

Backcountry Operations Strategic Review – Budget 08 Reductions

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Executive Summary

The requested \$200k reductions can be met by April 2011. Consequences include work force adjustment (WFA) and a change in the level of service to primarily wildland for 2/3 of Jasper NP, while retaining the semi-primitive status for 1/3 of the park, which includes the 'signature' popular longer trails of JNP. Total savings \$203.5k wages and \$135.5M asset base reduction.

1.0 Introduction

The 2008 strategic review decision to implement backcountry cuts within the mountain National Parks will require a targeted reduction of \$1.25M 'A' base resources, with an additional equivalent amount from over target shared revenue. For Jasper National Park, this equates to \$400k in 'A' base resources, of which \$200k are to come from within what has traditionally been coded to backcountry, and the other \$200k to come from other in-park resources to be determined in the winter of 10/11. Substantial changes are suggested to meet this target, yet still provide for a quality program offer to the Canadian public.

2.0 Reductions Proposed

The \$200k reductions for backcountry can be met through the following categories;

- Eliminate 3 positions Backcountry (B/C) Trail crew - \$45.9k (WFA possible)
- Reduce B/C trail crew overtime - \$20k
- Eliminate B/C project monies - \$50k
- Eliminate 1 RC GT-04 (0.8py) salary - \$52k (WFA not required)
- Reduce horse program oversight by 0.5py – \$20k (WFA required)
- Reduce VE trail office MPS-04 – 15.6k (WFA required)

Total \$203.5k (WFA not required if 2-3 yrs allowed to implement all of above)

3.0 HR Implications and Strategies

To meet the human resources targets the following staff management scenarios are suggested. It is understood that not all of the following options are possible.

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Jim Suttill – [REDACTED]

Pete Lough – current seasonal, acting MAN-07

Norm Lamothe – current seasonal MAN-03

Martin Ederle – current seasonal MAN-03

Theron Sawchuck (term) - staff as seasonal MAN-03

Beau Michaud (term) – staff as seasonal MAN-03

Brett Haug – current seasonal MAN-03, or move to RC as EG-02

Kent Baylis – current seasonal MAN-03, staff as fire crew in LMNP

Shawn Buckle – current seasonal MAN-05, WFA/assign to CRM FHBRO crew in Banff with F. Burstrom

Clayton Praill (term) – staff with fire crew in JNP

Shawn Elliott – seasonal packer, WFA to trail crew

Info Centre py – seasonal?, WFA to other VE

These moves would retain the senior Trail Crew members, all of whom currently have the capacity to serve as Crew Leaders for additional term crews as required from time to time. There is a high probability of the need for additional trail crew personnel within 6 months of making this decision, thus continuation of term hires, as has occurred for the last 10+ years. The 400km of existing semi-primitive trails still require substantial investments. The quality of work performed by our senior trail crew members is likely worth a contract equivalent value of two to three times internal costs. Should we enter into a period of Trail Crew labour dissatisfaction, production and value may be seriously impeded, eroding any book value savings for PC and resulting in a substantial net loss to the crown. WFA of the packer and info centre attendant would also not be viewed favourably.

4.0 Level of Service Implications

With these cuts, the backcountry program in Jasper will have eliminated the PM-05 Coordinator position, a GT-03 seasonal position, a GT-04 position, 0.5py from the horse program and 3 of the 4 person backcountry trail crew all within the last two years. For Resource Conservation (RC), this exceeds a 50% reduction in staffing. Reducing the trail office by 0.34py is a 30% cut. The significant program changes required include re-classifying the North Boundary, South Boundary and Whirlpool areas to wildland designation from primitive. Within wildland facilities are minimal, but allowed for by exception or need. **Camping is random** and visitors are asked to follow no trace standards, to be self reliant and to accept high challenge and risk (Trail and Backcountry Facility Design Guidelines 2008). Jasper NP will retain 2 trail class designations, semi-primitive (which includes the 'signature' areas of Tonquin, Brazeau Loop, Skyline and Maligne Lake) and wildland.

As all of the above areas are currently in reasonable operating condition, JNP will have a number of years before some critical infrastructure components begin to erode. These components include some basic signage, current campsite locations and clearings and bridge structures. As these primarily wooden structures degrade, on site demolition and disposal will occur at minimal cost. Critical bridges to

consider for future replacement include; Lower Smokey, Twintree, Blue Creek Hiker, Chaba, Brazeau Lake and Snake Indian (6 of the current 95 bridges). Without these 6 bridges the wildland trail system is for all intents and purposes closed (ie inaccessible) to the general public until late summer/fall or by horse only, during non winter months.

