



# Jasper

National Park of Canada

## Annual Report



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## Introduction

Parks Canada is pleased to present highlights of our work to protect and present Jasper National Park's natural and cultural heritage in 2020. This year was unlike any other. It presented many challenges, but it also reminded us of the importance of national parks to all Canadians.

While 2020 began like other years, on March 11, the World Health Organization declared the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to be a world-wide pandemic. Eight days later, Parks Canada temporarily suspended visitor services in all national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas across the country, in support of the Government of Canada's efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19.

During this closure, Parks Canada continued to deliver critical functions, including road and highway maintenance, avalanche control and forecasting, search and rescue, and wildlife management. All non-essential staff began to work from home, many services were moved online and important health protocols were put in place to protect critical workers.

To help Canadians gain access to the health and wellness benefits that come from being in nature, visitor access and services in many Parks Canada-administered places, including Jasper National Park, were gradually restored beginning June 1. Despite the many challenges and rapidly changing realities throughout the year, Parks Canada was able to continue our important work in all areas of operation and park management.

## Welcoming visitors to mountains of opportunity

### Visitor statistics

During the 2020 calendar year, 1.6 million independent visitors came to Jasper National Park, a decrease of about 25% from 2019. There are either no counts or low counts for visitation in March, April and May due to the partial closure of visitor operations. The months of June, July, August and December all experienced decreases in visitation from the previous year. September visitation remained the same and January, February, October and November experienced slight increases over 2019. Group tours are usually included in the total visitation estimate, but were not factored in this year due to the significant drop in group tours in 2020.

### Visitor services in the time of COVID-19

The Jasper National Park Information Centre provided a call centre service starting in early May and throughout the summer. By early July visitors had the option of "porch-side" in-person service.

Day use visitor operations resumed on June 1 and camping resumed on June 22. During the closure, the park prepared plans for staff and visitor safety, operations, communications, and cleaning standards to enable a safe reopening. These plans aligned with provincial and national health guidelines, as well as mountain park and Parks Canada Agency direction.

Jasper National Park instructed visitors with 'what to expect during COVID-19' information on the website, and placed over 160 COVID-19 safety signs throughout the Park to remind visitors about their responsibility to physically distance and sanitize.



Welcoming visitors while keeping physically distanced, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros



"Porch-side" service at the Information Centre, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros

## Trails

Trail repair work was needed on Cabin, Pyramid and Signal fire roads after heavy rainfall last spring, as well as washout repairs and reroutes on the Fryatt Trail, trails 2g, 2b, 8, 8b and more. The trail crew repaired and rebuilt bridges or installed temporary alternatives on trails at Nigel Creek, Trail 2j, Wabasso and Jacques Lake, as well as at Waterfalls campground.

The trail crew also installed new signs on some main trails, repaired trails close to the Jasper townsite and installed bear lockers at the main backcountry campgrounds. They completed campground maintenance, brushing, signage and trail repairs in the Brazeau and Tonquin Valley.

## Winter in Jasper

Of the 1.6 million visitors in 2020, 272,000 arrived during the winter months, which is down approximately 40% from 2019. These numbers include the month of April, however, when park visitor services were suspended and, as such, recorded no visitors. If April is excluded from this count, the visitation rate in the winter only declined about 3% from 2019.

Jasper National Park supports a safe and diverse winter experience by clearing and maintaining over 300 kilometres of roads, managing the avalanche program, maintaining the scenic corridors for sightseeing and wildlife watching, ensuring access to over 40 day-use sites and trailheads, and offering 33 kilometres of groomed cross-country (nordic) skiing and 16.5 kilometres of flat-packed trails.

Trail counters indicate that the multi-use trail network receives more than twice as much use as the groomed cross country ski trails. The Athabasca Snowshoe Loop, established in 2018, attracted over 10% of groomed trail use during the 2020 season.

