

Just when you think its spring... it's winter



FRIENDS^{OF}
KANANASKIS COUNTRY

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



In this month's newsletter...

- Executive Director's Report
 - New Chester Sawmill Winter Trails Approved
 - Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities: Highway Clean Up, Visitation Monitoring
 - Trails Fest -- June 11
 - Videographer Call Out
- News from the Board -- Welcome to our new Executive Director
- In other news: The Bears are Out
- Signs of Spring: Elk gnaws

- Critters of K-Country -- Red-breasted Nuthatch

Executive Director's Report

by Nancy Ouimet

Good news! You can look forward to snowshoeing, skiing and winter (fat) biking on new trails at the Chester Sawmill trail system next winter. The Friends of Kananaskis, in partnership with the Chester Sawmill committee, and Alberta Parks worked on developing a [CHESTER-SAWMILL WINTER TRAIL ENHANCEMENT PLAN](#) in 2016, presented the plan to the Kananaskis Trail Committee on June 24, 2016 and have received approval for most of the recommendations put forward to Alberta Parks.

We're going to skip ahead to the recommendations put forward and approved, however, you can read the entire Trail Enhancement Plan which includes a project overview and a series of maps by clicking on the plan on the right.

Plan's Purpose

The plan's purpose and process was to explore the Chester-Sawmill winter recreational opportunities and experiences that merit consideration while carefully considering the approved park management plan. It set forth recommendations to enhance and expand the winter trail system within the planning area.



Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed by the Chester Sawmill Committee based on field assessment and detailed discussions. All were approved except as noted below. The recommendations correspond with the below map and numbers included in map.

1. Upgrading Existing Trails

1. Widen and remove hazards from the hill portions of the Chester ski/summer trail, upslope of the junction with the “recommended one-way” ski loop segments. This is a safety issue (see Map 5, trail #1).
2. Chester Snowshoe Trail, reroute sections of steep trail grade (see Map 5, trail #2).
3. Designate and upgrade Rummel Lake trail, as per the 2006 PLPP/SVPP Management Plan (*This recommendation was **not** approved. As per KTC decision document, the classification of the Rummel Lake Trail is on hold until the completion of the Trails System Plan, targeted for Summer 2019.*)
4. In the lowest part of drainage of James Walker creek (that portion starting near the highway and leading no higher than the Snowdrift Trail), install permanent stakes with markers to indicate recommended snowshoe trail (see Map 5, #3).
5. Brush the overgrown Mt. Murray view point (see Map 5).



2. New Proposed Trail

Map 5 outlines the proposed new trails. They include:

Trail #4. Part of the former cross country ski system trail. Provides an easy short loop from the Sawmill Parking. Provides good view of the Mt. Murray mountain range, and connects with the High Rockies Trail. Offers more attractive options from the Sawmill parking.

Trail #5. Creates two loops and provides two intermediate loop distances. This trail will offer a unique single track snowshoe experience through the forest.

Trail #6. Creates two loops and provides two intermediate loop distances. This trail also offers good views of the Mt. Murray mountain range.

Trail #7. Former cross country ski system trail, connects with the High Rockies Trail, provides good views and length for moderate loops from both Chester and Sawmill.

Trail #8. Former cross country ski system trail, provide loop up to Mt. Murray viewpoint.

Trail #9. Trail goes through a nice open meadow, provides an easy short loop from the Chester Parking.

3. Shared Use Winter Trails

1. Remove brush and overhanging trees from all trails to provide appropriate tread width. Remove loose rocks, debris and smooth trail surfaces as required.
2. Separate snowshoers and winter bikers from xc-skiers on steep hills by providing an adjacent route option on hills for snowshoe/winter bike to avoid collisions and to provide adequate space.
3. Ensure clear signage is placed at appropriate locations.
4. It is recommended that most trails be shared use for XC skiing, snowshoeing, winter biking and winter walking.
5. Suggested trail designation is outlined in Map 6 (*This is **not yet finalized**; Alberta Parks to work with the Friends on confirmation of designations*).
6. Occasional winter grooming to compact and smooth the snow is desirable, but not required for this plan. The option of grooming/track-setting should be considered if economic and/or climate conditions allow (*This recommendation was **not** approved. Winter grooming is not supported by Alberta Parks at this time*).

4. Separate Winter Trails

1. Remove brush and overhanging trees from all trails to provide appropriate tread width. Remove loose rocks, debris and smooth trail surfaces as required.
2. Ensure clear signage is placed at appropriate locations.

