



Parks
Canada

Chief Executive Officer

Parcs
Canada

Directeur général



OCT 18 2018

Ms. Meaghan E. Parker
Executive Director
Society of Environmental Journalists
mparker@sej.org

Ms. Karyn Pugliese
President
Canadian Association of Journalists
karyn@caj.ca

Dear Ms. Parker and Ms. Pugliese:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding Parks Canada's media services and related practices. I appreciate your perspective and am grateful that you took the time to share your concerns.

Parks Canada's mandate is to protect nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and to share these places with Canadians and the world. The Agency works daily with the media, as well as with the Canadian public and a broad range of stakeholders, to foster greater public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Canada's natural and cultural heritage. We value greatly the relationship we have with the Canadian and international journalism community.

Parks Canada supports the Government of Canada's commitment to make scientists available to speak freely about their work with the media and the public. As an institution of Canada's federal government, Parks Canada rigorously adheres to the Government of Canada Directive on the Management of Communications. This directive helps federal departments and agencies to ensure that all communications activities are effectively and efficiently managed are well co-ordinated, and are responsive to the diverse information needs of the public. Parks Canada reports regularly on its compliance with the Directive, including on the timeliness of our responses to enquiries from the media.

While your letter asserts that journalists have limited access to Parks Canada's experts, I can confirm that over the past 21 months, four out of every five media enquiries on matters related to science and conservation resulted in an interview. Further, in the Rocky Mountain national parks, 85 percent of media enquiries were responded to with interviews. Given that not all media enquiries involve a request for an interview, the Agency's responsiveness to interview requests is even higher than these numbers indicate.

.../2

Your letter further contends that Parks Canada is not timely in its responses to media requests. However, the Agency's media relations function reviews its response times for media requests on a monthly basis as part of its compliance with the Government of Canada Directive on the Management of Communications. On average, over 97 percent of media requests are responded to within deadline. In fact, for all but the Agency's busiest months, the rate of on-time response is 100 percent.

In your letter you allude to the recent article in the online journal, *The Narwhal*, which relates the experience of a journalist who was denied a request to accompany Parks Canada scientists on a ride-along. Your letter also raises concerns regarding the role of media relations personnel in responding to media enquiries and requests.

The experience of the journalist requesting the ride-along was not fully conveyed by *the Narwhal* article. Her request to accompany Parks Canada scientists occurred during summer 2017 when Canada was celebrating its sesquicentennial and admission to all national parks and historic sites was free. For Parks Canada, 2017 proved to be the busiest year ever in the Agency's history, and the journalist's request was made at the height of the operational season, when conservation staff were in the field, often in remote locations, and involved in everything from species reintroduction to wildfire management and monitoring human-wildlife interactions. Due to the heavy demands on the conservation team at the time of the request, a ride-along in the timeframe requested was not possible. However, the journalist was invited to follow up in the fall when there are fewer demands on conservation staff and they are more readily available to respond to such a request. The journalist did not follow up on this invitation.

Similar occupational demands apply to the majority of Parks Canada's scientists, particularly those working in the field at national parks, marine conservation areas and historic sites. The Agency's conservation staff are involved in applied science that can take them to remote locations where they are far from the office and do not have easy access to telecommunications. Moreover, during the spring and summer, their days can be extremely long and busy as they complete projects that are only possible during the warmer months. Parks Canada's scientists work collaboratively with communications personnel in order to be responsive to media enquiries while at the same time ensuring that they can implement their seasonal work plans. Sometimes this means that the Agency must reply to media requests by e-mail or that an interview must be delayed until an expert can return from the field to provide an interview. Communications personnel support scientists and experts and can help facilitate media requests by setting up interviews and providing journalists with background information.

Parks Canada is deeply committed to sharing its science and conservation stories with the public. In fact, since 2016, the Agency has been implementing a program of community outreach, social media campaigns, proactive media pitches, and new digital content focused exclusively on science and conservation and on the work of Parks Canada's scientists. So far, this initiative has reached hundreds of thousands of Canadians with the stories of Parks Canada's scientists and their projects. Over the past 18 months, our efforts have also been expanding to directly involve Canadians and visitors from around the world in science at Parks Canada places through a national program of bioblitzes, shoreline clean-ups, and a recent collaboration with iNaturalist—one of the largest networks of naturalists, citizen scientists, and biologists in the world. Furthermore, Parks Canada has been working to share stories of Indigenous knowledge and science and its traditional use and role in conservation in national parks and marine conservation areas across the country.

Your letter mentions the experience of a journalist who received a detailed questionnaire in response to a request for digital content relating to the recent reintroduction of bison to Banff National Park. The Agency regrets that this indeed did occur in a small number of isolated cases. When Parks Canada announced the reintroduction of bison to Banff National Park, it received hundreds of requests for digital content. Many of these requests were from journalists and were treated as media requests; however, many others were from travel websites, tourism-related businesses and commercial enterprises for use in everything from online promotional content to travel brochures and postcards.

Parks Canada regularly receives requests for digital content from private, commercial enterprises and manages these requests using formal and detailed request forms. The Agency regrets that, during the processing of the hundreds of requests that were received for digital content on the reintroduction of bison to Banff National Park, a small number of requests from journalists were confused by Parks Canada staff for requests from commercial enterprises, and a few journalists were mistakenly provided with a request form. Most of these journalists followed up to clarify that they were members of the media and were quickly provided with the digital content that was requested. It is unfortunate that the journalist referred to in *The Narwhal* article did not follow up, but Parks Canada truly regrets its error in the handling of this request.

Parks Canada greatly values its relationship with the media and the journalism community. We are grateful for your letter and for your diligence in conveying your concerns. The Agency shares your commitment to openness and transparency and to providing media with access to scientists and experts so that their views and stories can be heard. We demonstrate this commitment each day and look forward to future opportunities to respond to your members and to journalists from across the country and around the world.

I trust this letter responds to your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Nadler', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Nadler
A/Chief Executive Officer