

Land-use Framework

# South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

Implementation  
Progress Report for  
2020 and 2021

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Land-use Framework South Saskatchewan Regional Plan: Implementation Progress Report for 2020 and 2021

Land Use Secretariat, Government of Alberta

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## Introduction

The Land-use Framework, introduced in 2008, 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, taking into account the impacts of development on the land over several years. It relies on legislation, regulations and on Land-use Framework regional plans developed for each of seven regions within the province to provide direction. To date, two regional plans – the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan for northeastern Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan for southern Alberta – have become regulations.

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 the desired economic, environmental and social outcomes and objectives for the region using a cumulative effects management approach, and align provincial policy at the regional level to set integrated outcomes. Regional plans specifically describe the strategies, actions, approaches and tools required to achieve these desired ends and they contain regulatory provisions to enable achievement of these strategies and actions for the region over the next few years. 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.

This South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Implementation Progress Report for 2020 and 2021 meets the legislative requirements described in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the regulatory requirements embedded in the plan. It fulfills a commitment to regularly monitor and answer the question “was progress made toward achieving desired regional objectives expressed within the approved regional plans?” This report is dedicated to offering information regarding the work accomplished or the barriers encountered from 2020 to 2021 for the plan's implementation.

Copies of this and earlier reports are available on-line at [landuse.alberta.ca](http://landuse.alberta.ca) or by contacting the Land Use Secretariat at [LUF@gov.ab.ca](mailto: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 twelve 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 [landuse.alberta.ca](http://landuse.alberta.ca)

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

## South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Strategies

### Provincial Outcome: Healthy Economy Supported by Our Land and Natural Resources

SSRP Outcome 1: The region’s economy is growing and diversified

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

Jobs, Economy and Innovation – in progress

##### Description:

Jobs, Economy and Innovation is enhancing tourism destination areas 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:

In 2020, the government’s efforts focused on providing immediate relief to the tourism industry deal with the pandemic related effects. As part of those efforts, the government developed a new approach to implementing its strategic outcome for tourism towards contributing to government’s economic development and diversification objectives.

In 2021, the government expanded Travel Alberta's mandate for it to function as a destination management organization to work directly with communities, businesses, and entrepreneurs to develop new tourism destinations, products, and experiences. The government's role relates to tourism policies and provides strategic direction for tourism.

The evolved nature of tourism governance has resulted in a different approach to meeting the intent of the 10-Year Tourism Strategy. The government and Travel Alberta are currently working together such that policies and initiatives align to advance the government's strategic outcome including the development and implementation of destination management strategies and plans. One specific initiative, anticipated for completion in fall 2022, is identification of potential tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities on Crown Lands.

## **Provincial Outcome: Healthy Ecosystem and Environment**

### **SSRP Outcome 2: Air quality is managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship**

#### **2. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Air Quality Management Framework**

Alberta Environment and Parks – 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 (NO<sub>2</sub>), fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>).

##### **Progress:**

Government and regulators continue 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, and the progress of management responses. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government website at: [open.alberta.ca/publications](https://open.alberta.ca/publications).

As of 2020, no limits have been exceeded for this framework; however, triggers have been exceeded at all monitoring stations. The management response is focused on improving knowledge and understanding of what is contributing to air quality conditions. Several studies have been initiated or completed in 2021 to advance the investigation phase of management response:

- A provincial study was completed to assess the impact of reduced vehicle use during the COVID pandemic on ambient NO<sub>2</sub> conditions. Findings support previous analyses suggesting transportation as a significant source of NO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- Two studies have been initiated to better understand PM<sub>2.5</sub> composition in the region and links to possible emission source drivers.
- A study was initiated to characterize O<sub>3</sub> and understand the influence of local meteorology and of air quality conditions outside of the region on elevated O<sub>3</sub> occurrences in the region.

Investigation findings to date suggest that air quality management around South Saskatchewan Region reporting stations should focus on urban non-point source (e.g. transportation) emissions; however, further investigation are recommended to confirm this finding. It is important to recognize that some 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. For example, management of non-point source emitters is complex; it is an inter-governmental and cross-jurisdictional issue. Management actions are ongoing and range from policy and regulatory initiatives to reduce emissions, to voluntary actions and raising awareness and education surrounding air quality.

### **SSRP Outcome 3: Biodiversity and ecosystem function are sustained through shared stewardship**

#### **3. Complete the South Saskatchewan Region Biodiversity Management Framework**

Alberta Environment and Parks – 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 evaluated against triggers and reported on to help assess whether biodiversity objectives are being achieved.

