

# Comfort camping closed in Dinosaur Provincial Park



By Joanna Skrajny, AWA Conservation Specialist

Up until recently, my perception of comfort camping was dismissive, believing it to be an unnecessary luxury. I pictured rich people, rolling up in designer wear and flashy cars – name brand coffee and phone in hand – using the comfort camping yurts as a way to show off to their social media followers.

Environment Minister Jason Nixon made similar comments when he announced the closure of some comfort camping sites in the province:

*The NDP brought in comfort camping. This is the situation: My constituents and many Albertans across this province are struggling to be able to pay their mortgages and the luxury of comfort camping is not something they want us to focus on.*

Ironically, my perspective was changed by an experience I had at Dinosaur Provincial Park, which is one of the very sites that Nixon was disparaging and will now be closed.

I was visiting Dinosaur in June a couple of years ago and happened to talk to a young couple that was staying at one of the canvas wall tents. They admitted they had never been camping before and had been uncertain about whether they would enjoy the experience. While at \$100 a night, it wasn't the most affordable weekend, it was cheaper than having to buy all of the equipment just to see if they enjoyed the experience. Renting camping gear made them equally nervous; what if they couldn't figure out how to set up a tent or start a fire? In the end, they decided to rent out one of the canvas wall tents. They liked the fact that everything was "set up," so they could spend their time exploring the park and going on tours. From the animated

looks on their faces, I could see they were hooked, and they gushed that they were already planning ahead to future trips.

After spending the next couple of cold nights with torrential downpours in our cheap tent, I have to admit I was pretty jealous of their setup.

There are plenty of other reasons why someone might want to rent a comfort cabin besides "doing it for the 'gram." For some, such as busy parents or working professionals, it might be an easier way of getting out than having to wrangle all of your equipment together and plan ahead just to be able to get outdoors. It's also a lower cost alternative to other, more comfortable forms of camping such as purchasing or renting trailer units. It also provides more peace of mind during the shoulder season or for folks who are wary of spending the night outdoors in a tent.

Finally, if it isn't hurting anybody or the land, what is the harm if some people are willing to spend extra for a little luxury? While AWA has legitimate concerns about structures such as fixed-roof cabins in back-

country areas – where they have a large footprint, reduce the wilderness experience and are potential attractants for wildlife – in a gravelled front country campground, the impact of comfort camping is likely comparable to trailers.

I would seriously contest the Minister's claims that comfort camping sites were costing the government money to maintain. Environment Critic Marlin Schmidt stated in an interview that in his experience the Dinosaur comfort camping sites, the only comfort camping sites targeted by Minister Nixon, were "overbooked."

The comfort camping sites probably provided a good alternative for both Albertans and out-of-province tourists without camping gear who wanted to spend a couple of days taking tours to see dinosaur bones, and learning about our incredible badlands. While comfort camping is something I probably won't use personally, I don't think it does any harm to provide some alternative ways to get outdoors. And now that option is gone. ▲



*The long-billed curlew, a COSEWIC species of special concern, is a species noted for remarkable aerial displays during the formation of breeding pairs. PHOTO: © C. WALLIS*