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# Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse

National Historic Sites of Canada

Management Plan

2022



A UNESCO  
World Heritage Site

2022

Rideau Canal  
and Merrickville  
Blockhouse  
National Historic Sites of Canada

Management Plan

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RIDEAU CANAL AND MERRICKVILLE BLOCKHOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2022.

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#### Note to readers

The health and safety of visitors, employees and all Canadians are of the utmost importance. Parks Canada is following the advice and guidance of public health experts to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing Canadians to experience Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Parks Canada acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may have unforeseeable impacts on the *Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan*. Parks Canada will inform Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public of any such impacts through its annual implementation update on the implementation of this plan.

For more information about the management plan or about

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## Foreword



From coast to coast to coast, national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas are a source of shared pride for Canadians. They reflect Canada's natural and cultural heritage and tell stories of who we are, including the historic and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples.

These cherished places are a priority for the Government of Canada. We are committed to protecting natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places, and contributing to the recovery of species at risk.

At the same time, we continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities to ensure that more Canadians can experience these iconic destinations and learn about history, culture and the environment.

In collaboration with Indigenous communities and key partners, Parks Canada conserves and protects national historic sites and national parks; enables people to discover and connect with history and nature; and helps sustain the economic value of these places for local and regional communities.

This new management plan for Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse national historic sites of Canada supports this vision.

Management plans are developed by a dedicated team at Parks Canada through extensive consultation and input from Indigenous partners, other partners and stakeholders, local communities, as well as visitors past and present. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this plan for their commitment and spirit of cooperation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort and I am pleased to approve the *Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan*.

**Steven Guilbeault**

*Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada*



## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*

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## Executive Summary

Conceived in the wake of the War of 1812 to serve as a secure war-time supply route from Montréal to the settlements of Upper Canada and the strategic naval dockyard at Kingston, the Rideau Canal officially opened in 1832 with 47 locks, 23 lockstations and supporting dams and bridges, providing through navigation between the Ottawa River and Lake Ontario. A national historic site, Canadian heritage river, and a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Rideau Canal is valued for its canal construction and engineering technology, its integrity and authenticity, the contribution and sacrifices of canal construction labourers, its military purpose and its contributions to the social and economic development of Upper Canada.

The Rideau Canal comprises a remarkable collection of cultural resources including engineering works, buildings, lockstation landscapes, archaeological sites and artifacts, and archival material. This includes the Merrickville Blockhouse, built in 1832 to 1833, and designated a national historic site in 1939. Since 1966, it has operated as the Blockhouse Museum.

This management plan communicates the strategic direction over the next ten years toward realizing the long-term vision for the Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse. The successful implementation of this management plan, in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders, will advance the understanding, conservation and presentation of the waterway's cultural and natural heritage values, strengthen its reputation as a world-class historic waterway and iconic Canadian destination, and introduce modernized tools and processes to support responsive management of the site in a complex environment.

Three key strategies and a dedicated management approach for the Merrickville Blockhouse will guide the management of the site over the next ten years:

### **Key Strategy 1: Advance the understanding, conservation and presentation of the Rideau Canal's rich and complex cultural and natural heritage environment**

This strategy recognizes the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the values of the cultural and natural heritage resources to the canal's cultural landscape, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystem. Supported by regular maintenance and monitoring of cultural and natural heritage resources, strategic capital investment, and cooperation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders, this strategy aims to advance the conservation and presentation of North America's oldest continuously operated canal as the waterway approaches its 200th anniversary.

### **Key Strategy 2: Realize the Rideau Canal's full potential as an iconic Canadian outdoor destination**

The intent of this strategy is to build upon the beloved recreational boating and land-based experiences of the Rideau Canal to offer visitors a wider range of premier experiences, aimed at discovering and enjoying the great outdoors through low-impact recreational and cultural activities and with the support of organizations focused on conservation and sustainability. The Rideau Canal is well positioned to attract new explorers, with its calm and flat water for paddling, its accessible lockstations for camping, and its many connections to trails, roads and communities. Working in collaboration with others to animate, market and promote the Rideau Canal corridor will strengthen the canal's World Heritage profile, and will enhance its reputation as a relevant, world-class and sustainable heritage waterway.

### **Key Strategy 3: Effectively administer a 19th-century canal in the 21st century**

This strategy is focused on securing a sound suite of management tools and processes to effectively respond to the diverse pressures and evolving environment of the Rideau Canal as it proceeds through its third century of continuous operation. This includes developing and enhancing sustainable sources of revenue, developing modern, comprehensive and supportive regulations and policy tools to support the effective management, maintenance, proper use and protection of the Rideau Canal, and responding to the impacts of climatic change, in particular as it relates to integrated water management across two watersheds.



A management area approach provides specific direction for the management of the Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site, building on the above key strategies with a focus on greater collaboration between Parks Canada, the Merrickville and District Historical Society, and the Village of Merrickville-Wolford. The Merrickville Blockhouse and its historic setting can broaden visitors' understanding of the evolving role of the waterway and its impact on shaping the region, and engage visitors in experiencing the latest chapter in the canal's long history.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada administers 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 historic site, national park, national marine conservation area and heritage canal administered by Parks Canada supports its vision:

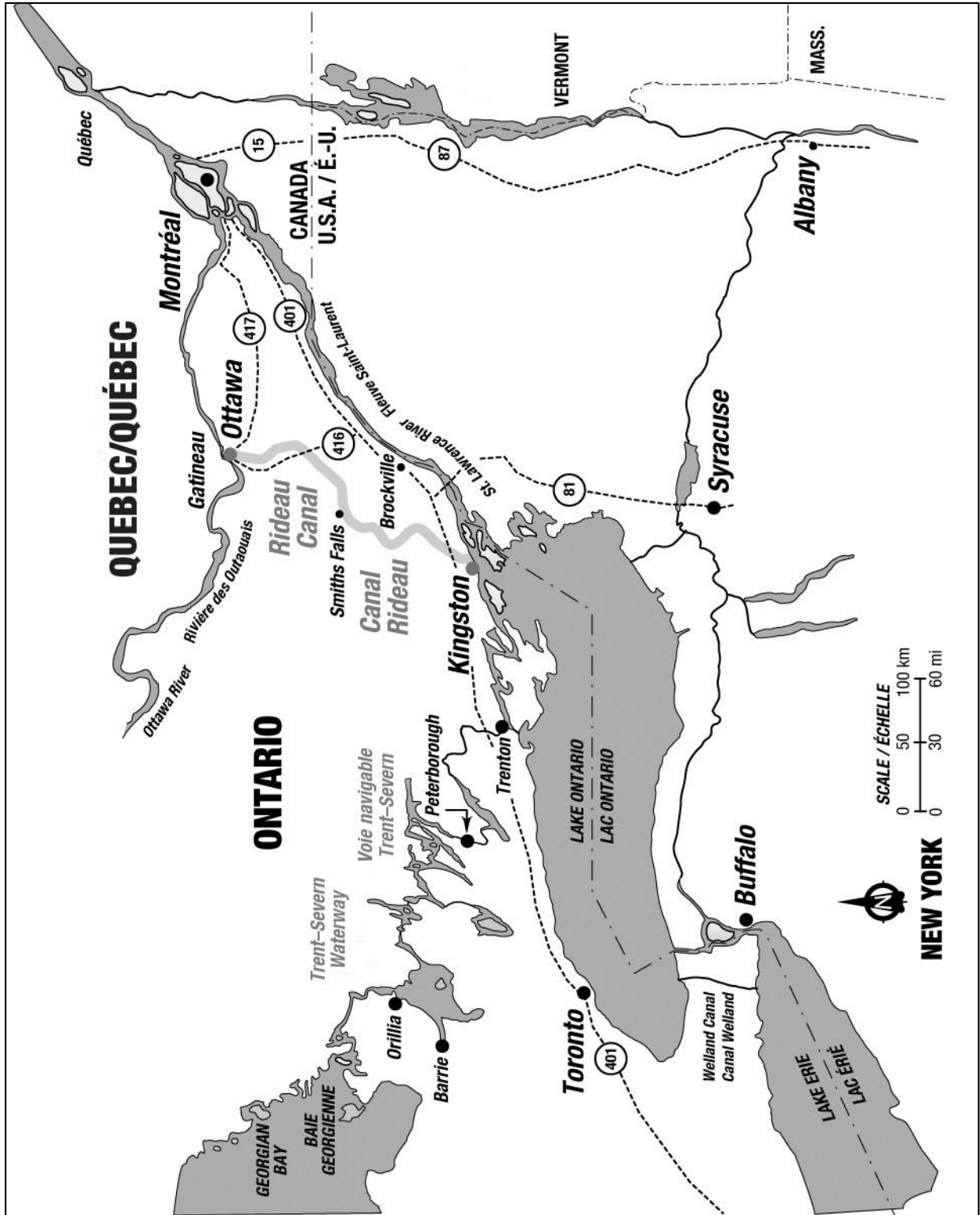
*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites it administers. The *Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Sites 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 its mandate.

