So This Bear Walks into a Bar . . .
Business and Environmental Policy in Banff National Park

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Abstract: National parks are created as pristine wilderness reserves, and yet at the same time are intended for the use and enjoyment of visitors. National parks legislation is tasked with protecting not just the land and biodiversity, but also the values, emotions, aspirations and memories of the visitors and the Canadian public. This research examines the role of business within Banff National Park, and the tension between conservation and development within the park. This study identifies the extent to which businesses have embraced the purposes and policies outlined in the regulatory documents, analyzes the issues and concerns of businesses, and theorize about how businesses integrate into the national park. This work also identifies ways in which businesses can better support the conservation mandate of Banff National Park through a discussion of business strategies. The research is based on field interviews, a mail-back survey and archival research in Banff.

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1. Introduction

National parks are created as pristine wilderness reserves, and yet at the same time are intended for the use and enjoyment of visitors. The first involves isolating parks from adverse human impacts, the second, making parks accessible to the public (Orr and Humphreys, 2012; Lowry, 1994). In many ways this creates a policy paradox, whereby national parks policy is tasked with simultaneously supporting both environmental and visitor use mandates.

There is a fundamental tension between ideas of conservation and use, although tension does not mean that these notions are necessarily incompatible or that conflict is inevitable. Fundamental to this tension is the question of what do we mean by use? How do people use parks? What are the consequences of use? What uses are appropriate in protected wilderness areas, and more importantly, who gets to decide?

National parks legislation is tasked with protecting not just the land and biodiversity, but also values, emotions, aspirations and memories. The historical, cultural and political process through which people seek, develop and contest meaning in parks in turn structure the ways in which we use parks, as well as the legislation that authorizes their protection and determines how these landscapes may ultimately be used. National parks are many things to different people: playground, place of

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1 While the national park systems encompasses natural resource, cultural and historical sites the focus of this research is on natural resource parks.
employment, refuge from society, curiosity, spiritual retreat or tourist attraction. As public goods, national parks belong to the people, and as such governance of national parks must take into consideration fundamental ideas of use, while at the same time conserving the very attributes that lead them to protected status in the first place (Fifer and Orr, 2013).

Discussions of use are particularly noteworthy in Banff National Park, located in the Rocky Mountains of Canada where the national park is at once a recreational backyard playground for the urban center of Calgary located 125 km away, the traditional homeland of First Nations people, the habitat of diverse wildlife, the home of 7,437 permanent residents, a thoroughfare for the TransCanada Highway and rail system, a vacation destination for 3.2 million visitors, and the place of business for a diverse range of enterprises. How does the park navigate these varied interests? How can these needs and activities be reconciled with a legislated priority for ecological integrity? This research will specifically examine the role of business within Banff National Park, and the tension between conservation and development within the park. This research seeks to identify the extent to which businesses have embraced the purposes and policies outlined in the regulatory documents, analyze the issues and concerns of businesses, and theorize about how businesses integrate into the national park. This work will also identify business strategies through which businesses can better support the conservation mandate of Banff National Park.

The research that follows is based on field interviews, a mail-back survey and archival research in Banff. Twenty interviews were done either in Banff National Park or over the telephone with stakeholders representing the major leaders business, environmental issues, social concerns and government in Banff. In addition, a mail back survey was sent to 504 businesses in Banff National Park. The population list was derived from the Banff phone book. Because there is no street delivery of mail in Banff, Google searches and phone calls were used to identify mailing addresses. A total of 122 surveys were returned as undeliverable. The final response rate of surveys, with the undeliverable surveys removed from the count was 32.2%, with 123 completed surveys returned. The survey questions were in part identified while doing the field interviews of stakeholders in Banff National Park, and through a web based pilot test of survey questions.

2. Why Are National Parks Important?

While national parks may be created for political, economic, environmental and biodiversity reasons they are typically justified as a means to preserve species and endangered ecosystems (Archer and Orr, 2008). These arguments are based on two subtly nuanced claims: that parks protect biodiversity, and/or that they protect against environmental threats such as timber harvesting, human overuse and population growth (Gutman, 2002; Abuzinada, 2003; Parrish, Braun et al. 2003; Stoll-Kleemann, 2005). Protected areas not only conserve biodiversity and natural features, but they also serve important research and education needs, and contribute to local economies through income generating activities such as entrance fees, sales of goods and activity charges; providing employment and attracting visitors to the region. Implicit in the creation of national parks and other types of protected lands such as preserves is the idea that human use must be controlled and regulated. Failure to protect the land from unrestricted human activity results in biodiversity loss, a decrease in landscape variety, and a diminishing of ecological interactions and the evolutionary processes that sustain and promote biodiversity (Hoekstra, Boucher et al., 2005). Despite the acknowledged importance of protected land, there are grave concerns about the enduring sustainability of protected land around the world (Ritchie, 1999; Jamal and Eyre, 2003; Alexander, Waters et al., 2005; Dilsaver and Wyckoff, 2005; Bronson and Noble, 2006). It should be noted that while this research focuses on use, there is value in national parks beyond simply visiting parks.
3. Banff National Park

