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# 2023-2024 Implementation Report

Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse  
National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan



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# Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. Its mandate is to protect and present these places for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Strategic management focuses on the future of each national park, national marine conservation area, historic canal and national historic site that the Agency administers.

The [Parks Canada Agency Act](#) requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for each national historic site. The [Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan](#), tabled in Parliament in December 2022, ensures that Parks Canada is accountable to Canadians by describing how the management of the sites will lead to measurable results that support the Agency's mandate.

This Implementation Report serves as a progress update to Canadians, community partners and stakeholders on the actions and accomplishments Parks Canada has taken to support the vision, strategies and objectives of the Management Plan in 2023 and 2024.



# Strategy 1:

## Advance the understanding, conservation and presentation of the Rideau Canal's rich and complex cultural and natural heritage environment.

This strategy recognizes the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the values of the cultural and natural heritage resources to the canal's cultural landscape, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystem. Supported by regular maintenance and monitoring of cultural and natural heritage resources, strategic capital investment, and cooperation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders, this strategy aims to advance the conservation and presentation of North America's oldest continuously operated canal as the waterway approaches its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.





## Strategy 1 PROJECTS

### Rideau Canal – Ottawa Reach Cultural Landscape Study

Parks Canada worked collaboratively with the National Capital Commission and the City of Ottawa to undertake a [cultural landscape study](#) of the northern section of the Rideau Canal, from Ottawa Locks to Hogs Back Locks, that outlines its heritage values and character-defining elements, and provides conservation guidelines and recommendations.

Informed by public and stakeholder engagement, and ongoing Indigenous consultation, the report will be publicly available in Fall 2025 and will be a living document as understanding of values broadens

The study will be used to help inform the three organizations' respective planning, reporting, project development, and review of internal and external proposals for both the lockstation grounds and the lands along the Rideau Canal.

The study will be released in Fall 2025.

## Shoreline Assessments

Over the summer months of 2023, Environmental Services staff assessed the condition of shorelines along the Rideau Canal of Upper Rideau Lake and the Tay Canal. Work continued in 2024 with the assessment of shorelines in Upper Rideau Lake; collaboration with Cataraqui Conservation to undertake assessment; expansion of the assessment program to the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site, and commencement of a collaboration with Living Lakes Canada to adapt Foreshore Integrated Management Planning for use in Ontario waters. This analysis will help inform updated policies for in-water and shoreline works and other environmental protection activities.



## Conserving Engineering Works along the Canal

Work continued throughout 2023 and 2024 to address the condition of cultural resources along the canal. This included contract tendering, stone cutting and rehabilitation of one wall of Lock 41 at Jones Falls Lockstation, to be completed in 2025; repairs to parts of Lock 47 at Kingston Mills Lockstation, to be completed in 2025; advancing the scope of rehabilitation work for Black Rapids dam and Long Island locks; and completing the installation of a new timber swing bridge at Lower Brewers Lockstation.



## Long Term Asset Management Plan

A 20-year capital plan for built assets was developed in 2023, and projects are prioritized by urgency informed by statutory regulations, public safety concerns and operational impacts. Annual capital and operational costs are captured over a 5 year period, and updated on a regular basis.



## Multi-Species Action Plan

Under the Federal Species at Risk Act, Parks Canada is responsible for preparing action plans to implement recovery strategies for Species at Risk Act-listed species. Over the course of 2023-2024, Environmental Services staff advanced the development of a Multi-Species Action Plan, which will provide strategic direction for the protection, monitoring and management of species at risk, species of cultural interest, and their habitat. Informed by Indigenous, public and stakeholder consultation, the plan will be completed in 2025 and reviewed and updated every 10 years.

## Indigenous Relations

Engagement with First Nations communities is ongoing, including on the Multi-Species Action Plan, and construction work around locks and dams. Through inclusion of Indigenous Participation Plans within Parks Canada's procurement process, opportunities relating to Federal Infrastructure Improvement for Indigenous businesses and communities are identified. These opportunities include contracting for Indigenous-owned construction companies and suppliers, as well as opportunities for training and Indigenous community-led initiatives to support infrastructure renewal projects.

## Academic Research

In 2023 and 2024, Parks Canada contributed to the first two field seasons of the NSERC-funded Freshwater Mission Alliance. This alliance brings together researchers and land managers from Carleton University, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Ottawa University, Toronto Metropolitan University, Rideau Valley Conservation Authority, Kawartha Conservation Authority, and Parks Canada. The goal of the partnership is to generate usable knowledge to address and mitigate pandemic-related pressures on freshwater ecosystems which will help ensure they remain healthy and sustainable.

