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Rideau Canal National Historic Site

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BUILT ASSETS

- Built assets found across the waterway, such as locks, dams, weirs, canal walls and bridges, total \$929 million in value and continue to support the Rideau as an operational canal.
- A National Asset Review was undertaken by Parks Canada in 2012. At the time, more than \$104 million worth of infrastructure improvements on the Rideau Canal were identified.
- By May 2016, the Government of Canada had announced funding for all of the deferred infrastructure improvements identified for the Rideau Canal.
- Parks Canada's Report on Plans and Priorities (2016-17) identifies the need to address the backlog of work and commits to improving the condition of heritage assets in poor or very poor condition to fair or good by March 2020.
- Recent investments in some of these assets, including buildings with historic significance and visitor facilities, means the overall condition of these categories is already improving.
- Most of the Rideau Canal's 53 dams require supplemental capital investment. Marine structures account for the largest number of assets and have the highest replacement values. Several of the Rideau Canal's 164 marine structures will still be in need of significant restoration for conservation.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Sustainable business development is a new focus for the Rideau Canal which aims to generate revenue and off-set costs while enhancing visitor services and activities.
- The number of commercial operators and associated revenue have improved, albeit slightly, over the last five years. Initiatives are currently underway to bring additional operators onto the Rideau Canal through compatible businesses opportunities, land lease arrangements and the re-purposing of existing surplus structures.
- Diversified accommodation offers were first introduced in 2015 and further expanded to include eight oTENTiks for overnight stays and the renovated crown house at Davis lockstation for weekly rentals.
- The Rideau Canal has five large operating water power facilities with a total installed capacity of 8.6 megawatts. The development of new and existing hydro installations could be achieved through public-private partnerships to realize a better return to the crown.
- Major infrastructure renewal is currently underway at most lockstations along the Rideau Canal. Site planning will commence once management planning is complete and will focus on sustainable visitor experience enhancements at six complex and high potential sites: Ottawa, Long Island, Merrickville, Smiths Falls, Jones Falls, and Kingston Mills.

CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- The Rideau Canal has been honoured with many cultural distinctions: a National Historic Site, a Canadian Heritage River and inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- Following the recommendation of the World Heritage Committee, Parks Canada committed to undertaking an assessment of the visual character of the Canal's corridor. This resulted in the Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy which identified key features and values of the site and supports more effective planning and management of the Canal.
- The Rideau Canal's cultural resources were evaluated in 2008 and 2015. Most are in stable, fair or good condition. The condition of buildings remains fair due to maintenance efforts and capital improvements. Meanwhile, the commemorative integrity of engineering works has deteriorated with the introduction of some new materials, like cement mortar and grout in repairs, and reconstruction works.
- Of the 40 locks identified as nationally significant, one is in good condition, 27 are in fair condition, and 12 are in poor condition. Similarly for dams and weirs, two of 22 are in good condition, 15 are in fair condition, and five are in poor condition.
- Landscapes remain a strength within the Rideau Canal, with four of 24 representative lockstation landscapes assessed in good condition.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

- The Rideau Canal is entrenched as a destination and partner in the National Capital Region due to its historical importance and central location within the Ottawa-Gatineau area.
- Parks Canada has been actively promoting its Canals at high-profile events in large urban centers to broaden the Canal's traditional audience of large pleasure craft operators to include smaller operators, paddlers and land-based visitors.
- In 2015, over 250 media articles were produced, approximately 50 direct media inquiries were received and 10 film shoots were requested. The Rideau Canal's strong social media presence allows it to leverage this attention and interact directly with its audience.
- Efforts have been made to enhance the quality and presence of the Rideau Canal at these types of events. Unique promotions like free seasonal lockage for individuals who purchased a boat at shows in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal and the 2 for 1 promotion aimed at increasing use during off-peak months have proved popular.
- The Rideau Canal travels through many communities and nine federal ridings, resulting in a large number of interested stakeholders with a range of interests. This remains opportunities to build more buy-in from stakeholders in support of the overall strategic direction of the Canal.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

- The Rideau Canal has a long history of engagement with Indigenous peoples through management planning, advisory committees and operational interactions. Engagement has focused on the ten Algonquin communities in Eastern Ontario and the Mohawk First Nations at Awkesasne and Tyendenaga due to their interests in the Canal.
- Over the years, the frequency of these engagement efforts have stagnated. Despite some efforts to consult on operational matters and broader initiatives, there remains opportunity to strengthen relationships with Indigenous peoples.
- The Rideau Canal does benefit other Agency sites and federal partners engaging and partnering with Indigenous communities in the area given their traditional territories. As an example, the Rideau Canal Promenade interpretation project was implemented in collaboration with the National Capital Commission, Canadian Heritage, City of Ottawa and Agriculture Canada and in consultation with Indigenous communities.
- Translating the work performed on the Rideau Canal into tangible benefits to Indigenous peoples remains the biggest area to improve relations. The Canal can expect to be further influenced by the Agency and the federal government's implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations.

