

## IN CLOSING: GUARDING THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The ecological integrity of Canada's national parks must be unimpaired for future generations of all species, not just humans. W. Lynch/Parks Canada



### Unimpaired for Future Generations

Since 1885, Canadians have set aside special places to create a national park system that is the envy of the world. Today, Parks Canada is charged with protecting ecological integrity as the first priority of national parks. By the end of 1999, Canada's national park system contained 39 national parks. More national parks are yet to be created, and the completion of a system that represents Canada's natural regions must be a high priority.

Canadians are awakening to the fact that national parks alone cannot protect and preserve ecological integrity. We deliberately chose a title for our report — *Conserving Ecological Integrity With Canada's National Parks* — to reflect the idea that Canada conserves ecological integrity, not in, but with national parks — using national parks as one element in a tool kit that includes many other kinds of protected areas. Collectively, national, provincial and territorial parks, First Nations lands, marine protected areas, conservation areas and many other types of protected areas must work together as connected patches in a quilt of sustainable land management, with national parks as the heart, the centre of the quilt.





**Tanquary Fjord and the Osborne Mountains within Canada's most northerly national park, Quttinirpaq**

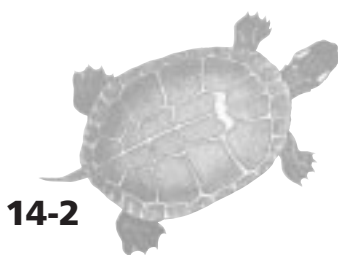
I. MacNeil/Parks Canada

Canadians have asked too much of their national parks and given back too little. National parks are bellwethers of the broader ecological change that is happening throughout the country and the world. Threats come from within the parks — pressures from visitor use, infrastructure and development, and management decisions that suppress natural processes such as fire. Larger threats originate outside the parks — encroachment of urban and industrial development, pollution, climate change, decisions and actions affecting wildlife populations, clean

air and water. Threats are even embedded within Parks Canada itself — the lack of a conservation culture, insufficient science capacity, ineffectual planning processes, a lack of funding and resources, and the disappearance of interpretation programs. These have all contributed to the decline of the ecological integrity of Canada's national parks.

Maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity in national parks requires bold action within Parks Canada and from all Canadians. Collective action becomes the thread that binds the quilt of protected areas together. To sustain these protected areas Canadians must work beyond core areas, to understand that maintaining the health of these core protected areas is central to maintaining the health — spiritual, emotional and economic— of the entire nation.

The ecological integrity of national parks can only be achieved in a cooperative effort. All Canadians must accept responsibility to work with and encourage federal, provincial, territorial, Aboriginal, and municipal governments, communities, organizations, employers, industries and landowners to actively work to conserve national parks for future generations.





Sage grouse in Grasslands National Park; national parks should be places where timeless natural patterns continue unhindered

W. Lynch/Parks Canada

## The Way Forward

While all Canadians have roles and responsibilities in ensuring that national parks continue to hold their significant places in the Canadian landscape and in Canadians' hearts, the Panel looks to Parks Canada for leadership. Initiatives and actions large and small, at every level of the organization, will be needed, encompassed by three broad principles:

- ensure that protecting ecological integrity is the first priority in all actions and thoughts of national parks;
- improve knowledge and understanding of ecological integrity, including the incorporation of naturalized knowledge;
- communicate the need to protect ecological integrity.

The way forward presents a significant opportunity for Parks Canada to reposition itself to reflect the primary goal of the organization in every facet of its operation. This evolution is not the task of just one person or level of the organization — rather it requires all employees to work together. The Panel believes that Parks Canada can build upon the personal commitment that is so evident in so many employees.





## Initial Steps on the Path



Marine life in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve; all species have intrinsic value  
Parks Canada

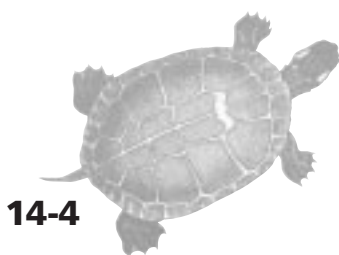
Ecological systems are complex almost beyond comprehension. The Panel would be naïve to think that the solution to the ecological crisis in Canada's national parks proposed in this report will be all that is needed. The course of action and results must be monitored, evaluated and adjusted along the way. In short, Parks Canada must engage in active and adaptive learning about how to maintain and restore ecological integrity.

