the site's landscape preservation plan will be updated.

### **Key Strategy 2: Enhancing national profile through strategic promotions, partnering and outreach.**

A focus of this strategy will be to explore opportunities to expand the national profile of Signal Hill National Historic Site within the Parks Canada family of National Historic Sites and to increase opportunities to create meaningful connections with Canadians. This will be accomplished by pursuing new relationships with internal and external partners, including other Parks Canada places with thematic links, as well as provincial and national tourism organizations and adjacent institutions such as the Johnson GeoCentre and Memorial University's Battery Facility. Through relationship building and maintenance, we will generate new promotional opportunities and expand Signal Hill NHS's reach into new markets, such as the conference sector. In support of this, Parks Canada will continue to reach out to Canadians where they live, build on established relationships with other military and communications history sites, particularly those within the Parks Canada family, and further increase the site's recognition and stature.

Objective: Signal Hill National Historic Site strategically targets investments to raise national profile and more effectively connect with target audiences such as youth, urban Canadians, New Canadians and key interest groups.

Targets:

- By 2020, the number of partnering arrangements (through partnership agreements, memoranda of understanding, and other mechanisms) is increased by 50% (for a total of fifteen formalized partnering arrangements).
- By 2020, the number of national media stories about Signal Hill National Historic Site is increased by 50% (for a total of twenty-five).
- By 2025, the number of conference and cruise visitors are increased by 25% (for an approximate total of 7,000).

**Key Strategy 3: Facilitate new, market focused visitor experiences, with an emphasis on featuring Indigenous stories, as part of a constantly improving visitor experience offer.**

Position Signal Hill NHS as a focal point for Indigenous reconciliation activities and strive to ensure that Indigenous stories are woven into the overall story of Signal Hill. Specifically, expand opportunities for Indigenous programming, tourism and public events, delivered in partnership with the MFN, QFN and other Indigenous organizations.

Tailor the VE offer to reach specific market segments that are currently underrepresented, such as urban Canadians aged 18-25 and fledgling families with parents aged 25-44. Ensure that the site's communications history is featured prominently in the overall VE offer. Maintain existing trails to augment visitor experience for the site and to ensure public safety requirements continue to be met.

Objective: An enhanced visitor experience offer that engages visitors through unique, meaningful experiences highlighting the many stories of Signal Hill National Historic Site, including those from Indigenous cultures.

Targets:

- More than 90% of visitors will enjoy and are satisfied with their experience at Signal Hill National Historic Site, as demonstrated through Visitor Information Program (VIP) survey reporting.
- By 2019, public safety enhancements on the North Head Trail will be completed.
- By 2025, paid visitation as a proportion of the number of overall person-visits to Signal Hill National Historic Site will increase by 25% (to approximately 15,000).
- By 2025, the proportion of visitors aged 18-25 years old and 25-34 years old will increase by 20%, based on VIP survey reports.

**Key Strategy 4: Strengthening relationships with key stakeholders and community members.**

Through fostering strategic relationships with stakeholders (such as Memorial University, Destination St. John's, The Association for New Canadians, and the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador), explore opportunities to create meaningful connections with key audiences, such as New Canadians, Youth and Urban Canadians. In addition, identify ways to engage residents of the Signal Hill neighbourhood and create new opportunities for Canadians from all backgrounds to experience the site's natural and cultural heritage.



Objective: Canadians, whether living across the country or next door to the site, feel a sense of connection to Signal Hill National Historic Site. Residents of the Signal Hill neighbourhood engage with Parks Canada in the stewardship of the rich natural and cultural history protected within the site's boundaries.

Targets:

- By 2019, opportunities for local public and stakeholders to connect with the site through open houses, targeted stakeholder groups and social media will increase by 50% (through, for example, public participation workshops and on-line discussion forums).
- By 2018, an expanded Learn to Camp Program will deliver a minimum of one onsite and one offsite Learn to Camp Program each year.
- By 2019, achieve the Parks Canada Agency target of a 10% increase in volunteers and achieve a 25% increase by 2025 (resulting in an overall increase to twenty volunteers).

## 6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on natural and on cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* prepared by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, requires a strategic environmental assessment of all plans and policy submitted to the federal Cabinet or to a Minister for approval deemed to have important positive or negative environmental effects.

*A strategic environmental assessment was undertaken on this management plan, and the management direction found within has been adjusted to respond to findings. The following is a summary of the environmental assessment:*

The Preliminary Scan for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) fulfils all SEA requirements related to the Signal Hill National Historic Site Management Plan. The Preliminary Scan determined that there are no anticipated important negative effects, nor public/stakeholder interests or concerns, associated with the management measures and objectives presented in this management plan.