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2023 Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada Report and Response

July 2023



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Message from the Minister



The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Environment and Climate Change

I have the honour of being Canada's Minister responsible for Parks Canada, and I am delighted to share our response to the 2023 Minister's Round Table.

As Canada and the world rise to the dual challenge of climate change and biodiversity loss, people are turning to natural and cultural heritage places to connect with nature and learn about history. National historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of Canadians. Protected areas conserve vital ecosystems, contribute to the recovery of

species at risk, and play a critical role in connecting Canadians with nature and our shared histories in a way that honours the past and contributes to resilient economies. The Round Table provides a valuable opportunity to hear directly from Canadians on critical issues facing national heritage places in Canada.

The themes presented at this year's Round Table fostered important discussions to advance Indigenous stewardship within and beyond the boundaries of our treasured places, to strengthen accessibility and diversify our experiences in ways that build resilience for Canada's tourism sector, and to work in new and innovative ways to reduce our imprint on the lands, waters, oceans, and ice that we are privileged to live, work and play on. Together we are shaping Parks Canada's priorities in the management of national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas in Canada.

Canadians generously shared their perspectives through this engagement, and strongly echoed the mandate of Parks Canada to conserve and present natural and cultural heritage places for current and future generations.

We heard feedback on how to braid Indigenous and western knowledge together, both to enhance connectivity between protected areas, and to advance Indigenous stewardship more holistically across the country.

Participants also provided tangible advice on how to make Parks Canada administered sites more accessible, diverse, and inclusive. And they challenged us to be leaders in both greening our operations and helping to grow a diverse and sustainable tourism industry that can benefit local and Indigenous communities.

In a country as large and diverse as Canada, collaboration is absolutely vital to our success in addressing biodiversity loss and climate change. Together, through opportunities such as the Round Table, we can create and promote new models that inspire Canadians and the world. My sincere thanks to everyone who participated in this major engagement.

Message from the President and Chief Executive Officer



Mr. Ron Hallman
President & Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada Agency

This year marked my second Minister's Round Table as President and CEO of Parks Canada. I am extremely proud of the work our team members do every day to protect and present our national treasures on behalf of all Canadians.

The 2023 Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada was conducted in a safe hybrid fashion to reflect Canada's progression out of the COVID-19 pandemic, with four in-person and six virtual stakeholder discussions. Through the 15 days of public input via the online engagement platform, over 2,050 people shared, reacted, liked,

or replied through social media, and 614 unique ideas were shared. One hundred and twenty-five organizations representing partners, rights holders, stakeholders, and equity-seeking groups participated in the engagement. We heard from Canadians from every province and territory.

These valued insights and perspectives are helping Parks Canada set a course for a sustainable future. The Round Table is a key forum to hear from Canadians on how to improve our efforts to care for and showcase national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas for the benefit of all.

The actions contained in this response are highly targeted to the issues and concerns raised by round table participants. It highlights Parks Canada's ongoing commitment to deepen relationships with Indigenous peoples, through the modernization of our practices, to better support Indigenous stewardship and help improve ecological connectivity in the sites we administer.

It reflects the ongoing commitment to implement innovative greening projects across the country, championing these efforts across the federal government, and sharing them with Canadians.

A number of these actions speak to our commitment to connect more Canadians to their network of treasured heritage places that will improve accessible experiences and programming, while collaborating with others to strengthen and diversify the tourism sector.

I am proud to lead Parks Canada and its extraordinary team of dedicated staff. We welcome and appreciate the input received and look forward to implementing these actions together with Indigenous communities, government partners, industry, and stakeholder groups in the years to come.



171
NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITES

5 NATIONAL
MARINE
CONSERVATION AREAS



47 NATIONAL
PARKS

1 NATIONAL
URBAN PARK

7,500+
DEDICATED
EMPLOYEES



12 of 20
Canada's
WORLD
HERITAGE
SITES

3,800+
designations
of people, places, and events
of importance



450,000+ km²
area protected



PARKS CANADA AT A GLANCE

22.5
MILLION
visits in 2022-23



protection of
250+
species at risk



8,000+ km
of trails

FREE
admission
for youth and new
Canadians



31 MILLION
archaeological and
historical objects



12,000
CAMPSITES

collaboration with
300+
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

\$27+
BILLION
OF ASSETS

200+
RED CHAIRS
#sharethechair



About the 2023 Minister's Round Table

Parks Canada's mandate is to protect and present Canada's heritage places and foster their understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment among the public in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations.

Every two years, the Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency holds a round table to seek advice from Canadians on the work of Parks Canada and share information on progress and developments since the previous engagement.

A requirement under the *Parks Canada Agency Act (1998)*, the Minister's Round Table provides a unique opportunity for dialogue on a wide range of issues affecting protected heritage places across the country. In this way, it strengthens and promotes accountability, engagement, and collaboration.

Each Minister's Round Table identifies a series of themes to explore. In 2023, these included:

- **Strengthening Accessibility:** Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to meaningfully experience national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas.
- **Indigenous Stewardship of Protected Heritage Places:** Advancing Indigenous leadership in heritage conservation.
- **Ecological Corridors:** Weaving Indigenous knowledge into connecting protected and conserved places through the National Program for Ecological Corridors.
- **Parks Canada and Tourism:** Parks Canada's role in Canada's dynamic tourism sector.
- **Greening Parks Canada:** Achieving net-zero emissions in Parks Canada operations.

