
Pekisko

Heritage Rangeland Management Plan



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Alberta

Cover photograph by Wendy Cartwright.

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Introduction

Heritage Rangelands and Management Planning

Heritage Rangelands are established for the conservation of representative areas of Alberta's prairies, using grazing (via long term leases) to maintain the native grassland ecology. This class ensures the protection of biological diversity and maintenance of ecological health of native grasslands in perpetuity while also sustaining the historic culture and economic function of ranching on Alberta's native rangeland. This designation is administered under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangeland (WAERNAHR) Act*.

A management plan provides a framework to guide internal staff and external communities, stakeholders and public users on management actions, access permissions and any development direction. This plan provides a foundation for long-term environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits for Alberta citizens. Implementation will be completed by the Government of Alberta with support and collaboration with other government agencies, disposition holders, Indigenous communities, other partners and site users.

Management Plan Intent and Alignment

The intent of the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland Management Plan ("the plan") is to conserve and sustainably manage Alberta's intact native Crown rangelands on the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland, through existing grazing disposition leases, stewardship collaboration and balancing other compatible land uses.

Management direction maintains the current pattern of land use, conserves remaining native fescue grassland, and limits new development that would significantly alter the landscape. Heritage Rangelands are administered through Acts, Regulations, regional and sub-regional plans (where applicable), related policy directives (e.g. Heritage Rangeland Operational Management Directive and Government of Alberta programs) and management objectives that focus on maintaining the current pattern of land use while conserving and enhancing the remaining native fescue grasslands, shrublands, and forest ecosystems. The plan also limits new developments that could significantly alter the landscape or compromise ecological integrity.

The plan provides clear direction for land use, resource management and access, and sustaining ecological values into the future. The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland Management Plan will adhere to current and future planning direction included in sub-regional plans, landscape footprint management plans, management frameworks and other directives, where available. See Appendix E for list of pertinent legislation, policy, and direction.

Pekisko Planning Area

Pekisko is in southern Alberta along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountain foothills, southwest of Calgary and near the community of Longview. It is part of a broader landscape of native grasslands, foothills and forested uplands that transition between prairie and mountain environments.

The area represents a convergence of climate, soils, and topography that has been shaped over millennia by fire, extreme weather, and grazing. Plains bison were central to this system as their migratory grazing patterns allowed for greater biodiversity in plant communities, their wallows created habitat diversity, and their hooves churned the soil in ways that improved water infiltration and nutrient cycling. Beginning with herds trailed north from Fort Benton into the region in 1877, the arrival of cattle partially restored the grazing role that bison had long fulfilled. While cattle differ in behavior, managed grazing allowed them to mimic many of the ecological functions of wild grazers.

The Pekisko Grasslands have therefore been historically sustained by large herbivores and, in turn, have sustained successive human communities. This has supported livelihoods rooted in ranching, stewardship, and food production linking ecological health, cultural heritage, and economic resilience across generations.

The Pekisko area is home to *Festuca scabrella*—the official grass of Alberta, also known as rough fescue. It is a symbol of Alberta's prairie heritage, and it provides year-round forage for wildlife and livestock. Rough fescue grasslands are now rare and slow to recover once disturbed. Once prevalent across Alberta, over 75% of our Fescue grasslands (Foothills and Plains Rough fescue) have been lost to conversion to crops or other land uses.



Image source: <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-emblems>

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland (34,292 hectares/ 84,737 acres) designation reinforces the importance of conserving these remaining native grasslands, maintaining the ecological integrity of the area, and contributes to the long-term protection of one of Alberta's largest remaining contiguous blocks of native foothills fescue grassland. The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland supports wildlife species that rely on intact landscapes and provides ecological connectivity to adjacent protected areas, while allowing and respecting the ongoing traditional ranching and grazing operations.

Grassland Landscape and Primary Land Use

The planning area is covered primarily by native grasslands, with areas of forest, shrubland and riparian vegetation occurring in specific settings. The area is a transitional tension zone between forest and grassland where without disturbance much of the landscape will gradually succeed to forest. The current native grasslands are among the most intact remaining examples of foothills fescue grasses in Alberta and in the world. Alberta is the only place in North America with three rough fescue species (plains, foothills and northern variations) with foothills rough fescue (*Festuca scabrella*) being the species occurring on the Pekisko area. Livestock grazing is the primary land use and will continue under existing grazing dispositions and provincial legislation. Carefully managed grazing plays an important role in maintaining grassland health and ecological function.

Development across the area is limited. This management plan maintains the current pattern of land use while prioritizing the conservation of the remaining native grasslands and watershed values.

Management Plan Development

The current boundary of the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland are based on their grazing lease areas. There are lands in this region held under grazing leases that fall outside the planning area. The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland also contains private land and this plan does not direct any action on private property and includes exemptions for their private use and for private access to private property.

In 2014, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) (Strategy 3.13) directed the development of a management plan for the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. In 2016, the grazing lessees' within the current Pekisko Heritage Rangeland boundary came together to request that the land they graze remained protected into the future. To support this initiative, they formed a multi-stakeholder working group and drafted the first management plan for the Pekisko area.

The draft management plan was reviewed and revised, keeping the core recommended objectives and outcomes. Current conditions and government direction also inform how the area will be sustainably managed for the future.

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland Management Plan is administered under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* (WAERNAHR Act or WAERNAHRA). Management and management plan direction is also provided through the Heritage Rangeland Operational Management Directive and Government of Alberta programs.

Management Plan Approach

The plan will be implemented by the Government of Alberta. An Advisory Committee may be established, involving members from the local grazing lease holders, municipalities, and other partners as determined by the Government of Alberta, to support collaborative, land stewardship implementation of this management plan.

Integrated Land Management

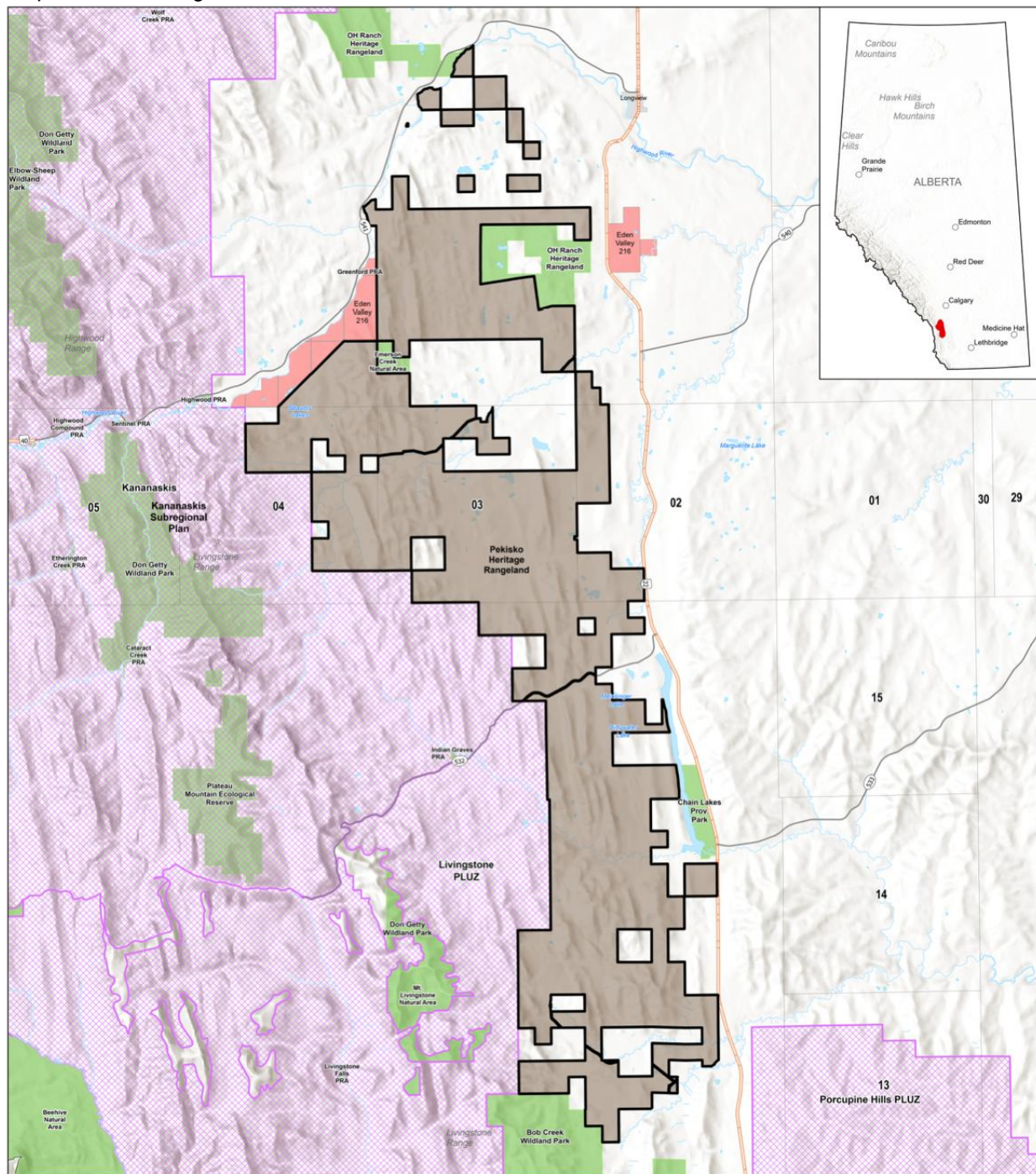
Integrated Land Management (ILM) is a holistic approach to land use that balances environmental protection, economic development, and social well-being by coordinating multiple land uses and stakeholders.

