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Rock Lake Provincial Park Boundary up for Amendment

THE ISSUE

In 2006, the provincial government, without any public consultation, expanded Rock Lake Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) northwest of Hinton and re-designated it as a Provincial Park. Since then, many local Albertans have voiced their opinions about the expanded park, focusing primarily on the elimination of hunting from areas where it was previously allowed in the encompassing Rock Lake–Solomon Creek Wildland Park. Public outcry has been sufficient that Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) is now considering adjusting the Provincial Park's boundaries based on public opinion. Until May 30, 2008, Albertans can provide input to TPR that will help direct possible future boundary changes.

BACKGROUND

In 2001, Rock Lake–Solomon Creek Wildland was established with a small PRA on the edge of Rock Lake to accommodate campgrounds and equestrian staging areas. After problems with poaching within the PRA and with the discharge of firearms within the campgrounds, the government decided in 2006 to increase the size of the PRA and change its designation to Provincial Park, thus eliminating the use of firearms from near the campground and along the road into Rock Lake for reasons of safety and lawfulness. In addition, the current boundaries were set to allow for and administer existing vehicle-access lodges, which are appropriate under a Provincial Park classification but not within a Wildland. The larger Provincial Park also allows for potential future recreational development.

As TPR was not adding or eliminating any land base to the parks system, they saw it as merely an administrative decision and therefore saw no need to consult the public. In the years since, comments from the public have shown that public consultation is necessary in regard to this change, and TPR has now opened the doors for official public input into the boundaries of Rock Lake Provincial Park. In April, TPR held two open houses, one in Hinton and one in Edmonton, to answer questions and hear comments from the public. Comments filed with TPR before May 30 will provide direction for the possible boundary change. The Government of Alberta expects to make a final decision regarding the boundary later this year.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has made a submission to TPR, which is available for viewing at issues.albertawilderness.ca/WM/archive.htm. In our submission we outline our concerns in regards to maintaining the vitality of the natural environment and the robust wilderness character of this area. Specific concerns are the possibility of future development within the Provincial Park, possible allowance of off-highway vehicle use within the Wildland, and the lack of public consultation in the initial decision of 2006. AWA believes that it is important that all Albertans be given the opportunity to comment on this and any future changes to the parks network.

ACTION

Tell the Alberta government what your opinion is on the possible boundary change for Rock Lake Provincial Park. To learn more visit the TPR website at www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/rocklake. Also available on the website is a downloadable feedback form for public input. Submit your form or written comments to Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation by **May 30, 2008**.

By mail: "Rock Lake PP boundary"
2nd floor, Oxbridge Place
9820-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2J6

By fax: 1-780-427-5980 (Attention "Rock Lake PP boundary")

Please also forward a copy of your comments to AWA at awa.cw@shaw.ca.

For more details, please contact Chris Wearmouth, AWA, at (403) 283 2025;
awa.cw@shaw.ca.

