



# PARKS CANADA AGENCY

*Response of the Minister of the Environment to  
Recommendations Made at the Third Minister's  
Round Table on Parks Canada (2005)*

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# MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

**T**he 2005 Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada, the first in which I participated in my capacity as Minister responsible for the Agency, was a definite success. Committed, dedicated and passionate stakeholders from all walks of life – Aboriginals, scientists, students, researchers, tourist operators, etc.



– came together to discuss Parks Canada's management and to recommend new or better ways to fulfill its mandate of protecting and presenting our natural and cultural heritage. I appreciate their efforts very much.

The recommendations that resulted from the first two Round Tables led to very positive changes – we acted promptly to restore the health of our national parks and to create new ones as well as new national marine conservation areas; we adopted new scientific measures to enhance our decision-making processes; and we increased our outreach to young people, women, Aboriginal peoples and ethnocultural communities. This year's Round Table, true to what we can now call tradition, continues in that vein.

The third Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada, which focused on the themes of the conservation culture in Canada and providing memorable experiences to visitors,

featured fruitful exchanges leading to relevant and substantial recommendations in the areas of education and outreach, communication, research, best practices, financing and governance, the use of traditional know how and Aboriginal languages, leadership and the visitor's experience.

Thanks to this very valuable work by the participants, we will be in a better position to preserve the majestic beauty of our splendid natural areas and the specific character of each of the magnificent jewels comprising our historic fabric, as well as presenting them.

I can already assure you that, like the recommendations coming out of the first two Round Tables, those developed this year will not be shelved. Within the Agency, we have already begun the process of following up on them, and my response, presented in the pages that follow, will tell you how Parks Canada intends to articulate and implement this wise advice.

The 2005 Budget recently passed by the Parliament of Canada will enable us to meet some major challenges. The Agency has been provided with new funding for ecological integrity, maintaining and

restoring its assets and infrastructure, and enhancing the quality of the memorable experiences it offers to visitors.

Once again, Canada's Aboriginal peoples demonstrated their will to be full partners. Their participation already constitutes a fundamental element of our planning process, and more and more, we are seeking to integrate their traditional knowledge into our management plans for parks and historic sites.

All of this requires a great deal of work and determination on the part of Parks Canada employees. I am convinced, however, that they will rise to the challenge. I consider myself to be very lucky to work with members of the Parks Canada team, which from coast to coast, demonstrates uncommon dedication and professionalism. I have had

many opportunities to meet with these men and women, and I am confident that the two years leading up to the next Round Table will be marked by as much progress as the two years that have just passed.

It is an honour for me to be responsible for ensuring that we meet Canadians' high expectations with regard to their national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas. It is an even greater pleasure to work toward this goal in the company of all those enthusiastic Canadians who made this year's Round Table a complete success.



The Honourable Stéphane Dion  
Minister of the Environment

# FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

**A**t least once every two years, Parks Canada enjoys a unique opportunity to hear directly from Canadians on how we can improve the management of national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas of Canada. The Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada brings together Aboriginal partners, stakeholders, organizations and people who are passionate about Canada's protected heritage areas to review key issues affecting the Agency and Canada's systems of historic sites, parks and marine conservation areas.

The insights, views and recommendations provide us with a yardstick by which we can measure progress in meeting our objectives, including the ecological health of our national parks and marine conservation areas, the commemorative health of our national historic sites, as well as visitor experience and public awareness and understanding. Seeing the state of these special places through the eyes of people who are committed to protecting and presenting Canada's natural and cultural heritage helps to shape our vision of how we can best fulfill our mandate.



The 2005 Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada was a resounding success in this regard. Participants brought considerable personal expertise to the meeting and clearly focused on how to achieve larger goals. The recommendations were crafted through group discussions and reflect the views

of many participants. Overall, there was a remarkable exchange between the cultural and natural communities, which no doubt led to the very strong recommendations.

