

## BACKGROUND

### Glacier Discovery Walk Project on the Icefields Parkway in Jasper National Park

Our national parks represent the very best that Canada has to offer and are iconic destinations that form the cornerstone of the Canadian tourism industry. The Icefields Parkway is a very special place – part of the Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site – and Parks Canada is committed to ensuring it remains that way.

The Icefields Parkway opened in 1940 as a scenic road for the use and pleasure of national park visitors. Each year, more than 1.5 million people make the Parkway part of their visit to Canada's mountain national parks.

In 2009, Parks Canada worked with an advisory group – made up of a broad range of stakeholders including environmental, tourism and First Nation representatives – to develop a vision for improved visitor experiences, learning opportunities and protection of the ecology and cultural history of the Icefields Parkway. That strategic concept was included in the public consultation and eventually approved as part of the 2010 management plans for both Banff and Jasper national parks.

The approved strategic concept laid out a vision for the Icefields Parkway at its future best that provided visitors with quality experiences and learning opportunities that allow them to connect with their surroundings and gain insights into the area's ecological and cultural heritage.

The strategic concept for the Icefields Parkway sought to identify opportunities that could position this iconic drive at its future best. While most visitors only experience the Parkway from their vehicles, stopping occasionally to admire the view, this project fulfills one of the concept's goals to provide visitors, regardless of their outdoor skills or physical abilities, with an opportunity to safely view the edge of the park's wilderness. It focuses on short, safe, high-quality opportunities for recreation and learning without leaving the Parkway too far behind.

The Glacier Discovery Walk presents a new and intriguing opportunity that meets the goals identified in the strategic concept for the Icefields Parkway, respects the approved management plans for Banff and Jasper national parks and addresses associated environment issues.

The Brewster Travel Canada Glacier Discovery Walk proposal will provide new visitor opportunities and learning experiences that contribute to the achievement of the direction provided in the park management plan for the Icefields Parkway – which was developed with public participation.

The proposal is consistent with land use zoning provisions for the Park and does not intrude into the lands managed as declared wilderness area. The project will utilize an already developed viewpoint and involves no incremental development such as new staff accommodation, transportation nodes, or maintenance facilities as it is supported by the Brewster operations at the Icefield Centre.

There is no question that public access to the Mount Kitchener/Sunwapta Canyon viewpoint will change under the proposal, in terms of access by private vehicles and convenience. However, Parks Canada is of the opinion that the potential merits of the new experience, with the continued, but modified opportunity for free access to the viewpoint, compensate for these changes. In addition, two other public viewpoints exist in the immediate area (Stutfield Glacier and Tangle Falls) as well as a number of other viewpoints in the broader vicinity, including the Icefield Centre itself.

Approval of the environmental assessment for the Glacier Discovery Walk proposal does not signal a change in Parks Canada's policies concerning commercial development, nor does it trigger other developments in Jasper National Park or other national parks. An important consideration is that the proposal will utilize an existing developed viewpoint in the front country, and does not create a new developed footprint. The project will now proceed to the next steps in the development review process, including lease negotiations and construction agreement.

The environmental assessment process under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* played an important role in identifying, analysing, and avoiding or mitigating any potential environmental effects of the project on the Park.

Each national park of Canada has a framework for managing growth and development through the park management planning process and land use zoning, which are aligned with the mandate, legislation, national policies, and objectives of Parks Canada. The approved management plan for Jasper National Park sets out specific limits to commercial growth and development, and provides directions to enhance visitor experiences and learning opportunities while ensuring that ecological integrity is maintained or improved. Under the management plan, more than 97% of the Park land base is managed as declared wilderness area with no roads and only basic facilities permissible.

Parks Canada administers many lease and license of occupation agreements and business licenses in Jasper National Park, whereby lessees, license holders and operators deliver services and programs to visitors as a key means of achieving Parks Canada's mandate of fostering public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of our natural and cultural heritage. Visitors to national parks have the option to access services from business providers, and have been doing so for 126 years.

All lands in Jasper National Park remain under the ownership of the people of Canada, through Parks Canada, as enshrined in law through the *Canada National Parks Act*. For more than a century, Parks Canada has been working with a range of partners to offer memorable visitor experiences while respecting the ecological and cultural integrity of the national parks and World Heritage Site in which it exists.