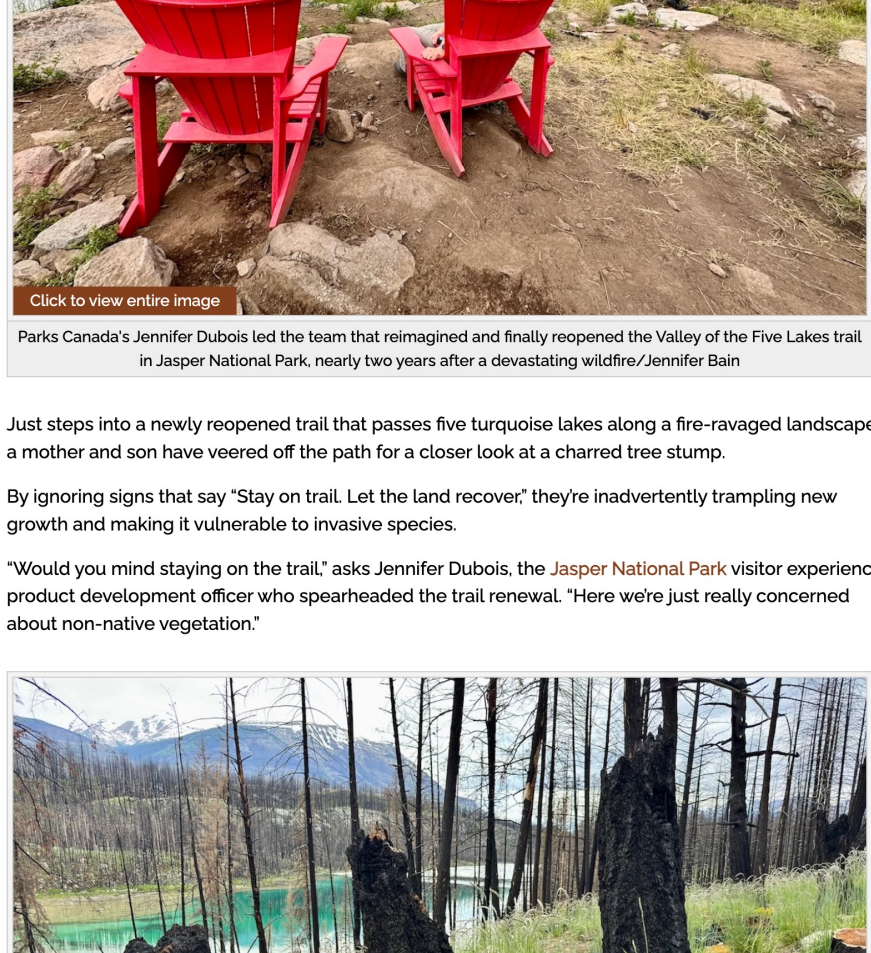


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Reimagining An Iconic Trail In Jasper Two Years After The Fire

By Jennifer Bain
June 27, 2026



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Parks Canada's Jennifer Dubois led the team that reimagined and finally reopened the Valley of the Five Lakes trail in Jasper National Park, nearly two years after a devastating wildfire./Jennifer Bain

Just steps into a newly reopened trail that passes five turquoise lakes along a fire-ravaged landscape, a mother and son have veered off the path for a closer look at a charred tree stump.

By ignoring signs that say "Stay on trail. Let the land recover," they're inadvertently trampling new growth and making it vulnerable to invasive species.

"Would you mind staying on the trail," asks Jennifer Dubois, the Jasper National Park visitor experience product development officer who spearheaded the trail renewal. "Here we're just really concerned about non-native vegetation."

