



Previous work in Kananaskis Country

Kananaskis Country

- **Spray Valley/Peter Lougheed Provincial Parks Management Plan**
- **Evan Thomas Provincial Recreation Area**
- **Sheep River Provincial Park and Bluerock Wildland Park Management Plan**

Kananaskis Country

Kananaskis Country is an area to the west of Calgary in the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains, adjacent to Banff National Park. This 4,250km² area is not only a popular recreation destination, but an area of high ecological significance.

Kananaskis is not one large park, as many people believe, but a series of parks, protected areas and unprotected areas. Recent years have seen the level of protection accorded to this area rise dramatically with the establishment of such areas as Elbow-Sheep Wildland Park in 1995, the Don Getty Wildland Park in 2001 and the Spray Valley Provincial Park in 2000. However, 44% of land in the Kananaskis is still unprotected, subject to logging, oil and gas development and other forms of resource extraction

Spray Valley/Peter Lougheed Provincial Parks Management Plan

Spray Valley and Peter Lougheed Provincial Parks are areas of magnificent beauty, both of which are valued for their wild character. CPAWS has had a long-standing and profound interest in Kananaskis Country.

The Draft Management Plan for Peter Lougheed/Spray Valley Provincial Parks was released in July of 2003. Although the draft was commendable in many ways, CPAWS was concerned that a few issues were not addressed adequately. The draft plan characterized the maintenance of business opportunities, including tourism and recreation, in the area as desirable. CPAWS believes it is critical for people to have opportunities to enjoy our wilderness, but these opportunities should not conflict with the purpose of parks and protected areas, i.e., recreational activities should not be prioritized over ecological integrity or ecosystem health. The draft failed to provide clear prioritization between the conflicting interests of protection and human use. A lack of direction in this matter could be exploited to justify anything from pristine preservation to intensive development. The draft also left the door open for the expansion of camping facilities in the Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, even though demand hardly warrants such an expansion. Given the historic degradation of fish habitat in this area, a commitment to *increase* the amount of fish habitat would have been more fitting than an objective to have “*no-net-loss*” of fish habitat.

The final management plan, which was released in 2006, did not address many of the above concerns. The final plan continued to characterize certain business opportunities as desirable and continued to provide a lack of direction between the conflicting interests of human use and protection. Failing to

address our concerns, the final management plan continued to allow for the expansion of camping facilities in the Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, and failed to commit to an increase in fish habitat. In fact, the final plan did not include the original commitment of “no-net-loss” of fish habitat. This is CPAWS’ greatest concern with this plan and we will continue to advocate for improved fish habitat in this area. Overall, however, the Final Management Plan was generally admirable, and is supported by CPAWS Southern Alberta.

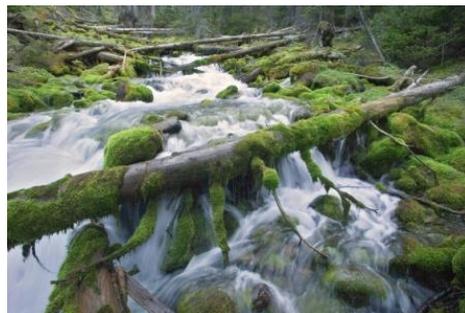


*Morning Mist at Goat Pond
Photographer: Leslie Degner*

Evan Thomas Provincial Recreation Area

In October of 2004, a final Management Plan for the Evan Thomas Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) was released. The Management Plan shrinks the size of the PRA, and enlarges the surrounding Bow Valley Wildland Park and Spray Valley Provincial Park. In total, 1849 ha were added to these surrounding areas, half of the Evan Thomas area. This is a positive step for the wildlife habitat and riparian areas in the Evan Thomas Valley and CPAWS supports this step.

The unfortunate aspect of the Management Plan is existing facilities will be allowed to expand 15-20% of their current size. At present, specific development proposals are being forwarded. CPAWS hopes that a comprehensive review of the impact of existing developments and uses will be completed before any further consideration is given.



*Karst Soaring Creek
Photographer: Peter Biro*

Sheep River Provincial Park and Bluerock Wildland Park Management Plan

The Sheep River Provincial Park and Bluerock Wildland Park are ~80km SW of Calgary and contain vital alpine, sub-alpine, and montane ecosystems. These parks are part of the Bow River watershed, and vital wildlife habitat for cougars, bighorn sheep and elk.

Draft terms of reference for the Sheep River/Bluerock Parks were released in January of 2005. CPAWS Southern Alberta was generally pleased to see the explicit commitment to a regional perspective and an ecosystem based approach to management. There were, however, a few areas in the draft management plan that could have been strengthened. CPAWS Southern Alberta recommended that the plan be clearer in making preservation a priority over all other objectives. We also recommended that grazing be severely restricted throughout the area and altogether stopped in the Sheep River Valley where a high density of ungulates would have to compete with cattle for resources.

The finalized management plan for the Sheep River Provincial Park and the Bluerock Wildland Provincial Park was released in July of 2008. The plan did not explicitly make preservation a priority over other objectives, but preservation remains an important objective. The finalized management plan also continues to allow for the grazing of both parks, although under the condition that it does not conflict with the management objectives or ecological integrity of the parks.

On the whole, CPAWS Southern Alberta is content with the final management plan and will continue to do its best to ensure the preservation of both parks.



Mountain Goat
Photographer: Christa Beckmann