These themes were selected in part to further conversations from the 2020 Minister's Round Table, as well as reflect emerging issues of importance related to conservation, stewardship, and enjoyment of places administered by Parks Canada.



From top to bottom:
Pukaskwa National Park;
Rouge National Urban Park.

Photo: Scott Munn

Photo: Scott Munn

About the 2023 Minister's Round Table *(continued)*

The Minister's Round Table took place in January and February 2023. It included different engagement opportunities, including six virtual and four in-person discussion sessions with a variety of organizations and individuals with an interest in Parks Canada's work. Several of these sessions were co-hosted by ministers with overlapping mandates, including the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Disability Inclusion and the Minister of Tourism.

Along with the sessions, the Minister's Round Table provided opportunities for engagement and

participation via an online platform. Members of the public, partners, and stakeholders could also send written submissions by email or post during the engagement period.

The Minister's Round Table endeavoured to improve inclusivity and accessibility in its engagement practices in 2023. Efforts were made to be more culturally tuned to stakeholders by adopting a wider range of facilitation techniques, including a virtual sharing circle. Enhanced translation and accommodation measures and new connections with stakeholders who had never previously participated in this type of engagement helped

to broaden the reach and hear new perspectives.

A summary of engagement outcomes from the 2023 Minister's Round Table is presented in the infographic below.

The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level summary of feedback received from the 2023 Minister's Round Table and articulate the Minister's response.



What We Heard: Shared Perspectives

The 2023 Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada brought together a broad range of individuals and organizations from all parts of the country through a combination of in-person and virtual sessions, online engagement, and written submissions. Several overarching messages emerged from the perspectives shared.

Weaving Indigenous knowledge and decision-making systems throughout Parks Canada

The critical importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge and making space for Indigenous decision-making systems echoed throughout the Minister's Round Table. Participants highlighted the importance of working in ethical space—where knowledge systems interact with mutual respect, kindness, and generosity—and engaging in a two-eyed seeing approach that better respects Indigenous ways of knowing. Parks Canada was asked to increase co-management with Indigenous peoples, support cultural continuity through access and support of Indigenous languages, and employ more Indigenous peoples, with a focus on youth employment and representation in senior management. Parks Canada was reminded that Indigenous peoples are rights holders, and not stakeholders.

Broadening and deepening efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusion

The importance of broadening and deepening efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusion in all areas of Parks Canada's work was also discussed across all the 2023 Minister's Round Table themes. Common ideas included encouraging Parks Canada to improve equitable access and enjoyment by all; participants thus called for a wider range of meaningful experiences, as well as affordable and accessible public transit to and within Parks Canada-protected places. The Minister's Round Table also underscored the importance of a more diverse and inclusive staff trained and ready to respond to the evolving needs of staff, visitors, and collaborators alike. Recruitment, training, and retention are all critical aspects of the work ahead.

The concept of Two Eyed Seeing helps guide Parks Canada's efforts to support Indigenous stewardship. This principle encourages us to look at Indigenous ways of knowing with one eye and western knowledge with the other, which in turn helps us to see and act in new ways that benefit everyone.

(Drawn from the teachings of Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall)

The concept of Ethical Space is also key. In their landmark 2018 report, the Indigenous Circle of Experts called for the creation of venues for 'collaboration and advice, sharing and cross-validation (where one side validates the other's decisions)'. In ethical space, knowledge systems can interact with mutual respect, kindness, and generosity.

(Drawn from We Rise Together, Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018.)



Photo: Scott Munn

What Was Heard: Shared Perspectives *(continued)*

Investing in relationships and collaboration

Investing in relationships and working collaboratively were also recurring themes. Participants shared a desire for ongoing collaboration and dialogue beyond the Minister's Round Table. Creating strong relationships with partners and stakeholders through systematic, consistent, and dynamic communications can help build stronger relationships and a basis for coordinated action across functional areas.

Leveraging pilot projects, data, and best practices

Throughout the 2023 Minister's Round Table, participants highlighted examples of successful

Parks Canada initiatives and pilot projects and suggested that Parks Canada build on this work by sharing lessons learned and adapting these approaches to the needs and realities of other sites within its networks. The importance of social science data in decision-making was also a common theme, and participants invited Parks Canada to play a leadership role in facilitating data sharing more broadly across sectors and interest areas. Parks Canada was also encouraged to continue its commitment to implement innovative technologies and processes to support its mandate, specifically in the greening of operations, accessibility, and tourism.

Addressing climate change and resilience at a global scale

The 2023 Minister's Round Table occurred immediately after the historic 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (known as COP15) hosted in Montreal, and just before the 5th International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) in Vancouver. These events brought significant attention to the critical need to address climate change and biodiversity loss in new ways, both at home and globally. Ecological connectivity, Indigenous-led conservation, urban parks, marine conservation, and green spaces were top of mind for many who participated in the Minister's Round Table. COP15 and IMPAC5 also highlighted the ongoing importance of education and fostering connections to place as a way of galvanizing greater support for the important work ahead. Participants suggested that Parks Canada can act as a beacon and leader on these issues, and on integrated approaches such as nature-based climate solutions.



Photo: Allie Banning

What Was Heard: Shared Perspectives (continued)

A participant's perspective:

“ The [Parks Canada] Agency is [...] well placed to play a leadership role in encouraging and incenting conservation action on the broader land and seascape and across jurisdictional boundaries. ”

Recognizing the interconnected nature of themes

Lastly, participants emphasized the interconnectedness of the 2023 Minister's Round Table themes, underlining the multiple shared outcomes of work across Parks Canada. This growing recognition of the interplay between addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, increasing Indigenous leadership, and improving inclusion and accessibility reinforced the need to build adaptability and resilience into all aspects of Parks Canada's work, using long-term planning horizons that can help create more sustainable outcomes, now and into the future.



