

# Park visitors' perceptions of governance: a comparison between Ontario and British Columbia provincial parks management models

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of the paper is to compare visitor perspectives of the governance of two of Canada's largest park systems: the parastatal model of Ontario Provincial Parks and the public and for-profit combination model of British Columbia Provincial Parks.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The authors developed an electronic survey based on the ten UNDP criteria of governance: strategic vision, accountability, transparency, consensus-orientation, public participation, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, equity, and rule of law. The survey was administered to park visitors for both park systems in the summer of 2008 and spring of 2009 (British Columbia Provincial Parks n=112, Ontario Provincial Parks n=255).*

**Findings** – *Researchers determined that the ten governance sections of the survey actually form 11 governance factors. Data suggested statistically significant differences in regards to the visitors' perceptions between the two park systems. Specifically, visitors to Ontario Parks ranked all 11 criteria of governance higher, closer towards good governance, than did visitors to British Columbia Parks ( $p < 0.001$ ).*

**Practical implications** – *These results suggest that the Ontario Parks parastatal model is closer to the ideals of good governance as perceived by the park users, when compared to the British Columbia parks' public and for-profit combination model. This paper also provides future policy makers with a new understanding of the multiple factors that affect visitors experience and perceptions of protected areas.*

**Originality/value** – *This is one of the first studies to investigate visitors' perceptions of two commonly used protected area management models. These research findings contribute to the debate regarding which protected area management model is superior when compared using the UNDP governance criteria.*

**Keywords** *Governance, Management technique, Canada*

**Paper type** *Research paper*

## 1. Introduction

Parks and protected areas currently encompass 12 per cent of the earth's terrestrial surface and 0.5 per cent of water based surfaces (Lockwood *et al.*, 2006). In conjunction with the protection of these land and sea masses, these areas also serve as major destinations for recreation and tourism-based services and products (Dearden and Rollins, 2002). Historically, parks and protected areas within Canada were based on natural features which served as an attractant for developing tourism-based industries (Dearden and Rollins, 2002; Buteau-Duitschaever, 2009). From the creation of the first national park in Canada, Banff National Park (1885) to the present day, protected areas are created through increasingly structured processes where each level of government adopts various

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management systems for the management of parks (Eagles, 2008; Buteau-Duitschaever, 2009).

The creation of government-owned protected areas is guided by public demand while the development and refinement of management systems for these protected areas are typically guided by active, vocal and demanding members of the public who place pressures on government representatives (Killan, 1993). Cooperating with and engaging civil society in governance processes is a vital component in ensuring proper management of a park agency (Bovaird, 2005; Edgar *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, Bushell *et al.* (2007) asserted that "political support for parks only exists if sufficient numbers of satisfied park visitors are influential enough to affect societal decision-making" (p. 9). Thus in order for parks to survive and thrive, a strong constituency of supporters must be present; namely satisfied park visitors. Yet there is a lack of understanding regarding visitors' perceptions of park governance (Eagles, 2008). This gap in knowledge is alarming as it indicates that protected areas are managed without proper understanding of the benefits and disadvantages of park management models employed and visitors' perspectives of the models. As parks are owned and managed by governments on behalf of the people of Canada, governments are ultimately accountable to citizens who are the owners of these protected areas. Furthermore, ensuring visitor satisfaction with parks management is necessary as visitors increasingly generate a significant amount of revenue for park management.

### **1.1 Park governance**

Governance is a relatively new concept within the study of parks and protected areas and is clearly distinguished from management and planning. Planning develops long-term goals while management implements those goals as management addresses what will be done regarding a specific site or situation (Borrini *et al.*, 2006; Eagles *et al.*, 2010). Management is an activity designed to meet organizational goals using people, available resources and work (Worboys and Winkler, 2006). Governance is a process where the government and other social organizations interact, how they relate to the public and how decisions are made (Graham *et al.*, 2003). Governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented (UNDP, 1997). According to Eagles (2008), governance is "the means for achieving direction, control, and coordination, which determines the effectiveness of management" (p. 39).

All planning and management occurring within parks and protected areas takes place within the larger framework create by governance approaches (Eagles *et al.* 2010). Good governance is of vital importance for successfully achieving the dual mandate of conservation and recreation within parks and protected areas (Dearden *et al.*, 2005; Eagles *et al.*, 2010). Although there has been a recent development and effort to develop and implement effective management processes (Hockings, 2003; Hockings *et al.*, 2000, 2006a, b), there is a paucity of literature focused on protected area governance (Hannah, 2006; Hanna *et al.*, 2008; Buteau-Duitschaever, 2009; Eagles *et al.* 2010), and little literature that documents the views that the visitors, the main political supporters of the parks, place on the governance principles that underlie planning and management within parks and protected areas.

In the last decade, traditional institutional processes have become more marginal due to fundamental debates while new processes and institutions have become more central to public policy (Kettl, 2000). By engaging civil society, the legitimacy of a democratic government can be increased. This in turn leads to governments that are increasingly recognizing that civil society can be the most effective actor when dealing with public policy and programs (Bovaird, 2005; Edgar *et al.*, 2006; Kettl, 2000). Thus, public governance systems exist because both civil society and government have realized the importance of collaborating in order to have governance models that are more efficient and will better function. This gives the government, government sector or agency, and government programs or services the ability to fulfill their missions, visions, goals and objectives. However, engaging civil society in the decision-making processes does not always indicate that good governance principles are being followed (Bovaird, 2005; Edgar *et al.*, 2006). This

can be problematic since many governance approaches theoretically function with the understanding that cooperation between civil society and government is needed.

There is a scarcity of research examining the manner in which various governance principles function for parks and protected areas or how civil society, in this case park visitors, perceives the various management systems. As was discussed by Bovaird (2005) and Edgar *et al.* (2006), cooperating with and engaging civil society in governance model processes for parks and protected areas is necessary for government agencies if they are to properly manage their agency or park system. Cooperating with, and engaging civil society favour the creation and adoption of good governance principles allowing the agency or park system to better function. Thus, it is important for both the government agency and the stakeholder groups involved (civil society) to know whether good governance exists. Knowing this allows for the government agency and allied stakeholder groups to address the areas of weakness within the governance model while also providing valuable information in regards to management practices that are functioning properly. Although much literature discussing various topics related to park management exists, little research has been undertaken in order to actually provide a proper understanding of the various management models for parks and protected areas and the manner in which their main constituents and supporters, namely park visitors, perceive governance within these management models.