## Camping in the park

Jasper welcomed 183,840 campers in the frontcountry and 24,751 campers in the backcountry from June 17 onwards. These numbers were down from 2019 by 52% in the frontcountry and 11% in the backcountry, partially due to the delayed opening of campgrounds. Average occupancy within frontcountry campgrounds during the camping season was 68%, on par with 2019. The four most popular backcountry areas —Maligne Lake, Skyline, Tonquin and Brazeau —were at capacity during the peak season of July through early September.

## Whistlers Campground reconstruction

Construction progressed at Whistlers Campground, despite challenges related to COVID-19. Whistlers Campground will reopen in 2021 with 18 new shower and washroom facilities, a new registration centre, graded and levelled campsites, new way finding signs, newly paved roads and reconstructed underground utilities.

This represents the largest investment in Jasper National Park's campgrounds since the 1960s, and one of the largest investments across Parks Canada's national camping infrastructure.



Installing a trail counter, photo Parks Canada K. Weir

## Which trails are most popular?

Jasper National Park counts the number of people using trails at 36 sites. Collecting data from specific sites is important to the future development of visitor use management tools.

The park's four most popular trails — at Athabasca Falls, Maligne Canyon, Sunwapta Falls and Toe of the Glacier — average 5,000 visitors each day. The Valley of the Five Lakes Trail and Path of the Glacier Trail at Mount Edith Cavell each host 500 users a day, while the Mary Schaffer Trail, Lake Annette Trail and Wilcox Pass Trail each host 300 users a day.

## Visitor safety

Jasper National Park staff are available to respond to dangerous situations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, all year round. In July 2020, tragedy struck when an “Ice Explorer” vehicle, owned by Pursuit Collection, rolled over at the Columbia Icefield. More than 20 Parks Canada staff, both on duty and off, responded to this accident, along with first responders and healthcare workers from Jasper and around the province. Our thoughts continue to be with those affected by the accident.

## Roadside wildlife viewing

People standing on the road close to wildlife create an unsafe situation for the wildlife, themselves and others. In 2020, Jasper National Park piloted a new program aimed at promoting safer viewing of wildlife at the roadside. A Restricted Activity Order placed the following conditions for viewing wildlife within 200 m of a roadway:

- stay at least 100 m from any bear, cougar or wolf unless you are within your vehicle;
- stay at least 30 m from any elk, moose, caribou, sheep or goat unless you are within your vehicle;
- do not displace or interfere with the movement of any wildlife at any distance;
- do not contribute to a potentially hazardous situation at any distance; and
- if the animal comes towards you, get back in your car.

The new Restricted Activity Order was well received by the public. Park staff found it much easier to manage ‘wildlife jams,’ and the number of dangerous incidents was reduced. This Restricted Activity Order will be reinstated for 2021.

## Compliance

Roving compliance teams operated 7 days a week and interacted with over 100,000 visitors in 2020. Common issues this year related primarily to parking and congestion at popular beaches and day use areas, improper storage of food or garbage, and illegal camping.

