
Draft Terms of Reference

For the Development of the Glenbow Ranch
Provincial Park Management Plan



Draft Terms of Reference for the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park management plan| Forestry and Parks

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Opportunity to Comment

The draft Terms of Reference is the subject of preliminary engagement with the public, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities and organizations, between August 5, 2025 and September 16, 2025.

Alberta Forestry and Parks is seeking your feedback on this draft Terms of Reference. The survey can be found [here](#). In addition to completing the online survey, participants are invited to offer recommendations for improvement and identify issues and features of interest associated with the current park infrastructure and trail network using our [interactive map](#).

Your feedback will be used to help develop a draft management plan for the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park (GRPP). Once completed, we will seek feedback again on the draft park management plan before it is finalized.



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Introduction

Alberta Forestry and Parks is preparing the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park management plan which, once approved, will be used to guide operations, decision-making and management of Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park (GRPP) now and into the future.

The purpose of this Terms of Reference is to define the scope, purpose, objectives, and development process for the management plan. It also describes the management issues and opportunities which will be considered in the development of a management plan. A [Background Report](#) has also been prepared that consolidates relevant information to support planning decisions and should be referred to when considering and providing comments on the Terms of Reference. Both documents are being released at the same time for input from the public, stakeholders and Indigenous communities and organizations.

Park Overview

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park (GRPP) protects over 1,314 hectares of land along a stretch of the Bow River between the City of Calgary and the Town of Cochrane (Figure 1). The land was acquired by the Province of Alberta from the Harvie family who became sponsors of GRPP programs through the Harvie Conservancy Foundation. Following the legal designation of GRPP under the *Provincial Parks Act* in 2008, the park opened to the public in 2011. The core infrastructure of GRPP consists of a parking lot, a trail and pathway system, toilets, an education centre and a visitor centre. GRPP is open to the public from sunrise to sunset with exceptions for special events.

About 80 per cent of GRPP consists of native fescue grassland, a habitat that is sensitive to change and threatened by urban development. Other habitat types in GRPP include aspen woodland, wetlands, springs and creeks, and the Bow River. Grasslands are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world and are underrepresented in Alberta's provincial parks system. GRPP has an important role to play in protecting grasslands while encouraging visitors to learn, appreciate and enjoy these ecosystems. The GRPP plays a special role in Alberta's parks and protected areas network as very few programs and parks in Alberta protect even small grassland ecosystem areas. Healthy, native fescue grasslands require a cycle of grazing and fires to persist. Prior to settlement, bison and periodic natural and human-induced fires maintained the health of the ecosystem. Since the late 19th century and into the present, cattle have been used to replicate processes formerly associated with bison populations to control weeds and retention of native grasses. GRPP actively manages the health of the grasslands ecosystem by allowing vegetation management activities such as grazing within GRPP.

Today, the landscape of GRPP contains evidence of thousands of years of Indigenous peoples' use followed by 100 years of settlement. In addition to archaeological sites and places that are known to have been of special value to Indigenous peoples, heritage elements include the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) line that was built in 1883, fence lines, the remains of the Glenbow sandstone quarry used to supply stone for the Alberta Legislature and other prominent Alberta buildings, and the former Glenbow village site. The topography and expansiveness of the landscape, the presence of the Bow River, and the sounds of birds and wind help visitors appreciate that the GRPP environment was once part of the vast grassland that stretched thousands of kilometers in all directions. GRPP and its surrounding area is also a cultural landscape that has been used by Indigenous peoples to practice their culture, including harvesting food and medicines, ceremony, and connecting to the land, providing great potential for authentic Indigenous-led tourism opportunities.

Through a unique cooperating agreement with the Government of Alberta, the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation supports the operations and development of GRPP while also serving as a key partner in the delivery of broader public engagement initiatives and collaborative management of the park. Visitor services, conservation and education programs are supported by volunteers and staff led by the foundation.



