

# Best Practices in Natural Heritage Collaborations: Parks and Outdoor Tourism Operators



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# **Best Practices in Natural Heritage Collaborations: Parks and Outdoor Tourism Operators**

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## Executive Summary

Parks and protected areas (PAs) are usually scenically attractive, form significant lures, have significant biodiversity and other values, and are important destinations in Canada for outdoor tourism operators. However, there are considerable challenges for Parks managers to fulfill many objectives, and to satisfy a range of users. These challenges have deepened with the recent decision that maintaining ecological integrity (EI) is the prime mandate for National Parks (NP).

Guided by the advice of their industry-led, Outdoor Tourism Product Development Subcommittee, the Canadian Tourism Committee commissioned Pam Wight & Associates to examine the best practices of both Parks Agencies and outdoor tourism operators. The study was wide ranging, and examined specific practices of both Parks Agencies and operators in all provincial, territorial and federal parks across Canada. The main goal was to demonstrate that while there are many challenging and varied issues in parks and protected areas, there is also a considerably body of good practice and constructive collaborative relationships. These good practices are intended to act as examples for discussion, as incentives for moving forward to which all parties may aspire, and as building blocks for key players to improve mutual relationships and collaborations, based on practical examples.

In Canada, the outdoor tourism industry is characterized by tourism businesses that offer ecotourism and/or adventure travel products and services. Ecotourism is defined as travel that creates a high level of understanding and interpretation of cultural and natural history, while safeguarding the integrity of ecosystems. It produces economic benefits to local communities that encourage resource preservation and sustainable tourism development practices. Adventure travel, by definition, is an outdoor leisure activity that generally takes place in an unusual, exotic, remote or wilderness setting usually involving some form of unconventional means of transportation, and tending to be associated with low or high levels of physical activity. The activity may entail some element of risk.

The Canadian Tourism Commission has identified 27 different outdoor tourism products offered in Canada. These are identified in Appendix A.

The following pages summarize only key Best Practices and Suggestions for improvement associated with each challenge. Details on challenges, as well as on Agency and Operator perspectives, are presented in the full report. The findings are numbered and organized by key topics and sub-topics, which correspond to chapters in the main report. The following marks indicate: ❖ - a challenge; ✓ - a good practice; ↻ - a suggestion for the future; ✕ - no practices/suggestions available.

A summary of the findings overall reveals that:

- **Planning and Policy Making** are key areas of challenges
- **Managing for Ecological Integrity**, and the **Future**, are key areas of uncertainty for all parties
- **Management and Administration** of protected areas, and **Marketing**, and **Monitoring**, require work on consistency of approach
- **Relationships and Trust, Communications, and Collaboration**, are areas requiring considerable attention, but are also areas offering the greatest opportunity (from both Agency and Operator perspectives) in resolving a very large range of issues
- **Operator Stewardship** and **Current Collaborations** are areas of strength, which should be expanded and built on

Clearly, collaboration in all these areas is key to building successful relationships and constructive solutions, and to achieving multiple objectives for Canada's special places.

## 1. PLANNING

<b>Long Term Planning</b>	❖ <i>Operators need to know long term directions and intentions of Parks agencies</i>
<b>Consistency Desired</b>	
⇒ Rewrite the park agreement, with guide/outfitters, based on visitor response of the summer wilderness survey.	
<b>Industry Level Cooperation Required for Input to Park Planning – Challenge</b>	❖ <i>As individuals, operators often find it difficult to deal with Parks agencies. Agencies also find it easier to deal with operators as a group</i>
<b>Operators and Agencies Support Industry Associations Collaborating with Park Agencies</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Industry associations work in the Yukon, BC, and elsewhere, to dialogue with Parks agencies, resolve issues, disseminate information, develop regulations, and assist with reporting and enforcement. A number of operators express willingness to belong to industry associations if this helps create a communications channel with Parks Canada</li> <li>✓ In BC, Parks Canada financially supports annual operators meetings, which open up all-party communications</li> <li>✓ Mountain Parks operators are working together to set standards and accreditation programs to improve the quality of interpretation. Parks Canada works with this group as a full partner</li> <li>✓ A Manitoba National Park established working groups related to Backcountry, Front Country and Recreation, which hold regular meetings, with input on management and issues</li> <li>⇒ Develop more operator opportunities to interact with Agencies through associations, working groups and planning forums, to help operators buy in to management objectives, and assist in creative issues resolution</li> <li>⇒ Develop a training/orientation manual and web site for use by operators and park staff, to understand each others' roles, responsibilities and expectations</li> <li>⇒ Commit time and resources (travel costs, meeting costs) to operators for meetings</li> <li>⇒ Ensure industry associations genuinely represent all industry, and don't simply purport to represent industry</li> </ul>	
<b>Need to Ensure Industry Associations Genuinely Represent all Industry</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Role of Parks</b>	❖ <i>Role of park agencies is unclear and inconsistent in terms of interaction with operator activities</i>
<b>Clear Distinction Needed for Agencies' and Operators' in Park Service Delivery Roles</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Parks agencies should not take over private sector roles, such as packaging. However, working/partnering with operators is appropriate</li> <li>⇒ Parks agencies should work to enlarge the constituency of public support, through collaboration with operators</li> </ul>	
<b>Role of Outdoor Tourism Operators</b>	❖ <i>Agencies views of Outdoor Tourism Operators vary considerably, from negative to fairly balanced</i>
<b>Mixed Agency Views on Operators' Environmental Impact or Sensitivity</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Many BC whale watching operators are developing and following a code of conduct</li> <li>✓ Most Waterton operators support green initiatives in the community such as recycling, or donate a percentage of sales to environmental projects in and outside the park</li> </ul>	
<b>Operators Viewed as a Threat to Park Jobs by Some Parks Staff</b>	
<b>X</b>	

### **Operators View themselves as Potential Parks Allies**

- ✓ **Operators Act as Park Communicators:** e.g., Mountain Park operators now communicate Park issues to Park visitors and brief guests on the sensitivity and real/potential visitor impact on the area, so front line parks staff is very supportive. Operators feel they are the eyes, ears and mouth of agencies regarding protection of the area
- ✓ **Operators Involve Clients in Parks Support:** e.g., in Ontario, by encouraging clients to write to Ministers about PA funding or staffing
- ✓ **Agencies and Operators Provide Mutual Support:** e.g., a NFLD operator is involved with a pro-parks lobby trying to obtain a buffer zone of wilderness corridors and buffers outside the Park.
- ⇨ Operators must become stakeholders of the park preservation mandate
- ⇨ Parks Canada should engage others, including operators, to generate interest in EI. They should bring this 'engagement of others' into their regulations
- ⇨ Agencies should change the paradigm from "us and them" to "we are partners in managing this resource and its visitors"
- ⇨ Parks management should recognize tour operators benefits - to the park, visitors, and local residents
- ⇨ A Northern operator suggests operator roles should include:
  - Providing an enriching experience for the Park visitor
  - Delivering Park messaging to all visitors
  - Providing eyes in the field to assist Parks management
  - Fulfilling roles that Parks can no longer afford to deliver (interpretation, Park presence)
  - Ensuring safety for park visitors
  - Ensuring visitors observe Park regulations

## 2. POLICY MAKING

<b>Attitude Towards Commercial Operators vs. FITs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <i>Commercial operators are treated is very differently from Fully Independent Travelers (FITs), especially re: rules such as group size.</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Agencies should not target commercial operators for more stringent regulations than FIT visitors.</li> <li>⇒ A balance is required in rules/ regulations/ restrictions applied to guided versus independent visitors</li> </ul>	
<b>Desire for Equitable and Timely Licensing &amp; Permitting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <i>Obtaining access to parks is a concern for many commercial Outdoor Tourism Operators – guidelines and requirements vary, and change.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Ease of Licensing Varies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ In New Brunswick, operators find it easy to obtain a business license, the process is clearly understood and easy and there is good overall cooperation – largely based on the good relations between Agency and operators</li> <li>✓ In BC, Pacific Rim National Park supports developing a code of conduct, best practices, minimal impact behavior, and public safety hazard awareness</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Varying Licensing Process may have Adverse Effects on the Resource and on Business</b></p> <p>X</p>	
<p><b>Limited Licenses Raises Potential for Commodification: those “First Through the Door” Benefit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ West Coast operators developed a Code of Conduct for sensitive sites <i>before</i> their protected area was created, demonstrating their stewardship without imposed limits</li> <li>✓ A West Coast Park conducts FAM tours on Park boats, so there is an objective overview by tourism industry reps. – no one particular company benefits</li> <li>⇒ An AB Park suggests a process for fairly distributing a limited number of operator opportunities (e.g., tender process, proposal calls)</li> <li>⇒ A BC operator suggests a transparent licensing process with some criteria the same for all parks.</li> <li>⇒ Waterton Lakes NP suggests the business license process should be used to regulate the activities of bus tour companies and outside groups who continually try to offer guided walks and hikes in the backcountry of the park. They suggest a more consistent approach to business and guide licensing across Mountain Parks and beyond</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Visitor Quotas Raises Potential for Commodification</b></p> <p>X</p>	
<p><b>New Technical Standards Being Applied in Some Parks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Waterton operators have supported better guide training, and Parks testing guides for quality assurance</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Timeliness of Parks Approvals and Activities</b></p> <p>X</p>	
<p><b>Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal Equity Issues</b></p> <p>X</p>	
<b>Standardized, Clear Regulatory Processes Desired</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <i>Businesses operating in a variety of parks observe inconsistencies in regulatory process. They seek consistency e.g., in application and renewal forms, timelines, and information or base standards required</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Clarity of Requirements Desired</b></p> <p>X</p>	
<p><b>Standardization of Requirements Desired</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Kananaskis Country has both general and special permit conditions, all explicitly stated.</li> <li>✓ BC Parks has a standardized process: a proposal opportunity is advertised annually, application forms are completed, staff adjudicate using criteria: (a) compatibility with Park Management Plan; (b) ‘soundness’ of proposal from a business/practical viewpoint; (c) number of similar opportunities being provided already in the same Park. The agency roles are clear: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Clearly state and clarify their expectations</li> <li>➢ Provide resource information (maps, hazards, history etc.)</li> <li>➢ Promptly respond to inquiries</li> <li>➢ Assist with annual operating plan proposals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Advise about and allow advertising/marketing opportunities</li> <li>➤ Provide assistance dealing with other government agencies (e.g., health permits)</li> <li>➤ Put operators in touch with other potential operators (for complementary offerings), marketers etc.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇨ A BC operator suggests a standard application system so operators don't have to fill out a multitude of forms for various provincial parks</li> <li>⇨ The Yukon Government offered to work with YK NPs to prepare a sample business plan, which could be used as a template by potential new operators</li> <li>⇨ A Quebec Park suggests developing generic accreditation for operators who want to offer tours in provincial or national parks</li> </ul>	
<b>Environmental Assessment Policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊕ <i>Operators want the Environmental Assessment (EA) process to be shorter and clearer: what it is and what is required.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Need for a Written EA Policy</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ YK Park management devotes considerable time to guide outfitters and new operators (e.g., help through the 2-year environmental assessment process and community consultation)</li> <li>⇨ A Prairie operator advocates environmental screening, where all operators are brought together by Parks, to educate them about general EIA/screening requirements. They suggest working operators through 2-3 hypothetical EA cases over the course of a day's workshop, for different types of operations</li> <li>⇨ A BC operator suggests a complete environmental assessment of new tour concepts</li> </ul>	
<b>Expeditious EA Processing by all Levels of Parks Staff Desired</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>2.5 Collaborating on Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊕ <i>Involve operators meaningfully in policy development</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Mountain Parks worked with operators to develop a heritage tourism strategy</li> <li>✓ YK Parks has asked for operator help in developing resource protection guidelines and/or licensing allocation procedures, and has committed to consult with operators to develop trip and permit scheduling and allocation guidelines for trail corridors in their park as they move to limits</li> <li>✓ MB Parks cooperated with operators on an Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Policy Framework</li> <li>✓ YK and other operators participate in Parks Management Plan reviews</li> <li>✓ Waterton Lakes NP provides training and resource materials for operators and helped create a system for training and certifying guides. They review promotional materials and suggest park messaging opportunities</li> <li>⇨ A BC operator suggests financial support for a Working Advisory Board of operators, scientists, Parks, and native leaders, to work out issues</li> <li>⇨ A Mountain Park suggests creation of an Appropriate Activities Framework for the park</li> <li>⇨ Quebec operators suggest allowing ecotourism rather than adventure products in parks</li> <li>⇨ A NFLD operator suggests closer work with parks program planning so both parties can benefit</li> <li>⇨ Parks suggest short training sessions for guides, and joint training in interpretation and communication for operator accreditation</li> <li>⇨ An Eastern operator suggests Agencies should require that all tourists who want to go into designated areas of the backcountry, must use an operator</li> <li>⇨ A West Coast Co-management Park suggests adding: 1) a representative for independent visitors, and 2) a representative for the ecosystem to balance the operator perspective in collaborations</li> </ul>	



### 3. RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

<b>Building Trust is Required</b>	❖ <i>There is a mutual lack of trust. Park agencies often have little faith companies are operating in an environmentally sensitive manner. Operators feel they are compliant with Parks standards, yet are not trusted. This inhibits relationship building, packaging opportunities, and policy collaboration.</i>
<b>Mutual Lack of Trust Needs to be Overcome</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Good Relationships and Trust do Exist</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ MB Parks maintains a relationship with operators and regional park managers, to work out operational issues (e.g. facility or land requirements, wildlife/fisheries concerns, enforcement and safety issues)</li> <li>✓ A Mountain operator says collaborative relationships often happen where bureaucracy is limited, or the leadership is more personal and hands on</li> <li>✓ An ON operator experiences informal collaboration with senior management – for day-to-day problem solving, product and service improvement, etc.</li> <li>✓ One operator says BC Parks “seem to have determined that we provide a quality product to park visitors and trust us to act responsibly without any regular monitoring or interference from them. This allows us to focus on the guest experience rather than administration to satisfy the Park”</li> <li>✓ An Outfitters Association has developed a relationship of trust and open communications with Nahanni National Park, communicates by phone and email throughout the season, and meets yearly with them</li> <li>✓ Various West Coast parks say: good practice operators visibly show respect for the park and park staff, and willingness to adhere to guidelines and codes of conduct. They are also willing to talk directly to Parks for issue clarification rather than feeding rumors. They understand administrative requirements and provide the necessary information in a timely manner. They work with parks when they get media requests</li> </ul> <p>⇒ A NB operator suggests bringing Park managers on an adventure outing to improve understanding</p>	
<b>Agencies: Regulatory, or Client-Service Oriented?</b>	❖ <i>Agency adoption of a more client-service orientation, and a less regulatory approach; operator adoption of a more realistic view of agency roles.</i>
<b>Whose Park is it? Agencies or Others?</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Collaboration vs. Policing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A Mountain Park says when they try a collaborative approach regulating outdoor tourism experiences, operators seem willing to impose restrictions on themselves; they mostly expect Parks Canada to regulate them and to restrict numbers and types of experiences in the park</li> <li>✓ A BC operator says they are always willing to share information, and costs (flights in and out). They make positive comments about Parks staffs where due, and are willing to take criticism from with regard to their operations</li> </ul> <p>⇒ <b>Open, Inclusive Approach:</b> A Mountain parks operator suggests the rule-based, regulatory, enforcing model does not do the best job of supporting the Parks mandate, and staff should change their “enforcer” mindset for “build collaboration to support the Parks mandate”. They suggest an open, cooperative and inclusive approach could harness the incredible energy/ingenuity of entrepreneurs to support the Parks mandate</p> <p>⇒ <b>Training:</b> One operator suggests training for Park wardens, who are wonderful individuals, just not comfortable working with outsiders (clients) e.g., they are not client-service oriented</p> <p>⇒ <b>Longer Contracts:</b> A Quebec operator suggests longer contract periods, operators maintaining park equipment, more mutual give and take, and clarification of operational roles for government and private sector</p>	

<b>An Environment of Security is Desired by Operators</b>	✚ <i>Provision of long term security for operators, throughout Parks adjustment to changing conditions</i>
<b>Rules Change Frequently</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Lack of Long Term Security Gives Operators Business Problems</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The Backcountry Manager in Gwaii Haanas has been the same person for over 8 years. Operators say this continuity of Management has been a highlight</li> <li>⇒ A Northern Park suggests moving to concessions in areas where use is limited would provide an operator more certainty (e.g., permits for 3 to 5 years). They acknowledge this might add more ‘red tape’ to licensing, and make it more difficult to “get in the door” once concessions have been let.</li> </ul>	
<b>Knowledge of Business Environment Needed</b>	✚ <i>Agencies need to acquire real knowledge of business, and the impact of agency decisions upon operators’ businesses.</i>
<b>Concern about Unilateral Action and Lack of Consultation</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Business Requirements of Small and Medium-Size Operators (SMEs) Not Understood</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ A Mountain operator suggests educating Parks about difficulties of small business. They also suggest more operator efforts to include parks staff in their product to demonstrate they <i>are</i> supporting the Parks mandate</li> <li>⇒ A NFLD operator suggests agencies consult with operators about reducing hours of operation to understand impacts on businesses.</li> <li>⇒ An East Coast operator suggests Parks learns more about the needs of a small ecotourism business, and how they need a reasonable minimum number of visitors to survive as a business</li> </ul>	
<b>Sharing Information is a Win-Win for Everyone</b>	✚ <i>Overcoming mutual reluctance to share information.</i>
<b>Agencies Need Resource Information from Operators for Management Purposes</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Operators Need Resource Information from Parks Agencies, for Providing Messaging to Clients</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Waterton Lakes NP provides training and resource materials to operators’ staff</li> <li>✓ Kluane NP explains the results of their research findings to operators</li> <li>✓ WBNP/ Nahanni NPs provide current information on issues and park operation, human and cultural history to guides</li> <li>✓ A Mountain Park operator says they are used by Parks to get messages out to the public as well as to advise the agency of wildlife sightings, trail conditions, etc. Parks, in turn, provide resources, communication and workshops about current Parks issues, and front line staff are always open to questions and requests</li> <li>⇒ MB Parks suggests communication about ongoing and planned activities, and greater understanding and appreciation of each other’s primary objectives</li> <li>⇒ A Mountain operator suggests sending operators information since operators act as the conduit for Parks messages: emails or newsletters on the results of research, e.g., the number of highway kills; the pros and cons of development; the effects of controlled burns. These can all be used to keep their public messaging current</li> </ul>	

## 4. COMMUNICATIONS

<b>Dialogue Between Parks and Industry</b>	❖ <i>All parties need a voice, especially between operators and senior Parks management.</i>
<b>Opportunities for Communication are Sometimes Limited</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Discussions:</b> A YK Park provides a general information package to those interested in guiding in the parks and the manager is always prepared to sit down and discuss/review business plan proposals</li> <li>✓ <b>Informing (two-way):</b> A Quebec Park provides client feedback/comments to the park manager</li> <li>✓ <b>Openness &amp; Compromise:</b> A BC operator has an open approach about their activities that helps the agency understand their intentions. They are oriented to compromise not confrontation</li> <li>✓ <b>Formal Communications and Training:</b> Northern Parks make every effort to continue to have ongoing formal meetings and discussions (e.g., re. licensing, permit/trip allocation, resource protection guidelines)</li> <li>✓ <b>Training:</b> NS Parks staff train guides and making sure staff are familiar with the park. A Northern Park lets operators know when training opportunities come up. A West Coast park provides opportunities for operator <b>training sessions</b> that they bring to the Islands</li> <li>✓ <b>Positive Attitude:</b> An AB operator says Parks has regular meetings during the off-season, and regular meetings on-site with operators during the season, so Parks takes the time to understand the business, looking at commercial operators as positive contributions to the park, and looking for opportunities to work together</li> <li>✓ <b>Meetings – Individual &amp; Group:</b> A Quebec Park holds meetings to establish what is going well or poorly</li> <li>✓ <b>Newsletters:</b> YK NPs publishes an electronic newsletter for guides, highlighting issues, initiatives, regulations, and Park Staff bios. This fosters good will and understanding</li> <li>✓ <b>Two-Way Communications:</b> YK NPs has meetings to explain the rationale/ process behind resource protection measures. Despite some "heated" discussions, meetings provide an open forum for learning each other's perspectives and working with operators towards solutions that address their needs too, and have resulted in change to administrative procedures to benefit both parties</li> <li>⇒ <b>Industry Representation:</b> A BC operator suggests local representatives on a co-Management Board, not simply Parks and Aboriginal representatives, especially when local communities are not entirely aboriginal.</li> <li>⇒ <b>Written or Electronic Information:</b> An ON operator suggests on-line ability to check permit availability for peak periods</li> </ul>	
<b>Standardization of Communications Process</b>	❖ <i>Current communication processes are time consuming and in some parks, operators get no reply at all. A standard process is needed</i>
<b>Improved Formal Agency-Operator Communication Process at all Levels</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ An AB operator suggests a formal process to address concerns, including sending concerns to Parks in writing, with a Parks report back describing <i>how</i> the concern was investigated, and <i>how</i> it was dealt with</li> </ul>	
<b>Communication with the General Public</b>	❖ <i>Informing the public about issues ( both agencies and operators)</i>
<b>The Operator's Job of Educating the Public</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Many operators include important park and management messages in the content of their tours (and promotional materials). They include: wildlife, safety, and ecosystem management messages. They have knowledgeable tour guides or contract with a private interpretive service to provide guide training. Some attempt to have a natural history/science resource person on trips to explain/identify natural features/resources</li> <li>✓ Some operators focus on discussing Park heritage resources, and communicating park values to visitors, and developing visitor experiences based on park objectives</li> </ul>	

### **The Park's Job of Educating the Public**

- ✓ A YK Park works closely with their local Chamber of Commerce.
- ✓ An ON Park has very informed rangers who provide excellent information to groups
- ✓ In BC, publications and information centers run and staffed by Parks are said by some operators to be the most beneficial contribution to company efforts to educate their clients

### **Collaborations Between Agencies and Operators to Educate the Public**

- ✓ *Operators Present Parks Programs:* Mountain Parks use operators to transmit their messages, providing them with resources and referrals, then operators put together programs and operate them
- ✓ *Operators Hire Parks Staff:* A PEI operator hires Parks staff, and finds their presentations get rave reviews, and Park staff is always outstanding. These initiatives are fostered by a good Parks manager who empowers her employees to try something new. Parks staff appreciate the operator who gives them schedules months in advance and are consistent in communications with Parks

## 5. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

<b>Interface with Parks Staff – Consistency Desired</b>	✚ <i>Consistency is required to overcome issues (e.g. senior staff turnover, policy swings, bureaucracy, and client service needs)</i>
<b>Staff Turnover</b> X	
<b>Inconsistent Policies Due to Superintendent Turnover</b> X	
<b>Lack of Communication with Parks Senior Staff</b> X	
<b>Conflicting Personalities</b> X	
<b>Bureaucratic System</b> ⇒ One operator suggests client services training for <i>all</i> parks services staff	
<b>Community Relationships</b>	✚ <i>Developing community relationships to stimulate awareness and benefit local people</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ WBNP NP is working to improve community relations (the local community is 70/80% aboriginal) developing an Aboriginal Tourism Strategy for the Park, and a two-way relationship <i>in the field</i> (whereas most communication has taken place in the Parks office and the Town)</li> <li>✓ A YK operator has developed a business relationship with local First Nations, taking some on river trips to promote guide training and/or cultural awareness</li> <li>✓ A NU operator stationed a guide in Iqaluit. This accelerated the relationship between the community and the guide. He could then better understand Nunavut and its unique environment (land claims, organizations, aboriginal population, etc.)</li> <li>✓ Some NU operators not only use the park, but communities, elders and the community centre. They discuss aboriginal practices in the community to heighten client understanding. Outfitters are now beginning to hire residents for guiding, and encourage clients to stay longer in the community which increases local benefits</li> </ul>	
<b>Parks Resource Constraints</b>	✚ <i>All parties agree that Parks agencies lack funding, staff, and other resources.</i>
<b>Lack of Parks Administrative Provision to Receive Financial Contributions</b> X	
<b>Parks Agencies are Given too Few Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ In PEI an operator approached Parks for interpretive staff in learning programs, offering a fee for service. The Agency was surprised (past groups had expected services for free). They offer this program during shoulder season, enabling seasonal staff to extend their employment with Parks Canada</li> <li>✓ Some operators help Parks politically in their battle against budget cuts</li> </ul> ⇒ An operator suggests higher Parks visitor fees, reinvesting monies into the park system, not general revenues	

