

Plan for Parks

2009 - 2019



MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER PLAN FOR PARKS

Albertans have a big, beautiful backyard to play in. There's a provincial park or recreation area within an hour's drive of every Alberta community. Our provincial parks provide access to some of the most spectacular natural landscapes in the world, including one of the richest dinosaur finds in the world, the largest collection of aboriginal rock art on the North American Plains, Canada's most northerly bird observatory, glaciers and so much more.

Albertans have a deep connection to the land. Nature has an important place in our hearts, minds and souls. Premier Ed Stelmach recognized this when he asked me to develop a plan to 'ensure Alberta's parks and recreation areas remain protected yet accessible to Alberta's growing population.'

Over the next ten years, our focus will be on achieving the vision of the Plan for Parks:

Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.

Developing the Plan for Parks was a collaborative process. It is based on extensive consultations with Aboriginal communities, stakeholder organizations, park visitors, elected officials, government staff and others. The result is a plan that changes the way we manage Alberta's parks as we invite Albertans to become more engaged in shaping our parks system.

Whether it's developing year-round trails, protecting delicate ecosystems or attracting visitors to an area, these decisions will be based on what Albertans want, and on what science tells us is good for the land.

Parks are an integral part of our lives and a big part of what makes Alberta a great place to live. I invite you to read our Plan for Parks and to become involved in regional parks' planning activities in your area. I look forward to working with you to keep Alberta's parks healthy, beautiful and accessible for generations to come.



Cindy Ady
Minister
Tourism, Parks and Recreation



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parks are essential to the quality of life that Albertans enjoy. They conserve our natural landscapes and wildlife habitat, and offer a broad range of outdoor recreational opportunities.

Alberta's growing population is creating new pressures on our parks. Already, many existing facilities are unable to meet the increasing and changing demand for outdoor recreation experiences. At the same time, we have some breathtaking parks that remain relatively unknown. We need to create better access to provincial parks so all Albertans can enjoy them.

We also recognize that unless we manage the environment responsibly, the beautiful landscape we enjoy may cease to exist. Good environmental management positively impacts ecosystems found within park boundaries and the effect is felt throughout the province.

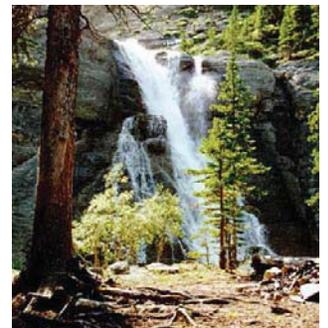
Alberta's *Plan for Parks* reaffirms that we must meet both objectives – recreation and conservation – within Alberta's parks system because they are inextricably linked.

The *Plan for Parks* introduces short and long term activities and a framework for decision-making to achieve the following vision:

Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.

Key to this vision is the role of Albertans, who will help create the recommendations that guide how parks in their region are managed (e.g., improved camping and day-use experiences, conservation of important ecosystems, and ideas for encouraging year-round recreation and economic development).

Although Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation has a long history of public engagement, the introduction of regional planning represents a new approach to parks management.





In addition to providing broad management direction, regional park planning will help shape the detailed operational plans for individual parks. It will also inform the Land-use Framework regional planning process, which is why the regional boundaries outlined in the *Plan for Parks* are the same as those in the Land-use Framework.

To ensure the management of parks aligns with the Government of Alberta's strategic direction, Alberta's *Plan for Parks* includes key planning elements also found in the Land-use Framework, and both share the following desired outcomes:

- o People-friendly communities and recreational opportunities
- o Healthy ecosystems and environment
- o Sustainable prosperity supported by our land and natural resources



To achieve these outcomes within parks, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation is embarking on several province-wide initiatives (please see table on the next page).

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation will report to Albertans on progress that has been made towards the desired outcomes and milestones in the Ministry Annual Report. This way, Albertans will be able to track the environmental, social and economic health of Alberta's parks system.

The years ahead are both exciting and important. Albertans have a new role to play in parks planning. Decisions we reach together will literally shape the landscape of Alberta and impact our quality of life.



PRIORITY ACTIONS

Strategy #1: Involve Albertans *(Page 22)*

- o Implement a regional planning model
- o Create a Parks Advisory Council
- o Engage Aboriginal communities
- o Develop a process for nominating new provincial parks
- o Ensure accountability through milestones and deliverables
- o Diversify existing volunteer programs and partnerships

Strategy #2: Offer Modern Facilities, Policies & Programs *(Page 24)*

- o Develop a central reservation system
- o Upgrade, restore and expand park facilities
- o Refine the parks classification system

Strategy #3: Provide Recreation Opportunities *(Page 25)*

- o Identify and develop opportunities for recreation
- o Encourage interest and opportunity in parks
- o Implement an inclusion strategy to enhance visitor experiences

Strategy #4: Conserve Landscapes *(Page 26)*

- o Facilitate contributions to parks
- o Balance in the parks system
- o Foster evidence-based decision-making

Note: Strategy numbers do not reflect an order of priority.



1. INTRODUCTION

A. WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN FOR PARKS?

With a thriving economy and a high standard of living, Alberta's population is growing at an unprecedented rate. The number of Alberta residents increased by more than 10 per cent between 2001 and 2006 – almost twice the national average¹.

A growing population creates new pressures on the landscape. Alberta's parks² are feeling the strain.

Existing park facilities³ were developed for a much smaller population and many are unable to meet the increasing and changing demand for a variety of outdoor recreation experiences.

