

July 25, 2024

Hon. Todd Loewen
Minister of Forestry and Parks
323 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Subject: Alberta Plan for Parks Draft Response

Alberta is home to some of the world’s most iconic landscapes—and some of the most robust environmental protections. The Draft Plan for Parks is a chance to reinforce our leadership, but in its current form, it falls short. It frames too narrow a vision that leans heavily toward exclusionary management and under represents the complex, interconnected realities of modern park use, especially the importance of tourism, wellness and recreation infrastructure, commercial and non-commercial accommodations at scale and equitable access.

Alberta’s parks system is an environmental, economic and cultural cornerstone. When these pillars work together, they support quality of life, powers our visitor economy, and foster community identity while maintaining some of the most internationally stringent environmental protections and regulatory requirements in the world. The plan must reflect this broader purpose to properly serve the interests of all Albertans.

According to the Canadian Tourism Satellite Account and consistent with UN standards, tourism refers to travel more than 40 kilometres from home or involving an overnight stay, undertaken for leisure, business, or other purposes. By this measure, a vast number of Albertans engaging with our provincial parks—whether for hiking, camping, skiing, or events—are active participants in the visitor economy. Far from being “outsiders,” these visitors are overwhelmingly Albertans themselves, making our parks system a public asset that must serve the people of this province first.

Recent public opinion surveys support this assertion. In the Alberta Recreation Survey, 76% of respondents identified outdoor recreation as essential to their wellbeing. The 2023 Provincial Recreation Report reinforces that Albertans value hiking, trail use, camping, and other recreation-oriented experiences as much as wildlife viewing and preservation. However, the survey used to inform the draft plan does not reflect Alberta’s demographic and cultural shifts. It overwhelmingly captured voices of long-time residents and those already engaged in traditional forms of conservation. It also appears to have not meaningfully captured diverse users: new Canadians, families with limited income, youth, and Indigenous land users. Their experiences and needs must also shape the future of our parks.

More than half of Alberta’s population growth over the last decade has come from interprovincial and international migration. Many of these new Albertans are urban dwellers, families with young children, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds who use parks

differently than prior generations. Yet their perspectives were absent from the engagement. In short, the survey represents who has historically been heard, not who is here now, or who Alberta is becoming. While the survey offers a useful snapshot, it does not validate whether its respondents reflect the full diversity of current and future park users. Critically, it fails to explore how newer Albertans, many of whom come from culturally diverse backgrounds and urban settings, might view or engage with outdoor recreation, including activities not traditionally captured in past park management frameworks.

Furthermore, while the survey did not explicitly exclude recreationalists, without intentional outreach to specific user communities, such as organized trail users, mountain bikers, adventure motorized groups, and multicultural outdoor associations, the likelihood of voluntary response was low. In effect, the absence of purposeful engagement with these groups resulted in a respondent base that potentially, but not necessarily, more aligned to conventional, preservationist views of how parks should be managed. The result is a dataset that does not reflect the full range of experiences, interests, and priorities of today's outdoor recreation landscape in Alberta. While TIAA notes specific engagement for these user groups was listed in the "What We Heard Report" a fulsome summary was unavailable and does not appear to have informed the final language of the report.

Serving All Albertans

Parks are a shared resource. The plan must affirm this by committing to:

- Inclusive infrastructure and services that reflect the needs of people of all ages, mobility levels, and backgrounds.
- Regional access equity, including urban, northern, and Indigenous communities.
- Cultural relevance, including newcomer outreach, Indigenous land use, and youth engagement.

The public parks system is a taxpayer-funded asset. It must reflect the demographic and geographic reality of a changing Alberta: younger, more diverse, more urban, and more mobile. Families, seniors, newcomers, Indigenous users, and working-class Albertans, all deserve to see themselves in the future of our parks. Without intentional inclusivity, we risk deepening inequality and eroding public trust over time.

A truly equitable system would consider not only access points, but amenities and programming designed with these groups in mind; from culturally informed facilities and signage to accessible mountain bike trails, youth camps, and newcomer orientation programs.

