



## McKinnon Flats Stewardship Partnership Proposal

### Summary:

McKinnon Flats was purchased by the Government of Alberta (GOA) in 1982 and subsequently developed into a Bow River access site midpoint between Calgary and Carseland. The property is considered “public land” but has been considered for recreational development while protecting the wildlife habitat that could change the land use disposition. The Alberta Environment & Parks (AEP) developed a strategy, the Bow River Access Plan (BRAP), that was approved by the GOA in 2019 to enhance recreational opportunities and protect the environment of McKinnon Flats in partnership with recreational interest groups.

McKinnon’s Flats is not just a river access site for the fishing community. As the popularity of outdoor pursuits has gained traction in urban centers, the paddle community, float tubers, mountain bike, bird watching, dog walking, bow-hunting, and general river recreation use has increased along with the population growth locally at Chestermere, Langdon, and Strathmore. A new all-season access road construction was completed in 2020, which will increase the recreational use of the site.

Regardless of the land designation, there is a need for stewardship - partnership agreements to develop McKinnon Flats as a recreational and/or conservation property to its full potential. **Calgary Fish & Game Association (CFGGA)** took the lead with AEP that charted the **McKinnon Flats Stewardship Partnership** in November 2020. Under the broad scope of the agreement, the two signatories will work together to enhance recreation infrastructure, property maintenance, and stewardship of the property. The first project is to expand parking, designate a river access site, and vehicle containment within road and parking allowances. Final plans are being developed with excavation in the fall of 2021.

The focus is now to expand stakeholder engagement to develop a **McKinnon Flats Master Development Plan (MFMDP)** for all recreational use while protecting the ecology, archaeological and historical significance of the property. This document explores those opportunities, potential benefits, and risks. It is important that all interested parties engage in the development of the MFMDP before any final decision is made, therefore we are asking for stakeholder participation in this exciting project.



### Introduction:

McKinnon Flats is a public lands recreation area east of Calgary and south of Dalemead on the banks of the Bow River. The property was purchased from LK Resources in 1982 and developed into one of the Bow River's most important river access sites. Sometime later an agreement was put in place between the GOA and Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) to install toilets, garbage containment, and waste disposal. The property of approximately 640 acres is currently administered by AEP Lands Branch with road maintenance by Rockyview County. The property has never been developed to its full potential, with little environmental protection, and subsequently has seen abuse by off-road vehicles and general vandalism. McKinnon Flats has been pivotal in the development of the Bow River fishery as it allowed for drift boat use from Calgary to Carseland. The Bow River was starting to get recognized as a world-class trout river that sparked a developing outfitting business and general recreational fishing expanded to where we are today. On summer weekends one can expect to see upwards of 100 fishing boats on the river each day with much more fishing from the banks of river access sites downstream of Calgary.

### The Recent Years:

McKinnon's Flats is not just a river access site for the fishing community. As the popularity of outdoor pursuits has gained traction in urban centers, the paddle community, float tubers, mountain bike, bird watching, dog walking, bow-hunting, and general river recreation use has increased along with the population growth locally at Chestermere, Langdon, and Strathmore. In recent years the floods of 2005 and 2013 changed the topography of the flood plain considerably. The parking lot and designated boat ramp sites were destroyed, gravel bars moved and the agreement between the GOA and ACA to maintain services was discontinued. Although rudimentary infrastructure was maintained the site fell into a state of disrepair. The site became a garbage dump and a party site during summer months, off-road vehicle use became prevalent and at times the access road was chewed up to such a degree that it became impassable for normal vehicle access. Finally, the road access to McKinnon's Flats was closed from November 01 to April 01 each year.



### The Bow River Access Plan:

Alberta Environment & Parks recognized the importance of river access with the development of the [Bow River Access Plan \(BRAP\)](#) in 2017 and approved by the GOA in 2019 with a \$2 million budget to rebuild the McKinnon's Flats access road in the fall of 2020.

The BRAP 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 Fish Creek Provincial Park, Policeman’s Flats, McKinnon Flats, Legacy Island, and Johnson’s Island in the Wyndham Carseland Provincial Park.

