

**Written Submission for House of Commons Finance Committee
Pre-Budget Consultations
in Advance of the 2025 Federal Budget**

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Recommendations:

Recommendation #1: Work with the Province of Alberta, the Town of Jasper and local businesses to rebuild and upgrade all infrastructure destroyed or damaged by the July 2024 wildfires.

Recommendation #2: Parks Canada should adopt the government's Tourism Growth Strategy principles as part of its annual planning while still delivering on commitments outlined in the Parks Management plans.

Recommendation #3: Increase capital investments in public infrastructure within Canada's Mountain Parks to reduce the chronic transportation and facility maintenance backlogs and address the accelerating impacts of climate change.

Recommendation #4: Increase the annual operational/maintenance budget of Canada's Mountain Parks, in particular to address the urgent safety upgrades to the Icefields Parkway.

Recommendation #5: Mandate that Parks Canada enhance transparency by publishing annual, publicly accessible reports within 90 days of a funding decision that outline internal funding decisions and expenditures on infrastructure projects.

About AMPPE

Created in 1994, AMPPE (Association of Mountain Parks Protection and Enjoyment) is a member-driven organization that advocates for accessibility and positive visitor experiences in Canada's Rocky Mountain National Parks. AMPPE's members include business owners and recreationists from various industry sectors and professions across the key tourism communities of Jasper, Banff, and Canmore. Additionally, the Rocky Mountain National Parks account for 60% of the visitors to Canada's 48 national parks, marine conservation areas, and historic sites. AMPPE strives to act as a collective, place-based voice for the mountain parks. We support fair and balanced science-based decision-making and provide locally-driven perspectives to decision-makers.

Benefit, education, enjoyment

Since the creation of the first Park in 1885, visitors have come to Canada's mountain parks to recharge, rejuvenate, and experience the natural wonders of the mountains. From the beginning, the Parks were created for Canadians' "benefit, education and enjoyment," and Parks should be left "unimpaired for future generations." Additionally, health experts continue to extol the benefits of nature and exercise to keep Canadians healthy and stress-free.

Today, Canada's natural environment and the mountain parks particularly, provide health and mental well-being benefits to Canadians and have become a cornerstone of the tourism industry, contributing between \$5-\$6 billion dollars in economic benefits annually. The Rocky Mountain National Parks attract millions of walkers, hikers, cyclists, climbers, paddlers, and adventure-seekers who want to learn about and connect with nature while they experience it.

Tourism is acknowledged as having a significant role in delivering Canada's wider economic strategy as it cuts across every sector and touches every part of Canada's economy. Investing in tourism assets and embracing recreation and the outdoors maintaining existing assets. Additionally, proper maintenance of Parks Canada's assets could help preserve them, saving funds in the long term. Despite increasing visitation and inflationary pressures, operational funding for existing national Parks has remained static for decades. An increase in operational funding within Canada's mountain national parks will make the parks safer for visitors and enable visitation to be dispersed throughout the year (thereby reducing summer congestion) while supporting local economies and contributing to growth in the tourism sector.

Like the Government of Canada. AMPPE believes the upcoming federal budget provides an opportunity to invest in the health and long-term viability of the parks and Canada's natural tourism assets. In that spirit, AMPPE submits the following four recommendations for consideration in your budget deliberations.

Recommendation 1: The government of Canada, through Parks Canada, should reinvest in Canada’s public infrastructure within Canada’s National Parks to reduce the existing transportation and facility maintenance backlogs.

Investing in public infrastructure and transportation will ensure public safety, quality and reliability in visitor offers, reduce GHG emissions, and increase accessibility while connecting Canadians with nature and history. Areas of investment should focus on social infrastructure such as mass public transit and active modes of transportation (hiking and cross-country skiing trails, multi-use trails, etc.) and projects that reduce carbon intensity to ensure the safety and accessibility of park users while protecting National Parks’ natural assets.

Allow Parks Canada to access funding through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan.

- 1.1 Fund and implement a sustainable transportation strategy that includes mass transit and active modes of transportation incorporating the recommendations of the August 2022 [*Expert Panel on Moving People Sustainably in the Banff Bow Valley*](#).
- 1.2 Reduce congestion in townsites by immediately improving connectivity to popular areas within the park by increasing the number of Parks Canada shuttles during busy times and by creating infrastructure for cycling and active travel within and between four contiguous mountain parks.
- 1.3 Support the creation of a marketable “Canadian Rockies Cycling Route” through dedicated operational and maintenance funding.
- 1.4 Create a dedicated and reasonable funding allocation to maintain Parks Canada Visitor Centres. In areas without a Visitor Centre, there is a clear opportunity to create one while ensuring it honours the land it is on.

Recommendation 2: that the Government of Canada commit to increasing the operational/maintenance budget of Canada’s Mountain National Parks year re-allocate the same amount of funding to the Icefields Parkway.