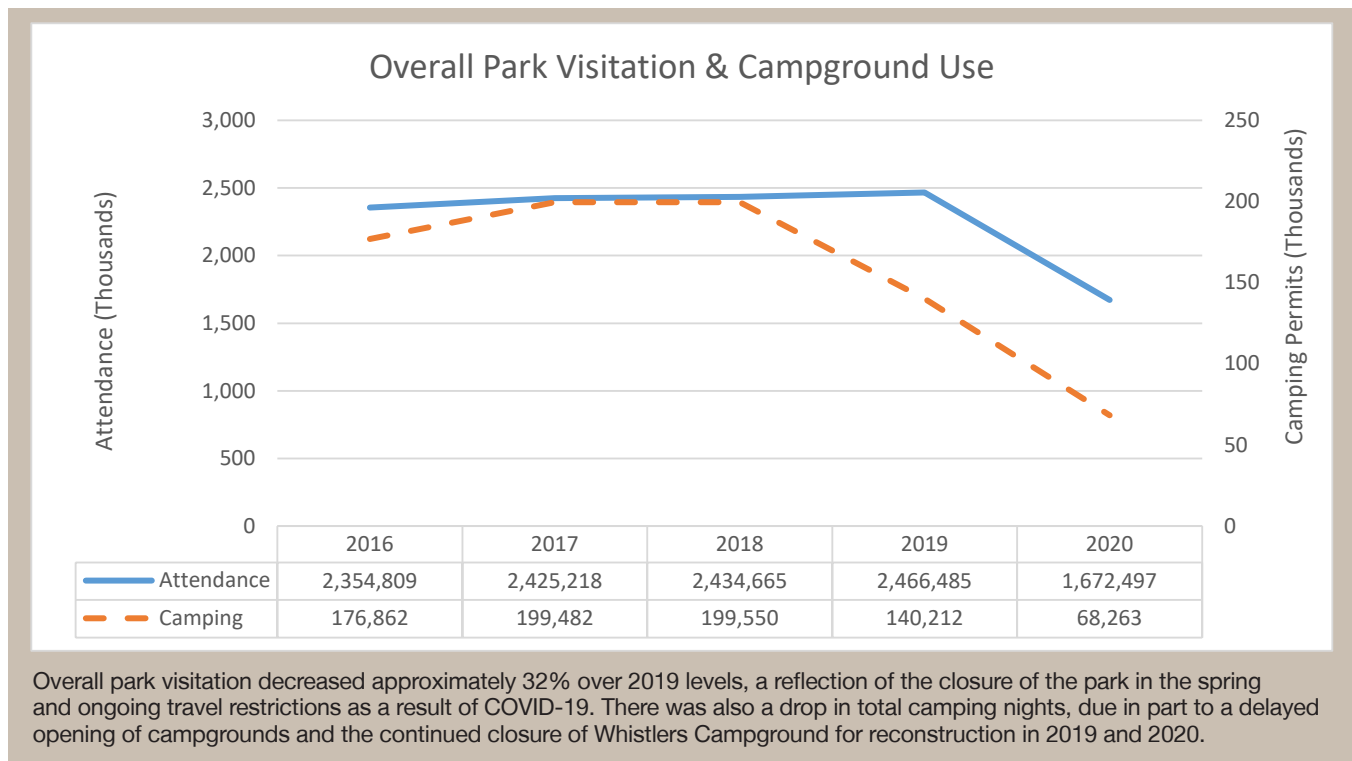


Safe wildlife viewing, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros

## Interpretation

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the interpretation programming for Jasper National Park was limited to the Wildlife Guardian program, which patrols roadways to support safe wildlife viewing and give advice to motorists. Wildlife Guardians responded to 193 wildlife traffic jams from July to October, a decrease of 55% from 2019. This is the first significant decrease in the number of wildlife traffic jams since 2015. Factors contributing to this decrease were:

- a ‘stay in your vehicle’ communications campaign together with the Restricted Activity Order for roadside wildlife viewing;
- the launch of new training resources for seasonal employees;
- and changes to visitor demographics during the pandemic.



## Celebrating history, culture and the World Heritage Site

### Mountain Legacy Project

The Mountain Legacy Project, based out of the University of Victoria, has been taking new photographs at some of the same places where surveyor M.P. Bridgland took photographs in 1915. These “repeat photographs” document dramatic changes to the landscape over time, caused by natural processes (such as mountain pine beetle) and humans. Researchers conducted a first round of repeat photography in 1999, and a second round in 2019. This year, Parks Canada brought M.P. Bridgland’s original glass plate photographs of Jasper National Park into the present by creating high resolution digital scans of these images. The digitized historical photos provide extra detail and clarity, and allow better comparison to the repeat photographs taken by the Mountain Legacy Project in 1999 and 2019.



Establishing a repeat photography station on Old Fort Point in 2019, photo Parks Canada

## Bringing mountains to people where they live

### Education programs

The Palisades Stewardship Education Centre delivered education programs to 12 schools and approximately 260 students at the beginning of 2020. This included a follow-up visit from the Canadian Rockies Youth Summit, where students explored ways to engage in the next round of public consultation for the Jasper National Park draft management plan.

