

Healthy Parks for People

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Introduction

This project is a three-year initiative at Prince Edward Island National Park, which engages a range of local, national and international interest groups and partners in the development of new options for memorable visitor experiences that contribute to improved health of the park ecosystem and the visitor.

Prince Edward Island National Park is the 3rd smallest national park in Canada, yet it receives the highest national park visitation outside of the mountain parks in the Canadian Rockies. Its small land base, composed of spectacular beaches, dynamic coastal dunes, wetlands, salt marshes and forest habitat, is congested with more than 1,000,000 visitors annually.

Visitor use is focused on swimming, camping and hiking. These activities are supported by extensive park infrastructure and facilities, which have been developed over the last 70 years. Access for visitor use is via the Gulf Shore Parkway, a two-lane highway which extends along the Park shoreline, a distance of 28 kilometers. Constructed in the 1950s, this highway guides visitors to expansive parking areas, beach facilities, beach access points, trailheads and campgrounds. Its use as a transportation corridor for vehicles has encouraged access by family vehicles and has contributed to the establishment of visitor use patterns that are threatening the ecological integrity of the Park ecosystem and limiting options in terms of quality visitor experience, not to mention the negative impact the highway has had on the use of alternative means of transportation.

In addition, over the past 35 years the Park has acquired a large buffer land base adjacent to the Park boundary (Crown Land holdings). While these

lands are not yet gazetted as part of the National Park boundary, they do present an opportunity to eliminate parking infrastructure and facilities inside the Park boundary by relocating them to the adjacent Crown lands. The elimination of parking areas would result in restored habitat and enhanced ecological integrity inside the National Park. The relocation would also provide an opportunity to address patterns of visitor use that are negatively impacting on the Park's ecological integrity.

Given that the natural processes of land and sea are continuing to erode the shoreline and threaten facilities and infrastructure, the timing is right to address negative effects in patterns of visitor use. By introducing changes to the Gulf Shore Parkway that support the reduction of parking, active transportation and habitat improvement, Parks Canada will foster a culture of use that results in mass public contribution to the health and stewardship of the environment. The changes will create new options and activities for the healthy enjoyment of truly memorable visitor experiences.

This project will engage non-traditional sectors such as consumer businesses, health sector, athletes, the performing arts, permanent and seasonal residents, aboriginals, seniors and youth. They will contribute, together with visitors, tourism operators and government, to the work of creating and sustaining a healthy park for people

Methods

The project vision is for park visitors to enjoy memorable experiences in ways that enhance the Park's ecological integrity and its surrounding environment, while offering them new and healthy ways to experience and learn from the Park. Visi-

tors' experiences will lead to a sense of attachment to the national park, to an interest in learning more about its natural resources and to a commitment to their on-going protection.

Objectives of the project are:

- To enhance the protection and sustainability of the National Park ecosystems.
- To promote the role and involvement of the general public, Park users and collaborators in protecting and sustaining the environment.
- To create new, high quality visitor experience options that promote and support healthy lifestyles and a healthy environment.
- To reduce visitor parking inside the National Park, and
- to increase public awareness, understanding and support for Parks Canada's role and leadership in developing sustainable tourism initiatives.

Criteria for Success include:

Multi-use corridor is constructed and available for public use.

Number of people using the corridor by activity.

Number of vehicles entering and traveling in the National Park.

Percentage of visitor satisfaction with the transportation options.

Level of comprehension by visitors of messages conveyed by Park interpretive programs.

Community and visitor attitudes toward changes to the visitor experience approach as measured by frequency of positive media statements.

Participation of communities and partners in delivery of Parks Canada project initiatives.

Indicators of improved ecological integrity of the Park's ecosystem, for example: number of asphalt parking spaces, area restored to natural state, number of wildlife mortalities etc.

Field Unit's revenue is not negatively impacted by implementation of this project and its associated options.

Results

Critical success factors include:

A communications strategy that builds local, provincial and national support for this project, and recognition of its goals as a healthy option for the visitor and a positive contribution to the Park's ecosystem.

Social science research information on current and potential visitors' interests and needs.

New and memorable visitor experience options that convey desired messages.

A new approach to moving visitors to and within the Park that promotes group and active transportation modes.

A revenue strategy that is supported by the local community and is consistent with Agency policy.