



## RECLASSIFICATION OF SASKATOON MOUNTAIN NATURAL AREA

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **Why is the province doing this?**

There is a need to better balance recreation use and conservation of lands at the Saskatoon Mountain site. There is, for example, long-standing issues with management of recreational use, in particular, random off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation use that is impacting the landscape and disrupting other types of recreation in the area. Over the years, the County of Grande Prairie has asked for more provincial involvement in management of the site.

#### **What does the reclassification mean?**

The reclassification to a provincial recreation area (PRA) will provide a wider suite of legislative and regulatory tools for the management of recreational use and to help visitors understand what kinds of recreation opportunities are available at the site. Management of the Saskatoon Mountain Provincial Recreation Area (SMPRA) will be guided by the rules and regulations administered under the *Provincial Parks Act*.

#### **What is the difference between a Natural Area and a Provincial Recreation Area?**

The management values of a Natural Area vs. a PRA are as follows:

**Natural Area:** The key objectives of Natural Areas are to preserve and protect sites of local significance and provide opportunities for low-impact and nature-based recreation. There are usually few or no facilities or services provided for visitors. Enforcement in Natural Areas is limited because there are no regulations associated with the class under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*.

**Provincial Recreation Area:** The key objective of PRAs is to support compatible outdoor recreation and tourism, often providing access to lakes, rivers, reservoirs and adjacent crown land. Enforcement within a PRA is stronger as the designation falls under the *Provincial Parks Act*, which includes stricter rules and regulations for violations such as inappropriate OHV use.

#### **How does this benefit the County of GP?**

The reclassification will provide greater protection of the land base and management support to its users. The new and expanded PRA will support a wide range of recreational pursuits and enhance tourism in the region.

**What stricter rules, regulations, and enforcement abilities will be in place?**

Compliance with OHV activity, prohibited removal of flora, fire restrictions and bans, when applicable, and fines for littering are a few of the rules and regulations that will apply to the new PRA. Alberta Parks will be responsible for management of the PRA, but will look to collaborate with the County of Grande Prairie and other agencies to assist with development and operation, including education, awareness and enforcement.

**When will the draft management plan be completed?**

Work on the park management plan will begin in 2018 and will take several years to complete to ensure that stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input to the plan.

**What unique or sensitive plants and animals are in the region?**

The mature mixedwood forest that makes up most of the site is home to a wide variety of birds, mammals and plants, many of which are more common in the foothill forest to the west.

**Who will lead development of the trail network? How long will that take?**

Developments will occur as planning and funding resources become available. Trail developments will be a priority and dependent upon Budget 2018. Parks Division will commit to stakeholder engagement on the trail development.

**What is the proposed Draft Concept Plan?**

The proposed Draft Concept Plan provides background information and outlines the management and development intents for the PRA.

**When will day-use facilities and other amenities be upgraded?**

Initial work will begin in 2018 with signage and access control; however, major project work is subject to Budget 2018.

**What is the process for looking at a campground with electrified sites?**

The concept plan for the park identifies a future campground with electrified sites. Developments will occur as planning and funding resources become available.

**Where is Saskatoon Mountain PRA?**

The area known locally as just 'Saskatoon Mountain' is located on an elevation of land (150-metres above surrounding lands) located about 36-km west of Grande Prairie. Due to its elevation, the site has an assemblage of plants and animals that are commonly found in wetter foothills areas, making it unique in the Grande Prairie area.

**What is the boundary amendment?**

The proposed boundary amendment is the addition of two land components totalling 311 hectares:

1. Addition of approximately 194.59 hectares of adjacent unoccupied crown land. This land was withdrawn from grazing leases managed by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) in 2000 for the purpose of adding to SMNA.
2. Addition of approximately 116.82 hectares of crown lands located between the two disconnected parcels of the current natural area. These lands include 11 leases for communication towers as well as other dispositions. Much of this land was previously disturbed by a federal radar base which operated from 1950-1988. A Doppler radar station remains on an eight-hectare parcel of federal land, which is not included in the PRA. As well, a small parcel of land owned by Telus is not included in the proposed PRA.

### **Will hunting be allowed in the proposed PRA?**

Hunting in provincial recreation areas is permitted in some circumstances. In the case of SMPRA, the site is currently designated as a Primitive Weapons Area (Wildlife Management Unit 357) where shotguns, muzzle loaders and archery equipment can be used to hunt big game during the hunting season as outlined in the Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations.

Alberta Environment and Parks manages hunting in Alberta and has recommended that this hunting regime continue in order to provide recreational hunting opportunities and as a tool for managing ungulate predation on surrounding agricultural lands. Alberta Parks has agreed to support this recommendation, but will require hunters to obtain a firearms discharge permit before hunting on the site.

### **What Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use will be allowed in the PRA?**

The intent is to offer a family-type experience for local OHV riders of novice to intermediate abilities. The concept plan proposes that quads and dirt bikes be allowed on designated trails from May 1 to November 1. The trails will be located west of Range road 92. Alberta Parks will work with the local OHV community and other stakeholders to identify a trail network.

### **What is the history of SMNA?**

Over the years, portions of the site have been used for farming, for recreation such as picnicking and viewpoints, as a fire tower location and as a Department of National Defence - Pinetree Line radar station from 1950-1988.

Consideration for park status began in 1936 and continued intermittently until 1979 when 411 hectares of land were reserved as a candidate natural area. The radar station site was reclaimed after 1988. In 1995, the site was designated as a Natural Area, but the former radar station site was not included.

### **How does this proposal fit into Alberta's *Plan for Parks*?**

In the *Plan for Parks*, a commitment was made to provide responsible and safe recreation opportunities within parks. The proposal to reclassify the site as a PRA will provide regulatory tools to manage the random OHV use with the intent of encouraging responsible and safe recreation opportunities on the site.

The *Plan for Parks* also makes a commitment to collaborate with local communities and other agencies to provide more value to visitors and achieve common goals. The Saskatoon Mountain project is a collaboration between the County of Grande Prairie and Alberta Parks, with the common goal of providing opportunities for responsible and safe recreation while maintaining conservation of natural values on the site.