Review of Parks Canada's Attendance Monitoring and Visitor Information Programs

August 2004

Performance, Audit and Review Group Strategy and Plans

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parks Canada has a long history of collecting data on attendance, visitor characteristics and satisfaction. Finance Committee provided the most recent national direction related to attendance monitoring and the visitor information approximately two and a half to three years ago. Since that direction perennial issues of data quality and affordability have continued to be debated and new challenges concerning the relevance of the data, the need for new or different data and management accountability for acting on the data have been raised. The current review summarizes these new challenges and assesses the adequacy of the management framework for ensuring data relevance and quality, participation in the programs, and performance target setting and follow-up.

The review was carried out by the PARG based on document review and interviews with social scientists and program managers. The review examined how well the programs conform to a number of criteria characteristic of good management frameworks (e.g., clear processes for defining what data is to be collected and associated quality requirements, clear direction on participation and processes for monitoring and follow-up, clear processes for target setting and processes for management follow-up and action when targets are not meet).

It was concluded that with a few specific exceptions the existing data collected is clearly defined and thought to be useful. However, there are weaknesses in the system for deciding what new or additional data is required at a national level, reporting attendance data to national office and the consistency of approaches to ensure data quality and communicating this across the country. The general direction concerning who should participate is clear although more direction is required on when third party managed sites should participate in the programs. Compliance with direction to participation is good for attendance monitoring but Parks Canada will not meet its target for participation in the VIP. Targets are not set consistently in the Agency. Most targets with respect to use and satisfaction are being meet. The national target for understanding is not likely to be met at most sites. There is no system to follow-up and report on management actions to improve performance when they do not meet the national standards.

As a result of the review it is recommended that Parks Canada:
- ▸ Clarify the overall governance of the programs (i.e., the key direction setting body and national lead)
- ▸ Address a number of issues related to standards and practices for quality, completeness, dispute resolution and public reporting in time for the 2005 operating season
- ▸ Conduct an independent audit of the quality of attendance data
- ▸ Improve the coordinate national reporting of attendance data so that the data can aid decision-making and action.
- ▸ Conduct a study of the national costs of attendance monitoring and value for money within five years
- ▸ Develop a guide on national target setting
- ▸ Develop a system to document follow-up actions and improvements to performance

Review Of Attendance Monitoring And Visitor Information Programs[1]

INTRODUCTION
Parks Canada has a long history of collecting data on attendance, visitor characteristics and satisfaction. Although they are separate programs, attendance monitoring and the visitor information program are linked.   Information on attendance is the basis of visitor surveys.   It guides the planning of surveys and ensures that the results of surveys are representative of all visitors or specific subgroups of visitors.

It is now approximately two and a half to three years since Finance Committee provided national direction on both attendance monitoring and the visitor information program.   During this time, perennial issues of data quality and affordability have continued to be debated and new challenges concerning the relevance of the data, the need for new or different data and management accountability for acting on the data have been raised.

The current review summarizes these new challenges and assesses the adequacy of the management framework for ensuring:
- Data relevance and quality
- Participation in the program
- Performance target setting and follow-up

METHODOLOGY AND CRITERIA
This review is the work of the Performance, Audit and Review Group (PARG) based on document and file review including standard summaries of attendance tracking methodology collected each year and interviews with social scientists and national program managers in Parks Canada. Field unit managers were not interviewed.   The work was carried out between September 2003 and February 2004.

Our criteria of a good management framework for these programs included clear definitions of appropriate and relevant attendance and visitor information, a reasonable consensus that the data was useful, processes for determining what data are important, what quality standards are expected, and for monitoring and verifying that the required data is collected according to accepted standards and in a timely manner. We expected to find processes for handling disputes about these issues.

With respect to participation in the programs we expected to find clear direction concerning what units (i.e., parks and national historic sites) are required to participate over what period of time, processes for monitoring participation and assessing compliance with the direction to participate and processes for handling disputes about these issues.

Finally with respect to performance targets and follow-up we expected to find performance targets that were clear, concrete and time bound, based on generally accepted processes for setting and modifying targets. When targets are not meet we expected to find systems for

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[1]   A much longer and more detailed version of this review is available from the Performance, Audit and Review Group

monitoring follow-up actions and changes to future performance and that managers where held accountable.

