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# Waterton Lakes

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

2022



A UNESCO  
World Heritage Site

2022

# Waterton Lakes

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

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WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2022.

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#### Note to readers

The health and safety of visitors, employees and all Canadians are of the utmost importance. Parks Canada is following the advice and guidance of public health experts to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing Canadians to experience Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Parks Canada acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may have unforeseeable impacts on the *Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada Management Plan*. Parks Canada will inform Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the public of any such impacts through its annual update on the implementation of this plan.

For more information about the management plan or about  
**WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA:**

Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada  
P.O. Box 200  
Waterton Park AB T0K 2M0

Tel: 403-859-5133  
Fax: 403-859-5152  
Email: [waterton.info@pc.gc.ca](mailto:waterton.info@pc.gc.ca)  
Web: [www.parkscanada.gc.ca/waterton](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/waterton)

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## Foreword



From coast to coast to coast, national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas are a source of shared pride for Canadians. They reflect Canada's natural and cultural heritage and tell stories of who we are, including the historic and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples.

These cherished places are a priority for the Government of Canada. We are committed to protecting natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places, and contributing to the recovery of species at risk.

At the same time, we continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities to ensure that more Canadians can experience these iconic destinations and learn about history, culture and the environment.

In collaboration with Indigenous communities and key partners, Parks Canada conserves and protects national historic sites and national parks; enables people to discover and connect with history and nature; and helps sustain the economic value of these places for local and regional communities.

This new management plan for Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada supports this vision.

Management plans are developed by a dedicated team at Parks Canada through extensive consultation and input from Indigenous partners, other partners and stakeholders, local communities, as well as visitors past and present. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this plan for their commitment and spirit of cooperation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort and I am pleased to approve the *Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada Management Plan*.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steven Guilbeault', written in a cursive style.

**Steven Guilbeault**

*Minister of Environment and Climate Change and  
Minister responsible for Parks Canada*



## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*



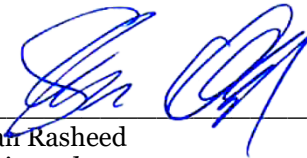
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Ron Hallman  
*President & Chief Executive Officer  
Parks Canada*



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Andrew Campbell  
*Senior Vice-President  
Operations Directorate*



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Salman Rasheed  
*Superintendent  
Waterton Lakes Field Unit*



## Executive Summary

This management plan sets the strategic direction for Waterton Lakes National Park for the next ten years. It replaces the 2010 management plan and provides updated direction for maintaining and restoring ecological integrity, protecting cultural resources, and providing memorable visitor experiences and education. The plan presents a vision of the park at its best, and outlines key strategies that will help achieve that vision. Indigenous peoples, stakeholder groups and the public were consulted on this management plan and, through its development, helped shape the future direction of the national park.

Established in 1895, Waterton Lakes National Park is Canada's fourth national park, the most southerly in the Rocky Mountains, and one half of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park UNESCO World Heritage Site. Featuring ancient mountains, deep lakes, vibrant rivers and wetlands, old-growth forests and windswept prairies, the park covers 505 square kilometres of the larger Crown of the Continent, an ecological and cultural landscape where ecosystems from north, south, east and west converge at the narrowest point in the Rocky Mountain chain. No protected area of similar size in the Rocky Mountains has as much ecological diversity as Waterton Lakes National Park, with over 1,000 species of vascular plants (including many rare species), and over 60 mammals.

Indigenous peoples have lived on these lands for millennia. This plan acknowledges the vital role and knowledge that Indigenous peoples have on the landscape and presents strategies for how Parks Canada will work together with the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) and other Indigenous peoples in park management. This plan seeks to facilitate Indigenous partners' reconnection with their traditionally used lands and waters, create platforms for their voices to share their cultures, histories, and knowledge, and increase their participation in initiatives to protect and care for park lands.

The park offers visitors a chance to connect with the natural and cultural environments of the Crown of the Continent. Visitation to Waterton Lakes National Park is increasing, with the park welcoming over 525,000 visitors in 2021. This plan aims to facilitate sustainable, high-quality visitor experiences rooted in the park's distinctive nature and culture. It also seeks to foster respectful and responsible use of the park, and the long-term support of undisturbed wilderness.

This plan charts the course for Parks Canada to continue protecting Waterton Lakes National Park's unique ecosystems in the face of ongoing and emerging challenges including climate change, invasive species and diseases, and habitat change outside park boundaries. The plan also aims to protect and present cultural resources in ways that respect their diverse origins and their significance.

This plan includes six key strategies and detailed direction for two management areas. These are:

- Conserving Natural and Cultural Heritage for Future Generations
- True-to-Place Experiences
- Strengthening Indigenous Relations
- Connecting with Canadians
- Managing Development
- Regional Connectivity and Landscapes
- Management Areas
  - Front Range Management Area
  - National Historic Sites

The key strategies and specific direction for the management areas represent Parks Canada's planned approach to park management for the next five to ten years. However, Parks Canada will use adaptive management, where strategies may be refined over time as conditions change. The management plan concludes with a summary of a strategic environmental assessment. This assessment included a thorough examination of the potential environmental effects of the direction in the management plan, with a focus on potential cumulative effects. The assessment determined that the strategies, objectives and actions of the plan, taken together, will have positive effects over the life of the plan.





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## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada administers one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national historic site, national park, national marine conservation area, and heritage canal administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

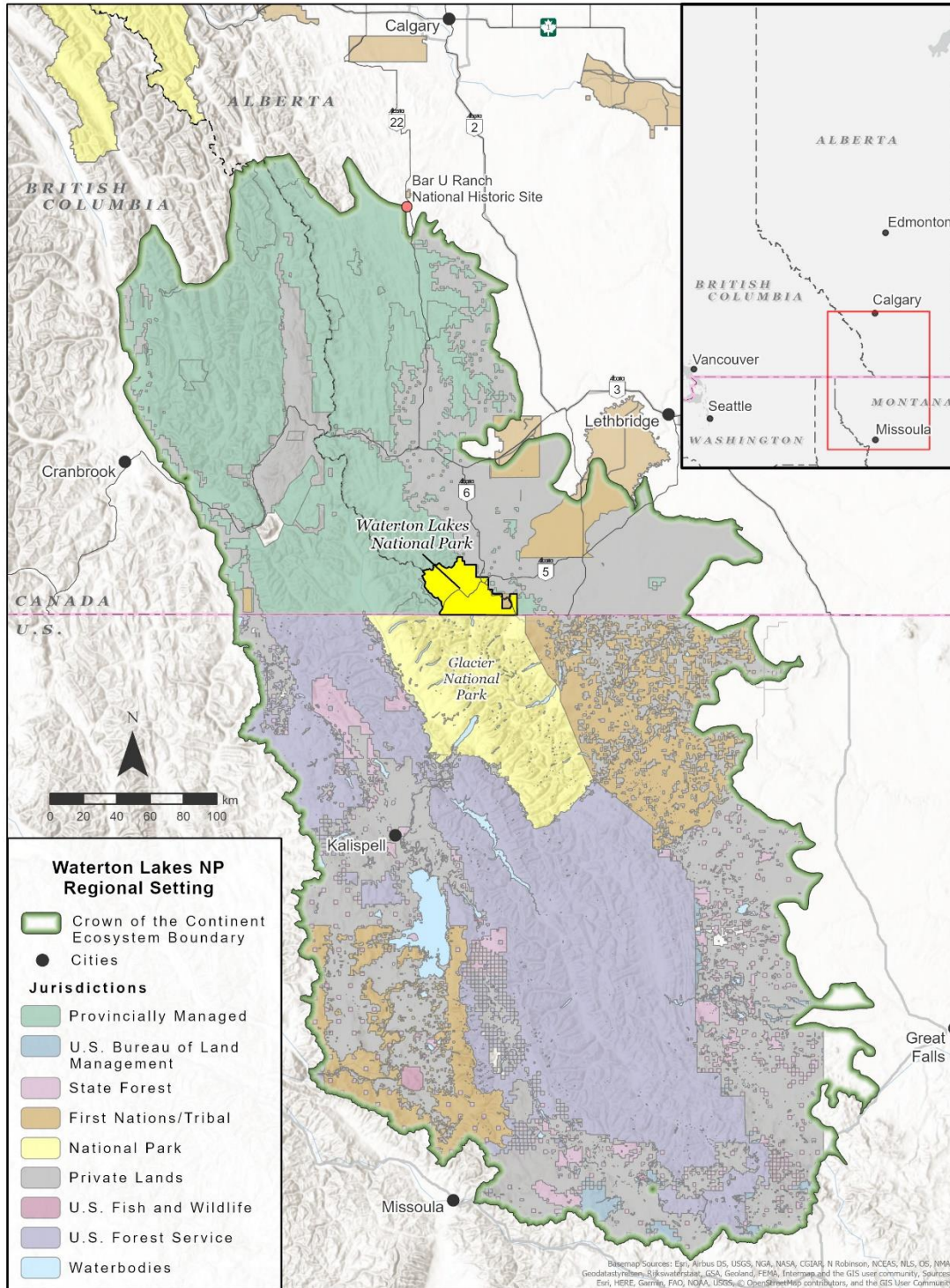
*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Parks Canada Agency Act* require Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for each national park. The *Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how park management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