The need to manage our natural resources responsibly is increasing. Parks protect ecosystems vital to our province's environmental health. They are home to natural species, historic and cultural landmarks and breathtaking landscapes that could otherwise be lost.

Parks also attract visitors from around the world, contributing tourism dollars to the province and creating a variety of jobs, from backcountry guiding to upscale hotel and food services.

Although provincial parks account for only four⁴ per cent of Alberta's land mass, they are critically important to our quality of life. That is why, in 2008, Premier Stelmach directed the Minister of Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation to develop a plan to ensure our parks are protected yet accessible to Alberta's growing population.

This document does that and more. In addition to outlining short and long term actions, it introduces a framework for decision-making, including guiding principles, desired outcomes and a process for accountability.

¹ 2006 Census

² For brevity, reference to parks includes provincial parks, provincial recreation areas, protected areas and all sites managed by the Government of Alberta's Parks Division.

³ Park facilities include campgrounds, picnic sites, trails, buildings, visitor centres, staging areas, and water and sewer systems.

⁴ In comparison, national parks account for approximately eight per cent of Alberta's land mass.

B. HOW DOES IT RELATE TO THE LAND-USE FRAMEWORK?

In December of 2008, the Government of Alberta approved a Land-use Framework for managing all public and private lands and natural resources. It notes that Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation is a key player in the management of public lands because it has responsibility for managing Alberta's provincial parks and for supporting tourism development.

Although the *Plan for Parks* is a stand-alone document, it is aligned with the Land-use Framework. This ensures that management of Alberta's parks system supports the Government of Alberta's overall strategic direction.

For example, the regional planning model featured in the *Plan for Parks* was first introduced in the Land-use Framework.

The Land-use Framework references the development of a plan for parks⁵. This document is the achievement of that goal.

The *Plan for Parks* and the Land-use Framework are guided by the same desired outcomes (see Section 3: The Decision-making Framework).

They also share a commitment to working with the Aboriginal peoples of Alberta in land-use planning⁶.

The Land-use Framework states that "the Government of Alberta will address the gaps associated with conserving and protecting the biodiversity of Alberta's land base (Natural Regions and Sub-regions Framework)⁷". This commitment is restated in the *Plan for Parks*.

The Land-use Framework also describes the development of new policy instruments to encourage conservation and stewardship on private and public land, including support for land trusts⁸. The *Plan for Parks* introduces the new Parks Conservation Foundation to encourage involvement and stewardship of Alberta parks and programs, and to facilitate donation of privately owned land.

As their planning activities are so closely aligned, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation will continue to work with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to share information and develop complementary processes.



⁵ Government of Alberta, *Land-use Framework*, December 2008, p. 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

C. WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR PARKS?

The *Plan for Parks* is a planning framework that describes how decisions will be made regarding Alberta's parks. It takes into account the values and needs of Albertans and the important role parks play in the environmental, economic, recreational and cultural life of the province.

The planning framework:

- o Establishes a vision for provincial parks;
- o Sets out the purpose of the provincial parks system;
- o Describes the desired outcomes;
- o Articulates the role of government in meeting the outcomes;
- o Specifies principles that will guide decisions; and
- o Outlines an accountability reporting mechanism.

As the name suggests, the *Plan for Parks* is also a plan with short and long term priority actions. The list of priority actions in this document currently focuses on province-wide initiatives because regional planning has not yet been initiated.

D. HOW WAS THE PLAN FOR PARKS DEVELOPED?



Understanding Albertans' expectations and ideas for parks was critical to the development of the *Plan for Parks*.

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation reviewed findings from consultations and gathered information about best practices in other jurisdictions. Further input was also sought from a wide range of groups through:

- o Meetings with Aboriginal groups and individuals from different parts of the province;
- o Meetings with stakeholders including environmental groups, organizations that represent the interests of recreation enthusiasts, commercial tourism operators and municipalities; and
- o Public opinion surveys.



Albertans told us that they want:

- o More involvement in decisions about parks and in the delivery of parks programs;
- o Modern amenities, more inclusive facilities and well-maintained trails;
- o More access to recreation opportunities; and
- o Protection of the environment and culturally significant areas.

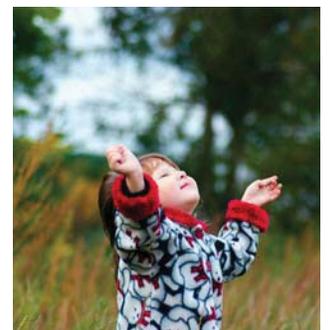
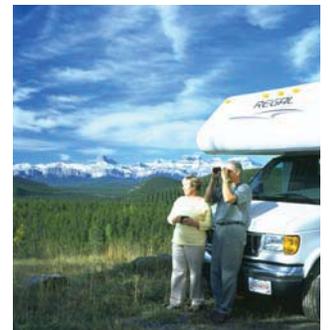
Stakeholders were invited to comment on draft documents. Many of their ideas helped shape the *Plan for Parks*.

E. WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

The passion that Albertans feel for their parks is evident in the feedback that Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation receives regularly from Aboriginal groups, stakeholders, staff and parks visitors. Their dreams and hopes for the future helped shape this plan.

To paraphrase their words, we will know this plan is a success if, in 10 years...

