

## SECTION D: ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND NATIONAL PARKS



Aboriginal drummer and dancers in Riding Mountain National Park  
Parks Canada

### CHAPTER 7: WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Human habitation throughout Canada long predates the creation of national parks. The naturalized knowledge, and traditional uses, culture and values of Aboriginal peoples were once as much a part of ecosystems as water, vegetation, landscape or wildlife. Until recently, national parks' creation and ongoing activities have largely ignored the Aboriginal human aspect of park ecology. As a result, naturalized knowledge and values are now generally lacking in national parks. This ignorance of naturalized knowledge has contributed to the decline of ecological integrity in many parks. Parks Canada appears to be receptive to fostering opportunities to increase

Aboriginal participation in parks management but real action remains sporadic and lacks direction, with the exception of recently-created co-managed parks.

A process of healing is needed to develop trust and respect and to facilitate two-way communication and education between Parks Canada and Aboriginal peoples. Future resolution of such issues as Aboriginal harvest of flora and fauna within national parks is contingent upon this healing and development of mutual trust and understanding.



## The Lessons of History — From Expulsion to Co-management



An ancient fish trap built  
by Aboriginal peoples in the  
Broken Group Islands, Pacific  
Rim National Park Reserve

P. Wilkinson

For the purpose of this report, the term “Aboriginal peoples” includes Inuit, Métis, non-status and status Aboriginal peoples. Whenever we are referring to governments of status Aboriginal peoples, we use the terms “First Nations” or “First Nation governments.” We use these terms as a sign of respect.

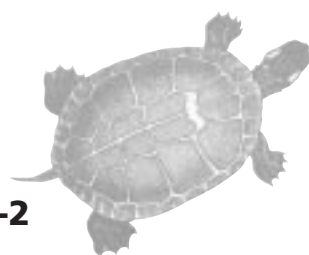
Humans have been present for thousands of years on the lands that now constitute Canada. Their association with the land and their traditional activities were part of the ecosystems and, to a certain extent, made the landscape what it was when Europeans first arrived. Over the past 200 years or so, the traditional natural ecological role of humans was extirpated to a great degree everywhere in Canada and almost completely from the national parks.

In the Panel’s view, ecological integrity embraces this traditional human element; the influence of Aboriginal peoples is fully consistent with our definition of ecological integrity as outlined in Chapter 1. This traditional human role is an important element of the ecological integrity of the ecosystems that Parks Canada is mandated to preserve or restore, and is currently missing from nearly all of Canada’s national parks.

Upon creation of some parks in the first half of this century, Aboriginal peoples were expelled from the lands they occupied. Until 1982, national parks created on lands governed by treaties are considered by Canada to be “occupied Crown Lands,” and are excluded from any claims for traditional rights. More recently, parks established on lands under claim by First Nations were created as “national park reserves” pending the resolution of Aboriginal lands and rights claims in these national park reserves. Still other parks were established with co-management agreements. With regard to co-managed national parks, Parks Canada policy states that *“in areas subject to existing Aboriginal or treaty rights or to comprehensive land claims by Aboriginal peoples, the terms and conditions of parks establishment will include provision for continuation of renewable resource harvesting activities, and the nature and extent of Aboriginal peoples’ involvement in park planning and management.”*

This provision is aimed at protecting any present or future negotiated rights under land claims agreements. Parks created as a result of negotiations with First Nations (such as Gwaii Haanas) or as part of the comprehensive claim process (such as Ivvavik) have included explicit co-management provisions.

The eastern and southern lands of Canada have been settled the longest and have seen the greatest conflicts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. These conflicts and settlements have made it difficult for



national parks and the Aboriginal peoples of the area to discuss ways to “heal the hurts.” With genuine partnerships, Parks Canada may begin to manage the older parks in the system while taking into account the rights and responsibilities of First Nations, as has been done in Gwaii Haanas and Ivvavik, and others.

Consistent with the overall Government of Canada approach to the resolution of issues respecting Aboriginal peoples, Parks Canada has traditionally adopted a legalistic approach and position in dealing with Aboriginal issues — which are often referred to as “problems.” In recent years, First Nations have also resorted to a legal approach to assert their claims and court decisions have consistently gone in favour of the recognition and implementation of their constitutional, traditional rights (Appendix E). Even as issues continue to be debated and resolved between governments or in the courts, there is

opportunity for significant progress at other levels in reconciling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Significant progress has been made. Parks Canada has recognized the importance of Aboriginal rights, culture and socio-economic interests in relation to national park management. Parks Canada has made efforts to hire more Aboriginal peoples, encouraged Aboriginal peoples’ participation in interpretation programs and actual park management. However, because relationships with Aboriginal peoples are based on official government positions, working arrangements tend to be adversarial and lack the openness necessary to enter into effective and productive partnerships.

