



FRIENDS^{OF}
KANANASKIS COUNTRY

If You Admire the View, You Are a Friend Of Kananaskis



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Program Coordinator's Report

by Nancy Ouimet

Our on-the-ground Trail Stewardship program goes into hibernation over the winter, but we're keeping busy with planning for next season and have been exploring ways to broaden our trail stewardship role with new opportunities for community engagement that supports Alberta Parks and Kananaskis County.

We have done meaningful work over the years, engaging Kananaskis surrounding communities in the stewardship of Kananaskis trails thus providing community and public access to safe and well maintained trails. And our membership continues to grow, indicating there is public interest and support for our programs.

Through a series of meetings with Parks managers, the following areas have been identified as potential opportunities and needs:

- Crowd sourcing for trail reporting
- Citizen science data collection (trail inventoring, auditing & monitoring)
- Dedication inventoring and maintenance of memorial and other benches
- Story telling/sharing

The essence of this exploration is to build on our success and continue to giving people unique ways to give back to their trails and build a sense of ownership and connection to the landscape.

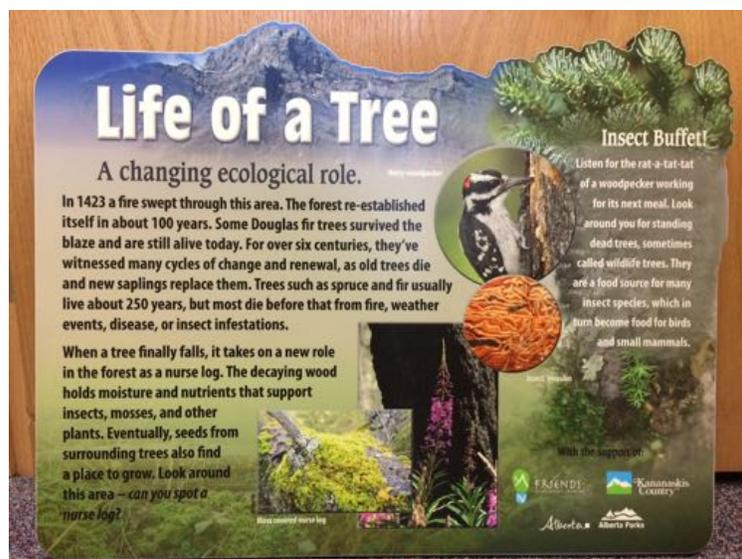
We can't promise that the above new initiatives will be developed in 2017, and some might never come to fruition, but we are committed to ensuring our trail stewardship program achieves its full potential and offers community engagement opportunities; with an increased variety of ways members can get involved, and cultivation of trail culture through a sense of ownership and connection to the landscape.

Rawson Lake Interpretive Signs

We continue to assist Parks with updating all interpretive trail signs in K-Country. New signs were installed on Heart Creek Trail in 2016. Next to be installed are the Rawson Lake Signs. This is a new trail to be included as a designated 'interpretive trail'.

Here's a sneak peak of one of the six new signs which will be installed in the spring as soon as the snow melts and ground thaws.

New signs for Beaver Flats and Elbow Falls are currently being designed.



Which Trails Could Use Some TLC?

Alberta Parks will start shortlisting their 2017 trail work plan in the coming months and have asked for our input on which trails could use maintenance attention. We all know that the 2013 Flood required extensive trail repairing and rebuilding, which resulted in less attention devoted to the non-affected trails.

Now that Alberta Parks has completed most of the flood recovery work, they're ready to work on the many other trails that require maintenance.

If you know of trails you think need maintenance, please email us your suggestions to nancy@kananaskis.org and we'll pass it along to Parks. Our long term plan is to develop an on-line form or possibly an app to do that reporting, but for now an e-mail works just fine. Thanks!