This Round Table, even more than previous ones, has demonstrated the benefit of close cooperation with Canada's Aboriginal peoples. The group heard from several leaders, among them Peter Irniq, Commissioner of Nunavut, who delivered a remarkable address on his experiences as a child and the considerable challenges he and his people have faced to retain their culture, their language and their way of life. Their messages and advice to the Minister and Parks Canada will not go unheard, and help to underscore the importance of the work being done to tell the story of Aboriginal peoples in connection to Canada's special natural and cultural places.

What I heard from participants is a desire for ongoing dialogue. Parks Canada will look for opportunities to continue consulting and working closely with stakeholders. My goal is that more Canadians will value, learn from, and experience our natural and cultural treasures. This goal will only be met by working with our partners. This goal will only be achievable if we work closely with Canada's Aboriginal peoples. It is by engaging with stakeholders at all levels and ultimately with visitors that Parks Canada will fulfill its mandate as expressed through the Parks Canada Charter. The work done at the 2005 Minister's Round Table and the advice provided will greatly assist the Parks Canada team to achieve these goals.



Alan Latourelle  
Chief Executive Officer  
Parks Canada Agency



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**F**rom February 20 to 23, 2005, over 70 people attended the Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada, held at the Chateau Laurier National Historic Site of Canada in Ottawa. Drawn from across Canada and broadly representative of the environmental, Aboriginal, heritage, academic, tourism and other communities, these individuals engaged on several themes in order to provide advice to the Minister of the Environment, the Honourable Stéphane Dion.

A Minister's Round Table is held every two years, as directed under Section 6 of the *Parks Canada Agency Act*, in order to convene a meeting of persons able to advise the Minister on the performance of Parks Canada. The Minister is required to respond publicly to any recommendations within 180 days of the meeting.

This summary provides an overview of discussions that led to the 15 recommendations that follow on the two main themes of the 2005 Minister's Round Table – *Towards a Culture of Conservation and Facilitating More Memorable Visitor Experiences*.

## A Culture of Conservation

In discussion on building a culture of conservation, participants urged Parks Canada to move forward on initiatives to educate and engage Canadians, exhibit extra leadership in selected areas and continue to build meaningful partnerships

with indigenous peoples. There was broad consensus among participants that a conservation culture will only emerge through engaging Canadians and pursuing education initiatives that successfully speak to audiences, particularly youth.

An important theme throughout the three-day meeting was that of furthering the engagement of Canada's Aboriginal people as partners to tell their stories and teachings about Canada's special places. Woven through many recommendations are calls for Parks Canada to work closely with indigenous people in the promotion of the relevance of parks through a holistic approach and to highlight traditional knowledge and language. François Paulette, a member of the Smith's Landing First Nation, spoke to the participants on the importance of language to his people " [In]our language, our spirituality, our environment, our political structures – our way of life – language is at the centre and foundation of our people" Parks Canada CEO Alan Latourelle recommitted the Agency to work closely with Canada's Aboriginal community as it tells the story of the land, and the persons, places and events that have contributed to Canada's rich cultural fabric.

Discussions at the meeting suggested that Parks Canada is on the right track with its effort to preserve and restore ecological integrity, and to ensure that future generations can also benefit from the beauty and richness of our national historic

sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas – goals that are consistent with traditional Aboriginal approaches to the land and the importance of protecting it for the future.

Discussion as well as recommendations revolved around the importance of engaging Canadians as the most effective means of protecting Canada's special places and building a culture of conservation. Whether it is youth – the next generation of stewards – or new Canadians living in urban settings, participants urged Parks Canada at every opportunity to pursue all efforts to reach these and other key audiences.

And finally, another current of discussion and recommendations directed attention at building research capacity and mechanisms to capture research with partners. Whether it is in conducting market research, understanding visitor needs and expectations, science or traditional ecological knowledge, participants urged Parks Canada to strengthen its capacity and understanding in order to be successful in carrying out its mandate.

