



## News Release: Losing protection where we need it most



Marbled godwit observed at Little Fish Lake Provincial Park, one of 164 sites being divested or deregulated under the government's initiative to "Optimize Alberta Parks".

Photo © AWA

The Government of Alberta's plan to remove 164 sites from the provincial parks system will take a significant cut out of 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.

"There's a very real risk that, once these sites are removed from the Parks system, we will lose all measures to protect their local ecosystems." said Grace Wark, Conservation Specialist. "As we face a rapid, global decline in biodiversity, now is the time to be expanding protections in the Grasslands, Parkland and Foothills, not stripping them away."

Under the *Provincial Parks Act*, these sites are currently managed for two primary purposes: the conservation of their landscapes and natural features, and to facilitate accessible recreation opportunities for Albertans. No guidelines have been released by the Government of Alberta on how these objectives will be achieved once these lands are divested to third party entities or become vacant public land.

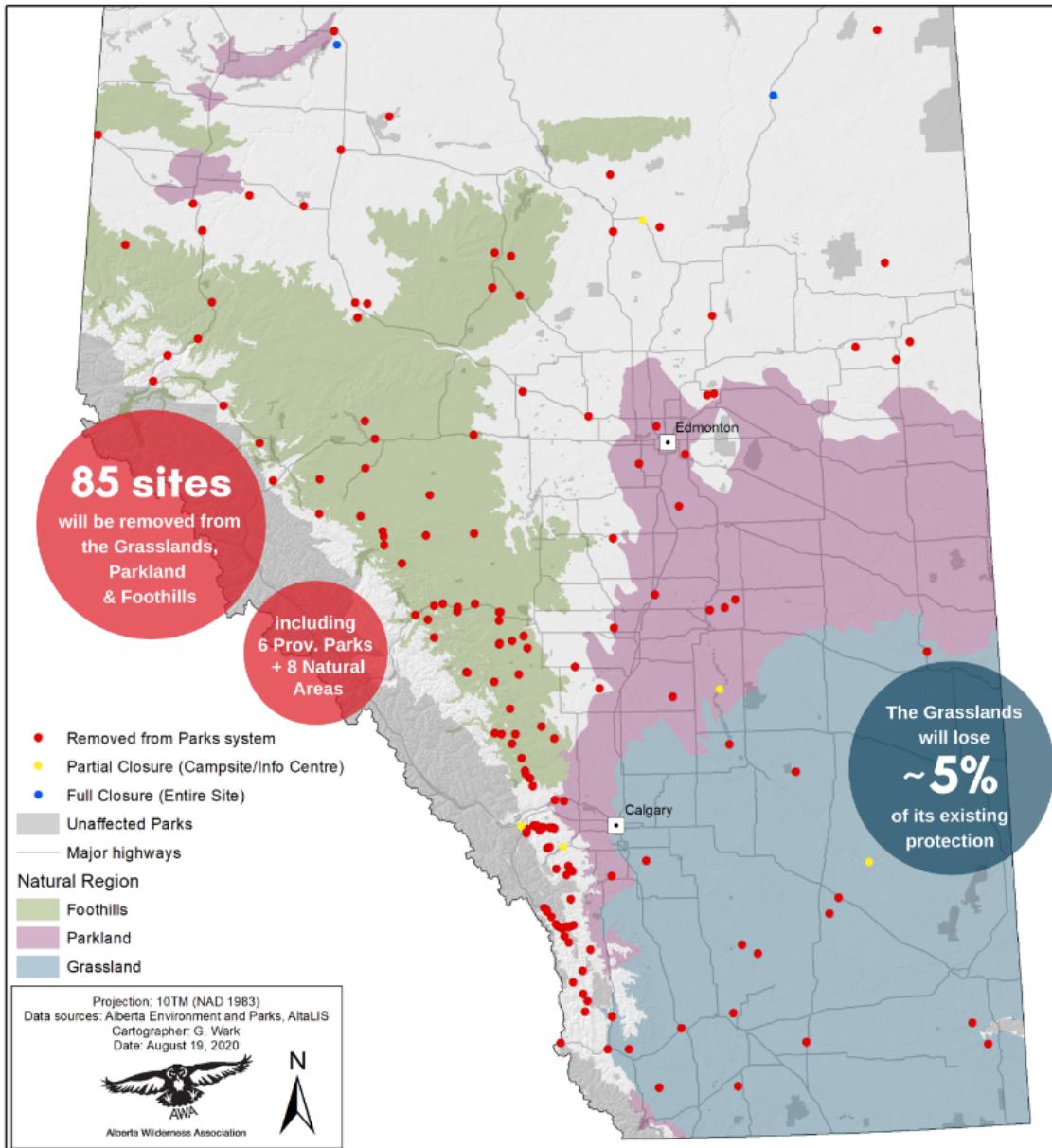
"Even small parks and recreation areas can offer refuge for migrating wildlife, improve habitat connectivity, and prevent conversion of native prairie and foothills landscapes." adds Wark. "The value these parks provide for Albertans and wildlife far outweigh a temporary savings of \$5 million."

#### **Quick facts:**

- 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. In comparison, 60.2% of the Rocky Mountains region is protected.
- In the [2020-23 budget](#), Alberta Environment and Parks committed to protecting and conserving 17% of Alberta's lands by 2021. Today, 14.9% of Alberta is protected. The government hasn't released any plans for how the 17% target will be achieved.
- The "Optimizing Alberta Parks" decision will result in a 5% loss of protection in the Grasslands Natural Region, which provides critical habitat for over 75% 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*.
- The Parkland is the least protected (0.9%) and most settled region in the province. Greater protection is urgently needed.
- The Foothills have important habitat for threatened populations of grizzly bear and westslope cutthroat trout. The recent cancellation of Alberta's Coal Policy has increased the risk that coal mining, with its associated environmental impacts, may take place in this Natural Region.

#### **For more information, contact:**

Grace Wark, Conservation Specialist, [gwark@abwild.ca](mailto:gwark@abwild.ca)



You can download a labeled version of the map [here](#), as well as you can find AWA's Briefing Note on the impacts to Alberta's grasslands [here](#).



Copyright © 2020 Alberta Wilderness Association, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe](#) from this list.