## 6. MANAGING FOR ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

<b>Qualified Support for the Ecological Integrity Mandate</b>	✚ <i>There is support for EI by operators and agencies, qualified by a need to overcome the <b>uncertainty</b> about the future. Good communications are needed.</i>
<b>Operator Support to the EI Mandate Ranges from Cautious to Unqualified</b> X	
<b>Operators Also Have Fears About EI</b> X	
<b>Agency Reactions to the EI Mandate Vary from Optimism to Feeling Threatened</b> X	
<b>Shared Concerns about Lack of Understanding of the Concept of EI</b> ⇨ <i>Operators hope Parks are not only interested in their own mandate, but the needs of operators who want to support and cooperate with them. Operators would welcome any regulations and agency efforts to balance ecological and cultural issues in the parks with commercial ventures</i>	
<b>Potential for Changed Relationship Between Parks and Operators</b> X	
<b>Clarify the Practical Implications of Ecological Integrity</b>	✚ <i>Need to implement EI in a practical, feasible manner, and present all Parks users with a clear understanding of what EI means in the field, <b>how</b> things should be done, or done differently.</i>
<b>Clarify Application of EI</b> ⇨ An operator suggests the best way to address issues around EI is to hold working sessions between parks and industry stakeholders about how they can work together to support the parks mandate	
<b>Limiting “Numbers” is Only One Management Approach</b>	✚ <i>An easy management option is setting numbers, quotas, or limits. However, a range of other management options needs to be considered.</i>
<b>Numbers-Based Limits Dominate – But Activity Type and Behaviour also need Consideration</b> ⇨ An operator suggests that “acceptable use” encompasses more than the idea of numbers, but operators also need to accept the concept of limits and be willing to change their business accordingly	
<b>Clarify Appropriate Use</b> ⇨ An ON operator, suggests establishing best practice guidelines for Outdoor Tourism Operators relevant to specific activities and operations	
<b>High Volume Companies are a Challenge</b> ⇨ Operators suggests Banff NP needs to concentrate on what people come for: wilderness, wildlife, and <i>big</i> nature	
<b>The General Public and FITs are a Challenge</b> X	
<b>Facilitate Visitors’ Experiences Using Local Operators</b> ✓ In ON, Green Zones are Crown Lands where visitors are classified into two types – <i>Residents</i> (Canadians), and <i>non-residents</i> (foreigners). Non-residents may <i>not</i> camp unless they are a client of a licensed tour operator ⇨ An operator suggests a local company/guide should be involved in all Parks trips, to help local economies ⇨ An ON Park suggests Ottawa should develop partnerships with colleges and universities to assist in measuring backcountry impacts ⇨ A Prairie operator suggests a range of collaborative approaches to Parks management (not just quotas and limits and demarketing) including: education, selection of the right markets, appropriate monitoring, appropriate limits to use, appropriate regulations, appropriate product-season matching, appropriate positioning, and appropriate image development	



## 7. OPERATORS' VIEWS ABOUT THEIR STEWARDSHIP

<b>Company Goals to Support Sustainability</b>
✓ Have operational principles supporting sustainability: safety; environmental protection; indigenous culture protection; enjoyment; education; experiential; using regional produce/food; demonstrating sustainable practices
<b>Careful Design and Delivery of Tours, Packages, or Facilities</b>
<b>Low Impact Design</b>
✓ Design experiences based on ecosystems; qualified interpreters; integrated parks messages; and work to minimize any disturbance of the natural setting
<b>Presentation, Interpretation, and Guiding Relates to Sense of Place</b>
✓ Many operators provide interpretation, educational posters; libraries; balanced discussion about parks issues and challenges; recent park research; understanding the place and potential human impacts; focus on guests' power to change impacts through responsible use
<b>Use of Appropriate Expertise</b>
✓ Many operators have highly trained guides and other specialists or scientists, and often tap into park experts
<b>Customer Services and Relations</b>
<b>Prepare Guests Before and During the Trip</b>
✓ Many prepare clients with materials about the park before the trip, and besides guiding, have regular presentations. Others continue the education process through newsletters
<b>Customize Product to Meet Particular Market Needs</b>
✓ Some operators try to fill any language gaps in Park materials, by developing their own, in specific languages
<b>Training</b>
<b>Formal and Informal Training</b>
✓ Some operators train their guides based on the standards of interpretive associations
<b>Resource Protection and Sustainability</b>
<b>Sensitivity to the Environment</b>
✓ Exceptional operators follow ecotourism guidelines; use local suppliers; use local guides and support staff; educate clients about the park's mission and mandate; work with researchers or employees; avoid high-impact areas
<b>Conserve Materials</b>
✓ Operators consciously follow the 3Rs; e.g., conserving materials, avoiding disposables, using biodegradable soaps, packing out garbage, and requesting suppliers to attend to conservation practices and packaging
<b>Consider Transportation Systems</b>
✓ Some operators have upgraded transportation equipment, converting boats to less polluting 4-stroke engines, avoiding jet skis and using wind driven personal watercraft, using group transportation systems, or using llamas to reduce pack animal impacts
<b>Small Group Size</b>
✓ Most operators have small client groups, for example, 8 to 10 people, and small guest-to-guide ratios
<b>Minimize Impacts on Natural Environments: Codes and Standards of Behaviour</b>
✓ Good operators brief staff and guests on expected behaviour, including Leave No Trace principles, packing out their own and others' garbage, and minimizing wildlife and other group disturbance.
<b>Support Regional Conservation Efforts</b>
✓ A number of operators give a % of profits to wildlife research, environmental or other conservation causes
✓ Some make donations to activities in the Park, or maintain an eco-fund for environmental or cultural projects

<b>Contribute to the Local Community</b>
<b>Benefit Local Communities</b> ✓ Some operators involve local communities or Aboriginal peoples in their programs
<b>Purchase and Employ Locally</b> ✓ Many buy supplies, materials and services locally, and promote the local area to their guests. ✓ Some started offering add-ons to their regular program (e.g., local museum trips, Aboriginal experience, etc.)

## 8. COLLABORATION FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES

### Mutual Commendations for Environmental Activities

#### Overall Environmental Protection and Messaging

✓ Most Waterton operators incorporate park messages into their promotions and products

#### Parks Agencies Collaborate with Operators

✓ Parks Canada shares part of its office with the Mingan Island Research Centre in Quebec

✓ NS Parks produced a *Guide's Guide*, and courses for bus tour guides focussing on interpretation

⇨ BC Parks suggests operators should:

- Maintain and upgrade trails/facilities needed for their activities
- Market the “setting” as well as the “experience” to their clientele
- Educate customers about park values.
- Provide appropriate opportunities in accordance with guidelines
- Report any environmental concerns to park management

⇨ YK Parks suggest offering allocation incentives to Outdoor Tourism Operators who use *Leave No Trace* practices (e.g. allow access to otherwise unavailable areas, if they guide fewer clients, and employ LNT methods)

### Collaboration on Visitor Education Projects

#### Operators Employ Parks Staff

⇨ Eastern operators suggest more paid sharing of park interpreters on commercial programs (and proper marketing of this). Park staff can educate clients on park mission, heritage resources, and constraints

#### Parks Employs Operators

⇨ MB Parks suggests collaboration on the development of interpretive resources, with greater use of Parks interpretive staff

#### Appropriate Messaging

⇨ An NB operator suggests using wardens, interpreters, and researchers as part of innovative nature, culture and heritage learning experiences. Also the provision of edu-kits for private trips (such as are currently available to non-profit orgs. “Why not give non-profits the first choice, but let private groups use kits if they’re available?” Also, give greater general access to ‘behind the scenes’ activities of parks

#### Collaboration and Community Involvement

⇨ A NFLD operator suggests longer orientation for front line Parks staff at season start, to experience the Park (e.g., hike trails, take boat tours, see interpretation programs and walks). They think the private sector would be willing to partner on this. “Parks staff would be more aware of products, and visitors would be happier”

#### Clarify How Price Structure and Commissions Work in Tourism

⇨ A Prairie operator suggests joint discussion/education about pricing services in tourism, to enable all parties to talk about joint goals and their ability to work together

### Collaboration on Park Enhancement Projects

✓ **Maintenance:** many operators assist their parks in trail clearing, privy installation, and parks maintenance

✓ **Research:** a number of operators provide observations to Parks, or conduct research e.g., experimental plots to examine the impacts of hiking or helicopters on wildlife or other park resources

## 9. MARKETING

<b>Parks Role</b>	✚ <i>Resolving the current role of marketing within Parks, and the marketing relationship between commercial operators and agencies.</i>
<b>Marketing and the EI Mandate</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Some operators targets people who are already coming to the park, rather than attracting more visitors, and focus their marketing on nature and learning experiences</li> <li>⇒ Operators suggest Parks should collaborate with operators so all educate and select the right market, do appropriate monitoring, set appropriate limits to use and regulations, match seasons to products, and position and develop images appropriately</li> </ul>	
<b>Cooperating with Operators Gets Mixed Response</b>	
⇒ An operator suggests a joint pilot program, to examine how joint marketing (parks and operators) could work	
<b>Marketing Collaborations</b>	✚ <i>Marketing relationships range from excellent, to non-existent. Some Parks seem to have more latitude than others to joint market.</i>
<b>Some Operators Currently Market on Behalf of Parks</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Operators currently sell permits, distribute parks brochures, collect park admission sales, or provide films</li> <li>✓ An East Coast operator markets their park and sponsors special parks events and provides prizes</li> </ul>	
<b>Some Parks Currently Assist with marketing Operators</b>	
✓ Various parks: distribute operator brochures at trade shows; provides operator referrals to visitors; or market operators' products through mailouts, VCR and in-house brochures	
<b>Some Operators and Parks Agencies Currently Collaborate on Marketing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Upon request, most operators collaborate with Parks in marketing opportunities, from travel guides to trade shows; a number of parks also collaborate with operators (e.g., media requests, links to websites, or free ads)</li> <li>⇒ operators suggest collaboration in all aspects of Parks, including information distribution, joint marketing and park endorsements of qualified operators</li> </ul>	

## 10. MONITORING

<b>Monitoring Illegal Operations</b>	✚ <i>Ensuring all Parks operators have appropriate permits, licenses etc.</i>
<b>Illegal Operators Should be Identified and Eliminated</b>	
✓ BC operators <i>like</i> to be checked by Parks (since this implies illegal companies are also being sought out)	
<b>Operators Monitor Illegal Businesses</b>	
✓ Quebec operators collaborate with parks (e.g. reporting visitor wrong-doing)	
✓ ON outfitters cooperate with Agencies in enforcement activities – sharing information, providing canoes for “undercover” work, alerting Parks to operating plan infringements (e.g. logging encroachments, littering, etc.)	
⇨ Many operators suggest Parks monitoring should be intensified, particularly for illegal operators, plus license, safety, and standards compliance, especially in Mountain Parks	
⇨ Agencies suggest involving operators in monitoring so they understand use decisions.	
<b>Monitoring Standards, Guidelines, and Activities</b>	✚ <i>Ensuring that all operators adhere to park operating standards, requirements, or guidelines.</i>
<b>Monitor Parks Messaging Requirements</b>	
<b>X</b>	
<b>Enforce Park Guidelines and Standards</b>	
⇨ Both operators and agencies would like to see more enforcement of regulations, and finalising and closing loopholes and inconsistencies in business licenses for outdoor activities	
⇨ Operators suggest that if they were encouraged to participate in parks planning and collaborate, they could have roles such as assisting with monitoring – the general visiting public, local trail users, or commercial operators	

## 11. FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

<b>Challenges for the Future</b>
<b>Education of Guides and Operators</b>
⇒ AB Parks would like to see more emphasis on educating guides (e.g., EI and minimizing group impacts)
<b>Redefining Parks Experiences</b>
✓ A BC operator says that while EI may be a new Agency concept, for many operators the concept has been deeply woven into their business practices and client education, and will continue
<b>Opportunities for the Future</b>
<b>Opportunities Related to EI</b>
⇒ <i>Resource Oriented</i> (research, restoration activities); <i>Visitor Oriented</i> (demonstrating alternative ways to enjoy nature e.g., remote viewing, limited group sizes, more interpretive activities, more monitoring by visitors, conservation vacations); <i>Marketing Oriented</i> (changed images, branding and targeting); and <i>Operator Oriented</i>
<b>Target Appropriate Visitors</b>
⇒ There is an opportunity to focus on attracting higher-value tourists who will stay a few nights, rather than attracting large groups who don't spend long and don't truly experience the park
<b>Educational Small-Group Travel</b>
⇒ Opportunity with learning research experiences, and a focus on more authentic, experiential tourism
<b>Aboriginal Components Incorporated</b>
⇒ Opportunities to work with local First Nation communities focussing on partnerships and the concept of stewardship, unique places, and Parks
<b>Research and Science Based Products</b>
⇒ Opportunities to focus on research projects, working vacations, conservation (e.g. bird surveys, archaeological digs, photo-monitoring, boardwalk/viewing platform construction, restoration or re-vegetation)
⇒ opportunities for exclusive opportunities which are "ecologically certified"
<b>Messaging Opportunities</b>
⇒ Opportunities in educational experiences, quality interpretive messages, product substitution, cultural and aboriginal presentations, and opportunities to spread Parks messages in the wider community
<b>Interpretation</b>
⇒ Opportunities in ecological integrity interpretation, and standardized interpretive training
<b>High Quality Environments, and Environmentally-Sensitive Operations will Attract Visitors</b>
⇒ Agencies see opportunities in matching increased public interest in sensitive and stressed ecosystems, with appropriate experiences in those ecosystems which conserve resources and contribute to their preservation
<b>Collaboration Between parks and Operators to Develop Product</b>
⇒ A number of Parks and operators are willing to collaborate on new or enhanced products
<b>Substitute Products, Rather than Create Additional Products</b>
⇒ Agencies and operators tend to see opportunities to replace or change existing tourism products or activities
<b>Extension of Parks Values Beyond the Parks Boundaries</b>
⇒ Parks see opportunities for advocacy by operators, and for operators/visitors to take messages into the community
<b>Suggested Future Actions</b>
⇒ Agencies on the West Coast see opportunities for baseline information, opportunities for operators to provide financial and moral support, and for improved information flows and formation of working groups. They see more need for operators to demonstrate understanding of EI and appropriate care for the park resource



<b>Communications, Collaboration and Feedback are Key</b>
<b>Communications</b> ⇒ More explanatory communications, discussions, explanations, and more community involvement
<b>Collaboration</b> ⇒ All parties agree that implementing appropriate measures will be easier with better mutual understanding
<b>Feedback</b> ⇒ Operators want feedback on <i>what</i> they are doing and <i>how</i> they are doing it

# Introduction

## Background

The Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) recognises that national and provincial/territorial parks and protected areas form a significant lure for tourists. Parks are usually destinations that are attractive for outdoor tourism markets; they are often remote, biodiverse, usually scenic, and present a range of ecosystems and landscapes that can provide the qualities often sought by these markets. They also carry an implicit endorsement, in Canada, of a quality tourism experience.

The CTC, as well as Parks agencies and the outdoor tourism industry, all recognize that there can be difficulties in their relationships and in their operations and management practices. Nevertheless, there are also fine examples of good relationships, exemplary operations, and collaborations between the public and private sector for tourism in Parks.

More recently, the operational environment in protected areas has become more challenging for both tourism operators and for Parks management agencies. In particular, the federal government has enacted legislation intended to maintain ecological integrity (EI) in Canada's National Parks, and supports several actions, to be implemented in dialogue with Parks partners. These include:

- Legislation reconfirming ecological integrity as a first priority in planning and managing parks
- Designating legal wilderness areas in national parks
- Improving relationships and ways of working with Aboriginal people
- Collaborating with other agencies to improve ecosystem-based management
- Working with those who market and use National Parks to attract visitors to the right place, at the right time, in the right numbers, and with the right expectations
- Reviewing appropriateness of visitor activities in the park
- Ensuring maintaining ecological integrity is the first consideration in capital redevelopment
- Developing training/orientation in ecological integrity for all staff, managers and partners

The CTC, together with Parks agencies and the outdoor tourism industry, are planning regional meetings throughout Canada, to bring together key parties to discuss issues, identify opportunities, and work toward best practices in a range of areas. The idea is to focus on what is working well, and to build on this, so as to encourage collaboration, solve problems, streamline activities, and further the primary objectives for these Canadian natural areas. In advance of the regional meetings, this report provides findings from key players – parks agencies and outdoor tourism operators – related to challenges, solutions, suggestions and best practices.

## Objectives

The principal objective of this report is to benchmark, assess and discuss the relationships and current best practices found in Parks. It is intended to demonstrate that, although there are challenging issues that vary from park to park, there is a considerable body of good operator/park practice, and constructive collaborative relationships between Parks and outdoor tourism operators, from which to draw.

## Desired Outcomes

By open-minded consideration of those good practices working well in other parks, it is hoped that all players will see that they have room for improvements, and consider how they can collaborate to support the protected areas, which we all cherish. The CTC hopes that as a result, both outdoor tourism operators and Parks agencies can develop or further collaborative relationships, which benefit both parties. For the operator, this means responsible access to the Parks resource; for the Park agencies, it provides a means to further understanding and commitment to maintaining the ecological integrity of Canada's natural places.

## Study Methods

In order to develop this report, and to benchmark current practices by both Parks Agencies and operators, Pam Wight & Associates conducted this study in the following ways:

**Planning:** This involved a literature review, contacting Parks agencies and CTC support committees across Canada to obtain the names of key parks operators. We designed a survey to obtain information on best practices and critical challenges. "Agencies" or "Parks" in this document refers to parks and protected area *agencies* (provincial, territorial or federal) and "operators" refers to the outdoor tourism industry operating in protected areas ("parks" represent the protected areas). A glossary of abbreviations (which include protected areas or operators with lengthy names) is found as Appendix A.

**Collecting:** We contacted all Federal Provincial Parks Committee agencies (13), as well as all National Parks Field Unit Superintendents (33), and administered a survey to each of these groups. In addition, we surveyed and contacted approximately 150 key outdoor tourism operators representing every province and territory across Canada. There were 97 responses from all agency and operator surveys.

**Analysing:** We analysed responses, acknowledging challenges, but concentrating on identifying strengths, best practices (both individual and collaborative) and suggestions for the future.

**Extracting and Evaluating:** Our knowledge of exemplary practices, tourism, and Parks and protected areas, was used to structure the report. The best practices selected exemplify good or innovative practices, insightful commentary, or collaborations, which work. We also highlighted suggestions for addressing current challenges and future directions.

The CTC would like to thank all those Parks agency representatives and outdoor tourism operators who took the time to speak or write to us, and we acknowledge their contributions as being fundamental to the findings here. We appreciate the fact that they not only identified what they and their collaborators are doing well, but they shared the challenges they face in a frank and constructive manner. They are identified in Appendix B, together with their province of origin.

## Chapter Organisation

In each of the following chapters (which address specific topics) challenges are set out for each sub-topic, followed by a brief summary of elements of the challenge, and discussion as needed. Then, where applicable, Best Practices and further suggestions are presented for each section. When possible, operator perspectives are highlighted for the benefit of resource managers. Some chapters have more specific functions. Chapter 7 examines the Ecological Integrity mandate. While this mandate does not necessarily impact all jurisdictions, more provinces are following the federal lead. Chapter 8 examines current operator stewardship, which essentially only represents good practices by operators. Chapter 9 is also focussed only on good practices in collaboration between operators and agencies. Chapter 12 looks to the future, with a focus on suggestions and on opportunities.

# Planning

## Long Term Planning

**Challenge:** *Operators need to know longterm directions and intentions of Parks agencies.*

### Consistency Desired

Operators understand that each Parks agency has a variety of operations and operators, in a diverse range of natural environments, and as such are challenged to be fair. However, they feel that “they must look at being fair to everyone, make decisions that have a sound rationale behind them, and then most importantly of all - stick to their guns and be consistent.”

### Suggestions:

**Wood Buffalo National Park and Nahanni National Park Reserve (“WBNP/ Nahanni NPs”)**, in the Yukon, suggests: “A rewrite of the park agreement, with the guide/outfitters, based on visitor response of the next wilderness survey.”

## Industry Cooperation for Input to Park Planning

**Challenge:** *As individuals, operators often find it difficult to deal with Parks agencies. Similarly, agencies find it easier to deal with operators as an industry group.*

### Operators and Agencies Support Industry Associations Collaborating with Park Agencies

In some parks, operators have seen dramatic improvements in agency responsiveness to operator concerns. Having an industry association often provides a high level of mutual trust and dialogue.

### Good Practices:

In the Yukon, an industry association, *The Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon (WTAY)* provides a link between the operators and the Parks agency, and serves as a collecting point for issues. The association:

- Provides a “survey point” for the Park and a communication conduit for operators
- Discusses the needs of all parties, looking for efficiencies and synergies
- Fosters understanding of issues, such as trends, visitor numbers, patterns, departures, conducts trends analysis of activities, group size, visitor needs, ratio of adventure / education, demographics, visitor needs
- Understands that all parties must be realistic
- Believes operators must be viewed as a service provider for Park visitors
- Develops regulations
- Assists with reporting, enforcement, proactive safety measures and actions
- Assists non-guided visitors

**Butterfly Tours** in BC is interested in attending industry meetings. They discuss how active participation in the Association of Canadian Sea Kayak Guides and the Gwaii Haanas Tour Operators Association enables industry to represent members in many Parks management meetings.

**Bluewater Adventures** in BC commends Parks Canada for its willingness to financially support annual all-operators meetings. “Though these meetings have sometimes been raucous, put Parks staff on the hot seat, and perhaps negatively impacted good communication between some individuals, they have also gradually opened up communication. Without these meetings, government is too easily characterized as big, uncaring, inflexible, and an unlimited source of money.”

**White Mountain Adventures** in Alberta is willing to partner with Parks and is interested in becoming more involved in policy input. “We would be willing to help facilitate a forum on the issues brought out by this consultative process.”

**Missinaibi Headwaters Incorporated (“Missinaibi”)** in Ontario is part of a “planning committee – actively involved in planning future development of the Game Preserve.”

**Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site (“Gwaii Haanas”)**, in BC, has ongoing dialogue with the Gwaii Haanas Tour Operators Association. Through this industry organisation, they can deal with issues as they come up, and board members disseminate information to other members.

**Kootenay and Yoho National Parks (“Kootenay/Yoho”)** in BC indicate “several companies are working together to set standards and accreditation programs to improve the quality of interpretation in the mountain parks – the organization is called the Mountain Parks Interpretation Association. Parks Canada is working with this group as a full partner.”

**Riding Mountain National Park** in Manitoba established a backcountry, working group that meets four times a year. “There is a representative from the horse outfitters and from ecotourism outfitters. The representatives come to these meetings and give their input on how the park’s backcountry is managed. Any issues are discussed with the operator and other stakeholders at the Recreation, Front Country, or Backcountry study group meetings. This has been a very positive step in fostering good relationships with outfitters, and all recreational users of the backcountry.”

### **Suggestions:**

**Manitoba Parks and Natural Areas (“Manitoba Parks”)** suggests “formation of an industry development group made up of operators dedicated to developing a stronger industry.” Kananaskis Country Recreational Area (“Kananaskis Country”) in Alberta would like to develop more opportunities for operators to interact with government through associations, working groups and planning forums. “This will help to get buy in to our ecological objectives as well as assist in developing creative approaches to issues”.