In 2021, a stream connectivity indicator and an updated interior habitat indicator were developed by the Government of Alberta. Province-wide data layers for the stream connectivity indicator were published on [GeoDiscover Alberta](#) and the [Open Government portal](#). A province-wide data layer for the interior habitat indicator and a detailed technical report will be published in 2022. 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**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

**Description:**

The Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land and 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, internal governance and cross-ministry collaboration efforts have continued to promote a coordinated approach to implementing the plan and align with an integrated resource management approach.

Motorized access limits continued to be managed to provide access to the public and for industrial activities. This includes improved coordination and integration of approval process between Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, Alberta Energy, 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 Spatial Human Footprint approach to develop thresholds to set desired future conditions based on ecosystem needs for biodiversity and watersheds considering social and economic outcomes continued with additional research and numerous discussions with key departments and agencies. This is all part of managing ecosystems and habitat, sustaining biodiversity and watershed integrity at a sub-regional scale as part of a system to manage cumulative effects of human footprint.

Work continues on developing the Restoration Strategy building off existing work, focusing on two components – aquatic and terrestrial. Progress has been made to further refine data including identifying known road locations, confirming the inclusion of data and field visits, and to confirm and support data being used in analysis. Phase 1 of strategy development assessed motorized roads and trails and used the READI model to assess risk of sediment contributions. The Native Trout Recovery Initiative will comprise the aquatic component and will look at ways to bridge the water-land interface.

Several actions identified in the footprint 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 disturbance limits; establishment of governance structures for implementation and communication across government ministries; and ongoing restoration efforts of critical aquatic habitat.

**5. Complete landscape management plans for Green and White Area public lands for remaining areas**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – 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 was previously initiated for landscape management on public lands in the Kananaskis and Ghost planning areas. This work has not been formally launched through First Nation and public engagement. Work continues to scope planning in this area within the context of the new Crown Land Vision. For the White Area, issues and pressures on public lands, focused on 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**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – 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, Crowsnest Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan, and Eastern Irrigation District Integrated Resource Management Strategy.

**Progress:**

Government continues to review the region's IRPs to determine the relevance of each plan and assess the opportunity to incorporate it within updated 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 Sub-regional IRP, the Castle River Subregional IRP and the Crowsnest Corridor Local IRP 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.

**7. Complete the Majorville Guidelines for Land and Resource Management**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – 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**

Alberta Environment and Parks – delayed

**Description:**

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

**Progress:**

Designation of the new or expanded conservations 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*; and 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**

Alberta Environment and 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 as well as the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. The next step in the planning process is to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations, stakeholders and the public.

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

Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development – complete and in implementation

**Description:**

Offsets are enabled under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and are identified as 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 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**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – 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 continues 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, and the progress of management responses. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at [open.alberta.ca/publications](https://open.alberta.ca/publications).

Trigger exceedances observed in 2020 are consistent with previous years. Further analysis, including trend assessment work, is underway to assess whether any will be investigated. 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 exceedances reported among the one South Saskatchewan River station and the four Bow River stations since 2014.

In 2020, a surface water quality limit for Escherichia coli in the open water season was exceeded on the Milk River and is undergoing investigation to understand the cause and determine the need for additional action. The St. Mary River diversion structure failure in May 2020 may have played a role in this exceedance. The limit for total dissolved solids was exceeded in both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 winter seasons on the Milk River. The investigation of previous specific conductance and total dissolved solids limit exceedances was completed and the report is available on the Open Government portal ([open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460151358](https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460151358)). A risk assessment was completed in 2021 and indicated minimal risks, primarily associated with aesthetic concerns (i.e. taste) and scale formation. Other risks associated with irrigation water quality are largely mitigated by the limit exceedances only occurring in winter. The results of the risk assessment have been used to identify management actions for implementation in collaboration with stakeholders.

**12. Develop a comprehensive approach for groundwater management**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – 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:**

Approaches for the regional scale management of groundwater quality and quantity are being developed to support the management of cumulative effects of development on groundwater resources across the province. This work will guide the development of a groundwater management approach in the South Saskatchewan region.

