Fall colours are basically gone, but beautiful weather remains for you to get out and enjoy the wilderness before the snow flies.

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

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2015 Trail Care Season Highlights
by Nancy Ouimet, Program Coordinator

It was another fun and successful Trail Care season. Our trail days were carried out far and wide through out most of Kananaskis Country. We spend 10 days working on the Boulton Creek reroute and had the chance to work on the High Rockies Trail which is an
exciting new addition to the Smith-Dorrien corridor. Season highlights include:

38 Trail Care days  
1,814 Volunteer-hours recorded  
167 Different individuals were engaged  
330 Volunteer slots were filled  
15 Volunteer crew leaders lead groups  
1,353 Members on mailing list

Trail Care projects were undertaken in 13 different locations, they include:

**Alberta Parks**  
Galatea Creek Trail (4 days)  
Canmore Nordic Centre (5 days)  
Boulton Creek Trail (10 days)  
Ribbon Creek Trail (1 day)  
Mount Shark Ski Trail (1 day)  
Mist Creek Trail (1 day)  
Elk Pass Trail (1 day)

**ESRD - Backcountry Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program**  
Diamond T Loop (1 Day)  
Prairie Creek Trail (5 days)  
Jumping Pound Ridge (5 days)

**High Rockies Trail Project**  
Sparrowhawk (1 day)  
Buller Mountain (2 day)

**Highway 40 Clean Up** (1 day)

A big THANK YOU to the outstanding volunteers and crew leaders for their time and effort improving Kananaskis Country trails. Your contribution made a significant difference.

We would value your feedback so we can continue to improve the Trail Care program and provide a unique volunteer experience. You can fill out this [FEEDBACK FORM](mailto:nancy@kananaskis.org) and email or mail to: nancy@kananaskis.org
We wish you a restful winter and look forward to seeing you back on the trails when we kick-off the season in May.

Welcome back TransAlta

We are happy to announce TransAlta has renewed their partnership and support for the Friends of Kananaskis Country – Trail Care program. TransAlta has been a key supporter as Title Sponsor of our Trail Care program in 2012 and 2013.

Keeping the communities we live in and work with vibrant is important to TransAlta. This support will enhance our Trail Care volunteer program so we can continue to offer excellence in trail care through: volunteer coordination and management, crew leader training, and volunteer stewardship and recognition.
Letter from the Board: Safety First
By Derek Ryder, Board Chairman

As I wrote in June 2015, your Board operates under a set of pretty strong core beliefs and values that go beyond our Vision and Mission statements. Among these is a belief that we can do what we do safely, and that all accidents are preventable.

We have had only one reportable injury in the last 3 years; in 2014, a volunteer fell down a hillside while building a new trail section and suffered minor injuries. So it’s not like we have a lot of safety issues. But the Board takes safety seriously, and believes in preventing accidents rather than just being prepared for them to happen.

In our October 2015 Board Meeting, we passed our new Friends safety policy. It sets out standards and expectations for our behaviour, Crew Leader training and equipment requirements, and outlines what we will do when incidents do occur. This policy applies to all folks who volunteer with us, so is therefore “required reading”. You can get your very own copy here, or by heading to the Vision and Mission page of our website where it is posted for all to see and review.

In truth, we have been doing virtually everything in the policy for some time now, so it is in fact not news. But we believe it important to document our expectations, and share them with our volunteers so that they know what to expect from us. As we move towards more work that is affiliated with, but independent of, Alberta Parks, policies like these also “fill gaps” that the Board sees. And as we all know, it’s that which we don’t expect that can bite us the hardest.

The Safety policy is the first of several policies that the Friends Board has under development at this time. You can expect more formalization of best practices and expectations for our workplace in the new year. We are proud to take these steps, and do so in the best interests in both our organization and our members and volunteers.

The Volunteer Recognition Evening a Huge Success!

On October 21st, we held our annual Volunteer Recognition Event in Calgary. Superbly planned & executed by our wonderful Nancy Ouimet, almost 60 people came for a fun evening full of cool prize giveaways, and a chance to connect with other volunteers when they weren’t covered in mud.
On hand from Alberta Parks were Michael Roycroft, Kananaskis Region Area Manager of Specialized Facilities & Trails (pictured at right), plus the Parks trail crew leaders from Peter Lougheed, James Cieslak, Andres Beliveau & Jody Cairns. Michael brought thanks for the Province and helped provide a context of the impact of volunteers on trail work in K-Country.

James, Andres and Jody gave updates of trail work completed this year in the Peter Lougheed district, both flood related and otherwise, plus talked about work upcoming in 2016, especially in the Chester, Sawmill and Headwall areas.

