



Interim National Urban Parks Policy



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Preamble to the Policy

The present document is an interim policy which enables Parks Canada to designate national urban parks and set parameters for their management. Over the coming years Parks Canada will assess lessons learned from the national urban parks that are designated under this interim policy and seek input from Indigenous partners, municipalities, and others involved in its implementation. Parks Canada will review the Policy and may amend it to ensure that it helps achieve the National Urban Parks Program objectives.

This policy applies to all national urban parks that are designated by Parks Canada's National Urban Parks Program, including those managed by one or more Indigenous governments or organizations, municipalities, provinces, the federal government, conservation authorities, land trusts or similar non-governmental organization, or a partnership between two or more of these. Parks Canada will also identify options regarding national urban parks legislation that would apply to federally administered land within national urban parks, while respecting other jurisdictions. This could include, for example, a national historic site that is administered by Parks Canada and is located within a broader national urban park that is co-managed with Indigenous governments or organizations, municipal governments, or other partners, or for example, a national urban park that is located on federal land and is administered by Parks Canada or another federal department or agency.

1. Effective Date

This policy takes effect on July 22, 2024.

2. Context

In August 2021, Parks Canada launched the National Urban Parks Program. The National Urban Parks Program is a next step for Parks Canada, an agency which, over the past 110 years, has provided Canadians with a system of national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas - as well as Rouge National Urban Park, the first national urban park in Canada.

National urban parks have tremendous potential to conserve and restore nature in cities, help protect cities from the impacts of climate change, provide access to nature close to where people live, conserve and share cultural heritage, and advance

reconciliation with Indigenous peoples by supporting Indigenous leadership and stewardship of urban park spaces. National urban parks may offer a wide range of benefits such as supporting economic opportunities related to infrastructure, services, recreation, and tourism, improving peoples' health and wellbeing by providing opportunities to spend time outdoors, and increasing natural areas which help clean the air, absorb greenhouse gasses, keep cities cool, and reduce the impacts of flooding.

National urban parks are places of natural or historical significance to the nation, located in or near a major city in Canada, that are managed in ways that contribute to three core objectives: conserving nature; connecting people with nature; advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. They are typically, large, predominantly natural areas that may consist of existing natural areas or areas that are being restored to a more natural condition. A national urban park may be one large area or a group of smaller areas that do not need to be physically connected to each other.

Candidate national urban parks are studied by Parks Canada in consultation with possible collaborators, such as Indigenous governments, municipalities, provinces, and federal organizations. Candidate sites are reviewed for their potential to contribute to the core objectives of conserving nature, connecting people with nature, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. These objectives guide the creation and management of a network of national urban parks across Canada.

National urban parks can be governed and managed under several different types of arrangements, for example, by one or more Indigenous governments or organizations, municipalities, a province, the federal government, conservation authorities, land trusts, or similar non-governmental organization, or a partnership between two or more of these. Most national urban parks fall under some form of partnership model. Indigenous governments, municipalities, provinces, and other governing authorities whose lands are included in national urban parks retain authority for those lands and commit to manage them in accordance with this policy and agreements with Parks Canada. Parks Canada does not assume responsibility for the management of non-federal lands in national urban parks that are designated under this policy.

National urban parks are designated by Parks Canada. Parks Canada makes sure that designated national urban parks contribute to the objectives of the program and meet the requirements set out in this policy. Parks Canada's role includes overseeing agreements signed with Indigenous governments or organizations, municipalities, provinces, and other governing authorities responsible for administering and operating national urban parks, and may include offering support, expertise, and guidance in their management. Most national urban parks are situated on non-federal land and are administered by Indigenous governments or organizations, municipalities, provinces, and other governing authorities. In some instances, Parks Canada or another federal department or agency may administer a national urban park that is located entirely on federal land. In other instances, Parks Canada may administer a national historic site

that is located within a broader national urban park that is co-managed with Indigenous governments, municipalities, or other partners.