**“Partnership and shared responsibilities are considered important in the delivery of the BRAP”.**

McKinnon Flats is currently held in an AEP Fish & Wildlife land disposition. Now that the new road has been completed, it is unlikely that the property will be assigned a parks status and therefore maintenance of the site will continue under current land use administration for the foreseeable future.



## Moving Forward:

Regardless of the land disposition, the McKinnon Flats Stewardship Partnership will be used to develop and maintain McKinnon Flats as a recreational and/or conservation property. An overview of the property can be seen in the link to a [Video](#).

## Our Current Understanding of Land Use

### 1. Land Disposition: Public Land – open to all recreational use.

- **Wildlife Management Unit 212: Big game** -archery-only season, Sep 01 – Nov 30. **Game birds**, Sept 01 – Jan 15. **Migratory game birds**, Nov 01 – Dec 21, over any islands in the Bow River or within 91 m (100 yards) of the edge of the waters.
- **Potential Pheasant Release Site:** An opportunity exists for CFGA Pheasant Release Conservation Program or adds to Alberta Conservation Association Pheasant Release “Put-and-Take” sites. The hayfield to the west of the entrance to the property and the adjacent escarpment is suitable habitat.



### 2. Bow River Access:

- **Fishing – Trailered Boat Access:** Currently open from April 15 – October 30. The new all-weather road will allow for an expanded river access season for not only the angling community by also migratory game bird hunting after November 01.
- **Paddle community:** An ever-increasing river recreation use.







### 3. Vehicle Use Restrictions:

- **River Edge Parking:** The river edge parking lot will be doubled in size in the fall of 2021 with perimeter barricades to restrict access to the gravel bar.
- **Boat Launch:** A designated river access site will be built into the parking lot upgrade. This will allow trailered boats to be driven to, or from the river edge and returned to the parking lot.



### 4. Mountain Bike Trails:

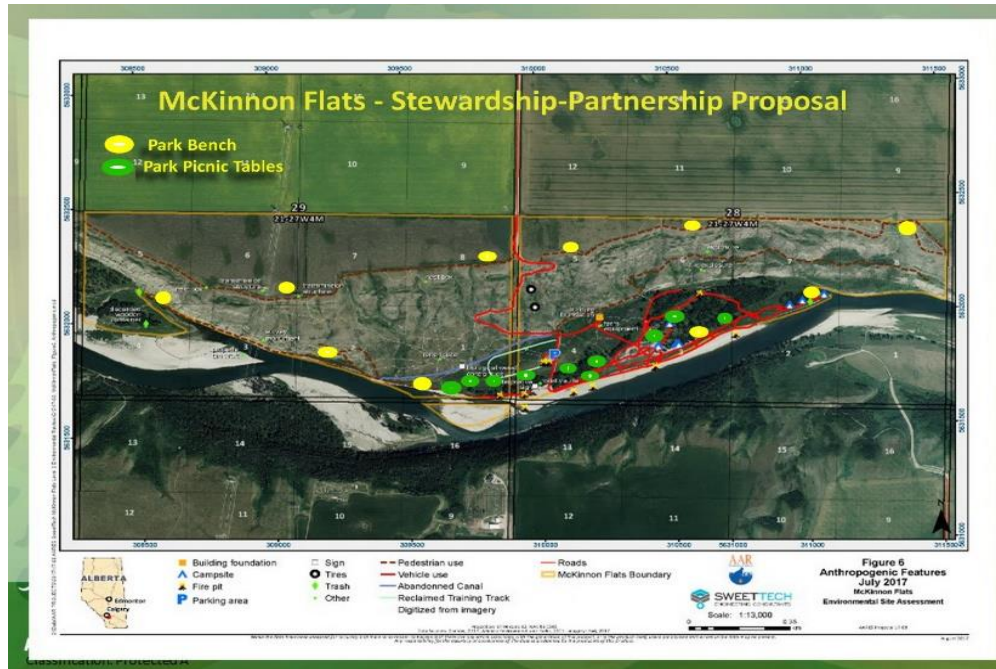
- McKinnon Flats has seen an increase in mountain bike use with random trails established across the entire property. The support of the local mountain bike community to establish and maintain trails that meet the recreational and environmental goals for the development of the property is essential.





