

2025

Alexander Graham Bell

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

Table of contents

1.0	Introduction.....	3
2.0	Significance of Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site	3
3.0	Planning context	4
4.0	Vision	8
5.0	Key strategies	9

Maps

Map 1:	Regional setting	5
Map 2:	Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site map.....	6

1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada administers one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. Parks Canada's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national historic site, national park, national marine conservation area and heritage canal administered by Parks Canada supports its vision:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by Parks Canada. The *Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of its mandate.

The Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia are important partners in the stewardship of heritage places, with connections to the lands and waters since time immemorial. The Mi'kmaq, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement and, where appropriate, consultation on the management of Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site in years to come.

2.0 Significance of Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site

Alexander Graham Bell was designated a National Historic Person in 1977 for his historical importance as an inventor, teacher and scientist and is best known for the invention of the telephone. His wife and collaborator Mabel Hubbard Bell was designated a National Historic Person in 2017 for her role as community organiser, philanthropist and for providing crucial support to Alexander Graham Bell's work as an inventor and scientist. After losing her hearing as a child, Mabel Bell learned to read lips with encouragement of her parents, who advocated the oral method of education for the deaf.

The Mi'kmaq, who have inhabited the region known as Mi'kma'ki¹ for thousands of years, have their own rich history and contributions to the area surrounding the site. Their presence is a vital part of the history surrounding Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site and community of Baddeck. It is important to recognize that the Mi'kmaq lived on and utilized these lands before European contact, and their culture and traditions continue today.

Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site was founded on an agreement between Bell's descendants and Parks Canada. In 1952, an extensive collection of artifacts related to Bell's life and work was shared with Parks Canada by the Bell family and formalized via a long-term loan in 1955. The artifacts had been stored in Bell's summer home in Baddeck, *Beinn Bhreagh*. At this location, Bell conducted scientific experiments in sound transmission, medicine, aeronautics, marine engineering and space-frame construction. One of the conditions of the transfer was that the artifacts be housed in Baddeck. In 1952,

¹ Mi'kma'ki is the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Mi'kma'ki encompasses Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the island of Newfoundland, and parts of New Brunswick and Quebec

the Historic Sites and Monuments Board recommended construction of a museum to house the memorabilia which was established as a national historic park and was opened to the public in 1956.

The designation of Alexander Graham Bell as a national historic person is under review as of 2025 by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board and Parks Canada due to beliefs and behaviours that are now considered controversial. When complete, recommendations from this review will be made to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and will be shared with visitors at the site.

3.0 Planning context

Location

Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is located in Cape Breton, also known as *Unama'ki*, “land of the fog,” in the Mi'kmaw language. The 10-hectare site is situated in a residential area on the edge of the village of Baddeck, Nova Scotia (Map 1), approximately two kilometres from Trans-Canada Highway 105 that leads from Port Hawkesbury to North Sydney and in the ancestral, unceded and current Mi'kmaw territory² of Mi'kma'ki.

The Village of Baddeck is a community of approximately 800 residents and the municipal and service centre for Victoria County. Baddeck is also considered to be the beginning and end of the world-famous Cabot Trail, and the picturesque town draws many visitors to the site, which is often considered a ‘must see’ destination in the area.

Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site overlooks Baddeck Bay, part of Bras d'Or Lake, and Bell's summer home *Beinn Bhreagh* (Gaelic for “Beautiful Mountain”), where much of his scientific work was pursued. Bras d'Or Lake or *Pitu'poq* is of great significance to the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia and the site provides an important visual connection to an environment that also held a special place in Bell's heart. The site falls within the Bras d'Or Lake watershed, which was designated a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve on June 29, 2011. The Biosphere Reserve was the 16th Biosphere Reserve designated in Canada and is part of a global Biosphere Reserve network.

Co-management

Parks Canada has a strong and growing relationship with the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia, with a budding relationship between the Mi'kmaq and Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site. The conclusion of the *Toqim'aliaptmu'k Arrangement* in March 2025 between Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia brings forth a co-management agreement in which the Mi'kmaq and Parks Canada will co-develop an approach to shared governance to all Parks Canada administered places in Nova Scotia, including Alexander Graham Bell Historic Site.

