

Best Practices Study for Sustainable Tourism at Dinosaur Provincial Park



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and his students have studied issues like visitor loyalty in Point Pelee National Park, visitor perceptions in Gwaii Haanas National Park, and organizational change in St. Lawrence Islands National Park. All of these initiatives have centred on challenges arising from increasing fee levels and client demand for service quality.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the study is to develop best practice recommendations for visitor management at Dinosaur Provincial Park. The objectives of this study include:

1. To assess the current state of Dinosaur Provincial Park relative to critical topics identified in a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis completed one year before this project¹;
2. To research and identify best practices that other parks, with similar characteristics as Dinosaur Provincial Park, have implemented successfully for each of the ten topics; and,
3. To determine how these best practices can be applied in Dinosaur Provincial Park.

All three of these objectives are addressed in this report. Additionally, the list of critical topics identified in the SWOT analysis was revised and prioritized based on a further assessment of the current status of tourism service planning and management at Dinosaur Provincial Park and within the Alberta parks and protected areas system. The following list outlines the subjects discussed in the report.

1. Financial management and planning (includes business plans).
2. Marketing and communications planning and strategies.
3. Pricing policies.
4. Understanding the visitor (includes measuring visitor use).
5. Service quality and responsiveness.
6. Regional and park tourism infrastructure and services.
7. Integrated regional tourism planning and community development.
8. Comprehensive park planning.
9. Volunteers, community outreach and constituency building.
10. Risk management.
11. Park personnel management and policies.

The study methodology involved interviews with:

- Tourism entrepreneurs and destination marketing organizations;
- Local community members and politicians;
- Park staff and experts in various locations across Canada; and,
- Park staff at the park, at the regional level and at Alberta Parks and Protected Areas headquarters.

Communities visited in Alberta included Brooks, Drumheller, Medicine Hat, Patricia and Rosebud. A site visit to Dinosaur Provincial Park was made in February 2004.

¹ See report prepared by Eagles and Carr, 2003.

A review of literature pertaining to park tourism best practices was conducted. Interviews and a literature review were also used to identify park agencies that should be interviewed for further information on sustainable park tourism best practices. The findings appear in this document.

Based upon this work, a total of 57 recommendations were developed and are found in the report.

Recommendations Summary List

The recommendations in this report relate to both Dinosaur Provincial Park and the Alberta Parks and Protected Areas system as a whole.

The recommendations are presented in three distinct implementation categories. One category is for short-term implementation to be completed as quickly as possible within a 2-year time frame. The second is medium term implementation, to be completed within 5 years. The final category is long-term implementation to be completed within 10 years. All recommendations should be investigated immediately, but some have a longer completion horizon than others.

Short Term Implementation Recommendations (2 Years)

Recommendation 1: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop an agency financial policy that incorporates each of the five policy elements of: 1) revenue retention, 2) flexible pricing policy, 3) multi-year financial carry over, 4) flexibility in public – private partnerships, and 5) staff business training.

Recommendation 5: The designs of the expanded Dinosaur Provincial Park Field Station consider the role of this important building within the business operations and business plan of the park.

Recommendation 7: Alberta Parks should develop a Business Plan model, for the use of individual parks. This model can be applied to Dinosaur Provincial Park as a case application.

Recommendation 13: Dinosaur Provincial Park should increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the reservation system for tours and campsites.

Recommendation 40: Ensure that field staff members are trained in how to greet and deal with clients. Their training must extend beyond how to “get things done” while onsite.

Recommendation 42: Staff should be encouraged to “own the problem.”

Recommendation 47: Dinosaur Provincial Park should partner with local communities, Destination Marketing Organizations and tourism operators to develop the Canadian Badlands brand and tourism collaborative.

Recommendation 51: Dinosaur Provincial Park should review and revise the volunteer programs, including cooperative association roles.

Recommendation 52: Dinosaur Provincial Park should work with the Dinosaur Natural History Association to redefine its role.

Medium Term Implementation Recommendations (5 years)

Recommendation 2: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas evaluate the current state of concession operations within the context of the emerging business model. If it makes business sense for the park agency to operate tourism services, then they should be operated by the park agency.

Recommendation 3: Dinosaur Provincial Park should consider expanding the supply of camping opportunities and associated visitor services, both through a longer operating season and the use of other campgrounds in the vicinity.

Recommendation 4: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should investigate the use of a full range of recreation and tourism income sources (e.g. rental equipment, parking, guided tours and the sale of branded merchandise). All of these sources can be considered for application in Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Recommendation 6: Alberta Parks should investigate the use of a range of business partnerships in regards to the provision of desirable park tourism services and products. This investigation can be immediately applied in Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Recommendation 8: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a comprehensive communications plan.

Recommendation 9: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and Dinosaur Provincial Park should increase the use of the Internet for facilitating and managing park visitation, including the provision of visitor information and the purchase of tourism services by the public.

Recommendation 10: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and Dinosaur Provincial Park should build a sponsorship and partners program. Once developed, this program can be applied to Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Recommendation 12: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop new distribution channels (e.g. hotel packages and central reservations systems) and improve existing methods of providing park visitors with products and services. An expansion of the bus tour opportunities in the summer season should be considered, such as increasing bus tours from one an hour to one each half hour.

Recommendation 14: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a central reservation system for campgrounds and other tourism services.

Recommendation 15: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and its partners should continue to examine branding as a strategy for regional and park tourism development through research and programming.

Recommendation 16: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a provincial-level Park Tourism Market Research Program.

Recommendation 17: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a Marketing Management Plan.

Recommendation 32: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a province-wide visitor use measurement, demand and reporting policy.

Recommendation 33: Alberta Provincial Parks should consider adopting an overall policy for public use measurement and reporting. The IUCN framework for statistical definitions and progressive levels of public use measurement should be considered for adoption within this policy. Each park in the system can be assigned to one of the five progressive levels of measurement.

Recommendation 34: Dinosaur Provincial Park should aim for the development of an Intermediate (III) level of public use measurement and reporting.

Recommendation 35: Dinosaur Provincial Park should expand the measurement of visitor satisfaction to include all recreational activities that occur within the park.

Recommendation 36: Alberta Provincial Parks should consider the development of periodic detailed study and reporting of visitation within each park in the system. Dinosaur Provincial Park should be an early application of this approach.

Recommendation 44: Dinosaur Provincial Park should design future park facilities and landscapes and retrofit existing infrastructure to meet current green standards and environmentally sensitive design.

Recommendation 45: Dinosaur Provincial Park should work with alternative accommodation facilities in the region to address the park campground's finite space.

Recommendation 46: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should continue to conduct and promote results of an economic impact analysis of park tourism.

Recommendation 48: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should integrate management planning and business planning. These two planning streams can have different planning horizons within an overall planning framework.

Recommendation 49: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should work towards integrating Marketing Plans into the park Management and Business Plans.

Recommendation 53: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should consider the establishment of a Local Advisory Committee for Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Recommendation 54: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should consider the establishment of a protected areas' Provincial Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 55: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and Dinosaur Provincial Park should establish communications and outreach strategies that address specific audiences and utilizes specific tools. This should be integrated with an overarching communications plan.

Recommendation 57: Dinosaur Provincial Park managers should evaluate the current capabilities of park staff, both permanent and seasonal, in regards to park tourism business management. This evaluation would help guide hiring and training decisions.

Long Term Implementation Recommendations (10 years)

Recommendation 11: Dinosaur Provincial Park should develop a publicity campaign that utilizes a variety of tools and is strategically oriented to specific target markets.

Recommendation 18: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should measure the effectiveness of its marketing efforts.

Recommendation 19: Policy makers should view price not simply as a source of revenue but as a robust management tool.

Recommendation 20: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop price packages that help visitors better enjoy the service offering and encourage new behaviours.

Recommendation 21: Dinosaur Provincial Park should be willing to lose money on some programs that serve basic needs and fulfill overall conservation goals.

Recommendation 22: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should price at levels that reflect program quality and service level.

Recommendation 23: Any fee initiative must deal with the emotional as well as the financial demands that fees place upon visitors.

Recommendation 24: Make fee increases small but on a regular basis. By doing so, existing fee levels are less likely to become price anchors in the minds of users.

Recommendation 25: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a method to inform users about the dollars spent on their behalf, to tell clients why fees are being charged, and to make clear the need for any contribution.

Recommendation 26: Ensure that price levels do not deviate too much from the going rate for comparable services.

Recommendation 27: When asking for fees, use that opportunity to tell users how they will benefit from that payment.

Recommendation 28: Consider how visitors use the site (how they register, how far they travel, what equipment they might require, etc) and develop ways to reduce associated costs. This will enhance value levels even as fees rise.

Recommendation 29: Alberta Parks and Protected areas should provide choices in terms of fee level and fee type.

Recommendation 30: Provide a price guide or anchor as visitors ponder the size of their donations.

Recommendation 31: Ensure that visitors are aware of the benefits of the offering before a donation is requested.

Recommendation 37: Focus service quality efforts on field staff.

Recommendation 38: Establish guiding principles for service management.

Recommendation 39: Guiding principles for service management are too often used as platitudes and window dressing. Ensure that they guide every day decision-making.

Recommendation 41: Under promise and over deliver.

Recommendation 43: Train staff in active listening.

Recommendation 50: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a Visitor Management System to inform park Business, Marketing and Management Plans.

Recommendation 56: Dinosaur Provincial Park management should review their current procedures to ensure that they are sufficiently robust to deal with future risk and public safety management.

Summary

This report provides a path towards a sustainable tourism model. It provides a focus for how Dinosaur Provincial Park, as well as the Alberta parks and protected areas system, can be managed within the context of its dual mandate of maintaining the value and integrity of park resources, and providing quality experiences to park visitors. We suggest that this is a path that involves a decade of work, with short, medium and long-term routes. We are convinced that the adoption of the recommendations in this report will produce a more viable tourism management approach.

Introduction

Alberta is known for its nature, safe environment, friendly people, spectacular scenery, natural wonders, wildlife and outdoor activities. Alberta's parks and protected areas showcase natural beauty and outstanding scenery, providing a diversity of landscapes for Albertans and visitors to the province to enjoy, learn about and experience.

The province is committed to strengthening and diversifying Alberta's tourism industry. Alberta's parks and protected areas are significant tourism assets, and can act as attractors for a region, influencing regional tourism expenditures. Alberta Economic Development is collaborating with the Alberta Parks and Protected Areas Division (APPA) of Alberta Community Development to identify how APPA can optimize its ability to effectively deliver quality experiences to large numbers of visitors at natural heritage sites and facilities, while maintaining the value and integrity of the resources preserved within protected areas.

The purpose of the study is to develop best practice recommendations for visitor management at Dinosaur Provincial Park. The method used was: "To research best practice examples of how parks outside of Alberta are providing optimal visitor experiences, while maintaining park resource integrity."² The categories of best practices to be investigated were selected based, in part, on a list of ten critical topics identified in the previous study titled *Existing State of Tourism Management in Alberta's Flagship Provincial Parks* prepared by Paul F.J. Eagles Planning Ltd. in 2003.

The objectives of this current study include:

- 1) To assess the current state of Dinosaur Provincial Park relative to each of the ten identified critical topics;
- 2) To research and identify best practices that other parks, with similar characteristics as Dinosaur Provincial Park, have implemented successfully for each of the ten topics; and,
- 3) To determine how these best practices can be applied in Dinosaur Provincial Park.

All three of these objectives are addressed in this report. Additionally, the list of critical topics to be addressed in this study was expanded and prioritized based on a further assessment of the current status of tourism service planning and management at Dinosaur Provincial Park and within the Alberta parks and protected areas system. The following list highlights these changes.

²*Terms of Reference – Sustainable Park Tourism Management Best Practices Study – Dinosaur Provincial Park, November 2003.*

- 1) Financial management and planning (includes business plans).
- 2) Marketing and communications planning and strategies.
- 3) Pricing policies.
- 4) Understanding the visitor (includes measuring visitor use).
- 5) Service quality and responsiveness.
- 6) Regional and park tourism infrastructure and services.
- 7) Integrated regional tourism planning and community development.
- 8) Comprehensive park planning.
- 9) Volunteers, community outreach and constituency building.
- 10) Risk management.
- 11) Park personnel management and policies.

The results from the study provide information on where APPA can focus its efforts on how Dinosaur Provincial Park can be managed, within the context of maintaining the value and integrity of the park's resources. The study will also assist APPA and Dinosaur Provincial Park to address increasing market demand for visiting Alberta's parks including how to provide quality experiences to park visitors.

For the purposes of this report, tourism management is considered to be the range of planning and management actions taken by Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, by Dinosaur Provincial Park and by the private tourism industry and regional tourism partners. Tourism management in parks is a planning approach designed to maintain the integrity of park resources and visitor experiences. The terms visitor management and tourism management are used interchangeably.

Sustainable tourism is tourism that is financially viable, does not impact negatively on the environment or the quality of community life, and contributes to the economic and social fabric of a region. One goal of park management should be to develop such sustainable tourism.

Study Methodology

Guided by the initial list of 10 critical issues related to tourism in Alberta's five flagship parks, the researchers re-examined the opportunities and challenges related specifically to tourism at Dinosaur Provincial Park and its surrounding region.

For this study, interviews were conducted with:

- Tourism entrepreneurs and destination marketing organizations;
- Local community members and politicians;
- Park staff and experts in various locations across Canada; and,
- Park staff at the park, at the regional level and at Alberta Parks and Protected Areas headquarters.

Communities visited in Alberta included Brooks, Drumheller, Medicine Hat, Patricia and Rosebud. A site visit to Dinosaur Provincial Park was made in February 2004.

A review of literature pertaining to park tourism best practices was conducted. Interviews and a literature review were also used to identify park agencies that should be interviewed for further information on sustainable park tourism best practices. The findings appear in this document.

A number of interviews with park agency personal in other provinces and other agencies were conducted. A list of these contacts is included in Appendix 1.

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- Marty Eberth – Head, Public Relations, Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology.
- Susan Summerville – Head, Visitor Experience Program, Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology.
- Barry Morishita – Town Councillor in Brooks, Tourism Subcommittee.
- Eric Deringer – Manager, Brooks Heritage Inn.
- Jean-Marc Lacasse – Drumheller Regional Chamber of Development & Tourism.
- Bob Lloyd – Economic Development Officer, Town of Drumheller.
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- Jared Prins – Economic Impact Researcher, Policy and Land Use Planning Branch, Alberta Parks and Protected Areas.
- Brian Kelly – Director, Policy & Program Coordination Branch, Alberta Parks and Protected Areas.
- Cyndy Jones – Senior Public Information Officer, Visitor Services Branch, Alberta Parks and Protected Areas.
- Christine Murray – Dinosaur Natural History Association.
- Donna Poon – Tourism Development Coordinator, Tourism Development and Services Branch, Alberta Economic Development.
- Kevin Crockett – Director, Resource Management and Development, Alberta Economic Development.
- Stephen Hill – Director, Tourism Services, Alberta Economic Development.
- Anne Craig – Senior Marketing Specialist, Marketing and Communications, Ontario Parks.
- Bruce van Staalduinen – Manager, Park Operations and Development, Ontario Parks.
- Gary Forma – Coordinator, Tourism Marketing Partnership, Ontario Parks.
- Greg Maude – Manager, Marketing and Communications, Ontario Parks.
- Dan Mulrooney – Research Analyst, Planning and Research Section Ontario Parks.
- Tracy Elbourne – Head, Outdoor Recreation Programmes, Manitoba Parks.
- Jack Ricou – Former Manager, Interpretation and Outreach, Parks Canada.
- Greg Danchuk – Manager, Market Research, Parks Canada.

1. Financial Planning and Management.

In the past, a typical parks agency in Canada obtained a budget allotment from government each year. Any income, for example from recreation use fees, was returned to central government in the same fiscal year. All allocated funds had to be spent in a fiscal year. No carry over of allocated funds or retention of earned funds was possible. Such an approach can often be effective for resource management, but is very challenging for the management of park tourism.

A fixed budget amount provided once a year provides no flexibility to managers in regards to change in tourism demand or service level. In tourism, all activities must be planned for well in advance of their delivery. Once the budget is set, changes are not possible. For example, if use levels increase there is no money available to service those new clients. If there is demand for increases in use, such as new shoulder season camping, such activity can only occur if central government provides the requisite money at some time in the future.

Each visitor utilizes services, consumes resources and makes demands. The situation of the fixed budget situation and the use fees being returned to central government turns park visitors into expenditure units. This makes managers, politicians and others view park tourism as a drain on the budget and as a liability. This is a severe conceptual limitation that underlies full government funding. With this approach, the park visitor is perceived as an expenditure factor and as a general liability.

On the contrary, a business-based approach to park tourism turns visitors into income entities. Once individual parks and the park agencies start to gain finance from tourism, the visitors start to be viewed more positively, as a benefit. With this approach, the park visitor is perceived as a contributor to the budget and to the park, as an income source and as a benefit to park management.

One of the largest benefits of a business-based approach to park tourism is the positive attitude that develops in regards to the perception of the role of park visitors. With tourism income as a major part of a park's budget, visitors become critically important and valued to the success of the enterprise.