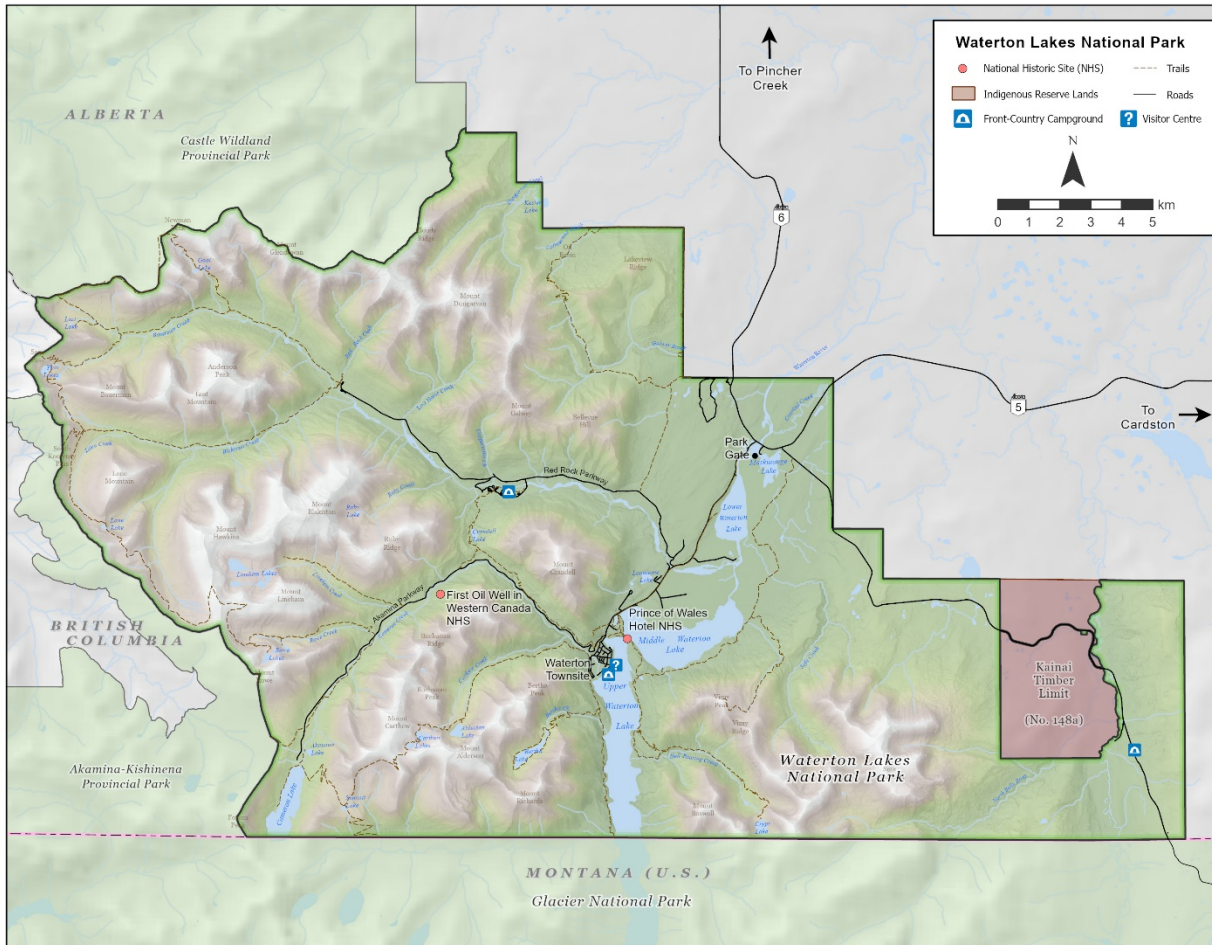
Indigenous peoples are important partners in the stewardship of heritage places, with connections to the lands and waters since time immemorial. Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national park. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Waterton Lakes National Park by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement and, where appropriate, consultation on the management of Waterton Lakes National Park in years to come.

Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Waterton Lakes National Park





## 2.0 Significance of Waterton Lakes National Park

Waterton Lakes National Park (WLNP) protects and presents a portion of the Rocky Mountain Natural Region, “where the mountains meet the prairie.” The Blackfoot name for Waterton Lakes—Paahtómahksikimi—means *inner sacred lake within the mountains*. It is a landscape shaped by wind, fire, and water with strong human connections dating back thousands of years. Old-growth forests, windswept prairies, flowing rivers and deep lakes intersect to support an astounding variety of plants and animals. Wide open spaces framed by spectacular mountains create a sense of peace and wonder.

Waterton Lakes National Park is Canada’s fourth national park, established in 1895 thanks to the leadership of local citizens. Located in the southwest corner of Alberta and covering an area of 505 square kilometres, it is the smallest of the Canadian national mountain parks (Banff, Jasper, Yoho, Kootenay, Mount Revelstoke, Glacier and Waterton Lakes).

The park lies within the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, one of North America’s most ecologically, physically and jurisdictionally diverse landscapes. This ecosystem is located in one of the narrowest points along the Rocky Mountain chain. The park helps to protect this crucial north-south wildlife corridor. Five ecoregions meet in Waterton Lakes National Park—Foothills Parkland, Montane, Lower Subalpine, Upper Subalpine, and Alpine—setting the stage for the park to host a large variety of plants for its size. Waterton Lakes National Park contains 83 vegetation communities and over 1,000 vascular plant species across grasslands, shrublands, wetlands, forests, and alpine areas, featuring seasonal fields of multi-coloured wildflowers. Almost 175 of these plant species, such as the Waterton moonwort, are rare or not found elsewhere in Alberta or Canada. This diverse vegetation supports a vast array of wildlife, including 256 bird, 66 mammal, 24 fish, 3 reptile, and 6 amphibian species, plus thousands of invertebrates, including insects.

This cradle of mountains, prairie, lake and sky has attracted and connected people with the natural world for millennia. Waterton Lakes National Park is within the traditionally used lands and waters, and is a place of significance for the Siksikaitisitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy, which consists of the Kainai Nation [Blood Tribe], Siksika Nation and Aapatohsiipiikani [Piikani Nation] in southern Alberta, and the Amskapi Piikani [Blackfeet Tribe] in northern Montana, USA) and other Indigenous peoples. Paahtómahksikimi, the Blackfoot name for Waterton Lakes, is pronounced *BUCK-toe-MOCK-sick-ih-mee*. The Beaver Bundle—representing all living beings, including the four-legged, the two-legged (humans), creatures that fly and those that live in the water—was given to the Blackfoot people in Aahkiaahkoinimaan, today’s Maskinonge area of the park. It signifies the sacred kinship between the land and all of its inhabitants, based on respect and reciprocity, from which flow the traditions of conservation and sustainability, values shared by Parks Canada.

The earliest evidence of human presence among Waterton’s lakes and mountains stretches back more than 10,000 years. In these rich valleys, Siksikaitisitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) and Ktunaxa peoples hunted bison and collected plants for food and medicine. Close to 400 archaeological sites have been identified in Waterton Lakes National Park. Most are Indigenous sites that include fire rings, bison drive lanes, butchering and fishing camps, and ceremonial sites. This was a place where the Blackfoot Confederacy and other First Nations would gather for camping, travelling, trading and peacemaking. The Blackfoot continue to hold ceremonies and harvest holistic medicine plants in Paahtómahksikimi.

International designations and inscriptions signify the importance of this area to citizens around the world. In 1932, Waterton Lakes National Park partnered with Glacier National Park in Montana to form the world’s first International Peace Park (Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park). Rotarians played a role in the formation of the peace park and continue to engage with Waterton through the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Association. Today, the two parks use this long-established relationship to work together to protect the water, plants and animals found in this unique setting. The Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995 in recognition of meeting the Outstanding Universal Value criteria for its ecological processes and scenic beauty. More recently, Waterton Lakes National Park and Glacier National Park were jointly recognized as the first

International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) International Dark Sky Parks, based on commitments to preserve their high-quality night skies and offer night-sky viewing opportunities. Waterton Lakes National Park also forms the core area of the Waterton Biosphere Reserve, established in 1979. The Waterton Biosphere Reserve is a mechanism for sustainable human use of the land, balancing biodiversity conservation, socio-cultural values and economic development.

Two national historic sites (NHS) are found within the park's boundaries: the First Oil Well in Western Canada NHS, and the Prince of Wales Hotel NHS. The First Oil Well in Western Canada was designated in 1965 to commemorate the first commercially productive oil well in the western provinces. Located in the Cameron Valley, this exploration foreshadowed the growth of the oil industry that has underwritten much of Alberta's subsequent economic development. The Prince of Wales Hotel is an iconic example of the Swiss-chalet architectural style strongly associated with the Canadian Rockies and the country's historic railway hotels. It opened in 1927 and received National Historic Site designation in 1992. Presently, the hotel is operated by a third party through a land agreement. Its striking design and dramatic setting make it Waterton Lakes National Park's most recognized landmark.

### 3.0 Planning Context

Waterton Lakes National Park is situated within a complex, multi-jurisdictional, ecological, social and political landscape. It shares histories, boundaries, and plant and wildlife communities with the Siksikaitisitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy)—particularly the Kainai and Piikani, the Ktunaxa people, Glacier National Park in Montana, Akamina-Kishinena Provincial Park in British Columbia, Castle Wildland Provincial Park in Alberta, and a range of other Alberta public lands, municipal governments and private landowners.

Parks Canada collaborates with the Siksikaitisitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) to ensure that their worldview and sacred kinship are reflected and valued in a range of projects, including cultural interpretation in the new Visitor Reception Centre, interpretive activities and events, and the conservation of natural and cultural resources. Parks Canada endeavours to respect all applicable treaties and work collaboratively with all Indigenous peoples who assert the park is part of their traditional territories, such as the signatories of Treaty 7. Parks Canada also strives to work with all Indigenous peoples in as equitable a manner as possible. Waterton Lakes National Park remains committed to continued engagement with Indigenous partners to ensure history, culture and values are shared respectfully.

Given the park's size and location, transboundary partnerships and collaborations with regional partners and stakeholders are important to successfully meet the park's management, conservation, visitor experience and engagement goals. Waterton Lakes National Park collaborates with Glacier National Park (USA), provincial agencies, local municipalities, Waterton Lakes Chamber of Commerce and Improvement District #4, local ranchers, and conservation organizations. Information and resources are shared to manage activities including wildfire, prescribed fire, search and rescue, non-native species, species at risk, wildlife, and restoration projects, and to inform memorable visitor experiences. The Nature Conservancy of Canada acquires land and works with private landowners adjacent to the park as part of the Waterton Park Front Project to maintain the natural value of working ranches and habitat for a variety of wildlife, including wide-ranging species such as grizzly bear.

Waterton Lakes National Park is an inspiring place to visit, with diverse opportunities for exploration. Its proximity to Lethbridge (1.5 hours) and Calgary (2.5 hours) makes it an easy day trip from these urban areas. The park includes lakes and rivers, mountain and prairie vistas, hundreds of kilometres of trails and roads, campgrounds and picnic sites (day-use areas). The welcoming townsite of Waterton is the focal point for visitor services, offering a recently built world-class Visitor Reception Centre, outdoor activities, dining experiences, and accommodations within a setting of rugged natural beauty. The community's population varies with the seasons, ranging from 108 residents to a seasonal population that increases to approximately 1,000 during summer months. An additional 5,000 to 6,000 day-use visitors and roughly 2,000 overnight visitors stay in park campgrounds or lodging during peak periods.