Land uses and developments within the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland are managed to protect natural values and support ongoing grazing operations. The intent is to limit new disturbances (other than those required to abate forest encroachment), minimize the footprint of approved activities, and maintain the open grassland landscape.

Existing commitments for recreational and commercial activities and essential infrastructure may continue, subject to conditions that reduce visual, ecological, and operational impacts and/or disturb the surface. New public roads, recreational infrastructure, and industrial development are not permitted.

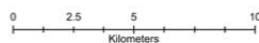
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Map of the Planning Area



Pekisko Heritage Rangeland

-  Pekisko Heritage Rangeland
 Sub-regional Plans
 Indian Reserves
 Urban Area
 Parks & Protected Areas
 Primary Road
 Secondary Road



Alberta
Government

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Coordinate System: NAD83 11TM AEP Forest
Prepared By: GST 26-024
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Alberta Environment and Protected Areas

Where applicable:
Base data provided by the Government of Alberta under the Alberta
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1. Natural Conservation and Protection

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is managed by the government of Alberta in partnership with grazing lease holders who are responsible for the sustainable stewardship of the rangelands on their disposition. The *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act (WAERNAHR Act)*, *Public Lands Act*, and the Public Lands Administration Regulation set the legislative and regulatory requirements for the conservation and protection of the rangeland on this designated Heritage Rangeland. The stewardship is further guided by specific management directives, policies and management frameworks, and guidelines (and any future iterations) such as:

- [Heritage Rangelands Operational Management Directive](#)
- [Alberta's Rangeland Grazing Framework](#)
- [Operating Standards for Alberta's Crown Land \(Grazing Dispositions\)](#)
- [Stewardship for Rangeland Sustainability](#)
- Other policy and management directives identified by the Government of Alberta.

Together, these documents outline the approach ensuring the long-term health, sustainability and resiliency of the rangeland ecosystem, supporting the many ecological goods and services that rangelands provide.

Outcomes:

- Ensure the long-term health, sustainability and resiliency of the rangeland ecosystem, supporting the many ecological goods and services that the rangeland provides.
- Support stewardship practices that value these lands, maintain the native grassland, and protect environmentally sensitive areas.

Rangelands and Grazing

Livestock grazing is the primary land-use management tool within the planning area and aligns with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan intent, *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* (WAERNAHR Act), and the Heritage Rangelands Operational Management directive.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Maintain the integrity of the native rangelands within this landscape through grazing management.
 - a. Use grazing dispositions under established legislative and administrative frameworks to provide the management guidance for maintaining these lands as well-managed, adaptive process in which grazing plays an important role in maintaining the structure and function of native grassland ecosystems.
 - b. Manage grazing dispositions under a stewardship model (Stewardship for Rangeland Sustainability) in which the disposition holder has the primary responsibility to steward the rangelands within the disposition with support from the government rangeland agrologist.
 - c. Ensure all grazing infrastructure is compatible with landscape connectivity with respect to wildlife movement.

The core measure of sustainable rangeland management on public land is range health and the associated riparian health measure. These health assessments are diagnostic tools that assess the specific systems' ability to perform certain key functions.

For rangelands, these include net primary production, maintenance of soil site stability, the capture and beneficial release of water, nutrient and energy cycling, and functional diversity of plant species. For riparian areas the key ecological functions assessed are the system's ability to trap sediment, build and maintain streambanks, store flood water and energy, recharge the aquifer, filter and buffer water, reduce and dissipate stream energy, maintain biodiversity and create primary productivity. Both assessments use key indicators to give the assessor a clear picture of the system's state.

The use of livestock grazing through grazing dispositions supports healthy, functioning rangelands and riparian ecosystems. Grazing is managed through the four principles of range management that guide stewardship:

- Balance livestock demand with the available forage supply (sustainable stocking rates).
- Distribute livestock grazing impact.
- Avoid grazing during vulnerable periods.
- Provide effective rest after grazing.

Plant communities and/or tame pastures with introduced non-native forages and species not designated by the Weed Control Act will be managed for their current conservation values and to minimize further invasion into native plant communities.

Range management projects which improve the overall management of the rangeland and benefit livestock and/or wildlife and ensure consistency with the objectives of this plan will be allowed.

Existing operational range management plans and grazing lease agreements pertaining to grazing dispositions will continue and will be updated or replaced as per rangeland lifecycle processes determined by the Government of Alberta. Individual dispositions may have specific plans developed by the Government of Alberta that will improve the management of livestock and/or wildlife. These plans will be reviewed and approved by the Government of Alberta to ensure that plans comply with the overall management objectives for the area and the terms and intent of the applicable grazing disposition.

Vegetation Management

Maintaining a landscape that reflects a mosaic of native grassland, forest, and shrub communities, representative of the Foothills Fescue, Foothills Parkland, Montane, and Subalpine Natural Subregions is a management priority. In the absence of disturbance, the natural tendency of ecological succession in this area is toward forest cover, altering the desired balance in heterogeneity on the Heritage Rangeland. Changes from this desired landscape diversity due to succession will be addressed through appropriate management treatments as determined by the Government of Alberta.

Vegetation management objectives and direction will comply with the overall management objectives for the area. Direction will be determined by the appropriate department of the Government of Alberta. All approvals, authorizations, and permits will be governed by the appropriate department and authority. Where appropriate, nothing in this plan prevents the issuance of vegetation management approvals and commercial or local timber permits to facilitate the required removal of identified woody vegetation.

Objectives:

- 1.2 Promote grassland communities in areas that have successional components and that have been encroached.
- 1.3 Use vegetation management tools including forest harvesting and thinning, mechanical clearing (brush plowing, mowing, mulching), prescribed grazing and fire, and chemical control to manage encroachment into grasslands.
- 1.4 Use vegetation management tools to support grassland, riparian, and wildlife values, and reduce fire risk.

Weed Management

This management plan supports early detection, monitoring, minimizing, and controlling of invasive species in accordance with provincial legislation, and municipal weed control requirements. Management actions emphasize prevention, responsible operational practices, and the use of approved control measures to reduce infestations and restore native plant communities.

Objectives:

- 1.5 Support early detection, monitoring, minimizing, and controlling of invasive species in accordance with provincial legislation, and municipal weed control requirements.
- 1.6 Manage invasive/non-native/noxious plant species to restore and promote the regeneration of native communities.

Invasive Plants and Noxious/Prohibited Weeds

Measures which prevent the establishment and spread of noxious and prohibited noxious weeds, and to control infestations as outlined in and in accordance with the *Weed Control Act*, *Public Lands Act*, provincial programs and the MD of Ranchland and MD of Foothills weed control bylaws will be used. Weed management requires a collaborative process and all stakeholders are needed to achieve outcomes.

Best management practices for prevention of invasive species, including cleaning of equipment used in close proximity to noxious or prohibited invasive species, and using materials from certified weed-free sources will be followed.

Outcomes:

- Terrestrial weeds are effectively managed through cooperation and collaboration.
- Aquatic invasive species infestations are prevented, controlled and reduced when identified.

Objectives:

- 1.7 Disposition holders are responsible for inspections and management of weeds within their dispositions and must work with agrologists from the Government of Alberta to complete assessments during inspections.
- 1.8 Municipal weed inspectors are responsible for weed notices and compliance action under the *Weed Control Act*.
- 1.9 The Government of Alberta is responsible for ensuring the legislation and policy are followed.
- 1.10 Application of the Alberta Aquatic Invasive Species Early Detection Rapid Response Plan in water systems, where identified.
- 1.11 Maintain public awareness campaigns to communicate the importance of cleaning equipment (e.g. watercraft, hip waders, life jackets, etc.) and management of domestic pets, using the 'Clean, drain, dry your gear' and 'Don't Let it Loose' campaigns.

Non-native Species

Non-native species, if unmanaged, can have a detrimental impact on native plant communities that could limit or prevent conservation outcomes for the Heritage Rangeland. Preventing the introduction and spread of non-native species in the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is a priority to maintain the integrity of native plant communities and healthy watersheds.

Objective:

- 1.12 Intentional introduction of non-native species of plants or animals will not be considered or permitted, with the exception of the seeding of tame forages on existing tame pastures and the use of biological control for invasive species (as approved by the Government of Alberta).

Reclamation, Restoration and Revegetation

Re-vegetation, reclamation and restoration projects follow current Reclamation Criteria Guidelines published by the Government of Alberta and any relevant supporting guideline documents that are published. This includes projects that return a disturbed area to its near native vegetation pre-disturbance site assessment condition or equivalent land capability.

Objective:

- 1.13 Applications for native seed collection will be reviewed and may be permitted as per current authorization application processes. Native grass seed is preferred for rough fescue revegetation.

Trail Management and Use

There are no designated trails identified within the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. Existing trails provide access throughout the lands for grazing purposes, access to embedded deeded lands and user access. No motorized access is permitted except for grazing and land management purposes (see Recreational and Commercial Activities section for more information).

On the Heritage Rangeland, new trails for ranching operations or access development to embedded deeded lands require review and approval of the Government of Alberta. Trails and roads on embedded deeded lands are at the discretion of the title holder.