- o Parks are recognized and supported as an essential public good for the role they play in conservation, outdoor recreation and tourism.
- o Alberta is recognized internationally for the beauty and diversity of its landscapes and for the steps it has taken to conserve this legacy for future generations.
- o Parks are safe, enjoyable and accessible for Albertans to explore their culture and their connection to the land, and where visitors from around the world are welcome.
- o Aboriginal communities are engaged in the delivery of parks programs and the protection of culturally significant sites and landscapes.
- o Alberta's parks support a variety of healthy ecosystems that, in turn, support a diversity of flora and fauna.
- o Alberta's parks system continues to grow with land donations from private owners.
- o Albertans are proud of the modern facilities that the parks system offers.



- o Alberta has an interconnected system of parks and recreational trails that enhance quality of life for citizens by providing easy access to nature and recreation experiences.
- o Alberta parks offer a variety of learning experiences that inform, inspire and involve visitors.
- o The public and private sector work together to meet the social, environmental, economic and cultural needs of our province through the parks system.
- o Knowledgeable, professional parks staff are visible and available to help visitors within our parks.



2. THE DECISION-MAKING CONTEXT

A. THE CURRENT PARKS SYSTEM

Alberta's provincial parks system comprises approximately four per cent of the province's total land mass, or 27,614 km². The national parks within Alberta cover an additional eight per cent of the province.

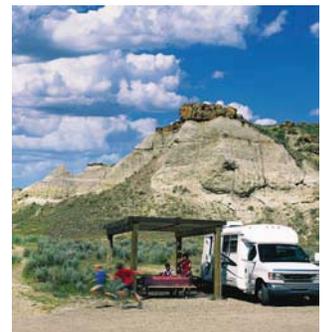
There are approximately 500 parks within the system, offering a rich diversity of opportunities and uses.

Some parks, like Aspen Beach Provincial Park, are designed for recreation, but many others support both conservation and recreation activities.

Some parks, such as the Athabasca Dunes, contain some of Alberta's rarest and most fragile landscapes. They provide living laboratories for research and their primary objective is conservation.

Alberta's parks range in size from very large (Caribou Mountains Wildland at 5,908 km²) to very small (Egg Island Ecological Reserve at less than a quarter of a city block). The vast majority (79 per cent) are less than 10 km².

Parks do not operate in isolation from other public lands, local communities or watersheds. They have an intricate relationship with surrounding areas. Good decision-making will depend on science and our ability to identify linkages and understand the broader inter-relationships and impacts.





B. EVOLVING VISITOR NEEDS

Each year, our parks receive more than 8.5 million visits. Although these numbers indicate a high level of participation, they also illustrate a current challenge.

Many of our park facilities were built in the 1970s for a population that has since doubled in size. Some facilities are now at or exceeding capacity and some no longer meet current environmental, health and safety standards, which are higher today than they were 20 years ago. The Government of Alberta has begun to address the most critical needs. Between 2004/2005 and 2008/2009, it committed close to \$200 million to upgrade park infrastructure.

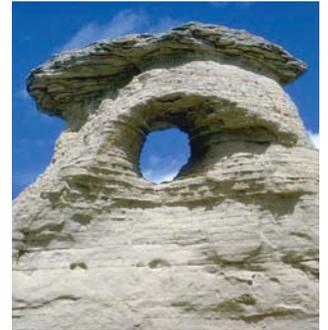
In addition to an increase in population, the kinds of outdoor experiences that people seek are changing. For example, Albertans tell us they need campgrounds that accommodate large trailers, access to designated trails for off-highway vehicles, and facilities that minimize physical, social and financial barriers to participation.

In addition to recreation, parks offer a unique and multi-faceted educational experience for visitors, students and others to learn about our natural and cultural heritage. Within this context, the Parks mandate has expanded beyond geographic boundaries. We increasingly facilitate virtual visitor experiences through the use of technology (e.g., school programs, video conferencing, website resources and wildlife webcams). These experiences extend our reach and influence, increasing the understanding of the natural world and encouraging stewardship of the land among Albertans.

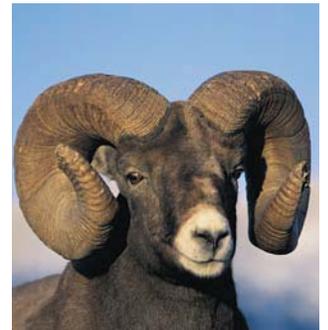


C. ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS

As the province grows, urbanization and development is fragmenting our natural settings and placing stress on the land. Important wildlife habitat is being lost, and ecosystems fundamental to the environmental health of our province are threatened. For example, wetlands throughout the province are disappearing. These areas are home to wildlife and play an important role in improving the quality of water destined for human consumption.



Land, air and water are not confined by parks boundaries. By supporting the ecological integrity and environmental diversity of our parks, we support the health of our province.



Albertans continue to place priority on land conservation including the acquisition of land for parks. As outlined in the Land-use Framework, measures to address gaps within the parks system will continue. The Parks Conservation Foundation will contribute to achieving this goal by facilitating the donation of funds and privately owned land, while nurturing a stewardship ethic within Alberta. In addition, a process for involving Albertans in proposing new parks will be established.

Increasing competition for use of the land also highlights the need for enforcement of the rules that guide responsible use. We need policies and resources to actively monitor the parks and enforce sizeable penalties when necessary.





D. RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARKS

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation has a leadership role in the establishment and management of parks. It works in partnership with other ministries on shared outcomes as varied as land management planning, outdoor recreation, youth engagement, learning opportunities, population health and reducing barriers to access.

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation also works with a number of community partners who play an important role in developing, maintaining and sustaining our parks.

