

SECTION F: USE AND ENJOYMENT



Park staff at Point Pelee National Park shows a monarch butterfly to a park visitor
L. Cave/Parks Canada

CHAPTER 10: INTERPRETATION AND OUTREACH

Conveying the significance will help [people] understand why it is necessary to protect these places while providing more in-depth knowledge will allow them to make better choices, both personally and politically, about how to protect [parks]. People protect what is meaningful and valuable to them. Canadians will actively support parks when they feel a connection to the place or what it represents. It follows that if our objective is to protect our national parks ... one of the critical elements is to get people to care about and value them ...

Parks Canada has a tremendous opportunity to facilitate connections by providing meaningful learning experiences that directly contribute to people's knowledge ... and foster their support for the conservation of national parks ... Heritage presentation is the way to gain public support. Without continuous public support in the future, Parks Canada is unlikely to achieve its ecological integrity objectives.

Parks Canada
"The Role of Heritage Protection in Achieving Ecological Integrity" (1999)



Interpretation is a key purpose for national parks. Interpretation is a form of education and a means of helping visitors to enjoy national parks, but the purpose of interpretation is not just to provide factual information about ecological integrity and national parks. Interpretation helps make people aware of the value and purposes of national parks, and what uses are appropriate in national parks, so that ecological integrity remains unimpaired. Visitors and others need to be aware that visitor use does impose stress on national parks, often to a serious extent. Through an improved connection with protected areas, park visitors and non-visitors alike can learn to take responsibility for the use and enjoyment of national parks and to make personal choices regarding sustainable actions in their daily lives.

Parks Canada is currently not well-positioned to serve its target audiences in terms of this vital education role. In recent years, there have been serious cuts to interpretation staff and budgets; many skilled staff have been lost. Much of Parks Canada's existing interpretation information, assets and materials are out-dated. More effective communication on ecological integrity requires attention to policy, strategy, partners, and evaluation related to interpretation. Public support will come from strong messages emphasizing the positive aspects of ecological integrity. Interpretation can be delivered in a variety of ways, from interactions with park visitors to providing information to non-visitors. Parks Canada needs to explore new media and means of delivering interpretation messages to non-traditional audiences.

Interpretation Issues

In this chapter, we examine several interrelated issues:

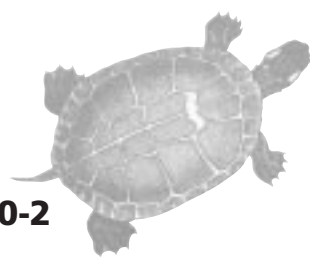
- the need for policy and strategy that will elevate the importance of interpretation;
- the need to develop interpretation messages that will help people in national parks and urban areas become aware of what uses and behaviours support the protection of ecological integrity;
- identification of various audiences and types of interpretation messages appropriate to those audiences, the ways in which interpretation can communicate messages about ecological integrity, and how interpretation messages should be delivered;
- the importance of partnering with Aboriginal peoples and others to develop and deliver ecologically-oriented interpretation messages;

- the role of marketing in delivering appropriate interpretation messages.

A closely related topic pertaining to policies on allowable and appropriate uses within national parks is examined in Chapter 11.

Confusing Terminology

In recent years, Parks Canada has used "heritage presentation" as an umbrella phrase for the traditional terms "interpretation" and "outreach," although other terms, such as "awareness," "communications," and even "marketing" have also been used in publications and presentations — to the confusion of both the public and Parks Canada staff. "Heritage presentation" is a term most people equate with historical heritage, not natural heritage and certainly not ecological integrity.



Both “interpretation” and “outreach” continue to be part of Parks Canada language; for example, the State of the Parks 1997 Report describes both terms as elements of heritage presentation: *“Interpretation programs inside parks, and outreach programs outside park boundaries are the two main elements of heritage presentation. Together they create a vital link between people and ecosystems”* (Parks Canada, State of the Parks 1997 Report, p. 49).

There is no significant difference between the terms “interpretation” and “outreach,” except that interpretation is aimed at people who are actually visiting a park, while outreach is aimed at non-visitors. To avoid confusion, Parks Canada should use only these two simple and easily understood terms — interpretation and outreach — in its education and information efforts. In this chapter, we use “interpretation” as a general term unless our discussion specifically addresses communication aimed at non-visitors.

Why is Interpretation Important?

Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.

Tilden (1967)

Interpretation about Canada’s national parks is important for the following reasons:

- to create a broader understanding of ecology in general and ecological integrity in particular;
- to create a broader appreciation of the parks themselves;
- to create a better understanding of the need to be responsible in terms of appropriate activities in parks;
- to help people understand how the existence of national parks is part of the web of nature that includes not just majestic mountains, plains, rivers, and lakes, but also urban wildlife such as robins and cardinals, foxes and raccoons;
- to create a better understanding of critical issues that affect the maintenance of a healthy environment.

Focus Interpretation on Ecological Integrity

One way to ensure that our parks are preserved for future generations is to educate and involve the public. By encouraging participation in various parks programs, Parks Canada can help ensure that school children, stakeholders and visitors come to appreciate ecosystem-based management and become responsible stewards of their heritage and ambassadors for national parks.

Parks Canada, State of the Parks 1997 Report, p. 49

Ecological integrity should be Parks Canada’s primary communication message. Despite many fine examples of successful interpretation efforts that highlight ecological integrity, it is not

yet the fundamental interpretation message across the entire park system. Achieving this goal will involve:

- positioning interpretation as a key element of protecting ecological integrity;
- integrating information at a variety of scales — global, national, regional, and individual parks;
- including all relevant information, not just “good news” about natural history but also the hard realities and critical issues about stresses that affect national parks;



- connecting with new audiences such as educators, youth, urban dwellers and other levels of government — groups that to date have not been a major focus of national park interpretation;
- partnering with Aboriginal peoples to interpret and deliver ecological integrity messages.

