



Public Lands Management

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) believes we all have an obligation to ensure the conservation and responsible management of Alberta's public lands. To date we believe the management of Alberta's public lands has failed to address the critical need to include the public within the management framework for public lands. A lack of transparency and accountability hinders public participation in the management of public lands, a vital public resource. AWA believes the development of an overarching public lands policy is long overdue.

Public Lands Conservation

As some of the last tracts of intact wilderness, Alberta's public lands represent thriving ecosystems that provide invaluable ecological services that are the foundation for the quality of life that Albertans enjoy.

Clean air, water, habitat for wildlife, and a multitude of natural resources, all of which are essential to sustaining our communities, and are imperative assets amidst a changing climate.

AWA believes that Alberta's public lands, in their natural state, should be conserved in perpetuity for all generations to come as they provide countless vital resources and services that once altered, cannot be replaced. We also believe that in the face of an uncertain future, buffers and hedges against unidentified changes are vital. ¹

Public Lands Policy

Over many years, AWA has advocated for a Public Lands Policy that is developed in a transparent and democratic manner, incorporating and protecting the values public lands provide. An overarching Public Lands Policy would address all aspects of public lands management including access, sales, and conservation of public lands while prioritizing the inclusion of the public through meaningful consultation.

Public Lands Sales

AWA opposes the sale of public land. Public lands provide benefits that outweigh any short-term interests or gains; the sale of public lands that would see the destruction of native habitat for alternative land uses is unacceptable.

AWA believes the sale of public lands reflects a failing on behalf of the provincial government to discern the true value of public lands, and manage public lands in a manner that continually serves to benefit Albertans. At minimum, a Public Lands Policy must be developed to address the deficiencies in notifying and triggering public consultation processes with regards to public lands management.

Public Lands Access

As a public resource, AWA believes that the public should have unrestricted foot access to all public lands. The current system and its supporting legislation, the *Recreational Access Regulation*, for requesting recreational access to public lands under agricultural dispositions discourages and excludes Albertans from accessing public lands. In some cases, grazing leaseholders have construed the regulation to give them land tenancy authority, and the leaseholders have prevented public access entirely.



AWA supports the economic and ecological benefits of sustainable livestock grazing, and emphasizes that recreational pursuits on grazing leases including hiking, hunting, fishing, and foraging have meaningful social and economic values to our communities.

When assessing the current level of access Albertans have to public lands, journalist Bob Scammell wrote that the provincial government has a duty of ensuring that, "...public access to our public lands for lawful purposes should be improved and guaranteed to the owners, the people of Alberta"².

AWA believes that Albertans have rudimentary rights in accessing public lands and will continue to defend that principle for Albertans.

AWA recommends and requests the development of clear guidelines for all forms of public lands recreation and access, along with appropriate controls to protect sensitive or significant cultural and ecological sites.

Livestock Grazing on Public Lands

AWA supports livestock grazing as an essential tool in managing our use of mixed grass prairies, fescue grassland and aspen parkland within Alberta's public lands.

It is important to recognize that livestock possess different physiological and behavioral traits than native grazing species such as bison and therefore do not completely fill that ecological niche. Cattle spend a disproportionate amount of time in riparian zones relative to bison³, therefore it is important grazing management on public lands be founded in sustainability and conservation.

AWA is interested in partnerships with ranchers and other parties who practice sustainable livestock grazing, and support the restoration of prairie wildlands to the full complement of natural processes and native species.

¹ Fitch, Lorne, "Public Land-Alberta's Best Idea," <https://donmeredith.wordpress.com>. 2019, July 14.

² Scammell, Bob, "Albertans' access to public lands decreasing," *The Red Deer Advocate*, 2014, October 16.

³ Fleischner, T.L., "Ecological costs of livestock grazing in Western North America," *Conservation Biology*, 8 (1994) 3: 629-644.