As COVID-19 restrictions prevented students from attending field trips, the Palisades Centre reached out to schools and offered education programs online. Currently there are nine programs for teachers and students in kindergarten through Grade 12, and more in development.



Students snowshoeing at Medicine Lake before the pandemic, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros

### Community outreach

Parks Canada participated in outreach and community events such as the Edmonton Deep Freeze Festival and Avalanche Awareness Day at Marmot Basin. September, saw the delivery of a community stewardship project with Jasper National Park Resource Conservation staff, Jasper Elementary School, École Desrochers, and the Jasper Local Food Society. Students picked apples in Jasper yards and processed them into juice and apple sauce; this initiative promoted “Bear Smart” practices, food sustainability and environmental stewardship.



Processing crab apples, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros

## “Do Not Let Moose Lick Your Car!”

Jasper National Park received significant media attention for two stories about human wildlife conflict in 2020. In May and June, there was a successful communications campaign around the new “stay in your car” regulations put in place by a Restricted Activity Order.

In the late fall, Parks Canada fielded media requests from Britain, Australia, United States and across Canada, in response to an electronic sign encouraging visitors to not let moose lick their cars. The sign was also featured on the CBS Nightly News and the *Tonight Show*.

## The source of information on COVID-19

The Jasper National Park website and social media channels quickly became an important source of information on the COVID-19 situation in the park. A new COVID-19 web page was created on the Jasper National Park website, which includes the latest on public health and safety measures, what’s open and closed in the park, and safety protocols to follow when visiting. The COVID-19 information page received over 147,000 unique page views from March to the end of the year.



Electronic “do not let moose lick your car” sign that went viral, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros

## Ensuring healthy ecosystems

### Southern mountain caribou

In 2020, Parks Canada determined that there is no evidence that caribou remain in the Maligne Range. The last signs of the Maligne herd were observed in 2018; the last known three animals have likely died or roamed out of their range. This small herd persisted for nearly 15 years with less than ten animals and too few females to increase herd size.

Given that no caribou remain in the Maligne Range, the boundaries of the winter caribou habitat closure in the Maligne-Brazeau area changed for the 2020-2021 season. In addition to year-round conservation measures and habitat protections, seasonal closures in important winter caribou habitat are in place from November to March to prevent people from creating trails that wolves can use to prey on caribou in places that are otherwise inaccessible.

Caribou continue to persist in three remaining herds in the Jasper National Park. The Tonquin herd is estimated at fewer than 45 caribou and the Brazeau herd has fewer than 15 caribou. The À La Pêche herd has about 150 individuals, which spend time in and outside of the park, on Jasper’s northern boundary.

As a commitment of the *Multi-Species Action Plan for Jasper National Park*, Parks Canada has developed a proposal for a conservation breeding program to help rebuild caribou populations. The proposal is based on the best available information from decades of monitoring and research by biologists, and from a wide range of experts in the field of caribou conservation. Before any further considerations are taken, the proposal will undergo a comprehensive review by external experts. For more information: [parks.canada.ca/caribou-jasper](https://parks.canada.ca/caribou-jasper)



Southern mountain caribou in Jasper National Park, photo Parks Canada L. Neufeld

### Ecological monitoring

Just as the 2020 bird breeding season started, the ecological monitoring team received approval to start field work with a number of COVID-19 protocols in place. Following these protocols kept the team safe while conducting their important and time-sensitive work.

This year, the team serviced 99% of the remote cameras for mammal monitoring, surveyed and protected blister-rust-resistant whitebark pine, planted more than 2,400 whitebark pine seedlings, installed protection measures at black swift nesting sites, completed surveys to identify new black swift nests and monitor existing nests, and completed bat monitoring.

## Protecting little brown myotis

Access to an important over-wintering site at the Bedson Mine for little brown myotis (also called little brown bats) was eroding and in danger of collapse, potentially trapping and killing these endangered bats. A culvert was installed at the opening of the mine to provide protection.



