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# **Making Collaboration Work: A Case Study of Two Canadian National Parks**

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## **Introduction**

If a bear travels outside a national park and gets hit by a vehicle or shot by a landowner, park managers are not achieving the national park mandate of protection, education and experience. It takes sitting around the table with provincial conservation officers, local landowners and Parks Canada staff to collectively develop long term solutions that work for bears and people – that’s collaboration and we need to encourage more of it across the country. As issues become more complex, involve large geographic areas, multiple jurisdictions, different perspectives and often historically adversarial relationships, the role of park managers has changed from being primarily inwardly focused to being more outwardly focused. Within a spectrum of public involvement, collaboration has become an important tool, in some cases an essential one, in helping managers develop and implement long-term solutions

In recent years, Parks Canada, the federal agency responsible for national parks in Canada, has joined the trend set by various government bodies worldwide, to more fully engage Canadians in decisions related to national parks. Public involvement is often expressed as a continuum of engagement, with collaboration near the upper end of a public involvement spectrum, just below full community control/empower. Collaborate is at the upper end of a spectrum for working together recently developed by Parks Canada (Figure 1, Parks Canada 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the participants in my thesis research who took the time to share their important stories, Erik Karlsen my thesis supervisor, Darlene Pearson my Parks Canada thesis sponsor, and Parks Canada for financial assistance. Additional thanks to Erik Karlsen for providing a helpful review of this paper.

**Figure 1: Parks Canada Spectrum for Working Together**

			
<b>Inform</b>	<b>Influence</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>
Build awareness by providing information	Foster knowledge and understanding by exchanging information, both ways	Build support and commitment through dialogue and exchanging ideas, both ways	Seek shared understanding, common purpose, and collective action; strive for consensus

As a planner with Parks Canada, I was interested in examining the role that collaboration currently plays within the Agency and exploring the role it could play. Research for a Master’s thesis in Environment and Management at Royal Roads University led me to ask the following questions: What are the underlying characteristics of successful collaborative processes in which Parks Canada has been involved? What lessons can be learned and how can they be applied by Parks Canada to encourage and improve future collaborative efforts?

I started with a technical review of some of the literature about collaboration, and through case studies, discovered two profound human stories that demonstrated the value of collaborative processes. The key findings resonated with the literature and recommendations suggest principles and actions that can assist Parks Canada and other agencies enhance and expand collaboration as a tool to help resolve complex ecosystem-based management issues.

**Collaboration**

While many definitions of collaboration exist, Barbara Gray’s (1985) definition was found to be most helpful, stressing the interdependence of the stakeholders involved: “(1) The pooling of appreciations and/or tangible resources, e.g., information, money, labour, etc., (2) by two or more stakeholders, (3) to solve a set of problems which neither can solve individually” (p. 912).

There are many reasons for using collaboration (Appendix A), including dealing with complex, ill-defined issues, involving multiple jurisdictions, with differing

perspectives that have led to adversarial relationships. Collaboration may also be tried when unilateral efforts to deal with the issues or other simpler public involvement strategies have failed. Collaboration is often used to resolve conflict, but may also be used by two or more parties who have a shared interest in solving a problem that none of them can address alone (Gray 1989).

The literature outlines various benefits of collaboration including providing a diversity of perspectives, reduced conflict, improved relations, innovative solutions, more successful plan implementation, and long-term capacity building (Appendix B).

Collaboration also has its detractors. Critics of collaborative processes contend such initiatives result in a loss of institutional power and influence or that federal laws and public interests are not adequately considered in local decision-making efforts. Furthermore, people not involved in the process may feel that their views were excluded (Conley and Moote 2003; Selin et al. 2000). Collaborative processes are often expensive and time consuming and can be value-charged and high risk. Collaboration is not suited to all situations, nor is it a panacea, but it can be an important tool to help park managers develop and implement long-term solutions.

## **Case Studies**

Two successful collaborative projects in national parks were examined using a case study approach. The issue of snowmobiling by local residents on the west coast of Newfoundland, in Gros Morne National Park, established in 1973, is multifaceted and as old as the park. It involves best intentions, mistrust built up over time and the success that a collaborative approach can bring to a complex issue. It also illustrates the perseverance of local communities and the evolving nature of management approaches employed by Parks Canada to fulfill its mandate.

