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# **St. Patrick's Island**

## **An Opportunity to Improve River Access**



# Calgary River Users' Alliance

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#### Background:

With Calgary Municipal Land Corporation's (CMLC) redevelopment of St. Patrick's Island completed in July 2015 inner city residents and visitors were given a 31-acre recreational area in the heart of the City of Calgary that allowed for adventure, escape and relaxation from the pressure of inner city living. A once neglected island was transformed into a recreation area which included hiking and biking trails, a plaza and amphitheatre, play areas, restored river channels and limited river access. The master planning process to shape the future of St. Patrick's Island was an extensive study and public engagement process with Calgarians expressing their ideas, hopes and dreams for what the island would become. Unfortunately, very little input was received from recreational river users who would have benefitted from more extensive river access infrastructure. Contact was made with CMLC by individual river users during the site development to see if a trailered boat ramp could be integrated into the design, but it was too late to make changes in the design at that time. The discussions did indicate that it would be possible to meet the needs for trailered boat access at a later date if the need still existed.

In 2016 the Calgary River Users' Alliance (CRUA) was formed by local recreational river user organizations to improve non-motorized boating access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers in Calgary. The goals were:

- To represent the interests of all boaters using the rivers of Calgary, including anglers and paddlers.
- To improve non-motorized recreational boating access to the rivers of Calgary.
- To improve working relations with City of Calgary departments, specifically Fire, Police, and Parks Departments.
- To educate City Councillors and City Departments about the importance of river recreation in Calgary and its value to the local economy.
- To work towards an overall River Management Plan.
- To clarify the intent of the City's "Parks & Pathways Bylaw" 20M2003 as it relates to river access.

CRUA is an alliance of 15 river user organizations and related businesses covering all aspects of Calgary's river use. The organization moved quickly to engage with the City of Calgary to make much needed improvements to river access on both the Bow and Elbow Rivers. Through a series of City of Calgary Council motions, a vision for the future of recreation river use was forged with the Calgary River Access Strategy passed by City Council in February 2017.

A total of four river access sites on the Bow River were approved as Priority 1 Projects for either new development or upgrades on the Bow River. When completed, all of Calgary's Bow River would be accessible for all river users. The priority development sites are:

- **West Baker Park Boat Ramp** across from Bowness Park in the north west Calgary. A full-service hand and trailered-boat ramp site. Planned for completion in the fall of 2019.
- **Sunnyside Hand Launch.** A new development adjacent to Memorial Drive and opposite Princes Island. Planned for completion in the 2019.
- **Inglewood – 12 Street SE Boat Ramp** on the south side of the river. A full-service hand and trailered-boat river site. This development would serve as a primary river access take-out point above Harvie Passage. Planned for completion in 2020 but postponed indefinitely due to land use and financial constraints.
- **Ogden Bridge Boat Ramp.** A new full-service hand and trailered-boat ramp site. This development would serve a primary river access site below Harvie Passage. Planned for completion in the fall of 2019 or spring of 2020
- In addition, directional and educational signage for several boat ramps and hand launches was also approved.

CRUA was very pleased with the commitment by the City to give priority to these four site developments and signage with a budget of \$1.69 million. Future Priority 2 development considerations over the next 5 years would increase the proposed budget to \$7.60 million. The total plan would see improved direction signage across the city and on the river, improved amenities both at designated river access points and possibly intermediate stop-off sites.

The development of the Inglewood river access site was always going to be a challenge due to the proximity to commercial and residential interests. During the development of the Calgary River Access Strategy it is our understanding that consideration was given to development of a river access site on the north side of the old 12 Street SE bridge site at the east end of St. Patrick's Island. But at that time, it was considered unsuitable for development. When delays with development of Inglewood became evident, CRUA asked Calgary Parks Department to open discussions on an alternative to proposed development and look at the feasibility to enhance river access at St. Patrick's Island. The attached document, "*Inglewood River Access Site – A Time to Consider Options*" details our proposal.

We were advised by Calgary Parks Department to take our proposal to CMLC as the lease holder of the property. An exploratory meeting was held with Josh Sartorelli Project Manager the week of January 21, 2019. The following proposal details short term upgrades to the St. Patrick's "The Cove" lagoon that would allow for new trailered-boat and upgrades to hand launch access to the river.

## The Proposal:

St. Patrick's Island is perfectly positioned to offer a river takeout point for recreational river users above the Western Irrigation District weir that was redeveloped into Harvie Passage and reopened to the public in 2018. What is clear is that not all river users wish to traverse Harvie Passage to a takeout

further downstream. Although float tubers, canoes, kayaks, and stand-up boards can use both St. Patrick's island and other sites upstream river access sites, a trailered- boat access site is not available for larger and heavier recreation river craft. This is of importance to the drift boat fishing community, large canoe and kayak lessons programs, and larger commercial rafts. Without a takeout ramp above Harvie Passage the city reach of the Bow River is excluded from drift boat fishing. With minor improvements to the current access to the lagoon drift boats could be loaded on vehicle driven trailers.

The proposal calls for expanding the current width of the concrete ramp (**Figure 1**) to the lagoon by two meters to allow trailers to be backed into the lagoon to pick up boats. A packed gravel base would be adequate for immediate use but could be upgraded to concrete in the future. An additional gravel base may be needed at the entry point to the ramp from the parking lot (**Figure 2**) to accommodate a turnaround area to back the trailer down the ramp to the lagoon.



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

The Cove lagoon will also need dredging to improve access for all river users. Consideration may need to be given to changing the hydrology to eliminate silting of the pool.

Some parking lot stalls assignments is also important. It is our understanding that the parking area adjacent to the entrance to the boat ramp could be reconfigured (Figure 3) by removing the handicapped parking stall and possibly removing parking altogether to allow the site to be used as a staging area and turn-around site for truck-trailers to back down the boat ramp.



**Figure 3**

Parking for truck-trailer combinations needs to be considered. Close proximity parking is not needed but should be in a short walking distance of the boat ramp. Our suggestion is at the eastern extremity of the parking lot. Other locations may be considered as more appropriate. It is unlikely that more than 6 parking stalls will be used at any one time and most likely for less than 3 hours. It is expected that when a boat or raft is launched at either West Baker Park or Shouldice Park that the truck-trailer will be parked at the drop-off site for some time before being moved to St. Patrick's Island to pick up the boat.

We do not foresee any conflicts with the current park and visitor use. For the drift boat angler, the attraction will be an early morning float taking off the river before noon. Alternatively, a late afternoon float taking off at dark. The latter would be unique for visitors to Calgary. There is not another city in North America that offers the opportunity to catch a once in a lifetime rainbow or brown trout while floating through a beautiful city centre backdrop.

Equally important, an opportunity would exist for local businesses to offer non-motorized sightseeing river trips through the heart of Calgary, stopping for lunch on the way or going out for dinner after a float near St. Patrick's Island.

The Calgary River Users Alliance and members of our organization will support this initiative in whatever way we can.

Peter Crowe-Swords      Patrick Mahaffey

January 30, 2019



*Dave Brown Photography*