

## Frequently Asked Questions



# Proposal to Redevelop Lower Kananaskis River-Barrier Lake

## Bow Valley Provincial Park

### Frequently Asked Questions

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### 1. What has been decided?

Alberta Parks will be redeveloping several day use areas and a group campsite along Highway 40 from Canoe Meadows to Barrier Lake. These upgrades will address concerns regarding user conflict, ecological impacts and traffic congestion. Upgrades will involve parking lot expansions, improved camping and picnicking opportunities and improved water access for recreational activities.

The project will also provide opportunities to address the diversity of uses in this area through engagement with stakeholders to ensure facilities meet user needs effectively. Five sites are involved in this project plan: Canoe Meadows, Kananaskis Visitor Centre, Widowmaker and lower and upper Barrier Lake day use areas.

### 2. What are the details of the plan?

All developments in this plan have been designed to meet the overall project area vision, which is: The Lower Kananaskis River (LKR) – Barrier area in Bow Valley Provincial Park supports an important wildlife movement pathway, rare habitat types and other important ecological values; it is a unique destination in the Alberta Parks system where visitors from around the world come to appreciate and enjoy world-class whitewater and lake-based recreation activities in a natural parks setting.

Detailed improvements are as follows:

1. Overall Project Area:
  - a. Installing consistent signage to improve wayfinding, safety messaging and understanding of the area's ecology;
  - b. Installing paddling-specific gear drying racks at day use areas. Boat racks will not be installed as originally proposed;
  - c. Installing bike racks at day use areas;
  - d. Once construction is complete, facility zones will be amended to more accurately reflect current facility footprints and;
  - e. A five-year moratorium will be placed on construction of all new river features; this moratorium will not include maintenance of existing features.
2. Canoe Meadows:
  - a. An auto-accessible walk-in tent camping loop will be constructed with some separation from the group camp area. Comfort camping stations will not be offered at this site;
  - b. Tent pads will be constructed along the north edge of the meadow of the group camp;
  - c. The group camp shelter, picnic tables and fire pits will be upgraded;
  - d. Trails to the river and access points will be formalized and a trail for people with limited mobility will lead to a new put-in at the north end of the site;
  - e. The parking area will be expanded and paved;
  - f. Gear drying racks will be placed in the north meadow day use area. Boat racks will not be installed;
  - g. A small training facility will be constructed in partnership with an external partner and;
  - h. Change rooms will be installed in the day use area and group camp but will not be heated.
3. Kananaskis Visitor Centre
  - a. River access points will be formalized and trail improvements will be made;
  - b. Parking lots will be expanded and designated for particular uses;
  - c. A staging area for water sports will be constructed. This staging area will include parking, a heated change room and picnic tables and;
  - d. A "standing wave" area will be designated on the river with signage to communicate the area where users may be recreating in one location on the river rather than passing through.
4. Widowmaker
  - a. Public access points above and below the Widowmaker feature will be repaired and upgraded;
  - b. A commercial access point will be provided upstream from the Widowmaker feature.
  - c. Access to this put-in will be provided via a new loop road designed for commercial use only;
  - d. Parking lot will be paved; trail kiosk will be relocated and;
  - e. An unheated change room will be constructed.

5. Barrier Lake
  - a. The name of Barrier Lake will not be changed to Barrier Reservoir, but the names of the day use areas will be changed to reduce confusion between these areas and Barrier Dam further north;
  - b. The main parking lot and secondary parking area will be expanded and a non-heated change room provided;
  - c. A hand boat launch, associated access road and loading zone will be constructed;
  - d. Picnic opportunities will be upgraded;
  - e. Half of the loop road will be decommissioned as will unused pull-outs;
  - f. A small-scale tourism accommodation opportunity and an equipment rental hut development opportunity will go out through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. Their construction is dependent on the outcomes of that process and'
  - g. A Connection Corner with an accessible trail will be constructed from the upper day use area.
6. Zoning changes
  - a. Facility zoning at all sites will be better amended to reflect facility footprint.

### 3. What changed as a result of the public and First Nations consultation processes?

After a 60-day public and stakeholder consultation period, Parks Division is moving forward with a final plan. Based on consultation results, the following changes to the draft plan were made:

- No comfort camping installation and construction of a walk-in tenting camping loop at Canoe Meadows;
- Designating a “standing wave” zone instead of a “surf zone” on the Lower Kananaskis River;
- Change rooms will not be heated but designed for maximum ventilation;
- The name of Barrier Lake will not be changed; the names of the day use areas at this site will be;
- Changing the facility zone boundaries at Canoe Meadows and Barrier Lake to more accurately encompass the facility footprint;
- Designating a new trail for day users to access the LKR at Canoe Meadows without day users going through the group camp; and
- Relocation of the commercial access at Widowmaker further upstream.

