



Aboriginal Peoples and Canada's Parks and Protected Areas

Introduction

This compendium of case studies from across Canada illustrates the broad participation of Aboriginal people in diverse areas of parks and protected areas planning and management. These case studies have been produced by the Canadian Parks Council, an organization of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial park agencies which has been working together since 1962 to promote excellence in park planning and management, advance park and protected areas values, and facilitate cooperation among and provide support to member agencies.

In 1975, the James Bay Crees, the Inuit of Quebec and the governments of Quebec and Canada signed the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* – the first of the modern day land claim agreements. Arguably, this agreement marks the beginning of a thirty-year history in the evolving participation of Aboriginal people in parks and protected areas in Canada. It established the Northern Quebec Hunting, Fishing, Trapping Coordinating Committee - the first of what are now referred to as “co-management bodies” – with a broad range of shared management responsibilities between provincial and federal government, Inuit and Cree representatives for environmental matters, including advice to the appropriate ministers regarding the establishment of new parks and protected areas.

Building on this model almost ten years later, in 1984, the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* (IFA) established similar management bodies, as well as established national and territorial parks, the inclusion of Inuvialuit traditional knowledge in management decision-making, preferential economic opportunities for the Inuvialuit associated with the parks, and a strong role in existing and future park and conservation management and planning.

Every modern day land claim agreement signed since has contained similar types of provisions. Collectively these agreements in Quebec, Labrador, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Yukon and British Columbia have changed the way parks and protected areas are established, planned, established and managed in Canada. They have greatly altered the relationships between Aboriginal people and federal, provincial and territorial governments in areas where these agreements apply, and created a framework and a growing body of experience that Aboriginal people and parks agencies are exploring and applying to parks and protected areas planning and management in other parts of the country. Even when these relationships are not codified in modern day land claims agreements, other less formal understandings and arrangements are strongly informed by traditional ties and relationships of Aboriginal people to the lands within their traditional territories.

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Map of Properties Profiled in Case Studies



1. Proposed Clyde River Territorial Park, Nunavut
2. Katannilik Territorial Park, Nunavut
3. Inuit involvement in park planning, Nunavut
4. Great Bear Lake watershed, Northwest Territories
5. Aboriginal Involvement in the Protected Areas Strategy, Northwest Territories
6. Ni'iinlii'Njik (Fishing Branch), Yukon
7. Tombstone Territorial Park, Yukon
8. Qikiqtaruk (Herschel Island) Territorial Park, Yukon
9. Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre, Nova Scotia
10. Metepenagiag Heritage Park, New Brunswick
11. Aboriginal Heritage Gardens, New Brunswick
12. Proposed Albabel-Témiscamie-Otish Park, Québec
13. Kuurujuaq Park, Québec
14. Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve, Newfoundland and Labrador
15. Aboriginal Youth Work Exchange Program, Ontario
16. Whitefeather Forest Planning Area, Ontario
17. Pimachiowin-Aki World Heritage Site initiative (Ontario and Manitoba)
18. Hayes River Canadian Heritage River, Manitoba
19. Fort Carlton Provincial Park, Saskatchewan
20. Lac La Ronge Provincial Park, Saskatchewan
21. Hay-Zama Wildland Provincial Park, Alberta
22. Say Nuth Khaw Yum Heritage Park/ Indian Arm Provincial Park, British Columbia
23. Tatshenshini-Alsek Park, British Columbia
24. Coastal conservancies, British Columbia
25. Ts'il'os Provincial Park, British Columbia

The enclosed case studies provide insights and lessons that can contribute to building and enhancing collaborative relationships between Aboriginal people and parks agencies through approaches that have been tried and succeeded or represent a significant departure from past practices. Most notably, park agencies identified three main ingredients to their success of the initiatives highlighted by these case studies:

- Community leadership in articulating a vision for the sustainable use and protection of their traditional lands
- Time, patience, trust and dedication in developing and nurturing a meaningful partnership between the park agency and the Aboriginal community(ies)
- Recognition of the importance of cultural resources and traditional knowledge as an expression of Aboriginal peoples history and relationship to the land

Six themes have emerged from the development of these case studies – each representing an area where leading work is being done cooperatively between park agencies and Aboriginal communities:

Co-operative Involvement in Park Planning and Management (Case Studies # 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25)

Many of the case studies highlight specific park agency - aboriginal community partnerships in the planning and/or management of individual parks, Canadian Heritage Rivers, National Historic Sites and World Heritage Sites. The case studies speak to the diversity of successful co-operative management arrangements across the country.