Recreation as Core Stewardship

Recreation is central to how most individuals experience Alberta's provincial parks. Properly managed recreation:

- Builds a conservation ethic by fostering personal connection to place.
- Promotes population health, family bonding, and community vitality.
- Generates jobs and regional economic activity in rural and gateway communities.
- Fosters appreciation for "appropriate use in appropriate places"
- Provides the platform for immersive and hands on education including sports

Examples abound: Trails maintained by volunteers and bike clubs; paddling access served by volunteers, and campgrounds operated by Indigenous and local businesses; decades long commercial developments with well managed performance, all tourism operators investing in land stewardship. These are success stories that Alberta should scale, quickly, in the interest of building a healthy and active population.

The same is true for growing communities of non-motorized and motorized recreationalists—including, but not limited to: mountain bikers, snowmobilers, adventure motorcyclists, gravel riders, and paddlers. These groups are increasingly organized, committed to stewardship, and invested in trail building, maintenance, and education. In some regions, user groups fill critical gaps in trail maintenance, provide tourism marketing support, and even run community-based visitor services. They contribute to the safety, sustainability, and economic vibrancy of parks. There must be a formal recognition of the active partners who are contributing to the evolution of Alberta's parks. And while appropriate use in appropriate places is entrenched within the Provincial Parks Act, the real-world implications are that Alberta's use-adverse framework has prevented the development of new trail assets, and infrastructure relative to jurisdictions such as Ontario, BC, and Quebec.

Alberta is also home to a high-performance outdoor recreation sector. Cross-country ski venues, climbing routes, rivers and alpine training zones have produced world-class athletes and serve as training grounds for Olympians and national teams. The Canmore Nordic Centre and Nakiska are not only venues of international repute, but they are also woven into the identity and economy of their host communities. Their value is both cultural and economic, and their visibility helps drive youth participation, health outcomes, and sports tourism. But assets like these require continual reinvestment to maintain viability, profitability, and sustainability over decades. Our current regulatory framework has not served the redevelopment of these venues well, particularly as the provincial population continues to grow.

Beyond elite athletes, Alberta's parks have been Canada's home for professional mountain guides, backcountry outfitters, snowmobile associations, alpine clubs, youth programs, and outdoor educators. These individuals and organizations are knowledge holders, stewards, and safety advocates. Their work ensures responsible use and passes down traditions of mountain literacy and safe backcountry travel.

The plan must include recreation infrastructure as a pillar of the system. One that is acknowledged to require sustained public and private investment, in partnership with user groups and the broader tourism economy.

Planning for Growth

The current approach implies that managing growth means limiting use. This is problematic. Alberta Parks are not overused or "over loved"; they are under-resourced relative to today's citizen expectations driven by the explosive population growth coming out the pandemic. TIAA recommends the following forward-looking actions:

- Implement impact-based zoning and deploy real-time management strategies and reservation systems that balance use with ecological thresholds.
- Expand and upgrade core infrastructure: trailheads, parking, restrooms, signage, campsites, digital connectivity, and accessible facilities.

- Align park development with Alberta’s 2035 Tourism Strategy, which targets over \$25B in annual visitor spending, and currently rests on a 2024 performance baseline of \$14.4B.
- Establish measurable infrastructure targets for new public, volunteer and private assets, including trail kilometres (motorized and non-motorized), recreational watercraft access, and diversified camping, lodging, and day-use areas.

These recommendations constitute a platform for managing seasonal and long-term demand in a way that protects ecosystems while enhancing public benefit and fostering the capital investment required to responsibly use these places.

Alberta has experienced a persistent tourism and recreation travel deficit with British Columbia—exceeding \$1.2 billion annually in recent years. This represents tens of thousands of Albertans seeking high-quality outdoor experiences out-of-province. The root cause is not a lack of demand, it is a lack of supply. Alberta would need to significantly modernize its recreation and wellness offerings in parks to close that gap.