 ATTENDANCE

Data Relevance: What and Why We Measure
Currently, national attendance monitoring is focused on a single statistic, the number of person-visits at specific locations Parks Canada administers. Person visits as a measure of demand for heritage places is well defined and understood within Parks Canada. It conforms to international standards for measuring tourist statistics (see for example, Hornback, Kenneth, and Eagles, Paul, 1999 "Guidelines for Public Measurement and Report at Parks and Protected Areas" IUCN).

Finance Committee endorsed the importance of attendance monitoring in October 2001. Social scientists and program managers in national office reported person-visit data is relevant and useful for a variety of purposes including helping central agencies, parliamentarians, media, stakeholders and the public understand the importance and general use made of heritage places; as a input in calculating the economic impacts and for most social science research; as a basis for revenue projections; as an input for operationally planning; and, as context for analysis of human use/visitor impacts on heritage resources. Because of the way the information is collected nationally it is not currently used for managing or decision- making at a national level.

A variety of additional visitors statistics are also measured locally or regionally but are not captured nationally (e.g., camping nights, visit days).   Sites in Western Canada have undertaken periodic studies to document patterns of visitor use where visitors self-report where they have been on-site and what they have done.   Some interest has been expressed in capturing paid visits as a subset of person visits and in documenting unique visits (e.g., over all reach of the program) compared to overall demand (e.g., overall demand).

The last directive on what attendance statistics should be measured and how to measure these has not been reviewed or modified in 17 years (e.g., Administrative Bulletin 1.2.6 Attendance Statistics July 1987).   It requires tracking of several different types of attendance statistics so that current practice is not compliant with the directive.   Currently there is no operational lead for attendance monitoring at the national level responsible for coordinating input and making recommendations about what additional visits statistics could or should be collected from a national perspective.

Participation In The Program: Where Number of Visits Is Measured
The 1987 directive on monitoring calls for all sites to provide information on the number of visits but allows for a number of exceptions to the requirement (i.e., it is too costly, operationally or technically not feasible, there is limited professional support or simply because the level of public attendance is too limited to justify the effort).

In total, 125-heritage places (i.e., 35 National Parks, 2 National Marine Conservation Areas, 85 National Historic Sites and 3 heritage places and exhibits administered by Parks Canada) report person visit data to national office. The majority of these places (72%) are estimating the

number of person-visits rather than counting. The number of reporting units by region and the percentage of all person visits by region is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Sites Reporting Visits by Geographic Area

Region	Number and (%) of Units Reporting (n=125)	% of Person-Visits to Parks Canada Facilities
Atlantic	33 (26%)	14%
Quebec	28 (22%)	19%
Ontario	19 (15%)	18%
West	45 (36%)	50%

Table 2 shows the number of sites reporting visits by visit volume.   The number of reporting sites has remained stable over several years. The 20 least visited sites account for less than 1% of the visitor volume.   The twenty most visited sites account for more than 80% of the visitor volume.

Table 2: Number of Sites by Visit Volume (September 2003)

Six Groups of Sites Categorized by 2002-2003 Visitor Volume		% Of Person-Visits in 2002-03 Represented by Group
# of Sites	Range of Person-Visits	
21	75 to 6,395	<.5%
21	7,000 to 14,441	1%
21	14,495 to 29,418	2%
21	31,822 to 63,741	3%
21	69,586 to 250,435	13%
20	279,249 to 4,690,060	81%
125 Sites Reporting Attendance		100%

From the point of view of social scientist most sites that should be reporting attendance data are doing so. There are 67 sites that are not reporting visit data to national office. It is known that a few of these at least do have visit numbers.   According to the existing directive all sites that monitor visitor attendance should do so in a way that is consistent with the national approach. Ideally all sites would report their data to national office in a consistent fashion.

It was noted during the review that some sites managed by third parties are reporting attendance data while others are not reporting data. There is no national policy on when third party managers should provide attendance data.   There is no nationally assigned responsibility for tracking whether sites that should monitor and report attendance are in fact doing so.

Data Quality
Most national parks and national historic sites have multiple points of entry making a precise count of the number of visits impossible. In these cases, the number of person-visits is estimated. The general approach is to count traffic (i.e., persons, cars, boats) in the PHA often with technological aids such as automatic traffic counters. Count are adjusted based on the

results of periodic observational or survey studies that quantify factors such as the average number of people travelling by vehicle, the reasons for visiting, and the number of people re-entering the site on the same day.   It is the adjusted estimate that is reported as person-visits. Other sources of data may also be used to adjust traffic counts (Statistics Canada data, local tourism information, etc.).

