

**Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the Upcoming
Federal Budget**

**Submitted by: Debbie Harksen, Executive
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Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Reimagine Jasper's Tourism Infrastructure. Work with the Province of Alberta, the Town of Jasper, and local businesses to restore all infrastructure damaged or destroyed by the July 2024 wildfires. This includes housing, public facilities, trails, and visitor amenities—many of which were already under strain before the fire.

Recommendation 2: Enable Winter Visitation Through Strategic Infrastructure

Investments. Invest in new tourism infrastructure that supports winter access and experiences in Jasper and other mountain parks. This includes improved winter transportation options, year-round visitor facilities, and infrastructure to support seasonal programming such as Nordic skiing, guided ice walks, and cultural events.

Recommendation 3: Increase 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: Define and fund an operational strategy for the Icefields Parkway.

Increase the operations and maintenance funding for the Icefields Parkway and support the development of a dedicated asset classification and management plan that reflects its dual role as both a scenic heritage corridor and iconic visitor experience.

Recommendation 5: Mandate that Parks Canada enhance transparency by publishing annual, publicly accessible reports that outlines internal funding decisions and expenditures on infrastructure projects.

Recommendation 6: Invest in Canada's tourism sector by increasing targeted support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through agencies such as PrairiesCan. Funding should focus on the development, diversification, and promotion of local tourism products and experiences.

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 recreationalists who operate and recreate across Canada's Rocky Mountain National Parks. These seven parks account for 60% of all visitors to Canada's 48 national parks, marine conservation areas, and historic sites. AMPPE supports fair, balanced, and science-based decision-making, providing locally driven perspectives to policymakers.

Benefit, education, enjoyment

In addition to their importance in providing health and mental well-being benefits to Canadians, Canada's Rocky Mountain National Parks have become a cornerstone of our nation's tourism industry, contributing between \$5 and \$6 billion in economic benefits annually. These parks attract millions of walkers, hikers, cyclists, climbers, paddlers, and adventure-seekers who want to connect with nature while experiencing it firsthand.

Tourism plays a critical role in advancing Canada's economy as it cuts across every sector and region. The Parks, however, require sustained investment to maintain and improve the assets which are key to the visitor experience. Despite increasing visitation and inflationary pressures, operational funding for existing national Parks has remained stagnant for decades. Increased operational funding within these parks would improve visitor safety and distribute visitation throughout the year (thereby reducing summer congestion) while supporting local economies and growing the tourism sector.

The federal budget provides an opportunity to invest in the long-term viability of Canada's parks and natural tourism assets while providing immediate support for Jasper as it recovers from recent wildfires. In that spirit, AMPPE submits the following recommendations for consideration.

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

AMPPE appreciates the efforts the federal government has directed towards Jasper's recovery and we urge the federal government to continue to collaborate with the province of Alberta and the town of Jasper, to implement holistic and forward-thinking approaches that integrate conversation, community needs, and resilience. AMPPE offers recommendations on issues that require decisive action.

Development Review Process

Given the scale of the redevelopment challenges, development permits must be reviewed quickly. While Ron Hallman, Parks Canada's President and CEO, has committed to ensuring a smooth permitting process, the federal government will need to provide funding to make this a reality.

AMPPE urges Parks Canada to consider:

- Delegating development review authority to the Town of Jasper;
- Rethinking the criteria requiring 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 team of experts to review redevelopment proposals.

In Jasper's tourism-based economy, where over half of operators say they cannot survive more than two months without taking on new debt, and with two-thirds who do not expect to return to seasonal revenues for another year, the community is in trouble. Urgent funding and support is required to ensure Jasper's recovery.

Land Rent

AMPPE recommends that Parks Canada execute a remission order, similar to the approach used during Covid, to suspend commercial land rent payments of affected operators until insurance payments come in and businesses are operational.

Lease Term

To support quality visitor services and acknowledge the significant investments needed 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 allow an acceptable period to recover the investment.

Recommendation 2: Enable Winter Visitation Through Strategic Infrastructure Investments

Invest in tourism infrastructure to expand winter access and enhance cold-weather experiences in Jasper and other mountain national parks. Priority areas for investment include:

- Winter transportation, such as seasonal shuttle services and improved road maintenance on routes like the Icefields Parkway
- Year-round visitor facilities that remain open and accessible in colder months
- Infrastructure to support winter programming, such as Nordic skiing, ice walking, skating, interpretive tours, and Indigenous experiences

Winter remains an underdeveloped season across Canada's national parks. In places like Jasper—still recovering from the wildfire—expanded winter visitation would diversify the economy, disperse visitor volumes across the year, and reduce pressure on peak summer infrastructure. At the same time, improved cold-weather access can support employment, foster deeper connections to nature, and build climate-resilient tourism systems.

The mountain parks attract millions of summer visitors, but for winter tourism to thrive, infrastructure must match the ambition of operators, communities, and Parks Canada's goals.