Kananaskis Country Speaker Series

Our Speaker Series is in full swing. We had our first speaker, Barry Blanchard, present on January 12th. Barry shared how he learned to climb in Kananaskis and how that



experience led him to bigger adventures in the valley and, eventually around the world. The audience got a good fill of thrill!

We have two great presentations coming up:

[Donna Schley - February 28, 7:00pm](#)

University of Calgary, [Science Theatres, ST 135](#) - 527 Campus Place NW

Kananaskis Conservation Officers - Guardians of Alberta Parks

Conservation Officers within Kananaskis Country perform unique and varied job functions. Join officer Donna Schley for a look into her role and responsibilities. Conservation Officers are often perceived as the 'back bone' of the park. Whether they are called upon to assist Public Safety staff during search and mountain rescue missions, to perform bear aversion near park campgrounds and facilities, or to investigate a wildlife poaching or other offence, Conservation Officers are the guardians of Alberta Parks. Donna will take a look at the evolution of Kananaskis Country Conservation Officers and the skills and certifications necessary to achieve their goals.



[Lesley Peterson - March 23, 7:00pm](#)

University of Calgary, [Earth Sciences, ES 162](#) - 844 Campus Place NW

Whirling Disease

Lesley Peterson is Trout Unlimited Canada's Alberta Biologist, based in Calgary. She is a member of the provincial Whirling Disease Committee which was established in late summer 2016 in response to the first detection of Whirling Disease in Canada that happened in Johnson Lake in Banff National Park. Whirling disease, which affects salmonid such as trout and whitefish, was confirmed in Banff in August 2016 and has since been confirmed at dozens of sites along the Bow River and in some commercial aquaculture facilities.



Lesley's presentation will include a background on whirling disease including the life cycle of the parasite that causes it, the history and distribution of the disease and how it can affect fish. She will also provide an update on the situation in Alberta and what we can all do to prevent the spread of whirling disease and other aquatic invasive species.

All presentations are at the University of Calgary, and all are General Admission with a \$5 Suggested Donation. There are no Pre-Show Ticket sales.

Help Wanted - We're Hiring

Are you as passionate about Kananaskis Country as we are? The Friends of Kananaskis Country are currently looking for a 6 month part-time **Program and Events Assistant** based in Canmore, AB.

The [job posting](#) will go live on our website this week. Ideal candidates should submit their resume and cover letter to nancy@kananaskis.org by **Friday, February 24, 2017**, indicating the position title.

Please share this great opportunity to join our team with your networks, thanks!

**WE'RE
HIRING!**

New Supporter - FortisAlberta

We are delighted to partner with [FortisAlberta](#) to help build our volunteer based Trail Stewardship program. The \$15,000 donation will primarily be used to purchase equipment/tool to outfit trail crews.

FortisAlberta recently completed work on an extensive project in the Canmore area and looked for an opportunity to give back to the community in a meaningful way that would benefit residents.

FortisAlberta's community investment program is based on the guiding principle that their organization's success depends on the well-being of the communities in which they operate, and where their employees live and work. Their vision is to empower communities by contributing to organizations that offer programs and services aligned with FortisAlberta's business focuses: safety, education, the environment and wellness.

We are honoured to receive this generous grant.





January cougar trudging through the snow. Photo courtesy Alberta Environment & Parks

News from the Board -- Where to from here?

By Derek Ryder, Chair

2016-2017 marks the Friends 20th Anniversary as an organization. I'd like to say the path of the organization over our 20 years has always been "onwards and upwards", but that would be far from the truth.

Like all organizations, the Friends has had its ups and downs. Conversations I have had over the past year with former Chairs and other past Board members made it clear that while the Friends has always been doing great "stuff," some time periods have just been better than others, and some windows were notably worse.

The Friends now is back in a position that is as strong or stronger than it was in the early- and mid-2000's. That is in large part due to the contributions of the current and past Board members, who have been willing to roll up their sleeves and become what is referred to as an "Administrative" or managing Board, as opposed to the more "Policy" style Board that the Friends had for it's first 15 years.



