



everyone belongs outside

Alberta's *Plan for Parks*: Inclusion Plan



1.0 Introduction and Rationale

Albertans enjoy a high quality of life, and Alberta’s network of parks is a major contributor. Parks provide opportunities for active, healthy living in nature. Parks provide opportunities for learning and social connection in diverse landscapes and facilities. Finally, parks protect natural habitat and processes and provide clean air and water. Regardless of age, ability, gender, cultural background, education level, or individual perspective, time spent in nature can be an inspiring escape from the busy urban world.

This document strives to create a foundation for the inclusion of all Albertans into park experiences and landscapes - from their first “experience of a lifetime” to a lifetime of experiences. This inclusion plan is a commitment that everyone is welcome in Alberta’s parks – and that everyone **belongs** outside.

1.1 Defining Inclusion

For the purposes of this plan, inclusion is defined as: *“Ensuring facilities and programs are designed so that everyone’s needs are considered regardless of age, ability or disability, economic standing or other factors.”*

Ensuring everyone’s needs are considered requires more than just a checklist to ensure accessibility, especially if natural landscape features may make barrier-free design impossible. There can be many approaches to involving diverse people in Alberta’s park experiences (see Figure A). Inclusion occurs when there is no boundary or barrier between participants of any experience or program.

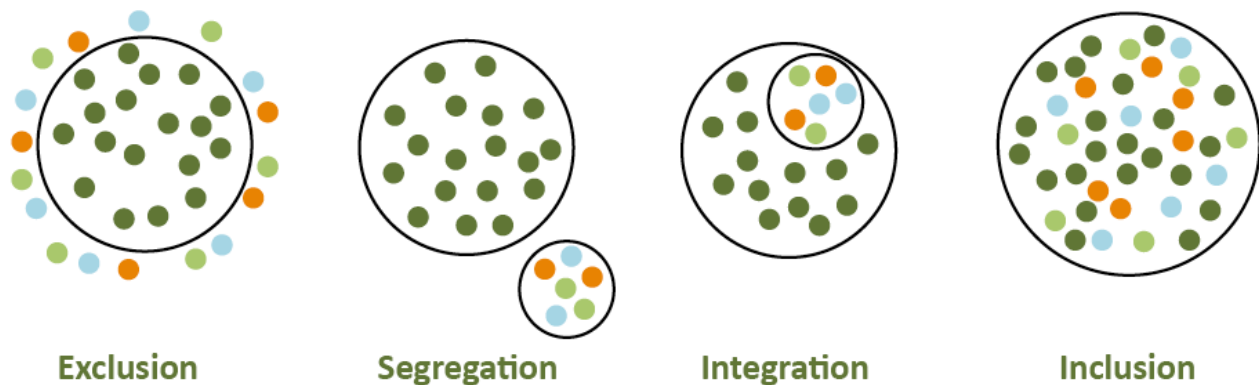


Figure A

Exclusion, segregation, and integration are each less desirable than **inclusion** unless the barrier is the result of a *choice* by an individual to not be fully included.

Striving for inclusion cannot overlook the reality that some communities are best served through integration, at least at initial stages of their involvement with Alberta’s parks. Similarly, some individuals simply do not wish to be fully included in every experience offered by the Parks Division. The goal of this inclusion plan is to ensure people have opportunities to try these experiences based on their personal capacity and desire to get involved in parks.

1.2 Importance of Inclusion in Parks

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* recognizes the “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all persons [...] without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation.” The inclusion plan builds on the *Alberta Human Rights Act* through a commitment in Alberta’s *Plan for Parks* to “increase opportunities for, and invite full participation of, all Albertans.” This inclusion plan is about more than human rights. It is about building public support for the landscapes and experiences that make up Alberta’s network of parks.

Park agencies worldwide are struggling for relevance in a changing and complex world. Alberta is no exception. Our province has experienced tremendous population growth in the past decade. Immigration and migration, more people living with disabilities, and a rise in active senior citizens make Albertans more socially diverse than ever. In addition, the growth of cities and gateway communities, the emergence of non-traditional outdoor activities, competition for the attention of youth, and the rise of *nature-deficit disorder*¹ make it more challenging than ever for parks to effectively engage people.

A priority action in Alberta’s *Plan for Parks* is to implement a province-wide inclusion strategy to remove barriers and create opportunities for all Albertans to be involved and inspired by Alberta’s parks. For nature and outdoor recreation to be relevant in Alberta’s changing society, park programs must engage people as diverse as the wild ecosystems protected within park boundaries.

1.3 How does this document fit within Alberta’s *Plan for Parks*?

Alberta’s *Plan for Parks* ensures that the management of parks aligns with the Government of Alberta’s strategic direction. The *Plan* presents an exciting vision that *Alberta Parks inspire people to discover, value, protect and enjoy the natural world, and all its benefits for current and future generations*. Through inclusion, more people can be involved in making this vision a reality.

Alberta’s *Plan for Parks* also outlines key planning elements that complement Alberta’s *Land-use Framework*, and identifies Four Priority Actions based on feedback from Albertans. The inclusion plan supports three of these Priority Actions:

Strategy #1: Involve Albertans. Albertans want more involvement in decisions about parks and in the delivery of parks programs. The inclusion plan will ensure that Albertans from all backgrounds are invited and welcome to participate in dialogue about how parks operate.

Strategy #2: Offer Modern Facilities, Policies and Programs. Albertans want modern amenities, more inclusive facilities and well-maintained trails. The inclusion plan will create a foundation to understand and address the changing needs of visitors.

Strategy #3, Providing Recreation Opportunities, directly commits to the development and implementation of an inclusion plan. Albertans want more access to recreation opportunities and the inclusion plan will increase opportunities for, and invite full participation of, all Albertans.

¹ *Nature deficit-disorder* is a term introduced by author Richard Louv in his 2005 book “Last Child in the Woods” to recognize that spending less time in contact with nature negatively impacts our physical, psychological, emotional and community health.

