



Parks
Canada

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Canada

2020 Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada Report and Response

April 2021



Photo: Eric Lajunen

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Message from the Minister



The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Environment and Climate Change

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I am very pleased to present this response to the 2020 Minister's Round Table.

This public consultation provides a unique opportunity to hear from Canadians on the most pressing issues facing national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas.

This input is more important than ever before. Innovation, partnerships, and dialogue will be critical to help us address some of the greatest challenges of our time, from the global pandemic to the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Getting outside has been indispensable to many of us during this difficult year, myself included. COVID-19 has reinforced the need to ensure that all Canadians can access, enjoy and feel welcome in all natural and cultural heritage places.

The Government of Canada is committed to taking greater steps to connect Canadians with nature. For example, we heard in these consultations that urban parks are a priority across the country – a priority that was also highlighted in the Speech from the Throne. Expanding urban parks can play a critical role in ensuring Canadians can get into nature – even for an afternoon – wherever they live, work and play.

Parks Canada also has a vital role to play in helping Canada expand its networks of protected areas to protect 25% of Canada's lands and waters by 2025 and 30% by 2030. The Round Table highlighted several opportunities to support these efforts, such as advancing Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and enhancing ecological connectivity. Embracing Indigenous leadership in conservation can help Canada meet its goals while advancing reconciliation and a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples.

We are committed to enhancing diversity, inclusion and accessibility in Parks Canada places, so that these places can be a source of pride and enjoyment for all Canadians for generations to come. We will also work to ensure that we tell more inclusive and diverse stories about Canada's history, and that all Canadians see themselves reflected in national heritage places.

The perspectives and recommendations shared during the Round Table provide a foundation upon which to build. I thank everyone who participated in the Round Table and look forward to working together toward a brighter future.

Message from the President & Chief Executive Officer



Mr. Ron Hallman
President & Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada Agency

As the President and CEO of Parks Canada, I am proud to lead the Agency and its team in the stewardship of national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas for all Canadians.

The 2020 Minister's Round Table was held with the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, through a series of nine videoconference discussion sessions, an online engagement platform, social media engagement, and 20 written submissions. In all, more than 13,000 people participated in the consultation, including representatives of national Indigenous organizations and some 60 stakeholder organizations. Their insights and contributions are greatly valued and Parks Canada is committed to implementing the actions articulated in the Minister's response.

This includes our ongoing commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples and to recognize and welcome their leadership and contributions in advancing the conservation of natural and cultural values across the country. More than 30 Parks Canada-administered sites are already managed cooperatively with Indigenous peoples. The Agency is committed to expanding these efforts, both within existing protected places and in the creation of natural and cultural heritage places.

We also heard from participants that national heritage places do not always feel welcoming or accessible to all Canadians, including those from racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2+ communities, and people living with disabilities. We are committed to working more closely than ever before with partner organizations in identifying and overcoming barriers to accessibility, diversity and inclusion. Additionally, to support these efforts, Parks Canada recently created an Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Council chaired by myself, and made up of internal champions as well as representatives from equity networks and unions.

On behalf of the entire Parks Canada team, I extend my thanks to everyone who submitted an idea, prepared a written submission, or participated in a virtual stakeholder session as part of the Minister's Round Table. Together, we can help ensure that protected places are conserved, presented and enjoyed for the benefit of all Canadians, now and in the future.



171
NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITES

5 NATIONAL
MARINE
CONSERVATION AREAS



47
NATIONAL PARKS



1
NATIONAL
URBAN PARK



7500 +
DEDICATED
EMPLOYEES



12 of 20
Canada's
WORLD
HERITAGE
SITES

3,826
designations



of people, places, and events
of importance



450 000+ km²
area protected

PARKS CANADA AT A GLANCE

25
MILLION
visits per year



monitoring of
200+
species at risk



7,000 km
of trails

FREE
admission
for youth and new
Canadians



31 MILLION
archaeological and
historical objects



12,000
CAMPSITES

collaboration with
300 INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES

\$26.5
BILLION
OF ASSETS

600+
RED CHAIRS
#sharethechair



About the Minister's Round Table

Parks Canada's mission is to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and to foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations.

Every two years, the Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency holds a round table to seek advice from Canadians on the work of Parks Canada, and to share information on progress and developments since the previous engagement. The Minister's Round Table is required by the Parks Canada Agency Act (1998) and is an important opportunity for dialogue with Canadians on a wide range of issues related to national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas.

The 2020 Minister's Round Table, Let's Talk Parks, Canada! was held in October 2020. Over 13,000 participants online and 60 stakeholder organizations (through nine virtual discussions) shared their perspectives on the work of Parks Canada throughout the consultation.

The unique circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a different approach to the Minister's Round Table than in previous years. A mix of strategies was used, including an extensive online consultation hosted

at letstalkparksCanada.ca, as well as virtual stakeholder sessions on each of the five main themes of the Round Table:

- **Urban Parks:** Parks Canada, as a leader in urban conservation, and providing access to nature and culture in communities.
- **Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility:** Parks Canada as a partner and a leader in inclusion, diversity, accessibility, and reconciliation in protected and heritage places.
- **Ecological Corridors:** Connecting protected places to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss.
- **Indigenous Leadership in Conservation:** Advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.
- **Protecting our Cultural Heritage:** Advancing legislative protection for federal built heritage.

