



The Ontario Archaeological Society Inc.
encouraging the ethical practice of archaeology

June 02, 2012

To: Prime Minister Stephen Harper
Government of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

RE: Significant Cuts to Parks Canada

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the Ontario Archaeological Society, I would like add our voice to the growing number of provincial, national, and international voices decrying your government's decision to critically reduce the function of Parks Canada in this country. Parks Canada's mandate, to celebrate, educate, care for and protect the significant heritage places and remains of Canada, was a daunting and challenging one for a country as large and as diverse as this. But for over a century Parks Canada has not just met but excelled in meeting this mandate. It had become a world leader in this field, and, indeed, was THE world leader in the management of archaeological sites and cultural remains of especially the recent past. Their standards, guides, advice and overall leadership was sought and emulated around the world.

The recent decision of your government to disproportionately cut Parks Canada staff and operations is a regrettable act that will have irreversible impacts on the state of Canada's heritage. We note that archaeological offices were significantly cut, so that, for example, all but one limited duties archaeological position will remain in the Ontario office, down from 7 archaeology staff. And similar deep cuts are occurring across the country. This drastic reduction in capacity means the end of any kind of effective archaeological programming and management, as remaining staff will not have the capacity or in house expertise to properly manage or react to threats to Canada's archaeological heritage on Parks properties. Meanwhile, existing archaeological collections will be pulled from regional centres and warehoused in the National Capitol region. Current rhetoric that Parks Canada's mandates will continue to be served is difficult to accept, given this overall loss in capacity.

Others have pointed out the significant impact this and other cuts will have to the economic contribution Parks Canada makes across the country – which Minister Kent reported on just a few short months ago, ironically at the same time that he announced admission fees to Canada's parks and

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historic sites would be frozen for a number of years. Others have also pointed out what these cuts mean to the loss of educating and instilling in Canadians and people from abroad an appreciation of the rich, diverse and complex heritage that is this place – ironic that as the Federal government moves to celebrate the bicentennial of the War of 1812, many of the historic sites commemorating that important part of our past will be closed more often and less able to interpret that regional heritage to the visiting public and local residents.

We would also add that the logic and vision for how Parks heritage and archaeological programs will operate and look like in the aftermath of this decision remains largely unknown. Is there any real commitment to continue to care for the archaeological heritage on Federal parks land? If there is, how will, for example, Parks Canada be able to respond to development pressures that can impact archaeological deposits within parks and sites, when there are no staff to mount either exploratory assessments or salvage excavations? How will Parks Canada respond to the inevitability, then, of accidental impacts when there is simply no way now for archaeological staff to respond? And what will become of continuing materials recovered from Parks Canada archaeological sites (either through impact or investigation) – will they be identified and analyzed at the site, or need to be immediately shipped to the warehouse to be incorporated with existing collections? And what kind of accessibility will there be at the warehouse, or capacity to service remote and regional needs to access that heritage?

These questions underscore the absence of a vision, at least one that has been shared beyond the doors of upper management at Parks Canada. Can we get a commitment from your government that it still commits to ensuring good management and preservation of its archaeological heritage? And will archaeological, heritage, community and First Nation groups be consulted on how Parks Canada will continue to meet its core mandates, and what the operational policies and commitments will be for the centralized materials warehouse? A broader, community oversight will be the only way any degree of confidence can be re instilled into Parks Canada meeting core mandates at this point.

A last important dimension of these cuts that we wish to remind you is that much of Canada's archaeological heritage is the material past of the First Nations of this land. This is a living heritage, and these communities have demonstrated a strong concern and desire to see that heritage is managed respectfully and carefully. This is underscored by the fact that major First Nations issues that arose in Ontario, for example, including Ipperwash and Caledonia, included strong concerns for burials and archaeological remains. Indeed, Canada has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure Aboriginal heritage is managed properly on behalf of our First Nations, something that seems will be difficult to achieve given recent drastic cuts. We hope your government has at least been speaking to Canada's First Nations on how you will continue to ensure respectful care of their heritage on Federal lands. We would point out that this obligation of the Crown to the Aboriginal archaeological heritage of this land has been well respected in most provinces. Indeed, in Ontario, successive provincial governments – including the Mike Harris Conservative government – have ensured for and even expanded on the good management of Ontario's Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal archaeological heritage. We expect your government to sustain no less a similar level of good management for this vital record of our collective past.

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We join with the Canadian Archaeological Association, Association des Archéologues du Québec, the Nova Scotia Archaeological Society, Laval University, the Society for American Archaeology, and the Society for Historical Archaeology, along with the many other voices who have called on or will be calling on the Federal government to rescind these disproportionate cuts which otherwise will contribute to an immeasurable loss to Canada's heritage and our ability to learn from that heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neal Ferris', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Neal Ferris, President
The Ontario Archaeological Society

cc. Hon. Peter Kent, Minister of the Environment
Hon. James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage
Hon. John Duncan, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

Mr. Alan Latourelle, Chief Executive Officer, Parks Canada

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