Collaboration and support of other research projects across the Trent-Severn Waterway and Rideau Canal include the Queens University Biological Station on Opinicon Lake, Trent University including the Trent Aquatic Research Program, Kawartha Conservation, McMaster University, Canadian Museum of Nature and various archaeological investigations

## Rideau Canal Stakeholder Advisory Committee

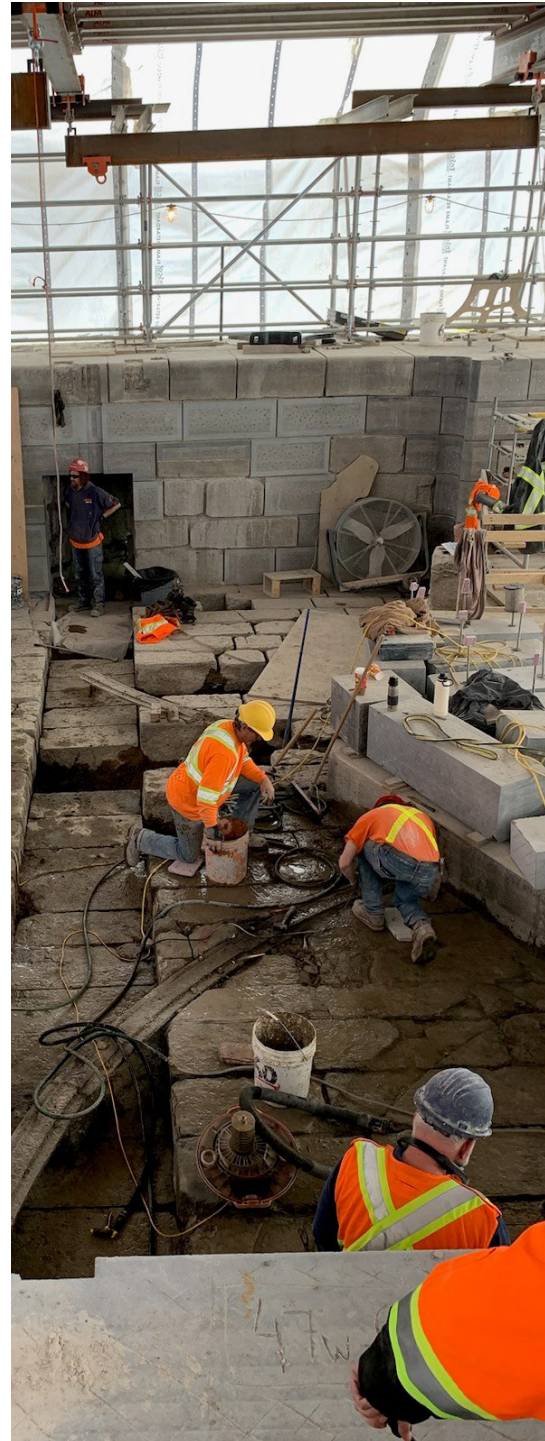
Established in Fall 2024, the Rideau Canal Stakeholder Advisory Committee, comprising representatives from various sectors, was established as an important mechanism to more effectively engage and collaborate with partners, stakeholders, organizations and associations with shared interests along the Rideau Canal.

Its primary role is to provide a consistent, ongoing forum for dialogue between the management of the Rideau Canal and the broader stakeholder community, to share information, discuss challenges and opportunities and collaborate on issues of common interest. The Committee does not replace formal consultation processes, nor does it replace periodic bilateral discussions between the Rideau Canal and individual stakeholders or groups.

## World Heritage

In 2023, Parks Canada completed its second Periodic Report to the World Heritage Centre, as part of the Europe and North America world heritage sites reporting cycle. Results from each site's questionnaire informs a Regional Report that supports the World Heritage Committee's response to the specific characteristics and trends of each region.

This exercise was supported by the completion of State of Conservation reports in 2023 and 2024, highlighting key initiatives and developments occurring within or along the inscribed property, as well as strengthened relationships between [Parks Canada](#) and the [Department of Defense](#), each having responsibility for portions of the site.



## Strategy 2:

### Realize the Rideau Canal's full potential as an iconic Canadian outdoor destination.

The intent of this strategy is to build upon the beloved recreational boating and land-based experiences of the Rideau Canal to offer visitors a wider range of premier experiences, aimed at discovering and enjoying the great outdoors through low-impact recreational and cultural activities and with the support of organizations focused on conservation and sustainability. The Rideau Canal is well positioned to attract new explorers, with its calm and flat water for paddling, its accessible lockstations for camping, and its many connections to trails, roads and communities. Working in collaboration with others to animate, market and promote the Rideau Canal corridor will strengthen the canal's World Heritage profile, and will enhance its reputation as a relevant, world-class and sustainable heritage waterway.



## Strategy 2 PROJECTS

### Paddling the Rideau Canal

Since 2022, over 5,600 people have [learned how to paddle](#) a canoe while experiencing the history and nature of the Rideau Canal from Hartwells Lockstation in the summer. Available to individuals, couples, families and groups, Visitor Services staff and summer students taught introductory paddling techniques, safe operation of a canoe, and encouraged exploration of the waterway through safe paddling routes. Guidance on paddling the Rideau Canal can be found via the Rideau Canal [website](#).