1.4 Outcomes

This inclusion plan supports the positive contributions that people can make in daily operations and long-term planning throughout Alberta's network of parks. A successful inclusion plan will ensure the full participation of diverse Albertans as visitors, participants, volunteers and employees, or partners. This will be measured over time by how well the Parks Division has achieved the following key outcomes:

- Decrease in physical and other barriers to accessing parks.
- Increase in knowledge of park recreation and stewardship opportunities among diverse communities.
- Increase in participation by diverse communities and new users in aspects of park programming such as experiences, consultation, volunteerism and employment and partnerships.
- Improved attitudes toward social diversity among visitors, partners and staff.

2.0 Developing this plan

Recent efforts to foster inclusion province-wide began in 2006 with the internal development of *Inclusion Strategy One: Persons with Disabilities in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas*. That document was guided by the *Alberta Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities*, and grounded in dialogue with persons with disabilities. The development process of *Inclusion Strategy One* built upon past efforts to promote accessibility, such as *KananACCESS*, which led to the creation of William Watson Lodge and an adapted trail system in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park in the 1980s. This history of trying to reduce barriers to nature indicates desire within the Parks Division to include underserved groups in meaningful experiences throughout Alberta's network of parks.

2.1.1 Workshops and Pilot Programs

From 2007 to 2011, formal and informal workshops were held throughout the province with staff, stakeholders, and partners to discuss barriers to accessing parks and to brainstorm opportunities for inclusion. At the same time, the Parks Division implemented a series of pilot initiatives to test new ideas for removing barriers and promoting inclusion. While the goal of each pilot was simply to learn, some of these initiatives were so successful in engaging diverse communities that they continue today. These pilot initiatives include:

2008-2012 Adaptive Kananaskis Challenge, Peter Lougheed Provincial Park

2010-2012 Adaptive Parkland Challenge, Eagle Point Provincial Park/Blue Rapids Provincial Recreation Area

2012 Adaptive Foothills Challenge at Crimson Lake Provincial Park

2008-2011 Nature as a Second Language "First Park Experience," Kananaskis Country

2009-2012 Nature as a Second Language "Free Fishing Day," Kananaskis Country

2009-2011 Learning the Language, Learning the Land, Miquelon Lake Provincial Park

2008-2012 Nature for Newcomers, Fish Creek Provincial Park

2011 Institute for Canadian Citizenship "Enhanced Citizenship Ceremony," Dinosaur Provincial Park

2011 Institute for Canadian Citizenship "Cultural Access Pass"

And, while not a pilot program, Alberta Parks has a successful collaboration with the Piikani First Nations (Blackfoot) at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park/Áísínai'pi National Historic Site.

In addition, Parks Division staff across the province has engaged diverse communities in creative ways. These range from Christmas Tree cutting for new Canadians at Cypress Hills Provincial Park to the unique William Watson Lodge barrier-free facility in Kananaskis Country, to partnerships with persons with developmental disabilities at Fish Creek Provincial Park. The common feature of all these programs is simply inviting and welcoming diverse users.

2.1.2 Social Research to Inform the Inclusion Plan

Alberta's *Plan for Parks* calls for evidence-based decision making. The pilot initiatives listed above offered great opportunities to draw upon social research. To support the development of the inclusion plan, the Parks Division has funded or participated in several studies aimed at documenting and analyzing initiatives and community engagement programs related to inclusion in parks and outdoor recreation (Appendix A).

Each of these social research studies provided the Parks Division with a better understanding of the barriers faced by various individuals and communities who want to connect to Alberta's parks. More importantly, these studies revealed new perspectives and ideas that can enhance our understanding of Alberta's cherished landscapes, processes, wildlife, and experiences.

2.2 Tracking our Progress

In order to share our progress in achieving the outcomes stated in section 1.4, the Parks Division will provide regular reports on this inclusion plan. These reports will focus on the outcomes outlined above, the objectives described in section 4.0, and on specific initiatives developed with our visitors, participants, leaders, and partners.

To better understand the social relevance of provincial parks, the Parks Division is building capacity for social research, such as pursuing collaborative relationships with various academic institutions. In the case of this inclusion plan, the primary focus of social research is setting targets and tracking indicators that can be used for decision-making and evaluation. These targets and indicators include:

Outcome-specific targets:

- Identify and reduce physical and other barriers throughout Alberta's network of parks.
- Identify existing or *potential* least-restrictive settings and experiences.
- Understand knowledge gaps and motivations among diverse communities.
- Track and report initial and repeat participation of diverse communities in park experiences, consultation, volunteerism and employment and partnerships.
- Explore intended and unintended impacts of participation by diverse communities.
- Understand the *relevance* of parks and park experiences to various communities.
- Develop a baseline for attitudes toward social diversity among visitors, partners, and staff.

Other indicators of inclusion:

- Quality assurance and improvement studies of various Park Division programs.
- Alignment of external and internal attitudes with priorities set by Alberta's *Plan for Parks*.
- Tracking return on investment for pilot or ongoing initiatives and programs.
- Evaluating and testing market information and trends.

Social research on work related to the inclusion plan will collect new and diverse stories of experiences in Alberta's network of parks. Regular progress reports on Parks Division inclusion activities will evaluate and share innovative approaches to engaging the public throughout the province.

