



## BULLETIN 1

# THE ROLE OF RECREATION, PARKS AND OPEN SPACE IN REGIONAL PLANNING



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# ALBERTA LAND-USE FRAMEWORK

## INTRODUCTION

### ALBERTA LAND-USE FRAMEWORK

This is the first of two bulletins that have distilled findings of *The Role of Recreation, Parks and Open Space in Regional Planning: A Working Guidelines Report* which is, itself, based on a Discussion Paper prepared for the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) in 2009 by O2 Planning + Design of Calgary.

This bulletin outlines the context in which the original Discussion Paper and the *Working Guidelines Report* were prepared, identifies opportunities for recreation, parks and open space development afforded by Alberta's new regional planning system, and proposes a set of five recreation, parks and open space outcomes from regional plans.

Its companion bulletin, *Objectives and Strategies for the Integration of Recreation, Parks and Open Space in Regional Plans*, lists 16 Objectives aimed at achieving the five desired recreation, parks and open space Outcomes for regional plans, and 69 Strategies calculated to give effect to the Objectives. It is intended to be a manual for use by ARPA members in open houses, public meetings and other deliberations that take place as Alberta's new regional plans are developed.

The complete *Working Guidelines Report* is available on the ARPA Website at:  
<http://www.arpaonline.ca>

**Dr. Tim Burton,**  
**President**

Adopted as Provincial government policy in December 2008, the Land-use Framework (LUF) identifies three desired outcomes for land-use planning and management in Alberta.

- A healthy economy supported by the land and natural resources.
- Healthy ecosystems and environment.
- People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities.

It then lays out seven principal strategies – in effect, a blueprint – for land-use planning and management in the Province, the most relevant of which for present purposes is the preparation by the Province of land-use plans for seven regions congruent with Alberta's major watersheds.

Other significant LUF proposals include: the use of cumulative effects management at the regional level to manage impacts of development on land, water and air; development of a strategy for conservation and stewardship on private and public lands; and creation of an information monitoring and knowledge system for land-use planning and management.

Finally, the document notes that several policy gaps in areas related to implementation of the LUF need to be addressed: in particular, a strategy for managing the recreational use of public lands in the Province, together with the development of criteria, standards, policies and guidelines for establishing an Alberta Recreation Corridor Designation Program.

# ALBERTA LAND STEWARDSHIP ACT

## **ALBERTA LAND STEWARDSHIP ACT**

The Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) gives effect to the Land-use Framework. It has four noteworthy provisions:

- Its compliance requirements are comprehensive. Once approved, a regional plan is binding on municipalities, Crown Corporations, Provincial Departments, autonomous Boards and Commissions, and industries – all of whom must adjust their own plans to conform with regional plans.
- It gives legal effect to four conservation tools – conservation easements, directives, off-sets, and transfer of development credits schemes – and to the establishment of a Conservation Exchange.
- It permits the use of conservation easements and transfer of development credits schemes by ‘a local government body’. In effect, this makes them available for use in municipal planning.
- It specifies that areas subject to easements must provide for any of four uses, as long as they are consistent with the purposes for which the easement was created: recreation, parks, environmental education, and research and scientific study of natural ecosystems. In effect, it proclaims that easements are not intended to ‘sterilize’ land.

ALSA also includes amendments to related legislation – for example, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the Forests Act, and the Public Lands Act – and asserts its primacy over other legislation: “If there is a conflict or inconsistency between this Act and any other enactment, this Act prevails”.

# RECREATION, PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

## RECREATION, PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Land-use Framework and Alberta Land Stewardship Act have created important opportunities for recreation and parks development in Alberta.

- The requirement that conservation easement lands must be used for recreation, open space, education, or research activities has created opportunities for new regional parks and open space systems.
- This is reinforced by inclusion of the protection of natural scenic and aesthetic lands as one of the purposes of easements, since such lands often have an affinity for recreation, parks and open space uses.
- The recognition that conservation easements may be negotiated by local government bodies increases the likelihood that they will be employed in municipal as well as regional planning.
- The proposed development of a provincial strategy for the planning and management of the recreational use of public lands enhances the likelihood of establishing networks of parks and trails on these lands.
- The proposed development of an Alberta Recreation Corridor Designation Program increases the potential for networks of trails and corridors throughout the Province and its regions.

Recognizing this, the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) prepared the *Working Guidelines Report* with two principal purposes:

- Examination of how other regional plans have considered recreation, parks and open space (i.e. best practices).
- Development of potential recreation, parks and open space outcomes, objectives and strategies for inclusion in Alberta's new regional plans.

