

Land-use Framework

South

Saskatchewan

Regional Plan

Implementation

Progress Report 2022

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Introduction

Introduced in 2008, the Land-use Framework provides a blueprint for land-use management and decision making to address mounting pressures on Alberta's land and resources. It also establishes a vision of Albertans working together to respect and care for the land as a foundation for our environmental, economic and social well-being.

Since that time, many advances have been made including the establishment of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the adoption of an integrated approach to resource management. This approach encourages cumulative effects management of natural assets and considers the impacts of development on the land over several years. It relies on legislation, regulations and Land-use Framework regional plans to provide direction to achieve the outcomes Albertans expect. To date, two regional plans, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan for northeastern Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan for southern Alberta, have been completed and are in effect as regulations under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act.

Regional plans are developed with input and feedback from stakeholders, Indigenous communities and organizations and the public. They establish a long-term vision for the region, set desired economic, environmental, and social outcomes and objectives using a cumulative effects management approach, and align provincial policy at the regional level. Regional plans specifically describe the strategies, actions, approaches and tools required to achieve the desired outcomes, and contain regulatory provisions to support implementation. They are enforceable by law and binding on everyone as identified in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. This provides guidance and clarity for land users and land-use decision makers.

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan: Progress Report 2022 meets the legislative requirements for reporting described in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the regulatory requirements embedded in the plan. It also fulfills a public commitment to regularly monitor and show that progress was made toward achieving desired regional outcomes expressed within the approved regional plans. This report is dedicated to offering information regarding the work accomplished or the barriers encountered in 2022 for the plan's implementation.

Copies of this and earlier reports are available online at <https://landuse.alberta.ca>, the open government portal at <https://open.alberta.ca>, or by contacting the Land Use Secretariat at LUF@gov.ab.ca or 780.644.7972.

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan progress

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, named after the South Saskatchewan River watershed encompassing the southern portion of the province and home to about 44 per cent of Alberta’s population, came into effect on September 1, 2014. The plan was last amended in May 2018 to reflect the creation of the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones, regulation of motorized access limits through approval of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan, and approval of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan.

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan provides for eight new or expanded conservation areas, eight new or expanded recreation areas, and 12 new areas for “no service” camping and trail access. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan sets environmental management triggers and limits for surface water quality and air quality, and commits to developing a biodiversity management framework, a comprehensive approach to groundwater management, and a regional parks plan and trail system. The plan continues to manage watersheds and protect headwaters in the eastern slopes, promote efficient use of land to reduce human footprint on the landscape, protect against native grassland conversion, and commits to continued work on climate variability issues within the region, including flood risk and drought management.

This report highlights the status of all the strategic commitments made in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. Although timelines for some strategies in the regional plan are delayed, they continue to be commitments of the Government of Alberta. Reporting for Regional Plan supporting indicators has moved online and can be found at <https://landuse.alberta.ca>.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS CATEGORIES AND THEIR DEFINITIONS.

Implementation Status	Description
Complete	No further work required.
Complete and in implementation	Strategy is in place and being implemented. Work is ongoing to implement the strategy, including changes to ongoing programs, continuous improvement, or through succeeding government action.
In progress	Development of the initiative is underway.
Delayed	Progress has not met original timelines due to unforeseen or changing circumstances, or because it is dependent on other work that remains incomplete.
Deferred	Work is on hold pending further government direction.

Ministries listed as responsible for strategies in this report are current as of the publication of this report. Refer to the cross-reference table at the end of the report showing the ministry responsibilities now versus when the plan came into effect.

SSRP strategies

Provincial outcome: healthy economy supported by our land and natural resources

1. Tourism destination areas: Develop and implement destination management strategies and destination management plans

Ministry responsible for tourism – in progress

Description:

Alberta is enhancing tourism development zones within the South Saskatchewan region by engaging Indigenous communities and organizations, municipalities, industries and local stakeholders. Destination management strategies further enhance tourism in the Canadian Badlands, southwest Alberta and Kananaskis areas.

