

The Economic Importance of Recreational River Use to the City of Calgary

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Purpose:

The Calgary River Users Alliance has been in discussions with a number of Calgary's Councillors and the city administration to improve river access to the general public. As the city grows there is increased pressure on the city's infrastructure and budgets to meet all public expectations. CRUA has proposed that a strategic plan is needed to address river access and use. As part of this, CRUA has been asked to present the economic importance of recreational river use to the City of Calgary as a platform for discussion. This document details the contribution of fishing and paddle sports to Calgary's business sector. It is hoped that City Council will be receptive to the importance of recreation river use to the local economy.

Background:

The Calgary River Users' Alliance (CRUA) was formed in January 2016 to improve recreational, non-motorized boating access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers in Calgary. It will also address other needs and concerns that are common to recreational river users. The CRUA consists of representatives of recreation and conservation groups and businesses in the city, including canoeing, kayaking, rafting, paddle boarding, river surfing and fishing

Calgary's Fishing Community – A Driving Force to the Calgary Economy:

The Bow River is considered a "**Blue Ribbon Trout Stream**" and is recognized around the world as one of the best destinations for an opportunity to catch a "Once in a Lifetime" Brown or Rainbow Trout. The City of Calgary business community benefits from this influx of anglers who more often than not extend their vacation to visit many of our local attractions. What would be of more benefit to the City of Calgary than an opportunity for visiting anglers to drift past some of the city's beautiful parks and a truly dynamic city centre on one of their fishing trips? The popularity of fishing the Bow River can easily be observed whenever you drive close to the river bank or cross the river by any number of the city's bridges. Anglers can be seen wading the river from the bank or casting out of drift boat as the oarsman navigates to his favorite fishing hole.

Where and how many people fish the Bow River and what is the contribution to the Calgary economy?

The Bow River Sport Fish Angler Survey⁽¹⁾ conducted in 2005 by Alberta Environment & Parks and Alberta Conservation Association sheds light on just how many anglers use the Bow River. An estimated 24,675 angling trips were made over the entire survey area of Bearsaw Dam to Carseland Dam during the months of May to September 2005. **17.6% of angler's time were within the City of Calgary.** Although the fish population above Harvie Passage is considered to be less than downstream it is still an important resource for local anglers. Further analysis of the data indicates that anglers fished the Bow River within the City of Calgary more than 7,500 days during the months of May to September. Anglers fishing the Bow River were primarily from the City of Calgary (74%) with the second largest number of anglers from out of province, including other provinces, the U.S.A. and outside North America (13%). This data suggests that approximately 3,200 out of province trips were made during the survey period.

Alberta Environment and Parks, Fisheries Management Branch's *Sports Fishing in Alberta, 2010 Survey* ⁽²⁾ reported 335,848 active anglers in Alberta, of which 96% were Alberta residents, accounting for 6.4% of Alberta's population. A total of 56,519 (23.5%) of those identified in the survey lived in the Eastern Slopes Zone 1(ES1) that encompasses Calgary and the south-west portion of the province. **Table 1** shows the overall amount of expenditure by each licensed angler group. Alberta residents spent \$2,018 per year on their sport, fishing 14.8 days for an average cost \$137 per day.

Table 1: Estimated economic value of sport fishing in Alberta in 2010

	Alberta Residents	Non-resident Canadians	Non-resident foreigners	Total
Average/ active angler (\$)	2018	925	1311	1967
Average / angling day (\$)	137	156	273	138
Average days fished / active angler	14.8	5.9	4.8	14.3

Since the completion of the AEP/ACA study in 2005, the number of fishing enthusiasts using the Bow River has increased substantially. A survey conducted by Ipsos Reid for Alberta Environment & Parks in 2014 entitled *Fisheries Management in Alberta* ⁽³⁾ shows that 16% of Albertans surveyed were active licensed anglers, 27% fished less than 3 days per year and 37% fished for more than 10 days per year. 31% prefer to fish rivers or streams and 18% prefer to wade fish. Extrapolating from the Ipsos Reid survey, Calgary with a population of 1,200,000 could well have 71,000 anglers who are passionate about fishing the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and local lakes.

Summary:

- **These data support our belief ⁽⁴⁾ that in excess of 12,000 anglers fish the Bow River on average 14.8 days a year. This accounts for more than 177,600 fishing day per year contributing more than \$24,500,000 to the local economy.**
- **In addition, the *Sports Fishing in Alberta, 2010 Survey* indicates that the Alberta's Eastern Slopes Zone supports 56,519 anglers each spending on average \$2,018 /year to support their recreational activity, for a total \$114,000,000 annually. A considerable amount of this money will be spent in Calgary as the pinnacle for southern Alberta fishing industry.**

With the increase in anglers there has been a corresponding increase in specially fishing supply stores and outdoor recreation box stores. The number of drift boats used to float and fish local rivers is estimated to exceed 200 within the watershed and outfitting services. On any summer day one can expect to see in excess of 50 drift boats on the Bow River. With the loss of access within the city and the flood damage to access points downstream of the city, more boats are using the city reach of the Bow River. Increased concentration of fishing activity on any one stretch of a river will increase fish mortality and decrease the fishing experience.

In recent years, the fishing community has lost public access to all but one Calgary boat ramp, Glenmore Trail / Graves Bridge. A permanent flood barrier parallel to Heritage Drive SE will be constructed in 2017. The concept plans indicate access at the Glenmore boat ramp could be eliminated. It is hoped that CRUA's discussions with city councillors and administration will result in maintaining current public access and open other boat ramps for public use.

