



**PRAXIS PAPERS:**

T H E O R Y I N T O A C T I O N

# Kananaskis Country Recreation Development Policy Review: A Consultation for All Albertans

Written by

▶ Richard Roberts President, Praxis, Inc.

November, 1999

## 1.0 Background - A Recreation Area for all Albertans

*Established in 1977 as a recreation focused multi-use area for all Albertans, Kananaskis Country is located in the southwest sector of the province of Alberta, Canada. A 90-minute drive from Calgary, one of the province's major urban centers (population 850,000), Kananaskis Country covers 4,250 square kilometres of foothill and mountain terrain.*

*Because of its spectacular natural environment, proximity to Calgary and easy access, Kananaskis Country has become the most popular multiple-use recreation area in the province.*



*Credits: The research team consisted of over 30 contractors and staff from Praxis. Of particular note for their contributions forming the core team are Dr. Keith Archer who provided the statistical oversight, Ms. Judy Otton, and Tammy Stevenson. Mr. Dave Nielsen and Mr. Don Cockerton provided ongoing consistency from Kananaskis Country offices of AEP. Finally, Ms. Joan Wood, who recently joined Praxis, assisted in reviewing all the materials and the writing and editing of this paper.*

1

KANANASKIS COUNTRY  
RECREATION  
DEVELOPMENT POLICY  
REVIEW:  
A CONSULTATION FOR  
ALL ALBERTANS



Praxis

To the early 1990s, recreation development in Kananaskis Country had been limited by the existing Alberta Environmental Protection (AEP) recreation development policies. However, the significant and increasing volume of recreational users (approximately 3 million visitors annually in 1996/97) suggested that a review of the adequacy of the existing recreational infrastructure, and thereby the recreational development policies, was required. In addition, with the popularity and inherent attraction of Kananaskis Country, the development industry identified the potential for lucrative recreation and tourism development opportunities and lobbied AEP to approve additional development.

Responding to the recreation management and development pressures, AEP initiated, in 1995, an in-house consultation process to assess public opinion about recreation development policies for Kananaskis Country. The sample population used in this consultation process was primarily Kananaskis Country recreation users. As a consequence, the results generated by AEP were challenged as being biased to a single perspective, and not representative of the opinion of "all Albertans".

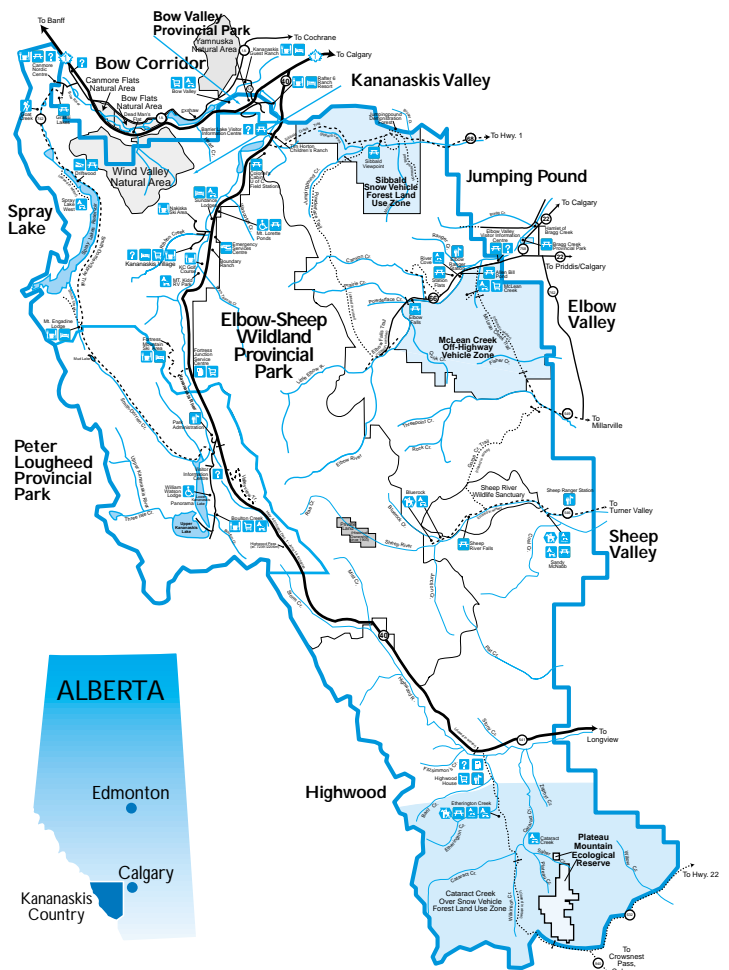
## 2.0 The Challenge – A Public Consultation Process for All Albertans