These themes were selected in part because they relate to commitments arising from the 2017 Minister's Round Table. The selection of themes also reflects emerging issues of importance to Canadians that relate to the conservation, stewardship and enjoyment of Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Both the stakeholder sessions and the online consultations posed focused questions to participants on each of the five themes outlined above. Participants were invited to submit ideas in response to these questions and could also comment on and rate ideas submitted by others. More than 1,200 responses to these questions were received.

The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level summary of feedback received from the 2020 Minister's Round Table and to articulate the Minister's response.

What Was Heard: Shared Perspectives

Participants in the 2020 Minister's Round Table came from a wide variety of perspectives and areas of expertise. Even though there was much diversity in participation, there were a number of views shared consistently across themes and among the many contributors. These areas of convergence are discussed below.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The importance of collaboration and partnerships was highlighted across consultation themes and was viewed as essential to Parks Canada's work in advancing all five areas. For example, participants emphasized the crucial role of meaningful partnerships with Indigenous peoples and facilitating greater Indigenous leadership in the stewardship of national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas, as well as in the creation of new protected places.

Participants in the Minister's Round Table emphasized that progress in areas like urban conservation, ecological connectivity, and accessibility and inclusion will increasingly rely on broad and often complex dialogue, collaboration and partnerships among a wide range of organizations, including all levels of government, Indigenous peoples, private sector partners, land holders, and not-for-profit, service and advocacy organizations.

Participants felt that deep civic and community engagement will increasingly be part of the conservation and enjoyment of heritage places in Canada.

New tools and models for collaboration, as well as more flexible approaches, were identified as critical to enhance urban conservation, achieve greater inclusion in the conservation and enjoyment of nature and culture, and connect ecosystems through ecological corridors.

Inclusion

Participants in all five theme areas of the Minister's Round Table reinforced the need for more diverse voices to be included in all aspects of Parks Canada's work. A sentiment expressed by many participants was the concept of "Nothing Without Us", or the importance of ensuring that those who are affected by decisions and initiatives are integrally involved in their design, implementation, and decision making.

Throughout the Round Table, Parks Canada consistently heard that Canadians of all backgrounds, abilities and traditions need to see themselves on "both sides of the counter" in order to feel welcome and included at national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas. This extends to all aspects of Parks Canada's operations – from senior leadership to marketing and communications to front-line services across the Agency's protected places.



Photo: Chantia Jones



Photo: Scott Mann

Top to bottom:
Tuktut Nogait National Park,
Rouge National Urban Park

What Was Heard: Shared Perspectives (continued)

Reconciliation

Participants reminded Parks Canada of the devastating impacts that past decisions in the creation of national protected places have had for Indigenous peoples, who were often alienated and separated from their lands and cultures as part of the establishment process and ongoing management of these places.

Across all of the themes, participants emphasized the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Participants also underscored the importance of integrating Indigenous science and knowledge in decision making and creating “ethical space”, or places where knowledge systems can interact with mutual respect, kindness, generosity and other basic values and principles. In “ethical space”, all knowledge systems are equal and no single system has more weight or legitimacy than another.

Access

Participants underscored the vital need to increase access to natural and cultural settings for all Canadians, including in urban areas. Participants also emphasized the importance of facilitating traditional use of protected places by Indigenous peoples, particularly in places where the history of

conservation has involved the alienation of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and waters.

Participants strongly expressed the need to ensure that all Canadians are welcomed inclusively in protected places, that diversity is encouraged, that everyone feels a sense of belonging as well as ownership, and that people living with disabilities are supported and their needs accommodated.

Leadership

In all five theme areas, Parks Canada was called upon to demonstrate national leadership. Participants noted that leadership can be demonstrated in many ways, such as recognizing the role of other partners and acting as a convener among diverse interests where multiple players are key to delivering outcomes on the ground.

Knowledge Base for Action

Participants consistently noted the need to generate and share different kinds of knowledge. They highlighted the importance of both western science and Indigenous ways of knowing. Many participants underlined the need for actions to be guided by knowledge and analysis, including the use of social science to develop experiences that reflect Canada’s diversity and are inclusive by design.



Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site

Stable and Ongoing Funding

Participants observed that achieving national targets for biodiversity and maintaining conservation gains across Canada will require both initial investments as well as ongoing funding. This view was echoed both with respect to advancing urban conservation, and in supporting the establishment and management of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.

Participants highlighted the opportunity and need to work with local organizations that can help encourage and promote diversity and inclusion at Parks Canada-administered sites, including providing funding to these organizations. New cost-sharing approaches were also suggested for cultural heritage sites, as part of efforts to improve their protection into the future.

Themes

Urban Parks: Parks Canada as a leader in urban conservation, and providing access to nature and culture in communities

In Canada and around the world, there is growing awareness of the importance of urban parks as essential places for conservation, recreation, learning and our mental and physical wellbeing. Urban parks can also play a role in promoting diversity, inclusion and social cohesion by bringing communities together in common places and working toward shared goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the vital importance of access to nature and outdoor space for all Canadians, regardless of where they live, work, and play. With its well-known network of urban cultural heritage sites as well as Rouge National Urban Park, Parks Canada has a strong presence and a long history of conservation in urban areas that could be expanded to advance even greater benefits.