On September 11, 2017, the Kenow wildfire entered the southwest corner of Waterton Lakes National Park through Akamina Pass. The fire significantly impacted park ecology, burning approximately 39 percent (19,303 hectares) of the park's area, or 50 percent of its vegetated landscape, affecting plants, wildlife and aquatic systems. While fire is a natural part of the Waterton Lakes National Park ecosystem and essential to maintain its ecological integrity, this wildfire was of uncommon size and exceptional, uniform intensity. The smaller, similar-intensity Boundary Creek wildfire took place in 2018. A thorough understanding of the impacts of both wildfires on the park's ecology will take many years to observe and assess, based on research and monitoring projects underway in collaboration with partners.

The Kenow wildfire also damaged and destroyed built infrastructure in the park and neighbouring lands. Despite the best efforts of firefighters to protect facilities, over 30 park assets including buildings, campgrounds, and parkways, and 80 percent of the hiking trail network were either damaged or destroyed. Decades of fuel reduction efforts and fire management planning, in addition to the on-the-ground firefighting protected buildings and assets throughout the park, the townsite, and at the Prince of Wales Hotel National Historic Site. Waterton Lakes National Park will continue with fuel reduction efforts around the townsite and outlying facilities to ensure a strategic approach to landscape-level fire management in support of wildfire risk reduction.

The Kenow wildfire revealed more than 70 new archaeological sites, and expanded 170 known archaeological sites within the burn zone. Members of local Blackfoot communities contributed to identifying and acknowledging some of these archaeological sites, and Indigenous communities will continue to be engaged as work proceeds. Parks Canada is working to restore visitor experiences that are safe, enjoyable, inclusive and fully consistent with the ecological objectives for the park.

Alongside post-fire recovery, Waterton Lakes National Park has seen an unprecedented investment in park infrastructure. Since 2015, approximately \$102 million was committed through the Federal Infrastructure Investment (FII) Program to support high-quality and meaningful visitor experiences and to help protect the park's natural and cultural heritage. Key investments made under the FII program include utility and road upgrades in the Waterton townsite, extensive modernization of the Townsite Campground and Peace Park Plaza, and construction of the new Visitor Reception Centre.

This management plan replaces the 2010 Waterton Lakes National Park management plan. A number of key issues and challenges were identified and considered during the development of the current plan based on the 2019 *State of the Park Assessment*, internal reviews and public consultations. These include:

**Ecological integrity:** Ecological integrity is the first priority in park management. Waterton Lakes National Park faces many challenges to ecological integrity, foremost among them the threats posed by non-native species. Terrestrial invasive plants threaten grassland ecosystems by outcompeting native species, reducing biodiversity, and eliminating key habitats. Five-needle pines, which are keystone species in the forest ecosystem, are under severe threat from blister rust, an introduced disease. Introduced fish have nearly eliminated the aquatic ecosystem's native trout population. The potential introduction of new invasive species to the grasslands and forests, or new invasive aquatic species like quagga mussel or Eurasian water milfoil remains a constant threat. Maintaining ecological integrity will require managing the impacts of introduced species and preventing new species from being introduced. Continued fire management will allow for ecosystem renewal. Appropriate human-use management is necessary to ensure people can continue to enjoy the area while leaving it unimpaired for future generations.

**Impacts from climate change:** Managing and adapting to the impacts of climate change represents a significant challenge. Climate change will alter the park's native biodiversity, wildlife habitats, wildfire cycles, weather patterns and water systems, and can exacerbate the risk of invasive species. The effects of climate change place additional stress on park infrastructure, human health and safety, cultural and archaeological resources, and visitor demand and experience. Integrating climate change adaptation actions into park planning and operations will help build climate resilience by reducing the negative impacts of climate change while taking advantage of potential new opportunities.

**Managing visitation:** Visitors value the unique character, minimal commercialization and tranquil feel of Waterton Lakes National Park. This appreciation and the park's accessibility as a day trip for a significant number of people has contributed to visitation increases over the past decade. Visitation is anticipated to remain strong, particularly as popular visitor areas such as Red Rock Canyon, Cameron Lake and Bear's Hump Trail have reopened after restoration following the Kenow wildfire. Understanding and mitigating the impacts of increasing visitation on the park's ecological integrity, character, resources, and experiences is crucial to developing effective strategies to manage park visitation in the future.

**Relationships with Indigenous peoples:** Waterton Lakes National Park is a place of significance for a number of Indigenous peoples, including the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot Confederacy), Stoney Nakoda, Tsuut'ina, Ktunaxa and the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA). Relationships and collaborations have strengthened since the last management plan. Further progress is expected as the park works closely with Indigenous partners so that their stories, knowledge, values, and perspectives are shared with the public and included in park management decisions.

**Partnerships and regional connectivity:** The park is a small component of an internationally significant ecological, social and political landscape. Increased inter-jurisdictional coordination and enhanced connectivity across the larger regional network of protected and conserved areas is essential to effectively advance the park's objectives. Further opportunities exist for Parks Canada to collaborate with neighbours, regional businesses and tourism organizations to amplify common messaging and information in areas such as trip planning, appropriate visitor behaviour and available services.

**Maintenance of built infrastructure:** Ongoing investment is needed to maintain built infrastructure (e.g. buildings, campgrounds, roads, water systems, sewers) to meet visitor safety needs and quality visitor experience objectives, while ensuring ecological integrity and effective cultural resource management. This challenge is heightened as the park strives to offer inclusive access to the park, and to adapt to evolving visitor demographics and increasing visitor demand.

## 4.0 Development of the Management Plan

This plan was developed concurrently with the management plans for Yoho, Kootenay, Banff, Jasper and Mount Revelstoke and Glacier national parks, as these places share many of the same challenges, opportunities, stakeholders and visitors. This synchronized approach allowed for landscape level coordination of approaches to protecting resources, managing visitor use and other key aspects of Parks Canada's work.

Plan development involved gathering input during two phases of engagement from Indigenous partners, stakeholder groups, and the general public, all of whom were invited to share ideas, issues and opportunities to shape the future of Waterton Lakes National Park through in-person and online engagement.

Input was gathered using a variety of in-person and online engagement methods. Phase 1 engagement (April 10, 2019 to July 3, 2019) focused on refining the long-term vision for the park and exploring priorities to address over the next decade. Feedback from Indigenous peoples, youth, stakeholders and the general public was considered in the proposed vision, key strategies, and objectives. During this first 3-month engagement period, the Waterton Lakes National Park "Let's Talk Mountain Parks" website received approximately 2,500 visits and a total of 443 online submissions. Parks Canada spoke with over 150 people at 12 different engagement events, including discussions with Indigenous groups, an open house, stakeholder workshop, youth workshop, and outreach at local festivals and regional events. A summary of the feedback received is available at [www.parkscanada.gc.ca/en/pn-np/ab/waterton/info/index/participation/entendu-heard](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/en/pn-np/ab/waterton/info/index/participation/entendu-heard).

Engagement activities in Phase 2 focused on gathering input on the publicly released draft management plan. Although initially planned for 2020, Phase 2 engagement activities were paused at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic until meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples, stakeholders and the general public could be held. Phase 2 engagement occurred between April 2021 and July 2021 in parallel with other mountain national parks, and encouraged local, regional and national dialogue on refining the draft management plan for each national park.

The majority of Phase 2 engagement was conducted through online forums. Social media posts and advertisements promoted the engagement opportunities to over 71,000 people. More than 115 people attended five digital engagement events or interacted with Parks Canada team members to provide input on Waterton Lakes National Park's draft management plan. Over 340 people participated in the online survey or ideas board. Responses showed a broad level of support for the draft plan's proposed vision, key strategies and objectives. Respondents most strongly supported the conservation of natural and cultural heritage strategy.

## 5.0 Vision

Waterton Lakes National Park is an awe-inspiring legacy of alpine peaks, pristine lakes, tranquil forests, and abundant wildlife that inspire a sense of wonder, self-discovery, and heartfelt connection to the landscape. Its intact wilderness, unique beauty, ecological integrity and native biodiversity persist. Wildlife thrive as they travel through secure habitat, which enables movement across the region. Humans continue to co-exist harmoniously with the park's rich ecosystems. Vibrant insights into the park's storied past are presented, including relationships with Indigenous peoples, and the history of the Prince of Wales Hotel and First Oil Well in Western Canada national historic sites. In this place, nature and culture are alive, treasured, and shared.

The longstanding role of the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) as stewards of this area of their ancestral homelands is recognized. Greetings and place names in the Blackfoot language remind us all of the enduring cultural, physical, and spiritual significance of Waterton Lakes. All Indigenous peoples are welcome in Paahtómahksikimi. Ongoing and meaningful involvement with Indigenous partners is founded on strong relationships of mutual respect and trust, and their perspectives influence key decisions about the park's future.

Waterton Lakes National Park is committed to inclusivity and invites people of diverse backgrounds to develop their own personal connections to this landscape, inspiring a sense of shared responsibility and stewardship now and in the future. Waterton Lakes National Park offers a broad range of experiences for all abilities, ranging from rugged and remote backcountry adventures to accessible frontcountry experiences. Increasing visitation is managed by working with partners and tourism operators, and promoting sustainable travel opportunities that support high-quality experiences and help protect park ecosystems. Waterton Lakes National Park also increasingly provides innovative and accessible digital experiences and information available for all, even those who cannot visit in person. The Waterton townsite remains a friendly hub with a small-town feel and serves as the visitor centre for Waterton Lakes National Park, providing a springboard for authentic and meaningful opportunities for visitors to experience the area. The new Waterton Lakes Visitor Reception Centre, in the heart of the community, is open year-round and welcomes visitors to discover the park, its enduring significance, and local Indigenous cultures.

The park is recognized as a living example of collaboration across borders and ecosystems. Inscription of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park on the UNESCO World Heritage List attests to its significance, as do the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and International Dark Sky Park designations. The park uses evidence-based decision making and actively participates in the management of the regional Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. Each visitor finds a personal connection to the web of life, and commits—as Canadians and as global citizens—to be active stewards in caring for the park.

