



**Calgary River Users' Alliance Position Paper
Presented to the Calgary River Access Strategy
November 22, 2016**

Preamble:

The Calgary River Users' Alliance (CRUA) was formed in January 2016 with the objective of improving recreational boating access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers in Calgary. The CRUA will also address other needs and concerns that are common to recreational river users. The CRUA consists of representatives of recreation and conservation groups and businesses in the city, including canoeing, kayaking, rafting, paddle-boarding, river surfing, and fishing.

In June 2016, City Council asked Administration to create a strategy that will allow for better access to the river while respecting the needs of all park users and the environment. The goal of this strategy is to ensure easier, safer, legal and environmentally-friendly river access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers within City limits.

The participation rate of Calgarians in paddling sports, canoeing, kayaking, paddle boards and river rafting now outranks most other organized sport activity including soccer, hockey, baseball/softball, basketball and many other sports that receive substantial capital and operational financial support from the City of Calgary each year. (Alberta Recreation Survey, 2013)

This Position Paper has been prepared by the CRUA in support of the River Access Strategy (RAS) now in preparation by City staff. The purpose is to consolidate the views of CRUA at the end of the RAS engagement cycle and to contribute to the strategy report to be submitted to Council in early 2017.

Acknowledgement:

The Calgary River Users' Alliance appreciates the actions of Councillors Shane Keating and Gian-Carlo Carra to propose the Notice of Motion and of the entire City Council to unanimously approved a Motion directing staff to undertake a River Assess Strategy. In meetings and written correspondence with the RAS team, CRUA has attempted to represent the interests of all river users and to respect the values of all Calgarians. The RAS process led by City parks staff has, to date, been a positive model of open and thoughtful dialogue with CRUA.

Key Messages:

As a guiding principle the CRUA supports the need for safe and informed practices on and near the Bow and Elbow Rivers, including compliance with applicable regulations, respect for others and for the environment.

The CRUA understands, and wishes to protect and promote, the value of Calgary's two main rivers and their adjacent lands for their natural ecological functions and as aesthetic and recreational amenities for all Calgarians.

Our Vision:

- There are strategically located river access facilities for all types of river users that provide good access to each of the river reaches within the City of Calgary.
- River access locations are fully supported with the necessary ancillary features for recreation users such as parking lots, toilets, changing rooms, boat ramps/ hardened pathways to the river, equipment storage, and boating safety and trip information through signage, websites, and brochures/maps.
- Each quadrant of the City has access to a river recreation facility that enables local citizens to enjoy the river, learn about river safety, and develop requisite skills.
- A full range of strategies be developed to offer safe and enjoyable river float trips from one end of the City to the other, which may take from one hour to a full day in duration.
- Clean-up and restoration of existing inappropriate locations.

The highest priority recommendations by CRUA include:

- Do not wait until the final River Access Strategy is proposed and approved before undertaking some of the easy, obvious and low cost improvements that are clearly needed; in particular Hand Launches, which only need basic facilities. [These opportunities are identified in more detail below.]
- Without contradicting the preceding recommendation, the River Access Study should also propose longer-term policies and programs leading to access management and river recreation facility development for the benefit of all Calgarians.
- In addition to the River Access Strategy, there are several concurrent policies, planning and construction activities currently underway. [Harvie Passage re-construction; 12th Street bridge replacement; other in- or near-river projects; the Bend-in-the-Bow planning; flood mitigation planning, and others] There is a need for coordination of these initiatives to ensure common purpose and cost effectiveness.

Immediate and Near-term Recommendations:

- Develop information brochures (online and paper) to inform and map existing river access locations and restrictions.
- Design & install standardized signage for all boat ramp and hand launch facilities; including on-street directional signs leading to the sites, educational & regulatory signs at each site, and directional signs along the rivers.
- Distinguish between “hand launch” and “boat ramp” river access locations. There is no need for a standardized design. Each site can be designed to suit the location.
- Undertake research next summer (2017) on the amount, type, and location of river use.
- Re-open (unlock) several existing boat ramps that are currently closed for public use by Calgary Fire Department until alternative, permanent ramps can be created. Over the past several years all such boat ramps have been closed to public access. Currently there are essentially no boat ramps available to the public to launch trailered boats (drift boats or large rafts). Of course, this must be done in a way that does not impede the Fire Department’s vital role of emergency response to aquatic incidents.
- Bowness Park has a long history of use for both launching for a downriver float and as a training

location using the eddies created by the rock groynes. Both uses should continue to be supported. The river bed between the groynes has become infilled by natural river deposition and, no doubt, exacerbated by the 2013 flood. In several areas it is too shallow to be used by paddlers. Subject to research and approval for fish habitat protection, this area should be dredged to increase the depth to approximately one meter.