As one survey respondent noted in the engagement summary: “The plan speaks about managing what we have but not how we grow, innovate, or meet the needs of new generations.” This is a significant oversight. Alberta must move beyond a static model of preservation and toward a dynamic model of environmental, recreational, and economic stewardship.

Grounding Policy in Better Data and Social Science

Sound planning requires integrated, interdisciplinary data. The plan must be rooted in:

- Alberta’s visitor economy performance and growth forecasts.
- Recreation demand models that analyze both passive and active uses across time, region, and user demographics.
- Longitudinal data on park visitation trends and seasonal usage patterns.
- Culturally informed recreation studies reflecting newcomer perspectives and barriers to access.
- Indigenous knowledge systems and outcomes defined by Indigenous leaders.
- Valuation of natural assets and rural economic multipliers.

The Draft Plan refers to environmental indicators but is silent on most other inputs. Alberta’s parks do not exist in isolation: they are economic engines, wellness systems, and intergenerational cultural assets. We must build a data-driven management regime (social and environmental) that reflects this full scope.

Inclusion of user-experience data, youth and newcomer access, overnight stay metrics, and rural economic indicators would ensure the plan better reflects the actual role of parks in modern Alberta life. Additionally, climate adaptation planning, active transportation data, and remote-work trends could all help shape a smarter approach to infrastructure placement and resilience.

A Plan for the Alberta of Tomorrow

TIAA thanks the ministry for initiating this important dialogue on the future of Alberta's parks system. We again encourage Alberta Parks to embrace its full potential as a facilitator of outdoor experiences and a key contributor to Western Canada's recreation and tourism economy.

Respectfully, the Draft Plan for Parks falls short in supporting TIAA's expectations for responsible recreation and stewardship within our provincial parks system. Its current framing is overly narrow and out of step with Alberta's rapidly changing demographics and economic realities. In a province that is young, diverse, and growing fast, a modern parks system must do more than restrict, it must inspire, include, and evolve.

Albertans value recreation, wellness, and shared access. Parks must remain places of connection: to nature, to community, and to personal well-being. Their future must be linked to the real needs of those who rely on them—for health, identity, and opportunity.

By fostering inclusive access and encouraging responsible stewardship, Alberta Parks can not only meet—but exceed—its conservation mandate.

We again urge the ministry to move beyond traditional land management models and outdated planning frameworks. Alberta is ready for bold leadership in outdoor recreation and tourism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darren Reeder', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Darren Reeder
President and CEO

Previous Submission

July 24, 2024

Hon. Todd Loewen
Minister of Forestry and Parks
323 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Subject: Alberta Plan For Parks Engagement Survey

Dear Minister Loewen,

On behalf of the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA), we are grateful to the ministry of Forestry and Parks for taking the time to consider the strategic direction of Alberta Parks as a deeply important public service that holds a prominent place in the Alberta narrative and in our quality of life.

TIAA has a number of recommendations and observations to offer with respect to the aims of outdoor recreation and tourism. This submission captures those perspectives, our specific responses to the Plan for Parks survey, and a summary of some important historical facts that contextualize Alberta's initial path to support the development of its outdoor recreation and tourism assets. This is where our commentary begins.

Outdoor Recreation and Tourism: History's Role in Informing Future Choices

After World War II, Alberta prioritized services and infrastructure to support its vision of becoming a highly desirable and prosperous resource-based economy and destination. Road building for transportation and resource access flourished.

At that time, a fledgling Alberta Parks service was mandated to build dozens of attractive, low-cost auto-access destination campgrounds near water for increasingly urbanized Albertans to drive their new vehicles to.

At the same time, the Alberta Forest Service found that the most cost-effective means to combat wildfire along Alberta's new roads was to prevent them. This was done by building over 200 small, no-cost, auto-access Forest Recreation Areas (FRAs) throughout the Forest Protection Area, and thereby consolidating most campfires to known locations.

