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KLUANE NATIONAL PARK AND RESERVE, YT
Dän Keyi, Champagne & Aishihik First Nations

CPPCL X ONTARIO PARKS

Project Proposal

Proposal for Sustainable Camping
Initiatives at Ontario Parks

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PRESENTED TO:

CPPCL Leadership
Program



CANADIAN PARKS, PROTECTED
AND CONSERVED AREAS
LEADERSHIP COLLECTIVE

COLLECTIF DE LEADERSHIP
POUR LES PARCS, LES AIRES PROTÉGÉES
ET LES AIRES CONSERVÉES DU CANADA



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**Canadian Parks Protected and
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I am finishing my double degree and minor in Parks and Protected Areas at the University of Waterloo. I currently serve as a Knowledge Gatherer for CPPCL and have worked in various roles across the Ontario Parks Organization and the Grand River Conservation Authority.

This passion project is deeply personal to me, as I come from a background of growing up in a low-income household of 10, having immigrated at the age of 4, and relying on food banks. My goal is to dismantle the barriers to camping and ensure equitable access to natural recreational spaces for everyone.



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Mission & Vision

This project proposal emphasizes the importance of every contribution, no matter its size, in addressing broader sustainability and community welfare issues. Even the smallest of donations can have a significant impact, and the focus is on fostering a culture of giving and environmental responsibility. The initiative recognizes that every contribution, however modest, is a step towards a greater goal of sustainability and community support, underscoring that success is not measured solely by the quantity of donations, but by the ongoing commitment to these values.



MISSION

- To reduce environmental waste and promote sustainability in camping practices.
- To support community welfare by providing food donations to local food banks and making camping more accessible to a broader demographic.

VISION

- To foster a culture of environmental responsibility and community engagement among campers.
- To create a model of sustainable camping that can be replicated in other parks, contributing to broader ecological and social impacts.



Introduction

This proposal addresses substantial food and gear waste observed at Algonquin and Killbear parks. The goal is to establish a food donation program and a gear library, promoting sustainable camping practices, community engagement, and making camping a little more financially accessible. Camping is recognized as a sustainable getaway, but without proper management, it can negatively impact local environments through trash production and habitat disturbance¹. These initiatives align with Ontario Parks' mission to ensure ecological integrity and enjoyable, sustainable outdoor experiences.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Waste in camping and outdoor activities is a significant environmental concern. The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics outlines principles to protect outdoor areas, emphasizing waste disposal as a key aspect².

Food waste, in particular, has far-reaching environmental impacts. Globally, one-third of all food produced is discarded annually, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and resource depletion. Food waste accounts for a substantial portion of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions and consumes vast amounts of water and land resources. The UN Environment Programme highlights preventing food waste as a critical action in transforming our food systems; food waste in campgrounds exacerbates these issues.

Increasing costs associated with camping in Ontario parks have made it a less accessible activity for many, particularly for families and individuals with lower incomes. The situation is compounded by the financial barriers and lack of access to necessary gear, making camping seem like a luxury for some.

¹ Bowman, S. (2022, May). How to reduce waste and lessen your environmental impact. Brightly. <https://brightly.eco/blog/sustainable-camping-trip>

² Canada, E. and C. C. (2022, January 28). Government of Canada. Canada.ca. [canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/managing-reducing-waste/food-loss-waste.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/managing-reducing-waste/food-loss-waste.html)

Food banks & Ontario

Food bank usage in Ontario has reached a crisis level. Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were 800,822 individuals who used a food bank in Ontario, representing a 38% increase in unique individuals over the last year. **This is the highest single-year increase ever reported, doubling the increase seen after the 2008 recession.** The total number of visits during this period was 5,888,685, a 36% increase over the previous year and a staggering 101% increase over pre-pandemic numbers.



The usage of Canadian food banks has surged by a substantial 80% since 2019.