To address the criticisms of the initial public consultation, and to achieve the original goal of reviewing the existing

recreational development policies for Kananaskis Country, AEP contracted Praxis Inc., in 1997, to conduct a second public review process. The expressed mandate for the review was:

- To identify and inform the public/ users with an interest in the existing and future development policies and the development review process in Kananaskis Country;
- To receive comments on the existing policies and related issues identified to date from Albertans at large, as well as groups/ users with an interest in Kananaskis Country. In particular, these include:
  - review of existing Kananaskis Country Recreation Development Policies,

### Kananaskis Country Boundaries





- establishing appropriate levels, if any, and types of future development,
- identifying development issues especially as they relate to both the Spray and Kananaskis valleys,
- review preliminary results received during the 1995/96 consultation processes; and,
- To make recommendations to the Alberta Environmental Protection on revising existing recreation policies where warranted.

While the expressed mandate for the process was clear, the inherent challenge for the second public consultation process was to design an approach that would be inclusive and transparent. Essentially, the second process was responsible for providing the broadest range of opportunities for input possible to the greatest number of people possible, all within a framework that was open, equitable and without bias.

### **3.0 Solution One – The Process Advisory Committee (PAC)**

During two initial ‘Issue Scoping Sessions’ (detailed in Section 4.4), held in late 1997, it became evident that the multi-use character of Kananaskis Country had resulted in the development of a significant number of user groups with a diverse variety of interests relating to Kananaskis Country. Because of the dissatisfaction with the approach to the initial (1995) public consultation process, during the sessions these interest groups and organizations indicated that a shared priority was ensuring that the consultation process was inclusive and transparent.

Praxis believed that the user groups and organizations related to Kananaskis Country had specific expertise and valuable opinions to offer. Consequently, their input should be actively sought and encouraged, not only in undertaking the consultation, but in actually designing and reviewing the process over the entire duration. As such, it was determined that a formal committee comprised of individuals from these groups and organizations should be established. In response to the challenge of generating an accessible consultation that was open to all interested Albertans and the expressed priorities of the user groups and organizations, the role of this committee was to oversee the process of the public consultation.

Membership in the Process Advisory Committee (PAC) was determined jointly between Praxis and AEP, mindful of advice given during the initial Scoping Sessions. The objective for recruiting participants was to generate a committee that would reflect the diverse recreation, development, and environmental interests and activities of Kananaskis Country. Consequently, sectors considered relevant to the Kananaskis Country review were identified, and participants were recruited.



*Photo Courtesy of Parks Canada*



Relevant sectors included:

- recreation user groups
- environmental organizations
- adjacent jurisdictions
- existing commercial operators
- downhill ski operators
- educational institutions
- permit holders
- provincial government
- scientific communities
- First Nations
- tourism
- gateway communities
- resource industries – forestry, cattle, oil and gas, hydroelectric

The result was a 25 member committee responsible for overseeing the process of public consultation for the review of recreation development policies in Kananaskis Country. The participants that were selected for the Process Advisory Committee (PAC) did not formally 'represent' the organizations that they belonged to, but rather represented a variety of opinions and perspectives. In this case, AEP was a member of the committee rather than outside of the process. This greatly assisted in both obtaining information from the department as well as in the decision making process. However, the Committee was responsible to Praxis, and not AEP.

In addition, from the beginning, it was made clear that this was a process focused committee and not content oriented. All participants were free to express their opinions through the various methods developed and used in the consultation itself but were not to bring these content issues to the table. Notably, the committee lived up to this commitment throughout the process - an achievement in itself.

Meeting ten times over a twelve-month period (January to December, 1998) as a working group, the initial task for PAC was to generate Operating Guidelines for the Committee. The Operating Guidelines were essentially a terms of reference for the roles and responsibilities of the Committee and encompassed aspects such as: purpose, working structure, committee composition, decision making, observer status, confidentiality and media contacts. The approach of collectively designing Operating Guidelines was successful for three key reasons.