Investing in winter visitation is not only an investment in tourism—it's a commitment to sustainable growth, community resilience, and Canada's global reputation as a four-season destination.

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

Investing in public infrastructure and transportation will ensure public safety, improve the quality and reliability of visitor services, reduce GHG emissions, and increase accessibility while connecting Canadians with nature and history. Investments should focus on social infrastructure such as public transit, active transportation and projects that reduce carbon intensity to ensure the safety and accessibility of park users while protecting the natural assets of Canada's National Parks.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 Fund and implement a transportation strategy that includes mass transit and active transportation incorporating the recommendations of the [*Expert Panel on Moving People Sustainably in the Banff Bow Valley*](#).
- 3.2 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 active travel within and between the mountain parks.
- 3.3 Support the creation of a "Canadian Rockies Cycling Route".

Recommendation 4: Define and Fund an Operational Strategy for the Icefields Parkway

Increase the operations and maintenance funding for the Icefields Parkway and support the development of a dedicated asset classification and management plan that reflects its dual role as both a critical scenic heritage corridor and iconic visitor experience.

The Icefields Parkway, lauded as one of the world's most scenic drives, draws millions of visitors annually and forms the scenic backbone of the Banff–Jasper corridor. However, current management and investment approaches **misclassify the Parkway** alongside smaller access roads or highway infrastructure, despite its unique function and high volume of visitation.

According to the "Evaluation of Parks Canada Roadways Management (2022–2023)," the Parkway:

- Lacks a clear service category or performance standard
- Is grouped with local roads such as Maligne or Pyramid Lake Road, despite its national tourism role
- Is maintained under highway frameworks that prioritize commercial throughput over visitor experience
- Has no dedicated operational or visitor experience plan, resulting in misaligned priorities and inconsistent delivery across field units

This approach fails to account for the Parkway's role as both a destination and a transportation link—limiting capital investment, impairing visitor safety, and undermining national park infrastructure goals.

AMPPE urges the federal government to:

1. Support Parks Canada in establishing a new “Scenic Corridor” asset class for the Icefields Parkway, with aligned policy, operations, and performance criteria
2. Increase ongoing operational funding to address safety risks, maintenance backlogs, and winter accessibility
3. Fund traffic and visitor experience monitoring programs to inform future investment decisions (e.g., cyclist counts, user surveys)
4. Facilitate the creation of a regional coalition to guide Parkway planning and advocacy

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada mandates Parks Canada to enhance transparency by publishing annual, publicly accessible reports that outline internal funding decisions and expenditures on infrastructure projects.

Parks Canada measures its 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 well-structured, developing metrics tied to the park's state would ensure accountability and provide greater transparency in decision-making.

Some national parks, including Banff (2018), have periodically created ‘State of the Parks’ reports. Working with stakeholders to establish and track meaningful metrics would improve park services, streamline operations, and reduce conflict between user groups.

AMPPE recommends including metrics for visitor experience such as kilometers of active travel paths, availability of transit seats, and public monitoring of asset repairs and maintenance.

Municipalities have found success using a ‘report card-like’ method of reporting, which allows the public to track, in real-time, the linear distance of paths built versus decommissioned, as well as the number of years since assets were last repaired.

Recommendation 6: Invest in Canada's tourism sector by increasing support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through agencies such as PrairiesCan. Funding should

focus on the development, diversification, and promotion of local tourism products and experiences.

Tourism is one of Canada's most important economic sectors—especially in national parks and adjacent communities. However, the industry remains vulnerable to shifting geopolitical, environmental, and economic conditions.

Canada welcomed 21.2 million U.S. tourists in 2023, generating \$12.9 billion in spending. With growing cross-border friction and increased travel hesitancy, even a 10% decline in U.S. visitors could result in a loss of 1.5 million tourists and nearly \$1.3 billion in spending—a devastating blow to Canada's tourism economy.

In mountain parks, where tourism is the primary economic engine, a drop in international travel could place enormous strain on the viability of small operators, guides, outfitters, accommodations, and seasonal programs. Many of these businesses are still recovering from COVID-19 disruptions, and localized crises like the Jasper wildfire.

AMPPE urges the federal government to:

1. Expand PrairiesCan tourism-specific funding streams, with a focus on tourism development, seasonal diversification and Indigenous experiences.
2. Ensure tourism SMEs are eligible and prioritized for federal relief programs during economic downturns or environmental crises (e.g., wildfire or flood recovery).
3. Invest in market research, training, and digital enablement to help small operators adapt to changing visitor expectations and travel trends.

Conclusion

Canada's national parks are more than just scenic spaces. They are drivers of tourism, culture, reconciliation, and environmental education. But they require sustained investment to deliver on this promise.

By funding infrastructure renewal, improving transparency, supporting small businesses, and enabling four-season tourism, the federal government can ensure mountain parks remain national treasures that enrich lives and economies alike.

AMPPE looks forward to working with all partners to deliver solutions that are bold, practical, and future-focused.

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