3.0 Inclusion and public engagement

Members of the public engage with Alberta’s network of parks in many ways, such as attending a Parks Division interpretive program, visiting the albertaparks.ca website, talking to a conservation officer, or applying for a job. Rather than view inclusion as something to be “achieved” by simply removing barriers to these experiences, the Parks Division recognizes inclusion as an ongoing relationship-building process. As the flowchart (Figure B) shows, inclusion also acts as a frame to ensure park experiences are relevant as we:

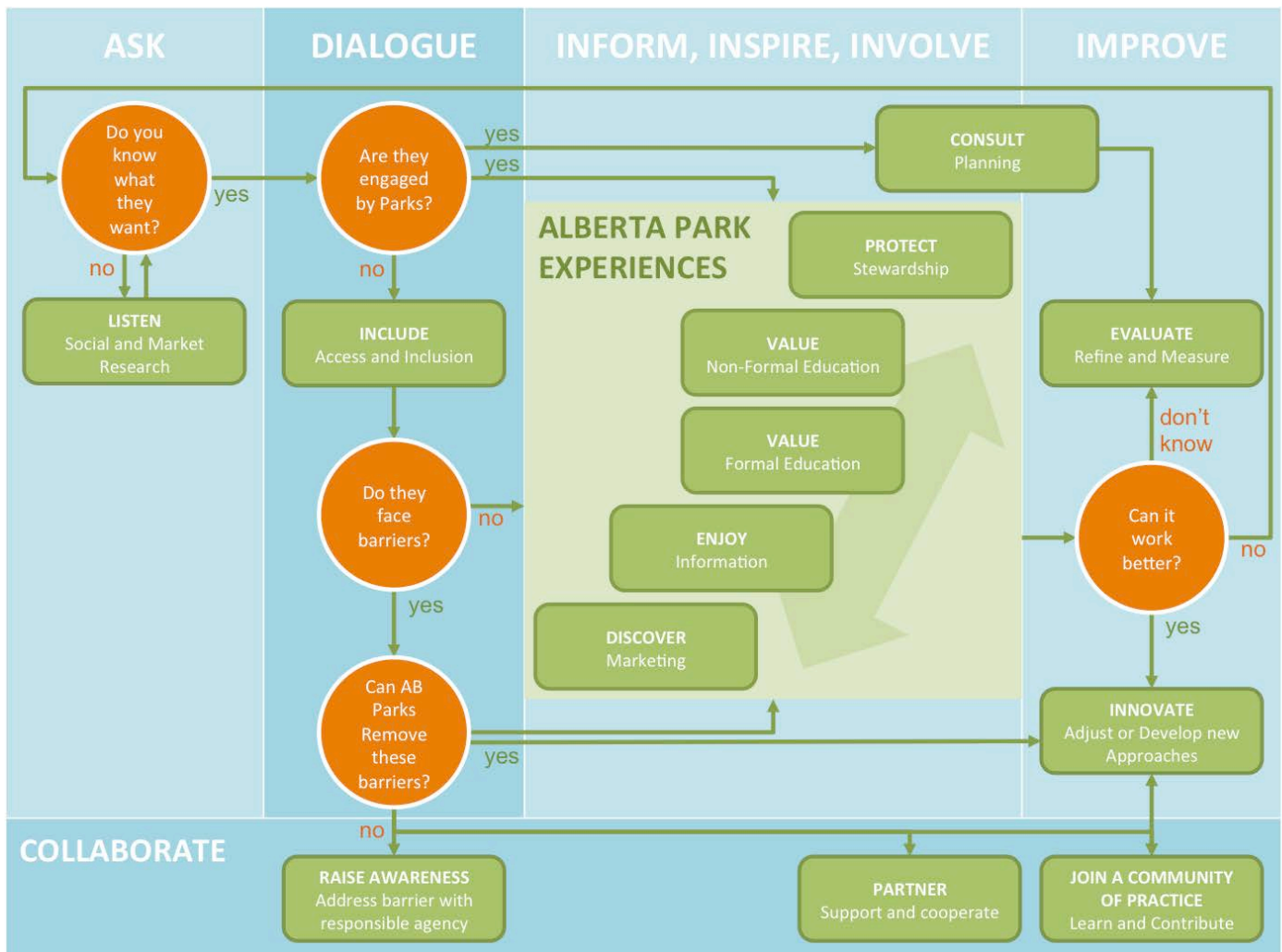
ASK: “Do you know what they want?” Understanding the public begins by asking *and hearing*: Who are they? What do parks and nature mean to them? What it would take for them to have enjoyable experiences in Alberta’s parks? Do they want to be engaged in the first place?

DIALOGUE: “Are they engaged with Alberta’s parks? Do they face barriers? Can the Parks Division remove these barriers?” Rather than present the public with traditional ideas of parks, sharing mutual values and ideas through dialogue can lead to understandings of parks beyond current and traditional ways of thinking.

IMPROVE “Can it work better?” The relationship between people and nature can change throughout life as people age, become ill, or experience challenges. Parks Division programs also change over time and require critical evaluation so resources are used effectively and meet the needs of a changing public.

COLLABORATE “Who can help?” No single person or agency can meet *every* need of parks or the public. The Parks Division can work with communities of practice and other partners as an enabler or as a catalyst.

