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Forges du Saint-Maurice

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2020



2020

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National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

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Note to readers

The health and safety of visitors, employees and all Canadians are of the utmost importance. Parks Canada is following the advice and guidance of public health experts to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing Canadians to experience Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Parks Canada acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may have unforeseeable impacts on the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan. Parks Canada will inform Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public of any such impacts through its annual implementation update on the implementation of this plan.

For more information about the management plan or about

FORGES DU SAINT-MAURICE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA:

Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site
10 000 boulevard des Forges
Trois-Rivières QC G9C 1B1

Tel: 819-378-5116
Email: pc.forges.pc@canada.ca
<https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/qc/saintmaurice>

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Foreword



As the steward of Canada’s national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas, Parks Canada is committed to protecting and restoring the ecological and commemorative integrity of protected heritage areas from coast to coast to coast.

We invite and welcome all Canadians to these sites to discover nature and connect with our country’s history.

We are proud to collaborate with Indigenous partners, local and regional residents and stakeholders, visitors past and present, and with interested people and parties from across the country. Together, we strengthen the connection that Canadians have with their natural and cultural heritage.

We are committed to work with, learn from, and share leadership with Indigenous peoples and elders who have walked the land since time immemorial and who have made possible the creation of so many protected places.

As the key accountability documents for the management of heritage places, management plans are developed through extensive consultation. These plans articulate long-term visions, set strategic management directions and establish objectives for Parks Canada places.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the development of this management plan for their contributions and their commitment to the future of this national treasure. I am pleased to approve the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan.

Ron Hallman
President & Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada

Recommendations

Recommended by:

Andrew Campbell
Senior Vice-President, Operations
Parks Canada

Nadine Blackburn
Field Unit Superintendent
La Mauricie and Western Quebec Field Unit
Parks Canada

Executive Summary

The Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site of Canada is located in Mauricie, Quebec at the northern end of the city of Trois-Rivières. The site was chosen to build forges starting in 1730 due to its terrain, hydrography and proximity to raw materials. Known as the cradle of the Canadian iron and steel industry, the site fulfilled its industrial purpose until 1883. Today, archaeological vestiges and museum facilities allow visitors to learn about the historic significance of this site. Its rich biodiversity, proximity to the Saint-Maurice River and vast grassy areas make it an enchanting natural setting for contemplation and exploration. A subterranean source of water emitting methane, commonly referred to as “Devil’s Fountain”, is considered to be a sacred fire by the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw community. In the present management plan, two key strategies are presented that aim to guide the historic site’s management over the next decade.

Key strategy 1: A major attraction for the community and for the tourist offer of la Mauricie

This strategy calls for a revitalized, more lively, and diversified service offer at the national historic site. Collaboration with partners, Indigenous communities as well as local and regional stakeholders will be critical in implementing this strategy. The proposed approach will attract more visitors, including families and groups from the region. It will also maintain interest from adult markets that presently frequent the site.

The strategy aims to:

- Collaboratively vitalize, renew and diversify the activity offer to attract new markets and retain the site’s traditional audience.
- Have the site become recognized as a gathering place for community use.
- Offer a joint, high-profile event or activity.
- Strengthen the site’s positioning with the local and regional tourism industry, partners and the community.
- Work with Indigenous communities connected to the site, in particular the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw, to honour and introduce their culture and historical contributions to the public.

Key strategy 2: A national historic site dedicated to cultural and natural heritage protection and promotion

This strategy underscores Parks Canada’s desire to continue conservation efforts for cultural resources and the natural environment. Interpretive activities can help raise public awareness of the variety and importance of cultural and natural attractions at the national historic site while showcasing Parks Canada’s actions to preserve them.

The strategy aims to:

- Maintain or improve the overall state of cultural resource conservation.
- Protect and showcase the cultural landscape and natural environments.
- Offer public activities on the site’s cultural and natural attractions and that underscore Parks Canada’s conservation efforts.
- Increase awareness and take more into account the cultural and spiritual heritage of the First Nations with connections to the territory of the national historic site. Parks Canada works with them, especially the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw, to enable them to perpetuate and pass on their knowledge.

