

TERMS OF REFERENCE

WEST BRAGG CREEK TRAILS MASTER PLAN KANANASKIS COUNTRY

DRAFT Version December 6, 2021

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The West Bragg Creek trails are within the West Bragg Creek Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) and in the Kananaskis Country Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) in the Eastern Slopes and foothills of the Rocky Mountains within the Elbow River watershed, approximately 9 km west of the Hamlet of Bragg Creek. This area is approximately 30 km from Calgary and is popular year round for day-use recreation activities.

The West Bragg Creek area is multi-use, including recreation, Indigenous traditional land uses, cattle grazing, petroleum extraction and forestry. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (2014, amended 2018) and Kananaskis Country Sub-regional Integrated Resource Plan (1986) describe the multi-use nature of the PLUZ. The Trails Plan will be consistent with these and other related plans and guidelines that facilitate management within the West Bragg Creek PRA, Kananaskis PLUZ and the Kananaskis Improvement District. Any proposed changes to the trail system will consider impacts on other land users, surrounding lands and communities.

In the early 1980's, the Alberta Government, as part of the Kananaskis Country capital construction program, aided in the development of cross-country ski trails in the area. Since then, the trail network has undergone many changes, including the addition of year round trails for a variety of activities. Today the trail network has ~170 km of authorized trails. Parking has been in the West Bragg Creek Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) and at the Fullerton parking lot along Elbow Valley Highway 66. Albertans value the area as a recreation destination, for the beauty of the natural landscape, the variety of well-maintained trails, and amenities, such as accessible parking, washrooms and a small warming shelter.

The West Bragg Creek trail network is operated by the organization "Bragg Creek Trails" (BCT, in the process of being renamed from The Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association), in partnership with the Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP), Government of Alberta (GOA). BCT is a non-profit organization registered under the Alberta Societies Act, and also a Canadian federally registered charity. BCT has a formal partnership agreement with Alberta Environment and Parks for the purposes of planning and maintaining both winter and summer use on non-motorized trails in the West Bragg Creek area.

The West Bragg Creek trail network is used by the public for a variety of experiences:

- Walking;
- Hiking;
- Trail running;
- Bird and wildlife watching;

- Cycling: mountain biking and fat-biking, including e-bikes;
- Cross-country skiing;
- Snowshoeing;
- Other activities and events, including geocaching, orienteering, educational programming
- Horse riding;
- Dog walking;
- Hunting and wild harvesting;

The West Bragg Creek area is also a cultural landscape used by Indigenous peoples to practice their culture, which includes harvesting food and medicines, holding ceremonies, and connecting to the land.

The level of trail use in the area has grown significantly over the years and the diversity of users and activities has expanded. While the expanded recreation opportunities are viewed as largely positive, they have spurred new trail management issues that need to be addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and restrictions on activities in urban areas led to unprecedented volumes of use and a significant numbers of new users, many of whom are likely to return.

Ten years after the completion of the first All Seasons Trail Plan (2010) for the area, BCT and AEP are collaborating on updating the Trails Plan (see planning process below). The updated Trails Plan will focus on adapting the current network to better address existing recreation use, reflecting desired experience and anticipated future demand. The new Trails Plan will also include recommended projects for environmental stewardship, education, signage, and other amenities.

Taking into consideration the high linear density of the existing trail network, impacts on wildlife and the desire to maintain the safety and quality of recreation experiences, the revised Trails Plan will not recommend significantly more kilometres of new trails. Additions or changes to the trails will be rationalized as addressing an issue related to safety, maintenance, environmental impact or user experience. The focus of the Trails Plan is on creating a comprehensive trail system to improve user experience and safety while minimizing environmental impact through maintenance, education, signage and wayfinding and environmental stewardship projects.

The intent of trail planning is to carefully plan, design, manage and maintain a trail system that will:

- Keep trail users on an authorized trail;
- Encourage a sense of place and stewardship;
- Increase awareness of natural environment and the cultural landscape through user experience and interpretive programming/signage, and
- Provide for the most effective and efficient use of financial and human resources in the maintenance and management of the trails system.

