



New Brunswick *Parks Act* Review Public Response Paper 2013



The Hopewell Rocks

Originally all Provincial Parks were dedicated to the people of the province and others to use for their healthful enjoyment and education, and were to be maintained for the benefit of future generations. As social, economic, and environmental impacts have changed in the decades since inception, the current administration of Provincial Parks cannot be taken for granted. It is therefore critical that the public, stakeholder groups and government work together to address how parks will meet present and impending societal needs, consider sustainability options and, as a result, offer recommendations to strengthen the *Act* that governs the Provincial Park system.

A White Paper was released in August 2013 in order to define the objectives of the *Parks Act* Review and to initiate public input by focusing on four themes affecting the future of Provincial Parks in New Brunswick:

- Mandate
- Stewardship
- Health, Safety and Accessibility, and
- Partnerships.

Proposed Mandate

- *To provide a natural setting for visitors to experience wellness, cultural and educational opportunities;*
- *To undertake legitimate ecological preservation and conservation practices; and,*
- *To offer and promote a tourism product that enhances New Brunswick's image as a vacation destination.*

A White Paper – Review of New Brunswick's Parks Act: Conserving and Protecting for the Future 2013

Summary of Public Engagement

Online Survey

Results showed that 80 per cent of respondents valued having land protected as natural areas for them and their families for years to come. Seventy per cent (70 per cent) believe the Parks are an important tourism product. Sixty-six per cent (66 per cent) look to Provincial Parks for a natural setting to experience wellness, culture and educational opportunities and 65 per cent support ecological preservation and conservation practices as critical to the mandate.

Briefs

Of the four themes presented in the White Paper, the mandate received the most comments among the briefs submitted. The majority strongly suggested the need to strengthen the language around conservation and

preservation of the ecology and biodiversity of the Parks. The general sentiment is that protection of New Brunswick's natural assets should be top priority for current and future generations. Preservation of these natural areas should be law and not just a matter of policy. The *Parks Act* should explicitly define the measures for protection and preservation such as categorization of Parks; zoning within Parks; ban on industrial exploitation; creation of mandated resource management plans; and providing the Minister the authority to designate other protected areas under the *Act*.

Stakeholder Roundtables

Participants in the stakeholder roundtables also agreed that conservation and ecological preservation need to be the focus of the mandate. At the same time, Provincial Parks economically support the local communities surrounding them. There needs to be a balance struck between conservation and development. Establishing classifications of Parks and a zoning system within each would support attaining that balance.

Youth need to be reintroduced to the value of Provincial Parks and emphasis should be placed on the need for natural spaces and activities such as camping and canoeing. The Parks also provide teachers with the hands-on environment to bring ecological, heritage and cultural lessons to life and those resources should be taken advantage of more often.

Stewardship

Stewardship is the cornerstone that will preserve the Provincial Parks for future generations – environmentally, economically, socially, and culturally. A sustainable Provincial Park system will be managed under the following principles:

- *Effective Resource Management*
- *Meeting Consumer Expectations*
- *Revenue Generation*
- *Awareness and Promotion*

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Summary of Public Engagement

Online Survey

Fifty-one per cent (51 per cent) of respondents to the online survey valued conservation and preservation as a priority within stewardship efforts. Fifty per cent (50 per cent) want the availability of the camping experience. Thirty-nine per cent (39 per cent) prefer preserving the natural beauty while 38 per cent want access to nature, parklands and coastline. Taking part in recreational activities in Provincial Parks was selected as important by 32 per cent with 22 per cent equally desiring Parks to be family-friendly and affordable. Seventeen percent (17 per cent) recognized the benefits to the local economies. Protecting the natural environment and keeping it pristine with reasonable accessibility is one of the most important elements that make Parks viable tourism attractions.

Briefs

It was recommended that resource management plans should be mandatory for each Park and that they be revisited regularly and include stakeholder input. The plans should also include a partnership strategy to maximize cost-sharing initiatives.

Although the submitted briefs unanimously recommended that Provincial Parks should remain government-owned and controlled, there was also a strong sense that privatization of certain activities would benefit the sustainability of the Parks system. It was strongly felt that Parks should not compete to provide recreational and tourism activities that would be better left to the private sector, such as golf courses, ski hills, marinas, campgrounds, et cetera. This would reduce government spending and relieve the pressure of cost-recovery. It was felt that any revenue generated by a Provincial Park should be reinvested in that Park and be used to sustain activities and infrastructure.

Entry and user fees were viewed as acceptable means of revenue generation to ensure Parks are protected and well-maintained. Appropriate programming was also seen as key to maximizing the use of the Parks. Providing healthy activities and educational opportunities that are in line with ecologically friendly practices will provide attractive options to entice a broad spectrum of visitors.

The potential for a Park Enhancement Fund to accept donations for specific projects or Parks was also brought forward as an idea to financially support the Parks system.

Stakeholder Roundtables

In addition to introducing classifications and zoning of Provincial Parks, the roundtable discussions raised the issue of ensuring that legislation holds fast and firm on the vision that natural assets are conserved and preserved, particularly from the perspective of mining and the extraction of other natural resources.