In recognition of the need to improve relationships, Parks Canada has recently established an Aboriginal Secretariat with the mandate to help all units to develop constructive relationships.

## **Shared Vision — The Spirit of Ecological Integrity**

Even as they maintained bonds and relationships with the land, aboriginal peoples have traditionally held certain places as sacred. Thus, they recognize a hierarchy of places and spaces through time. Today, as Canadians seek to manage national parks in ways that will ensure ecological integrity forever, Canadians can join with Aboriginal peoples in a common objective to protect these sacred places.

Embracing a shared vision for the protection of these spaces is the foundation of a constructive relationship which recognizes the early presence of Aboriginal peoples, their knowledge and understanding of the land and its processes, and the contribution that Aboriginal peoples can make to the management of parks and the

surrounding areas (for example, Vuntut National Park, as discussed in Chapter 3). Shared vision is the also basis for alliances and partnerships.

Shared vision requires policy direction that will encourage park managers to engage their Aboriginal neighbours in relationships based on mutual respect and recognition of the contribution that each party brings to the table. That relationship moves away from respective assertions of rights toward co-operation based on shared responsibility. It is interesting to note that 50 per cent of the current area contained within Canada’s national parks has been preserved as a result of Aboriginal peoples putting aside their lands for park creation. As discussed in Chapter 3, Parks Canada must nurture this



notion of shared responsibility and learning, and provide policy direction for personnel development and for practical measures of collaboration.

Canadians can learn from history and create new directions for the future. If Parks Canada is to achieve its mandate,

it is important to learn from history to create a common direction and alliances with Aboriginal peoples. Successful partnerships in the area of integrating Aboriginal knowledge and values into parks management may serve as models to Canadians at large for developing other partnerships and alliances.

## Forming Genuine Partnerships

The notion of genuine partnership is fundamental to successfully integrating Aboriginal knowledge and values into park management. It is important to understand the meaning of “genuine partnership” that the Panel endorses (Chapter 9).

Aboriginal peoples believe that any genuine partnership must be built on basic principles that embody certain fundamental conditions. For example, the Haudenosaunee First Nation bases genuine partnerships on respect, equity and empowerment. We have used this example as a model for initiating and maintaining genuine partnerships between Aboriginal peoples and Parks Canada but it is not the only means

---

### A Haudenosaunee Model for Genuine Partnership

In the Haudenosaunee model, the fundamental conditions for developing a genuine partnership are respect, equity and empowerment.

Respect for the partnership is built with the tools of understanding, communication, consensus, mediation and honour.

- understanding requires that the parties learn about one another — assumptions and myths are not sound foundations for partnerships. The process of learning about each other must be formalized so that each partner is clearly hearing, seeing and listening to the other;

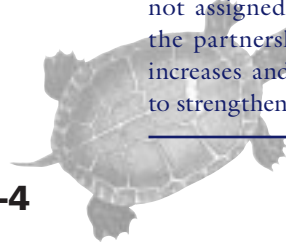
- communication is the process by which adequate information is transferred in a timely and appropriate manner to assist understanding;

- consensus and mediation are the backbones of respect. Consensus does not necessarily mean total agreement among the parties, but the reasonable agreement of a majority of the participants;

- mediation is the process for dealing with the minority who do not agree with the majority’s decision. Mediation may be formal or informal.

Equity refers to the resources needed to carry out the partnership. The tools of equity are finances, knowledge, networks, personnel and social-political power. In Canadian society, equity is mostly viewed as money; in Aboriginal communities, equity is viewed more as knowledge, networks, personnel and power. Finance, knowledge, networks, personnel and social-political power must be evaluated by the partnership and a common value established.

Empowerment is the power and will to perform an action. Empowerment is strengthened by application, authorship, credibility, new partnerships and responsibility. Projects are accomplished in a partnership only by the mutual work and responsibility of the partners. Success and blame are shared by the partners and not assigned to one or the other. As empowerment grows, misconceptions are ended and respect grows; the partnership becomes more powerful. As the partnership completes its task, the ability to find equity increases and empowerment of the partnership prospers. This type of genuine partnership cannot help but to strengthen both partners.



The Haida Gwaii Watchmen maintain a longhouse at Windy Bay on Lyell Island, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site. D. Andrews/Parks Canada

for developing partnerships — many others exist. Our point is that the fundamental conditions and principles must be understood and honoured by both sides for the partnership to be successful.

Parks Canada currently has many genuine partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, where the fundamental conditions and principles have been understood and applied. In other cases, partnerships have failed when the fundamental principles have been violated.



### Haida Gwaii Watchmen

The Haida Gwaii Watchmen program was instituted by the Haida First Nation at their culturally significant sites on South Moresby Island, within what is now Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site.