Themes

Strengthening Accessibility: Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to meaningfully experience national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas

Parks Canada is committed to providing opportunities for everyone to participate in the conservation and enjoyment of the heritage sites within its networks. However, challenges remain to remove barriers and foster greater accessibility, inclusion, and belonging at the wide array of heritage sites administered by Parks Canada, particularly for people living with disabilities.

In 2020, the Minister's Round Table sought views on how Parks Canada can be a partner and leader in inclusion, diversity, accessibility, and reconciliation in protected and heritage places. Participants highlighted the Nothing Without Us principle underscoring

the importance of meaningfully engaging and collaborating with people who have lived experience—and the organizations that represent or support them—in the design of efforts to address the barriers they face.

In response to this feedback, Parks Canada has launched a broad range of efforts regarding accessibility since 2020, some of which are elaborated on below. Recognizing that the pursuit of accessibility and inclusion is an ongoing and long-term commitment, the 2023 Minister's Round Table sought perspectives from participants on strengthening the accessibility to meaningful experiences.

Questions to participants included:

1. What criteria or principles should guide Parks Canada in developing and providing accessible meaningful experiences?
2. What kinds of meaningful experiences would you or your clients/members like to have at Parks Canada places?
3. What are some of the physical, informational, and social barriers to having these experiences?



Strengthening Accessibility: Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to meaningfully experience national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas (*continued*)

What we heard

The overarching message to Parks Canada was that addressing barriers to accessibility means going beyond retrofitting parking lots and bathrooms toward creating truly meaningful experiences for all Canadians.

Parks Canada was encouraged to create a wider range of experiences at the sites it administers, including more opportunities for exploration and discovery, providing adaptive equipment to enable more accessible experiences, and designing experiences that respond to a variety of visitor needs including neurodiversity.

This requires thinking about the whole process of visitor experience, from trip planning, to visiting, to opportunities for visitors to provide feedback afterward. Clear communication is key, so that potential visitors have enough detail to make decisions regarding whether experiences will meet their needs. In addition, increasing the representation of people with disabilities in related communications and publications sends a powerful message of inclusion and belonging.

A crucial aspect of this shift is enhanced training for staff to ensure that they are well equipped to facilitate more inclusive experiences, as well as more proactive hiring of people with disabilities. This feedback is consistent with actions identified in [Parks Canada's 2022–2025 Accessibility Action Plan](#).

Participants highlighted the importance of increasing physical access while also addressing affordability concerns. For example, it was suggested that Parks Canada could provide free or low-cost accessible shuttles both to and within its networks of sites.

Adaptive equipment can also play a key role in enhancing accessibility. Participants noted that Parks Canada has begun piloting equipment such as beach and all-terrain wheelchairs. These innovations can provide an important base upon which to build, recognizing that a commitment to ongoing maintenance will be essential to ensure that the experiences they facilitate can persist over time.

Finally, Parks Canada was encouraged to collaborate more closely with organizations working on accessibility and outdoor experiences for people with disabilities. This includes creating opportunities to get early input in the design of different offerings, as well as exploring possible mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and collaboration, such as an advisory committee on accessibility.

Participants' perspectives:

“ Disabled access means more than a ramp. [Provide] funding for programs that help disabled individuals to experience the parks. Bringing a family member is not always an option. Supporting programs that help disabled individuals enjoy the parks in a peer group setting would boost [enjoyment] and quality of time spent there. ”

“ [...] Examine accessibility requirements for an experience from start to finish—from web accessibility for all readers in trip planning, to when a visitor arrives, to when they leave, to ensure that every aspect of an experience addresses barriers. ”

“ Partnerships with organizations who support people with diverse abilities could help [achieve] Parks [Canada's] goals [...] don't recreate the wheel [Let's] move [...] together! ”

Strengthening Accessibility: Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to meaningfully experience national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas (*continued*)

Minister's response

Strengthening accessibility, removing barriers, and embracing diversity and inclusion are fundamental to the fulfillment of Parks Canada's mandate.

Parks Canada strives to be inclusive and welcoming with a collective aim to better understand and remove existing systemic barriers by working with partners, stakeholders, and communities to ensure all Canadians and visitors from around the world can enjoy national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas.

As part of this work, and building on the 2021 call to action on anti-racism, equity, and inclusion in the federal public service by the Clerk of the Privy Council, Parks Canada has implemented a

number of initiatives. This includes the creation of a Values and Ethics, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Branch and employee networks for equity-seeking groups, to provide advice in support of agency-wide policies, programs, and activities.

Parks Canada has also developed an action plan to support agency-wide efforts on improving accessibility. The [Parks Canada's 2022–2025 Accessibility Action Plan](#) was released in December 2022 and draws on feedback from the Minister's Round Table in 2020, as well as internal engagement with employees through a series of meetings over a nine-month period. This action plan aims to reinforce awareness of issues and barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, and guide Parks Canada as it implements actions and initiatives to achieve the sustainable culture change needed to integrate accessibility across the work of Parks Canada.

This action plan also aligns with the Government of Canada's 2019 [Accessible Canada Act](#), which emphasizes the importance of accessibility in the work of the federal public service and aims to achieve a Canada without barriers for people living with disabilities by 2040.