Calgary's Recreational Paddlers – A Diverse Group

Calgary with recreational access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers, city and regional lakes and the close proximity to the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountain recreational areas has become a major centre for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, paddle boarding and river surfing. Within the City of Calgary there are 11 organizations that represent various disciplines within the sport:

Bow Waters Canoe Club, Rocky Mountain Paddling Centre, Calgary Kayak Club, Slalom Canoe Kayak, Lazy Day Raft Rental Undercurrents, U of C Outdoors Centre, RiverWatch, Alberta Whitewater Assoc., Paddle Alberta, Alberta River Surfing Assoc.

Access to the Bow and Elbow Rivers is not restricted to boat ramps for the majority of paddle sports. The exception are the large group rafts such as those operated by RiverWatch and canoeing instruction businesses that require trailered boat access to the river and sufficient parking space in close proximity to the river.

CRUA has undertaken an inventory of all boat access points in the city. The data will be used to compile a list of initiatives for needed improvements to infrastructure. Unlike the fishing community, there is very little data available that documents the economic impact of recreational paddle sports to the Calgary business community.

Fortunately, Paddle Alberta has gained financial support to conduct a user survey of the Bow and Elbow Rivers this summer. The final report of the survey will be used to draft the economic importance of recreation river use to the City of Calgary. In the meantime, the following offers support for the economic importance of paddle boaters to the city.

The 2013 Alberta Recreation Survey⁽⁵⁾, conducted by Alberta Culture & Tourism reported 35.2 % of Alberta respondents participated in water sports. Canoeing at 10.9%, Kayaking at 8.1% and River Rafting at 4.7%. These data suggest that in the City of Calgary there are large number of participants in the 3 paddle sports. Based on the survey, **Table 2** shows the number of Calgarians who participate in the 3 major paddle sports. It is estimated⁽⁴⁾ that 20% of participants are actively engaged in paddle sports. Member organization within CRUA were asked to supply estimates of the economic contribution of paddle sports to the local community. There is a wide range of expenditure in the sport depending at what level of completion. For example, local members of Alberta Slalom Canoe Kayak do spend in the range of \$10 to \$20,000 / year. For the purpose this data set, an estimate of \$500 per year was applied to canoe and kayak recreational use and \$280 /year for river rafting.

**Table 2: The Number and Percentage of Calgarians who Participate and Actively Engage (20%)
In Canoeing, Kayaking and River Rafting with Individual and Total \$ Expenditure.**

Sports Discipline	Participation % Population	Calgary Participation	Actively Engage	Annual Expenditure	Total Expenditure
Canoeing	10.90%	130,800	26,160	\$ 500	\$ 13,080,000
Kayaking	8.10%	97,200	19,440	\$ 500	\$ 9,720,000
River Rafting	4.70%	56,400	11,280	\$ 280	\$ 3,158,400
Total	23.70%	284,400	56,880		\$ 25,958,400

Calgarians who expressed a desire to try a new activity ranked paddling in the top 4 sports they wanted to begin participating in on a frequent basis. This is similar to the past 2 Alberta Recreation Surveys in 2009 and 2005 that showed a similar interest in paddling sports.

Calgary River Users Alliance Position

- **The direct economic contribution of the Bow River fishing community to City of Calgary businesses is in excess of \$24.5M and by regional fishing related activities a total of \$114m annually.**
- **Upon completion of Paddle Alberta's River Users Survey later this year we will have a clearer understanding of what the total contribution that all river users make to Calgary's business sector – it could well exceed \$50M annually.**

The loss of boat ramp access in the city, specifically at 17 Ave. SE. / Cushing Bridge in 2008 eliminated any trailered boat access to the Bow River above Glenmore Trail / Graves Bridge. In addition, there was also difficulty with boat access associated with the Harvie Passage development at that time. The redevelopment of this project and hopefully the Bend-In-The-Bow Park should address trailered boat access at this important recreation resource location.

The economic contribution of river sports to the City of Calgary's businesses justifies increased public boat access on the Bow River. There are a number of boat ramps within the city that are currently restricted to "Emergency Vehicle Use Only". With some modification to ramp and parking layout these access points could be made available to the general public. Improvements to river access are not expensive, generally need minimal annual maintenance as compared to field and arena sports.

CRUA is of the opinion that improving boat access within the City of Calgary will contribute greatly to the fishing and paddling experience that visitors and local users have while in the city. An enjoyable experience will generate an increase in return visitors to the city. Local businesses will thrive and benefit from satisfied customer generating increased revenue.

It is also important that the City of Calgary recognize the importance of upgrading infrastructure at all river access points, especially washrooms, park benches/tables, garbage bins and parking areas.

It cannot be overstated for the importance of a **City of Calgary River Recreation Management Plan** to expand public access, infrastructure and quality river access across the City of Calgary. Well-designed boat access and parking is critical to a safe enjoyable trip on the river, reducing risks, time and expense to City of Calgary's Emergency Services.

References:

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2. **Sports Fishing in Alberta, 2010.** Zwickel, H. 2012. Summary Report from the Eighth Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fisheries Management Branch, Edmonton Alberta
3. **Fisheries Management in Alberta, 2014** Final Report Prepared for Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resources by Ipsos Reid, Calgary Alberta.
4. **Personal Communications**
5. **2013 Alberta Recreation Survey**, Alberta Culture & Tourism, Edmonton, Alberta