5. Day Use Area:

- **Hiking, Dog-Walking and Bird Watching:** These recreational activities have been commonplace for many years. An environmental assessment has identified historical recreational use. Uncontrolled river access, fire pits, open fires have commonplace. The completion of the new road and vehicle containment to parking lots will increase the use of the property but also allow for better law enforcement. Regulations and enforcement are critical to protecting habitat and the enjoyment of the property by all recreational users.



- **Park Benches, Picnic Tables:** A proposal has been prepared by CFGA for the addition of park benches and tables strategically located across the property. They will serve to contain recreational use of the property within walking distance of the parking lots. They also offer the more adventurous hikers a place to sit down and enjoy the panoramic view from key observation sites.
- **Option – Designated Camping:** Regardless of the regulations or restrictions, overnight camping on riverfront public property has been commonplace along the Bow River and will continue at McKinnon Flats. Therefore, it is advisable to designate appropriate casual camping sites, probably at the east of the property.

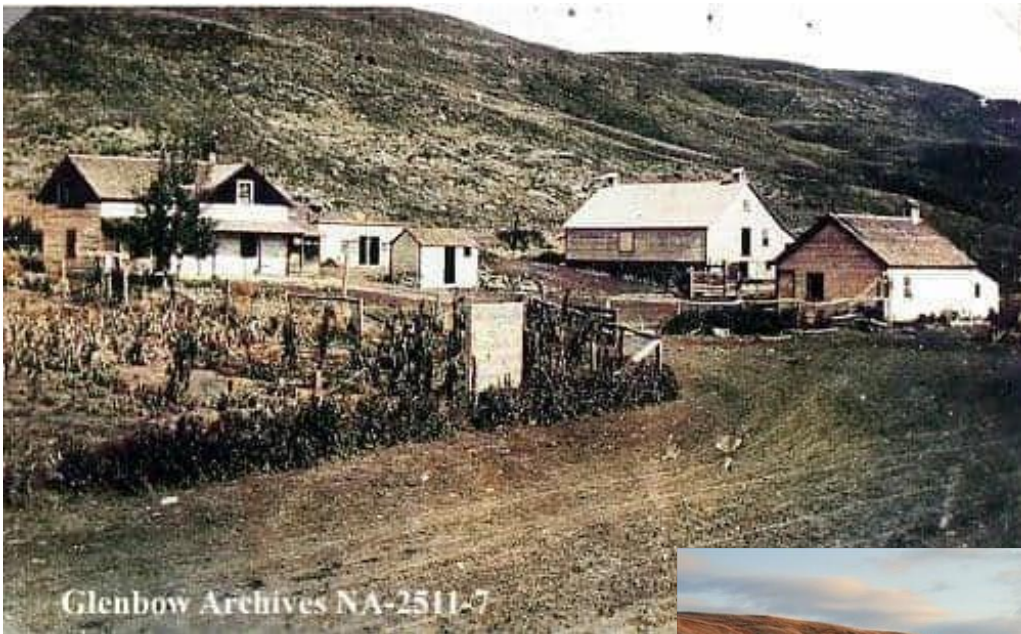




6. Homestead Interpretive Centre:

A condition of the purchase of McKinnon Flats was to recognize the importance of Lachlin McKinnon and his family as pioneer ranchers on the Canadian plains. There is a need to prepare a development plan for the historical significance of the LK Ranch homestead site, and the important contribution it made to the winter feeding regimes of range cattle. The archaeology of the site is also an important consideration and needs to be taken into account with an interpretive centre development.

The homestead site has the potential for redevelopment into a western heritage interpretation centre. Security of the site and funding opportunities need careful consideration before a development commitment can be put in place. The McKinnon family and various western heritage and archaeological support organizations need to be consulted and hopefully take responsibility to advance this initiative.



Three interpretive panels: 'Big Changes on the Open Range', 'Lachlin McKinnon, Ranching Pioneer', and 'Gathering at the River'. Each panel includes text, maps, and illustrations related to the ranching history.



