

# Castle Management Plan

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Addendum

March 2017

# Description of Proposed Revisions as of March, 2017

Minor revisions have been made throughout the draft Castle Management Plan. Major revisions are described in this addendum document.

The proposed revisions were drafted in response to feedback received during the Castle Management Plan consultation period. These revisions are intended to provide additional clarity to certain issues, and, in some cases, provide new provisions for permitted uses not addressed in the previous draft.

Each proposed revision below is labelled by section that corresponds to the chapters in the draft Castle Management Plan. A brief description of the issue being responded to is provided, and the new wording is provided in quotes.

As this is still a draft, any and all input is welcome. You may provide comments on these proposed revisions or any other aspect of the draft Castle Management Plan by visiting [albertaparks.ca/consult](http://albertaparks.ca/consult).

## 2.2.4 Vegetation

### Why the change?

There was desire to improve wording to reflect a management approach based on sustainable native plant communities.

### Revisions

One objective was replaced and one strategy was deleted.

#### 2.2.4 Objectives

#### Strategy

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~~Protect genetic integrity of vegetation within the Castle parks:~~

**Maintain the sustainability of native plant communities within the Castle Parks.**

Where possible, plant or replant native vegetation using seeds sourced from within the Castle area; where not possible, use best certified native seed sources or best available alternative sources.

Conduct restoration and reclamation projects in the Castle parks to protect genetic integrity, utilizing relevant best practices as specified and approved by Alberta Parks.

~~Work with adjacent landowners to prevent the introduction of non-locally sourced seed when native plants are being established.~~

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## 2.4.3 Grazing

### Why the change?

Feedback was received that Grazing Allotment Holders sought greater certainty to ensure the long-term viability of their operations.

There were requests to clarify the administrative processes and responsibilities for range management.

### Proposed Revisions

One new sentence was added to the narrative.

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“Existing grazing allotments and preference quotas that have been previously established for the Castle area will be honoured.”

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The objectives and strategies section was rewritten.

**Maintain livestock grazing as a legitimate and valued activity within the Castle Parks using Alberta Environment and Parks Rangelands Approval Team for oversight of this resource use.**

Continue livestock grazing in both Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park.

Develop a Memorandum of Agreement to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the Rangeland Agrologist within the Castle Parks to ensure that appropriate communication and collaboration occurs with management of other resources within these designations. The Rangeland Agrologist will be the primary point of contact for allotment holders and will maintain responsibility for daily operations of the Forest Reserve Grazing Allotments.

Continue to administer and manage grazing allotments within the Castle Area under the Forest Reserves Act and Regulation. The rights granted under the act and regulation will remain, including the right to transfer preference quotas.

Honour existing Forest Reserve grazing permits and preference quotas. The system and procedures will be consistent and seamless with those applied in the rest of the Forest Reserve.

The Rangeland Agrologist will continue to oversee the administration and operational management of livestock grazing in the Castle Parks. This will include the assessment, allocation and permitting of sustainable forage use within each grazing allotment.

Grazing disposition holders will continue to be involved in the development of Range Management plans, working with the Rangeland Agrologist to ensure delivery rangeland objectives in the Castle Area is operationally feasible.

Should additional grazing be required for vegetation management or other ecological purposes, additional quotas will be offered to the existing allotment holders.

Include grazing disposition holders in the development of plans and strategies for infrastructure or other changes on the landscape, as per Section 21 of the Forest Reserves Regulation.

Unless required for vegetation management purposes, cattle will be the only domestic livestock permitted.

**Enhanced conservation and management of native grasslands will be achieved through range management practices that support the overall conservation intent for both Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park.**

Review and update existing range management plans and strategies and ensure they are consistent with meeting the values of the protected areas.

Range management plans and strategies will be informed by range and riparian health assessments, conservation objectives for critical habitat, protection of critical fish habitat and the vegetation management strategy.

Sustain and protect foothills fescue, held under Protective Notation, by ensuring that all uses adhere to AER guideline #7.

Apply best management practices to achieve appropriate and successful integration with other resource uses.

Review riparian health data and current range management practices with respect to riparian areas. Explore ways to further protect water quality and fish habitat, continuing to collaborate and build on the partnership with Cows and Fish.

Apply best management practices to minimize impacts of livestock grazing in sensitive sites (e.g. riparian areas and alpine sites). Initial priorities for implementation will be in critical habitat areas for westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout and harlequin ducks.

