

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Evaluation of Parks Canada's National Historic Site Conservation sub-program



Evaluation Objective and Scope

Consistent with the requirements of the Treasury Board Policy on Results (2016), the evaluation addressed the National Historic Site Conservation sub-program's:

- **Relevance:** continued need and alignment with government priorities and federal roles and responsibilities.
- **Performance:** effectiveness and efficiency of the sub-program.

The scope of the evaluation included all activities and results of the sub-program, with emphasis on progress towards maintaining or improving the condition of heritage buildings and engineering works in national historic sites and of the Agency's historical objects and archaeological sites wherever they are located.

This evaluation covers the period from 2010-11 to 2015-16. Details on specific evaluation questions, expectations, methods and limitations are found in the full report.

Findings

Relevance

- The National Historic Site Conservation Sub-program is relevant and consistent with the priorities, roles and responsibilities of both Parks Canada and the Government of Canada.
- While the cultural resources managed by Parks Canada are unique and irreplaceable, they are also at risk. The need to conserve these valued resources justifies a continued need for the sub-program.

Effectiveness

- **Management Framework.** The Cultural Resource Management Policy (2013) provides an adequate framework for the program. Work remains to complete and communicate guidelines to support the policy's effective and consistent implementation.
- **Condition of Heritage Buildings and Engineering Works.** While there is evidence of significant infrastructure projects undertaken, it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the extent to which the overall condition of the Agency's heritage buildings and engineering works has been maintained or improved. Current investments in deferred work and improvements in project management practices are expected to have a positive impact on the condition of these cultural resources.
- **Condition of Historical and Archaeological Objects.** Parks Canada's collection is stored in a variety of environments that may impact the stability of object condition. Progress towards consolidation of some existing collection warehouses into a new facility that would meet museum storage standards has been slow. In the interim, large parts of the Agency's collection remain at risk. Overall, the Agency lacks reliable data on the condition of the objects in its collection. This gap may be partially addressed by the planned installation of a new cultural resource information management system.

SUB-PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- This sub-program aims to ensure the commemorative integrity of the 171 National Historic Sites of Canada owned or administered by the Parks Canada.
- Parks Canada applies its Cultural Resource Management Policy to ensure that cultural resources administered by the Agency are conserved and that their heritage value is shared for the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of present and future generations. These cultural resources includes a large inventory of heritage buildings and engineering works, historical and archaeological objects, and archaeological sites.

- **Condition of Archaeological Sites.** Archaeological sites located within national historic sites are generally reported to be in good condition, but these represent only 10% of the Parks Canada's full inventory of archaeological sites. The Agency currently lacks a centralized record of these sites or their condition that could be used to estimate the number of sites under threat. While it is making progress towards its corporate target to assess and reduce threats at 12 of these sites, we found a lack of clear criteria used to prioritize these interventions.
- **Commemorative Integrity.** Parks Canada exceeded its target to improve the Agency's overall commemorative integrity rating by March 2013. Since 2013, revisions to the commemorative integrity assessment process have weakened the level of confidence in ratings and limit their comparability to baseline results. Most importantly, the revised process limits the number of national historic sites that will be subject to assessment.

Efficiency and Economy

- The vast majority of the sub-program's resources (average annual expenditure of \$43 million) were dedicated to conservation and maintenance. However, work required to assess and address the condition of the Agency's cultural resources has exceeded Parks Canada's capacity to deliver. The Agency also lacks a clear human resource structure for cultural resource management, particularly at the site level.
- The Agency has established criteria to prioritize investment of human and financial resources and is undertaking an analysis of options that will enable it to align its human resource and financial capacity to ensure the sustainability of its asset base.



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Recommendations and Management Response

Recommendation 1: The Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage, should complete and disseminate guidance required to support implementation of the Cultural Resource Management Policy.



Management Response: Agree. Since 2015, supporting tools related to cultural resource impact analysis were added to the cultural resource management tool box. In addition, Parks Canada is developing e-modules related to the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada in order to further support implementation of the Cultural Resource Management Policy.

Recommendation 2: The Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage, should review and propose solutions with respect to the human resources management structure for cultural resource management (CRM) at the Agency's Field Units to ensure appropriate capacity.



Management Response: Agree. Since the launch of the Federal Infrastructure Initiative in 2015, cultural resources management capacity i.e. built heritage, archaeological and historical objects conservation and archaeological expertise dedicated to supporting field units has been added. Field unit dedicated cultural resource management capacity will be assessed at the end of the Federal Infrastructure Initiative in 2020 to ensure that the appropriate level of cultural resource management capacity is in place to respond to future needs.

Recommendation 3: The Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage, should review the structure for commemorative integrity assessments to ensure that it is effective in measuring the trend in commemorative integrity at Parks Canada's national historic sites.



Management Response: Agree. Given the direct link between commemorative integrity assessment results, State of Assessments and management planning, Cultural Heritage will maintain the current methodology until the end of the current management plan 10-year schedule (2014 to 2023). Cultural Heritage will launch a review of the methodology in 2022 and will implement changes unfolding from the review if need be.

Recommendation 4: The Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage, should review performance measures for historical objects to determine an effective method for monitoring and reporting on the stability of its collection.



Management Response: Agree. At the time of the evaluation field work, the Departmental Results Framework (DRF) for the Agency still included the number/percentage of cultural and archeological objects in fair or good condition as one metric contributing to the overall indicator related to the percentage of cultural resources in its care that would be safeguarded. However, in February 2018, the Agency updated aspects of its DRF methodology, including replacing the previous metric with a new one focusing on the percentage of cultural and archeological objects that were stored in appropriate environmentally-controlled and secure conditions and were appropriately monitored, consistent with the recommendation.

Recommendation 5: The Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage should document the process and criteria used to select priority archaeological sites to be tracked as part of the corporate performance framework.



Management Response: Agree. The Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage Directorate will review and document the process and criteria used to identify priority archaeological sites for purposes of future corporate performance monitoring.

