

Enhancing the Protection of the Castle Area

Establishment of the Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park in the Castle Area

1. How was protection of the Castle area enhanced?

In the fall of 2015, the Government of Alberta announced its intent to enhance protection of the Castle area, and invited Albertans to comment on the proposal from September 4 to October 5, 2016. Based on what we heard during consultation, the Government of Alberta has made the decision to establish the Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park in the Castle area under the authority of the *Provincial Parks Act*.

The Castle Provincial Park is 25,500 hectares in size, and includes the previous Lynx Creek Provincial Recreation Area (PRA), Castle Falls PRA, Castle River Bridge PRA, Syncline PRA and Beaver Mines PRA.

Castle Wildland Provincial Park is approximately 80,000 hectares in size, and includes the most critical and sensitive areas for headwaters and wildlife, including major wildlife movement corridors for wide-ranging species such as grizzly bear, and habitat for threatened species such as westslope cutthroat trout. The Wildland Provincial Park was expanded from what was originally proposed in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan in 2014.

Both Castle Mountain Resort and West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve are not included in this establishment, and are located outside of the new park boundaries.

2. Where is the Castle area and why is it important to establish under parks legislation? Why are these parks established?

The Castle area is located in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in Southern Alberta. The area borders Waterton Lakes National Park to the south and is located within the “Crown of the Continent” where Alberta, British Columbia and Montana meet.

The Castle area is an important source to the Oldman River Basin headwaters and is a key area for water protection. It is one of the most biologically diverse areas in Alberta and home to a range of rare and at-risk species. These include whitebark pine, the westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, wolverine and grizzly bear. It provides key movement corridors for large mammals, including grizzly bears.

With its numerous archeological, historical and Indigenous traditional use sites, this area also has cultural and historical significance for Indigenous Peoples and all Albertans.

3. Have the approved park boundaries changed from what was proposed during consultation in the fall of 2015?

The approved park boundaries have changed from what was originally proposed in the fall of 2015. The eastern boundary of Castle Wildland Provincial Park has been moved eastwards from what was originally proposed during consultation. This was done to maximize protection of the most critical and sensitive areas for wildlife. Accordingly, the western boundary of Castle Provincial Park has been moved eastwards to accommodate this change. Castle Wildland Provincial Park has therefore been made 7.5 per cent larger than what was originally consulted on, while the Provincial Park has been made 15.5 per cent smaller as a result.

4. What else has changed in this Castle area?

The [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#) has been amended to enable the establishment of these parks, and the former Castle Special Management Area Public Land Use Zone has been cancelled.

The [Procedures Regulation](#) of the [Provincial Offences Procedure Act](#) has also been amended, to reinstate violation tickets and specified penalties for offences in all Public Land Use Zones. This will improve the management of recreational activities on public land throughout Alberta, and will help to ensure environmental and sustainability outcomes are met. This amendment has not increased penalty amounts or specified new penalties. Violation tickets are used when a minor offence has occurred, there is no opportunity to correct the action, and a warning is not appropriate. They are also used to educate the recipient to act responsibly and discourage repetition of the offence.

5. What are the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and the Land-use Framework?

The [Land-use Framework](#), released in 2008, is an approach to managing our air, water, land and biodiversity to achieve Alberta's long-term environmental, social and economic goals through the development of land-use regional plans for the province's seven regions. Regional land-use plans are central to our government's integrated resource management system, which is designed to ensure a holistic approach to the way we monitor and manage the impacts of development on our environment. Each regional plan is developed by engaging with Albertans, Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders, and aims set the best course for each region. Regional plans are adaptive in that they are reviewed periodically to ensure that they are relevant and effective.

The [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#) was released in September 2014 and is the second regional land-use plan released under the Land-use Framework. The plan sets the stage for sustainable growth, a diversified economy, vibrant communities and a healthy environment within the region over the next 50 years.

6. How will the new parks be managed?

Conservation of nature will be the primary objective of both parks. Biodiversity conservation, protection of headwaters, species at risk and ecological connectivity will underscore all management decisions. Indigenous rights, cultural values and traditional uses are of high importance. Compatible, nature-based recreation and tourism will be permitted and responsibly managed, provided they are aligned with the overall conservation objectives as outlined in the draft management plan.

Castle Provincial Park will offer a wide range of nature-based opportunities, which will inspire people to reconnect with nature through leisure, learning or recreation. Facilities and infrastructure will support a front-country experience, such as auto-access campgrounds, staging areas and picnic areas. The

provincial park will be the focus for any educational or informational visitor programs.

Castle Wildland Provincial Park will provide for back-country and wilderness experiences where facilities will be limited to trails and backcountry campsites that minimize visitor impacts on the conservation and wilderness values. There will be limited infrastructure, if any, and visitors will have a range of available experiences; from day-length excursions to multi-day trips that require a high level of self-reliance.

A draft Park Management Plan for Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial has been developed and will undergo consultation with the public, key stakeholders and Indigenous Peoples.

The draft Management Plan and information about how to comment during the 60-day period can be found here: www.albertaparks.ca/consult. The draft management plan is based on the Provincial Parks Legislation, Regulations, feedback from the fall 2015 consultation process, current data and scientific knowledge available. Alberta Environment and Parks also consulted with management planning working groups who brought local and expert knowledge to the development of this draft plan. For more information visit the [Frequently Asked Questions about Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park draft management plan](#).