Banff National Park is unique in many ways because commercial development preceded protection, creating a legacy of entrepreneurialism within the park. In 1885, with the support of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which had reached the site two years earlier, the Canadian government declared the 26 square kilometers around the newly discovered Banff hot springs in the province of Alberta as reserved land, creating the first national park in Canada. In a partnership that in many ways foretells the future of Banff National Park, the federal government and CPR worked in concert to promote the area as an international resort and spa. The partnership was intended to provide financial support for the new railway, which was vital for the expansion of the nation to the west, and to try to ease federal government budgetary pressures. Over the next few years the CPR opened the luxury Banff Springs Hotel to attract wealthy tourists to the area, and to encourage them to ride the railway. In the words of then general manager of Canadian Pacific Railway William Cornelius Van Horne “since we can’t export the scenery we’ll have to import the tourists” (Wright, 1983-84).

During these formative years, government policy emphasized tourism opportunities around the hot springs and encouraged private investment in the park (Lothian 1987). In 1917 the government passed the National Park Act dedicating national parks “to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment and such parks shall be maintained so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations”. In the 1930s Banff gradually became a year-round resort, which fortuitously for the locals also meant year-round employment opportunities (Everts 2002).

In the 1970s and 1980s park officials began to rethink priorities for the park and became more vocal in their unease about development initiatives such as ski resorts. Early proposals in this time period included residency restrictions, fewer long-term leases and restrictions on golf course and airport development (Lowry, 2008). Actual policy initiatives in this time period were limited however, due in part to the strong relationships between some of the Banff commercial interests and powerful politicians (Lowry, 2008).

The international reputation of Banff continued to grow, and in 1994 in recognition of the “striking mountain landscape . . . exceptional natural beauty,” as well as their “representation of significant and on-going glacial processes along the continental divide” the United Nations declared Banff National Park (together with three neighboring national and three provincial parks) a World Heritage Site in 1984 (UNESCO, 2010).

While tourism continued to grow during this time, local residents in the park became frustrated with the lack of legislative and decision-making autonomy. Through a unique joint agreement between local citizens and federal and provincial governments, the Town of Banff became the first incorporated municipality within a national park in Canada in 1990, and municipal administration was formally transferred from Parks Canada to an elected Town Council. Although the Town holds most municipal government powers, town boundaries are fixed by law at 3.93 square kilometers. According to the agreement Town land is not owned, but rather is leased from the Government of Canada for $550,000 annually.

During this time period development within the park was extensive, with more than $500 million of development permits issued within the park in a 15-year span (Lowry, 2008). Out of concern for the fragile ecosystem and rapid commercial expansion, in 1994 the International Union for Conservation of Nature announced that continued development in Banff National Park would threaten its status as a World Heritage site (Lowry, 2008). In response to these and other concerns about the impact of growth and development within the park, the Banff-Bow Valley Task Force was convened by the Ministry of Canadian Heritage to research the issue.
The two year, $2 million Banff Bow Valley Study identified ways to “integrate environmental, social and economic considerations in order to develop management and land-use strategies that are sustainable and meet the objectives of the National Parks Act” (Banff-Bow Valley Study, 1996, p.2). In October 1996 the Banff-Bow Valley Task Force submitted more than 500 management recommendations to the Minister responsible for the Parks Canada agency; including the most controversial proposal that stricter limits to growth must be imposed if Banff is to continue as a national park. A government advisory group was appointed to assess how the department would address the recommendations and incorporate them into future management decisions and plan. Soon after the federal government announced that no new lands would be released for commercial development in the park.

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In June 1998 the federal government imposed a more restrictive growth limit, with maximum commercial development of 361,390 square feet. Parks Canada purchased land and bought out a number of leases such as a gas station and liquor store in order to begin to bring the level of development down to the mandated maximum (Lowry, 2008). Today Banff has an aggressive growth management strategy that limits commercial growth to 1.5% per year which is strictly enforced.

