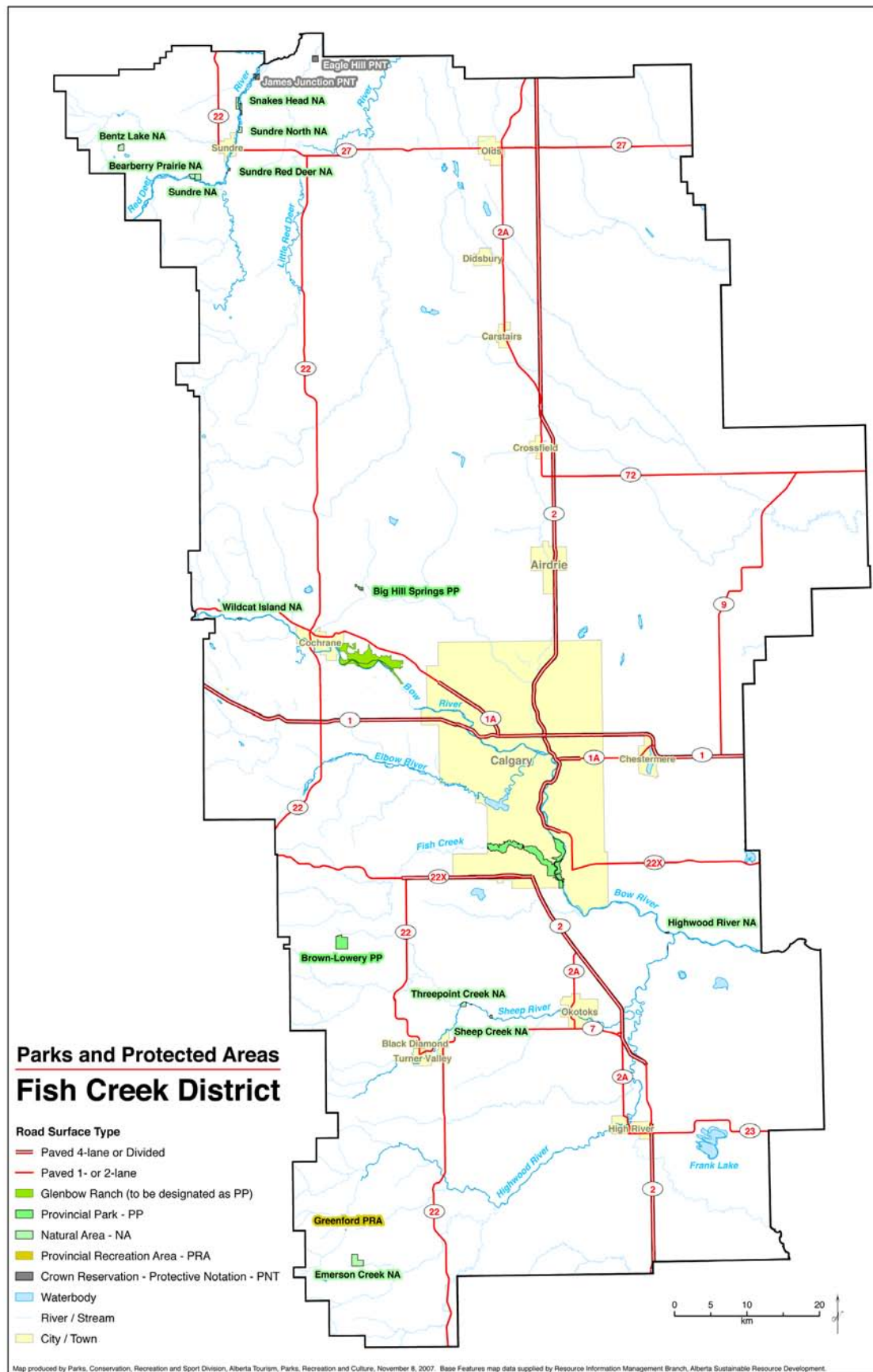


Executive Summary



Visitor Services Development Plan ***for Fish Creek District***

Visitor Services Development Plan for Fish Creek District



Introduction

In February 2008, Alberta Parks Division awarded the contract for the writing of a Visitor Services Development Plan for Fish Creek District to EcoLeaders Interpretation and Environmental Education. This detailed plan, completed in March 2009, is the culmination of over a year's site visits, consultation, research, review and planning and comprises over 1,000 pages.

Fish Creek District is an important component of the Alberta Provincial Park system, extending from just north of Sundry and Olds to just south of High River in the south and from just west of Cochrane in the west to east of the junction of Highway 72 and Highway 9 to the east. The district contains:

- two large provincial parks:
 - Fish Creek Provincial Park
 - Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park
- two small provincial parks
 - Big Hill Springs Provincial Park
 - Brown-Lowery Provincial Park
- many smaller protected areas including:
 - **Recreation Areas**
 - James River Bridge
 - **Natural Areas**

- Bearberry Prairie	- Bentz Lake
- Eagle Hill	- Emerson Creek
- Highwood River	- James Junction
- Sheep Creek	- Snakes Head
- Sundre	- Sundre North
- Sundre Red Deer	- Threepoint Creek
- Wildcat Island	

This plan concentrates mostly on Visitor Services planning for Fish Creek and Glenbow Ranch Provincial Parks. Fish Creek is one of North America's largest urban parks and Glenbow Ranch has the potential to be one of Alberta Parks Division's most popular near-urban parks. Both parks have significant natural and cultural features and high or high potential use. It will make good sense for Fish Creek District to concentrate most of their effort in these two sites.

The district's two smaller parks, Big Hill Springs and Brown-Lowery Provincial Parks have significant natural and cultural features but their small size and apparent low visitation compared to the major parks means that they will receive limited attention from Visitor Services staff.

The district's 13 Natural Areas and one Recreation Area covered in this plan are tiny, hard to find and are generally without identification signs or basic infrastructure. This plan recognizes that these sites have limited significance and are unlikely to be developed further at least within the next ten years, and concludes that the district's limited visitor services staff and resources will be put to better use in the two major parks.

Foundations

Foundations are planning and policy documents, initiatives and statements that provide directions for Visitor Services in Fish Creek District

Foundations are statements that document the intentions and mandate of an agency or program. They are the guiding principles for Visitor Services in Fish Creek District. Visitor Services, to be valuable and justified, must support the agency's mandate.

Visitor Services that support the key foundations of Alberta Parks Division will help strengthen the agency by assisting in achieving its mandate. Visitor Services that can not be shown to fit will not survive.

This plan looked at foundations at the following levels:

Provincial Government Level

- Strategic Plan
- Provincial Climate Change Policy
- Alberta Water For Life (Sustainable Water Policy)
- Spirit of Alberta (Cultural Policy)

Ministry Level

(Ministry of Tourism Parks and Recreation)

- Ministry Vision
- Ministry Mission
- Strategic Priorities 2007–2010
- Business Plan 2007–2010

Agency Level

(Alberta Parks Division)

- Vision
- Mission
- Visitor Services Program Goals

Visitor Services Development Plan for Fish Creek District

District and Park Level

- Park Vision
- Park Mission
- Visitor Services Vision
- Visitor Services Mission
- Visitor Services Program Goals

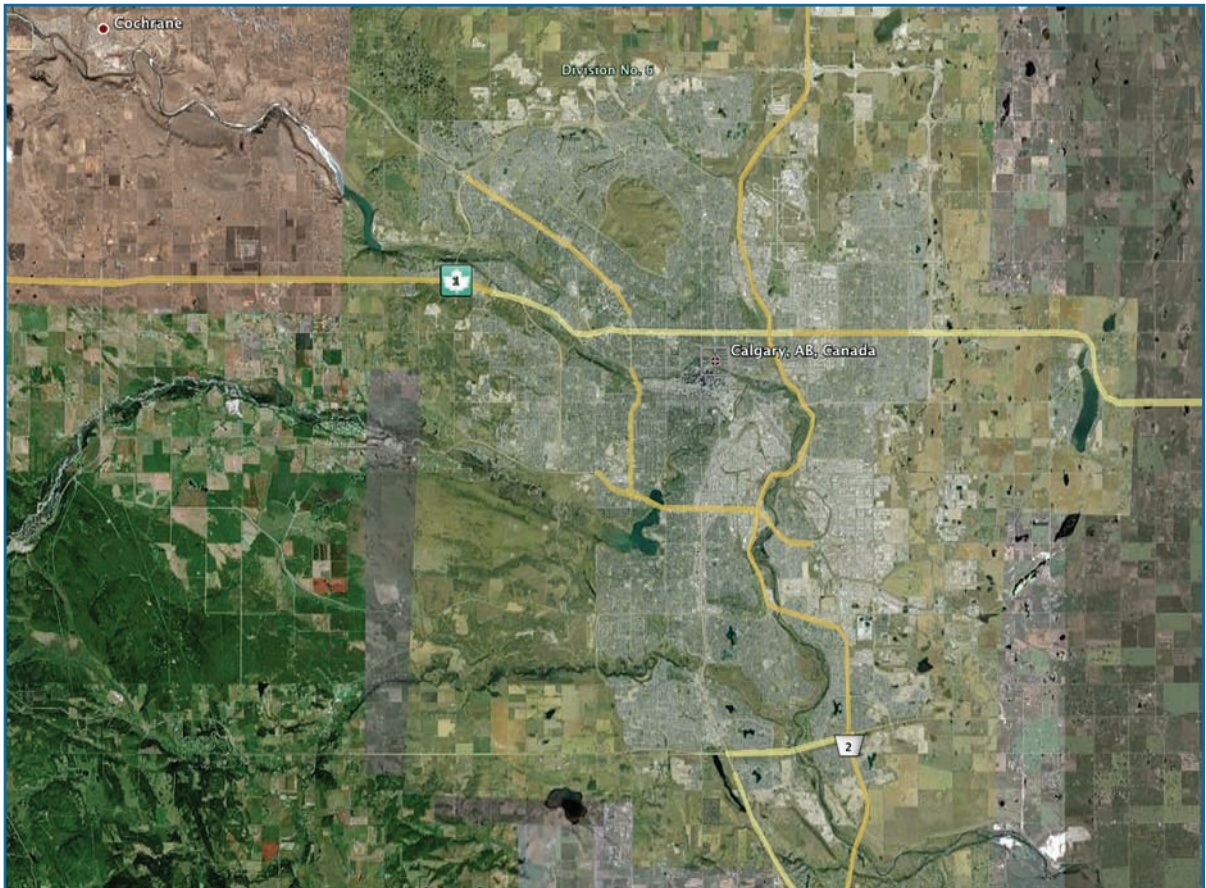
This information was gathered from existing Park-level Management Plans and Visitor Services Development Plans for Fish Creek, Big Hill Springs and Brown-Lowery Provincial Parks. The Management Plan for Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park was under development and unavailable.