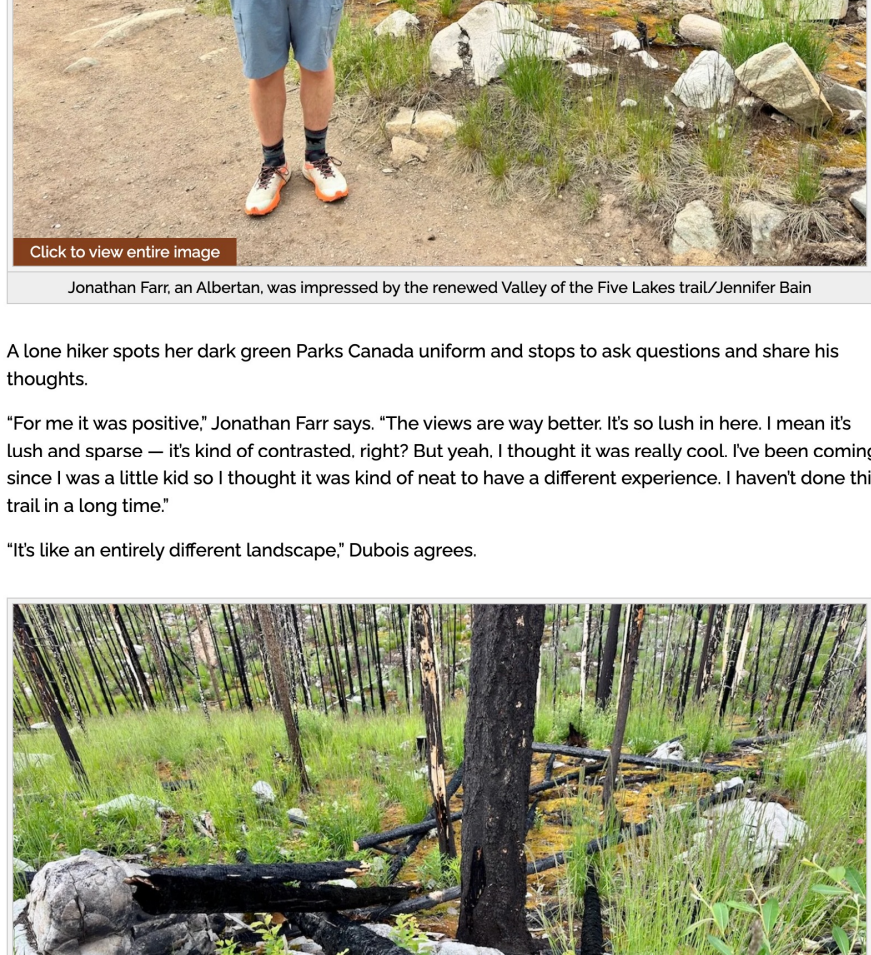


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Reminders of the 2024 wildfire in Jasper National Park are mixed in with signs of renewal./Jennifer Bain

It's coming up on two years since a historic wildfire ignited by lightning strikes tore through 80,000 acres of Jasper here in Alberta's Rocky Mountains, forcing 5,000 residents and 20,000 tourists to evacuate and destroying about 30 per cent of the townsite.

Locals started returning home about a month later, and the tight-knit community and park have been slowly rebuilding. On May 23, the popular Valley of the Five Lakes trail finally reopened to great fanfare and today Dubois is going to walk some of it with me.

This is grizzly and black bear country so we've got bear spray for a two-hour journey to see a wetland bridge, realigned trail section with new ridgeline views, stone staircase, improved signage, cedar railings to keep people away from sensitive areas, and new rest areas with benches and picnic tables made from salvaged timber.

