

# Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area

 **Winter Guide**



Snowshoeing

The 97 square kilometre Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area contains forests, pastures and wetlands. It is a multiple use area that supports a variety of activities, including agriculture, wildlife management, natural gas extraction and outdoor recreation.

Active wildlife management programs in the area have created a wide range of habitats that support numerous wildlife species. Winter recreation opportunities include horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and fat biking. The area provides excellent wildlife viewing opportunities along its more than 170 km of maintained trails.

Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area is the site of the *Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival*, held each year in February.

*Alberta*

## Trail Information

### Trail Conditions

- Winter trail conditions vary depending on snowfall amounts, temperature fluctuations and levels of trail use.
- Trail grooming staff work hard to ensure trails are managed accordingly.
- Typically trails between Waskehegan and Islet Lake staging areas are groomed first.
- Be sure to check trail reports before you head out at [albertaparks.ca/trailreports](http://albertaparks.ca/trailreports)

### Cross-Country Ski Trails

- Dogs are not permitted on track-set trails.
- Trails are packed and groomed regularly, as snow conditions warrant.
- There are trails for both novice and advanced skiers: 65 km track-set, 35 km packed for skate skiing, and numerous non-groomed trails.
- Many trails are double-tracked for 2-way traffic.
- Some warm-up shelters are provided along trails. Please extinguish fires when you leave.
- Skiers should keep left when passing and step off to the right when stopping. Downhill traffic has right-of-way. Use caution when approaching steep slopes and bridges.

### Equestrian Trails

- Pastures, alleyways and winter equestrian trails may be used for horseback riding (alleyways are also used by snowmobiles).
- For a quieter ride, use marked equestrian trails from Central and Waskehegan Staging Areas.
- Blackfoot Staging Area trails are closed to horses from Dec. 1 to Mar. 31.
- Please refer to [albertaparks.ca](http://albertaparks.ca) for current information.

### Dogsledding

- Available from Blackfoot Staging Area.

### Snowmobiling

- Snowmobiling is **only** permitted when there is at least **30 cm** of compacted snow
- Waskehegan Staging Area offers the only access point for snowmobiling. Snow machines must be transported to the staging area on trailers.
- Snowmobiling is permitted on Central Alleyway Trail and selected fields, when snow conditions allow. Please follow all posted signage for trails and fields.
- Snowmobiles are not allowed on equestrian, cross-country ski and boundary trails.

## Waskehegan Staging Area

The first four loops follow gently undulating terrain for 14 km and are ideal for families with children. Rest stops are spaced along the first three loops and there's a larger shelter at Lost Lake/Meadow junction. Pockets of spruce in low areas along trails are evidence of the mixed boreal forest that used to dominate this area.

### Ski Trails

**Detour** (2.1 km) shortens Wanisan loop, following ungulate fence on the inside.

**Don's Way** (3.7 km) runs along boundary fence from Spruce Hollow to Wanisan junction. Used for mini-Birkie.

**Ed's Way** (2.7 km) double-track; runs along the boundary fence from Siksika to Wanisan/Detour junction (used for the full Birkie).

**Flattail** (0.1 km) named for the beaver in the area (who sometimes drop trees along the trail).

**Grouse** (1.2 km) named for one of the area's bird species.

**Hare** (0.8 km) watch for snowshoe hares between Siksika and Lost Lake trails.

**Lakeside** (1.0 km) follows east side of Wanisan Lake outside ungulate fence.

## Recreational Use

- Cooking Lake-Blackfoot is open daily from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m.
- Garbage receptacles are not provided along trails or in backcountry areas. Please pack out all garbage.
- Open fires are permitted in designated fire rings and shelter stoves. For cooking portable stoves



Sleighing



Canadian Birkebeiner cross-country ski festival

**Lost Lake** (14.9 km) connects Islet and Waskehegan Staging Areas.

**Meadow** (0.8 km) short connector with views of grazing fields. White-tailed deer and moose are sometimes seen.

**Neon Lake** (1.6 km) easy trail circles part of Neon Lake.

**North Trail** (0.4 km) part of an old road, most of which was renamed Blackfoot Trail in the early 1980s.

**Siksika** (4.6 km) remote trail in hilly terrain, with numerous beaver ponds. Moose are sometimes seen along this trail.

