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Special Places:

Alberta's Rocky Mountain Natural Region

Special Places is a made-in-Alberta strategy to complete a network of landscapes representing the province's six natural regions (20 subregions) by the end of 1998.

Special Places provides the policy, science and process to fill under-represented areas or gaps in Alberta's natural regions, including the Rocky Mountain Natural Region.

The Rocky Mountain Natural Region contains Alberta's most rugged topography. Each of its three subregions are separated by geographic location and vegetation differences.

The Montane Subregion occurs on east-west trending ridges that extend from the foothills. Chinooks are a characteristic of this subregion and the area is intermittently snow-free in the winter. The montane landscape is characterized by a pattern of open forests and grasslands.

The Subalpine Subregion gets more winter precipitation than any other part of Alberta, often with

more than 200 cm of snowfall. Freezing temperatures occur in all months and the frost-free period is likely less than 30 days.

The Alpine Subregion – Alberta's coldest subregion – contains vegetated areas, bare rock, snowfields and glaciers.

Rocky Mountain Subregions

Montane
Subalpine
Alpine

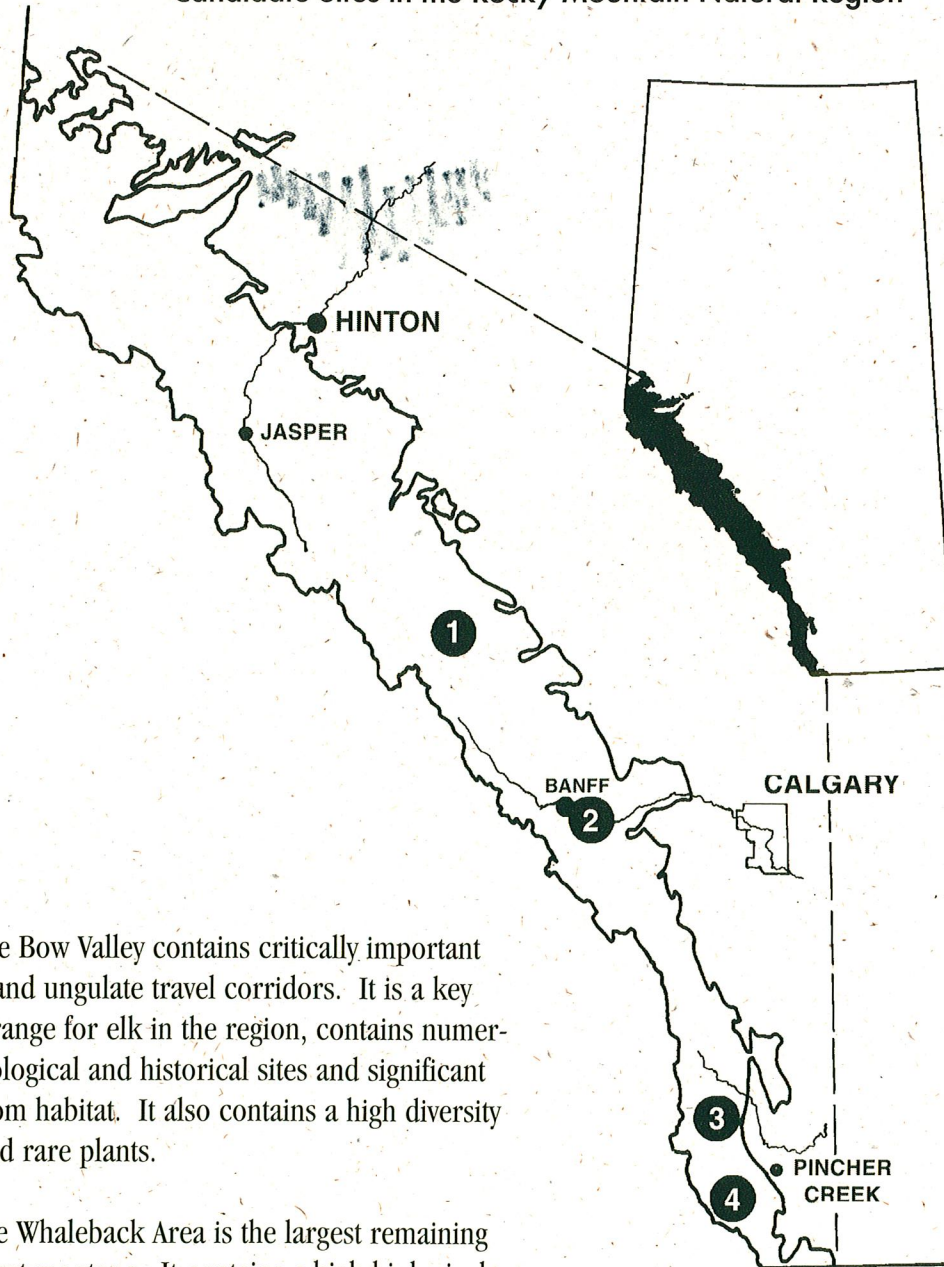


Special Places:

