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## **Management Changes a Concern in Waterton Lakes National Park**

The ecological integrity of Waterton Lakes National Park looks set to suffer if a draft Management Plan for the Park is passed without changes. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is calling for changes to the draft *Waterton National Park of Canada Management Plan* to bring it back in line with the legally-required priority for National Parks: ecological integrity.

As with all of Canada's mountain National Parks, the draft plan for Waterton is currently going through an ill-defined public review period. Banff and Jasper National Parks are going through similar processes, though the public consultation leaves a lot to be desired.

"Good luck to you if you want to have a look at any of the draft plans online," says Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist. "They aren't there. For a consultation process in this day and age that just isn't acceptable."

If you do manage to track down a copy of the draft plan, you will find that the primary mandate for Waterton National Park – managing to maintain the park's ecological integrity – is receiving short thrift. Instead, a shift towards maximizing the "visitor experience" receives a much higher profile throughout the new draft plan. Increases in visitor numbers will be encouraged in the winter and the "shoulder seasons."

"We recognize that visitors are an important part of the reason we have National Parks," says Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist. "But the draft plan proposes increasing visitor numbers without any apparent attempt to emphasize principles that protect the highly valued ecosystems within a National Park that must have priority over all other activities. It reads like a plan for a holiday resort, not a National Park."

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 maintenance of the Park's wilderness areas. But the change in tone of the plan, and the lack of specifics leave the park's future management open to considerable interpretation.

The draft Management Plan and AWA's full response can be seen online at <http://www.albertawilderness.ca/issues/issues/national-parks/archive>.

**For more information:**

Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist, (403) 283-2025

