



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

May 8, 2017

Hon. Catherine McKenna,
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada,
House of Commons, Parliament Buildings,
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Email: ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca

Re: Parks Canada's Shrinking Commitment to Heritage Resources Conservation

Dear Minister McKenna:

On April 7, 2017 Alberta Wilderness Association wrote to you regarding the Icefield Trails project. In that letter AWA stressed that our Association doesn't regard the project's ambitions as an appropriate or prudent use of taxpayers' dollars – not least because of the project's incompatibility with a sound interpretation of what ecological integrity demands.

This letter extends our concerns about the importance of ecological integrity to the operations of the Parks Canada Agency (Parks Canada). On the one hand, to reprise a comment from our April 7th letter, we were pleased you told the Canadian Parks Conference in March 2017 that: "I want to make sure that ecological integrity is front and centre in every decision I make about our national parks." It is heartening to see the Minister responsible for Parks Canada recognize what is stated so plainly in section 8 (2) of the *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.

AWA believes though that, for you to be successful in giving ecological integrity first priority in all aspects of national parks management, you must reverse a debilitating trend in Parks Canada budgets. This trend is the shrinking percentage of the Agency's resources devoted to Heritage Resources Conservation. This trend was pronounced during Prime Minister Harper's tenure. During the years of Conservative majority government the percentage of the Parks Canada budget devoted to Heritage Resources Conservation suffered; it fell from 23.4 percent in the 2011/12 fiscal year to 15.8 percent in 2015/16.

AWA had hoped Prime Minister Trudeau's government would move decisively to reverse this trend. You haven't. The 2017/18 departmental plan for Parks Canada reveals your government intends to allow Heritage Resources Conservation program spending fall to 13.8 percent of the Agency's total spending

by the 2019/20 fiscal year. What aggravates this absence of commitment to ecological integrity is the fact this decline will occur while the Agency's total budget rises by 27 percent in current dollars. Further to this, Parks Canada plans tremendous spending increases in infrastructure. The infrastructure budget in 2019/20 is planned to be \$468.5 million. That's 4.5 times more than what the Agency spent on infrastructure in the 2011/12 fiscal year (\$104.4 million). Infrastructure spending will consume 36 percent of the Parks Canada budget in 2019/20. This is double the 2011/12 percentage. Pavement, not protection, seems to be the most important priority to the Parks Canada Agency.

It's not that AWA objects to infrastructure spending. We believe that some national parks infrastructure, backcountry trails most notably, are in desperate need of investment. We believe, however, that the planned massive budget increases to infrastructure are going to projects with significant ecological costs, projects we believe the majority of Canadians are opposed to. The proposed Icefields Trail bicycle route is one such project. So too is the trail already under construction in Pacific Rim National Park.

We are also concerned that the traditional interpretive services offered by parks staff have been decimated and that work has been contracted to private companies. We believe the interpretive knowledge base and services provided by Parks staff must be supported financially. It is a core function of Canada's national parks service.

Commercialization of our National Parks is a mistake. Promotion of the backcountry and protection of Canada's exceptional landscapes, ecosystems, and wildlife habitat is where the investment of scarce taxpayer dollars should be concentrated.

For this reason, AWA urges you to reconsider the spending priorities outlined in the Parks Canada Agency's 2017/18 departmental plan and increase significantly the financial and personnel resources devoted to the Heritage Resources Conservation program. This is what section 8 (2) of the *Canada National Parks Act* and the supportive words you offered to the Canadian Parks Conference clearly require.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Dr. Ian Urquhart
Conservation Staff and Editor, Wild Lands Advocate

