



APR 18 2016

Mr. Sean Nichols
Conservation Specialist
Alberta Wilderness Association
snichols@abwild.ca

Dear Mr. Nichols:

Thank you for your correspondence of December 22, 2015, regarding the commercialization of Canada's national parks.

Parks Canada makes plans regarding the mountain parks ski areas carefully and in a principled manner, respecting the rigorous policy requirements of the Ski Area Management Guidelines and federal legislation, including the *Canada National Parks Act*, *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (2012)* and the *Species at Risk Act*.

Along with growth limits for all national park communities and outlying commercial accommodations, the Guidelines are a major achievement towards ensuring ongoing protection of Banff National Park of Canada, while maintaining its unique appeal as a national park destination within a UNESCO World Heritage site.

A strategic environmental assessment was conducted to assess potential cumulative impacts of proposed development. The assessment was prepared by Parks Canada and was reviewed by leading independent environmental scientists. Together, the Guidelines and the assessment provide the parameters and mitigations for commercial growth.

In 2013, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development concluded that Parks Canada is fulfilling its key responsibilities for maintaining or restoring ecological integrity in Canada's national parks and has developed a solid framework of policies, directives and guideline.

Over 95 percent of Banff National Park is designated wilderness and, under the Lake Louise Ski Area Site Guidelines, even more will be added. Approximately 30 percent of the current ski area leasehold—669 hectares of important wildlife habitat—will be permanently removed from the ski area leasehold to become designated wilderness. This area is roughly the equivalent of 800 football fields or the size of the Marmot Basin and Mount Norquay ski areas combined.

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The Guidelines build on Banff National Park's exceptional tourism and conservation legacies and provide for tangible and important improvements to ecological integrity such as improved protection for aquatic systems, wildlife habitat and sensitive species and enhanced visitor experience opportunities.

Site guidelines provide a framework and outline the conditions that must be met for Parks Canada to consider the proposed changes. With approved site guidelines, a ski area can develop long-range plans that detail specific projects or change-in-use proposals for implementation over a specific period of time (usually five to 15 years). Long-range plans are subject to a detailed impact assessment, further public consultation and Ministerial approval.

As an international leader in conservation and a leading tourism provider in Canada, the Agency is committed to facilitating exceptional visitor experience opportunities while ensuring ecological integrity is maintained in Canada's national parks.

With regard to Maligne Tours development, Parks Canada's decision on the Maligne Tours Concept Proposal means that Maligne Tours may now choose to submit a more detailed, design-level proposal for any or all of the 13 elements that the Agency has accepted for further consideration. Each of these elements would be subject to an environmental impact assessment and public and Aboriginal review prior to a final determination by Parks Canada.

As for the Glacier Skywalk in Jasper, in 2012, following an extensive public engagement process, Parks Canada approved the Glacier Skywalk proposal, determining that the project was consistent with the Jasper National Park Management Plan, that it will not adversely affect the ecological integrity of Jasper National Park of Canada and that it will enhance visitors' "view from the edge" experiences and learning opportunities on the Icefields Parkway. The Agency's determination on the environmental assessment for Brewster's Glacier Skywalk contained several important mitigations for wildlife in the area, including timing of construction, design and operations of the walkway. These mitigations have and will continue to help ensure the security of local mountain goat and big horn sheep herds. Follow-up programs by Brewster will monitor changes and inform the need for additional mitigation, if required.

Furthermore, special events have always been a part of the national park experience. They offer distinctive opportunities to create awareness of the unique aspects of Canada's national parks and foster connections between visitors and protected places. Each event undergoes an environmental impact assessment to ensure there are no impacts to the park, visitors or wildlife.

I appreciate having had this opportunity to respond to your concerns.

Yours 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.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change