Canada has extensive experience with a business approach to park tourism. The Niagara Parks Commission (NPC), in operation for almost 120 years, operates as a business, with various fees and charges used to provide the money to service the visitor needs. Interestingly, the NPC makes an operational profit most years without a fee for the central activity of the site, the viewing of Niagara Falls.

The NPC has many income sources including:

- Sales of consumer goods;

- Parking fees;
- Sales of recreation services;
- Currency exchange;
- Food sales;
- Transit tickets; and,
- A grant from Ontario Hydro.

We do not have a breakdown of the contribution of the various income sources as this information is not published and is not generally available. The Commission does not charge for visiting Niagara parkland or for visiting and viewing Niagara Falls. The NPC receives no government grants.

The NPC operates a series of consumer stores that are strategically located in areas of high visitor use. The agency makes a substantial profit on sales from these stores. Parking charges are a major source of income, with the large parking lot located near the lip of the Horseshoe Falls being particularly important. It is important to note that the Canadian side of Niagara Falls has no gate fees, but it does have parking fees. The income to the park agency is the same, but the perception of the fees by the users is quite different. The Commission provides most of the recreational services directly, including the viewing behind the falls, the gorge walk, and the St. David's Gorge cable ride. A concessionaire is used for one major recreation activity; the Maid of Mist boat rides in the Niagara River. The reasons for the use of a concessionaire for this activity are probably due to the specialized nature of boat tours and the higher level of risk and associated liability. Food sales are an important source of income, with a variety of products ranging from fast food through to fine dining. The food sales outlets are typically near the consumer stores. The NPC operates a bus transit system along the Niagara Parkway. It is funded through ticket sales and parking charges. The entrepreneurial nature of the NPC is revealed in its currency exchange business, another important source of income. Ontario Power Generation provides grants to the NPC for the gardening and maintenance in the areas where power generation facilities interact with the Niagara Parkway.

In most years the Niagara Parks Commission gains more income from its various sources than it spends in operational expenses. The profit is used for capital projects, such as facility development. The year 2003 was an anomaly due to a 30% drop in tourism flows in the Niagara Region due to the SARS disease outbreak in Toronto. Therefore, the NPC may have had a deficit in 2003.

Ontario Parks was restructured in 1996 with a new business model approach. The key authority given to the agency was the ability to earn and retain all revenues. Revenue retention authority allowed the agency to improve customer service and to generate increased income. From 1996 to 2002 Ontario Parks increased their revenue to such an extent that it moved from 32% cost recovery to 82% cost recovery.

To achieve effective tourism management in parks, it is essential that government policy allows park agencies to function like a business. Key aspects of this policy include:

- Revenue retention within the park system;
- Flexibility in setting prices;
- Multi-year carry over of earnings;
- Ability to enter into public and private sector partnerships, and,
- Staff with business training.

Alberta Parks now has partial revenue retention. However, the current policy structure makes business operation challenging, as not all of the five key principles are now in place.

Recommendation 1: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop an agency financial policy that incorporates each of the five policy elements of: 1) revenue retention, 2) flexible pricing policy, 3) multi-year financial carry over, 4) flexibility in public – private partnerships, and 5) staff business training.

Collection of money from recreation fees, revenue retention and multi-year carry over requires business planning. There are several examples of park business planning available in Canada and elsewhere. Parks Canada now does such plans, under the guidance of a 1995 manual. Ontario Parks³, who obtained semi-parastatal status in the mid 1990s, has a business-planning model. It is attached as Appendix 2 to this report. KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa, South Africa National Parks and Parks Canada also employ business-planning models. It would be useful for Alberta Provincial Parks to utilize the experience from these park systems in the creation of an Alberta Business Planning approach for provincial parks.

The financial flow from tourism moves through several key areas. The majority of the cash flow in tourism flows through three fundamental areas: transport, accommodation and food. More minor sectors include recreation service fees, merchandise sales, taxes, and rentals.

There are many potential income sources for parks. Figure 1 outlines some of these. It is important to note that most park agencies utilize only a small number of these income sources.

³ Ontario Parks (undated a).

Figure 1: Park Tourism Income Sources

Park Entrance Fees
Recreation Service Fees, Special Events and Special Services
Concessions
Accommodation
Equipment Rental
Food Sales (Restaurant and Store)
Parking
Merchandise Sales (Equipment, Clothing, Souvenirs)
Licensing of Intellectual Property
Cross Product Marketing and Partnerships

Park entrance fees are a common income source in parks. Entrance fees are charged in order to cover the costs of a range of services. However, Alberta does not now have a park entrance fee for day use activities. If such a fee is considered, its introduction should be explained as being related to the cost of providing the visitor services.

Recreation service fees are a common income source in parks, and one widely used in Dinosaur Provincial Park. These fees have the advantage of being directly related to a service, such as the fee for the bus tour of the badlands in Dinosaur Provincial Park. These are typically well-accepted by park visitors because people are well-acquainted with paying a fee for a service rendered. Park agencies must have flexibility in pricing policy in regards to such programs. Recreation services can be provided most effectively when the operators have the flexibility to charge the amount required, when it is required.

Park tourism involves the provision of a wide variety of services desired by visitors, from food sales in stores to overnight accommodation and from tourist guides to recreational equipment sales and rental. A park manager can ensure the provision of such services in several ways including:

1. Government ownership and operation;
2. Government ownership of facilities and non-profit organization operation;

3. Private construction, ownership and operation of a facility by a profit-oriented corporation; or,
4. Government ownership, with operations delivered by the private profit oriented sector.

Concessions

Agreements with private sector operators for the provision of visitor services and facilities within a park or protected area are termed concessions. Such agreements are struck by the park as tool of management to achieve one or more objectives of a park. Therefore, concession planning and concession agreements grow out of the overall park management planning process.

Concessions agreements relate to options 2, 3 and 4 above, which involve some combination of government ownership and direction, usually of buildings and infrastructure, along with operation by either a non-profit or profit-oriented corporation. These services are most often provided by the private, profit-making sector, though increasingly concessions are being leased to non-government organizations (NGOs) and to other not-for-profit enterprises such as to local community bodies.

In all cases, the concession agreement provides for the delivery of specified tourism services in the protected area under a permit and legal contract. The license may be exclusive, with no other similar licensed operation permitted, or non-exclusive, when other operations are allowed to conduct business.

Private sector involvement in protected areas is most commonly related to eight recognized fields of management (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Management Fields in Parks Utilizing Concession Agreements.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation, lodges, hotels • Trips and tours • Waste collection and management • Transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site and facility maintenance • Campgrounds • Food provision, both as food stores and restaurants • Information provision
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Park agencies utilize concessionaires for many reasons. In Canada, law and policy usually prohibit park agencies from functioning like a corporation. For example, many do not have the ability to retain earnings past the end of the fiscal year. They are limited in their ability to raise capital and operating funds. The setting of prices

may lie with cabinet, a time consuming and non-responsive approach. They are limited by the constraints of government policy and labour contracts. They may be restrained from purchasing products, which are destined for resale, by complicated procurement policies.

Concessionaires are typically more capable of adapting to changing market needs and conditions. They can often innovate and respond quickly. They may have more flexibility in labour contracts. They may have more freedom in setting price levels.

However, from the park agency point of view there may be negative aspects in the use of concessionaires. Much of their income may be income forgone by the park agency. Concessionaires usually only desire to operate under conditions of high income, and therefore may not operate in times of low tourism volume. The business community may not have the capacity to provide the products and services required by the park, resulting in concessionaires that are ill fitted to the park needs. The granting and management of concessionaires can be very time and resource expensive for park staff. Concessionaires sometimes do not follow the contract stipulations and in such cases difficult enforcement and legal disputes result. The granting of concession contracts can be subject to political interference.

Many park agencies utilize private concessionaires to provide certain services. Such operators are typically used under several circumstances. The most common is when law or policy limits a park agency from functioning like a business. However, even when the agency has full business capability, there are some reasons to use private concessionaires. One such circumstance occurs in highly specialized services. The private company may have expertise, equipment and manpower required for such services. For example, Ontario Parks uses the Pepsi Corporation to provide canned and bottled drinks to park visitors. Additionally, this agency uses a private corporation to provide the campsite registration service. Niagara Parks uses a private company to operate a specialized, high volume boat tour in the Niagara River. Another circumstance occurs when substantial levels of capital funding are required. With long-term leases private companies may be willing to invest high levels of capital in equipment, buildings and market development. South Africa National Parks recently entered into long-term concession agreements with private operators for the construction and operation of high-end ecolodges in some parks and other agreements for a series of restaurants and stores.

Key questions to be considered in concession contracts include:

- 1 What are the formal policies governing concession planning and management in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas?
- 2 What specific contract agreements now occur?
- 3 What are the park agency goals for the concession agreements?
Possibilities include:

- i. Maximizing income to the park?
 - ii. Reducing costs to the park?
 - iii. Local community development?
 - iv. High service quality?
 - v. Provision of services otherwise not readily available?
 - vi. Gaining specialized expertise?
 - vii. Gaining access to capital?
- 4 What are the identities of the contractors? NGOs, community groups, or profit oriented corporations?
 - 5 What are the products and services provided by concessionaires now?
 - 6 What arrangements are now in place for product pricing?
 - 7 How are the concessionaires chosen?
 - 8 What are the lengths of term of the agreement?
 - 9 How are the contracts monitored?
 - 10 What personnel and financial resources are necessary within a park agency for effective concession planning and management?
 - 11 What are the major issues with the current state of concession management, as identified by the park managers, the concessionaires and the interested public?
 - 12 What management options are most successful in achieving the stated goals?

Unfortunately, there is a major lack of literature available to answer these questions outlined above and it is beyond the capacity of this study to attempt to provide all the answers. However, one important issue we wish to discuss is the financial arrangement between Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and its concessionaires for campgrounds. We understand the current concession agreements for campgrounds do not provide for any financial return to the agency from the concessionaires. This is an unusual situation in Canadian parks and we recommend its revision as soon as possible. At the bare minimum the park agency should receive a fee and/or percentage of operator profits each year as well as implement firmer agreements with the concessionaires on the maintenance of campground infrastructure and adhering to visitor satisfaction targets.

In most agencies, the contract stipulates a monetary return to the agency from the concessionaire. This usually involves an annual fee plus a percentage of business income. Some park agencies report that concessionaires often manipulate their accounting so as to show as little profit as possible, in order to avoid paying the fee associated with a percentage of income. Ontario Parks found that with concession agreements for equipment rental, stores and wood sales the volume of business was frequently underreported. This was discovered after Ontario Parks started to operate these services with their own staff. For example, once Ontario Parks started selling

wood in the campgrounds, park staff found their volume of sales was double that reported by the concessionaire who had previously operated the business.

Therefore, if concessionaires are used to provide services under a profit sharing arrangement, the contract and accounting procedures must be rigorously applied to avoid fraud.

Alberta Parks and Protected Areas' current campground concession situation will have several significant outcomes. The parks agency will be forced to operate those campgrounds that have poor revenue prospects, while the private concessionaires will operate those campgrounds that have good revenue prospects. This removes the possibility that the agency can earn income at profit centers and then use this money to provide programs elsewhere.

Recommendation 2: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas evaluate the current state of concession operations within the context of the emerging business model. If it makes business sense for the park agency to operate tourism services, then they should be operated by the park agency.

Campgrounds

The park agency operates the campground within Dinosaur Provincial Park. With effective government policy the park and the agency should be better able to undertake business planning for the operation of this campground. However, from a financial profitability standpoint we are concerned about the size of the campground, since it is small and only open for business for a small period in the summer. Options need to be considered for more camping facilities and for longer seasons of camping. For example the Tillebrook campground is well outfitted for large RV use, something the Dinosaur Provincial Park campground lacks. It is located close to the Trans-Canada Highway near Brooks and is owned by the Government of Alberta. When combined with bus transit to the park, it could expand the range of camping services and park income. The various options need to be compared within a business-planning framework.

Recommendation 3: Dinosaur Provincial Park should consider expanding the supply of camping opportunities and associated visitor services, both through a longer operating season and the use of other campgrounds in the vicinity.

Rental Equipment

Outdoor recreation is usually equipment intensive. It is expensive and difficult for travellers to purchase and to carry such equipment to every recreation site. Park managers often fill this need by providing rental equipment on site. This satisfies a vital visitor need and can provide substantial income. Typically, park agencies find that such operations can be financially most successful if operated by the agency and its staff.

Food

Every park visitor eats food. Most parks provide some level of food service, varying from grocery sales, through fast food to fine dining. This is an essential service and one that can provide modest income. Typically, park agencies find that such operations can be financially most successful if operated by specialized concessionaires. However, in a few parks simple food operations, such as for fast food, are operated by the agency and its staff.

Parking

All park visitors are familiar with parking service fees, having paid such fees many times in many different situations in the past. They are therefore familiar with such service fees. Some park agencies charge parking fees, rather than entrance fees. A classic example is that of the Niagara Parks Commission. This agency charges a substantial parking fee for a parking lot near the edge of the Canadian falls. Another parking lot is a couple of kilometres away. This one is much less expensive and has bus transit to the lip of the falls. It provides a vital option. The NPC finds that the vast majority of the tourists pay the more expensive parking fee at the more convenient location. Hence, the NPC uses a parking fee rather than a day use fee. This policy is so effective that the press routinely states that Niagara Falls is one of the best tourist bargains, because there is no fee for entrance. Another parking fee example is the second car parking charge used in Ontario Provincial Park campgrounds. Campers with a second vehicle are required to park this vehicle in a special parking lot and to pay a fee. The justification is that allowing only one vehicle per campsite reduces visual blight and negative environmental impact on the campsites. In addition, park rangers patrol the ancillary parking lot so campers receive a feeling of vehicle security. This program has been effective with all three objectives, reducing campsite impact, increasing the campers' feeling of security and gaining substantial campground income.

Some park agencies are now providing winter parking and security services for recreational vehicle storage. This can provide a considerable level of income.

Merchandise

Merchandise sales are an important income source in tourism. Typically, parks were ineffective in such sales. Friends Groups are sometimes effective in merchandise sales. Good examples of this are the gift shop and bookstores in Point Pelee National Park and Algonquin Provincial Park. The latter now has an annual income of over \$2,000,000 a year.

Merchandise outlets in parks can have important cultural impacts. For example, they can stimulate local craft industries, book authorship and local artists. Older parks often have a major arts and crafts industry built on the sale of park specific items to park visitors.

Ontario Parks is an interesting example of an agency with expanding and successful merchandise sales. The merchandise is heavily oriented towards clothing, with an ever expanding and diverse product line. The gross sales for Ontario Parks' merchandise are over \$1,000,000 a year and expanding.

Some Ontario Parks' merchandise can be classed as vanity clothing, that is clothing that enables people to attain status through its use. Most such products are heavily festooned with the names of provincial parks and the logo of the agency. This assists with developing the brand name of Ontario Parks and enables consumers to advertise that they have been a visitor to specific parks. The developers of the products report that they now receive requests from consumers about what the new product lines will be available each year. It is important to remember the root meaning of the word "souvenir". It is based on the French verb "to remember". Therefore, vanity clothing as a souvenir helps people remember their visit.

Ontario Parks sells their merchandise both wholesale and retail. The retail operation sells products directly from the agency to the visitors within visitor centers and campground offices. Ontario Parks also sells products wholesale to park concessionaires; stores operated by Friends Groups and carefully selected stores outside the parks that sell recreation-related merchandise⁴.

One of the major challenges for park merchandising is the requirement to use government procurement rules for the purchasing of supplies. Such rules often make purchasing complex, with a lack of flexibility and an awkward timing. For effective retail and supply management, parks require a more flexible purchasing policy environment.

Private businesses utilize extensive licensing of intellectual property. For example,

⁴ Ontario Parks only wholesales its branded merchandise to retailers who meet specific service quality and pro-conservation standards.

many companies have substantial levels of corporate value tied to brand names and symbols. Park agencies have some of the most dynamic brand names in the world. Dinosaur Provincial Park has World Heritage designation. This automatically gives it a globally important symbol of quality and importance. Park managers may be able to capitalize on such intellectual property. An example could be the licensing of Alberta park names and images to clothing and equipment manufacturers.

Tourism businesses often do cross product marketing and packaging. For example, a bus company will also provide business to a local restaurant and to a local destination and vice versa. Park agencies in the past have often been ineffective in this activity, largely because they could gain little financial benefit from such activity. However, with a business operation approach they can gain considerable benefit by working closely with allied businesses, such as local accommodation providers, bus companies, equipment providers, etc.

Recommendation 4: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should investigate the use of a full range of recreation and tourism income sources (e.g. rental equipment, parking, guided tours and the sale of branded merchandise). All of these sources can be considered for application in Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Infrastructure Development and Business Planning

Dinosaur Provincial Park is in the enviable position of expanding the Field Station now found in the park. The new and expanded building will provide a major tourism service function. It is important that a full range of tourism services be considered in the building design. The most important considerations include:

1. Sales of tour tickets;
2. Management of tour operations, such as waiting areas, washrooms, and staging areas;
3. Sales of merchandise;
4. Information distribution and interpretation;
5. Information and booking of other travel opportunities in southeastern Alberta; and,
6. Local community outreach and communication.