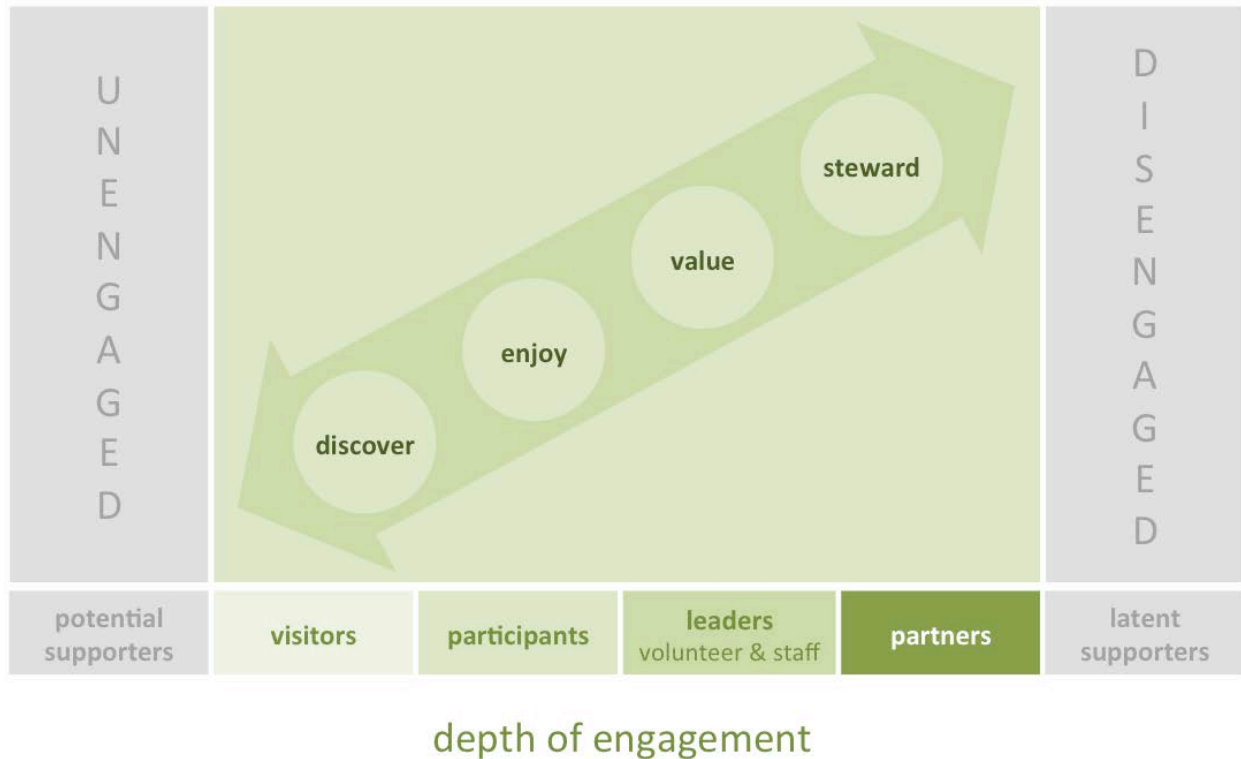
Figure B - Engaging the Public in Parks



3.1 Inclusion throughout Alberta Park Experiences

The Parks Division supports people through enablers or “inspiring factors” such as programs, facilities, policies, and partnerships. The depth of engagement with Alberta’s network of parks may increase or decrease based on life circumstances or personal capacity. As Figure B showed, Alberta’s park experiences are the core of public engagement. Programs are designed to help people discover, enjoy, value, or protect the natural world, and all its benefits for current and future generations.

Figure C - Alberta Parks Experiences



Inclusion is a way to ensure that all Albertans have opportunities to understand first-hand the role of nature and parks, the benefits of being outdoors, and their responsibility as citizens to act as stewards for nature. To foster inclusion at various levels of engagement, the Parks Division could implement enablers or *inspiring factors* such as:

- Include **visitors** through the physical removal of barriers, such as installing a ramp, providing information in different languages, or working with a community partner to provide transportation.
- Include **participants** by implementing a fee-assistance program or adaptive supports for programs.
- Include **leaders** by providing mentorship opportunities, or supporting diverse volunteer and staff roles.
- Include **partners** by collaborating with service providers connected to emerging users and communities.
- Include **fundors** by inviting stewardship for parks that respect the values of the partner.

3.2 Barriers to experiencing Alberta Parks

The pilot initiatives and social research mentioned in Section 2.0 have revealed five primary barriers to visiting parks. These barriers cross demographics, and are encountered by immigrants, youth, persons with disabilities, low-income earners, seniors, different cultural groups, and other communities. These common barriers are:

Transportation: Aside from several urban parks, most sites in Alberta's network of parks are only accessible by personal vehicle, and not by public transportation or pathways. Individuals requiring adaptive vehicles face exceptional costs, new Canadians often cannot afford vehicles or are uncomfortable driving to remote locations, and youth, children, and seniors don't always have independent access to transportation.

Cost: Aside from some special-use facilities, Alberta's parks have no gate fees. However, when transportation, equipment, camping or program fees are taken into account, the full cost of visiting parks is high; even more so for people facing systemic barriers to daily living.

Skills and knowledge: Park activities can be confusing or frightening for people with limited experience in nature, or from different backgrounds. For example, many people overlook the difference between picnic sites and campsites, or underestimate trail or weather conditions. Persons with disabilities might be unaware of adaptive recreation options and interested visitors may be unaware of ways they can volunteer.

Information: From signage to park designations, the Parks Division uses complex information that can be difficult to understand from an outsider perspective. This is even more complicated when people speak English as a Second Language, have a learning disability, or require specific information to meet their needs.

Feeling unwelcome: For people who are excluded on a daily basis, trying new things is intimidating and risky. Encountering negative attitudes in public settings can be devastating. However, attitude can be one of the easiest barriers to remove through diversity training and experience learning from different communities.

Section 4.0 of this inclusion plan presents objectives to overcoming these barriers in a general sense. These objectives also offer approaches that may impact one group more effectively than another due to unique barriers.

4.0 Objectives

This plan outlines specific objectives that reinforce and enhance the way the Parks Division does business. These objectives are broken into three categories:

Objective 1: Improving Access

Accessibility is built on the process of identifying and removing barriers through standards for design, tools for auditing parks, dialogue with users, and internal training processes. The primary objective here is to identify ways to improve access in sites and experiences across Alberta's network of parks.

Objective 2: Inviting Participation

It takes time to develop relationships and build trust with people who face daily struggles and who may have prior negative experiences with parks, in Alberta or otherwise. Moving beyond access and inviting participation requires an open mind, time, and patience.

Objective 3: Increasing Capacity

People who work for the Parks Division are passionate and committed to fulfilling their role in dynamic financial circumstances. However, external resources can bolster and enhance programs in Alberta's parks through expertise, partnerships, funding, and more. Capacity building strategies will build on current programs, identify opportunities to collaborate, and recognize limitations.