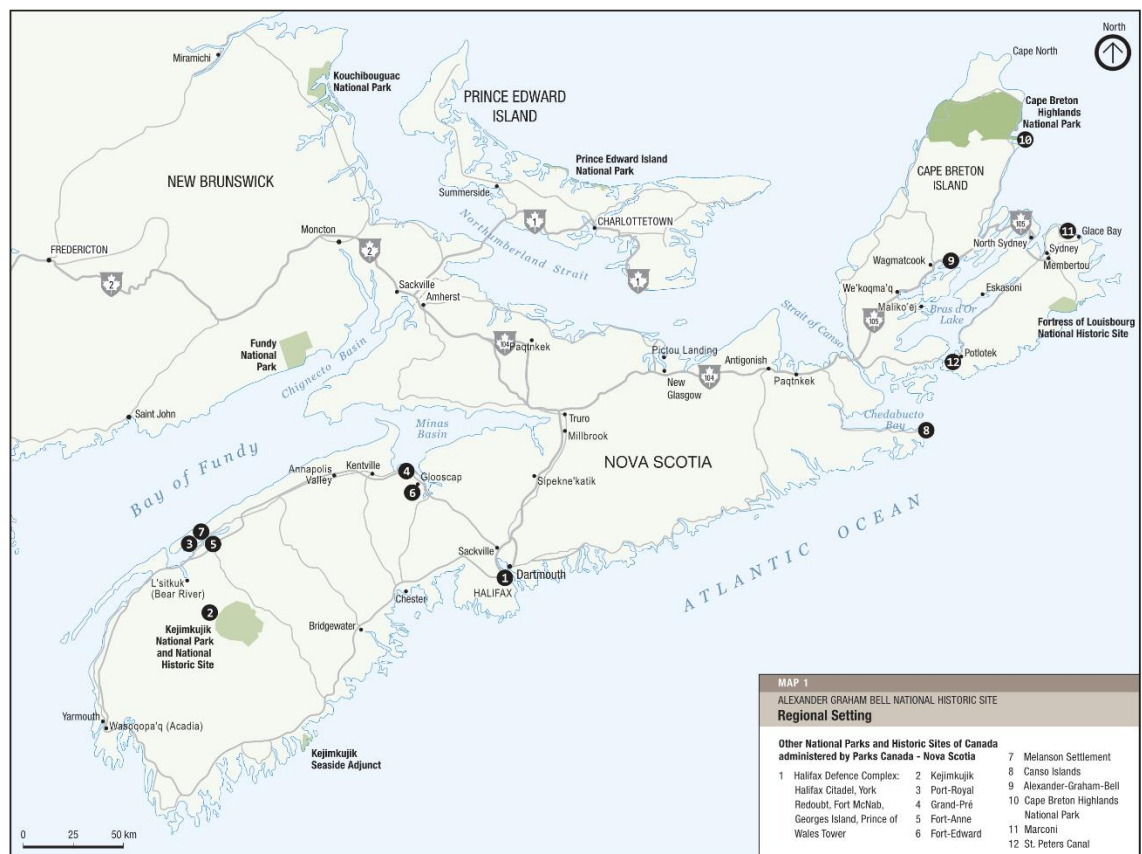
Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq have worked together at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site through the Parks Canada-Mi'kmaq Unama'ki Advisory Committee on matters of interest to the Mi'kmaq including collaborative work and opportunities for economic benefit. This committee was developed under the *Interim Arrangement* with the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia. Established in 2012 and renewed in 2017, the *Interim Arrangement* describes the relationship between Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia. The *Toqim'aliaptmu'k Arrangement* is the latest agreement that outlines how we wish to work together, and this management plan will reflect this Arrangement.