Recommendation 5: The design of the expanded Dinosaur Provincial Park Field Station should consider the role of this important building within the business operations and business plan of the park.

Corporate Partnerships

Ontario Parks has an extensive and successful range of business partnerships. For example, the Pepsi Corporation provides vending machines for drinks in many operating parks. Park visitors gain a desired benefit and the park agency gains approximately \$1,000,000 a year in income. Interestingly, the top selling drinks are water and fruit drinks. Each year Ontario Parks publishes a booklet outlining the extensive recreation opportunities available in this system. Advertising by allied companies, such as those providing recreation equipment, pays the full cost of this booklet. Some parks utilize corporate sponsorship for special events such as the Pelee Birding Festival and Ontario Parks Day. This sponsorship may be with the agency directly or with the Friends Group. Many parks provide yearly newsletters that contain information of interest to the visitors. This is paid for by advertising and local business partnerships.

It is challenging for parks to gain income from each of the three main areas of tourism cash flow: transport, lodging and food. Since parks do not make or sell vehicles, airplanes or transport companies, little income can be generated from this source. However, parks are often in the lodging business, with camping being ubiquitous. South African National Parks is heavily into roofed accommodation, providing the majority of this service in their parks. The excellent Rondovels, traditional round cottages, in South Africa's national parks provide a useful service to the travelling public and are important sources of income to the parks. Most park agencies find the provision of food to be a service that is too specialized for internal operation. Therefore, facilities such as grocery stores, fast food shops and dine-in restaurants typically occur through licensed concessionaires. Such an arrangement offers a valuable public service and provides income to the agency. However, some agencies, such as the previously mentioned Niagara Parks Commission, provide a full range of food services.

Apart from transportation, food and lodging, there are additional sources of tourism related products and services that should be evaluated by the park agency as potential sources of revenue. These include products such as branded merchandise and souvenirs and services such as guided interpretation tours, rental equipment, school programs and learning/volunteer vacations. Each park agency and each park must look at this full range of potential income sources and select those that best fit their situation.

Recommendation 6: Alberta Parks should investigate the use of a range of business partnerships in regards to the provision of desirable park tourism services and products. This investigation can be immediately applied in Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Implications of Adopting a Business Model

There are management implications that result from tourism income (Figure 3). Overall, park visitors face both higher fees and more increased service opportunities.

Figure 3: Implications of Tourism-based Income

Business-based management
Increased profile of visitors in management
More emphasis on client satisfaction
Service Quality Management
Enhanced marketing
Independence from government grants
Higher fees

The experience of many park agencies shows that there is usually considerable elasticity in the willingness to pay for recreation services. The fees now charged for most outdoor recreation services in parks are much lower than comparative fees for other leisure services. For example, camping fees are typically much below any other form of accommodation and are often below comparative private sector camping fees. Most users are well aware of this fact and are willing to pay a fee that more closely approximates the cost of production. However, park agencies should be more direct and active in informing visitors of this fact.

There is often complaining from campers about the need to pay for the full cost of production. However, experience shows that they are also very willing, once forced, to pay such fees. Ontario reports surprisingly little resistance to their substantial increase in camping fees over the last few years.

Ontario provincial parks increased their direct and indirect fees for camping considerably over the last 5 years. A number of new services were provided, such as campsite preregistration and merchandise. Over this same period the use levels of camping increased considerably. Additionally, the client satisfaction level remained high or increased. This triple increase in fees, usage and satisfaction is due to much better service provision, both in quality and quantity. Throughout western society service quality management is on the increase and citizens now demand quality and

will pay for suitable levels of service.

A business approach requires changes within the park agency. A business approach to management is necessary. This includes the ability to retain and utilize most if not all income. Given the need for income, the park visitors become more important. Visitor opinions on programs, length of stay, return rates, facility and program needs and overall satisfaction becomes important management concerns. The managers become more aware of the need to create a product that fits the needs of specific markets. Once the income becomes substantial, constituting a majority of the agency's budget, park management gains a higher level of operational independence.

Experience reveals many resistance factors to the move from a park agency dependent upon government grants, to an agency dependent upon tourism income and government grants (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Resistance Factors to Tourism-based Income

Public expectation of free nature
History of pricing below production cost
Private tourism sector resistance
Private sector competitors
Lack of business expertise in agency
Public concern about commercial development
Staff resistance to business operation

Nature is often perceived as being common property and requiring no human management. This concept of nature as a free good creates expectations that parks and other forms of protected areas should provide free access and free services. Over history this concept was reinforced with pricing of services well below the production cost of those services. For example, in the USA, national law prohibited fee collection in National Parks for many years.

Tourism's private sector sometimes objects to any fees, and especially to any increase in fees. In addition, many business people in tourism believe that substantial income can be earned by providing services to park visitors. In some cases, these people may use the political system to compete for the most important tourism services, such as accommodation and food provision. This denies the park

management income from these important sources.

Park agencies are typically not equipped to undertake business management. Their marketing, pricing policy, economics and financial expertise may be deficient. These and other factors lead some park agency staff to object to a park agency operating as a business. It is common for important sectors of the public, such as environmental groups, to object to public agencies adopting a business model. This is often due to fears of over commercialisation. It can also be due to personal resistance to paying increased fees.

Once each of these resistance factors are recognized, they can be dealt with. Increasingly people recognize that nature is under stress and must be managed. Management takes money. Park agencies should be proactive in letting their visitors know what management is required and how much it costs to provide this management. Park visitors can and should be the most vocal supporters of effective levels of park management.

The low reference price for outdoor recreation services in the past is a major conceptual challenge. Alberta Parks and Protected Areas is an example as the reference price for day use is close to or at zero. However, this also can be dealt with by careful explanation of the costs, the benefits and the costs of competing recreation services. People will pay for effective services. Private sector tourism interests will cooperate with new and increased fees if they see increased levels of vital services and are warned well in advance.

Some private sector competitors can be hard to deal with as they attempt to maximize the benefits to their business while transferring as much of the production cost to the public sector as possible. For example, some private sector tour operators may argue for minimum entrance fees to a park, while simultaneously charging substantial fees for their own services.

Park agencies can obtain business expertise by the hiring of new staff and the training of current staff. Public concern about commercial development must be handled by careful explanation of the services, the costs and the benefits. It is often necessary to explain that there is not new commercial development, just more effective management of current resources. Staff resistance to adopting a business model of operation can be handled by careful explanation of the situation and the use of successful examples from other jurisdictions.

Experience shows that those agencies that are given the opportunity to undertake business planning and to function like a business are much more successful at tourism management. The agency is better able to supply the services required by the visitors. Visitor satisfaction increases with the better fit of supply and demand. As park staff members are better able to utilize their expertise in public service

management their morale increases. They also feel more in charge of their own destiny. If the public service programs are financially effective, then the staff members are rewarded with a more effective program and more satisfied clientele.

Alberta Parks and Protected Areas need a business-planning model. A document and associated training for staff can help create the internal expertise to more fully function like a tourism business. The Ontario Business Planning document (See Appendix 2) is a successful model. The agency has experienced a successful period of business plan implementation and the model has proved to be effective. Appendix 3 contains a paper by Robert Moos of Ontario Parks that outlines the successes of the Ontario Parks Business Planning approach.

Dinosaur Provincial Park can use the provincial business-planning model in the development of its specific business plan.

In business planning at both the provincial and park levels, all of the various expenditure opportunities outlined in this report should be explored. Concurrently, the resistance factors must also be addressed.

Recommendation 7: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas Division should develop a Business Plan model, for the use of individual parks. This model can be applied to Dinosaur Provincial Park as a case application.

It is important that business planning be linked to other planning processes, such as management communications and marketing planning. It is critical that these plans are linked and supportive.

2. Marketing and Communications Planning and Strategies

Marketing and communications are two distinct, yet interrelated, activities. Park tourism marketing focuses on customer satisfaction as an end, and thus must begin with a complete understanding of the needs and expectations of these customers.⁵ Marketing is an overall management orientation reflecting corporate attitudes that, in the case of travel and tourism, must balance the interests of stakeholders with the long-term environmental and socio-cultural interests of a destination and at the same time meet the demands and expectations of customers.⁶ In the case of Dinosaur Provincial Park, these stakeholders include park visitors, but also the citizens of Alberta, as well as the global population because of the park's international significance.

Communications is the act of relaying information to a specific audience to achieve a prescribed purpose. In the case of Dinosaur Provincial Park, external audiences include park visitors, local communities, Alberta residents, the international community, the tourism sector, and politicians and policy makers. Internal audiences include park staff, scientists working in the park, and park agency bureaucrats. The purpose of such communication might be to build an advocacy base for conservation amongst the public and elected officials, to relay the natural and cultural significance of the park, and to prepare potential visitors for visitor management changes.

Within the marketing process, communication is used in various forms, and will be elaborated below. The development of a communications strategy can also draw on market research; for example, interpretation programs and environmental education programs, one category of communication strategies that the park currently uses, can be developed for specific visitor market segments that park managers want to reach.

Marketing is traditionally divided into four general categories: 1) products and services, 2) pricing, 3) promotions and 4) distribution or how the service is delivered to the customer. Pricing and understanding the customer are deemed to be so important to the Dinosaur Provincial Park context that they have been given separate sections in this report (see Sections 3 & 4). Using promotion and distribution as marketing strategies is described in detail next. However, a general overview of communications strategies currently used by Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas is first provided along with a few recommendations for improvements.

⁵ Canadian Parks Service, 1988

⁶ After Middleton & Hawkins, 1998

Communications

Communications can serve many roles. Communications can help facilitate the development of policy, management planning and public consultation. It can also welcome and orientate visitors to a park and warn them about possible hazards. Interpretation and environmental education are cornerstones of many park experiences for visitors; this is very true at Dinosaur Provincial Park. As mentioned earlier, communications can also include outreach programs to local communities, politicians, the private sector and so on. Tourism marketing, media relations, and training are other forms of communications. Parks Canada's External Communication Branch splits communications into three divisions: 1) stakeholder relations, 2) marketing, and 3) education and interpretation.

Forms of Communication

Dinosaur Provincial Park is currently using communications to address many of the roles described above. Public safety, visitor welcome and visitor orientation are achieved through park signage, the park's web site, and brochures. Interpretation and education programming is also currently offered at the park; plans for an expansion of interpretation and learning programs is scheduled to take place with the Field Station's expansion.

Public relations, a form of promotion, is the dissemination of information to audiences that is used to create a climate of support from stakeholders and decision makers for organizational objectives. Dinosaur Provincial Park does little of this, and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas does slightly more public relations, generally through its public relations office in Edmonton. This could be explored further as an option for fostering support for specific parks and the park system in general.

Public consultation is another form of communications. This current study is a form of public consultation; however other mechanisms for public input and policy planning do not appear to be administered in any systematic or formalized way at present by Dinosaur Provincial Park. Generally the park solicits input from stakeholders when a special task is being undertaken, such as a revision of the park's management plan, or when a unique opportunity or unexpected problem develops where the park must consult community members. However, generally this does not occur on an ongoing basis.

Training of staff takes place on an annual basis (i.e. summer students). Some permanent staff also receives training on an annual basis. For example the Conservation Officer (CO) participates in an annual gathering and training session for Alberta Parks and Protected Areas system COs. One to two days of this 10-day training workshop is devoted to visitor interaction and service skills.

A final observation on the status of tourism-related marketing and communications associated with Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas is that both institutions lack comprehensive communications strategies. Every successful park system in the world requires this to facilitate successful achievement of their goals (e.g. biodiversity conservation).

Recommendations for communications and marketing strategies are as follows:

Recommendation 8: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a comprehensive communications plan.

A communications strategy that is clear and consistent for Dinosaur Provincial Park as well as the entire Alberta Parks and Protected Areas systems needs to be developed. This will facilitate public understanding of the agency, its mission, and the importance of each of its parks. Attachment and commitment to specific parks or the idea of cultural and natural heritage protection may also be fostered. This can lead to political and financial support of the agency and specific parks.

A communications plan is an especially important action in that the park system has undergone many transformations in the last five years, causing identity confusion for its staff as well as for the public. A comprehensive strategy would address the following communications roles:

- Policy development;
- Management planning;
- Public consultation;
- Reception and orientation;
- Public safety;
- Interpretation and environmental education;
- Outreach;
- Tourism marketing;
- Special events and ceremonies; and,
- Training.

Parks Canada has developed a comprehensive communications plan.⁷ Specific core messages were drafted by agency staff to help guide operations and communications efforts of field and headquarters staff. Examples of core messages associated with visitation to Parks Canada parks are included in Appendix 4.

One starting point in identifying where to prioritize communications efforts is to research 1) stakeholders' awareness of the park system in general, and 2) visitors'

⁷ *Parks Canada Messages – Toolkit for Staff 2001*

needs and interests associated with park visitation and the kinds of experiences sought in parks. For example, Ontario Parks recently asked Ontario residents how many parks were in its system. Respondents stated there were only 10 to 20 parks in their province's system, when in fact there are almost 300 parks. This reveals an on-going communication problem that needs to be addressed.

A communications tool that is underutilized at present for Dinosaur Provincial Park is the Internet, and especially the park's web site.

Recommendation 9: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and Dinosaur Provincial Park should increase the use of the Internet for facilitating and managing park visitation, including the provision of visitor information and the purchase of tourism services by the public.

Dinosaur Provincial Park's web site does currently contain a significant amount of information, however improvements could be made. These changes include: 1) keep the content of the web site up-to-date (an easier mechanism for updates to the web site needs to be implemented at the agency level), 2) develop the ability to complete business transactions such as campsite reservations on-line, and 3) develop stronger links with regional tourism businesses, (e.g., informing potential park visitors, in a more direct manner, about accommodations facilities and attractions in the region).

When considering the redesign of the park web site best practices in web site design that should be considered include⁸:

- Efficient browsing and searching;
- Broadly accessible information;
- High quality and current links;
- Promotional and information intensive;
- Engaging tone and style;
- Key information required;
- Comprehensive and accurate database;
- Site map;
- Practical contact methods; and,
- Secure financial transactions.

It could also be useful for the site designers to take a look at the analysis framework for park tourism websites developed at the University of Waterloo.⁹ This framework entitled, *Using Web Sites for Park Tourism, Policy, Practice and Design*, is found at:

⁸ After Information Management & Economics, 1999.

⁹ See Murphy, et. al, 2004.

<http://www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/~rec680/>. Not only does this web document provide a structure for understanding park tourism websites, it also provides a constructive criticism of the current Dinosaur Provincial Park website.

This University of Waterloo analysis found that a web site should contain information for visitors in specific areas. The success of a park website is determined by how parks portray certain subject areas that are important to the potential visitor and the actual visitor. These subject areas include:

- Accommodation;
- Transportation;
- Food;
- Natural resources;
- Cultural / historic resources;
- Recreation facilities;
- Recreation, activities, special events;
- Consumer products;
- Special itineraries; and,
- Weather, safety, fees.

In addition, this framework suggests that each of these subject areas must be understood within the various stages of the trip experience, starting with 1) recognition of the park as a potential destination, through 2) planning for the trip, 3) travelling, 4) visiting the park and ending with the long period of 5) personal recollection.

Promotion

Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas utilize many different promotional tools to encourage tourism and recreation in Dinosaur Provincial Park. The primary focus for these efforts should be to ensure that sustainable forms of tourism are being promoted. The park is promoted in province-wide publications such as the *Alberta South Vacation Guide* and the *Alberta Campground Guide*. The image of a child climbing a hoodoo that appears on the front cover of the 2003 *Alberta South Vacation Guide* is a good example of the kinds of imagery the park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should work to discourage (see Appendix 5).

Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas are active partners with Travel Alberta and other provincial and regional promotional agencies and initiatives. Through partnerships such as these they can have an influence in how park related imagery and messages are relayed to potential visitors. Partnerships can also result in new opportunities for developing sustainable tourism in the

southeastern region of Alberta. One such initiative is the Canadian Badlands Initiative, being coordinated by Alberta Economic Development.

Sponsorships

Sponsorship is another marketing tool that Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should use. On a smaller scale, sponsorship programs could be developed at Dinosaur Provincial Park. Sponsorship is a marketing relationship between a park and another organization, often a corporation, which is designed to achieve specific objectives through a range of communications strategies. Sponsorship may come in many forms such as financial assistance, provision of event infrastructure or management skills. However, it is essential that the potential sponsor be an appropriate partner in addressing the needs and image of the park agency. Occasionally some sponsors seek to influence the nature of the park service or product, and nearly all expect a return of some description from their investment in the form of greater product and/or corporate recognition.¹⁰

There is a general agreement that for sponsorship to be effective the agreement should be relatively longer term. If the sponsorship is for an annual event, then it should be for three to five years. The reason for this is that it usually takes longer to establish a linkage between the park or park experience and the sponsor's target market, and this linkage is key to achieving the awareness and image benefits being sought.¹¹ A more lengthy term of commitment also means less administration for the park agency, as sponsor searches do not need to be performed as often.

