



Ron's address to team members

Thank you Andrew. Hello everyone. I would like to begin by welcoming you into my home, at least virtually. And I'd like to thank you for joining this virtual town hall meeting. I should acknowledge upfront that this town hall meeting and today's announcement by the Prime Minister and Minister Wilkinson regarding the gradual partial resumption of some of our field based operations has come together quickly and with very little advance warning for most of you.

This is clearly not the way we normally try to operate as you know but I trust you'll understand as professional public servants that the Agency operates within the broader government of Canada context and decision making processes -- and I can assure you the executive management committee continues to share all of the information you need to do your job as soon as possible within that context.

It is also within that context as federal public servants that we've all been fortunate throughout this pandemic to have benefited from our job security, our ongoing benefits and the flexibility to adapt our work to our personal circumstances. For this I am grateful to the leaders of our government for their compassion.

These are extraordinary times and it's important to me that we find ways to stay connected so we can continue to do our work and so that we can support each other through the challenging circumstances that we face and that we do so as one team, with one vision; and one voice.

I wish to provide further details on the approach to resume our operations.

First I'd like to acknowledge that so many of you, so many of us, are dealing with COVID-19 as patients, as parents, as family members and as friends. I know it's hard. We all feel it.

For those of you who are home schooling your kids, hang in there.

For those who live alone and may feel more isolated than others at this time, please know we're thinking of you.

For those who are caring for or worrying about friend, parent or another loved one who has the virus or other medical challenge, I wish you continued strength and a positive outcome.

For those who like our family have lost loved ones during this time and who ache at not being able to gather to comfort each other and say goodbye, we mourn with you.

For those Parks Canada team members who have personally contracted the virus and are now recovered or are still recovering, I'd like to say that I'm sorry for what you're going through and I'm grateful for your progress towards renewed health.

I know that we all remain firm in our resolve to take the necessary measures in the shadow of COVID-19, so that we can emerge together – safe, healthy, and ready to take on whatever new normal awaits us. The pandemic has impacted our work and how we do our work.

We've had to adapt to new work arrangements and take on new or adjusted duties. And we've had to do so amidst the uncertainty of if things might return to some variation of normal.

However, as I have often said, we'll get through this together – As one team. With one vision. And with one voice.

We have been busy. You should know that the Executive Management Committee is meeting daily by video conference to ensure that everyone across the Agency has the direction and support they need. We're also connecting bi-weekly with union leaders, some of whom are on the line today, to keep them apprised of our activities and to collaborate on approaches that serve the best interests of all Parks Canada team members.

It is important to me that the critical role of our unions be acknowledged and maintained now more than ever. I deeply value the positive relationship we have with them across the country.

We're also meeting remotely several times per week with all executives across the Agency including executive directors, directors and field superintendents in order to share information, respond to questions and identify approaches to common challenges together.

We have created a COVID-19 business continuity working group and a business restructuring working group each composed of representatives from all directorates which meet daily to help coordinate Agency activities, maintain engagement with federal partners and to provide advice to senior managers across the Agency.

Employees in critical functions continue to provide incredible service to Canadians because highways need to remain accessible and open, safety, search and rescue, emergency dispatch and law enforcement functions all need to continue. Dam operations, water level monitoring and management remain key. Water and waste water treatment functions cannot be deferred.

Critical safety related construction projects continue. Similarly, HR experts, finance staff, IM/IT staff and our amazing communications team continue their important work behind the scenes to support and facilitate all of the work that we are doing including implementing and sharing new technologies and processes that I believe will and probably should continue to transform the way we do our work for years to come.

Moreover, Policy and program staff across all directorates and regions continue to work from home to advance important government initiatives.

And some of you who cannot reasonably perform your normal from home are on Leave with Pay, doing your part to help reduce the spread of the virus.

We thank you. It is through each of us playing our respective roles that the Parks Canada Team performs best.

I'd like to talk now about the resumption of our business operations. I'm sure you were excited and perhaps a little nervous to hear the government's announcement today that beginning June 1st Parks Canada will begin a gradual resumption of our operations.

I know we all look forward to welcoming visitors and taking care of the special places where we work. Now, here is the situation. The path is not entirely clear. It will take time and we will need to work together but here are four key things I do know for certain and that I'd like to share with you.

