

Thousand Islands National Park

# What We Heard:

Management Plan Consultation Report

2022



# Thousand Islands National Park

## ‘What We Heard’ Management Plan Consultation Report

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## 1.0 Introduction:

Parks Canada Mandate:

*On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations.*

The *Canada National Parks Act* (2000) requires that Parks Canada prepare and review management plans for each heritage place in its care at least once every 10 years. Management plans are developed through consultation with Indigenous people, partners, stakeholders and the public, and are intended to serve as the key accountability document to Parliament and to Canadians for Parks Canada management and decision-making.

Parks Canada began working on a new management plan for Thousand Islands National Park (TINP) in 2018, starting with a State of the Park Assessment (SOPA) which described the current state of ecological integrity, cultural resources, external relations, Indigenous relations, visitor experience and built assets. To develop the SOPA, key issues were identified by the park management team and validated by Indigenous partners, external partners and stakeholders. Based on the results of the SOPA and a review of the 2010 Management Plan for TINP, a draft vision and four key considerations for the future of TINP were identified and summarized in the draft Management Plan:

- Working together to achieve conservation goals in a fragmented landscape;
- Re-imagining the visitor experience;
- Resilience and sustainability of assets; and,
- Awareness and Indigenous relations.

The Draft Management Plan was shared with Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public for consultation.

## 2.0 Consultation Process:

In order to facilitate meaningful opportunities to contribute to the development of the new management plan for TINP, an engagement plan was developed that utilized in-person and online approaches to solicit input.

### **Phase 1 Engagement, Pre-Consultation on Vision Elements and themes (2017-18)**

To initiate reflection on the future of the Thousand Islands National Park, current management issues were identified by the park team and validated by external partners, Indigenous partners and stakeholders through existing relationships. As the park has a working relationship with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, the key issues and potential vision elements were presented to Akwesasne community leaders at regular quarterly meetings to gather input and feedback. Feedback was received from partners and stakeholders at a Park Advisory Committee meeting in December 2017. A Visitor Information Program (VIP) survey was conducted at the park in the summer of 2018 to gather feedback from visitors.

## **Phase 2 Public Consultation on Draft Management Plan (2019-20)**

Between May 15 and July 15, 2019, the second phase of consultation was conducted to inform and engage in discussions about the future of the park with local, regional and national audiences. During Phase 2, the Draft Management Plan was posted online along with a comment card to gather feedback on the proposed vision and potential opportunities for the park over the next 5-10 years. Invitation to comment on the draft plan was advertised in newspapers (Brockville Recorder and Times, Gananoque Reporter), and sent to the park's seasonal boater mailing list. The consultation was shared on the *Thousands Islands National Park, Town of Gananoque* and *Visit the 1000 Islands* Facebook pages who collectively have over 17 thousand followers. Small cards promoting the online consultation were handed out to approximately 500 park visitors on the mainland and on the islands during the consultation period. A link to the online consultation was posted on the Consulting with Canadians website. In addition, personal invitations to comment were sent to over 50 partners and stakeholders. To gather input from a younger demographic, the online comment card was reopened from January 15 to February 15, 2020. During this time, all Parks Canada Campus Clubs were invited to participate and presentations and information sessions were held at the University of Ottawa and Queen's University.

In the online comment card, participants were asked to rank each proposed objective on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). They were also given an opportunity to share feedback on the vision for the park, and make suggestions for Area Management approaches on the mainland and on the islands.

In addition to the online comment card, a series of in-person sessions were held with various audiences including the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, partners, stakeholders, local residents, youth and the general public. These sessions followed a similar format, starting with a presentation on management planning, followed by an opportunity for participants to interact with subject matter experts, ask questions, and complete the online comment card survey. A Park Advisory Committee Workshop including representatives from municipalities, Thousand Islands Watershed Land Trust, Algonquin-to-Adirondack Collaborative, Regional Tourism Organization 9, Frontenac Arch Biosphere Foundation, Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network was also facilitated in May 2019. During this period, public open houses took place for two days.

