



PROPOSAL FOR RECLASSIFICATION, BOUNDARY AMENDMENT AND DRAFT CONCEPT PLAN FOR SASKATOON MOUNTAIN NATURAL AREA

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is this proposal being put forward?

For many years, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation has received requests from the County of Grande Prairie to reclassify Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area as a means to implement a better management regime at the site.

In 2012, the County of Grande Prairie hired O2 Planning and Design to develop a plan for recreation and conservation of the site. The County approved the consultant's recommendations, and directed its administration to work with Alberta Parks to move the recommendations forward.

The primary recommendation from O2 Planning and Design and the County is that the Natural Area be reclassified to a Provincial Recreation Area.

This proposal is a result of the collaboration between the County of Grande Prairie and Alberta Parks to build on the consultant's report and move forward the County's request for reclassification of Saskatoon Mountain to a Provincial Recreation Area.

2. Where is Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area?

The area known locally as Saskatoon Mountain is located on an elevation of land (150 metres above surrounding lands) located about 36 kilometres west of Grande Prairie. Due to its elevation, the site has an assemblage of plants and animals that are commonly found in wetter foothills areas, making it unique in the Grande Prairie area.

3. What is being proposed?

The proposal for Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area (SMNA) has three components:

- Reclassification of the site from a Natural Area to a Provincial Recreation Area (PRA);
- Boundary amendment to add adjacent unoccupied Crown land and other Crown lands under disposition¹ to the newly reclassified site and;
- A draft concept plan for the proposed Saskatoon Mountain Provincial Recreation Area.

¹ Dispositions are approvals from the Government of Alberta for a specific land use on a parcel of crown land. At Saskatoon Mountain there are a variety of dispositions such as communication tower sites, recreation leases, and ATCO power lines.

4. Why a reclassification from a Natural Area to Provincial Recreation Area?

Saskatoon Mountain is currently classified as a natural area. The key objectives of natural areas are to preserve and protect sites of local significance and provide opportunities for low-impact, nature-based recreation and nature appreciation activities. They are self-facilitated, meaning there are usually few or no facilities or services provided for visitors. They are administered under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Area and Heritage Rangelands Act*. This classification does not fit with the current and proposed recreational uses for Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area.

The reclassification of SMNA to a PRA is being proposed to provide a wider suite of legislative and policy tools for the management of recreational use and to help visitors understand what kinds of recreation opportunities are available at the site. The key objective of provincial recreation areas is to support compatible outdoor recreation and tourism by providing a diversity of front-country recreation opportunities. They are administered under the *Provincial Parks Act*.

5. What is the proposed boundary amendment?

The proposed boundary amendment is the addition of two land components:

1. Addition of approximately 194.59 hectares (480 acres) of adjacent unoccupied Crown land. This land was withdrawn from grazing leases managed by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) in 2000 for the purpose of adding to SMNA. The land description for this area is SE15 and S14 of TWP 72 R9 W6.
2. Addition of approximately 116.82 hectares (288 acres) of Crown lands located between the two disconnected parcels of the current natural area. These lands include 11 leases for communication towers as well as other dispositions. Much of this land was previously disturbed by a federal radar base which operated from 1950-1988. A Doppler radar station remains on an eight-hectare parcel of federal land, which would not be included in the proposed PRA. As well, a small parcel of land owned by Telus would not be included in the proposed PRA.

6. What is the proposed draft Concept Plan?

The proposed draft Concept Plan provides background information and outlines the management and development intents for the proposed Saskatoon Mountain Provincial Recreation Area (SMPRA).

7. What has been proposed before?

In 2008-09, Alberta Parks developed a proposed Grande Prairie Regional Parks Plan for 10 parks, including Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area. The proposed strategy for SMNA was:

- Reclassify the natural area to a provincial park to provide legislative and policy tools to develop recreation facilities and sustain the land base;
- Develop camping, day use, trails and interpretation facilities;

- Add adjacent unoccupied Crown land that was withdrawn from grazing leases in 2000 for the purpose of adding it to SMNA;
- Prohibit OHV use and hunting in the provincial park.

This strategy was not supported by the public and the decision was made to continue with the status quo for the time being.

8. What were the key recommendations from the O2 Planning and Design report in 2012?

- Reclassify the site as a Provincial Recreation Area
- Include former grazing lease lands
- Allow only bow hunting on the site
- Zone the site into historical/cultural, natural environment (motorized recreation and non-motorized recreation), facility and access zones for management purposes. The recommended location of the zone for motorized recreation was on the east side of the current Natural Area.

