BACKGROUND

There are 42 Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs) within Kananaskis Country located mainly in the Jumpingpound, Elbow, Threepoint and Highwood valleys. Provincial Recreation Areas are provincial crown lands designated under the Provincial Parks Act and Regulations and managed for public recreation to ensure that visitor safety and enjoyment is maintained. This designation also allows for the site to be managed to support and maintain important natural, cultural, scenic and tourism values where present.

The average size of these PRAs is approximately 34 hectares. Day use areas average about 10 hectares while campgrounds are generally larger and the largest one (McLean Creek) is 245 hectares. Most of these PRAs were established in 1981 during the capital development phase in Kananaskis Country. They are managed by staff of Alberta Tourism Parks Recreation and Culture with most of the day to day operations conducted by contractors under the terms of a Facility Operating Agreement.

This plan will not apply to the Evan Thomas Provincial Recreation Area in the Kananaskis Valley as it already has a management plan in place that was approved in 2004 following extensive public and stakeholder consultations.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

Following the designation of protected areas, management plans are prepared to ensure desired management intents, objectives and principles are identified and implemented. This plan will guide the management of these PRAs consistent with legislation and policies that are in effect taking into account stakeholder and public opinion. The scope of the plan will be limited by the amount and quality of existing information; if significant information gaps are identified during this planning process, future actions will be recommended. Existing jurisdictional roles and boundaries will be respected and policies and directives pertaining to Kananaskis Country will be maintained. This plan will address how existing facilities might need to be changed to better meet current or future needs or whether existing boundaries might need amendment. It will also identify appropriate management actions across jurisdictional and protected area boundaries. A regional perspective will be maintained.

AREA DESCRIPTION

Twenty-five of the PRAs are located in the Montane (foothills) portion of Kananaskis Country while seventeen of them are located within the mountainous portion. Most are located between public roadways and streams or rivers that provide a focal point for recreation as well as an easily recognizable boundary.

The Montane portion is characterized by mostly forested ridges composed of sandstones, conglomerates and shales. Occasional coal outcroppings occur. Elevations range from approximately 1400 meters to a high of 2500 meters above sea level (asl) with most
ridges averaging 1700 meters. The Rocky Mountain portion is characterized by significantly higher ridges composed of more limestone and shapes. The elevation in most mountain valley bottoms is 1500 m asl while the highest peaks or ridges are up to 3,000 meters asl. The importance of the foothills and mountains as part of the headwaters of the Jumpingpound Creek, Elbow River, Threepoint Creek and Highwood River has long been recognized. The role of these protected areas in both protecting the watershed and providing important learning and recreational opportunities will continue to be emphasized. While most of this part of Kananaskis Country is forested with lodgepole pine and spruce, larger valley bottoms have areas of grass or shrub meadows. In the Highwood valley in particular, the diverse slopes and aspects along with prevailing winds, sunshine and moisture regimes create a dramatic mix of open grasslands and various forest types. These areas provide important seasonal faunal ranges including movement corridors.

The most popular recreation activities within or near these PRAs include camping, picnicking, trail recreation and fishing. While hunting is not permitted within the PRAs for public safety reasons, it does occur on the nearby forest reserve and Wildland Parks. Seasonal paddling occurs on the Elbow and Highwood rivers.

The main road access is via Highway 68 (Sibbald Flats Trail), Highway 66 (Elbow Falls Trail), SR 549 west of Millarville, and SR 541 west of Longview (see map). As well; the Powderface Trail, McLean Creek Trail and Gorge Creek Trail provide lower standard gravel road access. Portions of most of these roads are subject to seasonal closures due to lack of winter use onto help protect wildlife values. A proposal to permanently close the middle portion of the Gorge Creek Trail is currently under review.

Sixteen of the PRAs contain campgrounds or group camps while 25 are day use sites. Most of the campgrounds also have day use components at the site. There is one backcountry campsite (Wildhorse) and two PRAs that include administrative or service nodes (Highwood Compound and Highwood Junction). Many of those in the Jumpingpound, Elbow and Threepoint valleys provide access to the 700 kilometers of designated trails in this part of Kananaskis Country. While most of these are non-motorized trails, the McLean Creek PRA and Fisher Creek PRA service motorized (off highway vehicle or OHV) trails within the McLean Creek Forest Land Use Zone.

This management plan will also apply to Bragg Creek Provincial Park. Despite having a different designation from the PRAs, it has a similar size and vegetative character and a similar visitor use pattern:

A previous tourism market assessment identified the potential for future fixed roof commercial accommodation in one or two sites in both the Jumpingpound and Elbow valleys. Some preliminary site feasibility studies have been done but through this planning process, more detailed work will be done and specific candidate sites will be identified in the draft plan. Stakeholders and the public will have the opportunity to review and comment on these proposed additional developments and any other issues or concerns at the draft plan stage.
MANAGEMENT INTENT AND OBJECTIVES

The proposed management intent for Kananskis Country Provincial Recreation Areas is:

"to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation and tourism which are dependent on the natural and cultural values found here".

