

Bow River Access Plan



Final Plan | February, 2019

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Introduction

Over the last 30 years, the Bow River (part of the South Saskatchewan River Basin) has grown in reputation to become a world famous fly fishing destination and popular area for rafting and canoeing. The Bow River, an iconic river with over a million people living next to it, draws local and international attention. Considering the Bow River status as a blue ribbon fishery, there is a high desire to improve access to the river and foster tourism development opportunities while ensuring the sustainability of the fishery. The fishing community and other recreational activities contribute significantly to the local economy. Enhancement of river access would support economic growth.

The Bow River provides important over-wintering, spawning and rearing grounds for fish with the adjacent riparian habitats serving as major wildlife corridors. In addition, some known pre-contact sites adjacent to the Bow River indicate First Nations and Métis have a long relationship with the river. First Nations have used the Bow River throughout time immemorial and continue to exercise treaty rights and traditional uses within the Bow River, Ghost Reservoir and Bears paw Dam areas.

The Bow River Access Plan (Plan) supports the broader provincial outcomes of providing Albertans more access to nature, recreation and tourism opportunities identified in Alberta's *Plan for Parks* (2009) and Alberta's Tourism Framework (2013).

At a regional level, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan identified water-based recreation as highly valued within the region and the need to maintain or develop access to recreational water bodies is important to provide outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism opportunities. The plan also stated that support of current initiatives and other potential co-operative initiatives is needed to provide stable, long-term public access to these water bodies in order to enhance water-based recreational experiences.

The Plan attempts to capture these broad outcomes and further identifies key river access points for public use; reduce site impacts; improve recreation, tourism and educational opportunities; reduce user conflict; and, improve public safety while ensuring a sustainable fishery. The GOA will continue to work with the City of Calgary on river access sites within the City limits as part of our involvement with the City of Calgary River Access Strategy (City of Calgary 2017).

This Plan enhances public access to the Bow River for current and future river users. There are substantial knowledge deficiencies such as carrying capacity for the Bow River fishery; the long-term impacts of whirling disease and invasive species; location of important waterfowl and nesting areas; social capacity of the day use areas; overnight use on islands; historic and pre-historic resources; and First Nations and Métis traditional use. The GOA acknowledges that more information is required to achieve the outcomes of this Plan and potentially expand the Bow River access sites beyond the current scope. However, the GOA recognizes that river use is occurring and the province recognizes its responsibility to address apparent challenges at the sites. This Plan provides information on the short- to medium-terms action and potential options for the future.

Outcomes and Objectives

The GOA has identified the following desired outcomes for the Plan:

- Develop a sustainable river access plan for anglers and other recreational users (i.e., canoeists, kayakers, etc.) as well as those seeking nature experiences along the Bow River.
- Ensure the health and sustainability of the fishery, riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems.
- To focus on improving the existing facilities at the Bow River access sites within the planning area. A priority is identifying an alternative location to Policeman's Flats.
- Reduce site impacts (i.e., site erosion, inappropriate user behaviour, human waste, etc.).
- Facilitate commercial recreation and tourism opportunities within and adjacent to the Bow River.
- Develop partnerships with anglers, guides and tourism operators to enhance the management and stewardship of Bow River access sites.
- Identify strategies for educating Albertans about the sites, what can be anticipated at each site and expected behaviours on and off the river.
- Continue to explore opportunities for expanding the Bow River access network beyond the sites identified in this Plan.
- Align with the City of Calgary's River Access Strategy (City of Calgary 2017).

The GOA has identified the following objectives for the Plan:

- Descriptions of the planning area and river access sites.
- Recommendations for facilities, signage, operations and site maintenance.
- Descriptions of the monitoring and follow-up programs.
- Suggestions for partnership opportunities.

Public Engagement

The Bow River provides valued personal and commercial recreational opportunities to numerous stakeholders and to the public. The GOA recognizes this and provided opportunities for river and river valley users alike to contribute their views and expectations into the planning process. As such, the planning process was designed to facilitate a two-step engagement process, each with a different objective and target audience.