Elevating the importance of interpretation in achieving Parks Canada's mandate will require:

- organizational links with all Parks Canada staff;
- appropriate levels of resources and personnel;
- developing a core of professional full-time staff;
- reaching and engaging a wide range of people both within and outside of national parks;
- the use of a variety of appropriate and innovative communications methods;
- a better understanding of how to effectively communicate with people;
- a clear definition of what needs to be communicated.

Without effective interpretation and education, park visitors do not understand the harm in feeding wildlife. R. R. Dore/Parks Canada



Interpreting Ecological Integrity: Interpretation of Critical Issues

Interpreting ecological integrity and critical issues is not an entirely new concept to Parks Canada. The 1990 Canadian Department of Environment's Green Plan promoted interpretation to develop environmental citizenship. Then Assistant Deputy Minister A. Lefebvre-Anglin wrote that Parks Canada was making extensive efforts to support critical issues interpretation, *"ensuring that visitors understand the role parks and other natural areas play in the maintenance of a healthy environment. It means using some of the very real management issues we face to illustrate broader environmental challenges and it means using parks as ecological benchmarks and examples of the sustainable use of resources."*

Spurred on by Green Plan resources and the focus on environmental stewardship, park interpreters began to develop and implement a variety of interpretation initiatives focused on critical resource issues. Just ten years later, the situation has changed.

We have heard and observed that:

- policy and management direction regarding the importance of interpretation in achieving the ecological integrity mandate is weak;
- professional interpretation staff have largely been cut from the organization and replaced by seasonal interpreters;
- many interpretation staff are neither educated nor trained to understand these complex issues;
- there is a perception among some park interpreters that visitors do not want to "learn" or be "depressed" while on vacation and that critical resource issue interpretation is both unwanted and depressing;

Interpreting Critical Issues to the Public

In the late 1980s, the United States National Park Service launched a program to train and assist staff in addressing the critical ecological issues facing the national parks, and the nation as a whole, through interpretation and outreach programs. The approach recognized that park interpreters needed scientific training and resources in order to address these complex issues.

With the help of university personnel who researched and developed training materials in the science and communication of these issues, the National Park Service launched the “Clearing the Air” program. It addressed the impacts associated with acid deposition in national parks, national historic sites and monuments. The following year, the focus was the loss of biological diversity, in parks, the nation, and the world through a program called “Biological Diversity: It Makes All the Difference in the World.” These were the first of a series of specific initiatives associated with critical resource issues interpretation.

Sample products and programs include:

- a resource training manual including scientific briefings, reference material, suggestions for developing interpretation programs, a slide set, and sample interpretation programs to help train interpreters in the scientific and interpretation skills associated with acid rain and biodiversity;
 - a series of possible personal services programs, exhibits, publications, and displays for interpreting loss of biological diversity and acidic deposition at natural and historic sites throughout the system;
 - an interpretation slide presentation and series of programs for chambers of commerce and municipal governments;
 - an initiative that developed curriculum for kindergarten to grade 8 on biodiversity and on the Southern Appalachian Biosphere Reserve.
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- the separate funding pool associated with the Green Plan disappeared before the staff, means, and media for delivering critical issues messages were well developed and distributed throughout Parks Canada;
 - there is a perception that the environmental stewardship initiative promoted by the Green Plan bordered on inappropriate advocacy and that Parks Canada should not advocate that the public get involved in environmental issues;
 - there is increasing reliance on non-personal interpretation through visitor centres, displays, and signs — media through which it is difficult to relate to the individual and to empower the individual;
 - given the limited staff and resources, interpretation programs are often geared to the lowest common denominator of knowledge; more complex issues that might be more suitable for some audiences have been dropped;
 - interpreters are often functionally separated from the ecosystem science and resource management side of Parks Canada.
- Critical issues are not being widely interpreted or communicated. Among Canadians at large there is little awareness that the seemingly pristine majesty of many national parks is masking serious environmental problems. For instance, high-altitude snow in Banff and Jasper national parks contains elevated levels of air-borne pollutants that eventually flush into rivers and lakes within the parks and surrounding regions, damaging ecosystems in a variety of ways. This situation is invisible to most park visitors and no interpretation information on the subject is available.
- Creative displays addressing critical ecological integrity issues do exist. Signs or brochures carrying simple resource management messages such as: “fragile dune area,” “area left for restoration,” or “tread lightly” are common throughout the parks. These



The Reality of Human-Bear Interactions

La Mauricie National Park's interpretation program explains that a particular black bear's feeding patterns in and around campgrounds resulted in it being shot after a failed relocation effort. The message — that the bear died because of conflict with human use — is harsh but powerful. To be effective, interpretation must not shy away from such hard messages.

types of messages are important to communicate to visitors. They should be developed to reveal and communicate the underlying messages associated with protecting ecological integrity.

Interpreting ecological integrity is part of the active management required to restore and maintain integrity. Park visitors, partners, and the public at large must understand:

- the local, national and global role of protected areas;
- that ecological integrity is fragile — even apparently wild and beautiful areas are not pristine;
- the significance of threats toward ecological integrity;
- most importantly, what people can do to help.

Achieving this level of understanding requires a skillful blend of communication techniques with current scientific knowledge in a way that relates to the audience and engages them in positive actions and outcomes.

Visitors are often unaware that their presence in and use of the park affects ecological integrity to some degree. Few interpretation programs deal adequately and honestly with human use.

To begin the journey toward understanding and embracing ecological integrity protection — and their role in it — visitors (and other audiences) should be told the critical story about internal threats to ecological integrity. Increased awareness may lead to a reduction in inappropriate uses and modification of otherwise appropriate uses to minimize stress on ecological integrity. Similarly, the reasons for use and activity restrictions that are designed to protect ecological integrity should be clearly communicated.

Examples include:

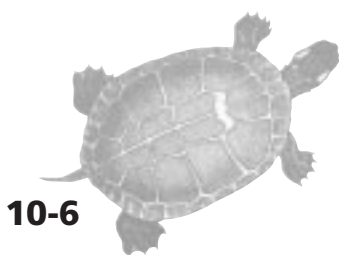
- the removal of overflow campgrounds in Banff National Park;
- the institution of a campground reservation system in La Mauricie National Park;
- the closing of trails in various parks in order to protect wildlife.