A healthy natural environment is the cornerstone to quality outdoor recreation experiences. The growing demand for recreational trails, the significant increase of summer usage in wet or sensitive areas, and the specialized user trails in West Bragg Creek may result in unsustainable trail use and damage to natural areas. The environmental impacts from trails and trail use include erosion, trail widening, riparian area damage, declines in fish populations, changes in wildlife behaviour and altered

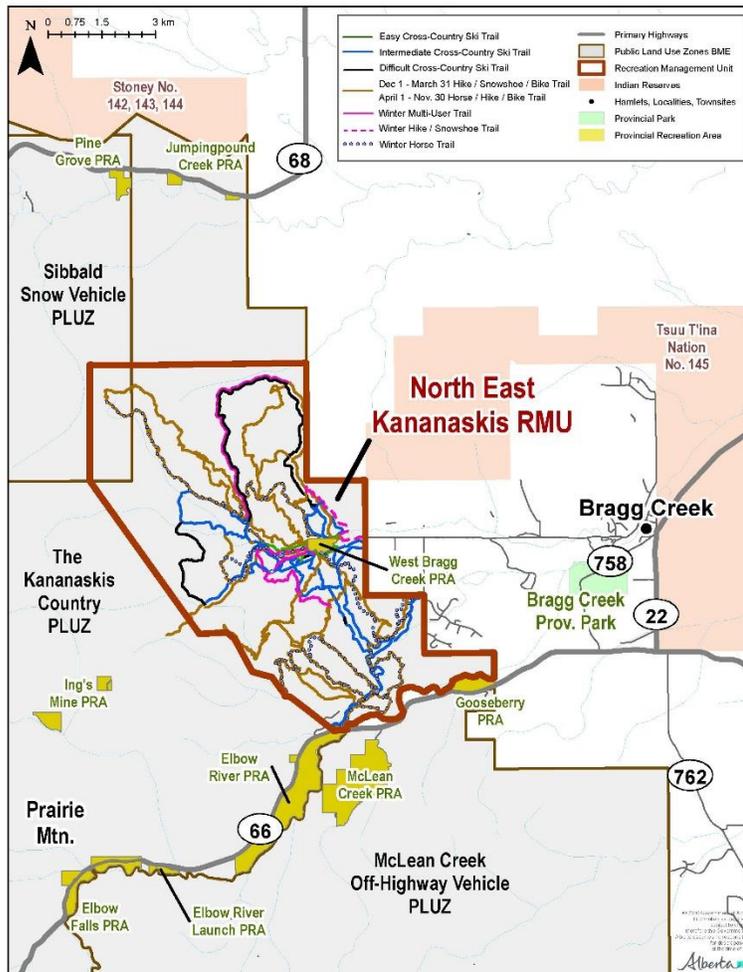
vegetation composition from trampling and soil compaction. Building better, sustainable trails in appropriate locations is critical to minimize impact to the natural environment, while balancing the user experience.

AEP and BCT are committed to including the participation of both individual users and organizations, with an interest in the trail system area. The Planning Committee will draw information and advice from a variety of sources in the development of the plan: GOA policy; BCT Strategic Plan; the results of user surveys; traffic and trail use counter sources; and feedback sought from stakeholders, Indigenous communities and the public through the planning process. The Trails Plan will underpin the future planning and design of trails in West Bragg Creek, and further provide the framework to help BCT and AEP manage competing uses in our natural area while protecting valuable natural ecosystems.

PLAN AREA

The Trails Plan area is constrained to the North East Kananaskis recreation management unit (RMU), an administrative boundary for the purposes of recreation planning and management (see Figure 1). The trail network is within Kananaskis Country on provincial Crown lands; the primary staging areas and 5 km of trails are within West Bragg Creek Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) and additional staging and the rest of the trail network are within the Kananaskis Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ).

Figure 1 Trails Plan area



The landscape of the trail network consists of forested ridges, valleys and wetlands. Elevations vary from 1400m in the valley bottom to 1700 m at the highest ridge top. Forest cover on slopes is primarily lodgepole pine and spruce with some aspen poplar mixed in. Valley bottoms have more diverse vegetation, including various grassy or shrubby meadows or wetland vegetation. The meadows, wetlands and riparian zones along the creek drainages provide some of the most important wildlife habitat in the plan area. Mammals include black and grizzly bear, cougar, bobcat, lynx, wolf and coyote, as well as deer, elk and moose and many species of smaller mammals. These include at least 4 members of the weasel family, red squirrels, rodents, mice and voles. Available bird data indicates at least 111 species occur in the plan area.