## **Facilitating More Memorable Visitor Experiences**

Participants to the 2005 Minister's Round Table discussed how Parks Canada can facilitate more experiences that will be memorable for visitors in national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. In order for Parks Canada to truly fulfill its mandate to protect and present Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment, it needs to

be relevant to Canadians. How better for Parks Canada to be relevant than to connect with visitors by facilitating memorable visitor experiences – ones that educate and inspire, as well as experiences that are emotive and spiritual.

Recognition was given to the issues presented by changing demographics, including the urbanization of Canada as well as the diversity of these urban audiences. Reaching these audiences was deemed critical for Parks Canada to remain relevant in the future and continue to have the support of Canadians to protect and present Canada's natural and cultural heritage places.

Discussions led to a number of recommendations on how Parks Canada carries out operations in support of visitor experiences: issues concerning the Agency organizational structure, how funding is directed, and how links can be made to other Parks Canada facilities on a thematic or geographic basis. Participants were very supportive of the direction toward having people actively take part and share in the visitor experience. Discussion also confirmed that interaction with Parks Canada staff contributes greatly toward having a memorable visitor experience.

Recognition was also made that connecting to the spirituality of the land, people and places leads to a greater depth of understanding and profoundness. By meeting and exceeding the expectations of visitors – and by taking an ordinary experience and making it extraordinary – participants believe Parks Canada will make the necessary connection between visitors and the natural and cultural treasures Canada has to offer.

# TOWARDS A CULTURE OF CONSERVATION

**R**ecommendations to make progress toward building a culture of conservation were made under three sub-themes: Educating and Engaging Canadians; Leadership and Management; and, Partnerships with Indigenous Peoples.

## *Sub-theme I – Educating and Engaging Canadians*

### **Recommendation 1 – Education and Outreach:**

Develop education programs on conservation that accommodate different interests and learning styles.

**Youth** – Invest in curriculum development that conveys the need to strengthen caring for the environment, create new or expanded education tools, including Web-based lesson plans for teachers and youth conservation programs;

**Local Community** – Develop outreach programs to educate and engage local community (in Parks Canada sites) as ambassadors and partners, and expand the distribution of the Parks Canada conservation message through virtual tours of parks and sites and the engagement of volunteers at national historic sites not administered by Parks Canada.

### **Response:**

Parks Canada’s goal is to foster the next generation of heritage stewards by offering them rich learning experiences in Canada’s natural and cultural heritage. Through the Parks Canada in Schools program, the Agency will continue to develop, in partnership with educators across the country, educational material that addresses provincial and territorial curricula. These learning materials will be added to the Parks Canada Web site and can be used by youth conservation organisations. Parks Canada will involve local communities and work with them to develop initiatives that promote a culture of conservation among residents, volunteers, visitors and other partners. Virtual tours that are already available on the Parks Canada Web site will be enhanced and their number increased. Parks Canada will also continue to work closely with provincial associations of national historic sites operators to share conservation values and best practices with their volunteers. (Also see recommendations 13 and 15 for related content.)

## Recommendation 2 – Communicating:

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Communicate “the culture of conservation” (cultural and natural) with passion and urgency that engages Canadians:

- Review the terminology to ensure it captures people’s interest;
- Give free access to various groups;
- Facilitate access to natural areas and historic sites in cities;
- Develop an orientation strategy for “new Canadians” through:
  - the citizenship process,
  - marketing of the Canadian nature brand,
  - spiritual groups.

### Response:

Parks Canada will work with partners and other jurisdictions to help define and promote a “culture of conservation” to engage more Canadians in shared stewardship. Parks Canada will consider how it uses terminology in educating Canadians on matters of ecological and commemorative integrity as it works to build the awareness and understanding that are essential to achieve a conservation culture. The Agency will consider targeted incentives to ensure access for key audiences and will also use its locations within major urban areas as gateways to the larger system of protected heritage areas across the country. In addition, the Agency will continue to explore opportunities to develop urban discovery centres, thus enabling Canadians to connect with each

other and with their heritage. A partnership strategy will also be pursued to find new ways to make Canada’s natural and cultural heritage meaningful and relevant to new Canadians. In particular, Parks Canada will endeavour to develop, in collaboration with other federal partners, learning material on national parks and national historic sites of Canada for new Canadians.