The 1973 national park establishment agreement permitted on-going park snowmobile use by residents, an unusual provision. In 1988, at a local public meeting, residents were told where they would no longer be able to go by snowmobile due to a conflicting use of the area for cross-country skiing. Over the next decade various solutions were sought but mistrust and animosity escalated. In 1999 a truly collaborative approach was introduced with 19 day and half long facilitated workshops held over 26

months, involving the eight local communities, Parks Canada and a provincial ENGO. When I asked a local resident why he stuck in for so long he replied, “I was fighting for our community and our kids.” In 2001, Snowmobile Guidelines for Community Use were approved and an on-going Resident Snowmobile Management Board was created. Many factors contributed to the success of the new process including hiring an independent facilitator, using consensus decision-making, ensuring no end runs were available and conducting joint information gathering and research (Appendix C).

Waterton Lakes National Park, “where the prairies meets the mountains,” is Canada’s most southerly Rocky Mountain national park in Southwest Alberta. Here I examined part of an innovative 1997 Southwestern Alberta Grizzly Strategy developed by Alberta Fish and Wildlife, involving local ranchers and Parks Canada. Based on a similar successful program in Montana, the grizzly bear intercept feeding program redistributes road-killed wildlife carcasses to selected sites, primarily on private land and in Waterton Lakes National Park, in early spring, mimicking a natural process of wildlife mortality on winter range. The carcasses provide food for grizzly bears, tending to keep them away from livestock, until spring green-up, when more food resources become available.

The program needed collaboration between Alberta Fish & Wildlife, local landowners and Parks Canada to succeed. This program illustrates that there are various ways in which Parks Canada collaborates with others. As an important player but not the lead, this case study is an example of engagement by Parks Canada in landscape scale issues in jurisdictions in which it has no formal authority.

## **Key Findings**

There were many useful lessons learned through my research:

**Relationships more than any other factor can make or break collaborative projects** and respect and trust provide the foundation. The respectful nature of the facilitated process in Gros Morne; the trust in staff shown by supervisors; the building of relationships based on spending time together on the land; consistent decision-making, all played important roles. The case studies also emphasized the importance of finding ways to ensure ongoing consistency when there are the inevitable staff changes.

**Collaboration is challenging. It demands innovative thinking and may push the boundaries of policy.** Solving complex problems through collaboration is time consuming and expensive. The solutions are often creative and hence unconventional. It may also be important to seek a pragmatic rather than perfect solution. In Gros Morne a local solution agreed to in 1989 was turned down in Ottawa because, “We weren’t comfortable with the proposal because we were waiting for the perfect solution.” At the same time, “We need to be really, really cognizant of the fact that sometimes we want to be able to build a collaborative process so much that we... [create] exceptions... in policy and direction... We need to be careful.”

**Collaboration requires leadership.** An example of this is the need to be willing to take some risk and trust the process. A senior executive realized, “If you are not prepared to have some risk and some trust that they’ll do the right thing in the end, you can’t really move... up the spectrum.” You need to be willing to put the non-negotiables on the table and commit to a process not knowing what the end product will be.

In the first year of the intercept program, nervousness built as the time for the actual carcass drops approached. A park manager showed leadership, feeling the intercept program was the right thing to do, worth the risk, and agreed that the program be implemented as planned. The success of the program validated this initial risk-taking.

**On-going consistent communication with a variety of audiences is critical.** It is important that an organization speak with a consistent and unified voice. On-going communication with participants was clearly a strength in both case studies, whether through formal meeting minutes or casual chats over coffee. In Gros Morne, two Parks Canada staff on the working group were the only ones who spoke publicly about the process, helping to ensure consistent messages. As well, senior managers in Halifax and Ottawa were engaged throughout the process, to help ensure that they would support the solution that was eventually presented to them.

**Process factors play an essential role in the success of a collaborative project.**

Bringing the interested parties together early in the process and building the process together helps build trust. Continuing involvement during implementation helps build commitment and accountability by the interested parties.

**Collaboration can and should provide on-the-ground results.** At the end of the day, while relationships and process are critical, a project also needs to produce on-the-ground results. When asked if the Gros Morne working group has been successful, one local replied, “It has. When winter comes we can get on our skidoos.” Monitoring is also in place to ensure ecological integrity is maintained and visitor experience has improved with no go areas identified for non-motorized use only. In Southwestern Alberta, there are more grizzly bears in the region with less cattle depredation.

**Success breeds success.** Although collaboration is not necessary or appropriate in every situation, as relationships and trust grow, so does the capacity to take on bigger projects and at times greater risk.

These key findings can be summed up in four principles based on respect and trust:

1. Nurture honest, open relationships, as relationship building is a long-term investment that pays off.
2. Design a collaborative process based on the history and complexity of the issue and then ensure integrity of the process.
3. Approach collaboration with humility, an open mind and a willingness to listen, really listen.
4. As an organization, speak in a unified, consistent voice and follow through on process and outcome commitments.