A survey of corporations in New Zealand in the 1990s identified the following criteria that were used by companies when making decisions to get involved in sponsoring an event or organization such as a park. Park managers must be aware of such criteria in order to attract the best kinds of corporate partners and develop their proposal accordingly (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Selected decision-making criteria for corporate sponsorship*

- Overall value for money represented by the sponsorship.
- Extent to which the sponsorship supports the company's image.
- Relevance of the cause for the company's customers.
- Extent to which the sponsorship enhances the good citizen role.
- Relevance of the cause to the community.
- Track record of the organization seeking sponsorship.

¹⁰ Hall & McArthur, 1998

¹¹ Crompton, 1999

- Extent to which the sponsorship provides a vehicle for corporate advertising.
- Amount of free publicity that can be generated for the company.
- Location where the sponsorship activity takes place.

*Criteria at top of list were identified as being the most important.¹²

An example of sponsorship's potential is illustrated in the recent purchase of outdoor clothing for Alberta Parks and Protected Areas personnel. Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) supplied the clothing at retail prices. The choice to patronize a Canadian retailer was a reasonable choice. All clothing clearly identifies the supplier and is in essence an advertisement for that supplier. However, instead of purchasing the clothing at full cost, a sponsorship agreement could have been struck between MEC and APPA, whereby the park agency receives a discount on the clothing and MEC acquires greater visibility (i.e. the MEC logo on a Partners page on the park agency web site and brochures). Currently MEC receives free advertising from the park agency as their logo appears on all park field staff clothing – a powerful and unintended endorsement that cost MEC nothing.

Ontario Parks partnered with the Dairy Farmers of Ontario to develop a shoulder season promotion in which coupons were distributed on milk cartons. Ontario residents were encouraged to visit parks in Ontario during the shoulder season at a discounted rate. It is important to pick appropriate partners for sponsorship schemes; the Dairy Framers of Ontario sell a wholesome product, perceived positively by the majority of Ontario residents.

A second sponsorship case study that also illustrates good practice in partnership and distribution strategies is Ontario Parks' 10-year contract with Pepsi. For a \$7 million exclusivity fee, Pepsi obtained exclusive beverage distribution rights in Ontario's provincial parks. Part of this agreement included Pepsi supplying new equipment (e.g. vending machines) and favourable, stable pricing for customers, especially those in remote parks. Pepsi gained the right to use park-related images in its promotional campaigns.

A third example can be found at Fort Henry National Historic Site in Kingston Ontario. This site developed a partnership and sponsorship program that earned in excess of \$2.2 million in cash and in-kind sponsorships, as well as thousands of dollars of value in free publicity through various publication and electronic media in Canada and overseas. Combining a nationally significant heritage resource with modern day products and promotions takes careful planning, matching site and partner needs in a way that is unobtrusive, yet with the ability to deliver public exposure or transactions back to each partner. Sponsorship examples include:

¹² Hall & McArthur, 1998

Hershey Canada supplies the Fort with snack-sized Oh Henry Chocolate Bars for distribution at the admissions gate, enough to supply over 160,000 annual visitors; Rogers AT&T Wireless offers cell phone and Via Rail offers free train passes in a effort to create awareness of Fort Henry's popular Sunset Ceremony evening performances; and the Radisson Hotel and Days Inn have financially supported the Sunset Ceremonies as lead sponsor since 1998. Although many other partnerships exist, no overt advertising or banners are permitted inside the Fort; once visitors pass through the Fort's gate any modern day images vanish. What remains is Fort Henry's ability to triple its modest annual marketing budget through creative partnership and sponsorship initiatives¹³.

Recommendation 10: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and Dinosaur Provincial Park should build a sponsorship and partners program. Once developed this program can be applied to Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Publicity

Dinosaur Provincial Park appears in local and regional brochures, such as the Canadian Badlands brochure and the *Visitor's Guide* for Brooks and the County of Newell. Dinosaur Provincial Park also provides a familiarization meeting for tourism suppliers in the region every spring to inform front-line tourism workers about the park.

Publicity, or press coverage, not paid for by the park, is constant due to its World Heritage Status. A slide library, with images related to Dinosaur Provincial Park, is maintained at Alberta Parks and Protected Areas headquarters, which the press can utilize for publications. However, it is not clear how well the images library is made known to the travel press. Films and documentaries have also been shot at the park resulting in additional publicity. Dinosaur Provincial Park does have a series of guidelines used to manage filming in the park, however Alberta Parks and Protected Areas does need to standardize a policy regarding filming in its parks as a means of managing this potentially powerful promotion tool.

Dinosaur Provincial Park should also provide images to the Travel Alberta Images Library, which positively portray the park, and which could be used in guides and distribution to travel media.

In terms of other outreach and information tools, the Dinosaur Natural History Association, a local NGO associated with Dinosaur Provincial Park, sponsors a comprehensive newsletter for the park titled *Dinosaur Provincial Park Times*. Additionally, the park has a home page on Alberta Community Development's web

¹³ Mercer, Bryan, 2003

site:

http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/featured/dinosaur/flashindex.asp.

However, this is buried within layers of government pages. The web site is underused in terms of achieving sustainable tourism goals (e.g. increasing visitation in the shoulder season).

Recommendation 11: Dinosaur Provincial Park should develop a publicity campaign that utilizes a variety of tools and is strategically oriented to specific target markets.

Publicity is a free form of advertising. Its disadvantage is that the park agency has little control over what is released to the public. Two forms of publicity include media coverage in major travel magazines, and travel sections of newspapers. These are often facilitated by familiarization trips that tour journalists and travel writers. Interestingly, researchers have found people are more likely to believe the information that is reported in these free feature articles. However, it is essential that the experience of the visiting journalists is carefully managed by the park agency to ensure the “right” message about the park is relayed. This can be facilitated by carefully developed and delivered press kits.

Image libraries and press kits prepared by the park agency can enhance Parks’ stories. All of this can be used to increase awareness among travel consumers, and eventually ensure that the visitors travelling to the park are coming with the most up-to-date information.

Publicity can also be used to modify visitor numbers or modify their behaviour. For example, publicity can promote support of biodiversity conservation through solicitation of visitor donations and education about low-impact visitation practices. Sissinghurst Castle Garden in the UK has used publicity to manage visitors prior to arriving at the garden site; the garden works with the media to stress the sensitivity of the garden and the restrictions that are in place to protect the attraction. The media report restrictions that the garden has put in place such as limitation of the number of visitors per day who can enter the garden and a system of timed entry.¹⁴

Distribution

In addition to promotional efforts, distribution is a second major category of marketing strategies. Distribution can be described as the delivery of services and products to park visitors.

The Internet and information technology, such as information databases, are tools that are increasingly used by park agencies to facilitate the delivery of tourism

¹⁴ Benfield, 2001

experiences. Within the Alberta parks system the Internet and information technology is under-utilized as tools for reserving, registering and performing financial transactions related to campground use and tours. At Dinosaur Provincial Park most transactions for reserving a space on the interpretation bus tours through the park are completed by phone contact with the park, in advance of the visitor's arrival. Some transactions for the bus tours are completed in-person upon arrival at the park in the low-season or as last minute additions when tourists who had paid to reserve space failed to show. At present, record keeping for these tours is kept in a three-ring binder; all transactions must later be transferred into the financial accounting system for the park. Plans are currently being implemented which will result in reservations being completed simultaneously on two networked computers, one for in-person transactions and one for telephone reservations. The reservation, ticketing and financial transaction will be handled in an integrated fashion. Campground reservations can be completed by phone or in-person. An integrated reservation system is operated by three summer students (2 shifts/day – 7 days/week). Reservation, permit issuing and financial transactions are all integrated and completed on site at a booth close to the campground. Dinosaur Provincial Park may be the first park to do this in Alberta's park system. The reservation system for the bus tours, and perhaps to a lesser degree the campground, received the greatest number of complaints for the park for 2003. The major issues were the inefficient registration system and the public demand exceeding the supply of tour opportunities.

Additionally, sales of food items, firewood, etc. are completed at the Visitor Service Center run by a concessionaire; souvenirs can be purchased at the park Field Station. Some visitors comment that they wish to see a range of grocery items on sale. This is most desired by campers.

Recommendation 12: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop new distribution channels (e.g. hotel packages and central reservations systems) and improve existing methods of providing park visitors with products and services. An expansion of the bus tour opportunities should be considered in the summer season, such as increasing bus tours from one an hour to one each half hour.

The bus tours are a key element of the visitor experience in Dinosaur Provincial Park. Currently, the bus tours operate in the high season once an hour. Given the high public demand, an increase in the frequency of operation from one per hour to one every half hour should be considered. The planning for such a change has implications for the number of tour guides and bus equipment availability that must be fully considered. It is our feeling that the current road system is capable of handling such an increase. The curvilinear route of the road through the highly diverse badlands landscape means that it is possible for each bus tour to be operated in relative isolation from other tours. Given that the road currently exists, we see no

significant environmental impact from increased use. Therefore, it is our conclusion that this increase can occur within the existing infrastructure, social and environmental carrying capacities of the site.

One means of improving the distribution of park services and products to current and potential visitors could be achieved through the packaging of park experiences and products with other regional tourism services. An example of this is packaging hotel rooms in Brooks with reservations for the interpretation tours at Dinosaur Provincial Park. This was attempted before, but with mixed results. As part of the larger Canadian Badlands Initiative, this approach needs to be revisited; the potential to package tourism services at Dinosaur Provincial Park with other attractions and services in the region must be explored.

The upcoming addition to the Field Station is a major opportunity to improve existing methods of providing park visitors with products and services. The design of the addition must be made with this in mind.

Two other distribution tools that can be used to improve customer service and facilitate positive park visitor experiences are the Internet and tourism reservations systems. The development of the Provincial Tourism Information System, linked by computer to all provincial Visitor Information Centers (VICS) and some regional VICS, also offers opportunities to enhance the distribution system.

Recommendation 13: Dinosaur Provincial Park should increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the reservation system for tours and campsites.

Recommendation 14: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a central reservation system for campgrounds and other tourism services.

Many park agencies in North America now have a central reservation system. Ontario, Michigan, Washington and Manitoba are leading the way in developing reservation systems that help park visitors make their visit to parks an easier and more enjoyable experience. Appendix 6 describes some of the key lessons learned in the development of the central reservation systems of the park agencies in Manitoba and Ontario and some of the current policy considerations.

A central reservation system has many advantages for the park system, for individual parks and for park visitors. The park system and the parks can be aware of the anticipated use levels well in advance. This is advantageous for operational

planning. The system can collect fees well in advance, providing considerable financial advantages. The system can ensure standardization across all parks. A well-planned reservation system allows the park agency to deflect use from heavily used sites to alternative sites and from heavy use times to other times. Such a system can provide better customer services in many ways. Park visitors prefer a system that allows them to plan their vacation months ahead of time. It attracts a high calibre of client that plans ahead as well as appreciates and is willing to pay for good service.

Often web site reservations are a more economical means of completing campsite reservations. There are several ways to encourage web site use to make a reservation. An example from the Quebec Parks' web site is inserted below.

With reserving on-line at www.sepaq.com from now until October 4, 2004, campers become automatically eligible for the draw of a camping stay, for four persons, at Anticosti Island. As well as lodging, the prize includes air transportation to the island, a vehicle, and a tent with inflatable mattresses - a value of \$4,000! (From: Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (Sépaq) / Parcs Québec web site: <http://www.sepaq.com/En/index.cfm>. March 17, 2004).

However, most park agencies have no problem in getting their clients to use the reservation system. Park visitors show a strong desire and ability to use such a system.

There are a number of considerations when developing a central reservation system:

- Most park agencies find it useful to utilize the expertise of a specialized private company for the design, development and operation of a reservation system.
- A long-term agreement and good relations with the contracted reservation company is desirable.
- It is best to have the reservation system designed and supervised by the head office. The central system can provide services and equipment to field sites.
- The system should have three major components in place. These are: 1) a call center reservation system, 2) an Internet reservation system and 3) computerized campgrounds and other field sites.
- The system should have three major managerial components. These include: 1) site reservations, 2) financial data transactions and 3) field level site assignment and permit production. This should all be done electronically and in a seamless fashion.
- The system should be powerful and interactive, providing data in real time to both clients and park staff.

- It takes time and sophistication to develop a full and effective system. Progressive iteration of software, rules and procedures should be planned for from the beginning.
- It is best to have a system that operates year round, one that allows advanced booking at some period well in advance of participation. A 5-month advanced period appears to be useful.
- Full payment should be made for the reservation when it is initially booked. No partial payments should be allowed.
- On-line credit card verification is needed.
- Upon reservation, it is desirable to send clients a written verification, either a paper copy or an email copy.
- The reservation system can be a powerful data collection tool on visitors, visitation, use levels, use distribution and changes over time. It is important to design the system with this in mind.
- Ensure that the park agency controls the data collected by the company that is contracted to operate the reservation system.
- More stringent rules on reservations are often easier to implement at first; they can later be eased.
- Reservation fees should be set at a level to cover the costs of the reservation system. All users should be informed of this fact.
- Anticipation of high call/reservation volumes at the beginning of the season is necessary. Core park users are highly committed to booking the right site, for the right trip, at the right time.
- Since visitors will quickly learn the rules of the registration system and will manipulate it to their advantage, there needs to be penalties built into the system for events such as roll over booking and late cancellation.
- There needs to be a communication strategy developed that targets agency staff and park visitors in regards to the introduction and operation of a reservation service.
- Reservation systems should be designed for a wide variety of visitor services, such as campsite reservations, bus tours, and special events.

Aside from park communications strategies, and marketing strategies that fall within the categories of distribution and promotion, there are several other marketing related issues that should be addressed in this section. These include branding, market research, coordination of marketing efforts, and monitoring and evaluation of marketing effectiveness. These are discussed below.

Branding

Branding, part of product planning, is used to identify a service provided by a park or park agency. A brand can be a name, design, symbol or a combination of these. Branding activities concentrate on conveying the essence of the spirit of the

destination, often communicated via a few key attributes and associations. Branding is not just a rational marketing activity, it is also a political act based on issues such as local and national pride. This needs to be kept in mind for any branding efforts developed for Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas. Citizen or stakeholder involvement and influence on the design of a brand is often a very complex process. Parks must reconcile a range of local and regional interests and promote an identity acceptable to a range of constituencies. Efforts to understand the message that the brand Canadian Badlands conveys to potential visitors have been undertaken. However, further research could be performed to explore this further. Additionally research on the meaning of the terms and symbols associated with the World Heritage status of the park and the Alberta parks system as a whole should be explored.

Recommendation 15: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and its partners should continue to examine branding as a strategy for regional and park tourism development through research and programming.

Market Research

There are recent attempts to understand the current and potential market for Dinosaur Provincial Park. These include the 1) *2001 Heritage Facilities Visitor Survey* and 2) *2002 Survey of Interpretation Programs for Cypress Hills Provincial Park, Dinosaur Provincial Park and Writing on Stone Provincial Park*.¹⁵ Each provides some basic information about the park's most recent visitors. However, much more needs to be done to understand the park's current visitors' needs, wants, level of satisfaction, etc. Additionally potential markets also need to be investigated.

Recommendation 16: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a provincial-level Park Tourism Market Research Program.

This recommendation is echoed in Section 4 of this report, however the suggestion for a market demand survey is a subsection within a larger recommendation calling for province-wide visitor use measurement, demand and reporting policy. Understanding the market for park visitation must go beyond customer satisfaction and importance surveys and park comment/complaint cards. A program that also focuses on potential and future visitors must also be developed. To this end a consumer demand study is required to obtain better understanding of Alberta, Canadian and possibly overseas markets such as the UK, Germany and the USA.

¹⁵ Western Management Consultants 2002a; and Infact Research and Consulting Inc., 2001.

Increased market analysis, segmentation and targeting needs to take place. Summaries of market research need to be made accessible to park management personnel. An example of this prepared by Parks Canada is included in Appendix 7.

As the Canadian Badlands initiative moves forward, there may be opportunities to incorporate Dinosaur Provincial Park's needs into the marketing strategies developed for the region.

Marketing Management Framework

At the marketing management stage, the actual implementation of marketing strategies takes place, based on the previous work of setting goals, conducting internal and external analysis and planning marketing strategies. This entails the use of specific tools and techniques for connecting the present and potential customers with products, services and experiences offered by the park or park agency. A wide range of approaches is included in this step including specific promotional techniques, sponsorships, and alliances mentioned above. A plan of action is designed to outline the required activities, tasks, responsibilities, timelines, cost estimates and priorities. This plan encourages both effective and efficient implementation of marketing strategies.

Recommendation 17: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a Marketing Management Plan.