In 2020, the Minister's Round Table sought views from Canadians on how Parks Canada can act as a leader in urban conservation and provide access to nature and culture in communities across the country. In particular, participants were asked:

- *What are the best ways to protect natural and cultural spaces in urban settings? Are the approaches different in urban and rural parts of Canada?*
- *How can the necessary collaboration, partnerships, and public support for urban conservation initiatives be achieved quickly?*

By the numbers

- 460 online contributions
- 73 ideas
- 82 comments
- 309 participant endorsements
- 25 organizations (in two virtual sessions)



Urban Parks: Parks Canada as a leader in urban conservation, and providing access to nature and culture in communities (continued)

What Was Heard

Participants in the Minister's Round Table confirmed that Canadians have a greater appreciation for green spaces than ever before. They recognize that access to nature and culture supports physical and mental well-being and quality of life, both for individuals and for whole communities. Participants noted that urban parks can help provide universal access to green spaces for all, provided that barriers such as transportation and affordability can be addressed.

Participants emphasized the role that urban parks can play in protecting biodiversity, offering natural solutions that protect communities (for example, flood risk mitigation) and promoting greater connectivity among protected areas. While praising local efforts to date, some participants expressed a desire for nationally protected urban parks to be bigger, prioritize conservation, and protect cultural connections to nature.

Many participants expressed the hope that creating more protected natural and cultural spaces in urban areas would encourage more Canadians to get outside. To that end, some commented that urban parks may be better oriented toward day activities (such as biking, hiking or paddling) than overnight camping.

A number of participants highlighted the opportunity that urban parks provide for public engagement and education and for helping Canadians to learn more about challenges, such as declining biodiversity. They noted that Parks Canada can be a facilitator to help Canadians learn more about nature, culture, conservation, and restoration.

Should Parks Canada advance urban conservation initiatives, the Agency was urged to collaborate and promote dialogue among many partners, including municipalities, private land owners, community groups, businesses, Indigenous peoples (including the growing number of Indigenous peoples living off-reserve in urban areas, as well as support organizations such as friendship centres) and other levels of government as a starting point for further action to advance urban conservation.

Participants underscored the crucial importance of Indigenous peoples as powerful partners, and also called for greater involvement of racialized communities, people living with disabilities, LGBTQ2+ communities, service organizations and advocacy groups in any possible future development of urban conservation initiatives.

Participants said:

"Urban Parks are a critical community resource to support physical activity among people of all ages as well as an important connection to nature, so important to our mental health during these unprecedented times."

"People ... may go to urban parks because they're convenient and accessible (especially to people without a vehicle), and offer a slice of nature in the hubbub of urban life. They're a good place to spend an afternoon."

"I'd like to see urban parks for their accessibility potential, for introducing Canadians to the ideas of conservation and protection as well as for the outdoor experience that gives people calm, fresh air, exposure to green ideas and information."

Urban Parks: Parks Canada as a leader in urban conservation, and providing access to nature and culture in communities (continued)

By engaging a broad audience and multiple voices, participants suggested that Parks Canada can help ensure that these conservation actions are inclusive, reflect community interests, and are sustainable and durable.

Some participants urged the government to apply flexibility in the design of urban parks and related conservation initiatives, to respond to the unique needs, potential partners and opportunities that exist in urban and near-urban areas across the country.

Parks Canada was also encouraged to collect data and better understand the demographics of existing urban parks to more effectively plan and develop new areas.

Participants underscored the fact that meaningful investments and innovative partnerships will be needed to advance urban conservation. This includes efforts to address potential barriers, such as the cost of land acquisition, infrastructure, and ongoing operational support. Participants emphasized that predictable funding, strong partnerships, and flexible approaches will not only help to advance urban conservation but can have the broader benefits of fostering greater community cohesion and equitable access to natural and cultural settings.

The Minister's Response

The Government of Canada recognizes the unique and vital role that nature can play in all of our lives, especially in challenging times.

The 2020 Speech from the Throne included a commitment to expand urban parks in order to ensure that all Canadians have access to the green spaces and cultural resources upon which we all depend.

In order to advance these efforts, Parks Canada will undertake the following actions:

Action #1 – Parks Canada will review best practices and successful models for supporting urban parks and enhancing conservation efforts in urban areas.

Urban parks can reflect a wide range of approaches and actions by multiple levels of government and stakeholders. Building on the feedback received from the 2020 Minister's Round Table, Parks Canada will research and explore approaches to support urban parks and enhance conservation in urban and near-urban settings across the country. This will include consideration of national and international best practices and success stories in the field, in collaboration with experts and practitioners in urban conservation and urban parks.



Lachine Canal
National Historic Site

Urban Parks: Parks Canada as a leader in urban conservation, and providing access to nature and culture in communities (continued)

Action #2 – Parks Canada will explore options to expand urban parks in Canada and to support conservation in urban areas to increase access for Canadians to green spaces.

Parks Canada will work with other federal departments (including Infrastructure Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Natural Resources Canada), municipalities, provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples, and conservation organizations to explore opportunities to make progress on conservation in urban and near-urban settings.

As part of this work, the Agency will consider a range of new models and flexible approaches that can help prioritize ecological outcomes, increase access to cultural resources, and enhance proximity and access to parks for Canadians. Parks Canada will also consider options for expanding its own network of urban national parks.



Photo: Scott Munn



Photo: Scott Munn

Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility: Parks Canada as a partner and a leader in diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation in protected and heritage places

Canada's national heritage places belong to all Canadians. Parks Canada is committed to ensuring that Canada's national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas reflect Canada's diversity and can be enjoyed by all. Providing opportunities for all Canadians to participate in the conservation and enjoyment of culture and nature will help to ensure that protected places endure over time.