Recent successful collaborative projects between Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq include: Indigenous visitor experiences led by staff from other Parks Canada sites, Elder visits, staff training (blanket exercises), recently refreshed interpretive panels, a Learn to Camp program and free admission for

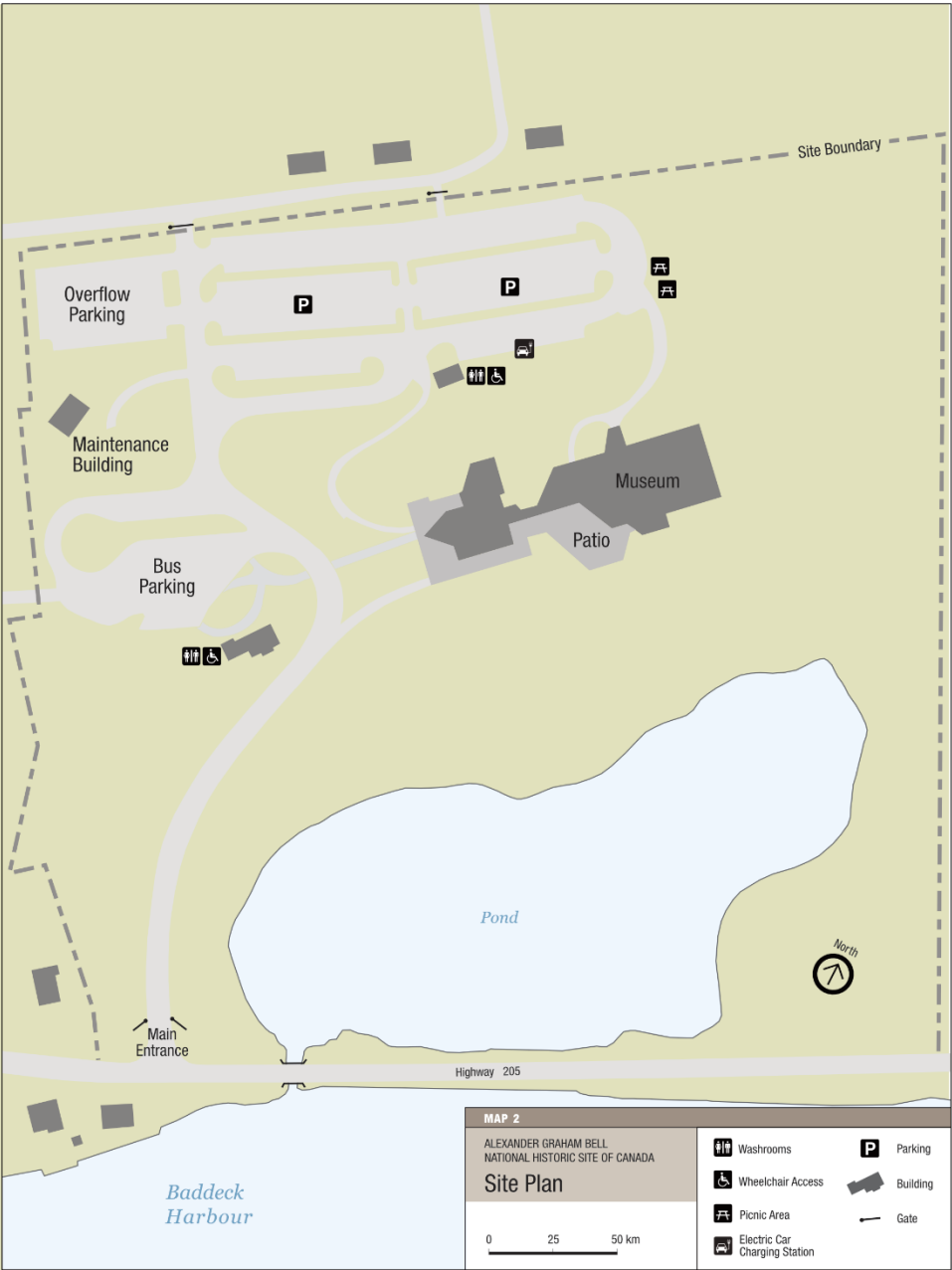
² i.e., the Mi'kmaq did not by treaty cede and surrender the lands of Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site

Mi'kmaq. Given the proximity between Wagmatcook First Nation and the site (less than 20 kilometres), there is a unique opportunity for partnership with this Nation.