Monitoring Marketing Effectiveness

The success or failure of a marketing strategy, and more relevant to this paper, its ability to meet goals associated with biodiversity conservation and issues related to over- and under-visitation to parks, can only be assessed through a systematic and repeating formal evaluation effort. Like the evaluation of any project or program, evaluation of a marketing strategy is often treated as an afterthought. Instead, it should be granted equal status with the earlier stages of the marketing process, and its costs be built into any marketing budget. It should be regarded as a basic strategic management tool, which assists park managers to find out where they have been, and for future marketing strategies, to decide where they want to go and identify how they will get there.

Ontario Parks uses several indicators to measure the success of their marketing efforts on an annual basis. Some of these indicators include:

- The number of campsite permits, day use permits, and seasonal passes;
- Attendance at education programs;

- Movement through use continuum (i.e. encouraging frequent users to use more sophisticated and revenue intensive forms of accommodations facilities);
- Increases in use by under represented groups;
- The number and value of partnerships;
- The number of media articles on Ontario Parks;
- The number of website hits;
- The level of coupon redemption;
- The number of customers that are enrolled in the loyalty program; and,
- Merchandise sales.

Many of these measures relate directly to revenue generation, which in turn, is linked to biodiversity conservation efforts through the financing of activities such as park administration, environmental education, and biodiversity research programs. Additional indicators such as “increases in use by under represented groups” provide examples of indicators that go beyond financial return, in this case how a park agency is attempting to expand its constituency of committed park supporters. In a recent discussion with an Ontario Parks marketing planner, it was outlined that Toronto’s ethnic communities and youth are to become important target groups for the agency in order to increase visitation levels of these important and growing communities.

Parks Canada has also recently instituted an evaluative program for its marketing programs. It is part of a larger system of evaluating effectiveness of all agency initiatives. The evaluation process forces park managers and headquarter’s staff to integrate marketing with other park planning and operations considerations.

Recommendation 18: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should measure the effectiveness of its marketing efforts.

3. Pricing of Park Services - Issues and Solutions

Prices and fees are of interest to everyone. For users, they tend to be the first, rather than the last, piece of information sought. Consumers may even ignore other bits of relevant information if a fee seems unacceptable. For many visitors, price levels represent a sort of threshold. If the fee is acceptable, they will cross the threshold and participate. If the fee is too high, they will look elsewhere for solutions to their particular problems.

Fees are of interest to staff members and elected officials because they represent a tool for generating much needed revenue. Indeed, they are the only component of the marketing mix that actually generates revenue. Fees can provide much needed funds to help maintain and improve service offerings. Further, judicious use of fees can alter demand patterns in ways that reduce crowding, reduce environmental degradation, ease maintenance schedules and optimize revenues. Consequently, in North America fees are being used more now than at any time in recent history to help fund park operations.

However, fees also represent a challenge because they are exclusionary. Typically, those who do not pay fees are denied services. Such exclusion can cause displacement, outcry and resentment. The challenge is to use fees in ways that minimise exclusion but also maximize their potential benefit.

As we consider fee initiatives it is worthwhile to remember that small fees, even those unlikely to displace potential users, may still generate public outcry. This is due to fees' often symbolic nature. Fees for parks, in particular, carry a great deal of symbolic baggage. Many visitors believe they have already paid for these services through their tax dollars. They feel that these fees are denying them access to their natural birthright. Outrage over fees often results. Research suggests that such outrage may be moderated or even eliminated through concerted efforts to manage impressions around fees. This same research suggests that visitors are typically open to fees once the reasons for the fees have been made clear. The key to gaining acceptance of fees is often that of managing impressions.

The critical elements of a park tourism-pricing plan are provided below. In all cases, general principles or guidelines are offered. Where relevant, specific recommendations are offered. This material can then be used to guide and direct deliberations over any subsequent pricing initiatives.

Pricing Strategy

Any fee initiative must consider the many roles that fees might play. Recent research suggests that planners tend to view fees from a very limited perspective,

that of revenue generation. While fees do generate revenues, they may also be used to pursue a variety of other management objectives. For example, one of the great challenges in service delivery is that of balancing supply and demand. Managers are constantly attempting to attract visitors while simultaneously avoiding overcrowding. The goal is always one of reducing crowding during peak periods and shifting demand to less popular periods. Pricing strategy can be very useful in doing just that.

Recommendation 19: Policy makers should view price not simply as a source of revenue but as a robust management tool.

Differential pricing is the practice of offering the same service for different price levels. While this may at first seem an unusual and even troubling practice, it is quite common among service providers. Providers use various fee levels to encourage or discourage participation. Campers who purchase early bird passes are rewarded with a discount. Those who visit during shoulder seasons may be eligible for lower price levels. Conversely, those who wish to visit during peak periods may expect to pay premium fees. Such practices help generate revenue while smoothing demand fluctuations.

Price packages or bundles also represent the strategic application of fees. Packages typically tie together different services and products in order to encourage purchase. These packages may be designed to reduce costs to users, increase convenience, simplify service delivery or encourage trial of under-used products. For example, in order to simplify administration or increase convenience for campers, firewood may be provided automatically with the purchase of a weekend camp pass.

Bundles are a great way to encourage new behaviours. For example, both the agency and local providers hope to encourage greater visitation during shoulder seasons. They might work together to provide discounts for day excursions or for local shops and services to anyone who agrees to visit during the off-season. There may be opportunities to bundle off-season park visits and tours with fixed-roof accommodation in the local community.

Recommendation 20: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop price packages that help visitors better enjoy the service offering and encourage new behaviours.

When establishing pricing strategy, it may help to classify programs into one of three categories. The “Basic” program is one that is highly standardized, offers limited value and has perhaps changed little over time. In many cases, these programs are offered at low cost simply because visitors are unwilling to pay more. While these programs often lose money, they continue to be offered because they help promote

other activities. For example, one park agency offers an information session before sending visitors out on their extensive grounds. They offer this program free of charge so it adds nothing to their revenue stream. However, they use this session to introduce other more expensive programs that visitors might wish to try (guided tours, self-guided tours using taped messages and maps) and even a wide array of related books and support materials. They lose money on this one initiative but are able to achieve impressive returns from it in other ways. Also at the upper end of the market, programmed learning vacation packages offer premium-pricing opportunities.

Recommendation 21: Dinosaur Provincial Park should be willing to lose money on some programs that serve basic needs and fulfill overall conservation goals.

“Customized” programs exist at the other end of the spectrum. These are expensive programs that are tailored to meet the needs of specific users. Reservation systems are an example of such programs. The system will enable an individual to set a time and place aside for his/her exclusive use. Visitors are typically willing to spend higher amounts for such programs. These programs are often priced at premium price levels.

There is another category of programs that exists between basic and customized offerings. These are “Enhanced” programs. They offer more than basic programs but are more standardized than customized offerings. Guided group tours might be an example of such a service. Typically these programs are offered at moderate costs. If they are customized to reflect unique group tastes, then they can be priced at more premium levels.

Recommendation 22: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should price at levels that reflect program quality and service level.

Managing Impressions

Traditionally economists believed that visitor response to fees was straightforward. They believed that visitors placed a value on a visit to a given park and would be willing to pay up to that value for rights of entry. They assumed that potential visitors made a rather basic calculation when faced with fees. Those who were able to pay the fee did so while those unable to pay did not take part.

Over the past two decades however, researchers have begun to appreciate the profound role of emotion as potential visitors assess fee levels. While visitors do indeed make mental calculations to establish willingness to pay levels, they seem to

make this calculation through an emotional lens. They consider not only the value they place on the visit, but also the apparent fairness of the fee. They consider not only the quality of the site but also the friendliness of the staff members they encounter onsite. This suggests that response to a fee is often more emotional than rational. Outrage over fees often arises, not from the level of the fees, but from the idea of the fees themselves.

Recommendation 23: Any fee initiative must deal with the emotional as well as the financial demands that fees place upon visitors.

In emotional terms, visitors seek three characteristics in any pricing initiative. They seek *fairness*, *value*, and *choice*. Each is discussed in turn.

Fairness

Those asked to pay a fee will inevitably ask themselves if the fee is fair. Fairness is established in two ways. First, users compare the price to what they paid last time for a similar service. Prices that are consistent with an already accepted price level are more likely to be considered fair. Our research on this topic tells us that not all visitors will respond in the same way to a given price initiative. Heavy users, who are accustomed to paying a given fee, are most likely to a) notice and b) criticize a new fee level. They have committed the old fee level to memory and consider deviations from that level to be “unfair.” Occasional users are less likely to commit old fee levels to memory and are therefore less likely to notice price increases.

Recommendation 24: Make fee increases small but on a regular basis. By doing so, existing fee levels are less likely to become price anchors in the minds of users.

Fees are also judged to be unfair if the provider is benefiting at the expense of the users. As visitors are asked to pay more and more fees for programs that were traditionally offered free or at low cost, they may feel that park operators are taking advantage of them. Surveys suggest that users sometimes believe that parks operators have wasted the original tax dollars they were given and are now returning to the taxpayer for more. They often believe that they are being asked to compensate for poor management decisions and internal waste; assessments of unfair pricing result.

Research suggests that explanations of why the fee is being charged and how it is being used will reduce perceptions of unfair pricing and encourage acceptance of fees. Simply telling people that their tax dollars have helped create a great park system and their fee payments will help Alberta Parks support their visit will help

visitors understand the complexities of public sector finance. In this way, fees will seem more logical and fair.

In a similar vein, if some elements of service delivery require considerable outlay of funds (building or maintaining bridges to a campground, the cost of drilling a well, etc) you might want to tell users about this expense. When informed of high costs of service provision, users tend to respond with greater willingness to pay. Your literature might welcome them to a site telling them what it has cost to maintain the site over the past year. This will give them the sense that there are costs associated with their visit and that it is “fair” that they, the users, pay at least some of that amount.

Recommendation 25: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a method to inform users about the dollars spent on their behalf, to tell clients why fees are being charged, and to make clear the need for any contribution.

If users ask why taxpayers’ allocations are not enough to pay the bills, staff could be trained to bring up the fairness issue. Simply tell those who complain that, “All taxpayers have put the parks here for you to enjoy but its fair that costs generated by users be paid by users.”

Recommendation 26: Ensure that price levels do not deviate too much from the going rate for comparable services.

One last comment on fairness; visitors will look to other providers to establish fair price levels. Pricing never exists in a vacuum. If other providers are offering comparable services at lower prices, your fees will automatically be viewed as unfair. Ensure that your price levels are at least generally consistent with those of competitors. It may help to know that many private providers likely hope that you will raise your fees. In one province private sector campground operators wanted public agencies to raise their prices so they could follow suit.

Value

Value is defined as the amount of benefit received moderated by the cost required to gain that benefit. Value can be maintained in the face of rising costs if perceived benefits are enhanced or other perceived costs are reduced. Providers must constantly point out the benefits to be enjoyed in return for fees. There is an implicit assumption among managers that users are well aware of all the benefits offered by a visit to a park. This is rarely the case. Alberta Parks and Protected Areas must constantly tie benefits to fee payment.

Recommendation 27: When asking for fees, use that opportunity to tell users how they will benefit from that payment.

Reducing perceived costs would also enhance value assessments. The notion of packaging services together, introduced above, is typical of efforts to reduce costs like convenience or uncertainty. Complementary firewood reduces the need for additional “running around” once visitors arrive on site. A discount for a new program or service reduces the risk associated with trying that new service. Such efforts all reduce perceived costs.

Recommendation 28: Consider how visitors use the site (how they register, how far they travel, what equipment they might require, etc) and develop ways to reduce associated costs. This will enhance value levels even as fees rise.

Choice

Choice seems to be the best way to reduce outcry over any given fee initiative. Users must be given the opportunity to pay in terms that are least clear to them. If someone has little money but lots of free time, she or he will prefer to visit the site at times that are less convenient, such as shoulder seasons or week days, if financial incentives are offered for doing so. By doing so this person pays a different type of fee, that is the use of time, enjoying reduced monetary costs.

Many providers offer discounts for those who are willing to help the agency in particular ways. If they require cash early in the season to help with start up costs they offer “early bird” discounts to those who purchase passes before a posted deadline. If they are concerned with over crowding, the agency can offer discounts to those willing to visit during non-peak periods. Such efforts use financial incentives to encourage visitors to act in ways consistent with agency priorities *and* reduce resistance.

Recommendation 29: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should provide choices in terms of fee level and fee type.

Encouraging Donations

Alberta Parks may wish to supplement fee programs with efforts to encourage donations among users. In order to make the most of such programs, we suggest three measures. First, don’t rely on the visitors’ judgement in setting the amount to

be donated. It is better to suggest an amount for consideration. You can do this by telling visitors how much their visit cost. An example could be: “It cost us an average of \$5.00 per visitor to offer you this service today. We would appreciate any donation you might make to help support this program.”

Visitors also use the size of previous visitor’s contributions to gauge the size of their own donation. If a donation box is full of \$1.00 coins they are likely to donate that same amount. Some charities deal with this issue by “salting” the donation box with donations that are of an appropriate size (often \$5.00 bills) to encourage visitors to respond in kind.

Recommendation 30: Provide a price guide or anchor as visitors ponder the size of their donations.

It is also best to ask for donations at the end of a visit rather than at the beginning. In this way, visitors have established a realistic sense of value for that visit and are more likely to respond appropriately. If staff members are present, it would also help if they outlined the benefits the visitors have enjoyed during their visit just prior to their being presented with the opportunity to make the donation.

Recommendation 31: Ensure that visitors are aware of the benefits of the offering before a donation is requested.

4. Understanding the Visitor

All management is dependent upon information; the better the quality of information, the better the opportunity for good management. Information about the visitors and their activities enables managers to plan for tourism.

Parks and protected areas are distinctive and attract significant public interest. Public interest leads to a stream of visitors who invest money, time and effort to experience these areas in person. Many factors determine the experience of visitors including; the conditions in the resource itself, the logistical support available in the park or available locally, and the attitudes of people contacted, including the park staff and other visitors. When visitors return home many of them become articulate and important voices favouring legislative and financial support for existing parks and the creation of new sites.

Monitoring public use is a fundamental management responsibility for managers. The resulting numbers are critical indicators of the natural, social and economic functions performed by parks and their custodians.

The scope and level of effort put into a public use measurement program should be in proportion to the requirement of park managers to provide for general management, natural resource protection, maintenance operations and visitor services and protection (Appendix 8). Public use measurement in any one park fits into an agency-wide policy framework. For example, Appendix 9 provides a set of definitions that underlie any public use measurement program in a park system.

Alberta Provincial Parks has many elements of a full public use measurement program. It has an approach to the measurement and reporting of camping use, system wide. There is an advanced program to measure camper satisfaction with programs and services. There is an emerging program to calculate the economic impact of park use.

However, there is a need for an overarching policy. For example, the day visitors are often poorly recorded. The system for the measurement of day user satisfaction with programs and services is not as comprehensive as that for campers. Many of the road counters used for the recording of vehicle traffic have fallen into disuse. There appears to be little data on the level of individual recreation activities that occur with the parks, except for those that have an associated user fee. We see no evidence of consumer demand studies.

We recommend that Alberta Parks and Protected Areas develop a province-wide visitor use measurement, demand and reporting policy. This policy can build upon the excellent efforts already underway, providing an over-arching framework and

encouraging improvements of the other visitor use measures already employed by the agency.

Recommendation 32: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a province-wide visitor use measurement, demand and reporting policy.

The key elements of a province wide visitor use measurement demand and reporting policy could include:

1. Standardized terminology for visitor use measurement;
2. Standard methodology for the recording of camping use, day use and special activity use;
3. Periodic consumer demand studies to inform the management and development of park activities, experiences and infrastructure;
4. Consumer satisfaction standards for visitor services, measurement and reporting. This must include improved measurement of the importance of different services as well as satisfaction;
5. Interactive data analysis and reporting capable of informing management decisions on an on-going basis;
6. Annual reporting of public use levels for all parks within the system;
7. Specialized reporting to park visitors of the most relevant and important findings and management outcomes resulting from the visitor use measurement system; and,
8. Specialized reporting to park staff (and concessionaires) of the most relevant and important findings and management outcomes resulting from the visitor use measurement system.

Many parks in a system, such as nature reserves, may have very low visitation and therefore there may not be the justification for ongoing use measurement. Nevertheless, it is important to note in policy and reporting documents if public use measurement does not take place in a park. The ongoing and repeated reporting of public use as being zero may be due to low visitation levels or low management levels, or both. In order to discern management effectiveness the accurate description of public use measurement is necessary.

It is important to recognize that it is not necessary or possible for all units in the Alberta provincial park system to have the same level of measurement. The IUCN Guidelines for Public Use Reporting provide for a 5-level system, each designed for different levels of data requirement.¹⁶ The five progressive levels of public use program advancement described in that report start with an initial level (I) of public use reporting program and move onto basic (II), intermediate (III), developed (IV)

¹⁶ Hornback and Eagles, 1999.

and advanced (V) levels. Each higher level results in greater accuracy and detail of public use data and a corresponding increase in required staff time, hardware and funding.