Purpose, Scope, and Site Significance

Purpose and Scope

The Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park management plan will be the primary guidance document for the future of the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park. The management plan will outline the overall vision, goals and direction for GRPP to support management and decision-making and to allow adjacent landowners and authorities to anticipate how their actions and policies may affect the park.

The management plan will also include management options for Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation lands (shown on Figure 1).

The management plan will be broad in scope and will address:

- Key and sensitive issues regarding conservation, surrounding land uses, visitor services and access.
- Options for resolving key issues, concerns and opportunities related to the park.
- Strategies for both cultural and natural heritage conservation.
- Options for strengthening partnerships and communicating with the public, stakeholders and Indigenous communities and organizations.
- Healthy, nature-based recreation.
- Infrastructure, vehicle access, trails and pathways, facilities and programs that will provide safe, educational and memorable visitor experiences.
- Opportunities for visitors to connect with nature and more fully appreciate the beauty, nature and cultural resources of GRPP to help strengthen their commitment to ensuring its stewardship.
- Strategies to address pressures or impacts from nearby development.
- Park policies that will address anticipated growth in demand for park services and infrastructure.
- Application of zoning to identify areas for appropriate uses and activities.
- Understanding how physical connections between GRPP and adjacent lands can be managed to mutual benefit.

Role in the Alberta Parks System

GRPP was established with a primary role to protect representative examples of grassland, riparian and slope ecosystems of the Foothills Parkland Natural Subregion and cultural resources associated with Indigenous inhabitation, early European settlement, and ranching practices. As a gateway to the provincial park system, GRPP also provides a range of non-motorized day use recreation, education, and nature appreciation opportunities throughout the park and along the Trans Canada Trail connecting Calgary and Cochrane.

Site Significance

GRPP conserves a unique and diverse landscape that offers an impressive display of Alberta's rare and ecologically sensitive Foothills Parkland Natural Subregion. The park includes an excellent range of native fescue grassland and riparian and wildlife habitats that were stewarded for generations through cattle ranching. GRPP is one of only a few temperate grasslands protected in Alberta. Part of the Great Northern Plains, the park's grasslands are an intact example of one of the most threatened and disappearing ecosystems in the world. Being so close to Alberta's largest urban centre and located along the Trans Canada Trail, the park plays a special role in not only maintaining these natural ecosystems but also providing easily accessible opportunities for Albertans to experience and learn about them. In addition to the legacy of Alberta's ranching culture, the eco-cultural landscapes in GRPP contain evidence of thousands of years of Indigenous peoples use, and special elements of Alberta's settlement heritage including the CPR rail line and the remains of the Glenbow village and sandstone quarry that was used to supply stone for Alberta's Legislature. GRPP inspires an enduring legacy of environmental stewardship and cooperation between the Government of Alberta, local communities and the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation through the respectful integration of collaborative planning and governance.

Draft Vision and Guiding Principles

Draft Vision

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park is a model of collaborative stewardship for Alberta's ecologically sensitive Foothills Parkland Natural Subregion through the maintenance of biodiversity, native grassland, open landscapes, and riparian habitats. Diverse opportunities for visitors to learn about and experience Glenbow's unique natural and cultural legacy are supported by partnerships and community connections.

Draft Guiding Principles

The following principles and approaches will guide decision making for GRPP:

1. **Stewardship and environmental leadership:** Management and operations demonstrate stewardship of the natural landscape, species and habitats and environmental leadership by employing best practices in environmental design, grassland management, energy and water efficiency, construction practices and products.
2. **Knowledge-based decision making:** Decision making is informed by natural and social science, evidence and experience, and Indigenous traditional knowledge.
3. **Adaptative management:** An iterative process that includes research, monitoring, reporting, learning and adjusting, will be undertaken to achieve long-term desired conditions in the park.
4. **Integrated management:** Management decisions consider the combined impacts of environmental, economic and social and cultural factors.
5. **Collaboration and engagement:** The park vision will be achieved through the continued collaboration amongst Alberta Parks, the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation, adjacent communities, municipalities and developments.
6. **Inclusion:** Park management will work to ensure facilities and programs are designed so that all visitors' needs are considered.
7. **Quality visitor experience:** Visitor amenities and services are designed to enhance a unique experience in the park, maximize visitor safety, and foster stewardship of the park's resources.