Weiss (2000) and Francis (2008) provide an outline of the evolution of the concepts that underpin governance and review available definitions of governance for parks and protected areas. According to Eagles *et al.* (2010), in order to apply the concept of governance within an applied situation, standard definitions and criteria for evaluation must be used. Glover and Burton (1998), Graham *et al.* (2003), More (2005) and Eagles (2008) developed typologies that underlie governance for protected areas. A novel treatment of the concept of governance for parks and protected areas was produced by Graham *et al.* for the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) (2003) as a contribution to the fifth World Parks Congress held in 2003. This work is based on the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) list of good governance principles and is referred to as the UNDP-WCPA governance approach (Eagles *et al.*, 2010). The United Nations Development Programme (1997) developed a list of ten characteristics of good governance, which Graham *et al.* (2003) collapsed into five principles of sound governance for parks and protected areas (Table 1). According to the UNDP (1997), these ten principles form an interrelated group in which the core characteristics are mutually reinforcing and can thus, not stand alone. The presence of these ten principles in the management practices of parks and protected area agencies or industries represent good governance. The issue, as stated by Graham *et al.* (2003) is determining whether these principles are a part of the normal management practices of parks and protected areas, reinforcing the need for current research in this field.

Hannah (2006) applied Graham *et al.* (2003) principles to evaluate private protected areas in Canada and found overall good governance, with direction and legitimacy as the highest ranked principles and Performance as the weakest principle. Therefore, Hannah's research supported the use Graham *et al.*'s principles to evaluate governance of protected areas. While the principles intuitively fit together, it is important to note that research findings have demonstrated each of the ten UNDP principles as a distinct concept, which needs further investigation (Eagles, 2009; McCutcheon, 2009; Buteau-Duitschaeffer, 2009; Eagles *et al.*, 2010).

Using the UNDP governance criteria, Eagles (2009) evaluated eight commonly used management models which underpin recreation and tourism partnerships in parks and protected areas using a theoretical approach. A research effort by the Parks Governance Group (PGG) is currently undertaking the evaluation of several of the management models identified by Eagles. Of those, this paper will focus on two management approaches adopted by two provincial park systems within Canada: the parastatal model used by Ontario (ON) Provincial Parks, and the public and for-profit combination model used by British Columbia (BC) Provincial Parks. Specifically, this paper explores how the main user group and supporter of these parks, namely park visitors, perceive governance within each of these two parks management framework.

**Table 1** Principles of sound governance

<i>Five Principles of Sound Governance (Graham et al., 2003)</i>	<i>The United Nations Development Program Criteria for Good Governance (UNDP, 1997)</i>
Legitimacy and voice	<i>Public participation:</i> all people should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests <i>Consensus orientation:</i> the ability to mediate differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group
Direction	<i>Strategic vision:</i> looking constructively towards the future, with consideration of the historical, cultural and social complexities of each situation
Performance	<i>Responsiveness:</i> when institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders using a proactive manner regarding complaints and criticism <i>Effectiveness:</i> the capacity to realize organizational objectives <i>Efficiency:</i> making the best use of resources or the capability of acting or producing effectively with a minimum amount or quantity of waste, expense or unnecessary effort
Accountability	<i>Accountability:</i> officials answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their owners and duties, act on criticisms or requirements made of them and accept responsibility for failure, incompetence or deceit <i>Transparency:</i> sharing of information and acting in an open manner
Fairness	<i>Equity:</i> just treatment; requiring that similar cases are treated in similar ways <i>Rule of Law:</i> legal frameworks being fair and enforced impartially

The parastatal model has government ownership of resources, the majority of funding from user fees, and a government-owned agency or government-owned corporation as the manager. A parastatal is an independent corporate body which functions within government; it has the ability to make its own policy; it maintains its own internal financial operations; it has control over internal reporting and decision making; and has a board of directors providing oversight and ensuring accountability (Child *et al.*, 2004; Eagles, 2002, 2009).

The public and for-profit combination model has government ownership of the resources, funding through both societal taxes and user fees, and management by both a government agency and a private, for-profit corporation (Eagles, 2008, 2009). This model is the most common approach used today in North America and is similar to More's (2005) outsourcing model. Taxes provide for the natural and cultural resource management, while user fees principally support tourism and visitor services. In actuality, the sources of income often fund both resource and tourism management (Eagles, 2008).

### 1.2 Emergence of management models

Until the early 1980s, both the ON Parks and BC Parks functioned under the National Park Model (Killan, 1993; FORUM Consulting Group Ltd, 2008); with the government owning and managing the resources and receiving the majority of funding from societal taxes (Eagles, 2008). However, economic stagnation in the mid-1970s resulted in budgetary restraints in all levels of government in Canada. Decreased government appropriations led ON Parks and BC Parks to adopt market mechanisms, namely outsourcing the production of certain public services to the commercial sector (Killan, 1993). In BC, deep roots and a culture of privatization (Milne, 1990) led BC Parks to outsource the operations and management of all front country parks to private operators by 1989 (FORUM Consulting Group Ltd, 2008). Typically, front country parks are defined as parks that provide motorized access to

campsites, have infrastructure such as washrooms, electricity outlets and visitor centers, tend to have high visitation rates and are mostly visited by day users (Vaske *et al.*, 1996; Carr, 2000). Back country parks are essentially the opposite, there is little to no infrastructure development, no access to campsites by car or other forms of motorized vehicle and have lower visitation rates than front country sites (Carr, 2000).

Due to public concern, ON dropped the use of contractors for the management of entire parks in the late 1980s, while BC Parks retained this approach.

During the early 1990s, the Province of Ontario suffered a similar, although smaller, economic recession. The government once again reduced funding derived from societal taxes, leading to cutbacks in sectors such as natural resources and ultimately, ON Parks (Ministry of Natural Resources, 1996; Moos, 2002; Halpenny, 2007). The decrease in government funding at the same time as an increase in park visitor numbers led to a strategic management review of the parks program in 1993. This review recommended the establishment of a unified parks organization emphasizing the need for a stronger entrepreneurial focus and greater financial flexibility (Parks Ontario Transition Advisory Team, 1995; Moos, 2002). From the 1993 strategic management review, Parks Ontario was created in 1996 (Moos, 2002). Although ON Parks' management model changed from a public and for-profit combination model to a parastatal model, BC Parks retained its public and for-profit combination model. These park agency changes are further discussed below.