Permitted uses:

- ✓ Grazing
- ✓ Restoration and/or Rejuvenation of Tame Pasture
- ✓ Control of Tree and Shrub Encroachment
- ✓ Range Management Projects
- ✓ Weed Control
- ✓ Control of Invasive species and pathogens
- ✓ Motorized access- For management activities (Disposition Holder Only)
- ✓ Motorized access- Private land

Not permitted:

- x Cultivation of Native Grasslands
- x Motorized Access (including Highway vehicles, Off-highway Vehicles (OHV), Snowmobiles and Power Boats)

2. Forest

Lack of fire on the landscape has allowed forest encroachment to occur onto the grasslands over time. Managing the forest and shrub communities is necessary to slow and/or prevent tree encroachment while still providing a mosaic of forest, shrub and grasslands in the riparian areas. Vegetation management tools, in conjunction with species recovery plans, will be used as appropriate to support this landscape balance to minimize disturbance, protect grassland, riparian, and wildlife values, and reduce fire risk.

Introduced pathogens, such as white pine blister rust (*Cronartium ribicola*) also threaten native plant communities and species at risk (e.g. limber pine). The Government of Alberta continues to monitor limber pine populations, insects and pathogens and follow established recovery plans for the species.

Management for wildfire, forest encroachment, insect and disease control will be allowed in areas where traditional forestry activities are not permitted. This may include prescribed fire, forest harvest and other treatments as necessary. Prescribed activities will require an approved plan and follow current best management practices, species recovery plans and policies as determined by the Government of Alberta.

Outcome:

- Tree encroachment is slowed and/or prevented through management of forest and shrub communities while still providing a mosaic of grasslands, shrub and forest within the riparian areas.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Prescribed fires and prescribed vegetation management operations will be the preferred methods for balancing forest cover types with other plant communities.
 - a. Prescribed vegetation management includes forest harvesting and thinning, mechanical clearing (brush plowing and mowing) and chemical control on sites for the purposes of balancing grasslands forest and shrublands.

Permitted uses:

- ✓ Forest harvesting - for the purpose of vegetation management projects only
- ✓ Temporary roads for forest harvesting activities- for the purpose of vegetation management projects only
- ✓ Prescribed Vegetation Management
- ✓ Management for wildfire, insect and disease control

Not permitted:

- x Introduction of Invasive Species

3. Fire and Wildlife Management

Fire is a key ecological process that promotes vegetation renewal, increases biodiversity, disrupts continuous fuels, and creates more resilient landscapes. Research shows that fire helps maintain grassland stability and ecosystem heterogeneity in transitional areas.

Indigenous Peoples used seasonal, low-intensity fire as a deliberate land-stewardship tool that maintained open grasslands, promoted culturally important plants, and reduced fuel accumulation in the Pekisko Area. With increased human settlement and establishment of the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve land management shifted toward conservation and fire suppression.

Outcome:

- Wildfire management practices align and comply with the Alberta Wildfire Mitigation Strategy and the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*.

Objectives:

- 3.1 All proposed mechanisms for fire management will be assessed and managed for threats (wildfires) and opportunities (prescribed fires) within and outside of the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland.
- 3.2 The Fire Ban System or ministerial order as per *WAERNAHR Act* can prohibit or restrict human activities that may ignite wildfires.
- 3.3 Where fires impact the landscape, natural succession will be promoted for recovery of the area. Grassland communities will be promoted in areas that have a grassland successional component and have been encroached.

Recreational fires are not permitted, except at existing facilities on private land. The Minister may prohibit or restrict fires in a Heritage Rangeland at any time through an Order.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Prescribed Fire
- ✓ Managed Fire

Not permitted:

- x Recreational fires; except at existing facilities on private land under conservation easements

4. Water Resources

Water and soil resources are fundamental to the health of ecosystems within the Heritage Rangeland. Streams, wetlands and groundwater systems support livestock use, wildlife habitat and overall landscape function. The Government of Alberta has a number of tools at its disposal to manage water and groundwater.

Outcome:

- Natural watercourses and riparian areas are protected.

Objectives:

- 4.1 Limit activities that could alter hydrological systems.
- 4.2 Address source water protection to protect downstream communities from unintended increased mineral deposits with any land-use impacts.
- 4.3 Adhere to the *Water Act*, associated water, groundwater and soil regulations, the Alberta Wetland Policy, directives, all applicable codes of practice including the Code of Practice for Watercourse Crossings, and management frameworks.
- 4.4 Use monitoring and assessment through partnerships to guide management decisions and help maintain and improve water quality and quantity including riparian health management.

This plan does not support commercial water development such as hydro-electric generation, bottling operations, etc. The *WAERNAHR Act* does not permit the destruction or damage of any land or water within the boundary nor allow surface disturbance through the development of new infrastructure.

The Government of Alberta, along with partners, stakeholders and non-government organizations, initiate, complete and monitor watershed status and watershed projects for the effective management of riparian areas.

Offsite watering is a tool that supports improved livestock distribution to improve and/or sustain range and riparian health. Existing dams and dugouts for the purpose of livestock management will be maintained. New developments (e.g. dams) will be reviewed through the established referral process for review and approval.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Livestock Watering Developments

Not permitted:

- x Commercial Water Developments (e.g. water bottling operations, hydroelectric generation dams)

5. Wildlife and Fisheries

Wildlife and fish populations within Pekisko Heritage Rangeland are managed within established provincial and regional frameworks. Native species and their habitats are an important component of the area's grassland, riparian, and forest ecosystems. Responsible stewardship includes managing the coexistence between wildlife and people on the land. The *Wildlife Act*, hunting regulations and Alberta fishing regulations guide this section.

Outcomes:

- Maintain viable self-sustaining populations of native wildlife and fish species, and the unique grassland (fescue) habitats that support them while continuing regulated hunting and fishing.
- Ecological function, regional strategies, and the interaction between wildlife and livestock use is considered in making management decisions.
- Landscape intactness to support wildlife, sensitive habitats and biodiversity is sustained.

Wildlife

Wildlife populations are managed in a sustainable manner as per the direction contained in applicable Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) strategies and provincial/regional wildlife management plans.

Objectives:

- 5.1 Exclude livestock and controlled/exotic animals that are infected with diseases that are detrimental to wildlife (inclusive of domestic sheep and goats).
- 5.2 Use of domestic and/or controlled/exotic species such as donkeys, llamas, etc. for commercial purposes may be allowed subject to existing health requirements for commercial users.
- 5.3 Manage for non-native species, e.g., wild boar, that have been introduced, transported, and/or migrated using current best management practices.

Habitat supporting viable populations of native wildlife species are managed to emphasize the retention of all ecosystem components and the retention (or emulation) of natural processes. Habitat heterogeneity ensures both domestic cattle production and native wildlife species needs are met. Habitat and rangeland management decisions will consider the needs of both wildlife and livestock. As needed, species inventories and/or studies conducted by Alberta Fish and Wildlife Stewardship Branch, may provide direction for habitat improvement and enhancement projects. These projects will be evaluated and

prioritized on a multi-species basis; the benefits of habitat projects for livestock will also be considered.

Objectives:

- 5.4 Manage wildlife conflicts through appropriate remedial actions that have minimal impacts on non-target species, people, and property.
- 5.5 Predator management activities may use registered trappers when needed.

Fisheries

Sport fishery will be managed through established regulations that apply to the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland lands for Fisheries Management Area ES1.

Objectives:

- 5.4 Support fish population and fish habitat inventories are undertaken in the Heritage Rangeland.
- 5.5 Inform and support riparian habitat improvement projects as necessary.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Recreational Hunting
- ✓ Recreational Fishing
- ✓ Habitat Management Projects
- ✓ Problem Wildlife Control
- ✓ Motorized Access for management activities (Disposition Holders Only)

Not permitted:

- x Motorized Access for hunting, fishing access or game retrieval
- x Introduction of Exotic Wildlife Species

6. Species at Risk

Within the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland there are wildlife, fish and vegetative species present that are of varying conservation significance. Additionally, many species are also considered under the Federal *Species at Risk Act* (to protect Federally-listed endangered and threatened species) and determined by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). A listing of the provincial and federally designated species occurring on the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is included in Appendix D.

Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) and Limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*) are considered Endangered Species in Alberta, listed under the Alberta *Wildlife Act*. Grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*), Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and Westslope Cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) are currently listed as Threatened under the Alberta *Wildlife Act*. Each of these species have recovery plans, which provide strategies to achieve the overall recovery goal to restore them to viable, naturally self-sustaining populations within Alberta. Additionally, there are species that are considered Species of Special Concern (classification for wildlife that may become threatened or endangered due to a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats), where preventative actions are outlined in the form of Conservation Management Plans, which are designed to prevent the species from becoming threatened or endangered. Where species have been impacted (harming, killing or destroying habitats) due to inappropriate actions, could result in non-compliance of that protection and management direction.

Outcome:

- Known vegetation and wildlife species at risk are managed to facilitate their survival and regeneration.

Objectives:

- 6.1 Disposition holders will consult with local Fish and Wildlife biologists for activities that have likelihood of impacting species at risk.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Habitat Management Projects that support species at risk
- ✓ Control of Invasive Species and/or Pathogens
- ✓ Problem Wildlife Control

Not permitted:

- x Introduction of Exotic Wildlife Species

7. Trapping

Trapping supports wildlife and habitat management (e.g. predation management for protection of species at risk, disease mitigation, and problematic wildlife) and helps maintain sustainable wildlife populations. This activity is administered and regulated under the Alberta *Wildlife Act*, Wildlife Regulation and Trapping Regulations.