It is widely recognized that estimates of person-visits contain a degree of error and that sites differ in the degree of accuracy that can be provided in their estimates. Errors in the estimates of visitor attendance can arise from several factors including failure to monitor some entrances to a site, failure of traffic counters to performance as intended, and calibration surveys that do not cover a representative group of visitors or are based on very small samples and errors in data processing and application of adjustment factors.

Social scientists in service centres play a key role in reducing error by providing advice and guidance on where and how to track visitors; conducting the studies that provide adjustments to the raw volume counts; and periodically reviewing and updating the attendance methodology. In Ontario and Quebec, the scientists also receive the raw volume counts, clean the data and apply the formula's to calculate person-visits for some sites. This is not done in Atlantic or Western Canada Service Centres because of resource constraints and a decision to focus on other priorities coupled with a belief that field units are able to do the job adequately. The importance of this step for ensuring **acceptable** quality in counts of person-visits is disputed among the social scientists interviewed for this review

When reporting statistical estimates a traditional way of communicating the degree of error is to report the likely range of values rather than a single precise number (i.e., with 95% confidence we estimate there were between 50,000 and 60,000 visits rather than precisely 56,332 visits). This practice is recommended in the existing directive on attendance monitoring but is only implemented at a few sites in Alberta and Ontario.

Instead, field units provide self-reports of their confidence in their attendance data according to criteria established by Parks Canada in order to communicate varying degrees of caution in accepting the estimates. By their self-assessment two-thirds of participating sites are producing high or very high quality data. Only seven of the participating sites are reporting low confidence in their data.[2] Where social scientists in service centres are familiar with the sites' ratings they tend to support the rating however there are exceptions.   Self-assessments have not been subject to independent audit.

In a few cases, there are disagreements between social scientists and field unit personnel on how to measure visits, or concerning field units' ratings of the confidence in the accuracy of their data. The major risks are that the number of person-visits will be over-estimated and that sites will overstate the confidence in the accuracy of their estimated person-visits. There is no formal mechanism in place for communicating or resolving these disputes.

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[2]   Just over one quarter (26%) of the sites reporting attendance data have not provided up to date methodology forms on their process for tracking attendance.   With out these it is not possible to verify whether the sites' confidence in the data is consistent with the criteria.

Parks Canada did not meet its target with respect to attendance data quality (i.e., moderate confidence in estimates of visits based on a calibration study within the last 10 years). Only 15 of the 20 most visited sites meet this standard by the target of March 2004. The achievability of the target has been challenged in the case of the Fortifications of Quebec and for other sites with similar complications in measuring attendance (e.g., The Forks). In those sites where the target is achievable, the major barriers are reported to be the complexity in assuring coverage of all visitors and obtaining sufficient resources to conduct studies to review and update attendance methodology. There is no operational lead in the organization with responsible for follow-up on the target and ensuring it continues to be appropriate and achievable or for reporting periodically to finance committee on progress toward the target.

Completeness of Monitoring and Timeliness of National Reporting
Many sites only monitor attendance for their peak operating season rather than their whole operating season. Therefore, existing estimates or counts of person-visits likely underestimate the true number of person-visits by an unknown amount. There is no policy direction on when and under what circumstances sites would be expected to monitor only part of their operating season.

To compile overall person-visit numbers for Parks Canada as a whole, national office requests person-visit data on a monthly basis from each location tracking attendance. There is no official requirement for locations to provide this information and no standard reporting cycle. Reporting by sites to national office varies from monthly to yearly. Table 3 summarizes information on the frequency of reporting visit data to national office.

Table 3: Frequency of Reporting Visit Data to National Office

Reporting Frequency in 2003-2004 to date	National Parks	National Historic Sites	Total	
			#	% of Total Visits for 2002-2003
Monthly	10	48	58	27%
Every Two Months	7	9	16	31%
Every Three to Six Months	5	10	15	7%
Greater than Six Months	15	21	36	35%
Total	37	88	125	100%

Table 3 shows that 74 places, representing 58% of the person-visits, are reporting at least every two months. However, these are not on the same cycle so that in any given month only some of the data is current. The 36 units reporting at six months or longer intervals account for 35% of person-visits. Eight sites make up 90% of these person visits. Converting these eights sites to a two month reporting cycle would result in 82 sites reporting 88% of the person-visits to Parks Canada facilities being on a common cycle. The current system of intermittent national reporting means that Parks Canada never has a complete picture of emerging trends in visits throughout the year for managing and decision-making but only a historic record useful for retrospective reporting.

