

Chapter 26

Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area



Assessment and Recommendations for Visitor Services

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SAMPLE PAGES

Contents

Introduction	26.1
Section 1 Features Summary	
Figure 26.1 Location of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area	26.4
Figure 26.2 Map of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area.	26.4
Introduction to Section 1	26.5
Geology	26.5
Main Range of the Rocky Mountains	26.5
Landforms	26.5
Features Review	26.5
Figure 25.3 A main-range mountain seen to the south of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area.	26.5
What Are Provincial Recreation Areas	26.5
Figure 26.4 Flooding of lower Thompson Creek in July 2010.	26.6
Vegetation and Habitat	26.7
Montane Habitat	26.7
Riparian Habitat	26.7
Wide Gravel Bars	26.7
Post-Fire Regeneration	26.7
Figure 26.8 Map showing the location of the 2009 Upper North Saskatchewan Prescribed Fire.	26.7
Figure 26.5 Montane forest near Camp Loop 3.	26.7
Figure 26.7 Wide gravel bar along lower Thompson Creek	26.7
Figure 26.6 Typical riparian vegetation located along Thompson Creek.	26.7
Wildlife	26.8
Mammals, Birds and Amphibians	26.8
Historical and Culture Features	26.8
Infrastructure	26.8
Access... ..	26.8
Entry Sign	26.8
Day Use Area	26.9
Figure 26.8 Dayuse parking lot.	26.9
Figure 26.9 Information Kiosk	26.9
Figure 26.12 A typical rustic campsite.	26.10
Figure 26.13 A typical toilet.	26.10
Figure 26.14 Self Registration booth in Camp Loop 1.	26.10
Campground	26.10
Self Registration Kiosk	26.10
Information Kiosk... ..	26.11
Figure 26.15 Self Registration booth in Camp Loop 1.	26.11
Figure 26.16 The rustic campground map displayed in the information kiosk.	26.11
Other Campground Information/Orientation Signs	26.11
Figure 26.17 A cluster of information/orientation signs in Camp Loop 2.	26.11

Caretaker's Residence	26.11
Figure 26.18 Hiking trails in the vicinity of Thompson Creek	
Provincial Recreation Area	26.12
Nearby Trails	26.12
Information/Orientation Services	26.13
Site Specific Information Orientation Services	26.13
Brochure	26.13
Website	26.13
Orientation Map	26.13
Regional Information Orientation Services	26.13
Information Kiosk	26.13
Interpretation Services	26.13
Non-Personal Interpretation	26.13
Personal Interpretation	26.13
Section 2 Program Statements and Implementation	
Introduction	26.17
Constraints on Visitor Services	26.17
The Future	26.17
Visitor Analysis	26.17
Market Analysis	26.17
1. Research	26.18
Introduction	26.18
Current Conditions	26.18
Biophysical Research	26.18
Cultural and Historical Research	26.18
Visitor Research	26.18
2. Information/Orientation	26.19
Introduction	26.19
3. Assisting Recreation Area Management Team	26.20
Introduction	26.20
4. Interpretation	26.21
Introduction	26.21
Plan	26.21
Target Audiences	26.21
Lack of information	26.21
Visitor Focus	26.21
Remote Visitors	26.21
The Planning Process	26.21
Deliver	26.21
Interpretation Themes	26.21
Choice of Interpretation Media	26.21
Evaluate	26.23
Support	26.23
Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail	26.24

Chapter 26: Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area: Assessment and Recommendations

- 5. Education ... 26.25
- 6. Stewardship Involvement ... 26.25
- 7. Recreation ... 26.26
- 8. Collaboration and Partnerships ... 26.27
- 9. Tourism ... 26.27
- 10. Marketing ... 26.28

SAMPLE PAGES

Introduction

This chapter consists of two sections:

Section 1: Features Summary

This is a review of key features and processes that can be found about Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area. Visitor Services staff can use this section (plus Background Paper 2: Features Inventory: Big Picture Aspects) as a first stop for information for use in interpretation and information/orientation programming.

Section 2: Program Statements and Implementation

This is a review and recommendations for Visitor Services Programming in ten areas of core competency:

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

Visitor Services staff can use this section to make decisions on Visitor Services programming over the next five years.

Key Constraint

Staff

Lack of staff at this site is a major constraining factor for developing the overall Visitor Services program. Staffing will limit what can be achieved over the next five years. In some cases core tasks can only be achieved with addition of highly skilled staff.