**Nahanni River Adventures** in the Yukon, suggest a need for: benchmarks to measure change; a training/orientation manual and web site (for those with no time for courses or workshops) for use by operators and park staff to understand the relationship, roles and responsibilities and expectations of each other. They also see a need for a commitment of time and resources (travel costs, meeting costs).

### **Need to Ensure Industry Associations Genuinely Represent All Industry**

Some Mountain Parks operators feel that the standards-setting industry group (Banff-based Mountain Parks Heritage Interpretation Association [MPHIA]) is not representative of all operators, especially the smaller ones; that the exam is designed by larger operators to eliminate smaller companies; and that holding all meetings in Banff also makes it difficult for many Mountain Parks operators.

Similarly on the West coast, one operator says larger businesses have developed standards to their own benefit. “Three large companies who use double kayaks formed their own BC Sea Kayak Guides Association. They developed guidelines, and submitted them to Parks Canada, who accepted them as minimum standards”. One key problem for smaller operators is the operator-to-guide ratios (2 guides to 10 people for double kayaks; 2:8 ratio for singles). This is biased to benefit the larger companies who operate double kayaks, whereas the single kayak companies are at a great disadvantage, since their two “for-profit” customers are gone.

## Views of Role of Parks

**Challenge:** *The role of Park agencies is unclear and inconsistent in terms of where they encroach on operator activities*

### Park Services: Agencies’ or Operators’ Roles?

In Quebec, operators are afraid that the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SEPAQ) may be encroaching on their private sector role, with regard to managing all activities in the parks and wildlife preserves, or “controlling/offering outdoor tourism excursions”. They suggest SEPAQ is getting increasingly involved in managing more activities (e.g. taking over almost all concessions). In other provinces this concern is echoed. Operators are concerned about agencies are getting into the business of packaging. They have no problems with agencies being a partner, but not marketing and selling.

Agency comments reflect some of this paradox. For example, Parks Canada has a requirement to generate revenue and recover costs, but they know operators are concerned about National Parks assuming the role of a commercial operator. “Some operators are worried about Parks taking a more commercial approach as an agency wanting to operate all the profitable activities.”

Some operators don’t share these views. For example, they feel Parks Canada should have *more* control over the resources and visitors that it manages. They question the fact that the private sector delivers so much of the park experience to people, rather than Parks Canada (PC) itself. Their view is that only those who can afford to pay can use commercial operators, whereas national parks can provide education and interpretation services for free to visitors. They feel it is regrettable that there is insufficient (free) education / interpretation being offered in National Parks.”

### Suggestions:

*Earth Rhythms*, in Manitoba, suggests Parks Canada should have a motive/ role that has less to do with money, and more to do with enlarging the constituency of public support. If they were to collaborate with Outdoor Tourism Operators to do this, they could achieve their mandate and the EI results they desire.

*CIME Adventure* in Quebec suggests agencies (SEPAQ) should not “start acting like a large operator. Concession holders should not be selected on the lowest bid, but on quality standards. Be clear on what an operator cannot do in the park”.

## Views of Role of Outdoor Tourism Operators

**Challenge:** *Some agencies have a relatively negative view of Outdoor Tourism Operators in terms of being environmentally sensitive or even being their allies. Other agencies have a fairly balanced view of operators.*

## **Ecotourism Operations: High Environmental Impact, or Extremely Knowledgeable Operators?**

There is, at one end of the agency spectrum, a view that ecotourism operators are actively damaging the environment. For example, one provincial agency feels that by their very nature, ecotourism activities are often those with the highest environmental impact to protected areas. Also that most operators will talk the talk and preach a good message, but will seldom agree or accept limits to their business, even when the evidence strongly shows the need.

At the other end of the agency spectrum, some agencies feel that “if an operator is a true outdoor tourism operator, there should be no problems, they should already be ecologically sensitive” and “ecotourism is less likely to have a negative effect on the ecological integrity of our natural protected areas.”

Usually agency views are in the middle of this spectrum, where they feel that improvements could be made. For example, one western provincial agency feels frustrated that environmental technologies (such as composting toilets) may be used by some operators in other countries, yet not in BC. And an east coast agency feels that there is need for more attention to “guidelines, training, and operator best practices”. In other words, a number of agencies give credit where it is due, but realistically look for more comprehensive, and speedier efforts.

A slightly different perspective comes from some operators, who feel that agencies act as if only they know what is best for the protected area. One west coast marine operator acutely feels that agencies don’t acknowledge that eco-operators may know a great deal – in fact often more than National Parks employees. They give the example of a mandatory orientation session required for operators. “I have been working [in the park] for 13 years, and know more about the park than the Parks person who gives the orientation”.

### **Good Practices:**

*British Columbia Parks, “BC Parks”:* “Many of the BC whale watchers are developing a code of conduct or ethics and following them.” Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta, says most operators “are incorporating park messages into their promotions and products. Most support green initiatives in the community such as recycling.”

*Trail of the Great Bear* in Alberta, sponsors heritage presentation programs and donates a percentage of their sales to environmental projects in and outside the park.”

### **Operators Viewed as a Threat to Parks Jobs?**

Some operators say park managers don’t appreciate what the operator is doing for the park. They feel they are treated like an average visitor, not like a business partner.

Some feel subcontractors are perceived as a threat by park employees (to park jobs). They feel many agency staff resist the fact the private sector are currently involved in parks services as a result of agency invitation. They suggest that this attitude results from policies being “brought in from the top-down rather than from the bottom-up”.

### **Outdoor Tourism Operators View themselves as Potential Parks Allies**

Operators feel that they can work together with Park agencies to meet visitor requirements, and can complement agency offerings; however, this rarely happens. They tend to be quite frustrated at the apparent inability of many Parks to view operators as: a resource, an ally, a partner, a collaborator, or a support network. They feel that agencies are missing a powerful opportunity. They believe the ecotourism operator role very much supports the legislated mandate and the EI role.

## Good Practices:

**Operators act as Park Communicators:** “Banff National Park front line staff is very supportive, because they understand that tour operators are now the communicators of the Park issues to the majority of Park visitors.” says *White Mountain Adventures*. “In order to get their message out, they need us to do it. We are responsible for the operation of bus access to, and the interpretive services of a unique alpine meadow in Banff NP and Mt. Assiniboine Provincial Park in BC. As the constant presence in the area during the summer, we are the eyes, ears and mouth of the two jurisdictions regarding protection of the fragile area. All guests are briefed on the sensitivity of the meadows and our real and potential impact on the area”.

**Operators Involve Clients in Parks Support:** *Missinaibi Headwaters* in Ontario, “encourages clients to write to the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources encouraging him to give more funding and staff to Missinaibi Park, which would allow more flexibility for the Park [agency] to form partnerships with the private sector”.

## Mutual Support by Agencies and Operators

*Gros Morne Adventures*, a Newfoundland operator is quite concerned about their park and “what is happening on the boundaries! Currently, Gros Morne NP’s east boundary is being clear-cut and access roads lead to the edge of the park. We feel that this will lead to uncontrolled access to the backcountry, impacts on fauna, flora, threatening integrity of this UNESCO World Heritage Site! The company actively supports their park” because they feel the Park cannot do much more. “We are actively involved with the Main River Coalition (a group of concerned operators, outfitters, environmentalists, tourism industry association members, etc.) trying to obtain a compromise of wilderness corridors and buffers [outside the Park]. As an industry we must protect our tourism icons.”

Similarly, *Gros Morne National Park* also supports their operators: “Operators are strong advocates for sustainable tourism and in many cases defend the park’s protection mandate in public debates.”

## Suggestions:

*Saguenay/ Saint-Lawrence National Marine Park in Quebec (“Saguenay/Saint Lawrence MP”):* “Operators must become stakeholders of the park preservation mandate.”

*Earth Rhythms:* “there seems to be an incredible missed opportunity in the bigger goal of enlisting public support with EI. Parks Canada thinks it is our responsibility to generate public interest. But it is Parks Canada’s responsibility to engage others [including operators] to generate interest in EI. From a regulatory perspective, PC should bring this ‘engagement of others’ into their regulations.”

*Nahanni River Adventures:* “We need to change the paradigm from “us and them” to “we are partners” in managing this resource and its visitors”.

*Butterfly Tours* in BC suggests that tour operators must be given more credibility and become more recognized by parks management for all the benefits that they provide to the area, the visitors, and the local residents.



### **Suggested Roles of Operators in Parks:**

- Provide an enriching experience for the Park visitor
- Deliver Park messaging
- Provide eyes in the field to assist management and act as emissaries for Parks
- Fulfill roles that Parks can no longer afford to deliver (interpretation, Park presence)
- Safety – provide instruction, judgment, assistance, and communication to park visitors. Proactive measures to avoid accidents
- Provide a service to Park visitors
- Provide a link with the visitor
- Ensure that visitors observe Park regulations and receive Park “messaging”
- Act as eyes, presenters, custodians, and finger on pulse, & notice trends

## **Policy Making**

### **Attitude Towards Commercial Operators vs. FITs**

**Challenge:** *The way that commercial operators are treated is very different from Fully Independent Travellers (FITs), particularly related to rules such as group size. Operators feel a balance is needed in the rules applied to commercial operators vs. FIT visitors.*

Where parks are concerned, operators feel that they are an easy (and often unfair) target when compared with the FIT visitor. They feel that commercial operators are consistently easier on the environment, and have procedures in place to minimise impacts. They also feel there is a misguided agency view that the guided visitor is less valid than the FIT visitor. Operators suggest that guided visitors are people serious enough about the experience to seek out the expertise of an operator to get their Park experience.

Commercial operators feel accountable, and have a vested interest in maintaining and supporting the areas they use, since guests are buying an experience that is enhanced by the protection of the resource.

Commercial operators feel they offer the Parks more protection, in that they can be held accountable for the actions of their staff and guests. Whereas “individuals [FITs] cannot be held accountable, yet can have significant impacts through lack of local experience, knowledge, or irresponsible use.”

Operators feel “individual travelers should also be limited, and held accountable, just like commercial operators.

A west coast parks agency tends to agree that there is a problem in “striking a balance between the rules/regulations/ restrictions placed on commercial operators, and (in many cases) the apparent lack of those same rules/regulations/restrictions on the general public. For example, it is relatively easy to restrict group size for a commercial operator but hard to justify when the area the operator goes into is being ‘over-run’ by general public.”

#### **Good Practices:**

*Gaboteux Tours*, in Nova Scotia: “We have access to all the trails and facilities that the general public do. We have not had any problems accessing the park itself, the park has been very open minded towards our activities. This may be because Jean worked as a senior naturalist in the park for eight years.”

### **Desire for Equitable, Timely, Licensing and Permitting**

**Challenge:** *Obtaining access to parks is a concern for many commercial Outdoor Tourism Operators, in that guidelines and requirements vary, and may change. A challenge is clarifying the process and making it less time consuming and bureaucratic. “Access is always a concern for everyone who uses the parks”. Operators want rules to be fair and equitable. So do Parks Agencies. The manner of implementation is a challenge.*

#### **Ease of Licensing Varies**

Some operators feel it is relatively easy to get a commercial license, with no specific review or assessments being done.

Others say each year it becomes more difficult, with more jurisdictions implementing licensing, and the application process becomes more cumbersome.

Some operators acknowledge that Parks employees may try to be flexible, but can't, due to the "inflexible working structure of government."

There are some agencies and some operators, who feel the current reservation system is working for both the public, and the guide/outfitters who want to preserve a wilderness experience.

### **Varying Licensing Process may have Adverse Effects**

Obtaining access seems to be much easier for provincial/territorial parks than for national parks.

Many Mountain Parks' operators feel licensing is restrictive and erratic. They recount how licenses were unavailable for many years, then opened up for a short time, then closed again. They feel this is due to reactive management responses, which has had adverse effects. Not only did demand for interpretive hiking experiences increase when licenses were unavailable, but a number of companies simply operated without a license (causing Parks Canada to react by opening up relatively relaxed licensing again). Operators said the number of companies who subsequently obtained licenses was overwhelming, causing dramatically increased commercial use on the trails. The reaction was then to close the licenses.

Closing licenses causes problems for small companies who would like to work with other licensed companies or freelance guides to take their excess business, since there is no one currently available for them to work with, of the quality they expect. However, there are a number of good freelance guides who are currently unlicensed. Thus many companies ignore the rules and subcontract illegally. This puts ethical companies at a disadvantage. Some operators feel the management of the licensing issue has resulted in licensing of some "bad" companies, while "good" people are not.

There is no enforcement of illegal (unlicensed) guiding.

Some operators comment, that exactly who gets a license from PC has been a matter of luck, to date.

## Good Practices:

**Process is Easy for Some:** *FreshAir Adventures* in New Brunswick claims it is an “easy process to obtain business license, easy tracking of guests without park passes - good overall cooperation. Cooperation is largely based on the good relations between the Park and FreshAir Adventures. We apply for a business license - the process was clearly understood, and easy to process.”

*Pacific Rim NP* in BC supports “development of a code of conduct, best practices, minimal impact behavior, and public safety hazard awareness.”

## Suggestions:

*Majestic West coast Adventures* in BC says: “The Park should request operators to purchase a permit at the beginning of the year. The company “must meet specific requirements like showing a level of training for guides; 2 million dollar liability insurance; and specific plans of use and frequency.”

*Kluane National Park and Reserve/ Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site/ Vuntut National Park* (Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs) suggest a “future review of permit allocation and trip scheduling guidelines.”

**Manitoba Parks** suggest providing operators with ‘canned’ interpretive resources to benefit clients.

**Saguenay / Saint-Lawrence MP**, suggest a permit system that will implement their code of ethics.

## Those “First Through the Door” Benefit: Limited Licenses Raises Potential for Commodification

Some operators feel the licensing process benefits those who had historical use. At the same time, they acknowledge it shut the door on new operators, as well as severely limited more recent operators to small quotas of guests.

Some agencies have no allocation system in place. They feel they need to consider this during future park management planning processes.

Lack of ability to obtain licenses where there are quotas is a sore point with some operators. They are frozen or not available in some parks, or only open if based on traditional use by operators, which keeps new operators out. Agencies have mixed feelings about traditional use. In the Mountain Parks, agencies have a certain level of comfort with licensed operators because they are known entities, but discomfort with the fact that access is not based on merit or a competitive process.

The exclusivity of having one of a limited number of parks issue licenses eventually benefits those operators who persevere to obtain a license, or who have been licensed due to historic park use. Agency perspectives are that operators certainly benefit from limited licenses, because “others are kept out” and this increases the sense of security, and helps the business survive. For example, an East coast provincial park agency says “there are 10 permits available and the operators are very protective of them - knowing any more would hurt their business”.

Operator perspectives are mixed:

- Some of those with licenses admit they benefit from license quotas, but they see access inequities. One perspective comes from a Mountain Park operator who says, “Currently there is no new allocation of access. This is great for those of us who already have permits, but pretty lousy for newcomers.”

- Another perspective from an East coast operator is “I am not complaining about ‘the lengthy, convoluted process’ because once obtained, licenses provide a barrier to entry that preserves our business value. If managed properly, they can also enhance both business and environmental sustainability.”
- Still others can see the rationale for some limits, but look at guiding licenses being “unfairly targeted” since they are relatively benign compared with other activities that are approved at the same time. “It seems quite odd that while parks allows twinning of the highway, ski resort development, town site development, etc. etc., they will not give out new guiding permits.”

Some operators worry about commodification of licenses. Because of limited access, “This quota/allocation may become a commodity, even though management and operators would not want to see access abused.”

### **Good Practices:**

*Bluewater Adventures*: “Gwaii Haanas operators developed their own Code of Conduct in the late 1980’s to manage sensitive sites, and place their own limits on activities, well before Parks management came about. They believe from this position of stewardship that some increased access can be allowed. All operators are using small group/eco-sensitive means”

*Gwaii Haanas*, in the spirit of equity, “has FAM tours on Park boats, so there is an objective overview by tourism industry reps. – no particular business gets the benefit”.

### **Suggestions:**

*Kananaskis Country* in Alberta recognizes “improved collaboration may mean fewer operators and limits to the amount of business they can have. A process for fairly distributing a limited number of operator opportunities is needed. (e.g., tender process, call for proposals).”

*Kanata Adventure Specialists* (“Kanata Adventure”) in BC suggests licensing process should be transparent and some of the criteria should be the same for all parks.

*Waterton Lakes NP* in Alberta, says “we need to be able to use the business license process to regulate the activities of bus tour companies and outside outdoor tourism groups who continually try to offer guided walks and hikes in the back-country of the park as part of their service offer. A more consistent approach to business and guide licensing across the mountain parks and perhaps the entire Parks Canada system is needed.”

### **Visitor Quotas: Raises Potential for Commodification**

Often, low visitor quotas affect the economic feasibility of operations. This results in very little long-term security to operators because of changing guidelines and requirements. This seems to be one of the largest of all the issues for operators.

Operators are striving to communicate the need for flexibility in quota allocation. For example, if they have a bad year in terms of visitor numbers (which happens regularly to a small tourism business) they do not feel it is appropriate for immediate quota reductions.

## **New Technical Standards Being Applied in Some Parks**

The views of both operators and agencies vary considerably on standards. One agency said “there is sometimes a lack of professionalism and competency on the part of the guides. This mostly stems from a lack of knowledge or awareness of the park context and regulations.”

Some operators feel standards are a good strategy to limit newcomers to the better companies. They also hope this will eventually limit numbers using trails, and are of the view that improved strategies for limiting numbers and controlling use of popular trails are required.

Some parks think “the development of standardized interpretative training is an important step in the right direction.” They give the example of standards set by the Mountain Parks Heritage Interpretation Association (MPHIA), and say they can endorse such companies in their print material (seal of approval).

Not all operators think that applying new standards in the manner chosen, is a good plan. Some think the exam questions are designed for geology or biology specialists, and that some questions are irrelevant to their operations/visitors. One operator says different standards are required for different experiences. “The MPHIA exam does not recognise that there should be different levels of interpretation required (e.g., for those who spend 7 minutes on the Sky Train, or longer on a bus, or are hotel guests, or who overnight in the backcountry, or take 20k walks in Sunshine Meadows).”

Some operators say: “Guides also need client skills as well as technical skills.” In other words, the interpretation exam does not take into account the important market need for people-centred guides.

### **Good Practice:**

*Waterton Lakes National Park* says “Waterton Visitor Services and Trail of the Great Bear have been very supportive of better training of their guides and have brought forward their support for the idea of testing of the guides by the park to ensure quality.

### **Timeliness**

Most operators agree that the length of time required to obtain Parks approval for various activities is far too long. Cited as examples are, the process of obtaining a license (lease, or permit); for renewing a license (lease, or permit); or for the first license in a jurisdiction (whereas subsequent licenses seem to be slightly easier to obtain). It was not infrequent to have operators indicate that their licensing process took 5 years, or 7 years!

Operators also feel that park management decisions, which may have an impact on their business, also take a long time (e.g., changes in acceptable uses, or locations). One operator remarked, “The time-line for implementing solutions to the many problems here seems to stretch on for decades, with no significant progress. This creates business difficulties. We need to know what ‘activities’ agencies are contemplating. Parks need to start a collaboration with operators now, not after they come up with ‘activities’ that are then found to be unworkable by operators or by the visitors to the park.”

On the other hand, a different perspective, related more to timelines than to timeliness, is held by concession operators. Some feel that renewal of their license every 5 years is nerve-wracking, since their livelihood depends on the outcome (not to mention the time they put into developing a competitive proposal). They feel they cannot invest adequately in their business, when long-term certainty is not there. They feel that if their concession is not performing adequately, they would like agencies to provide some warning so that they could proactively take improvement measures, rather than re-bidding, not knowing of problems, and then potentially losing their livelihood.

## Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal Equity Issues

Some operators, particularly on the west coast, are concerned about what they view as an agency preference (or bias) in favour of aboriginal operators. They are concerned about such aspects as agencies working on redistributing allocation from non-aboriginal operators who are not currently using all of their allocation, to the First Nations.

Non-aboriginal operators feel that aboriginal operators have an unfair advantage, which non-aboriginal operators feel all the more acutely when they are descended from generations of historical operators. Another operator finds that it is difficult to obtain Co-management Board recognition and approval of non-aboriginal tour operators in the protected area.

At the same time, *Ontario Parks* suggests there may be need for more allocation of access and permits to First Nation operators.

## Standardised, Clear Regulatory Processes Desired

**Challenge:** *Some businesses operate in a variety of parks and so observe inconsistencies in the regulatory process between parks. They do not expect uniformity in each regulation, but look for consistency in such aspects as application forms, renewal forms and other documents, timelines, information required, or base standards required.*

## Clarity of Requirements Desired

A number of operators did not understand all the requirements, for example, related to:

- Calculation of visitor nights
- Leasing
- Licensing
- Permitting

Some feel their business has suffered as a result (e.g., when the process of calculating the number of visitor nights was not understood, the resultant quota allocated became insufficient to sustain business).

Some have had processes clarified by the merest chance (e.g., through a chance backcountry meeting with a Chief Park Warden and the ensuing informal discussion).

Some said the agencies themselves didn't really appear to understand their own process.

## Standardisation of Requirements

Operators are concerned at the prospect of any new regulations, with no clear processes, guidelines or requirements. They feel that the associated bureaucracy and red tape is a concern.

Operators are concerned when there is no uniform standard across different parks that they operate in (e.g., different documents and timelines).

Other areas where lack of standardisation creates concerns include policy areas. For example, parks may or may not have:

- Criteria for ecotourism in the park
- Park plan
- Advisory committee
- Enforcement

Some Mountain Parks agencies also feel a need for more standardisation, since they feel that inconsistent application of business license regulations (especially for bus tour companies) has left them with one less tool to use to regulate backcountry activities.

On the other hand, Park agencies would like to see elements they consistently require, to be better addressed by operators (e.g., they experience frustration when an operator proposes an activity inconsistent with park values). Similarly, Parks may consistently require the submission of a business plan. While Parks feels that most experienced operators have no problem with this, they also feel other operators view this as "red tape". Thus the quality of operators' business plan proposals is quite variable.

In terms of consistency, one agency commented they feel an agency weakness is that they don't test operators/guides for communication/interpretation skills or messages, and provide no follow-up to the proposed activities (monitoring the experience and interpretive message).

### **Good Practices:**

*Kananaskis Country* seems to take account of need for standardization as well as for modification to unique situations. "Permit conditions are either general conditions (those that apply to all operators) or special conditions, (those which apply to a specific operator's situation). Conditions for all operations generally address the following areas:

- Time & location constraints
- Safety
- Environmental impacts
- Conflicts with public use
- Operations as they relate to a specific activity
- Depending on activity, may require guides to have certain certifications
- All guides must be certified in first aid,
- The company must have liability insurance

They say, "Operators are now familiar with the permitting process and our requirements. They are aware that they need to apply annually for a permit if they wish to continue operating in the area. They have one contact person with the Department who deals primarily with their questions and concerns."



**Kluane/ Chilkoot NPs** say: “People wishing to guide in the parks are provided the general info package. I’m always prepared to sit down and discuss and/or review business plan proposals. Pretty well all proposals are approved if what is being proposed is consistent with existing park guidelines and management plan direction.”

**BC Parks** has a standardised process: “An opportunity to present a proposal is provided (advertised) in the fall annually. Interested individuals/companies complete an application form, which is then adjudicated by Park staff. Determination to grant the opportunity is based on criteria:

- Compatibility with Park Management Plan;
- ‘Soundness’ of proposal from a business/practical viewpoint;
- Number of similar opportunities being provided already in the same Park.

The exceptions to this process are:

- 1) Film company applications (not restricted to the “annual application process” and having a much shorter “turn-around” time); and
- 2) Commercial operators who were in business prior to an area being declared a Park are automatically permitted without having to apply.

The present processes appear to work well, except that the fees we charge are not usually compatible with the fees charged by other Crown agencies for similar activities occurring outside BC Park boundaries.”