Canada has made many advances in diversity and inclusion in recent years. However, there have also been darker periods in our country's past that need to be acknowledged in order to work towards a brighter future.

In 2020, the Minister's Round Table sought views on how Parks Canada can be a partner and a leader in inclusion, diversity, accessibility and reconciliation in protected and heritage places.

In particular, participants were asked:

- *What principles for inclusion and diversity are the most important for achieving full participation of Canadians in the conservation and enjoyment of national parks, historic sites, and marine conservation areas?*
- *What does an inclusive national park, historic site, or marine conservation area mean for you?*

By the numbers

- 568 online contributions
- 89 ideas
- 50 comments
- 432 participant endorsements
- 19 organizations (in two virtual sessions)

What Was Heard

Participants in the Minister's Round Table expressed that national historic sites and national parks are not always welcoming or accessible to all Canadians. Racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, people from LGBTQ2+ communities, and people living with disabilities frequently feel excluded from these places.

They underscored the importance of providing opportunities for Canadians of all backgrounds and abilities to engage in how Parks Canada designs, develops and implements visitor experience at all

Nothing Without Us was an important principle heard throughout the Minister's Round Table. It highlights the need to proactively and consistently collaborate with those most affected by the design and delivery of given initiatives. This in turn helps to build confidence and trust, and supports the design of more effective and inclusive approaches.



From left to right: Prince Edward Island National Park, Banff National Park, Riding Mountain National Park

Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility: *Parks Canada as a partner and a leader in diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation in protected and heritage places (continued)*

heritage places.

Participants also called on Parks Canada to help all visitors feel more welcome in these places and emphasized that the stories told at heritage places need to tell history from all perspectives.

They suggested increased use of social science and analysis to better understand who is visiting and to assess the quality of their experiences to support the design of more effective approaches.

A number of barriers to diversity, inclusion and accessibility were articulated by participants. For example, many online respondents felt that admission fees are a barrier to entry for Canadians and urged Parks Canada to both make heritage places free and to explore ways to subsidize transportation and potentially accommodation close to these sites for low-income Canadians.

To overcome these and other barriers, participants suggested that Parks Canada first acknowledge the reality and pervasiveness of these barriers. They highlighted the need to bring multiple perspectives and world views together through constructive spaces, like *ethical space*¹, where all perspectives and world views are equally valued.

Participants called on Parks Canada to be bold as a leader and influencer in addressing diversity, inclusion and reconciliation, noting that a culture shift of this nature would have impacts well beyond national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas.

Many participants emphasized that Parks Canada-administered places can be settings where Canadians from diverse backgrounds learn from and about one another. For example, Parks Canada can help advance reconciliation by providing opportunities for greater awareness and understanding of the Indigenous history associated with the lands and waters where national heritage places are located.

Continuing to work to build trust will be essential to Parks Canada's success moving forward. This will require ongoing dialogue, collaboration and relationship building at all levels. A number of participants suggested that, rather than trying to duplicate work underway by local organizations, Parks Canada should seek to partner with organizations who are active on the ground in communities and neighbourhoods across the country.

Participants said:

"Inclusion and diversity is more than just making Parks Canada sites physically accessible, it is about making sure that everyone can enjoy their visit, and connect with the experiences available."

"(Stories) are inclusive when they tell the event being commemorated from the perspectives of all those involved. No one is left out or forgotten... The story told is inclusive when it is relevant to all. This takes courage and generates debates that make the beauty of diversity".

Finally, many participants emphasized that diversity starts in the workplace. To feel welcome, people need to see themselves reflected in Parks Canada's workforce at all levels.

¹ *Ethical space is a concept promoted by the Indigenous Circle of Experts, which focuses on creating places for knowledge systems to interact with mutual respect, kindness, generosity and other basic principles. In ethical space, all knowledge systems are equal.*

Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility: Parks Canada as a partner and a leader in diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation in protected and heritage places (continued)

The Minister's Response

At Parks Canada, removing barriers, fostering participation, and embracing diversity and inclusion are fundamental to the fulfillment of the Agency's mandate.

The federal Public Service has made important commitments to address systemic racism and make the Public Service more inclusive. In his 2021 Call to Action on anti-racism, equity and inclusion in the Federal Public Service, Clerk of the Privy Council, Ian Shugart, called on Public Service leaders to appoint, sponsor, support and recruit Indigenous employees and racialized employees from all regions of Canada.

The Clerk also called on Public Service leaders to invest in developing inclusive leadership skills and establishing a sense of belonging and trust for all public servants, present and future, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender expression.

Parks Canada is committed to creating a representative workforce, developing an inclusive, welcoming and barrier-free environment supportive of all team members,

and removing barriers experienced by racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2+ communities, and people living with disabilities.

To support these efforts, the Agency recently created an Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Council chaired by Parks Canada's President & CEO, and made up of internal champions as well as representatives from equity networks and unions. In addition to reporting on activities, this Council will help share information and best practices and will provide advice to support horizontal integration of efforts across Agency-wide policies, programs and activities.

In addition, as part of its commitments to implement the Accessible Canada Act and to respond to the Clerk's call to action, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #3 – Parks Canada will continue comprehensive efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity in its Visitor Experience and Outreach activities.