When visitors understand why their activity or use has been curtailed, they are more likely to support the restrictions.

Similarly, many park visitors still have little understanding of park wildlife; the belief persists that wild animals are harmless. Inappropriate behaviour results in human/animal conflicts and the animal is usually the loser. Interpretation programs must communicate these messages.

The Need for Policy

Canadians generally have a clear image of either a particular national park or a national icon such as Banff National Park. There is, however, no clear image of national parks as a system, of Parks Canada as an organization, or of managing for the protection of ecological integrity as the first priority of national parks. Parks are seen as discrete entities — isolated islands with no connection to their regional or national contexts. Because of a lack of communications on the subject, there is an absence of public awareness of the fragile nature of national parks, including awareness of threats from inside and outside of park boundaries. The current major focus of public interest — and interpretation messages — lies in appreciation of park scenery and recreation opportunities, not in ecological integrity.



In February 1998, the Parks Canada Executive Board approved the following Statement of Purpose for Interpretation and Outreach:

As many Canadian citizens and visitors as possible will be touched by meaningful, captivating and enjoyable interpretation and outreach experiences so that these audiences will appreciate, understand and support:

- *Canada's system of nationally significant heritage places;*
- *the essence of each heritage place and how it is significant to the country and relevant to individuals; and*
- *the need to protect heritage resources.*

Parks Canada, "The role of heritage presentation in achieving ecological integrity" (1998) p.1

There is no mention of ecological integrity in the Statement.

Parks Canada is currently developing an "Action Plan for the Renewal of Heritage Presentation in Parks Canada." The draft version of the action plan does not have ecological integrity at its core; in fact, the term "ecological integrity" is used only once in the draft document, in a box labelled "Protection of Resources." (Parks Canada, 1999, p. 10).

The communications message should be clear: protection of ecological integrity is the primary consideration in achieving the management of national parks, period.

RECOMMENDATION

10-1. We recommend that Parks Canada add ecological integrity to the "Statement of Purpose for Interpretation and Outreach" as the core purpose of interpretation and outreach. In order to formally entrench the importance

of ecological integrity in interpretation, this Statement should be backed by a clear policy that all national, regional, and individual park publications, interpretation programs and facilities reflect the ecological integrity obligation.

Cascade Gardens in Banff National Park contain many alien plant species but to most park visitors these formal gardens are not inappropriate
Blackbird Design



The Need for Strategy

On a conceptual level, the way interpretation is presented tends to externalize the concept of nature and the understanding of natural systems. It implies that people are observers of the natural environment, but not part of it. On a practical level, the protection of ecological integrity must be relevant to, and directly involve, the visitor's experience of the park. For this to be achieved, there is a need to internalize nature. This means that interpretation of natural systems and ecological integrity must begin by helping people understand that they are part of the processes that sustain life. Interpretation messages that focus on sustain-

able infrastructure facilities, such as tertiary sewage treatment, composting programs and so on, would provide a sound basis for linking people with these natural processes.

From this first message, interpretation of ecological integrity can logically continue with the message that the same evolutionary and ecological processes also sustain the park — its geology and geomorphology, natural water systems, soils, plants, and animals, unique natural and cultural regional settings, wonderful scenery, and the special qualities of wild areas. The key to effectively delivering ecological integrity messages is to “bring the message home” and make ecological integrity something that everyone can understand. Identifying appropriate target audiences and their information needs is central to accomplishing the effective targeting of interpretation messages.

An Evaluation of Current Interpretation

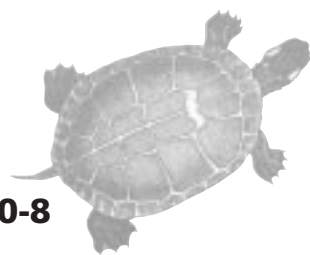
Many past studies have shown that visitors and other audiences are satisfied with interpretation programs and communications messages. However, there is a lack of research on visitors’ and non-visitors’ existing level of knowledge about national parks. Another unknown concerns the effectiveness of current interpretation communication media, programs, or facilities, especially regarding ecological integrity. For example, an aesthetically-pleasing film or television program may be entertaining, but it might have little effect on increasing a viewer’s knowledge of ecological integrity or changing that viewer’s behaviour in support of ecological integrity.

Some parks already promote a strong ecological integrity message. For example, a brochure from St. Lawrence Islands National Park (Parks Canada, 1998) includes information on such topics as the Park Conservation Plan, the park and regional ecosystems, specific plants and animals, geographic information systems, the Committee on the Status of Wildlife in Canada, and national park zoning.

Many interpretation programs include media and facilities that are out-dated in terms of content and style. Renewal and updating of exhibits and facilities has suffered from a lack of funding. Improving physical assets, such as museums and displays, needs to be balanced against increasing the number of interpretation staff. Staff have a big advantage over centres or displays — staff can move through the park and interact with visitors in campgrounds, on trails, and through outdoor experiences and learning.

On the other hand, physical assets are used by only one audience — visitors — and only a small proportion of that audience actually uses interpretation programs in national parks. Perhaps as a consequence of reduced funding, outdated materials, degraded physical assets and insufficient levels of staffing, visitor involvement in interpretation activities is often very low. For example, only two to three per cent of the annual 350,000 visitors to Riding Mountain National Park take part in such activities, a proportion that could also be applied to most other parks. Repeat visitors have “been there, done that,” so they do not return to a park museum or interpretation centre to view the same displays.

Another factor that could be related to low levels of involvement is that many interpretation programs (guided events, evening programs, and most school programs) are offered on a cost-recovery basis. Cost-recovery presents





Park buildings in Fundy National Park are surrounded by acres of lawn, increasing the ecological footprint and sending the wrong ecological message to park visitors
P. Wilkinson

barriers to the delivery of messages in general and ecological integrity messages in particular. A portion of the potential audience will not attend because they are unwilling or unable to pay. Eventually, only those programs and related messages which have a high draw — and, therefore, high cost-recovery — are offered. Essential interpretation information must be available to all park visitors at no additional charge (excluding park entrance fees).

