

Notice of Determination

This notice of determination is being issued by Parks Canada under the *Impact Assessment Act*. Parks Canada has decided that the Project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects.

Parks Canada plans to renovate Highway 431 and the Tablelands Trail access road and parking lot (the Project) in an area commonly referred to as the “Trout River Gulch” which extends from the Town of Woody Point to the Town of Trout River, through Gros Morne National Park. Highway 431 is the only access route to visitor attractions in the south of the park such as the Tablelands, Green Gardens, and Trout River Pond hiking trails, the Trout River Pond Day Use Area, and the Trout River Campground. It is also the only access route to the Town of Trout River.

Highway 431 and the Tablelands Trail access road and parking lot are in an area of high visitation, within a dynamic environment featuring internationally significant geological features and near fish-bearing waterbodies. Because of these factors and the potential for the Project to have adverse environmental effects, Parks Canada has determined that the level of analysis appropriate is the DIA pathway. This DIA resulted in the following findings.

Project alternatives were considered during project planning including “do nothing”, conducting the restoration using externally sourced aggregate and conducting the restoration using aggregate from Dry Brook. The latter is the preferred option which will preserve the World Heritage Site Outstanding Universal Value in the area, minimize impacts to natural resource values, maintain road safety and improve visitor experience.

While there are many smaller drainages coming off the Tablelands, Dry Brook is one of the largest and has resulted in the formation of an alluvial fan, a unique geomorphological feature to the region. Reflecting its name, Dry Brook lacks surface water flow during most of the year except during spring runoff and periods of high intensity rainfall but there is sub-surface flow through the year. Potential effects to surface and sub-surface hydrology may occur in the area during and after the excavation and rock removal component of the Project. This includes changes in flow of surface and sub-surface water and increased erosion and sedimentation carried downstream to Wallace Brook. A hydrology assessment was completed to inform the development of a Rock Extraction Plan and ongoing management of the area. With implementation of mitigation measures, the effects of the Project on surface and subsurface hydrology are expected to be local and short-term. No significant residual adverse effects are expected.

Highway 431 largely parallels along the southern side of Wallace Brook and crosses over at several named brooks and at least seven unnamed tributaries that feed into it. The Tablelands access road and parking lot, located along Highway 431, is also upstream of Wallace Brook. Dry Brook flows into Wallace Brook which provides habitat for several species of fish including American Eel, a species at risk under the provincial Endangered Species Act (Vulnerable) and COSEWIC (Threatened). The Project has the potential to result in short and/or long-term sedimentation to Wallace Brook and other tributaries during and after construction, changes to flow, reduced water quality, changes to fish habitat and mortality of fish from sedimentation. A Rock Extraction Plan, Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s measures to protect fish and fish habitat, buffer zones, surveillance, water quality monitoring during construction

and working in the dry will ensure effects on fish and fish habitat are local and short-term. No significant residual adverse effects are expected.

Wildlife is limited on the Tablelands but caribou from the Gregory Plateau Herd have been seen in the area and two were hit by motor vehicles in the last three years. The Newfoundland population of woodland caribou is currently undergoing extended consultations for Special Concern legal designation (and addition to SARA Schedule 1). There may be impacts such as attracting, disturbing or displacing wildlife during construction. Standard wildlife mitigations during construction work will be applied. There is some uncertainty relating to whether improved road conditions on Highway 431 will result in increased wildlife mortality post-construction due to increased driver speed. There is also the potential for cumulative effects to caribou from mortality related to other road improvements in the park. However, Gros Morne National Park is committed, through the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the 2019 Management Plan, to understand the risk of highway mortality and to identify mitigation options for caribou. Post-construction monitoring of wildlife mortality and collection of traffic data will inform requirements for additional road mitigations. Effects of construction activities are expected to be local and short-term with no residual adverse effects expected.

While there have been rare plants identified in the Tablelands area in the past, the area generally lacks vegetation. This is due in part to the composition of the substrate found here which is toxic to most plants. The plants which do survive here are often slow growing and some juniper are over 300 years old. Historically, use of the local rock from the area during construction work has been preferred to prevent spread of non-native vegetation species. Potential impacts to soil and vegetation are common during construction activities. Standard mitigations apply to these routine activities in addition to the implementation of a Rock Extraction Plan. To prevent introduction of or spread of non-native vegetation species, rock from the Dry Brook area will be used in the reclamation work.

If any external gravel is used, it will be used sparingly to help maintain the pH of the surrounding soil and minimise spread of non-native vegetation species. Sensitive vegetation, including old-growth woody trees and shrubs, will be avoided. It may not be possible to avoid impacts to all vegetation in the immediate area of the excavation, highway, access road and parking lot work. However, this will not impact ecosystem function of the area. No significant residual adverse effects are expected.

Highway 431 provides a critical transportation link for locals and visitors. The Tablelands Trail access road and parking lot is used by 40 000 visitors a year. There will be some local and short-term impacts to visitor access to the site during the restoration of the access road and parking lot and there may be some traffic delays during the highway restoration. A Communications Plan will be developed to inform visitors and residents of the construction activities prior to commencement. There will be some longer-term changes, although not permanent, from the color change of crushed peridotite and time to fully reclaim the site. However, it is not an official or popular viewpoint for visitors, the site has been disturbed in the past and increasing visitor numbers to the Tablelands Trail has not shown diminished enjoyment of the area despite similar past work in the area. When completed, the Project will result in increased visitor safety and enjoyment of the area. No significant residual adverse effects are expected.

The valued component linked to Outstanding Universal Value is visitor safety, access, and enjoyment. While there will be some impacts to scenic value remaining after construction, they will not be significant for the reasons described above. No significant residual adverse effects to Criterion vii –

scenic value is expected. With implementation of mitigations, including the Rock Extraction Plan and site reclamation, no residual adverse effects to Criterion viii – geological elements are expected.

Indigenous partners did not have any comments to provide on the draft DIA. Comments on the draft DIA were received from the general public, local stakeholders, and government departments. Most feedback was generally in support of the Project, however, concerns about some of the components were raised and recommendations provided. The key areas of concern identified by multiple parties included 1) Impacts to hydrology, aesthetics and vegetation from excavation of material at Dry Brook; 2) Impacts to aesthetics and vegetation from on-site crushing and impacts to visitor experience from truck traffic and potential to bring in non-native vegetation species from off-site crushing. 3) Impacts to vegetation from the parking lot and access road restoration. 4) The need to effectively communicate information on the Project to residents and visitors prior to commencement and throughout the Project. This feedback has resulted in additional explanation within the DIA.

Taking into account implementation of mitigation measures outlined in the assessment, the Project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects.

To request a copy of the Detailed Impact Assessment report, contact:

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