

Every year, over five million visitors go to Banff National Park in Canada, an area that includes part of the Rocky Mountains. The town of Banff, which is situated inside the park, has a resident population of 7,000, and is host to the vast majority of those visitors. Tourism directly or indirectly employs virtually everyone in the town and has enormous economic benefits for the region and for Canada as a whole. It's a multimillion-dollar industry that ranges from large, upmarket hotels, ski resorts and tour operators to restaurants, galleries, guides and much more.

Only a small proportion of those millions of visitors leave the streets, shops or ski slopes to actually experience the wilderness first-hand. For the vast majority of visitors, Banff is merely a great place to shop, ski or party, with pretty scenery and the occasional deer that wanders along the streets.

There are many ecological problems affecting the park, and while the press on this topic has generally been too sensational, the basic story is true. The town and the highway and railway that slice through the park are all barriers to wildlife movement. Habitats have been destroyed, leading to a decline in natural food supplies: because of this, and because of highway mortality, large carnivores – bears and wolves – have almost disappeared from the river valley where Banff is located; meanwhile, deer and elk populations have increased unchecked. The whole ecosystem is out of balance and in danger of collapsing – yet tourism operators continue to market Banff as an unspoilt ecological paradise.

In 1997, a number of businesses and concerned citizens in Banff came together to find a way of preserving and protecting the park without destroying tourism. Their view is that, in the face of current human population increases and worldwide ecological damage, healthy ecosystems will increasingly become major tourism destinations, and that it is therefore essential to preserve the natural landscapes and ecosystems of the national park. To this end, they developed the Banff Heritage Tourism Strategy (HTS).

The strategy sets out guidelines for a form of tourism that doesn't harm the environment. One of its central policies is to educate tourists before they go to Banff, so that they have realistic expectations and can behave appropriately once they are there.

The other main thrust of the strategy is to convince tourism service providers within the park that if they are to continue to be successful, they need to re-think what they offer and act in socially and environmentally responsible ways. One recommendation is that hotels and restaurants should teach their front-line staff about the natural and human history of the park, so that they in turn can influence the behaviour of tourists. However, individual businesses will need to work towards the objectives in their own ways: coach-tour companies, for instance, may take a very different approach from car-hire companies.

To date, several tourism operators have accepted the proposals and are making progress in a number of respects, including training their staff and helping visitors to understand the implications of being in a national park.

Parks Canada – the government agency responsible for maintaining national parks – is now taking a tougher, more pro-active attitude towards managing the park, in line with HTS thinking. For the past 50 years, it has had an active fire-suppression policy, which limited the natural growth of plants, but it is now bringing the essential role of forest fire back into the park's ecology through the use of controlled fires. Other initiatives include closing several facilities around Banff town that were barriers to wildlife movement; setting limits on how many people can visit certain beauty spots such as Moraine Lake; and using various tactics to scare deer and elk out of the town (where the animals had moved to escape predators).

The ecology of Banff National Park is now improving, as a result of the efforts of the HTS group and Parks Canada. However, the strategy does not currently have broad acceptance. There are many obstacles and many opposing points of view. There needs to be much more dialogue among the various interested parties before the park is safe for future generations, and this dialogue is ongoing.

Questions 1–7

Do the following statements reflect the claims of the writer in the reading passage? Write

- YES** *if the statement reflects the claims of the writer*
NO *if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*
NOT GIVEN *if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

- 1 Most visitors explore the wilderness areas of the park.
- 2 Press coverage of the problems in Banff National Park has affected the number of tourists.
- 3 Tourism operators give a misleading impression of the park in their marketing.
- 4 The HTS group believes that eco-tourism is likely to grow in the future.
- 5 Parks Canada has changed the way it manages the park.
- 6 The HTS group is pleased with the amount of progress it has achieved so far.
- 7 The strategy of the HTS group has the support of all interested parties.

Questions 8–12

Choose **FIVE** letters **A–K**.

Which **FIVE** of these policies does the HTS group support?

- A developing alternatives to jobs in tourism
- B preventing any increase in the number of hotels
- C introducing more bears and wolves into the area
- D reducing the number of tourists
- E giving information to tourists in advance of visits to Banff
- F changing the services offered by tourism companies
- G giving hotel workers a role in protecting the park
- H reducing the use of cars
- I burning some sections of the park
- J encouraging tourists to visit certain beauty spots in the park
- K removing some animals from the town of Banff

Question 13

Choose the correct letter, **A, B, C** or **D**.

Which of the following is the most suitable title for the reading passage?

- A Damage done to the tourism industry in Banff National Park
- B The growing popularity of eco-tourism in Banff National Park
- C Why tourism is so important for the economy of Banff National Park
- D The struggle to ensure a long-term future for tourism in Banff National Park