They include:

- o Aboriginal communities
- o Academic institutions
- o Friends societies
- o Local communities
- o Non-governmental organizations
- o Parks visitors
- o Private sector
- o Recreation interest groups
- o Tourism authorities
- o Volunteers
- o Youth

When we think about a parks system that meets the needs of Albertans, we must also consider parks for which the provincial government does not have legislated responsibility.

Municipalities also provide a leadership role in the management of parks. Cities, towns, counties and municipal districts throughout the province are home to parks that contribute a great deal to the quality of life Albertans enjoy.

Through the management of national parks like Banff, Jasper and Waterton Lakes, the Government of Canada also plays an important role in meeting our province's recreation and conservation needs.



Beyond government initiatives, private efforts – through conservation easements on private land, donations to land trusts and volunteer efforts by associations and clubs to build and maintain trails – are growing as a means to conserve landscapes and provide recreational opportunities.

As Albertans participate in regional planning, they will be asked to consider the larger picture in developing recommendations for the use and management of parks. They will also be asked to consider the stewardship role they play through their own actions.

E. WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The Government of Alberta recognizes the constitutionally protected rights of First Nations and Métis peoples, and the unique relationship that Aboriginal communities have with the land.

While the Government of Alberta has the constitutional mandate to manage Alberta's provincial parks, it also has a duty to consult with Aboriginal communities where decisions may adversely impact their constitutionally protected Treaty rights and Aboriginal rights.

The goal is to reach a meaningful balance that respects the rights of Aboriginal communities and the interests of all Albertans.

In addition to respecting their constitutional rights, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation values the unique perspective that Aboriginal communities offer. Aboriginal communities will be encouraged to participate in the development of regional park planning.

We will also continue to develop and deliver interpretive parks programs in partnership with the Aboriginal community.





3. THE DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK

A. PURPOSE OF THE PARKS SYSTEM

Alberta's system of provincial parks came into being when the *Provincial Parks Act* was passed in 1930. At that time, the main goal of the parks was to provide places for outdoor recreation that Albertans could enjoy. The parks system consisted primarily of small recreation sites with scenic spots to swim, picnic and camp.

Since that time, the role of parks has evolved and expanded as Albertans recognize that environmental conservation is also an important goal. This is not unique to Alberta; there is growing global awareness of the need to better manage the world's natural resources.

The parks system is structured to reflect Alberta's environmental diversity – from boreal forest to grassland – to ensure parks visitors for generations to come will be able to see and learn about Alberta in its natural state.

Both objectives – recreation and conservation – are critical to the quality of life Albertans enjoy. Although they may appear to be different, they are closely related.

If we do not create public places and opportunities for Albertans to enjoy nature through recreation, we close the door to experiences that can enrich lives and nurture a culture of respect. At the same time, if we do not properly manage recreational experiences within our parks, we put our environment and natural heritage, as well as cultural heritage, at risk. Achieving both objectives requires leadership and a new approach to managing our parks.

B. VISION FOR PARKS

Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.



C. DESIRED OUTCOMES

The success of the *Plan for Parks* will be based on whether we achieve the following outcomes, adopted from the Land-use Framework:

- o People-friendly communities and recreational opportunities
 - o Healthy ecosystems and environment
 - o Sustainable prosperity supported by our land and natural resources
- Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation contributes to these outcomes directly and indirectly.

People-friendly communities and recreational opportunities

- o Parks provide diverse, enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities that contribute to healthy lifestyles.
- o Parks offer an opportunity to learn about, appreciate and care for Alberta's natural and cultural heritage.

Healthy ecosystems and environment

- o Parks conserve Alberta's natural heritage and associated cultural heritage for current and future generations.
- o Parks contribute to the long-term sustainability of Alberta's ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the overall health and wellness of our population.

Sustainable prosperity supported by our land and natural resources

- o Parks foster sustainable, nature-based experiences for Albertans and visitors that contribute to the economic and social fabric of Alberta.
- o Canadians and international visitors recognize Alberta as a desirable nature-based tourism destination. This contributes to diversifying local and regional economies and provides economic benefits to the province, as well as the private sector, local communities and partners.





D. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING

To achieve our vision for parks, we will make many decisions along the way. Guiding principles help us to navigate an increasingly complex decision-making environment where needs are diverse and sometimes competing. They will form the foundation for the decision-making criteria that will guide regional planning.

Accountability – Milestones and deliverables are established and Albertans receive timely information about progress in achieving desired outcomes.

Citizen engagement – Albertans have opportunities for meaningful input into decisions about parks; the decision-making process is inclusive and transparent.

Collaboration – Through greater collaboration with local communities, communities of interest, the private sector and other government departments, we create increased value for visitors and achieve common goals.

Continuous improvement and innovation – We seek to improve our parks system by proactively monitoring, evaluating and implementing innovative parks management strategies.

Education – Through our programs, we strive to inform, inspire and involve Albertans to increase their understanding of, respect for and connection to the natural world.

Environmental leadership – Alberta's park management and operations demonstrate environmental leadership and showcase best practices in energy and water efficiency, environmental design, construction practices and products.

Inclusion – We work to ensure park facilities and programs are designed so that everyone's needs are considered.

Integrated management – Park management decisions consider the combined impacts of environmental, economic and social factors.

Knowledge-based decision-making – Decision-making is informed by natural and social science, evidence and experience, which includes traditional knowledge of Aboriginal peoples.