Information

Currently there is a lack of information about the site's features. The recreation area also lacks detailed information about visitors activities, background and interests. Until these deficiencies are addressed, it will be difficult for Visitor Services staff to develop effective interpretation.

Infrastructure

Most of the recreation area's infrastructure is old and not up to current Alberta Parks standards. Improved, up-to-date infrastructure will make it possible for Alberta Parks staff to develop effective information/orientation and interpretive programming.

Section 1

Features Summary



Figure 26.1
Location of Thompson Creek
Provincial Recreation Area.

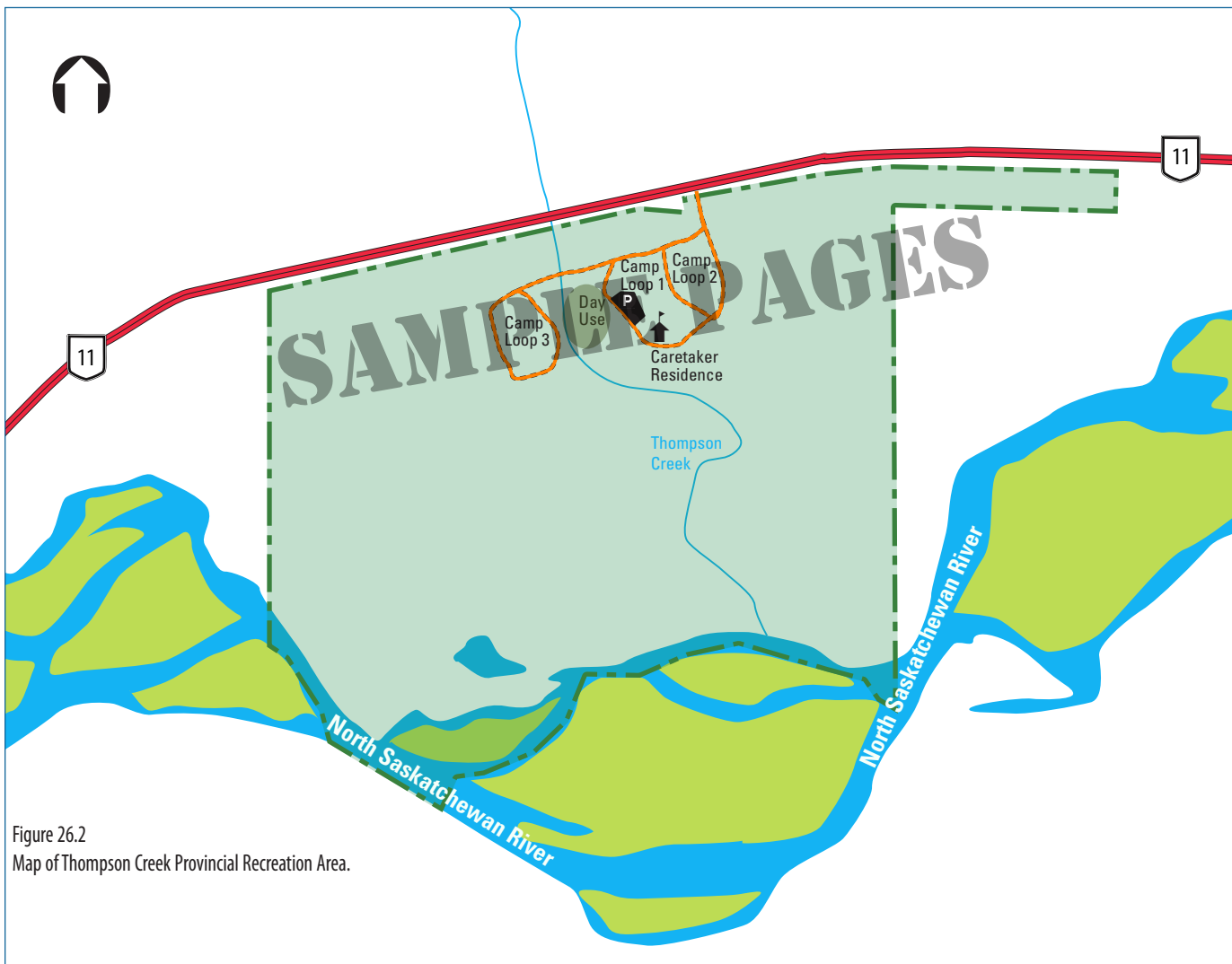
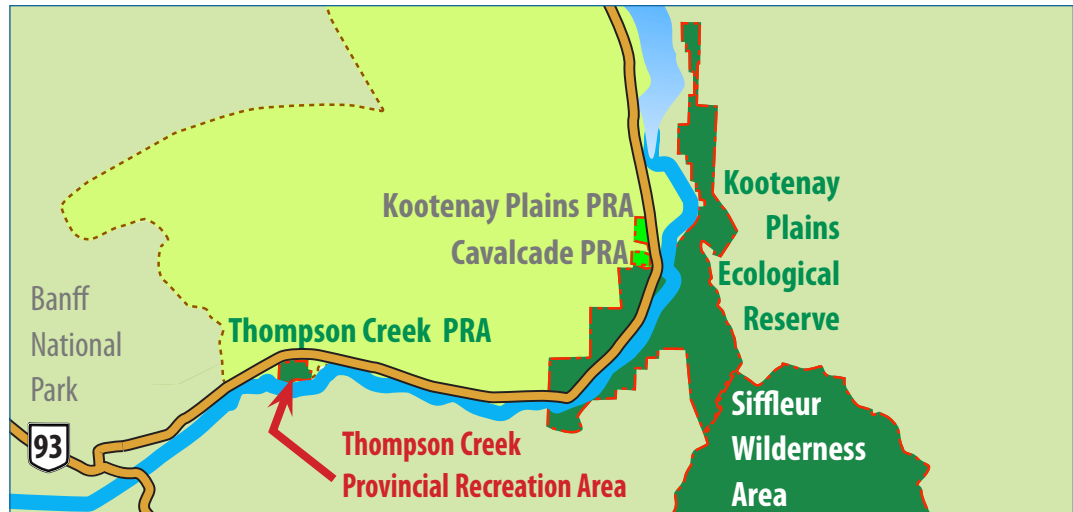


