

NATURE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Towards the Inclusion of New Canadians in Alberta's Provincial Parks

自然

natuur

حماية

NATURE

as a second language

природа

naturaleza

kalikasan

natura

ਕਰੀ

자연



Government
of Alberta

Written By:

Erin E Stapleton, M.E.Des (Planning)
University of Calgary, Faculty of Environmental Design

Edited and Appendix:

Don Carruthers Den Hoed, M.A.
Kananaskis Country Outreach

Funding and Support by:

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Parks Division, Kananaskis Country Outreach
and the Parks Research Fund

May|2009

NATURE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Parks For All Albertans

“Alberta’s parks inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.”

– Plan for Parks, April 2009

All residents of this province are entitled to a high quality of life, and this includes the ability to access, use and enjoy parks and park programs. Yet many Albertans – First Nations, persons with disabilities, youth, senior citizens, and new Canadians – have traditionally been excluded from opportunities for recreation, employment and stewardship in parks. In recent years, actions have been taken to change this trend.

In June 2006, *Inclusion Strategy One: Persons with Disabilities in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas* was developed. The result of dialogue with persons with disabilities, Parks Division staff and education researchers, this strategy laid the foundation for more initiatives dedicated to inviting other non-traditional user groups to enjoy all that our provincial parks have to offer.

Since the release of *Inclusion Strategy One*, inclusion has become a priority for Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, as well as the entire Alberta Government. As expressed in the Land Use Framework, the Government wants “citizens of Alberta to have ready access to parks.” In the spring of 2009, Alberta Parks Division presented the Plan for Parks, in which Albertans

express the need for “facilities that minimize physical, social and financial barriers to participation.” As a response to this feedback, one of the key strategies of the Plan for Parks is to *implement an inclusion strategy*, with the aim to “increase opportunities for, and invite full participation of, all Albertans.”

As part of implementing the inclusion strategy, and in an effort to specifically engage new Canadians, Kananaskis Country Outreach launched *Nature as a Second Language* in 2008. This program aims to introduce new Canadians to provincial parks and all the opportunities available therein. The success of the pilot year was overwhelming, and has led to questions about how to create a sustainable and effective program that supports the ongoing inclusion of new Canadians in the Alberta Parks system.

“As a Parks professional, I was with the public all the time, doing programs, looking over a sea of parks visitors from the amphitheatre stage, seeing who is coming to the counter and I realized they [parks visitors] are a pretty homogenous group.”

-Don Carruthers
Den Hoed,
Kananaskis Country
Outreach Coordinator

In the winter following the pilot *Nature as a Second Language* season, a graduate student in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary undertook a developmental evaluation of this program in order to answer these questions. This evaluation of this program has not only produced recommendations for program improvement, but has also provided further direction for the inclusion strategy.

Work still remains, but the goal is to break new ground in building a park system that fully engages all Albertans, and ensures everyone can connect to nature.

Parks as culture



“Albertans have a deep connection to the land. We believe Alberta’s natural glories are among the most beautiful and inspiring in the world. Our attachment to environment through our parks and wilderness areas is an important part of what constitutes our understanding of culture and quality of life.”

- Spirit of Alberta Cultural Policy, 2008

Alberta’s culture is inherently tied to the outdoors. Appreciation of nature and enjoyment of the outdoors is a core value of this province, and is consistently expressed by the Alberta Government. The recently completed *Land Use Framework* is aiming for a province where all citizens have access to parks, forests and other areas to “pursue outdoor recreational and cultural interests.” The *Spirit of Alberta Cultural Policy* envisions “an Alberta where all citizens feel a sense of belonging and pride, and participate in cultural and recreational activities that reflect their diverse heritage and enrich their lives.” The *Plan for Parks* hopes to create parks that are “safe, enjoyable and accessible for all Albertans to explore their culture and their connections to the land.” Alberta’s Provincial Parks are not only natural experiences, but part of our cultural fabric.

It's not surprising then, to learn that visiting parks is one of the first things new Canadians want to do when they arrive in their chosen new home. To newcomers, the scenery, wildlife and activities in our parks are fundamental parts of Alberta and Canada and they are anxious to experience it for themselves. At the same time, new Canadians also wish to use parks in ways reflective of their own culture and beliefs. However, despite the willingness to participate, new Canadians have apprehensions about acting on that desire.

"Where do I go? What can I do? Will I be understood? Do I belong? These are the questions we have as newcomers."

- CCIS employee and new Canadian

Parks are an important part of our culture. For new Canadians looking to integrate and fit in, parks are the ideal place to experience life as an Albertan while also celebrating their own culture.