### Lock & Paddle at Hartwells Lockstation

Based on the popular Lock & Paddle event at Peterborough Lift Lock on the Trent-Severn Waterway, Parks Canada launched the inaugural event on the Rideau Canal in celebration of Parks Day, July 20 2024. Over 100 participants in colourful kayaks and canoes enjoyed the thrilling experience of locking through Hartwells Lockstation, complemented by bubbles, beach balls, music, food and kids entertainment. Lock & Paddle returns to the Rideau Canal on July 19, 2025 and will include free lockage for paddle craft at all lockstations on the Rideau Canal for the day.





## Supporting Active Transportation in Ottawa

Parks Canada and the National Capital Commission are working with the City of Ottawa to explore how access across the locks at Hartwells Lockstation can be improved for the diversity of visitors who traverse this site.

To support high-quality active transportation connections and sustainable transportation growth, the City of Ottawa is leading a feasibility study at this busy lockstation following approval of its [Transportation Master Plan – Part 1](#) in April 2023, which includes policies, active transportation projects and networks.

## Strategy 3:

### Effectively administer a 19<sup>th</sup> century canal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This strategy is focused on securing a sound suite of management tools and processes to effectively respond to the diverse pressures and evolving environment of the Rideau Canal as it proceeds through its third century of continuous operation. This includes developing and enhancing sustainable sources of revenue, developing modern, comprehensive and supportive regulations and policy tools to support the effective management, maintenance, proper use and protection of the Rideau Canal, and responding to the impacts of climatic change, in particular as it relates to integrated water management across two watersheds.

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## Strategy 3 PROJECTS

### Law Enforcement

Further to the addition of two Park Wardens to the field unit in April 2023 for a period of two years, for a complement of four Park Wardens, Parks Canada is engaging with enforcement partners to explore joint patrols along the Rideau Canal. During the 2024 operating season, four compliance officers supported canal staff at Ottawa-area lockstations in public outreach and education. In addition, the ongoing shoreline assessments will help provide a greater understanding of the impact of boat wake on adjacent properties and inform safe navigation policy and communications initiatives along the waterway.

### Greening Strategy

To support energy conservation within field unit operations, electric and hybrid fleet continue to be incorporated into the Ontario Waterways fleet as older vehicles are decommissioned. Explorations were also underway in 2023-2024 to increase the heating efficiency of Parks Canada buildings by converting oil furnaces to heat pumps, and converting the HVAC system at the Rideau Canal Headquarters in Smiths Falls to electric and supplemented by hydro power generation.



## Climate Change

To support a greater understanding of the impact of climate change on the operation and management of the Trent-Severn Waterway and Rideau Canal, field unit staff are working closely with colleagues in National Office to assess the impact of, and to develop proactive management responses to, increased temperatures, drought conditions, and increased frequency and intensity of storm events through the new Strategic Environmental Assessment process.

In 2024, the Rideau Canal was selected as a Preserving Legacies initiative led by National Geographic, Climate Heritage Network and International Council on Monuments and Sites. Preserving Legacies is a global initiative that equips local leaders with the scientific knowledge and technical training to develop place and people-based climate adaptation actions.



## Water Management – Monitoring

Over the course of 2022-2024, the Ontario Waterways [gauge network](#) was upgraded with the new telemetry consisting of cellular and satellite modems to improve the real-time data access and retrieval for daily operational cycle activities. This project was supported by Site Services Department (OCIO) within Parks Canada.

The upgrading process with new telemetry is currently extended due to lower than expected cellular coverage across both canals and scheduled to be completed 2025-2027.



## Water Management – Communications

Parks Canada continues to collect and communicate vital public safety information about water and weather trends with First Nation partners, other federal departments, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Fisheries, conservation authorities and municipalities along the Rideau Canal to inform their respective public communications.

In addition to responding directly to stakeholder and public enquiries by phone, email and social media, Parks Canada and the Ontario Waterways Field Unit maintains the [Water Management InfoNet](#) website with important water management information. During peak activity periods, Parks Canada holds frequent information meetings with partners to provide updates and answer questions, and shares conservation authority advisories through our social media channels.

Work advances on a formalized Water Management communications protocol as we gather information and engage with partners.



# Merrickville Blockhouse

## National Historic Site

A management area approach provides specific direction for the management of the Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site, building on the above key strategies with a focus on greater collaboration between Parks Canada, the Merrickville and District Historical Society, and the Village of Merrickville-Wolford. The Merrickville Blockhouse and its historic setting can broaden visitors' understanding of the evolving role of the waterway and its impact on shaping the region, and engage visitors in experiencing the latest chapter in the canal's long history.

Conversations continue with the Merrickville and District Historical Society and the Village of Merrickville-Wolford on the coordination, collaboration and promotion of special events at Merrickville Lockstation and the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum.