Like all national parks, Banff National Park continues to deal with many environmental problems and threats. For example the population of the Banff Spring snail, a tiny air-breathing freshwater snail found only at the sulfurous hot springs in Banff, fluctuates dramatically and scientists/volunteers are engaged in efforts to increase the population through captive breeding. Other concerns include the introduction of non-native species such as brook trout, wildlife fatalities due to the TransCanada Highway, landscape fragmentation, fire management, waste management, human-wildlife conflicts especially involving walk and bears and climate change (Orr 2011). The park is also still dealing with the aftermath of the June 2013 flood, which caused extensive damage.

4. The Banff Regulatory Environment

Today the Town of Banff is administered like other comparable communities in the province of Alberta, however it is also subject to additional layers of regulation and bureaucracy as a result its status as a national park community. Businesses located within the Town of Banff operate in a unique regulatory environment. In order to make decisions about appropriate use and development within the park, Parks Canada and the Town of Banff may be bound by some or all of the following policy documents: the National Parks Act, Parks Canada’s Guiding Principles and Operational Policies, the Park Management Plan, the Alberta Municipal Government Act, the Banff Community Plan and/or the Incorporation Agreement.

4.1 The National Park Act

The National Park Act is the federal legislation guiding the creation and operation of national parks in Canada. According to section 4.1 of The National Parks Act “the national parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment, subject to this Act and the regulations, and the parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. Section 8.2 of the National Park Act states that “maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks”. Ecological integrity is later defined as “a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes.”
4.2 Banff National Park Management Plan

The *National Park Act* requires that each national park in Canada have a management plan, which must be revised every five years to reflect the most up-to-date policies and legislation of the government and be submitted for federal government review. The management plan outlines the core vision for the park including a long-term ecological vision for the park, as well as objectives and indicators for ecological integrity to serve as a framework for park planning. The core vision of the 2007 Banff National Park Management Plan states:

*Banff National Park reveals the majesty and wildness of the Rocky Mountains. It is a symbol of Canada, a place of great beauty, where nature is able to flourish and evolve. People from around the world participate in the life of the park, finding inspiration, enjoyment, livelihoods and understanding. Through their wisdom and foresight in protecting this small part of the planet, Canadians demonstrate leadership in forging healthy relationships between people and nature. Banff National Park is, above all else, a place of wonder, where the richness of life is respected and celebrated (Parks Canada, 2007).*

Key components of the 2007 Banff management plan include the following: limits on overnight accommodation/ski areas and day use of some areas, habitat restoration, management of key trails to enhance visitor experience and minimize impact, ensure environmental assessment practices are of the highest standard, public participation and engagement. The 2012 draft management plan for the first time suggests a need to increase visitors to the park; a proposal that has raised questions again mandates and ecological integrity.

4.3 Community Plan

Section 33 of *The National Park Act* outlines the requirement for a Community Plan for each community located with a national park. A Community Plan for a park community must be consistent with the larger Management Plan for the park and include a strategy to manage growth within the park community. The 2007 Banff Community Plan is the primary planning document for the Town, and also serves as the Municipal Development Plan as required by the Alberta Municipal Government Act. The Banff Community Plan details a particular vision and development plan for the park based on a series of goals, objectives and indicators. The Community Plan outlines specific commercial development goals for the town including remaining competitive with other worldwide visitor destinations, providing a mix of commercial services that meet the long-term needs of visitors and residents and ensuring that commercial development reflects the role of the Town as a visitor centre while upholding national park values. Commercial development objectives include maintaining a commercial development annual growth rate of 1.5 percent maximum, monitoring the mix of chain and independent retailers to ensure community character is maintained, and promoting economic diversification that is appropriate in a national park.

One of the most important elements of the National Park Community Plans is the No Net Negative Environmental Impact (3NEI) requirement. It is a plan to ensure that the cumulative impact of development decisions is positive for the ecological well being of the park. This is a key component of the ecological integrity mandate. Elements of 3NEI for Banff include shared responsibility (government, communities, visitors, private sector and residents), the precautionary principle (taking precautions to prevent harm to the public), establishing baseline knowledge, and identifying targets, indicators, monitoring and evaluation procedures (Town of Banff 2007). Each year the town monitors and tracks progress on the Community Plan, and the town council then identifies action items to remediate any deficiencies/weaknesses.
4.4 Guiding Principles and Operational Policies