## **3.0 Who We Heard From**

### **Participation**

During consultations, Parks Canada met with Indigenous partners, multiple stakeholders, university students, local residents and the general public (see table 1). Parks Canada received 175 comment cards in addition to a number of written submissions. Results from the comment card questions varied depending on the number of participants that completed individual questions. In addition to comment card responses, over 150 comments were recorded during in-person meetings and events, and from written submissions. All of the input received through this process has been carefully analyzed and was considered in finalizing the updated management plan.

**Table 1: Who We Heard From**

	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Meetings and feedback from key partners and stakeholders (CPAWS, St. Lawrence Parks Commission, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Thousand Islands Area Residents' Association)	5
Meetings with Indigenous partners (Mohawks of Akwesasne, Mohawks of Bay of Quinte)	4
Park Advisory Committee Workshop including representatives from the Town of Gananoque and the Township of Front of Yonge, Thousand Islands Watershed Land Trust, Algonquin-to-Adirondack Collaborative, RTO9, Frontenac Arch Biosphere Foundation, Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network (May 24, 2019)	11
Public Consultation Open Houses (May 24 & 25, 2019)	36
Online Comment Card (May 15-July 15, 2019)	91
Online Comment Card (January 6-February 6 2020)	84
Post-secondary Visits – Students reached (January – February 2020)	105
<b>Total participants engaged</b>	<b>336</b>

### Demographics

The online comment card included optional questions about demographics. The majority of respondents from online consultation were 60% regional residents, 50% boating visitors, 24% mainland visitors, and 52% interested members of the public. Initially, most respondents (44%) were between 45 and 64 years of age, with only 9% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 years of age. As a result, from January 15 to February 15 2020, the online comment card was reopened, and all Parks Canada Campus Clubs were engaged to gather input from a younger demographic. This approach resulted in an increase in respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 years to 24%, while 59% of respondents were over the age of 45.

### Indigenous Consultation

From the beginning and during each step of the management planning process, the park engaged with representatives of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. Most of these interactions occurred during regular quarterly meetings in order to discuss issues and gather input and feedback in identifying themes and a proposed vision. The park received feedback from the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne after the Scoping document and the State of the Park Report. In February 2019, a presentation to Grand Chief and Council was given by the Park Superintendent. The draft plan was reviewed during a quarterly meeting in April 2019. As a result, the interests of the Mohawks of Akwesasne to support ecological connectivity was highlighted in the *Park Context* section of the plan. The spiritual importance of Main Duck Island to the Haudenosaunee was also acknowledged. The park also shared the draft plan with the Mohawks of the Bay

of Quinte who had no specific concerns. The park also reached out to the Algonquins of Ontario related to the future of the Skoryna Property. As with the previous plan, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne provided a foreword at the beginning of the management plan.

## 4.0 What We Heard

Responses to the online comment card and feedback provided at in-person sessions indicated that participants were receptive to the proposed vision elements and four key considerations identified in the Draft Management Plan.

### 4.1 Vision

Overall responses were positive with 82% of respondents supporting the proposed vision for Thousand Islands National Park. Respondents who disagreed with the park vision mentioned the lack of dock availability, infrequent local engagement and a dislike for the visual appearance of the park's natural state as their primary concerns. In contrast, many respondents mentioned the importance of Indigenous presence, asset resilience, the need for day use programs and partnerships both strategic and ecological. It was noted that to accurately reflect the objectives of the plan, the vision should include a reference to protecting species at risk and to maintaining ecological integrity. The general message from respondents was that the plan must clearly articulate Parks Canada's mandate and that the park must continue to protect the ecological integrity of the park while balancing the visitor experiences people have enjoyed for generations.

