



ENHANCING THE PROTECTION OF THE CASTLE

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is being planned?

The Government of Alberta plans to amend the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan to designate the Castle Special Management Area (the Castle) under the *Provincial Parks Act*. The following classifications of parks are being planned:

Expansion of the Castle Wildland Provincial Park: This expansion would include the most critical and sensitive wildlife areas, major valleys and front canyons, as well as critical habitat and two major wildlife movement corridors along the continental divide northwards to the Crowsnest Pass.

Creation of a new Provincial Park: The new Provincial Park would encompass the existing Provincial Recreation Areas:

- Castle Falls Provincial Recreation Area
- Castle River Bridge Provincial Recreation Area
- Syncline Provincial Recreation Area
- Beaver Mines Lake Provincial Recreation Area
- Lynx Creek Provincial Recreation Area

The Provincial Park would provide for a wide range of nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities while still maintaining the ecological health of the larger area.

The [planned designations](#) would not include the Castle Mountain Resort lease or private land. West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve will remain in place and is unaffected by the commitment.

2. Why is this plan being put forward?

The Government of Alberta is acting on its intent to enhance the protection of the Castle Special Management area. As a first step to honour this commitment, government is consulting with Albertans, stakeholders and aboriginal people on its intent to amend the [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#) and designate the Castle under Parks' legislation. The Government of Alberta is also asking for feedback on broad concepts related to potential facilities and services use that would help diversify the economy of the local region in the future.

3. What is the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan?

The [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#) was released in September 2014 and is the second regional land-use plan released under the [Land-use Framework](#). The plan sets the stage for

robust growth, vibrant communities and a healthy environment within the region over the next 50 years.

4. What is the Land-use Framework?

The Land-use Framework, released in 2008, is an approach to managing our air, water, land and biodiversity to achieve Alberta's long-term environmental, social and economic goals through the development of land-use regional plans for the province's [seven regions](#). Regional land-use plans are central to our government's integrated resource management system, which is designed to ensure a holistic approach to the way we monitor and manage the impacts of development on our environment. Each regional plan is developed by engaging with all Albertans, including aboriginal peoples, to help set the best course for each region.

5. Where is the Castle area and why is it important?

The [Castle area](#) is located in the eastern slopes of southern Alberta. The Castle area borders Waterton Lakes National Park and is located within the Crown of the Continent (the area of the Rocky Mountains where Alberta, British Columbia and Montana meet).

The Castle area is an important source to the Oldman River Basin headwaters and is a key area for water protection. It is one of the most biologically diverse areas in Alberta with over 200 rare or at-risk species. These include species like whitebark pine, westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, wolverine and grizzly bear. It provides key movement corridors for large mammals, including grizzly bear.

With its numerous archeological, historical and First Nations traditional use sites, the Castle area also has cultural and historical significance for First Nations and all Albertans.

6. What is the difference between a Wildland Provincial Park and a Provincial Park?

A wildland provincial park has the primary purpose of conserving nature while providing opportunities for low-impact nature based outdoor recreation in backcountry or wilderness settings. Wildland provincial parks are relatively undisturbed areas that protect large, ecologically healthy and functioning landscapes. Visitor experiences focus on backcountry/wilderness travel and appreciation and provide opportunities for solitude and personal challenge. Facilities and services are limited to trails and backcountry camping areas that minimize visitor impacts on the wilderness values. In the Castle, the expanded wildland provincial park would protect important headwaters, wildlife corridors and habitat, while providing trails and backcountry opportunities for motorized and non-motorized users.

Provincial parks have a primary purpose of conserving nature, but offer a wide range of nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities. They typically provide for automobile access and opportunities for recreation and tourism facilities and services, including interpretative information that supports conservation. Visitor experiences focus on inspiring visitors to reconnect with nature through leisure, learning or recreation activities that are often supported by built facilities. Provincial parks are typically large enough to maintain ecological functions, while providing for a full range of outdoor recreation opportunities. The new provincial park in the Castle would be a modern take on the provincial park class and create space for the types of experiences people are looking for – such as hunting and off-highway vehicle use.

