Alberta Parks’ Kananaskis Region Top 20 Research Questions

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Final Report
Lars. K Hallstrom

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Publications in this Series should be cited as:  
AUTHOR, TITLE, ACSRC REPORT SERIES NO./YEAR [URL]
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

“Generation of priority research questions to inform Park management and conservation policy.”

OBJECTIVES
This project met multiple objectives of relevance to both the research and policy communities within the Parks Division of Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. In addition to generating a list of relevant, feasible and implementable Parks priority research, this project:
1) Identified potential gaps and innovation in public policy that will support Parks sustainability in the face of demographic/social change, economic stressors and ecological variation;
2) Contributions to “horizon scanning”- the systematic search for potential threats and opportunities.
3) Increase communication, interactions and potential collaboration between government, non-governmental and research communities and practitioners;
4) Increase the exposure and knowledge base of the research community to the policy and research priorities of both governmental and non-governmental organizations at the provincial and federal levels in Canada.
5) Generate and communicate the policy and research priorities of different levels and branches of government across those different levels and branches; &
6) Provide guidance to funders and funding agencies as to areas of priority and interest.

METHODOLOGY
This project solicited submissions of priority research questions via a web-based interface. Participants were solicited on the basis of purposeful sampling (subjective sampling targeting stratification) via email.
The instructions given to those wish to submit questions is based on Rudd et al. (2011:4), aspirational criteria for questions requires that they; (1) be answerable through an implementable and realistic research design; (2) be answerable on the basis of fact; (3) be of a spatial and temporal scale that can be addressed realistically; (4) not be answerable with a yes/no or “it depends”; (5) contain a subject of intervention, an intervention and a measurable/ evaluated effect related to that intervention or policy; and (6) increase the efficacy, scope or efficiency of policy related to Parks policy.
Once the questions were submitted, questions were culled on the basis of (a) the aspirational criteria noted in and (b) redundancy and repetition. This produced a list of questions that were reviewed and consolidated into the final listing.
PLENARY RESULTS

Alberta Parks’ Top 20 Policy and Research Questions Phase 2
Kananaskis Region Workshop
Plenary Session Results
November 20, 2013

1. Who are past, current and potential users and what range of their needs (health, social, cultural, economic, recreational, spiritual, etc.) are being met?
   - 1 & 2 too theoretical;
   - Why are they coming to parks over going to other places? Motivation – community needs, values);
   - Baseline info;
   - What are the current baseline information for;
   - Why are people going to parks?
   - Who has and does use parks in the Kananaskis region? – demographics
   - How do we have to change to be ready for that?
   - Broad definition of user.

2. What positive and negative interactions occur with Parks (direct, indirect) in this region and what are the effects on values, attachments, transformative learning?
   - Policy – enforcement?
   - Short term and long term. effects not necessary in question;
   - Public engagement and social experience;
   - Positive and negative interactions with parks;
   - Direct and indirect, causation;
   - Experience and interactions very debatable;
   - Visitor experience question? Visitor interaction?
   - The way people interact with a park – visit, idea, etc.

3. Where in this region are people doing the same activities but not doing it in provincial parks, and how does this affect parks core utilizations? Why and how do AB parks fit into their experience planning process?
   - Value of the Park that is different from other places;
   - Accessibility of Parks vs. other spaces;
   - Motivation to visit Parks;
   - To what extent are the regional and provincial needs for recreational opportunities and natural green spaces being met by each region’s existing family of provincial
parks and other conservation and/or outdoor recreational lands in accordance with Parks’ mandate?
• Why are visitors choosing Parks over other land areas?

4. **What ways can Alberta parks maximize the health and wellness (emotional, physical) benefits of our sites?**

   • Community health – social health and wellness;
   • Very important question – somehow get in on the health and wellness;
   • Marketing the parks – how markets want to market it? Promote health values/benefits;
   • Education about what is possible to do in parks;
   • Managing expectations;
   • Barriers to participation;
   • Park offering and programs and how they relate to different areas of health;
   • Extremely difficult to measure – people’s ability to access nature, etc. There is an evidence base for this;
   • Speaks to relevance piece of parks. Ties into AB policy;
   • Has effect on the programs delivered and how we design facilities;
   • It’s the one area that is missing – need to link parks with people;
   • Lump with visitor and non-visitors question;
   • Risk of non-participation in parks;
   • What do you mean by health? Physical, emotional, mental.