- BC Parks management activities are clear:
- Clearly state and clarify expectations
- Provide resource information (maps, hazards, history etc.)
- Promptly respond to inquiries
- Assist with annual operating plan proposals
- Advise about and allow advertising/marketing opportunities
- Provide assistance dealing with other government agencies (e.g., health permits)
- Put operators in touch with other potential operators (for complementary offerings), marketers etc.

### **Suggestions:**

**Kluane/ Chilkoot NPs** say the Yukon Territorial Government “has offered to work with us to prepare a sample business plan, which could be used as a template by potential new operators. This should help address problems and frustrations experienced by Parks and operators”.

One Prairies agency suggested discussions of the license and proposal with the operator, plus sitting down to discuss Park concerns regarding appropriate activities. Then follow up with tests for a guiding license, business license, and insurance checks.

An operator suggests opening up permits to waterways within Banff. “You can’t guide a canoe or sea kayak trip on Lake Minnewanka, yet every day there are large tour boats roaring up and down the lake.”

**Gaspésie Provincial Park** in Quebec suggests developing a generic accreditation for operators who want to offer tours in provincial or national parks.

**Aventure Boréale** in Quebec suggests being able to book a year in advance (e.g., the operator must make arrangements with European wholesalers in September for the following summer tours).

**Newfoundland Parks** suggests having “proposal calls for operators in other reserves and parks.”

One BC operator suggests: “An effective standard application system should be in place so that we do not have to fill out a multitude of forms for various (mostly provincial) parks”

**Gros Morne NP** suggests: “Use concession agreements instead of business licenses. The benefits to Parks would be: formalizing requirements, bidding process to get the best operators, and a % of gross sales. The benefits to operators would be: exclusivity and a guaranteed operating period (which could be up to 10 years).”

## Environmental Assessment Policies

**Challenge:** *Operators want to be much clearer about the Environmental Assessment (EA) process, what it is, and what is required, and want the EA process time to be reduced.*

### Need for a Written EA Policy

Operators want Parks to have a written policy relating to EA as well as to other previously mentioned aspects of commercial compliance. They want very clear guidelines for the process of the environmental assessment, and feel it needs more consistent application. For example, related to EA, a Maritimes operator said: “The park conducted the environmental assessment on our walking tours without telling us and without any input from ourselves. We heard about this assessment through a casual conversation with one of the park managers. Yet, with the moose safari we had to fill in a form relating to our activities.”

### Expeditious EA Processing by All Parks Staff

Some operators feel there are considerable delays with their EA application. One felt this was mostly because the role of senior agency managers in the process was/is not clear, or even that there may be confusion as to responsibilities within one agency. Such delays may have negative business impacts (e.g., not being able to market product that year).

### Good Practice:

*Earth Rhythms* is “trying to advocate for environmental screening. They have suggested to Parks that all operators should be brought together by Parks, to educate them about EA/screening requirements”. The suggestion is intended for overall operator education, rather than to do the EA with operators.

## Suggestions:

*Québec Hors-Circuit and Excursions Mauricie* suggest having ecotourism products rather than outdoors adventure products, with very in-depth nature interpretation programs.

*Earth Rhythms* suggests working through 2-3 hypothetical EA cases over the course of a day's workshop with a group of operators, for different types of operations, e.g.:

1. A service based operation;
2. An infrastructure operation;
3. Another type of operation.

*Bluewater Adventures* suggests conducting a complete environmental assessment of new tour concepts to determine whether they are sustainable both environmentally and logistically. Then a base line is available to judge whether operations are appropriate.

## Collaborating on Policy

**Challenge:** *Involving operators meaningfully in policy development through a collaborative process.*

Both agencies and operators discussed the need for operators to be included in the Park management process. Operators feel this would be good, since some can provide the experience of many years of operations in the area.

There is some operator frustration when cooperative work toward a collaborative product is lost through lack of implementation or adherence (e.g., to guidelines).

While most agencies agreed collaborative work with operators was desirable, another perspective was that “most operators represent one interest – the guided person. We (agencies) need to balance their needs with those of the ecosystem and of the independent traveler”.

## Good Practices:

*Kootenay/ Yoho NPs* have committed to working with operators on a heritage tourism strategy, which may also assist in the creation of new learning vacation products appropriate to parks.

*Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs* say ‘As Kluane moves towards use limits along other trail corridors in the park, we will consult with Outdoor Tourism Operators to develop the trip and permit scheduling and allocation guidelines for these areas of the park.’

*Manitoba Parks* worked on the advancement of a cooperatively developed “Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Policy Framework”.

*Go Wild Tours (“Arctic Vision”)* in YK, keeps in touch with Parks rangers. “I will be participating in the Management Plan review. I also participated in the Ivvavik National Park Management Plan review.”

*Waterton Lakes National Park* “remains involved in operator staff training, providing training and resource materials and helping to create the system for training and certifying guides. They “continue to review promotional materials and suggest opportunities for including park messages.”

## Suggestions:

*Bluewater Adventures* suggests: “Creating a “working Advisory Board” that includes tourism operators, scientists, Parks, and native leaders, and has a clear mandate to work out issues. Support the initiative financially and with resources to ensure its success.”

*Waterton Lakes NP* suggests creation of an Appropriate Activities Framework for the park. “It will provide direction for present Outdoor Tourism Operators and for future product development.” The agency proposes to help coordinate the involvement of the Heritage Tourism Council in this, and to help them create a system for the training and certification of guides and other staff.

*Gros Morne Adventures* suggests having an opportunity to work more closely with program planning so that private operators and Parks interpretation department can both benefit from programming.

*Prince Albert NP and Gaspésie PP* suggest short training sessions for guides, and developing joint training in interpretation and communication for operator accreditation.

One operator suggests that Parks, for special areas of the back country, should require all tourists should go into special areas with an operator, to better manage impact through: guided trips; or, if a person wants more solitude, facilitated by the operator.

*Saguenay / Saint-Lawrence MP* suggests preservation zoning related to some time periods of the year.

*Gwaii Haanas* suggests that the way to incorporate other perspectives than those of guided visitors, is to explicitly build in 1) a representative for independent visitors, and 2) a representative for the ecosystem, in any collaborative process. The advantages are that this will increase the spectrum of needs being identified.



# **Relationships and Trust**

## **Building Trust is Required**

**Challenge:** *A major barrier to collaboration in many parks appears to be a mutual lack of trust. Operators mostly feel they are compliant with Parks standards. Many Park agencies seem to have little faith that operators are conducting business in an environmentally sensitive manner. Lack of trust inhibits relationships in operations, packaging opportunities, and policy input forums. Where trust has been built, communications seems to be a key.*

## **Lack of Trust – Agencies and Operators Echo Each Other’s Perspectives**

### **Agency views include:**

- A Mountain Park: “Operators are very suspicious of Parks Canada. With the closure to rafting of the Maligne River, the Bow Valley Task Force recommendations, the limits to growth announced by the Minister and their inclusion in the proposed Community Plan, the proposed park management plan, the Ecological Integrity Panel report and the Outlying Commercial Accommodation Panel recommendations, they feel their business will be further restricted. We are seen to have hidden agendas.”
- A westcoast Park: “Staff takes an unnecessarily heavy hand without active communication of perceived problems. This has led to distrust.”
- Two eastern NPs said lack of staff time (due to other priorities) is a big barrier to working with operators. “We don’t schedule our staff the time to monitor impacts or to develop relationships.”

### **Operator views include:**

- East coast operator: “There is not enough trust. We are checked by wardens and ecologists to ensure we are compliant with regulations. They check us more than the ATVs that run across endangered species habitat.”
- Another east coast operator agrees that most Park staff is suspicious of us but indicates that this seems to lessen over time.
- This latter comment about time helping to build trust as well as a positive relationship is well presented by a Quebec operator who notes, “At the beginning the relation was rather stiff, but over time, good practices and [our] reputation have helped to reach a more open relationship”.

## Good Relationships and Trust Do Exist

On the other hand, some parks and operators have a good or excellent relationship.

### Good Practices:

**Ongoing or Informal Relationship: Manitoba Parks:** “Maintain an ongoing relationship between operators and regional parks’ managers, to work out operational issues and areas of mutual interest. (e.g. facility or land requirements, wildlife and fisheries concerns, enforcement and safety issues).”

**White Mountain Adventures:** “There are many collaborative relationships, which appear to happen in Parks where the bureaucracy is limited, or the leadership is more personal and hands on. There often is a personal, collaborative relationship between operator and parks staff.”

**Algonquin Outfitters, Ontario:** “Informal collaboration with senior management - day to day problem solving, product and service improvement, etc.”

### Mutual Trust & Respect Leads to Understanding: *Places Less Traveled (“Purcell Lodge”) in BC:*

“They seem to have determined that we provide a quality product to park visitors and trust us to act responsibly without any regular monitoring or interference from them. This allows us to focus on the guest experience rather than administration to satisfy the Park.”

**Nahanni River Adventures:** The Nahanni River Outfitters Association relations have “developed in a spirit of trust and open communications. Small number of members (4 – 5) meet yearly and communicate by phone and email during the season with Nahanni National Park”

**BC Parks:** Most BC regional parks staff said “Operators are commonly building understanding and respect for resources within parks”

**Nature Trek Canada Wilderness Expeditions (“Nature Trek Canada”) in BC:** “I have to say that working together with Kluane NP is a real pleasure on all levels of park /operator interaction.”

**Pacific Rim NP:** “Good practice operators (e.g., Raincoast Communications and Subtidal Adventures) visibly show respect for the park and park staff, and the willingness to adhere to guidelines and codes of conduct.”

**Understand Administrative Needs: *Gwaii Haanas:*** “ Good practice operators are “willing to talk directly to us to get clarification on an issue rather than feeding the rumor mill. They understand our administrative requirements and provide the necessary information in a timely manner. They work with us when they get media requests – some do this better than others when they understand it is a benefit to them.”

### Suggestions:

**Kayakouch,** in New Brunswick, suggests: “We could bring managers on an adventure outing” to improve understanding.”

**Manitoba Parks** suggests work on changing “pre-existing attitudes amongst both government and industry. Greater openness is required to improve trust.”

## Agencies: Regulatory, or Client-Service Oriented?

**Challenge:** For agencies to adopt a more client-service orientation and less of a regulatory approach, and operators to have a more realistic view of agency roles.

### Whose Park is it?

Some operators feel “the attitude on the part of some parks managers that it is “their” park and that it is a privilege for others to enter it, as opposed to the attitude that they are there simply as custodians of the public trust.” On the other hand, an Ontario National Park reports that some operators expect special treatment from the park, e.g., that park staff should accompany their groups free of charge, or that operators should be exempt from entry fees.

### Collaboration vs. Policing

Operators often said that the approach to managing parks is like that of the military or the police, as evidenced by many interactions as well as the language used by parks agencies (wardens, gating, compliance, regulations, permits, limits, and how they operate in the field, etc.).

Operators feel it is not a partnership when one party has all the power. Operators feel that collaboration for outdoor tourism can be the opening for all sorts of opportunities for partnerships. “The danger is that the parks just use this to become more of a ‘rule’ enforcer.”

Agencies sometimes share this view. A West coast agency had difficulty with field staff, trained to enforce and regulate, and often new to the area. They themselves, however, recognise that tour operators and guides should be part of the solution, not the problem.

A number of Parks and operators do work well together:

### Good Practices:

**Waterton Lakes NP:** “Most operators see a benefit to complying with Parks Canada and ensuring quality experiences because they know they will be recommended to visitors by Parks Canada staff if they do.”

“There is a fair amount of good will between the operators and Parks Canada. When we try a collaborative approach to how we regulate outdoor tourism experiences, the operators seem willing to impose restrictions on themselves. For the most part, they expect Parks Canada to regulate them and to restrict numbers and types of experiences in the park.”

**FreshAir Adventures**, New Brunswick commends Mingan Islands Park Preserve, [“Mingan NP”] Quebec: “Collaboration with small operators provides a source of regional / local development.”  
“We have all of the access we require - camping when needed - access points for entering and leaving the water, and access to an important road for us.”

**Nature Trek Canada:** “An open approach to our activities in the park helps Parks understand our intentions. We are always willing to share costs (flights in and out) and share information. We comment on friendliness of staff and are willing to take criticism from them with regard to our operations.”



## Suggestions:

**Open, Inclusive Approach:** A Mountain parks operator suggests “staff at Parks should get out of the “enforcer” mindset into the “build collaboration to support the mandate of parks” mindset. The rule-based regulatory, enforcing model does not do the best job of supporting the parks mandate. An open, cooperative and inclusive approach could harness the incredible energy and ingenuity of the outdoor tourism entrepreneurs in concert with Parks to support the mandate of Parks”.

**Training:** One operator feels “there are some wonderful people in warden service, as individuals, in ecosystem roles too. They just don’t feel comfortable working with outsiders (clients).” Perhaps training would help.

**Longer Contracts:** *Québec Hors-Circuit* suggests more give and take between park agencies and Outdoor Tourism Operators. This could be longer contract periods, maintaining park equipment, and in general, clarifying what should be operated by government agencies and the private sector.

## An Environment of Security is Desired

**Challenge:** *Providing long term security for operators, while Parks adjusts to changing conditions.*

### Frequently Changing Rules

Mountain Parks’ operators say they never know what will next be expected of them from one week to another. Mountain Park agencies agree there is “uncertainty for the operator as they are never sure just what Parks Canada will decide in the future.

Other Mountain Park agencies don’t share quite the same perspective. Operators want to have long-term stability [but] they cannot guarantee an end to new restrictions. They are constantly doing research and this research may turn up something that requires action in managing human use. Open communication is required.

### Lack of Long Term Security

East coast concession operators feel uncertainty of livelihood dealing with Parks, due to: agency need for frequent bids (e.g., every 5 years); proposal time; reply time (waiting for results); and the fact there is no appeal. They explain: “We feel we can’t invest in our business, and can’t improve it, because there is no incentive, or long term assurance.”

## Good Practices:

***Katannilik Territorial Park*** in Nunavut commends the consistent outfitters who give the agency and the community the opportunity to establish a good relationship with them, and work together meet the goals of the community and its residents.”

***Bluewater Adventures:*** “The Backcountry Manager (in Gwaii Haanas) has been the same person for over 8 years. This continuity [of Management] has been a highlight”

## Suggestion:

*Kluane/ Chilkoot/ Vuntut NPs* suggest a “move towards concessions in areas where use is limited. This would provide an operator a little more certainty, e.g., permits approved for a 3 to 5 year period”. They acknowledge while “it would also add more ‘red tape’ to the licensing procedures (e.g., limited entry through tendering-type submission every 3 to 5 years), it would also make it more difficult to get in the door once concessions have been let.”

## Knowledge of Business Environment

**Challenge:** *The need for agencies to acquire real knowledge of a range of business considerations and the impact of their decisions upon operators' businesses.*

### Concern About Unilateral Action and Lack of Consultation

**Fees Introduced:** Specific examples were outlined, where operators had invested in an operation, but that the agency, without consultation, soon introduced regulations that were actively detrimental to business. One East coast operator experienced a big reduction in day visitor numbers and a reduction of business revenues by 55 per cent as a result of the unilateral introduction of a vehicle fee for all vehicles entering the park, and a refusal to make allowances for the operators' daytime customers.

**Quotas and Lotteries Introduced:** Operator visitor quotas are a source of contention, particularly when the practicalities of visitor use, bookings, and seasonal fluctuations do not seem to be well understood. A West coast operator said “Parks has cost me \$30,000 to \$40,000 because of their new reservation system. They have a daily quota. At first, it was to be a similar number of visitors whatever the season, but Parks were persuaded to make a bell curve, allowing 300 visitors per day in the peak season. However, if you are booking people over, say, the first week of August, and one day is ‘full’ in the quota, you can't take visitors to the park for the entire period, because of that one day. Also, they have introduced a lottery for peak season use. So when kayak season is one month (July 15 – Aug 15), this can ruin your business if you don't get use during that period.”

### Business Requirements of Small and Medium-Size Enterprises (SMEs) Not Understood

**SMEs don't Operate like Large Businesses:** Operators feel there is an acute lack of understanding of the financial reality of small businesses (risks, insecurity, time constraints, financial constraints) by governments. They feel it is easier for Parks to work with ‘big business’ because such companies have similar resources as those available to government. However, if they want to see sustainable, small-scale, tourism, agencies have to be able to understand all realities and constraints of SMEs.

**Agencies are Aware of the Challenge:** One agency agrees: “We do not have a great relationship with most of the operators, as we have been becoming more restrictive as time goes on. Many, such as the fishing guides, see us eventually removing the activity. All are suspicious when we bring in changes”. Agencies understand conceptually that “operation and management of a park and a business” or “protecting park resources vs. entrepreneurial activities” are not only quite different, but a challenge.

**Resource Management May Require Increasing Regulations:** Agencies are aware that some of their activities/ regulations designed to protect the resource may have an adverse effect upon business operations. A west coast Park was concerned about the resource (e.g., possible use of certain hiking trails or non-approved campsites, in bad weather). So they put limits on access. A Northern Park says that major weakness/challenges are a result of the agencies' resource and/or visitor protection guidelines making it more difficult for operators to achieve a viable economic return. (E.g., group size limits; desire to carry a firearm for client safety; limits on the number of permits; desire to use motors; closure of

campsites; - all have been issues). In such cases this agency says: “We agree to disagree and move on to areas of common ground and interest.”

**Make Rules Practicable and Reasonable:** Operators feel that reasonable regulation is required. They give examples of problems: an east coast operator invested more than a quarter of a million dollars in the Park, and asked permission to place a business premises sign at the park entrance. They were refused permission, although the entrance to the Park is on the Trans Canada Highway. They feel this is not reasonable. Similarly, another east coast operator says: “Government agencies operate on theories and ideologies that are not always practical or commercially viable.” They feel it may be because “government departments have such a diverse agenda, they don’t seem to work well with tourism operators at all.”

*Jasper NP* makes these frank, but constructive points: “Operators will support changes or restrictions to their operations if:

- They are convinced of the reasons (based on sound science);
- The long term viability of their business is not affected;
- They are consulted about changes;
- They restrict new competition.”

### Suggestions:

*Mountain Quest Adventure Co. (“Mountain Quest”)*, in Alberta, suggests educating parks about the vagaries of small business and entrepreneurship: “making more efforts to include parks people in my product and show them that we’re actually supporting the mandate.”

*Gros Morne Adventures* suggests agencies consult with operators about hours of operation and see what impacts it may have on businesses. Maybe there are better times to reduce hours?

*Kayakouch* suggests: “Parks could learn more about the needs of a small ecotourism business. In order to survive as a business, we do require the ability to guide a reasonable minimum number of visitors through the region.”

## Sharing Information is a Win-Win for Everyone

**Challenge:** *Overcoming the reluctance of some parties to share information. Both agencies and operators need information from each other to improve management and operations, and to communicate the parks message.*

### Agencies Need Resource Information from Operators for Management Purposes

*Kananaskis Country* says: “More information on human use, environmental impacts, carrying capacity etc. is needed [for us] to better rationalize permit issuance and to balance visitor use with environmental requirements.”

### Operators Need Resource Information from Parks for Clients

Operators feel they need access to resource materials in the same way that other individuals and organizations do, to help them provide a more comprehensive experience to their clients, and allow them to communicate the Parks message and mandate (which is something agencies indicate they want operators to do). Operators sometimes feel there is unwillingness and resistance to share park information,

research, data, and trained people, with local operators in a proactive way, which they feel would strengthen the EI offerings to all visitors. A Prairies operator says: “Where there seems to be a problem is when we ask for data. Immediately a proprietary hand forbids this. We get no research data or monitoring info (or get told it is only half developed), or just, that we can’t have this. Why are agencies willing to share such data with others, such as universities, and not with operators? If it needs to be defined as ‘preliminary’, rather than ‘conclusive’, that is fine.”

Some operators and agencies do share information.

### **Good Practices:**

*Waterton Outdoor Adventures* in Alberta have a “good working relationship with the Park in terms of Resource Material Assistance.” This is reciprocated: Waterton Lakes NP provides training and resource materials to operators’ staff. They also recommend operator services to visitors who are seeking a certain type of experience.”

*Kluane/ Chilkoot/ Vuntut NPs* explain the results of their research findings to operators. They have also asked for operator input and help in developing resource protection guidelines and/or licensing allocation procedures. They commend certain operators for taking time to make tourism presentations at First Nation forums.

*WBNP/ Nahanni NP* provides current information on issues and park operation, human and cultural history to guides. “Also, the Manager personally devotes a great deal of time to guide outfitters when they have questions or concerns, and worked very closely with our newest operator, helping him through the entire environmental assessment process and community consultation (two years of work).”

### **Mutual Good Practices:**

*White Mountain Adventures* summarises: “In order to communicate the proper Parks messages to our guests, we need to know what [the messages] are. We also need to know up-to-date information, so that we can provide balanced information. We are often the eyes and ears in the Parks. We are in the field every day and are used by Parks to get messages out to the public as well as to advise [Parks] of wildlife sightings, trail conditions, etc. Parks, in turn, provide us with resources, communication and workshops dealing with current Parks issues. The front line [Mountain Parks staff] is always open to our questions and requests.”

### **Suggestions:**

*Manitoba Parks* suggests communication about ongoing and planned activities. A greater understanding and appreciation of each other’s primary objectives is needed.

*Mountain Quest* suggests: “Send us information. We are the conduit for the parks message. Send us emails or newsletters on the results of research: the number of highway kills; the pros and cons of development; the effects of controlled burns. These are all things we can use to keep the information we’re providing current.”



# Communication

## Dialogue Between Parks and Industry

**Challenge:** *It is necessary to give all parties a voice, particularly allowing communication between operators and upper Parks management.*

### Opportunities for Communication are Sometimes Limited

A west coast Park said there is “limited direct contact between us and tour operators. Communication has not been as effective due to infrequent meetings. The contact focuses on current operational needs and leaves little time to discuss marketing or product development.” A Prairies Park says, “We had a partnership with one eco-operator. He continues to offers programs but not in partnership with the park. The issue was miscommunication around expectations from both ends.”

Below are two typical perspectives on regulation, where improved communications might have assisted:

**Agency:** “I believe we have not been effective in communicating the carrying capacity of areas and getting the message across that there are limits to what the area can handle in terms of human use. The operators want to extend the area they work in and continue to want to go into areas that we want to keep relatively undisturbed by human use.”

**Operator:** “Parks continually close down areas, trails, and facilities because they no longer wish to service it. While it is recognized that no two parks are the same, there are areas of this park that can be used with no environmental damage, but Parks tries to limit use in those areas. While there have been several very comprehensive studies done in the Park, park staff take only from these studies what they like and disregard what they don’t like. They also twist studies around to meet their own wishes and totally ignore some recommendations.”

Agencies agree there is a need to communicate and share information about the Park with operators. For example, a Quebec Park says: “Outside operators do not know the park enough and some of its climatic aspects” (e.g. not being prepared for climate changes, such as a snow storm on a mountain top in June, which is quite usual).

### Good Practices:

**Discussions:** *Discover Acadia Vacations* in Nova Scotia says: “We told the chief of interpretation at Kejimikujik that we were coming for the day, and that we would be attending a naturalist-led program. That's it. Easy. Simple. Painless. Same with Blomidon Provincial Park -- we said we were coming for a hike and picnic and did it. Easy. Simple. Painless.” *WBNP/ Nahanni NPs* say: “People wishing to guide in the parks are provided the general info package. I'm always prepared to sit down and discuss and/or review business plan proposals.”

**Informing (two-way):** *Mingan NP* provides feedback from their clients (comments), to the park manager. *Nahanni River Adventures* says: “On the Park side, it requires a commitment to disseminate resolutions for action throughout the organization (even small parks can be unwieldy, with the right hand unaware of the left). Operators must be committed to ensuring their staff is aware of policies and plans evolving from the process, so they are acting in sync with the agreed course of action (even small companies can fail to communicate things).”

**Openness & Compromise:** *Nature Trek Canada* in BC says: “We feel that an open approach to our activities in the park helps parks understand our intentions. Our policy is one of compromise and not of confrontation. That seems to put staff at ease.”