The Benefits of On-site Teaching

Direct experience of place is one important way of delivering interpretation messages.

The Communications Manager at Wood Buffalo National Park took members of the Panel to the mouth of a small stream where a delta is developing. He regularly takes groups of school children to that location, to explain river delta processes and how deltas are formed. He has found it extremely difficult to get children to understand these dynamic hydrological processes in a classroom setting, but when these processes are interpreted on site, the children have no problem in understanding. In his view, the only way to give them a meaningful explanation is to take them to experience the stream itself and show them delta-forming processes in action.

Ecological Integrity: Walking the Talk

Interpretation centres perform important functions in providing a focus for information and literature on ecological integrity. They are less effective, however, in providing visitors with an outdoor, hands-on experience and knowledge of natural history and ecological processes. The Panel observed that many interpretation centres contain static displays, including stuffed animals, that are outdated and/or inappropriate to conveying the ecological integrity message.



dated and/or inappropriate to conveying the ecological integrity message.

Interpretation, to be effective, needs to be focused on the outdoors — the direct experience of the park environment. For example, restoration plots, ecosystem experiments, and prescribed burns can be used as means of communicating with local stakeholders and park visitors.

There is a danger that park residents may resent messages that present the reality of critical issues, particularly if these messages are perceived as harming the local tourism sector. Parks should not shy away from such potential conflicts, but instead work with local residents and explain why it is important to educate people about the realities of ecological integrity.

There are also significant opportunities for national parks' interpretation programming to reinforce the message of ecological integrity by linking it with the ecological sustainability of park infrastructure and facilities. Messages can be delivered in a number of subtle, indirect ways. Ecological Integrity not must only be done, it must be seen to be done. Parks must walk the talk in delivering environmental messages.

In many cases, park visitors currently receive conflicting ecological messages. For example, visitors may be confronted with:

- manicured lawns and exotic species in gardens around buildings, picnic sites, and campgrounds;
- facilities such as swimming pools, ski resorts, golf courses, and tennis courts;
- roads and parking lots whose design is no different from those outside the parks;
- inefficient or outdated sewage treatment facilities that may be degrading waterways and lakes.

Collectively, these elements of park infrastructure are at odds with the fundamental principles of sustainability and ecological integrity. Thus, there is a lack of consistency between Parks Canada's primary goal and the reality of the visitor's experience of the park. Conflicting messages support the supposed dual mandate, an historical holdover that persists and continues to interfere with management for and protection of ecological integrity and the associated interpretation messages.

The resolution of conflicting park messages is vital to increasing visitor awareness of ecological integrity. National parks must follow their own messages by making environmentally responsible choices in all aspects of park planning,

management and maintenance. That parks are special and different must be evident, right down to park facilities and infrastructure. Actions that support environmental stewardship send strong messages to all audiences, especially park visitors and residents. Such measures as adopting environmental management systems, upgrading sewage treatment and other infrastructures, and establishing functional recycling programs all serve to consolidate the ecological integrity message and to realize the potential for national parks to truly protect ecological integrity.

Chapter 12 contains further discussion on the links between ecological integrity, park infrastructure, and interpretation messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

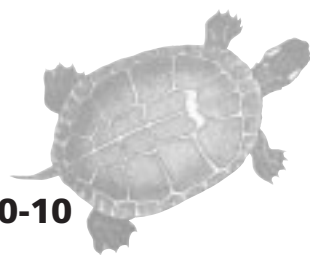
10-2. For each park, we recommend that Parks Canada develop an ecological integrity interpretation and outreach strategy that confirms ecological integrity as the prime objective, presents clear and consistent messages about ecological integrity, balances plans for both interpretation and outreach, and has measurable goals and objectives that can be evaluated on a regular basis (for example, in Implementation Plans or State of the Park Reports).

This strategy requires the following elements:

- programs that reflect a focus on ecological sustainability in each park, including messages about the design or retrofitting of infrastructure facilities to reflect Parks Canada's commitment to ecological integrity;
- a content analysis of each park's interpretation program (including museum displays, information signs, brochures, presentations) to measure the degree to which ecological integrity is being communicated;

- research on the reasons for low visitor involvement in interpretation activities and subsequent actions to increase involvement;
- interpretation programs with a focus on outdoor experiences and learning;
- integration of natural history education and broader information on the whole national park system, present and future challenges and opportunities, dissemination of literature, the results of scientific research in both natural and social sciences, and visitor research information;
- programs that include messages that accurately discuss human/animal conflicts, visitor use patterns, and the implications for ecological integrity.

10-3. We recommend that Parks Canada make essential interpretation information available to all park visitors at no charge (excluding park entrance fees).



Current and Potential Audiences

Park visitors have traditionally been the focus of interpretation programs, from bear safety to ecosystem dynamics. Park visitors may range from one-time visitors, from outside the park's region or outside Canada, to visitors who live near the park and visit frequently. These two sub-groups have different patterns of use within the park and have different information and education needs, but Parks Canada's interpretation programs currently make no distinction between them. There are also limitations in the ability of visitor-oriented park interpretation programs to achieve lasting awareness and commitment to ecological integrity, because visits to national parks are generally sporadic and short in duration.

Many people just want to learn about parks and do not necessarily intend to visit. In the past, most of the information available to these people was in the form of traditional media, such as television programs and large-format picture books or through education materials aimed at teachers. More recently, individual parks have used a wider variety of media to serve the non-visitor audience; some parks produce newsletters, and Parks Canada currently maintains a Web site with information on all national parks. Information about a park may also be disseminated via news releases, media events or interviews with park managers or staff.

Given the ecological integrity objective, the complexity of the concept, and the need to educate people about ecological integrity, Parks Canada must reinforce and broaden its interpretation and outreach efforts beyond the traditional focus on park visitors. There are now many communication methods available, and numerous potential audiences for the ecological integrity

message, each with specific needs. These potential audiences include the following categories.