- First, it provided explicit definition of the philosophy, purpose and activities of the Committee. This diminished the potential for misunderstanding and conflict during the working process and provided an established and mutually agreed upon framework for resolving any issues.
- Second, although the Committee members originated from diverse and in some instances conflicting organizations and represented a variety of perspectives, by collectively producing the Operating Guidelines, the Committee members revealed common interests, objectives and concerns. This generated a level of respect and trust among Committee members, ultimately resulting in cohesion of the group.
- Finally, by clearly identifying the expectations for and responsibilities of the Committee members, participation in the Committee was based on informed agreement. Because the participants 'knew what they were getting into', the level of





commitment and overall buy-in for the project was high. Notably, all but one of the Committee members saw the process through to completion.

Establishing an integrated, multi-sectoral committee that was reflective of the diverse character of Kananaskis Country's recreational use to oversee the process of public consultation was the first step toward ensuring that the process was inclusive and transparent.

#### 4.0 Solution Two – A 'Kit of Tools'

The initial responsibility of PAC, with the guidance of Praxis, was to identify appropriate sample populations and determine the research tool(s) that would most effectively reach these populations and generate the results required.



In identifying the appropriate population, one of the most important issues confronting PAC was determining whether the assessment of public opinion should be based on 'informed' opinion or on the current opinions of Albertans as they existed at that date (1998). Some members of PAC suggested that opinions about recreation development would differ if individuals had a comprehensive awareness of the current state of the Kananaskis Country environment. In addition, it was suggested that a true

understanding of Albertans' opinions about present and future recreational development should take the potential knowledge gap into account. From these discussions, PAC additionally indicated that there was a need for benchmark data on Albertans' views toward recreation development, independent of their current level of knowledge and understanding.

From this, PAC agreed that the public consultation process had several different, and potentially complementary, purposes. Three objectives for the process were identified, namely:

- To collect solid and reliable benchmark data on Albertans' attitudes toward recreation development in Kananaskis Country;
- To generate, in an effort to fill in the gaps of understanding, a single, readily available package of current information about the state of Kananaskis Country; and
- To provide the opportunity for all Albertans to become more informed about the current state of Kananaskis Country and to measure the opinion of an 'informed' public with regard to recreational development policies.

It became readily apparent that to achieve the objectives that had evolved for the project, different types of input from a broad and diverse cross-section of the population was required. A single research tool or methodology would not be capable of generating the response that was necessary. Consequently, to provide the opportunity for as many Albertans as possible to contribute, a research design that employed a variety of techniques was generated. The resulting research 'kit of tools' offered



the public a variety of methods to access the different stages of the consultation process. Essentially the 'kit of tools' allowed people a means to participate in their own way, in their own place and in their own timeframe.

The methodology for the Kananaskis Recreation Development Policy Review is chronologically detailed as follows:

#### **4.1 Background Data Review**

All background data that was available from prior and on-going activities relating to public opinion about Kananaskis Country was collected from a wide variety of sources. This included a wide range of users survey data from Kananaskis Country offices and results from a Calgary newspaper survey. In all cases, the raw data from these surveys was requested so that Praxis could complete its own evaluation of the responses. From this data review, a series of issues relating to recreation development in Kananaskis Country and the public consultation were identified.



#### **4.2 Scoping Information Package**

A mailing list of approximately 1,600 individuals who had previously participated in the Kananaskis Country

public consultations or were involved in groups or organizations relevant to Kananaskis Country was compiled. To obtain feedback on the accuracy of issues that had been identified during the background data review, these individuals were sent a Scoping Information Package and a response form and asked to complete and submit the form. In addition, the results of the Scoping Information Package provided information about groups, organizations and individuals that were interested in contributing to the upcoming public consultation process.

#### **4.3 Scoping Sessions**

Two Scoping Sessions were held, one in Calgary – the major urban centre 90 minutes from Kananaskis Country and one in Canmore – a mountain “gateway” community adjacent to Kananaskis Country, in November and December, 1997. Like the Scoping Information Package, the purpose of the Scoping Sessions was to inform the public about the upcoming consultation process, validate existing issues, identify additional issues, and determine potential participants for the consultation process.

#### **4.4 Process Advisory Committee (PAC)**

The rationale for and approach to developing the Process Advisory Committee has been detailed in Section 2.0. However, in the context of a chronological overview of the research methodology for the consultation, it is relevant to identify the timing of the initiation of PAC. In addition, it is important to note that in keeping with the goals of the public consultation process, following the development of





the Committee (January 1998), PAC provided significant conceptual and substantive guidance to the remaining components of the research design.