**Excellent Communications:** *North Shore Tales* in PEI: “I have great co-operation from Parks staff. I have a good understanding and appreciation for their mandate so they trust my judgment, and I do not pressure them to use facilities that would put the integrity of the park's resources at risk.”

**Formal Communications and Training:** *Kluane/ Chilkoot/ Vuntut NPs* say: “We must make every effort to continue to have our ongoing formal meeting and discussion pertaining to licensing, permit/trip allocation, and resource protection guidelines. If and when resources come to us as a result of the EI panel report, time and effort should be spent working with operators to develop high quality park messaging packages”. They also realise they need to continue to work/communicate with the Territorial Government Tourism and Outdoor Tourism Operators to ensure they are marketing appropriate outdoor tourism activities and messages.

**Training:** *Kejimukujik National Park/ Cape Breton Highlands National Park* (Kejimukujik/ C. Breton NPs) in NS say Parks staff “train guides and making sure staff are familiar with park - e.g. Gaboteux Tours.” *WBNP/ Nahanni NP* tries “to let our operators know when interesting initiatives or training opportunities come up. We have only 3 operators (guide/outfitters) that have open communication with the Park, lots of consultation, and a long-standing relationship with the park. Gwaii Haanas NP provides operators “with opportunities to participate in relevant training sessions that we bring to the Islands and continue to hold meetings, issue newsletters etc.”

**Positive Attitude:** *Canadian Mountain Holidays* say “taking the time to understand our business; looking at commercial tourism operators as positive contributions to the park, rather than as a negative that must be restricted and discouraged; looking for opportunities to work together (form partnerships); most of this occurs through regular meetings during the off-season, and regular meetings on-site with Parks staff during the season.”

**Meetings - Formal & Informal, Individual & Group:** *Mingan NP* has meetings to establish what is going well or wrong, to offer better experiences. *BC Parks* suggests “more frequent meetings and other communication to address [potential] concerns such as impacts to natural values, and options for provision of activities outside (instead of or as well as inside) parks.”

**Newsletters:** *Nahanni River Adventures* says “The best practice is a Newsletter published electronically by Nahanni NP for the guides. It highlights current issues and initiatives, reviews regulations, and features bios of Park Staff (admin and field). This fosters good will and understanding which goes a long way in ensuring policies and plans are executed successfully and consistently.”

## **Two-Way Communications:**

*Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NP* says: “The most important collaborations are formal meetings with affected operators. The guidelines and issues discussed at these meetings are directly related to fulfilling our mandate to protect the resource. These meetings are used to explain the rationale and process behind the resource protection measures.”

“Meetings have also been important in discussing and dealing with administrative issues such as licensing, trip scheduling and/or permit allocation issues. These have been some of the more "heated" areas of discussion, but provide an open forum for learning each other's perspectives. The meetings have resulted in change to administrative procedures to benefit of both parties.”

“Letting the operators know the agency mandate requirements and limitations, and working with them towards solutions that address their needs as well, has always been productive. To do this, you must be prepared to take some heat; you must be prepared to identify and stand by your bottom line, and you must be prepared to change if/where possible. In the past, I have always made time to sit down, listen to and discuss issues and concerns with operators. I have taken the time to point out our bureaucratic trip wires, and explain how I would address or handle these challenges”.

### **Suggestions:**

**Industry Representation:** *Archipelago Ventures* in BC suggests there be local representatives on the Archipelago Management Board: - 2 Haida, 2 Feds, and 2 locals. Thus, when parks have co-managed boards, there is a way to involve the local communities, especially when communities may not be entirely aboriginal.

**Written or Electronic Information:** *Algonquin Outfitters* suggest it should be easy for people to check permit availability for peak periods. Perhaps some on-line availability is needed.

**Field Communications & Feedback:** *Kayakouch* suggests more talks and exchange of ideas.

**WBNP/ Nahanni NPs:** “Be in the field - monitor their level of service and messaging so that we can provide feedback and training re: appropriate park messages.”

**Workshops and Training:** *Kananaskis Country* suggests: “Facilitate information flow on heritage resources such as workshops in areas our department has expertise.”

## **Standardisation of Communications Process**

**Challenge:** *To have a standard process of communication. Current processes are time consuming and in some parks, operators may get no reply at all.*

### **Improved Formal Agency-Operator Communication Process at all Levels**

Operators want a process to deal with issues or communicate suggestions, with improved communications and a more streamlined flow of information.

Operators also want “a mechanism to disseminate info and decisions to all Park staff and operator staff so that decisions move beyond the management level.”

### **Suggestion:**

*Great Divide Nature Interpretation* in Alberta, suggests, “a formal process that includes sending our concern to Parks in writing, and then a report back to us about how the concern was investigated and how it was dealt with. (e.g., ‘I have heard from a number of other guides that “X” company is selling illegal guide badges’. I report this. Parks Canada investigates, and finds its true. They take away the illegal badges and ensure that the illegal guides are not guiding. They report back to me.)”

## **Communication with the General Public**

**Challenge:** *To let the public know about issues (the environment, parks, low impact tourism, safety, etc.) through both agencies and operators.*



## The Operator's Job of Educating the Public

Some agencies think operators lack knowledge or awareness of the park context and regulations. They also suggest: "Operators should educate their clients about the park challenges, standards, and preservation mission. Make them feel like it is a privilege to be in a National Park."

One the other hand, some agencies say many operators do a good job and communicate well. *Kootenay/Yoho NPs* commend some operators for including good park messages and interpretation in their programming." Similarly, *WBNP/Nahanni NP* says: "Sub Arctic Wildlife Adventures owner/operator Jacques Van Pelt is an accomplished naturalist, and is dedicated to expanding visitors horizons as to the significance of this National Park as well as the surrounding area."

## Good Practices:

*Waterton Lakes NP*: "Waterton Inter-Nation Shoreline Cruise Company has made a tremendous effort over the past five years to include important park and management messages in the content of their tours. They have gone beyond standard points of interest and provided wildlife safety and ecosystem management messages." "Waterton Visitor Services, and Trail of the Great Bear have shown a commitment to include park messages in their presentations and promotional material."

*Jasper NP*: "Brewster's Snowcoach Tour has seen the value of knowledgeable tour guides and incorporated some important park messages into their tour. Jasper Tramway have contracted with a private interpretive service to provide training to the guides - vastly improving the quality of information clients receive."

*Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs* commend Canadian River Expedition's attempts to have a natural history/science resource person on their trips to explain, and identify the natural features and resources on their trips.

*Riding Mountain NP*: "Earth Rhythms provides visitors with this experience by having trained staff that are very educated about the Park. The company sells packages for groups to discuss the heritage resources."

*Trail of the Great Bear*: "Our reason for being is to support the concept of parks and to contribute to meeting the objectives of local regional and national park management. We communicate park values to consumers and develop and deliver travel experiences based on park objectives. We target and distribute visitors based on park strategies. We financially support park interpretive programs. We adhere to and embrace park training suggestions."

## The Park's Job of Educating the Public

Some operators say that park management could focus more on education of the general public (FITs) about park issues. One the other hand, some parks communicate very well. *Trail of the Great Bear* says the Mountain Parks do "a good job in the development of appropriate messaging, interpretations, training, publications, participation, and packaging."

## Good Practices:

*WBNP and Nahanni NP* both work closely with their local Chamber of Commerce.

*Great Adventure Tours*, Ontario, says “[Point Pelee & Pinery] Park rangers are very informative, and provide excellent information to groups.”

*Tours of Exploration* in BC: “We find that publications and information centres [that are] run and staffed by the [national & provincial] parks are the most beneficial contribution to our efforts to educate and have our clients experience these areas.”

## Collaborations Between Agencies and Operators to Educate the Public

A number of operators and Parks collaborate well to educate the public, as described below.

### Good Practices:

**Operators Present Parks Programs:** *White Mountain Adventures* says, “National Parks have largely gotten out of direct interpretation. Companies like ours are used to get the message out. Parks provide us with resources and referrals, then we put together programs and operate them.”

**Newsletter:** *Kootenay/ Yoho NPs* comment: “One of Great Divide’s marketing tools is a newsletter, and it regularly contains articles about key park issues or studies that are going on. They do a great job of educating visitors about park issues in a sensitive manner.”

**Operators Hire Parks Staff:** *Northshore Institute* in PEI notes, “Participants in our programs are keen learners who make interpretive activities challenging and fun for Parks Staff. We receive rave reviews about presentations – we never worry about activities provided by park staff – they are always outstanding. The staff whom I work with is dedicated to offering quality service to the public and are good at offering new products to organized groups. These initiatives are fostered by a good [parks] manager who empowers her employees to try something new. The staff also appreciate us because we give them schedules months in advance and plenty of warning – we are consistent with our communication to them.”

### Suggestions:

*Trail of the Great Bear* suggests Parks participate with the community in a Sense Of Place Symposium so all people living in the park could reach a common level of appreciation and practice.



# **Management and Administration**

## **Interface with Parks Staff – Consistency Desired**

**Challenge:** *To overcome issues, such as senior staff turnover, policy swings, bureaucracy, and need for client service orientation.*

### **Staff Turnover**

**High Staff Turnover Overall:** Parks' front line and interpretation staff has a large turnover. Some operators feel that consequently, Parks messages to visitors about what to do and see, where to go, and advice on trails, and so on is often poor. One east coast operator says they come across numerous visitors who have been misinformed by Parks. They say the result is that visitors are ill prepared for weather conditions, trail conditions, etc. In some cases this leads to increased impact on the environment (lighting fires to keep warm, mounting searches for overdue hikers, etc.)

**High Senior Staff Turnover:** Operators feel that there is a high staff turnover in National Parks, especially senior staff. This is disruptive and slows the process of building good, sustained relationships between Parks and operators. Several operators stress the regular change of superintendents in Parks seriously interrupts or destroys any progress with Parks that operators may have developed.

### **Inconsistent Policies Due to Superintendent Turnover**

The high turnover in Parks Superintendents somehow leads to inconsistencies in park policies. For instance, a Prairies operator says; "Two Superintendents were very positive, but then the most recent one was very conservative, and policies swung. There is no consistency between Supers. Policies should be firm, not changing and fluctuating with the Super."

### **Lack of Communication with Parks Senior Staff**

Communication with front-line staff often is lost before reaching upper management. Operators tend to meet field staff while in the park – field personnel are the employees who become knowledgeable and familiar with operators' business practices. But it is senior office staff, not front line staff, who make decisions on park policies, such as access in Parks. A west coast operator says: "Management decisions are often made by people who have little or no true connection or relationship with the area, while feedback from individuals who spend their lifetimes in the region is so often overlooked. I find the discrepancy between office and field personnel too big."

Operators feel Parks staff could be advocates on their behalf if they were aware of their products and services, and were willing to direct clients to private sector offerings.

### **Conflicting Personalities**

Some operators say there have been past personality clashes between operators and park staff. This has led to some problems: A west coast operator says "personalities are the problem; those who feel they are exclusive 'emperors of the parks'. They have no confidence in the operators. They don't appreciate that operators do a lot of good. Parks does not believe this and sees operators as taking advantage."

### **Bureaucratic System**

Some operators feel that the process is sometimes rather bureaucratic and cumbersome, since operators have to work with many different people. There should be one park representative for them to deal with.

## Suggestions:

*Gros Morne Adventures* suggests “longer orientation programs for front line staff at the beginning of the season – to experience the Park. Hike trails; take boat tours; and see various interpretation programs and walks. We think that private sector would be willing to partner on this. It would benefit private sector having front line staff aware of products, plus it would lead to happy visitors!”

Another operator suggests: “There is a need for client services training for all parks services staff.”

## Community Relationships

**Challenge:** *Developing community relationships to stimulate awareness and benefiting local people.*

### Good Practices:

*WBNP/ Nahanni NP* has a 70 per cent-80 per cent aboriginal local community. They are working towards improved community relations through various strategies, “the most significant, from an outdoor tourism perspective, being an Aboriginal Tourism Strategy” for the Park. They hope for community buy-in and vibrant new service offers. They are also developing a two-way relationship in the field – whereas to date, most communication takes place in the Parks office and the Town.

Nahanni River Expeditions has developed a business relationship with local First Nations, taking some on river trips to promote guide training, and/or cultural awareness according to *Kluane /Chilkoot /Vuntut NPs*.

*Katannilik TP*, Nunavut, commends Wanapitei C.A.N.O.E. “In summer 2000, they stationed one of their guides in Iqaluit. He was responsible for all of the Katannilik Park trips that year.” This accelerated the relationship between the community and the guide. “He was then able to better understand Nunavut and its unique environment e.g., land claim, organizations, aboriginal population.” They say outfitters are beginning to know and hire the residents for guiding, and are enabling their clients to stay longer in the community after the trip – which really increases the economic benefit.

*Auyuittuq NP*, Nunavut, commends operators who not only use the park, but other locations, and who use the elders and the community centre, and talk about aboriginal practices in the community.

## Parks Resource Constraints

**Challenge:** *Both operators and Parks agree that Parks agencies lack funding and other resources.*

### Lack of Administrative Provision to Receive Financial Contributions

Administrative inflexibility may mean that the resource, operators, and visitors are not able to benefit as they could. Parks may not be able to accept partnership money from the private sector to fund initiatives. One project proposed in a Prairies Recreation Site (but regulated by the Parks Act) found there was no mechanism in Parks to allow receipt of money. “The Regional Director was a person of great ideas and vision. She wanted to follow the concept of how to make nature accessible to people. She was prepared to strike great partnerships with operators, parks, and private sector monies. But there was no mechanism for corporate partners to put money in.” The tour operator wanted to collaborate with Weyerhaeuser “to convert cross country ski trails to hiking and biking trails in summer, with interpretive signs. Weyerhaeuser was to put in the signs, and the operator was to contribute. But, this all failed. The Regional Director gave up.” This is paradoxical, in light of Parks Canada’s “requirement to generate revenue and recover costs” as well as the clear need for improved funding.

### Parks Agencies are given too Few Resources

Most operators feel that insufficient resources and budget cutbacks have greatly affected Park agency programming and planning, and feel service and facilities are suffering. They observe such problems as lack of investment in dedicated staff and resources. Operators agree there is “insignificant funding to the parks systems to support the necessary infrastructure to properly maintain it.” They say “Parks need to find ways to increase the season of use of parks, and to spread use over the year. Also, finding a way to fund the parks system is needed (e.g., private funding, fundraising, user fees).” Agencies agree.

According to agencies and operators, consequences of insufficient resources include:

- Need for staff training and for operator/outfitter training is limited/curtailed by lack of budget.
- Inability to work with operators to develop high quality interpretation natural and cultural park information packages, to provide appropriate, accurate and consistent messages about park resources to visitors.
- An Ontario operator claims its Park “has no visitor services, interpretive center or Park naturalist. Increased funding is required to provide these necessary services”
- Lack of money for “infrastructure, trail design and expansion.” A Prairie Park says its trails are actually being reduced, due to cost of maintenance.
- An east coast Park notes a lack of programs to assist the operators.
- An east coast Park also cites a lack of money for investment in collaboration.

A Mountain National Park sums up the problem: “Money is the challenge – We do not have enough money to manage/mitigate visitor impacts, develop new programs or assist operators with development of their own programs.” They have significant questions about appropriate numbers of visitors and appropriate types of use in their park, saying that with its size and diversity, “this requires significant funding that is not forthcoming”. They see it as necessary to “convince Canadians that National Parks are a political issue. If people want them preserved, it must be made abundantly clear to their local politicians that appropriate resources must be allocated.”

Parks and the agencies have the full support of operators in their need for more resources.

## **Good Practices:**

**Agency Support from Operators:** *Northshore* Institute in PEI: “In 1995, we approached interpretive staff from PEI NP with the intent to utilize them as educators for our Elderhostel programs. We assumed that Parks Canada would command a fee for service. They were surprised that we wanted to pay them for their services – because groups in the past had expected the services for free. Coupled with our proposal to pay for service, was the fact that we were giving parks an opportunity for their staff to utilize their knowledge with groups that would spend a one- hour session learning about various aspects of the park. Some groups actually spend a full week studying with the NP. In addition, staff would be used during shoulder seasons enabling them to extend their employment with Parks Canada.”

*The Land of the Loon Resort* in Saskatchewan: “We support the parks branch politically whenever the opportunity arises to help them in their constant battle with budget cuts”.

## **Suggestions:**

*Kluane/Chilkoot /Vuntut NPs* suggest, “If new resources are received, the potential exists to work with operators to develop high quality park messaging information packages.”

An operator suggests, “Charge higher visitor fees, and monies collected should go back to the park system and not into general tax revenue.”

# Managing for Ecological Integrity

## Qualified Support for the Ecological Integrity Mandate

**Challenge:** *There is support for EI from both operators and agencies, but need to overcome the uncertainty about the future, inherent in the new EI. Good communications are needed in any new direction.*

### Operator Support to the EI Mandate Ranges from Cautious to Unqualified

**Support for EI:** There is some unqualified support for EI from operators, and some think the EI recommendations don't go far enough! For example, some operators think 'historic uses' of the park should also be under examination as well as the numbers of people coming to the parks overall. A typical comment, one echoed by *Great Divide* is "We would support any moves to increase the ecological integrity of the park and feel that they would be good for our business."

**Active Support of Local Park:** A number of operators support their park very strongly and are concerned about incremental incursion into the park. For example, *Gros Morne Adventures* is concerned about threats to the boundaries of Gros Morne NP, from clear-cutting, access roads, and impacts on the resource. They feel "the National Park's hands are tied" and are compelled to voice their support.

**Support for Local Economies:** Some operators feel the positions are often presented as "a fight between development and the protection of ecological integrity". As *Bluewater Adventures* points out, rather, "it is the urgent discussion of how to have a protected area and also provide sustainable jobs in the local economy, and how to have Parks managers trust and work with small ecotourism operators who are already bringing over 70 per cent of the visitors to Gwaii Haanas."

### Operator Also have Fears About EI

Operators have many fears about EI, all of which relate to their ability to survive as a business:

- Some perceive a threat in terms of allowable activities (e.g., more restrictions on access), and that the relationship with agencies will become even more unbalanced (they feel unempowered)
- Some are concerned their costs will increase (e.g., through environmental assessments, insurance requirements, etc.)
- Some are concerned about: lack of collaboration, and onerous business requirements (costly in dollars, time, and effort). "We fear that park staff will now be less interested in working with tourism operators and communities adjacent to the park."
- A concern is: "An outdoor tourism product means clients; true preservation of ecological integrity likely means no humans."

### Agency Reactions to the EI Mandate Also Vary

Parks agencies have a varied response to the Ecological Integrity mandate. Some feel that it presents opportunities, principally related to ecotourism and educational activities (see chapter 12). While other agencies see it leading to a need for more controls, regulations and restrictions (e.g., a west coast Park expects the introduction of EI to lead to "more control of visitor activities and use, access, etc.")



Agencies felt the areas of EI challenge relate to:

- Visitors (Reducing human use in critical areas, slowing growth, consistent messages)
- Operators (having smaller groups in more structured activities, persuading operators of the benefits of this, more communications)
- Funding (of inventories, planning, developing Limits of Acceptable Change [LAC] targets, etc.)
- Resource management (how to be fair about determining appropriate types and amounts of use, First Nations concerns)
- Previous decisions (which might be difficult to reverse)

A few agencies feel a threat from EI, both internally and externally. A west coast Park is concerned that some park staff will perceive a threat from this focus on EI as leading to job loss. They also feel that “there will be pressure from the public to maintain traditional activities that are inconsistent with the EI approach”.

There are also more optimistic views. *Gwaii Haanas* says: “EI will allow us to celebrate what we are”, and they can “use that to discuss new opportunities – bird festival, learning packages, cultural camps etc.” *WBNP/ Nahanni NP* says: “Operators will be able to hold Parks Canada accountable for maintaining ecological integrity.”

### **Shared Concerns about Lack of Understanding of the Concept of EI**

**Operator Concerns that the Meaning of EI is not Adequately Understood:** Operators question the understanding of some fundamentals about the concept of EI: “Ecology is dynamic; it includes the processes of evolution, change, adaptation.” They also question whether ecological integrity in a park means: “Parks tries to revert ecosystems to the ‘old days’, and if so which ‘old days’ will they revert to? The days when park wardens were game wardens? The days when predator species were thought of as pests and shot on sight by these same wardens? The ‘islands of civilization’ days when fancy hotels were encouraged? Or the ‘islands of wilderness’ days where any development is quashed?” A Mountain operator says their worry is that without a balanced understanding of ‘ecological integrity’ and the reality that nature is not static, environmental extremists will use the ‘ecological integrity’ label to impose their vision of National Parks. Similarly, another worries that an anti-development focus will remove opportunities for small eco-friendly businesses.

**Agency Concerns about the Lack of Clarity of Meaning of EI, what it is, how it relates to the range of values in parks, etc.:** In addition, some agencies consider that their senior level decisions sometimes present conflicts to policy direction. A Mountain Park says “there is still some lack of clarity on just what the EI Panel recommendations and Minister’s response mean, to how we deal with tourism, including ecotourism.” Also, they question understanding of related concepts, such as carrying capacity or optimal performance limits. And there was concern there might be polarisation of conservation and recreation, due to varied interpretations of what EI means.

**Lack of Practical Definition:** Most operators feel that a practical, everyday definition or application of “ecological integrity”, has not been made clear to operators, or to Parks staff, or to the public. “Each Parks staff person we know has different interpretations – which does not help operators in their day-to-day business.” *White Mountain Adventures* says, “The major challenge is for Parks to define what they mean, and the actions associated with that definition. What is a workable definition of ecological integrity and what is preserving?”

**Concerns that Ecosystems Vary, and EI Needs Vary, so Implementation of EI Should Vary, Rather than Be Applied by Centralised Policy:** One operator says “clearly, some areas require sensitive management, yet many other areas are well suited to certain human activities such as minimal impact camping.” Some operators observe they have been active in a number of regions for decades, perhaps prior to Park establishment, with no or low impact. They are concerned that there will now be some unjustified restraints. Another operator observes impact is not necessarily damage, “We must keep in mind that the minimal impact signs of human presence in an area are not necessarily a threat to ecological integrity.”

Some operators feel that the main challenge will be adapting management to the needs of specific parks. They are concerned that centralised national policies will not necessarily solve specific park problems. They worry that Parks may need to challenge operators who state that certain regions are not undergoing a threat to ecological integrity.

### **Operators Hope for Balance:**

*Kanata Adventures:* “We hope that the climate changes, and that Parks are not only interested in their own mandate but recognize the needs of those who want to support and cooperate with them.”

*Tours of Exploration:* “We would welcome any regulations and agency/Government efforts to balance ecological and cultural issues in the parks with commercial ventures in those zones.”

### **Potential for Changed Relationship Between Parks and Operators**

**Some Agencies Anticipate Changes in Relationship:** Many agencies felt that the new EI mandate would change their relationship with operators, due to the greater emphasis on resource knowledge and EI. The changes discussed included: changed emphasis in operators’ interpretive messages; need for more research; improved mutual understanding of the need for zoning (temporal and spatial) of commercial use; angling and hunting changes; increased use of non-mechanised travel; greater orientation to ecotourism; greater preservation vigilance by park managers; and the need for greater recognition that tourism can create impacts.

**Some Agencies Anticipated No Changes in Relationship:** A few agencies felt there would be no change in relationship, due to the good fit of the EI mandate with current park strategies, policies and activities. Others said that while they anticipated no change in relationship, there was need for better communication, suggesting, “Any changes would be easier to implement if we have a better relationship with the operators.”

**Views Sometimes Vary Between and Within Agencies:** Within *BC Parks*, some felt “there would be no change, as this is a good proactive strategy that fits with proactive permit approval processes”. While some agencies felt “there will be changes because of the greater emphasis on resource knowledge and ecological integrity”, others felt that even current requirements (e.g., related to EAs) are at the point of being barriers to operations, and are concerned about the impact of more stringent requirements. It is helpful to know these varied views for future appropriate directions, information, and approaches.