Management Issues and Opportunities

The following issues and opportunities inform the need for the management planning effort and will influence the strategies and objectives presented in the management plan. The issues and opportunities are organized under four program goals (Conservation and Protection, Nature-Based Recreation and Healthy Living, Learning and Engagement, and Tourism and Community Partnerships).

Conservation and Protection

- Sensitive species and ecological communities are at risk in GRPP. Rough fescue and limber pine are local examples of native plants that can be impacted by heavy recreational use or through the spread of invasive plant species.
- Grasslands need regular disturbance to stay healthy. These disturbances can come from animals eating the grass, fires burning through the area, or people cutting or mowing it.
- When visitors wander off trail, new desired trails are created. Existing trails may widen or show braiding, and sensitive plant communities can be damaged.
- The growth of residential development in adjacent lands will increase the volume and frequency of visitor use. Neighbouring residents may be tempted to create their own trail connections to the park which can damage native plant communities and disrupt wildlife movement and resting behaviour.
- Climate change is expected to impact GRPP through altered weather patterns and increased risk of drought, floods and fires.
- Human and cattle use along creek and riverbanks may impact aquatic environments and damage fish habitat.
- Small litter and waste, like food packaging and dog feces, are left on and near the trails which degrade visitor experience and present health and mortality risks for wildlife.

Nature-Based Recreation and Healthy Living

- The existing trail network has not been upgraded to accommodate increased visitation and support the wider range of recreational activities. Current users have identified a desire to enhance the existing network to improve user safety and enjoyment through:
 - Additional connector trails to create variety, shorter loops and improve dispersion of users across GRPP.
 - Realignment of existing trails and/or separation of activity types to address safety and conflict between users.
- Users indicate a desire to have additional amenities and facilities (such as hiking only trails, toilets, additional picnic tables, sun shelters, potable water sources, river access, and viewpoints).
- Some natural surface trails require maintenance and redesign to improve accessibility.
- Interest has been expressed to consider new specialized trails for equestrian or mountain bike use.
- Grazing activities may temporarily limit visitor access to portions of GRPP; mitigations such as trail detours, re-designed gates, and improved communication with the public are needed.

Learning and Engagement

- Sustainable recreational use is facilitated when users are aware of the environmental sensitivities and risks in the park and are provided with information to support wayfinding, compliance with regulations, trail etiquette, and stewardship of the park.
- Users indicate a desire for additional interpretive programs on Indigenous culture and connection to the land and environmental education.
- Mitigating conflicts between groups (e.g., tours, schools, guides) and other trail users may require designated spaces for learning and gathering.
- Opportunities to better connect research in GRPP with applied research needs in recreation or natural resource management.
- Ongoing communication with the public regarding trail and area closures related to grazing.
- The size of GRPP, coupled with new and proposed access points may require additional resources for visitor services programs and additional amenities in the park.
- Visitor services in GRPP are dependent on the financial and volunteer sustainability of the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation.