Parks Canada-administered places belong to all Canadians. The Agency strives to be inclusive and welcoming to all and is committed to working with partners, stakeholders and communities to do more to ensure that all Canadians and visitors from around the world can enjoy national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas.

To that end, Parks Canada will continue its work to remove barriers and systematically include racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2+ communities and people living with disabilities in the enjoyment and appreciation of Canada's national heritage places.



Photo: Austin Mackin

Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility: Parks Canada as a partner and a leader in diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation in protected and heritage places (continued)

Action #4 – Parks Canada will work with experts, as well as advocacy and service organizations, to strengthen accessibility and inclusion at national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas.

Round Table participants called on Parks Canada to reach out broadly and connect with existing organizations doing invaluable work in communities across Canada to advance accessibility and inclusion. Parks Canada will work with experts, as well as with advocacy and service organizations to improve accessibility and inclusion at national heritage places. The Agency will also work closely with staff and with experts to support implementation of the *Accessible Canada Act*.



Photo: Ryan Brey

Ecological Corridors: Connecting protected places to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss

Experts agree that the world is losing species at an unprecedented rate. According to a 2019 global study, approximately one million species are now threatened with extinction – more than ever before in human history.

Habitat loss is an important contributor to this loss of species and consequent decline in biodiversity. However, the fragmentation of habitat is also a growing factor, as the impacts of climate change force many species to move in order to adapt to a changing environment.

All species, including humans, are affected by declining biodiversity and habitat fragmentation. Ecosystems offer important services to people and their communities, by providing clean water, moderating climate, cleaning the air, and even supplying the components of medicines.

Ecosystems are more resilient when they are ecologically connected. Enhancing habitat connectivity and ecological corridors can play an important role in stemming the decline of biodiversity, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and helping to achieve Canada's international conservation targets, particularly its commitment to protect 25% of its lands and inland waters, and 25% of its oceans by 2025, and 30% by 2030.

As such, in 2020, the Minister's Round Table sought views on how Parks Canada can support the creation of ecological corridors and connecting protected places to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss.

In particular, participants were asked:

- *What are some of the challenges to connecting protected natural spaces in Canada and creating ecological corridors?*
- *What are the various tools that can be used to support ecological connectivity between protected areas?*

By the numbers:

- 520 online contributions
- 88 ideas
- 60 comments
- 372 participant endorsements
- 11 organizations (in virtual session)

What Was Heard

Participants in the Minister's Round Table highlighted that habitat fragmentation is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity worldwide, and that ecological connectivity is essential to both biodiversity conservation and climate change response strategies. They emphasized the need to protect ecological connectivity where it still exists, while restoring ecological corridors where connectivity has been degraded or lost.



Photo: Nigel Fearon

Ecological Corridors: *Connecting protected places to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss (continued)*

Participants also voiced support for developing ecological corridors, noting that existing protected areas do not always reflect the migratory patterns or traditional habitats of many species needing protection. Connectivity strategies are ideally comprehensive, reflecting not only landscapes but also seascapes, riverscapes, and the places where these ecosystems meet.

In addition, participants highlighted the importance of facilitating species movement as a core objective in any strategy to enhance connectivity. They noted that it will be crucial to locate ecological corridors in areas that will be most beneficial to species at risk.

Many participants emphasized that ecological and cultural connectedness is foundational to Indigenous traditions and world views, and called for Indigenous voices to be an essential part of the conversation on ecological corridors moving forward.

Given that any possible future efforts to enhance connectivity will need to engage multiple land owners, communities, regions and jurisdictions, participants noted that connecting protected places will require levels of collaboration and partnership that go far beyond efforts to date. In particular, participants called for greater collaboration between Parks Canada and municipal, provincial, and territorial governments.

Participants emphasized that Parks Canada has the potential to be a convener and catalyst for advancing ecological connectivity and working outside of the borders of existing sites. With expert capacity in conservation and restoration, the Agency is in a unique position to facilitate creative, inclusive, and innovative solutions for the future.

Cooperation, dialogue and collaboration among public and private partners, including the philanthropic community, will be essential to success. Participants emphasized the importance of both flexibility and adaptability, as well as the need to build public support for these efforts moving forward.

Participants said:

"Response to this issue has been just as fragmented as the landscapes that are in need of connectivity enhancements or protections."

"Working with businesses, governments, Indigenous communities is key ... cooperative management structures and Guardian programs with Indigenous communities along with finding common ground with business and local municipalities has the opportunity to create greater habitat protection along with functioning ecosystems."

"There are few areas in Canada that are designed to specifically protect the ocean/land interface need for the continued perseverance of many species ... Parks Canada is in a unique position to facilitate the development on implementation of these protocols."



Photo: Ryan Brey

Ecological Corridors: *Connecting protected places to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss (continued)*

The Minister's Response

The Government of Canada is committed to rising to the dual challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change. This includes commitments to protect 25% of Canada's lands and waters and 25% of Canada's oceans by 2025 and 30% by 2030.

Parks Canada has a crucial role to play in fulfilling these commitments and in stemming the decline of biodiversity in Canada. Improving the connectivity of national parks and national marine conservation areas within the context of the broader landscapes, seascapes and riverscapes in which they are found is an important part of fulfilling this role.

Enhancing connectivity means working across broader ecosystems, including lands and waters over which Parks Canada does not have jurisdiction. Effective action will therefore require leadership, collaboration, and partnerships.