Each national urban park is planned, created, and managed through meaningful collaboration and cooperation between municipalities, provinces, local governing authorities, Indigenous governments, organizations and communities, key stakeholders, and other interested organizations and individuals. National urban parks are situated in urban areas with existing and often complex jurisdictional regimes, land use and tenure arrangements, infrastructure, and regulations. This means that governments and organizations involved in managing national urban parks need to work together in a spirit of trust and respect to achieve common goals. Urban parks are important to a variety of users with different needs. National urban park managers are expected to meaningfully engage with a range of voices to ensure that all park visitors and users are treated with respect and dignity and that their values and interests are considered in the management of the park.

National urban parks are part of a network of national urban parks across Canada. The network is a forum for national urban park managers to exchange information, develop guidance and tools to support the management of the parks, and facilitate opportunities for learning.

National urban parks are created in close collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations, including Treaty and Aboriginal rights holders. Having the support of and working closely with Indigenous governments and communities whose territories, treaty lands, or homelands are overlain by the proposed national urban park is key to conserving and protecting nature. It is also critical to ensuring that national urban parks provide space for Indigenous leadership and stewardship, promote Indigenous voices and stories, recognize and respect Indigenous systems of law, and facilitate connections to lands and waters based on Indigenous knowledge and values. Encouraging and supporting the participation of Indigenous governments and organizations in the creation of national urban parks is an essential part of the designation process. In working with municipal, provincial, federal, and Indigenous governments and organizations to create national urban parks, Parks Canada strives to work in a Two-Eyed Seeing approach and establish Ethical Space for collaboration that fosters relationships among partners and honours a distinctions-based approach. In doing this, national urban parks contribute to upholding the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and support implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action including, for example, supporting revitalization of Indigenous peoples' languages.

3. Objectives

This policy guides the designation and management of new national urban parks across Canada.

- This policy establishes a formal mechanism for the designation of national urban parks by Parks Canada.
- This policy supports consistency in the designation and management of national urban parks by specifying common requirements for national urban park designation and management.
- This policy creates a flexible framework for the management of national urban parks that enables locally driven decision-making.

4. Application

- 4.1 This policy applies to all national urban parks that are designated by Parks Canada's National Urban Parks Program.
- 4.2 This policy does not apply to national urban parks created through a different federal mechanism, for example, Rouge National Urban Park, which was established under the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*.
- 4.3 Nothing in this policy should be construed to abrogate or derogate from the protection provided for existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Indigenous peoples of Canada by the recognition and affirmation of those rights in s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

5. Expected Results

Parks Canada works with other levels of government, local Indigenous partners, and others to create a network of national urban parks across Canada. These national urban parks conserve nature by contributing to climate resilience and conservation of biodiversity in urban centres. They connect people with nature by improving access and opportunities to connect with nature in cities. They advance reconciliation by supporting leadership by Indigenous peoples in the stewardship of urban natural areas. National urban parks benefit people and nature locally and contribute to national and provincial commitments in bilateral and international agreements.

6. Guiding Principles

The following principles guide decision-making in the creation and management of national urban parks:

