

February 25, 2019

Ms. Tracey LeBlanc
Banff Field Unit, Parks Canada Agency
101 Mountain Ave, Box 900
Banff, AB T1L 1K2

Subject: Cave and Basin National Historic Site Draft Management Plan Review

Dear Ms. LeBlanc,

The Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association is pleased to have the opportunity to provide input on the Cave and Basin National Historic Site Draft Management Plan. As the “Birthplace of Canada’s National Park” system, the Cave and Basin plays a special role not only as an historic site, but also as a vital chapter in the story of parks that is conveyed to visitors.

BLLHA believes that many more visitors should come to experience Banff National Park’s historic sites. As such, we were pleased with many of the objectives and strategies laid out in the initial plan.

From an asset management perspective, it is imperative for Parks Canada to develop alternative means for revenue generation to help offset both the issues associated managing thermal waters and the high costs of maintenance of the complex. The management plan should ensure a sustainable reinvestment of funds to support the commemorative and ecological integrity of the Cave and Basin.

These priorities can be balanced alongside the delivery of a high-quality visitor experience; one on par for a site revered as the Birthplace of Canada’s national parks. The Parks Canada Agency policy that assures revenues generated in a park remain in the park where they were generated is central to supporting the future operation of the Cave and Basin.

BLLHA is supportive of the points aiming to bridge the history of the site, while striving for modern day relevance. Issues that stood out for us include:

- Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples that will move the historically limited access that followed the National Park’s designation in 1885, and progress this for the exploration of expanded shared use over the next 10 years and beyond.
- Using the Cave and Basin as a host location to deliver engaging interpretive programs and content. An example of this is using this location for staging further Parks Day activities, as it offers a pertinent sense of place to mark the occasion.
- Apply a concerted focus on the birthplace theme and create a narrative around the series of firsts that have occurred at the Cave and Basin.
- Elevate and improve the site’s point of entry by installing a notable welcome experience. This could include interactive and imaginative signage, to be placed by the Welcome Building. Create this structure through the lens of today and tomorrow’s visitor; one who thrives on sharable moments, anchored on visually stunning landmarks that they can physically connect with.

BLLHA also suggests that Parks Canada deepen its understanding of visitor impressions and preferences at the Cave and Basin. As the location that marks the evolution of Canada’s entire national parks system, learner opportunities should not just be limited to the history of the Cave and Basin, but expanded to include a rich narrative about Canada’s other national parks and historic sites and their combined contribution to making visitors more aware about Canada’s commitments to biological diversity.

The creation of a Visitor Attraction and Experience Advisory Group could also be an industrious addition to the draft plan. This group should include in-resort industry specialists who have sound knowledge around experience and product creation. They could offer input toward the visitor experience strategy (VES); exhibit content and programming, the technology recapitalization plan and more.

BLLHA appreciates the reference to an integrated management approach to the Cave and Basin. We enthusiastically support the continued use of the site for quality partner events such as the Banff Craft Beer Festival and when these captive audiences are onsite at your facility, we encourage you to explore how Parks Canada can play an active, authentic and relevant role as part of your VES.

As the Cave and Basin's visitation continues to be strong during the high season, we recommend the development of additional programs to grow visitation during the winter months in collaboration with other tourism partners. As illustrated in the draft plan, there is tremendous opportunity to collaborate with Indigenous communities and incorporate their stories in the rich history of Banff National Park. Creating the Indigenous Advisory Group for the Cave and Basin is a sound step in this direction.

For Key Strategy 3: "Enriching and creating new experiences" the noted Visitor Experience Strategy will be an essential piece toward finding your best customer. As noted above, collaborating with Banff & Lake Louise Tourism would benefit all parties. We encourage Parks Canada to develop further understanding of their visitor segments and target those with repeat and long-term stay habits. Adding a specific measure around this is recommended for either Objective 3.1 and/or 3.3. We would also suggest adding a measure to Objective 3.3 to ensure that infrastructure is ready and geared to attract interest from partners who rent the site.

One final suggestion is adding "external stakeholders" to the fourth last paragraph on page 12 (second sentence) "Assembling a comprehensive team of internal stakeholders at critical stages of the VES development can ensure a properly integrated approach."

BLLHA members support the vision noted in the draft plan for the Cave and Basin as an iconic gathering place for sharing stories about people and the land over time. We would be pleased to work with Parks Canada and our partners at Banff Lake & Louise Tourism to collaborate further on engaging visitors at the Birthplace of Banff National Park through heritage protection, education and indelible experiences.

Sincerely,



Darren Reeder
Executive Director