



Fort St. James
National Historic Site



FORT ST. JAMES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

Phase 2 Consultation, Summer and Fall 2023

Introduction

Parks Canada consulted with Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public to seek feedback on priorities for the Fort St. James National Historic Site draft management plan. This was the second of two phases of consultation. This “What We Heard Report” summarizes the feedback Parks Canada received during the second phase of consultation in summer and fall of 2023.

Parks Canada sincerely thanks all those who shared their feedback on the draft management plan for Fort St. James National Historic Site.

Consultation Overview

Phase one of consultation for the new management plan for Fort St. James National Historic Site occurred in 2022. Objectives of this first phase of consultation were to inform Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public about the management planning process, and to seek feedback on important considerations to inform the development of the draft plan. An additional engagement with Indigenous partners was held in February 2023 to further discuss incorporating Indigenous stories on site.

Phase two of consultation on the draft management plan was held in summer and fall of 2023. Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public had the opportunity to comment on the draft management plan through bilateral meetings at the Caledonia Days public event and through a public survey.

Engagement by the Numbers

- Forty-seven respondents completed the draft management plan survey
- Three respondents sent emails with comments to planfortstjames@pc.gc.ca
- Two First Nations and one Métis community association met with Parks Canada in person and virtually
- Two stakeholder groups met in person with Parks Canada.

Indigenous Groups and Stakeholders

The following Indigenous groups and stakeholders were sent draft versions of the new management plan for Fort St. James National Historic Site:

Indigenous Groups

- Binche Whut'en
- Nak'azdli Whut'en
- New Caledonia Métis Association
- Prince George Métis Community Association
- Tl'azt'en Nation
- Yekooche First Nation

Stakeholders

- BC Parks
- College of New Caledonia
- Community Arts Council
- David Hoy Elementary School
- Fort St. James Chamber of Commerce
- Fort St. James Secondary School
- Fort St. James Tourism Committee
- Friends of the Fort St. James National Historic Site
- Municipality of Fort St. James
- Nak'albun Elementary School

- Northern BC Tourism
- Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako

Consultation Activities in 2023

Parks Canada used a variety of consultation methods during the second phase of consultation. This included bilateral meetings, online and print media, an online survey and in-person public consultation at community events on site (Table 1).

Activity	Objectives
<i>Indigenous</i>	
Bilateral meetings	One in-person bilateral meeting and two virtual bilateral meetings with Indigenous groups were held. Goals of the bilateral meetings were to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share information about the management planning process, and • listen to feedback on the draft management plan and how it reflects Indigenous priorities and interests in the site.
<i>Public and Stakeholder</i>	
Website	The Fort St. James National Historic Site website was used as an online hub for providing project information and updates and included a link to the survey and project team contact information.
Social Media	The site’s X (formally Twitter) and Facebook pages were used to communicate the launch of consultation and key dates, and to provide links to the project website.
Print Advertising	Advertisements were placed in two newspapers with local and regional circulation to communicate the launch of consultation and key dates, and to provide links to the project website. A postcard was sent to all Fort St. James post boxes advertising the consultation period and related events.
Stakeholder Meetings	Two in-person meetings with stakeholder organizations were held.
Online Survey	A survey was the primary mechanism for gathering feedback from the public on the draft management plan. The survey was available on the project website, by hardcopy in the site’s visitor centre and at a pop-up booth at the annual Caledonia Days event.
Information Booth at Caledonia Days	At the site’s annual Caledonia Days on August 26, 2023, Parks Canada set up an information booth to answer questions and collect public input on the draft management plan.

Table 1 Consultation methods during the second phase of consultation on the draft management plan



Image 1: Public consultation at Caledonia Days, 2023. Photo Credit: Luuk Wijk

Consultation with Indigenous Partners

We heard the following themes from discussions with Indigenous partners:

Stories and Truth

Indigenous partners shared that they believe the national historic site has an important role in telling the truth. This includes telling not only the history of the site but also the history of the First Nations and Métis in the area and the impact of the site on Indigenous communities. Indigenous partners requested more emphasis on the interpretation of the significance of Chief Kw'eh's dagger; the history of the site before, during and after European contact; and the fur trade. Additionally, we heard that partners would like to see information on each Indigenous group presented on site in signage and programming. Indigenous partners suggested expanding the school program, including more in-person interpretation by Indigenous staff, and inviting elders and knowledge keepers to share their knowledge and skills through workshops on site.

“The historic site has a role to play in telling the truth.”

Community Connections

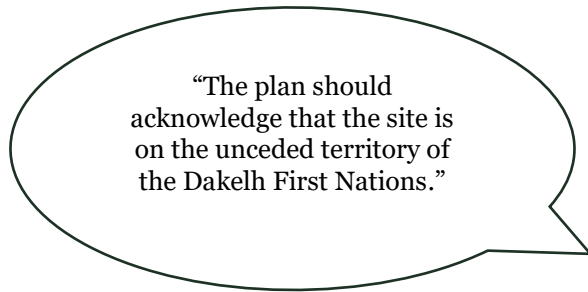
Indigenous partners value the site as a meeting place, event venue and place of learning and sharing, not only for Indigenous partners to share culture with visitors, but for Indigenous communities to learn and share about their own culture with their own community.

Signage

Indigenous partners look forward to seeing more Dakelh language on site and improved regional wayfinding signage to reflect the diversity of Indigenous culture.

Indigenous Management

Indigenous partners shared that they are supportive of the target to establish an advisory group. An advisory group is seen as a positive step towards increasing Indigenous partners' role in management of the site moving forward.