*1.2.1 Ontario parks.* Due to provincial wide decreases in government funding, coupled with an increase in park numbers and park visitors, ON Parks adopted the new business model in 1996 (Ministry of Natural Resources, 1996). The management body of ON Parks began to function under the parastatal model. In-house park staff predominately provide services to the public such as visitor registration, entrance fee collection, law enforcement, interpretation programs and fire wood provision, while in some instances private contractors and licensees provide specialized services such as provision of rental equipment, facility maintenance and garbage removal. ON Parks also works closely with friends organizations, which are non-profit organizations in the delivery of visitor services. The friends groups predominately operate education and interpretation programs.

The business model adopted by ON Parks in 1996 had a goal of obtaining higher levels of cost recovery derived from tourists' fees and charges. As such, ON Parks was able to retain all income derived from user fees, grants and donations (Ministry of Natural Resources, 1996). At the present, 80 per cent of ON Parks receives funding through tourism-generated income while the ON Provincial Government provides the remaining 20 per cent of operating funds (Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2008). This heavy reliance on visitor-derived revenue demands high levels of financial efficiency on behalf of ON Parks, and leads to increases in user fees. ON Parks has one of the highest park user fees of all provincial park systems in Canada (Table II). Day use fees are collected by park staff at the gate entrance of the park. Front country campers are typically required to pre-book and provide a deposit for their campsite in advance, the remainder of the fee is paid at the entrance gate on arrival.

<b>Table II</b> User Fees for 2008		
<i>Services</i>	<i>BC Parks<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Ontario Parks<sup>b</sup></i>
Front country camping fees	\$10-25/night	\$25-40/night
Backcountry camping fees	\$5/night	\$9.50-20/night
Day use fees	\$3/child; \$5/adult in 2 parks; all other parks are free	\$2.00
Parking	\$1/hour or \$3/day or \$25/annual pass	\$10-18/day
<b>Notes:</b> <sup>a</sup> BC Parks (2009b); <sup>b</sup> Ontario Parks (2009)		

*1.2.2 British Columbia parks.* In the early-1980s, the BC government made a policy change and began to transfer front-country visitor services in provincial parks to for-profit companies (Cavers, 2004). By 1989, private contractors, known as park facility operators (PFOs), managed all front-country visitor services (FORUM Consulting Group Ltd, 2008). BC Parks employees focus their efforts on the ecological and resource management of the parks and monitoring the private contractors.

BC Parks sets all park fees, which the PFOs collect. If the fee revenues for the PFOs are less than the agreed-on operating costs, then BC Parks makes up the deficit, through deficiency payments (FORUM Consulting Group Ltd, 2008). Most parks run at a deficit. However, in the rare case that the fee revenue exceeds the negotiated contract amount at a park, the PFO returns a portion of the profit to BC Parks (FORUM). Deficiency payments enable PFOs to operate a financially viable business and BC Parks to offer visitor services at a relatively low cost to citizens (McCutcheon, 2009). However, in lieu of an explicit guideline regarding a reasonable level of profit for a PFO, many acrimonious negotiations occur between BC Parks and the PFOs (FORUM, p. 26). Although the public and for-profit combination model is typically designed to reduce dependence on government funding, using public financial data, it appears that for the fiscal year of 2007/2008, approximately 80 per cent of funding for BC Parks is provided from societal taxes while only 20 per cent is provided through user fees (BC Parks, 2008). However, those data do not include the internal financial details of the PFOs.

### 1.3 Overview of BC and Ontario Parks

BC Parks has the largest system of provincially protected areas in Canada with 972 parks and conservation reserves covering 13.05 million hectares of land and reports over 19 million visits (in person days) in 2006 (BC Parks, 2009a) (Table III). These visitor numbers may be inflated as BC Parks' methods for recording visitor use statistics are not directly available and include both visitors and entrants (McCutcheon, 2009). Eagles *et al.* (2002) define a visitor as "a person who visits the land and waters of a park or protected area for the purposes mandated for the area. A visitor is not paid to be in the park and does not live permanently in the park" (Eagles *et al.*, 2002, pp. 163). These authors define an entrant as "a person going onto the lands and waters of a park or protected area for any purpose" (Eagles *et al.*, 2002, pp 163). Thus, the inflation of these figures is attributed to the counting of park entrants, those just driving through the park on a provincial road and the daily activities of park employees. The actual method employed by BC Parks for counting visitors is not publically available.

ON has the second largest system of provincial protected areas in Canada with 9.4 million hectares of protected land distributed in 621 parks and conservation reserves (Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2008). ON Parks reported a total of just over 9.5 million visitor days in 2008 (Ontario Parks, 2008) indicating a high level of use of their park

**Table III** BC Parks and Ontario Parks Statistics for 2008

Categories	BC Parks	Ontario Parks
Hectares <sup>a</sup>	13,050,000	9,400,000
% province <sup>b</sup>	14.26	7.31
Number of parks <sup>b</sup>	972	621
Number of parks with visitor services <sup>b</sup>	206	111
Number of campsites <sup>b</sup>	11,000	19,349
Number of visitor days <sup>c</sup>		9,537,636
Visits <sup>d</sup>	19,642,854	

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>The BC Parks statistics represents the overall size of the protected areas system in the province which includes provincial parks and protected areas, as well as national parks and national park reserves (BC Parks, 2009a); ON Parks statistics represents the overall size of the protected area system in the province which includes provincial parks and nature reserves (Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2008); <sup>b</sup>BC Parks (2009a); Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (2008); <sup>c</sup>Ontario Parks (2008); <sup>d</sup>BC Parks (2009a)

system (Table III). Ontario Parks (2010) uses an openly shared formula to calculate their visitor statistics and the authors of this paper have strong confidence in the accuracy of the reported data. The formula is (adapted from Ontario Parks, 2010):

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Ontario Park Visitors} = & \text{average occupants/vehicle} \times \text{number of daily vehicle permits} \\
 & + \text{average occupants/vehicle} \times \text{number of annual vehicle permits} \times 10 \\
 & + \text{number of bus permits} \times 40 + \text{number of regular camper nights} \\
 & + \text{group day-use visitors} + \text{group camping camper nights} \\
 & + \text{free day-use visitors} \\
 & + \text{interior camper nights}
 \end{aligned}$$

In terms of user fees, ON Parks have very high rates compared to BC Parks (Table II). As the ON Parks' management model relies heavily on user fees, higher prices are expected; BC Parks' management model focuses on providing the lowest possible cost to the users (McCutcheon, 2009). Aside from day use fees, all of ON Park user fees are more than double those of BC Parks (Table II). These low user fees explain the heavy reliance by BC Parks on government funding.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Survey instrument

The research instrument was created by the Parks Governance Group (PGG) at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. To measure the governance of environmental management models, the PGG designed a survey to investigate stakeholder perspectives of governance and park management issues. The ten governance criteria, as identified by the UNDP, served as framework for the survey. Through an extensive literature review, the PGG developed statements designed to measure each of the ten governance criteria (Table IV).