Darin Langhorst (pictured at right) also came to provide an update on the incredible progress made on the High Rockies Trail this year. All the new section of trail is essentially completed from Goat Creek to Buller Pond, and features some pretty spectacular views and experiences. Guidebook author and Friend Advisory Council member Gillean Daffern, who was also at the event, indicated she has already walked the whole thing and reports it to be excellent.

Special recognition trophies were given out to:

- **Ghulam Jamro**, who received the award for Crew Leader of the Year. Ghulam led 10 days, volunteered on 5 others, and put in a total of 97.5 hrs volunteering
- **Terry Mullane**, who received the award for Volunteer of the Year, putting in 10 days and 62 hrs;
- **Jim Beaton**, who earned the Newbie of the Year Award. In this, his first year volunteering with the Friends, he came out 6 times for a total of 41 hours.

Twenty door prizes were given out from companies like Alpine Helicopters, Canmore Caverns, Patagonia, Out There, Switching Gears, the Delta Lodge at Kananaskis and the Coast Hotel in Canmore. The wonderful Eclair de Lune Bakery donated a special cake for the event.

You can see the full list of donors on our website [here](#).
The Elements of Kananaskis: Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park

2nd in a series by Derek Ryder, Director of Communications

Kananaskis Country is not one park but a multi-use landbase consisting of numerous parks and public lands, all managed under one framework. In this series, we’re going to examine at each part that makes up K-Country. We’ll look at the history, the rules, and significance the area plays.

Technically this is the first in the series, but because Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve is one of the more unique elements in K-Country, and clearly qualifies as a truly special place, I covered that area in last month’s Special Places series.

This month, I’m going to tackle what I consider to be K-Country’s most visible and single most complicated space: Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park (“BVWPP”). I want to acknowledge Duane Fizor, former Friends Board member and Kananaskis Region Information and Advisories Coordinator, and a few Conservation Officers, including Seasonal CO Genivieve Primeau and Acting District CO Andrew Rees, for their assistance with this article.
BVWPP is NOT Bow Valley Provincial Park, despite what Apple Maps may tell you (they don’t map most of the park, and parts that they do are mislabeled). BVWPP spreads far and wide and is made up of several discontinuous fragments, as you can see in the map to the right (best to click on it to enlarge it). It runs from the Banff Park Boundary in the northwest, down the east side of Spray Lakes to Buller Mountain, across Mt. Bogart to the Ribbon Creek area, surrounds the Nakiska Ski Area, runs up the west side the Kananaskis River and past Barrier Lake to just short of the Rafter 6 area (abutting Bow Valley Provincial Park the whole way), covers most (but not all) lands south of the 1A through the Bow Valley, and surrounds Canmore, the Nordic Centre and and Harvie Heights. There’s a northwestern extension north and east of Harvie Heights surrounding Mt. Lady MacDonald, but Grotto Mountain is not included. There’s a discontinuous section of the Park on the north side of the 1A as well that butts up against the base of the Yamnuska cliffs. It includes lands within the Town of Canmore boundary. The islands and inlets along the Bow River from Banff Park to Seebe are a mixture of Canmore Town land, BVWPP, Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park and Bow Valley Provincial Park land. Here’s the official BVWPP park map. Study it carefully!

You’ll even see that there are currently some “holes” in the park; private land the park surrounds. All are in the Bow Valley and represent old privately held mining or exploration lands, mostly south and above Three Sisters, or in Quaité Valley. Parks is actively working to make some of these disappear by purchasing them, or swapping land for them.

Most of the Park came into being via an Order in Council in December 1998, along with the Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park and a realignment of the Bow Valley Provincial Park. BVWPP was expanded in September 2000 with the addition of lands in the Spray Valley, and again in October 2004 when the area previously known as the Yamnuska Natural Area was included in the Wildland Park. The Park now sits at over 37,000 ha, or 144 square miles. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan recommended expanding the Park to include the space east of Lady Mac, west of Yamnuska and south of Don Getty Wildland park, but that hasn’t happened yet.
The Park includes a space that people are becoming more aware of over time: the only designated wildlife corridors in Kananaskis. There are two; one is above Silvertip and the second is above Three Sisters. Because things aren't complicated enough, the "P4 Corridor" above Three Sisters has several separate segments, and part of the corridor is in Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park, too. The one above Silvertip is well marked; the Three Sisters one is barely marked at all as yet, though it is signposted in the big bend on Hwy 742 near the Rundle Forebay, and more signage is coming. This is a “space within a space”. Closed by a Ministerial Order in 2005, people are not allowed to be in designated wildlife corridors except on trails designated by the Minister. The Montane Traverse and the Highline Trail accesses are such designated trails. Both trails were specifically designed with the wildlife corridor in mind. Read more about these corridors on the Wildsmart website.

