



ALBERTA WHITEWATER ASSOCIATION

Water Recreation Opportunities in Castle Park

The new Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park as proposed by the Government of Alberta will bring changes to recreational activities in southwestern Alberta. The Alberta Whitewater Association (AWA) and its member clubs and paddlers have a long history of paddling the lakes, rivers and creeks in the region. Maintaining access to the paddling opportunities while respecting the environmental integrity of the region are critical factors for the AWA in reviewing the plan for the new Parks.

The AWA has 3 paddling clubs in southwest Alberta, the Waterlogged Kayak Club and Oldman River Canoe Kayak Club in Lethbridge and the Pinch-o-Crow Creekers in Pincher Creek and Crowsnest Pass. The area is the host for the largest whitewater paddling event in western Canada, the 3 Rivers Whitewater Rendezvous. This event is held on the May long weekend for almost 20 years at the Castle River Rodeo Grounds campground. The Alberta Freestyle Kayak Association also holds one of its annual events, the Carbondale Creek Race, on the 5 Alive rapid each year. Paddlers come from all over Alberta, BC and Saskatchewan to paddle in southwest Alberta during the short paddling season each year.

Paddling activities by their very nature have a small environmental footprint on the landscape. Human powered watercraft traversing on lakes and rivers are unique to recreation in the following ways:

- the water trail that paddlers travel across already exist as part of the natural landscape
- paddlers do not leave footprints in the river and the boats do not impact the terrain they cross over
- water travel is a protected right under Canadian and Alberta law
- fish and wildlife may be temporarily displaced but are not adversely affected by paddlers
- most other recreational users are not inconvenienced or disturbed by the travel of paddlers along the river. The one exception to this rule may be terrestrial fishermen. But paddlers are usually more common during the high water season before the fishing season begin on the Castle watershed and when the fishing is not ideal due to the murky water.
- the infrastructure needs are quite simple and already exist in Castle Park
- water trails require little to no maintenance and the padding community will help as needed to restore navigability when deadfall or obstructions present safety problems

Paddlers began exploring the Castle region in the 1970's and the Castle Falls run and the Carbondale River became very popular during the 70's and 80's. These runs are still paddled today during the high water season from mid-May to mid-July. In the 1990's and 2000's the other smaller creeks in the Front Range Canyons and upper Carbondale were explored and are paddled during the shorter creeking season in early June for a week or two each year.

Guide books and website guides to the runs in the Castle Park include references to these river runs. The references include:

1. Canoeing Chinook Country Rivers – Hans Buhrmann & David Young, 1980
2. Marks Guide for Alberta Paddlers - Mark Lund
3. Canadian Rockies Whitewater: the Southern Rockies – Stuart Smith 1997
4. Adventure Guide & Topographical Map of Southwest Alberta – SWABDC, 1998
5. Recreational Flows for paddling along rivers in Southern Alberta – Stewart Rood & Wilco Tymensen, 2001
6. Liquid Journal website - 2005
7. Paddling ABC website – 2013

Waterways that are paddled in Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park include:

1. Beaver Mines Lake
2. West Castle River (M Kootenay Creek to Castle River Bridge campground)
3. South Castle River (Grizzly Creek to Castle River Bridge campground)
4. Castle River
 - a. Castle River Bridge campground to Castle Falls
 - b. Castle Falls to Hwy 507
5. Carbondale River
 - a. Lost Creek to Willoughby Ridge (Shell Road Bridge)
 - b. Willoughby Ridge (Shell Road Bridge) to Hwy 507
6. Lost Creek (S & N Lost Creek confluence to Carbondale River)
7. Lynx Creek (Goat Ck to Carbondale River)
8. Yarrow Creek
9. Spionkop Creek
10. South Drywood Creek
11. North Drywood Creek
12. Pincher Creek
13. Mill Creek

To the best of our knowledge, the reaches shown in red are the major paddling trips in the Parks. The critical infrastructure for accessing these river runs is already in place.

1. Beaver Mines Lake – public road, parking area and beach access
- 4a+b. Castle River Bridge Campground – public road, parking area and river access trail
- 4b. Castle Falls Campground – public road, parking area and river access trail
- 5a. Lost Creek Campground – public road, parking area and river access trail
- 5a. Shell Road Bridge – public road, parking area and river access trail
9. Spionkop Creek – gated road always closed
10. South Drywood Creek – gated road closed till June 15

Access Points

Of concern to the AWA and our members will be the continued access to the water. Based upon the Draft Management Plan as written this should not be a problem because all our access points are already identified as ongoing facilities for the future.

Front Range Canyons

The short paddling season on the Front Range Canyons varies year to year from May 20 – June 20 depending on when peak runoff occurs. It usually only lasts for 10 days but during that period, the elite paddlers in western Canada come to challenge themselves on these steep creek runs. The South Drywood Creek road opens June 15th each year but this is often after the peak runoff season for paddlers.

Changing access dates and providing motorized access up the canyons would improve paddling opportunities and the number of people that come to southwest Alberta to paddle.

Castle Falls Run Access

The river segment from the Castle Falls to the Carbondale has a half dozen defined rapids and is one of the best whitewater runs in Southern Alberta. It is the most paddled segment in the Park and commences near the boundary of the Provincial Park lands. There's a road along the west bank that prior to 1995 paddlers had access to. This provided access at the end of the whitewater section and provided an outstanding half-day play run from the Falls down to the Carbondale. This take-out avoided the long shuttle drive - it's only about 2 km from the road to Castle Falls. The road is developed and maintained for gas wells, but it has a closed gate.

The river gradient after the Carbondale inflow is substantially less and the run becomes a beautiful but long float down to Hwy 507. Access above the Carbondale confluence would allow for a take-out after the short and challenging advanced Grade III whitewater run and a put-in for the longer intermediate (Grade II) float downstream. These different segments would be favored by different users with different types of boats. Currently, the long float-out and long shuttle discourage whitewater paddlers while the rapids are too challenging for those wanting a scenic float.

This access point would also increase the safety of the system, by providing an access point below the more advanced whitewater. It would also be ideal for other users including picnickers and anglers.

In Conclusion

The AWA looks forward to a positive relationship with Alberta Parks in the new Management Plan for the Castle Provincial Park and the Castle Wildland Provincial Park.

Respectfully,

Kurtis Broda
President

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Executive Director