Progress:

Due to the expanded mandate of Travel Alberta, Alberta is taking a different approach to meeting the outcome of this strategy. The government and Travel Alberta are currently working together to ensure that policies and initiatives align to advance the government's strategic outcomes, including the development and implementation of the Tourism Strategy and the implementation of Travel Alberta's tourism development zones. Through Travel Alberta's tourism development zone analysis, the zones of Lethbridge to Medicine Hat, southern Rockies, and Foothills have been identified as zones with the most potential for growth. Work began in 2022 on engagement and development of the first phase, known as the discovery phase, of destination development plans for these three zones.

Another initiative completed in fall 2022 was the identification of potential tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities as part of the Investing in Tourism on Alberta's Crown Lands Report. Alberta is reviewing the findings to help advance tourism destination planning to support the Tourism Strategy and tourism development zone implementation.

Provincial outcome: healthy ecosystem and environment

2. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Air Quality Management Framework

Ministry responsible for environment – complete and in implementation

Description:

The South Saskatchewan Region Air Quality Management Framework is designed to proactively manage the cumulative effects of human activity on ambient air quality within the region by setting triggers and limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and ozone (O₃).

Progress:

The Government of Alberta and regulators continued to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on air quality within the region. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions. Biennial reports provide information on the progress of management responses relative to the framework. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta government website at open.alberta.ca/publications.

Since the framework was implemented in 2014, no limits have been exceeded; however, triggers have been crossed at all monitoring stations. Investigation findings to date suggest air-quality management in the region should focus on urban non-point source (e.g., transportation) emissions. Investigations are ongoing and will continue to inform and establish necessary and appropriate mitigative management actions.

Management actions are ongoing and range from policy and regulatory initiatives to reduce emissions, to voluntary actions and raising awareness and education. The following projects were initiated in 2022 and aim to explore strategies to reduce emissions:

- A provincial modelling project to evaluate strategies to mitigate exceedances of various ambient air quality objectives, including the development of an integrated assessment model to inform efficient delivery of reductions in ambient pollution and provide benefits to human health and economics.
- A provincial education and engagement campaign focused on reducing transportation emissions. This project is delivered through the Alberta Airsheds Council.

These projects aim to take a provincial approach to managing urban and transportation emissions as management of non-point source emitters is complex. It is an inter-governmental and cross-jurisdictional issue. Management actions can take a number of years to initiate, and the impact of implementing certain actions may take several additional years to be realized.

3. Complete the South Saskatchewan Region Biodiversity Management Framework

Ministry responsible for environment – due 2015, in progress

Description:

Biodiversity management frameworks seek to maintain terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity while achieving environmental, social and economic objectives for the region. Frameworks offer a systematic approach for biodiversity management.

Progress:

Work continued on developing a South Saskatchewan region biodiversity management framework. The framework proposes monitoring a suite of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity indicators that would be monitored, evaluated and reported on an ongoing basis to help assess whether biodiversity objectives are being achieved.

In 2022, the province-wide data layer for the interior habitat indicator was published on GeoDiscover Alberta (<https://geodiscover.alberta.ca>) and the Open Government portal (<https://open.alberta.ca>), together with a detailed technical report. The Government of Alberta also made progress on developing indicators for landscape connectivity and aquatic and terrestrial habitat. The province-wide data layers for landscape connectivity and aquatic and terrestrial habitat indicators will be published in 2023. Biodiversity indicator data and supporting methodology are being made available to communicate current and past conditions of a suite of complementary biodiversity indicators to inform and enable the management of cumulative effects of development on terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity.

4. Implement the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan

Ministry responsible for environment – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan helps direct land management decision making to minimize the extent, duration and rate of cumulative human disturbance for achieving landscapes with healthy and functioning ecosystems that provide a range of benefits. Opportunities for the responsible development of natural resources, tourism and recreational activities are maintained.

Progress:

Since plan approval in 2018, implementation has been achieved through internal governance and cross-ministry collaboration to align with the integrated resource management system.

Motorized-access limits continued to be met, allowing for public and industrial activities while managing for the cumulative effects of all motorized activities. This includes improved coordination and integration of approval process between Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation, Alberta Forestry and Parks, Alberta Energy and Minerals, and the Alberta Energy Regulator. Work continues to develop new information, administrative processes, and refine spatial tracking and accounting of motorized access.

