

# Introduction

As a contribution to the on-going conversation about a National Park Reserve on Bowen Island, I have asked the simple question, What is Parks Canada? and What does Parks Canada do?

I went to Wikipedia to get a short definition: I have shortened it down to:

*Parks Canada is a Government of Canada agency that is mandated to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment...*

The full definition can be seen at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parks\\_Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parks_Canada).

To answer the question What does Park Canada do? I went to two sources:

- the National Parks Act: [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/bib-lib/docs1a.aspx#1](http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/bib-lib/docs1a.aspx#1)
- Parks Canada Corporate Plan: [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/plans/plan2010-2011/sec01/index.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/plans/plan2010-2011/sec01/index.aspx)

# The National Parks Act

## 1. Ecological Integrity is Very Important to Parks Canada

*"Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks."*  
Canada National Parks Act (section 8 (2)).

### What is Ecological Integrity?

The Canada National Parks Act defines ecological integrity as "a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes."

- In plain language, a national park has ecological integrity if it has all the native plants and animals normally expected to live in that part of Canada, if their populations are healthy and likely to survive, and if natural processes such as fire, flooding, and predation continually shape and renew the landscape and its habitats.
- Signs of decline in species or landscapes, because of pollution or other unnatural influences, demand action so future generations can experience as healthy and whole a park as we enjoy today.

## 2. Commemorative Integrity is Also Very Important

Maintenance and restoration of commemorative integrity of buildings, structures, places and people is also of paramount importance to Parks Canada, either at national historic sites or within national parks and marine protected areas (e.g., a lighthouse within a coastal national park).

### What is Commemorative Integrity?

A historic place (national historic site, heritage railway station, federal heritage building, etc.) may be said to possess commemorative integrity when the resources that symbolize or represent its importance are not impaired or under threat, when the reasons for its significance are effectively communicated to the public, and when the heritage value of the place is respected.

# Parks Canada Corporate Plan

The *Parks Canada Agency Corporate Plan 2010–2011/–2014–2015* ([www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/plans/plan2010-2011/sec01/index.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/plans/plan2010-2011/sec01/index.aspx)) sets out Parks Canada's objectives and priorities for the next five years, and the way in which they will deliver them.

This is an important document that tells us much about Parks Canada and the kind of neighbour the agency may be to Bowen Islanders. I have summarized below.

## The Parks Canada Charter

Page 2 of the Corporate Plan displays the Parks Canada Charter (see below).

Serving Canadians

THE  
PARKS CANADA  
**CHARTER**

OUR 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.

OUR ROLE

- We are guardians** of the national parks, the national historic sites and the national marine conservation areas of Canada.
- We are guides** to visitors from around the world, opening doors to places of discovery and learning, reflection and recreation.
- We are partners**, building on the rich traditions of our Aboriginal people, the strength of our diverse cultures and our commitments to the international community.
- We are storytellers**, recounting the history of our land and our people — the stories of Canada.

OUR COMMITMENTS

- To protect**, as a first priority, the natural and cultural heritage of our special places and ensure that they remain healthy and whole.
- To present** the beauty and significance of our natural world and to chronicle the human determination and ingenuity which have shaped our nation.
- To celebrate** the legacy of visionary Canadians whose passion and knowledge have inspired the character and values of our country.
- To serve** Canadians, working together to achieve excellence guided by values of competence, respect and fairness.

2002

## **Mandate**

This one sentence encapsulates what the Parks Canada Agency is all about.

It indicates that a National Park on Bowen Island will have a clear commitment to the people of Canada to protect in perpetuity the ecological and commemorative integrity of the native coastal temperate rainforest, wetlands watersheds and marine habitat of its holding on Bowen Island. As well, the park must foster understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the park's natural and cultural features—the function of the park's Visitor Experience and Outreach programs.

## **Role**

These four short sentences (see page 2) provide guidance to the activities of the agency.

This provides direction for a National Park on Bowen Island including:

- protection of the park's natural features and processes and protection of the park's cultural features (e.g., archeological sites, historic buildings and places)
- facilitating discovery, learning and connection with a National Park on Bowen Island—its land, its history and its people, to Bowen Islanders and visitors from Canada and around the world
- stewardship, education and interpretation partnerships and collaborations with local groups, individuals and neighbouring landowners plus individuals, groups and communities and cultures from across Canada
- collection and sharing of the vast range of stories about Bowen Island's nature and people

## **Commitment**

This section of the charter (see page 2) identifies four guiding principles for all operations within the Parks Canada Agency.