First, top priority for me and the Agency will remain the health and safety of our Parks Canada team members and our visitors, always. This overriding priority will continue to drive all of our planning decisions and all our implementation activities across the Agency. We will continue to follow the advice of public health experts and emerging government of Canada directions aimed at avoiding the spread of COVID-19.

As we work to gradually resume our operations, team members will have the training and equipment needed to do their jobs safely.

Second, we take expert advice very seriously on how to safely reintegrate physically our office environments. I can tell you that Treasury Board is currently developing guidance for that purpose.

Until that Treasury Board guidance has been received team members who perform primarily office work will continue to work from home.

Third, we have a plan to gradually resume our important cultural, heritage and natural resources conservation work. This plan provides Field Unit Superintendents and

Resource Conservation Managers with a principles based approach prioritizing their local conservation activities.

Each field unit will take a phased approach to resuming those activities and each activity or activity type will be assessed relative to public health, occupational health and safety and conservation implications.

Fourth, I can tell you, personally, that the decision to suspend visitor services was something that I never imagined being faced with.

Like you, I am excited about welcoming Canadians back to their treasured national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas. In fact, we began planning for the resumption of visitor services almost immediately after the suspension was announced.

As the government announced today, starting June 1st, we will begin to gradually reintroduce visitor access and basic services at Parks Canada places. Local visitors will be able to use some trails, day use areas, green spaces and have some recreational access to lakes and waterways.

While the Prime Minister spoke primarily about national parks this applies equally to heritage canals and waterways, construction areas and it applies to green spaces around our national historic sites that can also provide Canadians space to practice physical distancing, of which there are many.

For example, grounds around Signal Hill, Dalvay-by-the-Sea, Louisbourg, the Citadel, Martello Tower, Fort Chambly, Fort Henry, The Forks, Batoche, Fort Langley and the list goes on. But what all of these places and approaches have in common is that we will only begin operations where and when the work can be done safely. This includes having the right personal protective equipment, safe work practices and human resource capacity in place.

As you know, we operate across Canada and there are different measures in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 in different jurisdictions. That is why as a result the exact opening dates and level of visitor access and service will necessarily vary across our organization, particularly in the early days.

The path forward will be complex. I am confident that if we work together as one team we can take on this challenge.

Those were the four key messages that I wanted to share with you today.

On a personal note, I want to say I understand that dealing with so much change and uncertainty including with respect to resumption planning is stressful.

I feel it too. So does my family. I'm sure you and your loved ones do as well. I want to remind you colleagues, once again, that we have many tools and resources in place to help you in caring for your own physical and mental health and that of your families.

lease continue to pay close attention to your personal circumstances and step back when you need to.

As I have said before taking care of each other sometimes means taking care of ourselves first and reaching out to others when we need support.

In closing, I would like to share a quote from someone who I dearly love and admire – and whose resilience and strength inspires me every day.

I'm speaking about my daughter, Mairi. She is 17-year old.

To repeat in English, In closing I'd like to share a quote from someone who I dearly love and admire and whose resilience and strength inspire me every day. I'm speaking about my 17-year-old daughter, Mairi. Those of you with whom I'm connected on Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter may have seen a letter I posted online about two weeks ago. It's a letter that Mairi who is currently in grade 12 and preparing for university wrote recently her grade 7 self.

I posted it on social media because Mairi asked me to. She asked me to share it publicly in the hopes that her message can help others. In her letter Mairi reveals her diagnosis received March 23rd that she has autism. In her letter she recounts how after several misdiagnoses over the years and following ill-suited prescriptions that nearly had devastating consequences for our family last November this diagnosis has been a relief and a blessing.

For Mairi it has lifted finally a veil of confusion and struggle that she and we her family have managed for years and that we now understand better and can continue to work on together. I want to leave you with a quote from her letter that captures a bit of my thinking about the challenge ahead of us in terms of resuming our operations.

Here is the final line of Mairi's letter to her younger self, in which she says the following:

"Things are never going to be perfect, but they're going to be pretty awesome. You'll see."

Again in English, the quote I want to leave you with is from the final line of Mari's letter to her younger self in which she says the following. *"Things are never going to be perfect, but they're going to be pretty awesome. You'll see."*

Thank you sincerely colleagues on behalf of the Minister, the Executive Management Committee and all Canadians for all you have done to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Thank you for all that you will do as we work together to resume our operations, check the resources that Canadians have entrusted to us and to welcome visitors once again to the treasured places we love so much.

And now, I'm sure that many of you have questions and comments, so I will pass things back to Michelle to moderate.