In designated Heritage Rangelands, trapping is not allowed as per the Heritage Rangeland Operational Management Directive. Existing (before Heritage Rangeland designation), registered fur management areas will be permitted to continue, provided that the activity does not impact the grazing operations. New traplines will not be issued.

Outcome:

- Support sustainable wildlife populations.

Objectives:

- 7.1 Manage predators through appropriate management activities as per Government of Alberta direction.

NOTE: No Registered Fur Management Area or registered traplines exist in the Heritage Rangeland. No new traplines will be issued except where problem wildlife management control is required.

8. Cultural Heritage

Native grassland landscapes and ecological systems provide essential services for maintaining natural habitats, sustaining populations of plants and wildlife, supporting clean hydrological cycles, carbon sequestration ability, and biodiversity. They have extensive history of human use and conserving and protecting these lands to support this living history and culture is an important value.

First Nations and Indigenous Peoples

The direct relationships that Indigenous Peoples have with the land and water provide valuable interconnections for their culture, spirit and language. Conservation and preservation of these lands for future generations is necessary for intergenerational knowledge transfer, traditional use, and is essential for cultural and natural landscape monitoring.

First Nations' rights provided by the treaties in Alberta to hunt, fish and trap for food are recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Alberta's government understands the important role these rights have in maintaining First Nations' cultures and traditions. The treaties define the ongoing relationship between the Crown and First Nations and set out the obligations and rights of all signatories. Nothing within the content of the plan is intended to be interpreted to add to or take away from any existing rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

Outcome:

- Indigenous values, perspectives and traditional land uses in land management, monitoring and protection activities are considered in the management, monitoring and protection of the Heritage Rangeland.

Objectives:

- 8.1 Support the ability for First Nations and Indigenous peoples to access and use the land and resources. The Recreation Access Regulation guides the process to access this area.

Historic Resources

Pekisko Heritage Rangeland contains historic resources that contribute to the heritage value of the landscape. These resources are managed under provincial legislation and require careful management to avoid disturbance.

Outcome:

- Historic resources are managed to prevent disturbance and unauthorized removal.

Objectives:

- 8.2 Ensure appropriate oversight of developments that could affect known and undiscovered historic resources by ensuring that all ground disturbing activities comply with the *Historical Resources Act*, *WAERNAHR Act*, and associated policy and directives.
- 8.3 Ensure appropriate mitigation measures when ground disturbance is proposed to manage sensitive sites and the historic resource information they contain.
- 8.4 Manage landscape conditions to conserve culturally sensitive areas, where known or discovered.

Heritage Rangeland designation limits the possibility of disturbance on the landscape to support appropriate management of all existing historic resource sites.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Low Impact Access – Use Recreation Access Regulations for information and contact details.

Not permitted:

- x Removal of cultural and/or historical items found. Follow processes to report findings.
- x Disrupting sensitive areas and Indigenous ceremonies or activities when occurring.

9. Recreational and Commercial Activities

Recreation Use and Access

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland will not be promoted as a recreation or tourism destination. Recreational access and use are intended to remain limited, low-impact, and compatible with the protection of natural, cultural and heritage values, while respecting the ongoing grazing operations. Maintaining ecological integrity of the area takes precedence over any recreational access that negatively impacts the grasslands, as well as recreational development.

Outcome:

- The Heritage Rangeland is protected from negative impacts made from extensive, intensive recreational use activities and motorized recreational access.
- The ecological integrity of the area takes precedence over any recreational access that negatively impacts the grasslands, as well as recreational development.

Objectives:

- 9.1 Motorized recreation is not permitted.
- 9.2 New trails, recreational infrastructure and formal trail systems are not permitted to be developed.
- 9.3 The *WAERNAHR Act* and the Recreational Access Regulation (RAR) will provide direction on accessing the Heritage Rangeland for accessing lands and permitted recreational activities.
- 9.4 Non-motorized recreation will be dispersed and facility-free.
- 9.5 Recreational access management plan(s) will be considered if non-compliance access increases and/or these activities severely impact these lands.

Under the Recreation Access Regulation (RAR), grazing lease holders have a duty to allow access unless one or more of the circumstances outlined in the legislation applies. All recreational users must contact the grazing lease holder prior to any entry on the lease. Refer to the Government of Alberta website for the most up to date information <https://www.alberta.ca/recreation-on-agricultural-public-land>. Non-compliance with the Recreational Access Regulation can result in a ticketable offence or administration penalty. Reports of non-compliant incidents are reported to 310-LAND.

Access to the Heritage Rangeland may be closed or restricted by:

- Minister Order (*WAERNAHR Act*).
- Local Settlement Officer (LSO) or Director under the Recreational Access Regulation for the purposes of proper land management, public safety, or animal health.

See Appendix B for a complete list of permitted uses under the Access Management and Integrated Land Management Sections.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Foot Access- Subject to Recreation Access Regulations
- ✓ Cycling and Biking- Subject to Recreation Access Regulations
- ✓ Backcountry Camping- Subject to Recreation Access Regulations

Not permitted:

- x Motorized Access, including Highway Vehicles, Off Highway Vehicles (OHV), Snowmobiles and Power Boats
- x New Public Roads
- x Aircraft Take-off or Landing

Commercial Activities

Commercial Recreation

The type of commercial recreational activities that occur will be reviewed by the Government of Alberta and in consultation with the grazing leaseholder, to assess the impacts to the Heritage Rangeland. A methodology may be adopted or developed to assess levels of use, environmental impacts, and recreational carrying capacities.

Outcome:

- The impact of non-motorized commercial recreation activities is mitigated through management and ongoing monitoring.

Objectives:

- 9.6 Manage commercial recreation requests and activities that may be compatible with; the Heritage Rangeland designation, the compatibility with the existing ranching operation and the cultural goals and objectives, of the Heritage Rangeland.
- 9.7 Manage commercial recreation activities that include horses, feed and equipment to minimize impact and prevent the introduction of weeds.
- 9.8 All commercial recreation will require review and approval by the Government of Alberta. This review and approval will follow the established referral process.
- 9.9 A license and/or permit is required to conduct any commercial recreation including guiding and outfitting services
- 9.10 Restrictions to access, duration, group size, and activity may be placed on any permits granted for commercial recreation activities.

Commercial Tourism

This activity is inconsistent with the purpose and intent of the Heritage Rangeland and will not be considered under any circumstances. Visitation and tourism development are not a priority of the Heritage Rangeland.

Outcomes:

- The Heritage Rangeland remains free from all commercial tourism infrastructure.
- The Heritage Rangeland is not promoted for tourism or recreation purposes.

Objectives:

- 9.11 Commercial tourism facilities such as hotels, motels or small-scale ecolodges, recreational vehicle (RV) parks, golf courses, or similar types of development or outdoor recreation facilities such as auto access campgrounds, picnic areas, hard surface hiking trails, boat launches and beach areas are not permitted.
- 9.12 Manage requested public visitation using the Recreation Access Regulation (RAR).
- 9.13 Limit the amount of public visitation by using appropriate education and communications tools.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Limited, Low Impact Non-motorized Activities

Not permitted:

- x Motorized Access: including Highway Vehicles, Off Highway Vehicles (OHV), Snowmobiles and Power Boats
- x Facilities and Infrastructures (see section below)

Special Events

Special events within the Heritage Rangeland designation, especially large-scale events, are considered not compatible. A special event may include but is not limited to weddings, rallies, sports competitions, filming and still photography, etc. Applications are submitted through the Ministry/Minister responsible for Heritage Rangeland management, in consultation with other Government of Alberta departments and the grazing lease holders.

Outcome:

- Special events or compatible activities on Crown Lands are limited and approved by application if the activity does not impact natural or cultural features or disrupt grazing operations.

Objectives:

- 9.14 Ensure grassland and ecological values are considered and supported in requests for special events and evaluate the appropriateness of event use on these lands.
- 9.15 Pekisko continues to use the private land under conservation easement as settings for private, special events.
- 9.16 Special event. applications are submitted through the Ministry/Minister responsible for Heritage Rangeland management, in consultation with other Government of Alberta departments and the grazing lease holders.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Small-scale, short-term events (requires approval)

Not permitted:

- x Large scale, long-term events that impact the native landscape

Facilities and Infrastructure

The management intent is to maintain the undisturbed natural quality of the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland through a review of all considered/proposed facility and infrastructure development.

Facilities and infrastructure on the Crown land portions of the Heritage Rangeland will only be considered for approval if they are for rangeland management purposes.

Pekisko Heritage Rangeland has no designated 'staging area' for parking purposes.

Outcome:

- Facilities and infrastructure on Crown land portions of the Heritage Rangeland exist only for rangeland management purposes.

Objective:

- 9.17 Maintain the undisturbed natural quality of these lands through a review of all considered/proposed facility and infrastructure development.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ For Rangeland Management Purposes- Requires approval

Not permitted:

- x Commercial Tourism and Recreational Facilities
- x Outdoor Recreation Facilities

10. Energy and Minerals

The Pekisko Area is underlain by coal deposits with varying levels of petroleum and natural gas resources. The Pekisko Area is relatively untouched by energy and mineral development activities and there are no active oil and gas wells or tenure agreements in the Pekisko Area. There is a large diameter operating pipeline corridor paralleling Highway 22 in addition to a 500 KV powerline.

