



Time for Nature



Research without a trace

Scientists learn to protect the environment at Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site of Canada

Every year, researchers conduct hundreds of studies in national parks. They study natural resources such as species at risk, analyze the quality of lakes and rivers and monitor processes such as climate change. These studies provide vital information for Parks Canada to manage our national parks.



The diverse environment of Kejimikujik provides an outdoor laboratory for researchers. © Parks Canada, J. Steeves, 1981.

Most scientists are very aware of the need to protect park ecosystems. But researchers, like any park visitor, can inadvertently trample vegetation, disturb wildlife or even drop litter.

At Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site of Canada, Parks Canada is training scientists to consider the impacts they can cause and prevent environmental damage.

Unintended consequences

To collect the data they need, researchers may have to handle wildlife species, mark study plots, collect samples and survey visitors. These necessary techniques can lead to problems.

For example, in some habitats, “social trails” form quickly as a result of people straying from established trails to access areas of interest. Often the first person to travel off trail leaves a slightly observable path. Subsequent visitors may notice the path and follow it. Impacts quickly accumulate and an unwanted trail can result.



Setting the standard for researchers

Every researcher at Kejimikujik must have a research permit and a safety plan. When the research techniques are invasive, or when scientists are studying a species at risk, Kejimikujik requires an environmental assessment screening

Parks Canada encourages researchers to keep to established trails as much as possible. © Parks Canada, A. Holbrook, 1979.



Parks Canada also asks researchers to consider how to make their research less disruptive. Could they take fewer vegetation samples? Could they avoid certain sensitive sites or make fewer visits to the park? Are less intrusive experimental techniques available?

Scheduling is important as well. Parks Canada asks scientists to schedule their data collection to avoid periods such as nesting when wildlife are particularly vulnerable.

Research and outdoor ethics

Now each researcher must also attend a course that incorporates the Leave No Trace philosophy. Leave No Trace is an international instructional program for visitors travelling and camping on public lands. Its Principles of Outdoor Ethics encourage us to dispose of waste properly, to leave behind what we find and to respect both wildlife and other visitors.



Researchers must take special care when studying species at risk such as the Blanding's turtle. © Parks Canada, P. Hope, 1994.

Pack it in; pack it out

Researchers, like all visitors, must dispose of waste properly and make sure not to leave anything behind that doesn't belong. Conversely they must leave behind the rocks, shells, plants, antlers, feathers, bones, fossils and other objects that are part of the park environment. Photos and memories make the best souvenirs.

Researchers as goodwill ambassadors

Researchers are encouraged to leave a good impression on park visitors by respecting their needs as well - avoiding data collection in times of peak visitor use, for example. They can also help visitors understand their research project and its experimental techniques. When scientists engage visitors and capture their interest, they help develop stewards who will in turn protect the park environment.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/kejimkujik