## 6.0 Key Strategies

The following key strategies will guide Waterton Lakes National Park's decision making over the next ten years in order to achieve the vision, consistent with the mandate of Parks Canada and its inscription as a World Heritage Site. Objectives describe the desired outcomes following the successful implementation of each strategy. Targets, with specific dates where feasible, identify tangible steps that demonstrate measurable progress toward achieving each objective, and allow for adaptive management. Targets are deemed achievable during the timeframe of the management plan, based on opportunities, Agency priorities and capacity. Parks Canada is committed to working collaboratively with Indigenous Nations on a shared-interest basis to implement these key strategies, and Parks Canada will work with them to identify how they want to participate in park management.

Six key strategies frame the broad approach Parks Canada will use to manage Waterton Lakes National Park. These strategies support each other and will be implemented in an integrated manner.

### **Key Strategy 1: Conserving Natural and Cultural Heritage for Future Generations**

The protection of natural and cultural resources and park landscapes are core to the purpose of the park's existence, and maintaining and restoring ecological integrity is the first priority in park management. Parks Canada's approach to conserving these important aspects will be guided by understanding and respecting significance of place and natural and cultural values. Knowing that uncertainties exist, Parks Canada's ecosystem management, conservation and restoration initiatives will be built on the best available science and Indigenous knowledge, in support of a precautionary, adaptive approach that provides for evolution of management policies and practices based on the monitoring of outcomes.

Waterton Lakes National Park is the only national park that protects foothills rough fescue grasslands within the Foothills Parkland ecoregion. Grassland ecosystems are among the most threatened in the world, and Alberta's native fescue grasslands continue to undergo substantial declines; less than 35 percent remain intact. Within the region, loss and degradation of fescue grasslands is due to invasive plant species, historical infrastructure, recreation development, and previous agricultural conversion. The absence of key natural processes—including disturbance by plains bison, and mixed-severity wildfires—are also detrimental to the integrity of this ecosystem.

Waterton Lakes National Park's ecosystem conservation and management efforts will continue to place a high priority on key factors that define ecological integrity: biodiversity and habitat, ecological processes that shape the ecosystem (e.g. fire, plant succession, predation, migration), and long-term ecosystem sustainability. Where ecological integrity may be compromised by human-related impacts (e.g. high human use, the introduction of invasive species, long-term fire suppression), these will be managed to minimize their effects. Similarly, known climate change impacts will be adaptively managed to minimize their negative effects on the park's natural and cultural heritage values.

The 2017 Kenow wildfire dramatically changed the ecology of Waterton Lakes National Park. The transformed landscape offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance understanding of ecological renewal and the long history of human habitation in the area. Over the next decade, Parks Canada will work to ensure that changes to the park's baseline ecology and archaeology are well documented. For example, a review of the ecological monitoring program will include both burnt and unburnt areas, while new baseline vegetation inventories will provide critical information to support the ongoing ecological management of Waterton.

Issues related to the management of species at risk, invasive species, wildfire, effects of climate change (e.g. extreme weather events), and habitat security for sensitive species will be addressed through landscape-level collaboration involving neighbouring protected areas and other regional stakeholders. Collaboration with academic communities and other knowledge holders, including Indigenous communities, will continue to advance understanding of post-fire renewal, native rough fescue grassland ecosystems, natural processes such as fire, and unique aquatic species communities, and will be considered in each objective.



**Objective 1.1:** A mosaic of functioning native grasslands persists on the landscape by ensuring fire remains an active ecological process, along with restoration of disturbed sites, active management of existing non-native plants and preventing establishment of new invasive species populations.

#### Targets

- Reduce the extent of existing populations of terrestrial invasive species by reducing establishment and spread.
- Disturbed sites within native grasslands are restored to improve ecological integrity by 2029.
- The *invasive non-native plants* measure for the grasslands indicator improves to a positive trend in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.
- The *grassland extent* measure for the grasslands indicator is assessed and improved to a “good” condition in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.
- By 2026, the *area disturbed by fire* measure for the grasslands indicator changes to “good.”

**Objective 1.2:** A mosaic of functioning forests persists, forest ecological integrity improves and species at risk are restored.

#### Targets

- By 2030, a minimum of 50,000 rust-resistant five-needle pine seedlings are planted, monitored, and reported as a result of regional collaboration.
- Prescribed fire is used to improve the *area disturbed by fire* measure for the forest indicator to a “good and stable” condition in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.
- The establishment of the Front Range Management Area ensures that the *sensitive species secure habitat* measure for grizzly bears is maintained at “fair” and “stable” condition in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.
- The *multi-species mammal occupancy* measure for the forest indicator is maintained at “stable and good” condition in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.

**Objective 1.3:** The ecological integrity of aquatic communities is improved by preventing the establishment of aquatic invasive species and restoring native fish and amphibian species.

#### Targets

- Reduce the risk of establishment of aquatic invasive species in Waterton through ongoing assessment and implementation of enforceable, preventative measures such as mandatory inspection of watercrafts, permitting and monitoring.
- Inform and influence behaviour of visitors and other audiences (e.g. contractors) to reduce the risk of introducing aquatic invasive species.
- The trend of the *lake fish* measure for the freshwater indicator changes to “improving” in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.
- Parks Canada will undertake restoration of native aquatic species in Waterton Lakes National Park where appropriate, as informed through monitoring of aquatic ecosystems.
- More visitors are aware that Upper Waterton Lake has a unique aquatic ecology as one of the only known lakes to include bull trout (a threatened species), lake trout, northern pike, and glacial relic species such as pygmy whitefish, deepwater sculpin, and opossum shrimp.

**Objective 1.4:** Species at risk are protected and recovery actions improve local populations and distribution through park and landscape-level conservation measures that address known threats, promote species recovery and strengthen public awareness.

#### Targets

- Conservation and recovery measures for species at risk (including Bolander’s quillwort, half-moon hairstreak, and little brown myotis) outlined in the *Multi-species Action Plan for Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada and Bar U Ranch National Historic Site of Canada (2017)* are implemented within the timelines.

- The *Multi-species Action Plan for Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada and Bar U Ranch National Historic Site of Canada (2017)* is updated regularly to reflect the current status of species in the park and to identify emerging issues, needs and priorities such as new species listings.
- Information on species at risk and how people can impact and protect them is presented to stakeholders, visitors and the public to enhance awareness and promote compliance with the *Species at Risk Act*.

**Objective 1.5:** Understanding of the heritage value and condition of significant cultural resources is improved and documented in collaboration with Indigenous partners.

#### Targets

- All archaeological sites, including those affected by the Kenow wildfire, are assessed and have condition ratings by 2025.
- A climate-based vulnerability assessment of cultural resources guide decisions on the management of related sites.
- The inventory and management of Indigenous cultural sites, including archaeological sites, is developed in collaboration with Siksikaitstapi and other Indigenous partners whose traditionally used lands and waters lie within the park.
- By 2030 and following engagement with partners and stakeholders, a cultural resources management strategy is completed, including a Cultural Resource Value Statement for Waterton Lakes National Park.

**Objective 1.6:** Climate change considerations and changes generated by the 2017 Kenow and 2018 Boundary Creek wildfires are incorporated into the management of park ecosystems and cultural resources.

#### Targets

- In cooperation with regional partners, a detailed climate change model is completed for the region by 2023, to inform park climate change adaptation planning and resource conservation activities, and to ensure continued ecological integrity and commemorative integrity in the park while adapting to a changing climate.
- The ecological integrity monitoring program is reviewed and updated to reflect changes resulting from the wildfires.
- By 2022, the vegetation inventory is updated to document the dramatic changes shaped by the Kenow and Boundary Creek wildfires.
- By 2024, available results on post-fire ecological monitoring and research are presented to the public, stakeholders and partners and influence ongoing research and monitoring needs and management actions.

**Objective 1.7:** Human disturbances affecting wildlife and habitat are reduced through active management of potential human–wildlife conflicts and the promotion of responsible behaviour and stewardship by park users.

#### Targets

- A diverse range of communication products provided on various platforms and visitor experience programs inform park visitors on how to minimize risk of human–wildlife conflict, and how to reduce incidents and impacts on wildlife when exploring the park.
- The wildlife corridor in Blakiston Valley is enhanced through improvements in Crandell Mountain Campground.
- A range of visitor-use management strategies and tools such as directing visitors to less congested areas, area closures, and trail restrictions are considered and implemented when and where necessary to protect sensitive ecosystems and reduce wildlife disturbance in affected areas.

## Key Strategy 2: True-to-Place Experiences

National parks provide exceptional opportunities for Canadians to develop a sense of connection to their natural and cultural heritage. The opportunity to be immersed in nature, history and diverse cultures while surrounded by true wilderness and mountain landscapes is truly distinctive. Maintaining the authenticity and quality of this experience while ensuring that visitors understand its uniqueness is central to Parks Canada's mandate. Visitor opportunities will be characterized by sustainability and responsiveness to diverse visitor needs and expectations. Activities and communications will be designed to advance understanding and stewardship of natural and cultural resources, encouraging all to share the responsibility of conserving these special places.

For thousands of years, Waterton Lakes National Park has been a meeting place of cultures. This perspective continues to resonate for the park and community of Waterton. The townsite is the focal point for information, interpretation, events and activities. It offers facilities and activities that directly support Parks Canada's mandate, characterized by environmentally sustainable practices. The Visitor Reception Centre, located at the heart of the community, serves as the entry point to discover the park, its enduring significance, and Indigenous and local cultures.

Waterton Lakes National Park will continue to offer visitors a range of experiences that encourage stewardship, raise awareness of the value of protected areas, and minimize impacts on the park's ecology and local cultures. These experiences will allow visitors the firsthand opportunity to learn, understand, appreciate, and contribute to the exceptional natural and cultural values of the region, including ecological renewal following the Kenow wildfire. Opportunities will be provided to enable youth to enjoy the mental and physical health benefits of spending time in this landscape while developing connections with nature. Opportunities to develop and deliver authentic Indigenous experiences will be pursued in close collaboration with partners.