Outcomes:

- Native grasslands and habitats are maintained and supported by limiting surface access.
- Heritage Rangeland legislation, policy, directives and grassland processes are in compliance when considering new proposals for existing access changes and maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Management of energy and mineral resources within the Heritage Rangeland is guided by provincial legislation, regulatory processes, and the intent of maintaining ecological integrity and native rangeland function. The *WAERNAHR Act* and Heritage Rangeland Operational Management Directive provide direction for resource development and processes within Heritage Rangelands.

Crown and freehold mineral rights will be honored if the right to access subsurface minerals (e.g. petroleum and natural gas, brine-hosted minerals, geothermal, and which authorize the use of pore space) existed prior to or at the time the land became designated (*WAERNAHR Act*) as a Heritage Rangeland. Crown mineral dispositions (*WAERNAHR Act*, under the *Mines and Minerals Act* and applicable regulations) may be issued and include a *no surface access* condition, to prevent new surface disturbances on the land base. Subsurface resources may only be accessed from outside the Heritage Rangeland boundary (e.g., horizontal or directional drilling), consistent with provincial policy and the intent of the protected area.

Objectives:

- 10.1 The Heritage Rangeland will remain unavailable for disposition agreements for rock-hosted metallic and industrial minerals, and ammonite shell recovery.
- 10.2 Surface access restrictions associated with sensitive wildlife habitat (e.g., raptor habitat, species at risk buffers) and native grassland and ecological values of the lands will be applied through existing provincial tools and referral processes.
- 10.3 Surface access on Crown land, where required and approved, will be subject to authorization under applicable legislation and coordinated Government of Alberta review processes.

Any Crown exploration or development proposals that represent existing but undeveloped mineral rights will be reviewed and regulated through established Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) processes and applicable provincial legislation. Where surface access is required to honour existing mineral rights, development activities should minimize surface disturbance, prioritize the use of existing disturbance and access areas, avoid native grasslands where possible, restore disturbed lands in accordance with reclamation requirements, and align with provincial guidance for minimizing disturbance in native grasslands.

Objectives:

- 10.4 Manage footprint, where existing (prior to Heritage Rangeland designation) commitments occur, in a responsible manner.
- 10.5 Surface access restrictions associated with sensitive wildlife habitat, native grasslands, and ecological values will be applied through existing provincial tools and referral processes.
- 10.6 Surface access on Crown land, where required and approved, will be subject to authorization under applicable legislation and coordinated Government of Alberta review processes.

There is freehold mineral title outside of, but surrounded by, the Heritage Rangeland. If these freehold minerals are approved for development, access may be provided through the Heritage Rangeland subject to established regulatory process.

Should surface access in the Heritage Rangeland be required to support the development or transport of freehold minerals on embedded deeded lands, such access may be permitted in accordance with approval conditions and the principles contained in Alberta Energy Regulator Information Letter *ERCB IL 2010-02* (Principles for Minimizing Surface Disturbance in Native Prairie and Parkland Areas). Alberta Energy Information Letter *2003-25* (Honouring Existing Mineral Commitments in Legislated Provincial Protected Areas) provides additional direction regarding the management of existing surface and subsurface commitments.

No new agreements for petroleum and natural gas, brine-hosted minerals, geothermal, and which authorize the use of pore space will be issued. Metallic and industrial minerals, ammonite shell, and coal remain reserved from disposition.

Objectives:

- 10.7 Manage minerals and natural resource activity in a sustainable manner that maintains ecological integrity and native rangeland function.
- 10.8 Honour all existing freehold mineral rights while ensuring that any approved development minimizes impacts to fescue grasslands and the ecological values of the broader landscape.

Any approved development of freehold mineral rights will be reviewed through existing Alberta Energy Regulator processes. Where development is approved, dispositions may be issued for access roads, well sites, and associated infrastructure. Development activities should minimize impacts to native grasslands and ecological values consistent with the intent of this management plan.

Anthropogenic footprint should be minimized by avoiding native grasslands and using existing disturbances and access routes wherever practical. New access roads or infrastructure will only be considered where no reasonable alternative exists, and access is required to honour existing rights. To reduce new disturbances, operators shall use existing or shared access routes wherever possible.

Objectives:

- 10.9 Maintain and support intact native grasslands and habitats by limiting surface access.
- 10.10 Manage footprint, where existing commitments occur, in a responsible manner.

New roads through the Heritage Rangeland to access resources outside of, or adjacent to, the Heritage Rangeland are not supported. Existing public roads that pass through the Heritage Rangeland are generally not included as part of the designation. Where they are included, they will continue to be maintained.

Objectives:

- 10.11 Surface access restrictions associated with ecological values and native grasslands will be applied through existing provincial tools and referral processes.
- 10.12 Maintain existing public roads that occur within the Heritage Rangeland boundary.

New surface pipeline dispositions within the Heritage Rangeland are not permitted unless required to support existing authorized subsurface commitments. Existing pipeline infrastructure will continue to be operated and maintained under existing approvals.

Objectives:

- 10.13 Manage footprint, where existing commitments occur, in a responsible manner.
- 10.14 Ensure compliance with all Heritage Rangeland legislation, policy, directives, and grassland procedures when considering existing access changes and maintenance of existing infrastructure.

All reclamation and closure requirements for energy and mineral activities will be managed through provincial legislation and regulatory processes (e.g., under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* and associated directives). This management plan does not alter or duplicate those requirements but supports

their application to ensure the restoration of ecological function within native grassland ecosystems.

Objective:

- 10.15 Support the application of existing provincial reclamation and closure requirements to ensure restoration of ecological function following energy and mineral activities.

Other Activities

Neither extensive nor intensive resource development activities are permitted on Heritage Rangelands. Examples of prohibited developments include new data centres and electricity generation facilities, including renewable energy developments such as wind, geothermal, hydroelectric, and bio-energy projects.

Permitted uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Maintenance of existing communication towers and transmission corridors
- ✓ Existing oil and gas commitments—impacts must be minimized
- ✓ Minerals—existing commitments. Surface access and activity will be permitted in honoring existing mineral commitments. Surface access and activity will minimize surface disturbance as per conditions of approval and principles of IL 2010-02
- ✓ Existing pipeline agreements
- ✓ New pipeline agreements—only to access existing subsurface commitments
- ✓ Existing access/resource roads—access controls may apply

Not permitted:

- x New oil and gas commitments
- x Surface materials extraction (e.g. sand, gravel, peat, marl)
- x New or expansion of existing communications towers and transmission corridors
- x Commercial windmills or wind farms
- x Minerals—new exploration
- x New access roads—access for developing existing oil and gas commitments must use existing roads, if possible

11. Embedded Deeded Lands

The Heritage Rangeland excludes private land within its boundary. Access through and across the Heritage Rangeland will continue to be enabled for landowners to their private deeded lands. Access activities must minimize disturbance, maintain native grassland values, and align with the intent and outcomes of the Heritage Rangeland designation.

Access (including roads, rights of way and undeveloped allowances) will adhere to *WAERNAHR Act*. Efforts to minimize surface disturbance will be guided by *the Foothills Fescue Grassland Principles for Minimizing Surface Disturbance* document.

Outcome:

- Embedded deeded lands are accessible.

Objectives:

- 11.1 Maintain access through the Heritage Rangeland for private landowners to reach their deeded lands.
- 11.2 Minimize surface disturbance associated with access activities to protect native grassland values and ecological function.
- 11.3 Ensure access management is consistent with the *WAERNAHR Act*, Heritage Rangeland management intent, and applicable grassland disturbance minimization guidance.

Private landowners within the Heritage Rangeland will retain the right to access their properties using existing routes. Improvements to private infrastructure, including the provision and upgrading of utilities, should utilize existing access routes wherever possible. Motorized access should follow established routes and avoid disturbance to native grasslands where no route currently exists.

Objectives:

- 11.4 Retain access rights for private landowners using existing routes.
- 11.5 Encourage the use of existing routes for infrastructure improvements and utility upgrades.
- 11.6 Limit new surface disturbance by directing motorized access to established routes and avoiding impacts to native grasslands.

The Government of Alberta will communicate and work with deeded landowners and grazing lease holders adjacent to private lands that require access through the Heritage Rangeland. Discussions may include new access road considerations, alternative access options, potential impacts to grasslands associated with surface disturbance on private lands, and reclamation

requirements where Heritage Rangeland grasslands have been affected by private access or development.

Objectives:

- 11.7 Collaborate with private landowners and grazing lease holders when evaluating access requirements through the Heritage Rangeland.
- 11.8 Consider alternative access options and minimize impacts to native grasslands when reviewing new access proposals.
- 11.9 Promote reclamation of disturbed native grasslands where private access or development activities have resulted in impacts.

Heritage Rangeland management does not occur in isolation, and management decisions within the Heritage Rangelands may have consequences for surrounding lands. Similarly, management activities on private and other non-Crown lands can influence ecological and human-use values adjacent to the Heritage Rangelands. These influences may include changes to grazing management, access requirements, wildlife management, land-use activities, and development pressures. Maintaining relationships, ongoing communication, and encouraging conservation initiatives will be important components of stewardship within the Heritage Rangelands and among neighbouring private landowners.