People planning to visit a national park. Interpretation should be aimed at park visitors prior to their visit. Interpretation messages delivered once the visitor has arrived in the park may be too late to explain ecological integrity to uninitiated visitors, or to change their behaviour. The message needs to be taken to visitors in the planning phase of their trip and even during their journey to the park through such means as Web site information, publications, video and audio tapes.

Park community residents. Several national parks contain park communities. While there are examples of park community residents who are involved in advisory committees, round tables or planning exercises, interpretation programs rarely focus on communicating ecological integrity issues to this group. Residents have a personal stake in the park and also have effects on and are affected by the ecological integrity of the park.

Parks Canada staff. Many Parks Canada staff have unclear or even incorrect ideas about ecological integrity or believe that their jobs have no relationship to ecological integrity. Geographically-remote locations and separate work sites often lead to a lack of formal communication, although such means as the communication working group, section meetings and management team meetings currently address this problem somewhat. Parks Canada staff should be the targets of educational and training programs about ecological integrity (see recommendations in Chapter 2).



Current Examples of Interpretation Involving Scientists and Researchers

- The semi-annual publication “Gwaii Haanas Currents: Sharing Scientific and Traditional Knowledge for Protected Heritage Areas Management”
 - Annual science reporting at Grasslands National Park
 - The use of scientists in interpretation programs in Fundy National Park
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Parks Canada now recognizes the continued need for the individual national parks and national historic sites to communicate at the local level while focusing on the establishment of a strong image of a national system encompassing the whole country — an image that is understood and valued by all of its varied clients, whether they are schoolchildren researching local history or Canadians travelling to remote corners of this country.

Parks Canada, State of the Parks 1997 Report, p. 93

Politicians, other federal government units, and other levels of government.

People in government generally have a poor understanding of Parks Canada’s ecological integrity mandate. However, members of this group may make decisions that could seriously affect the ecological integrity of national parks — for example, the location of transportation or utility corridors, changes in land use, resource extraction, pollution control. These key stakeholders need to be targeted by outreach programs on ecological integrity. This is especially true where parks staff are attempting to advocate for national parks interests and values beyond park boundaries, as we recommend in Chapter 9.

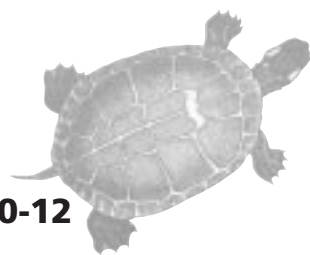
Scientists and researchers. These groups are simultaneously target audiences for interpretation and sources of interpretation information. Communicating the results of scientific research conducted by Parks Canada, university personnel, and others is a means of helping various

audiences to understand and embrace ecological integrity. There are many excellent existing interpretation efforts in this regard. Potential channels for presenting research, planning, management, monitoring, and inventory activities include open houses, press releases and media events, newsletters, and Internet sites.

Regional communities. Approximately 70 per cent of current park visitors are from surrounding regions, although in some parks, regional visitation is much higher — for instance, over 90 per cent of visitors to Bruce Peninsula National Park are regional. The need to integrate parks into their surrounding regions means that regional communities are an important audience. This group includes school systems, environmental non-governmental organizations, corporations, farmers, regional land managers, Aboriginal peoples, and many others. Effective communication with these audiences implies partnering, a topic discussed below under “The Importance of Partners in Interpretation.”

Aboriginal peoples. There is a very mixed pattern of linking Aboriginal peoples and their traditional ecosystem knowledge into interpretation programs and facilities. As a sign of respect, each park should communicate about the traditional territory in which the park is located and involve Aboriginal peoples in interpretation programs relating to a variety of topics. For example, there could be programs about the close links between humans and the land, or about traditional naming and mapping. This topic is discussed further in Chapter 7.

Not only are Aboriginal peoples a new audience for interpretation messages, they are also a source of knowledge and understanding that needs to become part of Parks Canada’s interpretation and outreach programs. Building trust and support among Canadians for the re-integration of Aboriginal activities in national parks can be greatly aided through interpretation. Aboriginal peoples themselves are the obvious choice for developing and delivering these programs.



Young people and teachers. As the generation whose support will be essential for maintaining the ecological integrity of Canada's national parks, young people — and their teachers

Incorporating Naturalized Knowledge in Interpretation

An Ojibway Elder of the Pic River First Nation leads an interpretation program on trapping at Pukaskwa National Park. Two years after Pukaskwa was created in 1978, the Elder joined the park staff as one of a dozen or more Aboriginal employees. In 1998, he was invited to join Pukaskwa's First Nations Interpretation Program, one of the main purposes of which is to demonstrate to visitors that Anishnabe culture is alive, not static.

Like all true teachers, this Elder is most effective when he teaches by example. He sometimes muses on relations between the Anishnabe and a world that has too often misunderstood their way of life: "People of different cultures have always had different ways of doing things," he says quietly (he says everything quietly). "What you have to realize is that at heart we're not different, we're the same. The message I try to get across in the park is that we're one big family doing the best we can to survive, and that we have to work together. I can't tell anybody anything. To learn from me or from anyone else, people have to want to know, to watch, to listen."

from Panel Newsletter Volume I, Number 4
(September 1999)

— should be a particular focus for interpretation concerning ecological integrity. Parks Canada should support educators by providing information on specific topics. Although Parks Canada has developed "Edukits" on particular topics, the Panel was frequently told that most teachers do not have time to incorporate these topics unless they are part of the formal curriculum. An exciting and innovative link between Parks Canada and a school system is the recent decision by the government of Ontario to include Canada's national parks as a major focus of the Grade 9 geography curriculum. We were told that this new curriculum has resulted in a major increase in the use of Parks Canada's Web site by Ontario schools and individual students.

Businesses, corporations and industry associations. The private sector is an important target audience for outreach programs. Whether individual businesses or industry associations, the private sector makes many decisions and takes many actions both within and outside of national parks that affect the ecological integrity of national parks. In many cases, the private sector is very knowledgeable about ecological integrity, often through research.

