

# RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Evaluation of Parks Canada's National Historic Site Visitor Experience Sub-program



## Evaluation Objective and Scope

Consistent with the requirements of the Treasury Board Policy on Results (2016), the evaluation addressed the National Historic Site Visitor Experience sub-program's:

- **Relevance:** continued need and alignment with government priorities and federal roles and responsibilities.
- **Performance:** effectiveness and efficiency of the sub-program.

The scope of the evaluation included all activities and results of the sub-program, including implementation of Parks Canada's On Target Strategy.

This evaluation covers the period from 2010-11 to 2016-17. Details on specific evaluation questions, expectations, methods and limitations are found in the full report.

## Findings

### *Relevance*

The National Historic Site Visitor Experience sub-program is relevant and consistent with the priorities, roles and responsibilities of both Parks Canada and the Government of Canada.

The sub-program directly supports the Agency's mandate and vision by fostering opportunities for visitors to discover, experience, enjoy and develop a sense of personal connection to Parks Canada-administered national historic sites.

### *Effectiveness*

Overall, the Agency has met most of its expected results for the sub-program. In 2016-17, Parks Canada welcomed more than five million visitors to its national historic sites, the largest recorded level of visitation since 2010-11. This increased visitation was well above the national target of 2%. The Agency is also meeting and or exceeding its targets for visitor satisfaction, enjoyment, and learning in these historic places. However, there may be a need to improve results related to visitor connection at some national historic sites.

Findings related to each of the six key activities in the visitor experience framework are highlighted below:

1. **Identify Target Markets.** Parks Canada has identified and refined national target markets. However, inconsistencies in the presentation of these markets in different reference materials has contributed to confusion at the field-level with regards to the application of this approach.
2. **Do a Diagnostic.** Parks Canada has completed national reviews of the national historic site visitor experience in attempts to develop an integrated strategy to address key barriers to visitation. While most national historic sites have access to data required to complete a local diagnostic, there have been few comprehensive diagnostics completed since 2012. Resources to complete this activity have been limited.
3. **Create and Deliver On-Site Experiences.** We observed a renewal of the visitor experience offer at national historic sites, including both the implementation of new national programs aimed at increasing visitation from target markets and site-specific initiatives. However, many smaller sites have had a limited capacity to develop, deliver and review new programs, products and events. Guidance and tools created to facilitate decision-making are not necessarily scaled to the capacity or geared to the activities of national historic sites.

## SUB-PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- Parks Canada owns and/or administers 171 national historic sites. It is through the National Historic Site Visitor Experience sub-program that the Agency shares heritage messages in support of the commemorative integrity of these sites. The sub-program includes a range of activities, services and products associated with pre-visit planning, the on-site visit, and post-visit communications.
- Parks Canada's On Target Strategy (2011) identified the need to diversify the visitor base and renew opportunities to attract and grow target market segments. The strategy further specified a set of core and optional activities aligned with targeted markets to be used in support of this renewal.

As of 2016-17, the Agency was reported to be 'on track' to deliver expected improvements in the condition of visitor experience assets but existing funding is insufficient to address all deficiencies identified since 2012.

4. **Promote.** The Agency has made strides in improving its website and broadening its exposure on social media platforms. However, staff are challenged to develop effective site-level campaigns given limited marketing resources. Many national historic sites leverage partners' resources to increase their reach, either through joint marketing efforts or partnered events.
5. **Measure and Report.** Performance measurement programs are in place to ensure the accountability and effectiveness of the sub-program. However, measures may be insufficient to effectively assess the contribution of heritage messaging at national historic sites to their commemorative integrity. Field staff also perceive a need for more timely and targeted visitor information that can be used to evaluate and adjust specific aspects of the visitor experience offer.

### *Efficiency and Economy*

We found that Parks Canada has used its management flexibilities to implement significant changes to the design and delivery of the sub-program at numerous national historic sites (e.g., move to a 'self-guided' delivery model, reductions in hours and season of operations).

However, there is no existing objective criteria or thresholds that can be used to assess the efficiency of the sub-program or determine acceptable costs or cost-recovery. As a result, it is difficult to conclude on the relative efficiency of national historic sites in the delivery of the visitor experience.

We also found that Parks Canada lacks a coherent system to define and classify the visitor offer at its national historic sites. This makes it challenging for the Agency to apply consistent management direction and review related performance. The ability to assess the relative performance of individual national historic sites was impeded by the lack of a clear framework for judging sub-program performance at the site level.



# RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Evaluation of Parks Canada's National Historic Site Visitor Experience Sub-program



## Recommendations and Management Response

**Recommendation 1:** The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, and Senior Vice-President, Operations, should develop a consistent approach to classifying national historic sites according to their level of visitor offer and identifying which sites must apply the Visitor Experience framework.



### **Management Response:**

**Agree:** The Parks Canada National Pricing Standard includes a definition of services and rights and privileges that are commonly available in national historic sites (NHS). The standard classifies national historic sites into five different categories based on their service offer. This classification is clear as are associated service levels. When the service offer of a NHS increases, the fees charged are adjusted. This is the case for the 17 NHS that are part of the new fees that will be implemented in January 2020.

**Recommendation 2:** The Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, should develop a communications strategy to ensure a clear and consistent presentation of target audiences and how these are to be used in decision-making.



### **Management Response:**

**Agree:** The External Relations and Visitor Experience Directorate has updated its multi-year marketing and promotion strategy, "On Target" 2019-2022. The strategy's overall intention will remain to "seek and identify market segments with long term potential of growth" (with special consideration being given to new Canadians, young families, young adults, and school-aged children). The "On Target" strategy was updated in July 2019.

**Recommendation 3:** The Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage, in consultation with the Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, should review and update the performance measurement indicators related to visitor learning and understanding at national historic sites.



### **Management Response:**

**Agree:** Consistent with the Independent Working Group Report to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage Directorate, in collaboration with the External Relations and Visitor Experience Directorate and Strategic Policy and Investment Directorate, will develop new performance measurement indicators to measure how visitors learn about the significance (commemorative integrity) of national historic sites.