As part of its commitments to implement Parks Canada's Accessibility Action Plan and in response to recommendations received during the 2023 Minister's Round Table, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #1 – Parks Canada will incorporate feedback from the 2023 Minister's Round Table to advance implementation of its 2022–2025 Accessibility Action Plan.

Parks Canada's three-year accessibility action plan sets out seven priority areas with the objective of achieving progressive and long-term systemic change for Canadians visiting national parks and historical sites, as well as for employees.

The plan addresses issues raised during the 2023 Minister's Round Table including improving visitor access to national parks and national heritage sites by leveraging the expertise of external organizations to advance the following priorities:

- Improving access to national parks and heritage sites (built environment);
- Making Parks Canada communications more inclusive through alternate formats for publications and launching marketing products reflective of its visitors;



Point Pelee National Park

Strengthening Accessibility: Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to meaningfully experience national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas (*continued*)

- Developing standard accessibility requirements for commonly procured commodities taking into consideration Government of Canada and industry standards and best practices;
- Developing a strategy to include principles of accessible design and inclusive experiences in the creation of services and programs, including supporting criteria, service standards, and processes; and
- Helping to eliminate barriers to employment by equipping managers with appropriate tools, including training to recruit people with disabilities and retaining employees through talent development and inclusive workplaces.

In the spirit of Nothing Without Us, the Parks Canada Employees with Disabilities Network is actively engaged in exploring and developing a new service delivery model for accommodations to support both employees and managers. Improving response times for adaptive technologies is key to providing meaningful and inclusive experiences for visitors and supporting the contributions of employees to the Parks Canada mandate.

Action #2 – Parks Canada will partner with accessibility organizations working in communities across Canada to strengthen accessible experiences and programs at national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas.

Drawing on participant feedback, Parks Canada will continue to strengthen connections and seek new opportunities with accessibility organizations working in communities across Canada to improve the accessibility of meaningful visitor experiences in Parks Canada-administered places.



Indigenous Stewardship of Protected Heritage Places: Advancing Indigenous leadership in natural and cultural heritage conservation

Indigenous peoples have been stewards of lands, waters, and ice since time immemorial.

Historically, Parks Canada's laws, policies, and practices—as well as those of the broader Government of Canada—have resulted in the disconnection of many Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories, treaty lands, and ancestral homelands.

Parks Canada is working to expand and deepen relationships with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities across the country, including through the development of an Indigenous stewardship framework.

This initiative builds on discussions and Action #8 of the 2020 Minister's Round Table to develop a framework to guide efforts in support of Indigenous stewardship in protected heritage places. The Minister further committed to developing this framework through meaningful engagement, collaboration, and dialogue with Indigenous peoples and partners and rights holders.

The 2023 Minister's Round Table provided an important forum to engage with Indigenous partners on both this framework and the overall direction of Parks Canada's work.

Questions to participants included:

1. What does meaningful stewardship look like to you and your community?
2. What kinds of changes do you think are required to enable and support Indigenous stewardship of the heritage places administered by Parks Canada?

An Indigenous participant's perspective:

“ Stewardship is a process. Not one singular thing, action, opportunity, or program. It is the responsibility to maintain relationships, not manage them. Culture, language, health, well-being, are all components of stewardship. ”



Indigenous Stewardship of Protected Heritage Places: Advancing Indigenous leadership in natural and cultural heritage conservation (continued)

What we heard

Minister's Round Table participants noted that the concept of stewardship is inherent in Indigenous cultures and language. Indigenous languages communicate the interconnectedness of all things and highlight the power of more holistic approaches to conservation rooted in responsibility, relationship, and ways of life.

Being on the land, water, and ice is an essential part of this worldview. Parks Canada can build and deepen its relationships with Indigenous peoples by supporting more access to lands, waters, and ice in the sites they manage, and by encouraging involvement of youth and elders in activities on the land. Creating opportunities for intergenerational transfer of knowledge is sometimes referred to as “cultural continuity.”

A participant's perspective:

“ It is important to ensure that Indigenous individuals, communities, and nations are supported to continue to access, use, and manage the land in ways that are informed by rich knowledges and practices. Part of this is investing in capacity and making the space to access and use the land, but there is also a deep importance of committing to building the knowledge and opportunities (including meaningful and accessible education and employment) that enable folks to live on and with the land in a reciprocal and relational way. ”

Giving meaningful space to the role of Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous decision-making on lands and waters is also key moving forward. Participants encouraged Parks Canada to advance effective co-governance and

co-management arrangements, and embrace Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous Guardians programs. Powerful examples of these approaches already in place can provide inspiration and tools for a broader application across the country.

At the same time, there is power in acknowledging past harm while charting a path toward a shared future. Parks Canada can work towards new relationships built on trust and supporting the advancement of self-determination through, for example, changing policy to respect Indigenous laws and ways of knowing.

An Indigenous participant's perspective:

“ Conservation is not saving the last polar bear or the last beluga. It is living in harmony within the natural environment and the species within it. It is understanding the importance of a particular species, like caribou, to our society, and thinking about our children's relationships to these species and their ability to continue those relationships. It is about how meat gets shared in a community, and how the animal is respected. This is conservation—an active relationship that must stay active to be whole. ”



Photo: Eric Laflamme

Indigenous Stewardship of Protected Heritage Places: Advancing Indigenous leadership in natural and cultural heritage conservation (*continued*)

Indigenous businesses make important contributions to the local and regional economies in and around Parks Canada-administered sites. There is a significant opportunity to support the growth and prosperity of Indigenous businesses, while also helping to ensure that visitors to Parks Canada-administered places understand the rich histories and cultures of the Indigenous peoples in these areas. Indigenous-led visitor planning and greater involvement of elders can also support these efforts.