**Operators Seem to have Several Perspectives:** Some felt there would be no change; some had no comment, particularly if they did not operate in National Parks. Some felt that this would make an already tense situation worse while others had specific constructive suggestions related to activities. These are outlined elsewhere in this report.

## Clarify the Practical Implications of Ecological Integrity

**Challenge:** *To effect implementation in a clear, practical, feasible manner, and to present all Parks users with a clear understanding of what EI means in the field, and how things should be done, or done differently.*

### Clarify Application of EI

**Caution about EI Implementation:** Most operators respect the ecological integrity mandate, but are cautious about how this is to be implemented. Some felt “each park should be assessed and managed on a park-by-park basis” and that “Parks should be open to any [operators] that are able to demonstrate near-zero impact”.

Most agencies agree application of the EI mandate will be key. *Kananskis Country* says: “We need to clearly define the ecological objectives for our protected areas and provide a stronger legislation and guidelines for operators to follow”. Agencies raise the following valid issues, questions and topics:

**Lack of Consensus:** What is it [EI] and how does it relate to the range of values such as high level decisions, sometimes conflicting direction from planning processes, sometimes conflicting policy direction, and purposes for designation.

**Knowledge:** How do we know when we have reached optimal performance or limits of acceptable change or carrying capacity?

**Resources:** How do we fund inventories; development of plans; optimal development targets; LAC or carrying capacity studies?

**Expectations** that protected areas can be viable economic development opportunities, when resources do not keep pace with expectations.

**Potential conflicts** between financial and protection or quality opportunity objectives.

**Evolution** of legislation, policies as, for example, relating to endangered species.

**A fair allocation** of types and amounts of use should be employed. Examples include conservation, ‘First Nations’ as protected under the Constitution, commercial, research, education, and public outdoor recreation.

**Polarization** of conservation and recreation being fueled by varied interpretations of what it means; potential to lose staff support and public support.

**Existing uses, recent/past decisions** that may not fit but would be very difficult to reverse.

### Operators raise a range of issues and questions:

**Clarify Sensitive Area/Site Designation:** Operators say, “Protected area designations, and particularly sensitive sites, are currently unclear”. They need a more “balanced and clearer understanding of both ecological integrity and the specific areas affected.”

**Concerns about Extremes in Implementation:** One operator says “Parks management seems to have taken the concept of ecological integrity to an unrealistic extreme. Four operators are concerned that any and all minimal signs of human presence in the area will be considered by parks as a threat to ecological integrity.”

**Desire to be Involved in EI Decisions, due to Business Implications:** Some say, “in some cases, operators are unsure as to the viability of their business, due to the Ecological Integrity Report. Closure of

campsites or trails can affect programming and tour offerings. Often decisions about closures are made unilaterally with little or no contact with the tour operators that the closure might impact.”

**Operators are Easy Targets while other High Impact Developments Continue:** An operator questions “how can a blanket statement with words like EI be used when [Mountain Parks] already have major highways and railway lines transecting the Parks?”

**Illegal or Inappropriate Activities Continue:** Operators are frustrated and feel targeted when they are complying with standards which become even more stringent, yet see that illegal activity from other visitors continues, and at the same time some Parks are being developed for resorts and industry use.

### **Suggestion:**

*Mountain Quest* feels that, “Since the ecological integrity report is a given, and it is overwhelmingly supported by the public, the best way to address some of these issues is to hold working sessions between parks and industry stakeholders about how they can work together to support the parks mandate.”

## **Limiting “Numbers” is Only One Management Approach**

**Challenge:** *The easy option for management often seems to be to considering numbers, quotas, or limits. However, a spectrum of other management options needs to be considered by most agencies and operators.*

### **Numbers-Based Limits Dominate – But also Activity Type and Behaviour Need Consideration**

Both operators and agencies point out that the different types of use and users may have different types of impact. Yet the reality is that many operators and agencies seem to view options in terms of growth, numbers, or quotas (rather than considering management of visitor activity, behaviour, destination, impact, resource, activity, frequency, location, season, group size, unguided vs. guided, etc.).

Agencies comment (with respect to commercial operators) about:

- Maximum use limits, maximum visitor use capacity, and unused visitation opportunities;
- Reservation systems being at capacity, so new operators or new products (causing more visitation) are out of the question;
- Outdoor tourism growth is faster than we can accommodate;
- We want slow, manageable growth.

Some agencies partially recognise the fact that there is a multitude of management techniques (of the resource, the visitor, and the impact), when they ask the question “What should be the appropriate numbers that can use an area without impacting on that experience and the particular environment?”

A Northern Park says on the one hand “While there is still room for additional visitation and use, e.g., more operators, this will come at a cost to natural and cultural resource protection.” On the other hand, the agency does partially recognise the range of management techniques by saying “One could argue that operators will be able to lower (minimize or slow down) the impact of any increased use through their high environmental protection standards and Leave No Trace experiences.”

## Suggestion:

*Kananaskis Country* recognises “acceptable use encompasses more than the idea of numbers only”. They add, “Operators need to accept the concept of limits of acceptable use and be willing to change their business to reflect this.”

## Clarify Appropriate Use

Operators are confused as to what is considered appropriate use and behavior in Parks. “There needs to be a clearer understanding of the meaning of low-impact and “eco” tourism so operators can adapt accordingly”. Some agencies agree with the need for clarification. *Georgian Bay Islands NP* in Ontario suggests their challenge will be identifying inappropriate use or levels of use. *Jasper NP* says, “Policy and the park management plan have designated some activities as inappropriate (e.g. snowmobiling, jet boating on rivers).” But they say, “There is a need for more research into defining what is the appropriate experience for an area.”

*Bruce Peninsula Outfitters* in Ontario suggests establishing best practice guidelines for Outdoor Tourism Operators related to their activities and operations.

## High Volume Companies are a Challenge

Not all operators object to limits to their numbers, but often they are concerned about the numbers of visitors and crowding which comes from volume-based tour companies. A number of operators, particularly in the more “popular” parks, feel that the commercial bus tour visitors have greater impact than guided outdoor tourism clients. They painted the picture quite dramatically, with considerable strength of feeling. Their points include:

- A number of parks cater to and attract high volume operators who keep insisting on more capacity and lower prices, which leads to ruin for destinations where the primary attraction is quite the opposite.
- Large investor-driven tourism companies focus on short-term results, leading to high volume and low return tourism so keep high revenues, but this is not great for the ecology.
- When parks are crowded, resort, or facility-oriented, most visitors have considerable lack of education about what to expect from National Parks, and the societal purpose of the park. This creates ever more pressure to provide services for increasing numbers of users who want experiences that are not appropriate to a national park setting.
- We are in danger of overbuilding in our natural attractions, then killing the goose that laid the golden egg.
- We need to attract people who want appropriate national park experiences. Ultimately the quality of the outdoor tourism operator clients’ experiences will be determined by how mass tourism is managed.
- Outdoor tourism clients come because of wilderness, and are disappointed with crowds.
- Outdoor tourism clients are the ones who spend more, and stay longer, and appreciate the values of the place more.

## Suggestion:

*Mountain Quest* says, “Banff needs to concentrate on what people really come for. The wilderness, the wildlife, the BIG nature, and give them every opportunity to experience this.”

## **The General Public & FITs are a Challenge**

Some operators also feel concerns about the number of FITs and feel that the general public may present a larger problem than guided visitors. They say, “The unguided public are a problem for parks, for management, and for ecological integrity”. They cite instances of where regulations for managing commercial operators are far stronger than regulations for the public, and they give examples.

Operators say unguided visitors need controls. A Maritime operator gives an example: “Public education in the protection of parks resources, notably the dune system, is essential. Passive signage is ineffective. People stop to read the warning sign, walk around it, and continue on through the dunes. More beach and road access patrols are required, and fines may be useful for the FIT.”

One Ontario operator suggests that a local company/guide should be involved in all trips, which would help local economies significantly.

## **Facilitate Visitors’ Experiences Using Local Operators**

There is also a view that all tourists who go into the backcountry should go with an operator to ensure management of fragile areas. One operator feels “parks are a finite resource. Canada has a long history of giving its resources away cheap or free. Wilderness is a finite resource as well as a valuable resource. We should increase its value and reflect this in prices and rules”.

*Majestic West Coast Adventures* says, “there are operators leading trips in the park from the US” and suggests commercial “operators should be Canadian only”.

## **Good Practice:**

The Ontario Provincial Parks system introduced Green Zones, which are Crown Lands where non-residents may not camp unless they are a licensed tour operator’s clients. The pilot project was started in the Kenora area many years ago, and “works really well” according to an operator. It is based on a classification of users into two main types – Residents (Canadians), and Non-Residents (foreigners).

## **Suggestions:**

An Ontario operator feels the Parks pilot project in the Green Zones should be considered by all Canadian jurisdictions. They suggest that while all residents (Canadians) should pay a reasonable fee for use of parks, it should be recognised that they already pay for parks through taxes and other lost opportunities, whereas, non-residents should pay more direct fees to use Parks. This type of system exists in other international protected areas. Suggested options for international visitors could be:

- Higher price of Park admission for international FIT visitors, or
- The same prices as those charged to Canadians if the foreign visitor goes with a commercial tourism operator.

*Pukaskaw NP* suggests their National office should work on developing partnerships with colleges and universities to assist in measuring backcountry impacts.

*Earth Rhythms* suggests what is needed is a range of collaborative approaches to Parks management (not just quotas and limits and demarketing) including: education, selection of the right markets, appropriate monitoring, appropriate limits to use, appropriate regulations, appropriate product-season matching, appropriate positioning, and appropriate image development. Earth Rhythms feel that this could be a collaborative effort between operators and agencies.



## **Operators' Views about their Stewardship**

This section does not reflect challenges in collaboration. Rather, it reflects many of the exemplary practices of operators alone, (whether or not they are in parks or in other natural or fragile environments) that are oriented to transmitting benefits to the place, the people, and the visitor.

### **Company Goals which Support Sustainability**

A few companies (*Wabikimi Canoe Outfitters and Eco-Lodge* in Ontario, and *Earth Rhythms*) indicated that they had operational principles or ranked goals that supported a range of elements of sustainability.

#### **Company Goals**

- Safety
- Protection of natural environment
- Protection of indigenous cultures
- Enjoyment
- Education
- Experiential - Interactive and involving, with continuity of one experience to another
- Involvement of regional produce, food, and cuisine
- Demonstrates sustainable tourism/ecotourism practices

Some operators feel companies should emphasise providing “an experience” rather than a tourism product to the visitor, enabling enlightenment for individuals. *Earth Rhythms* thinks the outdoor tourism travel sector can take leadership in creating experiences, as part of the new economy. They have company Ecotourism Practices for every aspect of their operation, used in all settings.

*Trail of the Great Bear* designs all the elements of their tour packages with the same care:

- Tour packages based on eco-system based experience and interpretation
- Provision of qualified interpreters and guides
- Publications and programs carry park messages
- Financial contribution to Park interpretation
- Participation in park planning and strategy development and delivery
- Distribution of visitation
- Use of park interpretive planning
- Participation and initiation of relevant research



## Careful Design and Delivery of Tours, Packages or Facilities

### Low Impact Design

The design and development stages of product development are key to what the product will be like. Some outdoor tourism operations have fixed-roof facilities. During their construction phase, *Arctic Vision* “made every effort to disturb as little as possible of the natural setting. Any areas that had to be disturbed were returned to their natural state. We designed everything to blend in with the park environment”.

### Presentation, Interpretation, and Guiding Relates to Sense of Place

Visitors to Parks and protected areas should have an experience that includes awareness that they are in a special place, with messages that transmit information about this. Many operators provide such interpretive opportunities. *Land of the Loon Resort* has “a little library in their lodge where they display posters about loons and habitat, and promote responsible use of waterways, particularly related to habitat preservation. Similarly, *Purcell Lodge* presents interpretive messages that feature the delicate and sensitive nature of the alpine ecosystem. *Northshore Institute*: “We spend a good deal of time educating people about the challenges and issues in PEI National Park. We have been involved first hand in developing the protection of other areas. Because we are an educational provider, our job is to provide the best practice possible and the most current knowledge about the park.”

### All Guides Naturalists

*Gros Morne Adventures*: “All guides are naturalists and present the park message to visitors. They provide information on geology, flora, fauna and cultural aspects of area so that visitors have a better understanding of why this place is special and the importance of protecting it.”

### Interpret the Seasons, Human Use and History

All *White Mountain Adventures*’ programs focus on the cultural and natural heritage resources of the parks. “We integrate the Park messages in our discussions with guests and provide a balanced discussion of issues. E.g., Wildlife and Nature (summer) programs, and Wildlife in Winter programs focus on seasonal ecology, human impacts, and environmental stewardship needed in the parks. Our “Tale of the Town that Vanished” program provides the visitor with an in-depth experience of what the town of Bankhead represented during the first 20 years of the 1900s and how its short life ended due to changing park policies, labour strikes and international economies.”

### Discuss Parks Mandate

*Great Divide*: “Our activities reflect part of the park’s mandate to educate people. We discuss not only natural and cultural history, but conservation biology and national park issues, mandates and value to society.”

*FreshAir Adventures* indicates their guides are well versed in the mandate of the park for interpretive programs. *Blewater Adventures* have regular talks/presentations during their trips to reinforce and widen visitors’ knowledge, and to enable guests to better observe and appreciate their experiences. “In Gwaii Haanas, our interactions with the Haida Watchmen also provide our visitors with additional information, and often a different perspective”.

*Excursions Mauricie* educates their clients about park heritage resources, while *Mountain Quest* uses local themes, wisdom, culture, heritage, and historical characters, to educate clients about the environment in their corporate team learning and incentive adventures.

*The University of Saskatchewan* presents programs offered under the banner of ClubSEE, where SEE stands for Science, Education, and Ethics. “We insist on accurate science, skilled education techniques, and ethics of deep respect for nature above all else.”

*Acres of Action* in Newfoundland, and a number of other operators provide written information. “Our aquatic and land based activities are designed to indirectly teach an appreciation for wilderness and wildlife resources.”

Many operators take a holistic view of interpretation, and don’t communicate only natural history information. *Majestic West Coast Adventures* feels they are ambassadors of the park. “We teach people to respect the area and show them how it works. We promote safety, fun, environmentalism, and low impact tourism.” *White Mountain Adventures*, from the beginning, focused on having guests learn more about the areas they visit, while actively enjoying and appreciating the unique surroundings and natural settings of the area. This learning has also focused on having guests begin to understand their place in the natural world, their impacts, and the power they have as individuals to change these impacts through responsible and thoughtful use.

*Discover Acadia Vacations* in Nova Scotia provides interpretive messages about resource impact and conservation measures.

*Earth Rhythms* uses regional ecosystem foods and produce as the basis for regional cuisine in menus. They do team development work with corporate groups, using entry points for interpretation such as the history of the park as a metaphor for specific teamwork. They use National Park phenomena (e.g., a moose kill) to illustrate recycling opportunities with corporate and industry groups.

### **Use of Appropriate Expertise**

Many operators express pride in the quality of their staff, many having special training, skills or local knowledge. *Bluewater Adventures* says, “All our tours are educational and led by leaders with years of local knowledge. Each trip has a dedicated resource person – typically either an anthropologist or biologist.” *Acres of Action*, in Newfoundland, have trained, knowledgeable staff that are always willing to provide information to visitors, as well as written information.

*Great Divide* staff have:

- High levels of knowledge about all aspects of natural and cultural history;
- High levels of knowledge about all aspects of national park management, history and issues;
- High levels of interpretive skills.

*Butterfly Tours* says, “Our tour guides allow us to provide safe wilderness experiences that are intimate and challenging.” Some of the unique qualities that their guides can provide to clients are:

- Guides with 20 years experience sea kayaking and guiding in Gwaii Haanas;
- Tours led by the most experienced sea kayak guide in the park;
- Proven ability to effectively teach wilderness kayaking skills;
- Intimate familiarity with the area and its inhabitants.

## Use a Researcher

*Mountain Quest*: “We use field researchers & biologists to provide interpretation in our specialized outings.”

*Earth Rhythms* uses the knowledge of experts (scientists, aboriginal guides, wardens, researchers, bird-banders, etc.) as part of the packages they create and deliver.

The goal of *Coastal Adventures* in Nova Scotia is to introduce the adventure tourist to the features of the environment in a safe, informative, and unobtrusive way. To this end, they employ experienced sea kayaking guides with first aid training, and a good working knowledge of local biology, geology and human history.

## Promote Learning

*Great Divide* notes, “Articles on our website and in our newsletter provide information on all of the topics. Our focus, which comes through clearly in our advertising, is on the learning aspect of the experience.”

## Customer Service and Relations

### Prepare Guests – Before and During the Trip

*Bluewater Adventures* provides visitors with detailed resource materials before the trip to better prepare them for their trip. They have regular talks/presentations during the trip to reinforce and widen visitor knowledge and enable them to better observe and appreciate their experiences. *Algonquin Outfitters* promotes responsible camping practices in all their literature and materials. *Tours of Exploration* provides detailed information kits to each client on their tours.

### Customise Product to Meet Particular Market Needs

*Silver Line Tours*, Ontario, finds there are gaps in Parks agency materials in certain languages. They try to fill the gap by providing the information in the visitor’s language. *Nahanni River Adventures* “reviews policies and procedures within Parks against changing trends and visitor profiles (e.g., increase in guided travel). These visitors are aging, and opting for less technical travel, so now we provide a greater ratio of raft trips to canoe trips. This changing visitor profile means changing visitor attitudes – and more willingness to accept composting toilets or packing out solid waste.”

*Canadian Mountain Holidays* has “a significant on-going training program for hiking guides, that allows them to do the best possible job of interpreting park values for visitors”.

## Training

### Formal & Informal Training

*White Mountain Adventures* says their training programs are focused on the standards of MPHIA and they finance their guides’ training. “The President of our company is also President of MPHIA which has been created to set standards, promote ongoing education and certify Professional Interpreters and businesses operating in the Mountain Parks”.

## Resource Protection & Sustainability

### Sensitivity to the Environment

Most Outdoor Tourism Operators in Parks say they operate in a totally environmentally conscious fashion, and feel particularly strong, although open to constructive suggestions. Besides the examples incorporated throughout this report, others follow:

*FreshAir Adventures* says “I think the Park recognizes that our activities have a low impact on the Park - at the same time providing education and challenge to park visitors.”

*Mountain Quest* adheres to a range of principals of sustainability. “Our agenda is to have everyone leave with a higher environmental conscience.”

- We follow ecotourism guidelines. We use local suppliers as much as possible for lunches, transportation and other supplies.
- We use local guides and support people, as much as possible.
- We educate people about the park’s mission and mandate, and the importance of properly managing these special areas.
- We work with researchers and, on occasion, park employees, to help with program delivery and design.
- We go to places that are away from the high human use, high-impact areas of the park.

### Practice Low Impact Techniques (LIT)

*Gaboteux Tours*: “For our picnics we use washable plates, knives, forks etc. and we use biodegradable soap when we wash up. We provide individual reusable bags for personal garbage including toilet tissue.”

### Conserve Materials

*Purcell Lodge* is a model of sustainable development, since its power and sewage facilities are very environmentally friendly. *FreshAir Adventures* practices conservation on all their trips. *Earth Rhythms* requests all suppliers to provide all food services in an eco-friendly way.

## Consider Transportation Systems

Mode and maintenance of transportation is not always considered. *Lake Minnewanka Boat Tours*, in Alberta, have completed a new fuel storage system to service their tour boats and marina, and it has a safety factor of 300 per cent. “This is well above any other system in the National Park. The new docks that are under construction also have many safety features designed for both environmental and human safety.”

*The Land of the Loon Resort* has a number of good operational practices that relate to transportation:

- “Our motorized boat fleet is being converted to four stroke engines. These do not use oil in the gas, and are much less polluting, and quieter.
- We do not rent accommodation to people arriving with jet-skis.
- We have added two windriders to our equipment rental fleet, which is a wind driven personal watercraft (which can be as exciting and certainly takes more skill to operate than motorized personal watercraft).”

*Strider Adventures*, in BC, uses llamas as pack animals. This ensures that foreign seeds are not carried into the protected areas (because of the soft pad of the lama), which avoids impacting vegetation. *Earth Rhythms* uses public transportation systems (bus, vans) to move clients around, rather than individual vehicles.

## Small Group Size

*Gros Morne Adventures* provides low impact trips, and their group size averages 8-9 people. *Tours of Exploration* keeps a minimum group size. *Strider Adventures* has maximum groups of 10 people. *Québec Hors-Circuit* also uses small groups. In addition, it has a strong focus on interpretation, has high standards, and works to educate clients.

*Butterfly Tours* prefers groups of 6 guests to 2 guides, which maintains low-impact for the park. They ensure each guest has a clear understanding of minimal impact camping techniques.

## Pack Out Garbage

*Coastal Adventures*: “Our impact is minimal and restricted to the few places where we land and camp. We pack out what we pack in.”

## Minimise Impacts On Natural Environments, Codes and Standards of Behaviour

*Wildwater Nature Tours and Expeditions* emphasises the safety of their guests – “we sometimes say ‘no’ to clients, and tell them why.”

*FreshAir Adventures* says their activities have a very low impact on the Park, since they usually have visitors view the Park from the water. Beach stops are generally on sandy beaches that are soon covered by the Fundy tides. Similarly, *Tours of Exploration* says, “We minimize our impact on the parks system, minimize refuse in pristine areas, carrying out any trace of visitation”.

*Gaboteux Tours*: “We remind our larger groups that our presence may impact on others’ enjoyment of the park, particularly those coming to the park for solitude. We encourage use of the washrooms. We explain park policy: staying on the trail, not picking plants, not bothering wild life. For example, we were driving over North Mountain in thick fog, we came across a line up of cars and people watching a moose.

We felt the situation was potentially dangerous for the moose and our clients, and did not stop. We later explained our actions to our clients and discussed safety issues.”

*Willow Root Nature Tours* in Alberta ensures participants are well aware of value and sensitivities of landscape, and informs them of and ensures appropriate behaviour. They have voluntarily changed published itineraries to reflect [park] management issues.

### **Support Regional Conservation Efforts**

*Kootenay/ Yoho NPs* commend Great Divide who give 15 per cent of their profits to wildlife research like the Central Rockies Wolf Project, or bear studies, and wildlife research funded by the Friends of Banff and Yoho NPs. The wildlife studies are usually conducted in the national parks. *Waterton NP* says the Trail of the Great Bear sponsors heritage presentation programs and donates a percentage of their sales to environmental projects in and outside the park.

### **Donate for Conservation**

*Bluewater Adventures* supports a different conservation or research group on each trip. “Our company donates a small portion of the trip fee to this group, supplies information on the work of the group, and promotes to our visitors our perspective that those who are fortunate enough to experience a protected site also take on a responsibility to help in protecting our environment – either here locally or back in their home yards.”

*Algonquin Outfitters* donates funds and labour to restore heritage structures in Algonquin Park.

*Tours of Exploration* maintains an ecofund to support local environmental and cultural projects.

## **Contribute to the Local Community**

### **Benefit Local Communities**

*Majestic West Coast Adventures* says, “We belong to the community in Ucluelet and support the local economy.” *Outside Expeditions*, in PEI, says, “All our expeditions benefit and involve people of local communities and generate funds that help preserve and promote the areas we travel through.” *Earth Rhythms* involves aboriginal teachers as leaders of team sharing sessions in National Park “fire circles.”

### **Purchase and Employ Locally**

*Bluewater Adventures* says, “In recognition of our role as an ‘ecotourism’ company, we buy all food and fuel locally, promote the local area with our visitors and provide them a list of local accommodation to lengthen their trip locally outside the protected area. Last year we started organizing a one-day add-on local trip to visit the local museum, and enjoy a native Haida dinner hosted in a local home. We seek to hire resource people locally and are starting to have success.”

### **Involve the Local Community**

*Butterfly Tours* works very closely with several local residents, who provide accommodation, food services, and transportation.

*Gros Morne Adventures* hires from local area first, then from the region.