Staff reductions at the Info centre require a commensurate increase in the automation of wilderness overnight trip planning, registration and reservation through the PCA website. JNP will need to use a model for the development of the frontcountry reservation system and identify a lead to work through the process of developing standard and area-specific wilderness information, policies and procedures for trip planning purposes. Work with National Office/Mountain Park Information Technologists, the Parks Canada Reservations System Team to incorporate web-based trip planning, registration and reservations.

RC will continue to cooperate with Asset Management and Visitor Experience (VE) on an integrated delivery of services to the public. Specifically;

- RC will continue to provide some basic clearing of wildland trails as required for monitoring, science and resource management purposes
- RC will continue to monitor, sweep and report on conditions in 'signature' trail areas
- The Initial Attack crew will assist as available with spring trail clearing in the Three Valley Confluence (3VC) and hazardous tree removals in campgrounds and day use areas.
- Human waste disposal by helicopter will be assisted with by RC machines as available.
- The outfitting community should continue to liaise with RC as their primary contact
- Input into general trail conditions, priorities, planning scenarios and other prioritizations will continue.

5.0 Infrastructure Reductions

Structures – reduce 12 of the 42 cabins and 40 other woodsheds, tacksheds, etc – \$60M 40% reduction

Trails – 800km X \$50/metre - \$40M 70% reduction

Bridges - \$5M (retain above 6 only) 90% reduction

Primitive campgrounds – 50 @ \$30.5M 100% reduction

Signs (non-critical) - \$100k 40% reduction

Total \$135.5M 48% total asset reduction

Wilderness pass revenues are generally \$160k/yr, of which 80% is in iconic areas, or \$128k. Even if backcountry revenues drop by 50% in wildland areas the park should not notice any significant revenue reduction. Perception by the public might differ though, and efforts to bend communications on these reductions as a positive move by PC for caribou or other reasons may be viewed somewhat with cynicism, particularly by staff.

6.0 Third Party Delivery

Jasper should fully identify potential work and/or projects where third party delivery might occur and investigate which organized groups and/or associations might match the work identified. Groups such as Outward Bound, Katimivik and various horse outfitters and Associations should be consulted on this. Possible cabin use must be tied to appropriate briefings on cabin use protocols. Occupational Safety and Health liabilities associated with the public use of these facilities will require careful consideration. For non-motorized trail clearing (ie without helicopter) there is no other practical way to clear large trail sections without horses. Camping gear, saws, fuel, tents, food, supplies etc cannot be reasonably packed by manpower alone. Thus most volunteer trail clearing will necessarily be limited, predominately using hand tools, and likely restricted to the 3VC area. Need to develop a funding envelope (possibly through the Friends of JNP) associated with volunteer work crews related to internal coordination, accommodation as required, training, provision of tools and materials and appreciation, etc. Additional funding pressures will come with such activities.

7.0 Horse Program

A mountain park horse program review is recommended. Non-motorized Resource Conservation or any other sections activities such as resource management, science and monitoring, visitor experience and prevention contacts or asset inspections are inaccessible for over 70% of the park without horses for dangerous river crossings, large distances and for carrying heavy equipment. Quads cannot cross many of our rocky, bouldery, deep and swift flowing water courses, and 89/95 of our bridges are slated for removal. The vast majority the 89 bridges are for hiker use only, thus even retention of those bridges would not facilitate quad access. Our 1200km trail system was built by personnel on horseback, and the trail widths also do not allow ground mechanized access.

Horses are considered a green alternative (they use considerably less greenhouse gases than helicopters, and do not cause extensive noise pollution – a VE detractant) and are positively communicated as such by the US NPS. Horses are a cultural and iconic symbol of PC and the elimination of this program would be viewed poorly by many Canadians. The Jasper horse program has been reducing for many years, and will reach a **50% reduction** from 5 yrs ago within the next year or so. 'Eat like a horse' is more than just a quaint saying, thus retention of the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch, with plentiful natural grass is supported. The mountain park operations can move to a reduced seasonal operation, with the YHT as the base core. A 0.5py reduction is supported for Jasper, although preferred by yr 3 to avoid WFA.

8.0 Moving Forward

8.1 Communications

Improve communications at every level of the trip planning cycle with a particular focus on new technology and web-based information service delivery

- Trailhead kiosk structure and media renewal – ongoing
- Brochure renewal for trails – ongoing with a full review of brochure information planned for the future
- 3VC trail junction and distance signs identified as high priority for replacement with the additions to this particular trail system
- Website and pre-trip planning information is also a high priority for all visitors
- No savings – improves service and ability for visitor self-guiding

8.2 Monitoring

Develop a monitoring program for visitor use, satisfaction and needs; ecological impacts; and practise adaptive management

- Monitoring visitor use, satisfaction and needs and ecological impacts needs to be done in an integrated manner for both collection and analysis
- One effect of decreased backcountry usage might be an increased demand on our iconic wilderness areas of the Brazeau Loop, Tonquin, Skyline and Maligne Lake. Reasonable ecological limits on human use need to be discussed and implemented in these areas.
- No Savings: Currently there is no funding identified for gathering social science, visitor use data, or the use of GIS technology. This is a funding gap.

