



The Alberta Fish & Game Association is your voice in conservation

May 14, 2020

Honourable Jason Nixon
Minister of Environment and Parks, House Leader
Office of the Minister, Environment and Parks
323 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB, T5K 2B6

Emailed to: aep.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister Nixon,

The Alberta Fish and Game Association appreciates the challenges that the Government of Alberta faces as it navigates a path forward during these uncertain times. The world has changed for us all. At a Government of Alberta level, this will involve a re-evaluation of proposed actions and programs across many ministries. The same is true for other levels of government and indeed across society. Innovative solutions will need to be developed as we move forward together, to deal with the reality of less tax-payer dollars to fund many former programs. One of the first steps is to consider what priority and value Albertans place in programs delivered by the Government of Alberta.

When governments ask ministries or departments to find savings or cut costs, they often rely on their internal perspective as to what their core responsibility is. We have seen this in the past, related to recreational facilities, when the Ministry of Transportation and the Alberta Forest Service closed recreation sites that they had previously developed and maintained. The question that must be asked of Albertans is, what is the most important role that Alberta Parks should be fulfilling?

Alberta Parks has increasingly focused on becoming a land manager, rather than a recreation facilities or program provider. The *Provincial Parks and Protected Areas Act* is one of many pieces of legislation that lead to varying designations of public land and permitted uses across the province. What Albertans expect is that our public lands be managed in an environmentally prudent fashion regardless of the designation. They also support a range of land designations which will include areas minimally impacted by the human footprint (wilderness parks) to multi-use. The boundaries between various designations are human determined but these must be based on extensive consultations with Albertans.

Protecting riparian areas or critical wildlife zones from development is as important as creating large contiguous wilderness areas. An assumption has developed that public lands must be designated as parks to be protected. What has occurred in Alberta and elsewhere in North America is a system of land management that has become siloed and compartmentalized within often competing ministries or agencies. This leads to conflict, lack of transparency, environmental trade-offs, and increased costs due to overlap of responsibilities, as well as the creation of hierarchical empires in government.

Alberta Parks, Public Lands, Alberta Forest Service, Alberta Agriculture, Alberta Energy Regulator, Solicitor General, and Alberta Energy are among the agencies that are involved in managing our public lands. Reducing bureaucracy, perhaps with a single manager to provide the appropriate oversight, compliance monitoring and enforcement might result in far greater cost savings, transparency, and outcomes than the move to close or shift responsibilities to others for recreational sites maintained by Alberta Parks. This would allow each of the agencies to concentrate on their core responsibilities and services they should be delivering on behalf of Albertans. It is time for critical thinking and re-evaluation to take place as we plan together for the future.

Albertans want to know there are protected areas on the landscape, even if they never visit them. For most, they believe that the core function of Alberta Parks is to provide, operate and maintain infrastructure, facilities and programs that allow Albertans access, along with enjoyment of the outdoors. Size, use, or geographic location in the province should not be the defining criteria.

Outdoor enthusiasts are directly impacted by the recent announcements relating to Alberta Parks. For the angling community alone, many lakes, streams, and stocked waterbodies will see access lost. This is currently the case at many sites in Alberta where multi-use recreational areas are gated, blocked and closed. This is not the time to close recreational sites. Partnerships are only one of a range of options that need to be considered to run other sites more efficiently.

It is time to rethink the plan developed by Alberta Parks and enter into consultations with stakeholders and municipalities. Opportunity for partnerships due to uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic will likely be limited. Cost savings might be possible using contracts with municipalities or industry. Consideration of user maintained, reduced maintenance, or a combination thereof is another consideration.

The Alberta Fish and Game Association is a key stakeholder in these necessary discussions. We are asking you to reconsider moving forward with the actions developed by Alberta Parks. Our members and their families are among the most active on the outdoor landscape. We have a deep appreciation for our public lands and the recreational activities they support. Maintaining recreational sites, facilities and associated access are a critical component that allow recreation to occur in an environmentally responsible fashion. These are essential pieces of the puzzle as we reopen our economy, and allow society to adjust to a new norm.

Respectfully yours,



Brian Dingreville, President
The Alberta Fish and Game Association

cc: Delinda Ryerson, AFGA Executive Director

The Alberta Fish and Game Association
13045 - 156 Street NW, Edmonton, AB, T5V 0A2
780-437-2342 office@afga.org www.afga.org