In addition to designated wildlife corridors, there are also three designated spring wildlife protection closure areas in BVWPP. These are in Wind Valley, Pigeon Mountain, and The Centennial Trail, which are closed annually to protect wintering ground for sheep and elk (that's a deer in the Pigeon closure space to the right; Wind Ridge's closure space is in the background). Access to these areas is closed December 1st to June 15th every year, and when closed, no one is allowed in those areas, similar to a wildlife corridor. But unlike a wildlife corridor, during a closure window all the trails close (even the designated ones, such as the Centennial Trail) and people are not allowed in the area at all, even on official trails. An unofficial mountain bike trail on Pigeon Mountain was decommissioned in part because it was in the seasonal wildlife closure area. These are also the only designated wildlife protection closures in Kananaskis with such seasonal restrictions – though Highway 40 has a wildlife space through the Highwood Pass, but that’s for a later article. The Management Plan originally proposed 9 of these in BVWPP

Hiking is permitted in the Park, with the following surprisingly short list of 19 official trails:

- Quaite Valley, Jewell Pass, Windy Point on Wind Ridge, Prairie View, Montane Traverse, Ridge Traverse, Johnny's Trail, Tibbits Quarry Trail, Meander Trail, The Douglas Fir Trail, The G8 Trail, The Horsehoe Loop, Ha Ling (to treeline), Lady McDonald (to the old helipad), Yamnuska Ridge, The Highline Trail and it’s 3 access trails, Skogan Pass, and The Centennial Trail
The TransCanada Trail runs from Quaite Valley to Dead Man’s Flats and while official is not maintained by Parks, just like the new High Rockies Trail. The HRT section in BVWPP runs from Spray Lakes Dam to near Buller Pass.

Because most people don’t know which park is which, there are trails people think are in BVWPP that aren’t. Heart Creek Interpretive is not in the Wildland Park; in it’s own Provincial Recreation Area (PRA), or at least the trail in the canyon is. Stoney Trail is for the most part not in the Park, nor is Grotto Canyon; they’re both in Bow Valley Provincial Park. East End of Rundle, Old Goat Glacier and the first kilometer of Goat Creek aren’t either; all are in Spray Valley Provincial Park as is Ribbon Creek (though parts of Ribbon are in Evan Thomas Provincial Recreation Area). Grassi Lakes isn’t either; that’s in Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park. Jura Creek, Exshaw Creek and (most of) the Grotto Mountain trail aren’t currently on park land at all.

A short list of just the most popular but unofficial (and thus not maintained) “routes” in BVWPP include:

- Three Sisters Pass, West Wind Pass, the continuation above Windy Point to Wind Ridge, Sparrowhawk Tarns, Read’s Ridge & Tower, Memorial Lakes, Pigeon Mountain, the Razor’s Edge mountain bike trail, and the Heart Mountain Horseshoe.

Several of these are working their way through the process to become official (a process we described in the May 2013 newsletter) but are not there yet. The trails up the front side of Yamnuska are official and in the Park; trails on the backside are not in any park, and the scramble across the top isn’t either. Notice that there are basically no official maintained trails in BVWPP south of the Bow Valley corridor.

So what really is a “trail” or a “route”? Interestingly the Parks Act doesn’t actually define what a trail is. They reserve the term “trail” for official ones only. Anything else, Parks uses for these is “routes”, which is also undefined. In any Provincial Park, you can go for a walk anywhere except where specifically prohibited, such as a wildlife corridor. Does walking somewhere enough constitute building a trail? Section 9.1(1)(b) of the Parks Act says you can’t disturb the surface of the ground in a Park, and 9(2)(a) says you can’t damage plant life. So if you dig up the ground to make your trail, that’s contravening the aforementioned sections and have hefty citations associated with them. Stamp the ground down with 10,000 feet a summer (like West Wind Pass) and a trail will show up, but that’s technically not illegal. However -- and a big however...

Section 3 of the Parks Act makes the purpose of any Park pretty clear, and one of the highest mandates is protection of flora and fauna. Yes, recreation is a purpose, too, but it
takes a back seat to protection. So Parks spends a LOT of time creating park management plans, and the [one for BVWPP](#) is merged with the other protected areas in the Bow Valley. Routes and trails -- even those stamped down by 10,000 feet -- that are in contravention of this management plan can and will be closed. So... it's complicated.