5. Integration with High Rockies Trail

1. Endeavour to use the High Rockies Trail corridor, wherever possible, in order to minimize duplication.
2. Designate the High Rockies Trail west section between the Chester Lake ski trail and Rummel Lake winter trail to be snowshoe and winter bike accessible (see Map 6 in plan).

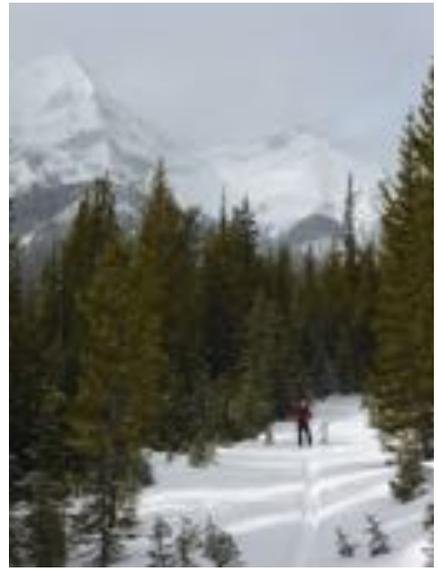
6. Possible Future Trails and Infrastructure

1. The installation of a seasonal winter warming huts at the Sawmill Day Use, provides opportunity to enhance outdoor winter recreation while also encouraging Environmental Education Programs for school groups, and Public Education. A 30' diameter yurt (sq. foot 706), similar to the one in the right picture has an approx. base price of \$10,800. (*This recommendation was **not** approved by Alberta Parks at this time*).
2. To consider the possible reintroduction of cross country ski trail grooming on selected trails. (*This recommendation was **not** approved by Alberta Parks at this time*).

With these new approvals comes a Volunteer Plan! We estimate there will be over 10 volunteer days working on the Chester Sawmill trail system and installing signage this summer and fall. That means these new trails will need your help to get all brushed up before next winter. Most of the work will include brushing overgrown old logging roads and dormant trails that used to be included in the 1990 ski system. We'll keep you posted on when we're ready to start working!

A big thank you to the Chester Sawmill committee; Alf Skrastins, Don Cockerton, Maurice

Gaucher, Bob Truman, David Mills, Jennell Rempel, Derek Ryder and Alberta Parks – James Cieslak, for their time and energy in creating the recommendations and trail enhancement plan.



Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

Highway 40 Cleanup

Join us for our annual Highway 40 cleanup, from Highway South to Galatea Day Use Parking (32km). The clean-up is sponsored by Alberta Transportation. This event is great for families who can walk 3km comfortably, we leave it to your discretion whether your child is old enough to join. No pets allowed.

Date: Saturday, May 6

Meeting time: 9:00am (9:00am – 3:00pm)

Meeting location: [Stoney Nakoda Casino Parking](#)



Trans Canada Hwy (Hwy 1) to the junction with Kananaskis Hwy 40. Turn south on Hwy 40, the entrance to the casino parking lot is approximately 100 meters from the junction.

What to expect: Volunteers will work in pairs picking up debris the size of a chocolate bar wrapper or larger and filling garbage bags. You will clean approximately 3 kilometres of road edge, or more, depending how fast your group moves.

SIGN UP: If you are signing up your family (parents and children), one adult should sign up using our sign up system, and email Nancy (nancy@kananaskis.org) the names of the other family members, including children's age. All others are required to sign up in the volunteer system.

Note: Should Alberta Transportation cancel this event due to weather, it will be rescheduled Sat, May 13.

[SIGN UP HERE](#)

Visitation Monitoring

Here's something new. Alberta Parks is currently participating in a Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) assessment, which is being piloted in Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park. PAME is an assessment of how well a protected area is being managed to meet the conservation and recreation goals defined in the area management plan. Through the PAME assessment of Bow Valley Wildland and Peter Lougheed Provincial Parks and through conversations with Alberta Parks staff, it is clear that there is a lack of social science data essential to understanding the potential impacts of recreation on park ecology and if recreation-based management objectives are being met. Understanding where people are recreating, what kinds of recreational activities they are pursuing, and where they have come from are essential components of this process. Increasing knowledge about the number of users, their type of use, and basic demographics can assist in PAME assessments, site planning, and developing robust social science research questions for future investigation, and future management planning initiatives.

We have an opportunity to help Alberta Parks address the lack of social science data.