Several factors contribute to this crisis. Precarious employment, inadequate social safety nets, and the high cost of living are making it increasingly difficult for Ontarians to meet their basic needs. Earnings have not kept pace with expenses, and Ontario has seen a rise in unstable employment forms like gig work and contract positions. Social assistance supports, crucial for many, fall far below the poverty line, with programs like Ontario Works having been frozen since 2018. The high cost of living leaves many with insufficient funds to cover other essential expenses.

Food banks, largely funded by community donations, are struggling to keep up with the escalating demand. The report reveals that one in four food banks experienced a growth of 40% or more in unique visitors last year. This growing demand is becoming unmanageable and has begun to exceed the capacity of many food banks in Ontario.

Repurposed abandoned gear

The increasing costs associated with camping in Ontario parks have made it a less accessible activity for many, particularly for families and individuals with lower incomes. The situation is compounded by the financial barriers and lack of access to necessary gear, making camping seem like a luxury for some.

Cost of Camping

Camping in Ontario Parks varies in cost based on the facilities and services provided. The parks offer different levels of fees for car camping, with each level reflecting the popularity of a campsite and the availability of facilities. For example, a premium site with electricity can cost around \$59.33 per night, whereas a less popular site with fewer amenities might cost around \$38.70 (Ontario Parks, 2023).

Financial Barriers

Many individuals and families face financial barriers that hinder their ability to fully enjoy outdoor activities. These barriers include the lack of affordable gear, limited financial resources, and inequitable access to green spaces and recreational facilities. These challenges are particularly acute for marginalized and racialized communities, who may also face systemic and intersectional barriers to accessing nature-based experiences. The Ottawa Outdoor Gear Library was established in response to these barriers, providing free access to outdoor gear for marginalized and racialized communities, as well as for people living with low incomes, women, youth, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and newcomers.

Increasing Demand for Affordable Recreation

The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the lack of equitable access to outdoor recreation, with many people facing barriers such as cost, transportation, and access to equipment. This situation has led to a greater appreciation for affordable recreation options like camping, which can be economical compared to other forms of vacationing. For instance, pitching a tent at a serviced campground can be significantly cheaper than staying in a hotel. However, the cost of gear and other expenses associated with camping, such as park entry fees and permits, can add up, making it less affordable for some families

Food Donation Program

The primary goal is to collect and donate unused non-perishable food items to local food banks. This program targets reducing food waste among campers and addressing food insecurity within the local community.

Method

COLLECTION POINT



Install clearly marked collection bins at park gate offices and other strategic locations within the parks. These bins would be designed to accept non-perishable food items only.

AWARENESS



Launch an educational campaign to inform campers about the program. This would involve posting signage around the parks, and leveraging social media platforms.

PARTNERSHIP



Collaborate with local food banks to establish a regular pickup and distribution schedule. Engage with community volunteers for managing and monitoring the collection points.

Impact

ENVIRONMENTAL



By redirecting surplus food to those in need, the program contributes to reducing food waste, a significant environmental concern highlighted by the WWF and UNEP. Food waste contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and wastes resources used in food production.

COMMUNITY



The program supports local food banks, providing a tangible benefit to the surrounding community. It addresses the issue of food insecurity, which is a growing concern globally and locally.

AWARENESS



Raises awareness among campers about food waste and encourages responsible consumption and donation practices.

In light of statistics, proposed initiatives for Ontario Parks take on even greater significance. By facilitating the donation of unused non-perishable food items from campers to local food banks, the program could help mitigate the increasing food insecurity in Ontario. It presents a practical solution that not only supports vulnerable populations but also aligns with sustainable camping practices and Ontario Parks' mission for ecological integrity. e planning to take, the people you'll be working with, and the estimated time of completion.

Gear Repurpose

To create a system where left-behind or donated camping gear can be borrowed by other campers, promoting the reuse of resources and making camping more affordable.

