

Managing recreation on public land: How does Alberta compare?

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Have you ever wondered if recreational use of public land is managed differently, and perhaps better, in places other than Alberta? Do you believe that the law is a factor in such differences?

Recreational use of public land promises the coveted “triple bottom line” of social, economic and environmental outcomes. However, the negative impacts of recreation are diverse and potentially profound. In many western jurisdictions, the impacts of outdoor recreation and related tourism are beginning to surpass those of the traditional natural resource industries. The challenge in responding has further increased with the growth in motorized recreation.

Over the past decade there have been numerous indicators that the challenge of managing recreation on public lands in Alberta is aggravated by our legal framework. New planning and regulatory tools have become available, yet the issues continue to escalate. It is time to revisit the potential need for reforms by taking a closer look at the law in other jurisdictions.

Our review compares the legal framework for managing recreation in Alberta to other Canadian provinces and American states facing similar challenges. Its findings can help improve recreation management in Alberta by identifying the most optimal features to be imported while deliberately avoiding the least optimal ones. This review should be in hand as land use moves back up the political agenda.

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