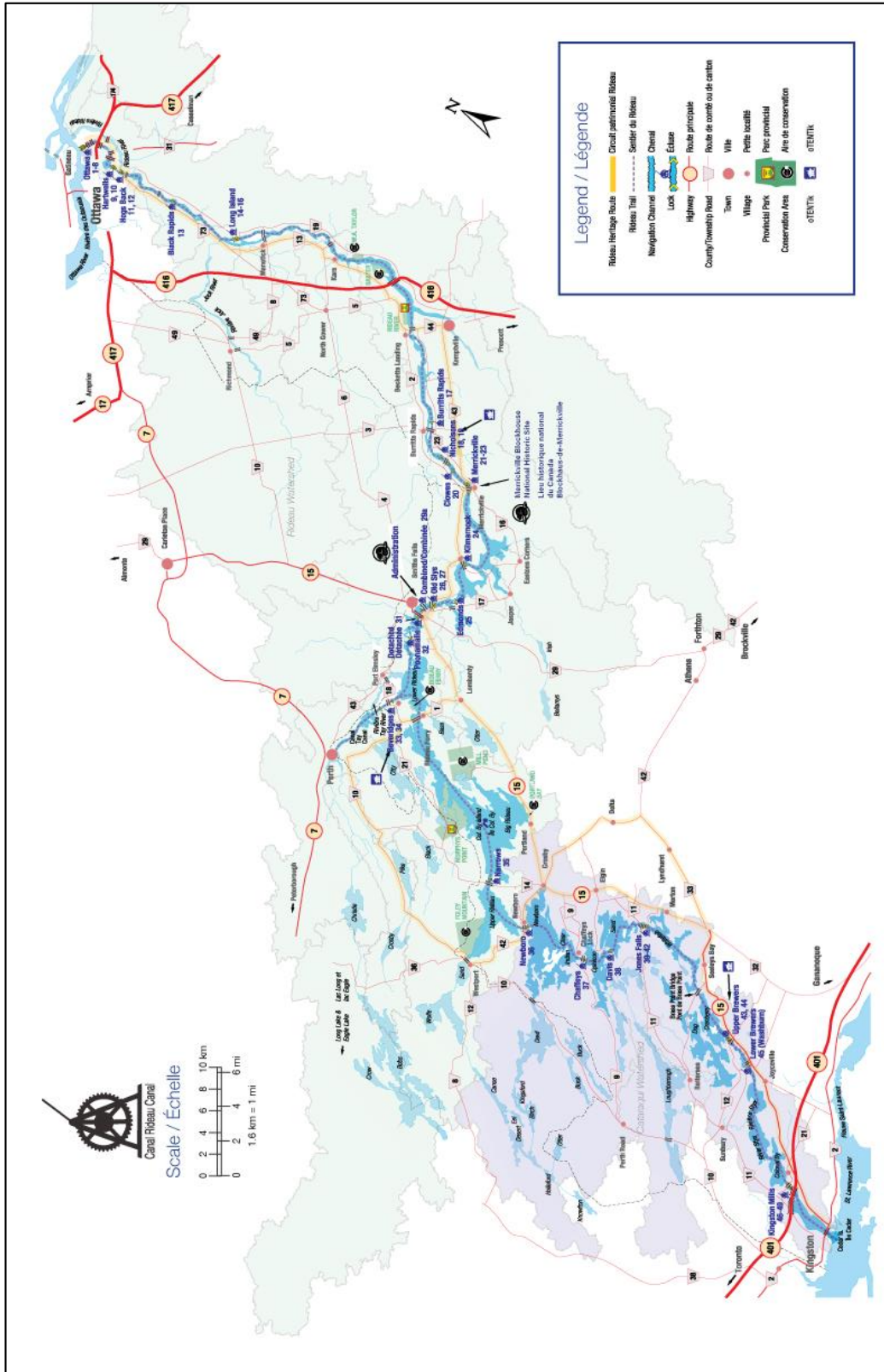
Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic sites. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Rideau Canal National Historic Site and Merrickville Blockhouse 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 and, where appropriate, consultation, on the management of Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse national historic sites in years to come.

Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Rideau Canal National Historic Site



## 2.0 Significance of Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Sites

The Rideau Canal was conceived in the wake of the War of 1812 to serve as a war-time supply route providing a secure water route for troops and supplies from Montréal to reach the settlements of Upper Canada and the strategic naval dockyard at Kingston.

The original plan for the canal called for the construction of dams and locks that could handle small barges. With considerable foresight, Lieutenant Colonel By advocated for a lock system that would accommodate larger vessels, following the emergence of military steamboats in England. Plans were also made to establish blockhouses at strategic lockstations, and four were built, the largest at Merrickville.

Work commenced in the fall of 1826, starting at Ottawa Locks (then Bytown). Irish immigrants, French Canadians and Scottish stonemasons were among the contracted labour force brought in to push the canal 202 kilometres through what was characterized as primarily bush and swamps of Eastern Ontario to Lake Ontario at Kingston. Most of the locks and dams were built of stone quarried near the construction sites. Timber for lockgates, bridges and buildings was sourced locally, while the necessary iron fixtures were forged by local blacksmiths using flat iron imported from England, and iron castings were sourced from established foundries in Lower Canada.

The Rideau Canal officially opened in the summer of 1832 with 47 locks, 23 lockstations and supporting dams and bridges, providing through navigation between the Ottawa River and Lake Ontario. As a result of the Rebellions of 1837 to 1838, stone defensible lockmaster houses were constructed at many lockstations to bolster the defence of the canal. The Rideau Canal was expanded an additional ten kilometres in 1887 with the second, successful construction of the Tay Canal, connecting the town of Perth to the Rideau Canal at Beveridges Lockstation. The construction of the Rideau Canal was an incredible engineering feat at the time: today, it still serves as a monument to the great 19th century canal-building era in North America.

Prior to the canal's construction, these lakes and rivers were important traveling and trading routes for Indigenous peoples. In the north, the Rideau Canal connects to the Ottawa River near the confluence of three major rivers; at its southern end, the Cataraqui River connects to Lake Ontario near the juncture with the St. Lawrence River. These areas have historically been natural meeting places and a focus for trade.