Through multiple meetings, the PGG condensed each of the ten lists into five to nine statements. Two examples of statements include "at 'park x' those who wanted to contribute to the public participation process had the opportunity to do so" and "'park x' seriously responds to public criticism" (For a full list of statements, see Buteau-Duitschaever, 2009). Responses were measured using a five point Likert scale: strongly agree (1); agree (2); neutral (3); disagree (4); and, strongly disagree (5). Also added were the option of "Do not know" and "Not applicable" in the event that participants did not have an opinion regarding a statement, or, that the statements did not relate to them. Participants completed the survey

**Table IV** Origins of the governance survey statements

<i>Criteria for good governance</i>	<i>References</i>
Public participation	Charmley and Engelbert (2005); Rowe <i>et al.</i> (2004); Wang (2001)
Consensus orientation	DeHoog <i>et al.</i> (1990); Hornsby <i>et al.</i> (1994); Jones (1986)
Accountability	Kluvers (2003); Schacter (2003); Wang (2002)
Transparency	Bellver and Kaufman (2005); Drew and Nyerges (2004); and Bladescu <i>et al.</i> (2005)
Responsiveness	Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1988), Glaser and Hildreth (1999)
Effectiveness	Crompton and Lamb (1986); Petrick (2002); Vigoda (2000)
Efficiency	MacKay and Crompton (1989-1990); Howat <i>et al.</i> (2003); Shneider <i>et al.</i> (1980)
Equity	Joshi (1989); Kacmar and Ferris (1991); Brewer and Selden (2000)
Rule of law	Fraerich (1993); Rowe <i>et al.</i> (2004) and Stolton <i>et al.</i> (2003)
Strategic vision	Graham <i>et al.</i> (2003); IUCN Strategy 2009-2020 (2008)

from the viewpoint of their most familiar operating park and management area within that park.

There were two main management areas categories:

1. park services; or
2. park administration and management (Table V).

By asking participants to select two viewpoints, the researchers felt they would better understand the items within each governance section, as they would place each item within the context of their own personal experience. This paper reports on the first viewpoint stated.

The PGG transferred the survey to a computerized format on finalization. The survey obtained information on the perception of these ten governance criteria from five distinct stakeholder groups:

1. park staff;
2. visitors;
3. contractors working within a park;
4. NGOs involved with or having an interest in provincial parks; and
5. nearby residents to provincial parks.

## 2.2 Survey distribution

The PGG collected data from five groups (park staff, visitors, NGOs, contractors, and nearby residents to provincial parks); however, it is beyond the realm of this paper to compare and discuss differences or similarities between the five stakeholder groups perception of governance for the ON and BC park management models. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on visitors for reasons previously mentioned. As such, only data collection processes for this stakeholder group are presented.

The PGG administered the survey in BC for a three-month period ranging from July 1 to October 1, 2008. Since neither BC Parks nor the contractors had a database of information regarding BC Parks visitors, the research team concluded it was not financially feasible to contact visitors directly for the survey. Rather respondents were obtained by recruitment and participation of the key environmental and recreation-focused NGOs in British Columbia. The NGOs e-mailed their members to invite participation in the survey. Interested participants were required to send an e-mail with the title "BC Parks Governance Survey" to the researchers. This allowed the researchers to monitor and control survey distribution. After receipt of the e-mail, participants received a unique electronic survey link. This process allowed for strong control of the sampling framework as duplicate e-mail addresses were not sent a survey link. As part of the survey, individuals self-selected their primary role in parks, which in turn created a database of information regarding perceptions of BC Parks' governance from the perspective of both NGOs and park visitors.

**Table V** Park management areas listed on the survey

<i>Park services</i>	<i>Park administration and management</i>
Campgrounds	Park administration
Children's camps	Park staff
Education programs	Park management plan
Equipment rentals	Park police
Food services	Park policy issues (please specify):
Gift shops	Other (please specify context):
Interpretive programs	
Resorts or lodges	
Visitor interpretive centre	
Other (please specify):	

To increase efficiency over the sampling framework, modifications were made to the survey distribution process for Ontario. In ON, a webpage was created allowing participants to sign up individually in order to complete the survey. Each e-mail address received a specific survey URL address for access to the survey.

Survey recruitment in ON took place from 11 March, 2009 until 11 May 2009. ON Parks had a database of information on park visitors. The research team contacted this stakeholder group directly through a campers' blog and an electronic quarterly newsletter. In both instances, a short summary of the study and the link to the survey webpage allowed interested participants to sign onto the survey directly.

The collected survey data were transferred to SPSS and analyzed using version 17. All responses were confidential and the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo approved all methods.

### 3. Results

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the researchers determined the face validity and internal consistency for all items within each of the ten governance sections of the research instrument using a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation (Snedecor, 1946; Babbie, 1989). Researchers conducted a reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha to determine if the grouping of statements (as indicated by the principal components analysis) was a reliable indicator for the factors created. Based on the reliability analysis, several items within five of ten governance sections (efficiency, effectiveness, consensus orientation, public participation and strategic vision) of the survey were not included in the factors. As these items either formed a single item factor or did not properly hold together with the other items within the factor, most likely due to the negative wording of the items, they were dropped (Gliem and Gliem, 2003; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; McIver and Carmines, 1981; Spector, 1992). Although the principal components analysis grouped all items within one factor for the governance section Effectiveness, researchers rejected two items due to their low contribution. The reliability analysis confirmed the rejection of these two items.