The Parks Canada *Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* includes an overarching vision for Parks Canada as a whole. The Preface of the document states, “efforts will be made to manage natural protected areas on an ecosystem basis, while meeting compatible social and economic needs, and maintaining the areas in a natural state.” As outlined in the Guiding Principles, while Parks Canada “does not have a direct mandate for tourism, it does have a part to play in recognizing and supporting tourism's place in presenting an image of Canada to visitors, in helping to maintain a sound and prosperous economy, and in fostering sustainable development that benefits local communities.” According to the Guiding Principles:

*The challenge for Parks Canada is to maintain the ecological integrity of the parks while providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education. This requires the careful protection of the natural features and processes for which each park is established, a key component of which is the fostering of public awareness of the value of safeguarding representative natural landscapes in the national parks system. National parks cannot sustain all the types of activities and development that a broad range of visitors might desire. Generally, access and services that relate directly to the objective for national parks will be provided within the parks, while a broader range of needs will be met in the surrounding region. The cooperation of tourism and other sectors will be essential to help establish the appropriate balance of services and facilities on a regional basis (Parks Canada, 1994).*

4.5 Incorporation Agreement

On January 1, 1990 through an agreement between the federal government and Alberta, the right to elect a local government was granted to the town of Banff. Under this agreement an elected Council now administers the town, although the federal government is still the authority on planning, land use, development and environmental issues. The relevant policies and legislation state that: 1) the town community plan will provide for a balanced community whose permanent population will not exceed 10,000 people. By-laws will address the protection of heritage buildings, streetscapes and architectural designs: 2) the purpose and objectives of the town will be stated in the *Incorporation Agreement*, and these will be integrated into the park’s management plan; 3) the municipal government will be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the town. Parks Canada will work closely with the town on planning, visitor services, regional initiatives, land use and environmental issues, 4) the town boundaries will not expand; 5) the town will continue to show leadership in practicing environmental stewardship; and 6) Parks Canada will work with the Town to develop a working model for managing types and levels of visitor services within the community.

The purposes of the Town, as set out by the Town of Banff Incorporation Agreement and the Banff National Park Management are:

- To maintain the townsite as part of the World Heritage Site;
- To serve, as its primary function, as a centre for visitors to the Park and to provide such visitors with accommodation and other goods and services;
- To provide the widest possible range of interpretive and orientation services to Park visitors;
- To maintain a community character which is consistent with and reflects the surrounding environment; and
- To provide a comfortable living community for those persons who need to reside in the townsite in order to achieve its primary function (Canada, 1998)
5. The Business Sector in Banff

The business sector in Banff is wide-ranging, including services, tourism, accommodations, dining and goods. In 2013 municipal tax revenue in Banff totaled $13.1 million and the town received $3.5 million from business licenses. Foreign workers are an important element of the Banff business environment, with 1375 temporary foreign workers in Banff in 2011, primarily in the tourism sector. Within the population of Banff, 94.9% are employed in service industries, and 85.9% work locally, reflecting the need to reside mandate (Bow Valley College, n.d.)

What is the attraction for people to set up a business? When asked why they decided to work in Banff, 36.1% of survey respondents indicated that it was for the recreation opportunities or to be near nature, while just 21.3% indicated that it was because it was a good business opportunity. Additionally, 20.4% of the respondents were already a resident of Banff when they decided to open a business.

Shopping, dancing and fine dining are not typically activities associated with a national park environment, so how does the business community of Banff fit into the larger national park? The pressure for parks to pay for themselves and for conservation initiatives tends to encourage further tourism expansion and economic development. The environmental impact is related to the scale and intensity of the activity; “... in a democratic and pluralistic society, where established orders are increasingly called into question, the pressing issue may not be what to do, but rather how to make decisions and set standards and policies to ensure the stewardship and sustainable “enjoyment” of our national parks by present and future generations” (Jamal, 1998).

Tourism is typically viewed as the economic sector most compatible with sustainable development and national parks in particular (Jamal and Eyre, 2003) and certainly one of the most important roles of businesses in Banff is tourism. The town of Banff and in particular the commercial sector plays an important role within the park. Government surveys have shown that almost 80% of the people who visit the park visit the downtown commercial district at least once during their stay (Parks Canada, 2007).