During the Plan Development Phase (February to May, 2017), Alberta Environment and Parks' (AEP) staff and members of the GOA's Bow River Access Plan planning team met directly with primary stakeholders for the purpose of collecting information on current access and access needs; identify potential management issues and options, and to test their level of support for the management

concepts contemplated in the Plan. Meetings involved representatives of active local recreation, conservation, commercial recreation organizations and municipal governments. Information shared during these two-way conversations was considered and incorporated into the Plan.

During the Plan Engagement Phase (July to August, 2017), AEP facilitated a broader discussion with stakeholders and the general public. Interested persons and parties were encouraged to provide their feedback on the Plan by responding to an online survey on AEP's online public engagement website. Online engagement on the Plan was open from July 4 to July 31, 2017. Feedback from the online survey was considered and incorporated into the Plan.

First Nations and Métis Engagement

The intent of Crown-led engagement is to support good governance and informed decision making. To ensure First Nations communities and Métis organizations were meaningfully involved and informed, the GOA took the following steps:

- Ensured that identified First Nation communities and Métis organizations were provided with the same engagement opportunities as stakeholders and the public.
- Provided the identified First Nations communities and Métis organizations, at each phase of the Plan renewal, with information on engagement opportunities, background information on the Plan as well as the status of Plan's development process, including relevant information such as data, maps and Plans with requests for feedback.

During the Plan Development Phase (February to May, 2017), AEP staff and members of the GOA's Bow River Access Plan planning Team met with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan First Nations Sub-Table on May 24, 2017. Input from the First Nations Sub-Table meeting was considered and incorporated into the Plan.

During the Plan Engagement Phase (July to August, 2017), AEP staff met with members of the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3 on August 17, 2017. Input from the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3 was considered and incorporated into the Plan.

First Nation communities and Métis organizations were provided copies of the Draft Plan and encouraged to provide their feedback directly to AEP staff. First Nation communities and Métis organizations were also able to respond via the online survey on the AEP online public engagement website. Online engagement on the Plan was open from July 4 to July 31, 2017.

Site specific projects, as a result of this Plan, may require further engagement.

What We Heard

Feedback collected through engagement with the public, First Nations communities and Métis organization was considered in the development of the Plan. For additional detail regarding the public engagement activities undertaken and a summary of feedback gathered, please refer to the Bow River Access Plan–What We Heard Report available on the AEP online public engagement website.

Planning Area

The planning area includes the main stem of the Bow River from Calgary to the Carseland Weir with a focus on the area from Fish Creek Provincial Park to the Wyndham Carseland Provincial Park. The sites included in this Plan are Fish Creek Provincial Park, Policeman's Flats, McKinnon Flats, Legacy Island and Johnson's Island, Wyndham Carseland Provincial Park (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Planning Area

Site Descriptions

Table 4 provides information on the access site, land ownership, distance between the sites, and existing facilities at the site.

Table 4: Bow River Access Sites



Bow River Access Site	Land Ownership	Distance From Fish Creek Provincial Park Launch	Existing Facilities
Fish Creek Provincial Park	GOA	KM 0	Parking, washroom, garbage, signage and boat launch.
Policeman's Flats	Private	KM 8	Parking, basic boat launch.
McKinnon Flats	GOA	KM 31	Parking, washroom, gravel bars currently used for launching boats
Legacy Island	GOA Lease	KM 44	Parking, basic boat launch.
Johnson's Island	GOA	KM 52	Parking, washroom, garbage, signage and boat launch.

Plan Considerations

The following subsections provide information on what GOA intends to consider or implement as part of this plan.

Facilities

- Install and maintain designated boat launches and parking.
- Install and maintain wildlife proof garbage bins and toilets and at some locations recycling receptacles.
- Install gates at all sites for safety and security (i.e., flood events, seasonal closures).

The facilities at Fish Creek Provincial Park will be used as a model for design for the other GOA river access sites (Figure 2). Site designs will consider mitigating impacts to ecological and cultural values; impacts of floods and droughts; emergency response specifications; and, methods to reduce the introduction and spread of invasive species, both terrestrial and aquatic.

