



Society of Environmental Journalists

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CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
INTERNATIONAL PRIZE
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September 26, 2018

Daniel Watson
Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada Agency
30 Victoria Street
Gatineau, QC J8X 0B3 Canada
Daniel.Watson@pc.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Watson,

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took office in 2015, he promised a more open and transparent government than his predecessor's. That promise has gone unfulfilled at Parks Canada, however. Journalists report having less access today than they did under the Harper government to the agency's staff and scientists, who are responsible for protecting Canada's national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas.

According to an investigation published on September 19 in *The Narwhal*, journalists have been blocked in several ways from keeping the public informed about Parks Canada activities:

- Requests to accompany Parks Canada scientists or staff in the field have been repeatedly rejected;
- Interviews with Parks Canada employees have been highly scripted, with media relations staff often requiring journalists to email questions in advance;
- Wait times for interviews with Parks Canada staff and scientists range from weeks to months;
- When interviews are granted, they are often conducted via email.

We're especially concerned about a standardized questionnaire that Parks Canada is sending journalists who request any information or media materials relating to the Banff Bison Reintroduction Project. This form asks journalists to describe how their reporting will benefit Parks Canada as well as the project itself, adding that "the review process is rigorous to determine the best alignment with internal goals for the reintroduction and not all projects will receive Parks Canada support."

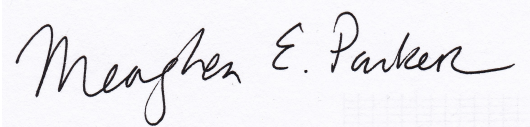
Requiring members of the press to fill out such a form before connecting them to sources within Parks Canada strongly implies that this access will not be provided unless they promise to report uncritically on the agency and its project.

With more than 1,400 members in the United States, Canada and 44 other countries, SEJ is dedicated to strengthening journalism that advances public understanding of environmental issues.

Along with the Canadian Association of Journalists, we call on you to fulfill Prime Minister Trudeau's promise and open Parks Canada immediately to journalists, as has been done with other sectors of the Canadian government. In the name of transparency and greater public accountability, we insist that journalists be able to speak freely and openly with Parks Canada staff and scientists in a timely manner, whether that be on the phone, in person, or in the field.

Canada has long been a beacon of successful democratic governance to the rest of the world. The same cannot be said of news media policies and practices at Parks Canada. We call on you to rectify this intolerable situation now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meaghan E. Parker". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light blue rectangular background.

Meaghan E. Parker, Executive Director
Society of Environmental Journalists

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Pugliese". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light blue rectangular background.

Karyn Pugliese, President
Canadian Association of Journalists