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1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and those national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the President & Chief Executive Officer of the Parks Canada Agency, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

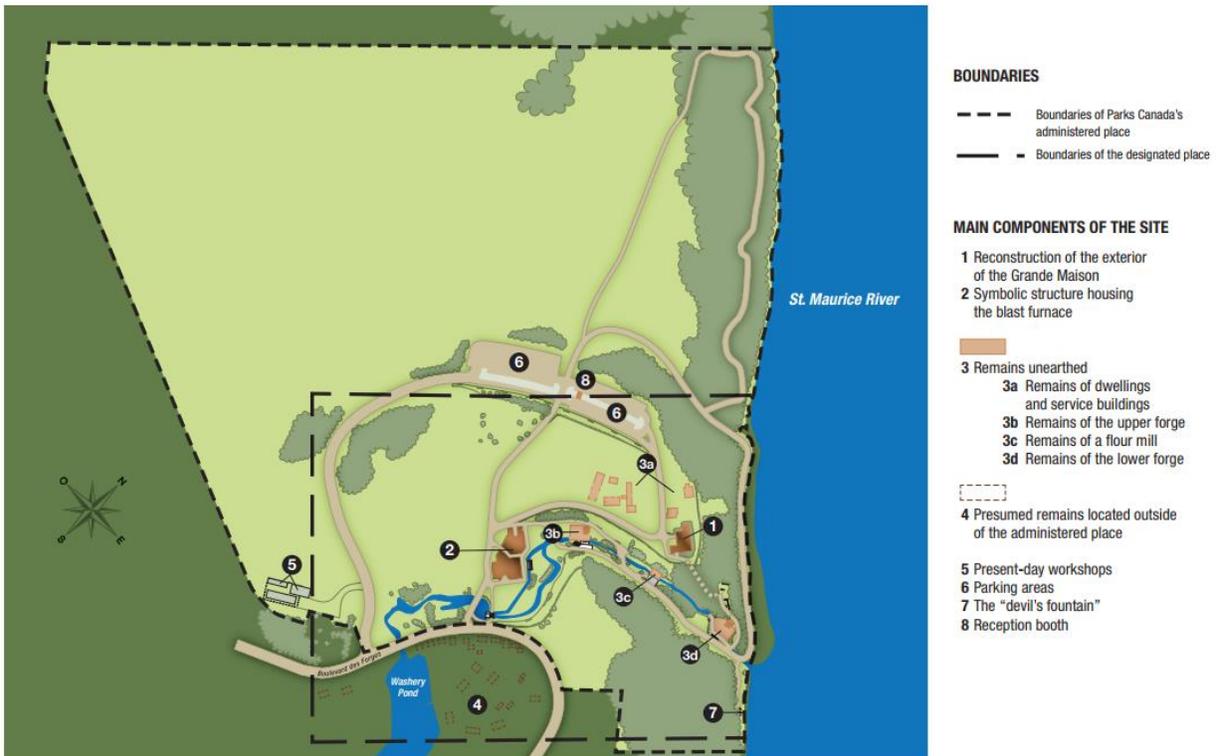
Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site in years to come.

Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Forges-du-Saint-Maurice National Historic Site



2.0 Significance of the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site

The Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site is located in Quebec's Mauricie region, halfway between Montréal and Québec City. The site is located within the city limits of Trois-Rivières, about 15 km north of the downtown core.

It is bordered by the impressive Saint-Maurice River, with several streams cutting through, and served as an ideal site to build forges due to the main stream's unique hydrographic features and terrain. Built in 1730 by François Poulin de Francheville, the forges remained in operation until 1883.

Known as the cradle of the Canadian iron and steel industry, the Forges du Saint-Maurice became a national historic site in 1920.

The site was designated for the following reasons:

- *The Forges du Saint-Maurice, established in 1730, served as the main industry under the French regime.*
- *The creation of the Forges du Saint-Maurice marked the beginning of the Canadian iron and steel industry and established the country's first industrial community.*
- *The Forges du Saint-Maurice closed in 1883 after more than 150 years in operation.*

The site underwent several archaeological excavations in the 1970s and 1980s. The vestiges discovered revealed industrial and domestic elements of a typical old ironworks of European origin dating back to the late 15th century.

Parks Canada took over the site in 1973 and has since taken steps to develop and preserve it. In 1985, the massive metallic structure protecting the remains of the blast furnace and containing one of the exhibits was inaugurated. In 1990, the *Grande Maison* (the ironmaster's house) was rebuilt to be used as the main visitor reception area.

The place designated as having national historic significance refers to the 23-hectare area formerly occupied by the old industrial village. The site administered by Parks Canada is larger and covers some 60 hectares. It consists of a large grassy terrace (called the high plateau), full of archaeological vestiges and trails. The site includes a reproduction of the Grande Maison, as well as the metallic structure that protects the remains of the blast furnace and its storage sheds. The terrace is bordered to the east by a ravine that runs down to the shores of the Saint-Maurice River. Visitors can discover the vestiges of the lower forge and an area where methane emissions cause the water to ignite, known locally as the "Devil's Fountain." This area is considered a sacred fire by some Indigenous communities, including members of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw community.