Revenue generation is necessary to maintain the Parks system. A special-operating-agency concept would allow for the retention of revenue to reinvest appropriately. Offering programs for youth that are reasonably priced is another funding option, as well as well-defined parameters around corporate branding within the Parks.

Health, Safety and Accessibility

Provincial Parks will continue to offer activities and programs that will enhance the quality of life of the guest in order to promote the outdoor experience as being key to a healthy, active lifestyle. At the same time, grounds and facilities will be maintained to ensure a safe environment. The Provincial Parks system will strive to offer the “Park Experience” to all guests by providing a reasonable level of accessibility while working toward a goal to achieve universal accessibility standards.

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Summary of Public Engagement

Online Survey

Interest in activities at Provincial Parks promoting a healthy, active lifestyle ranged from 91 per cent for hiking to 19 per cent for downhill skiing. Other significant preferences include: nature walks (89 per cent); swimming (86 per cent); wildlife viewing (73 per cent); canoeing (65 per cent); cycling (54 per cent); and dog walking and snowshoeing (both at 50 per cent). Sixty-four per cent (64 per cent) thought that Provincial Parks are a good venue for sporting events.

Eight-eight per cent (88 per cent) expected that security in the Parks system should be a government service. Ninety-two per cent (92 per cent) was not aware of issues surrounding accessibility within the Parks.

Briefs

Overwhelmingly, respondents felt it was important to ensure the safety of all park users. This could include the development and maintenance of infrastructure such as roads, trails and sanitary facilities within the Parks. Roads leading to the Parks should also be kept in good condition while directional signage should

be improved. Doing so will ensure visitors find the Park easily and safely. In addition, park security staff should be properly trained.

Accessibility was addressed in two ways. Parks should be physically accessible to as many users as possible. Where appropriate and reasonable, infrastructure should accommodate physically challenged visitors. Secondly, all fees should be kept reasonable as to allow users, regardless of socio-economic status, to enjoy the benefits of Provincial Parks.

Stakeholder Roundtables

All participants were in agreement that health, safety and accessibility are important priorities for the future operation of the Parks; however, it was acknowledged that standards should be adopted over time based on “what is financially realistic”. Consideration should be given to accessibility to activities and programming. All new development should include accessible camp sites. It was also suggested that the Parks system be assessed against current acceptable standards.

It was noted that there is a need to raise awareness about the value of Parks to individual health and wellness within an aging population.

Infrastructure needs to be maintained and safe for visitors; and rules and regulations of the Parks cannot go without enforcement.

Partnerships

Partnerships are vital to the provision of quality services within all Provincial Parks. Potential opportunities to build a strong network of parks for the future can be found through collaboration with communities, the private sector, tourism regions, interest groups, other provincial departments and levels of government and even between parks particularly in the areas of (but not limited to):

- *health and wellness*
- *education*
- *recreation*
- *conservation, and*
- *outreach programming.*

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Online Survey

The following partnership opportunities received the most support from respondents to the online survey: conservation groups (67 per cent); other Parks (national, provincial, municipal) (63 per cent); neighbouring communities (57 per cent); volunteer groups/committees (51 per cent); educational/youth groups (46 per cent); not-for-profit groups (41 per cent); private-sector companies (33 per cent). Eight per cent (8 per cent) felt that there should be no partners other than government fulfilling the mandate of Provincial Parks.

Briefs

The concept of partnerships was the second-most recurrent theme among the briefs submitted for consideration. Partnerships were seen as the mechanism by which the Parks could offer a rich variety of programming and help to address sustainability by cost-sharing and value-add collaboration. Groups willing to work with parks to offer a

variety of programming include the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, First Nations communities and Scouts Canada. Rich programming will attract visitors and will provide enriching opportunities for education and appreciation of the natural world.

The municipalities of Kedgwick, Saint-Quentin and Atholville consider Provincial Parks in their area (Mount Carleton and Sugarloaf) as anchor points for people to experience the Appalachian and Restigouche landscape and culture. They consider these Parks as central economic generators in the area and are looking to create a tourism strategy in which the two Parks would play a pivotal role.

Stakeholder Roundtables

Parks are not independent entities; they rely on communities and therefore there needs to be more emphasis in the *Act* on local partnerships. There is an opportunity for better cooperation and cross-promotion between partners.

Corporate sponsorships were viewed as an opportunity for partnerships and funding sources however, it was agreed that financial support should only be undertaken in accordance with well-defined guidelines.

Increased use of Parks by youth could be achieved through school-curriculum opportunities to raise awareness and interest in the future.

Recommendations

“Parks nourish the human spirit, help sustain the planet and reflect the ideals of the societies that protect them. Landscape and memory combine to tell us that certain places are special, sanctified by their extraordinary natural merits and by social consensus. We call these places parks and we take them for granted.”

- Chris Johns, Editor, National Geographic magazine

The next step is to finalize the detailed recommendations for legislative drafting, which is anticipated to occur in the Spring of 2014.