

What we heard

Preliminary feedback for the development of the Kluane National Park and Reserve draft management plan

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Introduction

The *Canada National Parks Act* requires Parks Canada to review management plans for each national park 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 for park management decision-making.

Kluane National Park and Reserve's (NPR) last management plan was signed in 2010 and is now under review. The new management plan will include a long-term vision and strategic direction for protecting, presenting and operating the park. Kluane NPR is cooperatively managed by Parks Canada, Kluane First Nation and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations through the Kluane National Park Management Board. Parks Canada and the Board lead the development of the park's management plan.

In order to facilitate meaningful opportunities to contribute to the development of the management plan, a two-phased consultation plan is being implemented:

- **Preliminary consultation:** Preliminary consultation was conducted in the spring and early summer of 2019 to gather feedback on primary elements to be considered in the development of a draft management plan. A newsletter was distributed to stakeholders and the general public via email and the Kluane National Park and Reserve website, providing background information on the planning process, updated park information, and key questions for feedback. Parks Canada and the Kluane National Park Management Board hosted three open house events in June in Burwash Landing, Haines Junction and Whitehorse, as well as Elders meetings, stakeholder meetings and staff information sessions. A public comment period was open until June 30, 2019.
- **Draft plan consultation:** The public will have an opportunity to comment on the draft management plan during a second phase of consultation.

Response

During the preliminary consultation, open houses and Elders meetings drew a total of 66 people, with facilitators recording over 300 separate comments. In addition, seven letters were received from groups and individuals via the Kluane NPR plan email address. Parks Canada received general comments as well as responses to five specific questions outlined in the newsletter pertaining to the vision, protection of natural and cultural resources, visitor experience, and zoning.

Thank you!

The management planning team appreciates the time and consideration everyone gave to providing comments, participating in open house discussions, and addressing the questions in the newsletter.

What we heard

The following is a summary of the comments received to provide a general sense of the feedback; it does not represent individual verbatim comments from respondents. Comments have been summarized under five main themes:

- Improve the system of access to allow for visitors to better connect with the park, while mitigating visitor safety concerns, ecological impacts, and addressing areas with high visitor use pressure.
- Protect cultural resources while increasing opportunities for visitors to engage with the area's history and culture, learning from local knowledge holders and fostering the development of future knowledge holders.

- Protect the park's natural resources by shifting our perspective, educating visitors, collaborating with partners, and using science and Traditional Knowledge to inform decision making.
- More needs to be done to heal the relationship between Parks Canada and local First Nation communities that still do not feel at home in the park due to the legacy of the park's establishment.
- Suggestions relating to management plan elements or the management planning process.

1. Improve the system of access to allow for visitors to better connect with the park, while mitigating visitor safety concerns, ecological impacts, and addressing areas with high visitor use pressure.

1.1. Trail system

Many suggestions were made about how to improve the park's trail system, including better trail maintenance, the development of new trails optimized for different types of use (e.g., easier front-country day hikes, track-set cross-country ski trails, snowmobile trails, and mountain bike trails), incorporating opportunities for FireSmart principles in trail initiatives, and engaging First Nation and other youth in trail maintenance and development.

1.2. Mountain biking

It was recognized that mountain biking is an activity increasing in popularity in the park that requires a comprehensive strategy to determine what level of use and in what areas of the park this activity is appropriate, and how it will be monitored.

1.3. New activities and access

It was also suggested that the management plan explore new ways for visitors to engage with the park, including more alternative accommodations, hut-to-hut options, spring and winter use of oTENTiks, First Nations tourism opportunities, shoulder and winter season offers, campground expansion, and the development of visitor itineraries in conjunction with local businesses.

There were calls for creating new access options (e.g., new landing sites, trails, some motorized river and lake access, motorized winter access to climbing areas), particularly for increasing access to areas of the park that are currently difficult to experience (e.g., glaciers, alpine regions, north end of the park), along with calls for mitigating measures for the busy A'ay Chu valley to ensure long-term ecological protection there (e.g., food storage lockers, designated camping, staff patrols, monitoring or restricting use).

Others voiced concerns about increasing access and visitation, due to the potential for negative impacts on the environment and the visitor's sense of wilderness, noting that access to some areas of the park should be limited and that new activities should be assessed within the context of a wilderness park, not driven only by visitor experience needs.

1.4. Visitor safety

Suggested improvements to the visitor safety program included updating safety messaging and making insurance mandatory for mountaineering.

2. Protect cultural resources while increasing opportunities for visitors to engage with the area's history and culture, learning from local knowledge holders and fostering the development of future knowledge holders.

2.1. Whole history

There was a clear desire from many respondents to see the area's whole history presented to visitors, from before the park was established to the present day, with careful consideration of who tells the stories and how, and expanding the reach of interpretive products beyond the visitor centres.

2.2. Culture for now and into the future

Comments conveyed the need to carry on Traditional Knowledge and practices, and to present these to visitors. Suggestions to achieve this included developing and sharing more in-depth stories; using Indigenous language in displays and publications; using traditional place names; providing better education and on-the-land learning opportunities about Indigenous history and values for youth, staff and business license holders; creating opportunities for Elders to provide interpretative programs to visitors; bringing school children to culturally important areas; reactivating traditional trails for guided interpretive trips; and incorporating cultural aspects into other trip offers.

2.3. Cultural resources on the ground

Some felt that cultural resources could be best protected through the appropriate use of zoning, limiting access to cultural resources, and better protecting the values on the landscape. Underlying these suggestions was also the need for research and assessments to create cultural and archaeological resource inventories and to study relevant questions about current threats to the park's cultural resources. There was also a desire to see communications products developed about how Parks Canada manages cultural resources.

