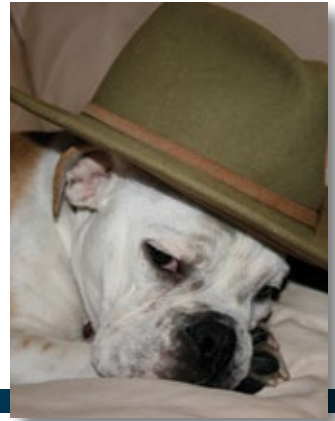


Meatball, the Castle, and Alberta's "Modern Take" on Provincial Parks



By Meatball

Discouraged. Frustrated. Angry. Those are some of the adjectives your species might use to sum up how this magazine's editor often has felt since the provincial government announced more than 10 months ago its commitment to "fully protect" the Castle wilderness. Ian was giddy in early September 2015. "Fully protect," he told me over a bowl of kibble, had to mean the Castle Provincial Park would receive at least the same level of protection as other Alberta provincial parks. It wouldn't be any less than what a previous Progressive Conservative government set when it created Sheep River Provincial Park in Kananaskis Country in 2001. Hikers, cyclists, fishers, and horseback riders would be welcome there in the summer; cross-country skiers and skaters could enjoy the park in winter. Off-highway vehicle users and hunters would have to find other public lands for them to enjoy those activities on. He also thought this is the approach the government would take to the Wildland Provincial Park. After all, he said, the Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park north of Canmore created in 2001 doesn't allow OHVs.

He seems to think that keeping recreational hunting and motorized recreation out of provincial parks is a good idea. I'm compelled to write this today to tell Ian he's wrong, that he's married to an old-fashioned idea about what provincial parks are for and what recreational activities should take place within their boundaries. We're in the 21st Century now and it is high time fossils like Ian

embraced a modern perspective on what a provincial park should be.

Being modern and giving the people what they want – that's what the government preaches on its "Enhancing the Protection of the Castle area" website (<http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparks/about-us/public-consultations/archives/enhancing-the-protection-of-the-castle-area/>). Read what Alberta Environment and Parks says in the "Frequently Asked Questions" link on that webpage: "The new provincial park in the Castle would be *a modern take on the provincial park class* and create space for the types of experiences people are looking for – such as hunting and off-highway vehicle use." (Meatball's emphasis)

Ian thinks he's progressive. If he really

was then he should join me and applaud the government for its commitment to a modern interpretation of what provincial parks should be. Unlike Ian I'm sure that, if the government ever releases the results of its poorly designed Castle public consultation survey from last September, the vast majority of respondents will favour hunting and OHV use in the provincial park. I think I speak for the silenced majority in my imagination when I say I'd much rather ride shotgun in an OHV on the trails in the Castle than walk them (walking, to this svelte English bulldog, is not recreation – it's work).

And, speaking of shotguns, I think Ian should appreciate the educational opportunities recreational hunting will offer his grandson. He should think about what



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he could teach Benji about grouse in the Castle if he had the chance to kill a few so he could give Benji a really close look at them. Ian also shouldn't forget that maybe others who would be out for a fall hike in the Castle could benefit from the government giving him the opportunity to hunt in a provincial park. Those park visitors too might appreciate a close up view of a dead grouse or maybe a freshly shot elk, moose, or deer.

What Ian might appreciate if he stopped looking in the rearview mirror is that this proposed modern take on the provincial park class could be a real commercial boon for southwestern Alberta. Ian claims that his preliminary research on provincial parks in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Ontario as well as his research on state parks in Washington, Idaho, and Montana shows how out of sync those governments are with what a modern take on parks should look like. None of those governments dedicates provincial or state parks to OHV users.

In Ontario, OHVs generally are prohibited in all provincial parks except, as one official told him, "in rare circumstances."

(one such rare circumstance is in Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park where a private land owner uses an ATV to access the owner's property, surrounded as it is by the park). The fact OHVs are generally prohibited (see section 34 Ontario Regulation 347/07: Provincial Parks: General Provisions) likely arises from the purpose of Ontario's *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006*. When it comes to recreation the purpose of the Act is to provide "opportunities for compatible, ecologically sustainable recreation." B.C., for its part, doesn't appear to allow OHVs in any of its hundreds of Class A provincial parks; Saskatchewan permits OHVs in two parks.

South of the border, the state of Washington has 141 state parks. Riverside State Park is the only park where OHVs are allowed. In this 14,000 acre park only a measly 600 acres – hardly enough room to crank up my Yamaha – are open to OHVs. Where can you ride OHVs in Montana's State Parks? Nowhere, OHVs are prohibited in all Montana state parks; in Idaho only three state parks allow OHVs.

The conclusion I urge you to take from this research is one I hope Ian will see too. None of these other governments has yet recognized what a modern take on a park offers. People, opportunity is knocking. If we open up the Castle Parks to OHVs southwest Alberta could become a Mecca for off-highway vehicle users. If we market the Castle well – I'm thinking of an advertising campaign based on the accompanying cartoon – we could become a destination for a type of recreational activity that out-of-touch Ontarians, British Columbians, and Montanans don't seem to believe is ecologically sustainable. Let them live in the past.

Like the government, I'm confident a modern take on provincial parks will improve tourism and increase the amount of motorized recreation that graces the Castle. Here's what the department hopes for: "The Castle's proximity to large population centres and its natural amenities could offer a similar draw for visitors as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, Kananaskis Country and Banff National Park." Other than the fact that visitors to the National Parks and any provincial park in K-Country can't be drawn there to ride OHVs I think the analogy here is brilliant.

Instead of fuming about the government's apparent intent to embrace modern times and ideas of what parks should be I wish Ian would just jump on my OHV, sight in his .308 Winchester, and welcome a new normal when it comes to provincial parks in Alberta. ♣

Meatball is the canine member of the Urquhart clan. Her current project is a book of fiction entitled "Defending the Modern Interpretation of Provincial Parks in Alberta."



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