Method

Collection Point



Establish a system for collecting left-behind gear post 3 month waiting period as per OP Dir. 20,11. This would involve setting up designated drop-off points and storage facilities.

Maintenance and Safety:



Implement a process for checking and maintaining the gear to ensure it is safe and functional. This might include cleaning, repairing, and regular safety checks.

Borrowing System



Develop a library-like system where campers can borrow equipment for a specified duration. This system would include a simple check-in and check-out process, perhaps integrated with the park's existing reservation or information systems.

Impact

Financial Accessibility



By providing gear at no or low cost, the program makes camping more accessible to a broader range of individuals and families, especially those for whom purchasing equipment might be a financial burden.

Environmental Sustainability



The initiative supports the principles of a circular economy by extending the life of camping gear, reducing the demand for new products, and consequently lowering the associated environmental footprint.

Community Engagement



Encourages a sense of community among campers and promotes shared responsibility for sustainable camping practices.

This concept is not new to Ontario Parks, just this past summer at Sandbanks Provincial Park, a maintenance student initiated a project to reuse left-behind beach toys. The initiative established a collection point for abandoned toys, allowing other visitors to use them. By offering popular gear left behind by campers, such as camping chairs and stoves, Ontario Parks could provide a valuable service. This initiative aligns with Ontario Parks Directive 20.11 on the disposal of lost, mislaid, or abandoned property in provincial parks, potentially enabling more families and individuals to enjoy camping experiences without the prohibitive costs of purchasing or renting equipment. This approach not only supports equitable access to nature but also promotes environmental stewardship by reusing and repurposing gear.

Alignment with Ontario Parks' Mission for Ecological Integrity

Ontario Parks' Commitment to Ecological Integrity

Ontario Parks places a high priority on maintaining and enhancing the ecological integrity of its parks. This commitment involves protecting natural processes, biodiversity, and ecological features while offering sustainable recreational and educational opportunities. The principles of ecological integrity guide park management decisions, ensuring that conservation and preservation are central to all activities.



Reduction of Food Waste

- Encouraging campers to donate unused food, the program directly contributes to minimizing waste within the parks.
- Reducing the environmental impact associated with food waste, such as greenhouse gas emissions and resource depletion.

Sustainable Community Support

- Supporting local food banks through the donation of non-perishable items reflects a holistic approach to sustainability, addressing both environmental and social aspects.

Circular Economy

- The Gear Library exemplifies the principles of a circular economy, where resources are reused and repurposed rather than discarded.
- Reduces the ecological footprint of camping activities, aligning with Ontario Parks' dedication to conserving natural resources.

Conservation Awareness

- Educates campers about the importance of resource conservation.
- Encourages more responsible behaviour, not just within the parks but also in visitors' everyday lives.

Promotion of Sustainable Practices

- The borrowing initiative encourages campers to participate in sustainable practices, fostering a culture of sustainability.

Prevention of Litter and Habitat Disturbance

- Reducing the amount of gear and food left behind or improperly disposed of in parks helps maintain natural habitats and landscapes, a critical aspect of preservation.

Broader Impact on Ontario Parks



Leadership in Sustainable Recreation

By implementing these initiatives, Ontario Parks reinforces its role as a leader in sustainable recreation, setting an example for other park systems and outdoor recreational areas.

Enhanced Visitor Engagement

These programs offer visitors practical ways to contribute to ecological integrity, enhancing their connection to the natural environment and their commitment to its preservation.

Long-Term Ecological Benefits

Over time, the cumulative effect of reduced waste and increased sustainability practices will contribute to the overall health and resilience of the ecosystems within Ontario Parks.

Incorporating these initiatives into the broader mission of Ontario Parks not only addresses immediate issues of waste reduction and resource efficiency but also furthers the organization's long-term commitment to ecological integrity. By demonstrating how sustainable practices can be seamlessly integrated into recreational activities, Ontario Parks can continue to be a model for conservation-minded outdoor enjoyment.