When asked which vision elements resonated the most:

- 29% noted the significance of ecological connectivity and protection through working with partners, along with leadership around responses to climate change.
- 24% of respondents mentioned asset resilience and efficiency which included dock reconfiguration.
- 20 % recognized the need for exceptional day use programs and experiences that enable inclusive access to the park.
- 20 % acknowledged the importance of collaborating respectfully with Indigenous partners.
- 6% pointed out the importance of recreational tourism to the local economy.

### 4.2 Key Strategy 1: Working Together to Achieve Conservation Goals

All of the objectives for this strategy were met with agreement (91% to 95%) from respondents both through the online comment card and through the public open houses. There was an obvious importance attributed to the park being a conservation leader and working with regional partners to improve ecological connectivity and ecosystem health. The balance between education and protection was raised as an issue in several responses. Many felt that more public education would allow visitors to gain a deeper respect and understanding of this unique and treasured area within the thousand islands region. For example, the importance of the protection of Deerberry was not clearly understood by visitors to Endymion Island. Some respondents felt that restoration of the natural landscape at places like Mallorytown Landing was a result of poor asset management rather than a protection measure. Some feedback also suggested that the park could improve communication about Parks Canada's mandate with ecological protection as a first priority, and that while protection is important, the economic importance of the region should also be taken into account when making management decisions.

“Stop investing in more and more docks. This should not be the focus of a national park. The land and water you are mandated to protect should be your primary concern.”

Online survey respondent

#### 4.3 Key Strategy 2: Re-imagining the Visitor Experience

The majority of respondents (78% to 96%) agreed with the objectives outlined in this strategy. Respondents acknowledged the increase in visitation and tourism in the region and were in favour of better access to islands to give the opportunity of an island experience to all visitors. There was some concern that increased accessibility will impede the ecological integrity of the islands and create further

“It would be great to see more people out enjoying the islands who do not own boats. 1000 islands is beautiful, yet only accessible to those fortunate enough to own large boats.”

Online survey respondent

damage to the park’s natural landscape. Many boaters mentioned that they value the park islands because of family history that goes back several generations and they fear losing this connection. There was a desire for the park to develop strategies to facilitate experiences that are respectful and harmonious (ex. further limits to generator use, preventing monopolization of dock space, more mooring buoys, an improved fee collection system). It was noted that the park’s current users supported the need to appeal to younger generations and families. A common suggestion was that interpretation on the mainland and on the islands would allow visitors to understand the importance of protection for

species and plants like Deerberry. There was also support for involving Indigenous partners in visitor experience and conservation initiatives. Long-time visitors reported a genuine curiosity about the Indigenous history of the region especially at places like Main Duck Island.

#### 4.4 Key Strategy 3: Resilience and Sustainability of Assets

A large percentage of responses received were from the boating community who had concerns about the rebuilding of marine structures following flooding events of 2017 and 2019. While most respondents wanted to see more resilient structures built, they also wanted to see more docks opening following the damage caused by high water in 2017.

This was the strategy that received the most support from respondents (88% to 99%) who expressed the need for asset sustainability and resilience to climate change and high water levels. This included continued infrastructure maintenance on existing buildings, and dock configurations that adapt to changing water levels. The general consensus from respondents was that a well balanced approach between boaters and non-boaters should be established. Dock availability and boat size remained an ongoing concern for many respondents. Non-boaters and paddlers felt that the boating community was the park’s primary target market and resources should be equally concentrated on all demographics. The development of kayak routes and maps was mentioned in addition to improving island accessibility. There were also concerns that the park is focusing too much on boater needs, when Parks Canada is mandated as a first priority to protect and restore healthy ecosystems and contribute to the recovery of species at risk.

“Over the past 35 years, I have witnessed the continual reduction of island services and gradual degradation of docks and marine facilities. Asset design for the next 10 years and beyond needs to factor in docking facilities that are damage tolerant (from climate extremes) and accommodate larger vessels.”