**Recommendations**

How can Parks Canada and other agencies conduct more effective and successful collaborative work?

1. **Recognize collaboration that is happening now** (Appendix D).

2. **Encourage collaborative efforts** through a variety of means including toolboxes on collaborative techniques; providing financial assistance and training; sharing best practices; creating networks; mentoring staff; and including collaborative attributes like relationship building, team skills and leadership in selection criteria for key collaborative positions (Appendix E).
3. **Adapt the organization to help collaboration flourish.** A strong message from these land-based case studies is an underlying need for Parks Canada as an organization and for its individual staff members to respect local community members and their livelihoods. A genuine desire to understand and appreciate area residents' connection to the land is essential for true collaboration. For example, although Parks Canada is concerned with ecological integrity, historically its actions have often not recognized or acknowledged the stewardship role undertaken by individuals in the landscape around national parks.
4. **Be flexible.** A key to successful collaboration is defining a desired end from the outset of the process without knowing the means to that end. The need for flexibility is inherent in the process. In addition, influences external to the main issues can block collaboration. Flexibility can help managers get by these impediments. For example, introducing rules or charging fees which may make sense in the broader national context may be highly counterproductive to the fundamental local objective of building trusting relationships to achieve substantive outcomes. Although each national park cannot make all of its own rules, some flexibility in interpreting rules and applying fees would help collaborative efforts. In such cases, what is more important: the potential loss of fees or the potential erosion of a key relationship – which is priceless, in that it can't be bought and its absence has unintended and unacceptable consequences?
5. **Overcome current barriers.** For example, many staff still need to move from, “We are consulting with people so they can help us” to “We are working together so we can all benefit.” Parks Canada has a culture of perfectionists that can make collaboration difficult. There is a need for patience on the part of the Agency; processes can take longer and there is a tendency to underplay the amount of time and effort required.

6. **Sustain change.** How can collaboration as an approach be internalized and sustained within the Agency? While not the focus of this project, change strategies from the literature may provide guidance on how to create and sustain change throughout the organization (examples, Appendix F).

## **Conclusion**

Collaboration is the kind of activity in which much of the learning is in the doing. The managers in the case studies saw issues that needed to be resolved and opportunities to be pursued. They had no step-by-step process to follow. Staff should be encouraged to learn the tools and learn by doing – there are many potential rewards in fulfilling Parks Canada’s mandate in locally meaningful ways.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A. Reasons for Using Collaboration as an Approach and Characteristics of Collaborative Processes.**

<b>Reasons For Using Collaboration as an Approach</b>
Ability to solve problems that cannot be solved in isolation.
Issues are complex, messy <sup>2</sup> problems.
There is a need to address issues over a large geographic area.
Often more than one jurisdiction is involved.
Issues are ill defined or there is disagreement on how they should be defined.
Differing perspectives of the issue may have led to adversarial relationships.
There may be a disparity of power and resources among stakeholders that simpler processes cannot resolve.
Interdependence exists; several stakeholders have a vested interest in the issue.
Unilateral efforts to deal with the issues or other simpler public involvement strategies have failed.
<b>Characteristics of Collaborative Processes</b>
Voluntary participation.
Group often constituted to deal with a specific issue, though the group may continue as a secondary outcome of the process.
May have a third party facilitator.
Process is developed jointly by the participants.
Face-to-face discussions.
Joint information searching/research.
Diverse interests are respected.
Search for underlying interests.
Seek shared understanding.
Usually consensus-based.
Willingness to explore a broad range of options.
Process is flexible.

<sup>2</sup> “Messy problems” is a term used to describe natural resource management issues with contested or ambiguous goals where there is a lack of agreement on cause and effect relationships (McCool & Guthrie, 2001).

Social learning <sup>3</sup> occurs.
Shared decision-making but each organization retains its authority.
Shared ownership of process and outcomes.
Pursue collective action.
Process is accountable to participants.

Adapted from: Gray (1989, 1985); Innes and Booher (1999); National Forest Foundation and USDA Forest Service (2005); Parks Canada (2006); Roberts and Bradley (1991); Schusler, Decker, and Pfeffer (2003); Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000).

## **Appendix B. Benefits of Collaborative Processes**

<b>Benefits of Collaborative Processes</b>
Provide a diversity of perspectives.
Reduce conflict.
Mutual education can occur.
Broad analysis of problem improves quality of solutions.
Process ensures each stakeholder's interests are considered in any agreement.
Combines resources for mutual benefit.
Relations between stakeholders improve.
Potential to discover novel, innovative solutions is enhanced.
Creates a perspective of shared interest.
Provides mechanism for effective decision-making.
Builds understanding and support for decisions.
Can yield wiser and more enduring decisions.
More likely to result in successful implementation of a plan.
Develops capacity of agencies and communities to deal with the challenges of the future.