Additional improvements may include:

- Installing benches, picnic tables, picnic shelters and lighting.
- Establishing equipment cleaning stations (i.e., parking area for draining boats).
- Opportunities for tourism and recreation (i.e., camping, commercial river users, shuttle services).

Figure 2: Standard Washroom and Garbage Design



Signage

Enhance the signage at all GOA river access and lease sites and work with the City of Calgary to ensure consistent messaging and coordination of signage. Signage should be written for non-technical and multi-cultural audiences and include:

- Name of site.
- Consistent introduction to river access network (i.e., welcome to the GOA river access network, blue ribbon fisheries, importance of sites to Alberta, general site history, common fish species, fishery hatch times, etc.).
- Applicable regulations (i.e., new fishing regulations).
- Boat launch etiquette and user behaviour (i.e., gravel bar use, loading times, temporary parking, etc.) (Figure 3).
- Map with distances between river access sites and approximate float times to take-outs.
- Educational messaging (i.e., invasive species, whirling disease, clean/drain/dry, etc.) (Figure 4).
- Safety messaging (i.e., flow levels, levels of risk, misuse reporting).

Figure 3: Example of Existing Signs



Aquatic Invasive Species Signage

Recreational, agricultural and commercial activities depend on waterbodies such as Alberta lakes, rivers, streams and canals. Aquatic invasive species may threaten the diversity or abundance of native species and the ecological health of infested waterbodies. As a result, Alberta waters are at risk of becoming infested through the movement of watercraft, particularly into Alberta. The GOA has initiated the Clean, Drain and Dry campaign for all equipment departing a water body (Figure 4).

The species of greatest concern in Alberta currently are:

- Quagga Mussel and Zebra Mussel.
- Eurasian Watermilfoil.
- Whirling disease.

Figure 4: Example Aquatic Invasive Species Signage



Operations

The following information describes the operational requirements that will be considered at the Bow River access sites:

- Evaluating possible partnerships to assist in stewardship of the sites with municipalities, user groups, First Nation communities and Métis organizations.
- Designing all sites with the goal of minimizing the amount of maintenance required.
- Ensuring that adequate resources are available for enforcement and the ongoing maintenance of the sites.
- Evaluating the Plan as it is implemented to determine if the intended outcomes are being met.

Site Design, Monitoring and Follow Up

The following information describes site design, monitoring and follow-up actions that will be considered at the Bow River access sites:

- Using information provided by stakeholders to help inform the design for new sites.
- Designing new facilities for accessibility where possible and maintaining accessibility over time.
- Installing appropriate technology at select locations to track site usage and activities.

- Conducting recreational surveys or obtaining quantitative information to determine the visitor type and frequency.
- Adding recreation and tourism features to the existing provincial Recreation-Tourism Feature Inventory.
- Conducting routine fish population monitoring of the Bow River fishery to assess the health of fish populations.
- Implementation of additional angling regulations to ensure the Fishery Management Objective for a high-quality Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout fishery and sustainable populations of native Mountain Whitefish and Northern Pike are maintained into the future.

Partnership Opportunities & Shared Responsibility

User groups overwhelmingly shared a desire to be involved in both the planning and the long-term stewardship of the Bow River access sites. Some of the suggested roles provided by stakeholders include:

- Playing a role in the stewardship of the sites;
- Applying for supporting infrastructure grants and other related fundraising activities;
- Organizing community-driven programs (i.e., wrapping of trees to protect them from beavers, clean-up days, etc.);
- Informal monitoring for illegal behaviour;
- Care and maintenance of the river, its shoreline and facilities;
- Technical expertise and volunteer resources to apply to planning, design, restoration and conservation; and
- Partnerships on educational initiatives.

Some of the suggested roles provided by First Nations at the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan First Nations Sub-Table meeting on May 24, 2017 include:

- Coordinating volunteer clean-up days;
- Participating in economic and tourism opportunities, educational opportunities;
- Preparing traditional land use studies;
- Long-term monitoring of the sites including air quality, water quality and quantity, aquatic life, wildlife movement and habitat, and cumulative effects; and
- Monitoring during construction phase.