Encourage and support new strategies and innovations to effectively manage livestock.

Identify mechanisms to re-establish native grasslands as a result of forest encroachment and include these in the vegetation management strategy (see section 2.6.1 and 2.6.2). This may also include the re-introduction of controlled burns to enhance forage availability for both wildlife and cattle.

Develop zoning within the parks in consultation with grazing disposition holders and other stakeholders. Through this process, areas of high recreation use will be identified and measures may be taken to limit or restrict livestock access to these areas.

Request additional government resources to help ensure the effective management of livestock grazing in the park, specifically including additional field presence and resources to develop and maintain infrastructure to manage livestock distribution.

Develop a communication strategy to communicate the value of livestock grazing within the Castle area to park visitors.

Alberta Environment and Parks will monitor the efficacy of grazing in achieving overall conservation objectives.

Minimize user conflicts by implementing infrastructure improvements and best practices.

Explore and implement practices to reduce the impact from grazing in the alpine region, the upper elevations of the sub-alpine and other sensitive areas identified for recovery, while maintaining preference quotas.

Specific practices and implementation strategies will be developed in collaboration with grazing disposition holders and government rangeland agrologists.

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## 4.1 Park Facilities and Infrastructure

### Why the change?

Feedback was received that the plan did not adequately describe how parks would provide accessible opportunities for people with limited mobility.

There was a desire to add clarity regarding the commitment to maintain access from the Crowsnest Pass in the Castle Parks.

### Proposed Revisions

One new sentence was added to the narrative.

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“Government of Alberta will work with local municipalities to support regional economic development opportunities.”

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One strategy was moved from section 2.4.3 and added to the first objective, two new objectives and eight new strategies were added.



**Ensure that visitor facilities provide a wide range of services that support nature-based recreation and tourism and are consistent with the conservation objectives of the park.**

Maintain the fescue grasslands community by applying the Foothills Fescue Grassland Principles for Minimizing Disturbance and Principles for Minimizing Surface Disturbance in Native Grasslands.

In 2017, plan and implement:

- Rustic group campsites
- Blackfoot offering site
- Trail and road improvements
- Wayfinding and regulatory signage

**Provide accessible infrastructure to facilitate experiences for all park users.**

Apply Provincial inclusion Strategy as outlined in Plan for Parks and the Push to Open program.

Review all infrastructure developments in the Castle Parks from an accessibility perspective, and where possible, provide accessible opportunities.

In 2017 commence the development of a fully accessible pathway around Bathing Lake, including accessible fishing platforms.

Explore opportunities to develop access for persons with limited mobility, including the elderly, to reach select back country locations in Castle Provincial Park, using trails or roads specified for that purpose.

**Ensure access to the Castle Parks from the north (Crowsnest Pass) and from the east (Beaver Mines and Pincher Creek).**

Maintain key road access into the Castle Parks along the Adanac and Sartoris roads.

Maintain key road access into the Castle Parks along highway 774.

Work with Alberta Transportation and municipalities to upgrade main access roads.



## 5.5 Reservation, Retail and Event Services

### Why the change?

There was a desire to place more emphasis on locally operated retail services to maximize the economic benefits of tourism for local communities.

### Proposed Revisions

Major revisions were made to the fourth paragraph, minor revisions were made to other paragraphs in the narrative.

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“Reservations, retail and event services represent an aspect of Visitor Services that can help meet the needs of visitors and greatly enhance their experience.”

“An accessible and user-friendly reservation system can provide an essential service in the critical pre-visit portion of the visitor experience cycle. Campground reservations are typically handled through the provincial Reserve-Alberta-Parks reservation system, which provides both online and telephone access to sites designated as reservable through that system. With multiple frontcountry and backcountry camping opportunities, a systematic approach will be applied to create an appropriate mix of reservable and first come, first-serve campsites. Using models successfully applied in other groups of Provincial Parks and protected sites (e.g. Kananaskis Country, etc.), a system for tracking and permitting backcountry camping may be implemented.”

“As public programs and other experiential opportunities develop, a reservation system to help manage the scheduling and attendance to these events will be considered. Where possible, reservations will be handled under the existing Reserve-Alberta-Parks system or similar system (e.g. Vantix ATMS). Integrated reservation systems can provide the benefits of a convenient user interface for visitors and provide staff the ability to track inventory and help coordinate complex schedules of events, facilities and programs.”

