

# South Saskatchewan Regional Plan - RAC Advice

## Comments For Sustainable Recreation

The **South Saskatchewan Region (SSR)** is a diverse landscape from the Rocky Mountains, foothills and parklands in the west to prairie and grassland environments stretching to the eastern border. These ecosystems provide for unique and attractive recreational opportunities. An increasing population will look for highly valued recreational opportunities and inevitably influence the anthropogenic impact of Alberta's natural areas. Alberta is home to amazing, inspiring, and diverse landscapes. CPAWS SAB is supportive of efforts to increase a variety of **sustainable recreational opportunities** for all Albertans to get out and appreciate Alberta's wilderness.

**Recreation** and **tourism** are a large focus of the recommendations put forward by the **Regional Advisory Council** for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and are already significant economic contributors to the diverse economy of the region. In many areas of this region, there is the potential to increase this economic contribution and potentially *surpass* the economic contribution of more traditional resource extraction practices.

It is important, however, to understand that recreation and tourism activities *have their own impacts* on the landscape's ecological integrity; these impacts must be accounted for in the SSRP. For example, significant infrastructure developments (e.g., resorts, golf courses) in ecologically sensitive areas should not be permitted. It is always possible to *avoid, minimize, and mitigate the impacts of recreation and the plan should reflect that commitment*.

### FEEDBACK REGARDING RAC ADVICE:

We are in full support of the detailed RAC recommendations pertaining to **off-road vehicle recreation** (that it will only be permitted on designated trails, routes, or areas, that it not be permitted in riparian areas or wetlands, and that unmanaged camping should only be permitted in designated areas). These should be implemented immediately. The challenge in the past with motorized recreation, however, has not necessarily been the lack of regulation but the *lack of enforcement*. The Alberta Government must *demonstrate a commitment* to fund enforcement of designated and sustainable trail use in motorized recreation areas over the long term.

One of our primary concerns pertains to comments in the RAC recommendations that areas currently lack the **"critical mass"** of tourism attractions and infrastructure. We are unclear what "critical mass" is and how our current tourism infrastructure isn't meeting demand. Understanding more clearly where our current system is falling short will help to *create concrete planning actions* to address these shortcomings.



### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DRAFT PLAN:

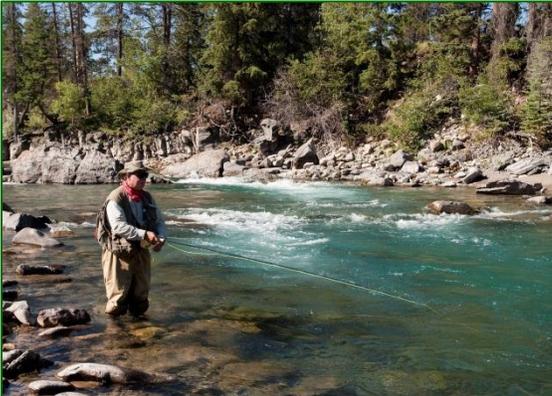
Recreation and tourism need to be planned and managed *thoughtfully* and in a way that does not compromise the ecological integrity of our ecologically sensitive areas.

#### General recommendations

- Recreation management plans need to be developed considering both the human and ecological aspects of use and opportunity. Of these, however, *ecological aspects in areas of environmental sensitivity should take priority*.
- Recreational activity should be focused in *areas where an impact already exists*. Visitation to areas of currently little to no use should be limited, both in type and intensity, before irreversible damage to the ecosystem is done.
- Recreation developments need to *fit within the social context of residents' and visitors' expectations for their recreation experience*. This social context must be based on scientific research examining visitor expectations, satisfaction, motivations, and how people

meaningfully connect with nature or their wilderness experience.

- Promote an *ethic in environmental stewardship* through sustainable recreation and tourism to create a healthy society and reduce obesity.
- Designate *priority recreational uses* in specific locations to minimize user conflict. Recreational activities should be prioritized in areas according to ecological impact first, then according to human needs.
- *Minimize the cumulative effects of multiple tourism operations* in an area, and encourage ecotourism best practices through an incentive program.
- *Assess current and potential recreation user conflicts activities*, such as Off Highway Vehicles and self-propelled recreation, to better utilize and enhance current trail systems.



impacted. Designated trail usage needs to be *effectively enforced*.

- Recreation in riparian areas, ESAs and other areas of high ecological sensitivity should be limited to *low-impact self-propelled activities*, and contain an educational component (e.g., interpretive hikes and signage).
- *Environmental thresholds and ecological carrying capacity* should also be identified.
- *Rotating trail closures* should be implemented to allow for reclamation of high user areas and reflect the seasonality of certain areas of ecological importance (e.g., breeding grounds, nesting sites, mating areas).
- Development of industrial and commercial activities proposed in iconic tourism destinations should be subject to the same *higher standards of approval* as those detailed for Conservation Management Areas.
- Developments should take care not to impact *aesthetic viewsapes and biodiversity* that act as recreation attractions for these areas.
- Sustainable tourism facilities should be prioritized under *operational guidelines* that maintain the natural environments they are found.
- Any development in Iconic Tourism Destinations should be subject to robust, accountable, and transparent *public consultation processes* to ensure the development is in alignment with local and regional residents' vision for the area.

#### **Recreation in environmentally sensitive areas:**

- Identify how these developments are justified by user demand through *social science research* and a better understanding of the recreation and tourism inventory in southern Alberta.
- Develop a plan as to how the creation of more recreation/tourism development will be *assessed and monitored* over time to ensure a sustainable scale is adhered to.
- Promote primitive and backcountry recreation/tourism activities (e.g. wilderness hiking, fishing, low impact camping, etc.) in areas where infrastructure to support this form of recreation (e.g., trails, campgrounds) already exists.
- Public motorized access into these areas should be confined to designated trails in areas where ecological integrity will not be negatively

