



MAR 23 2018

Ms. Deborah Schulte, M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ms. Schulte:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development for its report, *Preserving Canada's Heritage: The Foundation for Tomorrow*, which was tabled in the House of Commons on December 4, 2017. Please accept this letter as the Government's response to your report.

Canada's heritage places are of profound importance. They are powerful symbols of our identity and are important to telling the stories of Canada's past, including the history, cultures and contributions of Indigenous peoples. I thank all the Committee members and witnesses for their interest in the protection and conservation of Canada's heritage and for their thoughtful consideration of this important matter.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I have the responsibility for programs and policies that relate to national historic sites, federal heritage buildings, federal archaeology, heritage protection programs and other protected heritage areas. For well over a century, Parks Canada has protected and conserved many of these places and has shared countless stories of events and people that reflect the rich heritage of our country – from time immemorial to more recent events. Canadians take great pride in the people, places and events that shape our history, and this was clearly reinforced during Canada 150 celebrations in 2017 with a 24 percent increase in the number of visits to Parks Canada's national historic sites.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I convene a Minister's Round Table every two years to provide an opportunity for interested Canadians to share their views on Parks Canada's programs and performance, as well as the strategic direction that the Agency is taking in the management of national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas.

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Participants in the 2017 Minister's Round Table raised concerns that are consistent with the Committee's recommendations.

Measures to Strengthen Protection and Conservation of Canada's Heritage

The Government of Canada shares the Committee's concerns regarding the need to better protect and conserve heritage places in Canada. Parks Canada's mandate is to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage on behalf of all Canadians. As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I am committed to strengthening the role that the Agency plays in protecting and conserving the nation's cultural heritage.

Canadians have asked the Government to confirm that commemorative integrity will be given first priority in the management of national historic sites under Parks Canada's responsibility. In the area of built heritage and cultural resources, the Agency is guided by its Cultural Resources Management Policy.

This policy, which was renewed in 2013, ensures that cultural resources administered by Parks Canada are conserved and their heritage value is shared for the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of present and future generations. It outlines requirements for the identification and conservation of cultural resources at Parks Canada places, and for the assessment of impacts of interventions on their heritage value. The Agency encourages the use of this policy by other owners of heritage places.

Since 2001, the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Collaboration on Historic Places has worked to jointly develop programs and tools to support heritage conservation in Canada. The Canadian Register of Historic Places was established to provide a reliable single source of information about all historic places recognized for their heritage value at the local, provincial, territorial and national levels throughout Canada. The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*, revised in 2010, establish a consistent, pan-Canadian set of conservation principles and guidelines that have been widely adopted by heritage practitioners and owners of heritage places across the country.

Together, these measures have helped strengthen the conservation of many of Canada's heritage places. I acknowledge, however, that more can be done. In particular, the Committee's report notes the lack of comprehensive legislation to protect national historic sites, archaeological sites, and other heritage resources under federal jurisdiction. The Government is therefore committed to reviewing what legislative measures might be warranted to strengthen heritage conservation and protection at the federal level.

For example, the introduction of Bill C-64, *An Act respecting wrecks, abandoned, dilapidated or hazardous vessels and salvage operations*, has provided an opportunity for the Government of Canada to examine the potential to introduce new regulations to protect and preserve wrecks that have heritage value. Parks Canada is working with other federal departments to develop a heritage wreck strategy to ensure that these significant cultural resources are protected and managed for the benefit of all Canadians.

Indigenous History and Heritage

The Government of Canada is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government and Inuit-Crown relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. As part of this work, the Government is committed to promoting the recognition and understanding of the history of Indigenous peoples and the important contributions they have made to Canada since time immemorial.

Parks Canada demonstrates leadership both nationally and internationally in its relations with Indigenous partners, working with over 300 Indigenous groups across the country in the establishment and management of Parks Canada's heritage places. In Budget 2016, the Agency received \$4.7 million to launch the Indigenous Tourism, Experiences and Storytelling Initiative. This program has supported over 29 projects to develop and deliver tourism experiences and events in collaboration with Indigenous partners across Canada. For example, Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site has increased the frequency and variety of its iconic Mi'kmaw cultural programs, providing visitors with more opportunities to understand the importance of the parks as a historical and current cultural landscape for the Mi'kmaw.