- 6.1 **Nature and climate.** National urban parks contribute to halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and putting nature on a path to full recovery, maintaining and enhancing ecosystem services, restoring degraded ecosystems, protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitat, increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and enhancing climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 6.2 **Indigenous stewardship.** Recognition and respect for Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples underpins all relationships with Indigenous peoples. National urban parks support Indigenous peoples in revitalizing cultural practices, protocols, languages, and the expression of Indigenous peoples' histories, respect and reinforce Indigenous systems of law and knowledge, and facilitate Indigenous connections and reconnections with lands and waters. In these ways, national urban parks support Indigenous self-determination and cultural continuity.
- 6.3 **Respectful, inclusive, and collaborative.** National urban parks are managed with a commitment to respecting different values and interests and treating all persons with dignity. Decisions are informed by meaningful, deliberate, early, and ongoing engagement with and collaboration amongst a wide range of communities. Barriers are removed to enable accessibility and participation by individuals and groups not traditionally engaged in parks dialogues.
- 6.4 **Knowledge-informed.** Management decisions are informed by Indigenous knowledge, Western science, and local perspectives and respects the right of Indigenous people to exercise authority over their data; consider past decisions, the evolving urban landscape, and the anticipated future; are receptive to new information; and acknowledge knowledge gaps and areas of uncertainty. National urban parks are innovative and can be living laboratories where research and data support adaptive management and contribute to expanding knowledge.
- 6.5 **Precautionary.** Where there are threats of environmental damage, lack of certainty is not used as a reason for postponing preventive measures.
- 6.6 **Flexible.** National urban parks, while contributing to common core objectives of conserving nature, connecting people with nature, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, will be uniquely shaped by, and reflect, their local contexts, including relationships, cultures, heritage, traditional land uses, landscapes, legal environments, ecosystems, and other past and present dynamics.

- 6.7 **Fiscally responsible.** National urban parks are planned and managed responsibly, reflecting the resources and capacity of the responsible governments and organizations involved in their management, to ensure accountability and long-term financial sustainability.

7. Requirements

7.1 National Urban Park Designation Agreements

New national urban parks are created through formal, legally binding designation agreements between Parks Canada and one or more governments or organizations that will be responsible for the governance and management of a national urban park. Responsible governments or organizations may include Indigenous governments or organizations, municipal governments, provincial governments, federal departments or agencies, or others. In some cases, Parks Canada may administer a national urban park on its own. Designation agreements contribute to transparency and public accountability by articulating commitments by the signing governments or organizations to manage national urban parks in ways that contribute to the objectives of the National Urban Parks Program. Designation agreements are made publicly available in whole or in the form of a summary document. They set out, among other terms and conditions,

- 7.1.1 the structures for governance and management of the national urban park and the relationship between these structures and existing authorities, such as municipal councils;
- 7.1.2 an overview of roles and responsibilities of the responsible governments or organizations, including Parks Canada's involvement and branding;
- 7.1.3 financial commitments, including cost sharing arrangements, and a fiscal sustainability strategy, including cost recovery arrangements;
- 7.1.4 a vision for the national urban park;
- 7.1.5 an overview of key objectives and expected outcomes with respect to conserving nature, connecting people with nature, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples;
- 7.1.6 commitments by each responsible organization to meet the requirements in this policy; and,
- 7.1.7 deadlines, agreed to by the responsible governments or organizations, by which any outstanding designation requirements will be met.

7.2 Requirements

For a national urban park to be designated by Parks Canada, parties to the designation agreement agree to terms and conditions in the agreement to meet and maintain the following requirements.

7.2.1 Planning and management standards

- 7.2.1.1 The national urban park is managed by one or more governments or organizations that is/are responsible and accountable for overseeing the operation of the park.
- 7.2.1.2 The national urban park applies branding and communications approaches that are consistent with the national urban parks brand approach by fully applying the Parks Canada Brand in national urban parks that are administered by Parks Canada, and acknowledging Parks Canada contributions to partner-led sites by including the Parks Canada Partner brand.
- 7.2.1.3 The national urban park's management engages with other national urban parks through the network of national urban parks.

