

Parks Canada's Framework for Recreational Activities

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Introduction

Parks Canada is mandated – through national policy – to assess the recreational activities that take place in national parks, national historic sites, national marine conservation areas and historic canals.

Parks Canada is committed to providing visitors with opportunities to participate in recreational activities that will allow them to experience and connect with Canada's national parks, national historic sites, national marine conservation areas and historic canals. Working with our partners and the public, Parks Canada needs to provide high quality recreational opportunities in ways that offer visitors opportunities to learn, experience and connect with these special places while, at the same time, protecting the natural and cultural resources that make them special.

To do this, Parks Canada is developing a new way to make decisions about recreational activities. It is agreed that the process to make these decisions needs to be nationally consistent, transparent and open to the public and that it should be adaptable and flexible enough to allow decisions to reflect the local context. In addition, the new decision framework needs to help managers make decisions about new or changing activities.

Methods

The following five principles provide the context and vision for the assessment of recreational activities in national marine conservation areas, national parks and national historic sites managed by

Parks Canada. These principles aim to promote decision-making that is nationally consistent, transparent and open to the public and reflects the local context.

Parks Canada's core principles for assessing recreational activities are...

Respect for natural and cultural resources

The activity supports and contributes to the protection, maintenance and enhancement of ecological integrity of national parks, commemorative integrity of national historic sites or sustainable use of national marine conservation areas. Parks Canada and its partners continue to seek innovative solutions to mitigate or avoid undesirable environmental, social or cultural impacts.

Promote and enhance public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment

The activity enriches understanding and appreciation by providing engaging opportunities for visitors to connect with Canada's natural and cultural heritage. The activity enhances public enjoyment and negative impacts on the experience of other visitors. The activity fosters support, involvement and further discovery of natural and cultural resources and their associated heritage areas.

Value and involve local communities

The activity respects the rights and values of local communities, property owners and Aboriginal peoples. The activity supports the long-term economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits to these groups, as well as the Parks Canada mandate. Opportunities for recreational activi-

ties in national parks, national historic sites, national marine conservation areas and historic canals will complement those offered by local and regional industries, interests and groups.

Invoke a sense of place

The activity evokes a sense of place. It provides visitors with the opportunity to discover what makes the national park, national historic site, national marine conservation area or historic canal unique. It respects the importance that Canadians place on these special places. When visitors learn about and experience these activities, they believe them to be consistent with their view of Canada's national parks, national historic sites, national marine conservation areas and historic canals.

Results

The Recreational Activities Assessment Framework was developed as a tool to help managers make better decisions about recreational activities. It can be used in one of two situations:

Management Planning Processes

The first situation is during the management planning process. Using the Framework in this context provides an opportunity to assess the suite of recreational activities offered and how they work together. It also provides an opportunity to improve overall performance of the three core elements of the mandate in relation to recreational activities.

When, a planning team identifies an area of concern related to a recreational activity, that activity should be assessed during the planning process. The Recreational Activities Assessment Framework should be used and stakeholders (from the protection, tourism and education sectors) should be involved. The planning team does not need to assess every recreational activity occurring at a site during management planning, but must give consideration to the entire context in which recreational activities occur to ensure that all areas of concern are addressed.

Single Activity Assessments

The second situation is between planning cycles (which occur every 5 years). This may be required if: (a) managers are approached about a new activ-

ity; (b) an activity changes significantly and new concerns emerge; or, (c) new concerns about an existing activity emerge that are significant enough to be addressed immediately. In this situation, the Recreational Activities Assessment Framework should be used to assess and make a decision about the activity. Key stakeholders should be involved in this application of the Framework.

Communicating about decisions related to recreational activities assessments is an important part of their success. As a rule of thumb, people who have an interest should have an opportunity to be involved in assessing the activity. The broader public should have an opportunity to provide input to the process during existing public forums (e.g. management planning, annual planning forum, etc.).