Finally, participants in the Minister's Round Table called for greater efforts to hire Indigenous staff at all levels and prioritize Indigenous-led

training and learning opportunities to develop Indigenous relations and cultural competencies, especially for team members working directly with Indigenous partners. Consideration should also be given to meaningful support for Indigenous staff, including opportunities for on-the-land activities.

Minister's response

Parks Canada recognizes the essential roles that Indigenous peoples play in protecting, conserving, and maintaining relationships with the lands, waters, and ice that have been their home for millennia.

To this end, the Indigenous stewardship framework will help

Parks Canada focus on issues that are most critical to Indigenous communities. The framework is fundamentally about relationships and especially honouring those relationships. It is also about empowering Indigenous voices, supporting Indigenous leadership and self-determination, respecting Indigenous rights, Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems, and building a greener and more equitable future for generations to come.

In addition, Parks Canada participated in efforts across the Government of Canada to develop and implement an [action plan](#) to support the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#), which came into effect in Canada on June 21, 2021. This act provides a framework for the Government of Canada and First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples to work together to implement the United Nations Declaration. The action plan was informed by ongoing engagement, including the 2023 Minister's Round Table.



Photo: Jovan Simic

Indigenous Stewardship of Protected Heritage Places: Advancing Indigenous leadership in natural and cultural heritage conservation *(continued)*

In response to feedback from the 2023 Minister's Round Table, and consistent with these ongoing initiatives, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #3 – In support of the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and recognizing Indigenous peoples' long-standing relationships and sacred responsibilities for the lands, waters, and ice that have shaped their identities and influenced their cultures and languages for millennia, Parks Canada will modernize current policy, practices, programs, and approaches to support Indigenous stewardship within the places it administers. This includes co-designing policy that would promote cultural continuity as a principle guiding management and formalize the role of Indigenous knowledge in decision-making.

Action #4 – To recognize and implement Indigenous peoples' rights and responsibilities for lands, waters, and ice, Parks Canada will advance efforts to remove legal barriers to harvesting and on-the-land

practices by Indigenous peoples—including hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping—within the places it administers.

Action #5 – To support the advancement of Indigenous self-determination, Parks Canada will identify opportunities with Indigenous partners to broaden the spectrum of governance and decision-making approaches with respect to the lands, waters, and ice it administers.

Action #6 – Parks Canada will identify and implement actions to support truth-telling and respond meaningfully to historic and ongoing harms that resulted from the establishment, management, and operation of Parks Canada-administered places.



Ecological Corridors: Weaving Indigenous knowledge into connecting protected and conserved places through the National Program for Ecological Corridors

Now more than ever, the connections between protected areas are critical to help ensure species can move across lands, waters, and ice and maintain fully functioning natural processes. Known as “ecological connectivity,” this is essential to halting and reversing biodiversity loss and helping species and the habitats they depend upon to adapt to climate change.

Parks Canada plays a key role in these efforts, including those to ensure connections and corridors across the lands and waters it administers.

The Minister's 2020 Round Table explored the importance of connectivity in responding to both biodiversity loss and climate change. Participants highlighted the importance of protecting ecological connectivity where it still exists and restoring these connections where they have been lost or degraded. They also underscored the critical role that Parks Canada can play in advancing ecological connectivity across the country.

To help maintain, restore, and enhance ecological connectivity, and respond to feedback received during the 2020 Minister's Round Table, Parks Canada launched a new National Program for Ecological Corridors in April 2022.

An important aspect of the program is working with Indigenous partners to weave Indigenous knowledge into these efforts while advancing reconciliation in all aspects of program design and implementation.

Questions to participants included:

1. How can Indigenous priorities, knowledge, and worldviews be woven into the National Program for Ecological Corridors?
2. How can these be woven into the criteria and maps that would help identify priority areas for corridors in Canada?

What we heard

Minister's Round Table participants consistently highlighted the importance of ecological connectivity on lands, waters, and ice. Some suggested it should be a top priority for Parks Canada to develop a corridor strategy that contributes to broader protection goals, expands work on wildlife crossings, and emphasizes the



Ecological Corridors: Weaving Indigenous knowledge into connecting protected and conserved places through the National Program for Ecological Corridors *(continued)*

importance of collaborating with all levels of government, including Indigenous governments, as well as with existing organizations and initiatives.

An Indigenous participant's perspective:

“ Words matter. When you look at land claims and treaties, the treaties are very specific. They align to the ability for our people to hunt, fish, and trap forever. We have been managing wildlife and areas for thousands of years. Language is important. ”

Many tools can help enhance connectivity, including national urban parks and municipal protected areas, as well as identified bird areas, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, and tribal parks. Biosphere reserves—which lend themselves to a variety of land uses—were also identified as a possible model for this work.

Recognizing and elevating Indigenous leadership and decision-making is critical to the success of these efforts. Parks Canada was encouraged to employ a two-eyed seeing approach and to braid Indigenous and western knowledge together to support the corridors program. This could include greater use and recognition

of biocultural criteria and Indigenous names and languages, which reflect the interconnectedness of all life and acknowledge the unique stewardship role of Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

Parks Canada could also facilitate more opportunities for cultural continuity and sharing of knowledge and practices between generations by creating greater access for Indigenous peoples to areas within its networks.

