



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

October 26, 2017

The Honorable Shannon Phillips
Minister of Environment and Parks
aep.minister@gov.ab.ca

AWA RE: LKR-Barrier Redevelopment Project

Dear Minister Phillips,

Alberta Wilderness Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposal to redevelop Lower Kananaskis River (LKR) to Barrier Lake Day Use Area in Bow Valley Provincial Park. Founded in 1965, AWA works throughout Alberta towards more representative and connected protection of the unique and vital landscapes that are the source of our clean water, clean air, and wildlife habitat. With more than 7,000 members and supporters in Alberta and across Canada, AWA remains committed to ensuring protection of wildlife and waters in Alberta.

AWA would like to acknowledge our support for the change in direction from the original *Lower Kananaskis River Redevelopment Plan* released in 2011. It is encouraging to see the provincial government listen to public concern surrounding the proposed level of development and conduct a comprehensive environmental review which confirmed those concerns, showing that the amount of proposed development would have a negative impact on wildlife movement and connectivity.

Specifically, we support the elimination of the following 2011 proposals:

- Campgrounds (109 campsites) and expansion of the parking lot at Widowmaker
- Campgrounds at Kananaskis Visitor Centre (79 sites)
- 18 hole disc golf course at Barrier Dam

We also support the reduction in disturbance so that new development is largely contained within the existing disturbance footprint, compared to the 2011 proposal which proposed extensive new disturbance. It is also positive to see the plan consider wildlife corridor and ecological integrity; we support no development between Widowmaker and Barrier Dam in order to maintain this important wildlife corridor, as well as decommissioning half of the loop access road at Barrier Lake in order to widen the wildlife corridor at one of its narrowest points. Changes to the facility zones so that they closely surround the area of human use helps signal the government's intention to limit any further development.

Despite the improvements to the proposed redevelopment plan, AWA is concerned about increasing urbanization in the area, particularly in the Barrier Reservoir Day Use area, where a new hand boat-


launch and associated road access, water sports equipment rental hut, expanded parking, and comfort camping spots are being proposed. Comfort camping amenities are also being proposed in Canoe meadows, despite the fact that the proposal suggests that providing comfort camping options at Canoe meadows and Barrier Reservoir could increase human-wildlife conflict. We urge the government to carefully reconsider any development with the potential to increase urbanization and degrade ecological values. We support the recommendation to conduct an Environmental Review of the proposed changes to the Barrier Reservoir day use areas.

To conclude, it is clear that the LKR-Barrier area is well loved, receiving high numbers of visitors every year. We have seen these high visitor numbers firsthand and acknowledge that the plan is attempting to address these high visitation numbers by better managing human traffic in the area. However, we caution that the reasons why people are attracted to the area – primarily as an easily accessible place to access nature that is less commercialized than the National Parks – may be lost if this area is developed further.

This plan must not just “represent the build-out of this area for the foreseeable future,” it must be the final development in this area. AWA firmly believes that if visitation increases in the future, building facilities in order to accommodate visitors is not the solution. While not discussed in this redevelopment plan, we believe that there will be a point in the near future where Kananaskis will reach visitor carrying capacity – where it will be impossible to effectively manage human-wildlife conflict and ecological integrity will be significantly compromised. The popularity of this area shows that Albertans love and appreciate our protected areas network and we urge increased protection of this area.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

With regards,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Joanna Skrajny, Conservation Specialist

CC: Alberta Environment and Parks Consultation, kananaskis.projects@gov.ab.ca