

**BRAGG CREEK PROVINCIAL PARK
Draft Management Plan**

June 11, 2008

DRAFT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 1.0, Introduction, of this plan provides background information for the management of this small provincial park near the Hamlet of Bragg Creek southwest of Calgary. This includes the Vision, Mission, Goals and planning principles for Alberta's parks system. It also includes the Proposed Site Significance Statement:

Bragg Creek Provincial Park provides a significant nature based day use recreation resource for local and regional residents.

The Proposed Management Direction for Bragg Creek Provincial Park is:

- *To provide access to high quality, safe, and enjoyable experiences for nearby residents and visitors in well designed and maintained facilities.*
- *To protect significant natural, cultural, and scenic values within the park.*
- *To work with neighboring residents and the MD of Rockyview to coordinate planning and management of the park and surrounding lands.*
- *To provide high quality interpretation and educational opportunities primarily through partnerships.*
- *To continue to support the development of healthy, sustainable tourism activities and partnership opportunities that complement park features and facilities, as well as nearby community initiatives.*

Section 2.0, Preservation and Protection, provides a brief description of park resources and identifies several priorities for management action. These include protecting the alluvial aquifer of the Elbow River by limiting future facility development to lower standard trails as well as developing a comprehensive vegetation management plan. This plan would address wildfire and other hazards within the park as well as between the park and neighboring properties.

Section 3.0, Outdoor Recreation and Healthy Living, describes existing activities and proposes management objectives and strategies to maintain and enhance existing trail, picnicking or other appropriate day use opportunities.

Section 4.0, Learning and Engagement, proposes the maintenance and enhancement of visitor information, onsite interpretive and environmental education programming and activities. Expanded and improved volunteer and partnership activities will be encouraged.

Section 5.0, Implementation describes the roles and responsibilities as well as strategies and actions that are proposed for this park.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 How Will the Management Plan Be Used?

This plan addresses the overall management of Bragg Creek Provincial Park in the Kananaskis Management Area west of the City of Calgary (see Map 1). This plan provides background or descriptive information for the park as well as proposed management intent statements, objectives, and strategies.

The plan will be used by staff of Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation as well as staff of other government agencies, First Nations, stakeholders (such as volunteers, leaseholders, special interest groups) and the general public. It forms the foundation for more specific management strategies (e.g. vegetation management plan) or annual operating plans and budgets within this protected area. Management plans are normally reviewed and updated ten years after approval.