The Board had to do this step back because there were a few years (that happened a few years ago) where the cycle for the organization was most definitely not on the upswing. In fact, there were a few years when there was questions as to whether the organization would survive. Membership was down below 200 people, the list of accomplishments could be counted on one hand, and the finances were in a mess.

The work of the Board under those circumstances is different than when the world is good. We are long out of the woods (figuratively speaking) now, with a membership closing in on 2,000 people, our ability to deliver substantive, impactful accomplishments appear limited by staff time more than anything else, and while by no means "rich", our financial position is stable.

So your Board has started to look at whether the "Administrative" style Board structure we put in place to recover the organization from its problems remains appropriate, or if in fact we can go back to being the Policy Board that was in place for the first 15 years of our history. We believe the time could be right to once again step back, seeing if the policies, procedures, controls and other business management practices we have adopted will ensure the strength we have built will "stick".

Stay tuned to see how things play out.

Proposed changes to campground in K-Country

At this moment, there are two proposals out for public comment to change campgrounds in K-Country.

The first proposes the closure of the Three Sisters Campground in Dead Man's Flats. Ostensibly because of flood risk, but in great part to try to improve wildlife corridor linkages, the plan would be to turn the campground into a Day Use Area, primarily to access the boat launch ramp (*float fishermen as seen from the campground pictured at right*). The public comment period was extended by 30 days, and now closes February 13, 2017. There will be an open house on the proposals at Elevation Place in Canmore on Feb 1 from 5-9 PM. Read more about the proposal [here](#).



The second involves numerous changes to campgrounds in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, including:

- Adding 34 RV sites to Boulton Creek;
- Making a parking lot at Boulton Creek an overflow campground, similar to what is

done at Pocaterra;

- Upgrading of the Mt. Sarrail walk-in tenting campground;
- Closure of 12 lakeside campsites at Lower Lake for wildlife habitat reasons.

The public comment window for this proposal is open until Feb 7. Read more about this proposal [here](#).

While both of these proposals have been in the public domain for a while, we only heard about the Public Comment window recently. To stay up to date on this kind of news, follow us on Facebook where we are able to post info more frequently than this monthly newsletter.

As always, it is worth mentioning that the Friends is not an advocacy organization. As a Society, we have no comment on any of the proposals, but we do encourage our membership to participate in the public processes.



When is a trail NOT a trail?

by Derek Ryder, Director of Communications

We have written a little about this in the past, but it's a topic that comes up all the time, so is worthy of further insight and understanding – because not all paths in the forest are created equal.

A “**trail**” is, by Alberta Parks’ definition, officially recognized. It is maintained by Parks (sometimes with our help), and was built by Alberta Environment and Parks (*or someone else, with Parks’ specific permission or oversight*) to Parks’ standards. Trails that were damaged by the 2013 flooding were rebuilt, re-aligned to prevent future flooding, and had debris moved off them. Trails normally have designated parking lots for them



(Quaite is a notable exception), often have washrooms, are signposted with route maps (*as shown in the photo*) at least at the trailhead and along the way at various trail junctions. They are inspected annually by Parks staff, visited regularly by Conservation Officers, and even occasionally get Parks Interpreter Staff on them to help trail users learn about the trail’s environment. Some even have detailed interpretive signage on them (and these are called the Interpretive Trail network). Trails have designated and approved uses: hiking and/or biking and/or horseback riding and/or skiing and/or snowshoeing. Trails are built and maintained with the approved use in mind.

According to Alberta Parks, anything not described above is a “**Route**” or, occasionally, “**Rogue Trail**”.