Our parks protect biodiversity, water quality, and provide opportunities to escape from the busy urban world. Our parks also contribute to quality of life as a setting for socializing, relaxation, outdoor recreation, and active living. Alberta's parks exist for all Albertans, and they are the responsibility of all Albertans. It is imperative barriers are removed, access is increased and inclusion is achieved so that new Canadians build understanding for the role of nature and the benefits of being outdoors, as well as their responsibility as citizens to act as stewards for these protected landscapes.

"From the moment I arrived in Calgary, the first thing I wanted to do was get to the mountains."

- New Canadian

Inclusion Programming Case Study:

Nature as a Second Language



"It's not that I don't want to go [to provincial parks] and do things, but I may not know where or how. But if you tell me and show me once, then I feel I can myself the next time."

- New Canadian, NSL Participant

Program Background

To address the under-representation of immigrants and other groups in the Alberta Provincial Parks system, the Kananaskis Country Management Area launched a dedicated outreach program in 2007. The new Canadians outreach program was designed with guidance from new Canadians, settlement services staff, and the University of Calgary Environmental Design thesis "National parks and new Canadians: An exploration of culture, nature and meaning" by Melissa Bain.

Kananaskis Country Outreach is all about making parks more inclusive. Recognizing that increasing accessibility to resources and information is only one step, the intent is to deliver a program with, not for, new Canadians and other under-represented groups. The ultimate goal is to empower new Canadians to experience parks in their own way, to take ownership of provincial parks, and to become stewards of Alberta's natural and cultural heritage.

The Pilot Year – Nature as a Second Language

In 2008, Kananaskis Country Outreach launched the *Nature as a Second Language* program. In collaboration with the Calgary Catholic Immigration Services' Four Seasons Recreation Program, this pilot program brought over 650 new Canadians to Kananaskis for a day of in-park activities, including hiking, meeting other campers, watching an interpretive program, meeting various Parks staff, labeling a demonstration campsite and taking photos for a digital scavenger hunt (see Appendix A for more details). The program was designed to be applicable to any park in any part of the province, with only minor adjustments for different park contexts.

Program Evaluation

The outcomes of *Nature as a Second Language* are attitudinal and behavior change-based, and thus difficult to measure. Regardless, it is important to evaluate the pilot year to see if the program is fulfilling its intended purpose. Moreover, evaluating the program as it is still developing provides an opportunity to build a solid foundation for future programs and projects.

In non-formal environmental education programming such as *Nature as a Second Language*, developmental evaluation is used to support program, project, staff, or organizational development. The evaluator teams with program leaders to facilitate long-term discussions and explorations of continuous program improvement, adaptation and intentional change. A key component of developmental evaluation is participatory evaluation, which engages the program participants in dialogue – feedback that is an integral part of the program evaluation.

In accordance with the Parks practice of public engagement, as well as commitment to continuous program development, this evaluation employed the developmental approach in measuring the effectiveness of *Nature as Second Language*.

Research Methodology

Initial Participant Feedback

The research project began with a review of participant feedback. During the pilot season, surveys were distributed to program participants at the end of their day in Kananaskis and 150 surveys were returned, many representing an entire family group. The feedback acquired from these surveys not only captured the feelings of participants immediately following their program experience, but also provided a starting point for an exploration of new Canadians' perceptions of Alberta Parks.

Focus Groups

In December 2008 and January 2009, three daylong events were held at which new Canadians – both those who had participated in the summer pilot program and those who had not – were invited. Invitees were free to choose a morning or afternoon session. During each session, participants visited with friends from the program, viewed the photos from the digital scavenger hunt, saw another interpretive program, listened to a talk on Kananaskis and shared in a meal. Attendees were also invited to express their opinions about parks and nature through a series of focus group-style interviews with the researcher. Past program participants discussed their experience with *Nature as a Second Language*, as well as other means by which provincial parks could better meet their needs and offer them meaningful experiences.

For attendees who had yet to participate in *Nature as a Second Language*, discussions focused more on perceptions of nature, wilderness, Alberta Parks and a desire to participate in outreach programming.

Key Informant Interviews

While focus groups were an opportunity for new Canadians to voice their opinions and are the main source of data, one-on-one interviews were held with key individuals to gather various perspectives on the program itself, as well as on inclusion of new Canadians in parks. The Outreach Coordinator for Kananaskis Country, employees of CCIS, various parks employees, and representatives from Calgary-based cultural organizations were all invited to share their views. The combination of focus groups and interviews enabled a thorough examination of the program and of inclusion in general through a very diverse set of lenses.