Figure 26.2
Map of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area.

Introduction to Section 1

Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area is located on the western edge of the David Thompson Corridor (see Figure 26.1 on facing page) approximately 83 km southwest of Nordegg on Highway 11 or 10 km east of Saskatchewan River Crossing. This small 117 ha property is situated between Highway 11 to the north and the North Saskatchewan River to the South (see Figure 26.2 on facing page).

According to Alberta Parks the recreation area features 55 unserviced campsites and a small day use area located between Thompson Creek and Camp Loop 1.

General information about natural and cultural features of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area is very limited. It has no biophysical inventory or management plan.

What Are Provincial Recreation Areas

According to the Alberta Parks website (www.albertaparks.ca/aboutparks.aspx), Provincial Recreation Areas are managed with facilitation of outdoor recreation as the primary objective.

Many play a significant role in management of adjacent Crown lands and waters by localizing the impact of overnight camping and serving as staging areas for recreation activities on crown land.

Some Provincial Recreation Areas are intensively developed, while others such as Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area remain largely in a rustic state.

Features Review

Geology

Main Range of the Rocky Mountains

Geologically speaking, Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area is situated within the Main Ranges of the Rocky Mountains. Mountains viewed from this valley-bottom site have horizontal stratification typical of main range mountains (see Figure 26.3 below for a typical mountain view and Background Paper 2 for details on mountain formation processes).

Landforms

The entire recreation area is located on the floor of the Saskatchewan River Valley. At this site, the valley bottom consists of flat to slightly rolling river sediment deposits. Here, the North Saskatchewan River has a braided channel with many shifting, low sand and gravel islands (see the bright green islets in Figure 26.2).



Figure 25.3 A main-range mountain seen to the south of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area.

Hydrology

The recreation area lies within the North Saskatchewan River valley and includes a small section of the North Saskatchewan River and the lower section of Thompson Creek. This creek joins the North Saskatchewan River in the south-central section of the recreation area (see Figure 26.2).

Much of the recreation area lies in the flood plain of the river and the creek and is subject to flooding during snowmelt and after severe summer storms (see Figure 26.4 below). The campground is occasionally affected.