Combined with the dozens of Alberta Transportation highway campgrounds, and the monumental legacy investment in recreation and tourism in Kananaskis, these services generally served and satiated domestic outdoor recreation and tourism interests for over four decades. However, changes in the mid-90's initiated consequential shifts with cascading results on Alberta's outdoor recreation and tourism economy.

The following points help to illustrate some of those changes:

- *Mandates for Alberta Forest Service and Transportation were re-focused on the province's resource industry and movement of motor vehicles. Hundreds of outdoor recreation sites were decommissioned or transferred to Alberta Parks.*
- *Alberta Parks, with 40% less budget and 200+ more sites, constrained its recreation services to focus on existing auto-based camping, introduced new fees, and reduced services in many sites (particularly its inherited Forest Recreation Areas) prompting campers to abandon them in favour of camping on public land in ditches, meadows, and near pipelines, and well sites.*
- *Alberta Parks consolidated its resources to focus on conservation and preservation (e.g. Special Places 2000). Its recreation and tourism service mandates and goals became secondary, and these were not adjusted, redefined, or expanded to keep pace with outdoor recreation and tourism trends, demands, opportunities, or interests. Parks also found itself in a comfortable position of focusing on a relatively homogenous array of auto-based camping opportunities at existing sites where its only performance metric was whether the campers that happened to visit its parks were satisfied; not the many who chose not to. It was around this time that the disconnect between outdoor recreation supply and demand grew rapidly.*
- *With exploding recreational use and tourism on its lands, but without an explicit recreation or tourism service mandate, Public Lands struggled to understand, adapt, and equip itself for active recreation and tourism management.*
- *Not integrated or "baked-in" as a land-use priority in Alberta's early land allocation approaches, provincial land-use planning and management efforts struggled to incorporate outdoor recreation and tourism values as important resource-dependent land-uses. While some of these policy shortcomings were recognized, several efforts to affect overarching change were not successful. For example, early 2000's Alberta Recreation Corridor Coordinating Committee efforts to develop a provincial trails plan and trans-Alberta trail alignment were not realized. Neither were priority Land Use Framework recommendations in 2009 to develop a comprehensive provincial recreation policy by 2012.*
- *Rooted in land management approaches, rather than based in leading experienced-focused recreation and tourism management approaches, both Alberta Parks and Public Land recreation and tourism efforts have evolved to be independent efforts with little recognition that they are, in fact, complimentary services and few links to each other or with tourism planning and development efforts exist.*
- *While significant outdoor recreation infrastructure investment is now occurring on both Public Land and in Alberta Parks, it's often not clear how planning is occurring, what we're building towards, or what success would look like. The Alberta Parks' Master Development Plan process that guides infrastructure investment, for example, is internal and not transparent. The process does not involve communities, recreation user groups, or the tourism ecosystem. And it is not evident that these plans are guided by specific goals or objectives, that they are accountable for specific levels, quality or diversity of*

services, and because they are opaque, it's not clear if they align with Travel Alberta's tourism development zone processes.

In the context of the aforementioned points, TIAA believes Albertans are fortunate that the government is now attributing significant value to the importance of outdoor recreation and tourism. We applaud these recent efforts and promising developments, including Travel Alberta's expanded development mandate, the Trails Act, a more visitor-focused Parks Operations Division, more attention to tendering RFP's and contracts, and concerted outdoor infrastructure investment. And we fully support a public dialogue that considers the future of Alberta Parks.

TIAA believes, however, that opportunity exists to improve how a renewed Plan for Parks is framed and positioned within the broader array of outdoor recreation and tourism services.

Prioritizing Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Opportunities

The Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA), among others, have long been vocal proponents of elevating both the quality and quantity of outdoor recreation opportunities for quality-of-life, environmental, and economic benefits.

Alberta has recently passed through 25+ years where outdoor recreation and tourism was viewed as a low priority, where recreation management occurred without a clear champion, without a cohesive vision, with few plans, limited accountability, limited investment, and often with disjointed (and sometimes counterproductive) efforts.