Data Analysis

Attempting to quantify the experiences of the new Canadians who participated in the summer *Nature as a Second Language* program – as well as in the focus groups – would not do justice to their perspectives and would fail to capture the complexity of their interpretations. Instead, a qualitative analysis was employed whereby transcripts of the focus groups were analyzed using textual analysis mark-up software. Themes emerged from this analysis to inform the recommendations for *Nature as a Second Language*, as well as the broader Plan for Parks inclusion strategy.

Results: Program Evaluation

Initial Participant Feedback

The results of the initial survey reveal some general trends that informed focus group questions. Presented below are the questions on that survey, followed by the majority response:

1) Where are you from originally?

Nearly 72% of respondents listed China as country of origin.

2) Did you visit wilderness parks before coming to Canada?

For over 50% of respondents, the day in Kananaskis was their first time visiting a wilderness park.

3) What part of the day did you like the most?

Most respondents (64%) stated they liked everything equally. Hiking was the second-most common response.

4) What part of the day did you like the least?

Though many did not list a response, the majority (72%) of those that did simply wanted more time, particularly for the hike and for their time in the park in general.

5) Will you visit Kananaskis Country again?

All respondents (100%) said they would visit again.

6) Do you have any ideas for programs

Alberta Parks could offer?

While many respondents did not provide an answer, 80% of those who did suggested some form of educational program, particularly on the topic of wildlife.

This short survey revealed some expected results, such as a majority of Chinese participants, which is consistent with current immigration trends in Calgary, Alberta, and Canada, although this doesn't reflect the diversity of clients served by the Four Seasons Recreation Program. The results also reveal that participants are generally pleased with the program, but do have some suggestions for improvement.

At the same time, the limited nature of these results reveal that this quick, post-program survey does not yield the detailed information necessary to accurately and thoroughly evaluate a program. Instead, the researcher-conducted focus groups were used to elicit richer feedback, the results of which exposed themes that formed the basis of the recommendations for future program development.

Recommendations

"The in-situ Nature context of parks creates a powerful opportunity for a wide range of experiences based on peoples' different needs, interests, cultural and personal backgrounds and comfort levels...It is about bringing all people together into an arena where alternative realities and relationships with the world and each other can be discovered and explored."

- Terry Krause, Parks Planner

The following recommendations for refinement and further development of *Nature as a Second Language* reflect the views and suggestions of the new Canadians who participated in the focus groups, key informant interviews, and relevant literature.

- 1) Nature as a Second Language should allow new Canadians to spend more time in parks to provide them enough time to have a fulfilling and memorable first park experience.*
- 2) Nature as a Second Language should continue to include informational activities so that new Canadians may continue to learn about park rules, typical activities and safety.*
- 3) Nature as a Second Language should continue to incorporate a variety of activities and add even more activities to the program to reflect the wealth of recreational opportunities available to all park users.*
- 4) Nature as a Second Language should be a multi-staged program, each component tailored to the level of experience of the participant.*
- 5) Nature as a Second Language should partner with cultural organizations to offer opportunities for new Canadians to participate in stewardship activities.*

Recommendation #1: Nature as a Second Language should allow new Canadians to spend more time in parks to provide them enough time to have a fulfilling and memorable first park experience.

"I would just like more time – more time for activities, more time just to enjoy the scenery."

– New Canadian, NSL participant

For many new Canadians, their visit to Kananaskis Country was their first visit to a wilderness park. Participants expressed their desire to have more time in the park, to have more time for each activity and to have time alone to simply take in their surroundings. Though they realize they couldn't possibly experience everything parks has to offer in one day, they wish to have a longer visit so that they may enjoy an activity in the manner a "born-Canadian" would and also have a moment away from others to really appreciate the nature around them. New Canadians reported that while they enjoyed themselves, they also desire an authentic experience, one that represents a typical day for the traditional parks user.

Recommendation #2: Nature as a Second Language should continue to include informational activities so that new Canadians may continue to learn about park practices, rules and safety.

*"It is important that I learn the rules, how to be safe.
If I am not safe, I don't want to go there."
- New Canadian*

Safety is an overarching theme that is a concern of many new Canadians visiting parks for the first time, as they are unsure of their surroundings, what is right and wrong, and who can help. By learning about park practices and rules, about wildlife safety and the conditions they may encounter, they start to feel more knowledgeable and therefore more at ease in the unfamiliar environment.

New Canadians appreciated and took great interest in those activities that presented parks information. The educational message of the Mask of Fuego interpretive program was received and understood. The participants felt it was important for them to be aware of the practice of prescribed burning and the reason for it. They also found the demonstration campsite quite informative, particularly since they consider it a typical park activity.

Recommendation #3: Nature as a Second Language should continue to incorporate a variety of activities and add even more activities to the program to reflect the wealth of recreational opportunities available to all park users.