5. **How and in what ways has AB Parks (on and off site) fostered a conservation ethic and met Parks’ vision in the public through educational programs at a regional level (e.g. Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre, Kananaskis Interpretation, Kananaskis in the Classroom, Environmental Ed Field Studies)?**

   • Currently being worked on;
   • Fostering a conservation attitude of the public;
   • Attachment and bonds;
   • Are we effectively connecting developing develop more environmentally connected public through both visitation and off site opportunities?
   • Evaluation of projects;
   • On and off sight environmental programs;
   • Stewardship action included.

6. **What are the effects of invasive species on ecological health and what are strategic approaches to managing invasive species?**

   • Incorporated in stressors;
   • Aquatic, terrestrial (invasive species) – stressor;
• What are the tools and techniques to manage the stressors affecting ecological health?
• What are thresholds of invasive species on ecological health in Alberta Parks and what management approaches and techniques are effective?

7. **What role do protected areas in Kananaskis region play in maintaining ecological function across a broader landscape?**

• Proximity and bidirectional causality;
• Collaborative governance;
• Should AB parks be leaders in collaboration?
• Barrier to collaboration;
• Interagency approaches – formal governance is place – are they working are they not?
• Policy analysis – has this approach been effective?
• Models within Alberta of collaborative management;
• Goes both ways – parks to outside and outside to parks;
• Working with forest industry – industrial impacts on wildlife (East side of Kananaskis – Spray Lakes jurisdiction, FMA, etc.);
• Why do we need more protected areas?
• Alberta wide question;
• Consideration of the effects on ecological;
• Collaboration/integrated management and planning;
• Park influence on industry – indirect through planning tools;
• Land adjacent – landscape as a whole, not just protected areas;
• Fragmentation of connectivity;
• SSRP biodiversity management framework;
• Understanding of larger landscape and other land uses outside of Parks;
• How can we best work with our neighbors in ensuring biodiversity and ecological processes?
• How can the management of adjacent lands benefit/support biodiversity protection of the greater landscape?
• What is happening on adjacent lands and how does it affect the biodiversity of the landscape?
• Collaborative management strategies;
• What has been the impact on park mandate of the way we have or haven’t collaborated in the region and how can it inform future management?
• What is the best model for collaborative management strategies for Alberta Parks?
• Is Kananaskis country working well with its neighbours?

8. **What is the state of ecological health of the region (measured on site by site basis) and what are the current and future drivers (e.g. climate change, human use) affecting the ecological health of Parks’ sites?**
9. What are the appropriate ecological health indicators (site specific) in the Kananaskis region?

- Create discrete zones;
- Captures grassland question;
- Scale is an issue;
- ABMI within AB Parks;
- Include climate change – already being researched;
- Changes in functionality of parks due to climate change;
- Two questions (8&9).

10. What are the thresholds of human use within Alberta Parks (ecosystem health and visitor experience)?

- Carrying capacity;
- Speaks to ecological health;
- What management tools to use for modifying trail preferences and patterns;
- Criteria for decision making;
- Monitoring question – how is it changing with time?
- Effectiveness question in this region – management policies;
- What are the threshold patterns for trails in Alberta Parks?
- Social, ecological thresholds (use and management);
- Crowding issue affecting visitor experience.

11. How do we assess (short and long term) the effects of our engagement with Indigenous peoples in the region?

- Collaboration in decision making, knowledge, implementation;
- Consultation policy – assess need for consultation in decision making;
- What is the potential role of Indigenous peoples in the management of parks and protected areas in the region?
- What’s the TEK of the area and is it worth spending money to consulting;
- TEK= Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
12. How can we integrate vegetation management strategies to accomplish ecological, hydrological, social, risk-based goals of AB Parks?

- Valid to test within parks before practicing at a larger scale;
- What is the effective approach with fire-smarting practices in overall vegetation management with maintain ecological, social, and traditional regional aspects?
- Hydrological adds a large scale grasp.

13. In light of recent flooding (June 2013), what are the values at risk (assets, natural and cultural resources) within the protected areas?

- Where is the future headed and what can be done to increase the capacity of the landscape to store?
- Information gap question;
- What is the current status;
- Taping into other educational institutes for base lines;
- Watershed management packs;
- Risk associated with mitigation or hydrology.