## **Collaboration for Positive Outcomes**

This section presents only Best Practices. It demonstrates that some operators do communicate appropriate messages, and demonstrates that various Parks/agencies do recognise each other's environmental efforts. It also presents good examples of collaboration between operators and agencies to reach positive environmental outcomes.

### **Mutual Commendations for Environmental Activities**

#### **Overall Environmental Protection and Messaging**

**Issue Solving:** *Kananaskis Country* commends *Inside Out Experience Adventure Tours*. "They have been very involved with our department in looking for creative and collaborative solutions to issues related to white water activities on the Lower Kananaskis River. This includes interpretive and environmental training for staff, development of facilities and involvement with the Lower Kananaskis River Users Association."

**Voluntary Efforts:** A number of operators contribute to environmental protection voluntarily, or work with parks to provide information, etc. *Newfoundland Parks* commends *Wildland Tours* and *Miki Enterprises* - both use Cape St. Mary's as part of their program. *Wildland Tours* is involved internationally in funding protection of natural Areas - both operators market the product. The two interpreters - trained by us - deliver a good program during the summer and school programs in the fall."

#### ***Environmental Stewardship & Messaging:***

*BC Parks* say, "Some operators run very clean shows and pack out what they pack in. An example of good practices include site visits, interpretive walks, and the Golden Ears Outdoor Learning Centre (Katzie First Nation Cultural Experience) which is one of several collaborative ventures with First Nations in providing information, education, and various aboriginal tourism offerings. Another example involves the operator for Mitlenatch who freely assists our warden on the island with the delivery of supplies etc."

"Most Waterton operators incorporate park messages into their promotions and products. Most support green initiatives in the community such as recycling." notes *Waterton Lakes NP*.

*Prince Albert NP* commends *CanoeSki Discovery*. The operator offers programs with a strong environmental stewardship component as well as opportunities with ecological and cultural components.

*Waterton Lakes NP* says, "The operators who have traditionally been operating in the park, so far seem to have a keen interest in operating in a sustainable fashion that does not impair the resources." *Pacific Rim NP* commends *Raincoast Communications* ("good messages, low impact") and *Subtidal Adventures* ("messaging, collects valuable natural history data, obviously cares for the park)."

#### ***Visitor Conduct Guidance:***

*Saskatchewan Parks* notes the "*Land of the Loon Resort* has requested people not to use watercraft (seadoos) while staying at their facility. They ask this as a way of protecting the nesting areas on the lake [which is within the boundaries of the NP]. Clients comply."



### ***Submit Sightings and Information Reports and Research:***

**WBNP/ Nahanni NPs** say, “Guide outfitters provide info/updates on condition of remote Park assets/infrastructure that park staff may not visit very often.” **Nature Trek Canada:** “We report on wildlife sightings (our guides are professional biologists) and share costs when possible.”

**Great Divide** says, “We send in trail and wildlife sighting reports. We talk to people extensively about the mandate, use and value of national parks. Our interpretive storylines include the history of national parks, wildlife research and management, fire management, aquatics restoration and current park issues”

**Blewater Adventures** says, “We regularly support researchers with records of significant wildlife sightings by taking photographs, recording behavior and sometimes taking underwater recordings. We have purchased camera equipment and tape recorders to support this effort. Every year we are able to contribute several significant and unusual sightings.”

### ***Leave No Trace (LNT) Practices:***

**Yukon Territorial Parks** commends the “National Outdoor Leadership School Leave No Trace (NLT) program.” **Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs** say “All river operators follow pretty good LNT camping methods and procedures, and play an important role in having the agencies require some of these practices for the general public as well (e.g., human waste removal, requirement for fire pans etc.)”

### **Parks Collaborates with Operators**

“Parks Canada shares part of its office with Station de recherche des Îles Mingan (Mingan Island Research Centre), which offer science oriented excursions.” notes **Mingan NP**.

**Kejimukujik/ Cape Breton NPs** in NS produced a Guide’s Guide for Cape Breton, Environmental Assessment, and courses for bus tour guides focusing on interpretation.

**Kluane/ Chilkoot/ Vuntut NPs** have lent out their portable electronic bear fence to rafters with the hope that they would purchase and use this equipment themselves.

**Kananaskis Country** provides organisational and logistical support for groups such as the Lower Kananaskis River Users Association through partnerships. “This is an area where we have developed a “buy in” from operators and other users on the concepts of limits by involving them in ongoing dialogue and decision making.”

### **Suggestions:**

**BC Parks** would like to see operators:

- Maintain and upgrade trails/facilities required because of their activities
- Market the “setting” as well as the “experience” to their clientele
- Educate customers about park values.
- Provide appropriate opportunities in accordance with prescribed guidelines
- Report any environmental concerns to park management.

**Yukon Territorial Parks** suggests: “Offer additional allocation incentives to Outdoor Tourism Operators who employ Leave No Trace practices (e.g. allow access to otherwise unavailable areas, should they guide fewer clients, and employ LNT methods).”

## Collaboration on Visitor Education Projects

The following excellent collaborations highlight where operators employ parks staff to enhance their operations and increase the authenticity of their product, and where Parks employ operators to assist them in delivering and interpreting parks messages.

### Operators Employ Parks Staff

*Québec Hors-Circuit* says at Mingan, “Guides from the National Park get involved in interpretation activities.” *Mingan NP* says they “work in association with some specific operators from the region. Nature guides from the park are doing the interpretation content of tours organized and managed by operators (fee, or exchange of services/ some local cruises company are directly collecting the entrance fee to the park. The Park manager does a quality assessment of the operator before establishing any partnership.” *Gros Morne NP* says both Gros Morne Adventure Guides and Bontours have hired Parks Canada interpreters to raise profile and credibility.

*Excursions Mauricie*: “Tours by operators are provided mostly on a daily basis. A new product is now offered in partnership with an operator (concession): a cruise on a lake with a nature guide from the Park.”

*The Northshore Institute* hires Parks staff as educators: “Our collaboration with Parks Canada in PEI has proven to be a wonderful arrangement for us. We receive top-notch educational programming from Parks Canada staff, access to information about the area and issues that the general public does not receive, and special attention from guides at National Historic Sites. They have, through our programs, sent out approximately 1,200 ambassadors, who can share the lessons learned about conservation, preservation, and ecology. We have aided in employing several staff on a permanent basis, have exposed staff to eager learners, and participated in a three-week long service project on PEI.”

*Saskatchewan Provincial Parks* says, “Land of the Loon Resort utilizes [Prince Albert NP] staff to undertake winter programs. The staff person does the program on their own time and is paid for it by the Resort.” Similarly, *Earth Rhythms* hires park wardens to provide presentations inside their tourism packages. *Outside Expeditions* says, “Great to have PEI National Park interpreters along our tours. This is great as it gives our guest a better experience – and it is not something the park could do on its own.”

*Gros Morne Adventures* offer “a sea kayak outing on Bonne Bay as a joint effort with Gros Morne NP interpretation staff. It has benefited us by improving our guide's knowledge of area, added credibility to our program and activities that we offer, and improved our visibility within the Park. This program has provided some revenue for the [Parks] interpretation section as we hire the interpretation staff to deliver programs. On two occasions, we have had park staff on the Long Range Traverse so that they could see and experience first hand the environment, visitor's experiences, and our company's operation.” The company adds “Unfortunately, these two people are not involved in the briefing sessions for travellers wishing to do the Long Range Traverse!”

### Suggestions:

“More sharing of park interpreters on commercial programs. This isn't being marketed properly.” notes *Outside Expeditions* in PEI.

“Availability of more nature guides from the park who could join a tour (and of course these guides would be paid by the operator). Also, playing a more active role in clients' education on the heritage resources of the park - its mission, its constraints.” says *Aventure Boréale* in Quebec.

## Parks Employs Operators

By the same token, Parks agencies use the skills of private sector interpreters, especially where they no longer have the in-house resources to offer these services. *North Shore Tales* “was approached by the Senior Park Interpreter to offer picnic lunches and skits as he no longer had adequate staff to offer this service. As a former Park employee, I had been [voluntarily] doing the evening interpretive program. Upon retirement, I was hired to rewrite the script, direct parks staff and perform in this traditional park program to the French-speaking clients.”

### Suggestion:

*Manitoba Parks*: “Collaboration on the development of interpretive resources. Greater use of parks interpretive staff.”

### Appropriate Messaging

At *Saguenay/ Saint-Lawrence MP*, the Park agency helps operators with the interpretive content of their tour. Parks provides information tools: code of ethics, sea kayaking safety book. *Jasper NP* says, “The sharing of appropriate messages about ecological issues and environmental sensitivities is done well by Voyager Canoes, particularly relating to Harlequin ducks and the discussion of the effects of fire suppression.”

*White Mountain Adventures*: “We provide free guided walks every day, a nature centre with interpretive displays; maintain interpretive and directional trail signs, as well as help maintain the trails themselves, which includes maintaining outhouses, bridges, steps and railings. Our “Wolves in Winter” program focuses on wolf management issues in the Parks. Led by one of our guides and a Parks wolf researcher, this indoor/outdoor program allows guests to see how radio telemetry gear is used to track wolf movements, how tracks and marks in the snow are used to learn more about their habits, and what the current state is for wolves in the Banff Park area. They also see a slide presentation which gives information on den sites, animal behavior, identification, kill sites etc.”

*Riding Mountain NP* says, “One operator [Earth Rhythms] was the Chief Park Interpreter, so has a very good understanding of the regional ecosystem and the Park’s mandate. This operator often requests the services of Park staff to deliver programs to his clients. This provides the park with an excellent opportunity to deliver ecological integrity messages to the clients.”

*Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs* say if new resources are received, the potential exists to work with operators to develop high quality park messaging information packages.

### Suggestions:

*Mountain Quest* suggests: “Give motivational talks about what is possible in parks if a true vision is followed with enthusiasm and collaboration with the private sector.”

*Kayakouch*: “Use wardens, interpreters, researchers as part of innovative nature, culture and heritage learning experiences offered by the private sector. Provide use of edu-kits for private trips. They’re currently available for non-profit orgs. Why not give non-profits first choice, but let private groups use them if they’re available? In general, give greater access to “behind the scenes’ activities of parks.”

## Collaboration and Community Involvement

*University of Saskatchewan, Extension Programs:* “In some instances we recognize a mutual benefit: Parks Interpretive Services have suffered severe fiscal cutbacks over the last 8 years. Our programs help to fill some of the gap.”

*Land of the Loon Resort* offers their facility for Parks to use free of charge for the delivery of interpretive programs that may otherwise be cancelled due to bad weather.

*Algonquin Outfitters* offers a variety of free events providing educational opportunities for park users in all seasons.

In Nunavut, *Katannilik TP*, as part of their community inclusion policy, have “offered Visitor Center employees to the outfitters for their trips, as a method of training and improving the quality of the trips. Most of the operators that we work with, keep us informed of their plans and itineraries, and request advice on scheduling. At the same time, we provide each of the operators with whatever scheduling information we have, so as reduce conflicts on facilities, and unpleasant experiences for the clients.”

### Suggestions:

*Gros Morne Adventures* suggests, “Longer orientation programs for front line staff at beginning of season - experience the Park. Hike trails, take boat tours, and see various interpretation programs and walks. We think that private sector would be willing to partner on this. It would benefit private sector having front line staff aware of products, plus it would lead to happy visitors!”

*Kananaskis Country* “engage operators in meaningful partnership in which their stewardship of the land becomes important to the ongoing success of their business.”

## Clarify How Price Structures and Commissions Work in Tourism

Operators suggest there is a need to educate Parks about how to price services in the tourism industry. Some operators pay for park wardens or staff to perform services (such as interpretative functions). But in some locations, while the agency wants to increase hourly rates, they seem to shy away from the idea of these charges being commissionable. Operators fully recognize the competence and capabilities of Parks staff, and would be happy to determine what the fee should be for use of Parks staff, and then mark the price up. They feel Parks Canada is afraid of this, and that many in Parks have a really poor idea of how the tourism industry functions and how pricing structures work.

### Suggestion:

*Earth Rhythms* suggests that discussion of pricing services in the tourism sector enables all parties to talk about joint goals in being able to work together. “If there are issues that get in the way, we can find a solution that allows us to collaborate.”

## Collaboration on Park Enhancement Projects

One operator says, “If Parks support outdoor tourism as a preferable alternative to mass tourism, then there can be all sorts of opportunities for partnerships”. Not only do agencies and operators collaborate to benefit from visitors and to deliver services, they collaborate for the sake of the resource/park itself. There are a number of concrete practices that benefit the park resource as well as projects in the parks. These are described in this section.

**General Collaborations:** *Gwaii Haanas* commends contributions of gear to school outdoor programs. *Butterfly Tours* offers local courses for kayaking. *Queen Charlotte Adventures* hires locally when possible; works with local business to package; works with local artists to set up opportunities for interpretation and sales; provides staff with more training to support guide development.

**Maintenance:** *Missinaibi Headwaters* in Ontario assists Missinaibi Provincial Park in maintenance projects, trail clearing, privy installation, inviting park staff on guided tours.” *Nature Trek Canada*: “We help clean up trails and maintain infrastructure whenever possible while on expeditions.” *Jamie’s Whaling Station*, BC: “On our Hot Springs tours, we volunteer each spring to go up to the springs and clean out winter storm debris. Also, our passengers leave no footprints behind them by packing out anything they brought in.” *Algonquin Outfitters* has an annual Algonquin Park “clean-up” weekend. *Purcell Lodge* does pro-active trail development to address heavy use areas prior to damage occurring to the alpine meadow.

**Research:** *Canadian Mountain Holidays* has embarked on a new program called SECOND NATURE that looks at all aspects of the company’s operations from environmental and social perspectives. This program relates to both park and non-park lands. “Under the SECOND NATURE umbrella, we have undertaken a comprehensive study known as the ABLE (Applying Backcountry Landscape Evaluations) Project. Using a large number of permanent plots in alpine and sub-alpine areas, this takes a look at the interactions between our activities (primarily hiking) and the landscapes in which we operate. Finally, we are working with a number of provincial gov’t agencies on a Mountain Goat Working Committee, which is studying the interactions between helicopters and mountain goats.”

*Nahanni River Outfitters Association* & the Park have cooperatively tackled a range of types of projects:

- Departure regulation system to better use the resource
- Donated fire boxes to the Park
- Consultation on location of composting toilets and bear caches.
- Ongoing dialogue concerning park issues”

**Suggestion:**

*Trail of the Great Bear* suggests, “Commercial use of trails and other park resources should be regulated and managed. Commercial users of park resources should contribute to the maintenance and well being of those resources by revenue contributions and use modification based on management objectives.”

# **Marketing**

## **Parks Role**

**Challenge:** *Resolving the currently uncertain role of marketing within Parks agencies, and resolving the marketing relationship between commercial operators and Parks agencies.*

### **Marketing and the EI Mandate**

Some operators feel parks agencies seem to have a dual view, or even a major conflict of interest. Parks “need to preserve ecological integrity, but because of budget cuts, parks have got to earn money. The sheer volume of people using parks impacts on them, but numbers are necessary to generate income.”

Operators note that, “A segment of staff within Parks is anti-marketing, using the EI report which suggests there should be no marketing.” They feel it is an easy option to say “no marketing,” rather than to examine the range of options.

### **Good Practice:**

**Great Divide:** “Our marketing focuses on nature and learning about nature. It targets people who are already coming to the park, not on attracting more people to the park.”

### **Suggestions:**

**Operators** suggest, rather than say “no marketing”, Parks should “educate and appropriately select the right market, where appropriate monitoring, appropriate limits to use, appropriate regulations, appropriate matching of seasons to product, appropriate positioning, and appropriate image development could be a collaborative effort.”

### **Cooperating With Operators Gets Mixed Response**

**Operators Desire Website Links:** A number of operators feel that they have met all Parks requirements (or even more) to enable them to operate in Parks. In some ways, therefore, they feel “qualified” by the agencies. They are frustrated by Parks’ uneven response (usually refusal) to cooperate with certain marketing activities, such as providing a direct link to their web sites. This desire for a web link seems to be a relatively common issue.

Operators wonder, why would Parks Canada not want to give testimonials about quality businesses? “They seem to be afraid of supporting the operators they license. But other agencies do this”. One operator gave the example of the Business Development Bank (BDB) that has very good client services, and refers to the private sector in its testimonials. He feels Parks Canada should be far more client-centered, too. With agency status, it was suggested that Parks Canada should examine profit similar to other agencies. The analogy given is: “the Business Development Bank has money; Parks Canada also has capital – land. It is an environmental resource that clients wish to use, which is value-driven as opposed to money driven. Why would PC not try to obtain interest on that resource in the same way that the BDB obtains interest? Parks would gain interest on their land through protection, and environmental benefits, and enhancement, etc.”

**Earth Rhythms** suggests a pilot program, with Parks Canada examining how marketing with them could work.

## Marketing Collaborations

**Challenge:** Collaboration between Agencies and operators, in a manner acceptable to all, to market parks. Operators' and Parks' relationships regarding markets currently range from excellent to non-existent. Some agencies seem to have more latitude than others to undertake joint marketing.

### Sponsoring Special Events

*Acres of Action* provide promotion for the park and sponsor special events, by providing prizes and coupons. They market both their business and Barachois Park on their web page, radio and newspaper ads, posters, contests, special promotions and brochure. They cover all related costs.

### Some Operators Currently Market on Behalf of Parks

Operators are engaged in a variety of marketing activities that promote Parks and protected areas. Some marketing activities include:

- **Selling Permits:** *Missinaibi* is a “corporate partner – selling permits, providing information to users, generating revenue for the Park.”
- **Distribute Parks Brochures:** *Excursions Mauricie* “promotes the park brochure and is enabled to offer guided tours to campers at the park.”
- **Park Admission Sales:** *Earth Rhythms* is an authorized reseller of parks admissions passes and takes no mark up (revenues) or commission from this.
- **Film Materials:** *Miki Enterprises* worked with a Japanese film company on Terra Nova Park to make a movie of the park, and gave Parks a complementary copy of the film for educational purposes.

### Some Parks Currently Assist with Marketing Operators

A number of Parks also assist operators in their marketing endeavours, in the following ways:

- **Distribute Operator Brochures:** *Kayakouch* says, “When the Park goes to outside exhibits, they bring our brochures. Visitor Services is a strong believer in our product – accessible and open-minded.”
- **Referrals:** *Missinaibi* “receives referrals from the Park, and clients are directed to us from the Park. We provide canoe rentals that are not available in the Park.”
- **Promotion and Advertising:** *Grasslands NP* “We market their product through information – mail outs, VRC and in-house brochures”
- **Coordination:** *Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs* have worked with Alsek and Chilkoot operators to allocate and schedule trips 18 months in advance to facilitate operators’ advertising and marketing.
- **Subsidized Advertising:** *Pukaskaw NP* in Ontario sells advertising space in their visitor guide at a subsidized cost to operators (to assist in cost recovery).

## **Some Operators and Parks Currently Collaborate on Marketing**

Some marketing activities or collaborations are quite diverse. Atlantic Canada Adventures and Gros Morne Adventures guides are very active in marketing partnerships,” says *Gros Morne NP. Québec Hors-Circuit* says they collaborate with Saguenay Park and Monts-Vallins Park in marketing activities.

**Trade Shows:** “We get involved in any marketing opportunities that parks ask that we participate in, whether it be a travel guide, or a trade show,” says *Land of the Loon Resort*

**Trade Show Cooperation:** “Algonquin Parks staff cooperate in sport show marketing through booth sharing. They also cooperate in providing programs and services for FAM tours, media visits, VIP visits, etc. We have good informal relations with senior park managers for information sharing, problem solving, etc.,” notes *Algonquin Outfitters*.

**Cooperative Promotions:** *Gwaii Haanas* has a number of marketing collaborations that involve operators, related to: media relations – quality requests and coverage; links to website; free ads; and tourism industry contacts.

*Algonquin Outfitters* feels, “Cooperative promotion activities help support our image as premier outfitter. Government tourism agencies have better contacts with tour operators, media, etc., then they connect these people with outfitters.”

*Trail of the Great Bear* “participates in consortia marketing. The Park participates in planning and messaging, to promote appropriate products and visitor expectations. This helps maintain the integrity of the product.”

*Excursions Mauricie* says, “The Park and the operator are now involved as partners – with other regional organizations – in the offering – inbound regional wholesaler. It might be an opening for new collaborations.”

## **Suggestions:**

*Missinaibi* suggests joint marketing, improved information distribution from the Park, and official endorsement from the Park about operator services.

*Great Divide* suggests “working with those who market and use National Parks to ensure an understanding of the ecological integrity mandate, to attract visitors to the right place, at the right time, in the right numbers, and with the right expectations.”





# **Monitoring**

## **Monitoring Illegal Operations**

**Challenge:** Ensuring all Parks operators have appropriate permits, licenses etc.

### **Illegal Operators are a Problem**

Operators are quite aware that there are some businesses operating illegally in parks – and they know that Parks Agencies also know. Agencies say, “a major weakness is that some operators may be operating in parks without notifying us or acquiring a business license.” Another says, “Local operators indicate that there are many more illegal (unlicensed) van tours doing day hikes, etc. This is a direct result of the moratorium on business licence issuance. It would appear to indicate that demand is increasing.”

Some agencies attribute such activities to the fact that “Park Management Plans are not finished, making enforcement difficult.” Such illegal activity makes legitimate operators really frustrated. Legal operators feel they go through all the regulatory requirements, and also operate within or above certain standards, whereas there is no “check” on the illegal operators. It was suggested that parks where each visitor pays an entrance fee, help monitor such illegal operators, but that most park systems are not well monitored.

### **Operators Like to be Checked**

“We like to be checked by Parks while in the region. I find it frustrating to go through all the routines only to find other companies guiding illegally in the area,” says *Nature Trek Canada*.

### **Operators Monitor Illegal Businesses**

Many operators are active on behalf of Parks, in monitoring other park users’ activities (FITs or groups).

### **Good Practices:**

*Mingan NP* reports their operators provide “real involvement and support to the preservation mandate of the park (e.g. operators report wrong-doing from visitors).”

*Algonquin Outfitters*: “We also cooperate with park management in enforcement activities - sharing information, providing canoes for “undercover” work, etc.”

*Missinaibi Headwaters*: “We are the eyes and ears on the river, alerting park management to infringements of the park operating plan. These come from logging encroachments, garbage etc.”

### **Suggestions:**

*Kanata Adventures*: “Monitoring of illegal operations should be intensified.”

*Great Divide*: “Parks Canada should enforce the licensing they require.”

*Gros Morne NP*: “Involve operators in monitoring so they understand decisions regarding use.”

*Missinaibi*: “Greater enforcement to ensure that Park users have valid permits. All commercial users must be forced to comply.”

**White Mountain Adventures:** “More enforcement of current licensing. There are unlicensed companies operating in the parks and they do not seem to be getting caught. Meanwhile, they are guiding without a license, providing no or incorrect information, carrying out unsafe practices and generally not following parks protocols. By insuring that all companies operating in the parks are licensed, the quality of the experience improves as does the accountability.”

## Monitoring Standards, Guidelines and Activities

**Challenge:** *Ensuring that all operators in Parks are not only licensed, but adhere to the standards, requirements, or guidelines of operating in a park.*

### Park Messaging Requirements

One agency looked at the issue of ensuring that correct Parks messages were known by operators and were being transmitted to clients. They say, “Field monitoring/feedback loops would have to be established carefully and tactfully. The operators have not been held accountable for their messaging for a long time and for a good field relationship to work, there must be buy-in from them.”

### Enforce Guidelines and Standards

Greater enforcement of regulations or guidelines would enable trust building between Park agencies and operators to be initiated. Operators are willing to work with Park agencies to be sure that all Park visitors and operators are adhering to the rules and regulations of Park use. Perspectives of agencies and operators are essentially similar, although expressed differently:

#### **Operators:**

- “There are rules and protocols, but they are just not enforced”.
- “We have had an opportunity to work with Parks on guidelines. Unfortunately, these guidelines are not being adhered to. They are also not working – groups are too large and too frequent.”
- “There are operators that have little experience and knowledge of the area and do not promote environmental ethics to their clients. This is a major problem and nothing is done about it.”

