

# 13 Truths and a Lie About the Announced Changes to Alberta Parks

## 1 Parks will have their protected area status removed.

A total of 175 parks are slated to be closed and/or removed from the Alberta Parks system and reverted to public land (including 20 slated for full or partial closure, some of which overlap with 164 identified for future “partnerships”).

## 2 Sites removed from the parks system would have their legal park designations removed and could be open for alternate management approaches.

Removal of parks from the system opens the door for uses that are not currently permitted or which are more heavily regulated within our parks. Mining, commercial forestry activities and new oil and gas development are just a few of the activities that could be permitted.

## 3 37% of parks in Alberta will be impacted.

Closures, partial closures or removal from the parks system will impact 175 of the 473 provincial parks and recreation areas in Alberta. These changes add up to 37% of all parks in the province, including 74% of all provincial recreation areas.

## 4 The majority of Albertans do not support this announcement.

A recent public opinion survey shows that almost 7 in 10 Albertans oppose the closure or removal of these parks from the parks system. Majority opposition to parks closures and removal of parks from the system was consistent across urban, suburban and rural areas, and across age groups and income levels.

## 5 Ten sites will be closed to public access.

The announcement initially included the full or partial closure of 20 sites, although 17 of those sites are to be temporarily kept open this year due to rising demand during COVID-19. It is inappropriate to be barring Albertans from using park lands, and in direct contradiction to the promises made by the Minister of Environment and Parks to provide access to Alberta's wilderness.

## 6 Parks facilities will be sold and management authority transferred to third parties.

The Alberta Parks news release has been amended to remove the mention of sale of parks. However, an access to information request by CPAWS revealed that park facilities and assets could be sold and management authority for the area transferred to private partners through leases or other mechanisms. Potential partners such as volunteer organizations and municipalities already struggle to find funding and do not have the resources to properly manage and protect these important places. Private operators are not accountable to Albertans or to maintaining conservation values and quality outdoor experience.

## 7 This will not save us money.

It has been reported that these changes will amount to a savings of \$5 million. The Alberta budget for 2020 is \$56 billion in spending. \$5 million is only 0.0089% of the total budget expenditures.

## 8 Parks are not for profit.

The value of parks and recreation areas is much greater than direct government revenue alone. Parks have immeasurable value. They contribute to our health and quality of life through outdoor experiences, they provide key ecosystem services such as clean water, and they protect our fish and wildlife species. Our parks are our natural heritage and should be kept in trust for all Albertans and future Albertans to enjoy through a properly managed public parks system.

## **9 Transferring to third party partnerships is different than existing Facility Operating Agreements already in place in some provincial campgrounds.**

The proposed “partnerships” are different from current contracting agreements used by Alberta Parks. These agreements are used to contract daily operation and maintenance of campgrounds, concessions and day-use areas or to enlist private contractors for services like grass cutting or building cleaning. Under these arrangements, park areas remain in the Alberta Parks system and the overall direction and management is maintained by the government, accountable to the Alberta public.

In contrast to this existing process, the recent announcement indicates that facilities would be sold and long-term leases put in place for private management, removing areas from the parks system and greatly increasing the management authority of private operators.

## **10 The announcement is contrary to the intent of Travel Alberta’s 10-Year Tourism Strategy.**

The cuts to parks funding and removal of parks and recreation areas from the system is hard to reconcile with the Alberta government’s goals to more than double tourism revenue by 2030 and the intent to diversify the areas that Albertans and tourists are visiting. Our parks are emblematic of our tourism industry and the reason so many people visit and fall in love with our province. The removal of protected area designations within the parks system threatens the future of our tourism and outdoor industries.

## **11 These areas are not all under-used and no usage data has been released.**

There has been no information provided on the actual use of these areas or how “under-used” is defined by the Alberta government. Alberta Parks does not monitor or report on day use of our parks system or strictly monitor registration for overnight camping in more remote sites. However, we do know that the Barrier Lake Visitor Centre receives over 80,000 visitors/year and cross-country ski trails in Kananaskis are some of the most used winter recreation areas in southern Alberta.

## **12 The announcement was made without any public consultation.**

These changes were introduced without transparent decision-making or consultation, contrary to commitments made by this government to increase transparency and consultation on land use decisions. Until February 2020, the Alberta Parks Consultation Framework required consultation on changes in legal classification or the management intent of parks. On February 18, 2020 this framework was updated to remove the requirement for consultation and states only that “the public may be engaged or notified.”

Making changes to these requirements shortly before such a drastic announcement is clearly an underhanded attempt by the government to justify the lack of consultation.

## **13 The Government of Alberta does sell public lands.**

While the Minister has stated that these lands will not be sold, the government has sold public lands in other areas of the province. Recently a parcel of public native grasslands in southeast Alberta was put up for auction for a private sale. The election platform also included commitments on sale of Crown land for agricultural use, including 100,000 acres in MacKenzie County. These statements and actions cause great concern that parks lands removed from the parks system could be sold in the future.

## **14 THE LIE: The changes are a done deal and your actions won’t make a difference.**

If these parks are removed from the system, they will lose the environmental protections and quality recreation infrastructure that are affordably provided to all Albertans. These changes will be incredibly difficult to reverse once in place. Your actions can make a difference and force the government to rethink this decision. We know that tens of thousands of other Albertans have already signed petitions, called and written letters to the government about these changes. It is crucial that we keep pressure up.

Let the Minister of Environment and Parks and your MLA know that you do not support the announced changes to the parks system!

[bit.ly/DefendABParks](https://bit.ly/DefendABParks)