Of the original ten governance sections, items within the equity and efficiency sections separated into two separate and distinct sub-groups. These sub-groups were formed based on the wording and topics that the items attempted to measure. The first of two factors for equity that measured the "perception of the parks" by participants was comprised of seven items: treating all users with fair and equal treatment; attending the needs of all in a fair basis; the park has fair procedures for establishing priorities; the procedures used by the park to resolve conflict is fair; all users are permitted to use services; the tendering process is open to all; and, the same quality of services is provided to all by the park. This component was termed equity-fairness. The second factor for equity was comprised of two items designed to measure if participants perceive the park to be providing adequate services when user fees cover the costs; and, if participants perceive the park to be providing adequate services because tax revenues cover the costs. This factor was named equity-finance. The first factors for efficiency was comprised of three items designed to measure if the park provides value for the taxes paid; provides value for user fees charged; and, if it is efficient. This factor was named efficiency-financial value. The second factor for efficiency was comprised of two items designed to measure if the park has enough employees to handle their responsibilities; and, if it has too many employees. This factor was named efficiency-employees. The remaining eight governance sections retained their original name since all items (with the exception of those rejected) within each of the eight sections grouped into one factor indicating high levels of congruency in their measurement design.

The principal components analysis revealed that the ten governance sections of the survey created 12 factors capable of explaining over 66 per cent of the variance (Table VI). The reliability analysis confirmed the grouping of the items for 11 of the 12 governance factors identified in the principal components analysis (Table VI). Due to a low alpha score (0.51),

**Table VI** Principal components analysis and reliability analysis

Governance criteria		Number of factors	Pct. Of variance explained	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Responsiveness		1	69.79	0.94	8
Effectiveness		1	66.78	0.90	6
Equity	Factor 1	2	47.61	0.90	7
	Factor 2		19.49	0.71	2
Efficiency	Factor 1	2	40.29	0.82	3
	Factor 2		26.15	0.51	2
Public participation		1	68.24	0.92	7
Consensus orientation		1	76.73	0.90	4
Transparency		1	74.13	0.95	8
Rule of law		1	69.74	0.91	6
Accountability		1	71.94	0.93	7
Strategic vision		1	81.11	0.92	4

the second factor (efficiency-employees) as defined by the principal components analysis for efficiency was not further incorporated into any analyses conducted (Table VI).

### 3.1 Sample description

In total, researchers obtained 367 completed surveys from BC and ON Parks visitors; 112 (30.5 per cent) from visitors to BC Parks and 255 (69.5 per cent) from visitors to ON Parks. Both populations were almost equally divided between male (ON  $n=103$ , 48.4 per cent; BC  $n=65$ , 58.6 per cent) and female (ON  $n=110$ , 51.8 per cent; BC  $n=46$ , 41.4 per cent). Visitors to both ON and BC Parks were predominantly well educated with either a college diploma or university degree. The majority of visitors to both ON (96.0 per cent) and BC (83.9 per cent) selected contexts within the Parks Services category. For both visitors to BC and ON, the majority reported spending an average of 28 days or less in what they considered their primary park within the last year.

### 3.2 Governance factor rankings

All items within each of the 11 governance factors created were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly agree with the statement to 5, strongly disagree with the statement. A score of 3 indicates a neutral perception of the statement. The wording of the items allowed agreement with the statement to represent good governance and disagreement with the statement to represent weak governance. Therefore, items with scores below 3 can be seen as indicating good governance, while items with scores above 3 can be seen as indicating weak governance.

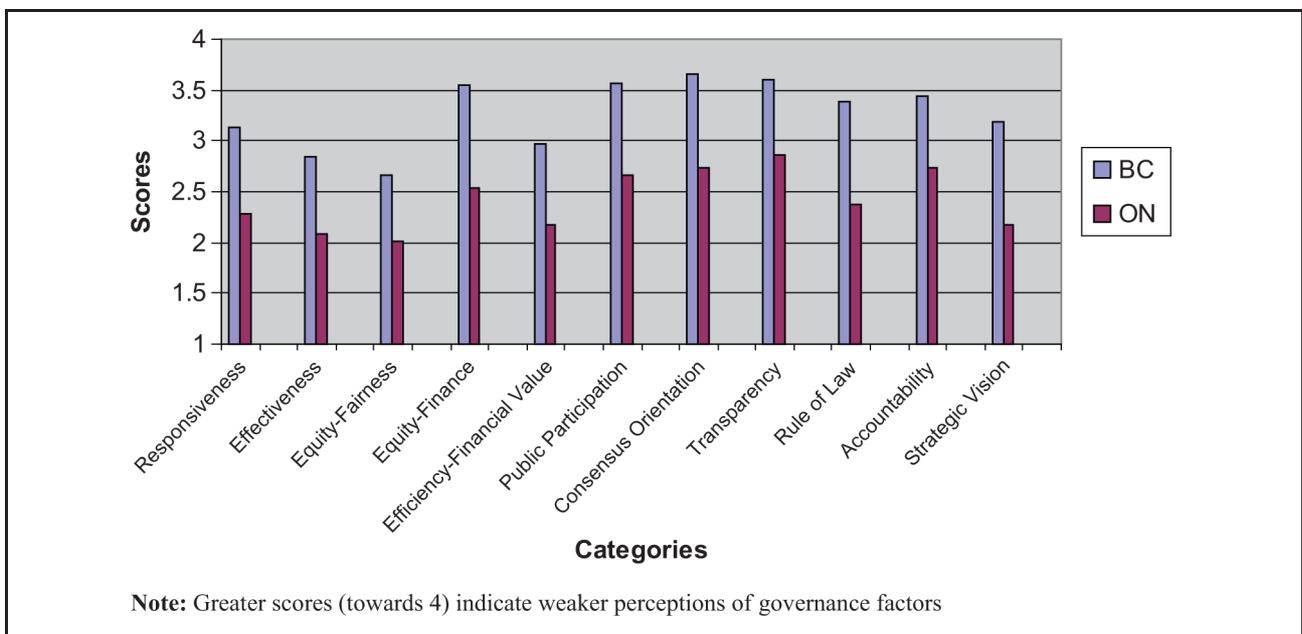
Visitors to ON Parks had positive perceptions (scores between 1 and 3) for all 11 governance factors: Equity-Fairness ( $m=2.02$ ), Effectiveness ( $m=2.08$ ), Strategic vision ( $m=2.17$ ), Efficiency-financial value ( $m=2.18$ ), Responsiveness ( $m=2.28$ ), Rule of law ( $m=2.37$ ), Equity-finance ( $m=2.53$ ), Public participation ( $m=2.66$ ), Consensus orientation ( $m=2.73$ ), Accountability ( $m=2.73$ ) and Transparency ( $m=2.87$ ). The highest level of disagreement between ON visitors was for Equity-Finance ( $SD=1.00$ ) while the highest level of agreement between ON visitors was for Equity-Fairness ( $SD=0.67$ ) (Table VII; Figure 1).