### 4. Where is the Project area located?

The project area spans six kilometres in length from Canoe Meadows Day Use Area to Barrier Lake day use areas. The day use sites of Canoe Meadows, Barrier Visitor Centre and Widowmaker border the Lower Kananaskis River, which starts just below the Barrier Dam. The Barrier Lake day use areas are on the southeastern shores of Barrier Reservoir, above the dam. The project area is bordered by Canoe Meadows at the north end, Barrier Reservoir day use area on the south end and the Lower Kananaskis River or Barrier Reservoir on the west side and Highway 40 on the east. While the project area is quite narrow, all developments were considered in the context of the surrounding landscape from an ecological and social perspective.

The project area is located less than five kilometres from the Stoney Nation Reserve on its northern end and is the first part of Kananaskis Country encountered when traveling south on Highway 40 from the TransCanada Highway. The day use areas serve as the gateways to the Kananaskis Country protected areas system from the north end, largely because of their proximity to the boundary of Bow Valley Provincial Park and the TransCanada Highway.

## 5. How will the plan affect me as a:

- *White-water paddler?* The plan provides for upgrades to land-based facilities associated with the Lower Kananaskis River day use areas. A new commercial put-in at Widowmaker will reduce congestion between commercial operators and the public. At Canoe Meadows, a new open-air change room and gear drying racks will improve the paddler's experience. The potential construction of a white-water paddling training facility will help establish Canoe Meadows as a world-class white-water destination. Finally, individually bookable campsites at Canoe Meadows will provide an opportunity to camp where you play.
- *River-surfer?* The plan will use signage along the LKR to make other river users aware of where surf waves are located and where surfers might be recreating. A new river-surfer staging area with a heated change room, surfboard rack and better picnicking will be available at the Kananaskis Visitor Centre area. Additionally, the trail to the river surfing waves and river access points will be improved to reduce erosion and improve visitor safety.
- *Flat-water paddler?* Infrastructure at the Lower Barrier Lake day use area will entail a hand launch for people with non-motorized vessels (e.g., paddleboards, canoes, rafts) easier access to the water. The hand launch will be located away from the motorized boat launch, which will provide more direct access to the water and reduce congestion. The potential construction of a water recreation gear rental hut (private sector opportunity) will improve access to equipment for people looking to explore a new sport.
- *Picnicker?* Barrier Lake day use areas, both upper and lower, will have additional picnic spots added and opportunities to enjoy either lakeside and beach picnics or quiet forest picnics. Picnic areas along the beach will have improved access to the beach through stairs and trails. Short trails in the area will provide opportunities to explore the area.
- *Someone seeking solitude?* The construction of a "Connection Corner" at the upper Barrier Lake Day Use Area will provide an opportunity for anyone to sit in stillness and connect with the beautiful views of Barrier Lake and the surrounding aspen forest.
- *Water-based business?* The provision of a separate commercial put-in at Widowmaker will provide better access for commercial operators above the Widowmaker feature. The potential provision of a training centre at Canoe Meadows and the equipment rental hut at Barrier Lake will attract new visitors to the area and enhance the water-recreation visitor experience.

## 6. What commercial tourism opportunities are provided?

There are three new commercial tourism opportunities in this plan, all of which will go out through a Request for Proposals process. The first is the construction and operation of a White-Water Training Facility at Canoe Meadows. This facility would serve athletes training on the river's slalom course as well as serve as a hub for special events in the area. The second opportunity is the provision of a water-sport equipment rental hut at Barrier Lake. This will support the ability for an operator to conduct on-site rentals of kayaks, canoes, stand-up paddleboards and other gear. The last opportunity is for a small-scale tourism for diversified accommodation and product/service offerings. This opportunity could potentially include but is not limited to proposals for: small cabins, yurts, geo-domes, culinary tourism, yoga retreat lofts, small eco-lodge and any other similar-scale project ideas brought forward by proponents.