Whether the business organizes recreation opportunities, sells goods and sundries to visitors, provides needed services for residents who work in tourism, or helps to pass the time, businesses in Banff are by and large linked to tourism. When asked specifically about the primary role of businesses in the park, 27.7% of the business respondents to the survey indicated that it was to improve the visitor experience, and 9.2% indicated it was to provide services to residents; although many indicated that both were important “Banff businesses are located in a community of people. The park is around us. Our priorities are to the community: after that, and not too far after, the visitors. People were here before it was declared a park”. Additional roles cited for business included attracting tourists (10%), and provide jobs (5.4%). Less than 1% of the survey respondents chose either generate revenue, or educate visitors about the environment as the primary role of businesses in the park, although in the qualitative comments these roles were highlighted as being important.

In addition to tourism, businesses can help to foster a greater sense of community within the park. One of the unique characteristics of Banff National Park is that there is a vibrant town community within the boundaries of the park, and the tourism sector plays an important role in supporting and nurturing that sense of community. Many small towns struggle to maintain a sense of community identity, particularly in the face of expanding franchises. With a captive tourist market and limited competition, Banff may be a particularly desirable location for chains such as coffee shops and restaurants. For many however, part of the enduring charm of the mountain town is small local businesses owned and managed by those who share a passion for the wilderness. When asked about their opinions on new chain businesses such as coffee shops and bookstores
opening only 17.7% responded that there should be no limits and 3.2% said there were not enough. In contrast, 12.9% said they should not be allowed, 57.3% indicated that a few are okay but there should be limits, and 8.9% said it was just right as it is now.

One of the themes that appeared consistently in the interviews and surveys was a love for wilderness and nature and a hope that visitors would feel the same way. One business owner commented, “Ideally we need visitors who stay longer and fewer day trippers who never leave the downtown”. Interestingly business owners in Banff see their operations as a small part of a larger whole, where visitors should be encouraged to connect with the non-commercial aspects of the park and engage with nature and wilderness.

While ‘need to reside’ legislation limits residents to those with a demonstrated need to live in the park, usually due to employment, there are ongoing concerns about the growth and type of commercial activity in the downtown area. One particular concern is whether or not the town should be self-contained in terms of services that are offered, or is it reasonable to expect that residents should have to travel to nearby urban centers such as Calgary to obtain basic services such as optometry. Further, to what degree should the town decide what businesses can operate and to what degree should market forces be allowed to play out? Many of these issues have not yet been resolved. Respondents indicated that tourists are the most important demographic served; 55.5% indicated visitors, 38.7% of the respondents indicated that local residents were their primary customers, and just 2.8% responded that their primary customers were online.

One of the issues in terms of development within the park is thinking about commercial needs. If the current mix of businesses does not meet the needs of visitors and residents, as was suggested in some of the interviews, then there is an argument to be made for further expansion of the commercial areas of Banff. Of the survey respondents 77.6% indicated that they felt the current mix of businesses did in fact meet the needs of visitors. Only 11.2% of the respondents felt that the current mix of businesses did not meet residents’ needs, with 68.4% indicating that they felt the current mix of businesses met the needs of the residents. While those needs may be met, there is always an issue of balance between the two. One business survey respondent indicated “the main problem is one of balancing the needs of the residents and the needs of the visitors while getting Parks Canada to help”.

6. Commercialization Concerns

It is clear that business and municipal decisions are subject to a unique level of federal government oversight; as stated in the Management Plan “The federal government is the ultimate authority on questions of planning, land use, development, and environmental issues” in Banff National Park. One environmental group, while supportive of the ecological integrity regulations commented “Banff isn’t going to rise or fall on the size of the toilets in McDonald’s” in reference to the idea that sometimes it is easy to get caught up in small development details rather than focusing on the larger issue of ecological integrity.

The Banff “Message”

Interview subjects representing every sector raised concerns about the message that is promoted about Banff and in particular the focus on the commercial amenities. As one scientist commented “Banff is not just a party. There is a difference between having a raucous good time, and having a national park experience. Visitors to Banff should get a national park experience”. Another concern is that both businesses and the park are promoted using icons such as bears that are presented out of context. As a government official commented, “society is ecologically illiterate”, and as such people arrive in Banff expecting to see bears on every roadside and to be able to “climb
every mountain”. There is a pressing need to manage visitor expectations before they get to the park. These are unrealistic expectations and set visitors up for a disappointing visitor experience. The importance of an appropriate message was also raised for seasonal workers who do not necessarily understand what it means to live and work in a national park. As one environmental organization pointed out, one of the great ironies of Banff National Park is that the information center is in the town rather than at the front gates. He argued that if you want to educate people you need to “catch people where they are, for example at the front door of the park”.