Visitors to BC provincial parks had negative perceptions (between 3 and 5) for eight of the 11 governance factors: Consensus orientation ( $m=3.65$ ), Transparency ( $m=3.60$ ), Public participation ( $m=3.57$ ), Equity-finance ( $m=3.54$ ), Accountability ( $m=3.44$ ), Rule of law ( $m=3.39$ ), Strategic vision ( $m=3.18$ ), and Responsiveness ( $m=3.14$ ). For the remaining three governance factors, BC visitors had positive perceptions (between 1 and 3): Equity-fairness ( $m=2.66$ ), Effectiveness ( $m=2.85$ ) and Efficiency-financial value ( $m=2.97$ ). The highest level of agreement between BC visitors was for the governance factor Responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability ( $SD=0.83$ ) while the lowest level of agreement was for the governance factor Equity-Finance ( $SD=1.07$ ) (Table VII; Figure 1).

**Table VII** T-test comparing BC to ON visitors for 11 governance factors

Governance factors	Visitor	n	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD	N/A	Do not know	t	Df	P
Responsiveness	BC	105	3.14	0.83	3	3	10.05	353	<0.001
	ON	250	2.28	0.70	1	3			
Effectiveness	BC	111	2.85	0.83	2	0	9.12	358	<0.001
	ON	249	2.08	0.69	0	0			
Equity-fairness	BC	107	2.66	0.86	3	3	7.52	341	<0.001
	ON	236	2.02	0.67	2	2			
Equity-finance	BC	80	3.54	1.07	7	27	7.31	253	<0.001
	ON	175	2.53	1.00	4	61			
Efficiency-financial value	BC	109	2.97	0.99	1	1	7.50	342	<0.001
	ON	235	2.18	0.87	0	2			
Public participation	BC	89	3.57	0.84	0	22	7.47	206	<0.001
	ON	119	2.66	0.89	9	101			
Consensus orientation	BC	70	3.65	0.90	0	41	6.37	163	<0.001
	ON	95	2.73	0.94	13	118			
Transparency	BC	79	3.60	0.84	0	32	6.19	199	<0.001
	ON	122	2.87	0.81	11	92			
Rule of law	BC	96	3.39	0.95	0	16	9.91	276	<0.001
	ON	182	2.37	0.73	7	35			
Accountability	BC	106	3.44	0.83	2	3	6.89	306	<0.001
	ON	202	2.73	0.87	14	32			
Strategic vision	BC	109	3.18	1.05	0	4	9.87	313	<0.001
	ON	206	2.17	0.75	0	18			

Note: <sup>a</sup>Based on five-point scales where lower scores, towards one, represent a positive perception for the governance factors

**Figure 1** Graph of mean governance scores for ON and BC visitor population

As previously mentioned, the research instrument also allowed participants to select “Not applicable” or, “Do not know” when answering items. Both the ON and BC visitors seldom indicated that items within each of the 11 governance factors were not applicable to them, demonstrating high levels of content validity for the research model used in this study (Table VII). However, responses for “Do not know” were much higher for 5 of the 11 governance factors for both ON and BC visitors (Table VII). The governance factors are Equity-Finance (ON=61, BC=27); Public participation (ON=101, BC=22); Consensus

orientation (ON=118, BC=41); Transparency (ON=92, BC=32); and, Rule of Law (ON=35, BC=16). This indicates that for five of the governance factors, many respondents from both BC and ON felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge to provide an answer for some of the items within the above factors indicating that these areas of park management may be in need of remedial action in both park systems. Visitors from ON also had a moderately high response rate for "Do not know" to all items within the governance factors Accountability ( $n=32$ ) and Strategic vision ( $n=18$ ) (Table VII). It is probable that these high response rates of "Do not know" for the above governance factors may indicate that visitors have less insight into these governance factors and corresponding management frameworks.

In order to determine if the observed differences between visitors to ON and BC Parks were statistically different from each other ( $p < 0.05$ ), an independent sample *t*-test was conducted. This revealed that all the observed differences in the perception of the 11 governance factors between ON and BC visitors were statistically different from each other ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table VII).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Overall perceptions by province

This study reveals that visitors to ON Parks have positive perceptions for all 11 governance factors tested in regards to ON Parks' parastatal model. This confirms that the parastatal model, which emphasizes service provision for the visitors at market prices is well accepted by the visitors to ON Parks. Therefore, this management model has good levels of governance.

In contrast, visitors to BC Parks have negative perceptions for eight governance criteria and positive perceptions for only three governance criteria in regards to the public and for-profit model. BC Parks' visitors' perceptions of governance indicate a weaker overall level of governance, suggesting the public-for-profit management model is inferior to the parastatal model approach.

The significant difference in perceptions observed ( $p < 0.001$ ) between ON and BC visitors for all 11 governance factors provides a clear indication that the parastatal model employed by ON Parks has much stronger levels of governance when compared to the public and for-profit combination model employed by BC Parks. This is an extremely important finding as it clearly indicates that ON Parks' parastatal model has much stronger levels of governance than BC Parks public and for-profit combination model, which has weak levels of governance as perceived by a key stakeholder group, the visitors. The reviewers to this paper were of the opinion that the parks visitors are too far removed from park management to fully understand the governance of the park. The authors of this paper disagree. The visitors are the primary users and consumers of services provided by park planning and management. Therefore, visitor perceptions of governance for a particular management model are extremely important as they can indicate the visitor's level of support, satisfaction, and agreement for the planning and management practices employed by park management within a particular park system. Thus, visitors' perception of the governance factors can act as an important indicator for the level of good governance present within a park management model.

### 4.2 Between visitor group differences

For both park systems, the perceived level of effectiveness, equity-fairness and efficiency-financial value is positive (between 1 and 3). Therefore, visitors to both park systems perceived organizational objectives as successfully realized, cases treated in similar ways and, resources used with minimum amounts of waste and expenses. However, visitors to ON Parks had a more positive perceptions than BC Parks visitors for Effectiveness (ON=2.08; BC=2.85), Equity-Fairness (ON=2.02; BC=2.66) and Efficiency-Financial Value (ON=2.18; BC=2.97). The lower scores observed for ON visitors indicates that ON Parks' parastatal model is ranked more positively by the visitors, while BC Parks public and

for-profit combination model may be in need of improvements in regards to these three governance factors.

