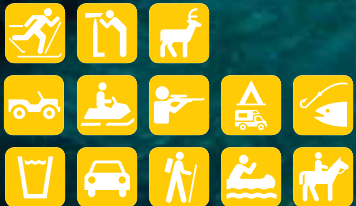


The Castle Special Place

It's Time:
Enjoy • Protect



What Happens with the Proposal

Proposals from local citizens' initiatives are recommendations to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. They are an indication of whether there is enough local consensus for the Minister to consider moving forward. The Minister has indicated that this proposal is a "strong fit" with the government's objectives for the land-use plan being developed for southern Alberta (South Saskatchewan Regional Plan).

The Minister consults with other Ministers, such as Sustainable Resource Development, and the local MLA. If they decide to proceed, Tourism, Parks and Recreation undertakes negotiations with the holders of resource rights, prepares a formal proposal and undertakes public consultation. Public notice and a 60 day comment period are provided. The boundaries and types of protected areas can change as a result of that public consultation and negotiations prior to a final decision. Once the type of protected area is legislated, public consultations are used to develop the management plan.

How to make your views known

Write Mr. Evan Berger, MLA Livingstone-Macleod & Parliamentary Assistant for Sustainable Resource Development
Fax: (403) 553-2133
Mail: P O Box 69, Fort Macleod, AB T0L 0Z0
Email: livingstone.macleod@assembly.ab.ca

The Honourable Cindy Ady, Tourism, Parks & Recreation Minister
Fax: (780) 427-0188
Mail: Legislature Bldg., 10800 – 97 Ave., Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Email: tpr.minister@gov.ab.ca

For more information

Guide book: *Exploring the Castle, Discovering the Backbone of the World in Southern Alberta* by Robert Kershaw. Published by Rocky Mountain Books.

Conceptual proposal and Frequently Asked Questions paper: www.castlespecialplace.ca or a public library in the region.

Camping: www.albertaparks.ca/searchparks.aspx (enter Castle, Lynx Creek or Syncline)

Off-road motorized trail maps: www.srd.alberta.ca/RecreationPublicUse/RecreationOnPublicLand/ForestLandUseZones/CastleAreaFLUZMapsPublications.aspx

Special Places: www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/establishing.asp#special

Types of protected areas: www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/flashindex.asp (Select "A Spectrum of Sites" in left menu).

Pictures: Murray Anderson (including cover), Louise Broderson, Richard Burke, Crownsnest Museum, Glenbow Archives NA-1905-28, David MacIntyre, McDougall, Gordon Petersen and Stewart Rood.

Maps: Miistakis Institute for the Rockies & Federation of Alberta Naturalists

Castle Special Place Working Group www.castlespecialplace.ca



Left to right: Bighorn sheep, ferruginous hawk, long-toed salamander, mountain goat, cutthroat trout, hoary marmot, bull elk.

The Castle – A Special Place

This area of public land is locally known as the Castle or, to the Blackfoot speaking First Nations, l'tai sah kòp – where we get the paint. It is cherished as a vital source of water; for its outstanding outdoor recreation and natural, historical, cultural and spiritual values; and for the sense of place it provides neighboring communities.

In 1998, the Alberta Government added the 1,040 sq km Castle Special Place “to Alberta’s protected areas network ... [as] a major milestone in the preservation of Alberta’s natural heritage for future generations.” That included a decision to phase in protection. After 12 years, it remains the only one of 81 Special Places without protected area status secured by law.

The Water Tower for a Dry Land

The Oldman River Basin encompasses much of southern Alberta. Even though it is only a small piece of the Basin, the Castle Special Place provides almost a third of the yearly water-flow for the entire, water-stressed region covering 28,000 square kilometers and 70 municipalities including Lethbridge. It receives more annual precipitation than any other area in Alberta. Legislating it as a protected area will ensure long-term security for this unsurpassed, headwater source, as the Elbow-Sheep and Grizzly Ridge Wildlands do for Calgary and the Town of Slave River. Prompt action is needed because water allocations in the Oldman Basin exceed supply.

Nature in Her Most Diverse Profusion

The Castle Special Place is Alberta’s most diverse display of nature; its most biologically diverse area. It is an extension of the renowned, natural landscapes of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Half of all plants with veined leaves and the majority of butterflies recorded in Alberta can be found here. It provides the habitat for a large array of wildlife listed as rare or as Species At Risk of extinction within Alberta, including 14 mammals, 44 birds, 145 plants, 6 plant communities such as the Big Sagebrush site, 3 reptiles, 5 amphibians, 2 fish, 10 butterflies and a number of spiders.