Potential Future Sites

- Over the short term, the GOA will work with the City of Calgary to identify an alternate location for Policeman's Flats.
- The Department will work with stakeholders in 2020 and later to explore future additional sites, with a focus on any potential sites in between McKinnon Flats and Policeman's Flats.
- As opportunities for future additional sites arise, the GOA will work with First Nations communities, Métis organizations, municipalities, private landowners, and user groups for both the planning and the long-term stewardship of potential future sites. Options beyond land acquisition to manage and enhance river access will be considered.

Plan Review

- The GOA will conduct a review of the Plan in 2027.

Implementation

- Implementation of the plan will be through the Department annual business planning process.
- The GOA will work with stakeholders and partners in the implementation, which includes regular communication and collaboration.

Bow River Access Sites

The following subsections provide information on the Bow River access sites within the scope of the Plan. In addition to the sites described below, the GOA will continue to investigate other river access opportunities in the planning area.

Site 1: Fish Creek Provincial Park

Background

Fish Creek Provincial Park (Fish Creek) is located in the south end of the City of Calgary. The park encompasses the Fish Creek valley as well as sections of the Bow River (Figure 5). Fish Creek provides recreational and leisure opportunities that promote public understanding, appreciation and respect for the sensitive natural and cultural heritage values within in the park (Alberta Parks 2009).

Hulls Wood day use area provides access to the boat launch; together these are substantial facilities during the spring to fall for public and commercial river users as well as access to river recreation use. The Bow River and Fish Creek also provide some limited opportunity for canoeing and kayaking.

The boat launch area includes a paved parking lot, washrooms (located a distance away) and developed boat launch. The boat launch design at Fish Creek is currently the flagship access point along the Bow River and as such, it will be used as a model for other boat launches within the GOA system.

This location is also referenced in the City of Calgary River Access Strategy (City of Calgary 2017) as an ideal ramp and an important component of the river system.

Location

The Fish Creek Provincial Park boat launch is located in Fish Creek Provincial Park at the south end of Bow Bottom Trail South East, just upstream of the Stoney Trail South East (Highway 22X) bridge.

Figure 5: Fish Creek Location



GOA Actions

Table 5 provides a summary of the GOA actions for the Fish Creek Provincial Park site.

Table 5: GOA Actions for Fish Creek Provincial Park Bow River Access Site

Infrastructure	Summary of GOA Actions
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain existing parking.• Maintain existing gates for safety and security (i.e., flood events, seasonal closures).• Consider opening the gates earlier and closing them later in the day during the main angling season (i.e., daybreak to dusk).• Consider overnight parking for the purposes of downstream overnight use as a pilot project. Overnight camping will not be permitted in parking areas.
Boat Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain existing boat launch.• Paint a centre line on the boat ramp to indicate that two boats can load or unload at the same time.
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain existing garbage facilities.• Move and re-install the existing washroom facility closer to the boat launch.

Site 2: Policeman's Flats

Background

Policeman's Flats is an important and heavily used river access site outside the City of Calgary on private land (Figure 6). Policeman's Flats should be maintained until such time that an alternative site in the local area is identified. The GOA is prepared to work with the City of Calgary on the establishment of a river access site in the local area.

This site includes a parking lot and an informal boat launch area; however it is not formally designed. This site, located on an outside bend of the Bow River, has a history of flooding. Repairs were required to the site following the 2005 and 2013 floods. As a result of changes during the 2013 flood, there is a wave-train just upstream of the site that has created a substantial safety hazard. In addition, there is a rock berm at the access site that is unsafe. In 2018, the Bow River Trout Foundation, Angling Outfitter and Guide Association in Alberta, Alberta Conservation Association along with other partners completed site improvements to Policeman's Flats.

There is a Great Blue Heron rookery located on the inside bend of the Bow River across from Policeman's Flats. Substantial development at Policeman's Flat should follow set back requirements for the rookery.

Location

The Policeman's Flats boat launch is located east of Deerfoot Trail (Highway #2) on Dunbow Road.