Map 1: Regional setting



Map 2: Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site map



Partner relationships

Collaboration is a key component of programming at the site. Parks Canada partners with a range of regional, national, and international organizations to enhance visitor experiences and celebrate the legacy of Alexander Graham Bell.

The site works closely with the Alexander Graham Bell Foundation (Canada) and other groups directly associated with Bell or inspired by his work, including the Alexander & Mabel Bell Legacy Foundation (United States) and the Bell family.

In addition, the site collaborates with Cape Breton University, the Celtic Colours International Festival, and numerous community organizations to support research, cultural programming, and special events. Partnerships with Tourism Nova Scotia and Destination Cape Breton further promote the site as a key tourism destination.

Locally, the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association and the Baddeck Area Business and Tourism Association are important partners and stakeholders.

Partner relationships will be strengthened through implementation of the *Toqim'aliaptmu'k Arrangement*.

Buildings and Grounds

The original A-frame exhibit building (referred to as the “museum”) built in the mid-1950s is designated a “Recognized” federal heritage building³ by the Federal Heritage Review Office. The building is a modern structure with rustic undertones based on a tetrahedral geometric grid. A large addition in 1975-77 tripled the size of the museum. Accessibility modifications were carried out in 1996.

The 10-hectare site is a popular walking spot for locals and includes a series of paved trails weaving through grassy slopes overlooking Baddeck Bay on the Bras d'Or Lake. Visitors can also enjoy recreations of some of Mabel's gardens, inspired by her many practical and ornamental gardens at *Beinn Bhreagh*.

Visitor Experience

With an average visitation of 69,000, Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is one of the most visited national historic sites in the Maritimes. As of 2023, about 60% of visitors are Canadian, with the largest proportions visiting from Ontario, Quebec and from within Nova Scotia. In recent years, visitors were largely adult groups (including many seniors), with about 20 percent families with children.

The current visitor experience centers on three main exhibit halls that highlight Bell's family life and work with Mabel and his associates, an exploration of his work with the deaf, and a detailed study of Bell's Aerial Experiment Association's accomplishments pursuing his dream of flight. Current additional programming includes Mi'kmaw interpretive panels, “white glove” tours, an audio self-guided tour, and interpretation of Mabel's Gardens.

The Alexander Graham Bell Museum Association delivers food and café services onsite and leads and supports special events and projects.

Collections and Cultural Resources

The collection at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site includes donations (many from the Bell family) consisting of books, photographs and copies of material from Bell's personal archives, various

³ The Federal Heritage Review Office evaluates the heritage character of federal buildings as non-designated, “Recognized” or “Classified” in order of increasing score for heritage value based on historical associations, architecture and environment.

personal items, furnishings, clothing, photographs and other historical objects, including awards received by Bell during his lifetime. The site is home to the original hull of Bell's HD-4 hydrofoil (a boat that had fins--or hydrofoils--that lifted it out of the water), its full-scale replica, and a replica of the Silver Dart aeroplane that flew in Baddeck during the 2009 centennial celebrations.

Other memorabilia and historical objects associated with Bell are included in the collection and are on loan to Parks Canada by members of the Bell Family, including diplomas, medals, a silver model of the first telephone commissioned by Bell as a gift to his wife and a portrait of an owl painted by Mabel Bell representing her husband's working habits as a "night owl."

Additionally, the collection includes historical objects related to the work of Bell's associates Frederick W. "Casey" Baldwin and J.A. Douglas McCurdy, such as replicas of early telephones.

The site's unique and extensive collection of material related to Alexander Graham Bell's research is the largest in the world.

Climate Change

Climate change projections for Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site are similar to those throughout Atlantic Canada with a predicted increase in temperature and precipitation, and concerns around flooding and severe weather. Recent research suggests climate change is contributing to more intense tropical cyclones with more extreme precipitation accumulations in the North Atlantic, with notable recent impacts in the area from post-tropical storms Dorian (2019) and Fiona (2022).

