

Wapiti

Recreation and Trail Management Plan

The Wapiti 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. The area has been identified as a Provincial Environmental-Significant Area due to the ecosystem dunes, trumpeter swan nesting habitat and river valley landscape. The planning area also includes historic sites and world-class paleontological resources.

Background

The Wapiti plan area has evolved into a major multi-use outdoor recreation and trail network for land and water-based activities. Several recreation facilities and trail networks have been in the area for years as well as a number of motorized associations. The types of recreational activities and user groups continues to expand and diversify as the population of the City of Grande Prairie and area continues to grow. The area is also an important economic source and contains areas of land used for lumber and pulp production, oil and gas, gravel extraction, grazing, and trapping. It is also a source of drinking water for regional communities and a cultural landscape and traditional use area for Indigenous peoples.

Growing recreational demand in the Wapiti Plan area has been a motivator for protecting the environmental integrity of the corridor, while balancing social and economic interests. Since the 1970s, Alberta Environment and Parks has developed several Integrated Resource Plans (IRPs) and Regional Integrated Decisions (RIDs) to provide management direction and guidance for the area. In recent years, community-driven planning initiatives have been undertaken separately to protect the environmental integrity of the sand dunes, address land use conflicts, and enhance recreational opportunities within. These planning initiatives were not led by the regulated decision maker (i.e. AEP); and therefore, the plans were not implemented. The previous initiatives will inform this planning process.

Challenges

Over the years, Alberta Environment and Parks and local stakeholders have documented the following key challenges in the Wapiti 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 risks from unmanaged recreational activity, target shooting and other firearm use and 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 Plan fits into the issue-specific level of the planning hierarchy, under the Provincial Land-Use Framework. At a future date, the plan might be adopted or incorporated into the future Upper Peace Regional Plan.



Public Land Management 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, working with partnerships and promoting sustainable use of trails and recreational areas.

The new approach promotes working and planning together to meet diverse goals and listening to stakeholder and community perspectives to incorporate in 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 (OHV) use.

Purpose of the Plan

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. The plan will provide strategic long-term direction for planning, management, operational, and capital decisions in the plan area.

Planning Process

Alberta Environment and Parks is committed to shared responsibility and working together to meet the interests and perspectives of local communities. The department will lead the planning process as regulatory decision-maker and provide overall guidance and direction to the planning process. The plan will be developed through a collaborative process to ensure the interests and the perspectives of all stakeholders and Indigenous communities are reflected in plan development. An inclusive Advisory Committee, consisting of local municipalities, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities, will be established to provide advice, input, suggestions, and sector perspectives in plan development. The decision to approve the final plan will remain the responsibility of Alberta Environment and Parks. The department has a duty to consult with Indigenous Communities and the planning process will engage Indigenous communities early in the process.

Engagement Strategy

Input from recreation users is important and stakeholder/public engagement will be a cornerstone for the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan Planning process. A proactive engagement strategy will be implemented to create opportunities for stakeholders and the public to provide input and feedback in a number of ways throughout the process.

For More Information

For more information on the planning process, please contact the planning lead:

Abdi Siad-Omar

780-427-7227

Abdi.Siad-Omar@gov.ab.ca

Proposed Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan Boundary