Removing barriers to access *and* inviting participation in park experiences will mean people can engage with parks to their own level of interest and capacity. Increasing capacity means people can benefit from connecting to the natural world whether or not they ever visit a park, and whether the Parks Division follows *or* takes the lead.

Objective 1: Improving Access

1.1 Directly or indirectly foster accessible experiences across the province, prioritized to reach the broadest range of diverse users with available resources. Current users and stakeholders of Alberta’s network of parks connect to nature in many ways. These opportunities and unique experiences should be available to newly included populations. Given the varied natural landscapes within parks, the principle of *least restrictive design* will ensure the removal of artificial and natural barriers, so long as it does not negatively impacting the natural world.

1.1.1. Develop and engage in accessibility audits to identify and make recommendations for complete and connected experiences wherever feasible, not just a series of isolated elements. For example, an accessible campsite at a lake is incomplete if the water experience is inaccessible.

- a) *Identify or develop standards for least-restrictive design in park facilities and programs:* Best practices exist or can be developed through public input or project-specific working groups.
- b) *Audit facilities and sites:* Staff, partners, and volunteers can continuously evaluate locations throughout Alberta’s network of parks to identify existing accessible sites and opportunities to remove barriers. Facility development can incorporate accessibility audits throughout planning.
- c) *Audit experiences and programs:* In some cases, access will be achieved through programming solutions beyond infrastructure, such as use of plain language, varied program techniques, or fee assistance. Staff, partners, and volunteers will develop and evaluate Parks Division programs and facilities from the perspective of diverse participants and will engage with community advisors for feedback. In some cases, these audits will provide an opportunity for outside agencies to use brands indicated in Objective 2.2.2.

1.1.2. Prioritize barrier reduction: Universal access should ultimately be pursued at all sites, but not everything can be done at once. While aiming for *least-restrictive design* everywhere, limited resources can be directed toward creating accessible opportunities that have the greatest possible impact across the province. For example, priority should be on the following sites:

Opportune sites: *least-restrictive design* should be pursued when the opportunity arises from “easy-wins.” Opportune sites include those that are already nearly accessible, future site renovations and new facilities, or events and partnerships that may provide resources.

Signature sites: *least-restrictive design* should be pursued at natural features or experiences that are unique in the province (or the world) in order to captivate new park supporters and provide exciting inclusive tourism opportunities.

Local sites: *least-restrictive design* should be pursued at parks close to communities across the province so people can connect with nature without being restricted by transportation barriers.

1.1.3. Work toward least restrictive design as common practice: As accessibility solutions are uncovered and tested, they will be used as best practices and housed in a shared resource. These best practices will serve as common benchmarks for facilities and baselines for programs and products.

1.1.4. Dedicate funds to barriers-reduction: In order to benefit quickly from audit results, funding should be designated for minor fixes that result in major impact, such as step mitigation, signage, programming improvements, or translations. These funds could be disbursed through an internal Park Inclusion Fund.

1.2. Modify the user, not the environment: Application of the *Provincial Building Code* at certain sites in Alberta’s network of parks may be impossible. Many accessible design elements that work in a city would destroy the

natural features at the core of the experience or essential to ecosystem health. Fortunately, access can be achieved by supporting use of adaptive equipment and educating for compatible user expectations.

1.2.1. Provide individual supports through collaborative community networks: Overcoming barriers on an individual or site-specific level may require transportation, adaptive recreation equipment, volunteer support, gear, advice, or fee reductions. These supports may be provided directly by parks or through a network of individuals and partners agencies with complementary goals.

1.2.2. Join existing programs that reduce cost barriers: Some programs already exist to improve access based on particular demographics or barriers. Alberta Parks will examine ways to participate in programs such as the Institute of Canadian Citizenship Cultural Access Pass, which provides free opportunities for new Canadians to experience parks. Another option could be an optional reduced camping fee for people on Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) or age-based reductions for particular experiences to encourage participation by families with young children, seniors, and so on.

1.2.3. Increase access through education: Fear, lack of confidence, or lack of information can prevent potential users from connecting to Alberta's network of parks and outdoor experiences, or from knowing what opportunities exist to pursue the activities they enjoy. Park programs such as orientations, showcases, and communication tools can make as much of a difference as physical barrier reductions.

1.3. Provide *descriptive* information, not *prescriptive* information: People have individual needs and preferences. Trying to prescribe a standard such as "barrier-free" or offering only segregated programs can undermine efforts to foster inclusion. Most individuals and communities are not looking for a checklist of *barrier-free* or *immigrant friendly* sites. Rather, they seek introductory and ongoing information that will help them determine for themselves which parks will suit their abilities and their interests.

1.3.1. Share information about sites and experiences: As site and program detail is gathered through audits (Objective 1.1), it can be shared with park users so they can plan their own experiences.

1.3.2. Encourage continuous, open feedback: Anyone who participates in experiences and programs within Alberta's network parks should be encouraged to share their stories. For those who encounter barriers, this feedback is essential to help the Parks Division make informed decisions and to continuously improve.

Objective 2: Inviting Participation

2.1. Develop outreach programming and facilities: Removing barriers is meaningless if underserved populations never get invited to come to parks, or are never presented with relevant reasons for visiting. The vision to discover, value, protect and enjoy the benefits nature for current and future generations can connect to people at their homes, places of worship, schools, community centres, and places of work. Outreach means the Parks Division connecting with people beyond physical park boundaries and beyond traditional ideas of park programming.

2.1.1. Extend invitations to join existing programs and experiences: Programs such as Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park's History in the Hills Day, the Saskatoon Island Swan Festival, Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory Songbird Festival, Parks Day, or any number of environmental education field studies and interpretive shows are great introductions to parks. Most of these events are promoted through mainstream channels and in ways that may not be welcoming to all communities. Explicit invitations and creative targeted marketing can go a long way to serving diverse groups. These invitations must be backed up by a willingness to support and adapt to these new users. For example, the Parks Division may need to provide multilingual directions, spend time working with community leaders, or arrange bussing.

