

# **The Need for a River Recreation Management Plan**

**A Supplement to Calgary River Users Alliance  
Economic Position Statement to the City of Calgary**

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The importance of recreation activity has been well documented in research papers, government surveys and city development plans. As the dynamics of a population change there is a need to revise recreation delivery models. Calgary's recreational needs have been captured in the "**Recreation Master Plan**". The relationship of recreation to wellness and the economic benefits derived from investing in recreation facilities has been documented in a paper "**A Pathway to Wellness**", presented by of the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association survey, "**Albertans' Values and Attitudes towards Recreation and the Wilderness, 2015**", gives an insight into the recreation activity chosen by location and proximity to home. Further discussion on these documents follows:

### Recreation Master Plan:

The City of Calgary's **Recreation Master Plan – 2010 to 2020** details the importance of recreation activity to the city's population. The plan positions recreation to respond to the diverse needs of its population, while continuing to help build a prosperous and vibrant city. The Recreation Master plan developed a "**Platform for Change**" that details 4 components:



**Corporate Context:** The need to establish a strong organizational culture that defines success as the ability to provide quality services to all Calgarians.

**Calgary's Changing Dynamics:** The demographic composition of Calgary communities will govern changes in recreational service delivery. The city's population will grow, with a larger number of seniors that will shift the importance of accessible recreation opportunities.

**The Impact of the Economic Climate:** Economic development in Calgary is largely driven by energy prices. Global economics effect Calgary's economic climate and the capacity to deliver municipal services.

**Recreation in Calgary: Listening to Citizens:** Calgarians participate in a diverse range of recreation activities, certain activities span generations. The top four recreation activities are; swimming, cycling, fitness training/working out and walking for pleasure. The importance of meeting the needs of the ever changing recreational needs of its citizens needs to be met.

***It is important to recognize that a framework for change in direction of recreation services will be driven by the annual budgetary process as much as***

*the needs for future development. Nevertheless, it is CRUA's responsibility as a recreational user group to advocate for change in the direction of services to an ever increasing user base.*

## A Pathway to Wellness:

The relationship of a population wellness and available recreation is discussed in a joint initiative of the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, **Pathways to Wellbeing a National Framework for Recreation in Canada**. This paper was designed to:

***“Guide and stimulate effective, coordinated policies and practices in recreation that improve the wellbeing of individuals, communities and places and spaces in Canada”.***

The current challenges that address recreation use are; **population demographics, urbanization, health, increasing inequities. social challenges and infrastructure deficit.**

**The benefits of recreation and parks can address all of the above challenges with policies and practices that:**



The paper goes on to document the economic case for investing in recreation renewal through economic benefit.

***“It is not the primary driver for recreation service decisions, recreation is an important contributor to community economic development and cost reductions***

*in other areas. Spending on recreation creates jobs, fosters tourism, and renders communities more attractive places in which to live, learn, work, and visit. Improvements in individual and community wellbeing that result from participation in recreation help to reduce health care, social service and justice costs”.*

## Recreation as an Economic Generator

In 2012, the average Canadian household spent \$3,773.00 on recreation, in comparison to \$7,739.00 on food.



In 2009, it is estimated that Canada’s national, provincial and territorial parks created over 64,000 full time equivalent jobs resulting in \$2.9 billion dollars in labor income and a \$4.6-billion-dollar contribution to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).