Respectful and responsive – We respect and respond to the diverse needs of parks visitors, stakeholders and communities throughout the province.

Stewardship – We work with citizens, industry, communities and governments to responsibly care for and manage Alberta’s parks system.

Sustainability – Parks decisions reflect a commitment to sustainability and the long term viability of ecosystems.

E. ACCOUNTABILITY

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation will inform Albertans on progress that has been made on the *Plan for Parks* through the Ministry Annual Report. The Ministry will also work with the Land-use Secretariat to ensure regional reporting is included with the Land-use Framework monitoring and reporting process.

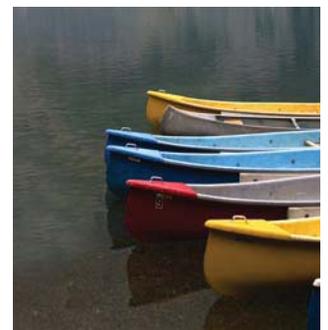
Through these reporting mechanisms, Albertans will learn about progress made in achieving:

- o the outcomes in the *Plan for Parks*;
- o the province-wide priority actions in the *Plan for Parks*; and
- o the strategies yet to be developed through regional planning.

With the input of stakeholders, specific milestones and deliverables aligned with the *Plan for Parks* will be developed.

People-friendly communities and recreational opportunities

- o Number of parks visitors and the level of visitor satisfaction;
- o Condition of park assets, such as trails, buildings, equipment, and water and sewer systems;
- o Number of volunteers and the outcomes they achieve; and
- o Progress on removing barriers to participation so all Albertans have an opportunity to enjoy our parks.





Healthy ecosystems and environment

- o Quality of air and water;
- o Number of invasive species in parks;
- o Quality of native habitats; and
- o Gaps addressed in the parks system.



Sustainable prosperity supported by our land and natural resources

- o Economic benefit to local communities, measured by annual expenditures of parks visitors;
- o Investment by partners and stakeholders to support programs and services (including environmental goods and services) delivered by the parks program; and
- o Commercial value of tourism services delivered in parks by commercial tourism operators and the ability of the parks program to support those services.



F. PRIORITY ACTIONS

In the *Plan for Parks*, priority actions are grouped by their relationship to feedback from Albertans (see Page 5):

o Strategy #1: Involve Albertans

Albertans want more involvement in decisions about parks and in the delivery of parks programs.

o Strategy #2: Offer modern facilities, policies and programs

Albertans want modern amenities, more inclusive facilities and well-maintained trails.

o Strategy #3: Provide recreation opportunities

Albertans want more access to recreation opportunities.

o Strategy #4: Conserve landscapes

Albertans want to protect the environment and culturally significant areas.

Strategy numbers do not reflect an order of priority.

Each priority action will be further defined with clear milestones and deliverables. The date of completion will vary, depending on the scope and nature of the initiative.





Strategy #1: Involve Albertans

Implement a Regional Planning Model

- o **Region-specific Planning:** Invite Albertans* in seven regions of the province to help create recommendations regarding use of parks in their area (e.g., the types of activity they would like to see, improved park experiences, economic development and conservation), within the context of what is best for the province.

Regional park planning will provide broad parks management direction for the Land-use Framework regional planning processes and site-specific park management planning processes.

Although decision-making authority will remain with the Government of Alberta, the introduction of regional planning is intended to redefine the role of Albertans in decisions about parks. Responsiveness to local needs will be significantly increased.

First steps include an examination of successful collaborative decision-making models so Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation can provide the structure and support necessary for success.

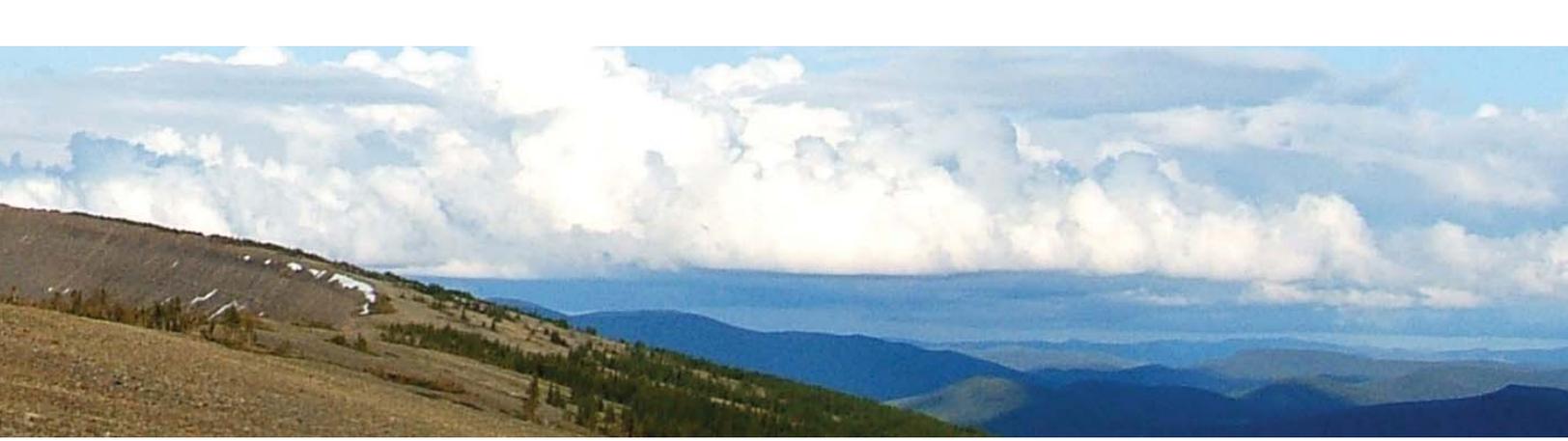
**Reference to Albertans includes Aboriginal communities, stakeholder groups, citizens, local MLAs, municipalities, industry and others.*

Create a Parks Advisory Council

- o **Parks Advisory Council:** Create a provincial Parks Advisory Council to provide input and advice to the Minister on park policies and initiatives.