8.3 Master Trails Plan

Integrate planning, and delivery of the Trails Program within the Asset, Resource Conservation and Visitor experience functions

- Complete a Master Trail plan incorporating the conversion of wildland trails, 3VC Trail plan and cross-country ski core offer into this Master Trail plan
- Identify trail priorities through an internal Trails Advisory Committee as part of business and work planning

9.0 Other Implications

9.1 Overall Trail Product

The overall trail product and range of this product will be reduced considerably. Options for backcountry users wanting maintained trails will be reduced to 4 or 5 iconic areas with commiserate increases in visitor use. More independent users will still have a range of choices depending on their wilderness travel ability albeit with a reduced level of service. The gap in service will be for those wilderness users wanting to escape the busier areas, but still travel somewhat guided with trail distance

and junction signs and some basic trail and campsite infrastructure. The actual number of visitors and trail users this will affect is relatively small. Monitoring will be required to determine VE impacts.

9.2 Maintenance

It will take more time in the spring to sweep and open trails in the frontcountry and in high-use backcountry areas. Priorities and timing will need to be identified and the reasons for these choices communicated to the visitor through trip planning mechanisms and frontline staff.

9.3 Info Centre

Currently, the Information Centre assigns one person each day to provide trip counselling, registration and permitting services for overnight trips. This system is cumbersome and is frustrating for the visitor. A web-based trip planning and registration system would respond to a large percentage of overnight visitors while reducing the demand on the staff at the Information Centre. More evaluation is required, more time to automate the system and some funding to develop this application. The Information centre would need to reduce its hours back to 2009 levels and close at 6 pm in the summer season. The level of information service as well as the backcountry fee levied for those planning trips into the wilderness within areas classified as Wildland will need to be reviewed.

9.4 External/Internal Relations

The 3VC Trails Plan and the Icefield Parkway Action Plan have developed high expectations and commitments for stakeholder involvement and trail upgrading and reinvestment. Major even minor deviations from these commitments to this plan could lead to serious mistrust with stakeholders and a reduction in trail use compliance and capital gained from the 3VC process. There is already suspicion around the perceived reduction in trails funding due to the elimination of the EI funding and the inability of other functions (visitor experience and resource conservation) to absorb the same intensity of trail improvements and collaboration.

Future external and internal planning and commitments will need to consider these already financial laden commitments (i.e. Tonquin Valley Adventure negotiations, mountain bike product expansion etc). Resource conservation pressures in a complex wildlife area like the Tonquin Valley may limit or reduce visitor use and create even more suspicion around visitor experience commitments.

9.5 New Funding Pressures

- Social science collection and analysis
- Development of new trail product (i.e. catered backcountry camping)
- Development of an automated overnight trip planning system

9.6 Due Diligence and Liability

Need to provide information to update trail inventory of assets by a variety of field staff including: trail crew, resource conservation specialists, fire and volunteer crews. To improve communications and to maintain the trails asset inventory we will need to develop a system and system of documenting to ensure trail condition information and assets condition rating information is collected and forwarded for

information services and data entry. Responsibilities will be tasked to a variety of field staff indentified in an integrated way to help maintain the inventory including trail and fire crew; resource conservation specialists, volunteer crews and maybe regular local users.

The Trail and Backcountry Facility Design Guidelines, 2008 should be reviewed by all to ensure a common understanding of maintenance, investments or other technical criteria are understood and communicated appropriately.

9.7 Ecological Integrity and State of the Park (SOP) Reporting

It is a field unit responsibility to monitor and report on the ecological integrity of the entire park area. Human pressures on and around the park are increasing at the same time our ability to observe and report on these will decrease. As a result, the number of ecological measures that we can effectively report on will decline and there will be increasing uncertainty in the information provided for the SOP Report. **The reduction in visitors to wildland areas may not be as ecologically significant as the effects of increased use of iconic areas, leading to reported declines in ecological integrity in key ecological indicators unless human use limits are considered.** This will affect the park's ability to meet performance management goals for PA2 under these conditions.

10.0 Implementation Strategy

1. Determine whether WFA will be utilized to meet the financial targets
2. Decide upon course of action, utilizing above document and others prepared
3. Communication plan prepared within 2 weeks of decision
4. Communicate decisions to staff as soon as possible with HR involvement
5. Master Trails Plan outline prepared by September
6. Working group of RC/VE/Assets and others to populate plan above
7. Implement strategy April 1/11.