“Retail services to fulfill visitor needs are available at the Castle Ski Resort and adjacent communities. These items are sold as a service to visitors and these retail locations can serve as another venue for the dissemination of information (e.g. warning of closures due to bears) if the proprietor is willing. Where opportunities exist for retail sales within the parks (e.g. at Visitor Information Centre or campgrounds) Alberta Parks will work with communities and local business to explore opportunities for these services to be provided by the private sector.”

“Provincial Parks can be an ideal venue for various types of events, including small meetings, family reunions and sporting competitions. Alberta Parks can help facilitate this use by having a comprehensive event services program. The development of such a program includes identifying venues, determining appropriate rental costs, usage agreements and permitting, developing an event scheduling system and determining necessary support services. By coordinating events within the park, or facilitating external organizations to do so, the parks can bring in new users, potential revenue sources, sponsorship and opportunities for media exposure.”

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One strategy was added and one objective and its associated strategies was deleted.

5.5 Objectives

Strategy

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**Where appropriate, ensure effective reservation services are available for park-managed accommodations and experiences.**

Where possible use Reserve-Alberta-Parks. Add campgrounds in Castle Provincial Park to the Reserve-Alberta-Parks system over the next two years.

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**Develop a Retail Services Plan.**

Evaluate the logistics and “return on investment” of implementing retail services:

Identify products that meet client needs in terms of safety and comfort (e.g. bear spray, rain gear):

Identify products that can help to promote the Castle area and Alberta Parks brands, and/or enhance the visitor experience:





## 6.7 Hunting

### Why the change?

Feedback was received indicating that the difficulty of retrieving game over long distances was not recognized.

### Proposed Revisions

One paragraph was added to the narrative.

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“Off-highway vehicle use, such as quads, may be permitted for the retrieval of game on a network of access trails specifically designated for those purposes.”

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The second objective and its strategies were reworded, and one new objective and strategy were added.

**Collaborate with fish and wildlife associated groups to determine best practices and develop guidelines to allow for limited use of Off Highway Vehicles for the purposes of game retrieval.**

Review best practices and develop guidelines for the responsible use of OHVs for the purposes of retrieving game. Guidelines for Park staff and users will address various management issues including the potential of permitting mechanisms, hours and seasonal limitations, code of conduct for users, etc.

**In Castle Provincial Park, Alberta Parks will work collaboratively with Alberta Fish and Wildlife to manage hunting.**

Communicate regulatory requirements around discharge buffers, game processing and carcass storage, and the requirement for hunters to obtain a parks discharge permit.

**Within a short timeframe, after the establishment of the provincial park, the main aim will be to communicate to hunters the parks regulations specific to hunting activities.**

Review all available hunter harvest and activity data that is available to inform managers of the trends in hunter use of WMU 400.

**In medium term implementation will involve collaboration with Alberta Fish and Wildlife to explore ways in which Castle Provincial Park can have its hunting managed as a discreet geographical unit. This may include options to manage hunting allocations, seasons and licence types to align with the overall management of Castle Provincial Park. Consideration may be given to the development of a separate Wildlife Management Unit that could facilitate the governance of unit-specific regulations.**

For public safety reasons, prohibit hunting in facility zones and within 183 metre buffer zones surrounding designated camping areas, designated day-use areas and roads. Hunting may also be prohibited by Alberta Parks in specific areas of the park where hunting is not compatible with other recreational activities.

Work towards management actions within Castle Provincial Park that permit recreational hunting for the purposes of managing wildlife populations, minimizing impacts on adjacent lands and maintaining quality visitor experiences across the full spectrum of recreation activities.

Through all stages, Alberta Parks will collaborate with Alberta Fish and Wildlife on existing hunter harvest and activity data collection to inform park management.



## 6.9 Sportfishing

### Why the change?

Feedback was received indicating that sportfishing objectives should specifically refer to both Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

### Proposed Revisions

One strategy was revised and one new strategy was added.

#### 6.9 Objectives

#### Strategy

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#### **Maintain sportfishing opportunities in the Castle Parks.**

In collaboration with Alberta Environment and Parks' fish and wildlife biologists, develop strategies to improve sport fishing opportunities that are consistent with fisheries management and park objectives, referencing existing species management and recovery plans where available (e.g. westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout).