As understanding of human pressures on the ecosystem, existing and future visitor-use patterns and climate change impacts improves, approaches to manage visitor use and demand across seasons and in different areas of the park will be developed. This may include transportation and reservation systems. Collaborating with regional partners and stakeholders will be essential to ensure that visitors have appropriate pre-trip information so they can take advantage of the opportunities being offered, be prepared, arrive with appropriate expectations, and maintain their connection to the park long after their visit.

Visitor facilities will be planned to protect the ecological integrity of the park, prioritize public safety, offer quality experiences, and improve accessibility and inclusion. The vast majority of visitation occurs within the townsite and along major parkways, while the remainder of the park has lower levels of use.

**Objective 2.1:** Visitor appreciation and connection to Waterton Lakes National Park is maintained through a wide range of enjoyable, accessible and inclusive experiences and services that respect essence of place.

### Targets

- Ninety percent of visitors have a high satisfaction rating of their overall visit to the park and consider the park meaningful to them.
- As of 2022, the proportion of visitors who engage with Parks Canada at the new year-round Visitor Reception Centre and discover opportunities for learning and exploration has increased from the 2016 baseline of recorded contacts.
- New or renovated visitor facilities incorporate accessible and inclusive design principles in accordance with the *Accessible Canada Act*.
- Improvements are made to existing infrastructure such as trails, trailheads, kiosks, exhibits, backcountry campgrounds and signage, in order to provide high-quality experiences, orient visitors, influence behaviours and manage expectations.

**Objective 2.2:** Visitors and the general public are offered a variety of learning opportunities that help them connect to the park and its stories, nature and cultures.

Targets

- A variety of communications products, visitor experience programs, and outreach activities incorporate multiple narratives and reach audiences (such as youth, urban and new Canadians) inside and outside of the park through online platforms, collaborative efforts and a variety of appropriate venues.
- By 2022, new exhibits at the Visitor Reception Centre contribute to enhancing understanding of the significance of Waterton Lakes National Park and the essential role of various partners to successfully protect it.
- In collaboration with the Siksikaitstapi, new interpretive signs at trailheads are developed to inform visitors of Blackfoot traditional place names and significance by 2022.
- By 2024, in-person contacts through events, activities and immersive learning programs in the park have increased 10 percent from the 2016 baseline of recorded contacts.
- In future visitor surveys, 80 percent of visitors report learning about natural and cultural heritage through engaging interpretive programs, communications products, and events at various venues in the park.

**Objective 2.3:** Visitor-use patterns are proactively managed to maintain natural and cultural resource protection and exceptional visitor experiences.

Targets

- A visitor use management (VUM) strategy developed with input from stakeholders is completed by 2025. Implementation of this strategy will enhance trip planning and year-round experiences in the park and promote and influence efficient visitor movement, particularly during peak visitation periods. The VUM strategy will also support Parks Canada objectives such as ecological integrity, sustainable asset management, climate change adaptation and regional collaboration in Waterton Lakes National Park.
- Visitor use at busy areas such as trails, the townsite, Red Rock Canyon and Cameron Lake is monitored to identify potential ecological, visitor experience, or congestion issues, and to evaluate the need for subsequent management actions, including regulating traffic flow/levels and transportation options, by 2024.
- A suite of tools and approaches such as directing visitors to less congested areas, area closures and trail restrictions are considered and implemented when necessary to protect sensitive ecosystems and reduce wildlife disturbance in affected areas.
- Powerboat use in Waterton Lakes National Park is an exceptional activity only permitted by Superintendent Order. A review and assessment of the activity that includes public engagement opportunities for all Canadians is completed by end of 2023.

**Objective 2.4:** Throughout the trip cycle visitors' expectations match available visitor offers and visitors are aware of and effectively adopt appropriate behaviours while in the park.

Targets

- Accessible online information, use of new technology, and collaboration with partners helps visitors manage expectations and plan ahead. In surveys, 90 percent of visitors report satisfaction with availability and usability of pre-trip planning information.
- Accessibility and inclusivity of information available to visitors is assessed, and options to improve these aspects are researched and implemented.
- Communication products, visitor experience programs and outreach initiatives such as *Clean, Drain, Dry* and *Play, Clean, Go* are provided throughout the visitor cycle, leading visitors to adopt appropriate behaviour to protect the park from invasive species.
- Visitors follow wildlife etiquette guidelines, reducing instances of wildlife habituation and promoting human-wildlife coexistence.

### Key Strategy 3: Strengthening Indigenous Relations

The Government of Canada has committed to deepen and strengthen relationships with Indigenous peoples. Accordingly, many places administered by Parks Canada are managed through cooperative management bodies or advisory relationships with local Indigenous communities. These structures recognize the important and ongoing roles and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples as stewards of heritage places. With approaches founded on renewed relationships, respect and cooperation, the mountain national parks will continue to recognize Indigenous connections and work with Indigenous peoples to advance priorities of mutual interest.

Waterton Lakes National Park will strengthen existing relationships with Indigenous communities whose traditionally used lands and waters include the park, particularly the nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Ongoing initiatives with Kainai and Piikani First Nations will continue. Reconciliation will be advanced through collaboration, based on recognition of traditional Blackfoot protocol, to address interests and priorities to understand, protect, and present the park's vast ecological and cultural legacy.

Working together, we will strive to respectfully incorporate Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and stories into park management, conservation and presentation. Parks Canada will recognize and profile the area, traditionally known as Paahtómahksikimi, as a sacred place based on the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) worldview and traditional value system, where nature and humans are deeply interconnected. This sacred kinship with the land and all of its inhabitants is based on respect and reciprocity. Recognizing significant Blackfoot heritage and the effects of colonialism promotes understanding and appreciation for this special place.

**Objective 3.1:** Ongoing, respectful relationships form the basis of collaborations with the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) and other interested Indigenous partners with traditional relationships to the area.

#### Targets

- An Indigenous advisory committee for Waterton Lakes addressing Indigenous initiatives and the management of cultural resources meets annually, by 2022.
- Waterton Lakes National Park employees receive Siksikaitstapi cultural orientation, starting in 2022.
- Parks Canada and Indigenous Nations in whose traditionally used lands and waters Waterton Lakes National Park lies work to collaboratively describe their relationship for the next *State of the Park Assessment* (2030).
- Parks Canada will support ventures by Indigenous communities through written agreements when opportunities become available.

**Objective 3.2:** The longstanding role of the Siksikaitstapi as stewards of the area is honoured and their knowledge and perspectives are incorporated into decisions related to park management.

#### Targets

- The sacred importance of the area and the perspectives and knowledge of the Siksikaitstapi are profiled in communications products, at the Visitor Reception Centre, in visitor experience offers and interpretive programming, and on digital channels beginning in 2022.
- The Blackfoot language is present and shared, particularly for greetings and Blackfoot place names of cultural importance by 2022.
- Siksikaitstapi and other Indigenous partners are engaged in the inventory and management of Indigenous cultural sites, including archaeological and ceremonial sites, by 2025.

**Objective 3.3:** Indigenous peoples continue to connect with their traditional lands, waters, and cultures in Waterton Lakes National Park.

Targets

- Waterton Lakes National Park remains welcoming and accessible to Indigenous peoples, particularly in areas of spiritual and cultural importance.
- Indigenous partners determine opportunities for knowledge transfer, which are facilitated across generations and cultures, including through in-person Indigenous-led experiences.
- Initiatives aimed at increasing employment and retention in Parks Canada careers, particularly for Kainai and Piikani youth, are identified and implemented by 2024.

**Key Strategy 4: Connecting with Canadians**

This strategy focuses on reaching out to Canadians where they live to connect them with their natural and cultural heritage. Parks Canada will work to adapt to the changing ways Canadians interact with national parks by connecting through the technologies they use, wherever they are. By reaching people who may never visit Waterton Lakes National Park or the region, Parks Canada will increase support for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of these places.

Waterton Lakes National Park communications—including media relations, partnering and engagement strategies, promotions and outreach opportunities, and digital channels—will promote awareness of Parks Canada’s mandate, share science and conservation stories, especially the results of post-Kenow wildfire research, foster stewardship behaviours, and facilitate an appreciation for the complexities of managing this special place for future generations. These efforts will use a range of media to reach youth, urban and new Canadians to foster shared stewardship and respect that transcends park boundaries.

Parks Canada will continue to take a “digital first” approach to reaching audiences beyond park boundaries. This means prioritizing the use of channels such as the Waterton Lakes National Park website and social media, to provide Canadians with opportunities to develop meaningful connections to this special place. A strong digital presence also enables people from around the world to explore the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park World Heritage Site even if they are not able to visit in person.

**Objective 4.1:** Canadians have opportunities to form personal connections with Waterton Lakes National Park and appreciate its ecological integrity and heritage value even if they are unable to visit the park in person.

Targets

- By 2025, Parks Canada works with Indigenous partners to highlight the sacred importance of the area for the Siksikaitsitapi in park communications, public programming and on digital channels.
- By 2024, an Outreach Strategy focusing on digital approaches is developed to guide efforts to reach and engage Canadians in learning about natural and cultural heritage conservation efforts in Waterton Lakes National Park.
- Science and conservation stories, particularly post-Kenow wildfire research updates, are shared widely through forums such as Science and History Day; the Crown Managers Partnership; and academic research publications, web, media, social media and partner platforms.
- Relationships are maintained and collaborative opportunities are sought out with tourism organizations and local business operators, media, international conservation groups and others, to enhance the ability to share successful cross-boundary efforts on sustainability, visitor experience, and science and conservation stories.



## Key Strategy 5: Managing Development

Ecological integrity is the first priority in park management, including in managing development or redevelopment. Parks Canada's approach will be transparent and consistent, and will continue to respect limits, zoning and declared wilderness designations. Any development considered must demonstrably support the vision and objectives of each park as described in its park management plan. Development will facilitate greater awareness and connection to natural and cultural spaces, and aim to protect the qualities that make these places distinctive for future generations.

Parks Canada has a well-established framework of limits to growth in the mountain national parks, comprised of legislation, regulations and policy dating back to the 2001 *Canada National Parks Act* amendments. This framework is a central element of Parks Canada's approach to maintaining or restoring ecological integrity, protecting cultural heritage and land-use management, and providing exceptional visitor experiences. Parks Canada applies a suite of regulatory, policy, and operational tools to achieve the spirit and intent of the legislation. In this regard, Parks Canada is developing new regulations and guidelines to implement a modernized planning permit process to ensure transparent and consistent decision making when reviewing proposed projects. In order to manage risk and responsibilities for utility services infrastructure, Parks Canada will use utility service agreements to ensure that responsibility for utility maintenance and operations rests with the appropriate utility provider or owner.

