

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Evaluation of Parks Canada's Visitor Safety Program



Evaluation Objective and Scope

Consistent with the requirements of the Treasury Board Policy on Results (2016) and associated Directive on Results and Standard on Evaluation, the evaluation addressed the Visitor Safety Program's:

- **Effectiveness:** extent to which it is achieving its expected outcomes.
- **Efficiency:** extent to which resources are used, such that output is increased or the same level is reached, with the same degree of input or less.

The scope of the evaluation included the four activity areas of the Visitor Safety Program: planning, mitigation, response, and monitoring and evaluation. Results achieved since the introduction of the Directive on Visitor Safety (2013) were the main focus.

This evaluation covers the period from 2013-14 to 2018-19. Further details on methods, evaluation questions, and expectations are found in the full report.

Findings

Effectiveness

Overall, the Visitor Safety Program is adequately responding to visitor safety incidents; however, an opportunity exists to strengthen program accountability, training and monitoring, which will in turn impact the effective delivery of the program.

The findings related to each of the following areas identified to have an impact on visitor safety are highlighted below:

Planning, Training and Coordination with Partners

The number of approved visitor safety plans remains low across the system, in particular for national historic sites. The creation of the Visitor Safety Training Guidelines has helped to clarify expectations, but barriers to effective implementation remain, including time constraints for receiving training due to seasonality of positions, an over-reliance on prior training, and logistical challenges for remote locations. Although few formal agreements were in place, working relationships with search and rescue partners were generally strong, and the process for establishing and reviewing business licenses with third-party operators was found to be acceptable.

Mitigation

Due to special funding, the condition of assets has improved in recent years, although ongoing financial support is needed. Signage addressing hazards was generally sufficient, and several best practices in public education were identified, but the consistency with which safety messaging is transmitted could be improved. There is also a risk that the effectiveness of direct visitor safety messaging will be lost as registration shifts online.

Response, Monitoring and Evaluation

With respect to incident tracking, the Agency has been proactive in addressing any associated issues with the Incident and Event Management system. A need for annual reporting on visitor safety plans was identified in order to document progress made on action plans and assess the success of mitigation strategies.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- The Visitor Safety Program assesses and mitigates the risks to which visitors are exposed when practicing recreational activities or using recreational facilities in Parks Canada places. The objectives of managing these risks are to minimize the frequency and severity of visitor safety incidents as well as to minimize Agency liability.
- The program achieves these objectives by conducting risk assessments and monitoring and reducing real and potential risks, while also promoting visitor self-reliance and safe practice of activities.

Program Accountability and Capacity

Issues associated with program guidance constituted a barrier to the effective delivery and overall accountability of the program. With respect to staff capacity, the majority of Visitor Safety and Fire Operations Coordinator positions have been temporarily extended; however, long-term funding has yet to be identified to fully fund these positions. Contributing factors to increased work-related stress included reduced capacity, the nature of visitor safety work, and increased responsibilities.

External Factors

Increased visitation and changing visitor demographics have presented challenges to managing visitor safety. Although the use of technology is helping to contribute to a safer visitor experience, reliance on such technology coupled with an increased interest in back-country activities can also have a negative impact on visitor safety. Additionally, climate change poses a significant risk to visitor safety due to unpredictable weather events and degradation of infrastructure assets.

Efficiency

The Visitor Safety Program was found to be working well alongside other related programs.

Program expenditures stayed relatively constant over the last four years, with estimated annual expenditures on visitor safety averaging \$11 million per year, representing approximately 0.9% of total Agency expenditures.

Overall findings for efficiency point to areas for improvement regarding prioritisation of goods and services budgets for visitor safety. With respect to search and rescue costs, high costs in isolated northern parks put a strain on field unit budgets, but there is currently no comparable model in North America where search and rescue fees are being regularly collected from visitors.



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Recommendations and Management Response

Recommendation 1: Visitor Safety Training

The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, with collaboration and support from the Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, Operations and Human Resources directorates, should clarify training requirements and develop a common repository for visitor safety training to ensure clear and consistent records are being maintained and monitored.



Management Response:

Agree. The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, will work with counterparts in the Operations, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, and Human Resources and Employee Wellness Directorates to clarify visitor safety training requirements. The Human Resources and Employee Wellness Directorate will lead the development of a database (repository) for visitor safety training records.

Recommendation 2: Coordination of Training

The Senior Vice-President, Operations, should ensure that staff participating in visitor safety activities receive the appropriate training to carry out those activities.



Management Response:

Agree. The Senior Vice-President, Operations will follow the training recommendations established collaboratively by the External Relations and Visitor Experience Directorate and document the training received by employees participating in visitor safety activities at the field unit level in the repository developed by the Human Resources and Employee Wellness Directorate as part of Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 3: Monitoring and Reporting

The Senior Vice-President, Operations, should require Field Unit Superintendents to report annually on the progress made implementing visitor safety plans, including the identification of functional leads and specific timelines for priority actions.



Management Response:

Agree. The Senior Vice-President Operations Office will request that Field Unit Superintendents report annually on visitor safety plans, including the identification of timelines. Field Unit Superintendents will also be asked to update any changes to their visitor safety leads for the field unit.

Recommendation 4: Program Accountability

Given the number of directorates involved and the cross-functional nature of the role of the Senior Vice-President, Operations, the External Relations and Visitor Experience, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation and Operations directorates should review and update the accountability structure in the Directive on Visitor Safety to ensure it is clear, accurate and contributing to the effective delivery of the program. Consideration should be given to clarifying responsibilities as well as enhancing communications between responsible parties.



Management Response:

Agree. The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, will work in collaboration with counterparts in the Operations and Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation Directorates to review the accountability structure in the Directive on Visitor Safety.

Recommendation 5: Visitor Safety Capacity

The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, in coordination with the Senior Vice-President, Operations, and the Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, should review and revise approaches used and risks considered to attribute available visitor safety resources at the field unit level. This will contribute to strengthening the Visitor Safety Program in the areas of planning, training, and monitoring and reporting.



Management Response:

Agree. The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, will work with the Senior Vice-President, Operations, and the Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, to review each year the allocation of visitor safety resources across the Parks Canada network for the previous year and will determine collaboratively whether adjustments to allocations or other measures such as planning, training, monitoring or reporting may be needed.