Responsiveness is the processes used to try to serve all stakeholders in a proactive manner regarding complaints and public criticisms (UNDP, 1997). BC Park visitors perceive a much lower level of responsiveness (3.14) present within the BC provincial park system compared to ON Park visitors' positive perceptions (2.28) within the ON provincial park system. Front country parks in BC are operated by PFOs with little to no government staff presence in parks. The more negative perception of responsiveness issues may be due to the lack of BC Parks' staff in the field. The negative perceptions observed from BC park visitors suggest that the BC Parks management model does not adequately respond in a proactive manner to complaints and criticism on behalf of park visitors. In contrast, government staff members operate ON Parks. The positive perceptions as observed by ON visitors indicate that ON Parks does respond better to complaints and criticism in a proactive manner. It is possible that the higher level of park staff presence and their effective responses to visitors' concerns within ON Parks is responsible for the positive scores observed.

Strategic vision had positive levels of governance within ON Parks' management model (2.17), but had weaker levels in BC Parks' management model (3.18). Strategic vision is the ability of the park system to look constructively towards the future by placing consideration for the historical, cultural and social complexities present within each situation encountered. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that ON Parks has stronger levels of strategic vision than BC Parks, according to the visitors. Of importance is the one-point difference between ON visitors when compared to BC visitors for this governance factor. This indicates a very large discrepancy in perception between the two parks systems and may suggest that the low ranking of BC Parks strategic vision is an indication that this factor is in need of remedial action.

The governance factor Rule of Law received a positive score from ON visitors (2.37), but a negative score from BC visitors (3.39). Once again, a large 1-point gap between these two visitor groups occurred. Based on the definition given in the survey for rule of law – the legal frameworks are fair and enforced impartially – this negative perception on behalf of BC Parks visitors is alarming, but confirms qualitative research indicating a low level of rule of law in BC Parks (McCutcheon, 2009). While BC Parks rangers are legally responsible for enforcing the rules of the Parks Act, it is in actuality, the PFOs who are the ones ensuring the safety of park visitors in front country parks. Yet PFOs lack enforcement authority to fully implement the Parks Act, and, a review of the service contract between a PFO and BC Parks revealed no PFO acceptance of liability (McCutcheon, 2009). BC Parks must examine the PFOs' lack of enforcement authority, the lack of clearly stated responsibilities surrounding visitor safety and the lack of funding needed to assign park rangers to the field to serve as enforcement officers.

Accountability refers to the manner in which officials answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their powers and duties, act on criticisms or requirements made of them and, accept responsibility for failure, incompetence or deceit. Visitors to BC Parks had a negative perception of this criterion (3.44) while ON visitors had a relatively positive perception (2.73). The more negative perception of this factor by BC visitors indicates they do not perceive BC Parks to be entirely accountable for their actions. McCutcheon (2009) suggests the negative perceptions of accountability can be attributed to the current Government's policies and initiatives for BC Parks. Although ON visitors had a more positive perception of this factor in comparison to BC visitors, the score is one of the weakest received for the ON system. It is possible that this lower score observed is linked to incongruent wording between ON Parks' class environmental assessment (EA) and the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act 2006, which give powers of interpretation to ON Parks officials in certain decision-making processes without requirement for public involvement (Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2009). This was demonstrated in 2008 when Ontario Parks refused to conduct an Environmental Bill of Rights, even when members of the public had filed an application, when it issued a work permit for the construction of a snowmobile trail through a conservation reserve without assessing ecological impacts. The Environmental

Commissioner of Ontario (2009) concludes that poor wording and incompatibility between the class EA and Parks Act is leading to decreasing levels of accountability on behalf of ON Parks to members of the public (i.e. visitors).

Transparency exists in order to assure and promote public confidence in the government or governing body and, to merge the gap between the public and the governing body (Bovens, 2005). Although Bovens (2005) stated that too much emphasis on transparency can lead to inefficiencies within the governing body, this does not appear to be the case for ON or BC Parks as visitors perceive efficiency positively. McCutcheon (2009) hints that the weak perception of transparency by BC Parks visitors may be attributable to several government park policy initiatives. Examples are the announcement of the installation of parking meters in BC Parks and the fixed roof accommodations proposal with no warning or any prior public consultation. According to Eagles (2009), both the public and for-profit combination model and parastatal model have low levels of transparency as government rules seldom demand that full disclosure of all activities be required. This is evidenced by the weak negative score given for transparency by BC visitors (3.60) and weak positive scores given by ON visitors (2.87). However, it is in the best interest of both park systems to increase their level of transparency as this can garner a greater understanding of actions taken and decisions made on behalf of visitors. Although a probable outcome of improving the level of transparency within both management systems may lead to disputes based on previous management actions undertaken (Bovens, 2005), doing so will lead to increases in accountability. As accountability received relatively low scores from both visitor groups, both park agencies need to address their level of accountability and transparency.

Although equity-fairness received positive scores from visitors for both ON (2.02) and BC Parks (2.66), equity-finance did not. Equity-finance was perceived negatively by BC visitors (3.54), towards weak governance, indicating possible dissatisfaction with the services provided based on user fees and societal taxes and/or, concern over contractual arrangements between BC Parks and PFOs. This is not surprising in the sense that BC Parks strives to provide recreation services for the users at the lowest possible cost (McCutcheon, 2009). Even though there are quite low user fee charges when visiting BC Parks, visitors are not satisfied with the issue of equity-finance. This may indicate visitors:

- feel that the quality and quantity of services are inadequate;
- have the nostalgic perception of free use of parks with no cost to the user; or
- visitors may be concerned with the deficiency payments.

ON visitors had more positive perceptions of this governance factor (2.53) indicating that ON Parks governance model is perceived as being more equitable in regard to the type and quantity of services provided with respect to the user fees collected and the government support received. The higher levels of financial reliance on visitor fees by ON Parks indicates that visitors are required to pay more but that visitors are also likely to obtain higher levels of service. This finding suggest that, although user costs in ON are much higher when compared to those of BC (Table III), visitors to ON Parks support the user costs associated with visiting ON Parks and agree that the quality and quantity of the services, products and experiences provided are adequate. This indicates that the parastatal model allows for greater capabilities for park staff to effectively respond to visitor needs and requirements, leading to higher levels of equity-fairness and equity-finance.

