

# Wapiti

## Recreation and Trail Management Plan

The Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management plan area runs along the Wapiti River Valley south of the City of Grande Prairie and forms one of the jurisdictional boundaries between the County of Grande Prairie and the Municipal District of Greenview. It spans unique ecological areas and key biodiversity habitat along the Wapiti Dunes, wetlands, and riparian areas. Notably, the province has identified the area as a Provincial Environmentally Significant Area due to the ecosystem dunes, trumpeter swan nesting habitat and river valley landscape. The area also includes historic sites and world-class paleontological resources.

### Background

The plan area has evolved into a major multi-use outdoor recreation and trail network for land and water-based activities. Several recreation facilities, trail networks, and motorized associations have been in the area for years. As the population of the City of Grande Prairie and region continues to grow, the types of recreational activities and user groups in the plan area are expanding and diversifying. Additionally, areas of land within the plan boundaries provide an important economic source for lumber and pulp production, oil and gas, gravel extraction, grazing, and trapping. The area also supplies a source of drinking water for regional communities and is a cultural landscape and traditional use area for Indigenous peoples.

Growing recreational demand in the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan area has been a motivator for protecting the environmental integrity of the corridor, while balancing social and economic interests. Since the 1970s, the Government of Alberta has developed several integrated resource plans to provide management direction and guidance for the area. In recent years, community-driven planning initiatives for the area have attempted to protect the environmental integrity of the sand dunes, address land use conflicts, and enhance recreational opportunities. Due to a variety of reasons, these initiatives have not reached completion. The previous initiatives will inform this planning process.

### Challenges

Over the years, the Government of Alberta and local stakeholders have documented the following key challenges in the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management plan area:



- Unmanaged motorized recreation without adequate infrastructure.
- Damage to sensitive environmental areas including sand dunes slopes, vegetation, riparian areas and watercourses and the introduction of invasive species.
- Public safety concerns including
  - fire risk from unmanaged recreational activity
  - target shooting and other firearm use
  - potential for human-wildlife conflict
- Random camping in inappropriate or unsafe areas
- Unmanaged and unauthorized social/group events that lead to issues with fires, garbage, noise, and other public safety concerns.
- Garbage dumping.
- Illegal driving and washing motorized vehicles in natural waterways.

### Where does the plan fit?

The Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan fits into the issue-specific level of the planning hierarchy, under the Provincial Land-Use Framework. The plan may be adopted or incorporated into the future Upper Peace Regional Plan.

### Alberta Crown Land Vision

Alberta's Government has adopted a common-sense approach to Crown land management that finds the right balance between conservation, recreation, and economic use. To meet this vision, Alberta's Government is committed to updating legislation, developing partnerships, and promoting sustainable use of trails and recreational areas. By listening to stakeholder and community perspectives, this approach promotes working and planning together to meet diverse goals for Crown land management.

## Trails Act

The [Trails Act](#) was proclaimed in February 2022. The *Trails Act* provides guidance and structure for trail use in our province's growing recreation and tourism sector. The Act allows for better trail experiences for Albertans by ensuring high quality, well-managed and safe designated trails. Over time, trail users will see improved management and planning for trails that better supports the activities Albertans want, such as hiking, biking and off-highway vehicle use.

## Purpose and Geographic Scope of the Plan

The Government of Alberta is developing the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan under the *Trails Act*. This work is to enhance recreation opportunities and aligns with "Alberta's Crown Land Vision" to guide and manage provincial Crown land to better meet the needs of communities, Indigenous peoples, and job creators without compromising conservation values. The purpose of the plan is to provide direction and guidance for the development of high-quality recreation infrastructure and trail networks that are ecologically, socially, economically, and operationally sustainable for the Wapiti planning area. The plan will provide strategic long-term direction for planning, management, operational, and capital decisions.

The Wapiti area has been divided into five management planning units. These units are based on a variety of factors including primary use (motorized, non-motorized), natural features (watercourses, environmental sensitive, and wildlife corridors), recreation and resource leases, and recreational opportunities. After discussions with stakeholders, it was decided that the focus of the current planning process will be on three of the planning units:

1. Dunes Area
2. Central Area
3. South Wapiti Area

These three areas are extensively used for recreation and trail-based activities. They comprise the current Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management planning area.

The following planning units are **excluded** from the current planning process:

1. **East Wapiti** – This area is mainly used for grazing leases, under agricultural dispositions. Recreational access to this area is managed under the *Recreation Access Regulation*.
2. **West Wapiti** – This area has potential opportunities for recreation and trail-based activities. Further assessment and inventory are required and will be considered for future trail planning.
3. **Private Land** – The Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan will only provide recommendations for trails on public lands within the plan area. No recommendations will be made for private lands included within the planning area.

## Planning Process

Alberta Forestry and Parks (AFP) is leading and providing overall guidance and direction to the planning process. The plan is being developed through a collaborative process.

- An Advisory Committee is responsible for providing advice, input, and feedback to the Alberta Forestry and Parks planning team for consideration while the team drafts the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management plan.
- Local municipalities, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities and organizations have been invited to participate in the Advisory Committee to help reflect their interests and the perspectives in plan development.
- The decision to approve the final plan will remain the responsibility of Alberta Forestry and Parks.

## Engagement Strategy

A proactive engagement strategy has been chosen to create opportunities for stakeholders, Indigenous communities and organizations, and the public to provide both input and feedback on the planning process. AFP's approach to engagement on the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan will take a phased approach:

- Phase 1: Feedback on proposed Trail Experience Zones
- Phase 2: Feedback on the draft plan, once written

See last page for Proposed Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan Boundary.

## For More Information

For more information on the planning process, please contact:

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Proposed Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan Boundary

