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Gitwangak Battle Hill

National Historic Site of Canada

**Management
Statement**

2018



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Gitwangak
Battle Hill
National Historic Site of Canada

Management Statement

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GITWANGAK BATTLE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA MANAGEMENT STATEMENT, 2018.

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For more information about the management statement or about
GITWANGAK BATTLE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA:

GITWANGAK BATTLE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA
P.O. Box 37
Queen Charlotte, BC
V0T1S0

Tel: 250-559-8818, fax: 250-559-8366
Email: gitwangak-nhs@pc.gc.ca
www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/bc/gitwangak

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Foreword



Canada's national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas belong to all Canadians and offer truly Canadian experiences.

These special places make up one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and cultural heritage areas in the world.

The Government is committed to preserving our natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places and contributing to the recovery of species-at-risk. At the same time, we must continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities so that more Canadians can experience Parks Canada places and learn about our environment, history and culture.

This new management statement for Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada supports this vision.

Management statements are developed through extensive consultation and input from various people and organizations, including Indigenous peoples, local and regional residents, visitors and the dedicated team at Parks Canada.

National parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas are a priority for the Government of Canada. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this management statement for their commitment and spirit of co-operation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort and I am pleased to approve the Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada Management statement.

Catherine McKenna
*Minister of Environment and Climate Change and
Minister responsible for Parks Canada*

Recommendations

Recommended by:

Michael Nadler
*Acting Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada*

Trevor Swerdfager
*Senior Vice-President, Operations
Parks Canada*

Ernie Gladstone
*Field Unit Superintendent
Gwaii Haanas Field Unit
Parks Canada*

Introduction

The Parks Canada Agency manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic areas in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. This management statement outlines Parks Canada's management approach and objectives for Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada for the next 10 years. It replaces the 2005 Ta'awdzep Kitwanga Fort National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan.

Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site was designated a national historic site in 1971 to commemorate the significance of the eighteenth century Gitwangak hill top fort, and for the site's association with Gitwangak *adaawaḱ* (history) which recalls the epic battles of the legendary warrior Chief Nekt who fought to gain control of the network of lucrative trading trails from the Nass to the Kitimat Rivers. According to Gitwangak *adaawaḱ*, the defensive fortifications were constructed by Chief Nekt. The battle hill fortification contained five cedar-planked longhouses, constructed on the summit of a hill and enclosed by a palisade. Archaeological research suggests that the site had been occupied for at least a century when, around 1835, it was burned and abandoned.

In 1981 the National Historic Site designation was expanded to recognize the national historic significance of the Gitwangak *Xwtsaan* (totem poles) located about five kilometres south, in the First Nations community of Gitwangak, British Columbia. The poles are owned by the Gitwangak Band Council.

Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site is located in Kitwanga, British Columbia, adjacent to *Xdi Dax* (Kitwanga River), about five kilometres north of Gitwangak. It is a self-interpreted site, including a trail and tri-lingual interpretive panels that were developed with members of the Gitwangak First Nation and representatives of the Nekt family.

Originally, the site was recommended to the Minister for designation as "Fort Kitwanga" by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. In 2006, the site was officially renamed "Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site" at the request of the Gitwangak Band Council, the main point of contact for the First Nation at that time.

This current management statement has been developed with input and support from an advisory committee comprised of members of the Simiget'm Gitwangak Society (hereditary leaders). The Simiget'm Gitwangak Society was established in 2015 and is responsible for management of all lands, waters and resources within Gitwangak traditional territory outside the boundaries of the Gitwangak Reserve.

During the development of this management statement, the advisory committee requested the official name "Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site" be revised to "Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site". The change reflects the substitution of the Gitxsan word (*ta'awdzep*) for the English version (battle hill). While the process for renaming a national historic site is outside the authority of Parks Canada and this management statement, "Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site" will be used through the remainder of this document to reflect the intent for this process to be undertaken.

Management Objectives

The following section outlines the strategic direction for the management of Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site over the next 10 years. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of this management statement, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful.

Parks Canada will meet annually with the Simiget'm Gitwangak Society to seek input on work plans that will achieve the objectives of this management statement.

Building Relationships with the Gitwangak First Nation: Parks Canada respects Indigenous rights and building mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities is a priority for the Agency.