Recent developments are positive, but Alberta is far behind where some north American jurisdictions are and, despite being blessed with so many remarkable outdoor spaces, we are not evolving the way we could be.

TIAA encourages the Alberta government to make a very intentional effort to bridge this gap by positioning itself as an integrated catalyst and facilitator of a diverse suite of high-quality outdoor experiences that invigorates communities, attracts and retains visitors, and stimulates the provincial tourism economy.

Specifically, TIAA recommends the Government of Alberta:

- 1. Adopt an intentional, coordinated, and whole-of-government approach to outdoor recreation and tourism services.***
 - Closely related initiatives such as trails, parks, land-use planning, tourism development planning, and other significant land-use initiatives must not continue occurring in isolation of each other or without efforts to align them with overarching provincial plans, goals and objectives. Quite simply, Alberta will never realize its full potential or become leaders in outdoor recreation and tourism without this.*
- 2. Set clear accountabilities with high expectations for delivery of relevant outdoor recreation and tourism services.***

- *While legislative accountabilities for land management exist in Alberta, service level accountabilities for the quality, quantity, relevance, or effectiveness of outdoor recreation and tourism efforts have been ambiguous for over 25 years. (i.e. These are not defined in the Provincial Parks Act, Public Lands Act, or associated regulations. This raises questions such as: Is Alberta Parks responsible for facilitating auto-camping? Non-auto camping? Trails? Climbing? Other services? If so, how much, with whose involvement and, how well?)*

3. Conserve and foster the quality and integrity of Alberta’s high-value recreation resources and settings.

- *Outdoor recreation and tourism are wholly dependent on the quality of our natural assets, and the ability to responsibly, and sustainably, access and support them. Like other scarce and valuable resources, land-use policy and practices should contextualize where these assets exist, strive to retain and leverage their value, minimize impacts to them, and restore their utility and efficacy where possible.*

4. Focus on improving quality, sustainability, accessibility, diversity, and connectivity of outdoor visitor experiences.

- *While recreation can still occur with poor recreation planning and infrastructure, poor sites have little practical value for residents and they have no value for the tourism ecosystem and economy (e.g. 200 km of rutted cutline routes may entertain a small number of local trail enthusiasts, but they are unlikely to attract the visitation or provide the same community benefits as 50km of quality, intentional trail that links key destinations and points-of-interest). Alberta Forestry and Parks (not just Alberta Parks) should see itself as a facilitator of “top-drawer” outdoor opportunities.*

5. Be guided by industry-leading approaches to develop systematic planning, policy, standards, operations, and monitoring.

- *Modern approaches, such as the Visitor Use Management Framework, allow for transparent and constructive navigation of contentious issues that have sometimes polarized and paralyzed previous efforts (e.g. motorized activities). The province should be actively using approaches that have been shown to work well.*

6. Nurture internal recreation and tourism management expertise and sustain a core staff of recreation and tourism professionals.

- *Like other industries, professional competencies and expertise exist for trails, visitor use, tourism development, outdoor recreation management, and other*

related areas. For ongoing efficiency, continuity, effectiveness, and credibility, these skillsets should be present and leveraged in related government structures.

7. Actively foster and sustain involvement and relationships with municipal, non-profit, and private partners throughout outdoor recreation and tourism planning and implementation.

- *For maximum impact, all significant parks, outdoor recreation, and tourism development processes should be transparent and have on-ramps for involvement. Some current processes, such as Alberta Parks Master Development Plans, are internal, do not involve communities, do not involve recreation user communities, are not accountable for levels or quality of services, do not involve the tourism ecosystem, nor do they transparently connect to Travel Alberta's tourism development zone processes.*

Many of the above recommendations are not new; a number are referenced in TIAA's "Alberta's Crown Land Outdoor Recreation Study" (<https://www.tiaalberta.ca/cpages/recreation-study>).