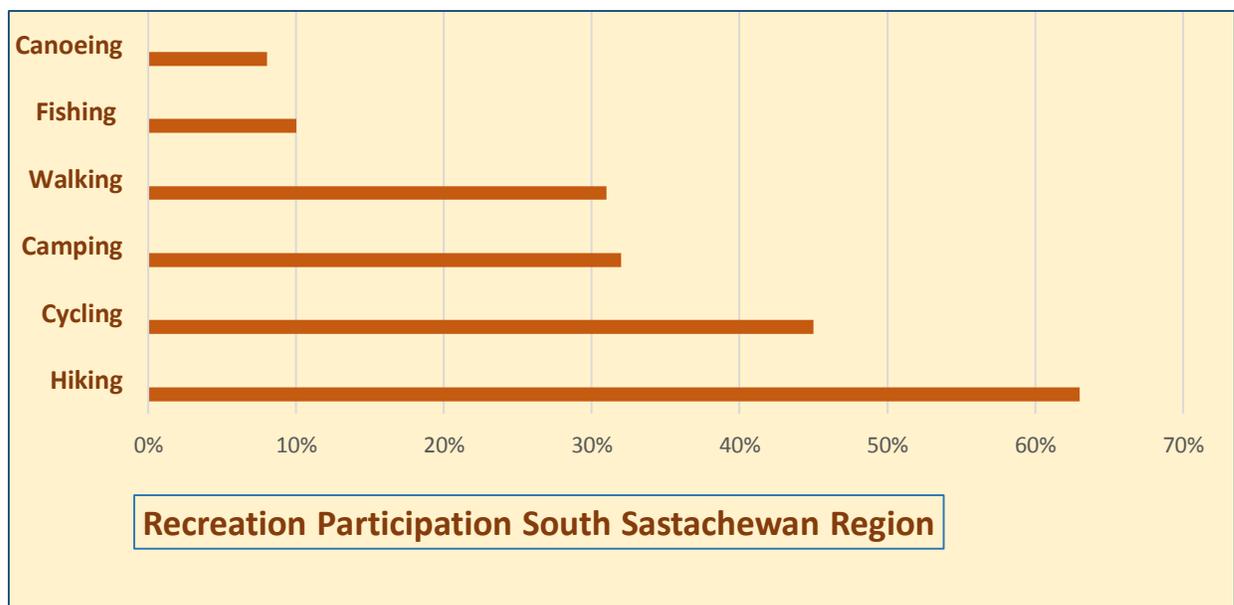
Anglers contributed a total of \$8.3 billion to various local economies in Canadian provinces and territories in 2010. Of this amount, \$5.8 billion was in the form of purchases of durable goods related to recreational fishing activities. The remaining \$2.5 billion covered direct expenditures during recreational fishing trips, such as transportation, food, lodging, fishing services and fishing supplies.

***The importance of the relationship between recreational activity and wellness within a community is critical to the society’s future. In addition, investment in recreational infrastructure will contribute to the economic wellbeing of the city.***

# Attitudes Towards Recreation and the Wilderness:

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association survey, **Albertans' Values and Attitudes towards Recreation and the Wilderness, 2015**. The telephone survey reports recreation uses in Alberta. The report highlights;

*“The most frequent outdoor recreational activities tend to occur close to home. As such, the extent and type of activities are related to supply and opportunity. Cycling for example is a frequent activity among those living in Calgary, whereas fishing, hunting and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use are the most popular activities among those living in northern areas away from large cities. Similarly, those living closest to national parks tend to visit the parks most often. Proximity to parks and protected areas is an important driver in use”.*



*One important finding from the survey was that even when national and provincial parks were nearby as is the case with Calgary, 79% of respondents preferred to use community parks and pathways.*

*Although Calgary's hiking, cycling and walking activities are well serviced by the city, the recreational opportunity offered by the Bow and Elbow river is underutilized.*

# Paddling Sports – A major Contribution to the Local Recreation:

Paddling sports are a major recreation and sports activity for Calgarians that includes both flatwater and river.

It is ranked as one of the top 5 sport activities that Calgarians want to learn over the past 3 Alberta Recreation Surveys.

Canoeing is ranked 15<sup>th</sup> and Kayaking is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the top physical activities that Calgarians participate in each year, ahead of most organized sports (ie. soccer, hockey, basketball, baseball/softball, football, volleyball) and ahead of other individual sports (ie. mountain biking, skateboarding, tennis, rock climbing). Combined together they are in the top 10 activities.

