

Special Places:

Candidate Sites Selected for Local Committee Review in the Foothills Natural Region

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

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

The selection of five Foothills candidate sites is an important milestone in Special Places. It marks significant progress towards completing a network of protected areas by 1998 and reflects the importance of local input into the selection of sites.

All sites sent to Local Committees are selected to contribute to the Level 1 Themes identified throughout Alberta. Level 1 Themes are broad landform types which can be easily measured from existing sources of information like maps and aerial photos.

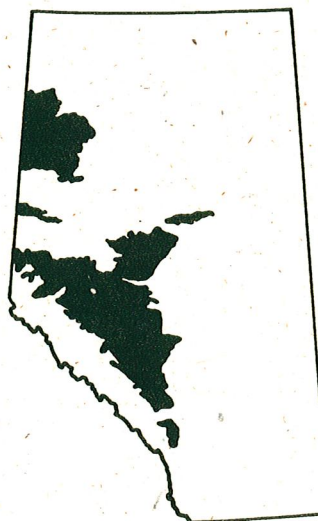
The Provincial Coordinating Committee has now forwarded five Foothills candidate sites to Local Committees for review. A map and description of these sites -- called Sheep River, Pouce Coupe, Sundance, Pioneer, and Otawau Lake-Donnelly River -- can be found on the next page.



The forming of Local Committees marks another step toward the completion of a network of protected areas in the Foothills Natural Region. Additional candidate sites will soon be announced to close gaps in the region's protected areas network.

The Foothills Natural Region extends north from about Turner Valley along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains in a gradually widening belt to just north of Grande Cache. Vegetation, geology and landforms separate the two subregions -- Lower Foothills subregion and Upper Foothills subregion.

The Lower Foothills subregion includes rolling topography created by deformed sandstone and shale as well as erosional remnants with flat-lying bedrock. The wide variety of trees reflects the transitional nature of this subregion's forests.



The Upper Foothills subregion occurs on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Bedrock outcrops of marine shales and non-marine sandstones are frequent. Forests in this subregion are almost all coniferous.

Special Places:

Overview of Candidate Sites

The five candidate sites in the Foothills Natural Region are:

Sheep River

The Sheep River candidate site is located in the Lower Foothills subregion roughly 70 km south-west of Calgary. The site includes significant hydrological and landform features, spectacular aesthetic features, highly diverse vegetation communities and a key wildlife movement corridor.

Pouce Coupe

Located approximately 80 km north-west of Grande Prairie, the key feature of this candidate site is the Pouce Coupe River which is the single most important watershed within the Saddle Hills. The area contains vast treed muskegs and untreed fens, floating bogs, and deciduous forest. It also contains 14 Trumpeter Swan nesting sites.

Sundance

Located 30 km north-west of Edson, the site represents significant habitat diversity, with moist spruce/fir woodlands and scenic, diverse and productive wildlife corridors.

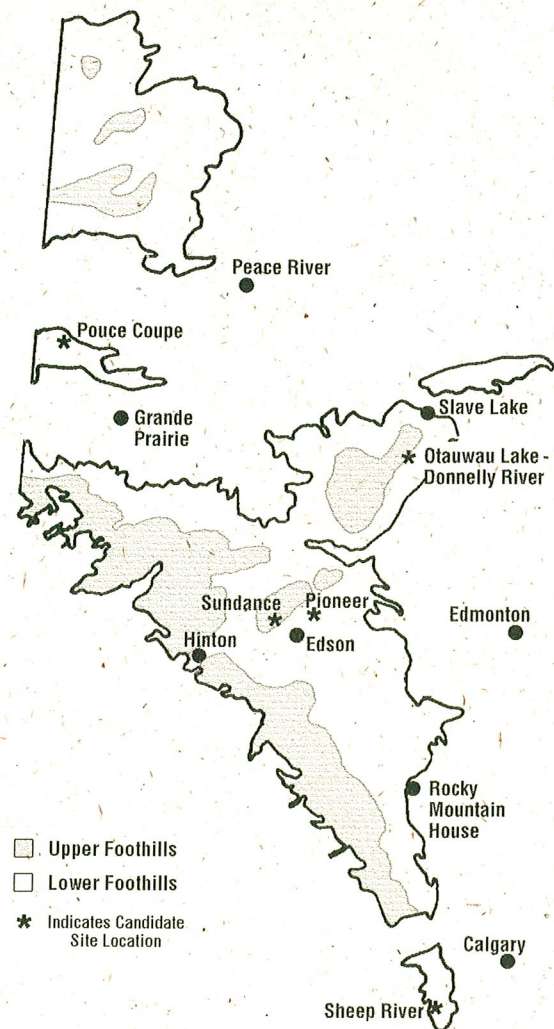
This site is characterised by steep valley walls resulting from a unique glacial spillway feature. Other important features include cliffs, hoodoos and the Sundance Lakes.

Pioneer

The Pioneer candidate site is located approximately 30 km north-east of Edson and includes Bear, Long and Horseshoe lakes as well as other small lakes and extensive wetlands interspersed through areas of mixedwood forest.

Otauwau Lake-Donnelly River

The area is located approximately 25 km east of Slave Lake and has areas of large floating bog or muskeg which drops off as steep, unstable drainage to a large area in the northwest. The eastern terrain is rolling with large pine and white spruce stands and several small well-defined drainage systems.



Special Places:

Questions and Answers About the Next Steps in the Process

How are candidate sites selected?

Over the past two years, Albertans nominated 95 sites for consideration as Special Places in the Foothills Natural Region. These sites were reviewed and prioritized by the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) -- a multi-stakeholder group -- and the government. Based on this prioritization, the Minister of Environmental Protection has forwarded five candidate sites to Local Committees for review. Other candidate sites in the Foothills Natural Region are expected to be announced in the near future.

What do Local Committees do?

Local Committee review is an important step in the Special Places process. These volunteer committees develop site-specific management principles and recommend boundary options and appropriate land-use activities for each candidate site. Members can include local elected officials, tenure holders, industry representatives and various local interest groups.

How does the Special Places process handle the rights of disposition holders such as grazing or oil and gas leases, within candidate sites?

From the beginning of the Special Places process, the Alberta government stated it would honour existing commitments to leaseholders. Renewals and assignments will follow normal approval processes and completion of any previously approved projects will be supported.

Local committees will ensure that the review process represents leaseholders' rights and interests within the candidate site as recommendations are developed for review by the PCC and the government.

What gaps still remain in the Foothills Natural Region's protected areas network?

The Foothills Natural Region contains two subregions: Lower Foothills and Upper Foothills.

While existing protected areas in the Upper Foothills subregion represent some important landscape themes, most are under-represented. In the Lower Foothills subregion, all themes are under-represented.

What kinds of protection options are available for candidate sites?

If a Local Committee decides to recommend a site for protection under the Special Places program, there are a number of designation options available. Protective designations range from recreation areas - with the greatest opportunity for a variety of uses on a site -- to ecological reserves -- which have the highest amount of protection and limit use to only a few, specific activities.

In the event that the Local Committee cannot support the candidate site, it will not continue through the designation process.

For More Information ...

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

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

For more information about Special Places in the Foothills Natural Region, contact one of the following Alberta Environmental Protection regional offices:

Edson
(403) 723-8383

Peace River
(403) 624 6402

Calgary
(403) 297-6070

If you are calling long distance, call the government Rite operator toll free at 310-000 and ask for the number to which you want to be connected.

You can also get more information by writing to:

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

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

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

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



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