As TIAA understands that the Government of Alberta and Travel Alberta recently cooperated on a report that explores ways to improve provincial policy, planning and legislation related to recreation and tourism in Alberta Parks and other Crown Land, we encourage an actioning of these reports and their recommendations.

Specific Responses to the Parks Engagement Survey

The Plan for Parks survey presented many points for engagement and TIAA wishes to offer the following observations in-line with the survey's structure.

Alberta's Parks

Frequency of Visits

- *While very few of our members currently conduct business within parks, all benefit from the recreation activities that occur within them.*

Value

- *Our membership views a healthy and vibrant parks system as an essential public good. Parks are a barometer of mature society's commitment to honouring its natural and cultural heritage. Albertans are passionate about their natural spaces. Even if they are not regular users, parks are an implied benefit of living in society. They are part of the province's social trust and better connect us to places and our sense of regional identity. Albertans deserve an opportunity to protect, preserve and actively enjoy these spaces as a fundamental right.*

Vision

Vision

- *TIAA has no objection to the updated vision statement but maintains that service level accountabilities are an imperative to support and achieve it.*

100-Year Outlook

- *Alberta's Park system has functioned as an integrated component of a suite experience-focused outdoor recreation and tourism services for decades. It is highly connected to communities, its services are highly relevant to outdoor user communities, it attracts and facilitates responsible visitation from around the world, it has adapted to welcoming more visitation with a much smaller vehicle footprint, and local communities are thriving and highly supportive of parks because of the benefits they offer residents and businesses.*

Principles

Accountability

- *Albertans have likely been a bit too complacent with the degree of accountability offered by the Alberta government in the outdoor recreation and tourism sector. Without specific service accountabilities and transparent processes, Alberta Parks' relevance to many outdoor interests has been severely eroded.*
- *In addition to clear milestones, TIAA recommends adopting industry leading practices such as the Visitor Use Management Framework approaches to clearly state the issues and opportunities it hopes to address with planning efforts, articulate future desired conditions, establish targets, present pragmatic management actions to achieve them, and report on progress.*
- *As stated earlier, the outdoor recreation and tourism accountability lens should be expanded beyond parks to include closely related services (e.g. trails, regional tourism development zone planning).*
- *Moreover, if Alberta Parks are to support the goals of sustainable outdoor recreation and tourism as reflected in the province's ambitious tourism strategy, the ministry needs to better collaborate with industry and Travel Alberta to understand and develop products that meet the needs of Albertans (visitors) today and tomorrow.*

Equitable Access

- *Less than 0.01% of Albertans (fewer than 30000 people) can access a provincial or national park for an overnight experience without using a road. Provincial parks, in policy and practice, do not incent lower impact access and its sites are rarely connected to communities, to trail systems, or to each other via trails. At a fundamental level, all auto-based park systems face inevitable sustainability and accessibility challenges, and a continued focus on high-impact and high-cost access seems to be at odds with the Plan for Parks vision.*
- *While enhanced internet and cellular access may be helpful for some users within the front-country (e.g. for safety reasons), it remains somewhat at odds with the Parks' vision and overall needs in the backcountry, and it may be redundant given*

the continued advent of other solutions (e.g. Satellite messengers, Starlink, cell phone satellite connectivity).

- *Primary parks messaging should be available in official languages and commonly used languages in the province.*
- *A broad range of site-appropriate accommodations (e.g. from simple hiker/biker campsites in front and back-country, to comfort camping, to simple inclusive lodging options) should be widely available. These should be planned and developed in cooperation with user communities, inline or ahead of demand, should be used to proactively and strategically shift a proportion of visitor use away from higher impact visitation, and should actively involve partners in service provision.*
- *Alberta's future park system should not be managed as a static patchwork of isolated sites offering seasonal services. New sites, new campgrounds (lower impact as much as possible), new seasonal services, and new connections (e.g. linear parks and trail) should always be on the table to help Alberta Parks achieve its vision.*