Refinement of the approach to manage risk to biodiversity and watershed integrity associated with spatial human footprint is nearing completion. Progress includes developing indicators, thresholds and management responses through collaboration with several government departments and agencies. The approach is based on ecosystem needs for sustaining biodiversity and watershed integrity, while considering social and economic outcomes.

Work on a restoration strategy is nearing completion and continues to focus on both aquatic and terrestrial systems. Progress to refine and confirm data is ongoing and will be used to adjust the process. The restoration strategy will inform operational implementation and partnering opportunities on restoration activities.

The development of the Cumulative Effects Decision Support Tool, which supports the implementation of motorized access management limits, is nearing completion. Once in place, the tool will improve data management, and create transparency and efficiencies in the approval process for decision makers, applicants and interested stakeholders.

Several actions identified in the footprint management plan have been completed and continue to be maintained. This includes:

- spatial tracking and accounting of motorized access to support land management decision making and the development of seasonal Public Land Use Zone motorized trail maps;
- maintaining motorized access in compliance with the limits;
- establishment of governance structures for implementation and communication across government ministries and agencies; and
- ongoing restoration efforts of critical aquatic habitat.

5. Complete landscape management plans for Green and White Area public lands for remaining areas

Ministry responsible for environment – due 2021, deferred

Description:

Landscape management plans direct management of human disturbance to support healthy, functioning ecosystems. For Green Area (primarily forested) public lands along the Rocky Mountains, landscape management plans consider the recent, rapid growth and expanding human development and manage the impacts of competing land-use demands. Plans for the White Area (primarily settled) public lands could consider approaches for public land human footprint to be voluntarily offset through agreements with landowners for conservation of intact grasslands on private land.

Progress:

Background work and information gathering has been initiated for landscape management on public lands in the Kananaskis and Ghost planning areas. Landscape management planning has not been formally launched; however, work continues to scope out future planning in this area within the context of the Crown Land Vision. For the White Area, issues and pressures on public land grasslands in southeast Alberta will determine next steps for landscape planning.

6. Review Integrated Resource Plans in the region for their relevance and incorporate under this regional plan

Ministry responsible for environment – due 2015, delayed

Description:

Integrated Resource Plans (IRPs) reflect government's resource management policy for public lands and resources within a well-defined area and have guided decision makers for over 30 years. The following plans remain in effect until they have been reviewed for their relevance and incorporated, where required, into the regional plan, sub-regional or management plans, or through other policy direction: Kananaskis Country Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Ghost River Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Castle River Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Poll Haven Integrated Resource Plan, Bow Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan, Eden Valley Integrated Resource Plan, Crownsnest Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan, and Eastern Irrigation District Integrated Resource Management Strategy.

Progress:

Government of Alberta continues to review the region's IRPs to determine the relevance of each plan and assess the opportunity to incorporate it within new land use plans. Results from the review will be assessed by sub-regional and issue-specific planning teams to ensure the recommendations are fully addressed and direction from the IRPs are incorporated as appropriate.

The content of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills and Castle River Sub-regional Integrated Resource Plans, and the Crowsnest Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan have been assessed for inclusion in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan, the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan, the Castle Management Plan and other plans, policies and operational guidance. These IRPs have not yet been rescinded.

7. Complete the Majorville Guidelines for Land and Resource Management

Ministry responsible for environment – complete and in implementation

Description:

Majorville Guidelines for Land and Resource Management is an operational policy that recognizes the Majorville planning area for its heritage values, First Nations traditional use and unique native prairie biodiversity within existing agricultural and industrial developments. Guidelines provide direction for managing public land and natural resources at Majorville. They encourage resource development in a way that reduces footprint and avoids or minimizes impacts on sensitive environmental and cultural areas, including impacts on lands important to Indigenous peoples.

Progress:

The Majorville Guidelines were completed and approved in 2015. Implementation of the guidelines continues. An Access Management Plan was completed and approved and is being applied to the site.

8. Establish new or expand existing conservation areas on provincial Crown land

Ministry responsible for parks – delayed

Description:

Work is underway to:

- complete the designation of new and expanded conservation areas on provincial Crown land;
- manage conserved lands in order to achieve long-term conservation of biological diversity and ecosystem processes; and
- explore further opportunities for collaborative conservation management approaches in the grasslands area.