Protecting little brown myotis, photo Parks Canada

## Vegetation restoration

The vegetation restoration program promotes functional and resilient ecosystems dominated by native vegetation communities. Through local and landscape management actions, Parks Canada restores the functionality and ecological services of degraded landscapes. Degradation typically follows recent human disturbance, and/or the introduction of invasive, non-native plant species.

The main focus of the 2020 season was on controlling invasive plants and restoring vegetation in the Jasper townsite, and transplanting Douglas fir saplings into popular frontcountry campgrounds.



Whitebark pine monitoring, photo Parks Canada

## Wildfire risk reduction work

In 2020, the Government of Canada announced \$6.9 million to help control, understand and mitigate the impacts of mountain pine beetle in several rocky mountain national parks. The majority of the projects are set to take place in Jasper National Park, where the impacts of this native insect are most significant.

Allocated over three years, the funds will help Parks Canada enhance our understanding of how mountain pine beetle affects our forests, and will support our actions to reduce the increased wildfire risk that results from beetle-killed trees. The work will be concentrated in the forests that surround the communities located within Jasper and Banff national parks.

## Resources for fire management

In addition to existing fire management personnel and a helicopter dedicated to fire response, Parks Canada increased the capacity of the fire program in Jasper National Park with the following additional national staff and resources:

- Two new weather stations at Maligne Lake and Ranger Creek were added to the existing four. These stations collect information used to calculate fire danger across the park.
- A second four-person crew dedicated to initial attack was added to Jasper's fire program.
- A second fire technician was hired. Fire technicians act as duty officers, monitor weather stations, analyze data, develop plans for prescribed fires, and assist in planning and implementing wildfire risk reduction and preparedness activities.

## Working together

This year, 800 whitebark pine seedlings were planted in Mount Robson Provincial Park as part of Jasper's partnership with British Columbia to work together for the recovery of this important endangered species. An additional 2,400 seedlings were planted in the Mount Edith Cavell area.

## Initial attack crew deployed to USA

In September, members of the Jasper National Park fire management team travelled to Oregon to assist with the unprecedented wildfire emergency response for the west coast states. Parks Canada is a member of the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) and assists partners with additional resources through international agreements when there is significant need.

Seven members of Jasper's fire management team were deployed. Most joined a 20-person Parks Canada crew, while one member helped with helicopter operations and another was a task force leader. In addition to helping suppress a massive wildfire, the team followed strict COVID-19 protocols while in the United States, and quarantined for two weeks once they returned home to Canada.



Members of the Parks Canada initial attack crew deployed to Oregon, photo Parks Canada S. van der Ros

## Strengthening relationships with Indigenous people

In spite of the challenges posed by 2020, Jasper's Indigenous Relations program continued to work with the more than 20 Indigenous groups who comprise the Jasper Indigenous Forum. The pandemic provided an opportunity to develop new processes and capacities to continue our work in the future. This work includes discussion of park management and operational issues, as well as specific consultation and engagement for park projects.

### Site renaming and systemic racism

Inspired by the events of this summer that drew attention to the prevalence and impact of systemic racism throughout our country, we began engagement with Indigenous partners on a number of projects that critically explore and address explicit and implicit racism within Parks Canada administered sites and operations. This includes the renaming of Jasper places with problematic names, as well as working with Indigenous partners on a series of journalistic pieces that explore how Indigenous partners have experienced racism at Parks Canada administered sites.

### Continued conversations

Engagement with Indigenous partners has continued, including two online meetings of the Jasper Indigenous Forum, continued progress with the Indigenous Exhibit Working Group and a number of other engagement initiatives. In total, we hosted 12 engagement sessions and 2 ceremonies with partners this year, across various projects and initiatives.

### Reconnection with the land

Reconnecting with the land is an important step towards addressing a number of systemic issues that date back to the creation of the national park system. Throughout 2020, Indigenous partners continued to come to Jasper for healing, ceremony and enjoyment. The Cultural Use Area continued to be an important site for Indigenous Partners to gather, camp and host spiritual and community events. Partners accessed the Cultural Use Area to host eight events over the summer and fall.