Adapted from: Day and Gunton (2003); Gray (1989); Jackson (2001); Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000); Wright (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Schusler et al. (2003) define social learning as, "...learning that occurs when people engage one another, sharing perspectives and experiences to develop a common framework of understanding and basis for joint action" (p. 311).

**Appendix C. Factors Contributing to the Successful Snowmobile Working Group Process.**

<b>Gros Morne Snowmobile Working Group – Collaborative Process Success Factors</b>
Independent facilitator.
Clear goal; core values developed by working group.
Participation was voluntary.
Participants built process.
Inclusive process.
Found common ground based on shared values.
Periodic checking back with larger constituency.
Joint information gathering/research.
Consensus based decision-making.
Consistency in participants.
Flexibility (e.g., no firm time line).
Everybody treated alike and with respect.
No end-runs available; progress towards a solution was made “in the room.”
Mileage and meals provided to participants.
Good ongoing communication internally.
Joint communication externally with key messages and spokespersons agreed to by group.
Meetings held in a comfortable space.
People had opportunity to voice opinions and concerns.
Guidelines recommended by all.
Management board established for joint implementation of guidelines.

**Appendix D. Ways to Recognize Current Collaborative Work**

<b><i>Ways to Recognize Current Collaborative Work</i></b>
CEO Awards of Excellence that recognize the work of Parks staff and project partners.

<p>Recognize accomplishments on Parks Canada Intranet Site.</p> <p>Find occasions to publicly recognize achievements with partners (e.g., Banff Round Table).</p> <p>Performance appraisals.</p>
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**Appendix E: Ways to Encourage Collaborative Efforts**

<i>Ways to Encourage Collaborative Efforts</i>	
Develop Tools	<p>Establish a clearing house, through existing structures such as the Western and Northern Canada Planning Intranet Site or the developing national Leadership Network, to provide toolbox information on public involvement techniques including collaboration, courses, etc.</p>
Provide Incentives	<p>Collaboration can involve risk taking and be costly. Consider a national special purpose fund with collaborative criteria that managers could apply for, providing financial assistance to undertake collaborative projects.</p>
Ensure Training	<p>Deliver Parks Canada “Skills for Working Together” course.</p> <p>Encourage attendance at external courses available (e.g., US National Park Service course “Transcending Boundaries”).</p>
Share Best Practices	<p>Modify “Skills for Working Together” training manual for wider distribution within the Agency.</p> <p>At different gatherings (e.g., senior managers’ forum, planning workshop) provide opportunities for sharing best practices.</p> <p>Evaluate and document important collaborative projects for lessons learned and for sharing with others.</p>
Create Networks	<p>Examine existing collaborative networks (e.g., US Forest Service</p>

	Collaborative Resource Teams, US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, 2003) and consider creating a similar network through the Parks Canada Leadership Network.
Mentor Staff	<p>Establish a pool of experienced staff willing to be paired with less experienced staff (could be at distance).</p> <p>At work sites such as a national park, service centre office or national office, determine experienced staff willing to mentor others at same location.</p> <p>On major collaborative projects, assign additional staff specifically for mentoring opportunities and to help manage any anticipated staff changes.</p>
Implement Transition Techniques	<p>Being clear and public about Parks Canada's interests on a project helps prevent changes when personnel change.</p> <p>When possible, overlap personnel when handing off projects.</p> <p>Act collegially and keep lines of communication open longer to help as a new manager takes over a project.</p>
Include Collaborative Attributes when Hiring	Include collaborative attributes, relationship building and team skills in selection criteria for key collaborative positions.

## Appendix F: Change Management Strategies

Seven Interventions of Change (Doppelt 2003, 89)	Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change (Kotter 1996, 21)
Change the dominant <i>mind-set</i> .	Establish a sense of urgency.
Rearrange the <i>parts</i> of the system.	Create the guiding coalition.
Alter the <i>goals</i> of the system.	Develop a vision and strategy.
Restructure the <i>rules of engagement</i> .	Communicate the change vision.
Shift the <i>flows of information</i> .	Empower broad-based action.
Correct the <i>feedback loops</i> .	Generate short-term wins.
Adjust the <i>parameters</i> .	Consolidate gains and produce more change.
	Anchor new approaches in the culture.