**13. Develop a water storage opportunities study for the South Saskatchewan River Basin**  
Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development – 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 Water Storage Opportunities in the South Saskatchewan River Basin in Alberta (2014) results continue to inform planning and decision-making regarding possible development of additional water storage sites as well as 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:  
[www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/irr15015/\\$file/ssrb- water-storage-main-report.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/irr15015/$file/ssrb- water-storage-main-report.pdf)

**SSRP Outcome 5: Land is used efficiently to reduce the amount of area that is taken up by permanent or long-term developments associated with the built environment**

- 14. Strategies are ongoing (and include building awareness and understanding of efficient use of land principles)**  
Alberta Municipal Affairs – 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**

**SSRP Outcome 6: Quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for outdoor recreation and the preservation and promotion of the region's unique cultural and natural heritage**

- 15. Develop the South Saskatchewan Regional Trail System Plan**  
Alberta 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. The 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 and Castle Parks.

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 and parks. Extensive hiking, biking and equestrian trails systems have been developed in Kananaskis Country, Castle Parks, and continue to expand in several places including 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.

Under the Crown Land Vision released in 2020, the newly created *Trails Act* will allow for the designation of both motorized and non-motorized trails on public lands. This work will support the development and management of broader trail networks, minimize the impacts on environmental sensitivities, and increase collaboration with recreation partnerships.

A recreation advisory group was established to provide recommendations for regional recreation opportunities for the Castle-Livingstone-Porcupine Hills region. This group provided advice in support of both motorized and non-motorized recreation in the area.

**16. Address flood (2013) damaged recreation areas**  
Alberta 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 are now helping to rehabilitate these areas and facilities (including the Kananaskis Golf Course) and restoring 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**  
Alberta 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 initiated in 2018 for public lands within the Kananaskis 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.

**18. Create Public Lands Recreation Areas in the eastern slopes areas**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – 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 potential land transfers between ministries are reviewed to gain efficiencies in management approach.

**Progress:**

Public land recreation areas are being assessed within the 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 these proposed public land recreation areas will be required.

**19. Invest in existing parks facilities and designate new Provincial Parks and Provincial Recreation Areas**  
Alberta Environment and 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 that 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 were completed including a significant redevelopment of William Watson Lodge, Barrier Lake Day Use Area, Fish Creek Washroom Facility Upgrades and Elkwood Wastewater Treatment Plant. Noteworthy was the completion of upgrades to the Yamnuska Trail, re-opening of this popular site to visitors, and construction refurbishment of Troll Falls Parking Lot and Turbine Backcountry Campground in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park.

Other noteworthy capital projects that were completed include trail system expansion in Cypress Hills Provincial Park, refurbishment of the Hoodoo Trail at Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park/Áísínai’pi, and the construction of the Equestrian Campground at Castle Provincial Park.

In addition, planning and design was initiated or completed and construction will proceed for several projects including Grassi Lakes Day Use Area, Goat Creek Day Use Area, Elbow Pass Day Use Area, Little Highwood Pass Day Use Area, Elbow Lake Backcountry Campground, Forks Backcountry Campground, Ribbon Lake Chains Refurbishment, Fish Creek Master Trails Strategy Implementation and Bow Valley Ranch Visitors Centre Refurbishment. Projects beginning the planning and design phase include Ing’s Mine Day Use Area, Peter Lougheed Wastewater Regionalization, Big Elbow Backcountry Campground and Jewel Bay Backcountry Campground.

**20. Develop a regional parks plan for the South Saskatchewan region**  
Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2016, deferred

**Description:**

Regional parks 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 as well as future opportunities for public engagement. As such, the plan is a starting point intended to provide Albertans with a clear picture and better understanding on 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 in order to focus on other priorities.

**SSRP Outcome 7: Indigenous peoples are included in land use planning**

**21. Establish a South Saskatchewan Region Land Sub-table with interested First Nations in the region**  
Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Indigenous Relations – 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 had been meeting regularly 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, and Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. The sub-table contributed to engagement and consultation for the approved Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint and Recreation Management Plans.

The Watching the Land Working Group of First Nations finalized the “Watching the Land” report. The working group collaboratively gathered information and co-developed a report about historic, current and planned culture based environmental monitoring initiatives within the region. The report outlines steps towards developing environmental monitoring programs and a series of recommendations to be used in advancing ongoing conversations between the Government of Alberta and the First Nation members of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan First Nation Sub-Table interested in Indigenous Community Based Monitoring.