We recommend that Alberta Parks and Protected Areas consider using the IUCN framework of statistical definitions and progressive levels of public use measurement. Dinosaur Provincial Park should, as a minimum, work at an intermediate, III, level.

Recommendation 33: Alberta Provincial Parks should consider adopting an overall policy for public use measurement and reporting. The IUCN framework for statistical definitions and progressive levels of public use measurement should be considered for adoption within this policy. Each park in the system can be assigned to one of the five progressive levels of measurement.

Recommendation 34: Dinosaur Provincial Park should aim for the development of an Intermediate (III) level of public use measurement and reporting.

Alberta Parks and Protected Areas has an existing progressive and useful system for the measurement and reporting of camper satisfaction with programs and services. This system should be retained and expanded to include day visitors. Dinosaur Provincial Park already has data on visitor satisfaction with the interpretation tours. This measurement program should be retained and should be expanded for all day-use visitors.

Recommendation 35: Dinosaur Provincial Park should expand the measurement of visitor satisfaction to include all recreational activities that occur within the park.

Parks Canada has a public use measurement and reporting system. One important aspect of this system is the periodic production of reports on the visitors to each park. These reports are prepared on a rotating basis for different parks in the system. The reports contain a full range of visitor use information that enable the manager, the concessionaire, the Friends Group, the local tourism providers and the local community members to develop a fuller understanding of the visitor to the site. An example of one such report is found in Appendix 7.

Specialists from Parks Canada's regional offices prepare such reports. These people utilize data from the normal, on-going public use measurement system of a park and combine it with other data, such as specialized surveys of visitors. A similar system

can easily be developed in Alberta as such specialists already exist in the head office and their role could be expanded to include the fuller range of public use reporting duties.

Recommendation 36: Alberta Provincial Parks should consider the development of periodic detailed study and reporting of visitation within each park in the system. Dinosaur Provincial Park should be an early application of this approach.

In this section of the report we emphasize the importance of province-wide policy and central office functions in public use measurement and reporting. It is important that the field staff at Dinosaur Provincial Park have the policy guidance and head office support in order to carry out public measurement effectively.

5. Service Quality

Service Quality: Issues and Solutions

Service quality is loosely defined as the quality of the experience the visitor thinks he or she has received. Typically, this experience is compared to positive expectations the visitor brought to the park site. If these expectations are confirmed, the visitor will be content. If they are exceeded, the visitor will be delighted. In the service quality literature, they call this the “wow” factor. Many of the leaders in service quality attempt to consistently exceed visitors’ expectations. They attempt to wow their clients at every encounter.

The great challenge here is that of human nature. Expectations rise as visitors are exposed to advertisements, promises, and new developments in everything from bank services to toys. For these reasons it is becoming increasingly difficult to wow visitors. More to the point, it is becoming increasingly problematic if services remain stagnant. Service levels that were acceptable yesterday may seem hopelessly archaic tomorrow. The world and visitors’ expectations have passed them by.

The challenge is to create an organization that is responsive to the client and is able to change with the needs of the service environment. This does not require that the entire delivery system change. Nor does it require radically different ways of doing daily tasks at the park site. It does, however, require a few basic additions to business as usual. This section offers a series of suggestions that will help make that possible.

Build Visitor Focus into Day-to-Day Operations

The earliest park managers had what we now call a “product orientation.” In other words, the park (and the park manager’s) priorities were of primary importance. Signs like “Keep off the grass” in city parks were characteristic of this approach. For decades park managers were charged with maintaining environmental integrity, for reducing environmental degradation, for preserving the natural environment. Their typical response has been one of marginalizing the eventual user. Visitors were treated as a nuisance rather than valued as a partner. Planners managed visitor behaviour through signs, barriers and even threats. Unhappy consequences were all too often the result of these actions.

Improved service quality does not suggest that the park manager should abrogate responsibility to the resource in favour of the visitor. Indeed, we know that compliance is best built through positive relationships between field staff and visitors. Visitors are more likely to respond to staff directions and requests once a positive relationship has been established. Research in settings as diverse as restaurants and doctors’ offices suggests that consumers are more willing to listen

and act accordingly if they like and respect the source of the request. As a result, visitor management plans now use a kinder gentler approach to visitor compliance than was the case in the past.

This suggests that the key to compliance and visitor satisfaction lies with front line staff. It is they who shape and direct ongoing interactions between the agency and the visitor. Note too that visitors do not distinguish between one category of staff member from another. They care not if the individual is a contractor, a maintenance worker, or a supervisor. They want that individual to be responsive, knowledgeable and friendly in all their interactions. They will be dissatisfied if they receive anything less.

Recommendation 37: Focus service quality efforts on field staff.

The question then becomes, “What do field staff need in order to create positive interactions with visitors?” The literature discusses the need for a strong vision statement. It is this statement that guides and directs all subsequent efforts. It is a management maxim that the stronger the vision, the smaller the policy manual.

However, vision statements are often a bit too nebulous to guide day-to-day behaviours. For this reason, we recommend the park agency establish a few guiding principles. Each decision made by staff can be compared to these few guiding principles. If the plan supports the principles, it is probably worth pursuing. If not, then the idea may need more tweaking.

Recommendation 38: Establish guiding principles for service management.

Guiding principles can typically be expressed in a couple of words. We might suggest principles like safety, efficiency, quality, value, convenience and friendliness. These few words can guide an amazing array of management initiatives. If safety is an issue then staff should be trained in basic first aid. If friendliness is an issue then staff should be screened during hiring (and evaluated after placement) for this quality. If convenience is an issue, then program planners must constantly work to ensure that convenience is addressed.

Recommendation 39: Guiding principles for service management are too often used as platitudes and window dressing. Ensure that they guide every day decision-making.

You may wish to use existing visitor survey information to develop and fine-tune your training program. These surveys will suggest what visitors value and how they are responding to current efforts. You may also wish to use this information to

structure contractor agreements in future. Establish what is valued and what is being experienced then work backwards to ensure that positive encounters result.

Consider Both Front and Back Stage

Each visit to an Alberta park is actually comprised of a series of encounters. Any contact between the agency and the visitor represents one such encounter. The encounter might be over the phone, through literature or face-to-face and on site. While park staff cannot control the entire visit, they can try to control key encounters.

One of the best ways to think about how and when to control encounters is to separate operations into their front and back stage components. Front stage efforts are those undertaken in the presence of the visitor. Back stage activities are invisible to the visitor but support visitor services. These stage analogies come from the world of theatre. The service literature suggests that any effort in the presence of the visitor is like the presentation of a play. Dialogue must be scripted, the stage must be set, staff must be in appropriate attire, and the emphasis is on creating a favourable impression. Poor maintenance efforts, uninformed staff, shoddy signs or structures all detract from the show.

Clearly, front stage activities take precedence in service quality efforts. Being on stage carries with it considerable responsibility. Staff members may be having a bad day or may wish to discuss personal issues with colleagues. However, training must convince them, that when in front of visitors, they must stick to the script. If not, all the back stage planning in the world will fail. Field staff must deliver the program as promised. This also includes service quality aspects for those field staff whose contact with visitors might not be so obvious, such as the work of maintenance staff and other behind the scenes staff.

Recommendation 40: Ensure that field staff members are trained in how to greet and deal with clients. Their training must extend beyond how to “get things done” while onsite.

Resolving Errors

Though managers and field staff will work to avoid problems, there are times when visitors will express unhappiness with some portion of their visit. The way in which these problems are handled will determine whether or not the individual will be satisfied. Visitors don't expect perfection but they do expect that their concerns will be taken seriously. We offer a few suggestions here that might help avoid problems and help resolve them when they do occur.

Recall that satisfaction occurs when positive expectations are met or exceeded. Expectations are often created by our own promises. When staff members promise that a site will be available or that a wait will not exceed 30 minutes, a set of expectations has been established. Visitors will hold staff to that promise. Staff members in many service industries regularly make promises they know they cannot keep. They do this in order to encourage customers to do business with them. Unfortunately, they are unwittingly creating expectations that will be dashed and dissatisfaction will result. One way to avoid problems is to under promise and over deliver. Make promises you know that you can fulfil and perhaps fulfil in less time than expected. Satisfaction levels will soar when the promises are kept.

Recommendation 41: Under promise and over deliver.

No staff member enjoys dealing with problems. Problems are unpleasant, unpredictable, and often require lots of resources. In many cases, front line staff members have neither the authority nor the resources to deal with problems. Unfortunately, visitors are unaware of this. They often complain to the first staff member they can find and expect that the problem will then be rectified.

Owning the problem requires that the staff member who first hears of the problem becomes the point person during the resolution phase. For example, a maintenance person may learn of a reservation mix up. This maintenance staff member will likely know little of how reservations are handled but should know how to direct the unhappy client. The staff member may be aware of a special number to call (and can take the visitor to the nearest phone). The staff member might even take all the necessary information and promise to get back to the visitor within a set number of hours.

Recommendation 42: Staff should be encouraged to “own the problem”

However problems are resolved, staff members should be trained in how to deal with unhappy visitors. For example they should know that unhappy visitors expect two things once they complain about a problem. First they expect that the staff member will listen. They need to vent or what is often called “give voice.” Much of the satisfaction that arises from the encounter will result from the staff member’s willingness to listen to the visitor’s side of the story.

Second, unhappy customers expect that their concerns will be dealt with by the agency. If their tent has been blown over repeatedly, they may wish to be assigned a new campsite. If their neighbours have been loud or unruly they may wish to have action taken. Staff should be quite open in what they will do to address the issue.

Their action may be as minor as “report it in writing to a manager” or as major as offering a full refund. Remember also that visitors are never interested in what a staff member cannot do for them. Staff should focus on what they plan to do to help.

The issue of refund is an important one. Solutions are often more acceptable when accompanied by “symbolic atonement.” Symbolic atonement is a small offering provided as a way of saying that staff members are sorry the problem occurred. If you have ever complained at a restaurant then received free dessert, you have received symbolic atonement. It is symbolic in that it is worth little in monetary terms. It is, however, worth a great deal in emotional terms.

Recommendation 43: Train staff in active listening.

Note that, with symbolic atonement, staff members are not apologizing for errors they have committed. Rather they are compensating in a small way for the inconvenience caused by the problem. This compensation might be gathered from within the agency (a discount card for a second night’s stay) or from the surrounding community (free swim passes at a pool close to the site). All staff members should be authorized to offer symbolic atonement without needing permission from a supervisor.

6. Regional and Park Tourism Infrastructure and Services

Achieving successful and sustainable tourism requires tourism infrastructure that is adequate for the numbers of visitors travelling to the park and its surrounding region. Infrastructure must also meet standards for protecting cultural and ecological resources, particularly in park settings. Additionally, services such as interpretation tours and food provision facilitate the visitors' ability to maximize positive experiences when visiting the park and its region. The scope of infrastructure and type of services required to offer quality tourism and recreation experiences at the park are contingent on the goals and objectives of the park, its size, special management challenges, and so on. Teaming with regional tourism providers enables parks to share the burden of hosting visitation and also drives economic gains into the park's hinterland.

This section of the report describes the status of infrastructure and visitor services at the park, as well as the region adjacent to Dinosaur Provincial Park. Data are based on meetings with park managers and a review of park-related documents. Meetings with regional tourism marketers and suppliers along with government officials and community representatives throughout southeastern Alberta also helped identify regional tourism infrastructure and services that park visitors currently utilize or could utilize in the future.

Park facility design and maintenance are examined here using three categories: 1) from the perspective of visitor experience, 2) the quality of life for park staff, and 3) the investment priorities. An understanding of how visitors' experiences have been affected by the quantity and quality of tourism related infrastructure and services were achieved, in part, from guest comments. A very small number of comments were submitted by email in 2003 and the majority of visitor comments are derived from comment cards left at the Field Station office. A more complete record of recent visitor comments is provided in Appendix 10. The most positive comments related to the interpretative bus tour and staff friendliness; negative comments generally related to the reservation system for the bus tour and facilities such as the washrooms at the Visitor Service Center. Other sources of visitor insights on the park's services and infrastructure can be identified in the campground and heritage appreciation or interpretation surveys.

The small number of campsites at the park creates some dissatisfaction amongst visitors (there are 126 campsites, 59 of which are powered). Campsites at Tillebrook Provincial Park and Kinbrook Island Provincial Park and roofed accommodation in Brooks provide alternative housing for tourists. One group camping area is available at Dinosaur Provincial Park's campground.

Tourism service provision and infrastructure maintenance are contingent upon the park staff's ability to perform their duties satisfactorily. Staff housing is an important

factor that contributes to staff performance. Currently there is housing for 13 seasonal employees at Dinosaur Provincial Park, as well as a house for the Conservation Officer. Housing arrangements appear to be satisfactory at present.

Current investment of capital to build an addition to the Field Station will significantly increase Dinosaur Provincial Park's ability to manage increased numbers of day visitors and provide richer interpretation and education programs. This will enhance the experience of visitors to Dinosaur Provincial Park. Visitor safety considerations are always an important factor when evaluating the status of visitor infrastructure in a park, as well as how tourism services are delivered (e.g. providing adequate access to drinking water on summer days). To this end, water and waste systems have also recently received financial attention.

In addition to park infrastructure, the delivery of park tourism services is equally important. Located between the Field Station and campgrounds at the park, the visitor service center provides food, washrooms, a small souvenir shop, etc. A private sector operator has just been given a three-year contract for the operation of this facility. The Dinosaur Natural History Association, a Friends Group affiliated with Dinosaur Provincial Park, operated the facility the previous year and had difficulties reaching financial goals. No grocery store is located at the park; only snack and prepared food can be purchased. Washroom and coin operated shower facilities are open 24 hours/day during the summer.

The Field Station acts as a greeting center for park visitors. Summer staff provides information and tickets for the interpretation tours are sold there. Park summer staff will run a gift shop, and there will be five information officers this summer. Interpretation exhibits in the Field Station explain the significance of the Dinosaur Provincial Park site; the exhibit has not changed in many years.

Interpretation and education programs consist of static display in the Field Station; self-guided interpretation trails (five in total) and guided interpretation tours. During the peak visitation months of July and August one interpretation bus tour per hour is operated. These tours are extremely popular with demand outstripping supply. Satisfaction with the tour experience is very high for visitors. Dissatisfaction with the tour system (e.g. double bookings and limited supply) also ranks very high amongst visitors. Seven summer staff members serve as interpreters. Two of these are usually retained into the fall months to provide interpretation tours in the fall. All interpretation is conducted in English. Additional details on interpretation programs and related future plans are documented in detail in the *Heritage Appreciation Strategy – Dinosaur Provincial Park, Like no Other Place on Earth*.

The Dinosaur Natural History Association and park staff often collaborate on a Park Day, held the third week in July, however staff suggest this event may not be run this year. About 45 to 50 people attend the Winter Open House held in March each year.

This represents an opportunity for Dinosaur Natural History Association members, park staff and interested members of the public to interact and hear a special speaker.

General infrastructure such as buses used for the interpretation tours, day-visitor washrooms, roads, etc. are additional components that need to be considered when analyzing the status of tourism services and infrastructure at Dinosaur Provincial Park. The park is currently upgrading its water and waste treatment plants and provides a dumping station for RVs. One of the major limiting factors in expanding the number of tour bus interpretation programs is the number and age of buses.

Accounting and sale systems are also receiving an upgrade at the park, as are reservations systems for the interpretation tours. The campground reservation system is already an integrated, computerized system able to process telephone reservations and walk-ins simultaneously. This is described further in the Marketing section of this report.

A final component of the infrastructure and services provided by the park and its hinterland are regional tourism and recreation attractions and services. A wide range of accommodations exists for tourists to the region, including private and provincial campsites, hotels and bed and breakfasts. Brooks provides the closest cluster of roofed accommodations with approximately 350 beds.

The nearest grocery store to the park is also located in Brooks. It is open 24 hours. The closest restaurants are located in Patricia (10 minutes) and Brooks (30 minutes). Within an hour's drive, many other eating establishments and stores exist.

An excellent road system facilitates transportation to the park and other attractions in the area; however bus service is limited (the closest stop is Brooks with approximately 3-5 buses from Calgary per day). The closest international airport is located in Calgary, approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours from Brooks.

Many regional attractions exist within 2 to 3 hours drive of Dinosaur Provincial Park. These include historic sites (e.g. Brooks Aqueduct), environmental education and interpretation centers (e.g. Reptile World and Royal Tyrrell Museum), recreational areas (e.g. Lake Newell or Drumheller's water park), and downtown shopping districts. Special summer events also draw tourists.