Waterton Lakes National Park will apply these regulatory and policy approaches to ensure the protection of ecological and commemorative integrity.

Parks Canada shall maintain limits to commercial development in Waterton Lakes National Park while providing high-quality visitor experiences. The park will support the Waterton townsite in its role as a centre for visitor services and continue to respect established spatial and development limits. For a sustainable future, Waterton Lakes National Park needs to go beyond accommodating increasing demand with more traffic-related infrastructure. At certain times, transportation-related infrastructure such as parking and pull-offs can be stretched beyond capacity. Building new infrastructure such as parking lots generally requires use of undeveloped lands, which means long-term loss of the ecosystem services and wildlife habitat that would otherwise be provided by those lands. Cohesively planned actions encouraging people to arrive at and visit the park by alternative modes of transportation other than personal driving vehicles will be explored. Through the Visitor Use Management Strategy, managers will explore collaborative efforts to reduce the number of personal vehicles coming to the park.

Waterton Lakes National Park is committed to upgrading and maintaining the park's built infrastructure (e.g. buildings, campgrounds, roads, trails, water, and sewer). Following the completion of Federal Infrastructure and Investment (FII) and Kenow wildfire recovery projects, efforts will focus on maintaining assets in good condition. Modifications to improve accessibility, efficiency, and visitor experience or to ensure asset sustainability within existing disturbed areas will be considered following standard Parks Canada development guidelines and assessment requirements.

Environmentally friendly construction methods and materials will be encouraged for construction projects. The park will invest in sustainable solutions to reduce the ecological footprint and greenhouse gas emissions associated with its real property, infrastructure and fleet management. It will work with partners and key stakeholders to better understand the impacts of climate change and propose adaptation and mitigation strategies to built infrastructure and visitor-use patterns.

**Objective 5.1:** Assets are inclusive, accessible, sustainable, and resilient.

### Targets

- Climate change impacts are identified and addressed, where possible, through adaptive designs; asset vulnerability assessments are completed by 2025.
- The condition of built assets, including visitor facilities, roads, vehicular bridges, highways and buildings is maintained at a "good" rating in the next *State of the Park Assessment*.
- By 2025, a long-term asset management plan is developed that defines strategies, resources and actions necessary to optimize asset performance, and sustainability, and to minimize risks. To meet these goals, all new Parks Canada construction is accompanied by a maintenance plan.

**Objective 5.2:** Development, visitor use and commercial activities are managed to ensure that ecological integrity and quality visitor experiences are maintained.

Targets

- Strategies related to managing visitor use are considered as infrastructure nears capacity, including alternative modes of transportation to and within the park.
- The visitor use management strategy includes a communications strategy to encourage sustainable transportation options, particularly during peak periods.
- The Waterton Community Plan is updated by 2030 and that plan will reflect commercial, residential and institutional lease conditions within the townsite, and address other topics such as signs, parking, and garbage and snow removal.
- When Parks Canada brings new land-use planning regulations and guidelines into force, Waterton Lakes National Park will implement a modernized planning permit process.
- Potential intensive use of wilderness settings by large groups is regulated by the Parks Canada permit process.

**Objective 5.3:** Carbon emissions from human sources within the park are decreased through energy efficient infrastructure, use of renewable energy, and fossil fuel reduction programs.

Targets

- By 2025, 10 percent of the total park vehicle fleet is electric or hybrid.
- By 2025, high-use park facilities with access to the power grid expand their visitor offer through a 100 percent increase in the provision of electric charging stations, from 2020 levels.
- New or upgraded park infrastructure, including housing, operational spaces and visitor facilities, increasingly incorporates energy-efficient design and technologies.
- Waterton Lakes National Park will support the installation of a solar array by 2023 to provide backup power to the townsite and to offset greenhouse gas emissions.

## Key Strategy 6: Regional Connectivity and Landscapes

The mountain national parks will strive to contribute to landscape-scale conservation in Canada by being ecologically, culturally and socially connected across boundaries. Many aspects of park management such as ecological restoration, emergency preparedness, climate change mitigation and adaptation, wildlife corridors, and tourism function over a broad region within and beyond park borders. Parks Canada will aim to maintain and expand regional collaboration to better monitor, understand and address these and other landscape-level issues.

As a vital component of the Crown of the Continent ecosystem, Waterton Lakes National Park is well positioned to participate in regional collaborations, and to protect and present its Outstanding Universal Value—the criteria for which the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List. The park will continue to work closely with the Blackfoot Confederacy, Glacier National Park (USA), provincial agencies and parks, community lessees and tourism operators, municipalities in the region, neighbouring land managers, and organizations such as the Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association and the Crown Managers Partnership on shared objectives such as human-use management, regional transportation networks, and other visitor services and facilities. Waterton Lakes National Park protects a portion of the larger Crown of the Continent landscape that provides important refugia for biodiversity as the climate changes.

Sharing information and data, developing complementary decisions and coordinating implementation will enhance the impact of individual efforts in conservation, human-use management and sustainable tourism. Advances made at a regional level will ensure the long-term sustainability of Waterton Lakes National Park.

**Objective 6.1:** Regional conservation and sustainable tourism initiatives are strengthened by information, data and research results that are widely shared across partners, Indigenous communities and stakeholders.

Targets

- Data and research are shared between Indigenous communities, stakeholders, and neighbouring management agencies to guide landscape-level cooperative planning in conservation, climate change adaptation, human-use and sustainable tourism.
- Lessons learned from the 2017 Kenow and 2018 Boundary Creek wildfires help to inform emergency preparedness and resource conservation efforts in the region.
- Regional tourism product development and marketing across the Crown of the Continent region informs visitors and regional residents of appropriate behaviours and shared stewardship responsibilities.
- Waterton Lakes National Park actively participates in the Government of Canada Open Data portal.

**Objective 6.2:** Regional connectivity, conservation and species-at-risk recovery initiatives are developed and implemented jointly by neighbouring land managers, stakeholders, Indigenous communities and Parks Canada.

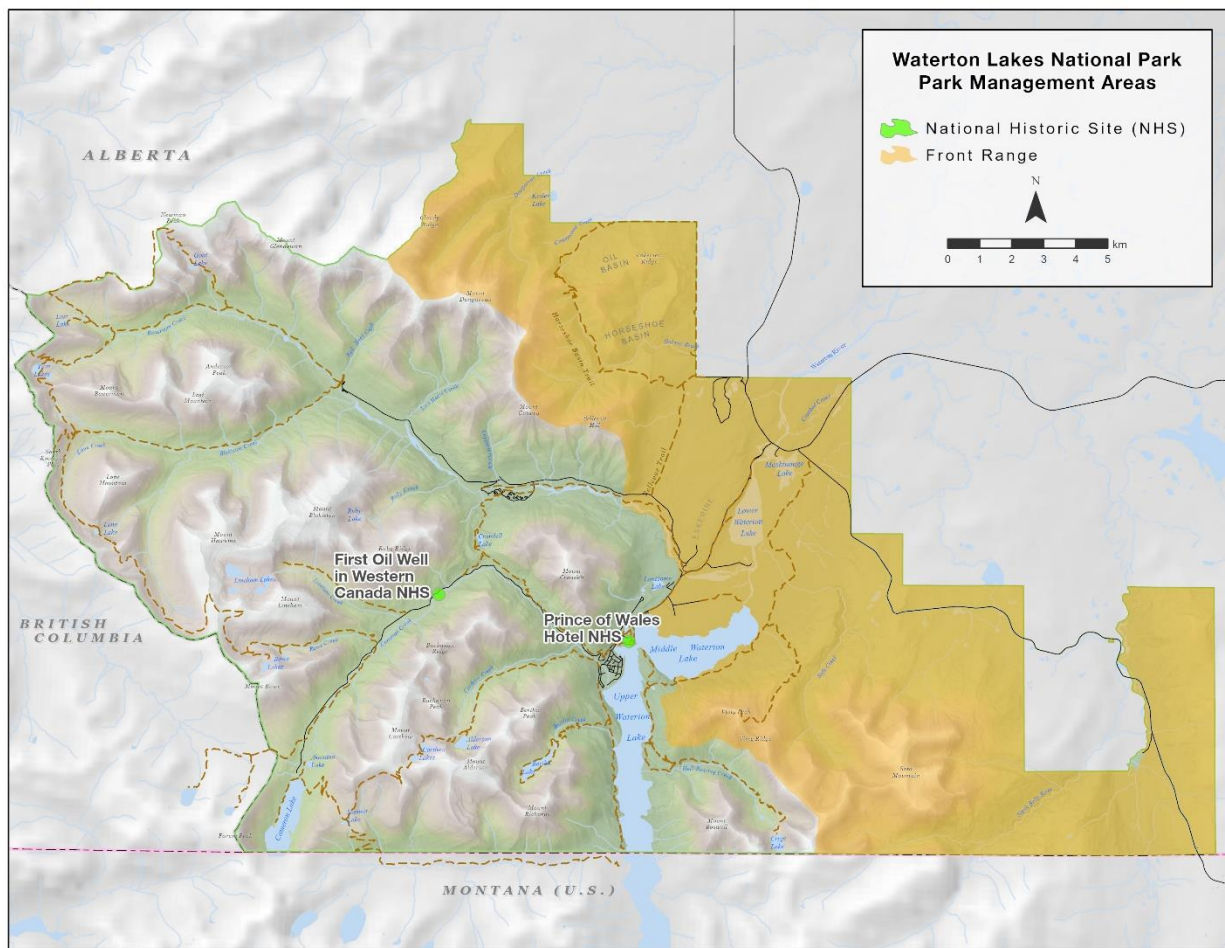
Targets

- Recovery efforts for species at risk such as northern leopard frog, bull trout, and whitebark pine are underway with regional partners by 2023.
- Waterton Lakes National Park supports Indigenous communities in the ecological and cultural restoration of plains bison within portions of their former range in the Waterton region.
- Cooperative regional programs focused on preventing and, as necessary, managing aquatic and terrestrial invasive species are developed and implemented with partners and neighbouring land managers by 2024.
- Key wildlife corridors within the park are identified and maintained as part of continued work with neighbouring jurisdictions to sustain regional wildlife connectivity by 2024.