7. What recreational activities will be available?

The new Provincial Park and expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park would offer a wide range of recreational activities. Existing uses, such as hunting and off-highway vehicles, would be managed to ensure appropriate use and public safety. The following table highlights what recreational activities would be permitted in the new Provincial Park and expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park:

Activity	New Provincial Park	Expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park
Hunting	Yes	Yes
Fishing	Yes	Yes
Auto Access Camping	Yes, in designated areas	No
Backcountry Camping	Yes, in designated areas	Yes
Designated Day Use Areas	Yes	No
Off-Highway Vehicles	Yes, on designated trails and areas	Yes, on designated trails
Commercial Trail Riding	Yes, in designated areas	Yes, in designated areas
Equestrian Use	Yes, in designated areas	Yes, in designated areas
Snowmobiling	Yes, on designated trails and areas	Yes, on designated trails
Mountain Biking	Yes, on designated trails	Yes, on designated trails
Hiking	Yes	Yes
Nature Appreciation	Yes	Yes
Climbing/Caving	Yes	Yes
Water Based Recreation	Yes	Yes

8. How will Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use be permitted?

Off-highway vehicle use in the new Provincial Park will be managed to designated off-highway vehicle trails and areas. Off-highway vehicle use in the expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park will be managed to designated off-highway vehicle trails. Off-highway vehicle use is permitted only on existing off-highway vehicles trails and areas where a management plan, trails plan, regulation, sign, notice, or trail marker designates such use.

No new trails or access may be developed without a management plan, trail plan or regulation. The Government of Alberta will engage Albertans in the park management planning process and work with them to identify and designate appropriate trail systems and access in the parks.

Off-highway vehicle use shall not occur in beds and shores of permanent water bodies.

Off-highway vehicle use shall not occur on power line rights-of-way, utility corridors, or industrial facility areas (e.g., well-sites), unless specifically authorized to do so.

9. Will hunting be permitted?

Yes, hunting would be permitted in the new Provincial Park and expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park. Existing regulations and policies for these activities would apply. Hunting would be managed to ensure appropriate use and public safety within existing legislation and regulations.

10. What facilities and services are permitted to support nature based outdoor recreation?

Facility and services would need to be in consideration of the conservation outcomes related to the new Provincial Park and expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park. The Wildland Provincial Park class is not intended to provide for significant facility and service development and will remain an undeveloped, natural area to allow for conservation of the high ecological significance of the area and for nature-based, low impact recreational activities to continue. Trail development and small rustic backcountry camping facilities are consistent with the intent of a Wildland Provincial Park.

The Provincial Park class allows for a wider range of facilities and services. The Highway 774 corridor could be the focus of the development. This corridor could provide for a range of camping opportunities from designated ‘unserviced camping areas’ to fully serviced campground to roofed accommodations. Non-motorized trail opportunities could range from access points leading to short walking trails to multi-day hikes, connecting to the Wildland Provincial Park. Off-highway vehicle trail opportunities could range from staging areas to access the larger off-highway vehicle trail system that offers a variety of lengths and difficulties to camping areas that provide access to the trail systems. Facilities, services and programs would be concentrated along the highway corridor and provide recreational users with the information and support needed to enjoy the wide range of recreation opportunities that could be developed in the new Provincial Park and expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park.

Prior to any development, the Government of Alberta would engage Albertans to gather input and feedback on what they feel would be appropriate facilities and services for these parks. Facility and services development planning would occur during the park management planning process.

11. What existing industrial activities in the Castle will be permitted under Parks legislation?

Activity	New Provincial Park	Expanded Wildland Provincial Park
Commercial Forestry	No	No
Coal and Metallic and Industrial Mineral Extraction of Crown owned resources	No	No
Existing Petroleum and Natural Gas Commitments	Yes	Yes
New Petroleum and Natural Gas	Yes, but with no new surface access	Yes, but with no new surface access
Exploration and Development of Freehold (Privately Owned) Minerals	Yes	Yes
Existing Sand and Gravel	Yes	Yes
New Sand and Gravel	No	No
Existing grazing	Yes	Yes
New grazing	Yes, Subject to grazing suitability assessment	Yes, Subject to grazing suitability assessment

12. Will the re-designation impact freehold (privately owned) mineral rights holders?

Government will continue to respect private property rights and freehold minerals (petroleum and natural gas, coal, metallic and industrial minerals, other freehold minerals) are exempt from the restrictions. Exploration and development of resources via drilling or mining would be permitted subject to normal regulatory approval processes.