Left to right: dwarf bitterroot, mountain lady's-slipper, hikers in beargrass, pileated woodpecker, ranchers at work in the Castle, Castle Falls.



A Proposal for Better Protection

Through an open process, a local citizens' initiative of user groups, adjacent landholders, First Nations members and holders of resource rights, developed by consensus a conceptual proposal that recommends principles and the types of protected areas to legislate the Castle as.

All of the Special Place is recommended for formal protection under Alberta's protected areas legislation, with the exception of the privately-owned Castle Mountain Resort. Over 99% is proposed as a Wildland under the Provincial Parks Act. Wildlands by law "preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for backcountry recreation." A total of 11 sq km is proposed as Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs) and Provincial Parks, which provide existing, road-accessed campgrounds and incorporate five existing PRAs, staging areas, cross-country ski development and sites for organized random-camping. West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve would remain as is.

All the multiple, current types of outdoor recreation and the summer cattle-grazing permits would continue within the ecological limits of the Castle. Wildland designations protect watersheds and natural landscapes of provincial or national significance. Thus, there would be no mining or commercial logging. Oil and gas activities would continue in conjunction with the existing underground leases and the 2003 agreement between government departments responsible for energy and protected areas.

Alberta's laws stipulate these types of protected areas "are established, and are to be maintained,

- ❖ to facilitate their use and enjoyment for outdoor recreation, education and the appreciation and experiencing of Alberta's natural heritage,
- ❖ for the preservation of Alberta's natural heritage,
- ❖ for the conservation and management of plants and animals,
- ❖ for the preservation of specified areas, landscapes and natural features and objects in them that are of geological, cultural, historical, archeological, anthropological, paleontological, ethnological, ecological or other scientific interest or importance, and
- ❖ to ensure their lasting protection for the benefit of present and future generations."

Why a Legislated Protected Area?

There are no laws that protect the Castle from the allocation of more of its public lands to resource extraction or private development. Nor does its current legal status require it to be managed primarily for protection of the watershed, outdoor recreation and protection of the natural environment, including wildlife habitat. Without the legal framework of a legislated protected area, it is very difficult to direct budgets and enforcement to achieve those goals. The ecological integrity of the Castle has deteriorated under a decade of special management. Without protection, plans are proceeding to clear-cut log in the Beaver Mines Lake/Castle Falls area, causing even further deterioration. The level of cumulative impacts is not sustainable.