Tourism and Community Partnerships

- Park programming, special events and marketing initiatives by local tourism organizations actively promote visitors to visit the park, increase visitor spending in the local economy and increase the likelihood that visitors will return and/or inspire others to visit.
- Indigenous peoples seek opportunities to reconnect with the land and rich Indigenous history of the park. Building relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations will identify opportunities to celebrate Indigenous culture and acknowledge Indigenous history, enable the practice of traditional activities and facilitate Indigenous participation in park operations and programming.
- Tourism operators have expressed interest in guided services like water-based or nature-based tourism opportunities in GRPP.
- Completion of the regional pathway between GRPP and the Town of Cochrane will create a continuous connection with City of Calgary. A new bridge over the river would improve accessibility for many more visitors to the park.
- Alternative connections to Gleneagles would present challenges for building trails on steep terrain and may increase traffic within adjacent neighbourhoods.
- Dedicated space and associated operational infrastructure will be required to support maintenance needs of the park. Storage yards, buildings and equipment will need to be located and designed to achieve operational efficiency, security, and minimize visual disturbance for park visitors.
- Rocky View County's Glenbow Ranch Area Structure Plan guides land use and development within the area surrounding GRPP, including proposed residential development, community trail connections and conservation areas adjacent to GRPP. Additional consideration may be needed for:
 - Safe and accessible pedestrian access points into GRPP from future residential areas.
 - A complementary regional trail system on top of the river valley with strategic connections to GRPP.
 - Advanced preplanning on future municipal stormwater treatment, and urban utility connections to minimize disruption on the recreational experience and environmental sustainability of GRPP.
 - Connectivity between natural spaces and wildlife movement corridors within the broader region.

Desired Conditions and Management Objectives

Desired Conditions

The following desired condition statements describe an ideal future if the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park management plan meets its vision and objectives. Desired conditions showcase the experience for visitors and the state of the environmental and cultural resources in the park.

Natural landscapes and scenic vistas are largely free from visual disruptions and open the imagination to the meaning of this place for the generations of people before us.

Native grasslands are maintained in a healthy state where plant communities retain natural integrity.

Wildlife populations continue to thrive, and conflicts between wildlife and humans, including visitors with dogs, are avoided.

Water and streams are free flowing, including largely intact riparian areas and streambanks.

The historic and cultural resources from generations of Indigenous use and ranching history are retained and cherished. Indigenous traditional activities and uses in the park are welcomed and sustainable grazing practices are supported.

Visitors can experience a unique spectrum of settings from a front-country setting with sustainable and well-developed trails and facilities that are integrated with nature, providing public access and amenities where social interaction predominates, to a more mid-country setting where interaction with people is less frequent and there are opportunities for solitude.

Visitors have opportunities to connect with nature through natural sounds, smells and views of largely undeveloped landscapes.

Interactions between different types of park users are generally positive with a sense of unity in the opportunity of having access to a beautiful natural place. Visitors have opportunities to learn about nature and the cultural heritage of the park, participate in the stewardship of the area and act in a way that conveys respect for wildlife and the land.

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park is valued as an important outdoor recreation and tourism asset for local communities and organizations where park boundaries and values are known and respected.

Onsite management ensures resource protection, public safety, and minimal visitor conflict.

Information about the area is readily available, and opportunities to be outdoors are provided for a wide range of abilities.

Objectives

Objectives further describe how the park's desired conditions will be achieved through park management. Objectives must be measurable through indicators and standards and realized through management strategies, which will be further defined in the draft management plan.

Objectives	Topic Areas
Conservation and Protection Objectives	
Ensure the long-term ecological health of the native grassland ecosystem through active management and regular assessment.	Fescue grasslands Invasive species Grazing
Maintain biodiversity, wildlife corridors and ecological systems in the park.	Species at risk Wildlife connectivity Collaboration with other jurisdictions
Protect sensitive features in GRPP such as steep slopes, riparian areas, quarry sites, and sandstone formations.	Steep slopes/ Hillsides Sandstone formations/ Quarry sites Cultural features Riparian areas Environment review processes Permanent and temporary closures
Maintain water quality and quantity flowing through GRPP to the Bow River.	Water resources Water quality/ quantity Springs Stormwater management Emergency Response Planning
Maintain the expansive views within GRPP.	Views Dark Sky
Nature-Based Recreation & Healthy Living Objectives	
Provide safe, accessible, equitable and secure infrastructure, including access (land and river) and staging areas for nature-based recreation activities appropriate for the conditions and conservation objectives of GRPP.	Trails Parking Facilities Amenities

