

Draft Parks Canada National Urban Park Program Policy Framework

Parks Canada is creating a new national urban parks policy, and the following information has been summarized from a discussion paper published by Park's Canada on its website, in order to seek public input¹. The National Urban Park policy will be used by Parks Canada to guide the designation and management of new national urban parks across Canada.

The Discussion Paper proposes that the policy would:

- provide a mechanism and structure for Parks Canada to designate national urban parks
- outline requirements that must be met for a proposed national urban park to be designated
- specify standards that must be maintained to retain the designation
- ensure that there is a consistent approach to designating and managing national urban parks
- provide certainty that all national urban parks contribute to the three principal objectives of the program: conserving nature; connecting people with nature; advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.



Each national urban park will be unique, so the National Urban Parks Policy will provide a flexible framework that encourages and creates space for local leadership and locally relevant approaches.

¹ <https://parks.canada.ca/pun-nup/politique-policy>

National urban parks will contribute to three core objectives:

- Conserving nature;
- Connecting people with nature; and
- Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

These three objectives are all interconnected: conserving nature in urban parks provides habitat for wildlife and spaces for people to connect with nature close to where they live; being able to connect with nature encourages people to care for, learn about, and support conservation of the natural environment and the natural and cultural heritage of a particular place; leadership by Indigenous people in urban parks allows for Indigenous knowledge and two-eyed seeing² to inform stewardship of the lands and waters and provides opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to learn from each other and connect. These three, core objectives provide a framework for the design and management of individual national urban parks. Each national urban park will contribute to the core objectives in ways that reflect the local contexts and interests of partners and stakeholders.

Each of the core objectives is outlined below.

Objective — Conserving Nature

National urban parks contribute to local, national and global efforts to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity and address the impacts of climate change in cities. This will be achieved in a variety of ways described below.

- Contributing to national and global biodiversity targets through recognition in part or entirely as a 'protected area' or as an 'other effective area-based conservation measure'.
- Protecting existing natural areas including significant, rare, or threatened ecological features like wetlands, dunes, or stands of old growth forest, and cultural landscapes and features including agricultural areas, built heritage, engineering works and archaeological sites.

² Two-Eyed Seeing: According to Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, two-eyed seeing is “to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together.” Source: <https://parks.canada.ca/pun-nup>

- Creating, restoring, and maintaining habitat for pollinators, migratory animals, and other wildlife.
- Managing the overall park in ways that maintain and enhance biodiversity (the variety of living organisms and the ecological systems they are part of) and ecosystem services (the benefits people derive from functioning ecosystems, such as clean air and water, food, flood control, medicines, recreation, spiritual and cultural connections with nature, etc.).
- Improving connectivity between natural areas, including protected areas.
- Implementing nature-based solutions such as planting trees to increase carbon storage, enhancing climate resilience by restoring native vegetation along shorelines to absorb storm water and reduce flood damage, and contribute to adaptation by, increasing greenspace which simultaneously will help to cool cities during heatwaves and provide climate refugia for wildlife.
- Creating, maintaining and enhancing natural infrastructure which can support cities' climate resilience-planning and reduce the burden on municipal assets like storm water systems, by increasing vegetation and porous surfaces in key places to improve storm water retention and prevent flooding.
- Supporting research in urban ecology and conservation, for example, by serving as living laboratories to test and develop best practices for conservation in urban areas in partnership with academic institutions.
- Creating space for traditional ways of knowing and complimentary research using two-eyed-seeing and conducting research in ethical space with local Indigenous communities; and
- Preventing land-use activities that conflict with the national urban park's objectives while enabling public use.

Objective — Connecting People with Nature

National urban parks will create a welcoming public space for all visitors and users to connect with nature, learn about natural and cultural heritage, and enjoy the benefits of spending time outside year-round. Urban parks will be places where visitors and users can explore how people and the environment in which they live interact and affect one another and see humans as a part of nature, not separate from it. National urban parks are a unique opportunity to bring people together within some of Canada's most culturally diverse areas. National urban parks have the capacity to highlight the diverse narratives that shape the country's past and present, ensuring that cultural sites bring to light the histories, cultures, and contributions of Indigenous peoples and all people living in Canada. They will be located within

close proximity to the urban or peri-urban area (the zone of transition from rural to urban) and will be accessible via public and active transportation (modes of self-powered transportation like walking, cycling, wheeling, etc.).

National urban parks will provide accessible and meaningful experiences for all visitors and users based on universal design principles. National urban parks will be inclusive spaces where diversity is welcomed, and where equity is intentionally advanced through policies, programs, and the built environment. This will be achieved in a variety of ways:

- Documenting, studying and preserving sites and resources of cultural significance within the park.
- Collaborating with local organizations and communities to develop interpretive programs to promote, share, and provide opportunities for visitors and users to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the park and deliver programs that respond to the needs, interests, and diversity of local communities.
- Fostering opportunities for leadership by community members from equity-deserving communities.
- Installing and maintaining accessible and inclusive infrastructure that supports meaningful visitor experiences for a wide range of interests and abilities.
- Establishing, maintaining, and enhancing activities that connect people with nature and cultural heritage in ways that are accessible and inclusive.
- Promoting participatory research through citizen science programs.
- Creating meaningful visitor experiences that are accessible and inclusive.

Each national urban park will be predominantly made up of grounds that are free to access and open to the public. Admission or participation fees may be charged for the use of facilities, installations, programs or other park offerings to support cost recovery.

It also anticipated that national urban parks may include areas with limited access, in order to achieve conservation, reconciliation, heritage preservation, and/or other objectives.

Objective — Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

National urban parks will foster meaningful partnerships and champion leadership by Indigenous peoples including supporting a renewed approach to Indigenous stewardship centered around a vision of management and governance

that is respectfully aligned with Indigenous ways of stewarding lands, water, and ice. National urban parks will support culture-based programming and activities to facilitate learning opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This will be achieved in a variety of ways:

- Recognizing and respecting Indigenous rights.
- Fostering opportunities for sustainable harvesting/gathering and traditional use.
- Maintaining accessibility and a sense of welcome for Indigenous peoples.
- Developing training and career opportunities for Indigenous community members.
- Welcoming the cultural presence and use of the spaces by Indigenous peoples.
- Encouraging tourism and learning opportunities with an Indigenous focus, including the use of Indigenous languages and culturally appropriate interpretative signage.
- Fostering Indigenous stewardship and leadership in conservation, such as through Urban Indigenous Protected Areas.
- Advancing goals, priorities, and interests of local Indigenous communities and governments.