With the expertise of Alberta's community leaders, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation is committed to ongoing innovation and responsiveness to the needs of Albertans. The Parks Advisory Council provides a forum for discussion of trends, issues and challenges affecting Alberta's parks.

The Parks Advisory Council is appointed by the Minister and is comprised of public, academic, industry and Aboriginal leaders who have a proven record of interest in parks, innovation and expertise.



Engage Aboriginal Communities

- o **Aboriginal Communities:** Build relationships with Aboriginal communities to identify, inventory and protect significant cultural and traditional-use sites within parks, and to collaborate on park initiatives of mutual interest.

Develop Process for Nominating New Parks

- o **Park Nomination Process:** Develop a clear process for Albertans to nominate new parks or the expansion of existing parks.

Ensure Accountability through Milestones and Deliverables

- o **Communicating progress:** Develop clear milestones, deliverables and scientific indicators based on desired outcomes. Communicate progress toward province-wide strategies, regional park planning and implementation of the *Plan for Parks* in the Ministry Annual Report. Link to the Land-use Framework monitoring and reporting process where appropriate. This information will help Albertans better understand the parks system and track progress of park initiatives.

Diversify Existing Volunteer Programs and Partnerships

- o **Volunteer Programs:** Diversify programs such as Volunteer Stewards, 'Friends of', Wildlife Ambassadors and Trail Care to provide opportunities for Albertans to contribute to the understanding, management and stewardship of parks.



Strategy #2: Offer Modern Facilities, Policies and Programs

Develop a Central Reservation System

- o **Central Reservation System:** Continue implementing an online reservation system for campground, group-use areas, special facilities and other programs to make it easier for Albertans and other visitors to plan their parks experience.

Encourage Interest and Opportunity in Parks

- o **Park Facilities:** Upgrade and develop campgrounds and facilities to accommodate changing needs of visitors (e.g., accessibility for people with disabilities, improved trail networks and more winter recreation opportunities).

Work with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to increase camping capacity throughout Alberta to address higher demand while maintaining ecological integrity.

Refine the Parks Classification System

- o **Parks Classification System:** Refine the current park classification system so Albertans can easily understand which recreation and conservation activities are supported in each park and why.

This will require the consolidation and modernization of two pieces of existing park legislation – *the Provincial Parks Act* and the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* – into a single Act.



Strategy #3: Provide Recreation Opportunities

Identify and Develop Opportunities for Recreation

- o **Responsible and Safe Recreation:** Identify and develop opportunities for responsible and safe recreation within parks.

This includes investing in existing facilities and/or developing new facilities*. It also involves creating operational policies to guide the use of parks, such as the operation of motorized vehicles, geocaching, horseback riding, hunting/outfitting, climbing and other activities.

**Facilities includes campgrounds, picnic sites, trails, buildings, visitor centres, staging areas, water and sewer systems, and all other infrastructure that supports park visitor experiences*

Encourage Interest and Opportunity in Parks

- o **Policy on Private Sector Involvement in Parks:** Develop a policy to encourage innovative private sector involvement in parks, thereby enhancing and diversifying visitor opportunities.

Implement an Inclusion Strategy

- o **Inclusion Strategy for Parks:** Implement a province-wide inclusion strategy to increase opportunities for, and invite full participation of, all Albertans.



Strategy #4: Conserve Landscapes

Facilitate Contributions to Parks

- o **Parks Conservation Foundation:** Establish a Parks Conservation Foundation to better enable private citizens and corporations to donate land, money and gifts-in-kind to the parks system and nurture a stewardship ethic among Albertans. This new foundation will adopt the parks portion of the current Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation's mandate.

Balance in the Parks System

- o **Initiatives to identify new parks to meet provincial recreation, tourism and conservation goals:** Consistent with the process for nominating new parks, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation will lead initiatives to create new parks, or expand or reclassify existing parks, to help fill conservation, recreation, and tourism gaps in the current parks system.

Foster Evidence-based Decision-making

- o **Science Strategy:** Implement a Parks Science Strategy that facilitates natural and social science research by the academic community, park staff, volunteers and others to inform the management of parks.

4. CONCLUSION

In less than 80 years, we have made great strides in creating a park system that meets the needs of Albertans.

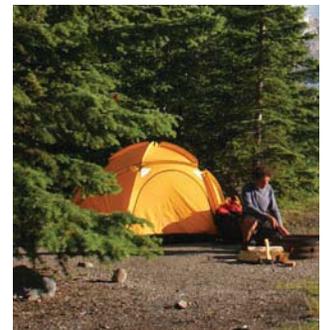
Over the next 10 years, our focus will be on achieving our vision:

Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.