The West Bragg Creek area includes a large portion of the Bragg Creek drainage, as well as portions of the Ranger Creek and Iron Creek drainages, which are all tributaries of the Elbow River. The southern boundary is Highway #66, while the eastern boundary is marked by the Kananaskis Country boundary. The northern boundary is the Bragg Creek-Moose Creek watershed divide, and the western boundary is an approximate line that follows the lower eastern slopes of Moose Mountain to the boundary of trail planning areas with trails operated by the Moose Mountain Trail Bike Society (MMBTS) in

partnership with AEP. The Trails Plan will consider linkages to the other trails networks and may make recommendations to improve trail connections but approval of these are outside of the scope of the plan.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The **purpose** of the West Bragg Creek Trails Master Plan is:

To develop a high quality, all season, sustainable (non-motorized) trail system in the West Bragg Creek area of Kananaskis Country while maintaining watershed integrity.

The **objectives** for this trails plan are:

1. To characterize recreation use, experience and demand in the area. This will describe the unique recreation experience and features of the West Bragg Creek trail system, relative to the recreation opportunities in the larger region and other parts of Kananaskis Country.
2. To evaluate the existing trails and trail system - considering both summer and winter use, the variety of activity types and trail experiences - to identify ongoing issues and gaps in the system.
3. To recommend a comprehensive trail system. This may include changes or additions to the trail system and facilities to improve the recreation experience and manage conflicts among recreation activity types (including seasonal, single use trails, and directionality on trails, where needed).
4. To improve the system of signage and wayfinding, and identify strategies to educate and communicate with trail users on responsible trail use and trail etiquette.
5. To recommend collaborative strategies and actions to mitigate impacts or conflicts with other land users, stakeholders and nearby landowners, such as commercial and industrial permit and tenure holders for livestock grazing, timber harvest, and natural gas extraction. This includes education and communication with trail users on the many land use activities on public land.
6. To follow best practices for sustainable trail building, maintenance and management to address the environmental impact of trails and trail use (such as avoiding riparian areas/ grassland communities, erosion control, bridges, boardwalks, re-vegetation, waste management, impact on wildlife).
7. To evaluate and make recommendations to address the impact of the Trails Plan on the maintenance and management of the trail system, including volunteer and financial sustainability.
8. To identify opportunities for future planning processes to improve trail connections across the region, in collaboration with other recreation groups to the north and west.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide the planning and management of the trail system:

1. Ecological and Land Use Integrity

The trail system and individual trails are designed and maintained to minimize negative impacts on the environment. The emphasis of the plan is on improving user experience, creating sustainable trails that can withstand future demand while mitigating the environmental impact (specific and cumulative), without significantly expanding the kilometres of trails in the area.

2. Alignment with current regulations, plans, policies and guidelines

The plan and trail system will be consistent with the following:

- *Parks Act* and *Public Lands Act* and regulations
- Plan for Parks 2009 - 2019
- South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (2014, amended 2018)
- Kananaskis Country Recreation Policy (1999)
- Land use plans including the Kananaskis Country Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, area grazing management plans, Detailed Forest Management Plan (Spray Lakes Sawmills)
- Kananaskis Country Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs) Management Plan (2012) including West Bragg Creek and Allen Bill Pond PRAs
- Rocky View County policies
- Kananaskis Improvement District policies
- Existing legislation, policies, standards and guidelines for development of trails, protection of vegetation, water and watershed, fish and wildlife sensitive species.

3. Safe, Sustainable and Enjoyable Trails

- Trail design, maintenance and management will enhance public safety, trail sustainability and visitor enjoyment.
- Adequate trail opportunities and a positive visitor experience will be provided for existing activity types, based on an evaluation of recreation use and future demand.
- Investments in the trail system must be sustainable and implementable from an environmental, social, economic and operational perspective.

4. Trail Management

- Existing and approved trails are expected to remain on the landscape, although some changes or alterations may occur over time. Decommissioning of unsustainable or redundant trails will be considered to decrease the linear footprint.