The natural beauty of the area through which the canal passes, along with the promise of excellent sport fishing and hunting, swimming, and boating, stimulated outdoor recreation and tourism. By the end of the 19th century, hotels and private cottages made their appearance along the waterway. By the end of the First World War, commercial traffic disappeared almost entirely from the Rideau Canal. The system was saved from abandonment in large part due to the high cost of decommissioning the waterway. Since that time, the Rideau Canal has become a recreational boating destination for local, regional, national and international visitors alike, with more people exploring the waterway by canoe and kayak. Land-based visitors to lockstations gather to watch the boats lock through and enjoy the historic and scenic landscapes. Increasingly, recreational use of the waterway has expanded to include cyclists and hikers traversing the corridor via the Cataraqui and Rideau Trails, enjoying overnights at lockstations and local communities along the way.

The value of the Rideau Canal has been recognized in many ways:

1. In 1925, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada declared the Rideau Canal to be a site of national historic significance. Following subsequent deliberations by the Board in 1967 and 1987, the reasons for national significance were concluded as:
  - the construction of the canal system;
  - the survival of a high number of original canal structures including locks, blockhouses, dams, weirs and original lockmasters' houses plus the integrity of most lockstations; and
  - the unique historical environment of the canal system.

In 2011, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada reviewed the original designation in consideration of commemorating the contribution and sacrifices of the Rideau Canal construction workers. The Rideau Canal was concluded to be of national significance because:

- Built between 1826 and 1832, it is the best preserved canal from the great canal-building era in North America that is still fully operational: its historic structures and environment speak to its ingenious design, construction, and military purpose, as well as to its social and economic functions.
  - It exemplifies cutting edge canal design due to Lieutenant-Colonel John By's innovative slackwater approach, which created a navigable route from natural waterways and lakes on a scale previously unseen in North America, and because it was one of the first canals in the world engineered specifically for steam-powered vessels.
  - Its construction through more than 200 kilometres of what was characterized as bush, swamps, and lakes was a monumental feat. Each year, as many as 5,000 to 6,000 workmen assembled at over two dozen worksites. The great majority of the labourers were Irish and French Canadian, toiling under the supervision of contractors and the Royal Engineers. Working primarily with hand tools and in extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, these labourers and skilled craftsmen, such as Scottish stonemasons, endured disease and injury, with large numbers dying during the canal's construction.
  - In the aftermath of the War of 1812, when relations with the United States were tense, it was built to serve as a military canal and represented a fundamental component of Britain's defences in the interior of North America, safeguarding the supply lines between Montréal and Lake Ontario by providing an alternative and more defensible route to that along the St. Lawrence River.
  - It contributed significantly to the social and economic development of Upper Canada/Ontario prior to 1850, when it was a key artery for the movement of goods and people in and out of the colony. After that time, it continued to be of local commercial importance until the 1930s; since then it has served as a popular recreational route.
2. In 2000, the Rideau Canal, Tay Canal and the Rideau River in Ottawa was designated as the Rideau Waterway Canadian Heritage River for its human heritage and recreational values. These values include elements of the national historic site, its historic setting, the wide range of water-based recreational activities, and water quality suitable to recreation.
  3. A southern portion of the Rideau Canal forms part of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, designated as Canada's 12th biosphere region by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2002. Comprising approximately 2,700 square kilometres, this important ecosystem is located at the intersection of the Frontenac Arch, which connects the Canadian Shield boreal forest to the forests of the Adirondack and Appalachian Mountains, and the St. Lawrence River Valley, a route extending from the forests of the Great Lakes to the forests of the Atlantic Coast. Here, five forest regions merge, creating significant biodiversity.
  4. In 2007, the Rideau Canal National Historic Site, along with Fort Henry National Historic Site and the Kingston Fortifications National Historic Site in Kingston, was inscribed as Canada's 14th and Ontario's first World Heritage site. It is considered of outstanding universal value by UNESCO for being the best-preserved slackwater canal in North America, and the only one dating from the great North American 19th century canal-building era that still operates along its original route with most of its original structures intact. It is also recognized as a significant example of a canal used for military purposes associated with a significant stage in human history – that of the fight to control the north of the American continent.

When it inscribed the historic sites on the World Heritage List, the World Heritage Committee addressed requirements for protection and management by recognizing a 30-metre buffer zone surrounding the inscribed property. While not part of the site itself, the buffer zone provides the site with an added layer of protection. On the Rideau Canal, the buffer zone extends 30 metres inland from the shoreline of the



waterway, and corresponds with the 30-metre minimum development setback from water stipulated in the zoning by-laws of all 13 municipalities along the canal.

The Rideau Canal comprises a remarkable collection of cultural resources including engineering works, buildings, lockstation landscapes, archaeological sites and artifacts, and archival material. Parks Canada's *Historic Canals Policy* (1994) and the *Cultural Resource Management Policy* (2013) provide direction for the management of these assets. This includes the Merrickville Blockhouse, designated a national historic site in 1939 because it represents a fine example of the best type of blockhouse erected for the defence of the Rideau Canal. In the event of war, the Blockhouse was intended to be a mustering point for local militia, a supply depot where provisions, munition and arms could be stored, and a strong defensive position for repelling anyone attempting to destroy the canal structures. It served a military function only once, in the aftermath of the Rebellions of 1837 to 1838, when it was temporarily garrisoned by the 34th Regiment.

As it is its own national historic site, specific management direction for the Merrickville Blockhouse can be found under Section 7.

### 3.0 Planning Context

#### **Geopolitical**

The Rideau Canal stretches 202 kilometres, winding its way through cities, towns and villages, rural and agricultural lands. It is bookended by Kingston, Canada's first capital, in the south and Ottawa, today's national capital, in the north. The Rideau Canal overlaps two Conservation Authorities, three regional tourism organizations, three counties, nine federal ridings, and 13 municipalities.

The sheer size of the Rideau Canal and its multi-faceted character presents jurisdictional complexities. Parks Canada is responsible for the administration of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site, comprising the bed of the canal up to the upper controlled water elevation limit, as well as the land associated with its lockstations and dams. This responsibility includes but is not limited to protecting the commemorative integrity and outstanding universal value of the site; safe navigation of the waterway; water management; and some aspects of environmental stewardship. In Ottawa, the National Capital Commission has land use and design approval authority over federal lands and maintains the scenic parkways, green space and pathways alongside the canal. Other government departments and agencies, at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, share responsibilities affecting both lands and waters of the Rideau Canal, including land use planning and development, conservation and protection, water quality, transportation, agriculture, resource extraction, and tourism activities. As these responsibilities are inherently linked, Parks Canada has relationships with each of these authorities to promote activities and decision making that support the canal's commemorative integrity and outstanding universal value.

For example, Parks Canada works closely with the conservation authorities and municipalities through the municipal land use planning and development process, reviewing and providing comment on applications on lands adjacent to the historic site. Since 1997, this work has been undertaken in coordination and collaboration with the conservation authorities, reviewing planning applications jointly as the Rideau Waterway Development Review Team. Parks Canada also participates, in coordination with provincial ministries, in county and municipal official plan reviews to encourage stronger policies that recognize, protect and promote the waterway.

Per the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, effective management of a World Heritage site goes beyond the inscribed property to include the buffer zone, as well as the broader setting. Following the World Heritage Committee's recommendation, at the time of inscription, to protect the visual values of the canal's setting, Parks Canada spearheaded the Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy, a collaborative working relationship, ongoing since 2010, comprising representatives from First Nations, federal, provincial, county and municipal governments and

conservation authorities working together for responsible planning and management along the Rideau corridor through improved communications, information sharing, and collaborative initiatives.