Progress:

Designation of the new or expanded conservation areas has not yet occurred.

The new and expanded conservation areas of Don Getty, Bow Valley, Bluerock, High Rock, Bob Creek and Livingstone Range Wildland Provincial Parks will be designated under the Provincial Parks Act. The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland will be designated under the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act as soon as practicable. Until these areas are designated, they are being held under the regional plan.

9. Establish the Pekisko Special Management Area and complete a management plan

Ministry responsible for parks – due 2015, delayed

Description:

To conserve important grassland habitat and support maintenance of healthy ecosystems in the Foothills Parkland sub-region, the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland was established in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The plan recognizes the

importance of managing the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland and Special Management Area to ensure quality outdoor recreation and appropriate nature-based tourism experiences while minimizing environmental impacts. Heritage rangelands preserve and protect natural features that are representative of Alberta's prairies. Grazing is used to maintain the grassland ecology.

Progress:

The draft management plan for the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland and Special Management Area was completed and taken to targeted stakeholders for input in 2018 and 2019. The draft plan identifies management objectives and strategies for lands within the Special Management Area and the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. The next step in the planning process is to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations, stakeholders and the public. Work on the draft plan has been paused.

10. Complete the development and evaluation of the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot

Ministry responsible for agriculture – complete and in implementation

Description:

Offsets are enabled under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. They are one of the important market-based tools identified through the South Saskatchewan regional planning process to help meet conservation and stewardship values on private agricultural land. Key components for an offset system will need to be considered at a local scale before being tested more broadly in Alberta. Government led a multi-stakeholder conservation offset pilot project in southeastern Alberta with the help of the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot Team and the collaborative efforts of industrial and agricultural stakeholders.

Progress:

In 2015, Government of Alberta completed the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot project and evaluation. The pilot was developed to test voluntary conservation offsets of new industrial impacts on native prairie. The pilot included:

- the development of a workable approach to quantify new industrial site offset requirements;
- targeting offset habitat project development on privately owned agricultural lands with the greatest benefit for biodiversity and species at risk;
- determining agricultural landowner costs and barriers to participation; and
- describing the role of a third party to facilitate habitat development and associated conservation offset obligations.

The final report is available at <https://www.alberta.ca/southeast-alberta-conservation-offset-pilot.aspx>.

11. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework

Ministry responsible for environment – complete and in implementation

Description:

The South Saskatchewan Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Mainstem Bow, Milk, Oldman and South Saskatchewan Rivers supports monitoring and management of cumulative changes in water quality within the main stem rivers of the region. It was developed as part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan to complement existing provincial environmental policy, legislation and regulation, and to help achieve desired regional objectives. It complements existing management systems such as those involving spill reporting or drinking water surveillance.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta and regulators continued to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on surface-water quality within the region. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions. Biennial reports provide information on the progress of management responses relative to the framework. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Open Government portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

Trigger crossings and the limit exceedance observed in 2021-2022 are consistent with previous years and investigations are ongoing. In 2022, a trend assessment tool was developed to support the management response process. Investigations

continue in the Bow and South Saskatchewan Rivers to address the total dissolved solids, specific conductance, sulphate, chloride, pH, nitrate and total nitrogen trigger crossings reported among the one South Saskatchewan River station and the four Bow River stations since 2014. In 2022, a literature review and third-party dataset compilation was undertaken to support this investigation. As well, the investigation into *Escherichia coli* exceedances in the open water season on the Milk River continues. Source tracking and potential management actions are being determined in consultation with local stakeholders.

The limit for total dissolved solids was exceeded for 2021-2022 in the winter season on the Milk River. An investigation into specific conductance and total dissolved solids in the Milk River was completed in 2021 to address exceedances previously seen at the Milk River station. It is available on the Open Government portal (open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460151358). The risks to various uses resulting from using water in winter from the Milk River are low; however, high salinity water may result in concerns related to taste and scale formation. Management actions identified for implementation in response to these risks include development of informational and communication materials for water users and water managers in the area.

Opportunities for engagement with impacted parties will continue to be sought to support any further investigation and the development of any potential mitigation measures.

