



ALBERTA WHITEWATER  
ASSOCIATION



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## Calgary River Users Alliance, Alberta Whitewater Association and Paddle Alberta oppose the City of Calgary closure of Boat Launches

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**What:** The Calgary Rivers Users Alliance (CRUA), the Alberta Whitewater Association (AWA), Paddle Alberta and the flyfishing community are concerned with the City of Calgary's actions last week to restrict sport fishing guides and organized paddling groups from accessing the Bow River in Calgary. The City of Calgary closed the boat ramp at Graves Bridge beside Glenmore Trail that allows fly fishermen to launch their drift boats in Calgary. Last week the City also denied access to Bowness Park to students from Thompson Rivers University that were setting up for a canoe lesson on the Bow River.

A few years ago **there were 6 boat launches** available to the public in Calgary to launch drift boats and rafts that are too heavy to hand launch and carry into the water. These boat launches provided a way for vehicles with trailers to launch their non-powered boats into the Bow River for a day of fishing, sightseeing, and nature observation on a World Class "Blue Ribbon" trout stream inside a World Class city. The boat launches are a critical infrastructure need for fly fisherman and contribute millions of dollars each year to Calgary's tourism industry.

One by one the City has closed the boat ramps in Calgary until only the Graves Bridge and the Fish Creek Provincial Park boat ramps were accessible. Last week **the City of Calgary blocked the City's last boat ramp at Graves Bridge** effectively shutting out fly fisherman, educational rafting and canoe outfitters from drifting the Bow River through Calgary.

The City is also closing access to Bowness Park for paddling groups. Last week a group of students from Kamloops who were going to spend the day **learning to canoe at the Bowness eddies were ordered out of Park**. This is a repeat of the situation last spring when the City prohibited paddlers from using Bowness Park. Calgary Parks claimed it was a misunderstanding last year but Parks is now planning to hire security guards and install a gate to control clubs and businesses from bringing groups into Bowness Park to launch their canoes and kayaks.

In June 2015, the AWA and Paddle Alberta raised the issue of the City of Calgary's Bylaw 20M2003 that restricts people wanting to engage in any water activity from using City Parks bordering the waterways in Calgary without the express permission of the Director of Parks.

Because almost all of the public lands bordering the rivers and lakes in the City are designated as Park or Natural Areas, this Bylaw blockades Calgarians from Calgary's navigable waters. Bylaw 20M2003 prohibits anyone from wading in the water, swimming, fishing from the shore, or launching a tube/raft/canoe/kayak or any other boat from any park lands bordering the rivers and lakes in Calgary.

**Why:** The CRUA , AWA, Paddle Alberta, and Calgary's flyfishermen's position is that public lands are for the public to use and restricting the public from the water is contrary to Federal Navigation laws, which allows the public to use Canadian waterways without undue restrictions.

It is also in the City's financial interest to bring tourists to Calgary to fish the Bow, learn to kayak and canoe and to enjoy a day on the water. Closing boat launches, restricting groups from using Calgary parks, and limiting access to Calgary's waterways not only hurts Calgaryans, it also financially impacts the people who have been able to find employment in the recreation industry.

The only Parks where the Director has given permission for access to the Bow River is Shouldice Park and Prince's Island. Three other Parks, Bowness Park, Baker Park and Edworthy Park, are said to be open but they are not shown to allow water access on the City of Calgary's website.

**Anyone launching a boat, fishing, swimming or wading in Calgary's rivers** is now in contravention to Calgary's Bylaw 20M2003 and "is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000.00 and in default of payment of any fine imposed, to a period of imprisonment not exceeding six (6) months. "

Our position is that:

