



The Alberta Fish & Game Association

13045-156 Street, Edmonton, AB T5V 0A2

Phone: (780) 437-2342

Fax: (780) 438-6872

Email: office@afga.org

Web site: www.afga.org

December 21, 2018

The Alberta Fish and Game Association's stand on the Government of Alberta's Bighorn Country Proposal

Alberta Fish and Game Association recognizes the intrinsic value of the Bighorn Country to all Albertans and that certain activities over the decades have caused degradation to important fish and wildlife habitats. We understand the premise behind tightening the management within the area however, we have concerns with the proposal as it is. Conservation cannot be confused with shifting types of activities from one form to another. The end result will still be the same regardless how we get there.

Alberta Fish and Game Association appreciates the opportunity to be included as a stakeholder in the region and recognize the unique challenges of conserving such an area as the Bighorn.

“The Government of Alberta is currently consulting Albertans on Bighorn Country, an exciting proposal for a mix of parks and public lands that will conserve important and unique natural landscapes while encouraging economic, recreation and tourism activities opportunities.” so says the Government of Alberta's Environment and Parks website. These activities are 3 of the major factors that have placed much of Alberta's landscape into jeopardy. As an example, the Grasslands region is estimated to be in less than 10% of its natural state. To exacerbate the condition by adding to these activities to the Bighorn can only result in further habitat degradation to what is still a very pristine area.

Canada's National Parks are an example of a good idea poorly thought out. Across North America parks are facing a crisis in terms of too many people visiting the areas and causing degradation to the landscape. Tourists are drawn to scenic areas such as delicate stream beds, alpine areas, and lake shores; thus increasing degradation to ecologically sensitive areas. The increase in tourists also increases the potential for wildlife/human conflict. As the animals become habituated, they can also become more aggressive and in the end it is the animals that are displaced as a result. With increased tourism, outdoor harvest opportunity (hunting, angling, and trapping) are decreased. As the current proposal is written, there will be eight areas that fall under Provincial Park or Provincial Recreation Area which come with restrictions to hunting in particular.

Further, the tourism development that is proposed requires a large amount of infrastructure to be built, such as roads, wider trails, huts, sewer/water facilities, and other support services. These are not activities that support conservation on the landscape. In similar recent proposals and park plans the current Government has indicated that linear disturbances affect wildlife movement yet the Bighorn proposal has a significant number of new disturbances proposed.

The Bighorn Proposal is also being rushed ahead of the Regional Plan for the area which is concerning because the government is showing little to no regard for their own process of land use planning which includes taking the time to properly consider all options and consult with all stakeholders.

Items inconsistent with proper conservation include but are not necessarily limited to the removal of activities such as fire for forest management which can increase the fire risk as timber stands age, not allowing dogs off leash in the area which will negatively impact cougar management, bird hunting, and companion and pack dogs.

Another major concern with the proposal is the lack of open and transparent public consultation with all user groups and the leading survey that has been produced. Some strongly biased special interest groups have gone so far as to coach people on how to answer the survey questions, encouraging them to copy and paste their pre-written answer such as: *“Hunting and trapping should be completely eliminated”* and *“fishing should be highly monitored with significant restrictions on regulations”* which are clearly intended to bias the survey results.

Given these concerns it is the feeling of the Alberta Fish and Game Association that the Government continue the consultation process with a fresh, open and fair mind towards making the public consultation a balanced playing field and listening to what the citizens of this great province have to say and what direction they would like to go in.