**Spruce Hollow** (2.4 km) passes through some of the spruce untouched by fire in the early 1900s.

- are recommended. It is unlawful to collect and burn deadfall in all Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.
- Staging areas are equipped with a shelter, multiple fire rings, vault toilets. Potable water is not provided.
- Do not disturb wildlife herds in fields.
- Leave all gates as you find them.
- Do not approach, harass or attempt to feed wildlife or livestock.
- Keep your pet on a leash at all times.
- For the safety of yourself and others please respect and obey all signage within the provincial recreational area.
- Snowshoeing and fat biking are not allowed on track-set ski trails.

## Hunting

- During hunting season, a valid hunting license is required for the kind of wildlife and the wildlife management unit to which the open season applies. Indigenous hunting may occur in the area year-round.
- Discharging firearms is not permitted within 400 metres of staging areas or within 200 metres of backcountry shelters. Boundaries are identified by bright orange-yellow signs. **Note:** under the *Provincial Parks Act*, bows are considered to be firearms.
- Hunters wishing to carry or discharge a firearm in the recreation area must obtain a Firearms Discharge Permit online at [albertaparks.ca](http://albertaparks.ca).



Elk calf

**Waskehegan** (1.3 km) connects forests north and south of grazing fields. Equestrian use is permitted north of Central Trail junction.

**Wanisan** (4.5 km) portion runs near east shore of Wanisan Lake. Main trail section is not regularly maintained and is outside the ungulate fence.

### Equestrian Trails

**Baker Springs** (1.3 km) location of a natural mineral lick used by animals in the area.

**Blackfoot** (25.5 km) longest equestrian trail in the area. Extends from Waskehegan to Blackfoot Staging Area.

**Cutoff** (0.5 km) connecting trail between Blackfoot and Waskehegan trails. Continues into Elk Island National Park. Equestrian use is not permitted north of Elk Island boundary fence.

**J.J.** (0.9 km) begins at gate in northwest corner near Range Rd. 210. Connects to Blackfoot Trail.

**Running Dog** (3.0 km): runs along north shore of Running Dog Lake. Group shelter just off the trail.

**Swan** (0.7 km) named for swans often observed in the area during summer months. Link from N.U.L. north to shelter on Running Dog Lake.

**Waskehegan** (1.3 km) equestrian use permitted north of junction with Central Trail.

**Winter** (3.7 km [South 2.4 km; North 1.3 km]) excellent wildlife viewing. South portion is for skiing only, north portion is for both equestrian use and skiing.

## Central Staging Area

Skiers and equestrian users share portions of these trails. Skiers meeting horses should stop and step aside to allow them to pass. Moose Link Trail connects Central and Islet Lake Staging Areas. Trails around Central are fairly flat, with one major hill on Beaver Loop heading west from Central Staging Area.

## Safety

In an emergency, locate the nearest trail map sign for emergency contact numbers.

Travelling on recreation area trails can be hazardous. Weather conditions can change quickly. Many of the trails are remote and are not patrolled on a regular basis. It is important that you be prepared by carrying the following in your pack or saddlebag:

- first aid kit
- warm clothing
- extra food and drinks
- headlamp or flashlight
- lighter or matches
- pocket knife
- whistle
- map and compass
- hoof pick and leather sticker (equestrian users)
- extra ski tip (x-c skiers)
- cell phone – there is cell coverage in most areas of Blackfoot.
- bike repair kit (mountain bikers)

## Hypothermia and Frostbite

**Hypothermia**, the lowering of body temperature is caused by exposure to cold and can occur even on relatively warm days. As the body cools, it loses its ability to function normally. Symptoms include shivering, confusion and clumsiness. To avoid hypothermia, keep warm and dry, dress in layers of loose-fitting clothing and wear a hat. Carry extra socks and an extra sweater or warm jacket.

