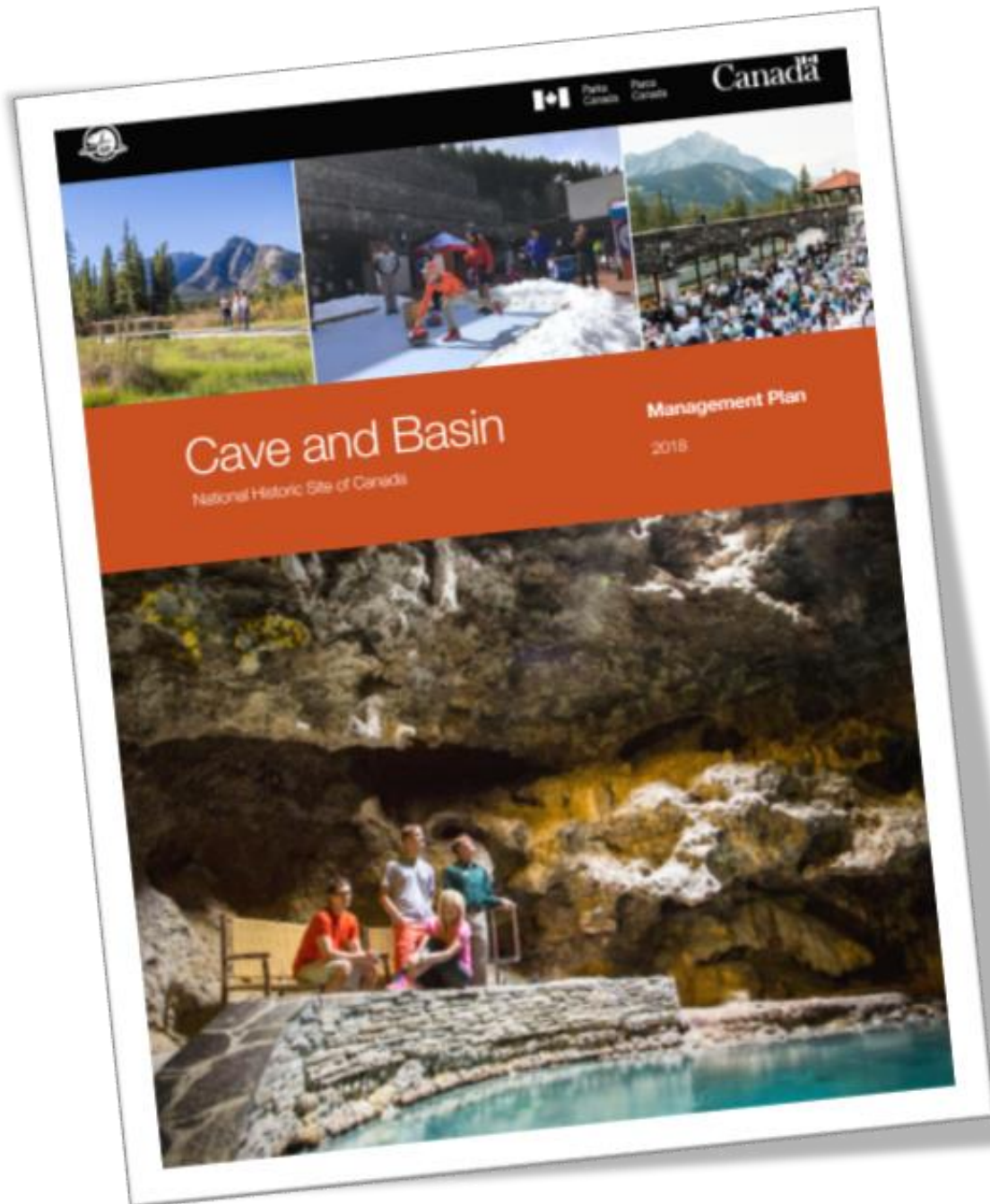




Cave and Basin
National Historic Site

What We Heard: Summary of Public Comment

**Cave and Basin National Historic Site Draft Management Plan
August 2019**



Context

The thermal waters found at the Cave and Basin have played an important role in the area for thousands of years. Indigenous groups have identified the Cave and Basin as an important and often sacred location where numerous nations gathered for trading, ceremonial, and cultural purposes. However, in the late 1800's, Indigenous ability to access to the Cave and Basin was fundamentally altered as the government took control of the area.