Objectives:

- 11.10 Foster collaborative relationships and ongoing communication between the Government of Alberta, grazing disposition holders, private landowners, and other stakeholders.
- 11.11 Encourage voluntary stewardship, conservation initiatives, and land management practices that support Heritage Rangelands objectives.
- 11.12 Consider the broader social, ecological, and land-use implications of management decisions within and adjacent to the Heritage Rangeland.

12. Education and Outreach

Public Awareness

Public awareness efforts will support the protection of Pekisko Heritage Rangeland by clearly communicating the sensitivity of its grassland, riparian and cultural resources. Messaging will emphasize responsible use, respect for grazing operations and the importance of maintaining ecological integrity.

Given that multiple grazing operations are active on the Heritage Rangeland, the conditions and restrictions to access, and the sensitivity of the grassland ecology, public education and awareness initiatives will not promote the Heritage Rangeland with the aim of attracting increased levels of visitor use.

Outcome:

- Educational messaging communicates the history of ranching and cultural use to build a stronger connection to the land.
- Visitor access to the Heritage Rangeland is minimized.

Objectives:

- 12.1 Focus education and communication materials on the natural, indigenous and ranching heritage of the area.
- 12.2 Develop education messaging in collaboration with Government of Alberta, grazing disposition holders, individual lease holders, indigenous communities and the conservation easement holders.
- 12.3 No promotional materials will be developed that encourage visitation.

Research

Research helps improve how the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is managed by building knowledge about grassland, riparian, and wildlife ecosystems. Research that studies natural values and addresses management needs is allowed.

Outcome:

- Scientific and applied knowledge of the Heritage Rangeland and native grasslands is supported and encouraged.

Objective:

- 12.4 Manage research activity through research and collection permits authorized by the Government of Alberta. Access to the land for research is authorized and managed through Temporary Field Authorizations or Recreation Access Regulation, depending on research intensity and duration.

Permitted Uses (under appropriate management direction):

- ✓ Research and Monitoring using the appropriate approvals processes

Not permitted:

- x Promoting the Heritage Rangeland as a tourist or multi-use destination

13. Public Safety

Public safety is a priority within the Heritage Rangeland. Fire, wildlife encounters, and the act of recreation can create situations that put the public or land managers at risk. There is limited cellphone coverage in the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland that makes communication challenging.

Recreation users need to be aware of the risks and take the appropriate precautions, so they are prepared. Education of the risks prior to visitation during visitation, and information obtained upon access approval help reduce the occurrences and severity of public safety incidents.

The Fire Ban System (Fire Advisory, Fire Restriction, Fire Ban or Forest Area Closure), issued by the local Municipalities or the Government of Alberta, will continue to be used throughout the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland and area. Wildfires may be reported to 310-FIRE.

Management will be in accordance with current provincial government policy and procedures, appropriate departments, and in collaboration with local Municipalities.

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland falls within several Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachments which include the following: Diamond Valley, High River and Nanton. The RCMP is the lead agency for Search and Rescue within the Province.

Outcomes:

- Minimize safety risk to users, including the grazing disposition holders, Indigenous Peoples, public, wildlife and cattle on these lands, where possible.
- Ensure all human users of these Heritage Rangelands are aware of the risks when accessing these lands through education and effective communications.

Objectives:

- 13.1 Collaborate with external agencies to ensure appropriate public safety measures are implemented.
- 13.2 Government of Alberta staff and municipal government staff provide assistance to federal and provincial enforcement agencies will work together with any public safety or emergency management situation within the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland.

Fire Safety

Outdoor fires will require consent of the grazing lease holder and adhere to the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*, the Fire Ban System, and local bylaws.

Note: *WAERNAHR Act* can prohibit or restrict fires as directed from the Minister responsible for the Act. All other fires, including wildfires and prescribed fires, will be managed in accordance with the above section on Fire Management.

Objectives:

- 13.3 Align with provincial wildfire management priorities.
- 13.4 Support implementation of the Alberta Wildfire Mitigation Strategy and any other applicable acts, regulations, policies, and directives.

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14. Monitoring and Review

Monitoring and review processes are critical to the success of implementation of the plan. Government of Alberta staff will continue to identify opportunities to complete monitoring activities in collaboration with the scientific community, partners, stakeholders and Indigenous People.

Outcomes:

- Environmental indicators provide information for management decision-making.
- This plan maintains purpose and relevance through regular evaluation and review.
- Other monitoring systems, such as rangeland monitoring and evaluation programs, are applied as their cycles require.

Monitoring

Monitoring will assess ecological conditions through monitoring programs. The information generated will be used to determine if adjustments to management practices are required. Any adjustments to grazing management will be consistent with existing grazing dispositions, range management plans, and applicable legislation, and will be implemented in collaboration with disposition holders.

The approach is to maintain monitoring programs that measure grassland and riparian health and adjust management practices as needed. There are two monitoring programs: rangeland monitoring and biodiversity indicator monitoring. Biodiversity indicators can be used to monitor key metrics that help understand the status of values on this landscape and to provide information that assists in long-term evaluation, planning, and decision-making. A set of indicators have been identified (Appendix C).

Objectives:

- 14.1 Rangeland Management staff will manage any grazing disposition inspections, monitoring and evaluation as identified under rangeland priorities, programs, etc.
- 14.2 Monitoring and evaluation of the overall impact of the Heritage Rangeland Management Plan will be conducted by government environmental monitoring staff using environmental indicators.
- 14.3 Indicators used will remain flexible to ensure that new findings or techniques to monitor changes to the landscape are able to be built in as need arises.

Review

Regular review processes for the overall Heritage Rangeland Management Plan are important to ensure the plan will benefit the current and future management directions. The environmental and social context may change before the completion of the plan, or monitoring may reveal unfulfilled plan objectives or unexpected trends. A regular review cycle ensures that management approaches and landscape changes or impacts are addressed early before further impact occurs. Management plan changes will continue to align with the policy as directed at that time.

Objectives:

- 14.4 Complete a comprehensive review of this management plan every ten (10) years from date of plan approval.
- 14.5 Initiate an evaluation of this management plan if the environmental indicators show undesirable trends or that this management plan is not meeting expected outcomes.

Minor changes during any review period may result in a simple amended statement, while larger changes may lead to this management plan being amended, replaced, renewed, or repealed. If this management plan meets the expected outcomes, no further action is required until the next scheduled review.

Appendix A: Glossary

Best Management Practices: Recommended operating practices that provide information to applicants of departmental desired practices while planning and performing activities on public land.

Conservation Easement: A voluntary agreement between a current private landowner, and all subsequent landowners, and a municipal agency or qualified not-for-profit corporation that applies stipulations to the land to ensure its protection (by restricting development, management or certain uses).

Controlled Animal: Species or groups of species named as such if they pose public safety or ecological concerns such as animals with toxins or behaviours which endanger people, are likely to cause damage to native species and their habitats, present a risk of disease, or otherwise are liable to cause economic damage to agricultural or environmental resources and result in a reduction or loss of recreational or economic opportunities that rely on the use of native species and their habitats.

Crown Land: Land titled to His Majesty the King in Right of Alberta and also includes public lands under the Public Lands Act.

Designated Trail: An area or linear disturbance (trail) identified for a specific activity, or activities as identified through a regional and sub-regional planning process, a regional management plan or the issuance of a disposition. Trails must be mapped, signed, and maintained.

Disposition Holders: The holder of a disposition according to the records of a regulatory body.

Ecological Goods and Services: The economic and social benefits humans gain, directly and indirectly, from the natural environment.

Embedded Deeded Lands: Private property which is surrounded by Heritage Rangelands. Access is only available by crossing the Heritage Rangelands.

Fescue Grasslands: Native grassland communities associated with the black grassland soils of Alberta that are located within the Foothills Fescue, Northern Fescue, Central Parkland, Foothills Parkland, Montane, and Subalpine Natural Sub-regions.

First Nation: A band as defined in the Indian Act.

Existing Footprint: Any human-caused spatially identifiable surface disturbance that remains visible or functionally altered on the landscape at the time of assessment and has not been fully reclaimed.

Footprint: The impact or extent of a disturbance on public land. This includes the intensity, frequency, and nature of any uses or activities related to the disturbance.

Grasslands: Also referred to as rangelands or native prairie. Natural region of Alberta where the dominant vegetative species are herbaceous grasses, forbs and shrubs.

Grazing Lease: A land-based disposition (in the form of an agreement with individuals, corporations, or associations) granted by the Province of Alberta to allow grazing on public lands. The Government of Alberta requires grazing lessees to employ sustainable rangeland management practices as the core component of their stewardship responsibilities. The objective of sustainable rangeland management is to maintain plant vigor, protect and build the soil, perpetuate the forage resource and ensure a stable flow of products and other societal benefits.

Heritage Rangeland: A classification of protected area, designated under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, and Heritage Rangelands Act*, which recognizes and legislatively protects Alberta's ranching culture and the connection of ranching to the land.

Indigenous: Includes the "aboriginal peoples of Canada" within the meaning of section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Intensive Recreation: High density recreational activities orientated toward developed facilities for example: campgrounds, day-use areas, day-use trail networks and off-highway vehicle areas.

Land Stewardship: The practice of carefully and responsibly managing land uses to ensure natural systems are maintained or enhanced for future generations.