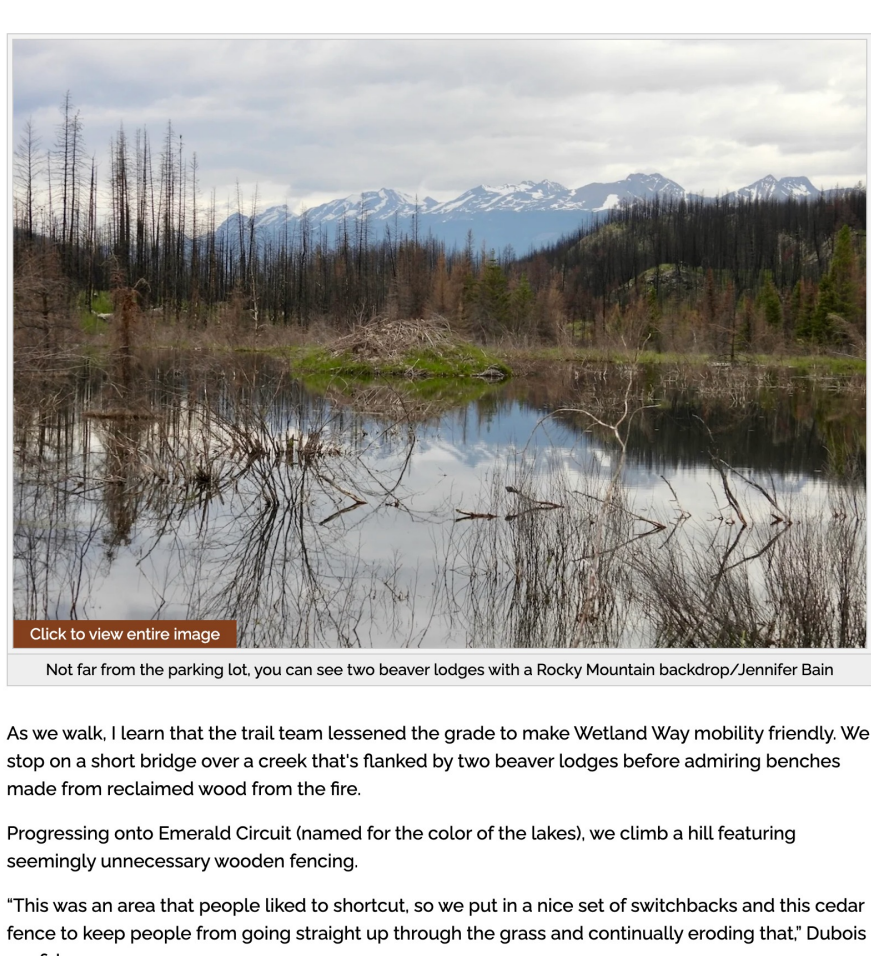


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Parks Canada's Jennifer Dubois studies wayfinding signage for the Valley of the Five Lakes trail./Jennifer Bain

There's a neat trailhead outhouse with an adult change table. Right after that there's an invasive species boot-brushing station to get rid of seeds of invasive plants like Canada thistle and spotted knapweed that might be hidden in our footwear.

We've studied the new trail map and plan to walk the easy, 1.8-kilometre Wetland Way and connect with the moderate, 5.4-kilometre Emerald Circuit. We'll skip the 7.7-kilometre Valley Loop because it isn't fully open.

"Because the fire did happen to affect some of our premier locations," Dubois says, "It's given us an opportunity to focus on our efforts on addressing some deficiencies, we'll say."