Some participants suggested that connectivity efforts should focus on key species and the areas they rely on at all stages of life. Working with Indigenous peoples—including elders and traditional land users—to learn from their understanding and knowledge of key species, including cultural keystone species, their movements, and needs, would help Parks Canada move forward in ethical space.

Finally, Parks Canada was reminded that how we protect biodiversity is often as important as what we protect and where. Cooperation and collaboration across a broad range of governments, nations, organizations, and communities will be key to advancing connectivity in meaningful ways across the country.

Participants' perspectives:

“ Our national parks are precious, both to Canadians and to the ecosystems and wildlife they protect. I would like to stress the importance of connectivity to natural systems and the species they support. It is vital that national parks not become isolated islands in seas of development. ”

“ Identifying, protecting, and connecting ecologically and significant areas will require the use of multiple tools and the inclusion of both historical and contemporary knowledge of those on the lands and waters. Working with local partners to combine conventional, local, and Indigenous scientific knowledge will help develop comprehensive understanding of historical use, changes over time, known and anticipated impact factors, and areas or populations of priority. ”



Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site

Photo: Scott Munn

Ecological Corridors: Weaving Indigenous knowledge into connecting protected and conserved places through the National Program for Ecological Corridors (*continued*)

Minister's response

Parks Canada is committed to halting and reversing biodiversity loss and addressing climate change. Maintaining, enhancing, and restoring connectivity through ecological corridors is a key strategy for helping species and the habitats they depend upon to adapt to their changing environments.

Parks Canada works on several initiatives promoting connectivity, including the National Program for Ecological Corridors.

This five-year program, launched in 2022, focuses on inspiring and supporting a diversity of partners in recognizing, maintaining, and enhancing connectivity between protected and conserved areas by

identifying key areas for ecological corridors in Canada and contributing to on-the-ground initiatives.

As it works to implement this program and in response to the 2023 Minister's Round Table, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #7 – Parks Canada will allocate a specific funding stream to Indigenous-led ecological corridor initiatives.

Parks Canada, through the National Program for Ecological Corridors, will support on-the-ground ecological corridor work through financial contributions to a variety of organizations. One stream of funding will be reserved for Indigenous-led initiatives, which aligns with feedback received emphasizing the importance of Indigenous-led conservation.



Photo: Scott Murray



Photo: Gary Pittman

Ecological Corridors: Weaving Indigenous knowledge into connecting protected and conserved places through the National Program for Ecological Corridors *(continued)*

Action #8 – Parks Canada will work with Indigenous partners to weave Indigenous knowledge and stewardship values into the development and implementation of the National Program for Ecological Corridors.

Parks Canada will engage with a variety of Indigenous partners, including national Indigenous organizations, Indigenous-led networks, and Indigenous governments to determine the best mechanisms to weave Indigenous knowledge and stewardship values into all aspects of the program in a collaborative way.

Action #9 – Parks Canada will support the capacity of Indigenous partners, including youth organizations, to facilitate their involvement in the National Program for Ecological Corridors.

Parks Canada will provide financial support to Indigenous partners to assist with capacity challenges and enable feedback on various program elements for the National Program for Ecological Corridors.



From top to bottom:
Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site; Kouchibouguac National Park.

Parks Canada and Tourism: Parks Canada's role in Canada's dynamic tourism sector

From coast to coast to coast, the tourism sector is an essential part of the Canadian economy. Parks Canada is an important contributor to Canada's visitor economy, administering 224 national heritage places located near 600 neighbouring communities that include some of the most iconic tourism destinations in the world.

Parks Canada collaborates with Indigenous partners and local, regional, and national tourism partners and destination marketing organizations to achieve its mandate to conserve and share national protected places with Canadians and visitors from around

the world. Prior to the pandemic, Parks Canada welcomed some 25 million Canadians and international visitors per year. In 2022–2023, Parks Canada benefited from the gradual recovery of the tourism industry by welcoming 22.5 million visitors.

The 2023 Minister's Round Table provided opportunities to discuss Parks Canada's role in balancing the conservation of protected heritage places with the enjoyment of domestic and international visitors, and the important contributions these places make to the growth of Canada's tourism sector.

Questions to participants included:

1. How can Parks Canada further its support and partner with the tourism industry while it delivers its important mandate to protect and share national historic sites, parks, and marine conservation areas?
2. How can Parks Canada further its efforts to work closely with Indigenous peoples to foster greater connection to protected places and also greater opportunities for Indigenous people and enterprises?

What we heard

Feedback from the 2023 Minister's Round Table underscored the important interconnections between the tourism industry and Parks Canada. Participants highlighted the many ways tourism offers at Parks Canada-administered destinations intersect with local and regional tourism



Photo: Dan Froese

Parks Canada and Tourism: Parks Canada's role in Canada's dynamic tourism sector *(continued)*

operators and businesses, Indigenous and rural communities, as well as regional, provincial, and national destination marketing organizations.

The issues and opportunities facing the tourism sector vary widely. For example, areas experiencing visitation pressures such as Banff operate within a different context than emerging tourism markets in many remote areas, particularly in the north. This suggests the need to promote Parks Canada destinations that have the capacity to welcome an increase in visitation, while also implementing measures to manage visitation where appropriate.