2.1.2. Establish a network of outreach sites for first contact with Alberta's parks: Welcoming signs, interactive kiosks, or travelling exhibitions can provide a recognizable starting point for people new to parks. These sites could vary with resources and location, but would share a common, inclusive brand such as "everyone **belongs** outside." The purpose of these sites is to help people unfamiliar with Alberta's network of parks learn the basic skills and knowledge required for safe, accessible, and meaningful experiences in nature. While these sites would complement information currently available in visitor centres and online, the target is new or unengaged people. These outreach sites would have the most effect at strategic sites within Alberta communities (e.g. libraries, convention centres, tourism information facilities, hospitals, government offices, or major events). Where possible, the Parks Division could collaborate with private sector partners to offer rental equipment or connect to guides through these sites.

2.1.3. Develop a network of Ability Facilities: A barrier-free facility such as William Watson Lodge in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park offers a safe and accessible option for people who could never experience nature otherwise. Implementing a network of Ability Facilities across the province could offer a progression of experiences, not all of which need to be fixed-roof lodges. These universally accessible facilities could range from fixed-roof accommodations to comfort camping, as well as RV, group camping, or family tenting spaces. Ability Facilities could also support nearby day use sites and would be ideal locations for outreach sites as described in Objective 2.1.2 above. To meet the needs of the entire province, the Parks Division would aim to establish Ability Facilities in range of parks across the province, based on the priority scale indicated in Objective 1.1.2 above. Key aspects of the Ability Facility concept include:

- a) *Barrier-free design:* Rather than just design to building code or least-restrictive design standards, these specific facilities would provide fully barrier-free access.
- b) *Responsive staff on site:* Providing personal caregivers falls beyond the scope of the Parks Division. However, the most important aspect for William Watson Lodge is the availability of staff to respond to questions, emergencies, and to ensure a high standard for facility maintenance and cleanliness. Responsive Parks Division staff at all Ability Facilities could help people build confidence as they experience nature for the first time.
- c) *Flexible and affordable fees:* In order to remove financial barriers, the cost of using these facilities should be within reach of the intended users. However, not everyone who requires these facilities will face financial barriers so pay-what-you can option may be appropriate.
- d) *A priority booking matrix:* In order to ensure the facility is available for those who require it, but

remains an option for those who would benefit from access to the facility, priority for booking Ability Facilities could build upon the current scale at William Watson Lodge. For example:

First priority: Albertans who are severely disabled (non ambulatory, legally blind, profoundly deaf, dependently cognitively disabled) may book up to four months in advance.

Second priority: Albertans with less severe disabilities (semi-ambulatory, medically fragile (Eligibility forms will be required) may book three months in advance.

Third priority: Other AISH recipients or Alberta senior citizens age 65 or over who are eligible for the Alberta Seniors Benefit may book two months in advance.

Fourth priority: All Alberta senior citizens age 65 and over may book one month in advance.

Final Priority: Provided space is available, any Albertan may book one week in advance, and will primarily fill vacancies due to cancellations.

Larger groups if eligible, may book cabins. 1/3 of the group must be disabled or senior. Maximum group size is 40 during midweek, 32 on weekends, and 12 in summer/on holidays.

2.2. Develop and support a culture of inclusion: Inclusion is the responsibility of every park employee, volunteer, facility operator, partner and visitor. Inconsistent application of the values expressed in this plan may undermine the best efforts of the Parks Division. Weaving inclusion throughout all levels will set the stage for future success.

2.2.1. Create recognizable branding of Parks Division inclusion initiatives: Common language will ensure consistent expectations among internal champions and external partners. This is especially true when removing barriers and building relationships first calls for **integrated** programs. The following Divisional brands were developed with participant input during the initiatives mentioned in Section 2.1.1.

Everyone Belongs Outside (referring to inclusion initiatives in general)

Push to Open Nature (referring to adaptive experiences for all abilities)

Adaptive Nature Challenges (referring to showcase events for all abilities)

Nature for Newcomers (referring to programs for people new to parks)

Youth in Parks (referring to programs for Albertans aged 13 to 30)

None of these Divisional brands prevent development of regional programs where more effective brands may exist. This list may expand or contract over time with the creation of new initiatives and as the Parks Division becomes more inclusive and has less need to target specific groups.

2.2.2. Share branding with external partners: Partners who meet or exceed the standards of inclusion measured through the auditing process described in Objective 1.1.1.(c) could be encouraged to use the brands described in Objective 2.2.2. For example, a private operator offering adaptive experiences could publicly promote themselves as part of the “Push to Open Nature” community. These brands could also be used to create common reference points for comparative program assessment and evaluation.

2.2.3. Provide diversity training and support: Support inclusion training for Specific skills and knowledge relating to accessibility and inclusion will ensure all people feel welcome and safe in parks. The Parks Division will provide permanent employees with opportunities for diversity awareness courses, and supervisors will assess diversity awareness as performance measures. Diversity training will also be incorporated into seasonal employee and volunteer training programs.

Objective 3: Increasing Capacity

3.1. Increase inclusion by sharing information: Compiling and sharing information related to inclusion in parks is essential to build on successes and learn from experience. Information sharing is also vital to communicating with staff, practitioners, partners, visitors, and the public. The Parks Division could manage and distribute this information internally *and* externally in order to promote the use of best practices in inclusion.