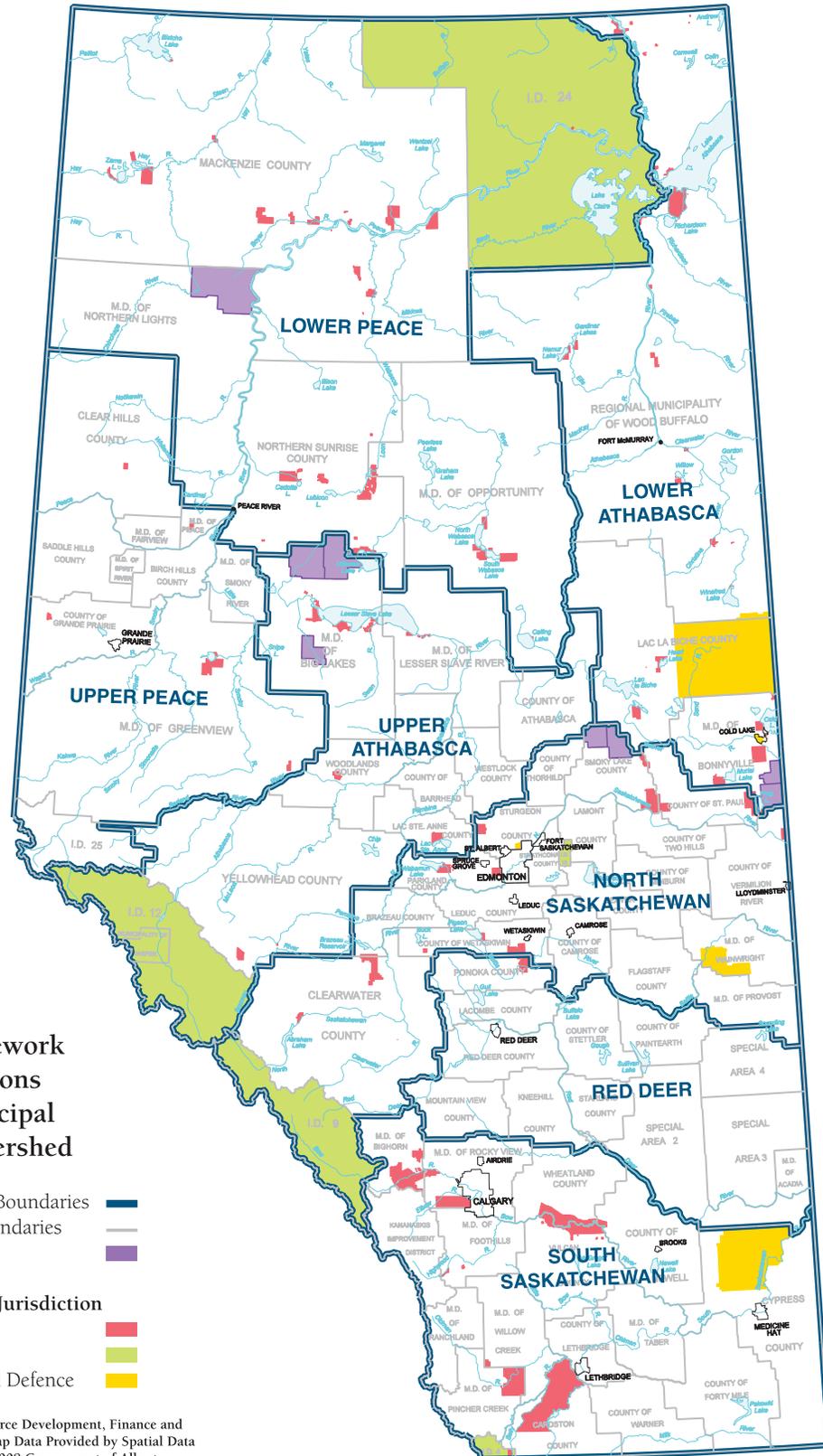
By establishing a new working relationship with Albertans, we can achieve two important objectives – conservation and recreation – to keep Alberta's parks healthy, beautiful and accessible for generations to come.

Through the introduction of regional planning, a Parks Advisory Council and a nomination process for new provincial parks, Albertans are invited to be part of the decision-making process.

By creating alignment with the Land-use Framework, we also ensure the decisions we make together are consistent with the direction of the Government of Alberta.



APPENDIX 1: Land-use Framework Regions



Land-use Framework Planning Regions based on Municipal Districts & Watershed

LUF Planning Regions Boundaries █
 Municipal Districts Boundaries █
 Métis Settlements █

Lands Under Federal Jurisdiction
 Indian Reserves █
 National Parks █
 Department of National Defence █

Produced by Sustainable Resource Development, Finance and Administration Division. Base Map Data Provided by Spatial Data Warehouse Ltd. ©Nov 27, 2008 Government of Alberta

APPENDIX 2: Glossary of Terms

*Adopted from the Land-use Framework, with the exception of those marked with an .**

Aboriginal Peoples*: Includes all First Nations and Métis communities, as well as all non-treaty Aboriginal communities, in Alberta.

Access*: Allowing or enabling entry, approach or use of an area.

Albertans: All people who live and reside in Alberta including Aboriginal Peoples.

Biodiversity: The assortment of life on earth including the variety of genetic material in all living things, the variety of species on earth and the various kinds of living communities and the environments in which they all occur.

Conservation: The responsible preservation, management and care of our land and of our natural resources.

Ecological Integrity*: Ecosystems have integrity when they have their native components (plants, animals and other organisms) and processes (such as growth and reproduction) intact.

Ecosystems: The interaction between organisms, including humans, and their physical environment. Ecosystem health/integrity refers to the adequate structure and functioning of an ecosystem, as described by scientific information and societal priorities.

