Soil & Water Contamination

Never feed or approach bears. Walk single file to avoid widening trails. Make plenty of noise when hiking into Bear Country.

Familiarize yourself with wildlife safety. Keep in mind that bears will eat just about anything, even things we don’t think of as food, like barbecue grease and toiletries.

Avoid outdoor activities from dusk until early morning when bears are most active.

Keep a close watch on children at all times.

There are sand dunes in the eastern two-thirds of the park that are part of a larger dune field extending northeast along the Athabasca River. Some of the dunes are located in a transitional state between transverse and parabolic dunes. Parabolic dunes are crescent-shaped, with horns facing away. Transverse dunes are linear-shaped and form at right angles to the prevailing wind. The western part of the park is predominately wetlands consisting of sedge/grass tins, black sedge/duck bogs, shrub fens and marshes.

Forts Assiniboine Sandhills

The area contains a high diversity of vegetation types—463 plant species have been recorded in the park. 20 of which are classified as “provincially rare” including low milkweed, MacCalla’s aster, Richardson’s sedge, stiff clubmoss, wooley sedge, blunt-leafed bog orchid and large northern aster.

Site Description & Location

Fort Assiniboine Sandhills is located in the central mixedwood subregion of the Boreal Forest Natural Region. The park’s diverse landscapes include steep valley walls and river flats; springs and wetlands; stabilized sand dunes; and pine, white spruce and aspen forests. The park includes Pembina Island and other islands in the Athabasca River. Access to the park is via Highway 661 from the west, access is via Vega ferry crossing.

Minimum Impact Recreational Use

You can minimize the impacts of your recreational activities by being aware of the effect you have on the environment and acting responsibly. Be informed; familiarize yourself with regulations pertinent to any managed areas you plan to travel through (i.e. wildland parks). Choose equipment that is lightweight, functional and safe. Park your vehicle in an established parking area; avoid parking on roadside meadows and other sensitive areas. Check trail and camping conditions before your trip. Be aware of the following environmental impacts of recreational use in wildland parks and wilderness areas:

- Soil & Water Contamination
- Loss of Vegetation Cover
- Soil Erosion
- Wildlife Disruption

Backcountry Safety Tips

- Inform family, friends or authorities of your intended route and estimated return time.
- Never travel alone.
- Bring sufficient clothing and gear such as food, matches, first aid kit and emergency blanket, even on day trips.
- Be prepared for sudden changes in weather.
- Be knowledgeable about your route; obtain maps; keep track of where you are at all times by map and compass or GPS.
- Be cautious when fording streams and rivers—they can be dangerous, especially when stream flows are high.
- Familiarize yourself with wildlife safety techniques; when hiking or riding in Bear Country, consider the following:
  - Never feed or approach bears.
  - Keep in mind that bears will eat just about anything, even things we don’t think of as food, like barbecue grease and toiletries.
  - Avoid outdoor activities from dusk until early morning when bears are most active.
  - Keep a close watch on children at all times.

- Keep bear spray accessible and know how to use it.
- Watch for signs of bear activity—tracks, scat (bear dung), rolled logs and rocks, torn stumps, claw-marked trees, ant hills, torn open and locations with many noisy birds. If you see these signs, leave the area.
- Make plenty of noise when hiking into the wind, in dense shrubbery and along streams and rivers.
- It is best to leave your pet at home; however, if you do travel with a pet, keep it on a leash at all times (loose dogs can attract and irritate bears).

For more information about bears and bear safety, pick up our Alberta Parks BearSmart brochure, or visit sr.alberta.ca.

Hiking

- Use well-defined trails.
- Walk single file to avoid widening trails.
- Don’t create your own pathways around muddy or rough sections of trail; this only makes the problem worse.
- In areas without trails, spread out; this disperses impact and prevents creation of new trails.
- Approach fragile areas such as low wet regions with caution; avoid such areas whenever possible.
- Never drop litter along trails; keep a plastic bag handy and pick up any litter you find along trails.

Equestrian Use

- Use established trails and routes in areas open to horseback riding.
- Be cautious around hikers.
- Supplemental feeds such as hay; grain pellets and alfalfa cubes can be used to prevent over-grazing and reduce competition with wildlife for food. Supplemental feed should be stored in sealed containers to prevent tampering by wildlife. Please note that using hay as supplemental feed has the potential to introduce noxious weeds into the backcountry;
- Grain and/or alfalfa pellets are preferable.

Garbage Disposal

- Garbage should always be packed out of the backcountry; never buried. Wildlife can easily find and dig up old garbage pits, even in winter. Once accustomed to human food these animals may become a problem for future visitors.
- Although some small animals may be curious, resist the urge to feed them; feeding wildlife upsets the natural balance of the food chain.

Recreational Activities

Visitors to the park can enjoy bird and wildlife watching, fishing, hiking and horseriding. Three staging areas in the park—Central, Athabasca Viewpoint and Klondike Trail—provide small parking areas and access to more than 80 km of trails.

Klondike Trail Staging Area

Klondike Trail Staging Area is located in the southwest end of the park. It provides access to a portion of historic Klondike Trail, which runs north/south through the park. Klondike Trail was first established in 1824-25 as a portage between the North Saskatchewan and Athabasca rivers. It was a major link in the Hudson Bay Company’s trans-continental transportation corridor. Although the trail fell into disuse when Ft. Assiniboine was abandoned in 1857, it came into use again as part of an overland route to the Klondike during the gold rush of 1897-99.

Central Staging Area

Central Staging Area is approximately 3 kilometers south of Highway 661. It provides access to trails in the eastern portion of the park. Athabasca Viewpoint Staging Area is in the northeast corner of the park near Vega ferry crossing. The closest provincial park with overnight camping facilities is Thunder Lakes, located 21 kilometers west of Barrhead on Highway 18 (roughly 30 kilometers south of Ft. Assiniboine Sandhills). Thunder Lakes’ campground is equipped with power hook-ups, coin-operated showers and flush toilets.
Note: OHVs are not permitted. Wagons and snowmobiles are permitted on designated routes only.