## Sub-theme II – Leadership and Management

## Recommendation 3 – Research:

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Set up a historical and ecological/conservation heritage observatory to:

- conduct socio-economic market research;
- develop a 30-year perspective;
- assess the fulfillment of national and international agreements;
- inform the development of policies and programs to ensure the achievement of Parks Canada’s vision, as well as national and international agreements.

### Response:

Parks Canada will consider this innovative idea in relation to its current work with other federal departments and agencies, non-governmental organizations and universities. An observatory function will be considered as a means of strengthening the Agency’s socio-economic research efforts. Parks Canada will enhance its social science capacity with the addition of a lead social scientist to help facilitate

innovative ways of partnering with the academic and social science sector. Partners will be consulted to discuss the mandate and potential governance arrangements to support an observatory of this nature. Parks Canada will also enhance cooperation with the existing Canadian Cultural Observatory at the Department of Canadian Heritage ([www.culturescope.ca](http://www.culturescope.ca)).

With respect to the fulfillment of national and international agreements, Parks Canada is working with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Canadian Parks Council to implement a national framework for action on protected areas that will help fulfill and report on Canada's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity's program of work on protected areas. As state member under the World Heritage Convention, Parks Canada provides periodic and reactive monitoring reports to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre that demonstrate how the requirements of the World Heritage convention are met in the management of Canadian world heritage sites.

## Recommendation 4 – Best Practices

Identify flagship parks as demonstrations of best practices in conservation and education, and cultivate national park model communities where stewardship, sustainability and best practices are encouraged and rewarded.

### Response:

Parks Canada is currently taking actions to address this recommendation. Five national parks (Gros Morne, Fundy, Saint Lawrence

Islands, Prince Albert and Jasper) actively participate in the Model Forest program, which provides a venue for discussions with adjacent landowners on how to manage land for both sustainability and ecological integrity. The Agency is investing in 11 national parks to promote best practices both within and outside the park and to demonstrate measurable progress on issues related to:

- Better park management
- Partnerships
- Ecosystem restoration
- Informing, influencing and involving Canadians

Six of Canada's 13 biosphere reserves also are centered on national parks, creating a wonderful forum to put into practice principles of sustainable development. The biosphere reserves help to address resource conservation issues in a cooperative way by involving government agencies, Aboriginal peoples, other landowners and different community groups.

Parks Canada is committed to the objective of national park model communities of environmental stewardship. The principle of No Net Negative Environmental Impact (3NEI) is applied to all national park communities to ensure they do not negatively affect the ecological health of adjacent park lands. A 3NEI performance framework that includes monitoring and action plans to mitigate the ecological impact of each national park community will be in place by 2006.

## **Recommendation 5 – Private Funding:**

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Establish a “Heritage Conservancy of Canada” organization (NGO) as a vehicle to ensure long-term financial support for heritage conservation (modeled on Nature Conservancy of Canada).

### **Response:**

Parks Canada is willing to pursue the concept of a Heritage Conservancy within the framework of the Historic Places Initiative. Such a national non-governmental organization could help contribute to the goal of strengthening a culture of heritage conservation in Canada, by helping to build public profile, and by encouraging corporate and individual investment and philanthropy in support of historic places. The concept of a national trust for Canada, similar to those in other countries, was one of the earliest elements of the Historic Places Initiative, and has been discussed in particular with the Heritage Canada Foundation and provincial and territorial governments.