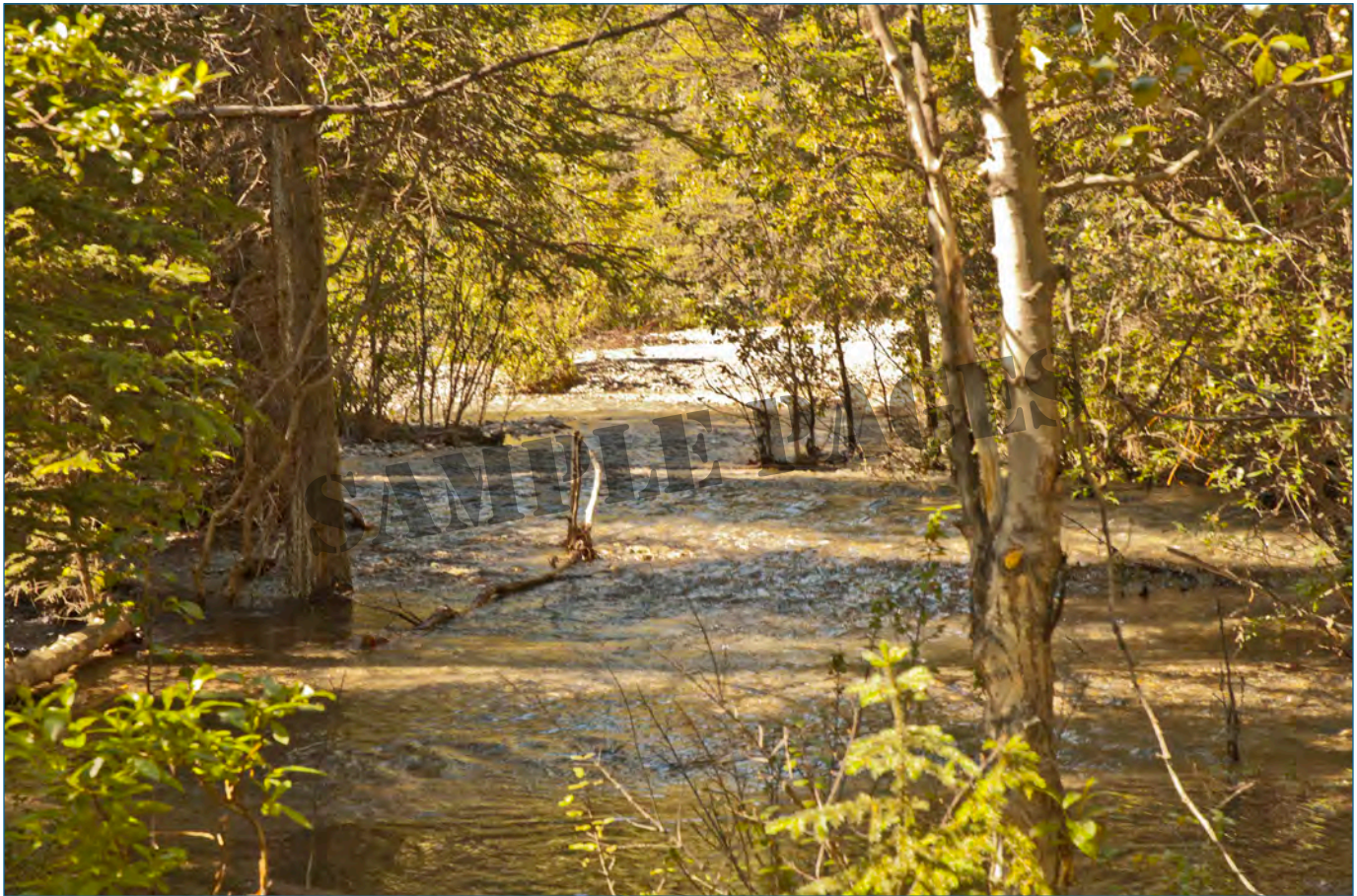


Figure 26.4 Flooding of lower Thompson Creek in July 2010. .

Vegetation and Habitat

As already stated, this recreation area is small and has neither a biophysical inventory nor a management plan. As a result there is little information about the plant species and communities present in Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area. EcoLeaders conducted a short reconnaissance of the site in July 2010. At that time, flooding of the southern section of the recreation area limited observations to the developed area of the site (campground and day use area). The following review is based on our on-site observations.

Montane Habitat

On-site observation indicates that vegetation is typical of montane habitat with lodgepole pine, spruce and aspen forests dominating the higher ground (see Figure 26.5).

Riparian Habitat

Low lying areas along the North Saskatchewan River and Thompson Creek have dense riparian vegetation with many species of willow and other disturbance adapted plants (see Figure 26.6).