The Icefields Parkway, considered one of the world’s most scenic drives, is a 230 km stretch of highway that winds between Lake Louise in Banff National Park and Jasper National Park – Canada’s flagship national parks. The Icefields Parkway provides access to numerous attractions, including the Columbia Icefield Centre, waterfalls, hiking trails, and backcountry ski routes, and is a popular route for road cycling.

The overall maintenance and operations of the Icefields Parkway has deteriorated and requires several safety upgrades to allow for winter maintenance, access to emergency services, road paint, trail maintenance (including trail markers), and better cell reception. Moreover, the lack of resources destined for the Parkway has left an untapped opportunity to adapt the road and develop active transportation routes between Lake Louise and Jasper.

As the only direct route connecting Canada's flagship National Parks, we are concerned that frequent and lengthy road closures in winter, and lack of alternatives to transit through the Parkway (i.e., active transportation modes), negatively impact local businesses and, ultimately visitor experience in the Rockies, which could ultimately be damaging to our standing as a winter destination of choice.

Our members and local businesses are concerned that frequent closures and poor safety infrastructure negatively impact economic activity, visitor experience, and park reputation.

- 2.1** Revive the Icefield Parkway advisory group to update the previous (2009) plan and recommend how targeted investments and operations could improve visitor safety and experience.

Recognizing the importance of this vital link between Banff and Jasper, current Parks Canada President and CEO Ron Hallman convened an advisory group to develop thoughtful and targeted recommendations to improve visitor experience along the Parkway. These recommendations were tabled and accepted in Parliament. Following recommendations from the report, the Icefield Parkway initiated several improvements. Recent years, however, have seen this plan shelved. A renewed Icefields Parkway advisory group would retain focus on this important park asset, including:

- Identify and make recommendations to provide greater surety of winter road maintenance, specifically, the group could find potential improvements and establish reasonable metrics to reduce the days the road is closed each winter. (businesses in Jasper estimate that approximately \$150,000 is lost in economic benefits each day the road is closed. The (2021/2022) winter saw three separate five-day closures directly costing the community of Jasper over \$2 million in lost economic activity.
- Identify and recommend amenities to meet current and future visitor expectations to meet visitor expectations.

Recommendation 3: that Parks Canada adopt the Government's Tourism Growth Strategy principles as part of its annual planning, while still delivering on commitments outlined in the Parks Management plans.

While Parks Canada's priority is ecological integrity, the Agency also plays a lead role in Canada's tourism industry. The Government of Canada's recently released Tourism Growth Strategy, which aims to double the tourism industry's contribution to Canada's GDP by 2033, has identified five strategic priorities to guide its actions and partnerships with tourism stakeholders and other orders of government towards this ambitious goal. The priorities for the new Strategy, in no particular order, are:

- Invest in tourism assets
- Embrace recreation and the great outdoors

- Partner to grow Indigenous tourism
- Attract international events
- Improve federal coordination

Investing in tourism assets in Canada's national parks means investing in nature itself.

The Rocky Mountain National Parks attract millions of walkers, hikers, cyclists, climbers, paddlers and adventure-seekers who want to learn about and connect with nature while they experience it.

Recognizing the role Parks Canada plays in the country's tourism industry, earlier this year, Parks Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with both Destination Canada and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC). These agreements were signed to, "enable these organizations to collaborate on complementary priorities within their respective mandates to support a sustainable and resilient tourism sector and offer Canadians and visitors to Canada meaningful opportunities to connect with nature and culture".

Investing in more sustainable transportation will help ensure public safety, quality and reliability in visitor offers, incorporate climate resilience, reduce GHG emissions and increase accessibility while connecting Canadians with nature and history.

Recommendation 4: that the Government of Canada, mandates Parks Canada to enhance transparency by publishing annual, publicly accessible reports within 90-day of the funding decision, that outline internal funding decisions and expenditures on infrastructure projects.

Parks Canada measures their success in various ways. However, it lacks a consistent, public-oriented report that tracks the state of the Parks against the priorities Canadians care most deeply about.

Parks Canada has done an excellent job of creating park management plans that incorporate a wide range of views from diverse groups of stakeholders. While the plans are solid, developing metrics tied to the park's state would provide the impetus to stay on track while providing transparency in the decision-making processes.

The Parks Canada Agency and some national parks, including Banff in 2018, have periodically created a 'State of the Parks' report. Working with stakeholders to measure metrics would help parks to improve and streamline services while reducing conflict between user groups. The state of the park reports did contain some metrics on visitor experience, but the reports were heavily weighted to ecological integrity measures.

AMPPE recommends including metrics related to visitor experience that go beyond counting the number of visitors and cars. AMPPE also recommends developing metrics for kilometers of active travel paths built availability of transit seats and public monitoring of asset repairs and maintenance.

Municipalities have found great success publicly using a 'report card-like' method of reporting in that citizens feel more informed. Watching in real-time the linear distance of paths built versus decommissioned and number of years since assets have been broken would dispel myths and create awareness of issues that should be addressed.