A detailed review of these foundations showed that Visitor Services in Fish Creek District have very strong mandates at all levels:

Provincial Level	- 43 areas of connection
Ministry Level	- 34 areas of connection
Agency Level	- 40 areas of connection
Park Level	- over 70 areas of connection

These connections and their implications to the Visitor Services program were discussed in Chapter 1: Foundations.

Calgary and Cochrane are two main market areas for Fish Creek District.



Market Analysis

The more that Visitor Services staff know about the current knowledge, interest, attitudes and activities of audience/participant/learner groups the better they can design, develop and deliver programs that meet their needs and the needs of the park.

This plan reviewed current information on park use and current literature about tourism and recreation. It identifies over fifty connections and recommendations for implementing findings and conducting additional research.

Best Practice

The market analysis in this plan (Chapter 2) includes a section on best practice. It identifies key areas of data gathering and research which are needed. These include:

- a review of current users of individual parks and protected areas including:
 - Who Visits the Parks and Protected Areas?
 - What are their interests?
 - What do they already know about the site's natural and cultural history?
 - What are they doing?
 - How often do they use/visit the park?
 - How often do they participate in heritage appreciation services?
 - Trends in visitation and program attendance
 - are demographics shifting?
 - are numbers increasing or decreasing?
 - are there any known stewardship activities undertaken by park users?
 - are there changes in the ways visitors use sites?
 - Who Does Not Visit the Parks and Protected Areas?
- a review of markets and market trends
- a focus on both external and internal audiences or participants
 - external audiences are current and potential park users, supporters and park neighbours
 - internal audiences includes decision makers within Alberta Parks Division and within current and potential partner groups

Findings: Park Users

Key findings include:

- of all the properties in Fish Creek District, only Fish Creek Provincial Park keeps regular visitor statistics
- note that Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park will not open until 2012, therefore no visitor statistics were available
- no visitor profile data was developed for any of the parks and protected areas in the district
- it is clear for Fish Creek and Glenbow Ranch Provincial Parks that a large proportion of park users are or will be multiple repeat visitors
 - visit the park many times each year
 - develop a close relationship with all or parts of the park
 - tend to be knowledgeable about the park's natural and cultural features
 - are often looking for opportunities to contribute to its care and stewardship

Key Recommendations

Recommendations For Fish Creek, Glenbow Ranch, Big Hill Springs and Brown-Lowery Provincial Parks

1. Install trailhead pedestrian counters at strategic location at all major activity areas
 - must be located to capture data about numbers of people using trails starting at major parking areas, and at areas served by public transit
2. Install vehicle counters at all major parking lots
3. Install pedestrian counters at the park Visitor Centres to count numbers of the public coming to get information about the park and/or to interact with exhibits
4. Each year, review the information gathered to identify:
 - Use Patterns
 - most heavily used and least used
 - pathways
 - parking lots
 - map annual and seasonal use patterns
 - map weekly and daily use patterns
5. Analyse the data to determine:
 - Overall Use Patterns
 - an estimate of total park use for the year
 - overall use trends by comparing with data from previous years
 - Area Use Patterns
 - annual, seasonal, daily use patterns at each site

- use trends for specific areas, sites and trails
- 6. Apply the data and analysis results in an annual VS program planning process to:
 - allocate funds and effort to areas in the park that have highest use
 - justify requests for funding from partners and funders
 - identify areas of further visitor study and analysis
 - e.g., study why there is a decline in use of a particular pathway
 - e.g., study and analyze make-up of attendees at special events—why are certain target users not attending?
- 7. Focus a significant amount of Visitor Services resources and staff time on programming suitable for multiple repeat visitors:

Findings: Review of Literature

Key types of literature reviewed included internal park documents on tourism potential of specific sites, Travel Alberta research documents and tourism research documents from other provincial and national sources.

General Tourism Studies

Key findings include:

Tourist Destinations

None of the properties in Fish Creek District are or are likely to become destination tourism sites for in-province, Canadian or international tourists. Instead, the provincial parks in the district will continue to have high local value being visited regularly for recreation, relaxation and nature enjoyment by people who live close to them.

Age Structure of Users

Aging Population

- the median age of Canadians will increase to:
 - almost 39 years by 2011
 - 43.6 years by 2026

Baby Boomers

- boomers between 45–64 years are the most likely to travel
 - competition for their interest will be significant
- 1/3 of Canada's population are baby boomers
- by 2026, the 65+ segment of the population will be 21 percent of Canada's population
- will be interested in:
 - soft adventure (active outdoor adventure with comfortable accommodation)
 - learning adventures with deeper content

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- activities with grandchildren

Calgary's Population is Growing Quickly

- at least 1.1 million by 2014
- 1.23 million by 2033
- growth will be primarily through in-migration
- Calgary may still have a slightly younger population than the rest of the country
- however, by 2033 over 40 percent of the population will be middle-aged and older

Family Structure

- average family size will decline
- the percentage of families with children will peak at 34 percent in 2016 and decline steadily over the next 20 years
- immigrant and First Nations families are more likely to include and, in some cases, to be headed by members of extended family, such as grandparents

Children

- although Calgary's population will rise in the future, the number of children will remain roughly the same

International Immigration

- in 2001, immigrants comprised about 20 percent of Calgary's population
- Calgary is likely to continue to be one of the major Canadian destinations for immigrants from a wide spectrum of countries
- visible minorities are a significant portion of immigrants to Calgary and vicinity
 - by 2016 visible minority groups will compose:
 - 25 percent of Calgary's total population
- places from where immigrants come have shifted over time from European countries to a wide array of countries
 - more than 40 percent of the city's immigrants are from:
 - China
 - India
 - Vietnam
 - the Philippines
 - Hong Kong
- there appears to be little research on ethno-cultural attitudes and behaviour toward parks and the natural environment taking place in Canada. Most appears to be coming from the USA and Australia

Findings: Target Park User Groups

The plan has identified and described a number of target user groups including:

- School Groups
- Anglers
- Casual Cyclists and Casual Walkers
- Commuters
- Dog Walkers
- Exercise Recreationists
- Family Groups
- Mountain Bikers looking for Challenging Terrain
- Mums with Small Children
- Park Neighbours
- Neighbourhood Children
- Naturalists and Bird Watchers
- New Canadians
- Picnickers
- Researchers
- Seniors
- Swimmers



Presentation Options

Chapter 3 gives a brief assessment of personal and non-personal Visitor Services (the means and methods available to VS staff, volunteers and partners to deliver effective Visitor Services) in context of a set of effectiveness criteria. The methods and media include:

Public Programming	
Personal Programming	
Activity-Based Program	Campfire Program
Characterization	Dramatic Presentation
Demonstration	Outreach/Extension
Guided Tour	Interpretive Roving
Information Roving	Information by Phone
Leader Training	Living History
Long Term Program	On-Site Reconnaissance Meeting or Walkabout
Participatory Setting (Visitor Centre)	Point Duty
Projects	Public Input Meeting
Special Event	Step-On Guide
Talk (Seminar)	Volunteer and Partner Learning Workshop
Visual and Performing Arts	
Non-Personal Programming	
Artifacts/Models	Computer-Interactive Stations
Exploration/Discovery Kits	Gift Shops
Live Animal Exhibits	Mass Media
Mechanical-Interactive Stations	New Media
Props and Decor	- Blogs
Self-Guided Trails	- Critter Cams
Dioramas	- Podcasts
Video	- Virtual Tours
	- Web Forums
	- Websites

School Programming	
Personal Programming	
Facilitated Discovery Activity	Simulation Activity/Game
Guided Hike	Discovery Hike
In-Service Teacher Training	Participatory Story/Participatory Theatre
Projects	Video Conferencing
Stories	
Non-Personal Programming	
Printed Activity Guides	Teacher Kits
Activity Packs	Social Networking Systems
Podcasts	Virtual Tours

School Programming

School programming in Fish Creek District, especially at Fish Creek Provincial Park, will focus on multiple park visits by students and extended study with a focus on inquiry learning. As well, Fish Creek Provincial Park staff plan to deliver a series of video conferencing-based school programs. These types of teaching and learning require methods and techniques that facilitate conversations between Visitor Services staff and students and between students, enabling students to develop and revise their thinking following a constructivist learning model.

Public Programming

The major parks in Fish Creek District have or will have a high percentage of multiple-repeat visitors. These people are often a high level of knowledgeable and are passionate about the park and its features. Many have a strong interest in participating in the stewardship of the park and its resources. Visitor services directed at this user group will need to be high in quality, provide opportunities for two-way conversation between Visitor Service Staff and participants and be very flexible to be able to follow lines of inquiry that come up during the program. Content must be accurate and up-to-date in order to meet the expectations of participants.



Fish Creek Provincial Park



Features

This plan includes a review of the geological, natural and cultural features of Fish Creek Provincial Park. A 99-page Special Features Inventory (Appendix 1) focuses on natural and cultural features from a district level perspective, a 152-page Feature Inventory specific to the park (Appendix 2), and a 106-page Features Analysis (Chapter FC 4). Within this analysis there are over 110 recommendations to Visitor Services staff for developing programs and services.

Geology and Geomorphology

Fish Creek Provincial Park has many easily seen geological features, including outcrops of sandstone and shale from the Paskapoo Formation that was laid down between 65.5 million and 55.8 million years ago in the Paleocene Epoch.

Most of the other geological features in the park are related to the Wisconanin glacial period which ended approximately ten thousand years ago with the retreat of the continental and cordilleran ice sheets. The park has extensive glacial till deposits which can be seen in cutbanks along Fish Creek and the Bow River. Other glacial artifacts include erratics, glacial spillways (the

valleys of Fish Creek and the Bow River), lake bed deposits and old shorelines of Glacial Lake Calgary.

An understanding of the park's geology and geomorphology can help VS staff and park visitors to develop skills of reading the landscape, predicting environmental consequences and understanding how physical and biological worlds interact.

Climate and Climate Change

Climate

The park's climate is a typical continental climate with hot summers and cold winters. The winters are often punctuated by warm chinook winds that blow eastward from the Rocky Mountains causing rapid snow melt and prolonged periods of warm dry weather. Low average annual precipitation of 412.6 mm and drying chinook winds combine to make the Calgary area a dry place that is often hostile to growth of some tree species.

Also, the park is influenced by the drought cycle that affects the great plains of Canada and the USA. (For more details see Appendix 1: Climate).

The drought cycle is a significant feature that exerts strong influence on the natural history, cultural heritage, agriculture and economy of this part of Alberta. It is often misunderstood by Albertans,



Extensive non-native grasslands near Bow Valley Ranch.



A waxwing on wolf willow.



Riparian vegetation along Fish Creek.



Saskatoon blossoms.

especially new Canadians and newcomers from other parts of Canada.

Climate Change

Environment Canada predicts that the climate change effects for the Calgary area will include hotter summers and warmer winters. There will be more severe weather events and a significantly dryer climate. As well, the glaciers that feed the Bow River are likely to disappear within fifty years. This will significantly affect the flow to the Bow River.

