

# Alberta's Plan for Parks 2009–2019

An Update—February 2010

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Online campground reservations available at 50 provincial campgrounds** across Alberta since the website launched in May 2009.
- **30 kilometres of new park trails across Alberta** to allow people of all ages and abilities to enjoy recreation and physical activities to help them lead healthier, more active lives. There are plans to create another 100 kilometres of park trails in 2010–2011.
- **Approximately 100 new campsites added in provincial parks campgrounds in 2009** and there are plans to add more campsites in 2010.
- **Albertans took an active role in planning the future of Alberta parks** by participating in more than a dozen online public consultations in 2009.
- **Alberta scientists will play a larger role in parks research** through a new *Alberta Parks Division Science Strategy* that supports evidence-based decision-making to relating to the management of parks.
- **Everyone belongs outside**, and work is underway on an inclusion strategy to remove physical barriers in new and existing parks facilities, as well introducing new Canadians to our Provincial Parks and bridging language barriers.
- **Volunteer parks programs expanded** with 2500 Albertans volunteering more than 100,000 hours of their time to assist with parks programs.
- **Alberta students can now take virtual field trips to provincial parks** through the new educational video-conference program. The interactive educational program ensures provincial parks are accessible to all Albertans.

# A NEW DIRECTION FOR MANAGING ALBERTA'S PARKS

Based on extensive consultations with Aboriginal communities, stakeholder organizations, park visitors, elected officials, government staff and others, *Alberta's Plan for Parks* was released to the public on April 20, 2009. The [Plan for Parks](#) will guide the management of parks over the next 10 years, and help ensure the sustainability of our natural landscapes and recreational opportunities for Albertans. It 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.*

The plan aligns with the province's [Land-use Framework](#), and is playing a key role in achieving our objectives for responsible land use in Alberta.

## IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN FOR PARKS

Less than a year into Alberta's 10 year *Plan for Parks*, significant progress has already been made in implementing the new vision for Alberta's parks.

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

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

To achieve these outcomes with parks, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation is embarking on several province wide initiatives over the next decade, many of which are already underway.

# STRATEGY #1: INVOLVE ALBERTANS

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

## Public Consultations

The *Plan for Parks* reaffirms the Government of Alberta's commitment to engaging Albertans in the management and planning of Alberta's parks. From focus groups to [online consultations](#), input from Albertans helps the province better manage Alberta's parks.

- **Since releasing the *Plan for Parks* in April 2009, Albertans have provided feedback through more than a dozen public consultations** on issues such as park expansion, park management and park facility plans. Specific examples include the proposed expansion of Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park and proposed facility upgrades at Carson-Pegasus Provincial Park.

## Diversifying Volunteer Programs

Albertans volunteer more than 100,000 hours of their time to assist with parks programs every year. In September 2009, the Government of Alberta honoured eight individuals and one organization for dedicating their time and talent to preserving, protecting and enhancing provincial parks for future generations. By diversifying park volunteer programs in 2009, Albertans now have more opportunities to contribute to the understanding, management and stewardship of parks.

- **A record number of volunteer wildlife ambassadors in Kananaskis Country educated visitors about wildlife safety and ethics, and responsible land use in 2009.** "From Visitor to Participant", Parks Division staff developed an evaluation paper for the Wildlife Ambassador program. The paper will serve as an excellent model for building relationships and engaging Albertans in community-based environmental education and stewardship.
- **Volunteers donated 2000 hours to the Alberta Access Challenge weekend.** Including participants, volunteers and staff, 75 people enjoyed a weekend in the wilderness this past August while promoting inclusion in parks. The adaptive nature challenge is designed to encourage people with disabilities to enjoy visits to provincial parks using adaptive equipment, creativity and teamwork to remove barriers to participation.
- **A partnership approach has volunteers improving trail recreation in the Bow Valley.** The Parks Division, the Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance, Bow Valley municipalities and the general mountain bike community worked together to provide an educational trail building experience, while improving Bow Valley trails this past summer. Volunteers engaged in classroom theory and hands-on training to connect with and to channel the communities' young energy into constructive projects.

## STRATEGY #2: OFFER MODERN FACILITIES, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

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

### Park Infrastructure

Albertans love to go camping, and we are planning to expand existing campgrounds, and add new campgrounds to meet the needs of our growing population. Since 2004, we have invested nearly \$225 million in park facilities and infrastructure. In 2009–2010, we invested another \$29 million in park facilities and infrastructure. We are prioritizing infrastructure projects to better meet the needs of Albertans and park visitors. We have focused on water treatment/distribution systems and sewer lines; campsites, road and trail resurfacing and paving; building repair and painting; shower and washroom facilities; and picnic table and fire pit replacement.

- **Approximately 100 new campsites were built in provincial parks campgrounds in 2009** and there are plans to add campsites in 2010.
- **A joint federal-provincial investment of \$5.4 million** is being used to improve trails and provincial campgrounds and facilities in Alberta in 2009–2010.
  - o Pigeon Lake Provincial Park Sewage System Upgrade
  - o Sandy McNabb Campground Refurbishments
  - o Lundbreck Falls Provincial Recreation Area Trail Upgrades
  - o Red Lodge Water Treatment Plant System Upgrade
  - o Saskatoon Island Provincial Park Trail Enhancements
  - o O'Brien Provincial Park Trail Improvement
  - o William A. Switzer Provincial Park Water System Upgrade
  - o Waskahigan Provincial Recreation Area Group Use Area Upgrade
  - o Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park Water Tower Replacement
  - o Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park New Water Supply System
  - o Aspen Beach Provincial Park Shower Building Upgrades
  - o Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area Playground at Touchwood Lake
  - o Smoke Lake and Iosegun Lake Provincial Recreation Areas Campground Upgrades
- **Fish Creek Provincial Park Educational Learning Centre undergoes major upgrades in 2009/2010.** The new Calgary-based learning centre will provide increased classroom space, public presentation venues, and improve the efficiency of the building's operation. Its official opening is expected in 2010.
- **Construction begins on a new 30 kilometre recreation trail system at Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park.** The trail project, to be built in stages over the next three years, is a partnership between the federal and provincial governments, the National Trails Coalition and the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

## Alberta's Online Campground Reservation Service

As of May 1, 2009, booking a summer holiday is just a mouse click away with Alberta's new online campground reservation service - [Reserve.AlbertaParks.ca](http://Reserve.AlbertaParks.ca).