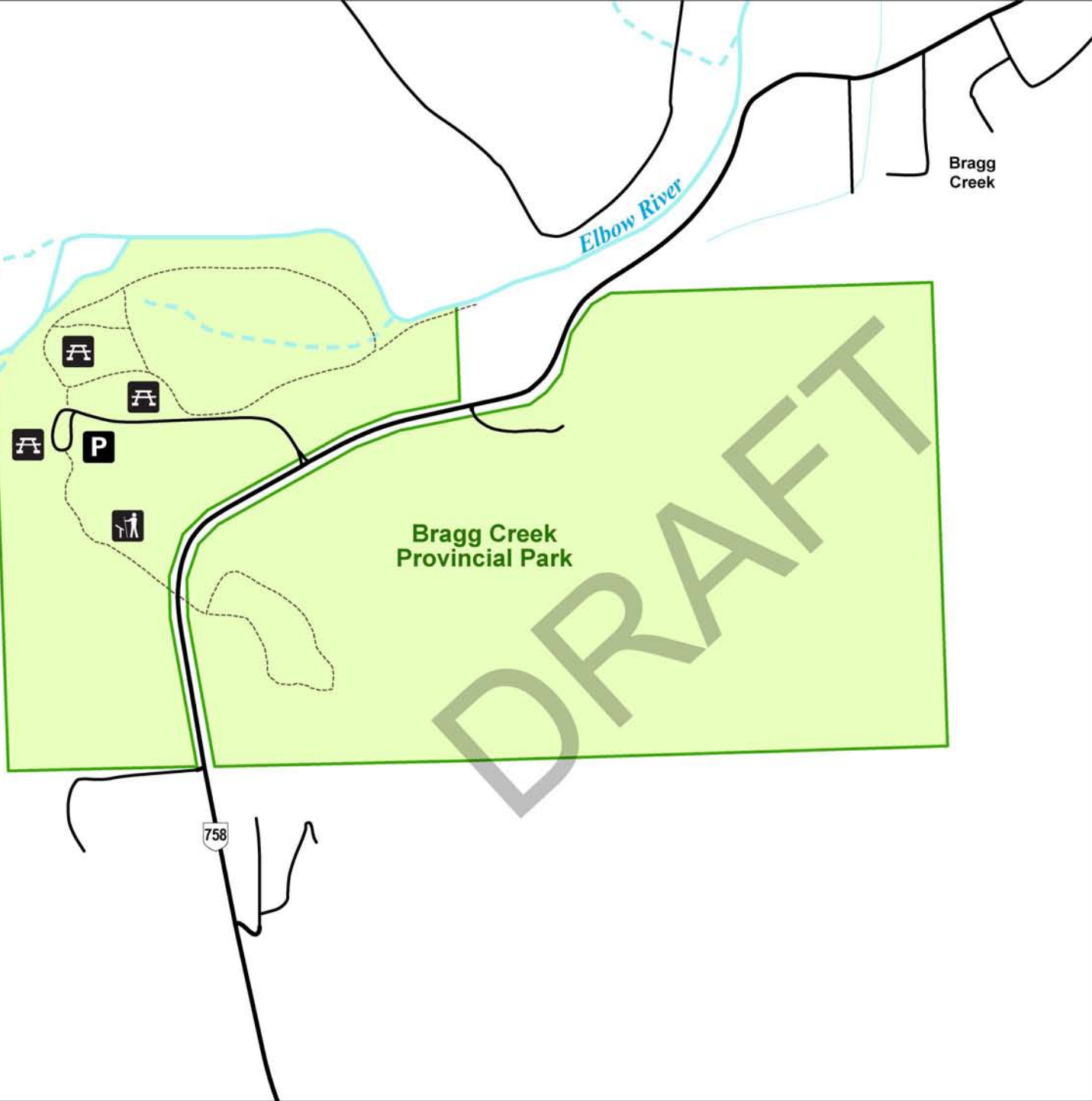
1.2 Working Together

Bragg Creek Provincial Park is a relatively small (128 hectares or 316 acres) provincial park adjacent to the Hamlet of Bragg Creek (see Map). It was established in 1960 and is surrounded mainly by private land used for rural residential purposes. Development control rests with the Municipal District (MD) of Rockyview. Alberta Parks staff work with staff of the MD of Rockyview to coordinate plans and activities within and around the park. As well, staff work with Treaty 7 First Nations with an interest in this park according to the Alberta Framework for First Nation Consultations and related guidelines. They also work with local community groups with an interest in trails, in educating students and visitors about the Elbow River or holding special events. A number of partnerships have been formed to improve communication between parks staff, recreational users, students and stakeholders in or near the park. Examples include the Friends of Kananaskis Country who have a Co-operating Agreement with Alberta Parks, an agreement with the Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association on the Centennial Trail within the park and, more recently, participation by parks staff in the Elbow River Watershed Partnership. To date, these partnerships have resulted in improved communications and understanding, additional and better coordinated research and management actions. Outside donations and volunteer labor have also contributed to help maintain or develop new trails, support research and environmental education activities in and around Bragg Creek Provincial Park.

1.3 Alberta Parks System Context

1.3.1 Strategic Plan for the Parks and Protected Areas Program

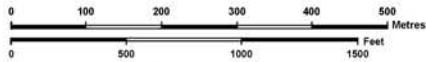
The Government of Alberta has developed a vision, mission, and goals for the Alberta Park's program. This strategy acknowledges the importance and interconnectedness between the Program's contribution to the environment, society, and the economy. The vision, mission, and goals explain the Program's purpose and key initiatives to ensure it is aligned with the Government of Alberta's 20-year Strategic Plan. The vision, mission, and goals will aid in directing management and planning to ensure that Alberta's protected areas continue to provide the environmental, economic, and social values important to all Albertans. More detailed management objectives, strategies and actions for the protected areas in this plan are presented later.