Recommendation 5: The Government of Canada should addressing climate change impacts on tourism and national parks in Canada by funding mass transit, building redevelopment, and new trails for active transit

The devastating fires in Jasper and the recurring summer smoke and fires across Canada's national parks underscore the urgent need to address climate change's impacts on tourism and natural heritage. Traffic congestion, a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions in the mountain national parks, requires innovative and modern transportation solutions. Parks Canada, local businesses, and communities like Banff and Jasper are keen to mitigate these emissions, but current funding and infrastructure are insufficient. AMPPE urges the Government of Canada to allocate budget resources to support sustainable and resilient infrastructure in these parks, enabling them to adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts.

Climate Change and Fires:

- Recent fires in Jasper have caused significant damage, emphasizing the need for proactive measures.
- Each summer, fires and smoke worsen, affecting tourism and local communities.

Traffic Congestion and Emissions:

- Major source of greenhouse gas emissions in the mountain national parks.
- Recent changes to reduce private vehicle use in Lake Louise are steps in the right direction but lack comprehensive implementation and funding.

Infrastructure Stagnation:

- Park infrastructure is outdated, built for past times rather than future needs.
- Example: Lake Louise Road repaving focuses on cars rather than incorporating bike lanes or active travel options.
- Banff National Park has not seen new trail development in several decades.

Wildlife Conservation Concerns:

- Protectionism by wildlife conservationists has led to resistance against modern transportation solutions.
- Despite these challenges and record visitation, wildlife such as grizzlies have shown moderate recovery in recent years.

Recommendations:

Funding for Modern Transportation Solutions:

- Allocate budget for developing and implementing modern transportation systems in the mountain national park to reduce emissions from vehicles.
- Prioritize projects that reduce reliance on private vehicles and promote active and mass travel (e.g., bike lanes, pedestrian pathways).

Investment in Sustainable Infrastructure:

- Support the rebuilding of infrastructure in Jasper and other affected areas with a focus on sustainability and resilience.
- Encourage the redevelopment of buildings to be more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly.

Empowering Local Municipalities:

- Grant municipalities like Jasper a degree of control over land use to allow for adaptive and responsive planning.
- Facilitate collaboration between Parks Canada and local governments to ensure infrastructure projects align with both conservation and tourism goals.

Trail Development and Maintenance:

- Invest in the creation and maintenance of new trails to enhance visitor experiences and promote eco-friendly tourism.
- Ensure trail development considers both wildlife conservation and the need for visitor access.

This budget allocation will ensure that Canada's national parks remain a treasured natural heritage, resilient in the face of climate change, and continue to attract millions of visitors annually.

A special note on Jasper

As the Municipality of Jasper comes to terms with its tragic loss, it will be important to plan the key steps and strategies to ensure a timely and orderly recovery of the Town, affected Outlying Commercial Accommodations and visitor services.

The recovery process will be challenging and multi-faceted as the community deals with emotional, economic and personal challenges. The tasks of dealing with the insurance industry and securing necessary construction capacity will no doubt be daunting and the residents of Jasper will require strong, determined leadership from the Town, Parks Canada, the Province of Alberta, as well as other federal departments.

As the recovery challenges are considered, AMPPE would like to offer some preliminary recommendations on issues that require quick and decisive action.

Development Review Process

Given the magnitude of the redevelopment challenges ahead, permitting processes will need to be reviewed quickly to avoid duplication between the Town of Jasper and Parks Canada..

AMPPE urges Parks Canada to consider delegating development review authority to the Town of Jasper, reconsider the criteria requiring the need for affected OCAs to submit a Master Redevelopment Plan when proposed redevelopment, repairs, or upgrades to more than 50% of the site and establishing a dedicated multi-functional team of experts to review re-development proposals.

Affected businesses will be financially challenged due to loss of revenues for an extended period. Providing certainty and speed in the rebuilding will spur re-investment in the community. In this regard, it is important to reflect on the experiences many of these same businesses went through during the pandemic where limited financial flexibility options existed and to apply those learning experiences to the current recovery effort.

Land Rent

AMPPE recommends that Parks Canada execute a remission order, similar to the approach used during Covid-19 period, for commercial land rent of affected operators until such time as the businesses are fully operational.

Lease Term

To support quality visitor services and acknowledge the significant investments that will be required to rebuild some of the commercial facilities that have been fully destroyed, AMPPE recommends that Parks Canada provide all affected operators with a 42-year lease to facilitate financing of the redevelopment costs and acceptable period to recover the investment.

Conclusion

By addressing these recommendations, the Government of Canada can ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of its national parks, supporting both tourism and conservation efforts. AMPPE calls on the government to recognize the importance of these parks in Canada's tourism ecosystem and to fund operations and infrastructure that enable recovery, management, and prevention of future hardships. This includes modernizing transportation, building resilient infrastructure, and empowering local municipalities like Jasper to manage their land use effectively.

If I can be of any further assistance or can provide additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at debbie@amppe.org.

Thank you in advance for your Committee's consideration of our recommendations.