- Best practices in trail planning, design, construction and maintenance will be employed.
- Trail signage and wayfinding will be designed to enhance public safety, visitor experience, minimize conflict among users and educate users on trail etiquette and environmental stewardship.

5. Stewardship and Collaboration

- Planning, development and maintenance of these trails will continue to be done through a collaborative, partnership approach between AEP, BCT, volunteers, stakeholders and other land users. Environmental stewardship activities will be pursued in partnership with other groups, such as Elbow River Watershed Partnership Group and Cows and Fish.
- The multi-use nature of public lands will be reflected in the plan, and communicated to trail users.
- A variety of government and non-governmental resources (e.g. volunteers, donations, contributions in kind) will be brought to the development and operation of the trail system.

PLANNING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The following issues and concerns were identified as part of scoping the Trails Plan Terms of Reference. These issues and concerns help frame the need for the planning effort and will shape the recommendations and options presented in the plan.

User Experience

- Congestion occurs on some multi-directional and narrow trails, resulting in frustration and conflicts between users
- Equestrian use is a long standing use in the area and equestrian users have indicated a preference to have year round trails dedicated for their use.
- The existing network has not adapted to all of the activity types and volumes of use that have evolved over time. Users have identified a need to enhance the existing network to improve user safety and enjoyment through:
 - Additional connector trails to create variety, shorter loops and improve dispersion of users across the network.
 - Additional guidelines for directionality and activity restrictions on some trails
 - Additions to the network to separate activity types or allow for alternate routes to address safety and conflict between users
- The parking lots at Fullerton and West Bragg Creek are at capacity during busy weekends year round. Additional trails in the area may encourage more use and change the nature of the experiences.

- Users would like better access to and from the other staging areas along the Elbow Valley Hwy 66 and Sibbald Trail Hwy 68.
- Variable speeds by different activity types is a safety issue on some trails, particularly for downhill routes for mountain biking.
- Uncontrolled dogs pose a safety risk to users, particularly where there are children and high speed activities.
- Existing signage and wayfinding system is not consistent and clear. It has led to confusion and frustration by users and a potential safety risk.
- Users indicate a desire to have additional amenities and facilities (such as picnic tables along the trails, water source, cell coverage, bike washing station).
- Users desire more family friendly mountain bike trails and hiking only trails.
- In emergency situations there are concerns with accessing the parking area when full/congested, and locating and accessing the injured people, depending on the season and location.

Environmental

- Some trail segments are unsustainable (ongoing erosion, wet areas) and need rehabilitation.
- Climate change will impact the trail network through altered snow retention, and increasing risk of floods and fires.
- Increasing volumes and speed of traffic to the West Bragg Creek parking lot has been attributed to more vehicle collisions with wildlife on the rural roads near Bragg Creek. Education of visitors to West Bragg Creek is needed.
- Winter-only trails are being used in the summer, creating permanent tread and leading to damage to sensitive environments (ie. wetlands).
- The linear density of trails in the area and the increasing volumes of users on the trails impacts wildlife behavior and the available core habitat (habitat away from the edge effect) which is needed for many species of wildlife.
- Trails within riparian habitats may affect aquatic environments and fish populations. New trails should reduce the number of crossings and avoid riparian areas. Concern about the need to design the trails to allow for coexistence with beavers.
- Trail use is leading to spread of invasive and non-native species of plants.
- Sensitive species like fescue and limber pine are declining in the area.
- Small litter, like food packaging, dog feces or dog bags are left on the trails.
- Increasing use of the trails and potential changes in wildlife behaviours are leading to wildlife/ human encounters that pose a safety risk.

Communication, Education and Outreach

- Need for additional users awareness of the trail etiquette (such as activity and seasonal restrictions) as indicated on the trail map.
- Need for additional user education to build awareness and understanding of the multi-use activities that occur in the West Bragg Creek trail system area.
- Need for additional user awareness of the difference between the regulations for the Public Land Use Zone and Provincial Recreation Area and trail etiquette represented on the activity and seasonal restrictions marked on the trail map.
- Bragg Creek community residents would like to have greater involvement in the development and management of the trail network.
- Users desire additional interpretive programs on Indigenous culture and connection to the land and environmental education.