"I want to try things Canadians do, like ride a horse or try a canoe."

- New Canadian, NSL Participant

New Canadians were pleased with the activities offered by *Nature as a Second Language* and would like to see those activities continue to be a part of the program. However, they would also like to see more activities added to the program repertoire, particularly those they associate with a "Canadian" experience – kayaking, canoeing, skiing and horseback riding.* They are aware that there are many recreational activities available in provincial parks and would like to see that diversity reflected in the program.

* In reality, many individuals would appreciate similar programs, especially groups faced with economic challenges or gaps in skills or knowledge. This is the main reason for the overall inclusion strategy, and the principles of inclusion on page 19.

Recommendation #4: Nature as a Second Language should be a multi-staged program, each component tailored to the needs or level of experience of the participant.

"Maybe I am looking for more excitement but others want to relax. I think it would be nice to go out again with people who want more adventure."

- New Canadian, NSL Participant

Building upon recommendation three, participants acknowledge that some activities may not be of interest to all. It's suggested that *Nature as a Second Language* become a program in which a participant can progress through a series of sessions, beginning with an introductory day in the park, or even an initial orientation in the city. An intermediate level may be to spend a night in an RV or campsite and enjoy a hike. A backcountry expedition or a cross-country ski trip could be an option for an advanced participant. Also, sessions could be tailored to the specific needs of families, single adults or older couples.

Recommendation #5: Nature as a Second Language should offer opportunities for new Canadians to participate in stewardship activities and to work for parks.

"I haven't involved/volunteer for parks so far in Canada ... but wants to involve for the noble cause of protecting nature and wants to be member of park family."

- New Canadian, NSL Participant, Informant

Ultimately, new Canadians want to reach a point where they no longer need to depend on a program and can instead use their acquired knowledge and experience to help with the overall mandate of parks. Opportunities should be created for new Canadians to take ownership of a particular project or initiative, as they are eager to make their contribution to parks and take on responsibility for what they now realize is theirs. New Canadians also envision advancing through the stages of *Nature as a Second Language*, from beginner to advanced, and then *returning* to the program as a volunteer guide or a paid instructor.

Results: Building upon inclusion strategy one

"Alberta Parks has a philosophy that parks are for all Albertans, and so, as Albertans New Canadians should feel welcome in parks, and included in the greater parks community as visitors, volunteers and/or employees."

- Scott Jones, Manager, Science and Planning, Alberta Parks

In addition to producing recommendations for further program development, discussions with program participants have added a new dimension to the inclusion strategy—the new Canadian perspective—that builds upon the principles and strategic directions laid out in the inclusion strategy for persons with disabilities. While it may initially be thought that these groups have little in common, themes emerging from the results show that when it comes to inclusion in parks, they are quite similar.

Principles of Inclusive Parks

Inclusion Strategy One: Persons with Disabilities in Alberta's Parks and Protected Areas offered five principles of inclusive parks, each of which is applicable to the new Canadian inclusion as well, as supported by the themes emerging from the discussions with new Canadians. Those five principles are (re)presented here, but are framed in the context of inclusion of *Nature as a Second Language* and inclusion for new Canadians.

Principle One: Provide a range of profound wilderness experiences

"In Kananaskis, I saw the trees, heard the birds, the water and thought it's so peaceful...perfect for meditation and prayer."

- New Canadian, NSL Participant

Alberta's Provincial Parks offer a whole host of opportunities to connect with nature and to enjoy recreational activities, the physical, emotional and spiritual benefits of which are already understood by new Canadians. Furthermore, new Canadians are seeking opportunities that allow them to experience Canadian and Alberta culture, but also fulfill their own cultural and spiritual needs. Parks can assist new Canadians in experiencing wilderness in the "traditional" way. At the same time, new Canadians can teach Parks about other experiences significant to their own cultural backgrounds.

Principle Two: Support a variety of inclusive outdoor activities

"We arrive here and feel like we already belong to our own [cultural] community, but we also want to belong the neighborhood, the city and the province. To feel like we truly belong, we want to meet Canadians, learn from them and be friends."

- *New Canadian*

A parks system inclusive of new Canadians would include more than the *Nature as a Second Language* program. While participation in the program provides an important "first-step" of initial experiences and foundational information, participants are *all* new Canadians. While feeling that they are not alone in their new home is important, immigrants also wish to branch out from their cultural group and establish relationships with "born-Canadians". For instance, new Canadians are supportive of a "buddy-system" or "mentorship" program whereby they can partake in activities with regular parks visitors. Another suggestion is to have Parks staff support various agencies or individual new Canadians on "first-experiences," such as an introductory overnight camping trip.