These relationships are helping to protect the cultural, natural and scenic values of the waterway, and the overall commemorative integrity and outstanding universal value of the site. While significant progress has been made to better understand common interests and values across the waterway, minimize visual impacts to the site and strengthen healthy shoreline management practices, it is recognized that further communication, cooperation and collaboration, as well as broader public education and stakeholder engagement, is needed to minimize the impact of upland development on cultural and scenic values of the waterway; as well as protect fish and fish habitat, water quality, and species at risk, and support recreational use and tourism potential of the waterway. This need is furthered by recommendations from the World Heritage Centre to better articulate the tangible and intangible attributes that contribute to the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage site and to ensure the protection of these values through federal, provincial and municipal policies.

### **Socioeconomic**

The Rideau Canal is a defining feature of the region, having transformed the geography and shaped the history of each of the communities along its length. Canal workers and contractors settled in the region, and many residents today can trace their family history to former lockmasters and lock operators. Industrial centres grew up in places such as Smiths Falls, Perth and Merrickville. The city of Ottawa (formally Bytown) exists because of the Rideau Canal and owes much of its early development and political prominence to the canal's construction.

Today, the Rideau Canal is one of the busiest national historic sites in Canada – welcoming nearly one million water and land-based visitors each year. As the canal is bookended by two urban centres, and is a few hours drive from the cities of Toronto and Montréal, it is uniquely placed to enable young, urban and new Canadians to discover and connect with history and nature. As visitors travel through the waterway, exploring its lakes, rivers and lockstations, they also discover the charm and hospitality of the numerous communities it connects. Many of these communities rely heavily on tourism to support their local economies, and studies have shown that the Rideau Canal serves as the economic backbone to this region. Specifically, a 2017 Tourism Economic Impact Study of the Rideau Canal prepared by BMO Canada on behalf of the Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association concluded that the tourism sector contributes \$695 million annually to the economies of the 11 municipal members of the Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association. When the cities of Ottawa and Kingston are included in this calculation, it is estimated that the tourism industry contributed \$5.5 billion to the corridor's gross domestic product in 2016. However, it is recognized that, like the tourism industry as a whole, the economic contributions from the Rideau Canal can fluctuate as visitation, whether it be by land or by water, is impacted by factors such as fuel prices, exchange rates, social trends, weather conditions, and global events.

Local residents, businesses and communities are passionate about the important role of the Rideau Canal to their quality of life and the sustainability of their communities, and take pride in their contributions to preserving and celebrating this national treasure for present and future generations. Given its significant presence, the Rideau Canal presents a wealth of opportunities to collaborate with communities and community groups, Indigenous partners, not-for-profit organizations, businesses and the broader tourism industry. Parks Canada is well placed to bring these diverse groups together to celebrate, promote and enhance the corridor to become a world-renowned destination.

### **Indigenous Peoples and the Rideau Canal**

Indigenous peoples of North America have a strong connection with waterways. The waterways were integral to Indigenous peoples and were used for fishing, hunting and gathering, transportation, trade, as well as cultural and spiritual gatherings. Archaeological information indicates that Algonquin peoples have lived in the Ottawa Valley for many generations, long before the Europeans arrived in North America. As a result of the slackwater engineering technology employed to construct the canal, submerged archaeological resources and sites may be located along former shorelines and islands.

When the Rideau Canal was first constructed, it passed primarily through lands traditionally used by the Algonquin, Mohawk and Mississauga prior to canal construction. This military undertaking had an impact on their unique relationship to the land. In addition to labour, Indigenous peoples aided canal construction through harvesting and supplying goods and provisions to the British military and trades peoples, and assisted in establishing the canal route based on traditional use and navigation of the lands and water.

Most of the historic site, from Ottawa to the height of land between the Rideau and Cataraqui watersheds near Kingston, is included in the Algonquins of Ontario Settlement Area, currently under negotiation with the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario. The Agreement-in-Principle includes the Algonquins' interest in the Rideau Canal related to management planning, access fees, interpretation, and harvesting, in support of ongoing land claim negotiations. The southern end of the Rideau Canal in the vicinity of Kingston is home to the Algonquin, Iroquois, Mississauga and Mohawk.

Parks Canada engages with the Algonquins of Ontario, as well as the Mississauga of Alderville and the Mohawk First Nations at Akwesasne and Tyendinaga through management planning, review of development proposals, advisory committees and operational interactions. In the spirit of reconciliation, Parks Canada is actively pursuing ways to grow our relationships with these communities through consultation, cooperation and new partnerships.

### **Authentic Immersion into Canada's Past**

The Rideau Canal is steeped in history and showcases rich cultural landscapes, which has cemented its place as one of the most iconic symbols of nation building in Canada. Today, lockmasters continue the tradition of manually operating the majority of the locks, stop-log dams and swing bridges that comprise the canal system, providing through-navigation for boats and spectacle for land visitors. The survival of a high number of original structures positions the Rideau Canal well to become an international symbol of integrity and authenticity. As custodian of this World Heritage site, Parks Canada is committed to protecting the outstanding universal value for which the Rideau Canal was inscribed.

Since 2015, Parks Canada has invested over \$103 million in projects to rehabilitate infrastructure on the Rideau Canal. These investments have supported the conservation of engineering works on the canal, including locks, dams and bridges, while raising awareness about the significance of the waterway and improving public safety.

Today, the scenic beauty of the Rideau Canal encourages the exploration of the many lakes, rivers and canal cuts by both self-propelled and motorized watercraft. Visitors can discover the cultural history of the waterway or take advantage of guided boat tours offered by commercial operators on the water. At Jones Falls Lockstation, costumed interpreters provide a look into the life of a lockmaster in the 1800s at Sweeney House, while the original blacksmith shop showcases the role of the forge in the construction of the canal. At all lockstations along the waterway, various interpretive plaques communicate the history and construction of the Rideau Canal, with details of the World Heritage inscription provided at some locations. Many not-for-profit organizations operate museums from historic canal buildings along the waterway including the Bytown Museum, Merrickville Blockhouse Museum, and the Chaffey's Lockmaster's House Museum, while the Friends of the Rideau welcome visitors to The Depot at Merrickville Lockstation to learn more about the history and visitor experience opportunities of the canal and area.

As the waterway flows through the heart of many communities, it also serves as a venue for a range of community events and celebrations in all seasons. For example, in the winter the National Capital Commission transforms the canal from Ottawa Locks to Hartwells Locks into the world's largest outdoor skating rink, while the villages of Newboro and Portland host skating and dogsledding competitions. In the summer months, the waterway is the stage for fishing derbies, boat and paddle shows, and healthy living festivals. All of these activities reflect the many layers and values of the canal's rich history and surrounding environment and provide a range of opportunities to connect with the historic site.

Given the size and complexity of the Rideau Canal, there remains opportunity to work more collaboratively between Parks Canada and partners and stakeholders to develop synergies that support coordinated presentation and visitor experience opportunities along the waterway.

### **Natural Environment**

The Rideau Canal corridor has long been recognized as an area of special interest owing to its unique combination of cultural, natural, scenic and recreational values. The landscape of the corridor is a mosaic of agricultural land, forests, wetlands, lakes and rivers, rural waterfront residences and urban settlements. One significant effect of canal construction on the corridor landscape was the creation of drowned lands. The slackwater system required extensive flooding to secure navigable water depths, creating larger lakes and navigable rivers out of creeks. Huge wetland areas were created along the route, many of which are recognized today for their ecological significance and diversity.