The site tour begins with exhibitions at the Grande Maison, then continues after a short walk along a path passing by archaeological vestiges to exhibitions of the blast furnace. From there, visitors can follow a trail that winds down the ravine to the banks of the Saint-Maurice River, and see the vestiges of the lower forge and the "Devil's Fountain."

As they walk the trails along the Saint-Maurice River or on the grassy high plateau, visitors can finally enjoy the site's natural beauty, which also plays an important role in regional biodiversity.

3.0 Planning Context

The national historic site is open to the general public from late June to early September. During this time, 70% of individual visitors are adults. The site hosts school groups in the spring and fall, and cruise passengers from September to October.

Several improvements have been added to the national historic site in recent years, including the installation of interactive terminals and outdoor interpretive panels, the replacement of outdoor furniture, and the restoration of the Grande Maison and other vestiges, including the lower forge's impressive chimney.

The site maintains close ties with the community and works with several partners. For example, the interpretive panels were installed as part of a project with Collège Laflèche in Trois-Rivières. The national historic site also works with several regional organizations, including Culture Mauricie, Tourisme Trois-Rivières, and Médiat-Muse and hosts annual events with its partners. Lastly, the national historic site team maintains a relationship and open dialogue with the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw community in northern Mauricie.

Some issues were raised during the management plan's development, such as:

- **Attendance below site potential:** Prior to 2012, the site averaged 15,000 visitors each year. Between 2012 and 2014, a shorter season and fewer events at the site resulted in a 50% drop in

traffic (14,350 visitors in 2012; 7,054 visitors in 2014). This number has since increased slightly to 8,147 visitors in 2016. In 2017, interest sparked by the 150th anniversary of Canadian confederation and free entry led 20,900 visitors to discover the site. This exceptional year shows that it would be possible to maximize the site's reception potential in order to increase its attendance.

- **The need to enliven the site:** This issue, partly related to the previous attendance issue, was raised during public consultations. According to the participants, the lack of animation of the place leads to disinterest on the part of the public. However, making outdoor visiting spaces entertaining is all the more challenging given the sheer size of the site.
- **Degradation of cultural resources and visitor reception facilities (parking lots, access roads, trails, etc.):** The national historic site has many cultural resources. Several are deteriorating despite Parks Canada's efforts. Such is the case for archaeological vestiges and metal objects. In recent years, Parks Canada has restored about 35% of the vestiges, but the vast majority of them continue to deteriorate and require conservation efforts and management of invasive vegetation. Visitor reception infrastructure (access roads, parking lots) are also in poor condition and—despite being safe and functional—reflect poorly on the site. Some nature trails have been closed as potential public safety risks due to several footbridges having structural deficiencies.
- **The need to recognize, honour and present Indigenous cultures having a history with the site:** Although to date there are no archaeological traces of occupation by Indigenous peoples, the Forges du Saint-Maurice site has cultural significance to some communities, especially the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw people. To date, no interpretive or commemorative activities have been implemented to recognize, honour and present Indigenous cultures and knowledge connected to the national historic site.

4.0 Vision

The vision below expresses the desired long-term state for the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site over fifteen years.

The Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site is a heritage site that shares and celebrates its rich and diverse history. Visitors can discover different historical, cultural and natural perspectives, including those of First Nation communities, which give the site its distinctiveness. Heritage resources, including cultural landscapes, archaeological vestiges and the natural environment are protected and showcased for the benefit of current and future generations.

As a full-fledged component of the region's culture and tourism offer, the site collaborates and conducts joint actions with various partners, Indigenous communities and stakeholders that in turn support Parks Canada and are involved in Forges du Saint-Maurice programming, activities and promotion.

As a friendly and welcoming destination, the site is a suitable place for gatherings that are enjoyed by the community. Visitors are charmed by the diversity and authenticity of the site's activities, history and cultural landscape. They feel a sense of attachment and do not hesitate to return to the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site to live new experiences.

5.0 Key Strategies

Key strategy 1: A major attraction for the community and for the la Mauricie regional tourism offer

The strategy will inject life into the historic site by diversifying the service offer and opportunities for visitor use. This approach aims to attract new markets, including families and regional groups, as well as foster a sense of belonging and ownership among the general public and local community. Located at the heart of the community, the site should be recognized as a space for learning and discovery, as well as a gathering place. To achieve this strategy, it is essential to work with partners, Indigenous communities and stakeholders on diversifying activities and enhancing the site's vibrancy. Holding a recurring high-profile event or activity will strengthen the site's role and attract local and regional tourism.

Objective 1.1: The national historic site stands out for its entertaining, evocative and original offer.