Interview subjects across sectors talked about the importance of reaching out to the aging population, new Canadians from other countries, as well as youth, as well as the challenges of attracting them to the park. According to many of the survey respondents, the business sector is uniquely poised to help attract many of these groups, however regulations can be an impediment to creating new and innovative park activities. For aging populations with mobility concerns, so-called “front country” activities are particularly important – amenities such as nice accommodations, group tours, and paved trails near the town are important to this sector. New Canadians who did not grow up with a national park tradition may need different incentives to visit the park. A Parks Canada official for example discussed growing use of previously under-utilized day use areas (e.g. picnic areas) by new Canadians using the park for extended family gatherings rather than traditional park activities such as hiking and camping. If visitor numbers and satisfaction are important, and based on the draft 2012 Banff Management Plan they are, then businesses and park administrators must find a way to support the visitors.

As one town official commented “we need to make national parks relevant to Canadians, but we also need to get them here. And when they are here, we need to make sure that the town is not the soul center of their experience.” Many of the interview participants from the business sector agreed with this sentiment, and expressed concern about how Banff can market itself appropriately, maintain ecological integrity and at the same time still compete on the global tourism market. Environmental regulations have limited expansion of the ski resorts in Banff for example, and now they cannot compete with the ski resorts in places such as Whistler, British Columbia which are not restricted by national park legislation.

Can activities like rock concerts and celebrity golf tournaments be compatible with the national park mission? Some respondents, such as local government officials and business representatives said unequivocally yes. Others, such as Parks Canada gave a cautious maybe. And others, such as many of the environmental groups and scientists gave a definitive no.

7. Unique Challenges for Businesses in National Parks

The regulatory environment in Banff National Park is complex as it requires not only compliance with traditional business laws and rules, but additional restrictions and obligation in terms of the environmental integrity mandate. Based on the survey results, businesses are not against environmental regulations, with only 4.1% indicating that they are harmful for businesses, 59.5% choosing a neutral position and 23.1% going so far as to say that environmental regulations actually help businesses in Banff. During the interviews a number of subjects indicated that environmental practices helped to reduce costs, and were a way to create a unique ‘niche’ in the competitive global tourism market.

The regulatory environment does however pose some challenges for business operations. During interviews and in open ended survey responses, many study participants commented that there are unique challenges to running a business in Banff National Park, with 70.6% commenting that it was more difficult, and just 17.5% saying there was no difference and 3.2% indicating it was easier. The most commonly cited reason for why it is more difficult to run a business in Banff was
the amount of bureaucratic regulations and restrictions. For example, one survey respondent commented “development restrictions make it more costly to expand a business in Banff than elsewhere”. Furthermore, the “finite property means increased rents, limited housing options which limit long term staff being able to afford purchasing property which leads to difficulties in long term staff retention. Issues of market were also mentioned as a concern “in my case, the market is too small to improve the business return and to have consistency”. Staff turnover and the lack of trained staff were also concerns, as owners “must rely on transient youth for employees”. Regulation costs were also cited, “it is more difficult mostly due to the very restrictive Parks Canada regulations regarding development”. Also, “lease/concession costs are higher inside the park. Official Languages Act and other onerous federal requirements are hoops and barriers to improving operations,” and it is more difficult because of “specific regulations regarding signage, restoration of existing buildings, building specifications, utility usage and costs”.

It is interesting that while there is a formal commitment of environmental protection and conservation expressed in many of these regulations, interpretation and implementation can be highly subjective and may lack measurable metrics. For example, while there is strong support of the idea of environmental business practices, the ways in which those practices are put into practice vary greatly. Of the 102 respondents who answered the open-ended question about environmental business practices all of them indicated that they recycled, however very few of them indicated that they did much more. A few “green” business practices included paperless offices, monitoring water use/conservation, composting, bio-friendly cleaning products, energy efficient lighting, sustainable cutlery for restaurant take out, turning down heating, using recycled packaging and bags, using dying trees for fireplaces, encouraging biking/walking for transportation, energy efficient equipment, bio-diesel, environmental committees at work, noise and light pollution reduction, and educating visitors. One of the most striking findings of the research is how few businesses are doing innovative sustainable practices. Walking to work may be environmentally friendly, but in Banff it is also more convenient and practical given the lack of parking in the commercial area.

A few businesses have tried to position themselves as environmental stewards. As one survey respondent suggested, the business community should “utilize the unique surroundings to benefit visitors in a sustainable manner. The natural environment can be a platform for personal, professional, national issues and spiritual exploration that many never stop/pause to address in their regular world”.