When you add in River Rafting and combine all Paddlesports together they are in the top 6 Recreation Sport Activities that Calgarians participate in each year.

Activity Centres for paddling sports in each of the different quadrants of the City are important recreation infrastructure opportunities for the City's sport community. Low cost to construct and maintain a flatwater training site complete with a boat storage shed, change rooms and pond are essential for the growth of the sport. Similarly, river recreation sites complete with eddies, a boat storage shed and change rooms would be equally beneficial. Combining the two facilities together would be a very nice fit that allows for a smooth transition between beginner skills to river running skills.

Harvie Passage will be a great facility but there is so much more that can be done to improve the accessibility for children in their local neighborhoods to build lifelong skills for water safety.

## The Need for a River Recreation Management Plan:

Mount Royal University, presented the **Bow River Recreation Management Plan** to the City of Calgary on 2011. The report documents river access points, parks and local amenities from Bearspaw Dam down to Fish Creek Park. The purpose of the Bow River Recreation Management Plan (BRMP) was to provide guidance to the City of Calgary Parks to manage recreational use of the Bow River.

The report emphasized the need **for improved river access infrastructure, improved safety and education.**

The 2013 flood changed much of the river bank and subsequent mitigation projects changed it further. Nevertheless, the BRMP offers a framework of scope for a future development plan.

*What is evident is the need for an all-encompassing management plan that documents the current river recreational infrastructure, bank mitigation projects and integrate planned and future developments into comprehensive river use development strategy.*

*Communication between City of Calgary departments, community and recreation stakeholders is critical in the early development of river and bankside projects.*

*The importance of well-designed recreation infrastructure at river's edge will assure controlled access, protect the environment and citizen safety.*

***The investment in recreational facilities, specifically for enhancement of river access and activities will:***

- ***Support growth to the local economy.***
- ***Help people connect with nature.***
- ***Experience the beauty of a natural resource in the heart of the city.***
- ***Assist with a healthy and safe lifestyle within the City of Calgary***

## **A River Recreation Management Plan needs to address the following issues:**

- **Bankside and recreational river use need to be integrated together within parks developments, capitalizing on the recreational resource available to meet multidiscipline recreation needs and river pursuits.**
- **The relationship of the Pathway System to river access. Bylaws may need to be amended and infrastructure upgraded to allow for trailered boat access to rivers and restricting access to adjacent parkland.**
- **Riverbank development projects appear to have limited scope, often viewed in isolation and do not take in account the relationship to overall river use. There is an interdependency between access points for**

recreational river use and therefore broader stakeholders input is needed.

- The need for improvement to access, parking, garbage bins, toilets, etc. at numerous existing informal river access points. In addition, design built river access points, will reduce the incidence of indiscriminate river access, leading to problems for all.
- There is a need for information and promotion of facilities available to the public with a “*River Recreational Use Policy*” that covers regulations and safety operation. Reference is needed to respect for other river users and public and private lands. Regulatory protection of the environment and wildlife habitat must to be documented.
- Safety of river access and use needs to be built into flood mitigation and recreation river infrastructure design.
- Consideration needs to be given to all operation models for recreation infrastructure maintenance.

***CRUA is open to further discussions and involvement as a stakeholder in the development of a River Management Plan.***

References:

**Recreation Master Plan – 2010 to 2020**, Recreation Department, City of Calgary

**Pathways to Wellbeing a National Framework for Recreation in Canada, 2014.**

A joint initiative of the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association

**Albertans’ Values and Attitudes towards Recreation and the Wilderness, Final Report, 2015.** The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Southern and Northern Alberta Chapters (CPAWS)

**Bow River Recreation Management Plan, 2011.** Presented to the City of Calgary Parks by Kelly Cytko, Leah Fink, Conner Janssen, Jake Martin, Ruben Nijenjuis and Vince Paul, Ecotourism And Outdoor Leadership Program, Mount Royal University

**2013 Alberta Recreation Survey.** Government of Alberta, March 2014