The diversity of landscapes and the natural resources contributes not only to the national historic significance of the canal but also to its conservation value. There are extensive ecosystem features – lands, waters, plants and animals – under the jurisdiction of Parks Canada that are valued because they comprise an important component of the canal’s history and landscape and as such are considered a vital heritage resource that must be respected and safeguarded.

The Rideau Canal’s natural environment is also home to a wide variety of flora and fauna, including many species which are threatened or at risk. There are at least 35 species at risk under Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* that are known to be “regularly occurring” at the site, and the Rideau Canal has been identified as containing critical habitat for six species covering more than 75 percent of the waterway. Additionally, there are many species of cultural importance to Indigenous peoples, such as the American eel, walleye, and furbearers like muskrat and beavers, living in and along the waterway.

Although generally healthy, the Rideau Canal ecosystem is being impacted by invasive and exotic species, nutrient inputs and the cumulative effects of waterfront development.

Jurisdiction over environmental matters on the Rideau Canal is complex. Parks Canada has responsibility for management of water levels and flows, in-water and shoreline development and for aspects of the environment mandated by federal legislation including species at risk, environmental impact assessment and contaminated sites. The primary mandates for fisheries management and water quality lie with the provincial government. Approvals for upland development rest with municipalities and conservation authorities.

Cooperation and collaboration between these levels of government is vital, as is working with the broader range of stakeholders, including waterfront property owners, lake associations, universities and non-profit organizations, such as the Rideau Waterway Land Trust, Rideau Roundtable, and Watersheds Canada to help support and ensure a healthy ecosystem for all.

### **Operational Realities**

Today, the Rideau Canal consists of 25 independent lock and bridge stations, including the Tay Canal to Perth. Operation of the lock and dam structures for through-navigation and water management remains a core purpose and function of the Rideau Canal. The Rideau Canal’s reputation as a premier destination for pleasure craft is due in large part to the high quality service provided by lockmasters and lock operators. In the 2021 season, lock staff welcomed over 61,000 motorized and self-propelled vessels through one or more locks.

The built assets of the Rideau Canal, comprised of engineering works and buildings, are valued at \$2.989 billion (2021). These assets are integral to the ongoing operations, commemorative integrity and outstanding universal value of an authentic, working canal. The protection and presentation of these engineering works and buildings require sufficient and stable capital investments, ongoing corrective and preventative maintenance, and adequate resources to manage them effectively and to meet federal and international obligations.

As the waterway has evolved over its lifetime, the overall management of water as a resource has remained central to its function. Parks Canada operates 26 dams across the Cataraqui and Rideau River watersheds, including two dams not located within the boundaries of the historic site. However, water levels and flows are no longer managed with only navigation in mind. Decision making considers the entire water system and is balanced to meet a broad range of considerations and stakeholder needs across the watersheds, including public safety, flood mitigation, protection of the environment, fisheries, wildlife habitats, water supplies, recreation, and hydro generation. Climate change is placing an increasing pressure on Parks Canada to manage the Rideau Canal to mitigate flooding and drought and these challenges may only grow in complexity and scope.

Similarly, the complexities of the canal's modern day operations require a strong, responsive legislative and policy framework to ensure effective management. Parks Canada's responsibilities for the Rideau Canal include, but are not limited to, the protection of the commemorative integrity and outstanding universal value of the site; safe navigation of the waterway; water management; and environmental stewardship. Parks Canada must also carry out enforcement activities, respond to tourism trends, and help manage economic growth and development along the waterway responsibly. Parks Canada is proud to continue the legacy of the countless prior stewards of the Rideau Canal by continuing to work to develop new regulations and tools, which will support historic canals in the 21st century.

## 4.0 Development of the Management Plan

In order to facilitate meaningful opportunities for the public to contribute to the management plan review for the Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse, a two-phased approach was developed to collect feedback from Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the Canadian public, locally and nationally, using in-person and online channels to obtain input.

Phase one engagement (2016 to 2019) focused on exploring the opportunities and challenges related to management of the sites, prior to the development of a draft management plan. Engagement activities commenced in 2016 to share and discuss the findings of the *Rideau Canal State of the Site Assessment* (Parks Canada 2016). This report assessed the condition of indicators for national historic sites pertaining to cultural resources, built assets, visitor experience, external relations and Indigenous relations and highlighted the key issues facing the Rideau Canal. Given the complexity of the site, other indicators reflecting the roles and responsibilities for the Rideau Canal, including species at risk, lock operations, water management, business development and realty and permitting, were also explored. Supported by a letter to stakeholders and website communications, four open houses were held during the month of June in Ottawa, Smiths Falls, Chaffey's Lock and Kingston, communities situated along the length of the waterway.

Following a pause to the management plan review process in 2017 to focus on Canada's sesquicentennial celebrations, public engagement activities recommenced in January 2018. Three all-day stakeholder workshops were held on January 18, January 19 and February 2. Over 20 representatives from a wide range of sectors and communities attended, including federal, provincial and municipal government, non-governmental organizations and not-for-profit groups, boating industry, heritage and culture, natural environment and tourism. These interactive workshops provided an overview of the management plan review process, discussed the key issues and opportunities for the site, and brainstormed what the Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse could be in 10 to 20 years.

From 2016 to 2020, Parks Canada engaged with Indigenous peoples to discuss their interests and vision for the Rideau Canal to help inform the draft management plan. Conversations were held with the Algonquins of Ontario, the Mississauga of Alderville and the Mohawk First Nations of Akwesasne and Tyendinaga.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, phase two public and Indigenous consultation on the draft management plan was postponed until 2021. To protect the health of all Canadians, a strictly online consultation

process was held from January to May 2021. An online bilingual engagement platform ([www.rideauplan.ca](http://www.rideauplan.ca) and [www.planrideau.ca](http://www.planrideau.ca)) was developed to facilitate the collection of feedback through a diversity of tools, including surveys, ideas and story-telling. Four English language and one French language virtual public consultation sessions, and five virtual stakeholder consultation sessions were held to elicit feedback on the draft plan. This was supported by letters to stakeholders and Indigenous peoples, and communications on social media channels.

The feedback provided to Parks Canada via the website, consultation sessions and direct email emphasized the importance of conserving the Rideau Canal's cultural and natural resources; presentation and interpretation of the waterway; the importance of public and stakeholder engagement, including greater opportunities for communication, information sharing, cooperation and collaboration; the cumulative impact of upland development and activities on the historic site; climate change; and safe and enjoyable navigation of the canal by all. This feedback has informed revisions to all sections of this management plan.

## 5.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site looking ahead 20 years:

The outstanding engineering feat and natural beauty of the Rideau Canal, and the vibrant and welcoming communities it connects, beckon Canadians and visitors from around the world to immerse themselves in one of the most authentic national historic sites in the country, operating much as it did when it first opened to through-navigation almost 200 years ago.

Extensive engineering works like manually operated locks, dams, and swing bridges connect boaters to over 200 kilometres of navigable waters, and countless lakes, rivers and canals across eastern North America. Historic buildings like lockmaster houses and blockhouses welcome visitors at each of the distinct lockstations, and these rich cultural landscapes showcase and interpret the layered stories of the past and present.

The freshwater ecosystems of the Rideau Canal and the broader watersheds are connected, healthy and resilient in the face of invasive species and climate change, and waterfront and tourism development is managed in a way that minimizes its impacts. Through ongoing cooperation and collaboration as stewards of these lands, Parks Canada and its partners, communities and residents value, conserve and protect the special cultural and natural heritage resources and scenic character of the canal corridor's waters and lands.

