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Ecological Integrity May be the Loser in New Banff Park Management Plan

The primary mandate for Banff National Park – managing to maintain the park’s ecological integrity – looks like receiving short shrift if a proposed new management plan goes ahead unchanged. Instead, a shift towards maximizing the “visitor experience” receives a much higher profile throughout the new draft plan.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is calling for changes to the draft *Banff National Park of Canada Management Plan* to bring it back in line with the legally-required priority for National Parks: ecological integrity. The draft plan is currently going through an ill-defined public review period.

“Of course visitors are a huge part of the reason we have National Parks,” says Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist. “Nobody wants to see Banff managed for wildlife and not for people.” But ecological integrity has always been the number one priority, and in fact it remains the legislated priority for the Park. “The draft plan proposes to increase visitor numbers by more than 20% over ten years, yet it gives no indication how this will be achieved without compromising the ecology of the park,” says Douglas. “Where will all these new people stay? Where will they go?”

According to the 2001 *Canada National Parks Act*, “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.” Disturbingly, maximizing the “visitor experience” receives a much higher profile throughout the new draft plan.

AWA believes that there are some very positive aspects to the draft plan – including proposals to reintroduce wood bison and endangered caribou in to the park – but there are also several concerns. The plan leaves the door open to possible erosion of the Wilderness Areas designated in the Park. And a vague and confusing public consultation process sees the public comment period drawing to a close while the draft plan is still not available on Parks Canada’s website.

AWA’s full response to the draft management plan can be seen online at <http://www.albertawilderness.ca/issues/issues/national-parks/archive> .

For more information:

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