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In collaboration with Alberta Environment and Parks' fisheries biologists, implemented recovery initiatives within the Castle Park to support recovery of the Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout as per existing species management and recovery plans.

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# 6.10 Recreational Off Highway Vehicles

## Why the change?

There was a desire to differentiate between summer and winter OHV uses in terms of their environmental impacts and to allow for different management approaches.

## Proposed Revisions

The first two paragraphs in the narrative remain as in the original, and content from the remaining paragraphs were moved to section 6.10.1 and section 6.10.2.

Two strategies were removed and remaining objectives and strategies were moved to 6.10.1.

### 6.10 Objectives

### Strategies

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~~Recreational OHV use south of Highway 774 will be discontinued, effective immediately.~~

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~~Prior to the beginning of the second year of the transition period, OHV use will be discontinued on all remaining trails within Castle Wildland Provincial Park, and on those trails within Castle Provincial Park that are determined to have high ecological value.~~

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## 6.10.1 Summer Recreational Off Highway Vehicles

### Why the change?

There was a desire to simplify the proposed phase out by allowing summer recreational OHV use on all designated trails in 2017.

### Proposed Revisions

One new statement written into the narrative (first paragraph) and the word “summer” was added in appropriate places within the subsequent paragraphs (which were moved from section 6.10 of the previous draft), and paragraphs three and four were revised.

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Summer recreational off highway vehicle use refers to activities from May 1st to November 30th using vehicles such as, quads, side-by-sides and motorcycles.

Analysis of environmental data, reports and published science (including research related to biodiversity, critical habitats, linear thresholds, species at risk, riparian areas, erodibility and noise disturbance potential) confirms that summer recreational off-highway vehicle use at current or substantially reduced levels is incompatible with conservation goals of the parks. Summer OHV use is also incompatible with quiet recreation experience and other non-motorized recreation.

Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park have high levels of biodiversity, important headwaters that are highly susceptible to damage and critical habitat for species at risk, including genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. To meet the conservation goal of the park and protect these ecosystems, landscapes and water resources, summer recreational off-highway vehicle use will be phased out of Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park.

Alberta Parks will develop a strategy to transition out summer recreational OHV use in Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park. A defined transition period will allow the Government of Alberta time to prepare plans which will identify suitable areas for a sustainable OHV trail network. This period will allow time to make decisions around the types of engineered trails and funding sources required to allow summer recreational OHV use on suitable public lands, with a specific focus in the neighboring Livingstone and Porcupine Hills public lands. The Government of Alberta is committed to working with Off Highway Vehicle users on the design of trail systems on public lands, and the prioritization of trails for phase out over the next five years, based on environmental and other criteria.



Additionally, a plan for the reclamation of illegal trails and the restoration of designated trails will be developed. Those trails that are appropriate for recreational uses compatible with the conservation objectives of the parks will be designated as such, and restored. Those trails and linear disturbances that conflict with the conservation objectives of the parks will be identified and actively or passively reclaimed.

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## 6.10.2 Winter Recreational Off Highway Vehicles

### Why the change?

Feedback was received calling for a differentiation of summer and winter OHV uses in terms of their described environmental impacts and permitted uses.

There was a desire to further explore the potential for limited winter recreational OHV use on designated trails.

### Proposed Revisions

New narrative text was added to the plan.

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“It is recognized that summer and winter off highway vehicle use differ in terms of their potential impact on the natural environment and on other recreational uses. Further study is required to fully understand the implication of allowing winter OHV use in the Castle parks. A thorough review of existing research, as well as an identification of the gaps in research, is required to better inform a clear management direction.”

“The Government of Alberta will work with snowmobile associations and other user groups to undertake a review of winter OHV use in the Castle Parks prior to making any decisions on the future of this activity in the Castle Parks.”

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# 7 Research, Monitoring and Adaptive Management

## Why the change?

There was a desire to emphasize Alberta Parks' role in ongoing monitoring of species and habitats.

## Proposed Revisions

One strategy was added.

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### 7.0 Objectives

**Encourage research in and about the Castle area, and conduct monitoring of biodiversity in accordance with conservation objectives.**

### Strategy

Monitor health and abundance of species, especially species at risk, and the quality of their habitats (e.g. westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, grizzly bears).

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