Wide Gravel Bars

As well, parts of Thompson Creek have wide, poorly vegetated gravel bars that suggest frequent flooding by fast flowing water (see Figure 26.7).

Post-Fire Regeneration

Although it was not directly affected, the recreation area is adjacent to a major prescribed burn area, the 2009 Upper North Saskatchewan Prescribed Fire (see figure 26.8 and read Background Paper 2 for details). As of 2011, this burn area is visible from within the recreation area as areas of reddened vegetation (see the background of Figure 26.7).

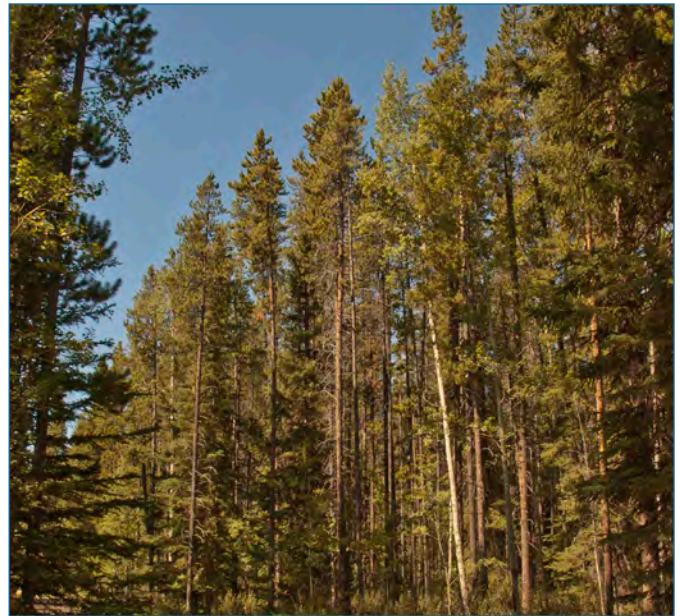


Figure 26.5 Montane forest near Camp Loop 3.

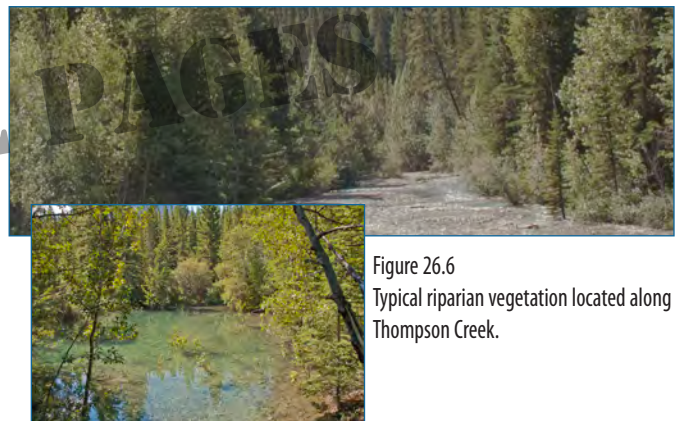


Figure 26.6
Typical riparian vegetation located along Thompson Creek.

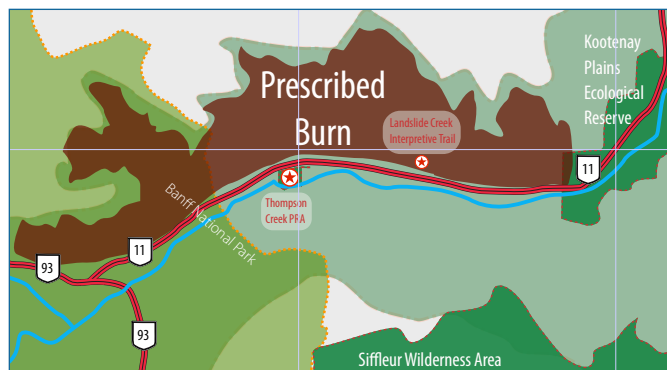


Figure 26.8
Map showing the location of the 2009 Upper North Saskatchewan Prescribed Fire.



Figure 26.7 Wide gravel bar along lower Thompson Creek. Note the Thompson Creek Valley in the background snaking its way between steep mountain slopes which still have snow on their summits.

Information/Orientation Services

Site Specific Information Orientation Services

Brochure

Alberta Parks does not have a brochure for this site.

Website

Currently the Alberta Parks website for this recreation area (www.albertaparks.ca/siteinformation.aspx?id=221) is simple with no detailed information about the site.