Figure 6: Policeman's Flats Location



Heron Rookery on North Side of River





GOA Actions

Table 6 provides a summary of the GOA actions for the Policeman's Flats site.

Table 6: GOA Actions for Policeman's Flats Bow River Access Site

Infrastructure	GOA Actions
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the City of Calgary to identify an alternate location for Policeman's Flats. The GOA considers Policeman's Flats a temporary site. • Review options for reclamation at Policeman/s Flats once a new location is found.
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No improvements are being considered.
Boat Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No improvements are being considered.
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install temporary washrooms, temporary garbage facilities and temporary signage. This work has been completed by partners in 2018 • No additional improvements are being considered.

Site 3: McKinnon Flats

Background

In 1983, the GOA obtained land in the area known as McKinnon Flats southeast of Calgary along the Bow River (Figure 7). Since the time of land purchase, McKinnon Flats land management has evolved through several GOA departments and stakeholder groups. McKinnon Flats is currently held under a disposition reservation by Fish and Wildlife. The GOA recognizes the important role McKinnon Flats has in regards to Bow River access planning due to its proximity to the City of Calgary and acknowledges the values of this site for water-based recreation as well as cultural storytelling.

In 2017, Alberta Parks assessed archeological and paleontological resources and conducted an environmental site assessment for the site. The information will be used to assess the site's contribution to Alberta natural regions and recreation values. The GOA will determine future land management options for this site and consider potential contributions to the Alberta parks system.

Over the years, McKinnon Flats has fallen into disrepair. The road is steep and presents safety issues during wet or winter conditions. Currently the road is closed during the winter months with reopening in the spring pending conditions. Upgrades to the road are planned for 2019.

Washroom facilities have been recently installed with garbage facilities forthcoming. There is a 'boat launch' area; however it is not formally designed. In the past, the site has experienced illegal activities.

Location

The McKinnon Flats boat launch is located by following Highway 22 East of Calgary and turning south on Range Road 274.

Figure 7: McKinnon Flats Location





GOA Actions

Table 7 provides a summary of GOA actions for the McKinnon Flats site.

Table 7: GOA Actions for McKinnon Flats Bow River Access Site

Infrastructure	GOA Actions
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade access road. Construction of the road is planned to commence in 2019. A temporary access site will be explored for the period of construction of the new road. • Improve existing parking area. • Restrict access to homestead site and areas adjacent the parking lot. • Install new gates at main entrance for safety and security (i.e., flood events, seasonal closures). • Restrict vehicle access outside of designated roads, parking lot and boat launch.
Boat Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize boat launch area along gravel bars adjacent to the parking area. • Restrict access to other parts of the gravels bar.
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install garbage facilities and signage. • Consider overnight camping as part of the future land management review.
Other	<p>Determine future land management options and consider potential contributions to the Alberta parks system. McKinnon Flats will be assessed to determine if it meets criteria for Parks designation and if so the most appropriate classification under the Parks Act. Once the proposed Parks classification is determined there will be a requirement for Public Consultation and Indigenous engagement prior to submission of an Order In Council to cabinet for a new the new Park.</p>

Site 4: Legacy Island

Background

Legacy Island provides a good public river access site and is well known among anglers (Figure 8). The GOA issued a lease to the Bow River Chapter of Trout Unlimited Canada (Bow River Chapter) for the purposes of commercial recreation development, specifically habitat development, boat launch and access road. Ongoing public access is a condition of the lease which expires in 2027. The GOA will determine future land management options for this site and consider potential contributions to the Alberta parks system.

Currently the site provides an access road and parking lot. The access road crosses a backwater channel (dry for the most of the year) of the Bow River and during high water events access across the channel can be difficult for some vehicles. Wheatland County owns the road easement to the north boundary of the lease (just north of the backwater channel). The maintenance of the access from the backwater channel into the lease site is the responsibility of Bow River Chapter.

Location

The Legacy Island boat launch is located by following Highway 24 east of Calgary, turning south on Range Road 263, turning west on 214A and following the road to the parking lot. At certain times of the year, there is a small backwater channel that will need to be crossed. This crossing may not be suitable for all vehicles.