As noted in Chapter 9, there is great potential here for partnerships with Parks Canada, partnerships that could have potentially important inputs into interpretation and outreach programs. In addition, this knowledgeable element of the private sector could work in co-operation with Parks Canada to inform and educate other businesses. The aims of Parks Canada outreach to this audience should be to inform and to encourage decisions and actions that are beneficial to ecological integrity both within and outside of national parks.

Urban residents. Urban regions include many potential audiences and are the source of much support for national parks. In spite of the significant effort spent in developing interpretation programs within national parks, Parks Canada faces a serious challenge in that few national parks are located near urban areas — where the majority of Canadians live. For lasting educational value, interpretation messages need to be close to home where awareness of natural processes can become a daily experience, reinforcing the links between national parks and the urban culture of cities. Support for an urban Parks Canada presence will lie in strong citizen environmental organizations and an activist population with sound knowledge of environmental issues and commitments to the ideals of protected areas.



Collaborative ventures with municipal parks departments should be instituted with technical and financial support from Parks Canada. Programs might include:

- interpretation of natural processes operating in different urban park settings;
- human use and impact within and surrounding urban parks;
- the history and role of Aboriginal peoples;
- issues of protection and management;
- cultural issues and associated arts and crafts;
- the natural regions in which the cities are located and on which the national parks system is based.

In addition, new Canadians, who represent a significant portion of the urban population, should be informed about the need to protect the natural and cultural heritage of Canada. Parks Canada should place special emphasis on reaching multi-cultural groups that have little understanding of park protection or traditions of park use.

Can Parks Canada Serve Its Target Audiences?

The simple answer is “no.”

Recent re-organization and budget cuts have led to a serious decrease in resources, both personnel and funding,

related to interpretation. Many interpretation programs and facilities are out-of-date and require re-capitalization. Many interpretation staff have either term or seasonal positions, a situation that fails to recognize the professional skills and expertise required for effective interpretation programs and fails to provide the scope for a year-round interpretation program to communicate ecological integrity on a regional basis.

Many experienced staff have left Parks Canada or have been re-assigned. Communicating about ecological integrity requires a high level of corporate knowledge and memory about individual parks and the parks system as a whole. That knowledge and memory have been seriously eroded by employment reduction programs and are also threatened by the aging of Parks Canada staff (a high proportion of Parks Canada staff are approaching retirement age). Ecological integrity itself, and communicating about it, requires maintenance and improvement of that corporate knowledge; an active succession planning program is imperative. There is a danger that a fine tradition of interpretation has been lost. The situation is such that Parks Canada must now re-invent interpretation.

We were told that in 1998-99, a total of \$34.26 million was spent on “presentation of heritage resources awareness and understanding,” which is 9.4 per cent of a total Parks Canada Agency budget of \$364.98 million (Table 13.2). We have not, however, been able to obtain historical data (funding and personnel levels prior to budget cuts) or data for individual parks. Thus it is

Stuffed wildlife display in a park interpretation centre may be outdated and send inappropriate messages to park visitors
P. Wilkinson





Helping urban residents understand the need for prescribed burns in urban parks can increase awareness and acceptance for similar active management in national parks
G. Dillon/City of Toronto Parks

Urban Interpretation Programs

Urban parks across Canada face a wide range of conservation issues. These issues provide opportunities for interpreting natural processes locally, regional, and Canada-wide. A few of these are:

- the Coastal British Columbia Field Unit of Parks Canada is developing an Urban Outreach Strategy, the intent of which is to reach urban adult audiences with critical Parks Canada messages. This program will be located in the Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park; audiences in Victoria and Vancouver will be targeted for the first phase of this initiative.

- a proposed pilot project to reach urban youth in the Vancouver school system is also underway. It will link Parks Canada's existing Web site with a "Kids Kare" Web site that contains interactive components to educate students on national parks, national historic sites, and marine conservation areas, initially within British Columbia and eventually all across Canada.

- the Minister of Canadian Heritage recently announced a joint interpretation program for the Rouge Park, part of the Toronto region's protected valley and ravine system, operated by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. This is an interconnected system of valleys and wild areas that retains plant and animal species not usually seen in urban areas. It provides great potential for interpreting the implications of human impacts on a natural system that still retains a high level of ecological integrity.

- Calgary's Nose Hill Park offers potential for interpreting protection and management of short grass prairie ecosystems in relation to urban users. Prescribed burns would provide opportunities for interpretation of prairie ecosystems in this region.

- restoration of black oak savanna with experimental prescribed burn management and removal of exotic and invasive vegetation has been underway since 1993 in High Park, Toronto's largest park. A major burn is proposed for the year 2000. The surrounding community has now accepted this process of vegetation management within the urban area.

- Tommy Thompson Park (also known as the Leslie Street Spit) on the Toronto waterfront, one of the most ecologically diverse urban habitats in Canada, provides potential for interpreting natural and biophysical regenerative processes and protection planning and policies in the field.



not possible for the Panel to provide detailed recommendations on required increases in funding and personnel for interpretation as we have done for science capacity. Chapter 13 provides an estimate of the increased interpretation capacity required to serve Parks Canada's current and potential audiences.

Employing Other Forms of Communication

The Internet is a communication medium that can provide ecological information to many potential audiences. For example, Wapusk National Park's Web site contains information on the realities of the park's environment, including the rigorous climate and the danger of polar bears, and relates these realities to appropriate visitor use. The

level of Web site development and the quality and quantity of information presented is highly variable among parks and is dependent on the personal interest of individual park staff. Moreover, insufficient translation capacity may present a barrier to greater use of the Internet because of the federal government requirement that all information be provided in both French and English.

Information with a strong ecological integrity focus could be provided via maps, audio tapes, CD-ROMs, video tapes and a host of other media. Individual parks have made some use of these media but overall use of these means for communicating national parks interpretation information is uneven.