Participation in Landscape Planning and Protected Areas Network Planning Initiatives (Case Studies # 3, 4, 5, 16, 24)

Aboriginal peoples are using land use planning processes as a means to articulate and implement their vision for the sustainable use and protection of their traditional land. This community-based means of planning, at times mandated through land claims agreements, helps to instill a strong sense of ownership and commitment. These processes are often slow, complex, involve many jurisdictions and stakeholders, and lack the necessary funds. Despite these significant barriers, the case studies demonstrate the significant opportunity for success.

Park Interpretation Activities and Tourism Ventures (Case Studies #6, 10, 11, 19)

Aboriginal communities are demonstrating an increasing interest in advancing tourism ventures within parks both as a means to provide economic benefits to their communities and to showcase world-class natural and cultural resources. The case studies highlight the priority being placed on ensuring an accurate expression of the communities' cultural traditions and safeguarding the ecological integrity of the park's natural resources. These projects, and particularly those in southern Canada, are providing a means to nurture and improve relations between the park agencies and Aboriginal communities, and are further helping to instill a greater sense of ownership and expression of cultural heritage by those communities.

The role of Culture and Traditional Knowledge in Park Planning (Case Study #1, 4, 5, 9, 12, 14, 17, 22, 24)

Aboriginal peoples have developed complex relationships with the lands they have occupied for countless generations. In the past traditional “science-based” models of park planning and management in Canada provided little opportunity to benefit from the traditional knowledge of Aboriginal peoples. Today, park agencies and aboriginal communities are involved in leading edge work that takes a fundamentally different approach to park planning - one based on the recognition of the significance of a landscape’s cultural resources, which serve as key reference points in the way in which these people view and associate with the land. These cultural resources are being catalogued and used as the cornerstone to park planning and management efforts.

Parks as Cultural Learning Opportunities for Aboriginal Youth (Case Studies # 2, 9, 14)

In many of Canada’s aboriginal communities, concerns are being expressed about the declining interest of youth in land-based activities and the resulting loss of community traditions. These case studies highlight important efforts being made to ensure meaningful land-based learning opportunities for Aboriginal youth, and in particular the opportunity for youth and elders to share time together on the land.

Capacity Building (Case Studies # 7, 8, 15)

Increasing opportunities exist for the hiring of staff from Aboriginal communities in park planning, management, and tourism. Several case studies profile innovative, on-the-job training programs designed to develop the knowledge, skills and leadership qualities needed to perform these park functions.

Opportunities and Challenges

Park agencies have come to recognize the special contributions that Aboriginal people and communities can make to Canada’s parks and protected areas, and in particular the traditional knowledge that Aboriginal people have of landscapes, ecosystems, wildlife populations and stocks, and cultural heritage. At the same time, differences in cultural values and institutional practices have given and may give rise to divergent views on approaches to achieving desired planning or management outcomes. In this regard, based on past experience present day relationships between Aboriginal people and parks agencies are evolving. In many regions of the country, significant capacity issues facing Aboriginal people, communities and institutions represent major barriers to the fulfillment of new opportunities. Cultural differences between peoples and institutions affect how management issues are approached and resolved. The diversity of park management arrangements and aboriginal cultures requires individualized approaches to co-operative park planning and management. And because parks and protected areas boundaries and ecosystems often overlap jurisdictional boundaries, inter-jurisdictional cooperation and management are usually complicated.

These are areas that will require attention in order to strengthen and develop the relationship between Aboriginal people and parks agencies. The case studies compiled here provide a good foundation for that work. As a part of a larger picture they illustrate what has been accomplished to involve Aboriginal people in parks and protected areas planning and management, what remains uncertain and what remains to be done. They provide an important foundation for enhancing this relationship in the future through the positive lessons that have been learned.