## 7.0 Management Areas

Area management focuses on specific areas of the national parks that have particular management challenges, including important natural or cultural values and specific visitor trends. Two areas of Waterton Lakes National Park warrant special management approaches: the Front Range Management Area and the two national historic sites.

Map 3: Waterton Lakes National Park Management Areas



### 7.1 Front Range Management Area

The Front Range Management Area consists of the northeastern and eastern portions of the park on the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains. This includes the north side of Cloudy Ridge, Mount Dungarvan, Mount Galwey, and Bellevue Hill, along with Horseshoe Basin and the Eskerine grasslands in the north. This management area also includes the Bison Paddock, Maskinonge area, Lower Waterton Lake, the Blakiston Fan, and the area east of Vimy Ridge and Sofa Creek. It encompasses 203 square kilometres or approximately 41 percent of the park, most of which is Zone II (wilderness, see Section 8.0 below).

Limited human use in the Front Range Management Area is essential for the maintenance of secure habitat for sensitive species. The area protects a natural landscape with few trails and minimal roads, where ecological processes function with minimal human disturbance. Secureness will continue to be used as a measure for determining high-quality wildlife habitat.

Aside from the road-accessible day-use areas, overlooks and privately operated facilities, visitor experiences in the Front Range Management Area rely on opportunities that require a high degree of self-reliance and wilderness skills in remote areas with little or no built infrastructure. Existing facilities, including a few day-use areas and overlooks, and the following designated trails—Horseshoe Basin, Bellevue Prairie, portions of the Kootenai Brown along the Entrance Road, Wishbone and Vimy—are included in this management area. Use of unofficial trails in this management area will be discouraged through strategies such as active restoration activities, minimal promotion and lack of signage.

**Objective 7.1.1:** Ecological connectivity, secure habitat for sensitive species, natural character, and cultural landscapes within the Front Range Management Area are maintained, in support of Key Strategies 1 and 3.

#### Targets

- Human-use levels are maintained at the “fair” rating level for the sensitive-species secure habitat measure in the next *State of the Park Assessment*, using mitigation measures only if required.
- Horseshoe Basin, Bellevue, Wishbone and Vimy trails are managed to reduce impacts.
- Ecological monitoring confirms that wildlife movement and connectivity are maintained in the Front Range Management Area.

#### 7.2 National Historic Sites

Two national historic sites are present within park boundaries—the First Oil Well in Western Canada and the Prince of Wales Hotel. Together, they encompass 0.06 square kilometres, or 0.012 percent of the park area. Both are accessible either by road or trail.

The First Oil Well in Western Canada was designated a National Historic Site (NHS) in 1965, commemorating the first commercially productive oil well in Western Canada. Located in the Cameron Valley along the Akamina Parkway, this exploration well foreshadowed the growth of the oil industry that has underwritten much of Alberta’s subsequent economic development. Western Canada’s first oil well was discovered in 1902 by John Lineham of the Rocky Mountain Development Company. While this was a small well that ran dry in 1904, its location signalled the presence of much larger fields that were later developed. Most visible remnants of the drilling operation were removed when the monument was erected over the well in 1968. The 2017 Kenow wildfire revealed an expanded area for the site, which will be documented and included as part of the management strategy for the site over the course of this plan.

The Prince of Wales Hotel opened on July 25, 1927, and received National Historic Site designation in 1992. Built in Waterton Lakes National Park by the Great Northern Railway (GNR) as the only Canadian link to a network of American park resorts associated with tourism development, the Prince of Wales Hotel was constructed in the rustic design tradition and followed the Swiss-chalet theme established for GNR resorts. It represents the golden age of railway resort development in Canada, a time when the construction of a large hotel was considered vital to the success of the national park as a tourist destination. The hotel is operated commercially under a licence of occupation from Parks Canada.

**Objective 7.2.1:** The heritage values and characteristics of the two national historic sites located within Waterton Lakes National Park continue to be protected, understood and appreciated.

#### Targets

- The First Oil Well in Western Canada NHS is conserved and presented to showcase the origins of the oil industry in Alberta.
- The Prince of Wales Hotel NHS continues to encourage connection to the area’s past and present.
- Both sites will strive to offer inclusive and accessible opportunities.

## 8.0 Zoning and Declared Wilderness Area

### 8.1 Zoning

Parks Canada's national park zoning system is an integrated approach to the classification of land and water areas in the national parks and designates where particular activities can occur on land or water. Zoning is an important management tool that supports the vision for Waterton Lakes National Park by directing appropriate uses within the park, and ensuring that rare and sensitive ecological or cultural areas are protected. Determining what visitor activities are appropriate in different areas of the park is a key consideration in zoning decisions. The zoning system has five categories:

- Zone I – Special Preservation;
- Zone II – Wilderness;
- Zone III – Natural Environment;
- Zone IV – Outdoor Recreation; and
- Zone V – Park Services.

The zoning plan for Waterton Lakes National Park is described below and illustrated in Map 4 (p. 25). Zone II through Zone V apply to the park, and some areas are further designated as Environmentally and Culturally Sensitive (p. 23). The current zoning plan reflects some changes from the 2010 management plan's zoning to offer certain sites better protection, to correct previous inaccuracies, and to refine zoning distribution. Zoning changes occurred for approximately 12 percent of the park's total area. A summary of key zoning changes follows:

- All previous Zone I areas are now designated as other zones, and also as Environmentally and/or Culturally Sensitive Areas, to more accurately reflect the level of protection in place and visitor use of these significant areas. For example:
  - The Maskinonge Wetland is now Zone II, while the Maskinonge Day Use Area is Zone III to reflect the visitor use of the area. Both are designated as Environmentally Sensitive and Culturally Sensitive Areas.
  - The buildings and paved areas on the Prince of Wales Hill are designated as Zone IV while vegetated areas are Zone II. The Linnet Lake Day Use Area is designated Zone III. All are also designated as both Environmentally Sensitive or Culturally Sensitive Areas.
  - Previous Zone I areas along the south and west shores of Lower Waterton Lake and along the east shore of the Waterton River are now designated as Zone II and also identified as Environmentally Sensitive or Culturally Sensitive Areas.
  - Similarly, some areas along trails adjacent to the Akamina and Red Rock Parkways and at the Red Rock Day Use Area have changed from Zone I to Zone II and are designated Environmentally and Culturally Sensitive Areas or both.
- Large sections of the Blakiston Fan, previously designated Zone III or Zone IV, are now Zone II. Environmentally Sensitive Area designation has been added to half-moon hairstreak butterfly critical habitat.
- Belly River Campground changed from Zone IV to Zone III, covering only the physical area of the campground.
- Cameron Lake, previously designated Zone III, is now Zone II, as public self-propelled watercraft are allowed while motorized boating activities are prohibited.
- Middle Waterton Lake and Upper Waterton Lake are modified from Zone IV to Zone III to reflect that public motorized boating activities are controlled, which can help protect the aquatic ecosystem from invasive species.
- The park's operational compound and office areas are modified from Zone IV to Zone V.
- The Zone V area around the townsite has been revised to match the legislated boundary of the townsite. The Zone V townsite area is changing from approximately 0.86 square kilometres to approximately 0.74 square kilometres. The subtracted 0.12 square kilometres is designated as

Zone II. The majority of the withdrawn area was on the west side of the townsite on the slopes of Bertha Mountain.

- Most day-use areas outside of the townsite were changed from Zone IV to Zone III, reflecting rustic facilities.
- Highways remain Zone IV, with revised areas extending 25 metres from road centre compared to 100 metres from centre previously. This Zone IV area continues to encompass roads, ditches, and pullouts, without unnecessarily including forest and grassland areas.

### **Zone I – Special Preservation**

The Zone I category provides the highest level of protection in the Parks Canada zoning system. This zone is applied to areas that are among the best examples of features representing the natural region, or that support outstanding natural or cultural features. It may be used to protect areas too sensitive to accommodate facility development or large numbers of visitors. Motorized access and circulation are not permitted.

Compared to the 2010 management plan, Waterton Lakes National Park has revised previously categorized Zone I areas to other zoning categories as described above and below, to more accurately reflect the level of protection in place and visitor use of these significant areas. Some areas that were previously Zone I are also designated as either Ecological or Culturally Sensitive, to align with current park management objectives, while at the same time affording high levels of ecosystem and cultural resource protection in these areas.

### **Zone II – Wilderness**

Zone II designated areas protect large areas of natural landscape. Protecting ecosystems for minimal human interference is the key consideration. These areas offer visitors an opportunity to experience nature with few, if any, services and facilities. The visitor experience in these areas is focused on self-propelled activities. No motorized access is permitted.

The vast majority of Waterton Lakes National Park is managed as Zone II, encompassing 481.9 square kilometres or 96.5 percent of the park. All lakes, with the exception of Middle Waterton Lake and Upper Waterton Lake, are designated Zone II.

### **Zone III – Natural Environment**

Zone III designated areas consist of natural environments capable of supporting a range of visitor experiences. These areas allow visitors to enjoy and learn about the park's natural and cultural features through outdoor recreational and educational activities requiring minimal services and facilities of a rustic nature. Motorized access is controlled.

Waterton Lakes National Park has 26 Zone III areas, encompassing a total area of 12.3 square kilometres or 2.5 percent of the park. They include the Belly River Campground, the Bison Paddock, and most day-use areas outside the Waterton townsite. Upper and Middle Waterton lakes are also Zone III areas.

### **Zone IV – Outdoor Recreation**

Zone IV designation applies to areas with a wide range of visitor use supported by facilities. Public motorized access is one of the primary characteristics of these zones.

Zone IV areas encompass 4.5 square kilometres, or 0.9 percent of the park. Zone IV areas are mostly composed of roads and heavily used visitor areas outside the Waterton townsite, such as the Prince of Wales Hotel area, the golf course, and Crandell Mountain Campground.

## Zone V – Park Services

Zone V areas contain a concentration of visitor services and support facilities. Major park operation and administrative functions are accommodated in this zone.