Parks Canada can play a vital role as a convenor, an expert and a longstanding conservation practitioner that can help advance efforts and share knowledge and tools with all interested partners on the land, rivers and oceans.

In this spirit, Parks Canada will move forward with the following actions:

Action #5 – Parks Canada will work with experts, partners, and conservation organizations on an overarching approach to ecological connectivity.

Parks Canada will work collaboratively with a wide range of partners and experts on initiatives to identify priority areas for ecological connectivity across the boundaries of Parks Canada-administered places. Partners will include Indigenous peoples, municipalities, provinces and territories, other federal departments, conservation organizations, and private land owners.



Photo: Fritz Mueller



Photo: Dan Reilly

Ecological Corridors: *Connecting protected places to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss (continued)*

Action #6 – Parks Canada will promote the adoption of best practices for ecological connectivity into conservation planning across Canada.

Parks Canada will work with other federal departments and levels of government to incorporate best practices for ecological connectivity into conservation planning across Canada.

In particular, Parks Canada will work with other federal departments (including Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Infrastructure Canada), along with provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments and communities, to consider how recent resources such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidelines on Conserving Connectivity through Ecological Networks and Corridors can help inform conservation planning and expansion of protected and conserved area networks across Canada.



Photo: Nigel Fearon

Indigenous Leadership in Conservation: Advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

Indigenous peoples have been stewards of the lands, waters, and ice of what is now Canada since time immemorial. Indigenous systems of knowledge, laws, governance, and practices continue to be vital to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and for responding to the pressing challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Since the creation of the first national parks in Canada, many protected places - including ones where Parks Canada operates - served to limit the exercise of the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples, impacting the health and well-being of these places and the communities they had sustained for generations.

In recent decades, Parks Canada and Indigenous peoples have worked together to build relationships that support

collaborative approaches for establishing and managing national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas, resulting in some of the most significant conservation achievements in Canada's history.

At the same time, there is increased recognition and support for Indigenous leadership in conservation and stewardship, including through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, Indigenous stewardship and

Guardian programs, and other initiatives that manifest the rights, responsibilities, and priorities of Indigenous peoples within their territories.

In 2020, the Minister's Round Table sought views on how Parks Canada can advance Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas. In particular, participants were asked:

- *What can Parks Canada do to further support Indigenous leadership in conservation and stewardship in national parks, historic sites, and marine conservation areas?*
- *How might Parks Canada help to advance and support Indigenous leadership in conservation and stewardship through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas?*

By the numbers:

- 176 online contributions
- 40 ideas
- 8 comments
- 128 participant endorsements
- 13 organizations (over 3 virtual sessions including one with Indigenous leaders)



Photo: Scott Munn

Indigenous Leadership in Conservation: *Advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (continued)*

What Was Heard

Minister's Round Table participants emphasized that Indigenous peoples have a deep connection to lands, waters and ice across Canada and have been stewards of these places for millennia. Indigenous people are leaders and essential partners in addressing both biodiversity and climate change.

Indigenous leadership and meaningful partnerships with Indigenous peoples will be critical for the achievement of Canada's targets to protect 30% of lands and waters and 30% of oceans by 2030. Participants called for Indigenous leadership to be recognized as a central tenet of Canada's strategy for meeting these targets, and highlighted the importance of meaningfully involving Indigenous peoples in all aspects of associated decision-making and management.

Participants called on the Government of Canada to make Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas a priority. Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas are a powerful articulation of Indigenous leadership. Some participants suggested that Parks Canada should develop a new designation for Indigenous Protected and

Conserved Areas, creating parks that are solely managed and owned by local Indigenous governments.

In addition to Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, participants emphasized the importance of Indigenous stewardship, through initiatives such as Indigenous Guardians. These programs can build cultural connections to lands, waters, and ice and play an invaluable role in monitoring and managing ecological and cultural resources. They can also help provide local jobs for Indigenous youth, along with economic benefits for their communities.

Cooperative management of national heritage places was also highlighted by participants. It was noted that co-management is a powerful tool for ensuring that decisions across all aspects of Parks Canada's mandate fully integrate the views of all parties and partners.

Hiring more Indigenous staff, both in leadership roles at Parks Canada and in sites managed by the Agency, was suggested by multiple participants. Greater participation in the Parks Canada workforce would help to ensure that Indigenous voices influence day-to-day operations as well as policy decision-making.

Participants said:

"The establishment of any new protected area must be led by a partnership with the Indigenous nations whose land it is on. At the same time, all of the current parks and protected areas across Canada should integrate Indigenous leadership and provide opportunities for giving land back to the Indigenous peoples whose land was taken to form the original park."

"In pursuit of science, university & other government researchers often exploit indigenous knowledge for their own purposes, but acknowledge no contribution or dissemination of the knowledge to Indigenous peoples, whose data they collect or use."

"An indigenous leader position could be created at each national park which is situated on unceded land. This person would be in charge of restoration, conservation and sustainability efforts, and would be from the local first nation community."

Indigenous Leadership in Conservation: *Advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (continued)*

Minister's Round Table participants noted that advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation requires strengthened government-to-government and nation-to-nation relationships. Participants emphasized the importance of distinctions-based approaches that ensure that the unique rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Métis Nation and Inuit are acknowledged, affirmed, and implemented.

The concept of *ethical space* was raised by a number of participants. This concept refers to the need to create places for knowledge systems to interact with mutual respect. The Indigenous Circle of Experts was identified as an example of this approach.