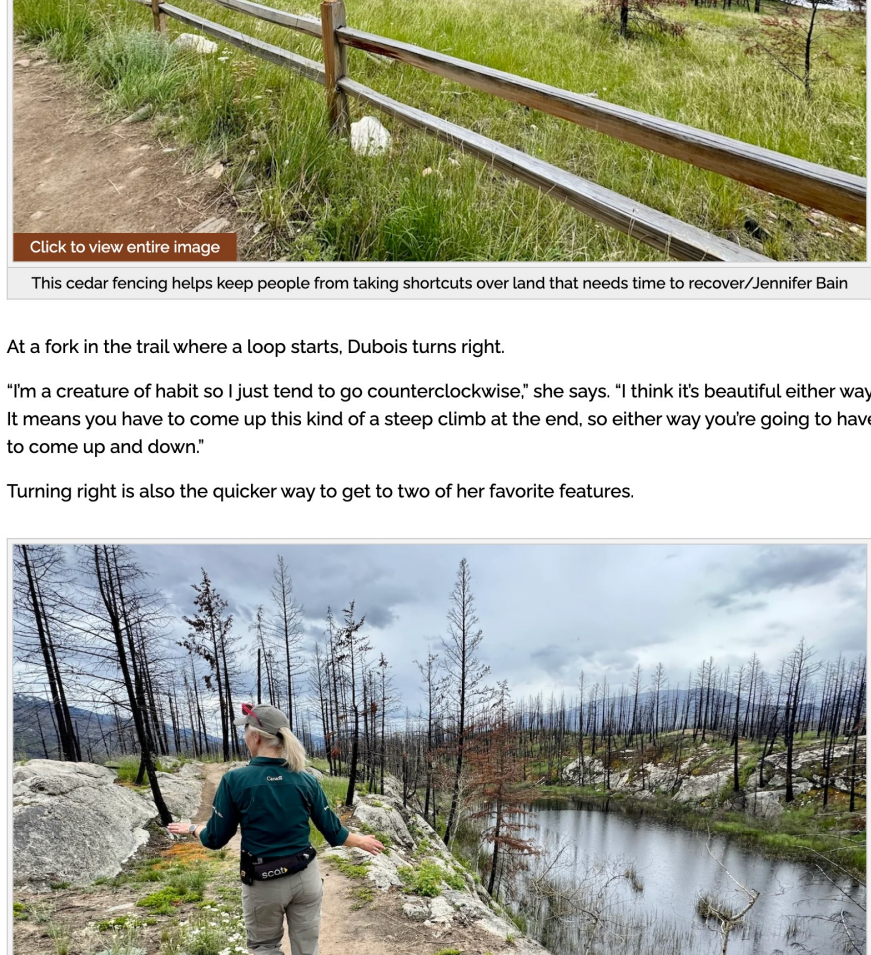


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Jonathan Farr, an Albertan, was impressed by the renewed Valley of the Five Lakes trail./Jennifer Bain

A lone hiker spots her dark green Parks Canada uniform and stops to ask questions and share his thoughts.

"For me it was positive," Jonathan Farr says. "The views are way better. It's so lush in here. I mean it's lush and sparse — it's kind of contrasted, right? But yeah, I thought it was really cool. I've been coming since I was a little kid so I thought it was kind of neat to have a different experience. I haven't done this trail in a long time."

"It's like an entirely different landscape," Dubois agrees.



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Parks Canada had to clear trails of dangerous trees after the 2024 wildfire./Jennifer Bain

Parks Canada left the fire-scarred area alone for a season to see how the landscape would recover and how the water would move. Next it did an inventory and assessment, to see how much infrastructure was destroyed.

"Then there was all the hazard trail cleaning," recalls Dubois. "This whole trail network and area would have been just a total shintangle of pine and aspen that were destroyed in the fire."

This iconic hike once attracted 500 to 900 people a day, but it was also notorious for steep, rocky, rooty and eroded areas.



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Not far from the parking lot, you can see two beaver lodges with a Rocky Mountain backdrop./Jennifer Bain

As we walk, I learn that the trail team lessened the grade to make Wetland Way mobility friendly. We stop on a short bridge over a creek that's flanked by two beaver lodges before admiring benches made from reclaimed wood from the fire.

Progressing onto Emerald Circuit (named for the color of the lakes), we climb a hill featuring seemingly unnecessary wooden fencing.

"This was an area that people liked to shortcut, so we put in a nice set of switchbacks and this cedar fence to keep people from going straight up through the grass and continually eroding that," Dubois confides.

She brought in Parks Canada's trail advisor Michel Blais in May 2025 to reimagine this trail network. After the plan passed an impact assessment, the trail crew started construction last fall and finished this spring.

