

Updates

National Parks, Nakiska, and Calgary's Potential Bid for the 2026 Winter Olympics

Should Calgary bid to host the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games? This question is being debated and will be the focus of a plebiscite in Calgary on November 13, 2018. Then Calgarians will have the opportunity to answer this question: "Are you for or are you against Calgary hosting the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games?" Depending in part on how Calgarians respond in November, the City will decide whether or not to submit a bid to the International Olympic Committee in January 2019.

In the second week of September, Calgary 2026 – the corporation established to explore and develop the potential – submitted its Draft Hosting Concept Plan Concept to Calgary City Council. Alberta Wilderness Association was pleased to see that this plan does not propose to locate any Olympic or Paralympic venues in Banff National Park. In April 2018, AWA wrote to Mayor Nenshi, Premier Notley, and Environment and Climate Change Minister McKenna asking them to insist that "any Olympic bid exploration by Calgary must recognize National Parks are not a suitable venue." Calgary 2026 proposed Nakiska as the venue for the alpine, snowboard cross, and ski cross events; Canmore is the proposed venue for the cross-country and biathlon events.

AWA's view now, as it was for prior Winter Olympics proposals, is that Olympic and Paralympic events will further threaten and compromise Banff National Park's ecological integrity. In 2016 Parks Canada assessed Banff's ecological integrity as only "Fair." Although the Park's ecological integrity hadn't declined it also hadn't improved. The days of more development and growth in Banff should be over if Parks Canada is committed genuinely to respecting the

2010 Banff Management Plan mandate to give "first priority to maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity."

If Calgary presses ahead in 2019 with a bid to the International Olympic Committee AWA intends to keep a close eye on how that bid evolves. Our institutional memory remembers well the efforts to shift alpine events to Lake Louise in 1988 despite the original bid's selection of Mount Allan, the site of the Nakiska ski resort, for those competitions. Any effort to shift Olympic or Paralympic events will redouble AWA's opposition. If a bid for the 2026 games is made you also can expect AWA to press organizers to ensure that any upgrading of infrastructure for the alpine events at Nakiska remains within the current footprint of the resort.

- Ian Urquhart