Native Grasslands: A landscape unit where the vegetation is dominated by grasses, grass like plants, and/or forbs (>50%). For example, if an air photo review shows a unit with 45% scattered woody species canopy cover and 55% grass species canopy cover, it would still be defined as a grassland. For grasslands to be defined as "native", they must be comprised of greater than 30% foliar cover of native grassland species.

Pre-disturbance Site Assessment: The assessment collects detailed soil and vegetation data within the area designated for planned footprint.

Rangeland: Land supporting indigenous or introduced vegetation that is either grazed or has the potential to be grazed and is managed as a natural ecosystem. Rangeland includes grassland, grazeable forestland, shrubland, pastureland, and riparian.

Resource Roads: Roads held under a department license-of-occupation (DLO)/ licence of occupation (LOC) allowing temporary authorization to enter and use

public lands (e.g. roads). (Additional information on resource road management is located in the Heritage Rangeland Operational Management Directive, 2015).

Riparian: The adjoining vegetated uplands that are directly influenced by the water body.

Stakeholder: A representative of an organization, or is an interested party, that has been identified as interested in, or potentially interested in, a specific matter.

Traditional Uses: For the purposes of this plan, “traditional uses” has the same meaning as in the Government of Alberta’s policy regarding consultation with First Nations on land and natural resource management.

Treaty Rights: The rights provided by the treaties in Alberta to hunt, trap and fish for food which are recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. These rights may be exercised on unoccupied Crown lands and lands where First Nations have a right of access for such purposes.

Wildlife Management Unit (WMU): The Province of Alberta is divided into a series of Wildlife Management Units, and wildlife within the boundaries of each WMU is managed according to the regulations under Alberta’s Wildlife Act.

Appendix B: Summary of Permitted Uses for Heritage Rangelands

Rangeland Management and Grazing	
Grazing	Permitted
Cultivation of Native Grassland	Not permitted
Restoration and/or Rejuvenation of Tame Pasture	Permitted
Control of Tree and Shrub Encroachment	Permitted
Range Management Projects	Permitted
Weed Control	Permitted

Forest Management	
Forest Harvesting	Permitted for the purpose of vegetation management projects only
Temporary roads for forest harvesting activities.	Permitted for the purpose of vegetation management projects only
Prescribed Vegetation Management	Permitted
Management for Wildfire, insect and disease control	Permitted

Fire Management	
Prescribed Fire	Permitted
Managed Fire	Permitted

Water Management	
Commercial Water Developments (e.g., water bottling operations, hydroelectric generation dams)	Not permitted
Livestock Watering Developments	Permitted

Wildlife and Fisheries	
Recreational Hunting	Permitted
Recreational Fishing	Permitted
Trapping No Registered Fur Management Area or registered traplines exist in the Heritage Rangeland	No new traplines or fur management areas will be issued in the Heritage Rangelands
Motorized Access- Disposition Holders	Permitted – <i>disposition management use</i>
Motorized Access —Hunting, fishing access or game retrieval	Not permitted
Introduction of Exotic Wildlife Species	Not permitted
Habitat Management Projects	Permitted
Problem Wildlife Control	Permitted

Invasive Species and Pathogens	
Control of Invasive Species and/or pathogens	Permitted

Access Management	
Motorized Access- Disposition Holders	Permitted – <i>disposition management use</i>
Motorized Access- Private Land	Permitted to private lands
Motorized access, including Highway Vehicles, Off Highway Vehicles (OHV), Snowmobiles and Power Boats	Not permitted
New public roads	Not permitted
Foot Access	Permitted Subject to Recreation Access Regulation
Development of New Facilities to Support Outdoor Recreation	Not permitted
Cycling and Mountain Biking	Permitted. Subject to Recreation Access Regulation
Backcountry Camping	Permitted. Subject to Recreation Access Regulation
Aircraft Take-off or Landing	Not permitted

Integrated Land Management	
Commercial Tourism and Recreational Facilities	Not permitted
Outdoor Recreation Facilities	Not permitted
Surface Materials (e.g. sand, gravel, peat, marl)	Not permitted
Maintenance of existing communication towers and transmission corridors	Permitted
New or expansion of existing communications towers and transmission corridors	Not permitted
Commercial windmills or windfarms	Not permitted
Existing oil and gas commitments	Permitted- <i>Impacts from this development must be minimized.</i>
New oil and gas commitments	Not Permitted
Minerals – Existing Commitments	Permitted <i>Surface access and activity will be permitted in honoring existing mineral commitments. Surface access and activity will minimize surface disturbance as per conditions of approval and principles of IL 2010-02</i>
Minerals – New Exploration	Not permitted
Existing Pipeline Agreements	Permitted
New Pipeline Agreements	Permitted <i>Note: only to access existing subsurface commitments</i>
Existing Resource Roads	Permitted <i>Note: access controls may apply</i>
New Resource Roads	Not permitted <i>Note: Access for developing existing oil & gas commitments must use existing roads, if possible.</i>

Research and Monitoring	
Research and Monitoring	Permitted

Appendix C: Indicators

Indicator	Function	Description
Forest Cover, Riparian	Habitat Provision	The amount of wetland and riparian area free from anthropogenic disturbances. Calculated for each of Riparian, Bogs, Fens, Marshes, and Swamps.
Forest Cover, Non-Riparian	Tree Encroachment	The amount of forest cover in an area can be used to identify woody encroachment in habitats where trees and shrubs are not native. Woody encroachment is characterized by an increase in the abundance and dominance of trees and shrubs within grassland ecosystems. This process poses a significant threat to native grasslands by, for example, altering fire regimes, grazing patterns, and other natural disturbance processes.
Grasslands	Patch size of Rough Fescue	In development
Suitable Habitat	Moose, Fisher and Martin	This indicator estimates the relative suitability of an area for Moose, Fisher and Martin.
Suitable SAR Critical Habitat	Grizzly, Westslope Cutthroat, Barred Owl	This indicator estimates the relative suitability of an area for Grizzly, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and Barred Owl
Invasive Vascular Plants	Grassland Degradation	The predicted distribution of invasive vascular plant species in Alberta, grouped by regulatory status.

Appendix D: Species at Risk Listing

Species At Risk in the Pekisko Heritage Rangelands

Common Name	Scientific Name	Alberta Wildlife Act /Detailed Status	Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) Status	Federal Species at Risk Act Status
American Badger	<i>Taxidea taxus</i>		Special concern	Special concern
Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		Threatened	Threatened
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		Special concern	Threatened
Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>	Special concern		
Bull Trout	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	Threatened	Threatened	Threatened
Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Endangered	Threatened	Threatened
Grizzly Bear	<i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i>	Threatened	Special concern	Special concern
Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	Special concern		
Hoary Bat	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>		Endangered	Recommended (Endangered)
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		Special concern	Special concern
Limber Pine	<i>Pinus flexilis</i>	Endangered	Endangered	Recommended (Endangered)
Little Brown Myotis	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Olive-sided Flycatcher	<i>Contopus cooperi</i>		Special concern	Special concern
Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	Special concern		
Sprague's Pipit	<i>Anthus spragueii</i>	Special concern	Threatened	Threatened
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	Special concern		
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi</i>	Threatened	Threatened	Threatened
Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>	Data deficient undergoing reassessment	Special concern	Special concern

Appendix E: List of Applicable Acts, Regulations, Strategies and Directives

Acts

- Constitution Act (Federal)
- Forest and Prairie Protection Act
- Historical Resources Act
- Public Lands Act
- Species at Risk Act (Federal)
- Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act (WAERNAHRA)
- Water Act
- Weed Control Act
- Wildlife Act

Regulations

- Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations
- Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations
- The Public Lands Administration Regulation
- Recreational Access Regulation
- South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

Plans

- Alberta Aquatic Invasive Species Early Detection Rapid Response Plan
- Alberta Ferruginous Hawk Recovery Plan (2024)
- Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan
- Alberta Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan
- Alberta Trumpeter Swan Recovery Plan 2012-2017
- Alberta Whitebark Pine and Limber Pine Recovery Plan
- Barred Owl Conservation Management Plan 2016-2021
- Bull Trout Conservation Management Plan 2012-2017
- Harlequin Duck Conservation Management Plan 2010-2015
- Sprague's Pipit Conservation Management Plan – 2017 Update
- Alberta Westslope Cutthroat Trout Recovery Plan 2012-2017

Strategies and Directives

- A guide to endangered and threatened species, and species of special concern in Alberta. Version 2
- Alberta Energy Information Letter 2003-25 Honouring Existing Mineral Commitments in Legislated Provincial Protected Areas
- Alberta Wetland Policy
- Alberta Wildlife Mitigation Strategy
- Alberta's Rangeland Grazing Framework
- Alberta's Strategy for the Management of Species at Risk
- Code of Practice for Watercourse Crossings
- *ERCB IL 2010-02*. Principles for Minimizing Surface Disturbance in Native Prairie and Parkland Areas
- Heritage Rangeland Operational Management Directive
- Operating Standards for Alberta's Crown Land (Grazing Dispositions)
- Reclamation Criteria Guidelines
- Stewardship for Rangeland Sustainability

Appendix F: History

About the Heritage Rangeland

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland (Figure x) (34,292 hectares/84, 737 acres) is public Crown lands within both the White and Green Areas of Alberta. This protected land is in the Municipal District of Ranchland, No. 66, the Municipal District of Foothills, No. 31 and the Kananaskis Improvement District, southwest of Longview, Alberta. The boundaries include the Highwood River to the north, Highway 22 (the “Cowboy Trail”) to the east, Chimney Rock and Saddle Mountain roads to the south and the Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park to the west, along the Eastern Slopes of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Surrounded within the Pekisko Area is the Emerson Creek Natural Area.