Key Considerations

This is the fourth management plan for Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site. Implementation of the most recent (2015) management plan has been successful, with most objectives either achieved or ongoing and relevant for the next plan. Key achievements include maintaining sustainable visitation and visitor satisfaction, increasing the variety of perspectives and story holders at the site, and increasing community use of the site. Challenges include the condition of assets and cultural resources, but ratings have been maintained or are trending upwards. Parks Canada's relationship with the Mi'kmaq has advanced significantly since the last management plan, and the site will be co-managed with the Mi'kmaq now that the *Toqim'aliaptmu'k Arrangement* has been signed and ratified.

This plan builds on the successes and lessons learned from previous management plans. Based on the implementation of the 2015 Management Plan and on emerging directions identified during the development of this management plan, including through the *State of site* assessment (Parks Canada, 2024), key planning considerations are outlined below:

- Preparing for co-management with the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia,
- A setting for learning and experiencing; built assets that support visitor experience and protect cultural resources, and
- Enhancing visitor experience by connecting visitors to the site through the lens of innovation.

4.0 Vision

In 15 to 20 years, Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is a place where visitors are inspired by the spirit of innovation embodied by Alexander Graham Bell, Mabel Bell, and the many Mi'kmaq and settler innovators who still call Unama'ki home.

Here, diversity drives innovation, reflecting adaptive experiences and universal accessibility. Every visitor is invited to connect, explore and feel profoundly welcomed in the energy-efficient museum and on the beautiful grounds overlooking Baddeck Bay on Bras d'Or Lake.

Those who visit will have their curiosity ignited by interactive and engaging experiences and will be able to observe fascinating, well-conserved artifacts.

The local community will gather at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site to share knowledge, connect with nature and support local initiatives. The landscape remains a place of reflection and engagement, fostering a deep connection to its past, present and future.

In the newly co-managed environment of Parks Canada administered places in Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaw perspectives lead and shape the site's management and interpretation, creating a dynamic, respectful narrative that bridges history with the present. *Etuaptmumk*, a concept that represents and respects the strengths of both western science's ways of understanding and Indigenous peoples' ways of understanding, will be increasingly evident at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.

5.0 Key strategies

Aligned with the Government of Canada's results-based planning approach, the management plan serves as a long-term strategic guide, outlining the outcomes Parks Canada wants to achieve. Rather than identifying ten years' worth of specific actions, the plan sets priorities to guide decision making.

The components of results-based planning work together as follows:

- Vision – describes the desired future, setting the management direction,
- Key strategies – presents major themes, introducing management approaches and commitments,
- Objectives – identifies management outcomes, indicating desired results,
- Targets – ties directly to the objectives, defining the amount of change expected, and
- Reporting – publicly communicates ongoing implementation, connecting actions to the direction set in the management plan.

Through the *Toqim'aliaptmu'k Arrangement*, Parks Canada and Mi'kmaw co-management teams will work with diverse community-interest holders to make decisions to meet the targets identified in the plan. The Mi'kmaq, partners, stakeholders and the public will be updated through various communications tools.

Each key strategy contains objectives and targets to guide site management and decision-making over the next ten years. The objectives describe the desired outcomes following the implementation of program activities. Wherever possible, targets are based on measurable data monitored by Parks Canada through Agency-wide programs. Other benchmarks and targets may need to be established and measured locally at the site. Programs and tools that are common sources of measurable targets include:

- Parks Canada monitoring programs (*State of site assessments*)
- Visitor surveys
- Attendance records
- Permits
- Media tracking
- Collaborations

Specific timeframes for reaching targets are provided where possible; where no timeframe is referenced, the target will be achieved during the 10-year plan period.

The key strategies are not in any order of priority and are interconnected. Collectively, they aim to achieve the vision of the site and fulfill Parks Canada's mandate. In many cases, direction for site management activities is integrated into several different key strategies. For the duration of this management plan, two key strategies guide the management direction for Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.

Key strategy 1: Enriching visitor experiences through innovation, inclusion and community engagement

This strategy focuses on improving visitor experience through diversified experiences and working with others as exemplified by Alexander and Mabel Bell, Bell's collaborators and the innovations of the Mi'kmaq. By achieving the objectives below, Parks Canada will make progress towards the vision elements of an inspiring, accessible and diverse place that is enjoyed and supported by locals and cooperatively managed with the Mi'kmaq.