Principle Three: Be flexible in stewardship and employment opportunities

"I know I would like to work in parks, but I'm not sure how to find this opportunity and I don't know if I qualify."

- New Canadian, NSL Participant

While there is no intentional exclusion of new Canadians from stewardship and employment opportunities in Alberta's Provincial Parks, relatively few newcomers are actually partaking in stewardship initiatives or hold positions. New Canadians are willing and eager to participate, but are largely unaware of what opportunities exist and how to pursue them. Engaging in partnerships with cultural organizations to create stewardship initiatives and to advertise volunteer, seasonal and permanent employment would be one way of reaching more of the demographic. While it is understood that candidates must meet certain requirements, Parks can hold information sessions with interested individuals, describe position requirements, and help them find ways to acquire those skills.

Principle Four: Offer a range of affordable high-quality programs

We arrive here, get our job and then work, work, work. We have no time to visit Kananaskis. Plus, I would have to rent a car and my children will want to do things and that is too much money right now. I know it's important for me to relax and for my family to have fun, but my job comes first. I need money for family.

- New Canadian, NSL Participant

Cost is a critical barrier to every under-represented group in outdoor recreation and wilderness parks. The cost associated with transportation, equipment, fees and taking time off work all prevent new Canadians from being truly included in parks. The transportation barrier could be addressed through a shuttle service that new Canadians can book themselves as a group and pool their resources. For equipment and camp fees, both the *pay-what-you-can* and *pay-by-volunteering* options were well received, as New Canadians feel these options are respectful of the often-tight financial situations faced upon arrival in Canada. Furthermore, they see the pay by volunteering option as serving a dual purpose – they get to use facilities and services, but can also learn and give back.

Simply finding time is another issue for some new Canadians, who support not only their families here, but may also be helping families in their homeland. Vacation time or a personal day is seen as a luxury that they cannot afford. A program delivered in the city would ensure as many people as possible can benefit from parks - if they cannot make it to the park, bring the park to them.

Principle Five: Promote transportation to a network of sites

"I may not understand everything you say, but I am trying. I also expect that you are trying to understand me. If we are both patient, we can understand each other, we can both learn."

- New Canadian

Though physical transportation to a network of sites is not as significant an issue for new Canadians as it is for persons with disabilities, the whole process of "getting there" stands out as one of the greatest barriers to the user group. Rather than simply being about accessible vehicles, though, "getting there" for new Canadians is about accessing information for trip planning, and being able to comprehend and apply that knowledge. Access to, and understanding, parks information is extremely important to new Canadians. Thus, information must be easy to find and understand, from a parks webpage specifically for new Canadians to translation services available onsite. While having a full-time translator employed by parks is not realistic, various multilingual communication tools could be provided to staff. Other approaches, such as visual instead of textual signage, a key phrase book and materials in major non-English languages would go a long way to making parks more welcoming to new Canadians.

These five principles were first introduced as part of the inclusion strategy for persons with disabilities. That discussions with new Canadians resulted in such similar themes indicates that there are many non-traditional user groups that could be included in parks, but face similar barriers.

Strategies for inclusion

"I will ensure that all Albertans, minorities or not, have an equal opportunity to voice their wants, needs and desires for parks. And I will listen. And I will act..."

- Alberta Parks Staff, Inclusion Workshop Participant

As with the principles, the strategy for inclusion also transcends user groups. The inclusion of new Canadians doesn't call for a second, separate inclusion strategy, but can instead be part of an overall strategy that aims to ensure everyone can participate in and benefit from parks. Ultimately, these various strategies will be consolidated under Alberta's Plan for Parks, but in the interim, new Canadians strategies are presented as part of this document:

Strategy One: Create an accessible network

Create an accessible information and communication network that includes web and printed material in various languages, and communication tools for parks staff. Getting information to new Canadians in a manner they understand is the first barrier to remove and is the initial step in engaging their interest. Creating access also requires raising the corporate knowledge among parks staff so that anyone—whether manager, maintenance worker, or conservation officer—has the skills to make new Canadians feel welcome in parks.

Strategy Two: Develop inclusion and outreach programming

Nature as a Second Language is an example of inclusion and outreach programming and as program evaluation revealed, it has been successful in making new Canadians aware of parks, parks opportunities and has increased their desire to become involved in recreational, volunteer and stewardship opportunities. This program can serve as a model for additional program development.

Strategy Three: Provide adequate, focused human resources

For an inclusion strategy to be successful there will have to be allocation of human resources in order to meet the needs of the non-traditional user groups. Adequate and focused does not have to mean an inclusion programming coordinator for each specific non-traditional user group. Instead, partnerships can be created between parks and existing government departments and agencies to allocate resources in a collaborative effort, to continuously improve existing programs, and to create additional programs as opportunities are identified. Additionally, individuals from these groups can be employed as program staff to lend their insider perspective as a member of this group, which is an invaluable insight for program development.