12. Develop a comprehensive approach for groundwater management

Ministry responsible for environment – due 2017, in progress

Description:

The development of a comprehensive approach for groundwater management is intended to:

- confirm priority issues and areas of concern and accelerate monitoring at existing wells in the areas of concern;
- enable development and implementation of an enhanced regional monitoring program to focus on priority issues;
- support continued groundwater mapping in southern Alberta under the Provincial Groundwater Inventory Program; and
- develop policy direction related to the connectivity of groundwater to nearby surface water sources.

Progress:

A guidance document is being developed that outlines a consistent overall structure for new and amended groundwater management frameworks and describes a suite of approaches for the management of the cumulative effects of development on groundwater resources in each region. This work will guide the development of a groundwater management approach in the South Saskatchewan region. Completion of the guidance document is anticipated in 2024.

13. Develop a water storage opportunities study for the South Saskatchewan River Basin

Ministry responsible for agriculture and environment – complete

Description:

Water supply in the South Saskatchewan River Basin is naturally subject to highly variable flows. Capture and controlled release of surface-water runoff is critical in the management of the available water supply. Examining the management of existing reservoirs and developing additional water-storage sites are potential solutions.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta contracted a consultant to lead a water-storage opportunities study for the South Saskatchewan River Basin in 2014. The study assessed previously identified potential storage sites and concluded that there was limited opportunity for additional storage to improve future water security in southern Alberta. The report continues to inform planning and decision making regarding possible development of additional water-storage sites, and the assessment of both on-stream and off-stream storage sites. Water storage is key to water management in the South Saskatchewan River Basin, and optimizing water management will continue to be a priority in this region. The final report is available at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/water-storage-opportunities-in-the-south-saskatchewan-river-basin-in-alberta>

14. Strategies are ongoing and include building awareness and understanding of efficient use of land principles

Ministry responsible for municipalities and local government – complete and in implementation

Description:

A set of efficient use of land principles was developed to provide guidance for land-use planners and decision makers on public and private lands in order to promote efficient use of land in a manner that reduces the footprint of human activities on Alberta's landscape.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta continues to build awareness and educate land managers and decision makers so that efficient use of land becomes a standard way of making land-use decisions.

Provincial outcome: people-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities

15. Develop the South Saskatchewan Regional Trail System Plan

Ministries responsible for environment and parks – in progress

Description:

Developing a South Saskatchewan Regional Trail System Plan entails evaluation of recreational trail demands, existing trails inventory, trail system design options and scenarios, the class and desired experience and management objective for each trail, and existing legislative options as well as drafting, assessing, implementing and enforcing the entire plan, which could include the support of local trail groups, municipalities and recreation organizations.

Progress:

Designated motorized trail systems for summer and winter use are in place within most of the public land-use zones across the eastern slopes, and within some parks such as Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park.

Detailed trail inventories were previously completed in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills, Castle Provincial Park, Castle Provincial Wildland Park, Ghost-Waiparous, and within the Kananaskis area public lands to support existing and future planning efforts.

Both motorized and non-motorized trails continue to be developed and integrated across public lands, parks and protected areas. Extensive hiking, biking, equestrian and cross-country ski trail systems exist in Kananaskis Country, Castle Parks, and continue to expand in several places, including Cypress Hills, West Bragg Creek, the Elbow Valley and the Crowsnest Pass. Many of the motorized and non-motorized trail systems are developed and maintained in partnership with local recreation groups. This includes continued work on an updated multi-use trail plan for West Bragg Creek, and a mountain biking trail plan in the Crowsnest Pass.

Under the Crown Land Vision released in 2020, the creation of the *Trails Act* allows for the designation of both motorized and non-motorized trails on public lands. This supports the development and management of broader trail networks that minimize the impacts on environmental sensitivities and increase collaboration with recreation partnerships. Since the release of the *Trails Act*, over 7,000 km of motorized and non-motorized trails have been designated as provincial trails supporting recreation across the eastern slopes, including within the Crowsnest Pass, Livingstone and Porcupine Hills region, Kananaskis Country, and the Ghost region.