When asked about the most significant challenges facing Banff National Park, the most frequent responses were centered on affordable housing, the need for more visitors and social concerns. When asked about the biggest problems facing Banff National Park, survey respondents indicated affordable housing (50%), need for more visitors (29.4%), drugs (22.2%), alcohol (20.6%), poor transportation planning (19%), poor infrastructure (18.3%), climate change (9.5%) and crime (4%).

One of the biggest challenges for businesses trying to recruit a seasonal workforce is the lack of affordable housing, an issue that was brought up in many of the interviews. Because of the restrictions on building and the ‘need to reside’ legislation, there is an extreme housing shortage particularly for seasonal workers. During the summer of 2007 a campground in nearby Canmore was fully booked for the season by summer workers with nowhere else to live. Local hostels are also stretched to capacity with long-term residents who are seasonal employees, which in turn limits the availability of budget accommodations for visitors. Reports of workers renting closets or living four people in a studio apartment are not uncommon. The affordable housing issue is directly linked to development restrictions to protect the natural environment. In response to high staff turnover at the municipal government due to high housing prices (11 of 18 employees quit because of housing prices), the Town will now provide a matching down payment loan of $30,000 to full-
time staff after one year of employment. The non-profit Banff Housing Corporation is a non-profit that has built 163 family housing units for home ownership in town which were sold to residents at below-market cost through a sublease arrangement whereby the Housing Corporation retains an equity share to try to support professionals and families in Banff. As one survey respondent commented, “the demographics of Banff residents are simply unsustainable. We need an infusion of the next generation of young professionals and young families to both energize the community and bring innovation to programs and services”.

Interestingly, within the national park there are some of the same social concerns experienced by large urban centers such as drugs and alcohol. These social issues become increasingly complex in an environment such as Banff. Drugs and alcohol combined with adventure sports, mountainous terrain and harsh weather are a hazardous combination.

While the academic debate continues over the impact of corporate environmental protection on business objectives, that controversy is mitigated somewhat in Banff, because the very existence of the park, and as a result the business community, is dependent upon a protected park environment, thereby altering the incentives for businesses to pursue environmental business strategies. Business and nature are intimately related in Banff. Tourists visit and return because of the clear vistas, stunning views and abundant wildlife. Businesses in Banff expressed a number of concerns about the threats to the local environment including changes to adjacent land use such as mining, agriculture, transportation, logging and urban development which have secondary effects on the park. A number of survey respondents raised concerns that logging activities in British Columbia and ranching and tourism in Alberta fragment habitat. Similarly there are concerns about the downstream effects of air and water pollution. Communities outside the boundaries of the park do not fall under the same requirements as Banff. During the interviews environmental organizations and government representatives specifically cited the development boom in the neighboring town of Canmore as a potential threat to the vitality of the greater ecosystem, and a number of businesses concurred in the qualitative comments of the surveys.

8. How Others See the Business Sector in Banff

Many of the environmental organizations interviewed for this study expressed concern about the impact of commercial and tourist activity in the park. While the government has expressly limited both the amount and type of development within the park, there are still those who feel that development should be further restricted. Some argue that there is no need to implement additional controls; as the town’s current boundaries are fixed by an act of Parliament, no new land can be zoned for development, and the town’s land-use bylaw, which is being revised as part of the new community plan already restricts buildings to a height of no more than three floors. There is concern by some stakeholders that the park’s carrying capacity or ability to accommodate more people without resource loss may eventually be exceeded with devastating consequences for the ecosystem.

One environmental group indicated that Banff was pushing the edge of how far one can exploit a national park, however the situation is better than it used to be and at this point environmentalists have to accept the reality of the town and the highway. One environmental group in Calgary commented, “the footprint of the national park community exceeds the boundaries of the park,” which is a concern. Commercialization “should not be a way to finance parks, parks are a public good.” However as one business owner commented, “if government isn’t going to pay for the parks, then businesses have to fill the gap. We bring in visitors, we keep them here longer and we pay taxes.” A scientist in Calgary commented that at this point “if you keep the development out of the park, it just moves to [nearby] Canmore which means wildlife corridors are still disrupted”.

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9. Business Strategies in Banff

Revell et al. (2010) suggested a number of very general environmental strategies for small and medium sized businesses in the United Kingdom, which can be applied to Banff. They suggest that the combination of environmental regulations, market-based instruments (e.g. taxes and subsidies), infrastructure developments (e.g. public transportation investments), local networks to provide support for business owners, and voluntary initiatives (e.g. best practices and eco-labeling) can be an effective way to facilitate change (Revell, Stokes et al. 2010). Of course there are other options beyond those identified by Revell, Stokes et al., including command and control or direct regulations, however those extend beyond the confines of this research.