The area includes a unique combination of climate and topography with diverse grasslands and forest cover adapted from grazing, fire, and harsh weather. Several natural sub-regions of Alberta are represented within the Pekisko Area, including Foothills Fescue, Foothills Parkland, Montane, Subalpine, and Alpine. The diversity of resilient and productive cover types favors quality water production, healthy and diverse wildlife populations, and sustainable ranch operations. Most importantly, it has produced vast tracts of fescue grasslands, some of the most rare and sensitive communities in Alberta and North America.

The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is also between two existing Heritage Rangelands, the OH Ranch to the north, and the Black Creek along the Whaleback to the south. Altogether, this land increases the protection and preservation of some of Alberta’s important intact native grasslands. The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is one of the largest contiguous blocks of native Foothills Fescue Grassland and Foothills Parkland in Alberta.

Historical Context

The archaeological record provides evidence of relatively continuous human occupation of the Eastern Slopes, where the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is located, from time immortal. European knowledge of the area increased through exploration, notably through the expeditions of fur trade explorer, mapmaker and surveyor David Thompson in 1800 and missionary Father Pierre Jean De Smet in 1845. Interest in the area’s natural resources and its potential for settlement brought government sponsored exploration to the regions, such as the expedition of Captain John Palliser of 1857-1860. Palliser Expedition members undertook significant exploration of the Bow River region, Ghost River and Kananaskis River valley, as well as southernly along the Eastern Slopes to what is now the Waterton area.

In the wake of the Dominion of Canada’s purchase of Rupert’s Land in 1869 from the Hudson’s Bay Company, the Pekisko area saw many changes. The establishment of the Northwest Mounted Police in 1874, the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877, the disappearance of the vast buffalo herds that had once dominated present-day western Canada, and the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in

Calgary in 1883 transformed the region and it became the heart of a vast ranching area. region and it became the heart of a vast ranching area.

Key early ranching figures included John Ware, Abe Cotterrell, Herb Millar, and George Lane who later chose the Bar U brand. Evidence of this early ranching history is found in the presence of two Provincial Historic Resource ranching sites (Alequiers, E.P.Ranch) and one National Historic ranch site (Bar U Ranch) that lie adjacent to, but just outside the Heritage Rangeland. Timber cutting, milling, sawmills, and early infrastructure supported the growing ranching economy in southern Alberta in the late 1800s.

A massive 1910 fire reshaped grazing conditions and accelerated support for formal forestry services, though decades of fire suppression caused ecological challenges. As forestry boundaries were formalized (1911–12), ranchers like Thorp, Cartwright, Cameron, and Hanson became central users of the upper watershed. Partnerships formed to share grazing, and ranches expanded through acquisitions, including lands from neighbors affected by harsh winters and difficult economic periods. By the 1920s and '30s, Thorp and Cartwright consolidated most Forestry permits for the Pekisko drainage, but drought and heavy rains in the 1930s–40s limited recovery.

Resource Management Context

Provincial policy direction for public land management in region began in 1948 with the designation of the Green Area, which generally restricted settlement on public lands. This was followed by the formal establishment of the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve through the *Forest Reserve Act* in 1964 to conserve forests and vegetation while protecting water supply. Broader strategic guidance came with the Eastern Slopes Policy (1977), which set direction for managing public lands and resources across Alberta's Rocky Mountains and foothills. The Eastern Slopes Policy identified watershed management as the highest priority across the Eastern Slopes, while recognizing significant benefits from private and public sector recreation and tourism values and facilitating natural resource development in a manner consistent with the principles of conservation and environmental protection.

The Eastern Slopes Policy framework was further refined through Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plans including Porcupine Hills- Livingstone, Eden Valley and Kananaskis Country, which covered the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland and the Special Management Area. The integrated resource plans provide landscape level direction intended to balance conservation and environmental protection with sustainable resource use and recreation: ensuring that forestry, grazing, mineral/energy development, and other land-use activities occur in a way that does not irreversibly damage watersheds, wildlife habitat, scenic and ecological values. These plans outline resource-management goals and guide land-use decisions through a zonation system to provide overarching direction to decision-makers, industry, government agencies, and the public about where and how various activities may occur in order to integrate decision-making and support the ecological and aesthetic integrity of these areas over time.

Bordering the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland there are three Public Land Use Zones (PLUZ). A PLUZ is an area of public land on which legislative controls apply to assist management of public recreational use with industrial and commercial land uses and resources. They are designed to manage unique local conditions, land use activities and protect sensitive areas, for example.

- Kananaskis Country PLUZ is a multiple use area where Off Highway Vehicle's (OHV's) and Snowmobiling is not permitted.
- Cataract Creek Snow Vehicle PLUZ is a multiple use area where OHV use is not permitted and snowmobiling is permitted on designated trails only.
- Willow Creek PLUZ provides random camping restricted to designated areas only. In addition, OHV restrictions of 800lb (gvw), or less, are in effect.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a number of Provincial Parks and Provincial Recreation Areas were established. Provincial parks legislation (*Provincial Parks Act* and *WAERNAHR Act*) plays an important role in protecting natural diversity and intact habitat for supporting biodiversity, in addition provides recreational and educational experiences.

The surrounding area has several protected areas including:

- Emerson Creek and Mt. Livingstone Natural Areas;
- Indian Graves, Fir Creek, Sentinel, Eyrie Gap, Etherington Creek, Cataract Creek, Greenford, Highwood, and Livingstone Falls, Provincial Recreation Areas;
- Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve;
- Don Getty, and Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park;
- Chain Lakes Provincial Park
- OH Ranch and Black Creek Heritage Rangelands

A province-wide shift came with the Land Use Framework (2008), which established an integrated approach to managing both public and private lands in support of Alberta's long-term economic, environmental, and social goals. The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA 2009) provided the legal basis for regional planning under this framework, culminating in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), implemented in 2014. The SSRP sets the stage for robust growth, vibrant communities and a healthy environment within the region over the next 50 years. SSRP establishes a long-term, region-wide vision and direction for managing land and natural resources across the region, aligns provincial policies at the regional level to support economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social/community values, and establishes environmental management frameworks for air quality and surface water quality.

The Pekisko Heritage Rangelands Management Plan was identified in the SSRP to be developed to provide consistency to the area's conservation. The Pekisko

Heritage Rangeland will be managed to maintain and preserve its unique natural heritage (i.e., soil, flora, fauna, landscape features, and natural/ecological processes), culture, and biodiversity in perpetuity for future generations. Other provincial program goals for protected areas (i.e., Learning & Engagement, Outdoor Recreation & Healthy Living, and Tourism & Community) are of secondary importance for the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland.

All users will be encouraged to accept stewardship responsibility for maintaining the ecological diversity and integrity of the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland.

Land Use Context

The majority of the Pekisko Area is undeveloped. In 2016, land was used for livestock grazing and associated infrastructure, powerlines, pipelines and access trails to industrial sites.

The land use surrounding the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland includes municipal districts, the Eden Valley Indian Reservation No. 216, and the Bar U Ranch National Historical Site.

The Municipal District of Foothills No. 31 covers an area of approximately 364,000 hectares (899,463 acres) with a 2013 population of 21,258 (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 2013). The M.D. of Foothills No. 31 surrounds four urban municipalities and contains ten hamlets, as well as the Eden Valley First Nation Reserve. The M.D. is also bordered by six rural municipalities, Tsuu T'ina Nation, as well as Alberta's largest City of Calgary.

The Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66 covers an area of approximately 250,000 hectares (617,763 acres) with a 2013 population of 104 (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 2013). The M.D. of Ranchland No. 66 contains no designated Urban Areas, but rather encompasses vast lands of forest reserve, protected areas and open rangeland that are intended to be used for agricultural purposes and conservation. The M.D. of Ranchland No. 66 is bordered by three rural municipalities, one improvement district and the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass.

The Kananaskis Improvement District (KID) is an unincorporated municipality located southwest of Calgary, Alberta and encompasses approximately 4,000 square kilometers and has a population of 249 (2011 federal census). Established in 1996, the Improvement District shares most physical boundaries with Kananaskis Country. The KID is the only Alberta municipality located within a provincial park, and virtually all its land base is owned and administered by the Province of Alberta's Municipal Affairs.

Eden Valley Indian Reservation No. 216 is correctly known by the ᑭᐱᑭᐱᑭ Nakoda as Ga-hna which means "Along the Foothills". This is in the geographic region where the southern Nakoda clans traditionally lived and borders the north portion of the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. The Pekisko Heritage Rangeland is a part of maintaining the integrity of the culture of indigenous peoples through language, traditional activities, and spirituality.

The Bar U Ranch is the only National Historic Site to commemorate the history and importance of ranching in Canada. The site has many historic buildings and structures, illustrating various stages of ranching development, and is rich in cultural landscape features. The plan describes the goals, objectives, and strategies of the Bar U Ranch National Historic Site for the coming years. Action plans are set out for realizing the site vision and for following Parks Canada's principle of "commemorative integrity." The management plan includes the presentation and protection of the site; visitor services; marketing; environmental stewardship goals and objectives; public involvement; administration and operations; an environmental assessment statement; and an implementation and evaluation strategy.

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