9. What are the key proposals now and why?

Some of the proposals made in 2009 and 2012 are also included in this proposal; however, some have been revised:

- Reclassify the natural area to a PRA rather than a provincial park. This classification is a better reflection of the current and potential use of the site.
- Allow Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use on designated trails. The classification of Provincial Recreation Area allows for this use. The designated trails will be located on the west side of the site instead of the east side as recommended in the O2 report. The west side is already disturbed land with many random trails on it, while the east side has landscape of high ecological value that is relatively undisturbed.
- Permit the current hunting regime to continue at the site. SMNA is currently designated as a Primitive Weapons Area (Wildlife Management Unit 357) where shotguns, muzzle loaders and archery equipment can be used to hunt big game during the hunting season as outlined in the Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations. Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) manages hunting in Alberta and has recommended that this hunting regime continue in order to provide recreational hunting opportunities and as a tool for managing ungulate predation on adjacent agricultural lands. Alberta Parks has agreed to support this recommendation, but will require hunters to obtain a firearms discharge permit before hunting on the site.
- Addition of the former grazing lease land was proposed in 2009 and in 2012, and is included in this proposal. As well, lands under disposition between the two parcels of Natural Area will be added. Alberta Parks will manage the dispositions.
- Proposed facilities include a campground, upgraded day use and designated OHV trails developed on lands that have been previously disturbed. A day-use facility already exists on the site and requires upgrading. A campground would provide alternative camping to Saskatoon Island Provincial Park, which is at capacity. Designated OHV trails would be a tool to manage the current random OHV use.

10. What sort of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use will be allowed in the PRA?

The intent is to offer a family-type experience for local OHV riders of novice to intermediate abilities. The concept plan proposes that quads and dirt bikes be allowed on designated trails from May 1 to November 30. The trails will be located west of Range road 92. Alberta Parks will work with the local OHV community and other stakeholders to identify a trail network.

11. Who will be responsible for managing the site?

Alberta Parks will be responsible for management of the PRA, but will look to collaborate with the County of Grande Prairie and other agencies to assist with development and operation.

12. When will trail and campground developments occur?

Developments will occur as planning and funding resources become available. Trail developments will be a priority.

13. What is the history of SMNA?

Over the years, portions of the site have been used for farming, for recreation such as picnicking and viewpoints, as a fire tower location and as a Department of National Defence - Pinetree Line radar station from 1950-1988.

Consideration for park status began in 1936 and continued intermittently until 1979 when 411 hectares of land were reserved as a candidate natural area. The radar station site was reclaimed after 1988. In 1995, the site was designated as a Natural Area, but the former radar station site was not included.

14. How does this proposal fit into Alberta's *Plan for Parks*?

In the *Plan for Parks*, a commitment was made to provide responsible and safe recreation opportunities within parks, and to upgrade and develop campgrounds and facilities to accommodate changing needs of visitors. The proposal to reclassify the site as a PRA will provide legislative and policy tools to develop and manage a range of recreation uses with the intent of encouraging responsible and safe opportunities on the site.

The *Plan for Parks* also makes a commitment to collaborate with local communities and other agencies to provide more value to visitors and achieve common goals. The Saskatoon Mountain project is a collaboration between the County of Grande Prairie and Alberta Parks, with the common goal of providing opportunities for responsible and safe recreation while maintaining conservation of natural values on the site.

For more information on Alberta's *Plan for Parks*, please visit:
www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/about-us/plan-for-parks.aspx

15. How can I comment on this proposal?

Public input on this proposal is encouraged and is important. Send in your comments, suggestions and concerns by clicking on the online comment link below, or by emailing or mailing in your feedback to the appropriate address outlined below. Feedback will be collected until August 11, 2014.

Online: [Online Comment](#)

By Email: ParkNews@gov.ab.ca

By Mail: Elaine Nepstad, Park Planner
Re: Saskatoon Mountain Proposal
Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Room 1301, Box 18 Provincial Building
10320 - 99 Street
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 6J4

16. What happens after the public comment period?

A decision regarding the proposal will be made after the 60-day public comment period is over and all comments have been considered. Public feedback gathered will be considered along with site management, public safety and further environmental reviews before making a final decision on this proposal.

A summary of public comments and the resulting proposed action(s) will be posted on www.albertaparks.ca/consult once a decision has been reached.

17. Who can I contact for further information on this proposal?

If you would like further information on the Saskatoon Mountain Natural Area proposal, please call the Alberta Parks office at Grande Prairie at 780-538-5350.