In 1885, through an Order in Council, the Government of Canada set aside 26 square kilometres of land in and around the Cave and Basin to protect the thermal springs on Sulphur Mountain for the benefit of Canadians. Two years later, this was expanded to 674 square kilometres and became the core of the first national park in Canada. In 1981, the site was designated as a national historic site commemorating the birthplace of Canada's national parks.

Parks Canada manages the Cave and Basin National Historic Site as part of one of the most extensive networks of protected historic and natural places in the world. An important requirement in the management of this national historic site is the development of a management plan. The plan sets out the vision and strategic direction for the site for the next 10 years. It outlines specific objectives and actions to achieve this vision and direction in three key areas: cultural resource protection, education and visitor experience.

A key component in the development of any management plan is seeking input from interested Indigenous peoples, key stakeholders and Canadians. It is only through engagement with these groups that Parks Canada can ensure the future direction of the site reflects the perspectives and aspirations of the people it is held in trust for. As such, Parks Canada released the draft plan for public comments from November 6, 2018 to March 1, 2019. Invitations to discuss the draft plan were also sent out to a number of First Nations in Alberta and British Columbia and the Métis Nation of Alberta. All comments received through the engagement program were documented, read and analyzed by Parks Canada specialists.

What We Heard

Comments were received from interested Canadians and Indigenous peoples through a number of formats over the three month engagement window. This included an open house and meetings with the Siksika, Métis, Kainai, and Piikani nations and the Shuswap Indian Band. Members of the public also provided comments electronically through email and an online engagement website. Support for the national historic site and its overall direction outlined in the management plan was high.

The following is a summary of the most frequently mentioned points rather than a comprehensive list of all comments received.

... On Visitor Experience and Heritage Values

Some respondents were of the view that Parks Canada needed to ensure that the focus of the site remained on the significance of the place: the importance of its historical background including its role as the birthplace of the national parks system. A couple of participants noted that keeping to the 'roots' of the site would help it retain its authenticity and allow visitors to fully experience this unique part of our nation's history. They felt that this significance of place should be the driving factor for interpretive content and for special events that take place on the site.

Other commenters felt that the overall personal and non-personal presentation of the site needed to be improved and updated. For certain participants, this included an increased focus on the important role that the site plays in the ecosystem of the valley bottom, as both habitat and a wildlife movement corridor. For others, improved presentation meant expanding visitor experiences and access to the site, including improved opportunities for visitors to interact with the thermal waters.

... On Indigenous Involvement and Participation

This topic garnered the greatest number of comments. The majority of respondents supported an expanded Indigenous presence on site that better incorporated the significant Indigenous history and use of the area, in both personal and non-personal interpretation. Participants clarified that the site was culturally and spiritually important to a number of nations, who also used the area as a meeting place where relationships could be built and strengthened.

It was recommended that Parks Canada not only focus on the historical use of the area but also the modern Indigenous context as well. Some participants suggested that collaborating with other heritage-based organizations, such as Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump or the Banff Centre, would improve Indigenous presentation at the site and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices between the groups.

Many of the nations who participated also expressed an interest in collaborating with Parks Canada to host Indigenous activities on site. These activities could be nation-focussed; providing cultural, spiritual and/or educational experiences to their members, or public-focussed; providing visitors the important opportunities to learn about Indigenous cultures and heritage from the people themselves.

Capacity building and support was another area of interest for many of the nations. Economic opportunities, through contracting or hiring of Indigenous people, was highlighted as a way to support the site's objective of broadening Indigenous participation at the site.

... On Infrastructure

As with all organizations that have significant historical assets, maintenance and upkeep are integral facets of the operations. It was noted that in order to maintain these assets to their expected high quality, sustainable funding is required. Others believed it is important for Parks Canada to maintain not only the historical buildings and structures but also the multi-use trail network and boardwalks in and around the Cave and Basin, as they often play a role in the overall visitors' experience of the site.

... On Ecological Integrity

Some respondents felt that ecological conservation of the Cave and Basin and surrounding area should be a key priority for Parks Canada and the national historic site. It was highlighted that the site and adjacent areas represent a significant element of the busy Bow Valley montane ecosystem, as both a wildlife corridor and habitat. Others recommended that Parks Canada take into consideration the potential impact an increase in visitation would have on the sensitive ecosystem of the area.

Moving Forward

In response to comments received, several changes have been made to the management plan, to better describe the strategic goals of Indigenous involvement and participation and to further emphasise the continuing importance of protection of the culturally and ecologically significant values that define this unique thermal water environment.

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