Online survey respondent

#### 4.5 Key Strategy 4: Awareness of Thousand Islands National Park

It was acknowledged by respondents that brand awareness and tourism play a critical role in the economic growth of the thousand islands region. 83% of respondents agreed that the park should improve awareness regionally through outreach, promotion and partnerships.

“As a neighbour, I would like to hear more about what the park is doing (plans, special events, meet the staff evenings). Many of us have never heard of a Management Plan review.”

Online survey respondent

Partners were especially supportive of branding along the 1000 Islands Parkway with ideas such as “respect our nature” signage, road painting and initiatives that go beyond the park’s boundary. Most respondents also supported an increase in Indigenous involvement (76%) and leveraging the park’s proximity to Highway 401 (60%). Local respondents expressed the importance of communication and transparency on operations and events. Many stated that the public consultation open houses gave the ability for visitor input and understanding of operational aspects that was not previously available. As a solution, many noted that

regular outreach and education will allow the park to communicate and promote events and projects while promoting community involvement.

#### 4.6 Area Management Approach

##### Mainland Properties (Mallorytown Landing, Landons Bay and Jones Creek)

The majority of the responses for mainland area management were considered important:

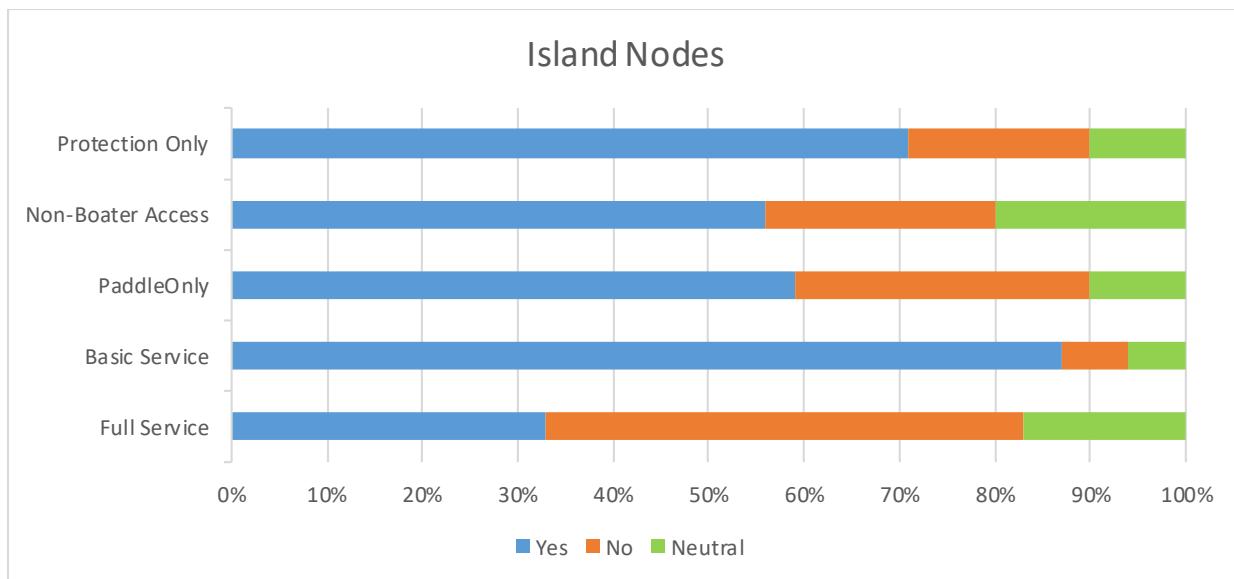
- 78% said that new multi-purpose facilities were important to them.
- 75% supported the idea of working with partners to leverage the Thousand Islands Parkway with mainland experiences such as bike rentals, day long itineraries and fitness events.
- 65% said that accessibility to Landons Bay was important to them.
- 62% said that visitor activities that connect Mallorytown Landing and Landons Bay were important to them.

