



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

*"Defending Wild Alberta through
Awareness and Action"*

"Rock Lake PP boundary"
2nd floor, Oxbridge Place
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Edmonton, Alberta
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May 13, 2008

Re: Rock Lake Provincial Park Boundary

At this time Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) does not have specific recommendations regarding changing the boundary of Rock Lake Provincial Park. However, we would like to make Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) aware of our concerns regarding this and the surrounding area.

Rock Lake Provincial Park is situated within a significant and relatively pristine wilderness area. While it is a destination in itself for many, it is also the staging area for those who wish to travel further into the backcountry of either Rock Lake–Solomon Creek Wildland or Willmore Wilderness Park. The area's wilderness character is what draws those who come, and utmost care must be taken to protect this attribute now and into the future. Each parks classification comes with strengths and weaknesses with respect to protecting the wilderness values of an area, and due consideration must be taken in determining the appropriate class for a protected area.

While we acknowledge the concerns of local hunters, as well as TPR's reasons related to administration, safety and lawfulness for the expansion and re-designation of the Rock Lake Provincial Recreation Area (PRA), we do not at this time have direct comments on the appropriateness of the initial boundary or the current possibility of altering it based on the concerns identified. Of prime importance to AWA is the continued health and integrity of the area's wilderness and the importance of conducting effective and meaningful consultation with Albertans regarding significant decisions within the parks network. We have directed our comments to these issues.

Increased development under Provincial Park classification

The Provincial Park classification supports development of facilities and services for recreational and heritage appreciation activities to a degree greater than other classifications with the exception of Provincial Recreation Areas. In part, 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. Alberta Wilderness Association understands that in the future TPR may feel pressure to increase the facilities and services within Rock Lake Provincial Park to meet a growing population and demand for outdoor pursuits. However, AWA strongly recommends that any future development be considered only if it will not compromise the area's wilderness values. While this may limit possible future development in and access to the area, it is of utmost importance that we work to ensure the continued vitality of the natural environment, including wildlife and the robust wilderness character of this area.

Ministerial discretion in allowing Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use and industry within a Wildland Provincial Park

Alberta Wilderness Association is concerned that under Wildland classification the Rock Lake–Solomon Creek area could be opened to OHV use or extractive industries through ministerial discretion. We understand that at this time no motorized recreation is allowed within the Wildland, and we strongly urge TPR to continue to support and enforce this prohibition in the future. It has been shown that OHV use can heavily damage the natural environment and is therefore incompatible with the wilderness values of such a sensitive area. Similarly, we support the continued prohibition against extractive industries operating within the Wildland.

Effective and meaningful consultation with Albertans

Alberta Wilderness Association is very concerned about the lack of public consultation in the initial decision regarding the expansion and re-designation of the Rock Lake PRA. Changing the classification of one of Alberta's protected areas represents a significant resolution and as such should automatically include meaningful and effective public consultation with Albertans. Through proper consultation, TPR can work to support Albertans' needs and desires for their protected areas while ameliorating the mistrust towards government by those whose interests have not been acknowledged or have been determined to be subordinate without their foreknowledge. AWA recognizes the efforts of TPR in the current public input process and looks forward to future parks issues being explored through openness and involvement from the Alberta public.

Should TPR staff wish to discuss this further, please contact me through the information provided at the bottom of this page. I look forward to hearing from TPR regarding the final decision on the Rock Lake Provincial Park boundary.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Chris Wearmouth
Conservation Specialist

Cc via email: Andy Van Imschoot, Acting Area Manager – West Central Area