Participants' perspectives:

“ A professional tourism operator can bring dozens of individuals in parks in a manner that leaves no trace [. . . They] can educate users as to the importance of protecting such areas, inform them of actions individuals can take to support conservation and do so while providing meaningful and impactful experiences that can last a lifetime. ”

“ It continues to be vital to support local and Indigenous leadership and employment to ensure local stories are highlighted and shared, both by facilitating Indigenous employment within Parks Canada and supporting Indigenous-led visitor-service businesses. ”

At the same time, the tourism industry continues to adjust in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The capacity of the industry to constantly adapt in the face of other global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss will be key to the long-term health and growth of the sector.

Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing innovation and collaboration between Parks Canada and tourism operators, with a goal of improving the experience for visitors and tourism providers alike. Recommendations included building capacity through training and focusing efforts on seasonal and geographical dispersion. For example, Parks Canada was encouraged to consider ways to leverage shoulder seasons or winter experiences as well as year-round operations for smaller sites.

An Indigenous participant's perspective:

“ When it comes to protecting and sharing these sites I feel like our histories and ways of relating to the land have been systemically repressed. Our peoples and stories were systemically erased; they need to be systemically restored. Tourism provides an opportunity to share a story with the entire world. ”

In addition, there is growing interest among visitors in sustainable tourism offerings, such as low-impact and nature-based experiences (sometimes referred to as “regenerative tourism”). This in turn presents an opportunity to communicate and educate visitors about the importance of ecological integrity, as per Parks Canada's mandate.



Parks Canada and Tourism: Parks Canada's role in Canada's dynamic tourism sector *(continued)*

Participants also highlighted the importance of working with Indigenous communities to support greater collaboration, more meaningful employment opportunities, and more holistic approaches to the visitor experience in destinations across the country.

Strengthening relationships with Indigenous peoples can also provide important opportunities to restore connections and acknowledge the harms associated with the displacement of Indigenous peoples from the lands over which they have traditionally exercised rights and responsibilities, as well as the subsequent marginalization and disempowerment of Indigenous peoples in maintaining their relationships to these places in ways that respect their traditional roles as stewards.

Ideas included funding for Indigenous peoples to develop tourism offers rooted in Indigenous language, culture, and ways of life, particularly in remote areas. Parks Canada was also encouraged to increase recognition of Indigenous languages and place names and enhance opportunities for land-based learning wherever possible.

Streamlining procurement and permitting processes, enhancing staff training, and communicating guidelines for new tourism offerings can help promote more proactive collaboration with Indigenous businesses and communities. This can in turn help increase employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples, both in the tourism sector and within Parks Canada's workforce.

Finally, a clear interest and desire were expressed for more ongoing relationship building, collaboration, and communication with Parks Canada. This could take the form of advisory bodies or targeted dialogue to address topics of shared interest such as visitor management, sustainability, and conservation education.

Minister's response

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that Canada remains a global tourism destination of choice. To advance this goal, Budget 2022 announced the development of a new [Federal Tourism Growth Strategy](#) to help reimagine tourism as a key driver of economic growth and secure Canada's position as a top global destination. The new strategy builds on the previous edition

with a focus on labour gaps and instability, investment attraction and destination development, and long-term economic growth across the country.

In addition to supporting the implementation of the Federal Tourism Growth Strategy, Parks Canada is committed to providing sustainable and meaningful visitor experiences, including Indigenous tourism offers, and participating in whole-of-government efforts to support and promote domestic and international tourism to Parks Canada destinations and surrounding communities. This includes promotional activities and collaborations with a wide variety of community groups, experts, and tourism industry leaders.

In response to the 2023 Minister's Round Table, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #10 – Parks Canada will support the Canadian tourism sector through collaboration with Destination Canada and the travel industry.

Parks Canada will continue to develop and implement initiatives in collaboration with Destination Canada to showcase the diversity of Parks Canada destinations,

Parks Canada and Tourism: Parks Canada's role in Canada's dynamic tourism sector *(continued)*

accessible activities, Indigenous and seasonal experiences, and regional itineraries. Promotional efforts will focus on Parks Canada destinations where increased visitation capacity exists, leveraging the attraction of these places to support four-season regional tourism and new market growth.

Parks Canada, in partnership with the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, will support the development, renewal, and promotion of responsible tourism products, including visitor experiences at Parks Canada-administered places and associated regional tourism and Indigenous tourism offers to further Canada as an international destination of choice.

Action #11 – Parks Canada will strengthen relationships and support Indigenous-led tourism offers through new or existing tools.

To further encourage Indigenous tourism renewal and growth, Parks Canada will advance the development and promotion of authentic Indigenous experiences in and around Parks Canada-administered places through continued collaboration with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC). Parks Canada

will also support ITAC's Original Original Accreditation Program and collaborate with ITAC to promote Indigenous tourism businesses that operate in or adjacent to Parks Canada-administered places.



Photo: Scott Mann



Photo: Brian Van Tighem

From top to bottom:
Riding Mountain National Park;
Jasper National Park.

Greening Parks Canada: Achieving net-zero emissions in Parks Canada operations

As part of its commitment to responding to the global challenge of climate change, the Government of Canada is working to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions within its operations by 2050.

Parks Canada is dedicated to responding and adapting to climate change throughout its operations. Recognizing that the Agency has one of the largest and most complex asset portfolios within the federal government, Parks Canada is pursuing a mix of short, medium, and long-term actions to achieve these goals.

Questions to participants included:

1. How can Parks Canada advance its efforts to green its operations and contribute further to the Government of Canada's net-zero target?
2. What partnerships or collaborations could help the Agency more quickly and comprehensively reduce the environmental footprint of its operations?