### **Protection**

This is a first priority for the agency. Therefore, all activities in the park must not directly or indirectly have adverse impact on the natural and cultural features of the park or its natural and commemorative integrity. For example an interpretive trail within the park should not degrade habitat.

### **Presentation**

This is a major thrust of both Visitor Experience and Outreach programs in Parks Canada to focus on the park's natural features and processes, their beauty, function, value and significance plus the park's human history

### **Celebration of the Legacy of Visionary Canadians**

This could include the conservation vision of Captain Cates in the 1800s. .

### **Serving Canadians**

According to the charter, this is achieved through the pursuit of excellence, competence and a culture of respect and fairness.

## Responsibilities

Pages 5 and 6 of the Corporate Plan outline the responsibilities of Parks Canada:

- *Parks Canada is a proud steward of these heritage places and protects and presents them for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians while ensuring that they remain unimpaired for present and future generations.*
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- *Parks Canada ... offer(s) to Canadians a variety of recreational activities and learning experiences as well as a unique opportunity to personally connect with these heritage places.*
- *Each national historic site tells its own story and contributes to our understanding of Canada as a whole.*
- *Parks Canada plays a national leadership role with regard to the conservation of historic places in Canada.*

Here again, care for and protection of natural systems is the highest priority of Parks Canada. Any activity initiated by parks Canada or its partners (e.g., the Bowen Conservancy) must do no harm in the short-term and the long term.

Bowen Island has a wide variety of recreational opportunities. Parks Canada may choose to promote some of these activities but all activities must not impact the ecological integrity of the park.

In addition, Visitor Experience staff (interpreters) make important contributions by applying their knowledge of park resources, visitor needs interests and characteristics and effective communication media and methods to integrate interpretation and education into many new park infrastructure projects such as trails, visitor centres, viewpoints and visitor gathering sites.

### **Personally Connect with Heritage Places**

Parks Canada has a major commitment to assist Canadians in making personal connections with places in the park. This can range from:

- *ensuring that some locations in the park have places where people can sit quietly and commune with the powers of nature and feel the ground that supported the footsteps of their family and ancestors*
- *interpretation and education programs that help park users to discover and learn about the park's nature and history*
- *opportunities to take part in real stewardship activities such as censuses, habitat monitoring and restoration.*

## Strategic Outcome and Program Activity Architecture

The Corporate Plan identifies the central outcome of Parks Canada's overall program as:

*Canadians have a strong sense of connection, through meaningful experiences, to their national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas and these protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.*

### *Key Performance Indicator Targets*

- *Maintain or improve the overall ecological integrity in all national parks*
- *65% of Canadians report a personal connection to Parks Canada administered places by March 2014*

This is a restatement that park education and interpretation programming must engender in park users a strong sense of connection to the Bowen Island National Park and other national parks.

This clearly supports Parks Canada's fundamental shift away from an agency-driven messaging approach where staff pile on loads of information in a lecture format towards facilitating targeted and meaningful experiences where park users interact with nature, are guided toward making their own discoveries, sharing their observations and asking questions about what they see, hear, smell and touch. In this type of learning situation park users engage and forge sensory and cognitive connections between their personal interests and the stories Bowen Island has to offer.

## Parks Canada Agency Priorities

On pages 16 and 17, the Corporate Plan identifies nine operational priorities.

Six of the priority areas have direct bearing on a national park on Bowen Island (see the table below).

Operational Priority	Description	What This Means for Bowen Island
<b>Establishing National Parks and National Marine Conservation Areas</b>	By the end of fiscal year 2013, Parks Canada will establish one new national park and one new national marine conservation area, and will complete feasibility assessments for five other national parks and two other national marine conservation areas. Through establishing and expanding national parks and marine conservation areas, new places are protected and conserved, additional opportunities are created for Canadians to connect with these places and Parks Canada expands its reach in facilitating meaningful experiences, public appreciation and understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowen is well placed as a combination new park/new marine conservation area</li> <li>• this would be Park's Canada's closest natural area to a major city in Canada</li> <li>• this park would greatly expand Parks Canada's reach in providing meaningful experiences to urban Canadians, New Canadian and youth</li> </ul>
<b>Advancing Ecological Integrity Results on the Ground in Canada's National Parks</b>	Parks Canada will continue to lead active management projects to improve key ecological integrity indicators in 20 national parks by March 2014. Addressing priority conservation challenges in Canada's national parks will help ensure these protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowen has rare habitat (e.g., Coastal Bluff—most of Bowen is made up of red and blue listed habitat) and some regionally red-listed species (e.g. great blue heron and crested cormorant), a national park would be able to protect and enhance rare species</li> <li>• as well Bowen has extensive tracts of relatively intact forest and wetland habitat that could become important seed sources for restoration of other habitats in the west coast that will be impacted by climate change</li> </ul>
<b>Investing Strategically in Historic Assets</b>	Parks Canada will make targeted investments in the national historic sites it administers in order to improve the elements of commemorative integrity rated to be in poor condition. Improving the commemorative integrity of these sites will support the Agency's strategic outcome by ensuring that the places it manages are left unimpaired for present and future generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowen has several archeological sites that with further study could be of national importance</li> </ul>
<b>Improving Visitor Experience</b>	Targeted Parks Canada initiatives will attract 10 percent more visitors to national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas by March 2015. This will be done by improving the quality of visitor experience opportunities and the desirability of the locations as travel destinations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks Canada is committed to providing high quality interpretation and education in sites such as a Bowen Island National Park</li> <li>• this may or may not significantly increase visitation to the island</li> <li>• high visitation has the potential to change some quality of life aspects for Bowen Islanders</li> </ul>