Map 1
Bragg Creek Provincial Park

LEGEND

-  Bragg Creek Provincial Park
-  Trail - designated
-  Interpretive trail
-  Picnic area
-  Parking
-  Road
-  River



Alberta



1.3.2 *The Vision, Mission and Goals for Alberta Parks*

Vision:

Parks are valued as natural landscapes that support the environmental diversity of the province. They inspire society to enjoy and rediscover its connection with the natural world.

Mission:

Parks are managed as a legacy for future generations through leadership, stewardship and research. They support biodiversity, foster sustainable visitor experiences, and provide environmental, social and economic benefits.

Goals:

The four goals which may be applied differently in the different classes of protected areas across the province are:

Outdoor Recreation & Healthy Living

- To provide inclusive, nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities that contribute to health and wellness

Preservation & Protection

- To preserve Alberta's natural heritage and associated cultural heritage for current and future generations

Tourism & Community

- To foster sustainable, nature-based experiences for Albertans and visitors that contribute to the economic and social fabric of Alberta

Learning & Engagement

- To encourage Albertans, visitors and communities to actively care for our natural world by developing an appreciation for and understanding of Alberta's natural and cultural

1.3.3 *Planning Principles for Provincial Parks*

The following management principles guide the development of objectives and strategies for these sites.

1.3.3.1 *Outdoor Recreation & Healthy Living Planning Principles*

- a) Provide safe and secure access and staging areas for a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities.
- b) Enhance visitor quality of life by providing opportunities for interaction with nature through recreation.
- c) Provide meaningful recreation opportunities for all visitors regardless of social, economic, or physical condition.

1.3.3.2 *Learning and Engagement Planning Principles*

- a) High quality interpretation, education and visitor information is easily accessible to visitors and nearby communities.
- b) Cultural features continue to be identified, researched and protected and/or interpreted as appropriate.
- c) Providing high quality volunteer opportunities as well as visitor information, interpretation and environmental education programs is essential.
- d) Current research is incorporated into programming wherever appropriate.

1.3.3.3 Tourism and Community Planning Principles

- a) People are a fundamental part of the ecosystem. Alberta Parks and other government agencies will work with visitors, residents and stakeholders to provide high quality, sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities within the planning area while protecting ecological, scenic and cultural heritage. Understanding the relationship between people and the environment is the foundation of good management decisions.
- b) The traditional relationship of First Nations to these protected areas will be respected and will help to guide management.
- c) Infrastructure is designed and developed to facilitate inclusive visitor experiences and where cost effective will employ new and innovative sustainable technologies.
- d) Enhancing effective communications and outreach will be a priority.
- e) The promotion of these areas as valued assets within the local community is a priority.

1.3.3.4 Preservation & Protection Planning Principles

- a) Ensure long term ecological health
 - Facility design and construction will recognize potential impacts on natural processes and systems (including vegetation and wildlife communities, watersheds in general and streams/rivers in particular) and will be completed to minimize or remove these impacts.
 - Natural vegetation communities and predator/prey relationships will be allowed to function and evolve naturally, wherever possible.
 - Wildlife corridors will continue to be maintained and free to function.
 - Where it becomes desirable to maintain or restore ecosystems through reclamation or other actions, local native species, patterns and processes will be used wherever possible.
 - Alberta Parks and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will work towards the establishment of more precise monitoring targets and/or indicator species through ongoing research and regional planning activities.
- b) Manage the areas within the broader landscape
 - Ecosystems extend beyond protected area boundaries. While management on neighboring lands may affect wildlife, air, water, vegetation, and visitor experience within a protected area, likewise management within a protected area may also affect adjacent lands. Ensuring good communication and collaboration among land managers and stakeholders including neighboring jurisdictions is essential.
 - In all cases, vegetation management is undertaken using an ecologically appropriate approach.
 - Grazing will be managed consistent with both grazing needs and PRA objectives.
 - Monitoring, research and adaptive management are key components of an ecosystem-based approach.
- c) Use of the precautionary principle
 - Decisions are based on the best available ecological, visual, cultural, economic, and social information.
 - The precautionary principle will be applied when potential consequences are uncertain.

- Alberta Parks recognizes environmental screening and assessment as a necessary tool for anticipating, evaluating, mitigating, and reducing the impacts of human activity on protected area lands. Screening and assessment includes a visual/scenic component.