The Rideau Canal is managed as a premier heritage waterway whereby Parks Canada, its tourism partners and local communities and businesses promote and deliver unforgettable experiences that immerse visitors in the living history and natural beauty the waterway embodies. Whether by motor or muscle, water or land, people from around the world connect with nature through diverse outdoor recreational experiences. They also connect with multiple chapters of Canada's history, including the traditional lands of the Algonquin, Mohawk and Mississauga, the 19th-century construction of a slackwater canal, and the present-day UNESCO World Heritage site. The site is an entry point for people in urban centres to experience and appreciate examples of the cultural and natural heritage places that Parks Canada protects and presents across the country.

Surrounded by a diverse landscape setting of urban and rural settlements and waterfront dwellings, wetlands, farm fields and forests, the Rideau Canal exemplifies a defining stage in Canadian history, and continues to shape and contribute to the well-being of local communities and the region of Eastern Ontario. Over the coming years, through strengthened relationships, Parks Canada and Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the public have collaboratively transformed the Rideau Canal into a sustainable historic site and a world-renowned, welcoming and inspiring destination that encourages people to discover and connect with Canada's cultural and natural heritage.

## 6.0 Key Strategies

The key strategies below frame the management direction for the Rideau Canal National Historic Site and the Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site for the next ten years. The strategies and corresponding objectives and targets focus on achieving the vision for the site through an integrated approach to site management. Unless otherwise specified, all objectives and targets are meant to be achieved within the ten-year period of this plan. Annual implementation updates will be reported to Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the general public, and will feed into Parks Canada's broader business planning processes. More importantly, these strategies and their related objectives and targets will serve as the basis for engagement and consultation into the future.

### **Key Strategy 1: Advance the understanding, conservation and presentation of the Rideau Canal's rich and complex cultural and natural heritage environment**

Canadians are proud in knowing that the Rideau Canal is an authentic, well-conserved and sustainable national historic site and World Heritage site. The inscription of the Rideau Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage site has increased public expectations of Parks Canada to improve visitor experience, interpretation and presentation, levels of service, and cultural and natural heritage resource conservation.

Regular maintenance and monitoring of cultural and natural heritage resources, strategic capital investment, and further cooperation and collaboration with partners and stakeholders are required to support and advance the protection and presentation of North America's oldest continuously operated canal as the waterway approaches its 200th anniversary.

In the spirit of reconciliation, Parks Canada will work cooperatively with Indigenous peoples who have traditional connections to the lands, waters, and histories of the Rideau Canal to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and perspectives in interpretive, educational and other opportunities on the canal.

**Objective 1.1:** The Rideau Canal's built heritage and lockstation landscapes are better understood and conserved.

#### Targets

- By 2025, the cultural landscapes and heritage values of five lockstations are described and documented to support conservation initiatives, interpretation and authentic visitor experience opportunities.
- Long-term asset management plans that conserve the cultural heritage significance of the Rideau Canal are developed by 2024 and are reviewed annually.
- By 2032, at least 70 percent of engineering works of national significance are maintained in fair or good condition.

**Objective 1.2:** The terrestrial and freshwater ecosystem of the Rideau Canal is better understood, conserved and protected.

#### Targets

- Biodiversity is protected by developing and implementing a species at risk site action plan by 2025.
- Over the next ten years, Parks Canada continues to support the work of academic institutions, such as those undertaking Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada research projects and programs.
- Visual assessment of all shorelines along the entire waterway is completed within the next five years to inform shoreline and in-water permitting, planning and environmental management.

**Objective 1.3:** Indigenous peoples have meaningful opportunities to connect with traditionally used lands and waters and share their cultures.

#### Targets

- The Algonquins of Ontario, Mississauga of Alderville and the Mohawks of Akwesasne and Tyendinaga are engaged on a regular basis to discuss initiatives related to presentation of Indigenous cultures, histories and perspectives on the Rideau Canal.
- Through collaborative work with Indigenous communities, opportunities for contracting, capacity building and cultural sharing are identified.

**Objective 1.4:** Relationships with partners and stakeholders are developed and strengthened to manage the Rideau Canal in a coordinated and collaborative way.

#### Targets

- The multi-jurisdictional representatives of the Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy continue their collaborative working relationship through semi-annual meetings of the Steering Committee and Planners Technical Advisory Group to identify and protect the values of the World Heritage site, its buffer zone and setting, through further analysis, recording, and public consultation, and appropriate federal, provincial and municipal legislative, regulatory and educational tools.
- By 2023, an inter-governmental consultative body is established to more effectively manage areas of overlapping federal, provincial and municipal jurisdiction on the Rideau Canal.
- By 2023, a community consultation group is established to more effectively engage and collaborate with partners, stakeholders, organizations and associations with shared interests along the Rideau Canal.
- Relationships with domestic and international canals and World Heritage sites are strengthened through collaboration and annual participation at the World Canals Conference and by working with the World Heritage Centre on matters relating to the UNESCO World Heritage site inscription.

**Objective 1.5:** Cultural and natural heritage resources and values of the Rideau Canal are authentically presented to visitors and integrated in visitor experience and tourism strategies and initiatives.

#### Target

- The next visitor information program survey shows an increase in its learning indicator as visitors to the Rideau Canal immerse themselves in cultural and natural heritage experiences along the waterway through the implementation of a visitor experience strategy.

### **Key Strategy 2: Realize the Rideau Canal's full potential as an iconic Canadian outdoor destination**

The Rideau Canal is a beloved cultural and recreational destination and one of the most scenic and historic waterways in the world. Between the entry points of Kingston and Ottawa, the Rideau Canal features a series of beautiful lakes, rivers and canal cuts connected by historic lockstations and supported by smaller, picturesque communities. While recreational boating of the Rideau Canal remains a vital focus as it is integral to the canal's historic significance as a continuously operational waterway and is a significant contributor to the local economy, there are also increasing opportunities to encourage repeat land-based visitors to explore beyond the lockstations in Kingston and Ottawa, and to attract new visitors across the waterway.

This key strategy seeks to offer visitors a wider range of premier experiences, aimed at discovering and enjoying the great outdoors through low-impact recreational and cultural activities and with the support of organizations focused on conservation and sustainability. The Rideau Canal is well positioned to attract new explorers, with its calm and flat water for paddling, its accessible lockstations for camping, and its many connections to trails, roads and communities.

Connecting visitors with more opportunities to engage with and appreciate the Rideau Canal's cultural and natural heritage, in collaboration with others, will strengthen the canal's World Heritage profile, and will enhance its reputation as a relevant and sustainable heritage waterway. Parks Canada must also



leverage new and existing partnerships to further animate the broader canal corridor and to champion it as a destination, both at home and abroad. By working together, marketing and promoting the Rideau Canal corridor as a world-class destination can be more effectively achieved.

To support this, it is important that enjoyable and memorable experiences on the Rideau Canal are also safe experiences. A diversity of uses on the waterway has the potential to result in conflicts and safety concerns, and can have an impact on the users and private lands of adjacent waterfront properties. Sections of the canal with narrow waterbodies and/or high usage can present a greater challenge due to traffic volumes and the impact of wake on other boaters and the stability and health of shorelines.

**Objective 2.1:** A broader range of visitors enjoy the Rideau Canal through greater opportunities for authentic Canadian experiences like paddling, camping, cycling and hiking.