Visitor experience will be enhanced through expanded stories (including those about the deaf and the stories and innovations of the Mi'kmaq), expanded accessibility, diversified outreach and staffing. Parks Canada's *Framework for History and Commemoration: National Historic Sites System Plan* (2019) commits Parks Canada to make space for Indigenous peoples' histories, voices and perspectives at heritage places. The plan encourages history interpretation to go beyond thinking about why a heritage place was designated or established and will be reflected in updates to visitor experience at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.

Partnerships with the Mi'kmaq (including through the *Toqi'maliaptmu'k Arrangement*), under-represented groups and local organizations will lead to more diverse visitation, visitor experiences and local use and support. All aspects of site management will apply *Etuaptmumk*⁴ "two-eyed seeing" and *Netukulimk*⁵, reflecting western and Indigenous knowledge that is seamlessly woven together.

Key Strategy 1 objectives and targets are reliant on the cultural resource conservation, connection to the natural environment and strategic asset management outlined in Key Strategy 2. These objectives will help Parks Canada reach its commitments to connecting to Canadians, having a capable and inclusive workforce and raising Indigenous voices and leadership in cultural heritage conservation.

Objective 1.1: The quality of visitor experiences at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is enhanced through STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)-focused, interactive and engaging programming, tailored to key audiences.

Targets

- By 2030, a dynamic menu of products and interpretation (including those that showcase Mi'kmaw technology and innovation) is available for visitors to enjoy as a result of an updated visitor offer.
- Overall visitor satisfaction at the site is maintained at "Good," by the next *State of site* assessment.
- The number of visitors who state they learned something is maintained at "Good," by the next *State of site* assessment.
- The number of outreach or promotional events targeting key audiences increases from the 2024-25 baseline over the life of this plan.
- The number of families participating in programs increases from the 2024-25 baseline over the life of this plan.

Objective 1.2: Visitors have a greater understanding of and connection to the history of the deaf in Canada and the life of Mabel Bell.

Targets

- By 2035, collaborations between the site and organizations that represent the deaf have increased.

⁴ *Etuaptmumk* or "Two-Eyed Seeing" refers to "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and to using both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012)

⁵ *Netukulimk* "is a complex cultural concept that encompasses Mi'kmaq sovereign law ways and guides individual and collective beliefs and behaviours in resource protection, procurement, and management to ensure and honour sustainability and prosperity for the ancestor, present and future generations." —Elder Kerry Prosper (2011)

- By 2035, the proportion of programming and special events focused on the deaf has increased from the 2024 baseline.
- By 2035, a greater proportion of existing outreach and promotion has shifted to under-represented groups such as the deaf.

Objective 1.3: Community support for and engagement with Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site increases through collaboration and promotion with local businesses and organizations.

Targets

- By 2030, the number of special events delivered in partnership with outside organizations has increased.
- By the end of the term of this management plan, third-party bookings of the presentation hall have increased.
- By 2035, the number of Cape Breton residents visiting the site increases from the 2024 baseline.
- By the next *State of site* assessment, the number of volunteers remains Fair/Good.
- By 2035, Mi'kmaw cultural tourism opportunities across Mi'kma'ki¹ will be promoted at the site.

Objective 1.4: Site visitors with diverse abilities, needs, social identities and cultures find welcoming and inclusive facilities, programs, services and experiences at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.

Targets

- By 2030, the number of inclusive events and programs increases.
- Universal access and inclusion⁶ is incorporated in programs, services, equipment and communications at the site, where possible, in collaboration with existing and new diversity and inclusion-oriented partners and stakeholders, by 2035.
- Barriers to employment are reduced, leading to a more diverse workforce over the life of this plan.

Objective 1.5: The relationship between Parks Canada, the Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaw communities strengthens Mi'kmaw connection with the site.