How it works: The Friends volunteers will be stationed at randomly selected trailheads for a portion of the afternoon to ask trail users to complete the survey onsite. A stratified random sampling approach will be used to create the sampling schedule defining which trailheads will be staffed on which days. Trailheads, days of the week, and time of day will be randomly selected. Volunteers will be stationed at trailheads two days per week (one weekday and one weekend day) during the afternoon. The start time will be randomly selected for between noon and 2:00 pm; volunteers will be at the trailhead for four hours. This exact sampling schedule will be created once the list of trails with a remote camera or trail counter has been finalized and the Friends has determined volunteer capacity for this project from mid-June to September, 2017. Volunteers will approach trail users at the end of their recreational experience and invite them to participate in the survey, which will be filled out on tablets and take less than 5 minutes to complete. It's a series of quick questions that could make a big difference for Alberta Parks.



The Survey: The survey will gather baseline demographic information about trail users in Kananaskis. Questions will be designed to complement, and not duplicate, data generated from the remote cameras and trail counters. The survey objectives are:

- To define what kinds of recreational activities trail users engage in while in Kananaskis
- To define group size and the number of vehicles belonging to each party
- To define basic demographics of the Kananaskis trail user (e.g., age, gender, city of residence).

Volunteers: We are recruiting volunteers to help with this project. Volunteers will be trained on

how to conduct the surveys and gather information. A one-hour training session will be offered on June 11 at 9:30am at the Canmore Nordic Centre (*allowing participant to then enjoy Trails Fest!!*).

Interested in helping Alberta Parks meet their conservation and recreation goals without digging dirt? Here's a great opportunity to get involved.

[SIGN UP HERE](#)

Trails Fest



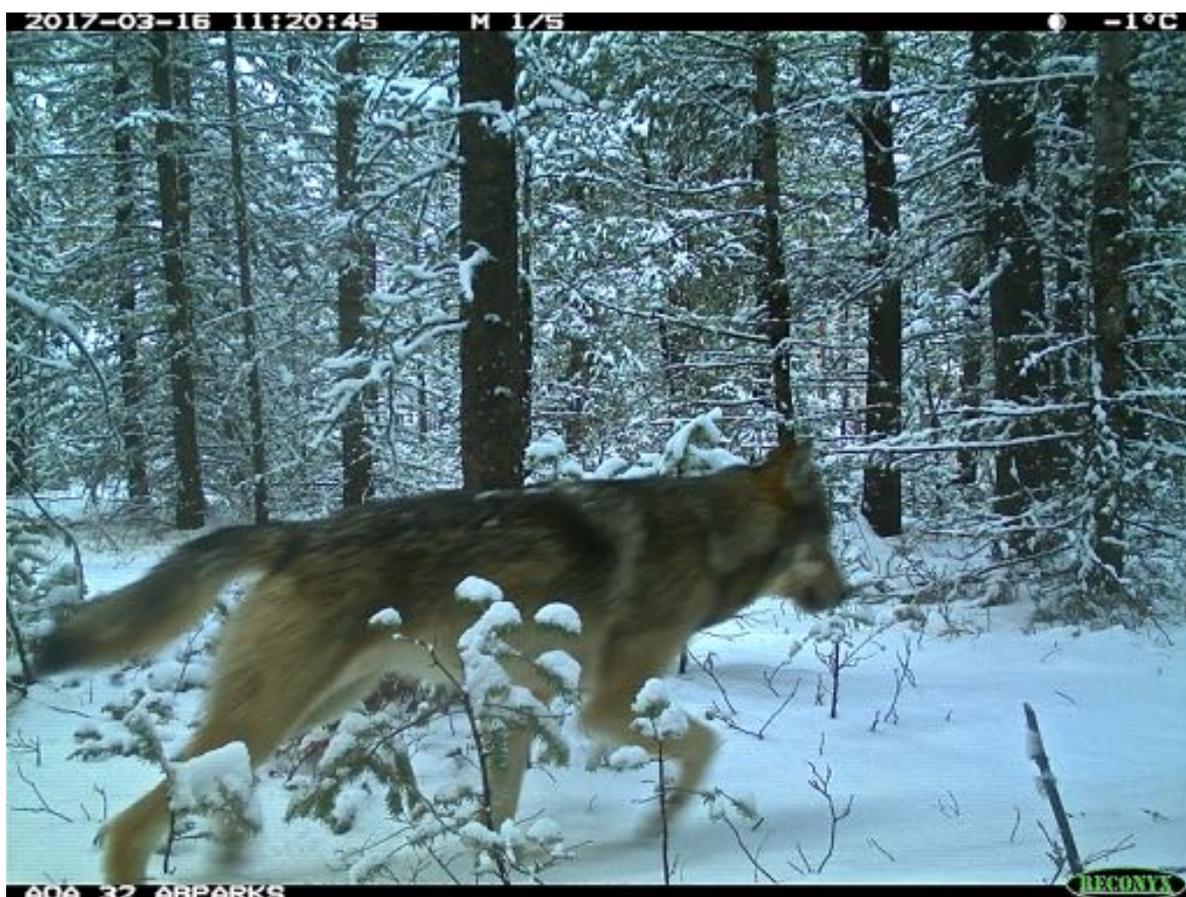
On June 11th, the Friends of Kananaskis Country will host the 3rd annual **TRAILS FEST** at the Canmore Nordic Centre and we want you to join us! A celebration of Kananaskis trails, people, and culture - the event will consist of multiple activities that showcase the many ways trails are used.