1.4 Protected Area Classification

Provincial Parks are one of eight classifications of protected area within the Alberta system. Each class allows for a different experience for the park visitor and level of protection for the landscape. *Provincial Parks* preserve natural and cultural heritage, support outdoor recreation, tourism, and heritage appreciation activities that depend upon and are compatible with environmental protection. Typically, they:

- *Protect natural and cultural landscapes and features*
- *Have greater vehicle access and provide for a wider range of recreation activities than Wildland Parks*
- *Provide interpretive or educational opportunities for visitors*

Despite having a different designation from the Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs), Bragg Creek Provincial Park is close to the Elbow PRAs, has a similar size and vegetative character and a similar visitor use pattern. The Draft Management Plan for Kananaskis Management Area PRAs is being prepared at the same time as this plan for the park and includes a proposal to reclassify several existing PRAs in the Elbow Valley as Provincial Parks. If this proposal is approved in the final PRA plan, then Bragg Creek Provincial Park would likely retain its long-standing name but continue to be managed by parks staff as a part of this larger entity.

1.5 Proposed Site Significance Statement

Bragg Creek Provincial Park provides a significant nature based day use recreation resource for local and regional residents.

1.6 Proposed Management Direction for Bragg Creek Provincial Park

Bragg Creek Provincial Park will be managed for the following purposes:

- *To provide access to high quality, safe, and enjoyable experiences for nearby residents and visitors in well designed and maintained facilities.*
- *To protect significant natural, cultural, and scenic values within the park.*
- *To work with neighboring residents and the MD of Rockyview to coordinate planning and management of the park and surrounding lands.*
- *To provide high quality interpretation and educational opportunities primarily through partnerships.*
- *To continue to support the development of healthy, sustainable tourism activities and partnership opportunities that complement park features and facilities, as well as nearby community initiatives.*

1.7 Provincial Park History

Bragg Creek Provincial Park was first established in 1960. Since then it has seen several boundary amendments and today occupies an area of 128 hectares (316 acres). It became a

day use park in 1983 during the Kananaskis Country capital development phase when many other camping facilities were developed further west in the Elbow Valley. No previous management plan exists for this park.

PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION

2.1 Environmental Review

Environmental review in Parks and Protected Areas is a cornerstone to appropriate development and land management. Within Alberta provincial parks environmental review is required under the following conditions:

1. There is ground disturbance and / or removal of natural vegetation associated with the development. This includes buildings, utilities, roads and trails.
2. There is a significant change to the management intent of the site. An example would be changing a summer only trail to a groomed X-country ski trail.
3. There is an anticipated significant (>20%) increase in human visitation to the site.
4. There is a significant change to the local viewscape as a result of increased building size, material used or site openings.
5. If during planning of the improvement any issues of interest are noted on or adjacent to the site. This may include but are not limited to nesting sites, dens and burrows, rare or endangered species, archaeological or paleontological artefacts.

When any one of these conditions exist the proponent of the development must submit a detailed plan to the Heritage Protection Team Leader for review. Following review of the plans the Heritage Protection Team Leader, in consultation with the Area Manager will provide details regarding the type and scope of Environmental Review required.

2.2 Biophysical Overview

Bragg Creek Provincial Park is located in the Montane Natural sub-region of the Rocky Mountains with terrain composed of several low ridges and a flat terrace near the Elbow River. Ridges are composed of sandstone and shale bedrock overlain with periglacial, colluvial and alluvial deposits. Bedrock outcroppings are visible along the Elbow River within or near the park. Valley bottoms are wet with many seeps and springs that run year round and drain into the Elbow River. There is a well developed forest cover composed of white spruce, lodgepole pine and trembling aspen and balsam poplar. The aspen has a well developed understory. No vegetation inventory or biophysical work has been done in this park and consequently it is not known whether sensitive or rare plants are present.

A variety of wildlife species will use the park with some using the park as a major component of their home range. Black Bears, Grizzly bears, White Tailed deer, mule deer and elk along with numerous smaller mammals have been known to pass through and use the park in recent years.