14. What challenges or opportunities would provincial flood mitigation strategies present for Parks’?

- Challenges or mitigation strategies for provincial flooding and park planning;
- Planning and risk assessment with infrastructure;
- What are the values - cultural and environmental - at risk within Kananaskis.

15. How can Alberta Parks address the gaps in the current protected areas system with respect to maintaining biodiversity, representation and ecological connectivity?

- Discussed;
- Ecological connectivity-role;
- Gaps are known, ways to address the gaps can change.

16. What are the primary ecological good and services produced and amenity value within Alberta Parks and how might these be quantified?

- To what extent do the amenity values of parks and the landscape protection certainty they provide factor into the decisions of businesses or individuals to locate in Alberta or to remain in Alberta? This is a critical question in building the economic case for park protection in a Province that sees itself as having an economy dependent on natural resource extraction (or, if the results are negative, of course, the results might point towards the need for more multiple-use management areas);
• Ecological value does not outweigh amenity values.
• Home and property value around parks.

17. What are the effects (economic, social, and cultural) of the Kananaskis region on those adjacent lands and communities and how has that changed over time?

• What does privatization do?
• What are the interaction and benefits of parks on outside communities?
• Marketing, outreach
• 200 businesses relied on parks for their livelihood in K-country
• Economic goods and services question.
• What does a stakeholder look like?
• Relevance question.
• Difference between Large park and multi-use landscape

18. In terms of management effectiveness, what model of service delivery works best in this region in providing (a) conservation programs, (b) public engagement programs, (c) general operations, etc.

• Partnership, volunteer based delivery system, Park foundations.
### APPENDIX A:

**Alberta Parks’ Kananaskis Region**  
**Top 20 Policy and Research Questions Phase 2 Workshop**  
**Canmore Nordic Centre | November 20, 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>09:30 – 10:00</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of the day’s goals &amp; activities</td>
<td>Lars Hallström</td>
<td>Banquet Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10:00 – 10:50</td>
<td>Breakout Session I</td>
<td>Note takers</td>
<td>Banquet Room &amp; Meeting Room A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10:50 – 11:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11:00 – 11:50</td>
<td>Breakout Session II</td>
<td>Note takers</td>
<td>Banquet Room &amp; Meeting Room A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11:50 – 12:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>Banquet Room</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>12:30 – 13:20</td>
<td>Breakout Session III</td>
<td>Note takers</td>
<td>Banquet Room &amp; Meeting Room A</td>
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<td>13:20 – 13:30</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>13:30 – 14:20</td>
<td>Breakout Session IV</td>
<td>Note takers</td>
<td>Banquet Room &amp; Meeting Room A</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>14:20 – 14:30</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>14:30 – 16:00</td>
<td>Plenary Session</td>
<td>Lars Hallström (note takers present)</td>
<td>Banquet Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>16:00 – 16:30</td>
<td>Wrap-up and next steps</td>
<td>Lars Hallström</td>
<td>Banquet Room</td>
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APPENDIX B:

Alberta Parks’ Kananaskis Region - Top 20 Policy and Research Questions Phase 2 Workshop

Background:

You are being asked to participate in an exercise to identify what you see as the most pressing or important questions for researchers to address in terms of research and public policy in the Northeast region of Alberta Parks. Given your role in the research, policy, non-governmental or conservation communities, you have been selected to provide feedback on different research questions via a workshop. These questions are supposed to respond to the following:

“What research question, if answered, would substantially advance the development or state of public policies, practices and management strategies for the development, sustainability, capacity and resilience of provincial parks in Alberta?”

These questions should:

(1) Be answerable through an implementable and realistic research design;
(2) Be answerable on the basis of fact;
(3) Be of a spatial and temporal scale that can be addressed realistically;
(4) Not be answerable with a yes/no or “it depends”;
(5) Contain a subject of intervention, an intervention and a measurable/evaluated effect related to that intervention or policy; and
(6) Increase the efficacy, scope or efficiency of policy or practice related to Alberta Parks.