Figure 8: Legacy Island Location





Actions and Suggested Improvements

Table 8 provides a summary of GOA actions for the Legacy Island site.

Table 8: GOA Actions for Legacy Island Bow River Access Site

Infrastructure	GOA Actions
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the leaseholder to consider potential site improvements, opportunities for funding improvements, and the ongoing stewardship of the site. • These improvements could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improving the parking area; - conducting an engineered study to assess crossing options for the side channel that would ensure the ongoing flow through the side channel; - installing a formal boat launch; - restricting access to areas adjacent to the parking lot, and; - installing washrooms, garbage and signage.
Other	Determine future land management options and consider potential contributions to the Alberta parks system.

Site 5: Johnson's Island (Wyndham Carseland Provincial Park)

Background

Johnson's Island is located within Wyndham Carseland Provincial Park approximately 65 km southeast of Calgary (Figure 9). Wyndham Carseland Provincial Park provides camping and day use opportunities including picnicking, hiking and Bow River access. There is a 178 site unserviced campground across the weir from Johnson's Island, four comfort camping sites and group camping areas. There are washrooms, garbage, parking and a designated ramp at the boat launch site. It's unknown how the boat launch functions in high reservoir conditions.

The 2013 flood damaged the access road into the boat launch site as well as an adjacent day use area. Some of the facilities were not restored.

As part of provincial species' recovery efforts, successful reintroduction of Northern Leopard Frogs has occurred at Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park. Development and improvement planning should incorporate species' appropriate breeding and young-of-the-year surveys, as well as ensure appropriate set-back recommendations are followed.

Location

The Johnson's Island boat launch is located by heading east of Calgary on Highway 24 East, turning south on Range Road 260 and following the signs.

Figure 9: Johnson's Island Location





Area Near Berm



Actions and Suggested Improvements

Table 9 provides a summary of GOA actions for the Johnson's Island site.

Table 9: GOA Actions for Johnson's Island Bow River Access Site

Infrastructure	GOA Actions
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the existing parking area.• Monitor current use and explore the need for increased parking at the primary parking area.• Manage inappropriate access at the unofficial parking area and reclaim as required.
Boat Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate options for the best long-term boat launch and depending on the evaluation results, improve the existing boat launch at the current location or install a new boat launch in a new location.• Paint a centre line on the boat ramp to indicate that two boats can load or unload at the same time.• Evaluate the need for riparian reclamation near the existing parking area and boat launch.
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain the existing washroom and existing garage and recycling facilities.• Install updated signage.

Plan Summary

As existing sites are improved and new information becomes available, new sites may be potentially added. The GOA will revisit this Plan in 2027 as part of the proposed 10-year review.

GOA actions outlined in this Plan:

- Install and maintain designated boat launches and parking.
- Install and maintain wildlife proof garbage bins and toilets and at some locations, recycling receptacles.
- Install gates at all sites for safety and security (i.e., flood events, seasonal closures).
- Enhance the signage at all GOA river access and lease sites and work with the City of Calgary to ensure consistent messaging and coordination of signage.
- Continue to work with the City of Calgary on river access sites within the City limits as part of our involvement with the City of Calgary River Access Strategy.

- Determine future land management options for McKinnon Flats and Legacy Island and consider potential contributions to the Alberta parks system.
- Upgrades to the McKinnon Flats road are planned for 2019.
- Add recreation and tourism features to the existing provincial Recreation-Tourism Features Inventory database and associated online mapping tool.
- Conduct routine fish population monitoring of the Bow River fishery to assess the health of fish populations.
- Consider the implementation of additional angling regulations to ensure the Fishery Management Objective for a high-quality Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout fishery and sustainable populations of native Mountain Whitefish and Northern Pike are maintained into the future.
- Over the short term, the GOA will work with the City of Calgary to identify an alternate location for Policeman's Flats.
- As opportunities for future additional sites arise, the GOA will work with First Nations communities, Métis organizations, municipalities, private landowners, and user groups for both the planning and the long-term stewardship of potential future sites.

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