This overview of the status of tourist services and infrastructure at Dinosaur Provincial Park and its surrounding region provides some insight into the needs for further regional tourism development plans. Recommendations for park and regional tourism infrastructure and services are described next. These recommendations, based on a brief field visit and input from park management, local stakeholders and visitor comment cards, should be supplemented by additional market demand research (called for in Sections 2 and 3). Market demand research could start

immediately by focusing efforts on understanding the importance of specific services and infrastructure provision to park users, not just their satisfaction. This would be useful in answering some of the questions that arose during field visits and interviews conducted for this study regarding what changes are needed at Dinosaur Provincial Park. For example a suggestion of increasing the number of self-guided trails along the edge of the park's preserve was made during interviews. It was also suggested that too much emphasis is currently place on the preparation of formalized, family-oriented evening programs and that more sophisticated programming for adults would be a welcomed addition to the park experience. We have not had the opportunity to experience interpretation programs at the park and therefore cannot make recommendations on its content. However we can make the following two suggestions:

1. It is important to offer opportunities to visitors to experience the park, especially the badlands, edge of the preserve, on their own terms rather than in tightly controlled contexts. This allows them to generate their own interpretations of their visit, something that researchers are finding increasingly important to visitors. The addition of longer self-guided trails may be one such strategy of providing this.
2. Fine-tuning the interpretive programs for different markets is also important. Matching sophisticated messages to sophisticated audiences, especially those who are repeat visitors should be explored as an option. Adding new programs to the parks repertoire of services (e.g. star gazing and spirit walks) will maximize the quality of first time and repeat visitors.

Additional recommendations for improvements to park and regional tourism infrastructure and services are described below.

Recommendation 44: Dinosaur Provincial Park should design future park facilities and landscapes and retrofit existing infrastructure to meet current green standards and environmentally sensitive design.

Leadership on environmental issues could be demonstrated by retrofitting existing park infrastructure so that it meets the best energy and waste management efficiency standards. New developments such as the expansion to the Field Station should utilize the latest developments in sustainable building design and construction techniques. Efforts to explain to park visitors the importance of green building technologies and sustainable land management approaches should be undertaken within the new facility.

The park's efforts to green their operations and infrastructure can act as a catalyst for encouraging other regional tour operations to follow its example. This is especially true if increased financial returns from such efforts can be demonstrated.

Recommendation 45: Dinosaur Provincial Park should work with alternative accommodation facilities in the region to address the park campground's finite space.

Increasing visitor awareness of hotel facilities in nearby communities, as well as Kinbrook Island and Tillebrook Provincial Park campgrounds will help address accommodation concerns and encourage visitors to stay longer in the region rather than returning to Calgary for accommodations. This can be accomplished by increasing the promotional links between the park and these facilities (e.g. links from the park web site to regional tourism operations) and by providing additional services that will facilitate visitors' use of these alternative accommodation facilities. For example, a shuttle bus that runs four times per day during the summer months between the park, Brooks, and Kinbrook Island and Tillebrook Provincial Parks to the park could provide an easy transportation option. It would also reduce crowding at the park's parking lot.

Reciprocal information sharing should also be pursued. Dinosaur Provincial Park could profile accommodation and services of the region, while regional partners profile the opportunities in the park, tours, reservation systems, etc.

7. Integrated Regional Tourism Planning and Community Development

Another main component of a successful sustainable park tourism program for Dinosaur Provincial Park is genuine integration of the park's planning with local and regional tourism planning efforts. Additionally, the park's decision-making processes must consider the effects of its role as a tourism attraction, and what impact, negative and positive, this can have on local communities.

Currently the park's interaction with local tourism planning efforts has been characterized by the park's involvement in programs such as the initial meetings for the Canadian Badlands Initiative and the development of relationships with local politicians and tourism organizations. An example of the latter is the park's participation in planning efforts associated with the annual Vacation Guide published by Travel Alberta. Constraints in park staff time limit significant involvement in promoting new tourism initiatives in the region.

Increased interaction with local politicians and decision-makers would help Dinosaur Provincial Park build stronger ties with local communities and help push forward a sustainable tourism agenda not just for the park, but also for the region. Several community members expressed an interest in seeing the park staff interacting more with policy makers as well as conducting educational outreach programming in community schools, with the partial goal of helping local citizens understand the importance of the park as well as the potential of tourism in the region as a truly valuable contributor to local economic health. In addition to the recommendation mentioned earlier in the marketing and communications section on outreach programming, the park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should consider the following recommendation.

Recommendation 46: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should continue to conduct and promote results of an economic impact analysis of park tourism.

Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should continue its efforts to conduct further economic impact assessments for Dinosaur Provincial Park to understand the park's impact on local economies. Data from these studies should then be used to highlight the importance of the park to local politicians (e.g. County councillors).

This should be completed for Dinosaur Provincial Park as well as several other key parks with immediate potential for increased tourism services enhancement. The assessment program should then be expanded as funding becomes available. Of crucial importance in this effort is relating findings to politicians and the public at the local, regional and provincial level. These findings need to be comprehensible and accurate. The Australian state park system of New South Wales provides a best practice case study in informing the public of Montague Island National Park's

economic impact on local communities. The agency supported the initial data collection and analysis with sufficient funds. It was equally serious in its communication efforts.¹⁷ It launched the results of the economic analysis with a special media and community event.

Dinosaur Provincial Park's Role in Regional Tourism

There are several ways in which Dinosaur Provincial Park can play a leading role in regional efforts to develop sustainable tourism in the southeastern region of Alberta. A form of governance leadership already suggested in the marketing and communications section of this document is the development of a Local Advisory Board. Dinosaur Provincial Park's main mechanism for soliciting feedback from local stakeholders and providing input on local tourism issues has been public meetings (e.g. current planning efforts for the expansion of the Field Station) and staff attendance at meetings of community groups and regional initiatives (e.g. the Canadian Badlands Initiative). An advisory board composed of skilled and influential local stakeholders would contribute greatly to Dinosaur Provincial Park's ability to develop as a true partner within regional tourism development efforts. An example of this is Parks Canada's efforts to establish a model of collaborative management with 26 communities along the Rideau Canal National Historic Site. Parks Canada is responsible for the preservation and use of this heritage waterway and understood that working with local community leaders would help protect the cultural landscape of the region and help maintain the integrity of the canal system in the face of growing development. The project began in the mid-1990s with the identification of significant cultural resources based on input from community members and park staff. Subsequently, an Advisory Committee for the Rideau Canal was formed with representatives from communities along the canal. The committee works on a variety of issues with Parks Canada, such as revising the management plan for the canal. The plan emphasizes the importance of interface and interaction with local communities and associations along the canal corridor.¹⁸

As suggested earlier in this report, leadership on environmental issues can be demonstrated by retrofitting existing park infrastructure so that it meets the highest energy and waste management efficiency standards. New developments, such as the expansion to the Field Station, should utilize the latest developments in sustainable building design and construction techniques. This visible example can be a useful tool for interpretation of sustainable development.

Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas could be partners in a regional effort to promote sustainable tourism in southeastern Alberta. Sustainable tourism is tourism that is financially viable, does not impact negatively on the

¹⁷ Christiansen and Conner, 1999

¹⁸ Mitchel, N., Slaiby, B. and Benedict M., 2002

environment or the quality of community life, and contributes to the economic and social fabric of a region. A sustainable destination is one that is prosperous because of tourism's presence in it. The destination is seen as an attractive place to travel to offering many quality tourism experiences on a consistent basis. Essential components of developing sustainable tourism destinations include integrated tourism planning efforts, service quality standards and training, financing programs for small and medium sized tourism entrepreneurs, collaborative marketing efforts, and so on. Its beyond the scope of this project (and the park's current resources) to explore specifics on how to accomplish these tasks, however, a few tools are described below to help guide initial thoughts on such regional efforts.

First, Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and the Tourism Optimization Management Model (TOMM) are two regional management tools that could be used to help guide a regional planning effort focused on developing southeastern Alberta and the Canadian Badlands as sustainable tourism destinations. LAC is described in Appendix 11. TOMM was developed for Kangaroo Island, a nature-based tourism destination in South Australia. Both approaches represent significant community and ecological planning efforts and would require greater political and financial input than Dinosaur Provincial Park or Alberta Parks and Protected Areas could provide. Partnerships with other government agencies would be required.

An equally ambitious approach to developing a sustainable tourism region is the development of an evaluation and/or certification program for local tourism providers. Many examples exist internationally. Perhaps the most developed is Australia's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program.¹⁹ This is explained in greater detail in Appendix 12. One of the greatest weaknesses of such a program is a consumer's lack of awareness of what the certification program is and confusion regarding what it stands for. A certification program's greatest contribution or strength is its usefulness in creating a regional standard of tourism operation excellence. Australian has found both of these lessons to be true. Their tourists do not always recognize or understand the certification system, however it has contributed greatly to the development of quality nature tourism and ecotourism operations in the country.

A second example is illustrated in the UK's Peak District National Park Authority's involvement in the development of the "Q Peak District Environmental Quality Mark." This environmental quality mark is used to indicate those businesses that have met specific standards to conserve the special environment of the Peak District National Park. Further details are provided in Appendix 13.

¹⁹ See the Australian Association of Ecotourism web site for more details:
<http://www.ecotourism.org.au/neap.asp>

Recommendation 47: Dinosaur Provincial Park should partner with local communities, Destination Marketing Organizations and tourism operators to develop the Canadian Badlands brand and tourism collaborative.

Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas need to continue their efforts to support the Canadian Badlands initiative. Many community members interviewed for this project saw the initiative as a positive step forward which will help develop the region as a whole while at the same time reduce the incidence of inter-community competition. Community members view Dinosaur Provincial Park as an essential component in the success of such an initiative, feeling that it can act as a “neutral” partner and central focus of marketing efforts.

One approach that may be useful in fostering community awareness of the region’s tourism potential and also developing a sense of cooperation between communities and entrepreneurs is “web-raising.” This approach to building an Internet based promotional and information source was pioneered in the US, but has been used in New Zealand and parts of Canada successfully. Building on the analogy of barn-raising, web-raising involves community meetings and community members collaboratively building an information data base that is in turn used to build a web site designed to promote a region as a tourism destination. The site can serve non-tourism purposes as well, such as acting as a main source of community services information for a region. Southeastern Alberta does not need the latter, however the benefits derived from community members being actively involved in identifying what is special about their region and then building a web site that relates this information to potential visitors can be very empowering and generate a sense of cohesion. It can also result in a web site with a very unique and insightful atmosphere.²⁰ There may be opportunity to work through the Canadian Badlands initiative to accomplish a coordinated website presence.

²⁰ Contact Simon Milne <simon.milne@aut.ac.nz> for more information.

8. Comprehensive Park Planning

Starting in the 1970s in Canada, park agencies prepared documents that outlined park specific management policies for land use and recreation. The early documents, entitled Master Plans, were detailed and thorough. Later, retitled Management Plans, they became more policy and system-oriented.

Starting in the 1990s in Canada a few park agencies prepared park specific documents that outlined budget and finance policies. These were typically called Business Plans. These became necessary as park agencies were asked by government to function more like business entities, with more emphasis on tourism-based income.

In most park agencies in Canada, there are still two planning streams, one for management planning and one for financial planning. Both Ontario Parks and Parks Canada maintain this separation. We feel this separation is historical and artificial.

Management plans are typically weak in tourism, visitor and financial management concerns. For example, they typically lack visitor use goals, such as a minimum and maximum use levels. They do not have visitor service level goals, or service quality goals. They do not have statements outlining the proposed costs of any proposals, nor the methods to be used to finance plan implementation. Pricing policy is never mentioned. They lack statements on the timing of plan implementation. This shortsighted approach often produces a document that is half complete, one that cannot be implemented in a coherent fashion without other plans and policies. One reason for these absences includes a lack of focus on visitor management. The plans are typically resource-based plans strong on land use planning. Another major reason is that in typical park agencies that rely totally on government allocations, the planners, the park managers and the visitors have no role in finance. It is all up to central government policy makers, both elected officials and senior government bureaucrats to provide funds necessary for implementation. Typically governments do not want to be tied to future allocations so there is political pressure for the plans to not include finance and timing.

Management plans are typically five and 10-year documents, with revision suggested at the end of the period. However, Canadian park agencies have a poor record of following their own policies of plan review at the set five or 10-year periods. Our observation is that Alberta Parks also shows this tendency.

Business plans deal with park finance and are typically annual plans, with five-year horizons for larger elements such as capital development. Alternatively business plans can also have a shorter horizon as well, focusing on short-term investments and objectives. At Ontario Parks, regional managers work with park superintendents to craft business plans with a one to three year time horizon. The goals mapped out in

the business plan are tangible but not “set in stone.” The business plans are used as tools to guide development efforts and measure success. Business Plans become essential when parks start to function more like business entities, with tourism-based income.

Ontario Parks describes a park-level business plan as “what we want to do.” This statement could also be used to describe the contents of a management plan. However, there is a second aspect described as “how we plan to do it.” This second element is important and typically goes further than statements in management plans. It gets to the critical issue of the costs and income associated with operations and plan implementation.

Recommendation 48: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should integrate management planning and business planning. These two planning streams can have different planning horizons within an overall planning framework.

It is time in Canada, and in Alberta specifically, that the management plan and the business plan approaches are coordinated and merged. This new planning framework, which might be called the management and business plan, needs to outline “what the park plans to do” and “how the park plans to do it.” Given the need for both long, 10-year policies, and short, annual policies, the documents must have nested and integrative policies over several time scales.

Recommendation 49: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should work towards integrating Marketing Plans into the park Management and Business Plans.

One component of business plans that are often treated separately by park agencies is the marketing plan. Marketing plans are focused on those strategies and goals that are related to stakeholder outreach and park visitors. It is essential that these goals and strategies be interwoven with overall park management plans and financial decision-making. This can be facilitated through the inclusion of marketing plans within the process to integrate business and management planning.

An important aspect of management that can be integrated into park business and management plans or used to inform these plans is a Visitor Management System. Visitor management planning is an approach designed to maintain the integrity of park resources and visitor experiences. They perform a number of important functions for a park agency. These include:

- They make explicit various values and assumptions about what visitors want and parks can provide;
- They provide a framework for defining and framing the challenge of visitor management;
- They require definitive statements of objectives and desired conditions; and,
- They force decisions on the use of specific management tools to be made following decisions on objectives.

There are a number of visitor management methodologies developed by different park agencies, scholars and academics. Some of these include: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), Visitor Impact Management (VIM), Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP), Visitor Activity Management Program (VAMP), Visitor Asset Management System (VAMS), Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), and Tourism Optimization Management Model (TOMM). A brief summary of each of these approaches to visitor management is described in Appendix 11. These visitor management systems may be useful to park agency management efforts because typically they: 1) require the identification of park values and objectives, and 2) they develop quantitative indicators and standards, which can be used to measure park tourism performance and impact.²¹ However, each of these systems has its limitations. One of the biggest limitations shared by all these methodologies is the lack of reference to finance and business planning. Virtually all assume stable government funding for operations and little income from tourist fees and charges.

Recommendation 50: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should develop a Visitor Management System to inform park Business, Marketing and Management Plans.

²¹ Eagles, Paul F.J. & Stephen F. McCool, 2002

9. Park Volunteers, Community Outreach and Constituency Building

Park volunteers, community outreach and constituency building are three interrelated ingredients for successful park management, planning and tourism delivery. Successful park volunteer and community outreach programs can have significant impacts on a park's ability to build a constituency of local and provincial advocates. The status of efforts associated with coordinating park volunteers, conducting community outreach and building a constituency for Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta's park system is described below. Recommendations accompany these descriptions.

Park Volunteers

Park volunteers can help supply information to visitors, prepare hiking trails and develop interpretation materials. There are currently three categories of volunteers who assist in the delivery of visitor services at Dinosaur Provincial Park, 1) members of a cooperative association called the Dinosaur Natural History Association, 2) individual volunteers who are coordinated on sporadic basis by park staff, usually focused on a specific project such as the development of interpretation materials, and 3) Campground Hosts who come each year to act as an information source and security monitor in the evenings.

Campground Hosts are common in many park campgrounds in Canada. Their dual role as information source and security monitor provides an important service to park visitors. Sometimes campground hosts only stay for three weeks at a time and then move to the next park along their itinerary. At other times they stay for lengthy periods. At Dinosaur Provincial Park the same couple has acted as campground hosts for two consecutive, full summers. The campground hosts benefit through the waiving of their camping fees. At Dinosaur Provincial Park one of the campground hosts has acquired part-time, seasonal maintenance work at the park. The other host dresses in historic costume and demonstrates for visitors.

The Dinosaur Natural History Association raises funds for infrastructure and information investment related to Dinosaur Provincial Park. For example, this group has collected monies for special projects and annual expenses such as publishing the annual park newsletter, *Dinosaur Provincial Park Times*. In the past the Dinosaur Natural History Association supplied the park with extra staff for the front desk, gift shop, lab tours and bookings. Some of the respondents interviewed for this study expressed a desire to move the Dinosaur Natural History Association beyond its narrow role of assisting with money generation and management to a larger partnership with the park. The Dinosaur Natural History Association recently experimented with operating the Visitor Service Center food and gift shop concession, as well as the information center and gift shop at the Field Station. Both initiatives encountered financial and service quality difficulties. The park will

manage the information and gift shop at the Field Station directly in 2004 and a private sector concessionaire will operate the food service facility. The Dinosaur Natural History Association is currently considering new avenues of action of how best the association can serve Dinosaur Provincial Park.

Recommendation 51: Dinosaur Provincial Park should review and revise the volunteer programs, including cooperative association roles.