Recommendations from the Castle-Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Advisory Group continue to be implemented to support the regional trails system in southwestern Alberta. This includes expanded motorized hunting opportunities in the Porcupine Hills, mountain-biking trails in the Crowsnest Pass, and designation of the Great Divide Trail and cross-country ski trails in the Alison-Chinook area.

Recreational use and experience surveys have been initiated and are ongoing in popular non-motorized recreation locations, including the Elbow Valley, the Crowsnest Pass and Highwood Pass. These surveys provide a better understanding of distribution, use and the experiences of visitors to these areas.

16. Address flood (2013) damaged recreation areas

Ministries responsible for environment and parks – complete

Description:

Flooding in 2013 severely damaged park trails, campgrounds, day-use areas and facilities from the eastern slopes of the Rockies near Rocky Mountain House south to the Crowsnest Pass and east of Calgary along the Bow River.

Provincial funds helped to rehabilitate these areas and facilities, including the Kananaskis Golf Course, and restore infrastructure in provincial parks to pre-flood conditions. About 90 per cent of the costs associated with this rehabilitation are expected to be recovered through the Federal Disaster Recovery Program.

Progress:

The flood recovery and repair program works were completed in 2019 with a total of 267 projects completed.

Highlights include redevelopment of the Mount Romulus Campground, Elbow Valley campground and day-use areas, Gray Jay Group Camp, Kananaskis Golf Course, Three Sisters Campground, Cat Creek Day-Use Area, Sentinel Day-Use Area and Big Elbow Bridge. Repair work was conducted for several sites, including Ribbon Creek, McLean Creek Water Treatment Plant, Fish Creek Provincial Park, Elbow Valley Interpretive Signage and decommissioning of the Mount Kidd Interpretive Trail Bridge. There was also a significant effort made by volunteers to remove flood debris in Fish Creek Provincial Park.

17. Complete recreation management planning and updates to existing plans for other areas, including McLean Creek, Sibbald and Ghost-Waiparous

Ministries responsible for environment and parks – due in 2016, delayed

Description:

Recreation management plans provide the framework for the management of motorized and non-motorized recreation activities on public lands to ensure there are opportunities for a diversity of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism experiences, while minimizing environmental impacts.

Progress:

Background work, issues identification and information gathering for recreation management planning was previously initiated and will resume in 2023 for the Kananaskis Country and Ghost region. Recreation management planning will be integrated and aligned with landscape management planning for the area to enable and optimize outdoor recreation opportunities. Planning is anticipated to be initiated following completion of the background work.

18. Create public lands recreation areas in the eastern slopes

Ministry responsible for environment – delayed

Description:

This strategy will:

- create new public-land recreation areas in the eastern slopes to provide defined “no service” camping areas;
- improve access to trails, and ensure all regional sites within the provincial parks system are appropriately classed and consolidated; and
- ensure the review of potential land transfers between ministries to gain efficiencies in management approach.

Progress:

Public land recreation areas may be assessed within recreation management planning processes. They will be based on existing access, use and natural features and will be small in size. Initial suitable locations for consideration are popular random camping sites and will be confirmed through the recreation planning process. New public-land recreation areas are not being considered as part of implementation of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan at this time due to conflict with other land uses, such as grazing. Further engagement on proposed public-land recreation areas will be required.

19. Invest in existing parks facilities and designate new provincial parks and provincial recreation areas

Ministry responsible for parks – in progress

Description:

To optimize the recreation and tourism potential for both residents and visitors, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan provides for three new provincial recreation areas and five new provincial parks.

Progress:

Designation of the new or expanded provincial parks and provincial recreation areas has not yet occurred. It is anticipated the new and expanded areas of Elbow Valley, Sheep River, Chinook, Syncline and Cypress Hills Provincial Parks and the Sibbald Lake, Crowsnest Lake and Coleman provincial recreation areas will be designated under the Provincial Parks Act as soon as practicable.