An Indigenous partner discusses Indigenous use of plants with staff members prior to the pandemic, photo Parks Canada K. Gedling



Indigenous partners share information with a staff member at a working group meeting prior to the pandemic, photo Parks Canada N. Gaboury

## Fostering open management and innovation

### Management planning

Jasper National Park, along with the other mountain national parks, is in the process of reviewing its 2010 Management Plan. Management plans are developed through consultation and input from various people and organizations, including Indigenous partners, local and regional residents, visitors and stakeholder organizations. An initial phase of consultation was conducted in early 2019. The second phase of consultation, which will focus on gathering feedback on a draft management plan, was initially scheduled to take place in 2020. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, consultation activities were suspended for all national parks and historic sites. Parks Canada looks forward to resuming public consultation on the draft management plan in April 2021.

### Financial summary

In fiscal year 2019-20, the Jasper Field Unit (which includes Fort St. James National Historic Site in British Columbia) had a budget of \$27.5 million. The budget is primarily derived from revenue from entry fees, campground fees and land rents.

In 2020, 54% of the budget was allocated to staff salaries, 28% to operating costs and 18% to capital investments.

Additionally, the field unit received approximately \$48.6 million in special funding for projects related to wildfire management, conservation and restoration, and investment in assets, including trails, campgrounds, roads and bridges.

## Managing growth and development

### Municipal development

The year 2020 was another busy one, with a total of 156 development permits issued in the Municipality of Jasper, for everything from new fences to new homes and businesses. Several multi-family units also began construction.

Following public consultation, Pursuit Collection was issued a development permit to proceed with a new hotel development on a vacant lot on Connaught Avenue. The hotel will have 88 guest rooms, and all required staff accommodation will be provided on an adjacent Pursuit property.

### Review of zoning regulations

On a national level, Parks Canada's review of several regulations under the *Canada National Parks Act*, including the Town of Jasper Zoning Regulations, is ongoing. Jasper Field Unit continues to make positive changes within current parameters, and released the Interim Policy for Secondary Suites in March 2020, permitting secondary suites in most zones in the Town of Jasper. This has increased the number of legal units for renters.

### Construction of residential staff housing

In an effort to densify staff housing, Parks Canada began construction on a residential duplex and a five-plex that will house Jasper National Park staff in modern, energy-efficient buildings. These facilities will maximize the number of residences in each building as per the established zoning on each lot. It is anticipated that construction will be completed in 2021, providing housing for seven staff members and their families.

### Working together

Parks Canada continues to work closely with the Municipality of Jasper, meeting regularly to discuss items of mutual interest. Key topics in 2020 included COVID-19 response measures, increasing the housing supply in town using all available mechanisms, and ongoing discussions on emergency response, including FireSmart and fuel reduction in and around town.

Parks Canada also continues to collaborate with the Jasper Community Housing Corporation on housing initiatives to provide more rental and leased units in town while respecting the legislated boundary.

Commercial Floor Area (CFA) Cap 2001	9,290 m <sup>2</sup>	% of Total
Developed CFA	4,560 m <sup>2</sup>	49%
CFA Not Developed, but Allocated	3,122 m <sup>2</sup>	34%
C1/C2/C3/C4 CFA available for Allocation	1,608 m <sup>2</sup>	17%
S Block CFA available for Allocation	0 m <sup>2</sup>	0%

# Jasper National Park Stats 2020



**1.6 million** visitors



**33 km** of groomed and packed cross-country ski trails



**183,840** frontcountry campers



**16.5 km** of flat-packed trails for winter walking, snowshoeing and fat biking



**24,751** backcountry campers



**8 Indigenous community events** at the Cultural Use Area



Wildlife guardians responded to **193 wildlife jams**



Social media stats:



**1,500** whitebark pine saplings planted in 1 day

**147,000** unique page views on COVID-19 webpage

**15% increase** of followers on facebook and twitter

**1,900** email subscribers