Conclusion



"This program lets newcomers know they are welcome, not only in parks, but everywhere."

- New Canadian, NSL participant

Nature as a Second Language was created to address an issue in Alberta's Provincial Parks: that new Canadians are under-represented in parks experiences, operations, and opportunities. Evaluation of the program resulted in recommendations for further program development and built upon the existing inclusion strategy. However, the most valuable component of this research was bringing forward the voices of new Canadians among park programmers and managers. It is only appropriate that they have the concluding words:

"This program meant so much to me. I arrived here, I felt so alone and wasn't very happy. Then I went to Kananaskis. I met people from my home country and I felt better. I realized that I now live in a beautiful place that I could never imagine and felt happier. I met people from this country and they helped me."

"I now know that people here care about me. It touches my heart to know people want to share this with me and welcome me to join them. I am now happy to be here"

Appendix One: Nature as a Second Language Kananaskis County Outreach Programs

Since 2008, several new Canadians programs have been pilot-tested in Kananaskis Country and Fish Creek Provincial Park. These initiatives are described in detail in the following pages, and can serve as a blueprint for implementing similar programs in other parks. This is not an exhaustive list – other area staff run programs such as “how to dress for the winter” for immigrants – rather this is a representation of the range of programs that are possible, and a springboard to adapt *Nature as a Second Language* to other locations.

Current and pending *Nature as a Second Language* Programs are listed in the following pages and include:

- First Park Experience Day Trips
- Fish Creek Provincial Park (Urban Park) Visit
- Free Fishing Day
- New Canadian Artists in Nature Program
- Camping Mentorship Program
- New Canadians Digital Guidebook
- www.albertaparks.ca/naturelanguage website

In all these programs, success has been (or will be) determined by the ability to develop partnerships with agencies such as settlement services, cultural groups, local diversity initiatives, and government departments such as Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, Employment and Immigration, and Travel Alberta. Program sustainability will come from using solid program design, developing standards for program excellence, and incorporating sound social science research – developmental and otherwise – as programs evolve.

Nature as a Second Language “First Park Experience” Day Trip

Program Status: Piloted 2008, active program in Kananaskis Country Management Area (over 750 participants to date)

Program Type: Day trip, 6 hours, multiple activity, informal

Theme: All Canadians can connect with nature in provincial parks.

Objectives: To introduce new Canadians to a wilderness park within driving distance, to remove barriers relating to fear of nature, to introduce them to the role of parks, to create dialogue between current park visitors and new Canadians, and to provide basic knowledge of skills and equipment required for a visit to a park.

Description: 50 to 100* new Canadians travelled by bus to Bow Valley Provincial Park (75 kilometers west of Calgary) for a 6-hour program held at Willow Rock Campground.

Setting: Program revolved around the Willow Rock Amphitheatre, nearby interpretive trails, and the Bow Valley Visitor Information Centre.

Partners: 4 Seasons Recreation Program, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) and City of Calgary Cultural Diversity Program (ArtsCan)

Partner Role: CCIS staff attended one Kananaskis Outreach orientation session (on local natural history, wildlife safety, trail routes, and logistics), and were responsible for notifying and registering their clients and bus rentals

Parks Resources: 1 AB Parks Outreach (or Visitor Services) programmer, amphitheatre, two short interpretive trails, campsite, demonstration equipment (tent, stove, labels, etc.), digital cameras, advertising to invite other visitors, collection and compilation of feedback

Challenges: Without CCIS staff the program is difficult to run without assistance. A 2009 pilot volunteer program had limited success. Similarly, the program requires bussing – without which few clients could attend.

Opportunities: This program could be run as a volunteer program, a public mentorship program, or in conjunction with an existing leadership program such as Junior Forest Rangers or Scouts/Guides Canada.