- There are two boat ramps above the City centre, (Sarcee Trail and Shouldice). These are frequently locked. They should be left in the unlocked mode and should be made available for public use.
- The “Prince's Island Bridge” location is used by many summer floaters on small rafts, either rented or private: even though the egress here involves walking across the pedestrian overpass, there does not seem to be a viable alternative. This beach and the bank should be improved for landing and exiting the river and carrying up the bank. This site is only for rafters – and perhaps kayakers – and is impractical for canoeists due to the long and awkward portage.
- There is no boat ramp to allow trailered drift boats and large rafts get off the Bow River above Harvie Passage. There is a need to develop a new boat ramp below Centre Street and above HP. The only option appears to be as part of the 12th Street Bridge replacement. Further study is recommended.
- Harvie Passage is scheduled to be reopened in 2018. Parking, supporting amenities and other opportunities are discussed below.
- Below Harvie Passage, the Cushing Bridge access ramp at 17th Ave SE is locked and not available to the public. (RiverWatch is an exception and it is imperative that RiverWatch continue to have access at this location.) However, there is also a need to re-open or modify or re-build a boat ramp at this location, which has had many decades of use as a public boat launch.
- The area between the CP Rail Bridge and the City's Ogden Road Bridge is well suited for a full service boat ramp. The area is owned by the City with sufficient space to add amenities and a parking lot. One complication may be the Bonnybrook Flood Barrier that will extend upstream from the Bonnybrook Water Treatment Plant.
- The Graves Landing boat ramp has been the only public trailered-boat access that allows for fishing drift boat use within the city in recent years. The boat ramp was closed in May 2016 to protect the upstream gravel bar against vehicle damage. The ramp has been temporarily reopened, but mitigation work is needed to the river bed to secure long-term public use. The importance of this river access point cannot be overstated.]
- The micro-groynes on river left below Graves Landing Bridge is an excellent example of how to create a river recreation facility that provides a training site for paddlers.
- The Fish Creek boat launch is outside the scope of this study, but it should be used as an example of construction methods and operational lessons.
- The opportunity to develop a boat ramp at Pine Creek Wastewater Plant is strongly supported.

Elbow River:

- The Elbow River is floated by casual tubers, small rafts and canoeists. The river access locations currently being considered (Sandy Breach, Stanley Park, and Stampede Park) should be expanded. However, there are issues with lack of parking and other things that make this a subject for ongoing study.

- CRUA would like to see an access/egress location at the confluence, but accepts that may be impossible without undue conflict with Fort Calgary. Development of an access location at 12th Street may be a partial answer here. We recommend that this be monitored of the next few years.

Longer-term Recommendations:

- As part of the 12th Street bridge replacement, there is an opportunity to create a new access location and repair the shoreline damage that currently exists.
- The RAS should include reference to the Irrigation Canal and Glenmore Reservoir but there may be no need to add to existing infrastructure, aside from standard directional and informational signs.
- Need for parking, access and other amenities at Harvie Passage.
- There is an opportunity at Cranston in the future to develop a launch site as this community is develop and the river bank land becomes available to the City as a park.
- A location at “Frenchman’s” would be a strategic location midway between Fish Creek and MacKinnon’s Flats at Calgary’s eastern boundary south on Dalemead. The property serving as the Sheppard Settlement Ponds Outflow is currently owned by the Province, but is expected to be transferred to the City in the near future.
- Development of a boat ramp at the Haskayne Legacy Park in the upper reach of Bearspaw Reservoir would offer an expansion of recreational river use downstream of Cochrane to the reservoir.
- Need for eddies to be installed at all boat ramps and hand launches, and possibly at other strategic locations.

Miscellaneous Site Specifics:

- The location named “Baker Park” is awkward as a hand launch and conflicts with other park attributes. Users should be directed to the “Stoney Trail” site.
- The Montgomery Home Road, Bowness Park, Point McKay 37 St, St Patrick and Douglasdale locations should all be improved and established.
- Other locations that could be improved as used as river surfing locations similar to the 10th St Wave should be researched.
- All new bridges or other construction projects in or near the river(s) should consider inclusion of a permanent river access site.
- Harvie Passage was badly damaged by the 2013 flood and is being repaired by the Province. This is a significant investment by the Province in a City park, Pearce Estate Park. While this is largely outside the scope of the River Access Strategy, there are numerous related issues. There is a need for the City to make some investments related to the reconstruction of Harvie Passage; specifically related to landscaping and amenities to support paddling activities. However, there is also a need for river access at this location. The CRUA looks forward to ongoing consultation with the RAS team to consider how to best resolve parking and access issues. The *Bend in the Bow* initiative may be the primary focus for this effort, but the RAS should be a part of the dialogue as well.

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Bow Waters Canoe Club
Alberta Whitewater Assoc.
Rocky Mountain Paddling
Centre Calgary Kayak Club
RiverWatch
Paddle Alberta
Angling Outfitter & Guide Association
Bow River Fishing Interests

Harvie Passage Alliance
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