#### **4.5 Random-sample Telephone Survey**

In April and May 1998, a survey questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 1,272 households from across Alberta. PAC participated extensively in the design of the survey, the survey content, and the wording of the survey questions. The survey was conducted on a 'cold call' basis, giving the respondents no advance notice. This approach determined the level of knowledge and understanding of the 'uninformed' public. The specific purpose of the survey was to identify the respondents' extent of use of Kananaskis Country and their opinion about the appropriate level of future development for Kananaskis Country.

The survey was conducted by telephone and took an average of 18 to 20 minutes to complete. The phone calls were based on a set of randomly generated telephone numbers stratified by place of residence. Interviews were conducted using a three-callback regimen. Response rates for the survey, based on the number of person-to-person contacts, was 18 percent. A sample of this size produced a margin of error for the province as a whole of +/- 2.8 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval.

The results from the random-sample telephone survey provided the information necessary to generate reliable benchmark data on "all Albertans'" attitudes toward recreation development in Kananaskis Country, achieving one of the primary objectives of the public consultation process.

#### **4.6 Public Knowledge and Education: 'The Kananaskis Backgrounder'**

As part of the public consultation process, Praxis, in cooperation with AEP and with significant input from PAC, produced a single and readily available package of current, unbiased information about the state of Kananaskis Country. The 'Backgrounder' provided context for questions that were probed in greater detail in the next phase of the consultation process and, in keeping with the objectives for the process, was intended to fill the gaps of understanding. This was made available in hardcopy and as downloadable electronic files from Praxis' Website.

#### **4.7 Self-selected Sample Survey - 'The Kananaskis Workbook'**

The next round of the public process involved a self-selected sample, mail/fax-back questionnaire. The 'Workbook' was designed to accompany the 'Backgrounder' and as such, with a framework of information provided, was designed to probe more deeply than was possible with the random sample telephone survey. This allowed respondents to elaborate on recreation development options in an 'informed' manner.

Albertans were made aware of this phase of the process in late June 1998. This was achieved through two rounds of province-wide newspaper advertisements that were placed in all weekly and daily newspapers, various print and electronic media reports, press releases from AEP, and information posters initiated by a number of user and environmental organizations. In addition, to provide



additional information and access to the Backgrounder and Workbook, information about the Praxis' toll free line and Website was included in all advertising formats.

Over 4,500 individuals called into the toll free line and packages, including the Backgrounder and Workbook, were mailed out. Additional distribution of the package included: all the individuals on the initial mailing list (1,600), the random sample telephone survey participants who agreed to participate in the second stage (800), individuals who accessed the web site and downloaded files (est. 1,200), and bulk distributions in relevant locations (e.g. municipal libraries, AEP offices, Kananaskis Country Information Centres). In all, over 10,000 packages were distributed along with those who downloaded from the Website.

One situation that bears elaboration is the issue of advertising and the media. Even with cross provincial advertising the response rates were only satisfactory, certainly not overwhelming. In late September 1998, one of the local newspaper reporters wrote a half page article and in "large print" provided both the Praxis Website and toll free numbers with a note, "If you have not participated, call or log on...today". Immediately following the publication of the article, over the course of 18 hours, 2,900 people logged onto the Website with up to 40 on-line simultaneously, ultimately downloading over 2.5 gigabytes of the Backgrounder and Workbook (PDF) data files. This clearly demonstrates how the media can influence public response.

Because the Workbook was completed by a self-selected sample (that is,

whomever wanted to complete it), it was not intended to provide a 'representative' view of Albertans. Instead, unlike the random sample telephone survey, it was expected that individuals choosing to participate in this stage would have an existing level of interest and experience in Kananaskis Country. Not surprisingly, these expectations were confirmed with 99 per cent of the Workbook respondents having visited the Kananaskis in the last five years. What was interesting and at first surprising, was the fact that a number of participants came from the United States, South America and Europe. On analysis, it was discovered that these participants were "ex-pats", that is people from the energy sector working offshore.

By employing a self-selected approach to the second round of the survey, and by providing an accompanying information booklet with the survey, the objective of measuring the opinion of an 'informed' public with regard to recreational development policies was achieved.

#### **4.8 Organization Submissions**

The final input into the process was the written submissions received from organizations. Various organizations adopted alternative approaches to





providing input – from organizing petitions, to letter writing campaigns, to writing letters, to providing detailed analyses of recreation development policy options. In many instances, a considerable amount of time and effort was dedicated to preparing these submissions. It was well understood by the consultative team that these submissions most likely offered partisan opinion. However, they were considered valuable in the context of determining the interest, priorities and preferences of groups who view themselves as having a significant stake in the future of Kananaskis Country.