Reconciliation

- *TIAA believes that the most important factors in reconciliation are to actively invite participation at different scales, to nurture relationships, to listen to Indigenous perspectives, and be open to adapting parks operations to support deeper and more meaningful involvement.*

Sustainability

- *Many of the factors that contribute to accessibility also contribute to sustainability (e.g. vehicle-free access, trails, simpler infrastructure).*
- *All campsites and other amenities offered should always be guided by the Parks' vision, but a full range of options and price points should be offered.*
- *There must be a better process for supporting evolving recreation infrastructure needs in parks, including the development of experiences, such as glamping, whether led solely by the government or in a collaboration with Travel Alberta and the private sector.*
- *Fees and pricing should reflect the costs of providing that service, align with fair market values, be transparent to consumers, and should have some relationship with the relative footprint and impacts of the activity.*
- *As a guiding principle, and following the leadership example set by Parks Canada, all fees collected within a park should be wholly dedicated for reinvestment in the park where those fees were generated, whether this is for infrastructure build (or renewal), conservation programming, ecological restoration, trail development, or other.*
- *Government references to "user fees", which can be interpreted as opportunistic revenue opportunities with no correlating service of benefit, should be reframed to correlate with pricing principles to help cement the relationship between the cost of access and the cost of experiencing place in a sustainable manner. Messaging around the Kananaskis Conservation Pass (KCP), for example, should more clearly communicate connection to vehicle-related impacts, footprint and costs. "Welcome! We have lots of room for you and your new boots ... it's your car that we're having trouble squeezing in." Albertans deserve full transparency in the accounting of how KCP revenues are applied to the conservation, restoration, education and infrastructure aims of the region.*

- *“Friends of” groups, volunteers, and other partnerships should be actively cultivated and recognized, but not at the expense of eroding the continuity, brand, and system as a whole. There’s immense value, pride, and cohesive forces in having a provincial parks system with common threads of continuity, familiarity, and connection. Voluntary contributions should be, on balance, supplementary rather than core.*

Increasing Access

- *It is important that Alberta Parks comes to view tourism as something not separate or distinct from its core mandate and vision. All of Parks’ people-focused services are tourism services. Alberta Parks is an important part of the national and provincial tourism ecosystems, and it is already part of dozens of local tourism ecosystems.*
- *Building an internal foundation and culture rooted in facilitating remarkable, high-quality, connected experiences consistent with its vision should underpin all operations.*
- *Concerted efforts should be made to:*
 - *Build relationships with local, regional, and provincial tourism ecosystems, including those organizations that could be involved in the product and service delivery continuum.*
 - *Physically connect parks to communities via a provincial trail system.*
 - *Purposefully invite and expand Indigenous opportunities*
 - *Greatly improve social science, relationships with user communities, visitor information, experience design and visitor use management capacities, and related internal capacities.*
 - *Invite tasteful participation and site-appropriate services and small-scale commercial development.*
 - *Carefully, but purposefully, consider larger scale commercial development as alternatives to the mountain parks where footprint, wildlife, vehicles, user conflict, and other issues can be carefully managed.*
 - *Building themed signature routes with on-route amenities and itineraries (e.g. river paddling routes, long-distance hiking and cycling loops etc.)*

Recreation Opportunities

- *A transparent, consistent and systematic approach should be used to gauge compatibility and appropriateness of activities within parks. Activities with attributes such as low-noise, low-speed, low-wildlife displacement, and low-physical footprint should be pursued. Activities with high-footprint (including motor vehicles), high-noise, high speed differentials, and high propensity to displace wildlife should be evaluated based on leading management approaches employed in other high use tourism and recreation areas.*
- *To ensure advancement of Alberta’s outdoor tourism and recreation economy, modern trail planning and Visitor Use Management Framework approaches should be purposefully implemented.*
- *Priority policy gaps, including electrified conveyances (e.g. ebikes) should be addressed and communicated.*
- *Trail connectivity within parks and to communities should be prioritized.*
- *Lower-impact, vehicle-free travel should be incentivized through welcoming policies (e.g. no turn-away overnight areas), route-building, and pricing of services commensurate with these lower impacts.*