Lots of routes exist. Some very popular walks in K-Country (like Sparrowhawk Tarns, Tent Ridge or Pocaterra Ridge) are routes. But routes are really unlike trails, despite both being paths in the woods. Routes:

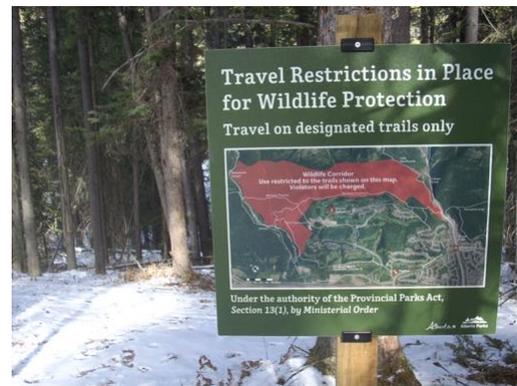
- Were almost never built by Parks. Many are access or descent routes to mountain climbs, or started as game trails but got beaten down with thousands of footsteps over a few generations.
- Are not maintained. By anyone, including us. And short of removing physical hazards to life and limb (and even that’s a stretch), any action you take to “improve” (or even build) a route is actually against the Parks Act, including cutting down or topping trees, brushing out shrubs, or even cutting large logs that have fallen across the trail.
- Are not signed. Most of the Park Management Plans specifically say only official trails (*redundant, because a “trail” is, by definition, official*) are signed. Signs erected by the public are often as not removed by Parks staff.
- Have no facilities, like washrooms or parking lots or picnic tables.



About the only thing Routes share in common with Trails is both get visits from Conservation Officers (*who really, truly, go everywhere*). Routes that were damaged by the floods of 2013 were left as is. Some popular but damaged routes were relocated by the footsteps of thousands who continued to go there anyway despite any flood damage; a good example is access to

Running Rain Lake, a popular fishing lake with no official trail leading to it. Industrious fishermen just figured out a way around the flood damage, adapted fallen trees to use as "interesting" bridges (*that would make Parks' staff shudder; pictured above left*) and a new route was born. Some routes (like Ha Ling) are occasionally adopted by Parks and, through the process noted below, become trails.

A “**Rogue Trail**” is a Parks term for a route that doesn’t belong. As I have noted before, the Parks Act permits you to walk on foot anywhere you want except where you are specifically prohibited from doing so. Permanent, seasonal and temporary closures are put in place from time to time, and you can’t be in the closed space, much less have a trail there. In addition, Park Management Plans designate some areas in K-Country as virtual “no go” zones, where trail development is actively discouraged. So even though you can walk (almost) anywhere you want, in some spaces even “leaving only footprints” is doing too much damage. Parks therefore reclaims “Rogue” trails, or at the very least, makes them difficult to find or follow. The pretty fall photo at the top of this article is of an old exploration road in a closed, designated wildlife corridor -- which, despite being in a permanently closed area, still sees substantial human use.



All of the above is true on Park land, but also true on non-Park land, such as in the various Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs) in K-Country. I'm not personally aware of any Rogue Trails in the PLUZ spaces, but it wouldn't surprise me that some exist. Our friends who spend a bunch of time on trail development in the Bragg Creek area in the PLUZ (including Moose Mountain Bike Trail Society, Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association, and others) all have spent a LOT of time developing and gaining approval for management plans for the spaces they play in, in partnerships with Alberta Environment and Parks and others. Those approved plans result in official designated trails, in some cases with agreements so the maintenance load is shared with Parks.

The process by which a trail becomes official -- whether through adoption of a route like Ha Ling, or through green field creation, like the Highline or the High Rockies Trail -- is thorough and detailed, and involves at least 2 committee reviews. The first is the

Kananaskis Trails Advisory Group, or K-TAG. This is a committee chaired by Environment and Parks and made up of dozens of diverse user groups, representing biking, hiking, snowshoeing, skiing, horseback riding, hunting and other organizations and users. The Friends is a member of K-TAG, as is guidebook author (and Friends Advisory Committee member) Gillean Daffern. K-TAG meets a few times a year and often makes recommendations and suggestions to Parks regarding trail development. For instance, a few years ago, K-TAG recommended that 3 of the routes in the Canmore area (Ha Ling, Lady Mac and Grotto) become official and get much needed maintenance.