Candidate Sites in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region

1. The Bighorn Area contains significant caribou, elk, mule deer, wolf and grizzly habitat. It is also an important spring range for mountain goats on the slopes of the Kootenay Plains area. Bighorn provides ample spawning, rearing and overwintering habitat for trout and whitefish. Many fossils have been found in the area, which contains significant geological and geomorphic features.

Special Places
Candidate Sites in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region



2. The Bow Valley contains critically important carnivore and ungulate travel corridors. It is a key wintering range for elk in the region, contains numerous archeological and historical sites and significant valley bottom habitat. It also contains a high diversity of birds and rare plants.

3. The Whaleback Area is the largest remaining tract of intact montane. It contains a high biological diversity, unique vegetation, critical habitat and wintering ranges. Numerous archeological and historical sites are found in the Whaleback, which also contains some of the most extensive limber pine and douglas fir stands in the province. A diverse population of birds, including the golden eagle breed in the area. One of the highest densities of cougar populations in Alberta live here as well.

4. The Castle Area has the highest biodiversity in Alberta outside Waterton Lakes National Park. Seven per cent of Alberta's wintering bighorn sheep live in the Castle area, which also contains species of butterflies found nowhere else in the province. About half of Alberta's rare vascular flora are found in the Castle Area. Western painted turtle populations live here, as well as trumpeter swans at Horseshoe Lake.

Review of Candidate Sites in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region:

The Special Places Process

What is the status of Special Places in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region?

The Rocky Mountain Natural Region contains several existing protected areas that contribute to Alberta's network of Special Places. However, the Minister of Environmental Protection advised the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) that he would consider recommendations for additional protection in several areas in the mountains. He asked the committee for advice about how to proceed. The PCC provided the Minister with information on four areas – the Bow Valley, the Bighorn, the Whaleback and the Castle. The Minister then indicated to the PCC he would establish Local Committees for these four areas.

How will this review by Local Committees (LCs) proceed?

Municipal governments in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region have been offered the first opportunity to host and chair LCs and help define the membership.

Made up of local stakeholders, the LCs represent broad local interests in developing recommendations for management principles, boundary options and appropriate land uses.

Once their review is complete, Local Committees will make recommendations for review by the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) and to the Minister of Environmental Protection.

What is the role of the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC)?

The Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) is the multi-stakeholder group which provides overall direction and awareness for Special Places. The PCC reviews nominated sites against Special Places policy, principles and science.

The PCC also provides liaison contacts for Local Committees. These liaisons provide support and advice.

What is the timeframe for Special Places in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region?

The Minister of Environmental Protection has asked the PCC to complete Alberta's protected areas network by 1998. The most efficient way to meet this goal is to proceed natural region by natural region. The time needed to complete each natural region depends on the number of nominations and how well they meet Special Places objectives.

Municipalities have already been contacted to help establish Local Committees to review the four sites in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region. Once established, Local Committees have approximately four to six months to review the site and make recommendations to the PCC and the Minister of Environmental Protection.

For More Information . . .

This fact sheet is one of several sources of information about Special Places. The Special Places "Policy and Implementation Plan" covers the Special Places process. You can find information about the natural regions and Special Places in the booklet "A Framework for Alberta's Special Places" and the brochure "Preserving Our Heritage, Protecting Our Future." If you need copies of these publications, contact the Alberta Environmental Protection Information Centre at (403) 422-2079. If you're calling from outside Edmonton, dial 310-0000 and ask to be connected to (403) 422-2079.

For general information about Special Places, call (403) 427-0047. If you're calling from outside Edmonton, call the government Rite operator toll free at 310-0000 and ask for 427-0047.

For more information about Special Places in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region, contact Jay Litke in Calgary at (403) 297-6070. If you are calling long distance, call the government Rite operator toll free at 310-0000 and ask for 297-6070.

You can also get more information by writing to:

**Alberta Environmental Protection
Corporate Management Service
11th Floor, South Petroleum Plaza
9915-108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2G8.**

To read about Alberta's Special Places on the Internet, visit the Environmental Protection Web site at:

<http://www.gov.ab.ca/~env/>

*click on the Lands icon and select Special Places from the menu displayed.



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