The Waterton townsite and the park's operational compound area are the only two Zone V areas in the park. They encompass a total area of 0.88 square kilometres, or 0.2 percent of the park.

## Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Culturally Sensitive Areas

These designations apply to naturally or culturally significant or sensitive features or areas that require special protection and visitor access management to protect resources, but do not exactly fit the zoning classification system described above. Recognition as an environmentally or culturally sensitive area complements the five zoning categories and ensures that the values for which an area has been designated are at the forefront of park management decisions or actions. Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Culturally Sensitive Areas overlay zoning designations and are not included in the area calculation for Zones II to V in the sections above.

Culturally Sensitive Areas provide heightened protection and commemoration of cultural resources. Areas of Waterton Lakes National Park with Culturally Sensitive Area designation include important Indigenous sites and subsurface and surface cultural and archaeological resources. Culturally Sensitive Areas cover 20 square kilometres, or 4 percent of the park area.

Culturally Sensitive Areas in Waterton Lakes National Park include (see Map 4):

- Maskinonge area: Important cultural site for the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy). This is where Blackfoot people were gifted the Beaver Bundle. It also includes a Blackfoot Confederacy marker.
- First Oil Well in Western Canada NHS and surrounding area, including the remains of Oil City and other wells (see Section 7.2, National Historic Sites).
- Prince of Wales Hotel NHS and surrounding area (see Section 7.2, National Historic Sites).
- Red Rock Valley and other areas of archaeological importance.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas provide protection of natural resources while respecting previous best management practices, and also allow some flexibility to implement adaptive management, such as the Waterton Lakes National Park Multi-species Action Plan under the *Species at Risk Act*. In Waterton Lakes National Park, Environmentally Sensitive Areas include fescue grassland areas, critical habitat and residence of a variety of species at risk, and known wildlife corridors. Environmentally Sensitive Areas cover 107.6 square kilometres, or 21.5 percent of the park.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas in Waterton Lakes National Park include (see Map 4):

- Fescue Grasslands: These grasslands form a narrow band stretching along the plains and foothills from southern Alberta into Montana.
- Half-moon hairstreak butterfly (*Satyrium semiluna*) critical habitat: This species is listed as endangered in Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. The Alberta population occurs only in the Blakiston Fan area.
- Bolander's quillwort (*Isoetes bolanderi*) critical habitat: An aquatic plant known to occur at only three sites in Canada—all located entirely within Waterton Lakes National Park. It is listed as threatened in Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*.
- Wildlife movement corridors: Important animal movement routes in the vicinity of the townsite and Crandell Mountain Campground.

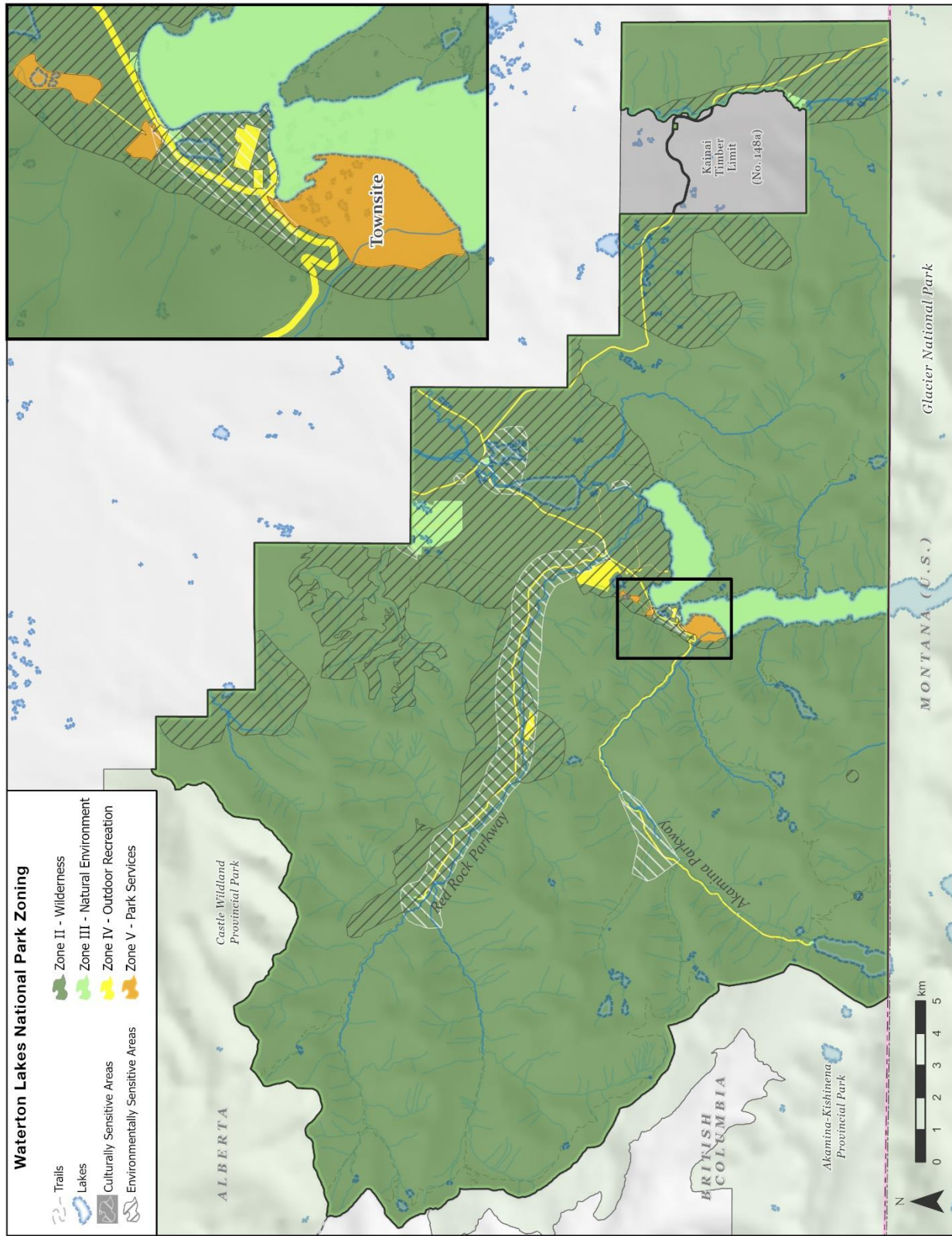


## 8.2 Wilderness Area Declaration

Large tracts of protected wilderness are becoming scarce. From an ecological perspective, the importance of wilderness areas is their ability to support natural processes and to serve as benchmarks. The Minister responsible for Parks Canada may designate areas of a national park as wilderness areas under Section 14 of the *Canada National Parks Act*. The intent of legally designating a portion of a national park as wilderness is to maintain its wilderness character in perpetuity. Only activities that are unlikely to impair the wilderness character of the area may be authorized within the declared wilderness area of Waterton Lakes National Park. Public motorized access is not permitted. Infrastructure within declared wilderness is restricted to rudimentary facilities such as trails and campsites intended to support wilderness experiences.

In Waterton Lakes National Park, all legally declared wilderness areas established in 2000 by the *National Parks of Canada Wilderness Declaration Regulations* (SOR/2000 – 387) are encompassed by Zone II Wilderness areas.

Map 4: Waterton Lakes National Park Zoning



## 9.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

All national park management plans are assessed through a strategic environmental assessment to understand the potential for cumulative effects. This understanding supports the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity over the life of the plan. The strategic environmental assessment of the management plan for Waterton Lakes National Park considered the potential impacts of climate change, local and regional activities around the park, expected increase in visitation and proposals within the management plan. The strategic environmental assessment analyzed the potential impacts on different aspects of the ecosystem, including species at risk, forest vegetation, freshwater and grasslands, and habitat security and connectivity.

The management plan will result in many positive impacts on the environment, including the maintenance and improvement of ecological integrity within the park, collaborative initiatives to preserve habitat security and connectivity across the landscape, and the development and implementation of strategies to lessen visitor impacts on the ecology of the park. In addition, the management plan identifies mitigations and adaptations for climate change and capitalizes on the potential for ecological restoration and research opportunities within the post-Kenow wildfire landscape.

To help manage cumulative effects on forest vegetation, freshwater ecosystems and grasslands, the park is implementing monitoring, active management and restoration programs. Examples include the restoration of five-needle pines, invasive species prevention and management, and planned aquatic systems restoration—as part of the Conserving Waterton’s Aquatic Communities program, which aims to improve the ecological integrity of water bodies in the park.

Although the occupancy measure of large mammals is currently in “good” condition, habitat security and connectivity are particularly sensitive to increasing human pressures and vulnerable to cumulative effects. Increasing visitation along with facility development has the potential to impact habitat connectivity and security within the park. In addition, while Waterton Lakes National Park provides important secure habitat areas and local corridors for connectivity, the park itself is not sufficiently large to maintain sensitive species with broad habitat ranges and requirements. The management plan identifies multiple objectives under key strategies 1 (Conserving Natural and Cultural Heritage for Future Generations), 2 (True-to-Place Experiences) and 6 (Regional Connectivity and Landscapes), which focus on visitation management and continued collaborative partnerships to maintain habitat security and connectivity across the regional landscape. The Front Range Management Area strategy will further help to preserve key areas of secure habitat for sensitive and wide-ranging species such as grizzly bears.

Waterton Lakes National Park shares an international border with Glacier National Park (Montana, USA). Together, these two national parks form the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. The management plan was evaluated and found to protect the Outstanding Universal Value criteria and the integrity for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public were consulted on the draft management plan and summary of the draft strategic environmental assessment. Feedback was considered and incorporated into the strategic environmental assessment and management plan as appropriate.

The strategic environmental assessment was conducted in accordance with the Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals (2010) and facilitated an evaluation of how the management plan contributed to the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy. Individual projects undertaken to implement management plan objectives at the site will be evaluated to determine if an impact assessment is required under the *Impact Assessment Act* or successor legislation. The management plan supports a number of Federal Sustainable Development Strategy goals, namely:

- Greening government;
- Sustainably managed lands and forests;
- Healthy wildlife populations;
- Connecting Canadians with nature; and
- Safe and healthy communities.

Many positive environmental effects are expected and there are no negative environmental effects anticipated from implementation of the Waterton Lakes National Park management plan.