Operations and Management

- Ongoing user damage to cross country ski tracks requiring additional time and resources for maintenance.
- The grooming schedule for cross-country, all season trails and fat biking/snowshoe trails is not always consistent or matched to the need.
- Grazing, forestry and petroleum operations occur throughout the area are active and require access and ongoing communication.
- Increase in use of some trails has led to exposure of roots, rocks and ruts in the tread that require additional maintenance and remediation.
- The ongoing operations and management of the trail network is dependent on the financial and volunteer sustainability of BCT.
- Unauthorized trail building has occurred within the area. These trails are not sustainably designed, do not consider historic, cultural or environmental constraints, and require time and resources to address.

PLANNING PROCESS

Ten years after the completion of the first All Seasons Trail Plan (2010) for the area, BCT and AEP are collaborating on updating the plan and producing an updated version.

As part of the planning process, representatives from the following organizations have been invited to form a Planning Committee:

- Alberta Environment and Parks
- BCT Board members
- Local trail users or group representatives including:
 - Cross-country skiing
 - Snowshoeing
 - Hiking
 - Mountain biking
 - Winter fat biking
 - Trail running

- Equestrian
- Conservation/Environmental
- Rocky View County
- Indigenous Governments
- Local industrial users of Crown land
 - Grazing
 - Timber
 - Petroleum

This Committee will provide input, advice and endorsement of the plan. All members of the Committee will be invited to speak for their area of interest, with the expectation that they are prepared to listen respectfully to all other members and adhere to the process.

In collaboration with the Committee, AEP and BCT have drafted the Trails Plan Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference will be the subject of the first phase of public, stakeholder and Indigenous engagement in December 2021 – January 2022, with feedback received through an online survey and interactive map.

AEP, BCT and the Planning Committee will draft the plan for public, stakeholder and Indigenous engagement in Spring/Summer 2022. Based on comments and input received, the Planning Committee will consider final amendments to the plan prior to it being submitted for formal approval by AEP and BCT.

Table 1 Phases, Methods and Timing in the Planning Process

Phase	Methods	Timing
Scoping/ pre-engagement	BCT and AEP will work with the other members of the planning committee to develop the Trails Plan Terms of Reference, which will clarify the plan scope, topics/issues to be addressed and will be the subject of preliminary public engagement. The recreation use and experience surveys and the engagement on the BCT Strategic Plan are also used to develop the Terms of Reference.	January - November 2021
Preliminary engagement	Feedback on the Terms of Reference will be sought from the trail users, stakeholders and Indigenous communities through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An online survey (Talk AEP). - Interactive mapping to better identify site specific issues/options. - Opportunities to engage or learn about plan development at kiosks at WBC and Fullerton parking area (Trail hosts) 	December 2021- January 2022
Develop the Plan	Based on the preliminary feedback, BCT and AEP will work with the Planning Committee to develop the draft plan.	January 2021 - April 2022

Draft Plan Engagement	The draft plan will be circulated for public comment through the Talk AEP website and linked from BCT website. An online survey will be used to receive feedback that will be used to inform changes to the draft plan.	Spring/Summer 2022
Release final plan	The final plan will be posted to Talk AEP and BCT website. Included in the plan, or as a separate document, will be details on how public and stakeholder comments were addressed/considered.	Summer 2022

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the plan would occur over a period of years as funding and/or other resources are secured.

DRAFT

Draft Table of Contents for the West Bragg Creek Trails Master Plan

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
 - a. Plan Area
 - b. Purpose and Objectives
 - c. Land Acknowledgement
 - d. Guiding Principles
3. Background and Context
 - a. Legislation and Regulation
 - b. Visitor Use and Experience
 - c. Biophysical
 - d. Other Land Uses
4. Description and Evaluation of Existing Trails and Trail System
5. Proposed Trail System
 - a. Trail Map (changes/additions to existing trail system, trail directionality, seasonal restrictions and rationale)
 - b. Facilities
6. Operations and Management
 - a. Detail Trail Design Phase: Steps and Best Practices
 - b. Maintenance and Inspections
 - c. Signage and Wayfinding
 - d. Monitoring and Evaluation
 - e. Communications, Education and Outreach
7. Implementation (prioritization and project phasing: short, medium, long term time frame, funding considerations)

References and Appendices