13. How will grazing use be permitted?

Existing grazing preference quotas and associated permits would be honoured under both park designations. Grazing will continue to be managed to ensure compatibility with conservation and recreation objectives. Any new grazing opportunities would be subject to a grazing suitability assessment as identified in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

14. What measures are being taken for interim protection of the Castle Special Management Area pending a decision?

The Government of Alberta has placed a temporary hold on the sale of coal, and metallic and industrial minerals sub-surface tenure. This restriction will remain in place until the Government makes a decision on the plan to enhance protection in the Castle Special Management Area. Given the planned management intent of the area, new disposition applications for surface exploration and development activities associated with existing coal or metallic and industrial mineral agreements will not be considered until a final decision has been made by Government. Sale of sub-surface tenure for petroleum and natural gas will continue but will have no surface access. Government will consider surface disposition applications in the area for existing petroleum and natural gas agreements. Government has also suspended all commercial forestry operations in the Castle Special Management Area while this plan is being considered.

15. How could this plan improve tourism and recreation development in the area?

The planned changes would eventually allow for a diversification of the local economy through enhancement of the significant nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities. The Castle's proximity to large population centres and its natural amenities could offer a similar draw for visitors as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, Kananaskis Country and Banff National Park.

If designated, the park management planning process would consider strategies to aid in the growth of tourism. These may include improving facilities, services and amenities in the region, while still respecting the conservation intent of the area. Albertans and local stakeholders will play a significant role in shaping the future of the region and will be instrumental to its success.

16. How can tourism and recreation in the Castle region benefit the local economy?

Growth of the tourism and recreation sector within this region could substantially increase the economic benefit to the region. For example, within Kananaskis Country, tourism and recreation provide an estimated economic benefit of over \$200 million annually in Alberta.

17. What is the status of key initiatives related to South Saskatchewan Regional Plan implementation?

As part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan implementation, Environment and Parks will be engaging this fall on development of recreation and linear footprint management plans for

the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone areas, a biodiversity management framework, and the potential for expansion and reclassification of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area.

18. Who will be responsible for managing the site?

Alberta Environment and Parks would be responsible for management of the expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park and the new Provincial Park.

19. How does this plan fit into Alberta's *Plan for Parks*?

Alberta Parks' made a commitment in the [Plan for Parks](#) to protect the environment and culturally significant areas to help fill conservation gaps in the current park system and to create additional recreational opportunities for Albertans.

20. How can I comment on this plan?

An extensive [consultation process](#) occurred through the development of the [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#). **The Government is now providing a further 30-day consultation process on the Governments intent to enhance the protection of the Castle area.** Your feedback and comments regarding the planned changes to the Castle are important. Send in your comments, suggestions, and concerns by clicking on the online comment link below, or by sending an email or by mailing in your feedback to the appropriate address outlined below. Comments will be collected until October 5th, 2015.

Online: [Online Survey](#)

By Email: ParkNews@gov.ab.ca

By Mail: Attn: Parks Division

Re: Enhancing the Protection of the Castle area
2nd Floor Oxbridge Place
9820 – 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2J6

21. What happens after the public comment period?

A decision regarding the plan will be made after the public consultation period is over and all comments have been considered. Public feedback gathered during this consultation will be considered along with stakeholder discussion and aboriginal consultation and engagement.

If designated, a park management plan would be developed for both the new provincial park and the expanded Wildland Provincial Park. Planning for recreation and tourism would occur during this process. The park management planning process will invite Albertans to provide input into decisions about how to manage the natural, cultural and recreational values of parks to meet current and future demands and expectations. If the Government of Alberta decides to designate the Castle under parks legislation, the park management planning process would likely begin in 2016.

22. Who can I contact for further information on this plan?

If you would like further information about the new Provincial Park and expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Park, please call Land Use Secretariat by phone: 780 644 7972 or email: LUF@gov.ab.ca