Workshop Goals:

(1) To reduce the number of submissions to 20 based on the criteria above;
(2) To edit/amend, combine and modify as necessary the submissions in order to achieve goal (1);
(3) To identify thematic consistencies or inconsistencies;
(4) To NOT prioritize or order in any way.
APPENDIX C:

Breakout Questions- Session 1a

- How are societal trends affecting and being affected by visitor use of AB Parks (e.g. nature-based activities, outdoor recreation, science, technological innovations, etc.)
- How are individual parks, regions, and the provincial system branded and marketed locally, within the province, across Canada, and around the world, and to what effect?
- How do user and non-users view AB Parks? (Also attendees and non-attendees of interpretive programs). What values to Albertans ascribe to AB Parks?
- Somewhere around 80% of all visits in provincial parks are repeat visitation, by the same people to the same park. Why is that and how can we use those motivations to the advantage of Alberta Parks?
- What are the variables that influence why certain visitors visit certain parks? (i.e. build a demand model)
- What does an optimally and efficiently run Park Agency look like? (E.g. centralized v.s. decentralized, ratio of management to staff, types of staff necessary).
- How do or could non-visitors value Alberta's provincial parks? What types of non-visitors are there (clustering/segmentation)?
- What are the health benefits that Alberta parks and protected areas provide to people?

Breakout Questions- Session 1b

- What are people willing to pay to ensure that Alberta parks and protected areas remain a part of our natural heritage?
- What are the health and social/community/family benefits of interaction with nature?
- What are the route characteristics of park user patterns?
- How does park visitation foster the development of more environmentally connected citizens?
- How do people form attachments to protected areas? What characterizes these attachments/connections to parks? What are the most powerful means of connecting people to (a) nature, and (b) particular parks, and (c) park systems/conservation initiatives that protect special places?
- How will changing cultural, demographic and lifestyle trends affect Alberta Parks’ ability to achieve its mission? [in terms of volunteers, front country services, wellness promotion, etc.]
- What experiences do Albertans desire most from their parks? What market segments seek what experiences? What market segments are most desirable, as visitors to Alberta Parks?
Breakout Questions- Session 2a

- Do parks serve as refugia or "breeding grounds" for wildlife that come into conflict with agriculture, such as elk, bears and wolves?
- In the face of climate change, what species of plants can persist over the longer term based on the projected environmental conditions?
- What are the best ways to address the chronic issue of beaver related floods of the Parks’ infrastructure?
- Are Weed Prevention Areas the effective part of the solutions to protecting biodiversity in AB Parks?
- What are the best specifications for boundary and cross fencing for AB Parks to address issue with effective wildlife crossings?
- What are the potential impacts of so-called green energy wind farms on parks wildlife and greater ecological communities (e.g. intact native grasslands) surrounding parks?
- How are (Japanese Brome/Timothy/Sweet Clover/Downy Brome/Crested Wheatgrass) controlled in non-grazed native grassland habitats within the Dry Mixed grass natural sub region of Alberta?

Breakout Questions- Session 2b

- Can we model the optimal spatial and temporal configuration of forest harvest with regards to spatial configuration of existing protected areas that is necessary to maintain species and ecological processes within the protected areas?
- Do existing Alberta parks protect biodiversity and ecologically resilient communities, relative to their surrounding landscapes?
- What role do Alberta parks and protected areas play in mitigating the effects of climate change on local, regional and provincial scales?
- What is the appropriate size and distribution of these various management systems (grassland patches) on the landscape to ensure conversation of biodiversity in a regional/provincial context?
- What tools and techniques are effective in the restoration/restoration of fescue grasslands?
- Access management around sensitive areas is a big issue in this province. How should AB Parks work with other GOA ministries, industry and land owners to ensure access is monitored and regulated?
- What is the state of the "ecological health" of the units within Alberta's park system and what are the major factors/stressors responsible for compromising the ecological integrity of the units?
- What are the trail preferences and patterns of use within Alberta Parks backcountry areas?

Breakout Questions- Session 3a
• What is the pre-development / fire control range of ecological conditions for each park?
• Given that parks tend to be small, but often ecologically important, (how) does more of a landscape approach (e.g., with neighbours) to management make sense? Where and how?
• What is the relative role of natural disturbance such as wildfire in each park? Parkland, grassland-forest interface, etc.).
• Is it desirable or possible to re-introduce fire as a restoration tool?
• What are the key biophysical resources for each park and region that contribute to its designation, distinctiveness, and representativeness? Key indicators?
• Develop/test the effective Fire-smarting methods for AB Parks sites throughout the province.
• What is the historical role of fire in the ecology of grassland systems and what is the response of grassland ecosystems to various types of fire?
• Do current land management practices in parks positively or negatively influence the retention of wetlands and other water sources on the landscape?