Targets

- By 2030, the number of all employees who have accessed Mi'kmaw language and Mi'kmaw cultural awareness training increases.
- By 2030 a co-management board between the Mi'kmaq and Parks Canada is functioning as described in the *Toqim'aliapmu'k Arrangement*, which includes the co-management of Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.
- Parks Canada outreach and cultural events taking place in Mi'kmaw communities increases over the life of the plan.
- Through targeted and culturally appropriate recruitment efforts, the proportion of Mi'kmaw staff at the site increases from 2024-25.
- Awareness of economic, employment and recreational opportunities including the "Mi'kmaw access pass" for Parks Canada sites is increased in Mi'kmaw communities over the life of this plan.

Objective 1.6: At Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site, Mi'kmaw stories are told by the Mi'kmaq in their own voice.

Targets

- By 2035, visitors will have more opportunities to engage with the stories of the Mi'kmaq (including Mi'kmaw technological innovations and mastery).
- By 2035, the number of Mi'kmaw employees who have accessed Mi'kmaw language training increases.
- Use of Mi'kmaw language in communications increases over the life of the plan.

⁶ including social inclusivity such as addressing neuro-diverse needs, facilities that are gender-neutral and welcoming to newcomers to Canada.

- Cross collaboration between Mi'kmaw communities and the site increases over the life of the plan.

Key strategy 2: A setting for learning and experiencing

This strategy focuses on maintaining the condition of cultural resources that are accessible to the public, increasing engagement with outdoor spaces at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site and strategic lifecycle management of assets. By achieving the objectives below, Parks Canada will advance its vision of an energy-efficient museum, well-conserved artifacts that visitors can engage with, and a deeper connection between visitors and the surrounding landscape.

Strategic life cycle management (replacing equipment and assets at the end of their life cycle with more efficient options), including in partnership with third parties as appropriate, will lead to energy efficiency at the site. Improvements in managing humidity and temperature (which will continue to be risks to objects given climate change projections) will allow for maintenance of condition of historical objects. Increased public accessibility (including online) of the collection will lead to increased public understanding of the cultural resources.

Increased engagement with the outdoor spaces at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site will be achieved through promotion and programming, including through opportunities to explore Mi'kmaw connections with the land.

Key Strategy 2 objectives and targets support the visitor experience and relationship-building objectives in Key Strategy 1. These objectives will help Parks Canada reach its commitments to conservation of natural and cultural heritage and asset sustainability.

Objective 2.1: Environmental stewardship at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is demonstrated, and the carbon footprint of operations is decreased.

Targets

- Where feasible, all equipment and assets that have reached end-of-life are replaced with more energy efficient options.
- Implementation of green technologies and the use of renewable power in operations at the site increases over the life of the plan, demonstrating progress toward the Government of Canada net-zero emissions by 2050 goal.
- Visitors have opportunities to learn about energy efficiency at the site.
- Third party opportunities to build environmental stewardship at the site and region with local corporations are explored.
- The Mi'kmaw concept of *Msit No'qmaq*⁷ is used to guide environmental management practices at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.

Objective 2.2: Visitor engagement with the outdoor spaces at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is increased, as funding and partnerships allow.

Targets

- Outdoor recreation opportunities are promoted over the life of this plan.
- By the next *State of* site assessment, some visitors note they participated in outdoor programming at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site.

Objective 2.3: Mi'kmaw connections with the landscape are explored, valued, and shared with visitors.

⁷ *Msit No'qmaq* or “all my relations,” is the Mi'kmaw belief that humans are physically and spiritually related to all elements of the natural world and that this relationship is the basis of land and resource management.

Targets

- By 2035, visitors will have more opportunities to engage with stories of Mi'kmaw connection with the landscape.
- The number of visitors who state they learned something at the site remains high by the next *State of* site assessment.

Objective 2.4: The condition of cultural resources is managed to maximize commemorative integrity.

Targets

- The condition of historical objects is maintained or improved by the next *State of* site assessment through consolidation of the artifact collection with similar temperature and humidity needs stored together.
- The condition of heritage assets is assessed and heritage assets that are not of national significance and are underutilized, not critical for visitor experience, or redundant, are identified for rationalization (or return to descendants) by 2035.

Objective 2.5: Public understanding of the cultural resources held at Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site is increased.

Targets

- By 2030, public accessibility of the collection is increased through digitization in public view, digital access, outreach and visible storage.
- By 2035, promotion of digital access to the collection has increased.