** Participation was capped at 100 to maintain a natural experience, and to adhere to established Kananaskis Country group size limits on trails and facilities.*

Event schedule:

time	Activity	details
Pre-event	Confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants receive information about appropriate footwear, clothing, food, and mountain conditions
9:30	Calgary to Bow Valley (bus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCIS staff facilitate a discussion on the bus about 'what is wilderness?' and 'what is the purpose of a park?,' etc.
10:30	arrive at park, washroom break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bus unloads at a washroom near the amphitheatre. for larger groups (and resulting bathroom delays), informal touch stations are set up with natural history artifacts
11:00	introduction to AB provincial parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park staff welcomes people to location, overviews park purpose and general information
11:10	'get to know your neighbours' initiative task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park staff leads a series of mixer activities with participants and other visitors in attendance, such as "welcome in different language, distance travelled, time in Canada." Follows up discussion from bus.
11:25	Parks staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visitor services staff introduces Conservation Officer, public safety, volunteer, and other uniformed staff to demonstrate uniforms and explain roles*
11:30	Interpretive program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Musical theatre interpretive program on parks-themed topic to set tone of parks as sites for learning and stewardship, and to appeal to family audience
12:15	Lunch break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants have one hour of free time to explore campground or ask specific individual questions of staff. Guidebooks and binoculars also made available.
1:15	Small group tours (first cycle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small (25 person) groups rotate through afternoon activities. Two separate groups are lead by CCIS staff (or volunteers) while two others combine for demonstration campsite with Park staff. <p><i>Elements of the guided hike include:</i> the digital scavenger hunt to find various natural items, using guidebooks and flower identification guides, reading interpretive signage, types of trails in Kananaskis Country.</p> <p><i>Elements of the demonstration campsite include:</i> renting/purchasing and using camping equipment, park safety, registering a site, using park maps, visitor centre resources, jobs and volunteer opportunities.</p>
3:00	Small group tours (second cycle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups rotate so each participant gets to do one hike and the demonstration campsite.
4:30	Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large group wrap-up and invitation to return to parks. Evaluation forms distributed.

* Depending on availability of other staff, this could be moved to the afternoon and incorporated into the tour, or done by visuals or dress-up activities.

Fish Creek Provincial Park (urban park) Visit

Program Status: Piloted 2008, active program in Kananaskis Country Management Area

Program Type: Evening trip, 3 hours, multiple activity, informal

Theme: Urban parks make it easy to include nature as part of your life

Objectives: To introduce new Canadians to a provincial park within the city limits and public transportation, to explain the role of parks, to demonstrate group-use opportunities, and to support settlement service agencies.

Description: 20 to 50 new Canadians travelled independently to Fish Creek Provincial Park (within Calgary) for a three hour program where they rotated through several stations: a guided walk, a display by the Friends of Fish Creek, a demonstration picnic site, and a bread making station (a distinct program run by settlement services, but that fit the mandate of the program).

Setting: Program revolved around the Glennfield Group Use site and nearby trails and picnic sites.

Partners: 4 Seasons Recreation Program, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS).

Partner Role: CCIS staff helped plan the event, were responsible for notifying and registering their clients, and ran the bread making session.

Parks Resources: 1 or 2 AB Parks Outreach (or Visitor Services) programmers, amphitheatre, trails, various guidebooks and displays (i.e. FOF CPP), and planning time.

Challenges: CCIS found it difficult to get commitment from clients and several events were cancelled due to low numbers. Working the bread making session in was unique, but limiting due to the complexity.

Opportunities: This program could be developed as a steppingstone to the Kananaskis day trips, or could be opened to general registration.

Nature as a Second Language

“Free Fishing Day”

Program Status: Piloted 2009

Program Type: Day event, 4 hours, informal

Theme: Sport fishing (recreation) is a great way to connect with the outdoors.

Objectives: To introduce new Canadians to sportfishing in Alberta, and the roles of Parks and Sustainable Resource Development in managing fisheries.

Description: 50 new Canadians travelled independently to Allan Bill Pond (40 minutes east of Calgary) for a full-day program where they rotated through several stations: how to get a fishing license, fish i.d., fishing rod loaners, and fish cleaning.

Setting: Program was set at Allan Bill Pond and scheduled for a) the same day as fish stocking and b) the “Free Fishing” Family Day weekend.

Partners: Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), Junior Forest Rangers, Various settlement service agencies.

Partner Role: SRD staff helped plan the event, provided fishing rods, fish i.d., and fish cleaning stations. Settlement services agencies helped spread word of the event.

Parks Resources: 1 Parks Outreach (or Visitor Services) programmer, 7 volunteer hosts (pulled from other volunteer programs), administration staff to coordinate event registration, and planning time.

Challenges: Interest was so high people that had to be turned away. Not providing transportation excluded some people.

Opportunities: Additional ‘activity-based’ events could be developed, such as ‘how to hike,’ ‘how to camp,’ or ‘how to mountain bike.’ There is also immense opportunity to work with SRD on programs relating to New Canadians.

Nature as a Second Language

“New Canadian Artists in Nature”

Program Status: In development/on hold

Program Type: Full Year, multi-visit, learning program

Theme: Parks and wilderness sites provide inspiration and intangible support for creativity and art.