Indigenous knowledge and stewardship practices stem from a deep understanding of the environment and natural laws. Participants noted that Western systems of science and conservation have overwhelmed oral systems, and have blocked traditions that allowed for the use, expression and transfer of knowledge.

Acknowledging these historic wrongs, affirming traditional Indigenous knowledge systems, and protecting the intellectual property held collectively by Indigenous peoples were all identified as important elements of reconciliation.

The importance of language and Indigenous place names was highlighted as a powerful way to demonstrate value and respect for Indigenous peoples and cultures. Participants noted that language is an important instrument for gaining and sharing knowledge.

For many Indigenous peoples, separation from their traditional lands in national parks remains a reality. Access to these places can be beyond the means of many Indigenous peoples, particularly in the North and more remote areas of Canada. Parks Canada was encouraged to explore new ways to facilitate access to these places for Indigenous peoples, in order to promote connection to the lands, water and ice and the knowledge that these connections foster.



Photo: Fritz Mueller

Indigenous Leadership in Conservation: *Advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (continued)*

Participants highlighted the need for long-term, sustained and predictable funding for the establishment and management of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas. Putting Indigenous leadership and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas at the centre of all future planning and investments in conservation in Canada could significantly advance conservation, reconciliation, reconnection to the land, and the broad restoration and advancement of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The Minister's Response

The Government of Canada is deeply committed to reconciliation and renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples, based on the recognition of rights, respect, collaboration, and partnership. The government also recognizes the importance of distinctions-based approaches that ensure that the unique rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Métis Nation and Inuit are acknowledged, affirmed, and implemented.

Parks Canada has a unique role to play in advancing these efforts. The Agency is dedicated to creating and managing a system of protected places that recognizes and honours the connection, cultures and contributions of Indigenous peoples, their histories, their traditions, as well as the special relationships Indigenous peoples have with their traditional lands and waters.

In the spirit of reconciliation, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #7 – Parks Canada will convene Indigenous partners to advise on Agency-led initiatives.

Many participants in the Minister's Round Table highlighted the work done by the Indigenous Circle of Experts during its mandate as part of the *Pathway to Canada Target 1* process², which helped to inform greater understanding and recognition of Indigenous leadership in meeting Canada's biodiversity commitments through protected and conserved areas.

Parks Canada is committed to meaningful engagement of Indigenous peoples in all aspects of decision-making related to the conservation of nature and culture in the sites for which it is responsible.

Over the past few years, Parks Canada has led a number of initiatives to strengthen engagement with Indigenous communities.

To further support and advance this work, and to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are considered in priority setting and decision-making, Parks Canada will work with Indigenous partners to provide advice and direction on Agency-led initiatives. Models and mechanisms for co-development will be explored. Particular areas of interest include Indigenous stewardship, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, and new ventures such as urban conservation and ecological connectivity.

² The Pathway to Target 1 initiative was an initiative to encourage efforts among governments and land management partners to contribute to Canada Target 1, including conserving at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland waters of Canada by 2020 through protected areas, Indigenous protected and conserved areas, and other effective area-based conservation measures.

Indigenous Leadership in Conservation: Advancing Indigenous leadership in conservation, traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (continued)

Action #8 – Parks Canada will advance efforts to develop a framework for Indigenous stewardship in places the Agency administers.

The Agency will develop a proposed framework to guide efforts supporting Indigenous stewardship in protected heritage places, including the advancement of new Indigenous Guardians programs and ensuring the sustainability of existing programs. This framework will be developed through processes of collaboration and dialogue with Indigenous peoples and partners.

Action #9 – Parks Canada will identify opportunities to support and advance Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas bring together all aspects of Indigenous conservation while also providing ethical spaces for Indigenous knowledge and Western science and approaches to interact. Parks Canada will explore how the Agency can contribute to Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas through dialogue with Indigenous peoples and partners.



Photo: Stephen DesRoches



Photo: Matthew and Chera Yorke

Protecting our Cultural Heritage: Advancing legislative protection for federal built heritage

Parks Canada plays a key role in delivering the Government of Canada's commitments to commemorate and designate places, persons and events of national historic significance and of heritage value, and to protect and conserve heritage places for future generations.

In fulfilling this mandate, the Agency recognizes that historical commemoration and historic places can also play an important role in acknowledging and recalling the past – and provides a powerful opportunity to build a more inclusive future that fully reflects the spirit of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

A patchwork of legislation and policies is currently used to guide, inform and support historic places administered by the federal government. As a result, there are varying levels of protection and conservation in place for different heritage sites across the country and within the federal family.

By the numbers:

- 253 online contributions
- 49 ideas
- 46 comments
- 159 participant endorsements
- 12 organizations (in virtual session)

There have been growing calls in recent years for stronger protections, such as stand-alone legislation, for Canada's historic places.

In 2020, the Minister's Round Table sought views on how Parks Canada can advance legislative protection for federal built heritage. In particular, participants were asked:

- *How is the enjoyment, appreciation and protection of historic places important to you and your community?*
- *How can the Government of Canada better reflect Canada's diverse histories and be inclusive of the cultures and perspectives of Indigenous peoples when it formally recognizes places, persons, and events?*



Protecting our Cultural Heritage: Advancing legislative protection for federal built heritage (continued)

What Was Heard

Participants underscored the importance of cultural heritage sites and historic places, and emphasized the wide range of physical, spiritual, natural and emotional values they represent.