RECOMMENDATION

10-4. We recommend that Parks Canada expand national parks interpretation programs to reinforce efforts aimed at traditional target audiences and to include new strategic target audiences and media. Support strong interpretation programs in terms of personnel, budget, and training. Acknowledge and support the professional status of those who work in interpretation through a national training program focusing on ecological integrity, funding for research and development of presentation programs, and a process for career advancement. Provide funds for interpretation and outreach programs for research, staff, and renewal of these programs to meet interpretation objectives. (Chapter 13.)

This would entail:

- working in collaboration with tourist operators and other visitor service providers to provide pre-trip information with a strong ecological integrity focus via the Web, maps, audio-tapes, CD-ROMs, video-tapes, and other media;

- in each park that contains one or more park communities, developing an interpretation program that is aimed explicitly at park community residents and their special relationship to ecological integrity. The linkages between interpretation and park residents should focus on environmental stewardship and working toward developing environmentally-friendly communities;
- promoting ecological integrity as the concern of all Parks Canada staff. Ensure that all staff are involved, empowered, and trained regarding communicating goals, objectives and messages, particularly as they apply to ecological integrity. Communicate the ecological integrity mandate more effectively within Parks Canada as a whole and especially at the individual park level;



- developing an education program on ecological integrity, aimed at politicians and other decision-makers in the federal government and other levels of government;
- developing interpretation and outreach programs specifically aimed at audiences in the regions surrounding national parks, including school systems, corporations, local governments, regional residents and others;
- making integration of Aboriginal history, culture, and relationship to the land a major priority in interpretation programs. Work with Aboriginal communities to allow Aboriginal peoples to tell their own stories and to build understanding and trust concerning traditional Aboriginal activities in national parks;
- focusing interpretation concerning ecological integrity on young people and educators, particularly through the formal curriculum;
- setting up programs and activities to bring national parks and their ecological integrity issues to major Canadian cities, particularly through collaboration with municipal parks departments;
- developing interpretation and outreach programs specifically tailored to businesses, corporations and industry associations (such as the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers or the Canadian Tourism Commission) to communicate the need to protect ecological integrity in national parks through sustainable activities outside of national parks;
- providing funding for research and development of the Internet and other media.

The Importance of Partners in Interpretation

Audiences within the regions surrounding national parks provide great potential for supporting the ecological integrity mandate of national parks through such means as political action and the advocacy efforts of environmental non-government organizations. Regional audiences can also become partners in interpretation. For example, the Panel met with several ranchers from around Waterton Lakes National Park who told us much about ranching, maintaining conservation values, and other aspects of their ranching operations that support ecological integrity. Parks can also extend their programs in the form of advocacy on regional, national and even international issues relating to ecosystem management and ecological integrity protection (Chapter 9).



This is a two-way street. Ecological integrity messages could be greatly strengthened by communicating the economic and cultural benefits and values that parks bring to local communities and to the country as a whole. The value of parks is often not appreciated by neighbouring and regional private landowners, partly because of the lack of knowledge of issues related to national parks and their connections to regional issues.

Collaboration is the key to promoting ecological integrity. Parks Canada must work with a variety of partners, such as Aboriginal peoples, other governments (including local municipal councils and parks departments, provincial and territorial governments), media, environmental organizations, the private sector, co-operating associations and volunteers.

In particular, volunteers have an important role in interpretation. For example, the Canadian Parks Partnership has over 60 member associations, including over 40 co-operative “Friends” associations working in partnership with national parks and national historic sites. These associations provide over 100,000 volunteer hours each year. Offering programming, services, publications, and products, their interpretation efforts are particularly focused on children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

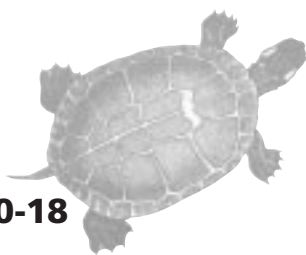
10-5. We recommend that Parks Canada include the regional dimension in interpretation programs in order to place ecological integrity messages into regional, national, and global contexts. Make each park the regional focal point for public education programs in protected areas networks and ecosystem management.

This would entail:

- increasing interpretation efforts to educate community and regional stakeholders on Parks Canada’s ecological integrity mandate and on the specific ecological integrity objectives of each park;
- targeting these efforts in support of regional integration;

- changing the thinking that it is only Parks Canada’s job to protect ecological integrity to a view that it is everyone’s job;
- discussing broader environmental themes (such as global climate change) that are threats to ecological integrity and link these themes to national parks;
- reinforcing interpretation in the field by reinstating interpretation staff.

10-6. We recommend that Parks Canada increase and support the role of partners, particularly volunteer associations, in interpretation and outreach as an enhancement to, but not replacement of, the work of core professional full-time staff.



Marketing and Ecological Integrity

Tourists — both domestic and foreign — have traditionally been a major audience for information on Canadian national parks, notably in the form of product marketing. That is, national parks are being “product marketed” by Parks Canada and other tourism organizations as tourism destinations.

Government organizations conduct four major types of marketing:

- Type A: Marketing of products and services (parks as tourist destinations).
- Type B: Social marketing (marketing that attempts to change the behaviours and attitudes of target groups).
- Type C: Policy marketing (to convince specific sectors of society to accept a policy, similar to “advocacy advertising” by private companies to trumpet their virtues as good corporate citizens).
- Type D: De-marketing or Don’t-use-our-programs marketing (to advise and/or persuade targeted groups not to use government programs that have been available to them in the past).

Madill (1999)

To date, Parks Canada’s marketing staff have been engaged in only the first type — marketing products and services. This product marketing demonstrates little or no regard to the fact that most national parks report serious stress from even current levels of visitor use. It also demonstrates little to no concern for the implications of increased human use on ecological integrity and, despite claims to the contrary, sends virtually no ecological integrity messages. The Panel is of the opinion that neither product marketing nor its potential impacts on the ecological integrity of national parks are based on solid research and data. The Canadian Tourism Commission told the Panel that ecological

integrity should be the first priority of Parks Canada and that the marketing of national parks should have ecological integrity as the primary message.

The Panel was told, “*We should not under-use our national parks.*” We were also told that one objective of product marketing is to divert demand to “under-used” parks and to shoulder seasons in parks that are currently “over-used” in high season.