In 1981, members of the Skidegate Band Council and Haida Nation sent Haida volunteers to several sites to watch over the natural and cultural heritage of these locations, in the face of increasing outside interest in and access to the sites.

The Watchmen also provided visitors with insights to Haida culture, and shared songs, stories, dances and teachings.

The South Moresby area was declared a Haida Heritage Site in 1985 and a National Park Reserve in 1988. The unprecedented Gwaii Haanas Agreement, approved in 1993, established the terms of area co-management between the Haida Nation and the Government of Canada/Parks Canada. The Haida Gwaii Watchmen program has continued to operate with funding made available through a contract with Parks Canada. Parks Canada has worked together with the Haida Gwaii Watchmen to create a training and development plan that is now being implemented. Parks Canada staff at Gwaii Haanas work closely with the Watchmen and support the spirit and educational aspects of the program.

## Aboriginal Harvest in National Parks: From Rights to Responsibilities



This Haida Elder was among the first Haida Gwaii Watchmen. H. Quan

Shared vision and genuine partnerships will help move issues associated with Aboriginal rights toward a shared responsibility for the Mother Earth. It is the Panel's understanding that Aboriginal peoples care more for their responsibility to the Earth and all living things than they do for the rights of the individual. Rights cases have been the only way in which Aboriginal peoples could get their issues and treaties addressed within Canada's legal system, but within Aboriginal communities the responsibility of the people to protect the Earth is paramount.

This dependency on court cases to establish rights is detrimental to the development of sound practices and the acknowledgement of responsibilities, since it undercuts the traditional ways and customs of protecting the land. Despite what many Canadians may believe, Aboriginal peoples adhere to a set of laws and prohibitions that, while perhaps different from formal laws and prohibitions that govern non-Aboriginals, are no less stringent and carry similar societal sanctions for those who break the laws.



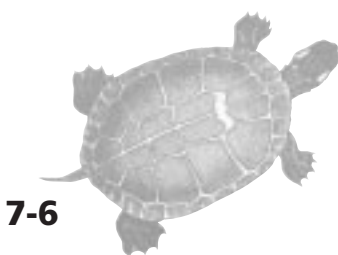
First Nations governments and people have their own laws, regulations, codes and practices for protecting the Earth. These instruments are an integral part of Aboriginal cultures and societies. Aboriginal peoples need the people of Canada (and the governments of Canada) to recognize and support these traditional responsibilities, this cultural commitment to conservation. This support will be the basis for trusting and respectful relationships, which in turn will allow the return of Aboriginal activities to national parks — including harvest of plants and animals within traditions, or for traditional uses, and supported by a strong cultural conservation ethic — with the full understanding and agreement of Parks Canada and the Canadian people.

Aboriginal harvest in Canada's national parks will become an important issue. Recent court cases have helped define the idea that Aboriginal peoples can harvest natural resources in Canada. Harvest does not only include fishing but also forestry, mining and gathering

practices used by Aboriginal peoples to gain a modest living from the land and sea. The traditional rules of Aboriginal peoples must be acknowledged and trusted, because these traditions are responsible, first and foremost, to conservation. Parks Canada can help to integrate humans back into national park ecosystems only if Parks Canada understands and trusts the traditional conservation practices of Aboriginal peoples.

Together with Aboriginal peoples, Parks Canada should develop interpretation and outreach programs and messages concerning Aboriginal use and harvest, emphasizing ecological integrity and the cultural conservation ethics of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal peoples themselves are the obvious choice to deliver these messages through interpretation and outreach programs.

**An Aboriginal caribou fence in Vuntut National Park**  
I. MacNeil/Parks Canada



---

## Champagne-Aishihik First Nation and Kluane National Park Reserve

Early in 1999, the Champagne-Aishihik First Nation held four workshops to gather band members' thoughts on appropriate activities within Kluane National Park Reserve. First Nation leaders took the workshop results forward as input to the Kluane Management Plan, which is still in development.

The Champagne-Aishihik First Nation proposed six goals for management of the park:

1. renew cultural ties to the park — a healing process was recommended so that Champagne-Aishihik First Nation members could reconnect with the land, plants and animals, and cultural sites within the park.
  2. learn and teach cultural heritage — members should learn about their people's history in the park, and that the band produce teaching materials and tourist information about the land and human history in and around the park.
  3. keep plants and animals healthy for the future — management decisions regarding the park's natural resources should be made based on western science and on naturalized knowledge.
  4. training and employment opportunities — for full-time and seasonal jobs in the park.
  5. participating in tourism — support for small business initiatives and cultural tourism initiatives such as teaching traditional skills.
  6. sharing responsibility for the park — work toward Champagne-Aishihik First Nation members becoming full co-managers of the park, with participation in planning and management, and responsibility for wildlife harvest.
- 

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel believes there is a genuine desire within Parks Canada to make progress toward integrating Aboriginal naturalized knowledge and values into park management, as evidenced by the creation of the Aboriginal Secretariat and a growing number of specific co-operative endeavours at the park level. But all this is taking place under the caveats which govern Canada's policies dealing with claims and First Nations, and patterns of asserting rights through court claims. The Panel therefore proposes that the policies and actions recommended below be implemented without prejudice by either party's positions or interests that can be expressed through legal means or through the claims process.