##### Island Properties

Most of the respondents felt that the objectives associated with the Island Properties were important:

- 71% said that putting a system in place that improves access to the islands was important to them.
- 66% felt that it was important that new island experiences and access options be created for visitors who do not own boats.

The comment card also asked for feedback regarding the island visitor areas that would be managed to support different types of visits including a day use offer, a full service offer, a basic service offer, and a paddle-only offer. Respondents were divided on whether they support the islands being managed to support these different types of visits. Respondents were supportive of areas and facilities being defined specifically for paddling activity.



Some specific locations were suggested by 72 respondents for the island offers. The day use offer was suggested for Grenadier and Thwartway islands. The full service offer was suggested for McDonald, Beau Rivage, and Grenadier islands. It was suggested that the basic service offer would be suited to Endymion, Gordon and Camelot islands. Paddle-only offers were suggested for Mulcaster and Thwartway islands. While few respondents indicated which islands would be best-suited for protection-only, Endymion, and West Grenadier islands were suggested.

#### 4.7 Zoning

50% of respondents agreed with the park's proposed zoning changes, while 28% remained neutral. There was some confusion among respondents about which zones were changed from the previous management plan. For the purpose of zoning in Thousand Islands National Park, boat access to docks was not considered motorized access to the park. Most islands throughout the park remained an unchanged zone 2. As a result, the definition of motorized access to the islands has been clarified in the zoning section of the management plan.