Planning and reporting

- 7.2.1.4 By the time of designation, an interim operational plan has been prepared and made publicly available. The plan outlines the initial steps that will be taken to launch the park, including but not limited to actions that are required to:
 - ensure that only land and water uses, infrastructure projects, construction or other types of development activities that do not compromise the objectives of the national urban park are allowed (see section 7.2.2.3 for more information);
 - eliminate barriers to the use of the national urban park by specific groups (e.g., harvesting by Indigenous peoples) by, for example, collaborating with relevant jurisdictions and in consultation with affected communities, to review, amend, and align relevant

federal, provincial, municipal laws and permitting processes and their enforcement;

- create a space that is welcoming and provides meaningful experiences for all;
- advance key park infrastructure needs;
- contribute to the expected outcomes related to conserving nature, connecting people with nature, including what visitors and users can expect to experience at the national urban park, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

7.2.1.5 Every 2 years, a national urban park update report is prepared and made publicly available. The report provides a snapshot of recent progress in implementing the national urban park’s interim operational plan within the first 5 years and the park’s management plan thereafter, and a forward outlook on activities that will be undertaken to contribute to the park’s objectives in the subsequent 2 years. Reports reflect common indicators developed by Parks Canada and the network of national urban parks and, where applicable, align with existing local monitoring and reporting initiatives.

7.2.1.6 Within 5 years of designation, an initial management plan is prepared and made publicly available. The management plan outlines the strategic management direction for the national urban park and medium- to long-term objectives for contributing to the core objectives of the National Urban Parks Program, building on the interim operational plan. A suite of common standards for management plans will be developed by Parks Canada in consultation with the network of national urban parks. Management plans are reviewed on a 10-year cycle thereafter. Management plans are informed by meaningful consultation and engagement with Indigenous peoples, stakeholders and interested organizations, and the public.

National urban park required products, plans and reports

Designation

Every 2 years

Within 5 years of designation

Designation Agreement

Interim operational plan

National urban park update report

Management plan
(reviewed every 10 years thereafter)

7.2.2 Commitment to conserve nature

- 7.2.2.1 Part or all of the proposed national urban park is a protected area or ‘other effective area-based conservation measure’ recognized in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database by the time of designation or a plan is in place to meet this requirement within a specified timeframe that is agreed to by parties to the designation agreement. This requirement can be met by incorporating existing protected areas or ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’ within the candidate national urban park, or by establishing new protected areas or ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’. Once it is designated, parties:
- 7.2.2.1.1 explore opportunities to expand the area that is recognized as a protected area or ‘other effective area-based conservation measure’ and/or increase the size of the national urban park to increase its conservation footprint;
 - 7.2.2.1.2 strengthen the effectiveness of conservation in the protected area or ‘other effective area-based conservation measure’ portions of the national urban park and in other parts of the park;
 - 7.2.2.1.3 ensure that protection measures are not weakened or removed and there is no reduction in the amount of area that is recognized as a protected area or an ‘other effective area-based conservation measure’.
- 7.2.2.2 Responsible governments or organizations plan and implement coordinated actions in the national urban park to conserve nature and support climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation through, for example, restoration, enhancing protection, improving connectivity, implementing nature-based solutions, monitoring the status of the park and the outcomes of conservation and climate-related actions, and adapting plans as needed.
- 7.2.2.3 By the time of designation, a plan has been prepared in collaboration with relevant jurisdictions to, within a timeframe agreed to by parties to the designation agreement, take steps, for example, enacting or amending zoning by-laws or other land use policies and regulations, to ensure that only the following are allowed within the national urban park:
- a. land and water uses, infrastructure projects, construction or other types of development activities

that contribute to the objectives of the park. This could include, for example, trail construction, building park user facilities, developing park-related public or commercial establishments such as event spaces or outfitters.

- b. land and water uses, infrastructure projects, construction or other types of development activities that are vital to the function of the urban area but do not compromise the objectives of the national urban park. This could include, for example, replacing sewage or water lines that run under the park or repairing existing infrastructure like bridge abutments located in the park. Any impacts to the park shall be temporary and remediation shall be part of the project.
- c. Pre-existing incompatible land uses must be mitigated as much as possible or removed where feasible.

