



## News Release

### Alberta's Plan for Parks Veers Off Track

**Alberta, Canada — February 4, 2009** The province's protected area watchdogs strongly support the Alberta Government's resolve to write and implement a new and much-needed parks policy in time for regional land-use planning. However, they are sounding the alarm because the current draft of [Alberta's Plan for Parks](#) does a poor job of accommodating what the majority of Albertans say they want for parks.

[The 2008 Survey of Albertan's Priorities for Provincial Parks](#), conducted by the Government to inform the Plan for Parks, makes this summary: "Albertans feel the top priority for Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation should be to set aside more land and leaving it in an undisturbed state." But is this what Albertans are getting? "The Plan for Parks is quite weak on even these fundamentals" says Dennis Baresco with the Federation of Alberta Naturalists "for it dilutes the protection mandate, it is ominously vague about setting aside more land, and it fails to give the Ministry the authority to create new parks."

Naturalist clubs, protected area stewards and conservation groups are asking Albertans to contact their MLAs and enlist their support in ensuring these core deficiencies are addressed before the 10-year Plan for Parks is finalized.

The groups acknowledge that recreation and protection are both important park objectives, but the draft Plan fails to state the main purpose of parks, which is protection, something the majority of Albertans have clearly said they want in this latest survey and in all previous surveys. To ensure Albertans' conservation priority is realized, sharper legislation is required, not just a "refined parks classification system" as proposed in the draft Plan for Parks.

"The priority should be on protecting natural habitats and ecosystems especially in the regions that are currently under-represented" says long-time Volunteer Steward, Dorothy Dickson, of the Red Deer River Naturalists. "Completing the protected areas network is essential, but the draft Plan fails to identify the types of gaps that will be filled."

The draft also leaves unclear who has the leadership role for creating new parks. George Newton of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society says "The Plan for Parks is like a car with no engine: it doesn't empower the Ministry to actually initiate new parks. While other interests encroach on our last undisturbed lands, the parks department is side-lined. The province may well be leaving an irreversible nature deficit to our children."

These and other corruptions of basic protected area principles have the groups wondering if the Government is listening to what the majority of Albertans are saying. "Looks like the politicians setting the direction for parks are out of step with Albertans," suggests Dianne Pachal, of the Sierra Club Canada. "So it's critical Albertans actually contact their MLAs directly, and not just rely on surveys and stakeholder consultations to get their message through, as it clearly hasn't up to this point."

1) *Alberta's Plan for Parks* (Nov 2008 draft) is on the following websites:

- AWA [www.albertawilderness.ca](http://www.albertawilderness.ca)
- CPAWS [www.cpawsnab.org/factsheets/DRAFTPlanforParks24Nov08.pdf](http://www.cpawsnab.org/factsheets/DRAFTPlanforParks24Nov08.pdf)
- FAN [www.fanweb.ca](http://www.fanweb.ca)
- SCC [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)

2) The 2008 Survey of Albertan's Priorities for Provincial Parks URL:

<http://gateway.cd.gov.ab.ca/pubsandmedia/Praxis%20Report%20Final.pdf>

## **For More Information:**

(those quoted in News Release in **bold**)

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## **Backgrounder:**

- Last May, the Alberta Government announced it would be developing a policy for protected areas and parks – a plan for parks.
  - The comment period for stakeholder consultations on *Draft #2 Alberta's Plan for Parks* ended December 22<sup>nd</sup>.
  - Once the Honourable Cindy Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks & Recreation completes *Alberta's Plan for Parks*, it goes to Cabinet's Community Services Policy Committee for review and approval.
  - Cabinet's Agenda & Priorities Policy Committee will determine its priority for completion within the government's overall agenda.
  - Cabinet Policy Committees are appointed by the Premier, with Ministers and Progressive Conservative MLAs comprising the committee membership. Policy Committees are not open to the public.
- *Alberta's Plan for Parks* will set the future for provincial protected areas – Heritage Rangelands, Natural Areas, Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Areas; parks – Wildland Parks and Provincial Parks; and Provincial Recreation Areas.
  - These designations range from those with a focus on strict protection (e.g. Ecological Reserves) to those with a focus on facilities and infrastructure for recreation (Provincial Recreation Areas).
  - Draft #2 sets "a new direction" for protected areas and parks, by taking the current Vision:  
"Parks and protected areas are valued as natural landscapes that preserve the environmental diversity of the province and inspire society to enjoy and rediscover our connection with the natural world."  
([www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/flashindex.asp](http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/flashindex.asp))  
and rewriting it as a Vision that doesn't include protection:  
"Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations". ([www.cpawsnab.org/factsheets/DRAFTPlanforParks24Nov08.pdf](http://www.cpawsnab.org/factsheets/DRAFTPlanforParks24Nov08.pdf))

- Provincial protected areas and parks annually provide an economic impact of \$1.2 billion for the Alberta economy according to Government calculations.
  - When compared with the logging and agriculture sectors on equivalent size basis (hectare to hectare), protected areas and parks generate a similar amount of economic activity and person-years of employment.
  - Provincial protected areas and parks total 4.15% of Alberta and 40% of Albertans have visited at least one within the past 3 years.
  - The Government has not met its targets for new protected areas and parks in 4 of the 6 Natural Regions that comprise Alberta. [http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/pdfs/target\\_progress.pdf](http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/pdfs/target_progress.pdf)
  
- The Government's Land-Use Framework finalized in December:
  - Defines conservation as, "*The responsible preservation, management and care of our land and our natural and cultural resources.*"
  - Provincial protected areas and parks are the definitive tool for achieving the "preservation" component of conservation.