#### **Agencies:**

- “Because of our staffing limitations, it is very difficult to determine whether the “product” proposed by the operator is being fully carried out in practice.”
- Newfoundland Parks Witless Bay says that operators are very protective of the 10 permits available. “The operators are in some ways caretakers of the reserve – we have no staff, and they report any non-compliant uses.”

**Suggestions:**

*Jasper NP* suggests, “Provide enforcement of our regulations. Finalize and close loopholes and inconsistency in business license for outdoor activities.”

*Riding Mountain NP* suggests operators “assist with monitoring programs – this has been discussed as a possibility, regarding the general visiting public, or local trail users, not just Outdoor Tourism Operators.”

*Bruce Peninsula Outfitters* suggest that if operators were encouraged to participate in parks planning and to collaborate, they could have roles such as helping agencies to police the park.

*Kejimikujik/ Cape Breton NPs* suggest “more monitoring of impacts, possible closure of some activities, upgrading of some trails to handle level of use.”



## **The Future**

This chapter looks beyond the current challenges and best practices described earlier, to opportunities and suggestions for the future.

### **Challenges for the Future**

#### **Education of Guides and Operators**

Many Park agencies tend to see that the whole area of education needs to be addressed.

#### **Suggestion:**

*Kananaskis Country* would like to see more emphasis on educating guides about ecological issues, and minimizing the impacts of group activities.

#### **Access Without Overuse**

“The challenge is providing access to a park experience without overusing and over stressing the ecosystem that people are here to see. Also, providing a quality experience if visitation keeps rising,” says *Kootenay/ Yoho NPs*.

#### **Increasing Demand**

Most agencies feel the challenge is that of balancing a variety of needs: balancing demand for additional trips and/or opportunities which are inconsistent with park values, e.g., demand for larger group sizes, more permits in areas with quotas etc.

A related challenge is providing “opportunities for Canadians and other visitors to experience the park and outdoor tourism activities while trying to reduce impacts associated with attracting more and more visitors to sensitive or stressed ecosystems,” notes *Waterton Lakes NP*.

#### **Aboriginal Issues**

Not only is it challenging to balance the interests of aboriginal and non-aboriginal operators, balancing various aboriginal groups’ needs is a challenge. *WBNP/ Nahanni NPs* feel establishing an Aboriginal Tourism Strategy is both an opportunity and a challenge. There are 11 different aboriginal groups in and around their Park, each with a different agenda and in different stages of land claim or entitlement negotiations or litigation, so coming to consensus can be difficult.

#### **Redefining Parks Experiences**

*Jasper NP* feels “the biggest challenge is the amount of extra energy and creativity that is going to be needed to develop a new way of defining what is fun to do in a National Park. Fun isn’t always about consuming; it can also be about giving service. Also, the realization that by enjoying and celebrating the parks directly, we may actually be doing them permanent harm.”

## Good Practice

*Butterfly Tours* says, “For Parks, the focus on preserving ecological integrity may be considered new. For many of the long-time tour operators, the concept [of EI] has long been woven deeply into the fabric of their business. The opportunities remain the same for us, we will continue to teach our guests to treat the region respectfully and to tread softly.”

## Limited Park Resources

*Jasper NP*, like other park agencies, feels, “We do not have enough money to manage/mitigate visitor impacts, develop new programs, or assist operators with development of their own programs.”

*Gros Morne NP* feels that operators will also feel a resource pinch and the challenge may be “maintaining a positive relationship when operators feel we are trying to cut short economic opportunity.”

## Opportunities

**Challenge:** *The challenge is to take advantage of opportunities by attracting the right people to the right place at the right time.*

## Opportunities Related to EI

Agencies had mixed views about whether the EI mandate presented opportunities. Major opportunities (some of which were discussed earlier) were considered to be:

- Resource Oriented (‘Limits of Acceptable Change’ work, more research, restoration work);
- Visitor Oriented (ways of showing visitors alternative ways of enjoying nature via remote viewing or limited group sizes, or more interpretive opportunities, more client education; more monitoring by visitors, learning vacations, scientific or conservation vacations);
- Marketing Oriented (market edge, as well as image changing, branding, and targeting); or
- Operator Oriented (superior operators will likely have a competitive edge)

Some agencies were not sure about whether there would be product opportunities. However, most agencies across the country felt that there were definite product opportunities. For example, *BC Parks* (and others) suggest there might be exclusive opportunities in Parks that could be certified. Examples of product opportunities follow:

## Target Appropriate Visitors

Commercial operators tend to feel they are currently attracting appropriate visitors, and virtually all would say they cater to a more appropriate type, rather than those who currently come in large groups to parks. A Mountain Park operator says there is “a great opportunity to focus more on authentic, experiential tourism; to attract the higher value tourist who will stay a few days and explore the park instead of the 50 passenger coach tourists who blast through and snap pictures and stay 1 or 2 nights.” Another feels that appropriate activities and visitors are key, and that a stronger focus on ecological integrity by everyone would encourage interest in appropriate activities “instead of ATV adventures, hummer tours, shopping and golf.”

## **Educational Small-Group Travel**

Many of the operators feel that the opportunities lie in the area of educational, small-group travel. *Silver Line Tours* feels that there are opportunities in “study tours – special interest groups – people who are interested in preserving our country.” They also feel school groups have potential. *Mingan NP* suggests there will be more learning experiences like those on the Mingan Island Research Station.

*Tours of Exploration* says, “There certainly seems to be a trend towards outdoor education, appreciation of nature, culture and wildlife. We are not interested in becoming a huge tour operator and prefer to offer service and experience over volume.”

“A great opportunity to focus more on authentic, experiential tourism. To attract the higher value tourist who will stay a few days and explore the park,” says *Mountain Quest*.

## **Aboriginal Components Incorporated**

Some agencies suggested that new partnerships with Aboriginal stakeholders could hold opportunities.

Opportunities exist for “more work with the local First Nation’s communities”, with the concept of stewardship, unique places, and National Parks as a place to experience relatively intact eco-systems,” says *Prince Albert NP*.

Opportunities may arise “for new products/operators, especially with regard to back country adventures and cultural tourism. This might come as a result of new partnerships with Aboriginal stakeholders,” suggests *WBNP/ Nahanni NP*.

## **Research and Science Based Products**

A number of Parks suggested active visitor participation in:

“Monitoring and improving the health of the park ecosystem,” suggests *Kootenay/ Yoho NPs*. They are, however, not sure how easy these markets will be to tap. “We tried offering experiential holidays where the focus was on learning about and assisting with wildlife research. It was a hard sell and although the socio-economic data shows great promise for this type of learning vacation, the actual sales did not reflect this.”

“Research projects,” suggests *Grasslands NP*.

“Working vacations, where tourists pay to learn and work on research or conservation-based projects e.g., bird surveys, archaeological digs, photo-monitoring, boardwalk construction, viewing platform construction, or re-vegetation”. And possibly “exclusive opportunities in areas which are ‘ecologically certified’, ” suggests *BC Parks*.

## **Use Increased Focus on Restoration as an Educational Experience**

*Jasper NP* feels there could be an opportunity to “develop an outdoor tourism program focussing on visitor or citizen science and restoration activities.”

They feel an increased focus on EI “should lead to restoration of sites that have lost ecological integrity. A great example of a restoration project that is dynamic and would be of interest to the public as a visitor activity is the Lac Beauvert restoration. Visitor volunteers could have participated in removal of the fish weir, help empty the fish trap, make fish and water observations and have a richer more memorable experience in Jasper. The test fishery at Cabin Lake was another example for a fun (fishing) learning opportunity. Pyramid Island Restoration is also a great opportunity for visitors to make a small contribution to the well being of the park in beautiful and enjoyable surroundings.”



## Messaging

Parks Agencies tend to feel opportunities lie in: educational experiences, quality interpretive messages, product substitution, incorporating aboriginal components, maintaining high quality environments which attracts visitors, and the opportunity for Parks messages to reach out into the wider community. For example, *Pacific Rim NP* suggests that there is a range of opportunities in:

- Niche markets for learning and experiencing nature
- Cultural presentations
- Virtual park experiences

## Interpretation

Agencies feel improvement of operator responsibilities as stewards and field leaders for visitors is possible, and would result in “more emphasis on low impact camping, etc., as well as communications about ecological integrity.”

A focus on interpretation of ecological integrity was seen to be a particular interpretive opportunity:

“Operators could assist in heightening the knowledge of the participants,” suggests *Prince Albert NP*.

Provide “a greater understanding and appreciation of nature and ecosystems and why it is important to visitors ensures a more unique and in-depth visitor experience,” says *Pacific Rim NP*.

*Jasper NP* thinks the development of standardized interpretative training is an important step in the right direction. “I anticipate that we will see a greater focus on ecological integrity messages as part of third party interpretation expectations.”

## High Quality Environments, and Environmentally-Sensitive Operations will Attract Visitors

Agencies feel that emphasis on environmentally sensitive products will respond to market demand.

“People are looking for products that minimize impact. If operators can do this, it will be a good position to take,” says *Newfoundland Parks*.

“The focus on EI will lead to recognition that current measures protect the unique experiences offered by Kluane and Chilkoot. A high quality wilderness resource (rich in natural/cultural heritage, and natural quiet and solitude) is what operators can market to their clients,” suggests *Kluane/ Chilkoot/ Vuntut NPs*.

“The opportunity for Outdoor Tourism Operators is that the Canadian and international public are beginning to hear more about sensitive and stressed ecosystems. As they become more aware, they will be more interested in having intimate experiences with elements of those ecosystems and demand experiences that do not impair them. Outdoor Tourism Operators can capitalize on this by demonstrating sensitive and prudent use of the resources, environmentally sound practices and their commitment to contributing toward their preservation. That will give them a competitive edge over traditional mass tourism operators as potential visitors become more informed and converted to ecological values,” notes *Waterton Lakes NP*.

## Collaboration Between Parks and Operators to Develop Product

*Georgian Bay Islands NP* suggests that there are numerous opportunities for collaborating with operators in the future, and that “there is probably an unsatisfied demand for ecotourism products which could best be fulfilled through collaborative action.” They expect to be exploring ecotourism opportunities more

fully. They expect more learning focussed experiences as an important way to encourage people to protect heritage resources and advocate for their wise use, and to continue increased support for EI protection.

**Operators are willing to collaborate:** *Naturally Superior Adventures* in Ontario says, “As a company we would be honored to develop new product in co-operation with our local federal park.”

**Parks could take various initiatives:** *Newfoundland Parks* feels that parks could be better used for backcountry camping. They say they need to supply sites and identify operators. Suggestions include:

- Some of our reserves could use private interpreters on a for-profit basis.
- We could work with more tour operators within our parks and reserves.
- We could develop awards for a “best practice” operator. Those who qualify would be given special park approval designation.

**Parks could train and Operators could train:** *Prince Albert NP* has suggestions to ensure ecotourism operations follow principles of ecotourism (rather than just being a fashionable “product”). They suggest operators could “take part in some in-park training, and as well, could develop a training program for commercial staff. This could actually assist ecotourism operators to be eco-tourist minded.”

### **Substitute Products, Rather than Create Additional Ones**

However, other agencies (even some of the less-visited Northern Parks) suggested there was no room for additional products, because their reservation system is almost at capacity already. Other suggestions were that if new products were developed, they should replace existing products that are considered less appropriate.

Both agencies and operators feel new products could substitute for inappropriate uses.

“There is an opportunity for new products, but only if the products can change existing uses and operate within or below current levels of human use.” There are “opportunities to show people alternatives ways of enjoying nature, e.g., through remote viewing, limited group sizes, non-obtrusive activities,” notes *Kananaskis Country*.

“New products developed should replace existing products that are less focused on preserving ecological integrity, rather than just additional products that would stress the system further by creating new demand by new markets,” says *Waterton Lakes NP*.

There is a “major opportunity to reduce inappropriate uses such as auto touring and shopping and attempt to focus on providing unique park experiences appropriate to the interpretation and preservation of the natural environment,” suggests *Purcell Lodge*.

### **Extension of Parks Values Beyond the Parks Boundaries**

*Gros Morne NP* hopes for “increased advocacy on the part of operators to speak on broader issues – e.g. regional land designations.”

The focus on ecological integrity “could assist participants to look at their role as stewards and how they could take that back to their own communities, and it could assist the Parks Canada Agency in achieving its goal of the completion of the system, by having more people understand the importance of EI and CI messages,” notes *Prince Albert NP*.

## Suggestion:

The more messages about ecological integrity that get into a range of markets, the more they will percolate into general publics. “Increased messages about ecological integrity are bound to lead to an overall increase in public understanding of environmental issues - that affect them both within and outside of National Parks. An increase in ecological literacy will in turn improve our stewardship of the country as a whole, and the planet,” suggests *Jasper NP*.

## Suggested Future Actions

**Challenge:** *Implementing needed activities and controls, with support from operators and public, within resource constraints.*

Besides the many helpful suggestions placed throughout the report, other constructive suggestions follow. A West coast park feels the need for:

- Assurance that other areas are available to meet demand for non-compatible uses
- Political support at the local/provincial level
- Financial and moral support from operators
- Public support for the development of guidelines
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Provision of information
- Formation of working groups

*BC Parks* wants more demonstration that operators know about ecological integrity and care for the special areas in which they work. They see the need to address:

- Acceptance that some activities may need to be scaled back
- Training/orientation about ecological integrity
- Impact assessments
- Sanitation
- Viewing methods
- More planning and setting of targets/standards (e.g., LAC)
- Securing more resources and enforcement capacity
- Improved provision of baseline information
- Group Size
- Access modes

## Suggestions:

“Operators must learn to operate with smaller groups in more structured activities,” says *Kananaskis Country*.

“The higher profile of ecological integrity may increase awareness of some Outdoor Tourism Operators to voluntarily withdraw services from particularly stressed areas,” says *Jasper NP*.

One operator suggests “Parks Canada should allocate a number or percentage of hours for all employees to dealing with Outdoor Tourism Operators (e.g. 5% to 10% of time). This would be an excellent beginning to collaboration and demonstration of Parks’ commitment. The operator would then be able to prioritise staff discussion topics, and Parks employees could select project and time parameters.”

## Communications, Collaboration and Feedback are Key

**Challenge:** Working with all parties to move ahead in an appropriate direction, yet using appropriate communications tools and manner of achieving this.

Some Parks agencies indicated what they would like to tell/educate the operators, so as to persuade the operators to adopt their view. “Telling” may be quite a limited view of communication. Despite this, some operators are happy to have direction from Parks Canada - “Just tell us what to do and how we are doing.” However, many operators say they want less “telling” and more collaboration.

## Communications

Some Parks are already working well with operators, and have varied suggestions for working better with operators in the future. These include:

- **More Explanatory Communications:** “Continue or enhance communication efforts that explain what and why measures are in place to protect resources and experiences. As long as there is a mechanism to ensure a dialogue on why/how these measures are developed and implemented, there should be at least an understanding (and hopefully an appreciation and acceptance) of their use,” says *Kluane/Chilkoot/Vuntut NPs*.
- **More Discussions:** “Marketing and external relations have already been achieved – this type of approach is identified in the EI report. We need to discuss it more with operators – to get them to buy in – this could change how we work with them,” suggests *Gwaii Haanas*.
- **Community Involvement:** “We are working towards improved community relations through various strategies,” notes *WBNP/Nahanni NPs*.
- **Consistency and Effort:** “Consistency of message is required for developing long term trust. Also, more regular informal end of season meetings, one-on-ones, and groups,” says *Yukon Territorial Parks*.
- “Whatever the nature of the relationship, new partnerships must revolve around EI,” suggests *Grasslands NP*.

## Collaboration

“Any changes would be easier to implement if we have a better relationship with the operators.” *Kootenay/Yoho NPs* say they will be working on this.

*White Mountain Adventures* indicate they need to know what ‘activities’ Parks are contemplating. Parks “need to start a collaboration with operators now, not after they come up with ‘activities’ that are then found to be unworkable by operators or the visitors to the park.”

*Manitoba Parks* feels that collaboration may be a challenge: “Demonstrating openness and willingness to communicate and work collaboratively with operators is an area that needs improvement.”

*Bruce Peninsula Outfitters* suggests that operators be enabled to collaborate directly with the key people who make the decisions – on new ideas, discussions about areas with problems, about impact, etc. They also suggest the development of a set of standards for both agencies and operators, as well as effectively focussed joint committees.

Collaboration involves all parties, and also incorporates the realisation that mutual learning is needed.

### **Ongoing Feedback is Needed**

Although the individual operators and agencies contacted vary considerably, the feedback from their responses indicated that all were earnestly struggling for an appropriate way to tackle the challenges that all parties acknowledge exist currently in protected areas. Operators are interested in improving through feedback. *CIME Adventure*, in Quebec, would like adequate feedback from the Parks Agency on how their operation is doing (as well as desiring to know where the Park is heading). Echoing this is an Alberta operator, who is concerned that politics don’t get in the way of doing what is right. They seem to reflect this earnest struggle in which both agencies and operators are engaged:

“The Canadian public, when surveyed, consistently says it wants our national parks to be about wilderness and wildlife. Despite so much input (Bow Valley Study, EI Panel), we have yet to see the government, and as a result, Parks Canada, act fully on the public’s wishes. Let’s hope that improves. For our operation, we want to make sure we offer good quality and appropriate national park experiences in a sustainable way. We need Parks Canada to keep telling us, based on the best science, whether what we do is OK or not,” says *Great Divide*.

## APPENDIX A –GLOSSARY

NP	National Park
PP	Provincial Park
TP	Territorial Park
MP	Marine Park
FIT	Fully Independent Traveler
EI	Ecological Integrity
EA	Environmental Assessment
Kluane/ Chilkoot/ Vuntut NPs	Kluane National Park and Reserve/ Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site/ Vuntut National Park
Gwaii Haanas	Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site
Kananaskis Country	Kananaskis Country Recreational Area
Kanata Adventure	Kanata Adventure Specialists
WBNP/ Nahanni NPs	Wood Buffalo National Park and Nahanni National Park Reserve
SEPAQ	Société des établissements de plein air du Québec
Kootenay/Yoho	Kootenay and Yoho National Parks
Nunavut Katannilik	Nunavut Katannilik Territorial Park
Kejimukujik/ C. Breton NPs	Kejimukujik National Park/ Cape Breton Highlands National Park
Newfoundland Parks	Newfoundland Provincial Parks and Natural Areas
Manitoba Parks	<i>Manitoba Parks and Natural Areas</i>
Mingan	Mingan Islands National Park Preserve
Nature Trek Canada	Lodewijk Camps: Nature Trek Canada Wilderness Expeditions
Missinaibi	Missinaibi Headwaters Incorporated
Mountain Quest	Mountain Quest Adventure Co. Ltd.
Great Divide	Great Divide Nature Interpretation
Gaboteux Tours	Les Tours du Gaboteux
BC Parks	British Columbia Parks
Purcell Lodge	Places Less Travelled Ltd./ Purcell Lodge
MPHIA	Mountain Parks Heritage Interpretation Association
Arctic Vision	Go Wild Tours! & Arctic Vision Travel and Consulting Services Tours
WTAY	The Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon
Saguenay/Saint-Lawrence MP	Saguenay/ Saint-Lawrence National Marine Park
Gaspésie PP	Gaspésie Provincial Park

Outdoor Tourism Products in Canada include bird watching, nature viewing, wildlife viewing, whale watching, all terrain vehicle touring, canoeing, horseback riding, rock climbing, camping expeditions, charter boat excursions, sea kayaking, caving, hiking, sailing, whitewater rafting, fly fishing, storm watching and mountain biking. Winter outdoor tourism products may include skiing, cross-country skiing, heli-skiing snowmobiling, dogsledding, ice climbing and snowshoeing.



## APPENDIX B – RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

### Outdoor Tourism Operators, Provincial/Territorial Parks, And National Parks

#### Outdoor Tourism Operators

NF	Acres of Action	BC	Moresby Explorers
QU	Aventure Boréale	AB	Mountain Quest Adventure Co. Ltd.
BC	Adventures Pacific	NF	Mountain Tours and Photography
BC	Archipelago Ventures	YK	Nahanni River Adventures
ON	Algonquin Outfitters	ON	Naturally Superior Adventures
BC	Bluewater Adventures Ltd.	BC	Nature Trek Canada Wilderness Expeditions Ltd./ Lodewijk Camps
ON	Bruce Peninsula Outfitters	PEI	Northshore Institute
BC	Butterfly Tours	PEI	North Shore Tales
ON	CAA	NU	NorthWinds Arctic Adventures
BC	Canadian Mountain Holidays	NF	Ocean Watch Tours
SK	CanoeSki Discovery Company	PEI	Outside Expeditions Inc.
QU	CIME Aventure	YK	Paddle Wheel Adventures
NS	Coastal Adventures	NB	Piskahegan River Company
NS	Discover Acadia Vacations Inc.	BC	Places Less Travelled Ltd./ Purcell Lodge
MB	Earth Rhythms Inc.	QU	Québec Hors-Circuit
QU	Excursions Mauricie	BC	Sea to Sky
NB	FreshAir Adventure	ON	Silver Line Tours
NS	Gaboteux Tours/ Les Tours du Gaboteux	BC	Strider Adventures
YK	Go Wild Tours! & Arctic Vision Travel and Consulting Services Tours	SK	Sundog Sled Excursions
ON	Great Adventure Tours	MB	The Great Canadian Adventure Company Ltd.
AB	Great Divide Nature Interpretation	ON	The Wilderness Adventure Company/Black Feather
NF	Gros Morne Adventures	BC	Tours of Exploration
BC	Jamie's Whaling Station	AB	Trail of the Great Bear
AB	Jasper Adventure Centre	SK	University of Saskatchewan
BC	Kanata Adventure Specialists	AB	Warner Guiding and Outfitting Ltd.
NB	Kayakouch Inc.	AB	Waterton Outdoor Adventures
AB	Lake Minnewanka Boat Tours	BC	Wells Gray Chalets and Wilderness Adventure
SK	Land of the Loon Resort	AB	White Mountain Adventures
BC	Majestic West Coast Wilderness Adventures Ltd.	ON	Wabikimi Canoe Outfitters & Eco-Lodge



NF	Miki Enterprises	NF	Wilderness NFLD Adventures
AB	Minnewanka Boat Tours	NF	Wildlands & Oceans Ltd. (Wildland Tours)
ON	Missinaibi Headwaters Incorporated	ON	Wildwater Nature Tours & Expeditions Ltd.
		AB	Willow Root Nature Tours

## **Parks Agencies – Provincial/Territorial**

BC	British Columbia Parks
AB	Kananaskis Country Recreational Area
SK	Saskatchewan Provincial Parks
MB	Manitoba Parks and Natural Areas
ON	Ontario Parks
QU	Gaspésie Provincial Park
QU	Mont-Orford Provincial Park
NFL	Newfoundland Provincial Parks and Natural Areas
NUN	Katannilik Territorial Park
NWT	Northwest Territories Parks
YK	Yukon Territorial Parks

## National Parks

BC	Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site
BC	Kootenay and Yoho National Parks
BC	Pacific Rim National Park Reserve
AB	Jasper National Park
AB	Waterton Lakes National Park
SK	Grasslands National Park
SK	Prince Albert & Elk Island National Parks
MB	Wapusk National Park
MB	Riding Mountain National Park
ON	Point Pelee National Park
ON	Pukaskaw National Park
ON	Georgian Bay Islands National Park, Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site
QU	Mauricie National Park
QU	Mingan Islands National Park Preserve
QU	Forillon National Park
QU	Saguenay / Saint-Lawrence Marine Park
NS	Kejimikujik National Park/ Cape Breton Highlands National Park
NFL	Gros Morne National Park
YK	Kluane National Park and Reserve/ Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site/ Vuntut National Park
NWT	Wood Buffalo National Park and Nahanni National Park Reserve
NUN	Auyuittuq National Park