For these and other reasons, there is much controversy today about the **construction of new and illegal bike trails** in the wildlife corridors around Canmore (remember: **no trails in a wildlife corridor unless specifically approved by the Minister**). But outside of this, unofficial routes pop up all over the place. The G8 and Horseshoe Loop areas on the north east side of Canmore, for instance, are a rabbit warren of unofficial routes, and every unofficial route listed above (including West Wind Pass) falls into this category. However...

Under section 9.1(1)(a) of the Parks Act, you’re not allowed to build a permanent structure in a Wildland Park. So that bike ramp is always illegal, even if the route or trail is not. Cutting down the trees to build a bike ramp increases the severity of the offence, because you’re not allowed to cut trees in a park without a permit, and those permits are REALLY hard to come by. Yes, a permit even needs to be issued to Parks themselves if they are constructing something. The Parks thorough trail approval process also includes archaeological and ecological reviews, among others. Build your own route by digging up the ground, cutting down some trees PLUS do all that in the Wildlife corridor and the consequences can be **severe**.

And even more confusing, [Provincial Parks General Regulation 27(2)](#) prohibits cycling in ANY park except on trails designated for cycling and identified by signage as such. So now it gets messy. In BVWPP, bikes are allowed on roads, plus any official trail listed above EXCEPT Heart Creek and Centennial. Technically, no other routes in BVWPP are designated and signed. So **technically**, bikes aren’t allowed on that rabbit warren of routes in the Horseshoe Loop area, but are allowed on the Loop itself. Needless to say, there are a lot of folks breaking rules they don’t know exist. And whether you could mountain bike on the disused 1950’s exploration road system in Wind Valley is a bit blurry. **Don’t get too worried, though**; in practice, Parks specifically posts trails where bikes are not permitted (like Heart Creek Interpretive) and allows them elsewhere.
Section 19 of the Regulations treats horses a lot like bikes. You can only ride horses in designated areas. But folks ride hoses all the time around the G8 Trail and the trails on the northwest side of Canmore; there are, after all two riding stables there. There are hitching rails at Wind Valley, and Quaite’s designated, too. In practice, just like bikes, Parks marks trails where horses are not allowed, and essentially permits them everywhere else.

You’re allowed to launch a hang-glider or paraglider from the top of Lady MacDonald or Ha Ling, but nowhere else within BVWPP. Other general Parks regulations apply, so, for instance, you can’t set off fireworks. Under Park Regulation 15(1) dogs must be on a leash less than 2 m long, and you must remove your dog’s excrement. Regulations 17 & 18 gives CO’s the right to take your dog if it is not under your control. There’s more they can do, too, but that’s for a later article in a different series.

The camping rules in BVWPP are even more complicated. There is only 1 designated campsite in the whole Park: Quaite Valley backcountry campground (one of the few backcountry campgrounds in Kananaskis that is open all year). The road accessible campgrounds in the Bow Valley are not in the Wildland Park; they’re in Bow Valley Provincial Park, as is Jewell Bay. A new campground was planned for BVWPP at Memorial Lakes in 2012 but the flood delayed its construction.

To make up for this, you are allowed to random camp for free in a Wildland Park. Restrictions on that camping in BVWPP are numerous. For instance, you must be at least 1 km from a road and you basically can’t camp anywhere in the Bow Valley at all, nor can you random camp near Yamnuska or around Barrier Mountain (except for the YMCA camp – who, under their lease, can random camp, though you can’t on their lease), nor can you random camp within 1 km of a designated back country campground like Quaite Valley. On Wind Mountain, in Wind Valley and Mt. Lougheed areas, “bivouac” camping designed for climbers is all that is allowed (no tents and no fires) – and even that camping is subject to the seasonal wildlife closure area rules mentioned above.

And most confusing of all, you need a backcountry camping permit to random camp in the center section of the Park, including Sparrowhawk Tarns and Memorial Lakes. This is the only area in Kananaskis where random camping requires purchasing a permit. The map to the right shows the camping zones, taken from the 2002 Bow Valley Protected Areas Management Plan. If you want to random camp somewhere, I strongly recommend first reviewing
the Random Camping Backcountry information on the Parks website, then stopping at Barrier Lake Info Center and chatting about it with the knowledgeable folks there.

In your random campsite, you’re allowed to burn deadfall in your campfire. That’s prohibited in anything other than a Wildland Park, and it’s only allowed in your random campsite. And the only deadfall you can burn must be on the ground already; you cannot cut down standing dead to use as firewood.

