
Park boundary amendments

Frequently asked questions

What has changed?

Forestry and Parks has amended 18 park boundaries through orders-in-council. These amendments enhance recreation and camping opportunities for Albertans, protect rare grasslands, and address unresolved administrative issues and small site deregulations. Collectively, these amendments add over 1,400 hectares (about the size of the Town of Bonnyville, or larger than Nose Hill Park in Calgary) to Alberta's provincial parks system, while removing approximately 50 hectares of land. These changes:

- establish two new parks in Northern Alberta: Kleskun Hills Provincial Park and La Biche River Provincial Recreation Area, expanding and improving public access and recreation opportunities;
- expand three parks to include titled lands that were purchased or donated for park purposes;
- amend Egg Island Ecological Reserve to correct a historical error in its legal description, with no change to its size, protections, or boundaries;
- deregulate Big Elbow Provincial Recreation Area as it fully overlaps with Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park; and
- deregulate 11 small provincial recreation areas that either have been permanently closed for years with facilities removed for several decades, or will enable transfer to the suitable local authority.

If this was so important to get done, why didn't you do it before? Some of these have been on the books for 20 years?

Advancing park boundary amendments requires specific operational planning and analysis, including an order-in-council. Given the many priorities of government, Cabinet agendas are prioritized to meet the needs of Albertans. Adding two new parks and expanding three others while at the same time advancing specific deregulations of small sites achieves an important balance and is why this work is proceeding at this time.

Where is the new Kleskun Hills Provincial Park, and how can I use it?

Located about 30 kilometres northeast of Grande Prairie, the new Kleskun Hills Provincial Park protects 1,087 hectares of ecologically rare and sensitive grassland ecosystems. Its establishment was made possible through the purchase of private lands by the Government of Alberta. This park connects with the adjacent Kleskun Hill Natural Area.

Recreation opportunities in Kleskun Hills Provincial Park will include hiking, nature appreciation, and other day-use activities compatible with the intent to conserve grasslands. Access to this fenced park is by foot, and facilities such as parking and trails will be developed to support access. As a former bison ranch, livestock grazing will continue through permits as needed to maintain grassland health. More information about how this park will be opened for public enjoyment will be shared in 2024.

Where is the new La Biche River Provincial Recreation Area, and how can I use it?

Located about 70 kilometres northwest of Lac La Biche, the new La Biche River PRA is adjacent to the eastern boundary of La Biche River Wildland Provincial Park. At 65 hectares in size, this recreation area will enhance recreational opportunities by providing staging and facility support for hunting, motorized and non-motorized trail use for visitors accessing the adjacent La Biche River Wildland Provincial Park.

La Biche River PRA will be developed to provide overnight camping, and bridge access across La Biche River to support visitors seeking backcountry adventure experiences. More information about the plans and timelines to develop camping in La Biche River PRA will be shared once available.

Which parks have been expanded?

Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park has been expanded by 238 hectares to include purchased land. This park protects Big Lake, a freshwater wetland ecosystem, and a popular location for low-impact recreation including trail use, paddling and bird watching. Expansion of the park enhances conservation and recreation opportunities including potential trail development. Expansion, management and development of the park is guided by the approved Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park Management Plan, which underwent public consultation in 2017.

Bleriot Ferry PRA has been expanded by 2.9 hectares to include purchased land. As the only nearby provincial campground serving visitors to Drumheller and the Royal Tyrell Museum, expansion will enable increased public access and has potential to expand camping in the future.

Peaceful Valley PRA has been expanded by 37 hectares to include lands donated by the Alberta Sport Connection Foundation. Peaceful Valley PRA contains a day lodge serving seniors, terminally ill individuals, and Albertans with disabilities. The addition of this land ensures that the scenic river valley views from the day lodge are maintained and will enhance recreation through new trail development.

What is deregulation, and have parks been deregulated before?

Deregulation means that the provincial recreation area designations have been rescinded and the sites will no longer be managed under the *Provincial Parks Act*. These lands will now be managed under the *Public Lands Act* as public land and will support public access and recreation.

Parks are regularly added and deregulated over the years, depending on site values and recreational needs. For example:

- 2018 deregulation and transfer of Sylvan Lake Provincial Park to the Town of Sylvan Lake.
- 2013 deregulation of Kitscoty, James River Bridge and Leslieville Provincial Recreation Areas.
- 2010 deregulation and transfer to local authorities of: Fork Lake, Hanmore Lake, Sun Haven, Willow Creek, Holmes Crossing, Crane Lake East, Crane Lake West, Ethel Lake and Minnie Lake Provincial Recreation Areas.

Why were these 12 parks deregulated?

