



Governance and Priorities Committee

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Topic: Big Lake Area Stakeholders and Park Management Plan Status Report

Introduction:

Administration provides this report and update as information, discussion, and possible opportunities to collaborate in the Big Lake and Surrounding Area in conjunction with the planning for the future developments in the park/area.

Facts (Background)

Parkland County passed a motion on March 8, 2022 to partner with Alberta Environment and Parks, Sturgeon County, City of St. Albert, City of Edmonton, the Big Lake Environment Support Society (BLESS), and the Big Lake Community Association this month to explore plans for an interpretive centre in Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park.

A future Environmental Learning or Interpretive Centre is an element of the broader Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park (LHCPP) Management Plan which was completed in 2019 in consultation with local municipalities and other key stakeholders. Therefore, the Centre would be planned in conjunction with the implementation of the management plan and Alberta Parks.

The Project

Background/Current State:

- Province has developed a Lois Hole Lake Management Plan which outlines, issues, opportunism and challenges around management of the wetland area
- Neighboring municipalities have carried out some work
- Parkland County has not been active in this area and there is interest in trying to move forward with some of the opportunities identified in the plan, special focus on the interpretive center

Project Objectives/Goals:

- Identify current stakeholders
- Identify current state of stakeholder activities in and around the Lois Hole Park (attention to the Interpretive Centre)
- Identify future plans or activities by stakeholders (attention to the Interpretive Centre)
- Identify potential collaborative opportunities to move the plan forward (attention to the Interpretive Centre)
- Next steps for Parkland County

Expected Outcomes:

- Current stakeholder activities identified
- Future stakeholder activities identified
- Collaborative opportunities identified
- Parkland County next steps

The Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park

Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park(LHCPP) Management Plan outlines the Scope, Purpose and Vision for the Park for the next 10 years:

The ***“Management Plan”*** is designed to provide a long term and comprehensive framework to guide both park operations and park developments. It has been produced in consultation with Albertans, stakeholders and Indigenous communities, and is intended to help achieve sustainable protection of the valuable natural and cultural values, and to provide stakeholders and Albertans a place to connect with nature for community engagement, stewardship, education, and scientific research. (LHCPP Management Plan 2019)

The ***“Management Vision”*** was developed by stakeholder input that shaped the vision statement, which summarizes the ideal future state of the park:

“Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park protects a unique and important wetland ecosystem and connects people to nature through educational and low-impact nature-based experiences.

The park models how biodiversity and urban development can exist in harmony, and facilitates community engagement in environmental stewardship and nature appreciation” (LHCPP Management Plan 2019)

The "**Environmental Learning Centre**" encompasses the development of a multi-purpose facility on site at LHCPP that models sustainable and innovative design that will greatly enhance the ability of Alberta Parks and partners to deliver high quality, high-impact environmental education programming. It is also a key resource in facilitating the type of community gatherings and events that will support a thriving, active, and diverse community of park stewards as outlined in section 4.0 of the management plan. A stakeholder workshop held in 2012 identified a number of design recommendations for the Environmental Learning Centre (ELC) at LHCPP including incorporating a central meeting hall and classroom space with visual and physical access to the park, plus administrative and building support space. *(LHCPP Management Plan 2019)*

In addition, the park and surrounding areas have some current and long range planning activities in progress including: land acquisitions, housing developments, potential new school, recreation facilities, parks and trail development, stewardship of the parks, local special events, environmental planning, transportation roadway developments, MDP review, Area Structure and Subdivision Planning and remediation/clean up projects.

The Stakeholders

There are numerous stakeholder developments and activities currently ongoing in the Big Lake Area as well as the surrounding communities led by: Alberta Parks, City of Edmonton, St. Albert, Sturgeon County, Parkland County, Big Lake Environmental Support Society(BLESS) and community organizations such as the Parkland Big Lake Community Association and the City of Edmonton Big Lake Community League. A Big Lake Area Summary Report provides further information on stakeholders current, long-term and collaborative activities.