Although random camping in the park isn’t all that popular (other than Memorial Lakes), it turns out that most of the random campers in the Park are hunters, because hunting is allowed in a Wildland Park. BVWPP is covered by Wildlife Management Units (WMU) 408 and 410. WMU 410 includes the Bow Valley and north, with 408 south of this. This is a nice map showing the WMUs in northwest K-Country. The hunting regulations are very complex and I can’t do them justice here. Follow the links, read the rules, then ask a Conservation Officer. During big game seasons, bow hunting is a common thing almost everywhere in the Bow Valley corridor area, including around the hamlets of Harvie Heights, Dead Man’s Flats and all the way through the swamps of Bow Flats. Rifle hunting is not allowed in WMU 410 but is allowed in 408. For the seasons, see this link and look for 408 and 410.

And again, you can’t build a permanent structure in a park, so if you “improve” you hunter’s random campsite by building tables or chairs out of logs, that’s an offense. I’ve seen camp chairs and tables built out of stacked rocks; I don’t know whether these qualify as permanent. The photo below right is a lovely picnic table someone built out of rocks in the back of Sparrowhawk Tarns. Again; ask the smart folks at Barrier Lake.

And finally, there are 3-day use areas that serve the Park: Heart Creek, Wind Valley and Yamnuska. Heart Creek Day Use is in the Wildland park, though the trail is in it’s own PRA once it gets to the creek itself. Any other day use areas you think of, like Sparrowhawk or Barrier Dam, are in a different park.

**Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park:**

**Camping:** 1 back-country campground. Random camping permitted with restrictions.

**Fires:** Permitted.
Hiking: 19 designated official trails, plus two not maintained by Parks.

Mountain biking: On permitted trails only.

Horseback Riding: On permitted trails only.

Hunting: Allowed.

Services: 3 day use areas

Doesn't that summary make it sound simple?

The Critters of K-Country: Spruce Grouse

12th in a Series by Derek Ryder, Director of Communications

Kananaskis Country is home to a wide variety of creatures, great and small. Big ones, like bears and elk, get a lot of attention. In this series, I’m going to look at some of the ones we pay less attention to.
If ever an animal believed that camouflage was the answer for everything, it is the Spruce Grouse (*seen trying to imitate a branch at right*). Some use the term “unwary”; personally, I think they verge on stupid. Run into one in a forest and they won’t move, nor fly away, nor run, and sometimes, they don’t even walk away. They are unperturbed by your presence, and appear to honestly believe they can’t be seen. Their nickname, after all, is "Fool's Hen." Now, they are in the same family as the domestic chicken and turkey (*Galliformes*) and I understand those birds aren’t that smart either.

In any case, trying to find a spruce grouse when you want to is hard, but I seem to run into them on K-Country trails all the time from August onwards. I almost stepped on the one on the left on the Rummel Lake trail, and a week later, in almost the same place, almost stepped on one a second time (perhaps it was the same bird).

Field identification of grouse can be tough. I find them very similar to the White Tailed Ptarmigan (that they are related to, and that I wrote about in this series in *June 2014*), or their nearly identical cousins the Blue (or Dusky) Grouse (which are more a steely gray than brown colour). I therefore tend to take pictures of what I see and identify them at home. All these birds are brown and mottled – I think the pattern on a ptarmigan looks like a snowflake -- but they have different white patterns. But while ptarmigan are found up high in alpine meadows, Blue and Spruce Grouse are found lower in the forests. Not unusual when you consider the Spruce Grouse’s favourite food is conifer needles. Yes, they will eat up to 10% of their body weight in green, live conifer needles each day, which they store in their crops and digest overnight. They are virtually the only animals that eat conifer needles.

Males establish a territory and breed with as many females as they can entice in for a visit. Females raise the chicks alone, and have 4-7 offspring (that's a chick to the left), who are “precocial” (your new word of the day), meaning they are born mobile and almost mature and are able to walk at 8 hours old. Walking is an
important skill because these birds really don’t fly very much, preferring to walk around even when pursued. They even grow special extensions to their toes in the fall that are shed in the spring (called “pectinations” – your 2nd new word of the day!) that enable walking on snow. Ben Gadd says Ptarmigan are the only ones with feathered feet, but all grouse have some feathering on their legs and feet.

They are non-migratory, but studies in Alberta have shown a significant percentage of females and some males move between summer breeding sites and wintering sites. Their range extends from coast to coast to coast (northern Yukon), anywhere there are conifer trees. They are actively hunted; in the mountain areas, hunting is in every month from September to mid-June, while in the foothills WMUs south of the TransCanada, it's just September to November. I understand they taste like chicken.
We are pleased to recognize the contributions of the Calgary Foundation, who in 2014, made a four-year commitment to support the Friends in flood recovery efforts, and who continue to support our work with grants.

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 $20.00. 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!

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