These recommendations are offered in the spirit of friendship and responsibility for ecological integrity. We acknowledge that the actions embodied in some of these recommendations demand

substantial funding and long-term commitment. We believe that Parks Canada will be substantially stronger and more capable to protect ecological integrity with the help and support of Aboriginal peoples.

7-1. To foster the development of relationships based on trust and respect between Parks Canada and Aboriginal peoples, we recommend that Parks Canada initiate a process of healing between Aboriginal peoples and Parks Canada.

Through this process Parks Canada will:

- recognize that the interpretation and acknowledged history of national parks must reflect the past and present occupation and use by Aboriginal peoples;
- recognize the historical presence, occupation and use by Aboriginal peoples as an inherent component of the greater park ecosystems of national parks;
- solicit Aboriginal peoples' involvement in Parks Canada's activities;

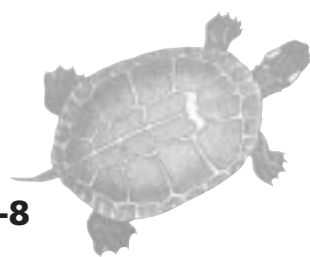


An Ojibway Elder performing a traditional dance to celebrate the opening of Pukaskwa National Park  
Parks Canada



- sponsor a series of healing conferences to begin the process of healing, moving from confrontation to collaboration. Note that by “sponsoring” we mean “fostering” or “facilitating,” not necessarily “organizing.” The notion of true partnership can begin with the respectful meeting of the two sides in a mutually acceptable healing process;
  - acknowledge that the healing process offers potential for research and co-operative ventures.
- 7-2. We recommend that Parks Canada adopt clear policies to encourage and support the development and maintenance of genuine partnerships with Aboriginal peoples in Canada.
- Through these policies, Parks Canada will:
- enhance its commitment to Aboriginal peoples by providing the newly-created Aboriginal Secretariat with the resources required to stimulate expressions of genuine partnership at the local, regional and national levels (see Chapter 13 for more discussion regarding funding of the Aboriginal Secretariat). Parks Canada will initiate national, regional and site projects with Aboriginal peoples, which will create an atmosphere of co-operation;
  - enhance relationships with the historical occupants of national park lands;
  - re-affirm that no new national parks will be established without the involvement of First Nations of the area.

7-3. We recommend that Parks Canada, together with Aboriginal communities, develop mutually-reinforced educational projects that will lead to better mutual understanding and joint





action toward protection of ecological integrity in national parks.

Through these educational projects Parks Canada will:

- provide opportunities for park staff to learn the history and culture of the Aboriginal peoples in their areas;
- give specific mandates to Field Unit Superintendents and adequate information about the Aboriginal history of the region that will enable them to initiate dialogue with the Aboriginal peoples of the area;
- work with Aboriginal people to develop an outreach program to Aboriginal communities, schools and First Nation governments;
- as part of the outreach and awareness program, support the cultural translation of parks materials, including publishing materials in the local Aboriginal language, and using Aboriginal names for places and species in materials published or printed in English, French and other languages;
- as a sign of respect, encourage the use of Aboriginal names for places, plants and animals;
- acknowledge and integrate the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal peoples into efforts to conserve the ecological integrity of Canadian national parks;
- work together with Aboriginal peoples to re-integrate Aboriginal harvest in national parks, on a case-by-base basis, to mutually acceptable levels based on traditional use and the common goal of protecting ecological integrity, including the mutual determination of areas that will remain free of any harvest (Chapter 6).

7-4. We recommend that Parks Canada ensure protection of the current cultural sites, sacred areas and artifacts that are under the auspices of Parks Canada.

As part of this process, Parks Canada will:

- return to First Nations all sacred artifacts and human remains currently in Parks Canada's possession, using proper ceremonies and rites;
- negotiate agreements for the use of Aboriginal artifacts in education and interpretive programs;
- work with Aboriginal peoples to create a secure and private inventory of sacred areas, so that they can be better protected;
- facilitate the execution of ceremonies and rites that Aboriginal peoples believe necessary for their culture;
- empower and enable First Nations people to tell their own stories in the parks, including direct participation in interpretive program planning and delivery;