Targets

- By 2021, in-person experiences will improve by increasing visitor opportunities to participate in programmed activities.
- By 2021, promotion of visitor experiences at Forges du Saint-Maurice will improve.
- By 2022, a high-profile event will have been collaboratively implemented on a recurring basis.
- By 2023, three new activities that focus on the site's distinctiveness will have been offered and designed for target markets.

Objective 1.2: The site will be recognized as a gathering place and confer a sense of ownership to the community.

Targets

- Within one year, a plan to improve engagement with representatives of stakeholders, partners and community members will be implemented in order to have meetings on an annual basis.
- By 2022, public reception infrastructure conditions will have improved, making the site more appealing and facilitating community ownership.

Objective 1.3: The national historic site is integrated into regional and local tourism development.

Targets

- Every year, Parks Canada contributes to a regional promotion strategy, along with its tourism industry partners.
- Every year, activities and events, consistent with the site's character and purpose, are held in collaboration with partners and stakeholders.
- Within four years, attendance will have increased by 25% compared to 2018 (8,624 visitors in 2018).

Objective 1.4: Parks Canada works with Indigenous communities connected to the site to honour and present their cultures, knowledge and traditions to the public.

Targets

- Every year, a meeting will be held with Indigenous communities interested in the site.
- By 2025, activities or events will have been established in collaboration with Indigenous communities connected to the national historic site.

Key strategy 2: A national historic site dedicated to cultural and natural heritage protection and promotion

This strategy involves continuing efforts to conserve and showcase the cultural landscape, archaeological remains and objects of national historic significance. Natural environments will also receive special attention. Alternative approaches to landscape management could be developed to improve regional biodiversity while highlighting the site's cultural resources. Activities will be developed to raise public awareness of the national historic site's various cultural and natural attractions. These activities will also demonstrate Parks Canada's actions in conserving cultural and natural resources. Finally, the value of the place for the First Nations associated with it is better known and taken into account. This becomes, for the Indigenous communities linked to the national historic site, in particular the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw, a space for sharing traditional and spiritual knowledge.

Objective 2.1: Cultural resources conservation efforts continue.

Targets

- By 2023, a strategy to prioritize work on cultural resources is developed and implemented in consultation with the community.
- By 2028, the general state of archaeological vestiges and objects of national historic significance will have been stabilized or improved.

Objective 2.2: New activities will raise public awareness about the value of the national historic site's cultural and natural resources while also demonstrating Parks Canada's conservation leadership.

Target

- By 2025, three activities will have been implemented to raise public awareness about the importance of these resources and showcase Parks Canada's conservation efforts.

Objective 2.3: The cultural landscape is protected and developed to support the promotion of heritage resources.

Target

- By 2024, a cultural landscape management plan will have been developed and implemented.

Objective 2.4: The natural environment will have been recognized, protected, showcased and will contribute to the site's importance.

Targets

- By 2024, a management approach for the natural environment will have been implemented.
- By 2024, the action plan for species at risk will have been implemented to contribute to their recovery.

Objective 2.5: The heritage and spiritual value of the place for First Nations is better known and taken into account, and intergenerational learning is facilitated.

Targets

- At all times, the importance of the site for First Nations is taken into account in its management.
- By 2022, the site will become a place that facilitates the intergenerational learning of knowledge, know-how and traditions of the First Nations associated with it.

6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impact of its management measures on ecosystems and cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plans and Programs Proposals*, prepared by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, requires that a Strategic Environmental Assessment be submitted to the Cabinet or a minister for approval for all policies and plans considered to have a positive or negative environmental impact.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment was carried out for this management plan. It was shared with participants during consultations related to this management plan's development. The concerns raised were taken into account. The following paragraphs outline this assessment.

The strategies in the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site Management Plan will allow Canadians to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of the historic site, to strengthen the site's ties with the community and to preserve its heritage resources. Implementing these measures to achieve the objectives set out in the management plan should help protect the cultural resources and the commemorative integrity of the Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site.

Certain objectives, strategies and targets identified in the management plan are likely to have negative environmental effects. These include increased attendance and site use. The Strategic Environmental Assessment also identifies potential environmental impacts on the site's vegetation. These different impacts can be mitigated by following existing guidelines and by conducting impact assessments for projects, including new facilities, activities and events, as well as infrastructure maintenance and cultural resource conservation projects. These assessments will determine the effects on the site's valuable features and help minimize potential negative effects on cultural and natural resources, the visitor experience and relationships with different partners.

The management plan cannot determine whether it will significantly contribute to the goals in the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, but given Parks Canada's mandate, it will likely not contradict them. No significant negative environmental impact is expected following the implementation of the management plan.