#### Targets

- A visitor offer targeting paddlers locking through the Rideau Canal is developed and implemented by 2023.
- Trip planning tools and amenities/facilities that support paddlers, hikers and campers are developed by 2024 in partnership with others.
- A universal accessibility audit of the three lockstations in downtown Ottawa (Ottawa, Hartwells and Hog's Back) is undertaken by 2023 to improve connectivity and safety across the locks at these high-traffic locations.
- Yearly, at least one special event that promotes camping, hiking, cycling and paddling on the Rideau Canal is hosted by Parks Canada in partnership with others.

**Objective 2.2:** Land-based visitation to lockstations is increased and visitors are more engaged with the Rideau Canal.

#### Targets

- Enhanced measurement of land-based visitation and demographic information is undertaken by 2024 to inform the development of a visitor experience strategy, and subsequent targeted marketing and visitor experience offers.
- By 2025, a visitor experience strategy is developed for the Rideau Canal in consultation with others.
- By 2027, two site plans are developed, in collaboration with key stakeholders, for strategic lockstations (and/or groups of lockstations), that outline priorities for future site enhancements to support and sustain engaging visitor experiences, increased land-based visitation, improved accessibility, and safe waterway operations. By 2032, an additional three site plans are developed. Examples could include Newboro, Smiths Falls and Jones Falls lockstations, and the lockstations within the city of Ottawa.
- By 2032, improvements to land-based programs and service offers are implemented at five lockstations, in collaboration with others.

**Objective 2.3:** Safe and enjoyable use of the Rideau Canal by all, with minimal impacts to adjacent lands.

#### Target

- By 2025, a process is developed to ensure consistency, clarity and transparency in processing requests for the removal or addition of wake zones along the navigational channel of the Rideau Canal.

**Objective 2.4:** As part of the commitment to greater coordination and collaboration with others, relationships with economic development and tourism partners are developed and strengthened to support a robust and sustainable Rideau Canal corridor destination.

#### Targets

- Parks Canada meets annually with partners, stakeholders, organizations, local communities and the tourism industry to explore new initiatives and opportunities for the Rideau Canal.
- Parks Canada meets annually with regional and municipal economic development and tourism organizations to ensure the Rideau Canal corridor and its many attractions, amenities, services and experiences are collaboratively marketed and promoted, with a consistent approach that leverages the historic significance and natural beauty of the Rideau Canal and its national historic site, UNESCO World Heritage site, and Canadian heritage river designations.

### **Key Strategy 3: Effectively administer a 19th-century canal in the 21st century**

Parks Canada relies on capital investments to manage and maintain its cultural resources on the Rideau Canal. Significant investments through the Government of Canada's infrastructure investment program have been made to protect the commemorative and structural integrity of the engineering works. Cultural resources with a high rate of deterioration, such as lockstation buildings, require stable funding and asset management capacity to monitor conditions and undertake maintenance and conservation work in a timely, effective and cost-efficient manner.

Sustainable business development represents an opportunity for Parks Canada to generate revenue, offset costs, and reinvest in the conservation and interpretation of cultural resources and infrastructure assets, while enhancing visitor services and activities, in innovative and engaging ways. In recent years the Rideau Canal has been regularizing commercial licences with private sector partners who use its facilities, and this work will continue.

The Rideau Canal was initially designed primarily for military navigation. Today, Parks Canada is responsible for managing water levels and flows on the Rideau Canal on a year-round basis to achieve multiple objectives. These include navigation, flood mitigation, protection of the environment, such as fisheries and wildlife habitats, provision of water for municipal water supplies, recreation, and hydro generation. Public safety also represents a challenge as the canal was not initially intended and designed for visitation. Extreme fluctuations associated with climate change patterns have resulted in challenges for water management decision making.

Lastly, Parks Canada relies on the *Historic Canals Regulations* under the *Department of Transport Act* to support the management, maintenance, proper use and protection of the Rideau Canal. However, these regulations are antiquated and do not fully address the complexities of operating a historic canal in the 21st century. There are also limitations on existing regulations and legislation which impact the ability to issue realty permits and to carry out compliance and enforcement. Developing modern, comprehensive and supportive regulations and tools would improve the ability of Parks Canada to effectively and timely respond to the diversity of visitor interests and needs, address the legacies left by industrial contamination, manage water levels and flows while responding to the impacts of climate change, and would better support Parks Canada's regulatory authority on a historic, navigable waterway in the 21st century.

**Objective 3.1:** Administrative tools are modernized to comprehensively and effectively address the complexities of an operational canal.

#### Targets

- An analysis of gaps in the current statutory, regulatory and policy framework is completed, and needed improvements within the Agency's control are identified by 2024.
- Compliance and enforcement capabilities are improved by establishing by 2023 in-house law enforcement capacity and through enhancing partnerships with other law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction.
- A review of in-water and shoreline works policies is completed by 2025, and changes that strengthen the protection of cultural and natural resources are implemented by 2026.

**Objective 3.2:** Sustainable sources of revenue are developed and enhanced.

Target

- By 2026, the implementation of licensing is expanded to include all commercial operators who use Parks Canada's lands and facilities, or the bed of the canal, in support of their business operations.

**Objective 3.3:** Sustainable development principles and practices are better integrated into Rideau Canal operations.

Targets

- By 2025, a strategy for greening Parks Canada's activities that includes adopting electric vehicles, increasing energy efficiency, and decreasing waste production, is developed and implemented.
- By 2032, the use of small-scale renewable energy generation is implemented to support operations, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and offset energy costs.
- By 2024, an evaluation is undertaken of how current predictions for regional climate change may impact operations, construction and asset management, environmental management and water management on the Rideau Canal, in order to inform future adaptive approaches.

**Objective 3.4:** Water management decisions are made using a system-wide approach based on high quality, systematic, regularized data collection.

Targets

- The water monitoring network continues to be modernized through the on-going exploration and development of new tools and methodologies, such as hydrological modelling, and their integration into decision making is reviewed on an annual basis.
- A formal communications protocol for communicating Parks Canada water management information to the public and stakeholders is in place by 2024.

## 7.0 Management Area

### Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site

#### Significance

Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site of Canada is situated on the grounds of the Merrickville Lockstation in the Village of Merrickville-Wolford, 60 kilometres southwest of Ottawa. Built in 1832 to 1833, the Blockhouse is the largest and the most impressive of the four blockhouses built along the Rideau Canal and the second largest surviving in Canada. In the event of war, the Blockhouse was intended to be a mustering point for local militia, a supply depot where provisions, munition and arms could be stored, and a strong defensive position for repelling anyone attempting to destroy the Rideau Canal structures. It served a military function only once, in the aftermath of the Rebellions of 1837 to 1838, when it was temporarily garrisoned by the 34th Regiment.

As a cultural resource of national significance associated with the Rideau Canal, a classified federal heritage building, and as a national historic site itself, the Blockhouse is a landmark in the Village of Merrickville-Wolford and on the Rideau Canal. Great care is needed to conserve and maintain this impressive structure, which has thick masonry walls, gun ports for mounting cannons, loopholes to defend from attackers, and a dry moat surrounding the building.

The Merrickville Blockhouse and its extensive interpretive collection provide an authentic and engaging glimpse into the original defensive role of the Rideau Canal and foster a greater understanding and appreciation for the historic sites' place in Canadian history.

### **Planning context**

The Merrickville Blockhouse has been leased since 1966 to the Village of Merrickville-Wolford, and operates as the Blockhouse Museum by the Merrickville and District Historical Society. The museum comprises a collection of artifacts and archives which reflect the history and industry of the Rideau Canal and the surrounding urban and agricultural community. The site also offers interior and exterior interpretive panels about the significance of the Merrickville Blockhouse and the Rideau Canal. The Blockhouse Museum is operated from May to October by a group of volunteers and students and welcomes approximately 10,000 visitors annually.