The governance factor public participation received a negative score from BC visitors (3.57) and a positive score from ON visitors (2.66). In the survey, public participation was defined as: all people should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that in BC, visitors feel they are insufficiently included, either directly or indirectly, in decision-making processes. Besides satisfaction surveys, in BC, the park visitor is simply a consumer of a service rather than an active participant in management and policy, unless they are a member of an influential NGO (McCutcheon, 2009). ON Parks conducts annual visitor surveys in order to determine areas of weakness and strength within their park system and to also obtain information on emerging visitor demands such as new activities, the need

for more campsites or the need for specific rental equipment. Unlike BC Parks, ON Parks has a continuous park staff presence within operating provincial parks allowing visitors to directly contact park staff in order to obtain required information and to voice complaints, comments and criticisms. Also, there is a stronger presence of active, vocal and respected NGO associations, Friends Groups, within the ON park system. These Friend Groups are comprised of volunteer members that are also visitors to these parks. These organizations actively represent visitors through their very close working relationship with the parks through both management and service provision capabilities. Therefore, it is possible that due to annual visitor surveys, park staff presence, and active NGO's, visitors believe that their comments, opinions and concerns are heard more often by ON Parks leading to the higher scores observed. Although public participation received a positive score from ON visitors, the score is closer to three than it is to two. This indicates that although ON Parks currently has strong public participation, more effective communication to visitors on the manner in which it has dealt with their complaints or comments is desirable. Buteau-Duitschaever (2009) argued that not only must abundant levels of public participation be present within a protected area management system; the system must effectively communicate these facts back to visitors.

Consensus orientation received a weak score from BC visitors (3.65) and a relatively strong score from ON visitors (2.73). In the survey, consensus orientation was defined as the ability to mediate differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that BC Parks has poor abilities for developing consensus orientation. Again, this can be attributed to the private nature of the contractual relationships between BC Parks and the PFOs, and, disconnect with visitors and government agency staff. Visitors to ON Parks view ON Parks as having positive levels of consensus orientation, indicating acceptance for decision-making processes undertaken. However, this factor obtained a score closer to three than to two from ON visitors indicating that it is in need of improvement.

#### **4.3 Presence of good governance**

As previously stated by Graham *et al.* (2003), in order for good governance to be present within a management model, all UNDP criteria need to be considered within a management model. This research leads to the conclusion that a certain level of "good" governance is present within both of the management models compared, as responses are obtained from visitors for both ON and BC Parks for all governance factors tested. However, the high level of "Do not know" answers from both ON and BC visitors for the governance factors equity-finance; public participation; consensus orientation; transparency; rule of law; and for ON visitors, accountability and strategic vision, may suggest that some visitors do not feel confident to evaluate these governance aspects.

Given that the ON Parks parastatal model received scores towards good governance, that is scores between 1 and 3, for all 11 governance factors, while BC Parks public and for-profit combination model only received scores towards good governance for three of the 11 governance factors, the research found that the differences are attributable to the management models employed. McCutcheon (2009) speculated that a major flaw of the public and for-profit combination model is the disconnect between the BC Parks agency and the park visitors. More importantly, McCutcheon observed that a lack of government park staff within the parks creates a large disconnect between the visitors and upper level park management. According to McCutcheon, contractors can respond to customer service requests but not to agency level issues. Due to BC Parks' non-transparent and inadequate visitor monitoring practices, the agency neither has an accurate measure of the use of parks nor a database of information that details visitors' contact information, patterns of use and suggestions for improvement. Given the large disconnect between visitors and BC Parks staff, it is possible to conclude that poor public communication practices are in place (Adams, 1963; Folger and Konovsky, 1989). Becker (1992) and Park *et al.* (2009) argue that when stakeholder groups, such as visitors, do not believe that certain public participation processes are open, fair and/or equal, they are not likely to view the manner in which the public agency's financial decision making processes as being accountable, transparent

and, as having weak abilities for consensus orientation. Therefore, disconnect between BC Park staff and visitor may explain part of the overall negative perceptions of governance as observed from BC visitors.

The parastatal model employed by ON Parks ensures that higher park staffing levels are present within ON Parks. This staff presence allows visitors to both obtain direct information from park staff, and voice comments, criticisms and concerns to park officials. This direct contact between park staff and visitors allows park staff to take immediate actions in order to resolve problems or to provide necessary information. ON Parks also has extensive, up-to-date visitor use data. These data allow ON Parks to provide services required by visitors, and to determine areas within management practices that require improvements or updates. We can conclude that the observed positive scores for all 11 governance factors by ON visitors is directly linked to the parastatal model employed by ON Parks.

High user costs for ON Parks, when compared to those of BC Parks, should have yielded more negative scores for the governance factors equity-finance and efficiency-financial value from ON visitors and lower scores from BC visitors (More, 2005); yet, we observe the opposite. The scores obtained for equity-finance and efficiency-financial value suggest that ON visitors accept the associated user costs, probably due to the higher level of visitor services received. However, visitors to BC Parks appear dissatisfied with the level of services and products provided; this suggests that BC Parks may need to reconnect with visitors to re-conceptualize the manner in which they define efficiency and equity. This finding indicates that ON Parks parastatal model has much stronger levels of governance than BC Parks public-for-profit management model as it is capable of effectively catering to the needs of visitors.

## 5. Conclusion

Public demand, cooperation, and engagement of civil society in governance processes guides management practices of government-owned parks and protected areas; they also play a vital role in ensuring continued support for management practices employed by public sector agencies (Bovaird, 2005; Edgar *et al.*, 2006). Government-owned parks and protected areas can only exist if there is sufficient political support from satisfied and influential park visitors to affect societal decision-making processes (Bushell *et al.*, 2007). Thus, perceptions of governance criteria for a park system act as an indicator of the level of public support for each of the governance areas measured and as an indicator for the level of political support present. This research provides important information that enables policy planners to better design the governance approaches that overarch the management of a park system.

While park visitors typically have no direct insight into park planning, management, or governance, they do however, experience parks within these established frameworks. Therefore, visitors' perceptions of governance are indicative of their satisfaction with parks. The research findings conclude that the park visitors are fully capable of understanding and commenting on the governance approaches that they observe operating in the parks that they visit.

This research provides important information that enables policy planners to better design the governance approaches that overarch the management of a park system. However, the research demonstrates that Ontario park visitors rank the parastatal model as having positive scores for all 11 governance factors while BC park visitors only ranked three of the 11 governance factors positively for the public and for-profit combination management model. This later model appears to have structural deficiencies build into it that no amount of model tinkering is likely to repair.

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