To achieve the vision and goals we have set out in this report is a task that must commence immediately but will take a number of years to fully implement. The Panel proposes that the following recommendations receive priority for immediate action while a more complete strategy for implementation is developed (recommendation numbers are in parentheses):

The Panel on ecological Integrity in Canada's National Parks recommends that:

- Parks Canada transform itself, by confirming ecological integrity as the priority for Canada's national parks and as the explicit responsibility of every staff member through new training, staffing, decision-making and accountability structures. (2-1, 2-4)

- Parks Canada revise and streamline its planning system to focus on ecological integrity as the core of strategic and operational plans. (3-3)
- The Minister direct Parks Canada to take immediate action to convert existing wilderness zones in national parks into legally designated wilderness, as provided by the National Parks Act. (3-11)
- Parks Canada significantly enhance capacity in natural and social sciences, planning and interpretation, to effectively manage for, and educate society about, ecological integrity in national parks. Develop partnerships with universities, industries, Aboriginal peoples, and other learning-based agencies. (4-1, 4-3, 4-4, 4-6)
- Parks Canada undertake active management where there are reasonable grounds that maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity will be compromised without it. Key actions are required in the areas of site restoration, fire restoration, species management and harvest. (5-1, 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, 5-8)
- Parks Canada initiate a process of healing with Aboriginal peoples. Adopt clear policies to encourage and support the development of genuine partnerships with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. (7-1, 7-2)
- Parks Canada develop partnerships that encourage the conservation of parks as part of larger regional ecosystems. Seek provincial and territorial co-operation to establish a comprehensive protected areas



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*“My choice for an indicator of ecological integrity in National parks is that parks will have ecological integrity when grizzly bears die of old age, instead of being shot or removed as a result of conflicts with people.”*

Dr. Stephen Herrero  
Acceptance speech, J.B.  
Harkin Award  
Ottawa, 1999

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network. Work with other jurisdictions, industry and the public to find solutions on maintaining ecological integrity. Support these solutions with a fund dedicated to conservation efforts in the greater park ecosystems. Advocate for park values and interests in the greater ecosystems. (8-1, 9-1, 9-3, 9-6, 2-9)

- Parks Canada develop an interpretation strategy that presents clear and consistent messages about ecological integrity. (10-1)
- Parks Canada cease product marketing to increase overall use of parks and concentrate instead on social marketing and demarketing where appropriate. (10-7)
- Parks Canada develop a policy and implement a program for assessing allowable and appropriate activities in national parks, with ecological integrity as the determining factor. (11-1)
- Parks Canada reduce the human footprint on national parks so that parks become models and showcases of environmental design and management. (12-4)
- Following the taking of first steps to improve the broader management framework for ecological integrity within Parks Canada, allocate substantial new and additional resources to implement the Panel’s recommendations on improving science and planning capacity, active management, monitoring, partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, stewardship initiatives in greater park ecosystems, and interpretation. Fund the establishment and operation of new parks from new resources. Enable management decisions in support of ecological integrity to be separated from revenue implications. (13-1, 13-2, 13-4, 13-9)



**Terra Nova National Park**  
G. Taylor/Parks Canada

## Signs of Success

Nations all over the world face threats to their own sacred places. Fortunately for Canada, Parks Canada has both the opportunity and the potential to achieve its mandate through the protection of ecological integrity in Canada’s national parks.

Canada is a wealthy country. This country has an enormous land base and a rich and diverse tapestry of cultures. Canadians are resourceful, innovative and take pride in being thoughtful and careful. Above all, Canadians hold the idea of wild places in high esteem. If Canadians cannot undertake the task of integrating various demands for development while protecting the ecological integrity of wild places, who in the world can?