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## **The 2026 Winter Olympics – Should History Repeat Itself?**

Will the City of Calgary? Won't the City of Calgary? Undoubtedly asked often by municipal taxpayers and others, the 2026 Olympics is the object of these questions here. For the time being, the City of Calgary's Olympics bid process – described recently in the *Calgary Herald* as “tortuous” – is going ahead. For AWA, there is one, non-negotiable, condition that must be incorporated into any bid to host the Olympics. Under no circumstances should sites in Banff National Park be used as Olympic venues. None... under any circumstances.

AWA's position regards Calgary's successful 1988 Olympics bid as a precedent that must be followed now. In 1988 Banff National Park was excluded as a venue for Olympic events. Reviewing the history of those Olympics makes it very clear that the promised opposition of AWA, the Sierra Club, and what is now the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society played a key role in the decision of the Calgary bid committee to exclude the National Park's ski hills as Olympic sites. Nordic skiing and biathlon events were staged in Canmore; downhill skiing

events took place on Mount Allan.

But, unlike in the case of the 1988 games, the commitment to exclude Banff National Park must be underlined now and be irrevocable. Organizers of the 1988 games vacillated over where the 1988 downhill events would be held. Originally, Mount Sparrowhawk, just north of Canmore, was the preferred site for those events. Then, Mount Allan was selected. Mount Allan's selection raised a number of objections. From the racing standpoint, the mountain was regarded as too tame for the Crazy Canucks and their peers. From the conservation standpoint, concerns focused on the health and impact ski hill development on the area's mountain sheep population. Subsequently, the International Ski Federation suggested Lake Louise would be the best site for Olympic skiing. This suggestion was endorsed happily by the ski hills' owners. For a time, the federal and Alberta governments along with the Olympic Organizing Committee warmed to that suggestion.

*“When Parliament creates national parks, it speaks for the soul of Canada, and not for its pocket-book.”*

- Parks Canada,  
1956-57 Annual Report

On this question, then Calgary mayor Ralph Klein joined conservation groups in opposing any thought of holding ski events in Banff National Park. The *New York Times* reported in September 1983 that Mayor Klein “has threatened to withdraw his support if any attempts are made to move within the Banff boundaries.” Ultimately, these opposition voices and provincial financial support for developing Mount Allan confirmed its selection for the 1988 Winter Games.

AWA has reiterated now the position it took previously with respect to all of Calgary's Winter Olympics bids; Olympic events must be held outside of Banff National Park. This is one key point made in our April 14th letter to Mayor Nenshi, Premier Notley, and Environment and Climate Change Minister McKenna (here is the link to AWA's letter to

the City of Calgary <https://albertawilderness.ca/olympic-bid-exploration-by-the-city-of-calgary/>). The scale of the Winter Olympics has increased tremendously over the last 30 years and, in AWA's view, the threats posed by the Games to the Park's ecological values have magnified accordingly.

If you read Banff's management plan I think you'll agree with AWA that common sense demands keeping Olympic events out of our national parks. "In implementing its core mandate that integrates heritage resource conservation, visitor experience and public appreciation and understanding," the 2010 plan says, "the Parks Canada Agency gives **first priority to maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity.**" (my emphasis)

AWA expects Mayor Nenshi, Environment and Climate Change Minister McKenna, and Premier Notley to follow the precedents set by their predecessors more than 30 years ago. Common sense and respect for Parks Canada's mandate demands nothing less.

- Ian Urquhart