- **Visitors made nearly 50,000 online campsites reservations at 25 provincial campgrounds in 2009.** In a 2009 Online Reservation Website Survey, 90 per cent of users said they were able to access the information they were looking for on the website and 86 per cent of users said they were satisfied with the website.
- **In 2010, visitors can make online reservations, 90 days in advance, at 50 provincial campgrounds.** We are doubling the number of provincial campgrounds taking online reservations by adding 25 new campgrounds online in 2010. Another 25 provincial [campgrounds](#) take reservations by phone and in person at the local registration office, and a further 200 provincial campgrounds offer first-come first served campsites.
- **In 2010, a new toll-free reservation phone service** will allow those who prefer to talk to a real person, to book their campsites 90 days in advance over the phone at 1-877-537-2757.

## Provincial Park Virtual Field Trips

In October 2009, five new [interactive educational programs](#) were launched to allow students to take online field trips to four provincial parks. The series of hour-long video conference presentations gives students the opportunity to trek into dinosaur country with paleontologists, learn about rock art and Alberta's First Nations history, uncover mysteries in our forests and discover birds, cougars and wetlands. The interactive educational program helps to ensure provincial parks are accessible to all Albertans.

## Updating Parks Legislation

Work is underway to refine the current park classification system so visitors can easily understand what activities are permitted in which parks. This involves consolidating three pieces of existing parks legislation—*Provincial Parks Act*; *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*; and the *Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act*.

## STRATEGY #3: PROVIDE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Albertans want more access to recreation opportunities.

### Inclusion

A province-wide inclusion strategy to increase opportunities for full participation of all Albertans is nearing completion. The strategy identifies barriers and opportunities to engaging various groups, and outlines several initiatives to connect people to nature, conservation, and outdoor recreation. In 2009, a number of pilot inclusion initiatives targeted new audiences, including persons with disabilities and new Canadians.

- **The Alberta Access Challenge in Kananaskis Country was expanded**, through the [Push to Open](#) program. The adaptive nature challenge encouraged people with disabilities to enjoy visits to provincial parks using adaptive equipment, creativity and teamwork to remove barriers to participation.
- **Award of Excellence from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.** Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation Communications and Outreach Coordinator Don Carruthers Den Hoed received the [Premier's Council Award of Excellence in Public Awareness](#) in December 2009 for his work on the Alberta Access Challenge. Through this project, Don brought together many organizations and volunteers who support Albertans with disabilities.
- **The [Nature as a Second Language Program](#) welcomed hundreds of new Canadians to provincial parks this past summer.** The program introduced new Canadians to provincial parks, campgrounds and conservation officers. The program also involved a successful partnership with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to co-host a free fishing day in Kananaskis Country.
- **A new online guidebook for new Canadians will be launched in early 2010.** The free guidebook, developed under the Nature as a Second Language Program, will be available in six languages and provide information about Alberta's provincial parks system, campgrounds and facilities, as well as important rules and regulations.

## STRATEGY #4: CONSERVE LANDSCAPES

Albertans want to protect the environment and culturally significant areas.

### Science Strategy

As part of Alberta's *Plan for Parks*, a science strategy to support evidence-based decision-making in parks will be launched in 2010. The strategy will facilitate natural and social science research by the academic community, parks staff, volunteers and others to inform the management of parks.

- A new [online permitting and clearance system](#) was launched in May 2009. Scientists who wish to carry out research or collection activities in Alberta's parks now have immediate and around-the-clock access to information about application procedures, contact information, and review requirements.

### Expanding Provincial Parks

In 2009, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation initiated a public consultation to amend the boundary of [Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park](#). The proposal includes adding islands in the east basin of Lac La Biche to the provincial park. The islands are in a protected area for migratory birds and were established as a bird sanctuary more than 80 years ago. The proposed change would increase the protection of the islands and almost double the size of the provincial park. A final decision on the proposed boundary amendment is expected in 2010.

### Mapping Environmentally Significant Areas

In 2009, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation contributed to an updated report of Alberta's [environmentally significant areas](#). The independent report highlights areas which contain important and unique environmental values. These areas are important to the long-term maintenance of Alberta's biodiversity, soil, water, and natural processes. This report does not represent government policy, and these areas do not necessarily require legal protection. The environmentally significant areas report is one of the tools used to help make informed decisions regarding land use at local, regional and provincial levels. The report will help the Regional Advisory Councils develop regional plans under the Land-use Framework. Albertans will be consulted on land-use proposals put forward by the Regional Advisory Councils before a Cabinet decision is made.

## THE PATH FORWARD

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, park visitors, and staff.

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.

We encourage all Albertans to take an active role in planning the future of Alberta parks. For more information on the *Plan for Parks* and for future updates, please visit [www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/p4p](http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/p4p).