

# Frequently asked questions:

# Bighorn Country Proposal

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## What is Bighorn Country?

- Bighorn Country includes all public lands located in the western part of the North Saskatchewan Region, extending from the borders of Banff National Park eastward towards Drayton Valley.
- The Bighorn Country area contains stunning mountain ranges, alpine lakes, foothills, massive river valleys and forests.
- It includes the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River, which supplies safe drinking water to over one million people in downstream communities.
- It provides key habitat to numerous species identified as rare or at-risk including grizzly bear, wolverine, harlequin duck, Athabasca rainbow trout and bull trout.
- Bighorn Country offers opportunities for world-class outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism, with some of the greatest unrealized tourism potential in the province.
- Indigenous Peoples have a long history of traditions on this land and value the landscape for their nourishment, identity and spirituality..

## How can Albertans inform planning for Bighorn Country?

- Consultation with stakeholders, municipalities, Indigenous Peoples and the public on the Bighorn Country proposal will be open from November 23, 2018 to January 31, 2019.
- All interested parties can find more information and provide input on the future of Bighorn Country via an online survey at [TalkAEP.alberta.ca](http://TalkAEP.alberta.ca).
- Feedback received during this phase of engagement will be instrumental as we refine the management intent of any new and expanded parks, protected areas and public land use zones and finalize the Bighorn Country project.
- Over this consultation period, we will gain your input on the future of the Bighorn area. If we proceed, further consultation with stakeholders, municipalities, Indigenous Peoples, and the public would be held to inform recreation and management planning – such as location and use of trails. Changes on the landscape will not be immediate as we continue to consult on the details.

## Why is enhanced management for the Bighorn Country needed now?

- Alberta and Bighorn Country are changing. Population growth, economic development and changing levels and types of recreational use are putting added pressure on a finite landscape. These cumulative impacts strain the landscape and threaten the unique characteristics that draw us to Bighorn in the first place.
- On public lands industrial users have created additional footprints which are also used by recreational users even when it is inappropriate or unsafe. This can contribute to damage to the land and degradation of critical fish-bearing streams.
- Enhanced management of the Bighorn Country would conserve the landscape while supporting traditional Indigenous use, diversifying the economy and providing improved outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism experiences.
- The proposed mix of public lands and parks would increase recreation opportunities, boost economic development, preserve the natural environment and protect the vital headwaters in this incredible region of our province.

## How was it developed?

- The Bighorn Country proposal has been developed from the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP), which has been underway since 2014, including ongoing consultations with people who live, work and have an interest in the region.
- A Regional Advisory Council consisting of members representing a range of perspectives and experience was established to provide recommendations for consideration in the development of the regional plan. These recommendations were considered in the development of the Bighorn Country.
- The North Saskatchewan Region is complex, with various, strong views on land and resource management, and as the draft NSRP is being developed, it has become clear that targeted consultation and action in some key areas is required to arrive at a regional plan that is reflective of the region's diverse views and goals. The Bighorn Country proposal is one of these targeted consultations.
- Following further consultation with Indigenous Peoples, stakeholders, municipalities and the public, a refined and final version of Bighorn Country would be implemented and eventually incorporated into the NSRP, once it is developed.

## What is happening with the NSRP?

- Bighorn Country is being advanced ahead of the NSRP as a focused priority in recognition of longstanding discussions, and in having received significant input already through the NSRP process.
- The Government continues to support regional planning approach because it encourages stakeholders, municipalities, Indigenous Peoples and the public to work collaboratively to respect and care for the land while managing for cumulative effects and achieving desired economic, societal and environmental goals.

## How will Indigenous Peoples be consulted on the Bighorn Country?

- One-on-one meetings will be arranged with First Nations and Metis communities interested in discussing or submitting feedback on the proposed Bighorn Country.
- NSRP First Nations and Working Group Tables will continue to meet after the launch of consultation on Bighorn Country.
- Alberta continues to meet with Indigenous communities across the province to discuss co-operative management and guardian programs in Alberta's parks and protected areas. These discussions will continue in relation to parks and protected areas within Bighorn Country.
- We have been engaging or consulting with 31 First Nations, 8 Metis Settlements, the Metis Settlements General Council, and the Metis Nation of Alberta, including Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, and numerous Metis Locals, specifically on developing the NSRP. Since 2013, there have been more than 185 meetings and 16 workshops held with Indigenous Peoples on the NSRP.
- Feedback provided by Indigenous Peoples during the development of the NSRP is being used to inform Bighorn Country.

## What is the management intent of the Bighorn Country?

- Protect headwaters and watershed integrity;
- Conserve and maintain biodiversity;
- Recognize Indigenous Peoples rights and traditional uses;
- Provide high quality outdoor recreation opportunities; and,
- Support economic diversification and increase tourism opportunities.