Operational Priority	Description	What This Means for Bowen Island
<p><b>Increasing Canadians' Connection with Parks Canada Places</b></p>	<p>The Agency will undertake activities in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver to increase connection to Parks Canada places in these areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks Canada recognizes the importance of connecting with Canadians in Big Urban Centres</li> <li>• this may result in increased visitation to Bowen</li> <li>• it should be noted that Parks Canada has several National Historic Sites in the Metro Vancouver Region (e.g., Fort Langley, Gulf of Georgia Cannery). These sites are not phoenixes that attract huge numbers of local or out of province Visitors</li> </ul>
<p><b>Renewing the Parks Canada Workforce</b></p>	<p>Parks Canada will continue its efforts to recruit and retain qualified employees in order to build a workforce more reflective of the diversity of the Canadian population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowen Island is not a typical lower mainland community with a broad multicultural background</li> <li>• as a result there may be preferential</li> </ul>

## Corporate Risks and Mitigation Strategies

On pages 17–18, Parks Canada identifies four key risks to achieving its corporate objectives. Risks are defined as potential events with which the Agency may have to contend in the future. The Corporate Plan summarizes these key corporate risks and describes mitigation measures being implemented. The following is a summary of the two risks as they may impact on a Bowen Island National Park.

### Corporate Risks and Mitigation Strategies

#### **Key Risk 1: Competitive Position**

*Visitation at Canada's national parks and national historic sites is variable from year to year. Over the last five years, both national parks and national historic sites have shown a negative visitation trend of similar magnitude. Parks Canada has, therefore, recognized as one of its key corporate risks that its service offer might be less competitive with other parks and cultural attractions, and/or other leisure activities. Parks Canada is mindful of its competitive position.*

Parks located near or within big urban centres have to compete with a broad spectrum of recreation and entertainment options for the attention of urban dwellers. For Bowen Island these will include:

- other parks with similar habitats but easier access such as Lighthouse Park (West Vancouver) Stanley Park, Pacific Spirit Regional Park and a wide variety of other Metro Vancouver Parks
- big city entertainment such as theatre, movies, concerts
- home entertainment (video games, computers, television videos etc.
- shopping centres, restaurants

#### **Key Risk 2: Environmental Forces**

*According to the World Conservation Union, invasive alien species are the second most significant threat to biodiversity after habitat loss, and exotic invasive species have been identified as a stressor for most national parks.*

*These threats are exacerbated by other factors over which Parks Canada has no control, such as the emerging effects of climate change and habitat degradation outside of national parks.*

*Parks Canada has, therefore, recognized as one of its key corporate risks that it may not be able to adapt effectively or quickly enough to environmental forces such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and exotic/invasive species, and this may hinder the ability of the Agency to maintain or improve overall ecological integrity in national parks.*

Compared to much of the lower mainland, Bowen Island has fewer invasive species (e.g., bull frogs, opossums etc.) The island also has significant tracts of relatively intact ecosystems which may be able to withstand the effects of climate change better than some other areas of the lower mainland.