A more systematic strategy for dealing with volunteers needs to be developed and implemented. Overall, tangible rewards are generally not desired by volunteers; instead they seek more intrinsic and intangible rewards. These can include a statement of appreciation from coordinators and efforts to foster a feeling of being part of the “team.” Recognition of volunteers who excel at their jobs is important to building moral and encouraging service excellence. The Royal Tyrrell Museum rewards its volunteers with some tangible objects. For example, decorative mugs for serving 25 hours per year or gas coupons for longer service are given. The latter reward is popular amongst Calgary-based volunteers. Experiential rewards are even more appreciated by the volunteers. An example of this is an annual behind-the-scenes tour of another cultural or natural heritage attraction.

Volunteer training can be enhanced to improve customer service and the volunteers’ administrative skills. Park staff training that emphasizes the importance of volunteers, and cooperative associations working with the park, can also improve relations between park staff and volunteers and make their joint provision of visitor services appear seamless.

Each member of the park staff interviewed was able to identify tasks that volunteers could tackle. These tasks include: preparation of interpretation materials; maintenance activities such as wrapping cottonwoods to protect them from beavers; collection of rubbish in remote areas of the park; building and maintaining self-guided visitor trails; and documentation of park operations and accomplishments. The greatest problem associated with this is a lack of staff time to coordinate such activities. One solution could be a part or full time park staff position that is funded by the Dinosaur Natural History Association. Part of this individual’s duties would be to coordinate volunteer activities. Park visitors could expand the program to incorporate revenue-generating opportunities such as learning and working vacations involving activities such as trail building or ecological monitoring. Many conservation NGOs provide similar opportunities; Volunteer for Nature is one such example (http://www.ontarionature.org/action/on_volunteers.html).

Recommendation 52: Dinosaur Provincial Park should work with the Dinosaur Natural History Association to redefine its role.

The Dinosaur Natural History Association is currently re-evaluating its role, due to the recent challenges it has experienced in operating the visitor services center at Dinosaur Provincial Park, and in light of the park now being able to retain revenues from the provision of certain services. Communications between the association and the park need to be made a priority. A visioning exercise that includes presentations from executive directors and/or park managers from other sites that benefit from positive collaboration may inspire the search for new ways in which the association can support the park. The *Heritage Appreciation Strategy for Dinosaur Provincial Park* recommends that the Executive Director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum's Friends group may offer some insights into successful partnerships. Ontario Parks went through a similar re-examination of relations with their Friends associations when the park agency obtained the ability to generate and retain revenues. During the last year this agency developed a new policy for guiding standard agreements between individual parks and their Friends groups. This is located in Appendix 14. Ontario Parks (undated b) has a manual for the creation and operation of Friends Group.

Community Outreach

Community outreach programs are limited in scope at Dinosaur Provincial Park, largely due to lack of staff time to devote to such an activity. Communications tools such as the park newsletter *Dinosaur Provincial Park Times* do provide some basic information on the park, largely directed at first time visitors to the park. Little to no information is prepared for nearby communities on a regular basis. Interviews with local community members reveal this as a source of concern. Community members desire more information about what is going on in the park, how it may affect them, and how they can collaborate more with the park. Related to this is a lack of presence in local schools by Dinosaur Park staff members. Lectures in local classrooms are performed only at the request of teachers. Plans for hands-on interactive learning opportunities will be available to schoolchildren upon the completion of the new addition to the Field Station at the park.

Failure to reach out to local community members retards the process of building a constituency of local supporters. Dinosaur Provincial Park will continue to face stiff competition from the oil and gas industry as well as agriculture for the attention and support of the general public and local politicians. Efforts to work more collaboratively to foster the development of a more sophisticated and diverse tourism sector in the region will suffer because of this. Outreach to several different audiences is required to achieve greater visibility and support amongst local and provincial members of the public.

Recommendation 53: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should consider the establishment of a Local Advisory Committee for Dinosaur Provincial Park.

As described in Section 7, the Local Advisory Committee for Dinosaur Provincial Park would be composed of local business, political, education leaders as well as unaffiliated community members with special skills. The committee would be used as a sounding board for the park on local and regional planning and development initiatives that the park is involved in. An example of this is collaborative marketing efforts such as the Canadian Badlands Initiative. The committee could also be asked to find solutions to specific regional-related problems that the park is facing or the development of school outreach programming. The committee would also act as advocates for the park within their respective professional fields. Challenges associated with such an approach include the amount of park staff time involved in liaising with such a group, finding an adequate number of local participants with the right mix of skills, and finally, volunteer burnout and turn over. The positive outcomes of establishing a Local Advisory Committee is increased visibility for Dinosaur Provincial Park within the southeastern Alberta region and the opportunity to tap local skills, knowledge and opinion.

An example of such a committee was that established at Point Pelee National Park. The park superintendent, utilizing economic impact data, convinced local politicians and business owners to sit on its board of the Friends of Point Pelee. The park now has much stronger and more influential links to local communities and the park is able to draw on these community members to facilitate tourism-related activities associated with the park. The Pelee example shows how the functions of the Friends' Group and a local advisory committee were merged into one organization.

Recommendation 54: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas should consider the establishment of a protected areas' Provincial Advisory Committee.

A provincial-level Parks Advisory Committee should be considered for Alberta Parks and Protected Areas. Composed of political, business and scientific leaders, this committee would be assigned a task each year; for example, how to enhance the role of park friends groups or how to develop better economic impact assessment and reporting to government and communities. This committee would not only bring expertise to the park system, but also function as visible advocates for the park system.

At the national level the National Parks Conservation Association assists the US National Parks Service with research and acts as a political advocate for the park agency. In recent years the NPCA has acted as the most vocal voice against funding

cuts to the US NPS, and has produced research to support their position regarding the importance of their park system. Within Parks Canada the Minister's Roundtable provides opportunities for policy leaders to contribute to agency policy development.

Constituency Building

One of the chief findings of the field visit to Dinosaur Provincial Park and from discussions with park and regional tourism personnel was the realization that Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta Parks and Protected Areas have little in the way of organized popular political support. The Dinosaur Natural History Association has existed since 1987 but its role is not as a political lobby group. Conservation-oriented groups such as CPAWS lack a mainstream focus that is needed to reach the middle and conservative sectors of Alberta's public and politicians. Efforts need to be undertaken, both at agency headquarters and at the park level to foster the development of advocates for Dinosaur Provincial Park and for the protected areas system in general. Park visitors are one of the chief advocates that need to be fostered.

Several options are provided next for addressing concerns and opportunities associated with volunteer, visitor and community outreach. Several outcomes will arise from successful implementation of these approaches including the development of a local and provincial level constituency interested in conservation in general and in Dinosaur Provincial Park in particular, increased awareness of conservation issues, greater financial and political support for the park, and so on.

Recommendation 55: Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and Dinosaur Provincial Park should establish communications and outreach strategies that address specific audiences and utilizes specific tools. This should be integrated with an overarching communications plan.

The following audiences should be the focus of increased communication efforts by both Dinosaur Provincial Park and Alberta PPA. These are listed by order of priority below. Examples of specific mechanisms for reaching these audiences are also provided. Further discussion related to communications strategies is provided in Section 2 of this document.

- 1) Local politicians and local community leaders. A meeting on economic impacts associated with the park should be a priority.
- 2) School children (expand curriculum program at the provincial level; utilize volunteers or Dinosaur Natural History Association members, trained by park staff to provide presentations to community groups and classrooms on a regular basis).

- 3) Park visitors (signs, newsletters prepared by DNHA or park staff, web site, brochures, etc.)
- 4) Local public (newsletter / press releases to local newspapers on what has happened in the park on a regular basis, e.g. once a Month – A Volunteer, Staff Member or Dinosaur Natural History Association member could document this and send it to local papers).
- 5) Provincial audiences (web site; province wide curriculum; park agency press releases).
- 6) International audiences (web site).

10. Risk Management

A risk, in the broadest sense, is any unintentional event or situation that leads to a loss for an organization. The loss might be as simple as the pain of a twisted ankle or as complex as a liability claim ending in a lawsuit. Risk is often expressed in terms of an equation: Risk = Frequency of Incident x Severity of Consequences.

Risk has an element of chance to it. Key aspects of risk management are controllable management variables such as foresight and control. Foresight is essential to the practice of risk management because being proactive has a greater influence on risk than being reactive. The concept of control means action, for only through thoughtful action can any organization reduce the probability of a risk event or its consequences.

Visitor Management

Public safety requires that parks managers and tourism operators understand who their existing and potential visitors are and what they do when they come to a park or site. To effectively assess visitor risks, many managers and operators should draw from the practice of visitor management. Visitor management is a client-oriented approach to planning and service delivery that considers the visitor's needs, expectations and satisfaction. Visitor management techniques can be useful in understanding the factors that lead to ill fortune, such as a visitor's lack of experience, or willingness to take some risks during his or her visit. Visitor management offers insights on how best to manage settings, target the delivery of services and facilities and protect visitors from the unexpected hazards they may encounter.

It is the combination of the concepts, principles and practices of these two areas that led Parks Canada to develop a program of Visitor Risk Management (VRM).²² VRM is a management framework for public safety programs for park managers and tourism operators. The foundation of that framework is a site/operation risk assessment, and the description of a future oriented plan for the delivery of public safety, and search and rescue (SAR) services. The development and implementation of a visitor risk management, public safety and SAR services must be guided by the principle of shared responsibility.

Shared Responsibility

The prevention of public safety incidents and when necessary the delivery of public safety/SAR services must be a shared responsibility between 1) park managers, 2) private and public tourism operators and 3) visitors. In a location such as Dinosaur

²² Parks Canada, 1996.

Provincial Park local municipal, and other, authorities will also play a role. It is essential that the roles of all parties be considered and decided upon within an overall risk management plan.

Park Managers' Responsibilities

Park managers' responsibilities include:

- Identification and where appropriate, addressing priority risk issues related to the environment, infrastructure, communications, visitor characteristics and program management;
- Visitor risk management and public safety planning for their area of responsibility;
- Targeted prevention education, and information programs that encourage self reliance;
- Communication of site specific hazards to tourism operators, stakeholders, visitors and other users;
- Appropriate levels of search and rescue services; and,
- Establishment of cooperative agreements, training and communications with other government departments, NGO's, tourism operators, concessionaires and service providers.

Tourism Operators' Responsibilities

Private and public sector tourism operators' responsibilities are similar to the park managers' responsibilities, but may be unique to the tourism operators' specific type and area of business. These include:

- Identification and where appropriate, addressing priority risk issues unique to their business operations;
- Visitor risk management and public safety planning for their business operation;
- Targeted prevention education, and information programs for their clientele;
- Communication of sites specific hazards to their clientele and to park managers;
- Appropriate levels of search and rescue services, including training of staff as first responders; and,
- Establishment of cooperative agreements, training and communications with park managers, government departments, NGO's, and service providers.

Both park managers and tourism operators must place a high priority on the prevention of incidents to ensure the provision of opportunities for high quality visitor experiences and to limit their exposure to liability.

Park Visitor and Tourists Responsibilities'

Park visitors and tourists must know their responsibilities. This includes planning and preparing for their trip before they leave home and continue to do so upon arrival at their destination. To do this they must:

- Recognize the risk inherent in their activities and ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and physical fitness to participate;
- Get trained, be properly equipped, and be prepared till help arrives;
- Seek and heed advice from park managers and tourism operators concerning risk and how to prepare for them; and,
- Observe and adhere to regulations, information brochures, fencing barriers and signs.

There is often an important role for the park's interpretation program in the provision of safety information, rules and procedures to park visitors.

Emergencies and Emergency Planning

An emergency is an abnormal situation that requires prompt action beyond normal procedures to prevent or limit injury to persons or damage to physical property or the environment. There is necessarily some overlap between public safety planning and emergency planning. Public safety planning focuses on risk assessment and the provision of prevention and search and rescue services associated with recreation and tourism activities. It is concerned with developing both proactive and reactive responses to high frequency-low impact/consequence events (e.g. overdue party, sprained ankle, broken limb). Emergency planning deals with the broader area of emergency programming for lower frequency-higher impact/consequence events (e.g. floods, tornadoes, hurricanes) and is primarily reactive in nature. Through the risk assessments described in the preceding paragraphs these types of events can be identified and emergency plans should also be put in place.

Summary

Dinosaur has risk potential, with important aspects being the presence of water, very hot temperatures in the highest use periods and a landscape with complex topography. The park has an admirable record of dealing with this risk successfully. We do not recommend any substantial change in current policy or procedures for risk management. We do suggest that the park managers review their current procedures to ensure that they are sufficiently robust to deal with future challenges.

Recommendation 56: Dinosaur Provincial Park management should review their current procedures to ensure that they are sufficiently robust to deal with future risk and public safety management.

11. Personnel Management

Personnel management is an important component of any organization. Effective personnel management recognizes and utilizes the human assets of an organization in order to fulfil short- and long-term goals. Movement towards a more client-focused park organization creates the demand for new and improved skills.

Park tourism management is a highly personal activity. The park personnel help the park visitor create the recreation experience on site. This is a highly interactive and iterative process. The staff member influences the visitor and the visitor, in turn, informs and changes the park employee.

A park employee works within an agency and a local community. Changes in these administrative environments affect the employee's job performance.

Dinosaur Provincial Park has an existing professional staff with considerable expertise and experience in the field of tourism management. No substantial changes are needed.

However, our report creates a very large number of implications for staff, ranging from pricing policy knowledge, through risk management to business planning. It is important to recognize that the current staff will require assistance in preparing for the challenges that come with full tourism management. This will involve increasing capability in a range of aspects. Training may be required through several avenues, such as interpretation of provincial policy manuals, short courses and possibly even refresher college or university courses in specific areas. It is important that the park's human resource planning consider these training needs.

Recommendation 57: Dinosaur Provincial Park managers should evaluate the current capabilities of park staff, both permanent and seasonal, in regards to park tourism business management. This evaluation would help guide hiring and training decisions.

12. Conclusions

Visitor and tourism management in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas generally and Dinosaur Provincial park specifically is in a state of flux. It is moving from a government-funded model towards a visitor-funded model. This involves inherent and fundamental changes in philosophy and in management style.

In the past, a typical parks agency in Canada obtained a budget allotment from government each year. Any income, for example from recreation use fees, was returned to central government in the same fiscal year. All allocated funds had to be spent in the fiscal year. No carry over of allocated funds or retention of earned funds was possible. Such a situation was often effective for resource management, but was very challenging for the management of park tourism.

A fixed budget amount provided once a year provided no flexibility to managers in regards to change in tourism demand or service level. In tourism, all activities must be planned for well in advance of their delivery. Once the budget was set, changes were not possible. For example, if use levels increased there was no money available to service those new clients. If there was demand for increases in use, such as new shoulder season camping, such activity could only occur if central government provided the requisite money at some time in the future.

Each visitor utilizes services, consumes resources and makes demands. The situation of the fixed budget situation and the use fees being returned to central government turned park visitors into expenditure units. This made managers, politicians and others view park tourism as a drain on the budget and as a liability. This was a severe conceptual limitation underlying full government funding. With this approach, the park visitor was perceived as an expenditure factor and as a general liability. It is our conclusion that this is generally the situation now occurring in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas.

On the contrary, a business-based approach to park tourism turns visitors into income entities. Once individual parks and the park agencies start to gain finance from tourism fees and charges, the visitors start to be viewed more positively, as a benefit. With this approach, the park visitor is perceived as a contributor to the budget and to the park, as an income source and as a benefit to park management.

One of the largest benefits of a business-based approach to park tourism is the positive attitude that develops in regards to the perception of the role of park visitors. With tourism income a major part of a park's budget, visitors become critically important and valued to the success of the enterprise.

A large number of the world's park systems are moving towards a sustainable tourism model with tourism fees and charges constituting an important portion of the

overall budget. This includes many senior park systems in Canada. Examples include the South Africa National Park System, the national park system operated by Environment Australia and Ontario Provincial Parks.

Dinosaur Provincial Park is a World Heritage Site. It has a worldwide reputation. Alberta has the responsibility under the World Heritage Convention to ensure that the resource is protected and that tourism is undertaken in a sustainable fashion.

Dinosaur Provincial Park is in an ideal situation to move to such a sustainable tourism model. It has visitor demand higher than the available supply of recreation experiences. It has an experienced and professional visitor service program. There is considerable local community interest in the park.

However, the park was restrained from attaining full sustainable tourism in the past. Even with the high international profile, the strong public demand and the public willingness to pay, the government agency management model inhibited the ability of the professional managers to manage tourism in a sustainable fashion.

This report provides a path towards a sustainable tourism model. It provides a focus for how Dinosaur Provincial Park, as well as the Alberta parks and protected areas system, can be managed within the context of its dual mandate of maintaining the value and integrity of park resources, and providing quality experiences to park visitors. We suggest that this is a path that involves about a decade of work, with short, medium and long-term routes as presented in the Executive Summary. We are convinced that the adoption of the recommendations in this report will produce a more viable tourism management approach.

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