Targets for Visits
A national target for person-visits were first introduced in the 2003/04 --- 2007/08 Corporate Plan with a commitment to increase by 10% the number of visits at four national historic sites by

March 2008. The process of target setting involved functional groups responding to direction from senior management, followed by research on reasonable sites, and leading to a specific proposal for Executive Board discussion and approval. It is expected that the targets will be achieved.

Costs
There is no single source for calculating the overall cost of attendance monitoring.   Sites that count visitors directly may incur relatively minimal costs. Those sites that require multiple automatic counters may be expect to pay upward of $100K for the equipment as well as an additional $50K to $100K for a study to accurately adjust the volume counts (e.g., salary costs for conducting calibration surveys).   There are additional unknown costs associated with maintaining the equipment in the field over time.   Given the lack of documentation on costs nationally it is not possible to determine if Parks Canada receives values for money from this activity.

VISITOR INFORMATION PROGRAM
Finance Committee (April 11, 2000) approved the current version of the Visitor Information Program (VIP).   The current program emphasizes surveying a fixed group of eligible sites over a five-year period[3], using a single core questionnaire to gather data on national indicators supplemented by site specific questions and including procedures to allow testing and adjustments to ensure more representative samples of visitors.   The revised program was first implemented in the summer of 2000.   The summer of 2004 marks the completion of the first five-year cycle.

Data Relevance: What and Why We Measure
The VIP collects information on 1) a core set of national indicators and 2) information for local managers on a range of site-specific topics.   The national indicators are linked to planned results in the Corporate Plan and so provide key information on progress against these commitments. The core set of national indicators covers three areas and nine indicators:

> ▸ The % of visitors who use heritage presentation products and services
> ▸ The % of visitors who understand the national significance of a site
> ▸ The % of visitors satisfaction with seven aspects of their visit (i.e., overall visit, staff courtesy, language of service, the visit as a recreational and as a learning experience, value for money[4], and with heritage presentation products and services

With the exception of the indicator of "use of heritage products/services", the core national indicators are reported to be clearly understood and are considered useful at national office and by service centre researchers.

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3   The program originally called for all eligible sites to be surveyed over a three-year period but this was modified after a year because of resource constraints in the service centres and field units.
4   In Quebec, the value for money question was originally translated as "rapport qualité/prix" and represents a different concept than value for money i.e., "la valeur par rapport au droit d'entrée".

There are continual pressures to use the VIP to obtain a variety of other information related to visitors' understanding and support for the national systems and their satisfaction with particular products and services (e.g., to provide benchmarks, to respond to management direction, new demands for information).   In particular it appears that the current VIP does not fully response to the original direction by Finance Committee on what to measure (i.e., assess visitors' understanding of the ecological and commemorative integrity of a site and their awareness of the place of the site in the national system).   The most recent Corporate Plan introduced a performance expectation and target related to the percentage of visitors expected to participate in a "learning experience".   This concept likely differs from the current measure of use of heritage presentation products and services and will require revision of this measure.

The current content of the surveys has largely been worked out in yearly meeting by social scientists based on their knowledge of field units' needs and national office priorities. Operational managers have not played a direct role in these meetings. At national office the External Relations Branch has taken on a coordinating role and increasingly a service provision role (i.e., survey design, question development, production and data processing) with respect to the program.   PARG has provided some monitoring and review of the program in the context of completing the Annual Report each year. Neither External Relations Branch nor PARG are formally assigned responsibility for leading the VIP program.

Participation in the Program: Where Visitors Are Surveyed
In November 2003 social scientists were asked to review and update the list of sites that should participate in the visitor information program during the first five-year cycle. As a result 114 locations were identified as existing in April 2000[5] and having sufficient infrastructure and visitors to warrant inclusion in the first VIP cycle.[6]   Table 4 shows the number of locations by region of the country that should participate in the VIP.

Table 4: Number of VIP Locations by Geographic Area

Area	Number and % of VIP Locations (n=114)	Percentage of Person-Visits to Parks Canada Facilities (n=110*)
Atlantic	31 (27%)	14%
Ontario	17 (15%)	18%
Quebec	28 (25%)	19%
West	38 (33%)	48%

*One VIP location in Atlantic Canada and three in Western Canada do
not report attendance and are not represented in the table.