- *Where appropriate, both spatial and temporal zoning options should be used to achieve separation between incompatible activities or values (e.g. prime wildlife rearing habitat could exclude dogs and people during spring but enable visitation during other times of year; grazing leases and reserves could offer clear and unambiguous access on designated routes for low-impact activities).*
- *Parks operations should have transparent, efficient, and principled on-ramps for the private and non-profit sectors to supplement and optimize the provision of a diverse, relevant, and high-quality suite outdoor recreation services. Ideally these processes should be developed with sector involvement so that they are attentive to needs and constraints (e.g. seasonality of RFP's) and they must have public transparency (e.g. grant processes and reporting).*

Nature-Based Experiences

- *Creation of more provincial parks, which is an imperative in Alberta as population growth continues to lead the country, is an investment in the health, connectivity, and resilience of our environment, and in priority allocation of areas for protection and public enjoyment. This is a laudable public goal and should endure through any future economic cycles.*
- *Interpretive and educational programs should continue to be a foundational part of park programming. It should be strategic, fun, nuanced, thought provoking, inspiring, and empowering. It should invite participation, offer strategies for responsible and low-footprint visitation, be memorable and remarkable, and cultivate a new generation of ambassadors that will promote and protect these special places.*
- *Parks strategic planning should consider how the department interfaces with school curriculum development (e.g. elementary school and outdoor education curriculums).*
- *Capital planning should ensure facilities are developed to support school visitation, and park programming operations should invite and welcome active school participation.*
- *Volunteer opportunities should always be available at all levels of park operations. These should not be limited to front-facing visitor services. Opportunities should be available in social and natural science research, planning, operations, social media, program coordination etc.*

Improving Legislation

- *With the exceptions of direction around Indigenous use and tourism, TIAA believes the Provincial Parks Act functions adequately.*
- *The Provincial Recreation Area classification is a hidden gem, holds remarkable potential, and is massively underutilized. Many, many remarkable recreation-focused, highly desirable outdoor destinations could be built, developed and marketed with this designation.*
- *Regulatory deficiencies include:*
 - *The ability to objectively regulate and prohibit in-park activities and impacts using objective and measurable attributes (e.g. noise, speed, wildlife displacement, physical footprint).*
 - *Electrified conveyances (e.g. ebikes, scooters, one-wheelers).*
 - *Tourism related dispositions.*
 - *Enablement of Indigenous cultural activities.*
 - *Designated trails on grazing leases and grazing reserves.*
 - *More nuanced abilities to manage dogs and related impacts.*

- *While it's true that user literacy around regulations can be low, it is critically important that park users are first grounded in the why parks exist, what purposes they are trying to serve, and what role park users have in stewarding them. Rules without context are empty and easily forgettable. Rules without enforcement are simple sabre rattling. In the wise words of world-renowned biologist and broadcaster, David Attenborough: "No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."*
- *Achieving voluntary compliance and/or alignment with Parks' vision should always be the primary goal.*

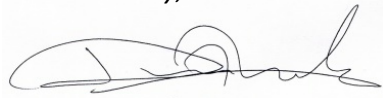
In Closing

TIAA thanks your ministry for opening this important dialog on the future of Alberta's Parks system. As unfamiliar as it may be to the ministry, we strongly encourage Alberta Parks to fully embrace a role as outdoor experience facilitators and as a key player in western Canada's outdoor recreation and tourism economy.

Through welcoming community connections and through inspiration of visitors to be responsible stewards and travelers, we feel you will achieve your legislated conservation responsibilities and more.

And we encourage the ministry to not retreat to traditional land management approaches, site-by-site management plans, or a narrow focus on auto-based services and camping. We believe Alberta, and the world, is ready for bold and novel approaches to outdoor recreation and tourism leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darren Reeder', is placed over a light grey rectangular background.

*Darren Reeder
President and CEO
Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA)*