Climate change will be an important topic for visitor services programs.

Natural Regions and Subregions

Foothills Fescue Natural Subregion

Fish Creek Provincial Park falls within the eastern edge of the Foothills Fescue Natural Subregion. This is the moistest of the four natural subregions that make up the Grassland Natural Region.

Fish Creek Provincial Park is no longer a strong representative of this subregion because:

- almost all of its native grassland has disappeared, replaced by non-native smooth brome and Kentucky Bluegrass
 - only two tiny pockets of native grassland remain in the park
- the long-term suppression of fire in the park has allowed infiltration of shrub and forest plants into former grassland

Key Ecological Concepts

The following concepts are key to understanding important natural functions in the park:

- Ecological Goods and Services
- Green Infrastructure
- Biodiversity
- Habitat Fragmentation
- Island Effect
- Ecological Corridors
- The Greater Park Ecosystem

Visitor Services staff need to understand these concepts and include them in public and school programs.



Vegetation Communities

The park is home for a wide variety of vegetation communities. Most of the communities present contain a mixture of native and non-native plant species, with smooth brome grass (*Bromus inermis*) found throughout the park. Native grassland has almost disappeared from the park.

Key vegetation communities in the park include:

Grassland Communities

- Native Grassland
- Mixed Grassland

Grassland/Shrub Communities

- Mixed Grassland/Low Shrub
- Low Shrub/Mixed Grassland
- Native Grassland/Low Shrub Community
- Mixed Grassland/Tall Shrub Community
- Shrub/Aspen
- Aspen/Mixed Grassland

Forest Communities

- Aspen Forest
- Aspen/Balsam Poplar Community
- Balsam Poplar Forest
- Balsam Poplar/Mixed Grassland Community
- Balsam Poplar/Willow
- Mixedwood Spruce Forest Community
- White Spruce Forest Community

Riverine (Riparian) Communities

Wetland Communities

Pond Communities

- Natural Ponds and Oxbows
- Engineered Storm Water Ponds

Running Water (Creek and River) Communities

Wildlife and Wildlife Watching

The park has a number of lists of wildlife seen within the park (see the current lists at the end of appendix 2). The plants, mammal and bird lists are detailed and extensive listing:

- approximately 508 plant species
- 28 species of butterfly
- 12 species of fish
- 39 species of mammals
- 217 species of birds

Wildlife watching can be so much more than creating lists of creatures that one sees in the park. It can include in addition to this activities, such as observing:

- mating rituals and territorial displays
- foraging, feeding and hunting
- evasion of predators
- birth and care of young
- tracking and reading spoor
- and any of the other activities of animals going about their lives

Cultural and Historical Assets

Fish Creek Provincial Park has a rich and diverse historic set of heritage features. The University of Calgary Department of Archeology has identified more than 80 archaeological sites. They date from approximately 8,000 years ago to historic times.

The area that encompasses the park has demonstrably been inhabited by people for at least the last 8,000 years. The park contains examples of the cultural history of southern Alberta from throughout that time period.

The park also is home of many important sites related to early European settlement and industrial development. Key historic sites include:

- the Glenn Farm and Trading Post
- Bow Valley Ranch and Ranch House
- the Ranch Foreman's Cabin
- John Glenn's Second Farm
- the Willans Barn
- the Hone House
- Paradise Grove Race Track and Dance Hall
- Shaw's Woolen Mill
- the Frederick Mannix House



Park management Issues

A major function of VS services is to support the park management plan. In the late months of 2008 the park's planning team released a draft of the revised Fish Creek Provincial Park Management Plan. The management plan indicated many areas of concern and focus. VS staff should review this draft and any others that are developed in order to understand the park's management issues and be able to work with park management and enforcement staff to develop effective VS services that support management initiatives. This section will review management issues from the 2008 management plan draft.

Management Designations

The park's management plan has identified five special management zones that identify and describe appropriate use and management of each part of the park. The zones include:

- Access Zone
- Facility Zone
- Historical/Cultural Zone
- Preservation Zone
- Natural Environment Zone

Management Areas

Fish Creek Provincial Park has been divided into six management areas.:

- Deer Run North
- Bow River East
- Bow River West
- Parkland
- Canyon Meadows
- Fish Creek West

Viewpoints

Existing Viewpoints

The park has ten viewpoints. They provide visitors opportunities for observing scenery and wildlife.

Two sites have viewing platforms:

- the Raven Rocks viewpoint
- the great blue heron colony viewing site

Potential Viewpoints

This plan identifies four additional sites for future viewpoints:

- Bow River Seasonal Wildlife Viewing Site
- Bow River and City Panorama
- Grassland Panorama
- Raven Rocks at a Distance



A winter viewscape from a viewpoint near Bebo Grove.

Current Programs

Operating for over twenty years, Fish Creek Provincial Park has a mandate to be a centre of excellence for environmental education. The park also reported over three million visitors in 2007. As a result, the park's Visitor Services staff provide a suite of education services for schools and public programs.

This plan includes a brief snapshot of Visitor Services provided at Fish Creek Provincial Park in 2007-2008. It can be used as a baseline/benchmark when evaluating new VS offerings and initiatives.

School Programs

In 2008 the park's Environmental Education core program was booked to capacity and served about 23,000 students, teachers and parent helpers. Programs are mostly based out of the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre and the Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre.

Almost all programs for grades K-6 were designed to be led by teachers and parent helpers. The one exception was the Grade 5 wetland program funded by Ducks Unlimited Canada in which most of the program is led by the park's wetland education specialist.

Park VS staff plan to develop more programs along the wetland program's design with a multiple visit immersion approach.

Key education program partners included:

- Marigold Foundation funding the Learning Naturally Program
- Ducks Unlimited Canada, a major funder of the Wetland Education Program
- University of Calgary Department of Archeology, the major provider of school programs focusing on human history of the park
- Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park fund and support many park initiatives

Public Programming

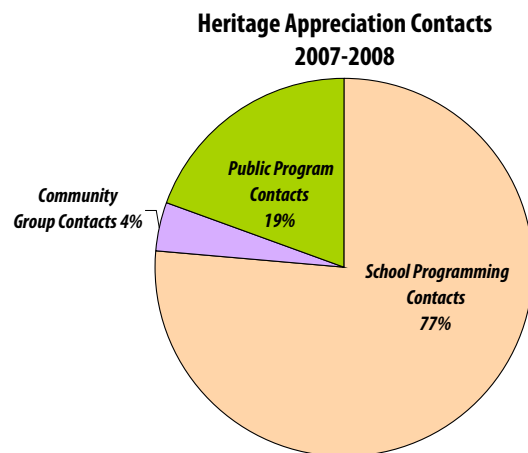
To date, only a limited amount of staff time and resources has been focused on this segment of the park's VS program. As a result, only approximately 20% of the park's VS contacts come through public program offerings. Public programs in 2007-2008 included:

Personal Programs

- PPA Slide Show Series
- Go with the Show (week-long camping trip)
- Tuesday Park Tours
- Taking It Outside (a series of high-end workshops aimed at increasing participant capacity in several areas of natural history study and awareness)
- Special Events

Non-Personal Programs

- park website
- Park Notes (25 single-sheet brochures featuring information about park features or regulations)
- cultural history exhibits in the Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre



The beginning of a Wetland Education school program.



Current and Potential Alliances

Fish Creek Provincial Park has a mature Visitor Services program and has established a significant number of collaborations and alliances. This plan includes a brief review of existing and potential partners that:

- fund programs
- deliver VS services in the park
- deliver VS services elsewhere in region

Funders

In 2008 funders included:

- Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society
 - this society is the park's premier partner and shares the park's interests
 - VS staff should continue to work closely with this group
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
 - DUC is a major funder of the Wetland Education program at Fish Creek Provincial Park
 - its vision mission and goals are compatible with those of Alberta Parks Division and Fish Creek Provincial Park
 - VS staff should continue to work closely with this group
- Marigold Foundation
 - this foundation was a major partner supporting a significant part of the park's environmental education program and shares the park's interests in providing services to the entire spectrum of Alberta's economic and social communities
 - in 2009 this foundation will be shifting its focus and will be unable to continue its fruitful and highly successful partnership with the park
 - VS staff should work to find funders to take up support for the Learning Naturally Program

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Current Program Partners

The park has a number of well established partnerships. These partnerships should be maintained and expanded. Key program partners include:

Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park

The Friends Society runs most of the volunteer programs that take place in the park. These include:

- Park Watch Stewardship Program
- Wildlife Monitoring
- Resource Management Programs
- Park Clean-Up/Invasive Plant Management
- Speaker's Series
- Environmental Education Programs

The Ranch Restoration Society

This is a non-profit historical restoration society, incorporated in Alberta in 1995. The society has a mandate to restore and oversee the Bow Valley Ranch to its original turn of the century grandeur.

University of Calgary Dept. of Archeology

Programs delivered by this group include:

- Discover Archaeology
 - for Division One (K-3)
 - for Division Two
- Simulated Dig
- Archaeological Field Studies

City of Calgary (City of Calgary Parks)

City of Calgary is a partner in some of Fish Creek Park's Visitor Services initiatives, such as the park's Wetland Education Program (funded by Ducks Unlimited Canada).

Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (Calgary Centre)

The RASC is a partner in the popular Star Night special events that take place in Fish Creek Provincial Park twice each year.

Potential Program Partners

This plan reviewed many of the groups and agencies that are active in school and public programming in the Calgary area. Looking for compatibility of their mandates and programs with the foundations and programs of Fish Creek Provincial Park, groups ranked as having high or moderate collaboration potential were described and potential partnerships were recommended.

Groups with high collaboration potential include:

- Alberta Consortium for Environmental Education (ABCEE)
- City of Calgary Parks (Inglewood Bird Sanctuary)
- Calgary Zoo
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)
- Creature Watching
 - Frogwatch
 - Worm Watch
 - Spider WebWatch
 - PlantWatch
- The Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association (GEOEC)
- RiverWatch
- Nature Calgary
- University of Calgary Biogeoscience Institute (BGS)

Groups with moderate collaboration potential include:

- Climate Change Central
- Cross Conservation Area
- Inglewood Wildlands Society
- The Institute for Earth Education Canada
- Pembina Institute
- Science Alberta Foundation
- SEEDS Foundation
- The Citizen Science Network
- Telus World of Science
- Creative Kids Museum



Curriculum Review and Analysis

Fish Creek Provincial Park has a long-running education program. School programs have been delivered in the park since it opened and the park's master plan indicates that the park is striving to be a centre of excellence in environmental education. The park's education program features a science-focused program delivered through the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre and a social studies-focused program delivered by park staff and in partnership with the University of Calgary's Department of Archeology mostly through the Visitor Centre at Bow Valley Ranch.