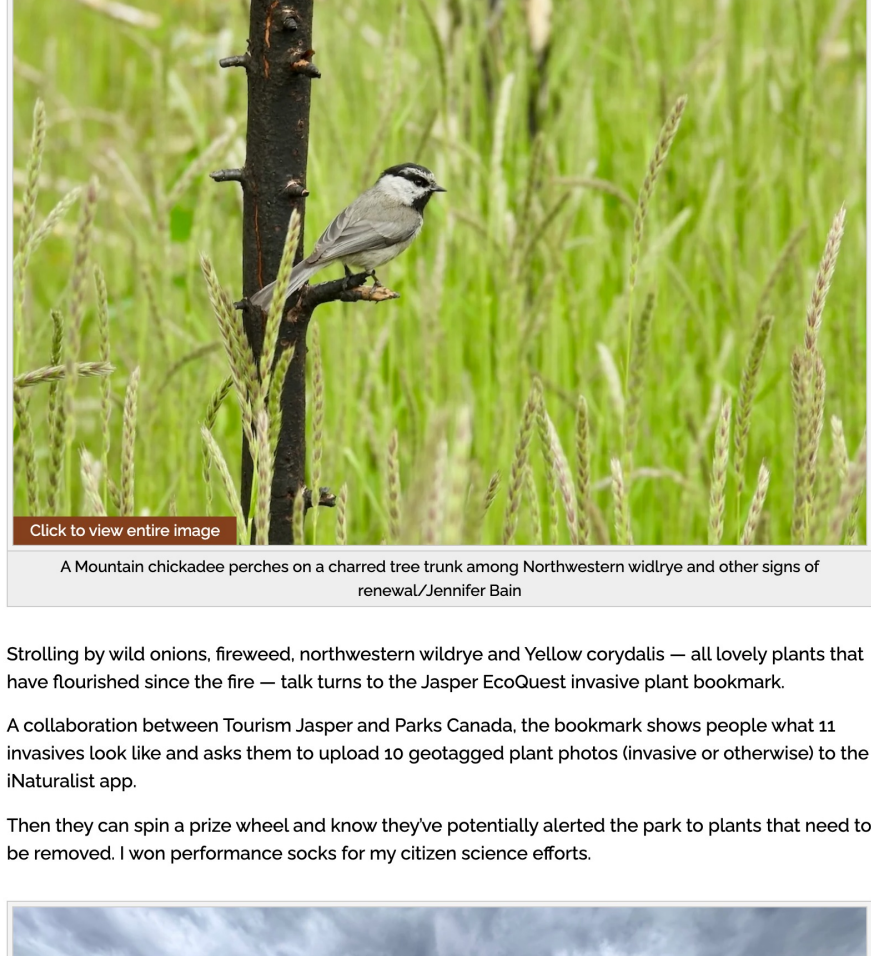


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This cedar fencing helps keep people from taking shortcuts over land that needs time to recover./Jennifer Bain

At a fork in the trail where a loop starts, Dubois turns right.

"I'm a creature of habit so I just tend to go counterclockwise," she says. "I think it's beautiful either way. It means you have to come up this kind of a steep climb at the end, so either way you're going to have to come up and down."

Turning right is also the quicker way to get to two of her favorite features.



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Wearing a bear spray holster, Parks Canada's Jennifer Dubois shows off a new ridge trail section that replaced a wet and treacherous former section below it./Jennifer Bain

Hiking along a new ridge, we look down across a valley at the old trail.

"See where it's all eroded?" Dubois asks. "It was right through the trees there, and into the swamp. So it was always muddy and yucky and steep. So happy to be done with that one."

The reimagined trail makes better use of ridges so hikers can stay dry and get better views. Parks staff realize that wildlife like bear and elk like to travel in the lower valley so "it also gives us a little bit more natural separation for movement."