**22. Continue First Nation involvement in watershed management planning initiatives**  
Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Indigenous Relations – in progress

**Description:**

Engagement of First Nations in water management planning activities will continue as part of ongoing delivery of the Water for Life Strategy and work of Alberta Environment and Parks. The Treaty 7 First Nations Water Sub-table consists 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 provides 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 on the following projects:

- **First Nation Water Needs Assessments:** The water needs assessment is an inventory of existing and future water needs on-reserve and assists both the First Nations and Alberta Environment and Parks 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:** Water Agreements are 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:** On-reserve source water protection plans were developed by First Nations involved. Stoney Nakoda Nation was the only First Nation involved that did not implement the plan.

First Nations engagement in water management planning activities continues, which would be broader in scope than the Treaty 7 Water Sub-table, 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**  
Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation and Alberta Indigenous Relations – in progress

**Description:**

Tourism development provides opportunities for Indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the regional economy. Jobs, Economy and Innovation will help Indigenous communities and organizations identify tourism and cultural experiences that may provide economic opportunities, while maintaining and seeking opportunities for traditional land use.

**Progress:**

Jobs, Economy and Innovation continues to work closely with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and Indigenous Tourism Alberta (ITA) to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in southern Alberta.

In 2020, the Government of Alberta provided support to Travel Alberta and Indigenous Tourism Alberta to assist and sustain existing ITA members through the pandemic while creating and establishing new relationships.

In 2021, the Kainai First Nation, Siksika First Nation, Piikani First Nation as well as Eden Valley Bears Paw First Nation took part in ITA's Community Pathway Program - a 7-week interactive training program on Community-owned Grassroots tourism planning and creation.

Blackfoot Crossing has been supported through ITA grants and funding applications for the development of their medicine trails, Chief Crowfoot Gallery, and the reopening of the park slated for 2022.

Two Cultural Awareness training sessions were hosted for over 100 Industry allies at the Stoney Nakoda Resort and Casino, and one of 50 participants in Lethbridge. Two additional trainings were hosted in Calgary for the entire Travel Alberta team. In 2021 there was an influx of members in this region that now reaches 81 in total.

In 2021, the overall contribution of Indigenous tourism to Alberta's GDP was at 70 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, nearly twice as high as 2020. Several members exceeded their 2019 pre-Covid sales during the summer and are on track to top those numbers in 2022. Aligned with Travel Alberta's Destination Development goals, ITA supported Indigenous entrepreneurs to grow their businesses including:

- Providing stimulus funding to more than 55 ITA members who could not access support elsewhere.
- Providing industry support to 20 members for building new websites to accommodate online bookings and business marketing tools.
- Facilitating mentorship programs to 11 members including face-to-face discussions with successful entrepreneurs
- Facilitating a seven-week Community Tourism Development Program to five communities

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.

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

Alberta Indigenous Relations – 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. The COVID pandemic prevented opportunities to further these conversations.

Educational experiences are continuing in the Kananaskis and Castle areas, focusing on improving relationships with local Indigenous communities and organizations, providing gathering and meeting space for community teachings and opportunities to inform the public about cultural heritage.

In 2021, the Indigenous cultural sensitivity program, co-created with Piikani Nation, was implemented as part of the commitments made in the Castle Management Plan and the Castle Cooperative Management Terms of Reference. The Government of Alberta and Piikani Nation continue to work on several topics including Indigenous employment, harvesting, research, Indigenous ways of knowing and systemic structures and processes related to Government of Alberta. These efforts continue to address issues, adapt and refine cooperative management approaches, and break down barriers and misunderstandings.

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 2021, Government of Alberta staff at Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi provide 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.

#### **SSRP Outcome 8: Community development needs are anticipated and accommodated**

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

Alberta Municipal Affairs – complete and in implementation

###### **Description:**

The land-use policies in the *Municipal Government Act* were repealed when the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan was adopted by the Government of Alberta in 2014, and pre-existing 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 in the course of 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.

Under the new *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 titles of lead ministries in effect as of this report and department titles when the regional plan came into force.

2014	2021
Aboriginal Relations	Indigenous Relations
Agriculture and Rural Development	Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development
Culture	Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Energy	Energy
Innovation and Advanced Education	Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development	Environment and Parks
Human Services	Seniors and Housing
Infrastructure	Infrastructure
Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour	Labour
Municipal Affairs	Municipal Affairs
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	Jobs, Economy and Innovation (Tourism) Environment and Parks (Parks and Recreation)
Transportation	Transportation
Treasury Board and Finance	Treasury Board and Finance