As of August 2004 a total of 85 locations or 75% of the 114 sites on the list of program participants representing about 79% of the person-visits to the Parks Canada administered heritage places will have been covered in the first five-year cycle.[7]

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[5]   Includes one location that did not exist in April 2000.
[6]   In some cases, separately established national parks and/or designated national historic sites are treated as one location for purposes of attendance monitoring and/or conducting a visitor survey.
[7]   Counting the number of locations that have successfully participated in the VIP is not straight forward since there are no clear national criteria for determining if the survey was "sufficiently comprehensive" or conformed

Progress toward the goal of covering all eligible sites within the five-year cycle is shown in Table 5. The table also shows the percentage of person-visits represented by the locations surveyed.

Table 5: Number and % of Participating Locations in Visitor Information Program

Year	Number of Participating Locations	% of Eligible Locations (n=114)	Participating Locations % of Recorded Visits
2000	27	24	53
2001	29*	26	15
2002	12	11	9
2003	6*	5	1
2004	8*	7	1
Total	**82**	**72%**	**79%**

* An additional survey took place or is planned for a location that did not report attendance data in each of these years.

Most of the participation in the program was in the first two years of the five-year cycle. Since then participation has dropped dramatically.   Parks Canada will not meet its target of having all eligible sites participate within five years.

As with attendance monitoring, some sites managed by third parties are participating in the VIP and others are not. There is no policy or direction in the Agency on when a third party managed site should participate.

Data Quality
There are a number of points in the visitor survey process that can lead to survey error and poor data quality including questionnaire design, survey planning and implementation, data entry and data adjustment and reporting.   In each of the years the VIP has been implemented there have been problems with a few surveys in one or other of these areas. These problems have tended to be minor. Each year a sample of surveys has been subject to review and verification by the Auditor General. The most critical concerns have been ensuring that there is adequate person-visit data to create a viable survey plan, that adequate documentation exists for survey plans and for the source of the true/false questions testing visitors' understanding of the significance of the site and that there is adequate monitoring and controls on survey implementation in the field.

Targets for Use, Understanding and Satisfaction
Parks Canada's targets with respect to satisfaction and understanding of a site's significance are reasonably clear, time bound and concrete. The target with respect to "participation in a learning experience" is clear (e.g., a specific percentage of the visits will participate) but the meaning of participation in a learning experience is not yet defined so progress toward the target is not currently measurable. Participation in a learning experience is likely not the same as the current "use of heritage products/service" indicator found in the VIP.

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sufficiently to implementation "standards" expected of VIP surveys.   In addition since some locations (e.g., canals) require two surveys over multiple years to cover different types of visits resulting in some ambiguity concerning when these locations should be counted as having participated.

The processes of setting targets for the percentage of visitor who should be satisfied or the percentage of visitors who should understand the significance of a site were not done consistently.   These processes also differ from the process, described above, used to set targets for increased visits at four national historic sites.   In brief, targets are sometimes set based on a wide reading of performance in other organizations (e.g., satisfaction targets) and with an expectation that the targets will be achieved in most cases.   In other cases, targets are set by program managers to reflect desired performance levels with no real expectation that actual performance in many cases will meet the targets.   In some cases, targets have been set with no clear idea of whether the Agency is in a position to achieve the target or not.

Parks Canada has a dual target for all aspects of visitor satisfaction it measures.   That is, it expects 85% of visitors to be a least satisfied and 50% to be very satisfied.   Since Parks Canada measures 7 aspect of visit satisfaction this creates 14 satisfaction standards that each site participating in the VIP program is expected to meet.   Only 50% of the sites surveyed in 2002 and 2003 meet all 14 standards. In general, most locations meet the targets for overall visit satisfaction, staff courtesy and language of service.   National historic sites are more likely than national parks to not meet the target for satisfaction as a recreational experience. Conversely, national parks are more likely than historic sites to not meet the targets for satisfaction with learning experience, value for money and satisfaction with overall heritage presentation programming.

In the current system it is possible for a site to meet the 50% target for very satisfied visitors but not meet the seemingly lesser target of 85% of visitors being satisfied. This is most likely to occur in ratings of value for money.   The fact that a site can meet the higher standard has reportedly caused some public confusion.

