

# Lower Athabasca Regional Plan - Conservation Areas

## Q&A

### **What are the advantages of conserving this large amount of land in northern Alberta?**

The protected areas will enable Alberta to contribute to the largest contiguous boreal protected area in the world.

The previous Conservative government has entered into an extensive and detailed consultation process which recommended Albertans have new conservation areas adjacent to heavily developed areas of the Province, to enable greater recreational and conservation opportunities for Albertans

The current government has reviewed the proposals and endorses the recommendations and previous decisions. The only remaining step is the final Orders in Council.

In addition, there are no job losses, reduction in economic activity or industrial challenges to the conservation areas, as the previous government undertook to compensate tenure holders in the area.

Unlike the relationship between currently suspended work on Caribou Range Plans, required by Ottawa, and jobs and industrial activity, all of the proposed parks were examined for those potential issues by the previous government and these areas present no similar challenges.

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) was approved by Cabinet in August, 2012 and commits to a number of new parks and protected areas. The plan came into effective on September 1, 2012 after three years of planning and input from several thousand Albertans.

### **How much new provincial land is being protected in the Lower Athabasca region?**

More than 1.36 million hectares (1,360,390 ha) is being added through the designation of four wildland provincial parks and the expansion of another. Within the new and expanded parks there are previously designated provincial parks and protected areas that will be consolidated into the new parks. The total conserved land, including new, consolidated and expanded lands in the region is 1,640,811 hectares.

Combined with Wood Buffalo National Park, the total conserved land in the region will create the world's largest contiguous boreal protected area (more than 6.7 million hectares or 67,000 square kilometres).

### **What is the classification of the parks?**

The parks will all be designated wildland provincial parks, which under Alberta's Parks and Protected Areas system, are lands designated to preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for compatible backcountry recreation.

### **What are the names of the parks and their land masses?**

Kazan Wildland Provincial Park:

- Newly established area: 570,822 ha

- Total final site area: 659,397 ha  
Includes the areas of La Butte Creek and Colin-Cornwall Lakes WPPs (18,147 ha and 70,428 ha respectively)

Richardson Wildland Provincial:

- Newly established area: 264,727 ha
- Total final site area: 312,068 ha  
Includes the areas of Richardson River Dunes and Maybelle River wildland provincial parks (32,033 ha and 15,308 ha respectively)

Dillon River Wildland Provincial Park (new park):

- Newly established area: 191,545 ha

Birch River Wildland Provincial Park (new park):

- Newly established area: 331,832 ha

Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park (expansion):

- Newly established area: 1,464 ha
- Total final site area: 145,969 ha

### **What are the benefits to establishing these wildland provincial parks to the following groups?**

**Indigenous Peoples:** Continued exercise of rights to hunt, fish and trap for food and other traditional land uses. Conservation of nature and accessible landscapes help government maintain its legal obligations to sustaining sufficient wildlife and fish for these purposes. Indigenous peoples are guaranteed access to landscapes that reflect Alberta's natural state and maintain ecological function as far as possible.

**Hunters & Fishers:** Access to large land bases conserved in perpetuity. Hunting and fishing access and backcountry camping is thus preserved in the long term and protected from land use changes.

**Trappers:** Trapping would be honoured within the wildland provincial parks where it is already an existing use.

**Recreationalists:** Land bases for backcountry and wilderness recreation are conserved in perpetuity. These uses are a recognized benefit of the wildland provincial park designations.

**Industry:** Clarity on land uses and future opportunities.

### **What are the permitted uses in wildland provincial parks?**

**Hunting/Fishing/Trapping:**

- Hunting is a permitted use in wildland provincial parks.
  - The current Wildlife Regulations would apply to hunting in these wildland provincial parks.
  - The designation does not change current hunting permissions.
  - No discharge permits are required in wildland provincial parks.
  - Baiting wildlife for hunting is prohibited in wildland provincial parks except where it was authorized for guide/outfitting operations who were licensed to perform this action before the identification of the wildland provincial parks in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

- The use of dogs off leash for hunting purposes is not permitted in wildland provincial parks.
- Fishing is a permitted use in wildland provincial parks.
  - The current Fishing Regulations would apply to fishing in these wildland provincial parks.
- Trapping will be honored in the wildland provincial parks where existing registered fur management areas are active.
  - Trapping within parks and protected area is guided by the Parks Trapping Policy (2003).
  - The use of OHVs and snowmobiles for trapping purposes on designated trails will be permitted.

**Recreation/Commercial Tourism:**

- OHV use is permitted in wildland provincial parks on designated trails only.
- Where trails have not been designated yet, OHV is permitted on existing trail systems until a trail system is designated.
- Backcountry camping is permitted – 1 km from roads or designated camping areas (if present)
- Guide and outfitting operations is a permitted use in wildland provincial parks.
- Guide and outfitting operators will need to obtain a parks operating permit prior to pursuing operations in the wildland provincial parks.

**Industry:**

- Existing commitments related to conventional oil and gas will be honored.
- Consistent with current policy and direction in the LARP, existing commitments related to conventional oil and gas tenures will be honored. However new petroleum and natural gas tenure sold in these conservation areas will include a restriction that prohibits surface access. Existing oil sands, metallic and industrial minerals, and coal tenure within these conservation areas have been cancelled and no new oil sands, metallic and industrial minerals or coal tenures will be sold.
- Commercial forestry is not a permitted use in parks or protected areas.