7.2.3 Commitment to connecting people with nature

- 7.2.3.1 Responsible governments or organizations plan and implement coordinated actions to create meaningful experiences for people of all ages and abilities to connect with and gain an appreciation for nature and the cultural heritage of the park and surrounding area, and as applicable, the network of protected and conserved spaces in Canada and the world.
- 7.2.3.2 Public access to the general grounds of the national urban park is free of charge. Admission or participation fees may be charged for the use of certain new and pre-existing park facilities, parking, installations, programs, or other offerings to support cost recovery.
- 7.2.3.3 The national urban park can be accessed by public transportation or other modes of accessible mass transit services. The national urban park can also be accessed by active transportation. If both requirements are not met by the time of designation, a plan is in place to meet them within a specified timeframe that is agreed to by signatories to the designation agreement, taking into account existing transportation plans if applicable.
- 7.2.3.4 Development, design and implementation of policies, programs, services, information, experiences, facilities and

infrastructure are informed by principles of inclusion and reflect the principles of the *Accessible Canada Act* or equivalent provincial, municipal or other relevant standards to support enjoyment of the park by all.

- 7.2.3.5 Services and communications about the national urban park, including signage and programming within the park, support Parks Canada's obligations under the *Official Languages Act*, as well as the linguistic diversity of the local area (which include Indigenous languages and which may also include other linguistic groups).

7.2.4 Commitment to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

7.2.4.1 By the time of designation:

- 7.2.4.1.1 Indigenous governments and organizations have had a leadership role and have been meaningfully engaged or involved at each step of designation, as they desired to be.

- 7.2.4.1.2 Parties to the designation agreement articulate ways in which the national urban park's governance and management arrangements respect and reinforce Indigenous systems of law and knowledge and Aboriginal and treaty rights. Leadership by Indigenous peoples could be formally articulated through a shared governance or cooperative management agreement.

7.2.4.2 Once designated:

- 7.2.4.2.1 The national urban park supports Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship that is aligned with Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, cultures, and worldviews.

- 7.2.4.2.2 The national urban park supports the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples' connections to lands and waters to create a sense of place. These opportunities may foster the promotion of Indigenous voices and stories, cultural practices, ceremony, languages, and more.

- 7.2.4.2.3 The national urban park supports economic development opportunities for Indigenous peoples, for example, employment or business

opportunities, that are aligned with the overall objectives of the national urban park.

7.2.5 Additional requirements

Parks Canada has the following additional requirements and responsibilities under this policy:

- 7.2.5.1 Parks Canada may offer financial support, expertise, and guidance to Indigenous governments or organizations, municipalities, provinces, and other governing authorities responsible for administering and operating national urban parks.
- 7.2.5.2 Parks Canada convenes the network of national urban parks to encourage the exchange of information among governments and organizations responsible for administering and operating national urban parks and support their progress in contributing to the objectives of the National Urban Parks Program across the network.
- 7.2.5.3 In cases where Parks Canada is the lead organization that is responsible for the administration of a national urban park, management of the national urban park will comply with relevant federal legislation and Parks Canada policies and directives.
- 7.2.5.4 In cases where a protected heritage place, such as a National Historic Site, that is administered by Parks Canada is located within national urban park, the management of that protected heritage place will comply with relevant federal legislation and Parks Canada policies and directives.

8. Maintaining Designation

The National Urban Parks program is grounded in a commitment to collaboration and continuous improvement. The process for designating a national urban park is intended to create long-term alignment and commitment among partners, to achieve a shared vision with a lasting impact for Canadians. Designation will remain in place as long as a national urban park continues to meet the commitments in designation agreements and complies with this policy. Progress will be assessed by Parks Canada based on a review of reports prepared by each national urban park every two years and reflecting common indicators developed by Parks Canada and the network of

national urban parks. If a national urban park faces challenges that prevent it from meeting its objectives, Parks Canada will work with the national urban park to address the challenges.

Parks Canada may re-assess a national urban park's designation if major challenges arise, such as:

- A national urban park fails to abide by its designation agreement.
- A national urban park ceases to meet the requirements articulated in this policy.
- A party to the designation agreement (this could include Parks Canada) requests an assessment of the national urban park's designation.