Greater collaboration between the Merrickville and District Historical Society, the Village of Merrickville-Wolford, and Parks Canada can broaden visitors' understanding of the evolving role of the waterway and its impact on shaping the region, and engage visitors in experiencing the latest chapter in the canal's long history.

An integrated management approach for the Merrickville Blockhouse, Merrickville Lockstation and the overall Rideau Canal is recommended, given the relationship of the Blockhouse to the Rideau Canal, the operation of the adjacent Merrickville Depot by the Friends of the Rideau, the proximity of the Parks Canada-administered Industrial Heritage Complex, established relationships with many associated community partners, as well as the site's prominence within a village rich with historic buildings.

### **Vision**

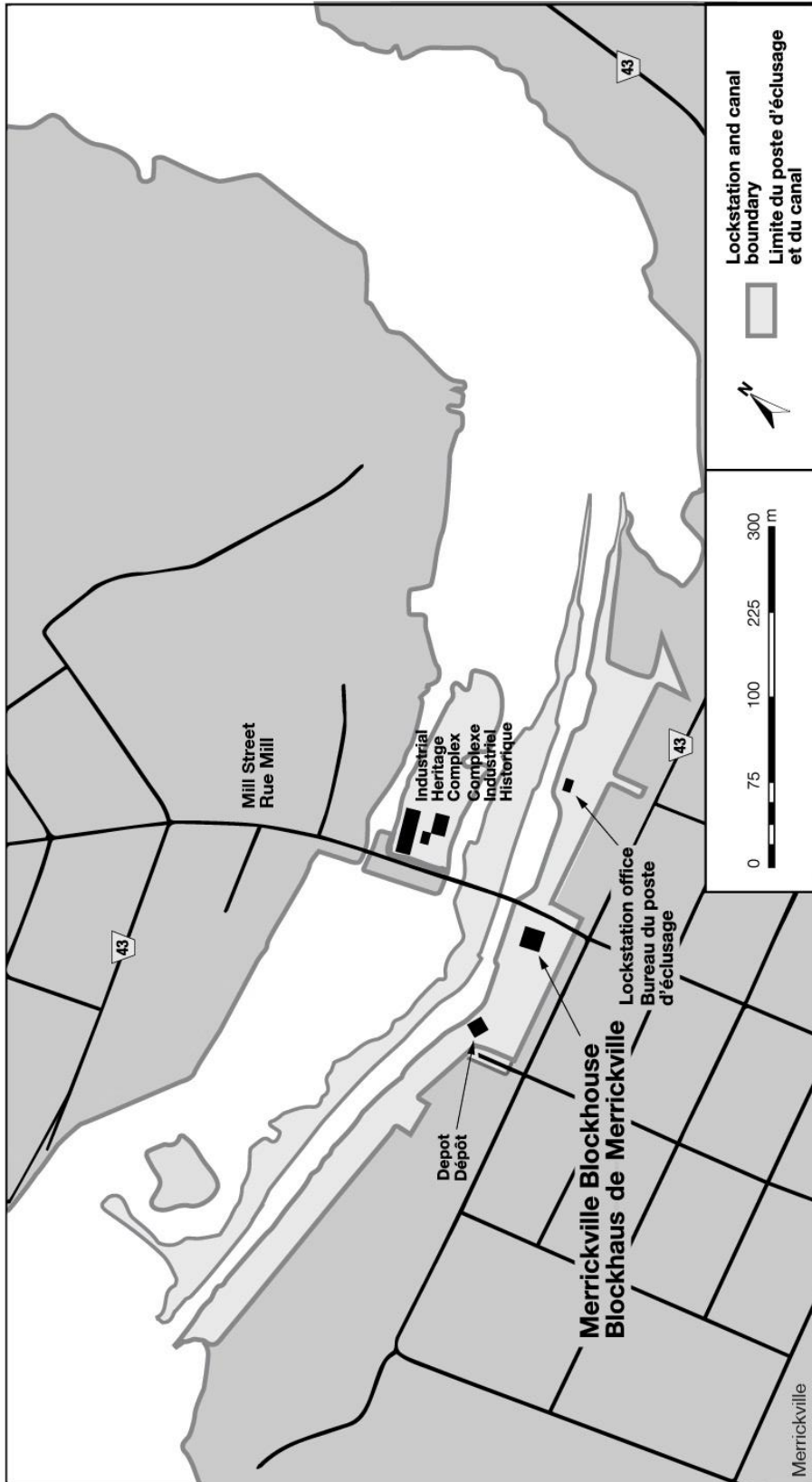
The Merrickville Blockhouse remains a landmark within the Village of Merrickville-Wolford that is appreciated and enjoyed for its historic significance in the defence of British North America, as an integral part of the Rideau Canal, and as a treasured local museum.

**Objective:** A renewed and strengthened collaboration between Parks Canada, the Village of Merrickville-Wolford and the Merrickville and District Historical Society, supported by associated community partners, in the areas of interpretation, promotion and asset maintenance ensures the Merrickville Blockhouse remains a must-see destination for visitors to the Rideau Canal and the village of Merrickville-Wolford.

### **Targets**

- The Merrickville Blockhouse is maintained in fair to good condition in the next state of the site assessment through regular monitoring, maintenance and repair.
- By 2023, a dialogue is initiated to identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration in presentation, interpretation and education, visitor experiences, and marketing and promotions at Merrickville Lockstation.

Map 3: Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site



## 8.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

The purpose of a strategic environmental assessment is to incorporate environmental considerations into the development of public policies, plans, and program proposals, to support environmentally-sound decision making. In accordance with the *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* (2010), a strategic environmental assessment was conducted on the *Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan*.

Many positive effects will occur as a result of the implementation of the plan, for example: developing and implementing a species at risk site action plan is expected to improve the protection of biodiversity and species at risk at the Rideau Canal. Key strategy three identifies several areas where modernizing the management approach at the canal is overdue, and identifies the key priorities to achieve those objectives, including updates to the legislative and policy framework; modernizing the approach to water management using data-based decision making; and enhancing the protection of natural and cultural resources through a review of the in-water and shoreline works policies. These updates are anticipated to benefit natural resources, cultural resources, visitor experience, and improve operations.

The management plan will help connect Canadians with nature contributing to the implementation of the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy*. The management plan also supports the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* goals of Greening Government and Pristine Lakes and Rivers.

Strategies/objectives/targets identified in the management plan that could potentially result in negative environmental effects include: the development of new land-based programs and service offers at strategic lockstations and development of new amenities and facilities for paddlers, hikers, and campers. However, these effects can be minimized by proactively incorporating strategic input from natural resource conservation and cultural resource management experts early in the planning of these concepts to help identify opportunities and constraints. Done properly, this can augment positive results and avoid or minimize negative effects. Operations at the site are required to mitigate impacts on climate according to Greening Government requirements in support of the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy*, and specific objectives have been identified to do so.

Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the public were consulted on the draft management plan, including a summary of the draft strategic environmental assessment. Consultation and engagement occurred over various phases between 2016 and 2021. Feedback, in particular where it related to conservation of natural resources, factored into the final version of the management plan and strategic environmental assessment.

There are no important negative environmental effects anticipated from the implementation of the management plan. Individual projects at the site will be evaluated separately under the *Impact Assessment Act* (2019), or successor legislation, as necessary.