Park education, interpretation and outreach programming can focus on information and education about invasive species and climate change with respect to their impact on Bowen Island and the west coast of Canada. The park could also:

- model good practice in reducing impacts of these threats through trail and road construction techniques that reduce the chance of invasive plants establishing themselves in the park
- encourage and enable park visitors to take part in stewardship activities such as the physical removal of invasive plant species
- model best practice in reducing release of greenhouse gases through:
  - use of low carbon emission vehicles
  - following LEEDs stands for all new building construction or upgrades of existing structures
  - develop program sites (e.g., interpretive trails, lookouts etc.) that enable park users to participate in programs with a minimal reliance on personal vehicles

## Section II – Analysis of Program Activities

### Parks Canada Vision

In this section of the Corporate plan the agency asserts that to deliver its strategic outcome and fulfill its mandate, Parks Canada has embarked on a renewal program and has developed a new Vision Statement and strategy for achieving it.

#### **Parks Canada Vision**

*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada. Page 19*

#### *Strategy:*

*Parks Canada will pursue this vision and accomplish its strategic outcome by ensuring Agency activities are relevant to Canadians and thus strengthen and deepen Canadians' understanding and appreciation of their national heritage places. This will, in turn, build a strong sense of connection to these places in the hearts and minds of Canadians.*

This vision and strategy will require that Parks Canada have an extensive education and interpretation program designed to meet the learning needs of a wide variety of park visitors. .

### Program Activities

The Analysis of Program Activities section of the Corporate Plan also describes five Parks Canada's program activities and:

- identifies the expected result, performance indicator targets for each
- explains how Parks Canada plans on meeting the expected results

The five program activity areas are:

1. Heritage Place Establishment
2. Heritage Resource Conservation
3. Public Appreciation and Understanding
4. Visitor Experience
5. Townsite and Throughway Infrastructure

Of these, three have direct bearing on a national park on Bowen Island.

#### **Activity 1 –Heritage Place Establishment**

Parks Canada has an objective of contacting and engaging Canadians living in major urban centres. A National Park Reserve on Bowen Island would be Parks Canada's first national park near any of the big three urban centres in Canada.

**Activity 2 –Heritage Resource Conservation**

This program includes:

- maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity in national parks through protection of natural resources and natural processes
- ensuring the commemorative integrity of national historic sites managed by Parks Canada
- influencing the commemorative integrity of those managed or owned by third parties
- protection and management of cultural resources under the administration of Parks Canada
- sustainable use of national marine conservation areas including protection of unique marine ecosystems.

**Summary of Program Activity 2 –Heritage Resource Conservation**

Key Outcomes:

- the protection of Canada's natural and cultural resources ensures that current and future generations will enjoy a system of protected heritage places
- the intact ecosystems and historic sites protected by Parks Canada provide opportunities for Canadians:
  - to appreciate and personally connect with nationally significant places and stories
  - to engage directly in the management of Canada's national treasures

Expected Result:

Management actions result in improvements to ecological integrity indicators in national parks, and the state of cultural resources in national historic sites is improved.

**Activity 3 –Public Appreciation and Understanding**

This program activity aims to increase Canadians' understanding, appreciation, support and engagement with respect to the natural and historical heritage of Parks Canada administered places. This is accomplished by reaching Canadians at home, at leisure, at school and in their communities through relevant and effective communication and public outreach education initiatives as well as by engaging many stakeholders and partners in the development and implementation of the Agency's future direction.

**Summary of Program Activity 3 –Public Appreciation and Understanding**

Key Outcomes:

- urban Canadians will be more aware, understand and appreciate Parks Canada's heritage places
- stakeholders and partners will have opportunities to build deeper relationships with Parks Canada
- Canadians are engaged through mass media
- Canadians will have increased access to relevant information
- Canadians will have increased opportunities to be involved with Parks Canada
- Aboriginal peoples will be engaged in the planning and management of Parks Canada heritage places

Expected Result:

Canadians appreciate the significance of heritage places administered by Parks Canada and support their protection and presentation.

## **Activity 4 –Visitor Experience**

Visitor experience is the sum total of visitors' personal interaction with the protected heritage place. This interaction helps the visitor create meaning and establish connection with the place. The experience sequence includes:

- awareness of the site
- planning the visit
- traveling to
- welcoming and orientation upon arrival
- participation in recreational and interpretive activities
- use of accommodation, trails, facilities, services and supporting infrastructure
- departure and the post-visit relationship

### **Summary of Program Activity 4 –Visitor Experience**

Key Outcomes:

- 10 percent nation-wide visitation increase by March 2015
- Visitor expectations, desires and needs will be met through delivery of meaningful experiences
- an increased number of new and repeat visits
- promotion of authentic Aboriginal cultural experiences
- Aboriginal peoples reconnect with their historically used lands

Expected Result:

Visitors at surveyed locations feel a sense of personal connection to the places visited.

- focus on attracting urban Canadians and increasing their participation in the visitor experience activities