Although targets for visitor satisfaction have been set and reported on publicly since 2000, there is no national management system in place to follow-up on the sites that fail to meet a target. Inspection of some field unit business plans and calls to social scientists at service centres have failed to generate examples of managers specifically taking action in response to not meeting targets measured by the VIP surveys.[8]. It is likely that actions to deal with some of the survey results are taking place but there is no system to monitor and report on this on a national scale.

It was reported during the course of the review that management actions may be constrained by several factors including lack of information in the VIP on the root cause the problem, lack of control over the root cause (e.g., increased fees driving down satisfaction with value for money) and lack of resources to address root causes (e.g., to replace or renew assets or equipment or update programming).

In response, we note that before assuming no additional action is possible managers should conduct farther research to clarify why targets were not meet. Research should consider how other units in the same region or nationally, that are subject to the same pressures and resources constraints are able to meet the targets.   Additional research counts as a first step in a series of

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[8]   For example, social scientists provided information for the 2002-2003 Annual Report on how data from special surveys lead to changes in service offer but could not identify any examples of how data from VIP surveys lead to changes in service offer.

management actions that should lead ultimately to improved performance. The extent of research and other management actions should be proportional to the extent of the problem. Sites that miss a target by a few percentage points requires a different level of effort to address the issue than sites missing the target by 10% or more.   In the event that additional research makes a credible case for not taking action to improve performance than this management decision and the reasons for it should be captured as part of a system of follow-up on performance against targets.

Costs
Beginning in the 2003-operating season Parks Canada acquired software and optical scanning equipment so that the organization would be able to design, produce, capture and process the data from VIP survey within the organization. The costs to the organization for the software, equipment and staff training were about $25K. Additional costs for staff to coordinate design, production, and distribution scanning and report generation are also incurred.   In 2004, a second set of equipment was purchased and staffed trained for approximately the same cost.   Field units paid on average $3Kto $8K per survey for salary for staff involved in administration and in some cases pay service centres for the costs of their administration of the process (e.g., about $3000 per survey).   These costs are widely seen as providing good value.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The focus of this review was on the adequacy of the management frameworks for attendance monitoring and the visitor information program and whether those frameworks lead to the intended results.   For example, we reviewed the processes for identifying data needs both locally and nationally (i.e., clear definitions, assigned roles and responsibilities) and asked whether these processes lead to data that is seen to be relevant and useful.   Similar questions were asked about processes and results with respect to data quality, program participation and target setting. The following are the recommendations that follow from the observations in the review.

Recommendations

Overall Governance
1. Parks Canada should confirm the finance committee or other body as the primary direction-setting group for the attendance monitoring and the visitor information programs.
2. A national lead should be identified for policy development, periodic monitoring of program implementation and for coordinating development of new data for both attendance monitoring and the Visitor Information Programs. A priority is to identify which of the current demands for information can and should be addressed within the attendance monitoring and visitor information programs.

Standards and Practices
3. The national lead should, in time for the 2005 season, clarify standards and practices for quality, completeness, dispute resolution and public reporting. Issues needing to be addressed include:

    Attendance
    ▸   A policy regarding when sites should track and report part or all of their operating season.

> ‣ Addressing the lack of standardization in service centres involvement in cleaning and processing attendance data (e.g., either this is necessary to ensure quality everywhere or SC's can devolve the role with appropriate safe guards).
> ‣ Review the current targets for attendance data quality (e.g., moderate level of confidence) and revise targets and standards as necessary.
> ‣ Identifying a standard process to follow when there are disputes about the validity of data and the validity of the site's confidence in the accuracy of their data.

VIP

> ‣ Determine if the current VIP cycle is realistic and achievable. An implementation schedule be developed that ensure full participation in the next five year cycle.
> ‣ Defining what standards are expected for a successful implementation of VIP survey
> ‣ Review the dual targets Parks Canada has set for all its satisfaction measures to see if these can be reduced, modified or clarified to facilitate public understanding. Target setting should take account of the new legislative requirements related to users fees.

Both

> ‣ A policy regarding third party participation in attendance monitoring and the VIP
> ‣ Adopt standard research practice of reporting confidence intervals for attendance and survey estimates unless there is a compelling case to do otherwise.

Independent Audit
4. PARG under take an independent audit of the quality of visitor attendance data at a sample of sites in 2005-06 (tentatively scheduled in Agency IA&E Plan).