## 7. What happened to the plan released in 2011?

The *Lower Kananaskis River Redevelopment Plan* released in 2011 was used as the foundation to create this updated plan. The results of the public consultation process and the comprehensive environmental review from 2011 showed there were substantial areas of concern requiring consideration. Ecologically, the extent of campgrounds proposed was not appropriate. Public concerns were also raised regarding

safety of having large campgrounds so close to an unpredictable white-water river. This plan used the pieces of the 2011 plan that were most supported and updated other components to account for new recreational uses. In addition, the current plan took a broader landscape scale approach and included the Barrier Lake day use areas.

## 8. Why is Alberta Parks further developing this area and where did direction to do this come from?

Alberta Parks is committed to managing its protected areas based on direction from management plans. The current Bow Valley Provincial Park Management Plan (2002) allows for the facility zone at Barrier Lake Day Use Area to include future overnight accommodation and development.

## 9. Why does this plan represent the anticipated last development of this area?

The project area is very busy with visitors, which demonstrates the need to increase capacity of parking areas and provision of diverse recreational uses. This project area, however, is also of great ecological significance. The Highway 40 wildlife corridor is a critical movement pathway for many species, including grizzly bears and elk. In addition, several patches of sensitive habitat exist here, which are essential for migratory songbirds in the summer and ungulate habitat in the winter. The facilities in this plan have been designed in a way to focus human use away from areas of ecological concern. The intention is to build these facilities to provide for a great recreational experience and to protect sensitive habitats so wildlife can continue to thrive here.

## 10. Why is the west side of the Lower Kananaskis River and Barrier Lake not included in this plan?

The west side of the Lower Kananaskis River and Barrier Lake are within the Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park, which is managed differently than the project area. The Wildland Provincial Park has been designated to have lower levels of human use and impact. By focusing human use on the east side of the river and lake, Alberta Parks can still provide for ample recreation opportunities without compromising the higher level of protection of the wildland provincial park.

## 11. What about future regional transportation?

All parking lots will include bus-sized parking stalls. This will allow for school groups to better access the area, as well as meeting the need for bus stops in the future.

## 12. How will this project improve wildlife corridors and ecological integrity?

By focusing human use close to the river and away from the highway, Alberta Parks is attempting to give wildlife as much space as possible to navigate the area without running into vehicles or people as they move along the highway. This plan also purposefully avoided development between Widowmaker and Barrier Dam, which has proven an important habitat patch and movement pathway for multiple species, such as moose, bobcat and black bear. By decommissioning half of the loop access road at Barrier Lake, Alberta Parks will widen the wildlife corridor at one of its narrowest points. This road decommissioning will improve habitat security by providing animals with safe access to important habitat without people.

## 13. What is a “Connection Corner”?

Connection Corner is a new kind of trail that Alberta Parks will pilot with this project plan. The idea of Connection Corner is to provide an area in the front country where people could go to have a quiet space

to reflect and connect to the beauty of this protected area. Research shows that people desire deeper connections to wilderness and that those connections are not facilitated by buildings, rather by providing space for people to appreciate nature. The Connection Corner in this plan will be a short, accessible trail in a quiet part of the park. At the end of the trail will be individual chairs created by local artists where people can sit to meditate, draw, paint or just listen to the birds and appreciate the view.

#### 14. How does this proposal enhance recreational opportunities?

A variety of recreational activities are being accounted for in this plan, particularly those associated with water. Day use areas associated with the LKR will have bigger parking lots to improve capacity, change rooms to make preparation more comfortable and better picnicking spots at which to spend time while gear dries in the sun. Lake recreation opportunities will be improved with a hand launch at Barrier Lake and better picnic sites along the lakeshore for families to enjoy the beach. Better trails throughout the area will improve the visitor experience and provide a range of walking opportunities. Better bike-related infrastructure, including bike racks and highway improvements, will provide better cycle-touring opportunities.

#### 15. When will construction start?

Construction will be implemented in phases. Redevelopment activities will start in 2018 continuing through beyond 2021. Changes to Canoe Meadows will start in spring 2019. Changes to the Widowmaker and Barrier Lake will likely occur in through to 2021. Changes at the Kananaskis Visitor Centre will occur after 2021. The public will be notified when construction starts through advisories posted on [www.AlbertaParks.ca](http://www.AlbertaParks.ca).

#### 16. Were First Nations engaged in this proposal?

First Nations were invited to consult on this proposal in 2011. For this plan, all Treaty 7 First Nations were consulted for the portion of the plan pertaining to Barrier Lake.

#### 17. Who can I contact for more information?

If you would like further information on the LKR-Barrier redevelopment plan, please email Kananaskis Planning at: [kananaskis.projects@gov.ab.ca](mailto:kananaskis.projects@gov.ab.ca).