## What are the land designations proposed for Bighorn Country?

- Provincial Parks conserve nature. They provide opportunities for nature-based recreation, tourism and education, which are dependent on and compatible with the conservation objective.
- Wildland Provincial Parks focus on the conservation of nature with significant opportunities for backcountry and wilderness recreation in a relatively undisturbed state. These areas are open to hunting, trapping, fishing and other traditional uses, as well as nature-based touring, guiding and outfitting. OHV use is allowed on designated trails.
- Provincial Recreation Areas (PRA) provide nature-based outdoor recreation, tourism and educational opportunities. They can include support facilities and access to adjacent water bodies and public land for outdoor recreation. They may be intensively developed and include tourism accommodations and facilities, or they may remain largely undeveloped to provide a place primarily for trail-based activities such as motorized OHV recreation.
- Public land use zones enable greater authority to manage priority issues including protection of watercourses and sensitive areas, recreational access, sustainable nature-based tourism development and retention of environmentally sensitive features. Public land use zones provide the authority to designate trails, ensuring that recreational pressures are appropriately timed and placed – and that public land user conflict can be minimized or mitigated.

How many new  
and expanded  
parks are  
proposed for  
Bighorn Country?

- Each of these designations has unique management objectives that are complimentary to each other to enhance recreation opportunities and support nature-based tourism, while ensuring protection of ecologically sensitive landscapes and features.
- There are four new or expanded parks proposed for Bighorn Country:
  - Bighorn Wildland Provincial Park
    - Focus is on high-quality hunting, fishing and other nature-based recreation experiences while conserving nature. Equestrian and off-highway vehicle use would continue, where appropriate, on designated trails. Indigenous cooperative management would be explored through ongoing dialogue.
  - David Thompson Provincial Park
    - Incorporates the existing Thompson Creek and Kootenay Plains Provincial Recreation Areas and the Kootenay Plains Ecological Reserve. Focus is on developing services, facilities and infrastructure to support current and future demand for recreation and tourism opportunities while prioritizing conservation.
  - North Saskatchewan River Provincial Park
    - Would protect important natural landscapes in the Lower Foothills Natural sub-region that are underrepresented in the parks system and unique to Bighorn Country. The area is well suited to water-based recreation, hiking, mountain biking and equestrian uses. Parks management planning would help determine the need for specific trails and infrastructure to support recreation, conservation, tourism and education.
  - Ya Ha Tinda Provincial Park
    - Ya Ha Tinda Provincial Park contains diverse landscape types and a wide range of experiences. It is an important staging area for the Bighorn Wildland Provincial Park, providing access for equestrian and other recreational users. Parks management planning would help us determine the need for specific trails and infrastructure.
- These parks would add more than 384,325 hectares of legislatively protected lands (369,395 ha within the Wildland Provincial Park and 14,931 hectares within the three Provincial Parks), covering 0.6% of Alberta.

## How many new and expanded Provincial Recreation Areas (PRA) are proposed in Bighorn Country?

- There are 4 new or expanded PRAs in the Bighorn Country area:
  - Bighorn Dam PRA
    - Focus is on providing trails, staging areas and campgrounds to suit different recreation and tourism uses. OHV and snowmobile use would be permitted on designated trails, and a staging area would link campgrounds to the existing trail network in surrounding areas. Appropriate commercial development would be identified through the parks management planning process.
  - Hummingbird PRA
    - An important campground and staging area that provides access to the Bighorn Wildland Provincial Park or the Kiska-Willson Public Land Use Zone. Focus would be on providing trails, staging areas and campgrounds to suit different recreation and tourism uses. Appropriate commercial recreation and tourism development would be identified through the parks management planning process.
  - Shunda PRA
    - Expansion and consolidation of the Fish Lake and Goldeye Lake Provincial Recreation Areas. Focus would be providing facilities and infrastructure to suit diverse recreation and tourism uses. Appropriate commercial recreation and tourism development would be identified through the parks management planning process.
  - Snow Creek PRA
    - Minor expansion and opportunity to formalize Nordic ski trails while meeting future demand for commercial recreation and tourism development opportunities. Would provide a staging area for snowmobiles to access adjacent trails.

## What are the proposed public land use zones in the Bighorn Country?

- The Kiska/Willson Public Land Use Zone boundaries would be reconfigured. This public land use zone would continue to support exploration for, and development of, coal, limestone and other resources. The northern portion would continue to provide commercial recreation and nature-based tourism opportunities, while the southern portion would provide low-impact backcountry recreation and nature-based tourism experiences.
- A new West Country Public Land Use Zone is proposed for land just east of Bighorn Backcountry, which would help us better manage recreation and tourism. The new PLUZ would continue to permit industrial uses, such as forestry and energy, and existing public land recreation areas would remain. Designated trails would remain unchanged in the public land use zone until consultation with public, Indigenous Peoples and stakeholders on recreation management planning is complete. Recreation and tourism planning would include new trails, staging areas and other infrastructure.

