

Decision to Update Alberta Parks Legislation

In Spring 2010, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) proposed new park legislation to align with *Alberta's Plan for Parks* and ensure park classifications are easier for the public to understand. Feedback was gathered during a 60 day online public comment period that ended July 17, 2010. The province took all comments into consideration before making a decision. We thank everyone who provided feedback.

Key highlights of the proposed legislation include:

- A simplified park classification and zoning system to more clearly communicate to the public what they can do in which parks throughout the parks system;
- Establishing a mandatory public notice process for changes in the parks system; and
- Establish a Parks Conservation Foundation and Parks Advisory Council.

What We Heard: Public Online Survey Summary Report

The public was asked to comment on-line on the following descriptions of Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands.

Provincial parks will include a range of land bases, including:

- Unique areas of physical features, rare or endangered native plants and animals.
- Areas representative of Alberta's biodiversity that are protected for the enjoyment of current and future generations.
- Areas managed to provide a wide range of recreational, educational, scientific, and visitor opportunities that contribute to Albertan's quality of life and encourage a healthy and active lifestyle.
- Areas where recreational use will be consistent with the environmental protection of the park.

Heritage Rangelands will adopt the existing definition and criteria currently under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*. Heritage Rangelands will be:

- Areas designated to preserve and protect the natural landscape representative of Alberta's prairies, using grazing to maintain the grassland ecology.
- Closely monitored and controlled to ensure all use has the protection of the landscape as the top priority.
- Areas that provide limited recreation and tourism opportunity.

- To what extent do you agree with the description of Provincial Parks? 69.9%
- To what extent do you agree with the description of Heritage Rangelands? 71.4%
- Are the proposed two classifications easy to understand? 65.9%
- Overall, how well do you support the proposed Park Classification System? 55.3%

A proposed park zoning concept was outlined and respondents were asked to respond to questions on specific aspects of the proposed concept, and each of the zones as outlined.

The zoning structure was presented as a scale from "Recreation" to "Conservation". The classification and zoning structure represented the intent to continue to permit recreation and tourism opportunities in

provincial parks, or specific areas of provincial parks, where appropriate, while still maintaining high levels of protection for entire provincial parks, or specific areas within provincial parks.

All lands within provincial parks will be zoned in order to ensure consistent communication on what activities are permitted in what areas of provincial parks as well as ensure the land is managed for the intended recreation and/or conservation outcomes.

The proposed legislation would give the Minister the authority to designate zones within provincial parks through ministerial order. The concept of zones and the ability to designate zones are included in the proposed legislation.

The specific definitions and applications of the zones will be further defined in regulations and policies. The details and definitions of zone to be included in the regulations will be provided during the next stage of consultation on the regulations.

- Overall, how well do you support the proposed Zoning System? 59.7%
- Is the proposed Zoning System easy to understand? 67.6%

The proposed description of each zone was provided and respondents were asked to respond to the following questions on each of the zones.

Zone A

This proposed zone will provide a means for allowing and regulating use in areas of a provincial park geared towards tourism and recreation. While this zone is mainly focused on recreation, any use or development must be environmentally compatible and appropriate. Permitted uses and development in this zone would be typical of the highly developed areas of parks, such as campgrounds, day use areas, golf courses, equestrian staging areas, visitor centres, education centres, etc. Examples of zone A areas might be specific areas or entire land bases of existing provincial recreation areas or provincial parks.

Zone B

This proposed zone will include areas which permit lower levels of development compared to Zone A, to support low-intensity recreational activities. These areas would be large enough to disperse use within the natural landscape so that protection of the landscape is maintained. Permitted uses and development within Zone B would include a variety of recreational opportunities and the facilities necessary to support these activities, where appropriate. It is anticipated that the majority of the existing park land base would be designated as this zone. Protection of the biodiversity and unique features within these areas must be balanced with the recreation opportunities permitted in this zone. Examples of Zone B area might be specific areas or entire land bases of existing wildland parks, natural areas, and the larger provincial parks.

Zone C

This proposed zone will provide the highest level of protection to significant natural or cultural features within a provincial park. The intent of this zone would be a very high level of protection of those features, with only minimal access and recreational use permitted. Access to these areas may be highly controlled or limited to foot access only. Development within these areas will be very minimal - such as visitor access control structures, including gates or fences, and minimal day use facilities to support education/interpretation.

- Is the description for Zone A easy to understand? 80.2%
- Is the description for Zone B easy to understand? 64.9%
- Is the description for Zone C easy to understand? 80.8%

Resulting Decisions Based on Public Feedback

- Expand zone structure from three zones to four zones
- Mandatory public notice will include the application of zones and zone boundary changes

The *Alberta Parks Act* would not be proclaimed until after TPR engages Albertans to develop strong supporting regulations and a zoning system to better manage parks. Public consultations on zoning are expected to take place in 2011. The focus of the consultations will be on drafting the conservation intents of each of the four zones as well as the parameters for acceptable activities within each zone.

The public consultations on the new *Alberta Parks Act* were conducted as part of a larger process to develop goals and initiatives for the future of the Alberta parks system, including extensive consultations beginning in 2008 for Alberta's *Plan for Parks*, a policy document which guided the development of the legislation.