Numerous investments into park facilities were completed in 2022, including a significant redevelopment of William Watson Lodge, Elbow Lake Backcountry Campground, Forks Backcountry Campground, and Ribbon Lake Chains Refurbishment. Noteworthy is the construction of upgrades and reopening of Elbow Pass Day Use Area, Little Highwood Pass Day Use Area, as well as the upgrades to Grassi Lakes Day Use and Goat Creek Day Use Area, with reopening of this popular site to visitors scheduled for summer 2023. Other noteworthy capital projects completed in 2022 include trail system expansion in Cypress Hills Provincial Park and potable water access and conversion of random camping areas into campgrounds in the Castle Provincial Park.

In addition, planning and design was initiated or completed in 2022. Construction will proceed in 2023 for several projects, including Ing's Mine Day Use Area, Peter Lougheed Wastewater Regionalization, Big Elbow Backcountry Campground, Spray West Campground Refurbishments, Dinosaur Provincial Park Trail Upgrade and Concession Building Refurbishment and Jewel Bay Backcountry Campground.

20. Develop a regional parks plan for the South Saskatchewan region

Ministry responsible for parks – due 2016, deferred

Description:

Regional park plans provide broad management direction required to achieve the integrated recreation and conservation mandate of the Alberta Provincial Parks Program. They are roadmaps for planning and managing parks within specific Land-use Framework regions of Alberta. They provide:

- a summary of recreation and conservation values on a site-by-site basis;
- an overview of existing recreational facilities;
- a detailed accounting of current commitments to pre-existing activities such as grazing and industrial activities; and
- specific instructions on how these will be managed.

These plans also identify where further site-specific planning or management is needed, and future opportunities for public engagement. As such, the plan is a starting point intended to provide Albertans with a clear picture and better understanding of the values of each park and the issues faced in retaining these values for present and future generations.

Progress:

Regional parks planning was initiated but put on hold in 2015 to focus on other priorities. Site-specific planning such as capital, trails and master planning continues to occur to provide guidance for management of parks in the region.

21. Establish a South Saskatchewan Region Land Sub-table with interested First Nations in the region

Ministry responsible for environment, parks and indigenous relationships – delayed

Description:

Engage with First Nations and the Cross-Ministry Indigenous Task Team to establish the South Saskatchewan Region First Nation Sub-table.

Progress:

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan First Nations Sub-table previously met to provide the opportunity for information exchange, collaboration, and direction on key implementation activities, including the Ghost Provincial Recreation Area, Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, Pekisko Heritage Rangeland, and the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint and Recreation Management Plans.

22. Continue First Nation involvement in watershed management planning initiatives

Ministry responsible for environment and indigenous relationships – in progress

Description:

Engagement of First Nations in water-management planning activities will continue as part of the ongoing delivery of the Water for Life Strategy and work of the Government of Alberta. The Treaty 7 First Nations Water Sub-table consisted of First Nations peoples and provincial and federal government members. The purpose of this table is to better understand current and future water needs of Treaty 7 First Nations and work toward water agreements. This forum provided an opportunity for all parties to discuss areas of alignment, best practices, water policy and implementation.

Progress:

The Treaty 7 First Nations Water Sub-table was established to work with Government of Alberta on the following projects:

- First Nation Water Needs Assessments: The water needs assessment is an inventory of existing and future water needs on reserve. It assists both the First Nations and the Government of Alberta to improve future water management and planning. Water Needs Assessments were completed for all Treaty 7 First Nations communities between 2009 and 2018.
- Water Agreements: In place for three Treaty 7 First Nations communities. The majority of the work was completed outside of this table.
- On-reserve source water protection plans: Developed with First Nations involvement.
- This sub-table was in place until 2019. Engagement in water-management planning activities continues with Indigenous Peoples based on current issues arising and as part of ongoing work of the Government of Alberta.

23. Engage Indigenous Peoples on initiatives to support tourism development

Ministry responsible for tourism and indigenous relationships – in progress

Description:

Tourism development provides opportunities for Indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the regional economy. The Government of Alberta will support Indigenous communities and organizations in identifying tourism and cultural experiences that may provide economic opportunities, while maintaining and seeking opportunities for traditional land use.

Progress:

Alberta Tourism and Sport, through Tourism Alberta, continued to work closely with Indigenous Tourism Alberta (ITA) to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in Alberta. With 2022 marking the second year of Travel Alberta's three-year partnership agreement with ITA, Travel Alberta provided ITA with \$1.25 million in support of operations, reconciliation, and Indigenous tourism businesses to position Alberta as the premier destination for Indigenous tourism in Canada.