**Frostbite** is the freezing of living tissue. Fingers, feet, ears, nose and cheeks are most susceptible. The first sign of frostbite is the skin turning red, then suddenly becoming a grayish-white colour. To treat frostbite, gently warm the area by breathing on it or placing it under an armpit. Avoid rubbing or massaging the skin – this can destroy skin cells.

**Beaver Loop** (2.6 km) active beaver colonies are numerous along this easy trail.

**Central Alleyway** (16.8 km) main alleyway connecting Waskehegan and Central Staging Areas. Can be accessed from either end.

**Roundup** (5.1 km) links trails in Central area to those in Blackfoot area. Shared by equestrian users and skiers.

**Tie-In** (1.1 km) this easy route joins Beaver Loop and Roundup trails.

**Wapiti** (6.6 km) passes through one of the best areas for elk viewing.

## Blackfoot Staging Area

Most of these trails are packed but not track-set, allowing free-style skiers and dog sledders to avoid conflicts with classic and touring skiers. Trails are challenging and very scenic with excellent wildlife viewing. This staging area is closed to equestrian use from December 1 until March 31. Please refer to [albertaparks.ca](http://albertaparks.ca) for current information.

**Buck Run** (2.3 km) good wildlife viewing along this trail, especially for white-tailed deer.

**Elkhorn** (1.6 km) the large 6-point antler this trail is named for can be viewed at the Friends of the Blackfoot Heritage Interpretive Centre located at the Waskehegan Staging Area.

**Faraway** (5.2 km) used for practice and preparation for dogsled racing events.

**Heron Hollow** (2.1 km) short connector through Blackfoot Lake drainage on Norris Creek. Named for blue herons that frequent the area.

**Muskkrat** (1.1 km) longer loops can be made using this and Blackfoot area equestrian trails.

**Morningside** (1.3 km) follows gas transmission line and accesses loops of varying length.

## Contact

**Park Office**  
Phone: Phone: 780-922-3293

**General Provincial Park Information**  
Web: [albertaparks.ca](http://albertaparks.ca)  
Phone: 1-877-537-2757

**Public Safety and Enforcement (24/7)**  
Phone: 310-LAND (5263)

**Emergency (Police, Fire, Ambulance)**  
Phone: 911



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**Norris Ridge** (2.1 km) follows ridge above Norris Creek.

**Outlet** (0.5 km) provides access to ungulate fence from northeast loop of Blackfoot Trail.

**Springs** (2.4 km) provides access to Ukrainian Cultural Centre via Elk Island boundary.

**Well Site** (1.0 km) there's access to the ungulate fence from this abandoned well site.

**Whitetail** (3.1 km) be on the lookout for white-tailed deer along this trail.

## Islet Lake Staging Area

More than 30 km of cross-country ski trails can be accessed from this staging area. Two short loops with small hills (Highline and Middle trails) are for novice skiers. Trails around Elk Push Lake are more difficult. Islet and Waskehegan trails are linked through Elk Push shelter.

**Highline** (2.4 km) mainly follows ridge crests. Excellent for bird watching.

**Lost Lake** (14.9 km) connects Islet and Waskehegan Staging Areas.

**Middle** (1.3 km) allows several loops of varying lengths to be made in the Islet Lake area.

**Moose Link** (2.5 km) Islet Lake trails can be accessed from Central Staging Area using this trail. Named for unusual moose antlers found along the route. Antlers are on display at the Heritage Interpretive Centre at Waskehegan.

**Porcupine** (0.8 km) many porcupines in the area. Keep pets on leash to avoid nasty vet bills!

**Push Lake** (1.9 km) hilly trail accesses west side of Elk Push Lake. Dividing ridge between Islet and Elk Push lakes. Excellent viewpoint.