## **Recommendation 6 – Advisory Council:**

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Create a knowledge advisory council comprising universities/colleges, NGOs and First Nations researchers to:

- Advance research in and about parks
- Encourage mutual understanding of park and research cultures, and
- Use the research community as a lever for advancing Parks Canada’s mandate.

### **Response:**

Parks Canada will explore options to meet the goal of having a knowledge advisory council.

## ***Sub-theme III – Partnerships with Indigenous Peoples***

## **Recommendation 7 – Holistic and Traditional Approach**

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Create meaningful partnerships with indigenous people to promote the relevance of parks using a holistic view and including traditional knowledge

### **Response:**

Parks Canada has committed to build on the rich tradition of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples as currently demonstrated by major ecological integrity projects in the Yukon and Nunavut that incorporate traditional knowledge in the park management process.

Parks Canada will act on this recommendation through the pursuit of several initiatives, including support of the development and communication of best practices associated with the policy entitled: “Use of National Parks by Aboriginal People for Traditional Spiritual and Ceremonial Purposes”; the respectful inclusion of traditional knowledge and holistic approaches in the management of national parks.

## **Recommendation 8 – Traditional Language and Knowledge**

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Use traditional language and knowledge in:

- a. place names,
- b. signage,
- c. interpretation,
- d. programming,
- e. management plans.

**Response:**

Parks Canada will develop an Agency-wide strategy for the use of traditional language and knowledge in the abovementioned areas.

## **Recommendation 9 – Indigenous Leadership**

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Provide support for indigenous people to take a leadership role (e.g. Victoria Island, Culture/Science camps, elder and youth camps).

**Response:**

Parks Canada will work with federal and Aboriginal partners to support indigenous peoples to take a leadership role. Furthermore, the Agency will continue to support the Aboriginal leadership and development program for Parks Canada's Aboriginal employees.





# FACILITATING MORE MEMORABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCES

To facilitate more experiences that will be memorable for visitors in national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas, six recommendations were made.

## Recommendation 10 – Funding:

Sufficient funding should be obtained and directed on a priority basis to restore infrastructure and visitor facilities to acceptable standards, and to implement an on-going preventative maintenance program.

Additional funding for content development and program delivery is also required.

### Response:

Parks Canada’s asset recapitalization shortfall was \$100 million annually. Budget Plan 2005 provided Parks Canada with additional funding amounting to \$209 million over the next five years and \$75 million annually thereafter. The recently approved multi-year user fee proposal will increase annual revenues growth by an estimated \$25 million the fourth year of

implementation. The combination of the two funding sources will address existing shortfalls on an on-going basis.

A portion of the funds will be used to implement an on-going preventative maintenance program. In addition, Parks Canada will undertake development of improved content and enhance program delivery capacity in consideration of needs and expectations.

## Recommendation 11 – Research:

To address changing demographics, Canadian diversity, and evolving tourism trends, invest in visitor related and socio-economic research to better understand the needs, expectations and behaviours of current and potential visitors.

Parks Canada should use the research to identify key markets and effectively target visitor opportunities

**Response:**

Parks Canada fully recognizes the role of research and science in the decision making process. The Agency will strengthen its visitor research and social science capacity by adding a Chief Social Scientist position and improving research coordination and dissemination. In collaboration with its partners, Parks Canada will continue to undertake research to better understand the needs, expectations and behaviours of current and potential visitors. This effort will include partnerships to improve the quality and availability of tourism, recreation and related information.

Parks Canada will carefully analyze visitor, public opinion, census and other data collected through its social science activities to describe and identify overall Canadian citizen and visitor segments. Parks Canada will improve the availability of research results to assist decision-making on strategic investments.