School programming requires detailed planning, expert teaching skills and careful evaluation. This chapter reviews Alberta Education's current curriculum guides and outlines many of the areas that must be considered by VS staff when developing and delivering school focused VS services that contribute to the development of environmentally literate Albertans.

Science and social studies have been chosen as key target subjects because of their direct connection to the natural and cultural heritage of the park and because an extensive social studies program for schools is already being delivered in the park by its partner, the Department of Archeology of the University of Calgary.

Alberta Education's science curricula focus on active discovery and inquiry learning as seen in this wetland discovery program based out of the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre.



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Science Curriculum

Alberta Education's science curriculum is broad, covering physics, chemistry and the natural sciences (astronomy, meteorology, geology, biology, genetics, ecology). VS programs focused on school science must have connections with Parks Division's mandate to preserve Alberta's biodiversity. This would centre on natural sciences, especially ecology and biology, with some opportunities in geology, astronomy and meteorology.

Another criteria for focusing on science is the set of natural features of Fish Creek Provincial Park, e.g., forests and wetlands.

Using these criteria, 22 specific teaching units from Grade 1–12 have been identified in this plan from the Alberta Education's science curriculum that best suits Parks Division's VS services. The following pages contain a review of the Alberta Education curriculum units. The information gathered can be used by VS staff when developing additional science-based VS services for schools and for evaluating new and existing offerings.

Philosophy

The educational philosophy of Alberta Education's approach to science education is outlined in the preambles to their primary, junior secondary and senior secondary science curriculum guides.

Inquiry Learning

It is clear that the overlying philosophy throughout is inquiry learning. Development of inquiry learning skills is central to the primary science program and is a key component of the junior and senior secondary program.

Science Literacy

A key aim of the junior and senior secondary program is to develop science literate citizens. Included in science literacy, VS staff also include environmental literacy.

Social Studies Curriculum

Our review of the current social studies curricula for grades 1–12 found many opportunities for connections with structured student learning. Most of the social studies topics are related to big-picture ideas about Alberta, Canadian and World History and social issues. Twelve grade-specific curriculum topic areas that have connections to the park's history and geography have been identified.

Key Approaches to Social Studies

The social studies curriculum clearly states the core learning approaches that should be followed. These have strong implications on how historical and geographical education programs should be approached by VS staff.

The curriculum guide talks about the following key approaches to thinking and learning.

In social studies, students acquire and develop thinking strategies that assist them in making connections to prior knowledge, in assimilating new information and in applying learning to new contexts. The following dimensions of thinking have been identified as key components in social studies learning:

- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Historical Thinking
- Geographic Thinking

These approaches should be used in the park's social studies programs.



Exhibits at the Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre assist students in learning about the park's history.



Visitor Services Goals, Objectives and Themes

This plan articulates Visitor Services goals, objectives, themes and subthemes for Fish Creek Provincial Park. The goals, objectives and themes are listed below. Sixty-five subthemes were developed to further articulate the 8 themes. It is hoped that it will be used as a reference by VS staff as part of the planning process whenever they are developing new programs.

VS Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: To become a centre of excellence in environmental education programming, training and research in Alberta

Objective 1.1 Provide enjoyable, effective curriculum -focussed learning opportunities based on current best practice for students and community youth groups focusing on the natural and cultural heritage of Fish Creek Provincial Park.

- education opportunities will be barrier-free and all-inclusive

Objective 1.2: Provide students and community youth groups with opportunities for unstructured play in natural settings in accordance to the findings of Dr. Richard Louv.

Objective 1.3 Provide teachers and group leaders with opportunities for professional development and contribution to a community of best practice in teaching and learning for environmental literacy and human heritage learning.

Objective 1.4 Regularly and thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of all educational programs offered to determine their teaching effectiveness.

Objective 1.5 Encourage and enable research in formal and informal education in natural settings by academic researchers that can be applied in the park.

Objective 1.6 Develop close relationships with academic institutions that will foster co-operation and the use of the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre as a test bed for new techniques in teaching and evaluation of learning.

Goal 2: Enhance visitor understanding, use, and enjoyment of the park

Objective 2.1 Understand park users, their interests and activities by regularly monitoring and reviewing user activities and use of the park.

Objective 2.2 Develop a spectrum of VS offerings that address different levels of participant interest, awareness, involvement and commitment to stewardship of the park's natural and cultural heritage.

Objective 2.3 Regularly and thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of all public VS programs offered to determine their learning, and community engagement effectiveness.

Objective 2.4 Encourage and enable research in informal education in natural settings by academic researchers that can be applied in the park.

Goal 3: Keep abreast of developments in technology

Objective 3.1 Monitor developments in technology that supports learning and community building and apply it when appropriate and affordable.

Objective 3.2 Monitor developments in green technology and apply it when appropriate and affordable.

Goal 4: Be a Gateway to the Alberta Parks System

Objective 4.1 Provide teachers and students with information about education initiatives and opportunities in other parks in the system.

Objective 4.2 Provide park visitors and other interested parties with the opportunities to learn about the Alberta Parks system and specific parks and protected areas within the system.

Objective 4.3 Provide researchers interested in conducting research about the natural and cultural heritage of Alberta or research on formal and informal learning information about opportunities and restrictions on research in other Parks Division properties.

Executive Summary



Visitor Services Themes For Fish Creek Provincial Park			
Theme A	Getting outside and active on Fish Creek Provincial Park's trails and aquatic centre is healthy and enriching. The park is a great place to make your own nature and history discoveries. Through park staff and its programs, you can explore the park and share your findings with family, friends and neighbours.	Theme B	Preserving and maintaining Fish Creek Provincial Park's biodiversity is important—for people and for the wide variety of living things that live here. The park and its partners work with visitors and volunteers to steward these lands.
Theme C	Fish Creek Provincial Park is a place to discover how the natural world works and how it is important to our lives.	Theme D	At first glance, the grasslands, forests, wetlands, waterways of Fish Creek Provincial Park appear to be unchanging. However, by learning to read the landscape you can observe how human and natural actions have and continue to shape the landscape.
Theme E	Fish Creek Provincial Park cares for many diverse natural places. These lands are an important part of the city of Calgary's green infrastructure that provides ecological services, such as clean air and abundant clean water.	Theme F	You can help Fish Creek Provincial Park protect its many native plants, animals and habitats, and help preserve it as a place of quiet and contemplation for people by following its rules and regulations and taking part in park-sanctioned stewardship projects.
Theme G	People are part of nature and have been important players in Fish Creek Provincial Park's past, present and future.	Theme H	Fish Creek Provincial Park is a gateway to the many parks and protected areas in the province's Parks Division.



Mission of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Visitor Services Program

“Humans need connections with nature and their own history for their physical, mental and spiritual health. The mission of the Fish Creek Provincial Park VS program is to enhance the experience of visiting the park, and living near the park, through the provision and facilitation of heritage appreciation and visitor experience services that increase the awareness, appreciation and understanding of the park’s natural and cultural heritage. The VS program will also assist citizens in developing their environmental and cultural literacy and also inspire and involve park users in stewardship of the park-related resources within the greater park ecosystem.”

Our Guiding Principles are:

- Inclusion of the diversity of park visitors and neighbours
- Do no harm to the environment and historical features of the park
- Focus on enabling discovery of the park’s landscapes, ecology and human heritage
- Encourage and enable life-long learning
- Focus on learning for stewardship
- Through engagement, empowerment and promotion of environmental literacy of individuals and groups, enable them to make informed decisions about their behaviour in the park and in making contributions to the park’s care and stewardship
- Include current issues, such as climate change and urbanization

Strategic Plan

The strategic plan for Fish Creek’s Visitor Services Program in this document includes:

- a mission statement
- a vision for the program
- a situational assessment (review of the factors affecting the future success of the VS program, as they relate to the program’s vision and mission)
- strategies, strategic goals and objectives

It is a management tool that helps Visitor Services staff to:

- focus its energy
- ensure that members of the organization are working toward the same goals
- help to assess and adjust the organization’s direction in response to a changing environment

Vision of the Fish Creek Provincial Park VS Program

The vision of this program is in two parts:

Part 1

“Fish Creek Provincial Park will be a centre of excellence for environmental education

- supporting new research into:
 - how children learn
 - identification and of current good practice in environmental education
 - teaching techniques that assist students to develop their environmental literacy
 - effective assessment techniques of formal and informal learning
- testing and assessing current and new outdoor learning techniques and approaches
- implementing the results of the above research to deliver high-quality, effective curriculum-based environmental education services related to the park’s VS themes to local schools and community service groups”

Part 2

“The park will have a dynamic public program where local citizens visit regularly to relax, recreate, learn and contribute to the care of this diverse park and the greater park ecosystem.

Because the park’s VS program includes learning, caring and doing, the citizens of the Calgary area will be better able to plan and act towards a sustainable future.”



The strategies for ongoing development and success of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Visitor Services Program are:

1. Maintain and improve the status of the VS program as a centre of excellence for environmental education
2. Maintain and build upon the positive profile of the VS school program
3. Maintain and build upon park public profile
4. Further identify and characterize current and potential park users and neighbours in detail
5. Regularly use the information gathered about current and potential park visitors to craft appropriate and effective VS services
 - develop a suite of VS programs (public programs and school-focussed programs) that fit the park's unique user profiles and take into account the PPA Stewardship Model
6. Use an action research approach when developing new VS offerings
7. Encourage and support appropriate and needed research in Fish Creek Provincial Park
8. Ensure that the VS program does not negatively impact the ecological integrity and ecological services of Fish Creek Provincial Park or adversely impact the park's historical and cultural resources
9. Further develop the park's partnership/collaboration policy for VS-related services
10. Continue to work to encourage and enable the Friends of Fish Creek cooperating society
11. Ensure that all Fish Creek Provincial Park education and interpretation programs support the park's foundations and one or more of the park's VS goals
12. Continue to assist park management and planners in the design and placement of the support infrastructure for the VS program

These strategies along with their associated strategic goals and objectives must be met before the VS program can be fully implemented and for the VS program to succeed and thrive.

Core Competencies

This is one of the most important sections of the Visitor Services Development Plan for Fish Creek Provincial Park. It provides guidelines for delivery and planning of the overall Visitor Services program for the park.

Guidelines

The plan also identifies and describes a set of guidelines that will aid VS staff in providing the VS services for Fish Creek Provincial Park. These include:

- go with Fish Creek Provincial park's main strengths
- go where the people are
- increase and/or maintain the profile Visitor Services and the park
- follow best practice in public and formal education
- maintain current partnerships and develop new ones

Core Competencies

Core competencies are the areas of operation and service in which the VS program should excel. They are useful as a checklist of areas of focus for the VS program and can be used as areas of responsibility for the various VS job classification discussed in this plan.

