

[back to News Contents](#)

Province evaluates K-Country practices

BY BLAIR BRAITENBACH
STAFF REPORTER

The provincial government's efforts to maintain natural areas around Bragg Creek is a good start, but won't be enough to combat Sustainable Resource Development's (SRD) logging mandate, according to an environmental lobbyist from the area.

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) is accepting feedback from the public until Sept. 30 on its Kananaskis Country provincial recreation areas and Bragg Creek Provincial Park draft management plans. The draft includes facility additions or expansions, the creation of 14 new recreation sites and the consolidation of several existing recreation areas in the Elbow watershed, and changed park classifications. The feedback from the public will be used to refine the 51 existing recreation areas in K-Country and the Bragg Creek Provincial Park to be approved by the Province later in the fall.

Doug Sephton, a member of the Save Kananaskis Wild Lands Society, said recreation areas do virtually nothing to protect the overall forest and highlights the "disconnect" between the Province's parks and resource departments. The Province has an agreement with Spray Lakes Sawmills under its Forest Management Plan to harvest certain areas in Kananaskis, which caused some controversy earlier this year when the logging company was given the go ahead to clear cut around Lusk Trail, an area of Kananaskis within the Trans Canada Trail, and nearby Baldy Pass.

"To my mind, anything they do in the Elbow Valley is an improvement over what they have been doing in the past which is nothing, other than dismantling it," Sephton said. "So if they are investing in upgrades and improvements to the area, that is to be lauded. I think the parks department is doing what they can, but what they are doing is totally inadequate for what's needed which is to designate that northeastern section (in the Sibbald, Elbow and Sheep areas) as a park."

Provincial recreation areas are defined as small land bases that serve as campgrounds and trailheads for the surrounding landscape, while provincial parks protect natural and cultural landscapes.

Ray Andrews, operations manager of Kananaskis for TPR, said the draft management plan consultation is not intended to be a forum for the creation of a large park in Kananaskis. Rather, he said it is to gain feedback as to whether the management plans for existing recreation areas and parks are in line with what the public believes is necessary.

"There are a number of organizations that have been lobbying for a large land based provincial park on the lands that are currently Crown lands managed under a forest management agreement. This is not the process for that," Andrews said.

In addition, Andrews said Kananaskis was developed as a multi-use area since its inception about 30 years ago. He said he doesn't see any issue between the mandates of his department and SRD.

"The overall concept for Kananaskis Country was a blend of both of those management objectives and that's right from the beginning of K-Country. There are appropriate sized tracks of land for forestry operations and oil and gas," Andrews said. Sephton, however, argued that recreation areas act as a sort of decoy to hide the truth about what is taking place in much of the Kananaskis region.

"It's a smoke screen saying 'we are going to create provincial parks,' but then make parking lots," Sephton said. "They are irrelevant. Part of the intent in that plan they are developing... is to protect watersheds. Well that's absurd. (Recreation areas) are on the shore of the river for maybe a couple of hundred metres. They don't encompass the river."

Sephton said he is supportive of TPR's initiatives, even going so far as to say if all of Kananaskis was under its authority he would be satisfied. However, his main concern is with SRD's resource extraction mandate. He said the Province's Land Use Framework has good intentions by recognizing the importance of forests in relation to water quality, however, he does not believe the plan nor SRD are taking steps to reduce logging that will actually protect the source.

"There are no trees to absorb the water so the water just flows and carries off the surface soils. It doesn't take a lot of brains to realize that having a disturbed surface of earth will erode when you have big rains. The whole dynamic of the watershed changes," Sephton said.

For more information and to give feedback on TPR's Kananaskis draft management plan, visit www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult/kcpra/. For more information on Save Kananaskis Wild Lands Society, an environmental organization dedicated to the preservation of Kananaskis and the development of a park in the northeastern portion of Kananaskis, visit www.savekananaskis.ca