The proposed management objectives are:

Outdoor Recreation: to provide a wide range of opportunities for recreational uses such as camping, hiking, off highway vehicle and equestrian (where permitted), mountain biking, cross country skiing and fishing within and near these sites*.

Heritage Appreciation: to provide opportunities for visitors to experience, understand and appreciate the natural and cultural values of the area.

Tourism/Economic: to provide opportunities and infrastructure to experience and enjoy the natural and cultural' resources of the area *.

Preservation: to preserve or enhance natural, scenic and cultural features of these sites and areas especially aquatic and riparian habitat and rare or uncommon plants and animals.

*Note: provision of any facilities will be consistent with the Kananaskis Country Recreation Policy (1999), Kananaskis Country Architectural Guidelines (updated 2004) and the Alberta Tourism and Recreation Leasing process for review of commercial facilities.

ACCEPTABLE AND NON-ACCEPTABLE ACTIVITIES

Existing provincial legislation, policies and regulations prohibit or restrict many activities within protected areas. For example, mineral/petroleum exploration and development, industrial development, commercial timber harvesting and resort type development are prohibited in Kananaskis Country Provincial Recreation Areas.

Within Kananskis Country PRAs, the only permitted activities are non-motorized trail recreation (except for McLean Creek, Fisher Creek, Dawson (snowmobile), Etherington and Cataract Creek (snowmobile only) PRAs), camping, interpretive trails, picnicking, and fishing. No hunting or firearms discharge is permitted within PRAs. Camping is permitted in designated auto access or backcountry campgrounds. Limited; small scale overnight accommodation is permitted in PRAs and the possible future development of these and other appropriate facilities will be established in this management plan. Kananaskis Country Recreation Policy restricts future development of fixed roof accommodation to those areas with an approved management plan in place that has included public consultation and is subject to appropriate environmental review.

PLAN PROCESS:

A planning team consisting of staff from Alberta Tourism Parks Recreation and Culture, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation prepared these draft Terms of Reference for approval by the Kananaskis Country Interdepartmental Consultative Committee (KCICC).
Stakeholders and the general public are invited to review and comment on these Draft Terms of Reference through a mail out and at public open houses to be held in Calgary and Bragg Creek. Comments received will be given careful consideration by the planning team in preparing the final Terms of Reference which will be approved by KCICC. The final Terms of Reference will guide the preparation of a draft plan in 2007/08. While no stakeholder workshops or other sessions are foreseen during plan preparation, they could be held if shown to be appropriate in order to assist in clarifying issues, concerns and identifying management options for the planning team. The draft plan will be made available for stakeholder and public review and written comments. These comments will guide the completion of the final plan.

Co-ordination with neighbouring municipalities will be maintained by regular communication and consultation as appropriate throughout the planning process. Consultation with the Central Rockies Ecosystem Interagency Liaison Group and First Nations with an interest in this area will also occur.

Categories of individuals or groups with an identified interest in Kananaskis Country Provincial Recreation Areas include:

- Recreationists (commercial and non-commercial) Local grazing interests
- Spray Lakes Sawmills/petroleum operators Kananaskis Improvement District (KID)
- Neighbouring jurisdictions (MD Foothills, MD Rocky View, MD Bighorn as well as Turner Valley and Black Diamond)
- Naturalists/Environmentalists
- University Researchers
- First Nations
- Guides and Outfitters
- Hunting and fishing organizations
- Film Industry

A mailing list of all interested parties will be prepared based on previous similar management plan processes, respondents to newspaper notices, open houses and other expressions of interest.

**MANAGEMENT TOPICS TO BE ADDRESSED**

(not in order of priority):

- Biodiversity, protection and maintenance of terrestrial and aquatic habitat and the maintenance of wildlife connectivity.
- Watershed protection
- Heritage appreciation programming and priorities
• Managing access, impacts, conflicts and facilities
• Provision of recreation facilities and opportunities to meet current and future standards/needs
• Address impacts/safety concerns of adjacent industrial or commercial activities on these protected areas
• First Nations interests o Aesthetics
• Vegetation management (eg., reclamation of disturbed areas, wildfire threat reduction, wildlife habitat enhancement and maintenance, disturbance regimes)
• Cattle grazing
• Research
• Fishing/Hunting
• Commercial and special events
• Boundary amendments/redesignations
• Protection of cultural/historic/palaeontolgical resources
• Facility programming in day use/trailhead PRAs.

PLAN OUTLINE
This sample Table of Contents indicates the format and content of the plan:

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