2.3 Management Objectives and Strategies

TOPIC	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES/ACTIONS
Vegetation Management	To ensure that the vegetation present in Bragg Creek Provincial Park is managed effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under terms of KC Vegetation Management Strategy, work with SRD to conduct inventories of forest composition and health. • Develop a comprehensive vegetation management plan for Bragg Creek Provincial Park. • Complete a biophysical inventory as resources permit • Complete a rare plant survey as resources permit
	To address wildfire and other fire hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local community and SRD on Firesmart initiative as well as monitoring and removing hazardous trees
Water Quality	To maintain or enhance water quality in the Elbow River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No further facility development on alluvial aquifer other than low standard hiking or interpretive trails
Fisheries Management	To effectively manage fish populations and habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with SRD fisheries staff to ensure MOU between SRD and TPR is implemented
Wildlife Management	To protect important / rare or unique habitats including den and nesting sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include identification of important / rare and unique habitats in a biophysical inventory of the park
	Maintain connectivity to riparian habitats and corridors along the Elbow river	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage development and human use to protect areas of important wildlife connectivity with adjacent lands.
	Reduce the potential for human wildlife conflicts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and manage facilities and trails consistent with Wildsmart principles.

OUTDOOR RECREATION AND HEALTHY LIVING

Bragg Creek Provincial Park is a day use park providing opportunities for picnicking, hiking, dog walking, and fishing. Traditionally firepits have been provided at most of the picnic sites. Over the last few years however, several have been removed and public complaints have been received about the inadequate supply.

A one and a half kilometer interpretive trail loop features the foothills environment and receives moderate use (see Map 6). Much of the park east of this trail receives little if any use. Recently, a community-based trails group has partnered with parks staff to develop and maintain the

Centennial hiking trail which links the nearby Hamlet of Bragg Creek to the park along the Elbow River. This trail commemorates the 2007 Alberta Parks Centennial and has become very popular with local residents. The park is open year-round and sees mainly hiking and dog walking in the winter. Use levels are high on fine weekend days and moderate on other days.

No hunting is allowed within the park but is allowed on forest reserve lands to the west.

3.1 Management Objectives and Strategies

TOPIC	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES/ACTIONS
Recreation Opportunities	To provide an appropriate range of day use opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install additional firepits at picnic sites • Improve accessibility of facilities where feasible • Monitor demand and opportunities for expanded trail partnership • Consider development of reservation group day use facility
Facility Condition	To ensure facilities meet current standards and demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbish existing facilities • Pave access road and parking to reduce dust issues • Formalize entrance with signs

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

Bragg Creek Provincial Park currently includes one interpretive loop trail of approximately one and a half km length. It contains messages about the foothills environment and is moderately used by local residents and some school groups. The recently developed Centennial Trail has excellent views of the Elbow River and the possibility of adding some interpretive signage relating to the river or watershed has been discussed by members of the Elbow River Watershed Partnership.

Park visitor information is available at the nearby Elbow Visitor Centre on Highway 66 which is open daily in the summer and on weekends in winter. Both personal and printed information is available and as well, a small gift shop is operated by the Friends of Kananaskis Country in conjunction with visitor centre staff. The Kananaskis Country website www.Kananaskis-Country.ca, also provides a variety of visitor information about Bragg Creek Provincial Park, other facilities in the Elbow valley, and the rest of Kananaskis Country.

Kananaskis Country Environmental Education (EE) staff provide a wide variety of field-based programs for students throughout the Elbow Valley including Bragg Creek Provincial Park. All programs meet Alberta Education curriculum objectives and help to increase environmental awareness, understanding, and stewardship of Alberta Parks. EE staff also provide educators with professional development opportunities to assist in the development and delivery of their

own field programs or to provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to take students outside. The most successful field program in the Elbow Valley is the watershed program which highlights a partnership between the Friends of Kananaskis Country, the Elbow River Watershed Partnership, and Alberta Parks.

Stewardship and volunteer activities to date in BCPP have consisted of the Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association members developing and maintaining the Centennial Trail with staff supervision.