Coordinated National Reporting
5. National lead to develop a coordinated reporting process so that up to date national visit statistics are available within an operating season (e.g., June and September) to aid decision-making and action.

Determining Program Costs and Value for Money
6. National lead to undertake a study of the costs of attendance monitoring, within five years to determine the value for the funds expended.

National Target Setting
7. PARG prepare a brief paper outlining considerations and roles and responsibilities with respect corporate target setting for use by Executive Board and managers setting national targets.

Document Follow-up Actions and Improvements to Performance
8. National lead develop a system to document what actions, if any, occur as a result of failure to meet visitor satisfaction and other participation and understanding targets. A useful model to consider is the work National Historic Branch in beginning in order to document follow-up actions in response to CI evaluations.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Representatives of Parks Canada's External Relations Branch, consistent with recommendation two below, prepared this management response for recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8. Performance Audit and Review Group in Strategy and Plans prepared the response to recommendations 4 and 7.

Overall Governance
Recommendation 1: Parks Canada should confirm the finance committee or other body as the primary direction-setting group for the attendance monitoring and the visitor information programs.

> Agree: Executive Board should provide overall direction setting for attendance monitoring and the visitor information programs in Parks Canada based on recommendations from either the Engaging Canadians or Visitor Experience Council. Both councils will be consulted on which is more appropriate and a recommendation will be made to Executive Board in early 2005.

Recommendations 2: A national lead should be identified for policy development, periodic monitoring of program implementation and for coordinating development of new data for both attendance monitoring and the Visitor Information Programs. A priority is to identify which of the current demands for information can and should be addressed within the attendance monitoring and visitor information programs.

> Agree: In principle it is agreed that External Relations Branch, in the National Historic Site Directorate, should assume the overall national lead for these programs. In particular, the proposed Chief of Social Science, reporting to the Director of the External Relations Branch, would be responsible for overall policy direction, coordination and monitoring of these programs.

> It is important to note however that at the present time, the Chief of Social Science for Parks Canada Agency has not been staffed and no funding has been identified for the salary or operating requirements of the position. Therefore, while the External Relations Branch is identified as the national lead for these programs, its operational capability to exercise its role is limited until the position of Chief Social Scientist is fully funded and staffed. Currently, there is no target date for funding or staffing the position.

Standards and Practices
Recommendation 3: The national lead should, in time for the 2005 season, clarify standards and practices for quality, completeness, dispute resolution and public reporting. Issues needing to be addressed include:

> Agree with Reservations: It is agreed that a thorough review of information needs and the corresponding procedures, standards and methods to provide that information should be completed. However, External Relations Branch will not undertake this review until the position of Chief of Social Science is funded and staffed. It is proposed that all the

issues identified in the review be addressed within 18 months from the hiring of the Chief of Social Science.

Independent Audit
Recommendation 4: PARG under take an independent audit of the quality of person-visitor data at a sample of sites in 2005-06.

> Agree: The audit is tentatively scheduled in the Agency's 2004-2007 Internal Audit and Evaluation plan for 2005-2006. The continued need for and timing of the audit will be reviewed as part of Parks Canada annual risk based internal audit and evaluation planning in January to March 2005.

Coordinated National Reporting
Recommendation 5: National lead to develop a coordinated reporting process so that up to date national visit statistics are available within an operating season (e.g., June and September) to aid decision-making and action.

> Agree: This will be completed within 18 months of the hiring of the Chief of Social Science.

Determining Program Costs and Value for Money
Recommendation 6: National lead to undertake a study of the costs of attendance monitoring, within five years to determine the value for the funds expended.

> Agree.   This will completed within five-years of hiring the Chief Social Scientist.

National Target Setting
Recommendation 7: PARG prepare a brief paper outlining considerations and roles and responsibilities with respect to corporate target setting for use by Executive Board and managers setting national targets.

> Agree: The Performance, Audit and Review Group will develop the paper by November 2004.

Document Follow-up Actions and Improvements to Performance
Recommendation 8: National lead develop a system to document what actions, if any, occur as a result of failure to meet visitor satisfaction and other participation and understanding targets. A useful model to consider is the work National Historic Site Directorate (Policy and Legislation Branch) is beginning in order to document follow-up actions in response to CI evaluations.

> Agree: National lead to collect summaries of actions taken and report to primary direction setting group (recommendation #1).