This plan identifies ten areas of core competency include:

1. Research
2. Visitor Information Orientation
3. Assisting Park Management
4. School Programming
5. Heritage Interpretation
6. Stewardship Involvement and Education
7. Recreation Programming
8. Collaboration and Partnership
9. Tourism
10. Marketing

Core competencies provide a basis for the development of critical success factors and key performance indicators.

For each core competency, the following areas are examined and discussed:

- key outputs
- critical success factors
- key performance indicators



Outputs

These are the key activities or products related to each core competency. Outputs are based on core competencies of the VS program and the values of the agency.

Critical Success Factors

These are any structure, process or event that must be in place for an activity to successfully take place. Tables throughout this chapter identify the critical success factors that must be in place for the identified outputs to be achieved.

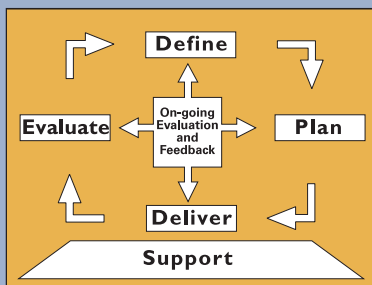
Key Performance Indicators

These will help VS staff define and measure progress toward delivering the outputs for each of its areas of core competency. Tables throughout this chapter identify key performance indicators for each of the VS program's areas of core competency.

Each core competency is discussed in detail under the five areas identified in the ANZECC Best Practice Model (see sidebar below).

The ANZECC Best Practice Model

In 1999, the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) released *Best Practice in Park Interpretation and Education*. This report contained a model developed based on an intensive study of best practice in 35 state and federal agencies (including several Canadian agencies) that deliver interpretation and education services. The model illustrates current best practices in organizing, managing, and delivering interpretation and education services.



Best practice can be divided into five areas: Define, Plan, Deliver, Evaluate and Support.

Define

This stage focuses on the interpretation objectives and services of the organization. They are clearly defined and linked to legislative requirements, mission statement, and broader agency objectives.

Plan

Here foundation elements from the define stage are translated into strategic planning for interpretation and education services. Markets are researched and considered, and messages, key audiences, performance standards, and options for service delivery are developed.

Deliver

Here managers ensure that front line staff, friends groups, and other service providers understand all relevant agency objectives, targets, and performance standards from the previous stage. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Evaluate

Here interpretation services are monitored, measured, evaluated, and improved. The contributions that services make towards achieving agency goals are assessed for effectiveness.

Support

Support includes financial systems, technology, equipment, human resources, and deployment of staff. Core skills are identified, trained for, and maintained at all interpretation and education service levels.

Executive Summary



The sections and subsections for each of the core competencies are described under the following headings:

Define

- outputs
- the key performance indicators
- objectives
- critical success factors
- rationale

Planning

- target audiences
- linkages
- themes

Delivering

- key locations
- optimal methods and media

Evaluation

Support

- capital costs
- operational costs
- operational support

Staffing

Our review of VS program foundations indicates that Fish Creek has two equally important areas of VS focus:

- environmental education programming for schools
- heritage interpretation programming/stewardship education and involvement for park visitors and neighbours

The development of the core competencies for Visitor Services at Fish Creek Provincial park indicates the need for additional staff to address the demands for high quality school programming from a center of excellence and the needs of over three million visitors per year.

EcoLeaders recognizes that Fish Creek has a long tradition of ensuring that all VS staff have an opportunity to work in all aspects of the program. However, with the ambitious program proposed by this plan and by VS staff, we strongly advise that programming and VS staff be divided into three areas of expertise:

- program management and coordination
- education program design and delivery
- heritage interpretation design and delivery

Based on the findings from the detailed review of core competencies and critical success factors the following VS positions are recommended:

Program Management and Coordination

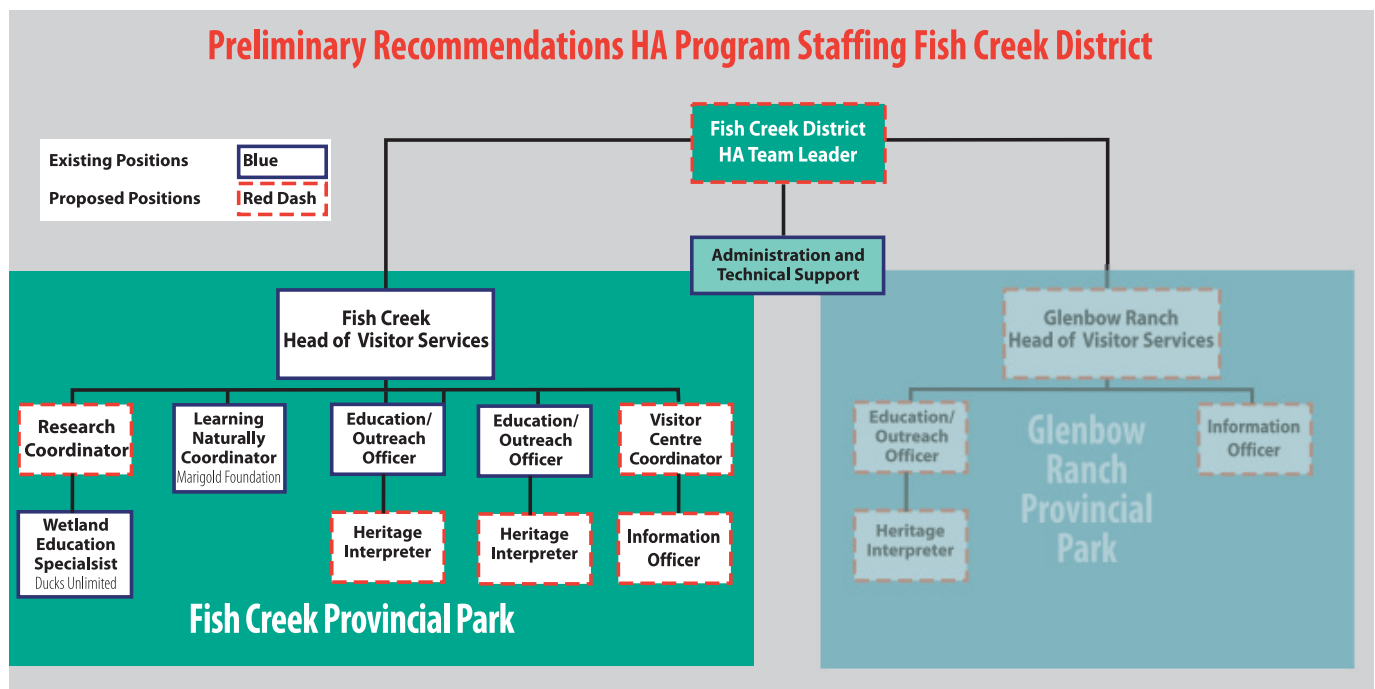
- 1 Position: Fish Creek VS Team Leader
- 1 Position: Research Coordinator

Education Program Design and Delivery

- 1 Part-time Booking Clerk
- 2 Positions: Environmental Educator
- 1 Position: Wetland Education Specialist
- 1 Position: Learning Naturally Coordinator

Heritage Interpretation Program Design and Delivery

- 2 Positions: Heritage Interpreter
- 1 Position: Information Officer





Implementation Plan

The implementation chapter is not a rigid cookbook-style document that identifies unchangeable timelines for development, nor should it be so.

The planning and delivery of VS services should be flexible and in the hands of Fish Creek Provincial Park VS staff. These will be the people who will develop the deeper understanding of park users through research and regular contact with them. They will be the people who through a process of action research will develop a suite of effective VS services that meet the park's mandate and serve the changing needs and interests of current and future park users, neighbours and partners.

Visitor Services at Fish Creek Provincial Park has two main areas of focus:

- school programming
- public programming

School Programming

The Visitor Services program at Fish Creek Provincial park has had a clear mandate to establish and maintain a centre of excellence for environmental education at least since the publishing of the parks's 1997 Management Plan. The park's new draft Management Plan (2008) includes the same objective.

The combination of mature market and stable (not growing) school population means that competition for students may become much stronger between environmental education program providers in Calgary. VS staff at Fish Creek Provincial Park will need to ensure that they understand the needs of teachers and students and develop effective programming to meet these needs. Further, through well-designed and effective assessment of student learning and evaluation of programs, VS staff must be able to prove this to:

- funders
- teachers
- principals
- park management all the way up to head office and the office of the Deputy Minister responsible for Alberta Parks Division
- partners
- parents
- school boards

A focus on the further development and maintenance of a centre of excellence for environmental education and cultural education will be an excellent strategy for VS staff in this mature market in Calgary.



Public Programming

The park has a mandate to inform park users about the natural and cultural features of the park. Its management plan also requires visitor services staff to inform, inspire and involve park users and park neighbours in stewardship of the park's natural and cultural resources and become involved in the sustainability of the park and its greater ecosystem. Another area of focus is that Fish Creek Provincial Park is a gateway park that must provide information about the overall park system and its individual park to interested parties.

The VS program at Fish Creek can support many mandates and initiatives of the Alberta Government and Alberta Parks Division.

The growth of Calgary has engulfed the park. When it opened, Fish Creek Provincial Park was a natural park on the edge of the city. In 2008, it is a large urban park *within* the city.

These changes have influenced how people use the park significantly. One key point is that the park has a high percentage of multiple repeat visitors. These are people that use the park often in a year, some people visit at least once per day. VS programming for this type of visitor must differ significantly from the destination camping visitors at many of the parks in the Alberta Parks system. These people are often very knowledgeable and passionate about the park. Programs must include opportunities for two-way communication and input from participants and may often require greater depth of coverage and more turnover of programs.

The Strategic Plan (Chapter 9) and Core Competencies (Chapter 10) outline recommended approaches and skills, infrastructure and support necessary to move the park's Visitor Services program forward. This chapter provides a model for implementing and phasing the program into the next five to ten years. One key recommendation is an increase in full-time staffing to meet the year-round need for public programming in the park.

Key Areas For Development to Support the VS Program

The situational analysis conducted in VS Strategic Plan (Chapter 9) identified the current environment for VS services at Fish Creek Provincial Park. It identified ten strategies required for implementation of VS services so that an effective VS program can take place. The following section identifies strategies required.

The plan contains recommendations for implementing this plan in two phases:

Phase 1: Program Revision (2009-2011)

Phase 2: Ongoing Program Development
(2012 and beyond)

Both phases emphasize the importance of flexibility and regular evaluation and assessment. Using these approaches will ensure that Visitor Services at Fish Creek Provincial Park will continue to be meaningful and valuable well into the next decade.



Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park



Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park spans 1,314 hectares and is nearly the size of Calgary's Fish Creek Provincial Park. It is located on both sides of the Bow River. However, most of its land is in the Bow River Valley on the north side of the river and south of Highway 1A.

This plan was written three years before Glenbow ranch Provincial Park was scheduled to open to the public. Much of its planning was still in early stages of development and little of its infrastructure was yet in place. As a result several key components of the Visitor Services Development Plan are missing or incomplete. For example, there is no chapter reviewing current programming because the park was not yet in operation and sections on visitor services infrastructure and park management issues are either absent or incomplete.