Twelve provincial recreation areas have been deregulated. Of these, ten have been permanently closed, with facilities removed for many decades: Chisholm, Crane Meadow, Eyrie Gap, Fir Creek, Gunn, Little Smoky River, Muriel Lake, Newbrook, North Ram River, and Raven Provincial Recreation Areas. These sites are very small in size and no longer provide any meaningful recreation opportunities. These sites were originally closed due to environmental damage (flood, fire), or due to low use. Managing these sites as public land re-opens them for public use, and self-directed, rustic recreation.

The deregulation of Fort Vermillion PRA will allow the site to continue to be managed by Mackenzie County, together with an existing lease on adjacent public lands. This deregulation is the last administrative step to follow through on a past commitment and allows the municipality to operate the site more flexibly to suit their regional recreation and tourism needs. No change in public use will occur.

The deregulation of Big Elbow PRA corrects an administrative oversight, as the PRA designation overlaps with Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park. This site will continue to be managed for backcountry recreation as part of Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park, and no change in use will occur.

Deregulating these sites helps to clarify the purpose of the provincial parks system and focus resources on providing quality experiences in sites with high recreation and conservation values. Fact sheets further describe each deregulation.

Provincial Recreation Area	Reason for Deregulation
Big Elbow	Administrative corrections – completely overlaps with Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park
Fort Vermillion (5 hectares)	Transfer to local authority (Mackenzie County) for management
Chisholm (1.6 hectares)	Closed in 2000 due to low use - facilities removed
Fir Creek (6.7 hectares)	Flooded in 1995 and closed
North Ram River (14.7 hectares)	Flooded in 2005 and inaccessible – facilities removed and reclaimed
Crane Meadow (3.9 hectares)	Closed in 2012 due to low use – facilities removed
Eyrie Gap (3.4 hectares)	Closed in 2013 due to low use – facilities removed
Gunn (1.4 hectares)	Closed in 2004 due to low use – facilities removed
Little Smoky (2.1 hectares)	Closed in 2003 due to low use – facilities removed
Muriel Lake (8.4 hectares)	Closed in 2003 due to low use – facilities removed
Newbrook (1.9 hectares)	Closed in 2007 due to low use – facilities removed
Raven (1.1 hectares)	Closed in 2010 due to low use – facilities removed

What was happening on these areas that are being deregulated?

Most of these areas that are being deregulated have not been used for 10 to 20 years. Seven of the sites have had all facilities removed, and one site is being used by Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors for road works purposes. There is some indication of recreational use at two sites and Albertans will still be able to access these sites for recreation. The twelfth site is Fort Vermillion Provincial Recreation Area and it will be maintained by Mackenzie County along with adjacent public lands that they already maintain under a Public Lands recreation lease.

Will these new public lands be designated for industrial use?

These changes are administrative in nature. While some lands that were previously protected under the *Provincial Parks Act* will now be protected under the *Public Lands Act*, they have not been designated for any purpose.

Is this just the first step in deregulating more parks?

No. Both the 1,400 hectares of land that we have added to the provincial park system and the 50 hectares that we have removed are the result of long-term planning. These amendments constitute a final administrative step to ensure the lands in question are properly managed. Albertans are now able to access more land and we will continue to seek opportunities to improve visitor experiences.

Are these the last parks deregulations that we can expect from Alberta's government?

Alberta's government will continue to manage Crown land responsibly for current and future generations, ensuring that designations match the needs of Albertans and continue to meet social, environmental and economic outcomes.

Did consultation occur prior to these changes?

These changes do not trigger public consultation as they:

- are the administrative last step of an existing land purchase or donation agreement;
- resolve legal land description errors or prior site closures; and / or
- do not impact land management, pre-existing land uses, access or Indigenous Treaty rights or traditional land uses.

This is aligned with past practice for administrative deregulations and park establishments and expansions based on titled land purchases or donations, such as the 2014 establishment of Antelope Hill Provincial Park, and the 2022 expansion of Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park. Deregulation of four Kananaskis PRAs (Eyre Gap, Crane Meadow, Big Elbow and Fir Creek) was approved through the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, which underwent public consultation.

If the areas are no longer a park does that mean people are allowed to hunt on them?

Hunting is governed under the *Wildlife Act*. Areas where hunting was previously permitted will continue to be permitted. When in doubt, call 310-LAND for more information.

There are some areas, specifically in the Blue Rapids area where people have been asking for the deregulation. Why did you respond to Mackenzie County but not to those leaseholders?

Alberta's government is actively and continuously managing Crown land to ensure it meets the needs of Albertans. Mackenzie County has been helping us care for and manage Fort Vermilion Provincial Recreation Area and this deregulation better allows them to manage both this recreation area and an adjacent *Public Lands Act* lease. Prior to advancing any park boundary amendment, Alberta's government requires assurances that public access and existing uses will not be impacted. Reassessments routinely occur and outstanding work is prioritized accordingly.

How big is a hectare?

1 hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres or 0.01 square kilometres – or about the size of one standard soccer field.