Acknowledgement of Unceded Territory

From both the public survey and in conversations with Indigenous partners, we heard that the plan should acknowledge that the historic site is built on the unceded territory of the Nak'al Bun First Nations: Nak'azdli Whut'en, Yekooche, Binche Whut'en, and Tl'azt'en.

Indigenous Capacity Building

We heard from Indigenous partners that their members, in particular their youth, would benefit from staffing opportunities on site as ways to build skills and experience that would benefit both the individuals and the community at large. Being involved on site in programming, site management and through an advisory group are viewed as positive, capacity-building opportunities.

This theme extends to employment opportunities for full-time work, opportunities for student summer positions and more informal opportunities which might be possible through flexible hiring structures.

The Role of the Site in Supporting Regional Tourism

Going forward, Indigenous partners hope the national historic site will support tourism opportunities in the region. There are opportunities to showcase Indigenous tourism offers and connections to the history of the site and region at large.

Consultation with Stakeholder Groups

Key themes which emerged from conversations with stakeholders included:

Community Meeting Place

Stakeholders shared that they value the role of the site as a hub for the local community and expressed their desire to see the site host more community events, with a strong focus on building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. The site is viewed as a natural meeting point as it sits between the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation reservation and the wider Fort St. James community.

Security

Security on site was a concern brought up by stakeholders—in particular, risks from vandalism, theft and fire.

Tramway

Stakeholders expressed concern for the future of the site's tramway, sharing that the tramway is highly valued by the community and represents an important link between the lake and the national historic site.

Animals

Stakeholders value the animals as an integral visitor-experience offer on the site. Stakeholders expressed disappointment at the reduced animal offer on site, particularly the relocation of horses.

Consultation with the General Public

Forty-seven respondents filled out the public survey on the draft management plan. When asked whether they supported the draft management plan’s vision, 62% of respondents strongly supported, 23% somewhat supported and 14% were neutral or opposed (Table 2). Overall, 72% of respondents were strongly supportive of the draft plan’s objectives.






How strongly do you support the draft management plan’s vision?	Percentage	Count	
Strongly support	62%	29	
Somewhat support	23%	11	
Neutral	4%	2	
Somewhat oppose	6%	3	
Strongly oppose	4%	2	
Total	100%	47	

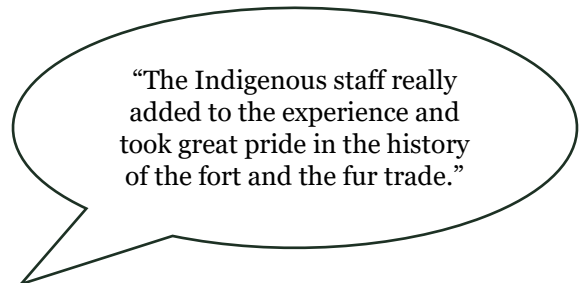
Table 2: Survey responses on levels of support for the draft management plan’s vision.

The Whole Story

The public expressed an interest in learning stories which told a more complete history of the site from the perspectives of First Nations, Métis and settler communities. In general, respondents commented that they value interpretive programs telling truthful and engaging stories of the place through diverse voices from within the community (be it staff interpreters, summer students, elders or knowledge keepers). These stories were viewed by respondents as a chance to foster connection and understanding within the community and outside the community with visitors to the site.

Indigenous Connections to the Site

Respondents suggested that the site should include more Indigenous cultural opportunities for visitors to learn about local Indigenous communities. Survey respondents also expressed the importance of increasing opportunities for partnership or co-management with local Indigenous partners. Respondents expressed their appreciation for the site’s staff and the Indigenous stories told, and how that influenced their desire to return to the site and share it with their own young family members. Others expressed their connection to the place through their family, past experiences and interest in the history of the fur trade.



How this Feedback was Considered

Parks Canada considered all feedback from Indigenous partners, stakeholder organizations and the public. The following changes were made to finalize the draft management plan.

Section 2.0 Significance

- Acknowledgement that the Fort St. James National Historic Site is on the unceded territory of the Dakelhne - Nak'azdli Whut'en, Yekooche, Binche Whut'en and Tl'azt'en - First Nations.
- Acknowledgment that Chief Kw'eh's dagger is on loan from Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation for safekeeping and access for his descendants and visitors.

Section 3.0 Planning Context

- Identification of the importance of
 - the site's location in the centre of town
 - the site's strong connections to the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation and
 - the site's role as a trading and communication post during the development of the community of Fort St. James.
- Description of the site's role in the local tourism industry for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and Fort St. James as a whole.
- Acknowledgement of the significant contributions to the site by the Friends of Fort St. James.

Section 5.0 Vision

- Acknowledgement that the Fort St. James National Historic Site is on the unceded territory of the Dakelhne – Nak'azdli Whut'en, Yekooche, Binche Whut'en and Tl'azt'en - First Nations.
- Reflection of Indigenous partner's words by including the role of the site in 'telling the truth' about difficult aspects of Canada's past and present.

Section 6.0 Key Strategies

Strategy 1: Honouring Indigenous Connections and Culture

- Added an objective to Key Strategy 1 welcoming Dakelh and Métis partners to connect with their culture, cultural resources and communities on site and target to track the use of the site as a venue for community events hosted by Indigenous partners.

Strategy 2: Protecting and Presenting Cultural Heritage

- Added a target in Objective 2.3 to expand online content to reflect the diversity of Dakelh and Métis culture and connections to the national historic site.

Strategy 3: Welcoming Visitors

- Added a target to Objective 3.2 to align on-site and off-site wayfinding and promotional signage with the Parks Canada brand, *Official Languages Act* and cultural values of the site.

Next Steps

The management plan is not an end in and of itself. Over the next decade, Parks Canada will continue to engage with Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public on how best to implement the vision and objectives established in the plan.