That said, there is an abundance of information about the park gathered by researchers and consultants. This information is summarized in approximately 200 pages of the park's features inventory (Appendices 1 and 3) and features analysis (Chapter GR4).

This information was helpful in the development of the features inventory and analysis which also contains many recommendations for further study in order to provide park users and Visitor Services staff the information needed to better understand the parks natural processes and its natural and cultural features.

Executive Summary

Features

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park was part of Glenbow Ranch held by the Harvie family. The land was a working cattle ranch up to the time of the transfer of the land to the province.

Cultural Features

Throughout time the lands that make up this park have been important to people. Preliminary archeological surveys of the property indicate the presences of several bison kill sites and numerous campsites that predate European colonization and may extend back to just after the retreat of the glaciers ten thousand years ago.

Although never as central to the early development of farming, the cattle industry and early factories as Fish Creek Provincial Park, Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park was in the early 1900s the site of an important limestone quarry, a small brick factory and the village of Glenbow that supported them. Sandstone from this quarry was used to build many buildings in Calgary and also parts of the provincial parliament buildings in Edmonton. The ruins of the town's general store and the remains of the quarry and brickyard can still be seen and have potential to be a focus of Visitor Services programming.

Since the coming of Europeans, the main use of the park's landbase has been ranching. In the 1800s, it was part of the historic Cochrane Ranch, one of the province's early mega-ranches. After a short period, this property was broken up and eventually passed into the hands of the Harvie family.

Natural Features

The park holds extremely important native grassland habitats and is one of the few parks in the Alberta system that protects lands in the Foothills Parkland Natural Subregion.

This provincial park protects a wide variety of native plant and animal species typical of fescue grasslands, one of the provinces most diminished natural habitats. Most of this important grassland has been plowed under for agriculture, urban and industrial development or has been replaced by non-native grasses mostly used as cattle forage.

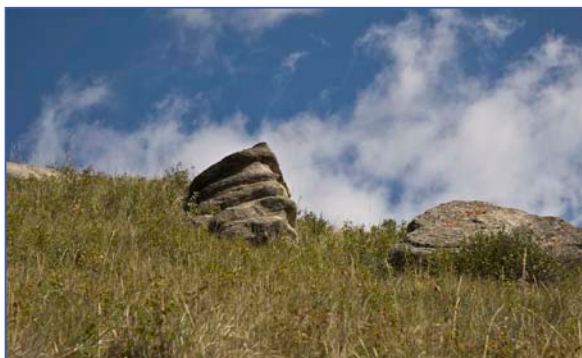
The park will provide one of the best opportunities to Albertans and visitors from elsewhere in the country and from around the world to experience the wide open grasslands and sheltered wooded coulees and valleys that supported huge herds of bison before the coming of the Europeans.

The major reason for the continued survival of native grassland in the park has been the wise stewardship of the Harvie family that for many years has followed good practice in sustainable agriculture in managing the Glenbow Ranch. Key to this has been the cattle ranching methods that have not overgrazed the land and the limited planting of non-native forage grasses. As a result, cattle replaced bison as a natural factor that held back the overgrowth of grassland by shrubs and forest and stimulated the healthy growth of native grasses.

The park also has a number of wetlands and riparian areas which are important for wildlife and for cattle.



Parts of the park has landscape typical of the Foothills Parkland Natural Subregion

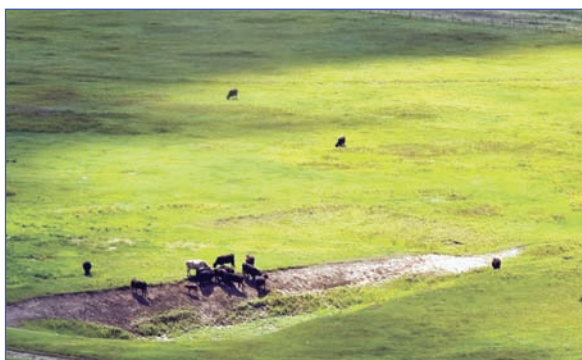


Outcrops of Paskapoo sandstone and shale can be seen in several places in the park.

Deep History

The park's landscapes have been shaped by many ancient geological processes. Bedrock exposures in the park, including those at the sandstone quarry, are part of the extensive Paskapoo formation, sandstone and shale sedimentary rocks that were deposited during the formation of the rocky mountains in the Paleocene epoch about 65 million years ago. The Paskapoo sandstones are very porous and have great importance as a groundwater reservoir for much of southern Alberta. The many springs and seeps in the park show where stored groundwater is flowing into the Bow River and associated ponds and wetlands.

The glaciation of the area and the subsequent melting of these ice sheets was the major shaping agent of the park's landscape. The huge amounts of water released by the melting ice cut a broad glacial spillway that is now the Bow River Valley. As well, glacial ice blocked the flow of glacial meltwater and formed the huge but temporary Glacial Lake Calgary. Terraces part way down the slope of the Bow river Valley mark the shores of this lake. Finally, the melting glacial ice dropped multiple metres of glacial till on the surface of the land. This is layers of mixed rock, gravel, sand and silt that lie beneath the park's topsoil and can be seen in exposures along the Bow River and elsewhere in the park.



Cattle grazing will be used as a range management tool.

Management Practices

Although the park's management plan is not yet completed, it is clear that park managers and the Harvie Conservancy Foundation (the park's major partner) will continue to use cattle grazing as a land management tool to maintain healthy native grasslands in the park.

Viewpoints

The broad landscape and the elevation of the upper banks of the Bow River Valley provide a number of spectacular views of the park and surrounding landscape. This plan identifies, describes, maps and assesses 15 viewpoints. Each is rated and recommendations are made for their use in Visitor Services programming. The final choice of viewpoints will take place within the park's management plan.

A viewscape from Viewpoint 4.





Current and Potential Alliances

The Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park VS program will be brand new when the park opens in 2011. Projections are that the majority of park users will be local multiple-repeat visitors. VS programs will have a strong emphasis on public programming with a smaller emphasis on school visits.

Fish Creek District strongly supports the development of partnerships and collaborations with existing conservation, education and research institutions. VS staff will want to develop relationships with a number of these groups, organizations and institutions to fund, and/or collaborate on the development, delivery and support of a wide array of VS programs and services.

Collaboration is the art of independent groups working together to achieve common goals.

The Continuum of Collaborative Relationships

Collaboration can involve many types of relationships. The plan describes and investigates collaborative liaisons in order from simplest to most complex:

- traditional contract
- information exchange
- input/output co-ops
- joint ventures
- partnerships
- mergers

This plan includes a brief review of existing and potential partners that:

- fund programs
- deliver VS services in the park
- deliver VS services elsewhere in region

Existing and Potential Funding Partners

These are groups or agencies who's foundations indicate that they can fund some part(s) of the park's VS program. These include:

- Harvie Conservancy Foundation
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Alberta Historical Resources Foundation
- Pembina Institute

Other Potential Partners

The plan identified 43 potential partners and grouped them into the following categories:

- **Groups with High Collaboration Potential (24 groups identified)**
 - deliver VS services in the regions
 - have foundations (vision, mission, and goals) that are similar to those of Alberta Parks Division
 - have complementary skills and capacities that can benefit Parks Division's VS program
 - have expertise that may increase the knowledge and understanding of Glenbow Ranch Provincials Park's natural and cultural heritage
- **Groups with Moderate Collaboration Potential (15 groups identified)**
 - are active in the region
 - have skills and programs that could complement Parks Division's VS services in the area
- **Groups with Lower Collaboration Potential but Still of Interest (4 groups identified)**
 - may be active in the region or elsewhere in the world
 - have lesser connection to core Parks Division and VS goals
 - may be of assistance in publicizing Parks Division's VS initiatives
 - or may be able to support the park's stewardship goals
 - or may model some desirable combinations of research, education and public involvement that could be adopted or adopted by the park and its VS program



Visitor Services Goals Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

- Goal 1:** Ensure that all VS offerings are appropriate to the mandates of the park, Alberta Parks Division and its parent agencies.
- Goal 2:** To be a place of quiet inspiration and enjoyment of the park's natural beauty and deep history.
- Goal 3:** To connect Albertans with the park's natural rangeland and other landscapes.
- Goal 4:** To reconnect or connect Albertans with the province's rich ranching heritage.
- Goal 5:** To connect Albertans with the park's extensive human history.
- Goal 6:** Encourage and enable engagement in stewardship of the park and other grassland areas in the province.
- Goal 7:** Encourage and enable appropriate research in the park.
- Goal 8:** Enhance visitor understanding, use, and enjoyment of the park.
- Goal 9:** Assist park management to steward the park's natural and cultural features.
- Goal 10:** Be a Gateway to the Alberta Parks system.

Visitor Services Goals, Objectives and Themes

This plan summarizes the relevant VS goals, objectives, themes and subthemes for Visitor Services at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park. They will be used by VS staff as part of the planning process whenever they are developing new programs.

Many elements described in previous chapters of this plan were taken into account in developing themes for Visitor Services in Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park. They reflect recent key developments which include:

- a desire to develop the overall environmental literacy of park visitors, neighbours and students
 - this includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to sustain our environment, lifestyles and communities for the foreseeable future
 - a key part of this will be to better understand and cope with the interactions of their communities with the natural landscapes that they hold dear
 - they will also develop fuller understanding of park initiatives
- the vision of including some VS programs that may take place in local communities beyond the boundaries of park
- current best practice in education and Visitor Services programming which focuses on interaction and two-way communication
- current desire of park management to develop new methods of delivering Visitor Services to reflect best practices and reach a broad range of participants
- a desire to involve park neighbours (landowners and other citizens) in conservation, preservation and sustainability activities and issues

Visitor Services goals for the park are listed in the sidebar on this page. Themes are listed on the facing page.

Sixty-four subthemes were developed to further articulate the 9 themes. It is hoped that it will be used as a reference by VS staff as part of the planning process whenever they are developing new programs.

Executive Summary



Visitor Services Themes For Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park			
Theme A	Getting outside and active on Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park's trails and aquatic centre is healthy and enriching. The park is a great place to make your own nature and history discoveries. Through park staff and its programs, you can explore the park and share your findings with family, friends and neighbours.	Theme B	Preserving and maintaining Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park's biodiversity is important—for people and for the wide variety of living things that live here. The park and its partners work with visitors and volunteers to steward these lands.
Theme C	In the past, careful ranching practices preserved most of this landscape's native species and natural habitats.	Theme D	Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park is a place to discover how the natural world works and how it is important to our lives.
Theme E	Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park provides people with Ecological Services.	Theme F	At first glance, the grasslands, forests, wetlands, waterways of Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park appear to be unchanging. However, by learning to read the landscape you can observe how human and natural actions have and continue to shape the landscape.
Theme G	You can help Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park protect its many native plants, animals and habitats, and help preserve it as a place of quiet and contemplation for people by taking part in park-sanctioned stewardship projects and following its rules and regulations.	Theme H	People are part of nature and have been important players in Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park's past, present and future. Key features in this landscape have influenced human settlement and activity from very early times to the present.
Theme I	Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park is a gateway to the many parks and protected areas in the province's Parks Division.		