Survey and interview participants had many suggestions, both large and small for Banff National Park that in line with the strategies discussed above. In order to address regulatory concerns for businesses in the park, numerous study participants suggested stakeholder meetings to address regulatory challenges and to encourage businesses to pool information. With growing frustration over the regulatory burden on businesses, such strategies would help the business community to have a stronger voice in government decision-making.

Similarly, the relationship between environmental interests and business interests in Banff is delicate and precarious. Running a business in Banff presents unique challenges, but also exciting opportunities (Orr 2011). The business community of Banff has the potential to become global leaders in innovative environmental business strategies, and partnering with local environmental organizations would be one way to do that, and at the same improve the relationship between the different interests. One possibility would be the development of an “environmental stewardship” program that would recognize local businesses that meet certain environmental targets.

A number of strategies were proposed to help businesses in Banff strengthen their market position, while at the same time maintaining the important balance for environmental conservation. For example, the aging baby boomer population is a rich market to tap into for future growth, and businesses have a key role to play in providing alternatives for those with mobility concerns such as restaurants with scenic views or coach tours through the park. Positioning Banff as an accessible vacation destination through the support of local businesses is an opportunity to generate visitor revenue while still maintaining a commitment to conservation values.

Businesses in Banff have yet to capitalize on environmental strategies that can simultaneously reduce environmental impacts, but also create marketing potential and in many cases reduce costs. For example a Banff-branded reusable shopping bag featuring environmental information would generate revenue for the parks, eliminate (or reduce) the cost of buying bags for local businesses and reduce waste.
10. Conclusion

Concern about economic development in Banff is not new. The Alpine Club and the National Parks Association actively campaigned against hydroelectric development in the parks from 1910-1930. In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental groups opposed urbanization in the parks, new ski development, new hotels, a twinned highways, and proposals for larger town sites (Bella 1987). In contrast to the early emphasis on economic development and expansion, policies at every level of government are now focused on ecological integrity and sustainable development. There is a continued effort to try to mitigate the negative repercussion from past policies such as construction of reservoirs, and the damming of rivers and lakes that have affected aquatic resources (Parks Canada 2007).

While there are significant concerns about the impact of retail stores and other commercial activity on the national park environment, businesses in Banff have created a niche for themselves, generating tax revenue, attracting visitors, offering services, and providing additional educational and tourist services to complement the work of Parks Canada. Within the legislation there is a fundamental tension between these competing constructs: between the park as economic driver and parks as a system to be managed/controlled and parks as untamed wilderness.

One of the overarching themes of this research is the challenge of making parks relevant to today’s society. As one survey respondent indicated “parks are becoming non-relevant, and if they’re not relevant, than parks are unsustainable”. While use is critically important from economic and political standpoints; nonuse values such as bequest values, altruistic values and existence values are also important. National parks are important to society, even for those who may never get the opportunity to enjoy them in person. Somehow Banff National Park must find a way to balance the need for ecological integrity, and at the same time engage with society. As one town official commented, “If you keep doing what you’re doing, you keep getting what you’re getting”.

As a major stakeholder in the national park, Banff businesses face additional challenges and opportunities. Many of the business strategies suggested here, do not have a financial incentive, however many would argue that there is a unique imperative for businesses in Banff to become leaders in sustainability even if it does not always contribute to the profit motive. It can be theorized however, that because of the “live to work” policy of Banff National Park and policies which support local business ownership, business owners have a personal investment in protection of the park, in contrast to other communities on protected land where land tenure policies have historically been much more tenuous for business owners and operators. From a larger perspective, creating and promoting a ‘sustainability community’ where businesses and residents and government are truly leaders and stewards of environmental action is both important for protecting the park, and also attractive to those likely to vacation in a national park. Business respondents seem to generally support the regulatory framework of Banff National Park.

Recreational pressure on conservation areas is increasing worldwide, which increases both the actual and potential environmental consequences and also the management effort and the investment required to control impacts and maintain the primary conservation function of the areas concerned. Options include either hardening the environment against visitor impacts or influencing visitor numbers and behaviors so that impacts are kept within limits. It is important to remember that national parks exist not only for ecological protection, but also for the enjoyment, recreation and enlightenment of present and future generations. It is through public exposure to national parks that their existence is valued by the citizenry at large. This enjoyment however, must occur on the park’s terms, not on those of the visitors.
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