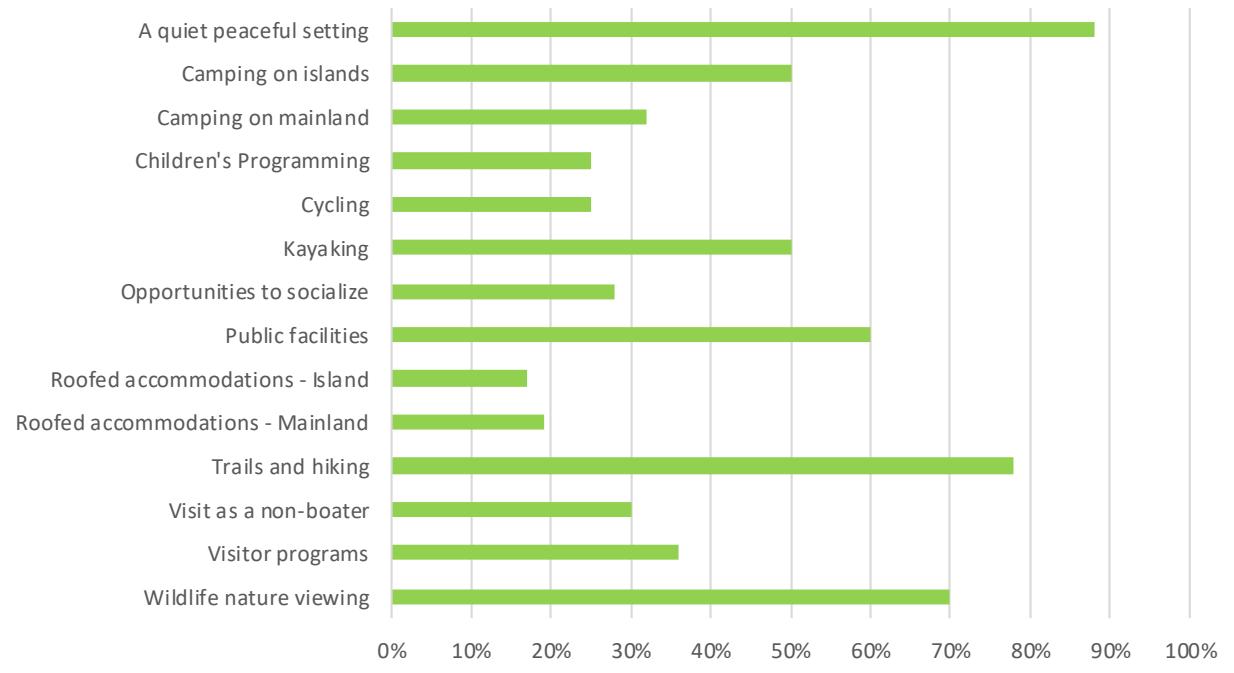
#### 4.8 Other Feedback

Additional feedback was sought to help inform Visitor Experience planning at the park. When asked which services or facilities respondents had participated in within the past 2 years, top responses were the Visitor Centre at Mallorytown Landing (46%), hiking on mainland trails (54%), and overnight mooring or docking (44%). Information collected about the visitor experience has been used as a reference for the creation of a Visitor Experience Strategy (VES) for the park.

#### What are you most looking for in a Visitor Experience at Thousand Islands National Park?

Most respondents indicated that they are looking for a quiet, peaceful setting. Other popular responses were trails and hiking activities along with nature viewing. Some other suggestions that were not listed as options in the comment card were services and promotions for local residents (swimming, free passes), and access to the history of the islands, including Indigenous history and culture (island names, traditional knowledge).

## What are you most looking for in a Visitor Experience?



## How to improve the experience for boaters, including ways to attract new/beginning boaters?

Respondents had mixed feelings on ways to improve the experience for boaters and ways to encourage new boaters.

- 50% said better enforcement is required.
- 47% said more docks are required.
- 45% said more mooring buoys are a good solution.
- 41% said the park should renew permit and length of stay policies.
- 31% of the respondents had other ideas and specified the need for limiting boat sizes, reducing the number of dock stays, removing the season's pass, prohibiting generators throughout the park, and creating speed limits and "no-go" zones.
- 27% liked the idea of reserveable dock spaces.

## What is the most important thing that the park should focus on in the next 10 years?

10 Year Focus Responses (%) n=62	
Improve ecological connectivity and maintain preservation through education and strong relationships with regional partners and stakeholders	32%
Design efficient and resilient assets that respond to climate change and other emerging trends	31%
Provide immersive and experiential day use programs that are accessible to all visitors	10%
Managed visitation and visitor-use	10%
Collaborate respectively with Indigenous partners	5%

The responses to this question were similar to the elements of the vision that resonated the most with respondents. Ecological connectivity, resilient assets and an effective day-use program were among the most popular suggestions for focus over the next decade.

## 5.0 Next Steps

Following the consultation period, feedback was reviewed and incorporated into a final management plan in the following ways:

- Parks Canada's first priority of maintaining or restoring the ecological integrity of the park has been clarified in the vision.
- A reference to species at risk has been added to the vision to more accurately reflect the objectives in the first key strategy.
- In Objective 1.1, the mitigation of the impact on connectivity of Highway 401 has been changed to include nearby roads, 1000 Islands Parkway and County Road 5.
- In Objective 1.3, public outreach was incorporated as a part of ecological protection. Outreach remains an important element of the fourth key strategy.
- In Key Strategy 2, careful planning and visitor use management has been clarified to include mention of sustainable visitation levels, visitor impact and traffic management.
- In Key Strategy 3, environmental protection has been added as an asset priority.
- In Key Strategy 4, examples of outreach have been listed to include public information sessions, local events and mailing lists.
- Area Management: Island Properties – An introduction has been added referencing the presence of conservation only areas. Mooring buoys were added to the target as an example of a system that facilitates better management and access.
- The importance of Main Duck and Yorkshire islands to the Haudenosaunee was emphasized.
- The zoning description has been modified to indicate that in Zone II areas, motorized access to docks is permitted. Most islands that were previously zone 2 remain unchanged in terms of zoning.

This plan will be submitted to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. The finalised management plan will be made available online in 2022. For updates on the management planning process, check back regularly at [www.pc.gc.ca/ti](http://www.pc.gc.ca/ti), or follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/TINationalPark](https://www.facebook.com/TINationalPark), or on twitter @TINationalPark