At the same time, participants called on the government to ensure that protected built heritage reflects the full, diverse history of Canada. They noted that the histories of Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, and LGBTQ+ communities are not currently protected to the same degree as Canada's colonial history. Including more voices and telling stories from different points of view is essential to increase awareness and connection to our past - and our future.

Many participants highlighted the importance of protecting Indigenous cultural and historic places. They urged the government to do more to empower Indigenous stewardship of their own cultural heritage, consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Some participants also called on the government to ensure that any new legislative protection of heritage places includes Indigenous heritage.

Minister's Round Table participants confirmed that there is an ongoing need and opportunity for federal leadership in the protection and care of cultural and historic places. Many called on Parks Canada to advocate on behalf of all national historic sites, given that many sites are owned or administered by multiple levels of government, non-profit organizations, or private owners.

Participants in the Minister's Round Table voiced support for new legislation that would allow for the protection of cultural values at risk. Some recommended that new legislation capture any international obligations, commitments and conventions that may apply to Canada such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

Participants said:

"The designation of new national historic sites (NHS) will allow Canadians to develop ties and relationships to their community, and Parks Canada. It would be great to see more NHS in the territories and across the provinces that recognize the national significance of Indigenous Canadians."

"When the world is back to normal promote visits to national historic sites by making annual passes available to charities for fundraising. These could be used in events like silent auctions by hospices, women's shelters, literacy councils, out of the cold shelters. Distribute information on historic parks through historical societies and local history associations."



Protecting our Cultural Heritage: Advancing legislative protection for federal built heritage (continued)

Others recommended that new legislation recognize and reference both the Canadian Register of Historic Places and the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*.

Finally, participants noted the importance of funding to support these evolving priorities. They indicated that resources are strained and that many heritage places are relying on volunteers to achieve conservation outcomes. Supporting capacity among its partners could help Parks Canada ensure that historic places tell stories about our full history, reflect diverse perspectives and voices, and lay the foundation for the future.

The Minister's Response

Parks Canada plays an important leadership role in telling the stories of Canada through the designation of people, events, and places of historic significance.

Parks Canada also has a clear mandate to work with Canadian Heritage to provide clearer direction on how national heritage places should be designated and preserved, and to develop comprehensive legislation on federally owned heritage places.

To support these commitments, Parks Canada will take the following actions:

Action #10 – Parks Canada will work towards strengthening legislation related to the designation of places, persons and events of national historic significance and the protection of federally-owned historic places.

Parks Canada will continue to work to strengthen legislation related to the designation of places, persons and events of national historic significance and the protection of federally-owned historic places. Work is underway, informed by feedback from federal departments and organizations, stakeholders and Indigenous groups, as well as recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (e.g., Call to Action #79) and various Parliamentary committees.

Engagement has taken place over the past few years, most recently through targeted engagement sessions. The development and introduction of such legislation would fulfill the Minister's December 2019 mandate letter and respond to concerns previously raised by the Auditor General regarding the lack of complete and current information on federally-owned historic places.

Action #11 – Parks Canada will explore opportunities to increase support to owners of historic places.

Participants in the Minister's Round Table emphasized that current resources are strained across the country and that owners of historic places have limited access to funding to allow for proper conservation practices. Given that the Government of Canada manages only a fraction of this country's historic places, collaboration is crucial to fostering a culture of stewardship and conservation in Canada.

In addition, public and private investment in historic places can play an important role as a catalyst for community sustainability and economic development. As such, Parks Canada will explore opportunities to increase support to owners of non federally-owned historic places, including those associated with Indigenous peoples and racialized communities.

Protecting our Cultural Heritage: Advancing legislative protection for federal built heritage (continued)

Action #12 – Parks Canada will continue to implement the Framework for History and Commemoration: National Historic Sites System Plan 2019.

Participants in the Minister's Round Table underscored the importance of renewed efforts to include more voices and tell stories from different points of view. Protecting cultural heritage requires ensuring that all aspects and perspectives of Canada's history are included. To that end, the Agency will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to implement the Framework for History and Commemoration and to adopt leading approaches and practices that are at the forefront of public history.



Photo: Joel Bonly



Photo: J. Evelyn

From top to bottom:
Riel House National Historic Site,
Jasper Heritage Railway Station

Conclusion

Parks Canada is deeply grateful to all participants in the 2020 Minister's Round Table.

By generously offering their ideas and perspectives, participants provided invaluable advice on how Parks Canada can fulfill its mandate to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of these areas in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity, now and in the future.

The actions outlined in this response will help Parks Canada foster greater diversity, inclusion and accessibility throughout its operations, and ensure that the stories we tell reflect the full history – and future – of our country. They will also support more consistent and transparent approaches to designating and protecting cultural and historic places.

In addition, supporting Indigenous leadership in conservation, promoting ecological connectivity and encouraging urban conservation will help us rise to the dual challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss while promoting reconciliation and connecting Canadians with nature.

Parks Canada is committed to fostering ongoing dialogue and partnerships in support of these efforts. Moving forward, the Agency will develop detailed action plans that reflect the feedback received and that outline next steps on each of the five themes addressed by the Minister's Round Table. These will become the basis for further work over the next 24 months, which will be reported to the next Round Table in 2022.

We look forward to working together to make this vision a reality.



Pukaskwa
National Park

Photo: Scott Munn