### Would OHV use be permitted in parks and protected areas?

- No major changes to OHV use on designated trails are proposed in the Bighorn Country parks and protected areas, and no rollback in designated OHV trails is planned.
- No changes to motorized access would be implemented in the West Country Public Land Use Zone until recreation management planning and engagement has been completed.
- OHV use would be permitted on existing designated trails and where a management plan, trails plan or regulation specifies.
- In areas where designation of trails has not yet occurred, use of existing access can continue, but no new trails, routes or access may be developed in parks without a park management plan.
- OHV use will continue to be prohibited in the beds and shores of permanent water bodies, watercourses and wetlands and use of appropriate or designated watercourse crossings is required.
- Where OHV use is currently permitted in provincial recreation areas, it would continue on designated off-highway vehicle trails and areas.

### Why would you not eliminate OHV use on designated trails?

- The boundary of the parks and public lands have been carefully designed to ensure sensitive areas are protected, while allowing OHV users to continue to enjoy the land with minimal impact.
- Significant investment has been made by the Government of Alberta, Bighorn Monitoring Standing Committee and other user groups and individuals to ensure the designated trail network is well maintained and sustainable.

### Would fishing, hunting and trapping be permitted in parks and protected areas?

- Fishing is permitted within provincial recreation areas, provincial parks and wildland provincial parks, subject to existing regulations.
- Hunting and trapping is permitted in wildland provincial parks, and in some provincial parks, subject to existing legislation and policy.
- In provincial parks where hunting is permitted, hunters are required to obtain a Parks Firearm Discharge Permit. The permit would outline site-specific area restrictions in discharge.
- Existing registered trapping areas would be honored. Parks would work with trappers to determine their needs for things like infrastructure and motorized access.
- Final policy decisions regarding hunting and trapping in some areas of the proposed parks would be determined as part of parks management planning, which would include engagement and consultation with Indigenous Peoples, stakeholders, municipalities and the public.

### Would my access to recreation in Bighorn Country change?

- Access to recreation would be supported with a focus on land stewardship and recreation management that ensures recreation would be place-appropriate, safe and available for future generations.
- On public lands, establishment and/or amendment of existing Public Land Use Zones, advancement on landscape management planning and recreation management planning supports safe and sustainable recreation and tourism experiences.

### Would random camping be permitted?

- Formalized recreation management planning and landscape management planning would further support recreation and nature-based tourism opportunities—such as staging areas, boat launches, campsites and other forms of private sector fixed-roof accommodation—to augment other recreational and tourism opportunities in the region.
- Random camping would be allowed on vacant public land, which includes public land use zones.
- Backcountry or tent camping would continue to be permitted unless there is a risk to public safety or environmentally sensitive areas, incompatibility with adjacent activity or existing dispositions issued under the Public Lands Act prohibit public access.
- In public land use zones, concerns associated with random motorized camping are assessed and managed to lessen impacts on the environment and promote more desirable camping experiences.
- “Random” foot-access backcountry camping would be permitted in the Wildland Provincial Park, except within one kilometer of designated backcountry campgrounds and/or designated trails.
- Existing random camping areas could be formalized in the future to enable enhancing recreation experiences, ensure camping is safe, accessible and a positive experience for users.

### What impact would Bighorn Country have on the energy and mineral industries?

- The impact would be negligible. The highest value coal and mineral resources in the area and the vast majority of existing Crown mineral agreements are within the Kiska/Willson Public Land Use Zone, which supports energy and mineral development.
- Any petroleum and natural gas agreements located within proposed parks in Bighorn Country would be honoured as existing commitments.

### What impact would Bighorn Country have on the forestry industry?

- The impact would be negligible as there is no forest tenure within the parks and protected areas being established in Bighorn Country.

### What impact would Bighorn Country have on grazing?

- Existing grazing commitments would be honoured in areas designated as Provincial Recreation Areas, provincial parks, and Wildland Provincial Parks.
- Where there is overlap between lands designated under the Provincial Parks Act and active range allotments within the Rocky Mountains Forest Reserve, the range allotments would continue to be administered by Alberta Environment and Parks.

What impact would Bighorn Country have on the tourism sector?

- Bighorn Country contains some of the best unrealized tourism potential in the province, and the proposal would support growth of commercial recreation and nature-based tourism that is important to the local and regional economy.
- Outdoor recreation and tourism-based businesses rely on a well-managed system of recreation opportunities to grow and thrive. Economic benefits of recreation management planning on public land includes enabling opportunities for nature-based tourism where desired by local communities.
- The proposed mix of parks and public lands provide different types of development opportunities. Combined, they would support effective tourism development, which would directly benefit businesses and communities.

What would these proposed changes cost?

- The Government of Alberta is earmarking \$52.1 million toward developing Bighorn Country, creating new opportunities for economic development, tourism, conservation, and recreation in a growing province.

When would proposed changes come in to effect?

- Any parks or public land changes would only happen after input from this consultation period has been considered.
- Recreational and management planning would require further consultation with and input from Indigenous Peoples, stakeholders, municipalities, and the public over the next year at least before any changes would be developed and implemented.