The Park Management Plan

The Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park Management Plan was completed in 2019 and looks at the activities and initiatives in the park for a 10 year period.

The area municipalities and local stakeholders are in the process of current and long range planning for the Big Lake and surrounding areas. Therefore, sharing of information, coordinating current planning and aligning long term strategies by all stakeholders in conjunction with the Province of Alberta is timely and could greatly enhance the future outcomes for the area residents and stakeholders over the next 10 years.

Analysis:

Agriculture, Community and Protective Services engaged a project plan to gather information and provide an update on current, future and potential collaborative activities in the Big Lake area in order to provide Council with a Status Report based on the March 8, 2022 motion.

Some of the key factors to consider in the development of a partnership moving forward include the following:

- The Province has developed a Lois Holes Provincial Park Management Plan related to the Park and Big Lake areas which outlines, issues, opportunities and challenges around the management of the wetland area
- Neighbouring municipalities and groups have carried out some park or trail related work in recent years or have future plans to carry out further work in the Big Lake adjacent areas
- Parkland County has not been active in this area and there is interest in trying to move forward with some of the opportunities identified in the plan, special focus on the interpretive centre (ELC)
- Residential, commercial and other land developments in adjacent neighborhoods are currently being planned or in some cases construction or acquisition of lands is already occurring which will increase population and use of the areas

The project deliverables included conversations and consultation with the stakeholders to create a summary report and status update related to the LHCPP Management Plan/Environmental Learning Centre and other intricate stakeholder activities currently ongoing or planned in the future as well as identified opportunities to collaborate.

Alternatives:

Recommendations and Possible Opportunities for Parkland County:

1. Trails Strategy Integration

Integrate the work for the Trails Strategy Plan/PRC Master Plan so that further detailed analysis and long range planning can occur in the Big Lake and surrounding area in conjunction with local municipalities/stakeholders as well as incorporating and aligning with strategies in the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park Management Plan.

2. Collaboration with Provincial Government and Stakeholders

Meet further with local municipalities and groups in the area to support creating a provincial or regional project team/committee to work in conjunction with Alberta Parks and surrounding municipalities/organization's current and long range planning activities.

3. Coordinate SW Zone Planning Activities

Begin further dialogue with the City of Edmonton and Sturgeon County on collaborative planning related to trail connections, park linkages, school developments, events planning/sharing and transportation corridors. The communications would also include conversations with local developers.

4. Synchronize with Area Planning Exercises

Create a further consultation meeting with municipal representatives and local stakeholders to share information, brainstorm ideas and prioritize collaborative activities for the near and distant future.

Short-term Wins Opportunities:

1. Utilize the LHCPP management plan and especially the *"Southwest Zone Ideas"* based on the consultations and research document gathered to date and incorporate them into the Trails Strategy Plan "Request for Proposal" scope of work in 2022.

Conclusion/Summary:

In conclusion, the Administration provides the status report and recommendations as information, discussion and possible solutions in relation to the March 8, 2022 motion.

In consultations with the internal and external stakeholders there is a general openness to developing joint methods to collaborate on the LHCPP Management Plan and the potential for a future Interpretive/Learning or Environmental Centre as well as sharing information on future transportation, schools, parks or trail amenities.

The success of the functioning of the Provincial Park and surrounding municipalities or local stakeholders can be greatly enhanced by creating a forum for sharing information, collaborating on projects and current or future planning exercises.

Parkland County can be a leader in these efforts by integrating the long term planning such as the Trails Strategy Plan/PRC Master Plan and supporting a provincial or regional project focused group to begin creating a terms of reference(s)/project plan(s) for joint projects such

as a new Environmental Learning Centre, the park management plan initiatives and/or a conceptual plan for a trail system/network around the entire Lake/Park area.

A first step may be working with Alberta Parks to bring local representatives from the surrounding municipalities and stakeholders to begin a dialogue on joint regional planning coordination for the management plan and current planning activities implementation.

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