Strategic Plan

The strategic plan for Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park's Visitor Services Program in this document includes:

- a mission statement
- a vision for the program
- a situational assessment (review of the factors affecting the future success of the VS program, as they relate to the program's vision and mission)
- strategies, strategic goals and objectives.

It is a management tool that helps Visitor Services staff to:

- focus its energy
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- help to assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment

Mission of the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park Visitor Services Program

"Humans need connections with nature and their own history, for their physical, mental and spiritual health. The mission of the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park VS program is to enhance the experience of visiting the park, and living near the park, through the provision and facilitation of heritage appreciation and visitor experience services that increase the awareness, appreciation and understanding of the park's natural and cultural heritage. The VS program will also inspire and involve park users in stewardship of the park related resources within the greater park ecosystem."

Our Guiding Principles are:

- Inclusion of the diversity of park visitors and neighbours
- Do no harm to the environment and historical features of the park
- Focus on enabling discovery of the park's landscapes, ecology and human heritage
- Encourage and enable life-long learning
- Focus on learning for stewardship
- Through engagement, empowerment and promotion of environmental literacy of individuals and groups, enable them to make informed decisions about their behaviour in the park and in making contributions to the park's care and stewardship
- Include current issues, such as climate change and urbanization

Vision of the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park Visitor Services Program

The vision of this program is:

"The park will have a dynamic public and schools program where local citizens visit regularly to relax, recreate, learn and contribute to the care of this wonderfully diverse park and the greater park ecosystem that supports it now and throughout the past.

Because the park's VS program includes learning, caring and doing, the citizens of the Calgary area will be better able to plan and act towards a sustainable future."



The strategies for initiating the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park VS Plan are:

1. Build and maintain park public profile
2. Identify and characterize current and potential park visitors and neighbours in detail
3. Regularly use the information gathered about current and potential park visitors to craft appropriate and effective VS services
 - develop a suite of VS programs (public programs and school-focussed programs) that fit the park's unique user profiles and situation
4. Use an action research approach when developing new VS offerings
5. Encourage and support appropriate and needed research in Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park
6. Ensure that VS program does not negatively impact the ecological integrity and ecological services of Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park
7. Develop a partnership/collaboration policy for VS-related services
8. Establish a VS-focused cooperating society or foundation
9. Ensure that all Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park sanctioned education and interpretation programs support the park's foundations and one or more of the park's VS goals
10. Assist in the design and placement of the support infrastructure for the VS program

These strategies along with their associated strategic goals and objectives must be met before the VS program can be fully implemented and for the VS program to succeed and thrive.

Core Competencies

This is one of the most important sections of the Visitor Services Development Plan for Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park. It provides guidelines for delivery and planning of the overall Visitor Services program for the park.

Guidelines

The plan also identifies and describes a set of guidelines that will aid VS staff in providing the VS services for Fish Creek Provincial Park. These include:

- go with Fish Creek Provincial park's main strengths
- go where the people are
- increase and/or maintain the profile Visitor Services and the park
- follow best practice in public and formal education
- maintain current partnerships and develop new ones

Core Competencies

Core competencies are the areas of operation and service in which the VS program should excel. They are useful as a checklist of areas of focus for the VS program and can be used as areas of responsibility for the various VS job classification discussed in this plan.

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For each core competency, the following areas are examined and discussed:

- key outputs
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Outputs

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Critical Success Factors

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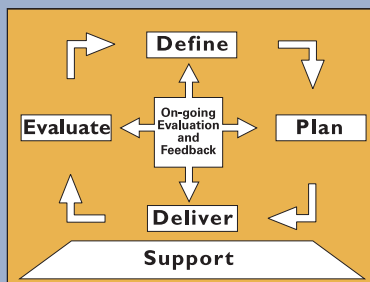
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These will help VS staff define and measure progress toward delivering the outputs for each of its areas of core competency. Tables throughout this chapter identify key performance indicators for each of the VS program's areas of core competency.

Each core competency is discussed in detail under the five areas identified in the ANZECC Best Practice Model (see sidebar below).

The ANZECC Best Practice Model

In 1999, the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) released *Best Practice in Park Interpretation and Education*. This report contained a model developed based on an intensive study of best practice in 35 state and federal agencies (including several Canadian agencies) that deliver interpretation and education services. The model illustrates current best practices in organizing, managing, and delivering interpretation and education services.



Best practice can be divided into five areas: Define, Plan, Deliver, Evaluate and Support.

Define

This stage focuses on the interpretation objectives and services of the organization. They are clearly defined and linked to legislative requirements, mission statement, and broader agency objectives.

Plan

Here foundation elements from the define stage are translated into strategic planning for interpretation and education services. Markets are researched and considered, and messages, key audiences, performance standards, and options for service delivery are developed.

Deliver

Here, managers ensure that front line staff, friends groups, and other service providers understand all relevant agency objectives, targets, and performance standards from the previous stage. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Evaluate

Here interpretation services are monitored, measured, evaluated, and improved. The contributions that services make towards achieving agency goals are assessed for effectiveness.

Support

Support includes financial systems, technology, equipment, human resources, and deployment of staff. Core skills are identified, trained for, and maintained at all interpretation and education service levels.

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The sections and subsections for each of the core competencies are described under the following headings:

Define

- outputs
- the key performance indicators
- objectives
- critical success factors
- rationale

Planning

- target audiences
- linkages
- themes

Delivering

- key locations
- optimal methods and media

Evaluation

Support

- capital costs
- operational costs
- operational support

Staffing

According to Fish Creek District staff, the park will not be open to the public until 2012. The main public access to the park has not been decided on and much of the park's infrastructure is not yet designed or in place. However, there are many opportunities for VS staff to begin to ensure that the identified key success factors are in place to ensure that the VS program can be up and running at opening time.

EcoLeaders recommends hiring four VS staff and phasing in the program and hiring in a three phase approach:

Phase 1: Pre-Program Preparation

2009:

- Hire a Park VS Program Coordinator

Phase 2: Program Preparation

2011:

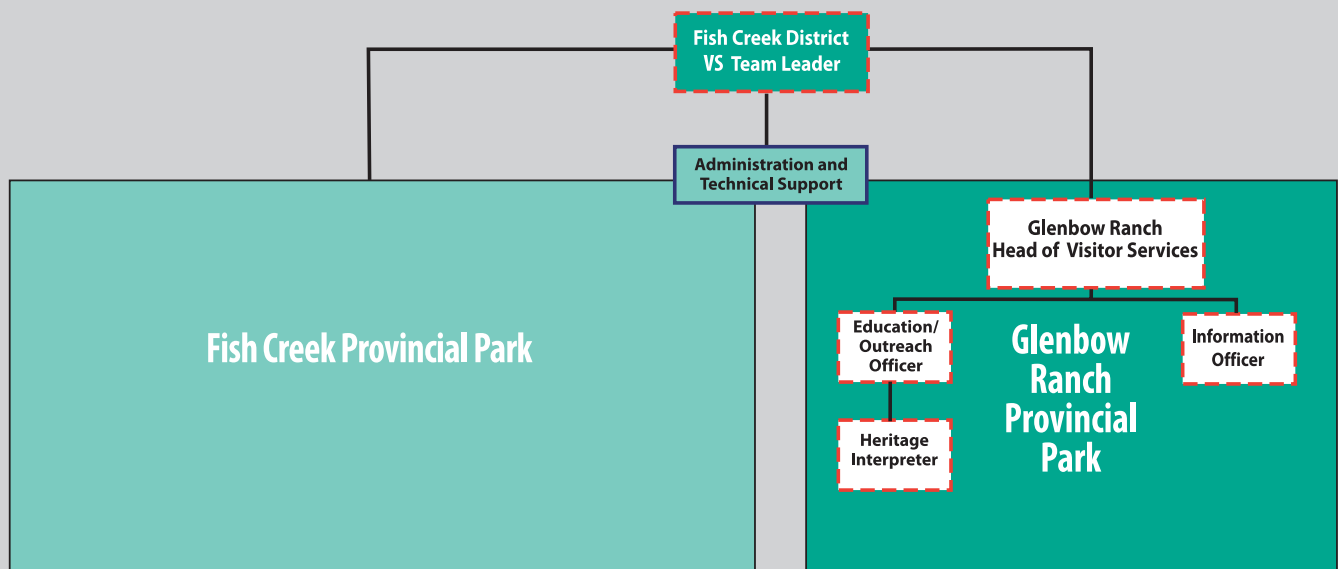
- Hire 1 Full-time Heritage Interpretation Specialist
- Hire 1 Full-time Education Specialist

Phase 3: Program Delivery

2012:

- Hire 1 Part-time Booking Clerk
- Hire 1 Part-time Information Officer

Preliminary Recommendations VS Program Staffing Fish Creek District





Implementation Plan

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park protects a scenic part of Alberta and its nearness to Calgary makes it likely to become one of Fish Creek District's most important and popular parks. However, the park will not be open to the public until 2012, so levels of visitation and the types of park users could only be estimates in very general terms.

The main public access to the park has not been decided on and much of the park's infrastructure is not yet designed or in place. However, there are many opportunities for Visitor Services staff to begin to ensure that the identified key success factors are in place to ensure that the VS program can be up and running at opening time.

Key Areas For Development to Support the VS Program

This section contains recommendations for implementing this plan in three phases

- Phase 1: Pre-Program Preparation Year (2009-2010)
- Phase 2: Initial Program Preparation (2011)
- Phase 3: Program Presentation First 2 Years (2012–2013)
- Phase 4: Ongoing Program (2014 and beyond)

For each phase, Chapter GR 11 identifies key objectives and their connections to the ten areas of Visitor Services core competencies identified in Chapter GR 10 and recommends procedures to reach them.

Executive Summary



Public VS Programming

When the park opens in 2012 it will be time for Visitor Services staff to begin to deliver regular personal and non-personal Visitor Services aimed at park users, and also to develop remote VS services for delivery through the park website.

We recommend a gradual approach using an action research approach whereby Visitor Services staff will develop and evaluate a number of approaches at a number of sites. The key objectives will be to:

- increase the profile of Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park and the VS program
- try out a number of personal and non-personal VS techniques, to gain experience with what's involved and to evaluate:
 - the effectiveness of these techniques for various types of park users
 - various locations as program sites
- assist VS staff in developing first-hand knowledge of park users, their interests, prior knowledge and attitudes

School-Focused VS Programming

We recommend that VS staff examine the opportunities for developing fee-based school programs that connect Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park's VS themes and sub-themes to grade-level science and social studies curriculum (they may also include language arts, art and technology curriculum connections). We do not see school programming at this park to be as high of a priority as programming at Fish Creek Provincial Park which has a mandate to be a centre of excellence for environmental education. Instead, school programming at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park should be more in response to local demand.

