

Updates

Land-Use Planning in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills

Important government land-use planning for the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone is under way. This planning will decide what types of land uses are appropriate, where those land uses should be allowed, and how much of an impact they will be allowed to have on the land. The planning is done under the auspices of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), which came into force on September 1, 2014.

The Footprint Management Plan is the first sub-regional plan developed in the South Saskatchewan area. “Linear footprint” is defined as all of the human-caused linear features on a landscape, including land clearing, motorized and non-motorized trails, seismic lines, and roads. Linear footprint is what gives much of our province a quilt-like design when viewed from the air (a simple Google Earth search will show this effect). The Plan aims to manage our impact on these special landscapes in order to protect a wide-range of values in the Livingstone-Porcupine. These values



include protecting native fish and terrestrial species that thrive on the habitat there such as grizzly bear and elk, recreational opportunities, and private landowner rights. However, land and water in this sensitive area can only handle so much use from people before some of those values become lost forever. The plan must prioritize the importance of headwaters, wildlife connectivity, and biodiversity over other values on public land such as recreational opportunities.

Under the sub-regional plans come operational plans, which include forest management plans, recreation plans, and water management plans. The Recreation Management Plan will determine the “what, where, and when” of recreational activities in the region. The range of activities, their locations, and their seasonality will depend on thresholds set by the Footprint Plan.

Current drafts of the plan indicate a zoning approach will be implemented. AWA is cautious about the adequacy of this type of approach and the subsequent enforcement needed to address conservation values. This ecologically-valuable and vital area is also used heavily by both industry and off-highway vehicles. Some difficult decisions must be made to ensure the landscape is not used beyond its limits. If done sensibly, these plans will set a positive tone for land use in the entire Eastern Slopes.

To voice your support for a conservation-minded and science-based plan, write to Minister of Environment and Parks, Shannon Phillips, at AEP.Minister@gov.ab.ca.

- Andrea Johancsik

View of the Livingstone Range from the Porcupine Hills.
PHOTO: © A. JOHANCSEK