Further information

Learn more about Alberta's [Plan for Parks](#).

We encourage all Albertans to take an active role in planning the future of Alberta parks. If you would like to be informed when future opportunities for public comment are announced, please send us an [email](#).

Proposed Alberta Parks Act Consultation - What We Heard	
Additional Comments	Response
Why Now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following through on commitments made in Alberta's <i>Plan For Parks</i> • Legislation brings the Alberta Parks system under one Act • Make land uses and values more clear through zoning
Why enabling legislation and not restrictive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent of the legislation is to <u>maintain existing levels</u> of protection and recreational access across nearly the 500 parks in the system • A regulatory framework can be more flexible to be able to respond to new challenges on land base, whether from an ecological or recreational point of view • This approach is more user-friendly as people will be able to go right to the issue they are interested in and not have to wade through an entire Act
<p>Conservation and Protection should be first priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... weakens existing levels of protection • ...certainty diminished if protected areas are no longer defined in the Act • Purpose statement should be reworded to include 'opportunities that are compatible with the conservation of ecological integrity' • Primary priority should be conservation recreation and tourism should be secondary purpose, only in defined areas • Act should reflect new global target for biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act's purpose statement highlights environmental conservation as a major priority • We know that protecting the environment is a priority and we also know Albertans want access to more recreational opportunities. • With proposed legislation, balance will be achieved in the parks system as a whole • Parks will continue to play an important role in ensuring Albertans have access to natural spaces for recreation. Parks will also remain a key tool in protecting Alberta's natural heritage • Our <i>Parks Science Strategy</i>, released in July 2010, fosters evidence-based decision-making and facilitates research

Proposed Alberta Parks Act Consultation - What We Heard

Additional Comments	Response
<p>Too much discretion for Minister</p>	<p>to inform the management of parks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister can only act within the zoning framework established by Cabinet • Minister's responsibilities are to manage appropriate land uses within each zone, as part of ongoing government responsibilities • Proposed legislation includes a mandatory public notice period of changes to park lands in response to a recommendation from this consultation. • In current legislation, there is no requirement of mandatory notice of changes to provincial parks, recreation areas or wildland provincial parks
<p>Doesn't grow the Parks system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...does not reflect priority expressed by Albertans in 2008 survey for increased investment in "land set aside to protect natural areas in an undisturbed state" (72.7% of respondents) • ...must be a clear statement of the primacy of conserving unique and representative lands ...followed by a statement of targets for protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a mechanism to consider new lands through Parks Advisory Council and Land-use Framework regional planning process. • Purpose statement references need for 'unique and representative lands within Alberta's natural regions' • Parks Conservation Foundation will increase the potential to enhance the parks system by accepting donations of land and funding. • Will work with Land-use Framework regional plans on developing conservation and recreation goals
<p>Protection for Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection will be weakened as provincial park with zoning decided by minister – need specific prohibitions regarding hunting, trapping, vehicles in Act • Should be treated like Willmore and Heritage Rangelands • If subject to zoning, define zone in the Act • Need statement similar to WAERNAHR Act regarding safeguards "from impairment and industrial development" • To retain current level of protection, Act should specify no new leases, dispositions, hunting or motorized vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intent is to maintain existing levels of protection and recreation access across the parks system. • All details of land use will be included in a Cabinet regulation • Highly sensitive areas like Wilderness Areas, as well as some areas of provincial parks like in Dinosaur and Writing-on-Stone, will be in the highest protection zone • Protection of the land base and carefully managing access to those land bases will continue to be our practice • We will continue to be guided by the Energy Information Letter 2003-25 regarding existing dispositions in parks system (honour existing commitments as a matter of fairness)
<p>Clarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better clarity could be provided by better information on how sites are designated, website, improved signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing park classifications are complex and work will continue to better communicate and provide signage at parks. Simplifying the parks system is a

Proposed Alberta Parks Act Consultation - What We Heard

Additional Comments	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stated purpose of providing better clarity to Albertans is not addressed in the Act; will require more signage with significant costs 	<p style="margin-left: 20px;">good place to start</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More clarity means better adherence to rules and better enforcement
<p>Public Consultation Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice is not consultation - need meaningful public consultation on future changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consult extensively on changes to parks. Consultations posted on at http://tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult/default.aspx from past year • Currently, there are no requirements for notice about change to Provincial Parks, Provincial Recreation Areas and Wildland Provincial Parks. The new Act will require mandatory advance public notice of changes across the parks system • Commit to posting a public consultation framework on parks website • Will establish Parks Advisory Council and Parks Conservation Foundation
<p>Don't Like the Zoning Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zones and allowed activities must be defined in this legislation • Need to see process that will be used to designate existing protected areas to a new zone. • Existing system follows international recognized standards (IUCN) for protected area management based on scientific structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning will be established through Cabinet regulation subject to further consultations in 2011 • The intent is to maintain existing levels of protection and recreation access across the parks system • Proposed legislation would not be proclaimed until work concludes on the development of supporting regulations and a zoning system to better manage parks