A Flexible Approach

This implementation chapter is not a rigid cookbook-style document that identifies unchangeable timelines for development, nor should it be so.

The planning and delivery of VS services should be flexible and in the hands of Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park VS staff. These will be the people who will develop the deeper understanding of park users through research and regular contact with them. They will be the people who through a process of action research will develop a suite of effective VS services that meet the park's mandate and serve the changing needs and interests of current and future park users, neighbours and partners.

All implementation phases emphasize the importance of flexibility and regular evaluation and assessment. Using these approaches will ensure that Visitor Services at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park will continue to be meaningful and valuable well into the next decade.

Other Properties

Fish Creek District is Home to a variety of other parks and protected areas. This Visitor Services Development Plan includes the following additional sites:

Provincial Parks

- Big Hill Spring
- Brown-Lowery

Recreation Areas

- James River Bridge

Natural Areas

- Bearberry Prairie
- Eagle Hill
- Highwood River
- Sheep Creek
- Sundre
- Sundre Red Deer
- Wildcat Island
- Bentz Lake
- Emerson Creek
- James Junction
- Snakes Head
- Sundre North
- Threepoint Creek

This plan assessed each site with regard to its capacity to support Visitor Services programming. Each property was assessed using the following criteria:

- accessibility
 - can people easily access these sites?
 - can people easily find these sites?
 - is the property's entrance marked?
 - are the boundaries marked?
 - are there wayfinding signs on access roads or trails?
- natural and cultural features
- existing amenities and infrastructure
- current use/potential use
- carrying capacity (how well can the site support visitation and regular use for VS programs) depends on:
 - size
 - sensitivity of habitat
 - safety for participants

Executive Summary

Sites with high ratings for VS programming potential must:

Access

- is the site accessible by private vehicle (car, bicycle, etc.) or by public transit
 - if not, the site was identified as having low VS program potential
- Wayfinding – can be easily found
 - roadside direction signs assist travelers in finding the site
 - text-based directions and/or user-friendly maps are readily available to assist people in finding the site
 - a site access point or entrance must be clearly marked by signs identifying its name and designation (e.g., Big Hill Springs Provincial Park)
- natural and cultural features
 - sites with numerous natural and cultural features are rated higher than those with few)
- existing amenities and infrastructure
 - sites with parking lots, washrooms, and trails are rated higher than those that do not
- current use/potential use
 - sites with current high current or potential use will provide more program participants than those that have few visitors
- carrying capacity
 - size
 - larger sites are more likely to support regular VS programming
 - sensitivity of habitat
 - VS programming should avoid sites with rare or delicate habitats
 - safety for participants
 - VS programming should avoid sites where hazards could threaten the health and safety of participants

Ratings

The sites were rated as follows:

Important Sites

These sites scored highly in most categories.

They include:

- Big Hill Springs Provincial Park
- Brown Lowery Provincial Park

Moderate Priority Sites

These are sites that are easily accessible, and have potential for a limited amount of Visitor Services programming.

Only two sites met these criteria:

- Bearbeary Prairie Natural Area
- Sundre Natural Area

Low Priority Sites

These are sites that are easily accessible, but for various reasons, such as small size, lack of facilities or lack of significant features are not likely to become important sites for VS programs.

- Bentz Lake
- Sheep Creek
- Snakes Head
- Sundre North
- Sundre Red Deer
- Threepoint Creek

Hard to Access Sites

Three sites identified for review by this plan do not have road access. Two, Highwood River and Wildcat Island, are accessible by boat and Emerson Creek Natural Area may be accessible by trail only. In general, the difficulty in accessing these sites made it impossible to assess them.

They include:

- Emerson Creek
- Highwood River
- Wildcat Island

Other Sites

Two other sites identified for review by this plan were not visited.

- Eagle Hill
- James River Bridge

Only sites rated as important received detailed coverage in this plan (see Big Hill Springs and Brown Lowery Provincial Parks below).

Big Hill Springs Provincial Park



Tufa deposits grow where springs release carbon-dioxide laden water at the surface .



Fall colours can be spectacular.

Big Hill Springs Provincial Park is tiny (31.5 Ha) site situated several kilometres north of Cochrane. It was established in 1957 as a camping park but is now a day-use only site. It has a small parking lot, a vault toilet and waste containers, plus a small picnic site and a short 1 km loop trail situated on the forested north-facing slope of Big Hill Springs Creek Coulee. The trail provides views of Big Hill Springs Creek, and a panoramic view of the local coulee system.

The park protects the lower reaches of Big Hill Springs Creek and features some very pretty waterfalls and riffles in the creek and some very nice pocket views of the Big Hill Springs Creek and Big Hill Creek Coulees. The site has numerous springs that contain high concentrations of carbon dioxide when they emerge from the ground. This gas combines chemically with other minerals to form a soft calcium carbonate rock called tufa. Tufa deposits are common along the Big Hill Springs waterway and include at least one large reef-like deposit, probably formed around a beaver dam sometime in the past.

The land protected by the park has a long history of human use ranging back to long before European colonization when the year-round water source of Big Hill Springs Creek and the steep sides of Big Hill Springs Creek and Big Hill Creek Coulees (used as buffalo jumps) made this area an important camping area for nomadic First Nations bison hunters. More

Executive Summary

recently, Euro-Canadians were attracted to the site to water cattle and make use of the constant supply of cool water—the site once supported a dairy and a fish hatchery. Long before this land became a park, local people came here to enjoy the beauty of the creek and the coolness of the local forest. Today they continue to come for the same reasons.

Management issues appear to centre on the apparent increasing use of the park (there is no data collected on visitation) including inappropriate walking in the streambed and climbing the soft-tufa deposits in waterfalls and riffles. Another concern is that the park does not protect the majority of the catchment area of the springs that feed Big Hill Springs Creek. Long-term projections of population and urban growth suggest that the City of Calgary and the town of Cochrane will expand to enclose the park at least

by 2050. Urban and industrial development within the Big Hill Springs Creek Watershed, especially the paving and hardening of the surface of the catchment area, will destroy the water catchment area and eliminate the springs that make this site ecologically important and aesthetically attractive.

Big Hill Springs Provincial Park provides many opportunities for personal and non-personal interpretation. At the time of writing, Fish Creek District VS staff were working with staff from the Alberta Geological Survey to develop a series of interpretation signs about the site's springs and tufa deposits. It is highly unlikely that this small site can support separate VS staff. Instead, this plan recommends that this park become a satellite of Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park with respect to Visitor Services.

Brown-Lowery Provincial Park



Brown-Lowery Provincial Park is a small (278 Ha) site located in the Rocky Mountain foothills 50 km southwest of Calgary. This day use park has limited facilities (a parking lot, vault toilet and single picnic table) but has a 11 km. of walking pathways that loop through forests of native lodgepole pine and white spruce and poplar typical of the Foothill Natural Region. There are several small streams in the park that flow southward to join Pothole creek located near the northern boundary of the park.

The Park's landbase was selectively logged from the 1890s till the late 1920s—the site includes an abandoned lumber yard (one ruined building

remains). In 1943 the land was acquired by Home and in 1969 the company donated the land to the provincial government for use as a park. The park was opened in 1985.

The park's main natural features are its extensive foothills forest which support a wide variety of mosses, flowering plants and wildlife. The trail system provides easy access to these features, views of the park's several streams, plus some views of the foothills and the Rocky Mountains.

The key management issues of the park include maintenance of trails and working with local landholders to ensure that the park does not become an isolated island of natural space

surrounded by urban, suburban, agriculture and industrial development.

Brown-Lowery Provincial Park is a beautiful site with excellent hiking opportunities. However, it is unlikely to need full-time Visitor Services staff. Instead, this plan recommends that this park become a satellite of Fish Creek Provincial Park with regard to the provision of visitor services.

The understory of the park's evergreen forest supports an abundance of flowering plants like these calypso orchids and is clothed in a thick mat of mosses.



Assessment of Minor Properties

Apart from the Provincial Parks in the district (Fish Creek, Glenbow Ranch, Big Hill Springs and Brown Lowery Provincial Parks) the protected areas in Fish Creek District are small and lacking in infrastructure (e.g., trails, washrooms or parking lots for regular types of VS programs, such as guided walks). It also appears that staffing shortages and budget constraints have made these properties a low priority for upkeep, so that it is highly unlikely that time, money and staff will be available for signing, and maintaining these sites into the foreseeable future.

The information available about the natural areas in the district does not indicate that they are the home of any highly significant or unique natural or cultural features.

Finally, VS staff at the district's two major parks (Glenbow Ranch and Fish Creek) will have their hands full meeting the needs of visitors to their sites. It is unlikely that they will have time to develop and deliver VS programs at any of the District's Natural Areas in the near future.

Almost all of the Natural Areas viewed for this plan were in need of more care and maintenance. The VS programs at Fish Creek and Glenbow Ranch Provincial Parks (this would include participation of the parks' cooperating associations and perhaps other partners) could include opportunities for interested volunteers to become volunteer stewards of individual Natural Areas in Fish Creek District. This would include training and support for volunteer stewards and would assist VS staff in addressing the higher levels of the PPA Stewardship Model.

Conclusions

Fish Creek District surrounds Calgary, one of Alberta's fastest growing and most diverse urban centres. This nearness to a major urban centre makes this district fairly unique within Alberta Parks Division. The major parks are day-use only and the majority of park users are likely to be multiple repeat visitors who live nearby (often within in walking distance or a short bicycle ride, trip on urban transit or car ride) and visit the parks many time in a year or season. School programs are also aimed at local school children who may visit or have the ability to visit the parks regularly with their families.

Many park users come to the district's parks daily and observe more nature-in-action than do park staff. Some of these park users are experts and professionals in fields of biology, ecology, anthropology, archeology and history. Visitor Services staff can not expect to be the authority on all things to do with the park. They must be prepared to learn from program participants as well as facilitate participant learning. They also must be prepared to deliver some programs at a higher level of detail and sophistication to meet the needs of more experienced and knowledgeable participants.

Because the target participants are often different than traditional provincial park program audiences, and because park programs are often in direct competition with professional theatre, recreation, sporting and leisure events commonly found in a big cosmopolitan city, Visitor Services staff must choose their program delivery method, timing and design carefully. Programs that are effective in regular parks in the system may not be effective in Fish Creek District parks and protected areas.

Visitor Services programmers in Fish Creek District need to have the tools to better understand park users and to plan, deliver, assess and evaluate their offerings to ensure high quality, effective programming. This plan is designed to assist district visitor services staff to define, develop, deliver, evaluate and support high-quality, effective public and school programming into the next decade.