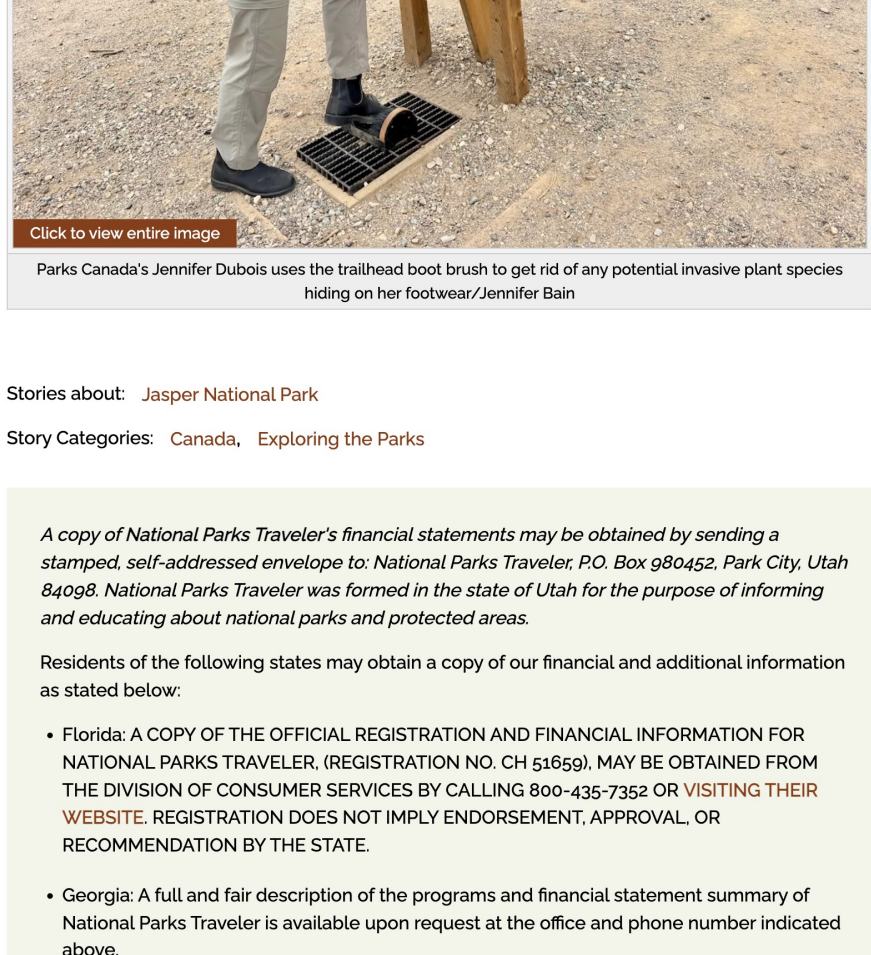
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At Fifth Lake, two people sit and quietly appreciate the lake and mountain landscape./Jennifer Bain

Finally, the trail's five beautiful turquoise lakes start to come into view.

Jasper's lakes and rivers have just been grouped into three zones with different rules for water activities. These five small lakes are part of a water recreation zone where you can swim, snorkel, paddle and fish.

But to guard against aquatic invasive species — especially zebra mussels and whitebait disease — people must clean, drain and dry their watercraft and gear for at least 48 hours before using it elsewhere.

On this June day, though, I only spot two people sitting and quietly admiring Fifth Lake's beauty.



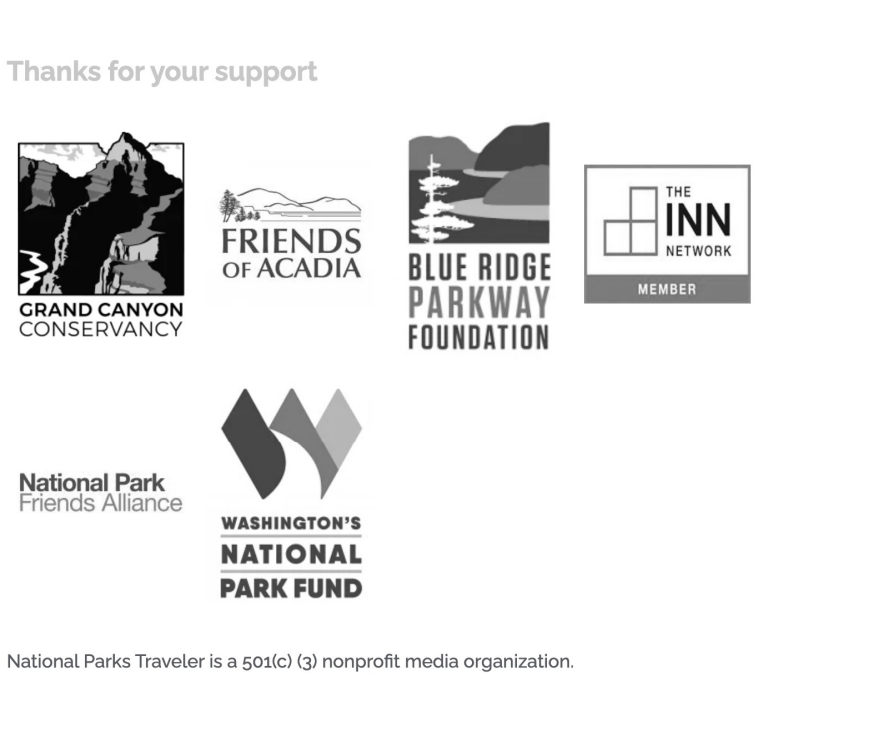
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Parks Canada used fire-ravaged timber to create benches and picnic tables for a reimagined trail./Jennifer Bain