Economic: Relating to the wealth of an individual, business, community or a nation.

Environment: The components of the earth – including air, land, water, all layers of the atmosphere, all organic and inorganic matter and living organism, and all of their interacting natural systems.

Facility: Includes campgrounds, picnic sites, trails, buildings, visitor centres, staging areas, water and sewer systems, and all other infrastructure that supports park visitor experiences

Inclusion: Ensuring facilities and programs are designed so that everyone's needs are considered regardless of age, ability or disability, economic standing or other factors.



Land: The entire complex of surface attributes including air, water, and the solid portions of the earth.

Municipalities: Cities, towns, villages, summer villages, municipal districts, counties, and specialized municipalities.

Natural heritage*: The geological features and landforms, associated biodiversity, and ecosystem functions of a defined area.

Natural Resources: Resources that occur in nature, including non-renewable resources, such as timber, fish, wildlife, soil, water, oil sands, coal and minerals.

Park*: Includes provincial parks, protected areas and all sites managed by the Government of Alberta's Parks Division.

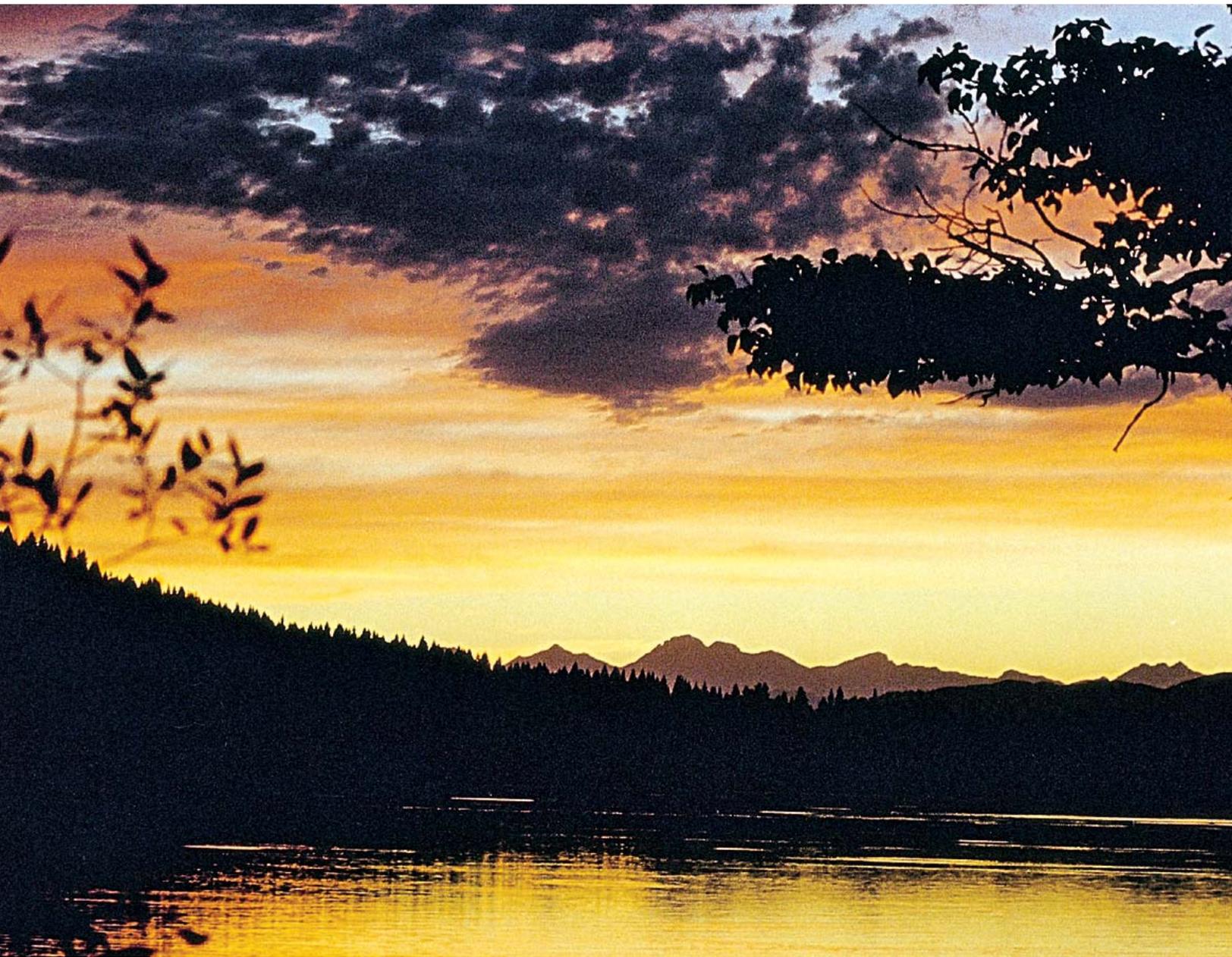
Recreation*: All those things that a person or group chooses to do in order to make their leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable and more personally satisfying.

Region: A geographical area or district having definable boundaries or characteristics. Regions can be based on natural regions, watersheds or administrative boundaries.

Stewardship: An ethic whereby citizens, industry, communities and governments work together to responsibly care for and manage Alberta's natural resources and environment.

Watershed: The area of land that catches precipitation and drains into a larger body of water such as a marsh, stream, river or lake. Watersheds can range in size from a few hectares to thousands of square hectares.





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