OPERATIONS

- The Rideau Canal consists of 25 independent lock and bridge stations, including the Tay Canal to Perth, which spans 202km between Ottawa and Kingston. Operations on the Canal today are much

the same as when it was first constructed and serves as living history for residents, boaters and visitors.

- Parks Canada relies on seasonal lock operations staff and students who interpret the Rideau Canal's cultural heritage, maintain its historical landscapes, build meaningful relationships, and facilitate the protection of species at risk.
- In 2012, the Rideau Canal underwent a series of transformational changes as part of a larger Government of Canada initiative to streamline services and implement operational efficiencies.
- Land-based visitation on the Rideau Canal has increased 15% over the past five years, reaching over one million visitors in 2015. This is in stark contrast to the 58 thousand boaters that used the Canal which represents a 23% decline over the same period.

REALTY

- Parks Canada is the custodian of lands around lockstations, dams and shoreline assets on the Rideau Canal.
- This requires Parks Canada to manage resource conservation programs and work closely with municipalities, conservation authorities and other government departments or agencies, to protect the Rideau Canal and its shorelines for future generations.
- The Historic Canals Regulations are Parks Canada's primary tool for managing, maintaining, and protecting the canals. These regulations are navigation-focused and have proven to be outdated and too limited in scope, which impedes Parks Canada's ability to manage, maintain and protect the canals.
- There is no mechanism to authorise Parks Canada's law enforcement personnel to enforce these regulations. Basic enforcement powers, such as search and seizure or the right of passage, are lacking.
- The six month statute of limitation is insufficient, there is no provision granting the courts the power to issue orders following convictions and the maximum fine of \$400 does not act as a deterrent.

SPECIES AT RISK

- There are at least 17 Schedule 1 species at risk that are 'regularly occurring' at the Rideau Canal. The site has been identified as containing critical habitat for six species covering more than 75% of the waterway. Critical habitat is also expected to be identified for additional species.
- Threats at the site include residential development, invasive and exotic species, nutrient inputs, and the cumulative impacts of shoreline development. The current absence of a resource conservation function at the site means that species at risk are not proactively being surveyed or monitored. Key knowledge and information is missing and a Site-Based Action Plan cannot be developed.
- Through the 'Action on the Ground' program, which wrapped up in 2013, the Rideau Canal acquired a better understanding of where species at risk are found, thanks to surveys for SAR turtles, snakes and select bird species.
- The Rideau Canal has been involved in providing observations and reviewing documentation for a number of recovery strategies and management plans. These efforts should continue but will need to be balanced with competing priorities.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

- The Rideau Canal welcomes over one million visitors by land and water each year. Ottawa Locks serves as its hub of activity due to its proximity to significant cultural sites such as Parliament Hill, Château Laurier and the National War Memorial.
- The most recent visitor survey was conducted in 2012 but only targeted land-based visitors. As a result, the boater demographic was not captured. Still, nine out of every ten visitors arrive at the Rideau Canal by land and the survey shows most are quite satisfied with their experiences.
- There remains some room to further animate the Rideau Canal and more focus is needed on activities and events outside of Ottawa. Declines in land-based visitors in Smiths Falls, Jones Falls and Kingston Mills contrast the overall increase in visitation across the Canal.
- In 2013, the Visitor Experience Opportunities Concept (VEOC) was developed as a way to ensure the Rideau Canal lives up to its potential as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The VEOC identified a

number of challenges and opportunities.

- Parks Canada is making efforts to strategically position the Rideau Canal as a world heritage destination through business development, community partnerships and responsive programs that highlight the Canal as a paddling and camping destination.

WATER MANAGEMENT

- The Rideau Canal operates 26 dams across the Cataraqui and Rideau River watershed. Operations of these dams are maintained on a system-wide basis, and must be balanced to meet the broad range of stakeholder needs including recreation, municipal water supply, flood mitigation, hydro power generation and fisheries.
- Parks Canada has recently invested significantly to expand the Rideau Canal water monitoring network. Real-time monitoring information allow for operational efficiencies and support data driven decision making.
- Historic and ongoing water level and dam adjustments are being phased away from paper to digital records. Electronic tools, automated dial-up programs and operational procedures are being developed to assist with water management activities.
- Communications with Conservation Authorities, Lakes and Cottage Associations, Power Producers and members of the public are improving. An emphasis is usually placed on the freshet season when the risk of flooding is at its highest.
- There remains an opportunity to develop a water levels website for public consumption using frameworks and lessons from the Water Survey of Canada at Environment Canada.

Date Modified 2016-07-07