4.1 Management Objectives and Strategies

TOPIC	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES/ACTIONS
Interpretive Opportunities	Maintain or enhance interpretive trail opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess current interpretive trail and messages to ensure they are current and appropriate. Explore potential to expand existing trail with trail partners here
Visitor Information	Maintain or enhance provision of visitor information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide up to date information and operate the Elbow Valley Information Centre and Kananaskis Country website. Install kiosks at key locations to provide basic onsite information
Environmental Education/Volunteer Opportunities	Maintain or enhance environmental education and volunteer opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks staff to continue to work actively with Elbow River Watershed Partnership and Friends of KC to deliver and enhance existing EE programs and explore establishing a volunteer steward and/or trail ambassador program

TOURISM AND COMMUNITY

Bragg Creek Provincial Park is used by some commercial guiding and instructing companies for staging and conducting outdoor activities including hiking and team building. As in all PRAs and other protected areas, commercial operators are required to obtain a “Guiding or Instructing an Outdoor Activity Permit” from Alberta Parks. Permits may be limited in numbers and include conditions which reduce conflicts, impacts, and improve safety and are consistent with the approved guidelines for group size limits on Parks lands in the Kananaskis Management Area.

To date the park has not been used for commercial filming of TV commercials, documentaries, and feature films. However, the Department recognizes the economic and other benefits

associated with commercial filming and the tourism which can result from films showcasing provincial park lands. If and when applications to film in BCPP are received, a permit intended to minimize impacts and conflicts within the park would be issued. Commercial filming would not normally be permitted on weekends in Bragg Creek Provincial Park.

Occasional special events (e.g. weddings) are held in BCPP and also require a permit that includes conditions to reduce conflicts and impacts. These conditions will be consistent with the approved Special Event Guidelines for Kananaskis Area which limit group size to 150 participants and parking use to 80% of parking space. Special events will be permitted when they do not unduly disrupt general public access or use of the trails or facilities. Events are generally not approved on long weekends.

Several tourism studies over the last few years have recommended upgrading existing public recreation facilities including those within Bragg Creek Provincial Park. As well, adding new tourist facilities and services in “gateway” communities such as the Hamlet of Bragg Creek as well as the nearby towns of Cochrane, Turner Valley, and Longview has been recommended. Development of commercial overnight accommodation within Bragg Creek Provincial Park has not been permitted and is not being proposed. Demand for day use sites for group functions, under a reservation system, appears to exist and will be considered.

5.1 Management Objectives and Strategies/Actions

TOPIC	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES/ACTIONS
Guides and Outfitters/Filming/Special Events	To encourage the provision of a variety of high quality guiding and outfitting opportunities, commercial filming and special events in Kananaskis Country, including Bragg Creek PP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with guides and outfitters as well as parks staff to improve quality of information provided to visitors. • Continue to monitor existing limits to numbers of permits issued and associated conditions • Improve monitoring of and reporting on existing activities to help minimize impacts and conflicts and ensure visitor safety and enjoyment • Continue working with the Alberta Film Commission to meet the needs of the film industry while minimizing impacts and conflicts.
Tourism Facilities	To provide a range of facilities that meet demand and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbish and enhance day use facilities existing trails, trailheads as resources permit. • Where demand warrants and feasibility is demonstrated, develop

		<p>additional facilities including loop or connecting trails.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use partnership approach where feasible. • Continue to direct all non conforming tourism development outside Bragg Creek Provincial Park. • Consider establishing a reservation group day use facility in the park.
Community Relations	Identify park boundaries and work to prevent access by park users onto neighboring private land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign, fence and clear park boundaries as appropriate

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The co-ordination of plan implementation and day-to-day management of this park is the responsibility of Alberta Parks. Parks staff will communicate with other government agencies, the MD of Rockyview, visitors, stakeholders and local residents in implementing this management plan. Alberta Parks will conduct periodic plan reviews or updates as the need arises.

Individuals or groups will be invited to assume a variety of responsibilities including stakeholder representation on planning advisory groups, protected area stewards, or trail volunteering through The Friends of Kananaskis Country Trail Care Group. Management of volunteers will conform to the standards set out by the Department's Volunteer Program. Volunteer stewards will assist departmental staff in inspecting and reporting on the conditions of the Protected Areas, as well as providing input to the ongoing management process. The volunteer stewards will have no enforcement role and will only serve to "Observe, Record and Report". In addition, volunteers will continue to support a variety of programs such as public safety, research, monitoring, and education. Alberta Parks will continue to work with a variety of interest groups and encourage the development of active partnerships to care for protected areas or educate and inform visitors.