Parks Canada would take the following steps in consultation with the governments or organizations responsible for the national urban park:

1. Examine national urban park update reports prepared every two years and conduct site visits as necessary.
2. Develop a strategy identifying actions and support needed to resolve the challenges.
3. Monitor progress in resolving the challenges over a defined period and adapt the strategy as needed.
4. Review the national urban park's designation if challenges are not resolved.
5. Determine whether to remove the national urban park designation and any associated federal funding if the challenges are determined to be irresolvable.

9. Definitions

The following definitions clarify how terms used in this policy should be interpreted.

Active transportation: All modes self-powered transportation; active transportation is made possible through infrastructure like pathways, bike lanes, multi-use trails and widened sidewalks.

Designation agreements: Formal, legally binding agreements between Parks Canada and one or more governments or organizations responsible for the national urban park.

Distinctions-based approaches: Ways that ensure the unique rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are acknowledged, affirmed, and implemented.

Ethical space: According to Cree Elder Willie Ermine, ethical space is a theoretical space of engagement between two disparate societies with distinct cultures and worldviews that encourages interaction in an environment of mutual respect, kindness, and openness.

Governance: Governance concerns the powers, authorities, and responsibilities that will determine how to organize and make decisions for the operation of the national urban park and design the tools necessary to implement decisions. The governance of a national urban park will refer to the jurisdiction(s) or governing authority(ies) who would therefore have final decision-making authority, financial responsibility, and legal responsibility over an area.

Management: Management concerns the resources, plans, and actions generated through the application of governance and decisions made by governing bodies. Management decisions and activities are those that support the “day-to-day” operations of the national urban park.

Other effective area-based conservation measure: A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values.

Protected area: A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

Responsible governments or organizations: One or more governments or organizations responsible for the oversight and management of a national urban park. This may include Indigenous governments or organizations, municipal governments, provincial governments, Parks Canada or another federal department or agency, or other relevant entities.

Two-Eyed Seeing: According to Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, two-eyed seeing is “to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together.”

Appendix 1: Summary of requirements

Note: This appendix provides an abbreviated version of some of the requirements specified above as a summary. In the case of any discrepancy, the complete version of the requirements above will take precedence.

Minimum requirements for designation as a national urban park

- a) Signed legally binding designation agreement between Parks Canada and one or more partners responsible for the governance and management of the national urban park.
- b) Governance and management structures are in place with defined roles, responsibilities, and financial arrangements.
- c) Indigenous governments and organizations have had a leadership role and have been meaningfully engaged or involved at each step of designation, as they desired to be.
- d) Governance and management arrangements respect and reinforce Indigenous systems of law and knowledge and Aboriginal and treaty rights.
- e) Vision for the national urban park is articulated, including key objectives, core offer for visitors and users, and expected outcomes relative to the National Urban Parks Program objectives.
- f) Interim operational plan that outlines the initial steps that will be taken to launch the park.

General requirements to maintain designation as a national urban park

- a) Parties comply with the signed designation agreement.
- b) Part or all of the candidate national urban park is a protected area or 'other effective area-based conservation measure' or plan is in place to meet this requirement within a specified timeframe.
- c) The national urban park can be accessed by public transportation or other modes of accessible mass transit services and the national urban park can also be accessed by active transportation or a plan is in place to meet them within a specified timeframe.
- d) Meet any outstanding and ongoing requirements by agreed upon deadlines or by deadlines specified in this policy.
- e) Contribute to the core objectives of the National Urban Parks Program:
 - Conserving: e.g., protecting key habitat, restoration, connectivity, nature-based solutions;

- Connecting: e.g., programming, learning, recreation to support connection with Nature;
 - Reconciliation: e.g., Indigenous-led culture-based activities, places for ceremony, Guardians.
- f) Engage with the network of national urban parks.
- g) Comply with planning and reporting requirements identified in this policy.