The Agency is reviewing policies, programs and practices in cooperation with Indigenous partners to inform an overarching vision of reconciliation, to better understand how Indigenous partners' priorities and Agency operations align, and to reinforce the benefits of collaborative action. This includes developing a new framework and approach to history presentation at Parks Canada places that is audience-focused and that integrates many voices, with an emphasis on ensuring Indigenous perspectives and contributions to Canada's history are incorporated and acknowledged. This approach will build on successful collaborations that highlight Indigenous voices and values at Parks Canada places, such as the opening of a new Indigenous interpretation centre at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site in 2017.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I designate places, people and events of national significance on the recommendation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

For many decades, Indigenous voices and perspectives have been inadequately represented in commemorative designations and the broader national historical narrative, leading to an unbalanced presentation of Canadian history at heritage places to Canadians and international visitors. I agree with the Committee's assertions that Indigenous voices, perspectives and values must be better integrated into Canada's national heritage and history.

In the 1990s, Parks Canada launched an initiative to encourage participation and increase the representation of groups, including Indigenous peoples who have been underrepresented in the system of historic designations. As a result, the number of official designations related to Indigenous heritage increased by 31 percent. These efforts were a good start to a more inclusive and representative historical narrative, but more needs to be done.

The Government has signaled its support, with amendments, for Private Member's Bill C-374, which will ensure Indigenous representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 79(i). This is an important step to ensure the integration of Indigenous values and perspectives into heritage designations and commemoration at the federal level.

I am pleased to note that Budget 2018 announced new funding of \$15 million over five years, starting in 2018-19, for Parks Canada to support Indigenous history and heritage. This proposed investment is a response to Call to Action 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which called for historical commemoration activities, and recognition and acknowledgement of the contributions that Indigenous peoples have made to Canada's history.

Financial Investment in Heritage Places

The Agency manages a diverse asset portfolio that includes national historic sites, heritage buildings, and contemporary tourism assets such as campgrounds, highways and waterways, including nine historic canals and over 300 dams. Parks Canada is investing close to \$3 billion over five years to address deferred maintenance of its assets, roughly one third of which is being directed at the conservation of heritage assets. Budget 2017 announced additional investments of \$364 million over two years targeting high-priority assets, including heritage assets. The Agency is currently developing a medium- and long-term plan to ensure ongoing management of these assets.

The National Cost Sharing Program for Heritage Places, administered by Parks Canada, provides matching funding to eligible non-federal custodians of national historic sites, heritage lighthouses and heritage railway stations to support heritage conservation and presentation projects.

As part of the *Investing in Canada Plan*, Budget 2016 provided a funding increase of \$20 million over two years. This funding will help support up to 111 heritage conservation projects between 2016 and 2018. Examples include the conservation of the silos of the historic barn built in 1899 at Ministers Island National Historic Site in New Brunswick, and the conservation of heritage buildings and structures at North Pacific Cannery National Historic Site in British Columbia, the oldest intact salmon cannery on the West Coast.

The Committee's report expresses concern about the conservation of heritage in rural areas. Parks Canada carried out a preliminary review of the allocation of funding under the National Cost-Sharing Program to determine whether rural sites are underrepresented. An analysis of projects funded since the program was re-launched in 2009 has determined that approximately 50 percent of the total number of funded projects were located in rural areas or small population centres (i.e. areas with a population less than 29 999), representing approximately 30 percent of the total approved funding.

Shared Leadership

The Committee's report highlights that Canada's history and heritage is not limited to federally designated historic places. Canadians look to Parks Canada to play a strong role in the broader cultural heritage community. I am committed to advancing this role, in part, by working with federal organizations towards a consistent standard of heritage conservation across the federal government.

While the Government of Canada has an important leadership role to play, there are many jurisdictions, organizations and individuals with varying degrees of responsibility and interest in the designation, protection and conservation of Canada's heritage. The Committee's 17 recommendations are ambitious and go beyond conserving those heritage places administered by the federal government. Indeed, the recommendations highlight the need for continued collaboration and engagement with other jurisdictions, Indigenous groups, stakeholders and partners in the development and implementation of effective solutions.

The Government commits to considering each of this report's recommendations carefully in collaboration with those who share interests and responsibilities, and to providing the Committee with a recommendation by recommendation response in December 2018. This review will also take into account the planned report of the Auditor General of Canada on cultural and historic federal properties, which is expected in fall 2018. I welcome any further advice the Committee may wish to offer following additional consultation, research or analysis.

I thank the Standing Committee for your vision and commitment to creating a path forward to secure the future of Canada's heritage places for generations to come. It is only through a unified and collaborative approach that we can create a path forward and secure the future of Canada's heritage places that we hold in trust for future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C McKenna', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Honourable Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.