In 2022 ITA:

- Supported Blackfoot Crossing grants and funding applications for the development of their medicine trails, Chief Crowfoot Gallery and the reopening of the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.
- Hosted a gathering at the River Cree Resort and Casino with a total of 344 delegates attending.
- Began six-month mentorships for 16 ITA members with Catalyze+.

Cultural awareness training for industry allies continues to be an important strategy supporting engagement with Indigenous Peoples. Sessions were hosted in Red Deer, Crowsnest Pass, Drumheller and Grande Prairie in 2022, with 148 total participants attending.

The Aboriginal Business Investment Fund, administered by Alberta Indigenous Relations, continues to partially or completely fund capital costs for Indigenous community-owned economic development projects, including Tourism Projects such as the Mini Thni Casino Corporation Event Center development, which compliments the existing Stoney Nakoda Resort and Casino.

24. Encourage and facilitate information sharing and education opportunities between First Nations with an interest in the region and the Government of Alberta

Ministry responsible for indigenous relationships – complete and in implementation

Description:

Information sharing helps guide and inform communities of the opportunities to practice traditional uses, including the exercise of Treaty rights.

Progress:

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Land Use fieldwork provides an opportunity for Elders, technicians, youth and government staff to further cultivate respectful relationships, explore Indigenous knowledge systems and identify areas of traditional and cultural significance. Opportunities to build on relationships, collaborate and share knowledge continued during several planning and cultural activities in 2022 (e.g., learning from Elders while walking the land during the West Bragg Creek planning, including pipe ceremonies in the Springbank Off-Stream Reservoir land-use planning).

Regular meetings at Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi with the Blackfoot Confederacy continue to build relationships and trust and provide a venue to share information and address issues. In 2022, Government of Alberta staff at Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi provided annual staff training on Blackfoot culture and protocols. Recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff members in Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi also provides a bridge to increased awareness and appreciation of Indigenous culture for staff and visitors alike.

The Blackfoot Confederacy Protocol Agreement Environment and Lands Table continues to work on the aquatic species at risk Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout project, which allows the Blackfoot Confederacy to bring together Elders and technicians to have discussions on fish, water, riparian areas and the eastern slopes area.

25. Build awareness and work with municipalities to implement land-use strategies

Ministry responsible for municipalities and local government – complete and in implementation

Description:

Land-use policy statements were updated and incorporated into the regional plan to guide future planning and decision-making by municipalities in the South Saskatchewan region. Municipal planning efforts must continue to complement provincial policies and initiatives, especially as municipalities adjust to the changing planning structure and their new responsibilities with respect to the new planning legislation and regulation.

Progress:

Municipalities continued to implement land-use policies while carrying out their planning responsibilities and day-to-day land-use decision-making processes. Municipalities are required to review and align their regulatory instruments with regional plans. For the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, a statutory compliance declaration was required by September 1, 2019. 100 per cent of Decision-Making Bodies and 76 per cent of Local Government Bodies have provided their compliance declarations as of the date of this report. The Land Use Secretariat continues to follow up with Local Government Bodies to help them with the status of their reviews and to remove barriers to completion.

Following updates to the Municipal Government Act, changes were made that will help, and in some cases require, municipalities to implement a number of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan strategies in the areas of planning, cooperation, integration and building sustainable communities.

Cross Reference Table

Over time, responsibility on behalf of the Government of Alberta, for leading a particular strategy or developing a particular supporting indicator may have changed as ministry mandates evolved. The table below lists the ministries responsible for the strategies listed in Table 2 of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (as amended in May 2018) and the ministry name at the time of publication of this report.

LEAD MINISTRY TITLES

Responsible Ministry in SSRP	Ministry name as of report publication
Ministry responsible for tourism	Tourism and Sport
Ministry responsible for the environment	Environment and Protected Areas
Ministry responsible for parks	Forestry and Parks
Ministry responsible for agriculture	Agriculture and Irrigation
Ministry responsible for municipalities and local government	Municipal Affairs
Ministry responsible for Indigenous relationships	Indigenous Relations