

IUCN Protected Area classification categories for Alberta

Plants, lands and wetlands indicators - Protected and Conserved Areas

TABLE 1. INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) PROTECTED AREA CLASSIFICATION CATEGORIES APPLIED TO ALBERTA.

IUCN category and definition	Alberta provincially designated sites equivalent to this IUCN category
<p>I.a. Strict nature reserve</p> <p>Strictly protected areas set aside to protect biodiversity and possibly geological/geomorphological features, where human visitation, use and impacts are strictly controlled and limited to ensure protection of the conservation values.</p>	<p>In Alberta, provincially designated sites equivalent to the IUCN strict nature reserve category include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Ecological Reserves • 3 Wilderness Areas (Siffleur, White Goat and Ghost River) <p>Designated under the <i>Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act</i>, Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves have the highest level of protection in Alberta.</p> <p>Ecological Reserves preserve and protect natural heritage in an undisturbed state for scientific research and education. They contain representative, rare and fragile landscapes, plants, animals and geological features. Their primary intent is strict preservation of natural ecosystems, habitats and features and associated biodiversity. Access is by foot only; public roads and other facilities do not normally exist and will not be developed.</p> <p>Similarly, Wilderness Areas preserve and protect natural heritage while providing opportunities for non-consumptive, nature-based outdoor recreation. No developments of any kind are permitted, recreation opportunities may include hiking, wildlife viewing and mountain climbing with access by foot only. NOTE: Provincially designated Wilderness Areas in Alberta are not equivalent to Wilderness areas as classified and defined by the IUCN.</p>
<p>I.b. Wilderness area</p> <p>Protected areas that are usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed to preserve their natural condition.</p>	<p>In Alberta, provincially designated sites equivalent to the IUCN Wilderness Area category include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Natural Areas • 26 Wildland Provincial Parks • Willmore Wilderness Park <p>These sites are designated under the provincial <i>Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act</i>.</p> <p>Natural Areas are generally smaller sites that preserve and protect areas of local significance while providing opportunities for low-impact recreation and nature appreciation.</p> <p>Wildland Provincial Parks are generally large, undeveloped natural landscapes established to preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for backcountry recreation, with some offering trails for off-highway vehicles.</p> <p>A Wilderness Park was designated under its own legislation in 1959, Willmore Wilderness Park, with similar intent to Wildland Provincial Parks while also providing opportunities for nature-based outdoor recreation.</p>

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	<p>This category also includes one federally designated Migratory Bird Sanctuary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richardson Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary <p>Migratory Bird Sanctuaries are designated under Canada's <i>Migratory Bird Convention Act</i> and work to provide safe refuge for migratory birds.</p>
<p>II. National Park</p> <p>Protected areas that are large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.</p>	<p>Provincially designated sites for this category in Alberta include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 Natural Areas 10 Wildland Provincial Parks 1 Ecological Reserve 56 Provincial Parks 9 Provincial Recreation Areas <p>These sites are designated under the provincial <i>Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act</i> and the <i>Provincial Parks Act</i>.</p> <p>Provincial Parks work to preserve natural heritage of provincial significance while supporting outdoor recreation, tourism and natural heritage appreciation activities that are compatible with environmental conservation.</p> <p>Provincial Recreation Areas are areas that support compatible outdoor recreation and tourism.</p> <p>This category includes 1 municipally designated Protected Area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Griffiths Woods Park (in Calgary) <p>The category also includes the 5 federally designated National Parks and 1 federally designated Migratory Bird Sanctuary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banff Elk Island Jasper Waterton Lakes Wood Buffalo Saskatoon Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary.
<p>III. Natural Monument or Feature</p> <p>Protected areas set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, sea mount, submarine cavern, geological feature such as a cave or even a living feature such as an ancient grove. They are generally quite small, protected areas and often have high visitor value.</p>	<p>Provincially designated sites for this category in Alberta include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 Natural Areas 1 Provincial Park (Big Hill Springs) <p>Examples of these areas in Alberta include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kleskun Hill Natural Area near Grande Prairie Wagner Natural Area near Edmonton Red Rock Coulee Natural Area near Medicine Hat

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<p>IV. Habitat/Species Management Area</p> <p>Protected areas that aim to protect particular species or habitats and are managed to reflect this priority. Many Category IV protected areas will need regular, active interventions to address the requirements of species or to maintain habitats, but this is not a requirement of the category.</p>	<p>Provincially designated sites for this category in Alberta include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67 Natural Areas • 3 Ecological Reserves • 2 Heritage Rangelands <p>Heritage Rangelands are areas to preserve and protect natural heritage, which is representative of Alberta's grasslands. Grazing occurs in these areas to maintain the grassland ecology.</p> <p>This category includes 4 federally designated National Wildlife Areas.</p> <p>National Wildlife Areas are designated and managed for wildlife conservation, research and interpretation.</p> <p>This category also includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 922 privately owned sites managed by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, or the Edmonton and Area Land Trust • 1 site owned by the Otipemisiwak Métis Government
<p>V. Protected Landscape or Seascape</p> <p>Protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.</p>	<p>As of 2024, there are no designated protected areas that meet these criteria in Alberta.</p>
<p>VI. Protected Areas with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources</p> <p>Protected areas that conserve ecosystems and habitats, together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems. They are generally large, with most of the area in a natural condition, where a proportion is under sustainable natural resource management and where low-level non-industrial use of natural resources compatible with nature conservation is seen as one of the main aims of the area.</p>	<p>This category includes 149 privately owned sites that are managed by the Alberta Conservation Association or Edmonton and Area Land Trust.</p>

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<p>Not Applicable – Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures</p> <p>Geographically defined areas distinct from traditional protected areas but managed in ways that yield positive, sustained, and long-term outcomes for biodiversity conservation, including associated ecosystem functions, services, and when applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally significant values.</p>	<p>This category includes 70 privately owned sites managed by the Edmonton and Area Land Trust or the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society</p> <p>This category also includes 1 site managed by Parks Canada Agency, Ya Ha Tinda.</p>

Source: Category definitions are taken from Environment and Climate Change Canada (2024)

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