



## DECISION TO APPROVE PROPOSAL FOR THE RECLASSIFICATION AND EXPANSION OF SASKATOON MOUNTAIN NATURAL AREA

### What We Heard

Alberta Parks conducted a 60-day public consultation on the Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area reclassification and expansion proposal from June 13 to August 11, 2014. The proposal also included a draft concept plan. Public input was received through 20 responses via email and letter. Public comments were related to the following key topic areas:

- Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use
- Hunting
- Enforcement of regulations and maintenance
- Trails
- Camping

Of these respondents, six were supportive of the proposal; eight were supportive with concerns; four were not supportive, and for two were unclear. Responses were mainly from individuals, stakeholder groups and one from local government.

Themes from the respondents were as follows:

- All respondents were supportive of the addition of Public Lands administered Crown lands to the protected area land base.
- Respondents who did not support the proposal were opposed to allowing OHV use at the site.
- Most respondents who supported the proposal expressed concerns about managing OHVs at the site, such as the capacity of Alberta Parks to enforce rules and regulations and the capacity to reclaim damaged areas.
- Public safety in an area that proposes to allow hunting and other recreation activities such as hiking at the same time was a concern.

A summary of public concerns and questions and Alberta Parks’ responses are provided in the following table.

What We Heard	Alberta Parks Response
<b>Municipal government supported the proposal and its goal to manage recreation use on the site and protect some of the unique natural values there.</b>	The addition of adjacent crown land consolidates the Natural Area with these lands into one land management unit as a Provincial Recreation Area (PRA). The reclassification to a PRA will provide effective regulatory and policy tools for managing the wide range of recreational uses and conservation values at the site.
<b>Support for OHV designated trails, with questions about how they will be designated.</b>	Alberta Parks will work with the local OHV community and stakeholders to plan a designated trail system that can be built to standards to prevent erosion and other environmental impacts.
<b>Proposed PRA is not large enough to support a network of OHV trails.</b>	The intent is to offer family-oriented OHV opportunities for novice to intermediate riders. A trail could be designed within a fairly small area that could provide these opportunities.
<b>Concerns about users staying on designated trails.</b>	Alberta Parks recognizes that it needs adequate information, education, and enforcement capacity regarding OHV use at the site, particularly in the next few years, and is working towards acquiring that capacity. Alberta Parks will work with the RCMP and the County of Grande Prairie to manage OHV use at the site. Alberta Parks will also look to the local OHV community and stakeholders to inform, educate, and encourage compliance of OHV use.
<b>Concerns about trail reclamation.</b>	After a trail plan has been approved, trails no longer in use will be reclaimed.
<b>Concerns about vandalism, garbage dumping, random fires,</b>	Much of this activity has occurred on the crown land which will be added to the PRA. <i>Provincial Parks Act</i> Regulations can then be enforced, such as fires

<b>bush parties.</b>	only in fire pits, no random camping, alcohol only in designated campsite(s).
<b>Concerns about continued hunting opportunities</b>	Hunting will continue in the newly-designated PRA as per Alberta hunting regulations, but hunters will be required to obtain a discharge permit from Alberta Parks prior to hunting in the PRA.
<b>Concerns about safety between hunters discharging firearms and other recreationists</b>	<p>As a Natural Area, firearms discharge could occur year round. As a PRA where hunting is permitted, firearms discharge is illegal outside of hunting season.</p> <p>Hunters will be required to obtain a firearms discharge permit which may have conditions to preclude hunting within a certain distance of a facility area such as a campground or trail. This condition is in place in other PRAs where hunting is permitted, such as Cooking Lake-Blackfoot PRA, North Bruderheim/Redwater PRA, and Sulphur Gates PRA.</p> <p>Only primitive weapon hunting (bows, muzzleloaders, and shotguns) is currently permitted, and this regulation will continue. Primitive weapons projectiles travel a shorter range than a high-powered rifle.</p>
<b>Would hunters be able to use OHVs to extract harvested big game?</b>	Permission would be required from a Conservation Officer.
<b>This proposal builds on a consultant's report from 2012. Why were some of the recommendations of the consultant's report not accepted?</b>	<p>After reviewing the consultant's report, Alberta Parks and the County of Grande Prairie agreed to the following changes to the recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continue to allow the current hunting regime (primitive weapons hunting) on the site for wildlife management and for recreation.</li> <li>○ Relocate recommended zone for motorized recreation to the west side of Range Road 92 which is where most of the OHV trails are. It does not make sense ecologically to develop new OHV trails on the east side of the site which is relatively undisturbed. Suggested staging areas may also be relocated because of this change.</li> </ul> <p>Alberta Fish and Wildlife were supportive of the reclassification provided recreational hunting continued to be allowed in the PRA, and OHV use restricted to those areas west of Range Road 92.</p>
<b>Concern about OHV users having a strong voice in determining what goes on in public spaces.</b>	The Alberta Plan for Parks 2009-2019 commits to providing responsible and safe recreation opportunities as well as responding to changing recreation use.

	<p>The 2009 public consultation to reclassify Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area to a Provincial Park was strongly opposed by OHV users, since a Provincial Park designation precludes OHV use.</p> <p>This current proposal is intended to provide a diversity of recreation opportunities, including safe and responsible OHV opportunities on designated trails.</p>
<p><b>Why isn't a multi-use trail that accommodates motorized and non-motorized recreation being proposed?</b></p>	<p>Motorized trail use and non-motorized trail use are generally not compatible on the same trail. Trails for non-motorized use such as hiking, biking and cross-country skiing will be planned for along with designated OHV trails.</p>
<p><b>Why is a campground being proposed?</b></p>	<p>Demand for camping opportunities near Grande Prairie continues to grow with increase in population. The campground nearest to the city, Saskatoon Island Provincial Park, is over-capacity. A campground at Saskatoon Mountain will increase camping capacity and offer alternatives to Saskatoon Island. Development of a campground facility will require a detailed concept plan.</p>