We cross a second bridge, and then where Fourth Lake meets Third Lake, pause at a pair of Parks Canada's red chairs.

The iconic Adirondack chairs are made from 100 per cent recycled plastic saved from landfills and can be found at 200 scenic and hidden spots across the country. People share their experiences on social media using the hashtag #ShareTheChair.

Jasper has seven sets spread over its 2.7 million acres. This set is on the newly renamed Picnic Point near three picnic tables made by the trail crew from more of that reclaimed, fire-ravaged timber.

The chairs were here before the fire and returned to the same spot so regulars can do before/after shots. "Some people may not be aware of the fire and may just want that experience," Dubois allows. "I'm happy to see people use them."



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A Mountain Chickadee perches on a charred tree trunk among Northwestern flycatcher and other signs of renewal./Jennifer Bain

Strolling by wild onions, fireweed, northwestern flycatcher and Yellow corydalis — all lovely plants that have flourished since the fire — talk turns to the Jasper EcoQuest invasive plant bookmark.

A collaboration between Tourism Jasper and Parks Canada, the bookmark shows people what 11 invasives look like and asks them to upload to geotagged plant photos (invasive or otherwise) to the iNaturalist app.

Then they can spin a prize wheel and know they've potentially alerted the park to plants that need to be removed. I won performance socks for my citizen science efforts.

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People love to see the turquoise waters along Jasper's newly reopened Valley of the Five Lakes trail./Jennifer Bain

Before heading off to check on a trail crew, Dubois stresses that "a huge team effort went into the reimagining and then the reopening of the Valley of the Five" and calls it "a huge success."

People have always been drawn here to see the turquoise water, but now they can witness post-fire beauty and renewal as well.

"This is one you can do many times," Dubois predicts. "It's achievable for a lot of people."

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On the Wetland Way portion of the trail network, you'll cross this bridge over a creek, see two beaver lodges and spot benches made from trees burned in the 2024 wildfire./Jennifer Bain

Alone for the final leg of the trail, I linger to photograph Mountain chickadees and Black-backed woodpeckers flitting among charred trees. The wildfire created open sightlines that make it much easier to spot wildlife, and I stay on high alert for bears or equally dangerous cow elk with calves.

I spot wildlife cameras and trail counters attached to charred trees and wonder what they will reveal. A hiker. I wonder what everyone else is seeing and thinking as they hike.

The parking lot is full of people coming and going, and while those unfamiliar with national park etiquette walk right by the boot-brushing station, I stop to rid my footwear of any dangerous new hitchhikers before moving on.

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Parks Canada's Jennifer Dubois uses the trailhead boot brush to get rid of any potential invasive plant species hiding on her footwear./Jennifer Bain

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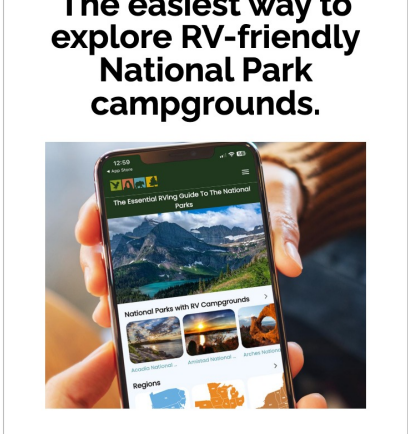
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