K-TAG's recommendation is taken to the **Kananaskis Trails Committee** ("KTC"). KTC is made up of various departments of Government including Parks, plus Heritage and others. Former Friends Board Member Duane Fizer currently chairs the KTC. The Friends, by way of our cooperating agreement, sit on KTC, and we are the only non-Government body to do so. KTC stewards trail proposals through the necessary planning and approval processes, ecological and heritage reviews, safety and engineering analyses and budgeting reviews, to enable work to be done.

Once KTC has approved a trail's plan, the trail is then "handed over" to Parks operation staff, who then start the processes of maintenance and/or construction. For instance, the popular but previously unofficial Ha Ling route (*pictured at right*) became official in 2015, and in 2017, Parks staff will commence work on re-routing and upgrading the trail to fix some obvious issues, and make the trail safer and more sustainable.



There are some 1,200 km of official trails in K-Country, and probably another 2,000 km of routes (though no one other than Gillean Daffern really knows how many). Only occasionally will you find the Friends talking about routes. When we use the word "trail" we're using it in the context of Alberta Parks definition. And we will probably never have volunteer projects for you on anything but trails. We work with Parks, and since Parks won't work on routes, neither will we.



The Critters of K-Country: Boreal Chickadee

18th in a series by Derek Ryder, Director of Communications

Everyone is familiar with chickadees; various types live all over the province. But with all the Black Capped Chickadees around (and eating out of your hand), I'm betting that less than 1% of your chickadee sightings are of the Boreal Chickadee.

Boreals are readily distinguished from the fairly abundant Mountain Chickadee, but share some visual similarity to the Black Cap in that they have a solid dark crown and solid throat patch. But Boreals are a rusty brown when compared to the Black Capped's steely gray back and sides. And while the Black Capped is a fairly bright white on the chest, the Boreals are much more muted.

Boreals aren't as adapted to people as much as Black Caps. Rather than being serious city dwellers, they are mostly denizens of the boreal forest, so look for them not in open meadows or aspen stands but in dense spruce and pine forests, and the denser the better. Rumour has it that they mostly eat in the trees and stay off the ground, but the ones near my house are



constantly foraging on the ground while the Black Caps and Mountains are flitting in the trees around them. Maybe mine are weird, but I will suggest they are well camouflaged for ground foraging as the photo shows one of the three being nearly invisible.



Chickadees are energy-burning machines, with a metabolic rate up near that of hummingbirds. They must feed daily to survive, and Boreals build food caches near their nests to help with that. They don't migrate, though there can be some north-south movement within their range. Since it occasionally snows heavily or gets very cold in the forest in the winter – making feeding difficult or

nearly impossible – unlike other chickadees, Boreals have the unique ability to put themselves into a state of torpor, shutting themselves down to minimal life support levels. In torpor, they can ride out ugly weather. They can sit like this for up to a week before waking themselves up.

Boreals are not as vocal as other chickadees, especially during June's nesting season, when they rarely make noise at all. They often mate for life, and like other chickadees, hang out in flocks of 5-25 birds that may even include other kinds of chickadees. They nest in tree cavities, and lay 5-8 eggs a year.



Your Donations are Always Appreciated and Needed

We are pleased to recognize the contributions of the [Calgary Foundation](#), [FortisAlberta](#),

[TransAlta](#), [Banff Canmore Community Foundation](#), [Patagonia Elements](#), [Husky Energy](#), and the many individual donors and clubs & organizations who support our work.

There are many ways to express your gratitude for Kananaskis Country and we are always grateful for contributions that help us maintain our programs, operations and restore flood damaged trails. Friends of Kananaskis Country is a registered charity in good standing and we provide charitable receipts for donations over \$25.00. You can reach us directly by mail at the address below, through the [donations link on our website](#), through [ATB Cares](#), or [CanadaHelps](#). Thank you for your support!

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