7. How was the management plan developed, and what will it do?

The management planning process gathered information from applicable legislation, policy direction, management practices, scientific data and existing activities. The plan contains information on the environmental, social and economic elements that guide management direction and reflects the interests of Indigenous People, the public and stakeholders', while maintaining the conservation intent.

Early engagement of Indigenous Peoples, municipalities, and stakeholders was a vital component of the management planning development process.. Meetings with key stakeholders and Indigenous peoples have been held to help understand their concerns, identify issues and challenges, develop strategies and solutions, and collect critical information. At the same time of this stakeholder engagement phase, an Ecology Working Group and a Land Uses Working Group made up of invited experts and organization leaders from the Castle area were consulted with. These working groups have supported the management planning development process by helping with analysis of information, and the evaluation of management decisions and potential outcomes. Input provided during these engagement efforts has fed directly into the development of the draft management plan.

For more information on the management planning process in general, see the [Management Planning webpage](#).

8. When and what facilities and trails will be developed to support recreational use?

Facilities, including trails, must be compatible with the primary conservation outcomes intended for the Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park. Available data, local knowledge, and environmental considerations have been used to guide discussions about facilities and trails with Indigenous people and stakeholders during the management planning process. The completed management plan will direct the types of facilities and trails, including location and density that will be permitted in both parks. Prior to construction of any facilities, additional processes such as Environmental Review, Historic Resources Impact Assessment, Indigenous consultation and public consultation may be required. The draft management plan will direct the use of some temporary facility areas to permit park operations. These facility areas may be subject to reevaluation at a later date, with further input from Albertan's.

Facilities and trails will be located in areas that minimize their ecological impacts, while aiming to ensure quality visitor experiences. Location, density and design of trails and facilities will consider environmental features or criteria that include: wet areas, including riparian areas and wetlands; topography and erosion potential; proposed linear density thresholds for sensitive species; cumulative effects of all linear features and disturbance; the known presence of species at risk; landscape intactness; and historical and cultural resources.

The Wildland Provincial Park is not intended to provide for significant facility and service development, and will provide for low-impact, nature-based recreation. Trail development and small, rustic backcountry and group camping facilities may be considered.

The Provincial Park will allow for a wider range of facilities and services, including the potential for picnic areas, staging areas, a higher density trail network, and auto-accessible campgrounds.

9. What will be changing now that the parks are established, before the management plan is completed?

Now that the parks are established, and prior to the completion of a management plan, the focus will be on education, awareness building and enforcement of the [Provincial Parks Act](#). Interim management actions include:

- Highway vehicles are no longer permitted on trails within Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park.
- A firearms discharge permit is required for hunting in the Castle Provincial Park. Other firearms use (i.e. not related to hunting) is no longer permitted. Hunting in the Provincial Parks will be implemented in a two phased approach. Note: Indigenous Peoples who are exercising constitutionally protected rights to hunt for food do not require a firearms discharge permit to do so.
- Random camping is not permitted in the provincial or wildland provincial parks. The management plan will address this issue.
- Trail use will be designated for specific purposes. Use of trails for non-designated purposes or random trail development is not permitted.

10. How will recreation be managed on adjacent land?

The establishment of the Provincial Park and the Wildland Provincial Park may shift some recreational users to adjacent areas like the Porcupine Hills. The [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#) outlined priority planning areas for Linear Footprint and Recreation Management planning, which will help to minimize user conflicts, maximize watershed and biodiversity outcomes, and enable outdoor recreational opportunities on public lands.

Linear Footprint Management Plans will provide direction on the management of linear features in a particular planning area (e.g. trails, roadways, well sites, fence lines, transmission line, pipelines, etc.). The first Linear Footprint Management Plan will be developed for the Porcupine Hills area, followed by the Livingstone area.

Recreation management plans will provide direction on the management of current outdoor recreational opportunities on the landscape and allow for future development of sustainable outdoor recreational

opportunities. Recreation management plans, including opportunities for stakeholder engagement, will shape recreation activities in the adjacent Livingstone and Porcupine Hills areas.

11. What existing industrial activities in Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park will be permitted under Parks legislation?

The Government of Alberta continues to respect private property rights and freehold minerals (petroleum and natural gas, coal, metallic and industrial minerals, other freehold minerals) are exempt from the restrictions. Exploration and development of resources via drilling or mining would be permitted subject to normal regulatory approval processes. As with other permitted land uses within parks, appropriate legislation will be applied to ensure that these developments can be accommodated, while still being compatible with longer term parks management objectives.

Activity	Provincial Park	Wildland Provincial Park
Commercial Forestry	No	No
Coal and Metallic and Industrial Mineral Extraction of Crown owned resources	No	No
Existing Petroleum and Natural Gas Commitments	Yes	Yes
New Petroleum and Natural Gas	Yes, but with no new surface access	Yes, but with no new surface access
Exploration and Development of Freehold (Privately Owned) Minerals	Yes	Yes
Existing Sand and Gravel	Yes	Yes
New Sand and Gravel	No	No
Existing grazing	Yes	Yes
New grazing	Yes, Subject to grazing suitability assessment	Yes, Subject to grazing suitability assessment

12. Who can I contact for more information?

If you would like further information about the Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park, please leave a message at 403.388.4034 or send your questions to the following email: ABparks.PlanComments@gov.ab.ca

Media inquiries may be directed to:
Media Line: 780-427-8636
AEP.Mediainquiries@gov.ab.ca