- Connect with local hiking, biking, skiing and outdoor clubs & organizations showcasing their activities and how you can get involved.
- Trail related presentations.
- Afternoon guided trail activity will include hiking, biking, trail running, bear spray demonstration and kid activities.

Stay tuned for more exciting details about the event coming soon.

Videographer Call Out

Like making short videos? Well we have a great little project for you! We'd like to invite anyone interested in making a video that demonstrates the Friends and our programs to contact us (nancy@kananaskis.org). This is a great opportunity to do something you like and get volunteer brownie points!



A wolf out for a walk in the snow. Photo courtesy Alberta Environment & Parks

News from the Board -- Welcome to our Executive Director

By Derek Ryder, Chair

It is with an enormous amount of pleasure that I announce (to those who have not yet heard) that Nancy Ouimet has accepted the position of **Executive Director of the Society** effective April 1, 2017. Nancy joined us in July 2014, and since that time, has had a substantial positive impact on our whole organization. Among her other accomplishments, she:

- Introduced Trails Fest, our annual season kick-off celebrating trail culture in Kananaskis

and elsewhere;

- Created the concept and advanced the Canmore Trail Alliance;
- Spearheaded the Chester-Sawmill trail revitalization project in partnership with Alberta Parks that just passed a major milestone;
- Advanced our interpretive trail revitalization project, also in partnership with Alberta Parks



She has had significant impact on our overall trails program, helped advance the stability of our organization from a financial perspective, built outstanding relationships with Alberta Parks, and done many, many tasks behind the scenes that you will never see but the Board recognized as fundamentally improving how we were doing our business.

And so, with her appointment, the Board has completed the re-organizational parts of the Board's transformation that I have written about for the last few months. We are now a "Policy Board with Subcommittees," having formally cut back on some Board work (that Nancy was mostly doing anyway) and "officially" moved it to the Executive Director role.

Nancy's appointment is coincident with the end of our fiscal year, which happens March 31 each year. We will be pulling together the story of our year into our Annual Report, which will be released prior to our Annual General Meeting that will be held on June 24th, 2017 at the Canmore Nordic Centre. Previous Annual Reports are all available on our website. Our AGM is a unique meeting, with an agenda specified in our bylaws and required under The Societies Act, and is open to all of our members. Unsurprisingly, not many of you attend (it's not terribly interesting) but it is an opportunity for you to see the Board conduct some formal business, ask questions about our Society and, if you are so inclined, stand up to join the Board itself. You are welcome to attend, and when there, join us in congratulating Nancy for her new role as Executive Director.

The Bears Are Out

Bear warnings have already been put out by Alberta Parks in the Rummell Lake area and, more recently, near the Fortress Junction. While it's always a good idea to carry your bear spray all year round, if you're not a winter bear spray person, time to get it out. Now's also a great time to check the expiry date, too, and pick up a new can if yours is no longer good. Expired bear spray should be treated like hazardous waste, and can be "traded in" at some stores for discounts on a new can.



Signs of Spring: Elk Gnaws

by Derek Ryder, Director of Communications

As I type this, 30 cm of snow just fell in the mountains of K-Country, meaning it doesn't really feel like spring. But spring offers more than just budding out bushes and prairie crocuses. On your first rides or hikes in the woods, you'll see another sign of spring: aspen trees that have been chewed by elk over the winter.