3. Protect the park's natural resources by shifting our perspective, educating visitors, collaborating with partners, and using science and Traditional Knowledge to inform decision making.

3.1. Concerns for the park's natural resources

From fish to sheep to air quality and moose, there is obvious concern for the natural resources within the park. Some of the concerns respondents noted are obmanagement of fish populations in the Kathleen Lake watershed; safety for motorists and sheep at Thechàl Dhâl; forest health; dust impacts in the A'ay Chu valley and beyond; air quality impacts and wildlife disturbance from aircraft; climate change; impacts to natural resources from mining at the park boundary; grizzly and wolf impacts on moose; the cumulative effects from tour operators on natural resources; and the lack of stable, long-term funding to support natural resource protection.

3.2. Protecting the park's natural resources

There were a number of specific suggestions on the best way to care for the park's natural resources:

3.2.1. Shift our perspective

On the broader scale, it was suggested that a shift in perspective is required to ensure we see ourselves as caretakers of the land with a collective responsibility to pass on a healthy land to our children, with all parts of the ecosystem being important. Ecological integrity should be reaffirmed as the first priority.

3.2.2. Capacity building

It was voiced that increasing the capacity for natural resource protection could support more wildlife monitors, a First Nation Ranger Program to work in the park alongside park staff, and developing a program of citizen scientists. It was also noted that through sharing data, research and stories, Canadians can better appreciate and understand the importance of funding protected areas.

3.2.3. Science and Traditional Knowledge

It was expressed that both scientific data, achieved through monitoring and research, as well as Traditional Knowledge, learned through natural laws, First Nation values, and traditional stories, are cornerstones to protecting our natural resources. We should look to modern tools and Traditional Knowledge to reduce the impacts of our research methods on the natural environment. Management decisions should be informed by strong environmental assessments and Traditional Knowledge.

3.2.4. Education

Opportunities for educating staff, visitors, school children and Canadians include using current environmental changes as real-time examples, connecting with local schools, and developing relevant interpretive and communications products.

3.2.5. Collaboration

It was expressed that we are stronger together in the face of complex problems. As the natural world does not recognize our man-made boundaries, park management must work with other governments and organizations to address threats to ecological integrity in the park. Respondents saw collaboration especially important for addressing the spruce bark beetle legacy, finding opportunities for landscape-level ecological monitoring, planning the future built environment, and addressing placer and quartz claims adjacent to the park.

3.2.6. Forest management plan

We heard that we need to make forest health a priority – developing a forest management plan to address the impacts of the spruce beetle legacy, fuel reduction needs, reintroduction of fire on the landscape, increasing forest resiliency, creating economic opportunities, and highlighting forest ecology research needs.

3.2.7. Fishing management

It was noted that to address concerns about fish populations in the Kathleen Lake watershed, managers should consider impacts to fish from catch and release practices, limit where guided fishing occurs, monitor outfitter etiquette, review catch allowances and lake stocking, and consider resting lakes.

4. More needs to be done to heal the relationship between Parks Canada and local First Nation communities that still do not feel at home in the park due to the legacy of the park's establishment.

4.1. Actions toward reconciliation

Recurring throughout the preliminary consultation phase was the request to have artifacts returned to First Nations people that were taken during the establishment of the park. It was also suggested that a cabin could be rebuilt in the Mush/Bates lakes area, where First Nations people could stay, and an annual welcoming program could be created to invite citizens back into the park. Along with an apology to acknowledge past wrongs and a commitment to telling the full story of the park, these measures would be further steps toward ensuring local First Nations people feel at home in the park.

4.2. Economic future

Some commenters encouraged park managers to find ways to realize economic opportunities for First Nations people in the park. This could include fostering cultural tourism opportunities (e.g., Matatana and Big Horn lodges, guided hiking, First Nation liaisons or interpreters at visitor centres), more First Nation representation on park staff (especially in management positions), and ensuring that First Nation harvesters understand their rights within the park. It should be noted that while there were voices of

support for the proposed Matatana and Big Horn lodges, there were other voices of concern for the impacts these developments would have on the ecological integrity and visitors' experience of the park.

5. Suggestions relating to management plan elements or the management planning process.

5.1. Vision

Ensure that the vision captures the importance of education, traditional knowledge, culture and the protection of natural resources. The vision should also convey a sense of an untouched, natural landscape.

5.2. Improving the planning process

Some suggestions were also made to improve the management planning process, including providing relevant background documents to the public (e.g., State of the Park Report) and improving communications between the public and the park throughout the management planning process and implementation of the plan.

5.3. Thoughts on zoning

- Consider significance and sensitivity when assessing cultural and natural resources.
- Consider the relative ease of access to different areas of the park and what the implications of that access are for protection and management.
- Consider zoning by ecosystem.

6. Next Steps

The planning team has considered each submission in the development of the park's draft management plan. Perspectives shared during the preliminary consultation process meaningfully contributed to the draft plan in several areas, including the goals related to First Nations' reconnection to the park, First Nation economic opportunities, ecological integrity, ecosystem resilience, the use of Traditional Knowledge, visitor use management and opportunities, and partnerships.

While management plans are intended to provide high-level strategic direction focusing on desired outcomes rather than prescribed actions, action-oriented suggestions shared during the preliminary consultation phase have been recorded by site managers and will help inspire future initiatives once the plan is finalized and implementation begins.

Parks Canada and the Kluane National Park Management Board look forward to more comments and conversations during the draft plan consultation phase.