What we heard

Minister's Round Table participants acknowledged the different contexts for action that exist for greening operations across Parks Canada's diverse and complex operations and asset base. For example, conditions in remote northern locations are different from those in more urbanized parts of southern Canada. Waste diversion projects often pose a particular challenge given varied conditions across the country.

Participants' perspectives:

“ Parks Canada could be a real beacon for Canada in proactive natural-asset management and implementation of nature-based solutions. ”

“ By procuring green buildings, Parks Canada could also contribute to developing skill and knowledge in the local workforce. ”

“ Both remote and well-visited sites could benefit from better waste diversion, collection, and separation options to improve sustainability and reduce both short- and long-term impacts. ”



Cape Breton Highlands
National Park

Greening Parks Canada: Achieving net-zero emissions in Parks Canada operations *(continued)*

As such, while striving for consistent approaches in advancing waste, water, and environmental quality initiatives, greening measures are typically designed on a case-by-case basis. For example, efforts to green national heritage sites must take heritage conservation values into careful consideration at all stages.

Parks Canada's efforts in undertaking innovative greening actions were acknowledged by participants, who underscored the role the Agency can play as an ambassador and internal champion for these efforts. This includes sharing successful practices and lessons learned, both within the Agency and across government. In addition, Parks Canada's unique connection with Canadians through the sites it manages offers educational and communications opportunities.

Participants also noted that Parks Canada can play a leadership role in integrating climate adaptation and resilience initiatives into its greening efforts, as well as showcasing nature-based climate solutions and proactive natural-asset management. Given these unique opportunities, Parks Canada was encouraged to be bold in its goals related to this theme.

In addition, participants emphasized the importance of planning for the long term when it comes to greening Parks Canada's operations and assets. Using extended planning horizons can help guide decision makers towards more sustainable solutions now and into the future.

For example, there are significant challenges associated with using more sustainable sources to operate Parks Canada assets.

Parks Canada was encouraged to consider applying renewable energy systems to sites that are remote, not grid-connected, and reliant on fossil fuel generators for electricity. Participants also suggested that wind and geothermal power be considered to account for capacity requirements and meet peak loads during extreme weather events.

Effective procurement policies and practices were identified as an important way to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Building on Parks Canada's considerable internal expertise, while leveraging external relationships with researchers and practitioners, can also support continual improvements over time.

Finally, participants encouraged Parks Canada to reach out to a broader range of potential allies—including Indigenous communities, municipalities, academics, and businesses—to help accelerate efforts to reduce its ecological footprint and move toward a net-zero future.



Cape Breton Highlands National Park

Greening Parks Canada: Achieving net-zero emissions in Parks Canada operations (*continued*)

On behalf of all federal departments, Public Services and Procurement Canada is leading the 100% Clean Electricity Initiative, which will enable departments to directly procure clean power by 2025.

Minister's response

Parks Canada is committed to responding to the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. As one aspect of this response, Parks Canada is working to green government operations, including shifting to cleaner energy sources, converting departmental fleets to zero-emission vehicles, and securing greener buildings and infrastructure through both retrofits and new constructions.

Government-wide efforts are outlined in the 2022–2026 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, an overarching strategy required by the Federal Sustainable Development Act that highlights key government-wide priorities, specific goals and targets, milestones, and actions to promote healthy ecosystems and sustainable communities. Parks Canada's commitments are also detailed in its Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy.

In response to the 2023 Minister's Round Table, and in conjunction with these existing federal strategies, Parks Canada will undertake the following actions:

Action #12 – Parks Canada will share and promote information on a variety of greening initiatives with both internal and external audiences.

Parks Canada will compile and share its successful greening practices and lessons learned from coast to coast to coast. Parks Canada will strive to encourage and inspire greening initiatives both internally and externally, while continuing to innovate greening practices.

Action #13 – Parks Canada will collaborate with a broad range of experts and partners to reach

the goals outlined in the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy and reflected in the Parks Canada Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy.

Consistent with government-wide commitments within both the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy and the Parks Canada Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy, Parks Canada will continue to build external relationships and collaborate with knowledge holders, researchers, business owners, and practitioners invested in a greener future, to green government and ensure sustainable operations across its networks of protected places.



Photo: Emily Madansky

Conclusion

Parks Canada is deeply grateful to all who participated in the 2023 Minister's Round Table.

With participation from partners, rights holders, stakeholders, and equity-seeking groups and Canadians representing all provinces and territories from coast to coast to coast, the 2023 Minister's Round Table benefited from a broad range of perspectives.

The invaluable feedback and insights generously shared by participants will help Parks Canada as it fulfills its mandate to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of these areas in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity, now and in the future.

The actions outlined in this response will help Parks Canada strengthen relationships with Indigenous peoples and weave Indigenous knowledge into efforts to enhance connectivity between protected areas, as well as further the development of inclusive and sustainable tourism experiences across the country.

They will also further the Agency's commitment to advancing greater diversity, inclusion, and accessibility across its work, and increase opportunities for accessible, meaningful experiences at Parks Canada-administered places.

In addition, expansion of Indigenous leadership in natural and cultural heritage conservation as well as work on greening will help Parks Canada address the dual challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, while promoting

implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Parks Canada is committed to collaboration and ongoing dialogue in support of these efforts. These actions will become the basis for further work over the next 24 months, and progress will be reported during the next round table in 2025.

We look forward to continuing this important work together.



Clockwise from top left:
Nááts'j'hc'h'oh National Park Reserve; Banff
National Park; Banff National Park; Gwaii
Haanas National Marine Conservation Area
Reserve and Haida Heritage Site.