- a. The Bow River, its bed and shore up to the high water mark is owned by the Crown and not the City. Citizens have every right to be in the water and on the shore and bank of the river. Bylaw 20M2003 provides too much authority to the Director of Parks regarding river access that is in contravention to Federal Legislation.
- b. City Parks should be open to all users. Canoers, kayakers, standup paddle boarders and rafters are citizens too and the groups they belong to have every right to use city lands. River Users should be able to unload boats and gear reasonably close to the river and then move their vehicles to a convenient parking area.
- c. River access points in Calgary have been incrementally restricted by the City over the past decade. This is contrary to the recreational interests of Calgaryans and tourism and economic development opportunities that the rivers in Calgary provide.
- d. A series of public Boat Ramps are required for trailered boats from the Bearspaw Dam through the city that provide options for drift boats to be easily launched for trips down the Bow River. Boat ramps in the city gives an option for upselling another day floating the Bow River for trout fishing enthusiasts. These tourists spend \$500/day when they travel to Alberta for a world class fishing trip. These well healed visitors are also Economic Development opportunities that could be enticed to move their businesses to a city where they could fish to their heart's content.

### **The Future of River Recreation in Calgary**

This Bowness Park and Graves Bridge issues brings to light a far bigger problem.

The Bow River transects the City for 50 km, touching all 4 quadrants. Hundreds of thousands of people float, paddle and wade in the Bow and Elbow Rivers each year. The City provides little or no facilities for river users. The City of Calgary's website shows only 4 public places to wade in the river or to launch a watercraft on the Bow or Elbow Rivers. To use any shoreline that is not designated by the Director of Parks for this purpose, risks a fine or imprisonment.

There is a serious need for public access to Calgary's waterways. This access needs to include:

1. boat ramps to unload trailered non-motorized boats and rafts
2. open access to wade, swim, fish and boat the rivers in Calgary
3. change rooms to dress and undress for water activities,
4. accessible washrooms for people that need to use a bathroom during their float trip,

Paddling sports are among the Top 5 activities that Calgarians would like to experience. In the 2013 Alberta Recreation Survey, canoeing and kayaking had more participants than many other organized sports in Calgary, including hockey, racquet sports, football, or baseball/softball. All of these sports have major municipal capital investments to build hockey rinks, sports fields and other recreational facilities not to mention the multi-million dollar annual costs to operate them. At the same time the City is restricting Calgarians' access to one of their most popular activities that cost the City virtually nothing.

***It would be unacceptable to have to change in the parking lot to go swimming at the pool.***

***It would be unthinkable not to have public restrooms at the hockey arena.***

There is an opportunity for the City to have a number of regional Paddling Centres on the Bow River with teaching eddies, safe launch sites and public amenities. For a city of 1.2 Million people that enjoy an outdoor lifestyle, this is sadly lacking.

The **City of Edmonton is investing \$2 Million to improve river access** and amenities to get more people to enjoy the North Saskatchewan River in their city.

**Why is the City of Calgary going in the opposite direction and restricting access to the Bow River ?**

***It is time for the City to take notice of a Recreational Sporting Activity that outranks many other traditional sports.***

**Who:** The Calgary River Users Alliance consists of recreation and conservation groups and businesses in the city, including fishing, canoeing, kayaking, rafting, paddleboarding, and river surfing. The goal of the Alliance is to improve recreational, non-motorized boating access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers in Calgary. It will also address other needs and concerns that are common to recreational river users.

The Alberta Whitewater Association is the Provincial Sport Governing Body for whitewater canoe/kayak sport in Alberta and represents 1,000 paddlers in 4 different clubs in the City of Calgary. We recently celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and have a very good safety record within our programs, our clubs and our members. The AWA certifies trip leaders, instructors, and coaches and trains people in swiftwater rescue.

Paddle Alberta is the Provincial Sport Governing Body for canoeing, sea kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding in Alberta and represents over 2,000 paddlers in Calgary. Paddle Alberta certifies canoe instructors, trip leaders and SUP Instructors.

For more information on this topic – please contact

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To find more information about paddling in Alberta visit [www.albertawhitewater.ca](http://www.albertawhitewater.ca) or [www.paddlealberta.org](http://www.paddlealberta.org) .

Reference from City of Calgary Bylaw 20M2003 Page 5 & 15 <http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Documents/Legislative-services/Bylaws/20m2003-ParksPathways.pdf>

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