

Updates

“Optimizing” Alberta’s Parks means losing protection where we need it most

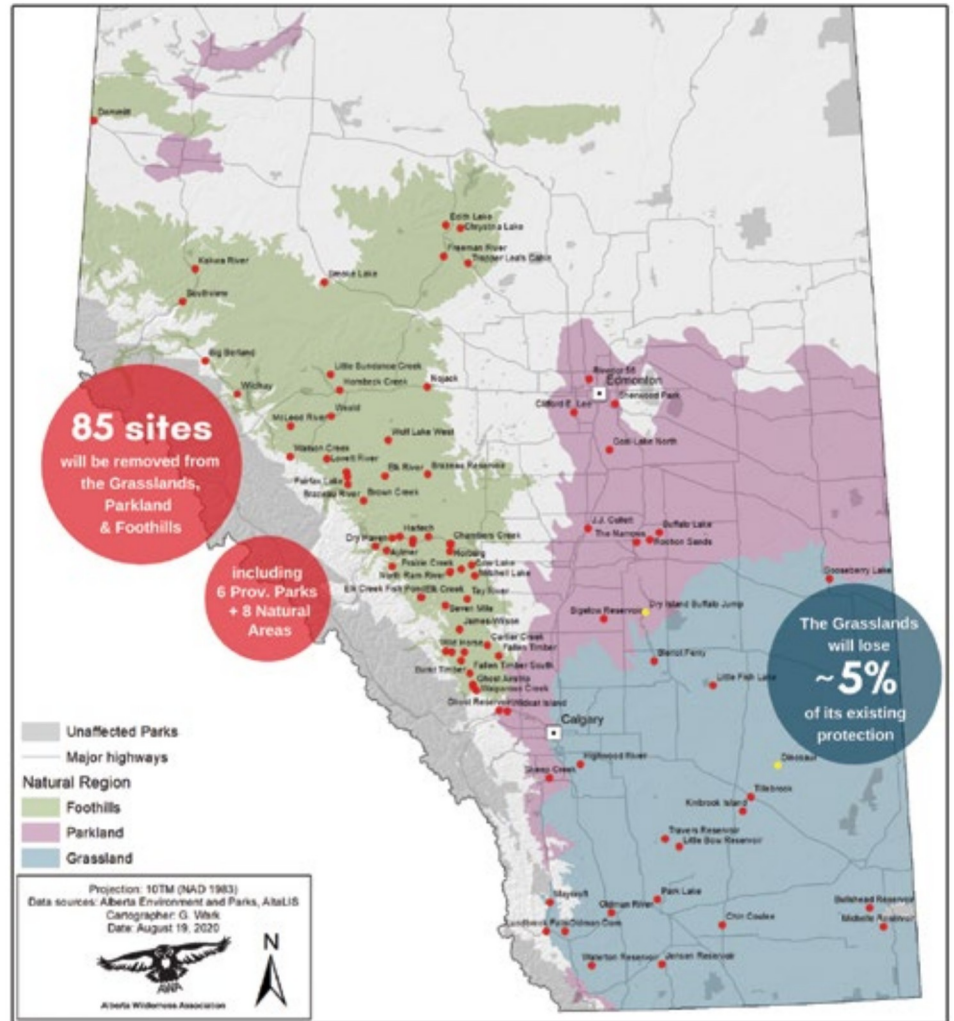
The Government of Alberta’s plan to remove 164 sites from the provincial parks system will take a significant bite out of the little protection offered currently to Alberta’s most endangered and least protected Natural Regions: the Parkland, Grasslands and Foothills. Between these three regions, 85 sites will lose their protected status, resulting in the loss of nearly 9,000 hectares of protection – equivalent to around eight times the size of Ghost Lake or one-half the size of Elk Island National Park. Without shrinking protections in these areas further, the Grasslands, Parkland and Foothills Natural Regions have only 1.25%, 0.9% and 1.4% of their landscapes protected, respectively.

Although many of these park sites are small, they offer important refuge for migrating wildlife, improve habitat connectivity, and prevent conversion of native prairie and foothills landscapes.

This decision will result in a five percent loss of protection in the Grasslands Natural Region, which provides critical habitat for over three-quarters of Alberta’s species at risk. Little Fish Lake Provincial Park, slated for removal, has important habitat for piping plover, a small shorebird listed as *endangered* under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

In the Foothills, Ghost Airstrip Provincial Recreation Area contains critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout, another SARA-listed species. Cutthroat trout, which have been listed as *threatened* since 2013, already have experienced significant habitat degradation on public lands – losing protected areas may only further exacerbate the issue.

If you are interested in sharing your thoughts with Alberta Environment and Parks on the ‘Optimize Alberta Parks’ decision and its impacts on Alberta’s least



protected Natural Regions, you can reach Minister Jason Nixon at aep.minister@gov.ab.ca or 780-427-2391 (Ministry office).

We always appreciate receiving a copy of your letter at awa@abwild.ca

- Grace Wark