### Stakeholder Engagement:

During 2017 AEP conducted a series of BRAP stakeholder focus groups to establish a plan for the development of the property. A wide range of interested parties attended the meeting. The link [BRAP - What We Heard](#) details the input. There was a general stakeholder agreement with the draft BRAP that received GOA approval in February 2019.

There are additional GoA reports that consider the property development, environmental and archeological protection at various sites across the property that will impact future development plans. The AEP /CFGA - McKinnon Flats Stewardship Partnership allows for outreach into an expanded stakeholder base to optimize recreational development and protection of the property. The capital improvements comprising of a new road built in 2020 and an expanded river frontage parking lot and designated river access site in 2021 will complete the priority developments. It is now important to develop a master plan for future property developments.

### Important Issues to be Addressed:

- Currently, road maintenance of the McKinnon Flats access is under an agreement between Rockyview County who owns the road, and AEP whereby the road is closed in the winter and maintained 2 -3 times a year when deemed appropriate. The new road is partially constructed on the AEP public land disposition as well as on county road allowances.
  - **Maintenance of the new road needs to be determined.**
  - **Winter road closure needs to be defined**
- Restriction to off-road use – this has been a big issue recently with Langdon and area residents considering the property as their backyard playground.
  - **Vehicle containment within parking lots will be achieved with large rocks taken from the new road excavation. It is hoped that this barricade stops random vehicle access across the property.**
  - **A network of signage is needed to show respect for the property and vehicle restrictions that are in place.**
- Policing the site – the RCMP and Provincial Fish & Wildlife Officers have historically patrolled the site if the road is considered passable to do so. No regular patrols were taking place.
  - **It is expected that improved access will see an increase in public awareness and police surveillance, with a corresponding reduction in unacceptable behavior.**
- Public and uninterrupted access to the river is critical for fishery-related activities.
  - **The newly designated river access site and expanded parking lot will meet this need.**



## Calgary Fish & Game Association

- A Historical Archaeological Site was discovered following the 2013 flood.
  - **This may complicate ownership and lease agreements. Also, Heritage Alberta will have a say in the preservation of the old McKinnon family farmstead.**
- Financial commitments and shared responsibilities to maintain the property in the event of another major flood, grass fire, etc.
  - **These are just two of the important issues that will need to be addressed.**

## The Proposal:

**The McKinnon Flats Stewardship Partnership Agreement** with the GOA offers stakeholders a unique opportunity to establish themselves as leaders in recreational property management in the Bow River Basin corridor. It will expand the influence outside of recreational activities to community support organizations to protect and enhance sustainable recreational use while protecting the environment.

- As projects are agreed to, group financial commitments will most likely be needed. In 2020 CFGA made a \$12,000 commitment to support the capital development of the expanded parking lot and river access site. Although a substantial financial commitment on the part of the GoA will be needed to complete the project later in 2021, it is important to recognize that stakeholder commitments are needed to kick-start infrastructure improvement.
- Infrastructure improvements and maintenance of McKinnon Flats will be a shared responsibility. Although the road access, toilets, and general garbage maintenance are currently covered by AEP. Volunteers can assist with trail maintenance, brush clearing, and property upkeep.
- If there is an opportunity to develop a lease disposition for McKinnon Flats in the future there will be a need to establish long-term financial support from government and grant agencies to meet road maintenance, archeological and historical site preservation.

## The Decision:

The decision on the part of another stakeholder to engage with Calgary Fish & Game Association and AEP to participate in the **McKinnon Flats Stewardship Partnership** to enhance recreation, the historical importance and ecology of the property is up to each individual or stakeholder group to make.

The Calgary Fish & Game Association's commitment to this initiative is based on the need to spearhead the development of a stewardship agreement that will encompass a broad-based recreational use plan that meets the GOA objectives for the property development. CFGA needs the support, commitment, and encouragement of other organizations to do the same.

No financial commitment is considered at this time. That decision will most likely come later if a satisfactory agreement can be achieved by all interested parties.