

Honourable Jason Nixon
Minister of Environment and Parks
Environment and Parks
323 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

March 8th, 2020

Dear Minister Nixon,

On behalf of the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association (AOHVA), I would like to express our support to the announced changes in optimizing Alberta's Parks.

The AOHVA is encouraged to see Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) committed to delivering solutions for better utilization of public lands designated for camping and recreational access to the backcountry, and our governments recognition of outcomes that are sustainable, meaningful, and fiscally responsible.

Albertans enjoy many diverse recreational activities, while the experiences, activities and motivations of those choosing front country camping/recreation and backcountry can differ – the common value is in the appreciation of our beautiful Alberta outdoors and environment. Alberta is ~60 Million Hectares in size, with ~5.4 Million hectares between Provincial and Federal parks systems. 88,602 hectares are designated as Provincial Recreation Areas (PRA), and the 164 areas identified for Partnership represent 11,605 hectares – the majority of which are Provincial Recreation Areas.

Provincial Recreation Areas (PRA's) have been implemented to facilitate and support managed recreational opportunity "*with outdoor recreation as the primary objective*". While many have been successful, some others as identified have been significantly underutilized and a financial burden to all Albertan taxpayers - providing minimal value to recreation or land management intent. The AOHVA is fully supportive of conservation and preservation of our environment, and we do not believe that optimizing designated recreation areas will have a negative impact on conservation or conservation areas. Rather, we believe that this initiative will improve sustainable land management by supporting the use of these areas over other non-sustainable locations.

Achieving successful recreational management includes incorporating the motivations, desires and opportunities Albertans seek – and include those values when providing managed recreation areas. If the recreation areas do not reflect that, they are not utilized as was identified through the government's detailed review of the existing areas.

For example, 29 of the 164 identified areas state OHV use but many do not permit access from the PRA to the trails or trail heads, whether being used for recreation or as access for other recreational activities. This would require many users (and added costs) to bring additional vehicles simply to haul their units to the trails or trailheads, which often does not provide any form of safe parking. In other cases, campsite stalls are too small or too close in proximity to each other to accommodate today's camping units or support the desires of those recreating - compounding on other limitations that resulted in some of these areas simply not being utilized.

There are many PRA's that sit vacant only to see a multitude of Albertans camped a short distance down the road on well sites, lease roads, pipeline right ways or road allowances – while not preferred (and some simply hazardous), they still provide better recreational value and opportunity to those Albertans than the adjacent PRA. From a land management perspective, this creates even further pressures on our landscape by pushing recreationalists outside of designated areas onto unsupported or unsustainable sites - instead of incorporating and supporting the recreational experiences desired within.

It's positive to see this Government's approach to seek solutions that ensure effective land management that is both fiscally and environmentally sustainable – while respectful and inclusive to the diversity of Albertans recreational desires.

We recognize that this new model, seeking partnerships with Non-Profit Organizations (including Municipalities and First Nations) to support recreational opportunities, social-economic benefits and improved utilization of in certain designated areas. We welcome this approach and see opportunity for others who are on the ground, contributing and committed to sustainable and meaningful recreation, as potential partners with government in delivering these outcomes.

Many of our member clubs (over 24 across the province) already provide support for the maintenance of various staging and camping areas in Alberta – in addition to the volunteer trail maintenance they perform. This model of collaborative partnership has been highly successful in other jurisdictions including BC, so we look forward to facilitating a provincial plan that engages and includes our member clubs in achieving the desired outcomes for some of the areas identified.

Whereas some may view this as a loss, the AOHVA fully recognizes and supports these changes as sustainable solutions to providing both recreational opportunity and effective land management. The AOHVA and its member clubs are committed to being part of the solution, and look forward to the partnership opportunities presented by our government in delivering these outcomes.

The AOHVA is dedicated to providing safe OHV recreational activities in an environmentally sustainable manner - committed to preserving our environment and Albertans responsible enjoyment of it for present and future generations. We see these changes as one of the many steps required to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes for all Albertans, and the landscape we all cherish and value.

Sincerely,



Garett Schmidt, President
Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association (AOHVA)