### **Recommendation 12 – Organizational Structure:**

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Create an effective organizational structure, adequately resourced, to lead the development and implementation of an improved visitor experience

**Response:**

The Agency has recognized the need for organizational support to achieve enhanced visitor experiences. Staff have been assigned to serve on the Visitor Experience Council, which provides advice directly to the Parks Canada Executive Board on enhancing visitor experiences. In addition, a team has been assembled to support the

Council and begin work on several initiatives. Key in these initiatives will be the establishment of a permanent dedicated organization to provide the cross functional coordination, a policy framework, supporting tools and staff training that are necessary to meet this challenge

### **Recommendation 13 – Continuum of Experiences:**

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Foster the development of a continuum of experiences that cross-promote and link sites (thematically, geographically), encouraging visitors to explore multiple destinations and enjoy a variety of activities

**Response:**

Parks Canada will investigate opportunities to more actively anticipate and respond to visitor expectations and cross-promote related activities and experiences through the development of a national marketing strategy and a national brand. In order to ensure the availability of a broader range of programs and activities, the Agency will invest in research, product development, staff training and capacity building, both internal to the Agency and with partners. Parks Canada will enhance the pre-trip planning tools, on-site orientation and departure information offered to facilitate cross-promotion. *(Also see recommendations 1 and 15 for related content.)*

### **Recommendation 14 – Spirituality**

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Parks Canada should embrace and present the spirituality of our land, people and places to allow visitors to move from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Programs and activities should respect the authenticity and integrity of the people and places being presented.

Inspiring the imagination, Parks Canada should facilitate experiential activities that encourage respectful engagement with aboriginal culture, cultural heritage and natural heritage.

**Response:**

Parks Canada will work to ensure that visitors have memorable experiences through programs and activities based on a sound understanding of the authenticity and integrity of the Agency’s natural and cultural places, and of the needs and expectations of visitors.

The focus of programs and activities will be on connecting visitors with the spirituality of Canada’s land and peoples. Programs and activities will endeavour to engage people’s hearts and minds to move them out of the ordinary and help create powerful memories.

Parks Canada will work with its partners and staff to ensure that programs and activities respect the distinct cultural and natural heritage being presented. Furthermore, to recognize the unique relationship of Aboriginal peoples with Canada’s history, land and people, Parks Canada will explore additional opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to tell their own stories and provide an enhanced opportunity for memorable visitor experiences.

## Recommendation 15 – Enriching the Visitor Experience

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Facilitate participatory experiences and activities that appeal to a wider range of visitors. Parks Canada should:

- provide an environment for visitors to create their own experience;
- enhance interpretive services through partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, other groups and communities;
- be built on a broader range of amenities and services to create a more complete, high quality experience; and
- make parks, sites and marine conservation areas *places to “do” as well as to see.*

**Response:**

Parks Canada will work closely with key partners to facilitate memorable experiences that will appeal to a wider range of visitors to our parks, sites and marine conservation areas. Based on an enhanced research program providing improved understanding of visitor needs and expectations, the Agency will seek to optimize the choice of amenities and services available. Parks Canada will ensure visitor requirements, needs and expectations are a priority consideration in the development of all asset renewal programs.

Increased opportunities for memorable visitor experiences will be provided through revitalized and innovative programs developed in cooperation with Aboriginal peoples, local communities and other partners. The Agency will strive to provide a continually evolving participatory environment for visitors to create their own personalized experiences through improved pre-trip planning resources, integrated visitor focused on-site services, and enhanced post-trip support. *(Also see recommendations 1 and 13 for related content.)*

# NEXT STEPS – HOW WILL PARKS CANADA MAKE USE OF ADVICE RECEIVED AT THE MINISTER’S ROUND TABLE?

**T**he Minister’s Round Table on Parks Canada, together with consultations carried out by Parks Canada field units with local residents on issues relating to national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas constitute the key mechanisms by which the public can hold Parks Canada accountable for its actions. The recommendations made at the 2005 Round Table, as well as the response of the Minister, will influence the direction of the Agency through the Parks Canada Corporate Plan and activities at the field unit level. Progress on responding to the recommendations will be provided at the next Minister’s Round Table on Parks Canada.