Provide a range of high-quality nature-based recreation opportunities, compatible with the conditions and conservation objectives of GRPP.	Railway crossings Accessible trails and facilities Special events Noise
Learning and Engagement Objectives	
Develop and deliver high-quality interpretation, education and park information that is relevant and appealing.	Interpretive programs Education programs
Continue to strongly support partnership with the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation to enhance park management, research and visitor services.	Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation Other Partnerships Research projects
Provide opportunities for the public to be involved in park stewardship.	Volunteer program
Tourism and Community Objectives	
Provide high quality sustainable tourism opportunities, compatible within the desired conditions and conservation objectives of GRPP.	Special events Film permits Guide permits
Respect and foster relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations to help guide management decisions.	Indigenous engagement and consultation Enable opportunities for Indigenous traditional uses within GRPP.
Collaborate with adjacent jurisdictions and land managers on projects of mutual interest.	Residential development in Rocky View County Recreation adjacent and into park TransCanada Trail Marketing and promotion

Planning Governance, Process and Schedule

Planning Governance

The management planning process will be led by Alberta Forestry and Parks Parks Division, which is responsible for coordinating, communicating and reporting to ensure smooth execution of the project. Within the Government of Alberta, other divisions and departments (Environment and Protected Areas, Transportation and Economic Corridors, Arts, Culture and Status of Women, Municipal Affairs, Agriculture and Irrigation) will be involved throughout the management planning process. The final management plan will be approved by the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Parks Division.

The Foundation is a partner in developing the management plan, given their unique role supporting the operations and infrastructure development and the delivery of visitor experience and educational programs in GRPP. Parks Division staff and the Foundation will form a Planning Partnership Team to guide the process of management planning and plan development.

Planning Process and Schedule

The milestones of the project are organized by the stages of management planning. The figure below contains the stages and timelines of the project, and the anticipated delivery date. Substages are created for the preliminary and draft plan engagement.

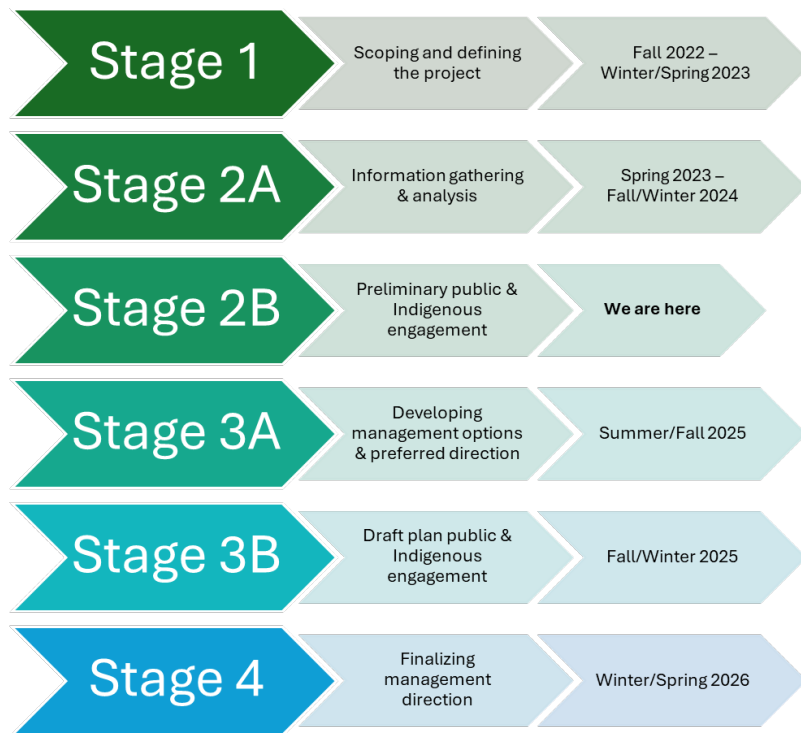


Figure 2 Stages of Management Planning