Orientation Map

There are no up-to-date orientation maps onsite. An old Alberta Forestry Service era map of the campground is posted on an information kiosk near the junction of camp loops 1 and 2. This map has many deficiencies, including:

- not conforming to current Alberta Parks Sign Program Standards
- not providing the current name of the recreation area
- not showing the boundaries of the recreation area (see figure 26.16)

No map is available through Alberta Parks websites.

Regional Information Orientation Services

Information Kiosk

A single three-panel kiosk is located adjacent to the day use parking lot. It contains information about many tourist attractions in west Central Alberta (including some major sites along the David Thompson Corridor).

Interpretation Services

Interpretation services at this site are limited.

Non-Personal Interpretation

There is no site-specific non-personal interpretation at this recreation area.

Personal Interpretation

According to Alberta Parks staff there are no personal interpretive programs offered at this recreation area.

Section 2

Program Statements and Implementation



4. Interpretation

Introduction

Low staff levels, distance from headquarters in Rocky Mountain House and low visitation numbers (approximately 8% of visitors to Alberta Park's major properties in the David Thompson Corridor) and competition from non-personal interpretive programs in nearby Banff and Jasper National Park makes it likely that Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area will have very limited interpretation services. And that those that are provided will be non-personal. The site's remoteness from Rocky Mountain House and Nordegg make it unlikely that interpretive programs can be delivered through partnerships with community groups.

Plan

Target Audiences

Lack of information

There have been no direct studies on visitors to this recreation area. Information gathered here is anecdotal from Alberta Parks staff.

Visitor Focus

The focus of interpretation services will be on people who visit the recreation area. Until year-round data collection is in place the following can be assumed:

- most visitors are campers
- there may be significant number of day users who stop by the day use area for a picnic and short walk around the site before continuing their travels

Remote Visitors

Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area is small and has no special features that make it an area of special interest. This site will not attract a following of remote visitors (people who find the site interesting but are unable to visit the recreation area in person so are interested in virtual visits).

The Planning Process

All new interpretation programs must follow the standard planning process identified in Chapter:11: Visitor Services Program Implementation. A Program Planning Form must be used by Alberta Parks staff or by partners and contractors who develop interpretive programs.

Deliver

As with other properties in the David Thompson Corridor, development and delivery of personal and non-personal interpretation will be severely limited by staff availability. The limited Visitor Services staff available to work at Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area will concentrate mostly on non-personal interpretation programming.

Development and delivery of some interpretation programming could be done by partners. However the site's remoteness from population centres makes this option highly unlikely.

Interpretation Themes

There is little detailed information about natural and cultural features of this small, lightly used site. As a result background for developing interpretation themes is limited. Also, the site's low visitation and small size make it unlikely that this recreation area will become a camping destination. Therefore, the number and complexity of interpretive themes for this site are limited.

Interpretive themes for this recreation area are listed on the following page. According to Alberta Parks staff, Theme A: *Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area is a gateway to the David Thompson Corridor* is one of the most important. However, the recreation area's low visitation makes implementing this theme challenging. Most effort put into this gateway theme should be best focused on travelers entering the David Thompson Corridor on Highway 11 — perhaps in a roadside pull-off and display.

Choice of Interpretation Media

Choice of medium and method must be made by Visitor Services staff based on:

- fit to the needs, interests and profile of target participants
 - this will require gathering of information about the recreation area's visitors (see recommendations in *Section 1. Research* of this chapter)
- cost-effectiveness of the medium
 - cost vs numbers of participants engaged
- durability of medium used
- fit to a remote site with few staff
 - e.g., are there staff available to maintain the interpretive program?

Evaluate

Evaluation of all interpretation programming should be done annually by a team of Alberta Parks staff. Best practice in evaluation goes well beyond collecting information about participant satisfaction. It requires assessment of success in reaching planning objectives concerning cognitive (learning information and developing skills) behavioral and attitudinal objectives identified in the program plan.

Alberta Parks is developing a new program evaluation system. This should be used as soon as it is available.

Support

All interpretation initiatives in this recreation area are dependant on Alberta Parks staff being available either to develop, deploy and evaluate programming directly or to coordinate, assist and mentor partners contracted to develop programs. Also, Visitor Services staff with competency in interpretation will also be required to evaluate programming delivered by partners.

The budget for this site should include a line item identifying funds available for development, deployment, maintenance and evaluation of interpretive programming.