# BEST PRACTICES

## BEST PRACTICES

In all, 25 regional and sub-regional plans from Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia were reviewed, from which two kinds of 'best practices' stood out.

Among best practices having to do with "goals" and "objectives" were:

- Linking compact development to recreation, parks and open space.
- Addressing access, quality and diversity.
- Linking mental and physical wellbeing to the provision of recreation, parks and open space.
- Linking economic benefits to recreation, parks and open space.

Among best practices emphasizing "strategies" and "actions" were:

- Those related to the planning process itself: inventories of land, prioritizing opportunities, protection, management, and partnerships.
- Those intended to protect lands in "focus" areas – for example, as hubs for the creation of permanent parks and open space systems.
- Plans identifying various elements of open space networks: agricultural lands, hazard areas, lands intended to "shape" urban areas, and more.
- Those addressing how private lands might be conserved.

In some cases, the plans took specific approaches to recreation, parks and open space planning through attention given to increased access, building and sustaining green open space networks, and expanding recreation, parks and open spaces as a means of improving the health and quality of life of residents.

# DESIRED OUTCOMES

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The ARPA *Working Guidelines Report* has adopted the three desired outcomes of the LUF, but has also identified five desired recreation, parks and open space outcomes as a sub-set within the LUF outcomes.

- **Ribbons of Blue and Green.** A region-wide open space and trail system links communities throughout the region through a network of connected trails, parks, waterways and open space.
- **Live a Better Life.** Quality of life in the region is enhanced by accessible, diverse, and high quality open space that offers a range of recreation experiences that encourages active living.
- **Learning Landscapes.** Residents have a deeper appreciation for the region's natural heritage and are aware of recreation, parks and open space resources.
- **Green Economic Engine.** The region is a magnet for people, jobs and tourists because of its outstanding recreation opportunities, parks and open space.
- **Ecological Keeper.** Parks and protected areas are critical anchors in regional ecological sustainability and protect natural capital, ecological integrity, and biodiversity including genetic, species and ecosystem diversity.

# OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

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The *Working Guidelines Report* also identified 16 Objectives and 69 Strategies that, collectively, make up an action plan for the integration of recreation, parks and open space into Alberta's new regional plans. The 16 Objectives are organized according to which of the five desired Outcomes each addresses, while the Strategies are organized within the 16 Objectives they are aimed at achieving.

However, the Strategies can also be grouped into seven categories by their general purpose – recognizing, of course, that many fit into more than one category, but assigning each to a single (primary) group.

- Sixteen (16) address environmental management and conservation, especially the use of the ALSA conservation tools and reserve dedications.
- Thirteen (13) are about information gathering and research, the need for common classification systems and standards, to carry out needs assessments, to compile data, and to develop information systems.
- Ten (10) address partnerships and collaborative arrangements, among and between municipalities, public and private sector organizations, not-for-profit associations, and Provincial departments and agencies.
- Ten (10) concern the roles of parks and open space in sustainable tourism and economic development within regions.
- Eight (8) speak to program development and educational initiatives.
- Eight (8) concern themselves with community design and the part played by recreation, parks and open space in community vitality.
- Four (4) address citizen, stakeholder and landowner engagement.

# COMMENTARY

## COMMENTARY

This bulletin would be inordinately long if it listed the 16 Objectives and 69 Strategies – and would defeat its purpose of offering a short overview of contents of the *Working Guidelines Report!* Instead, the Objectives and Strategies have been collected in a second summary bulletin – *Objectives and Strategies for the Integration of Recreation, Parks and Open Space in Regional Plans* – available as a companion to this bulletin.

To date, recreation, parks and open space planning in Alberta has been primarily municipal or Provincial, neglecting regional and countryside parks that could link them. Municipal recreation and parks plans have typically been prepared within the parameters of General Municipal Plans, dealing only with matters within the municipality, while Provincial Parks planning has been limited to parks and protected areas within the Provincial system. Occasionally, inter-municipal plans have addressed parks and open spaces across jurisdictions, but have been exceptions to the prevailing practice.

The Land-use Framework and Alberta Land Stewardship Act offer an opportunity to change this segmented approach to recreation, parks and open space planning. Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation's *10-year Plan for Parks* has already aligned planning of the Provincial Parks system with the Land-use Framework regions. It should also be considerably more effective to plan, develop and manage parks and open space networks outside municipal boundaries through Alberta's new watershed-based regional plans.



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**Government of Alberta** ■  
Tourism, Parks and Recreation