3.2. Build formal partnerships: Stable, long-term relationships can outlast staff changes, encourage collaboration, build trust, improve transfer of knowledge, and generate resources from multiple directions. These partnerships could be formalized through cooperating agreements, letters of understanding or other agreements. Formal partnership could include:

- a) *Non-governmental organizations (NGOs):* Many Canadian groups are leaders in providing services for diverse communities. Partnerships with immigrant settlement services, disability service groups, service clubs, and so on, offer the Parks Division opportunities to connect at the community level. The Parks Division could support these partners through in-kind services, information sharing, and developmental or support funding.
- b) *Alberta Ministries and Divisions:* Other parts of the Government of Alberta have expertise and interest in fostering inclusion or experiences in nature. Collaboration within the Government of Alberta could offer increased access to knowledge and may prevent duplication of efforts. These partnerships could assume a number of forms, ranging from advice on major programs (e.g. fee assistance through AISH) to employee learning opportunities (e.g. Human Rights Branch diversity training programs).
- c) *Federal and municipal government agencies:* Many jurisdictions have expertise and common challenges that directly relates to fostering inclusion in Alberta's parks. Working with these and other agencies should result in wide-ranging benefits for all parties. Joint initiatives and participation in groups like the Canadian Parks Council have already helped the Alberta do more with existing resources.
- d) *Corporate and private partners:* Inclusion lends itself to corporate and other external partnerships. These companies are often already trying to engage youth, newcomers, and other communities. The Parks Division could work with these partners through sponsorships and corporate volunteer initiatives.

3.3. Build informal networks and join communities of practice: The Parks Division recognizes that the people of Alberta are our most valuable partners. Joining informal communities of practice and local networks provides opportunities to share perspectives and learn from one another. While some individuals and groups may lack capacity for growth, the Parks Division can provide tools and resources necessary to support them. While there may never be a formal agreement, open and meaningful collaboration with the public should result in greater respect for parks and the development of shared values.

3.3. Involve Parks Division staff in inclusion: Parks Division staff at all levels and in all regions offer valuable insights into how people may experience nature. Some staff may face barriers themselves. Simply listening to these individuals may cultivate new ideas and solutions about including and engaging the public. The Parks Division could support staff development through direct experiences such as participating in inclusion initiatives, attending conferences and cultural events, going for coffee with local community leaders, and recognizing staff who show commitment and innovation in promoting inclusion.

3.4. Ensure sufficient resources to implement the inclusion plan: This plan emphasizes the importance of inclusion in maintaining the long-term relevance and sustainability of parks. While inclusion is a lens that will apply

to everything the Parks Division does going forward, there is also a need for some resources today. It takes time to implement, maintain, and evaluate pilot initiatives. It takes time to nurture relationships. And it takes time to gather and process information about best practices and about the barriers faced by different communities.

3.4.1. Cross-disciplinary Inclusion Coordinating Committee: Similar to the Tourism, Parks and Recreation Inclusion Integration Team, a Parks Division *Inclusion Coordinating Committee* made up of champions from a variety of sections and skillsets. This team would work to identify opportunities for inclusion throughout the province. This group would advise on provincial initiatives related to access and inclusion, and would guide the use of the Park Inclusion Fund proposed in Objective 1.1.4.

3.4.2. Allocation of staff time to inclusion: Inclusion is part of everything the Parks Division does. Many of the objectives outlined in this inclusion plan can be added to existing work plans, provided staff are given appropriate time to spend on the task. Other objectives directly complement programs such as training, capital development, administrative tasks, or visitor experiences programs and can be easily incorporated.

3.4.3. Resources for inclusion specialists and leadership: Ensuring a cohesive and sustainable Divisional approach to inclusion requires time, commitment, and specialized knowledge. Regionally, inclusion specialists could provide capacity for site-specific initiatives and for maintaining local relationships with diverse communities. Provincially, there is a need to maintain a coordinator or inclusion team lead role.

While these may not require full time or inclusion-only positions, there is a need for some combination of dedicated inclusion specialists throughout the province.

- a) *Internships:* Capacity for inclusion could be developed through internships, potentially as inclusive opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds (e.g. youth internships, internships for persons with disabilities, First Nations internships, or new Canadian internships).
- b) *Linking to social research:* The strong link between inclusion and social research may provide an opportunity to increase capacity in both areas by investing in shared resources (i.e. combined inclusion specialist and social researcher positions).
- c) *Leadership capacity:* During the development of this inclusion plan, the Parks Division allocated half of a full-time equivalent position from the Kananaskis Region to an Inclusion Team Lead position. Maintaining this single point of contact and leadership role is essential to implement the inclusion plan, to coordinate Divisional initiatives, to maintain best practices knowledge, and to prepare regular reports.

5.0 Implementation

Inclusion is a continuous process that should focus on setting a path toward greater inclusion, rather than trying to eliminate exclusion in one step. The objectives listed in Section 4.0 are steps along that path, and not every step can be taken at once. The following chart outlines the priority of each objective and the Parks Division's readiness to implement each objective in order to determine the best places to begin.

A separate internal implementation plan will outline timelines and estimated costs.

Priority is rated *primary* where the objective is necessary in order to achieve other goals or is highly aligned with current work. Priority is *secondary* where the objective stands alone and could be implemented at a variable pace depending on available resources.

Readiness is rated either *high* or *partial* in order to identify goals that may be easier to implement due to current momentum or opportunities and as those objectives that may require support to develop internal capacity. These are explained where necessary.