Elk gnawed trees are quite distinctive; close up looks will show you teeth marks, and all will be from a little lower than your knees to as high as you can reach with your hand in the air -- often (as in the photo to the left) at exactly the same height. A couple of different animals eat aspen bark, but they leave different signs. Elk chews that are low are often "expanded" at the edges by mice over the winter, so careful examination of low chew marks might show those little tiny nibbles and will tell you how deep the snow got, as the mice sit on the snow to chew.

Porcupines eat aspen bark as well, but much, much higher up a tree than elk can reach. Porkies are "lazy" (more like energy efficient) and good tree climbers, so once they find an aspen tree grove they like, they will stay in it and eat the bark all the way up to near the top of the tree on multiple trees clustered together.

Why do elk and others eat aspen bark? It turns out that the slight green tinge of the aspen in winter is the chlorophyll contained in the inner bark. While the main diet of elk in the winters is grass, aspen bark is nutritionally for them about the equivalent of grass hay, though harder to get at. Generally, elk go after the bark of younger trees about 3"-8" in diameter as it's easier to chew than bigger trees. In addition to being nutritious, soft, moist, and readily digestible, that inner bark is high in nitrogen, too, like the lodgepole pine needles they also eat. The bacteria in their gut require lots of nitrogen to break down the cellulose in the grasses they normally eat, so aspen bark and pine needles are almost essential in their diet.



Elk will occasionally tear the outer bark off willows or pines as well (as seen in the photo to the left), but more often than not, you're not seeing damage from elk eating, but places where they are rubbing their antlers or just leaving their scent.

Elk may scrape chunks off the outer bark, but rarely "girdle" a tree, cutting 360° around it. Doing so would kill the tree. Occasionally, mice extend elk chews down low to a girdle, but generally the tree survives an elk's nibbling just fine, though the tree is left with black scars as the chew scrapes heal. Aspen groves that see a lot of elk traffic in the winter have whole sections of forest with no branches up to about 7' off the ground (they eat the branch tips off) and have black bark up that high as well. The best example of this I have ever seen is not in K-Country but on Banff's old airport grounds, though the aspen meadows by Highway 40 near Kananaskis Village and Boundary Ranch do show this.

My observation, too, is that oftentimes only the south or west facing bark is chewed; I assume the sunny side is richer in chlorophyll and warmer in the winter, so easier for them to nibble. I often times walk south through an aspen grove and see no chews until I turn around and look north.





The Critters of K-Country: Red-Breasted Nuthatch

21st in a series by Derek Ryder, Director of Communications

One of my favourite birds in K-Country is the Red Breasted Nuthatch. I have wanted to write about them for some time, but as subjects of photography, they're a pain. Like a few birds, they do not hold still for so much as a second. Even though I see them all the time, it has taken years for me to get good photos of them. I was fortunate enough in mid-April to find a pair setting up a home in a cavity in a tree, which is how they nest. Typically, it's in an old woodpecker hole, like the one in the photo above, but they also make their own nests in rotten trees. They rim the entrance of their nest hole with conifer resin, protecting the nest from insects and such. They lay 5-6 eggs, which hatch in about 12 days, and the babies fledge ~20 days later.





Nuthatches are non-migratory, though they have been known to move north and south through their range. Accordingly, you can see them all year round, walking headfirst down tree trunks (their favourites are Lodgepole pines and Douglas Firs, of which there are a lot in K-Country). That “head first” thing is all about gaining seeds and insects out of tree bark that are missed by birds who move up a tree head first, like woodpeckers and the Brown Creeper.

Their call is a distinctive “yank-yank-yank” that sounds like an overly fast and too quiet car alarm. I often hear nuthatches before I ever see them, and sometimes I only ever hear them, as the tiny birds invisibly flit around up high.

Nuthatches are often gregarious, and hang out with chickadees and other forest birds like warblers and redpolls. They rarely sit still, though, and spend much more time on the tree trunks than on the limbs. They have cousins, the White Breasted nuthatch, that are much less frequently seen in K-Country, are slightly larger, and are white on the chest instead of red, and prefer leafy trees – but when I get some more photos of them, I’ll write about them!





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!

Friends of Kananaskis Country
201-800 Railway Avenue
Canmore, AB T1W 1P1
403-678-5593

[follow on Twitter](#) | [like on Facebook](#) | [forward to a friend](#)

Copyright © 2017 Friends of Kananaskis Country, All rights reserved.



[unsubscribe from this list](#) | [update subscription preferences](#)