Objectives: To connect new Canadian artists to parks as sites for their work, and to establish appropriate guidelines for this work. To connect these artists with Canadian artists and publics who find solace or inspiration in nature.

Description: As part of the new Canadians ARTSCan program, various excursions to Kananaskis Country will be developed to support visual, written, or performance arts. Over the course of a year, Canadian artists will present on how to develop and market art in Canada, and will serve as artistic mentors. Likewise, park staff will provide meaningful nature experiences that support creative endeavours, and will provide opportunities to showcase developed art, whether by exhibition or performance in park facilities.

Partners: ARTSCan, community arts groups, settlement service agencies.

Partner Role: To be determined.

Parks Resources: 1 Parks Outreach (or Visitor Services) programmer, volunteer artists and hosts, park sites, administration staff to coordinate event registration, and planning time.

Challenges: Transportation and lack of funding to ARTSCan program.

Opportunities: New Canadian Artists can serve as interpreters of nature, providing a valuable lens on places many Albertans take for granted. Art developed could also be used as a revenue generator, and programs could expand as economic ventures, such as art classes in nature.

Nature as a Second Language “Park Mentors” Program

Program Status: In development/on hold

Program Type: Volunteer program

Theme: Park stewardship is a shared responsibility that brings people together.

Objectives: To create an informal opportunity for new Canadians to try park experiences under the guidance of other visitors.

Description: Experienced park users and groups (i.e. hiking clubs) will be trained as mentors and provided identification so that new Canadians can feel confident approaching them for advice on camping, hiking, and so on.

Setting: Throughout parks system.

Parks Resources: 1 Parks Volunteer Coordinator, administration staff to coordinate event registration, and planning time.

Challenges: Time and funding for uniforms and training support.

Opportunities: Could be an opportunity for a corporate partner or sponsorship.

Nature as a Second Language “Introduction to Alberta Parks” Digital Guidebook

Program Status: Guidebook is complete and has been translated into Arabic, French, Spanish, Punjabi, Tagalog, and simplified Chinese). Official online launch planned for late 2009/early 2010.

Program Type: Non-personal digital information.

Theme: Alberta’s Provincial Parks protect biodiversity, offer a range of outdoor recreation activities, and are places where anyone can become a steward of the natural world as volunteers or staff.

Objectives: To increase cultural and environmental literacy related to mandate and scope of the Alberta Provincial Parks system, such as natural regions, park classes, and public safety concerns. Also to provide basic knowledge of the skills and equipment required for various activities, and to introduce volunteer and career opportunities within parks.

Description: 30 page digital guidebook to be posted on the upcoming www.albertaparks.ca/naturelanguage website.

Parks Resources: Guidebook development costs. Research, writing, and translation were completed under contract funded by the Communications Fund. Design, layout, and technical development were done in-house by Kananaskis County Outreach.

Challenges: Incorporating translations into the document have taken a tremendous amount of time due to technical challenges.

Opportunities: Travel Alberta, Immigration and Employment, and Alberta Recreation and Parks Association member agencies are interested in distributing the guidebook. A printed or even online version could become a revenue generation stream.

www.albertaparks.ca/naturelanguage website

Program Status: In development.

Program Type: Web-based

Theme: There is excellent information available to support trips to parks.

Objectives: To introduce new Canadians to various aspects of Alberta parks.
To provide field staff with an easy to distribute resource for new Canadians encountered on the job.

Description: A dedicated website that contains multilingual guidebooks, links to key information (e.g. bear safety pamphlets, trail reports, reservation systems, and eventually introductory videos of key park activities).
Additionally, front-line field staff will have cards with a link to the website that can be distributed during conversations with new Canadians.

References

- Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (2009). Plan for parks: 2009-2019. Government of Alberta. www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/p4p.
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (2009). Land Use Framework. Government of Alberta. www.landuse.alberta.ca
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit (2008). Cultural policy: The Spirit of Alberta. Government of Alberta. www.culturalpolicy.alberta.ca
- Bain, Melissa (2007). National Parks and New Canadians: An Exploration of Culture, Nature and Meaning. Masters Thesis, University of Calgary, Faculty of Environmental Design.
- Carruthers Den Hoed, Don (2007). Nothing about them without them: Creating framework of inclusion for persons with disabilities in Alberta's parks and protected areas. Masters Thesis, University of Calgary, Graduate Division of Educational Research.
- Carruthers Den Hoed, Don (2006). Inclusion Strategy One: Persons with Disabilities in Alberta's Parks and Protected Areas. Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Internal.
- Rubeling, Daniella (2009). From Visitor to Participant: Engaging Communities in Alberta's Parks by Supporting Volunteer Programs. Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Internal.