Breakout Questions- Session 3b

• What are the gaps in the current protected areas system with respect to maintaining both representation and ecological connectivity in Alberta?
• What are the primary ecological good and services produced within Alberta Parks and how might these be quantified?
• What is the overall contribution of Alberta Parks to protecting the biodiversity of the province?
• To what extent does the amenity value of parks and the landscape protection certainty they provide factor into the decisions of businesses or individuals to locate in Alberta or to remain in Alberta? This is a critical question in building the economic case for park protection in a Province that sees itself as having an economy dependent on natural resource extraction (or, if the results are negative, of course, the results might point towards the need for more multiple-use management areas)
• To what extent is the (a) regional and (b) provincial population's needs for outdoor recreational opportunities and natural green spaces being met by each region's existing family of provincial parks and other conservation and/or outdoor recreational lands?
• What size of protected areas is required to allow sustainable populations of the largest ranging species in Alberta?
• What degree of human use can be allowed in parks before negative impacts on wildlife can be observed?
• Should parks utilize a triad approach whereby areas directly around parks have a different type of zoning than the industrial land-base (i.e. more intense best management within 50 km of a park, no hunting, etc.).

Breakout Questions- Session 4a
• What are the motivations, needs and underlying values of park users who choose to use the park in ways contrary to management intent (e.g.: building illegal trails, trespassing into closed areas, etc.)?
• What are the effects of privatization of Park Facility Operations on outlying communities?
• Will parks use a park classification system that is broad enough to in fact consider the diverse landscapes and biodiversity across Alberta, and compatible activities within these landscapes that would substantially advance the development or state of public policies, practices and management strategies for the development, sustainability, capacity and resilience of provincial parks in Alberta?
• Does increasing partnerships ensure more effective establishment and management of protected areas?
• What has been the relationship between municipal growth and needs in Alberta, and the planning and policies around urban hinterland provincial parks in the 1950s through 1980s?
• How have the service and infrastructure demands of changing modes of transportation, particular from automobiles to ATVs, from the 1950s onward affected changes in parks policies and management questions.
• As parks have been set aside in Alberta, what have been the economic relationships between them and municipalities and urban centres nearby in terms of services, contracted construction and maintenance work, and out-of-park residency of parks employees and workers? Such a question can be approached in light of treasury records and parks accounts, particularly, Acc. 86.116, Parks Records, Contracts, Services files in the 1960s-1970s.

**Breakout Questions- Session 4b**

• How has the seasonality of Alberta's provincial parks been an historical policy issue, and in what ways have the incorporation of design, facility and changing recreation and use designations within parks policies allowed for more intensive and multi-seasonal park visits over time?
• How has the expanded number of provincial parks, and the concurrent development of urban parks, informed land use policies, provincial and municipal government cooperation and raised the need for shared land use, collateral expropriation and agreements between various levels of government in Alberta since the 1950s?
• Historically, how did developing understanding of wilderness and recreational parks dividing generally between federal and provincial park mandates in the 1950s shape decision making in policies in Alberta's multi-use recreational areas to the 1970s?
• Beyond policy innovations and management directives, how has popular culture in provincial parks changed between the 1950s to the 1980s, and, as reported in parks warden papers, can quantifiable incidents of behaviour "deviancy," criminal activity and illegal recreation, such as poaching, better inform directions in parks policies, public education and social programs?
• What opportunities are there for AB Parks to "integrate" into, partner with and support the Public Health agenda and provide tangible benefits that will improve and enrich the quality of life for Albertans? (also reduce health care costs)

• HERITAGE RANGELANDS (HR): How can HRs be more effectively managed to support and celebrate their unique marriage of Conservation, Culture (i.e. ranching/rural heritage), and Economy (a premium beef product based on human health benefits (grass fed), grassland ecology friendly, and local).

• In terms of management effectiveness, what model of service delivery works best in providing (a) conservation programs, (b) visitor services programs, (c) general operations, etc. What elements of private sector (e.g., concession) vs. public sector delivery systems contribute to the successful execution (management effectiveness) of park planning, management and maintenance?

• How do Albertans (and other visitors) make choices about visiting parks and other natural areas in Alberta (preferences; awareness; satisfaction; use history, etc.)? How do Albertans make a decision to visit one park versus another? How do Albertan’s make a decision to visit an Alberta park versus other recreational opportunities [i.e., natural areas with minimal to no protection (Crown land), shopping malls, museums, etc.]