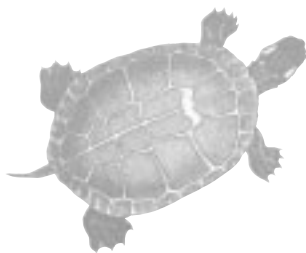
The notion of under-use is meaningless in ecological integrity terms. This labelling of parks as “under-used” is based solely on un-used facility capacity and similar economic motivations, without any scientific understanding of the relationships between use and ecological integrity. However, sensitive natural processes such as breeding and migration do occur in shoulder seasons and park staffing levels are lowest in shoulder seasons, thus making management for ecological integrity even more difficult at these times. The concept of marketing a shoulder season may be applicable to selling airplane seats to sun destinations in the summer, but it is not appropriate to national parks and the protection of ecological integrity.

The Panel was also told that Parks Canada’s External Relations Branch has a “client information base” of approximately 4500 documents that provide the basis for understanding, in the Branch’s words, “*spatial and temporal over-use of parks.*” In the Panel’s view, this understanding does not exist. The current product marketing of national parks is not based on solid social or natural science research, nor does an adequate database exist.

... a marketing approach may be more valuable for other goals [than revenue generation] of a unit such as improving relationships with groups and individuals with whom the unit interacts, serving clients better, encouraging healthier lifestyles and/or behaviours, etc.

Many in government identify marketing with cost recovery or revenue generation. It should be noted that there is nothing inherent in the philosophy, tools or techniques to force the role of marketing into either of these camps. It is true that marketing can assist in generating revenue within government, but it can also be a useful paradigm for improving relationships with clients and the publics with whom government departments deal. The marketing approach does not necessarily assume a revenue-generation or profit motive.

Madill (1999)



Individuals involved in the product marketing of national parks appear to have little knowledge about ecological integrity and little appreciation of the ecological integrity mandate. As a result, there is an almost total absence of information about ecological integrity in marketing materials, which rarely use the phrase “ecological integrity” and never mention the primacy of ecological integrity in the management of national parks. The Panel learned that many marketing materials are out-of-date and were created when there was less emphasis on ecological integrity. We were told that these materials would be replaced with new material emphasizing ecological integrity — when current material supplies run out. However, we also saw very recent material that was still devoid of ecological integrity content, such as the “Guide’s Guides,” and materials being prepared for long-haul markets by Parks Canada’s External Relations Branch.

The current marketing target of Parks Canada’s External Relations Branch is the long-haul tourist, notably foreign tourists such as Europeans and Asians. The argument for such a focus is economic, based on two facts: foreign tourist expenditures improve Canada’s balance of payments and foreign tourists have higher per capita expenditures per visit than domestic visitors to parks.

This product marketing strategy bears little concern for ecological integrity. As clearly reported in the State of the Parks 1997 Report, most parks report stress from current levels of visitor use, yet new marketing materials for foreign markets contain no ecological

integrity message and are aimed at increasing the number of visitors.

Social marketing teaches people about the benefits and stresses of national parks, and lets people decide whether or not to visit. There are many other ways that people can learn about national parks other than by visiting them, including increased use of the Internet and through urban outreach programs.

People learn about national parks and national historic sites in many different ways, through many different media. Fortunately, visiting them is no longer the only way to experience their sights and sounds. The advent of new technologies — including the Internet, CD-ROMs, and videos — coupled with traditional means of communicating with Canadians including school visits by Parks Canada staff, television specials and films, has opened horizons for reaching out to Canadians of all ages and in all walks of life, across the country.

Parks Canada, State of the Parks 1997 Report, p. 95

We are firm in arguing that product marketing of national parks should end and that the focus be placed on social marketing, policy marketing, and even de-marketing of the parks, with a focus on ecological integrity. Ecological integrity is the primary objective — therefore, market ecological integrity, including telling people that the ecological integrity of national parks is under stress and that part of that stress comes from too many people visiting the parks and from activities that are neither allowable nor appropriate. (See Chapter 11 on the issue of appropriate use.) This point is part of Parks Canada’s Corporate Image and External Relations Strategy, although use seems still to be the ultimate goal:



This document ... recommends telling Canadians about Parks Canada's mission and mandate, reinforcing the pride and identity these special heritage places evoke. It addresses specific target markets with messages which will help them to understand, to support, to become partners in the cause, and to visit parks and sites.

Marketing can help the organization achieve its corporate goals, improve its corporate image, and enhance internal co-operation and effectiveness.

Parks Canada
"Executive summary: Parks Canada's
Corporate Image and External Relations
Management Strategy" (1997) p. 1

The Panel found no evidence that such an alternative approach to marketing is even being contemplated.

Some national parks actively work with regional or provincial bodies involved in tourism product marketing. With or without the involvement of Parks Canada or individual parks, these bodies are likely to continue to product market parks with the understandable goal of increasing regional or provincial revenues. Parks Canada should work with such bodies to educate them about the stresses on ecological integrity caused by current or increased levels of use and to encourage them to incorporate appropriate ecological integrity messages in their marketing programs. Otherwise, the deteriorating ecological integrity of national parks will make parks less attractive to visitors, thus harming regional and provincial economies.

The Panel also heard park visitors referred to as "clients." The term is appropriate to a business where a primary goal is matching supply and demand; it is inappropriate to national parks. The term sends the wrong ecological integrity message. Visitors are guests who have a responsibility to behave responsibly in ways that are appropriate to the context of their host park.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10-7. We recommend that Parks Canada immediately cease the product marketing of national parks in general and the product marketing which attempts to increase overall use of parks or divert demand to shoulder seasons or so-called "under-used" parks in particular. Concentrate instead on social marketing, policy marketing, and de-marketing aimed at appropriate target audiences with messages focusing on ecological integrity.

10-8. We recommend that Parks Canada work with regional and provincial bodies involved in tourism product marketing to educate them about the stresses on ecological integrity caused by current or increased levels of use and to encourage them to incorporate appropriate ecological integrity messages in their marketing programs.