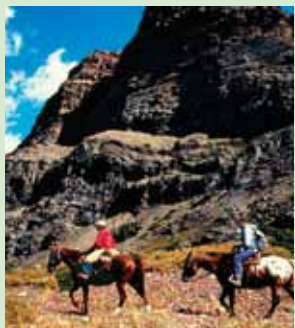
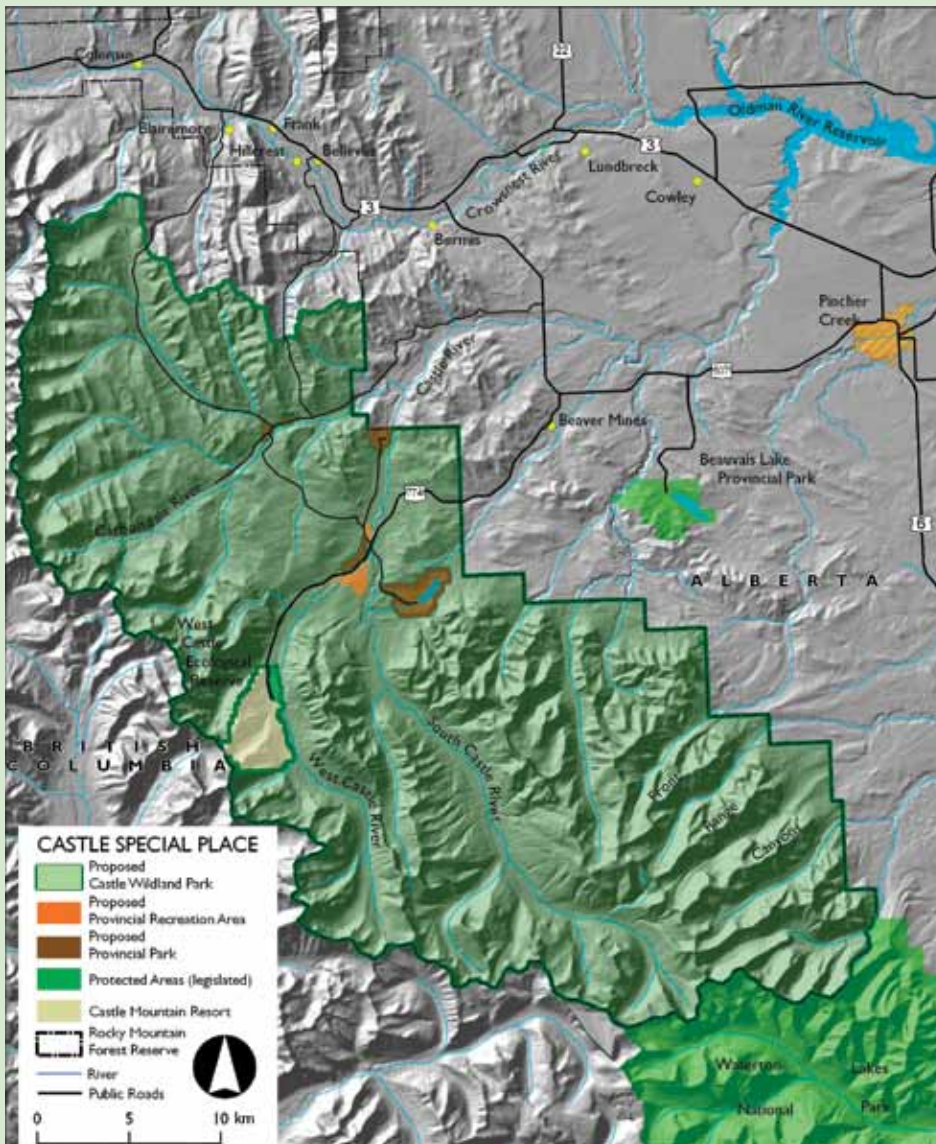
A Destination and Diversification for Gateway Communities

Legislating a protected area puts it "on the map" and businesses can "take it to the bank." With its cultural history and natural attributes, the Castle Special Place would be a major destination for The Cowboy Trail and Trail of the Great Bear tourism themes.

Adjacent communities could begin to share directly in the additional economic benefits that accrue from such areas. The province calculates an annual total of 23,480 person-years of employment and \$2.7 billion in economic activity directly generated by local and visitor use of the total network of provincially-legislated protected areas. Protected areas can also attract new residents in neighboring towns. They provide economically valuable, ecological services, such as buffering from floods, protection of soils, clean air and carbon storage — at no cost to the taxpayer.

Below: rafters in Castle Canyon, hikers approach Castle Mountain, horses in the Castle, Piikani offerings.





Q&A

\$ Will entrance still be free?
Yes!

Entrance fees are only charged for national parks and some historic sites.

🛠 Who will pay to look after it?

Maintenance would come from provincial, not municipal budgets. The province estimates it receives \$461 million annually in tax revenue from the economic activity generated by legislated protected areas.

Current budgets for managing resource development in the Castle would shift to outdoor recreation and protection. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) would still be responsible for the summer grazing permits, and fish and wildlife, including hunting. The rest would be under Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. It would, as now, be supplemented by stewardship groups and volunteers.

🚗 🏕 Will there still be roads and camping?
Yes!

Public roads, staging areas and campgrounds would continue. To protect the watershed and wildlife habitat, reduce the fire hazard and equitably share the area, environmentally appropriate sites would be designated for organized, vehicle-accessed random camping. Existing campgrounds could be improved to better meet needs.

🎯 🎣 🐎 Will there still be fishing, hunting and horseback riding?
Yes!

Wildlands are open to hunting and no separate fishing license is required. Wildlands and Provincial Recreation Areas and Parks provide for multiple types of outdoor recreation.

🚙 🛷 Will there still be Off-Highway Vehicle and sledding trails?
Yes!

OHV and snowmobile recreation is allowed on designated routes in the proposed Wildland and Provincial Recreation Areas. SRD committed in 2004, to update the 1992 motorized access management plan. That would be rolled into the province's public consultations on a management plan for the Castle as a legislated protected area.