

Statement of Principles for Land-use Planning in the Porcupine Hills

As a group of individuals, organizations and municipalities concerned about the land, water and livelihoods in the Porcupine Hills, we agree upon the following principles related to recreation and land-use planning in the Porcupine Hills.

1. The current planning exercises must begin with a clear recognition of the watershed and biodiversity values supported by the Porcupine Hills. Planning for future land uses within the Hills should then be done with preservation of these critical ecological values as the highest priority and the understanding of cumulative effects of all land uses in the region, including recreation. Motorized recreation is a rapidly growing and impactful new land-use that should be considered and regulated as a formal land-use in Alberta. This does not exclude recreational and/or industrial activity in the Porcupine Hills, but such activities must be planned and managed in such a way that the ecological values are not degraded over time.
2. An integrated approach should be used in any land-use planning in the Porcupine Hills. Planning should complement and support conservation initiatives on private land surrounding the Porcupine Hills. Users of public land should be responsible for stewardship of the land and processes should be put in place to regulate and encourage responsible use. As such, local landowners, landowner groups, relevant conservation and recreation organizations, land trust organizations, interested municipalities, and other interests should be invited and encouraged to fully participate in each of these initiatives prior to any decisions being made or options/scenarios determined.
3. The Biodiversity Management Framework and Linear Footprint Management Plan, should logically precede completion of forestry, industry or recreation use plans and commitments to any particular user groups. Additionally, while baseline information is important, the current condition of the Porcupine Hills is not adequate as a starting point for planning land-uses. Restoration of trails and disturbances are required, not just further damage prevention. This should be based on biodiversity objectives and linear feature thresholds.
4. The Southern Foothills Study (2005-2014), which was developed and supported by a wide variety of stakeholders, should be a key foundation for any sub-regional or sector plan, including recreation. The SFS included understanding land use trends, assessing cumulative effects of business-as-usual land use and of beneficial management practices on indicators of environmental health (water quality, water quantity, native fescue grasslands, mortality risk index for grizzly bears), and surveying public opinion. Recreation planning needs to be supplemented with more complete information on OHV trails (double- and single-track) and existing and potential recreation use.
5. Decisions made for the Porcupine Hills will affect land-uses on the rest of the eastern slopes and vice versa. Therefore, it is important that when looking at trade-offs of any activities including forestry, industry and recreation, the government considers not only areas within the Porcupine Hills but the context of the entire Eastern Slopes. This area, and many others, are ecologically sensitive and therefore may not be appropriate for all activities or activities at high intensities.

Signed,

Livingstone Landowners Group
South Porcupine Hills Stewardship Association
Porcupine Hills Stock Association
Tim Nelson, Landowner
Bruce Mowat, Landowner
Cheryl Bradley, Biologist
John Cross, Landowner
Jillian and John Lawson, Landowners
Justin Thompson, Landowner
Kevin Van Tighem, Landowner
Lorne Fitch, Biologist
MH Ranches, Landowner
Phil Burpee, Landowner
Phil Hazelton, Landowner
Ron Davis, Landowner
M.D. Willow Creek
M.D. Ranchlands
Alberta Native Plant Council
Alberta Wilderness Association
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Southern Alberta Chapter
Oldman Watershed Council
Southern Alberta Land Trust Society
Water Matters