



# ALBERTA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Honorable Jason Nixon  
Alberta Environment and Parks  
323 Legislature Building  
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February 18, 2021

## **Re: Alberta Crown Land Vision**

Dear Minister Nixon:

The Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society is a non-profit organization representing over 425 wildlife professionals in the province of Alberta. Our mission is to inspire and empower wildlife professionals to engage in science-based management and conservation of wild animals and their habitats. We are affiliated with The Wildlife Society, the largest organization of wildlife professionals in the world.

We are writing in response to the Alberta Environment and Parks November 2020 discussion document: The Alberta Crown Land Vision. As set out, the initiative is praiseworthy for modernizing policies and removing redundant and outdated administrative practices. Further, it correctly identifies the deep-rooted values of Albertans who appreciate Crown Lands as an integral element in their lives and livelihoods. The vision also correctly captures Albertans' expectation that their government should keep in mind and aim to manage these lands in trust for present and future generations. We support a land-use system that is clear and understandable, as well as focused on outcomes, sustainable funding and effective partnerships. There are some areas where the vision document lacks clarity, however, and we have several questions about how it will be actualized to improve management of Alberta's Crown Lands.

The vision repeatedly speaks to the industrial and recreational demands being placed on Crown Lands, and how these uses are stretching the sustainability of some landscapes and their ability to support the range of natural diversity and benefits for which they are so valued. We are curious if the vision will set out requirements for cumulative effects assessments to deal with the array of landscape pressures. If so, how will the requirements



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for such assessments be defined and what legislative body will hold planners and developers accountable for effectively modeling and addressing cumulative effects?

The vision makes little mention of the important wildlife habitat these lands provide. In reality, Alberta's Crown Land provides critical habitat for hundreds of wildlife species including several species at risk. Effective Crown Land management must consider, and in many areas prioritize (e.g., Parks and Protected Areas), the needs of species at risk and Alberta's iconic wildlife. In addition, Crown Lands provide critical ecological goods and services that benefit Albertans in myriad ways from flood control to water quality and from wildfire management to clean air. Although the vision recognizes the importance of biodiversity, the needs of wildlife and ecological goods and services are not recognized as a critical component of managing these landscapes. That is a significant gap in the vision.

There is a lack of information regarding why this initiative is needed and proceeding, which we find problematic. We fail to understand why the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) and associated Land Use Framework (LUF) planning processes are not already addressing the issues presented in the vision. ALSA, LUF, and Regional Plans are designed to address cumulative effects, involve stakeholders in the planning process, create plans that are easier to understand, and identify areas of the landscape where certain activities are prioritized. Land use planning is historically a drawn-out negotiation process, especially if it is designed to capture and address an expansive and conflicting range of interests. However, this does not diminish the need for such planning. It is encouraging to see a commitment to harmonize planning processes and develop cohesion across government on the management of Crown Land. However, we would like to better understand how current land use planning initiatives are insufficient, before assessing the benefit of another land use management exercise.

Over the past year, Albertans have repeatedly demonstrated interest and support for retaining Park lands and natural areas. Inherent in that support was an understanding that management was integral to meet continuing recreational demand, as well as the expansive ecological and economic values these lands bring to Albertans. These benefits far exceed the costs associated with their management. While Parks and Protected Areas play critical roles in the conservation of Alberta biodiversity and wildlife habitat, they also have an important role within the Crown Land matrix for focusing human activity into manageable nodes. Managing human use in these nodes requires less government



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capacity and investment because human use impacts are focused in centralized areas. Maintaining these nodes also ensures predictability of human use, which directly contributes to reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Presently, aside from a recreational use survey, there is little to respond to. Rather than embarking on a wide dissertation of the issues confronting Crown Land management, ACTWS would like to put forward an offer to assist the government in the deliberations to follow on modernizing management of Crown Lands. We value Crown Lands for the role they have in delivering on-going natural capital and benefits. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with your staff and Albertans to modernize Crown Land management to address long term economic, social, and ecological objectives. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Alex Beatty, President  
Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society

cc. Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta  
Rachel Notley, Leader of the Opposition  
Marlin Schmidt, Environment Critic