As with staff at other sites in the David Thompson Corridor, Visitor Services staff involved with programming at Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area will require regular professional development and training to keep up-to-date with current technology, techniques and learning theory.

Implementation Recommendations

Address Missing Critical Success Factors

Research

1. Encourage and enable research on natural history and cultural history of Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area (see Section 1 Research of this chapter).
2. Encourage and enable research on visitors with partners such as Travel Alberta and/or through contracts with social science research experts. Focus on both campers and dayuse visitors
 - current numbers
 - duration of stay
 - origin and destination of their travels
 - percentage of multiple repeat visitors
 - where they come from
 - activities they take part in
 - in the recreation area
 - outside the recreation area

Process

1. Visitor Services staff, partners and contractors must use a program planning form for all new interpretive programs.
2. Develop an effective evaluation system for each area of interpretation (non-persona, personal, outreach to remote audiences).
 - use the current Alberta Parks evaluation form as a start

Staffing

1. When budget allows, hire a full-time Visitor Services officer in charge of developing programs for the western half of the David Thompson Corridor (concentrating on Kootenay Plains Ecological Reserve, White Goat Wilderness Area and Siffleur Wilderness Area but including Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area).

Staff Professional Development

1. Visitor Services staff in the David Thompson Corridor will need to attend workshops and conferences in the field of heritage interpretation and be members of national and regional professional associations.

On-site Interpretation Opportunities

Personal Interpretation

Current low Alberta Parks staffing precludes on-site personal interpretation in the foreseeable future.

Non-Personal Interpretation

1. When Visitor Services staff time and budget are available develop interpretation programming focusing on forest fire ecology and the 2009 Upper North Saskatchewan Prescribed Fire and other nearby natural burn areas:
 - focus on viewscapes of the burn area that can be seen from within the recreation area
 - encourage visitors to visit the nearby Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail (see Sidebar on the facing page)

interpretive trail on site
feature North Saskatchewan River

 - trailheads for trails onto public land
 - consider developing interpretation for these trails
 - complement Landslide Lake trail
2. When more detailed information about the site's natural and cultural history is available, develop a self-guided loop trail with interpretive stations featuring discovery of the natural history of montane and riparian forests and the flow and ecology of Thompson Creek and the North Saskatchewan River.
3. When more information about nearby trails on crown lands is available, work with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and funding partners to develop trailheads within Thompson Creek PRA and interpretation programming for existing trails on nearby public lands.
 - ensure that interpretation focusing on the trail along Thompson Creek north of the recreation area is complementary (not repeating) to the content of interpretation on the Landslide Creek Trail (see facing page).
4. Work with partners such as the University of Alberta, the Alberta Conservation Information Management System and regional nature clubs to complete and maintain species lists of plants and animals found in the recreation area.
 - this could include citizen science projects such as IceWatch and PlantWatch

5. Education

Alberta Parks staff indicate that no school programming takes place here.

Implementation Recommendations

Current lack of trail infrastructure and lack of staffing make it unlikely that Alberta Parks will be able to deliver personal or non-personal school programming at this site.

6. Stewardship Involvement

It is likely that some of the visitors to Thompson Creek Provincial Recreation Area are multiple repeat visitors with a strong attachment to the site and the surrounding area. Members of this group are likely to be interested in better understanding and protecting the recreation area's natural and cultural features.

Implementation Recommendations

Beyond challenging and inspiring visitors to practice stewardship behaviours, limited Alberta Parks staffing will make it difficult for Visitor Services staff to initiate, lead or maintain stewardship programs here. Instead, Alberta Parks may look to working with partners with long-established stewardship initiatives. However, these partnerships will require Alberta Parks staff time for establishing relationships and forming and maintaining partnerships with these groups, and for managing and evaluating these partnerships.

Key areas of Visitor Services activity will include:

1. Inform, encourage and enable stewardship behaviors by all visitors.
 2. Encourage, enable Stewardship/Citizen Science activities:
 - identify suitable partners and initiate stewardship projects such as:
 - agencies and researchers who are willing to include Citizen Science components of their research
 - develop, lead, publicize and champion key stewardship projects that result from findings of professional and Citizen Science research
- Key stewardship projects could include:
- census of the recreation area's wildlife, plants and plant communities
 - trail maintenance and safety inspections of recreation area trails
 - IceWatch and PlantWatch programs with Nature Alberta