**Is there an estimated cost to manage the new parks?**

Once established, the ongoing management of the wildland provincial parks is estimated to cost approximately \$2.5 million per year to support infrastructure management, park operations, and enforcement. Implementing Indigenous co-operative management programs for all five wildland parks is estimated to cost an additional 850K.

**What is the socio-economic impact of this land conservation designation?**

These areas, identified in the 2012 Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, were evaluated to have low economic potential. All industrial oil sands, metallic and industrial minerals, and coal tenure holders in the designated areas have been compensated.

**Were Albertans consulted on these parks land designations?**

Yes, and extensively, during consultation on the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

### **Under LARP, Birch River was proposed to be a conservation area, so why is it changed to a wildland provincial park?**

The change is due to an agreement between the Government of Alberta, the Tallcree First Nation, Syncrude Canada Ltd., the Nature Conservancy of Canada, along with the support of the Government of Canada. The arrangement will see the Tallcree graciously give up its timber licence and quota in the A9 Forestry Management Unit (FMU) of the Birch River area to allow the Birch River Wildland Provincial Park designation to proceed.

A conservation area still allows for some industry, in this case it was eco-forestry. Given that the Tallcree will no longer exercise their quota allocation, there is no need to maintain an eco-forestry provision so creating a Wildland Provincial Park makes more sense.

### **How does this agreement benefit the Tallcree First Nation?**

The agreement provides a significant boost into the Tallcree community's economy. The Tallcree will receive funding support through the Nature Conservancy of Canada, thanks to a contribution from Syncrude and the Government Canada, as well as a grant from the Government of Alberta.

### **Why is Syncrude Canada Ltd. providing funds for this deal?**

This agreement supports Syncrude's commitment to responsible development of the oil sands resource while contributing to conservation efforts. The funds will help facilitate the cancellation of the timber quota and the eventual designation of the wildland provincial park; the conservation of this land will in turn provide conservation offsets that can be applied towards offsetting future industrial activities planned by Syncrude.

### **What opportunities will there be for recreation?**

Low-impact recreation opportunities, like hiking, hunting and fishing are conducive to wildland provincial parks, much like any other existing wildland provincial park in the Alberta Parks' system. There will be no significant land disturbances or developments like campgrounds.

### **How will the wildland provincial parks be managed?**

Government will use feedback and input received during the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan consultation to inform future management direction. The Government of Alberta will also be working with local Indigenous communities on co-operative management of these wildland provincial parks. If site specific management plans are developed, the process will include a public, stakeholder and Indigenous consultation phase.

### **What is cooperative management?**

Cooperative management is: involving Indigenous peoples in the decision making process through participation in an advisory capacity or through the sharing or exchange of information or knowledge.

### **Where will cooperative management be implemented?**

Cooperative management opportunities are being explored for all five wildland provincial parks and will involve direct engagement with Indigenous communities through a management arrangements These

arrangements will involve, members of the Indigenous communities and government staff, acting together as an advisory body and provide recommendations or management direction to decision makers.

**Is there an estimated cost to manage the new parks?**

Once established, the ongoing management of the wildland provincial parks is estimated to cost approximately \$2 million per year to support capital investments, operations, enforcement and establishing Indigenous co-operative management programs.

**What impacts will there be to First Nations treaty rights or Metis harvesting rights?**

None. First Nations treaty rights and Metis hunting rights will be honoured.

**Are there other parks identified in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan yet to be designated?**

The remaining Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Provincial Park identified in LARP could at a later date be brought forward for Order-in-Council. It is not proposed at this time. There are also a number of provincial recreation areas that have yet to be officially designated.

**Do the parks support any specific species that are either at risk or threatened?**

The area is home to numerous species of conservation concern, including three which are listed as At Risk under the federal Species at Risk Act (wood bison, woodland caribou and peregrine falcon). The Birch River Wildland Provincial Park encompasses 13 per cent of the core habitat of the Red Earth caribou range. It is an important habitat for migratory and song birds.

**What are the implications for Alberta's total land conservation?**

The addition of the four new parks and expansion of a fifth brings Alberta to a total of 14.85 per cent (including federal lands). This is a significant increase for not only for land conservation, but because Alberta is co-lead on a federal initiative (Pathway to Canada Target 1) to conserve at least 17 per cent of the nation's land by 2020.

Currently, 12.54% of lands in Alberta are protected.

**What is the percentage of federal versus provincial land in Alberta that contributes to Target 1?**

The provincial total contributing to the 14.85 per cent is 6.65 per cent and the federal contribution is currently 8.2 per cent.

**How many wildland provincial parks are there in Alberta?**

Upon official designation of the new wildland provincial parks, there will be 37 in Alberta.

**What are the total hectares of land within Alberta's provincial parks and protected areas?**

The four new wildland provincial parks and expansion bring Alberta's total to 6,027,623 hectares or just over 60,000 square kilometres. This includes wildland provincial parks, provincial parks, provincial recreation areas, wilderness areas, ecological reserves, heritage rangelands, natural areas and the Wilmore Wilderness Park.