Objective 1: Improving Access

1.1. Directly or indirectly foster accessible experiences across the province, prioritized to reach the broadest range of diverse users with available resources		
<i>Objective</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Divisional Readiness</i>
1.1.1. Develop and engage in accessibility audits	Primary	Partial: An audit toolkit for both facilities and programs needs to be developed and informed by a strong external body of work. Individuals and partners have expressed interest in a volunteer audit program. This program must be designed.
1.1.2. Prioritize barrier reduction	Primary	High: Park System Planners are developing similar frameworks for categorizing public use of parks and for filtering park experiences as part of Alberta's <i>Plan for Parks</i> Capital Planning process and the <i>Land Use Framework</i> Regional Park Plans.
1.1.3. Work toward least restrictive design as common practice	Secondary	High: The Parks Division Facility Development Process has already incorporated accessibility auditing.
1.1.4. Dedicate funds to barriers-reduction	Secondary	High: The process for selecting inclusion projects through a Park Inclusion Fund can be modeled after the Park Division's Research Fund or Innovation Fund.
1.2. Modify the user, not the environment		
1.2.1. Provide individual supports through collaborative community networks	Primary	High: Several community networks already exist that the Parks Division can leverage to connect users with needed supports, such as the Push to Open Nature Society and various Settlement Service Agencies.
1.2.2. Build on existing programs that reduce cost barriers	Primary	Partial: This requires an investment in relationship building among potential partners, and research to understand the best fit of potential existing programs.
1.2.3. Increase access through education	Primary	High: the Parks Division is very good at public engagement and can build on existing programs and networks.
1.3. Provide <i>descriptive</i> information, not <i>prescriptive</i> information		
1.3.1. Share information about sites and experiences	Primary	Partial: The redevelopment of the Parks Division website (www.albertaparks.ca) offers a strong base for better information sharing. However, technical ability and staff capacity for gathering, reviewing, and distributing content is limited.
1.3.2. Encourage continuous, open feedback	Primary	Partial: The Government of Alberta is committed to transparency and citizen engagement. However, there needs to be meaningful dialogue and feedback opportunities for specific groups (e.g. groups facing language barriers).

Objective 2: Inviting Participation

2.1. Develop outreach programming and facilities		
2.1.1. Extend invitations to join existing programs.	Primary	High: This is already occurring through regular program promotions.
2.1.2. Establish a network of outreach sites for first contact with Alberta's parks	Secondary	High: The current <i>Plan for Parks</i> Capital Planning process can incorporate this objective. An ongoing pilot of interactive kiosks is in place in Kananaskis Country.
2.1.3. Develop a network of Ability Facilities	Secondary	High: The current <i>Plan for Parks</i> Capital Planning process can incorporate this objective. William Watson Lodge is a leader in barrier-free access to nature.
2.2. Develop and promote a culture of inclusion		
2.2.1. Create recognizable branding of Parks Division inclusion initiatives	Primary	Partial: There is a need to develop a better corporate understanding of each brand and standards for their use internally and externally.
2.2.2. Share branding with external partners	Secondary	High: This already has momentum among various partners and will be enhanced through current work to develop a Divisional Marketing Plan.
2.2.3. Provide diversity training and support	Primary	High: The Government of Alberta strives to be an employer of choice in part through supporting staff development. Diversity training is can be made relevant and compelling for all employees, and can draw upon existing resources.

Objective 3: Increasing Capacity

3.1. Increase inclusion by sharing information		
<i>Objective</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Divisional Readiness</i>
3.1. Sharing information	Primary	High: This inclusion plan forms the foundation for building interest and capacity for inclusion. The Parks Division website and intranet can be developed to support information sharing to support objective 1.3.1.
3.2. Build formal partnerships		
3.2. Formal partnerships	Primary	High: the Parks Division can join, support, or partner with a variety of organizations using existing agreement tools such as the pilot "cooperative inclusion agreement" being developed with the Push to Open Nature Society.
3.3. Build informal partnerships and join communities of practice		
3.3. Informal networks and communities of practice	Primary	Partial: There is a limited understanding of these networks and how the Parks Division can play a role. While individuals have expressed interest in volunteer inclusion programs, these must be designed, implemented, and evaluated. Alberta Parks' capacity for supporting community of practice is limited.
3.3. Involve Parks Division staff in inclusion		
3.3. Involve Parks Division staff in inclusion	Secondary	Partial: Some staff may see the addition of inclusion to their workload as a burden. Building appreciation for inclusion as a way to increase relevance and support for Alberta's parks will be supported by objective 2.2.1.
3.4. Ensure sufficient resources to implement the inclusion plan		
3.4.1. Cross-disciplinary Inclusion Coordinating Committee	Primary	High: There are several employees in the Parks Division who are already champions of inclusion. They could contribute to a highly creative and effective coordinating committee if they had the time, support, and the opportunity.
3.4.2. Allocation of staff time to inclusion	Secondary	Partial: There are many aspects to implementing this plan (such as tracking progress) that could be done by employees with adequate time and knowledge.
3.4.3. Resources for inclusion specialists and leadership	Primary	Partial: Half of one full-time equivalent position was designated to lead development of this inclusion. This role requires review and increased capacity.

Appendix A: Social Research Studies that Have Informed the inclusion plan

- Cantelon, K., Jamal, Z., Lange, E., and Vogels, P. (2011) *Transformative intercultural and interprofessional learning: Learning the language, learning the land*. Alberta Parks, Grant McEwan College, St. Francis Xavier University, and Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.
- Carruthers Den Hoed, D. (2007) *Nothing about them without them: Creating a framework of inclusion for persons with disabilities in Alberta's parks and protected areas*. Government of Alberta.
- Carruthers Den Hoed, D. and Jakubec, S., (2012) *Upstream mental health promotion – A Three Phase Study of Inclusive Parks Programming Parks*. Alberta Parks, Alberta Health Services and Alberta Seniors (funded as part of the Collaborative Research Grant Initiative: Mental Wellness in Seniors and Persons with Disabilities), Mount Royal University Integrative Health Institute.
- Church, A., Burger, S., and Apathy is Boring, (2010) *Youth in Parks: Where are we now? Where do we need to be? How do we get there?* Canadian Parks Council (chaired by Alberta Parks).
- Cotter, G., and Lavoie, K. (2009) *Youth Engagement Best Practices Interim Report*. Canadian Parks Council (chaired by Alberta Parks).
- REACH Consulting (2008) *Plugging the Connected Generation into Parks*. Canadian Parks Council for Alberta Parks.
- Rubeling, D., (2008) *From Visitor To Participant: Fostering Community Engagement by Supporting Volunteer Programs*. Alberta Parks.
- Stapleton, E. (2009) *Nature as a Second Language: Towards the Inclusion of New Canadians in Alberta's Parks*. Alberta Parks.