For the Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site, Parks Canada works with the Gitwangak First Nation to incorporate traditional knowledge, values and cultural heritage, and to ensure:

- The site is suitably protected.
- The reasons for the national significance of the Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site and the site's role in Canadian history are effectively communicated to the public.
- The site's heritage values are respected by all whose decisions or actions affect the site.
- The Gitwangak First Nation's *adaawaᓕ* associated with the national historic site is accurately and respectfully commemorated.

Parks Canada offers technical advice to the Gitwangak First Nation on the protection and presentation of the Gitwangak *Xwtsaan* (totem poles) located in Gitwangak.

Maintaining Relationships with Local Partners: Parks Canada works with the Simiget'm Gitwangak Society, Gitwangak Band Council and Kitwanga community association in the maintenance, presentation, and promotion of the site.

Cultural Resource Conservation: Parks Canada protects cultural resources at its heritage places in accordance with its *Cultural Resource Management Policy* (2013) and the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (2010). This includes basic monitoring of the state of cultural resources, and documentation of interventions at the national historic site. At Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site, management efforts also ensure:

- The open character of the historical landscape surrounding Ta'awdzep as well as the viewscape to and from the summit of Ta'awdzep is maintained.
- The natural and cultural resources of the designated place are not lost, impaired or threatened by human actions within or outside the site.
- All decisions concerning the protection and maintenance of the designated place are made in accordance with the principles of cultural resource management including:
 - understanding heritage value
 - sustainable conservation
 - benefits to Canadians.

Site Maintenance: Parks Canada maintains the property it administers so as to respect the site's heritage values and present a positive image to the public. Parks Canada provides annual site maintenance with a focus on visitor facilities and safety. Parks Canada works with the Simiget'm Gitwangak Society and local residents to ensure the site and its facilities are safe, clean and welcoming during the visitor season.

Public Appreciation and Promotion: Parks Canada provides information about the significance of Gitwangak Ta'awdzep National Historic Site on its website, and on the Canadian Register of Historic Places. In addition, Parks Canada offers a visitor brochure to complement trilingual interpretive panels located throughout the site, describing the traditional *adaawaᓕ* associated with the site.

Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on ecosystems and on cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* (2010) prepared by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, requires a strategic environmental assessment of all plans and policy submitted to the federal Cabinet or to a Minister for approval deemed to have important positive or negative environmental effects.

A strategic environmental assessment was undertaken on this management statement, and the management direction found within has been adjusted to respond to findings. The following is a summary of the environmental assessment:

Strategic environmental assessment methods were used to evaluate the environmental effects likely to arise from implementing the October 2016 draft management statement for Gitwagak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada. The management statement outlines Parks Canada's management approach and objectives for the site which support fulfilment of the Parks Canada Agency's mandate. The results of the strategic environmental assessment are briefly summarised here.

Objectives in the management statement focus on building relationships with the Gitwagak First Nation whose history and culture is central to the site; maintaining relationships with local partners; protecting the cultural resources and heritage places at the site; maintaining the site amenities and facilities; and promoting the site so the public better understands and appreciates the traditional stories and history associated with the site. Implementation of actions to fulfil the objectives in the management statement are expected to increase the level of cultural resource protection and commemorative integrity at Gitwagak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada. There are no important negative environmental effects anticipated from management statement implementation. All objectives proposed in the October 2016 draft management statement for Gitwagak Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada are consistent with Parks Canada policy, and the *Kitwanga Fort National Historic Site Commemorative Integrity Statement* (2000).

Individual projects undertaken to implement management statement objectives at the site will be evaluated to determine if an impact assessment is required under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act 2012*, or successor legislation. In instances where an impact assessment is required, no project work will be undertaken until the impact assessment is completed and Parks Canada has made a decision to proceed with the project. A more detailed strategic environmental assessment was undertaken for the 2005 Kitwanga Fort National Historic Site (now known as Gitwagak Battle Hill National Historic Site) Management Plan. The strategic environmental assessment identified environmental effects sources as well as suggested means to mitigate these effects. That document should be consulted prior to undertaking vegetation management activities that may result in expansion of invasive weed species populations at the site.