



Protected Natural Areas Policy

PREPARED BY:	Agriculture and Environment Services	COUNCIL APPROVAL DATE:	JUN 10, 2025
EFFECTIVE DATE:	JUN 10, 2025		
REFERENCES:	Nature Policy Framework Alberta Land Stewardship Act – Sec 28 Alberta Provincial Parks Act Alberta Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act Canada National Parks Act MGA – Secs 216, 606, 661, 663, 664, 676	PREVIOUS REVISION DATE:	NEW
FUNCTION:	Agriculture and Environment Services	LS REVIEW DATE:	April 16, 2025

PURPOSE

Protected Natural Areas are areas that are environmentally significant and/or sensitive and whose Natural Features and Functions are protected in some measure through land-use constraints.

The purposes of this policy are to:

- 1) Identify the County, provincial, federal, and private designations that constitute a Protected Natural Area in Parkland County.
- 2) Provide clarity by creating a single descriptor (Protected Natural Area) for all areas of this type.
- 3) Direct how County-initiated Protected Natural Areas are to be chosen, designated, and managed.

POLICY STATEMENT

The County is committed to protecting important natural systems that provide food, habitat, water, clean air, and other Beneficial Ecosystem Services. The County shall identify and designate a system of Protected Natural Areas, including those held by the County and those held by provincial, federal, and private conservation agencies within Parkland County.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms as defined in the Nature Policy Framework apply in this policy:

1. Beneficial Ecosystem Services
2. Biophysical Assessment
3. Conservation Easement

4. Conservation Reserve
5. Environmental Conservation Master Plan
6. Environmental Reserve
7. Environmental Reserve Easement
8. Environmentally Significant Area
9. High Priority Landscapes for Conservation
10. High-value Wetlands
11. Innovative Conservation Approach
12. Legacy Land
13. Local Conservation Fund
14. Moderate-value Wetlands
15. Natural Buffer
16. Natural Features
17. Natural Functions
18. Natural Infrastructure
19. Natural Rural Character
20. Nature Park
21. Nature Positive
22. Protected Natural Area
23. Riparian Areas
24. Riparian Setback Matrix Model (RSMM)
25. Water Bodies
26. Wetland

SCOPE

This policy applies to all lands within the County.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Director of Agriculture and Environment Services is responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of this policy.

Responsibilities of departments include:

1. The Director of Planning and Development is responsible for ensuring implementation throughout the planning and development process.
2. The Director of Engineering Services is responsible for ensuring implementation during capital projects.
3. The Director of Growth and Strategy is responsible for ensuring implementation through management of County lands and during capital projects.

STANDARDS

Identification

1. Protected Natural Areas in Parkland County shall include:

- a. Areas designated under the Alberta Provincial Parks Act; the Alberta Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act; or the Canada National Parks Act;
 - b. Conservation Easements and fee-simple lands held by private land conservation organizations; and
 - c. Areas designated by Parkland County as Environmental Reserve, Environmental Reserve Easement, Conservation Reserve, and County-held Conservation Easements.
2. All Area Structure Plans (ASPs), Area Redevelopment Plans (ARPs), Master Site Development Plans, and Conceptual Schemes shall include spatial delineation of all existing and proposed Protected Natural Areas in the plan area.
 3. All Legacy Land within or adjacent to an Environmentally Significant Areas, along waterbodies or containing steep slopes shall be designated as Protected Natural Area.

County-held Protected Natural Areas

Acquisition

1. The County may acquire or designate Protected Natural Areas for the following purposes:
 - a. Conservation of:
 - i. High- and Moderate-Value Wetlands;
 - ii. High-priority Riparian Areas;
 - iii. Important habitat for wild species;
 - iv. Areas important for wildlife movement;
 - v. Relatively large areas of contiguous natural vegetation;
 - vi. Naturally-occurring Water Bodies;
 - vii. Hazard lands with environmental significance;
 - viii. Hydrological connectivity; and/or
 - ix. Areas important to the local community for their natural character.
 - b. Addition to the natural structure and/or function of, or mitigation of a risk to, an area adjacent to a Protected Natural Area or Environmentally Significant Area;
 - c. Mitigation of risk to groundwater;
 - d. Prevention of the transmission of pollutants into Water Bodies;
 - e. Retention, creation, or enhancement of Natural Infrastructure;
2. County-designated Protected Natural Areas shall be entered into the County's digital records and displayed in the County's geographical information system.
3. Council may approve the use of funds allocated to a Local Conservation Fund or Environmental Restricted Surplus for the acquisition of Protected Natural Areas.
4. Lands containing identified contamination or environmental liability will not be acquired as Environmental Reserve or Conservation Reserve.
5. Compensation for the acquisition of Protected Natural Areas will only be given where required by a Provincial Act and will not be given for Easements required to satisfy a subdivision or development application or for land dedicated as part of an Innovative Conservation Approach.
6. A Conservation Easement granted to the County freely and without consideration is eligible for a charitable tax receipt for the full value of the Conservation Easement.

Prioritization

7. When an opportunity arises to acquire or designate a Protected Natural Area, the County shall give priority to lands containing:

- a. High Priority Landscapes for Conservation;
- b. Environmentally Significant Areas; and/or
- c. High-value Natural Assets.

Disposition

- 8. Council will not approve the disposition of County-held Protected Natural Area land if it is deemed to have community and/or environmental significance.
- 9. In assessing potential disposal of any Protected Natural Area, the County shall ensure the on-going conservation of the area's Natural Features and Functions and associated Beneficial Ecosystem Services.
- 10. Land required for access to a Protected Natural Area will not be considered for disposition, lease, or licence.
- 11. Protected Natural Areas that were acquired using funds from a Local Conservation Fund, or where investment in restoration, or infrastructure has occurred shall not be disposed of.
- 12. In accordance with Sec. 676 (1) of the Municipal Government Act, the County will not, except by bylaw, and after giving notice in accordance with Sec. 606 and holding a public hearing in accordance with Sec. 216.4:
 - a. Change the use and purpose of an Environmental Reserve or Environmental Reserve Easement;
 - b. Transfer, lease, dispose of, or change the boundaries of an Environmental Reserve or Environmental Reserve Easement.
- 13. The County shall not seek to dispose of a Conservation Easement;
 - a. Conservation Easements granted to the County will only be disposed of by transfer to another Qualified Organization as defined by the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, as amended from time to time.
- 14. All revenues generated from the disposal of a County-held Protected Natural Area shall accrue to the Local Conservation Fund or Environmental Restricted Surplus.

Use and Management

- 15. Management of Environmental Reserve lands shall prioritize nature conservation and education over recreation and utilities.
 - a. Recreational access may be allowed at the discretion of the County and must not impact the Natural Function of the Area.
 - b. Recreational access areas should be mapped and detailed in all Area Structure Plans (ASPs), Area Redevelopment Plans (ARPs), Master Site Development Plans, and Conceptual Schemes
- 16. Management of Conservation Reserve lands shall be primarily for conservation of the Natural Features for which it was acquired.
- 17. Management of Easements shall be for the purpose of conserving the Function of Natural Features in accordance with the agreement on title.
 - a. Easements held by the County will be monitored to ensure compliance with the agreement.