Of interest in this process was that one of the PAC members reminded both PAC and Praxis, that organizations need time to respond if they are to consult their membership. As a result, it was agreed upon to provide these organizations with an additional month to obtain such membership input. In turn it was required that submitting organizations prove that they had consulted their membership in some manner. This was achieved by requesting that an elected member of the executive or board personally sign a letter indicating how the organization had been consulted.

#### **4.9 Analysis of Data**

All submissions, in all their various forms, were keyboarded and entered into a series of computer data bases. These were then analyzed using a number of tools, including: statistical analysis (Statsview / SPSS), data base analysis (Filemaker Pro / Excel), and analysis of all open-ended or textual data (Sonar Professional). In total, a team of fifteen data entry staff and ten

researcher-writers undertook the analysis and report production.

The analysis process began at the baseline, by examining the opinions of a representative, random sample of the population of Alberta. The responses of this representative cross-section remained at the core of all subsequent analyses. To substantiate whether the Telephone Survey respondents reflected the demographic characteristics of the Alberta population at large, a comparison between the Statistics Canada 1996 Census and similar characteristics with the random sample Telephone Survey population was completed. Further elaboration of the views of Albertans was pursued through the analysis of the Workbook responses and the submissions from organizations. There was no attempt to weigh one view against the other when examining organizations' or individuals' submissions. Instead, the perspective remained one of attempting to elaborate based on the core values and beliefs of "all Albertans".

One of the notable and unintended outcomes of the consultation process was the development of a 'state of the art' database, which can be used for planning purposes by the Kananaskis



Country staff in the future. There are few locations, including national parks, which have such a comprehensive, current database of user preferences, levels of satisfaction, future activities, and other pertinent information.

## **5.0 THE OUTCOME – ALL ALBERTANS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD**

Analysis of the response generated during the public consultation demonstrated that there were significant commonalities in Albertans' responses relating to their perceptions of Kananaskis Country and their reasons for visitation. In addition, the consultation identified a generally shared perspective toward recreation development in Kananaskis Country. The key messages from the public consultation were:

- Albertans go to Kananaskis Country instead of other mountain national parks for the location, the access, because it is less crowded and it feels more like “wilderness”.
- The diversity of recreation experience found in Kananaskis Country is important to Albertans. The preference is for activities to be compatible with the wilderness experience and the “escape to solitude”.
- Albertans view themselves as stewards of this unique area and want to promote the wilderness aspect over all others. This should take priority over recreation development.
- Albertans do not favour a blanket elimination of recreation development, but do not want any more large-scale facilities such as

new four season resorts, downhill ski areas, housing developments, or golf courses. They want to know that there are strict plans to control any small-scale facilities such as new campgrounds, trails or small, backcountry lodges, because they believe that Kananaskis Country is approaching its development limit.

- Albertans like what they find in Kananaskis Country now and the policies that led to this, but want them tightened to eliminate the potential of over-development.

Albertans' expressed preference was to maintain Kananaskis Country's ecological integrity and character by limiting future recreational development. However, the future of Kananaskis Country rested with the political decision-makers.

The results of 'The Kananaskis Country Recreation Development Policy Review' were submitted to the Provincial Cabinet in January 1999. The debate between Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA's) over future recreation development in Kananaskis Country fell into two camps. On one hand, several MLA's believed that further development would increase the tourism and recreation potential of the area and thereby make good economic sense. Alternatively, in an effort to respond to the voice of the public, other MLA's supported halting further development of the area as a means of protecting the environment. On May 18, 1999, the Premier of the Province of Alberta announced that, “Albertans want to escape to a Kananaskis Country that retains its natural environment and wilderness character, and think that Kananaskis Country is approaching the





limits for many kinds of development. We've clearly listened to that message. New proposals for major facilities will simply not be considered; they will be directed to communities or public land outside of Kananaskis Country" (*Government of Alberta News Release, May 18, 1999*). Clearly, the revised recreation policies for Kananaskis Country reflected the results of the extensive public input from thousands of Albertans.

While at varying levels, public acceptance of the results of the Review of Development Policies for Kananaskis Country was universal. User groups and organizations, environmentalists and users celebrated the outcome. Developers, while less than celebratory, recognized that public opinion and political decision were firm and did not challenge the results.

## **6.0 THE KEY TO SUCCESS – CUSTOMIZING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

The definitive political policy and general public acceptance surrounding the revised development policies for Kananaskis Country provided solid evidence that the public consultation process was successful. The challenge of overcoming the deficiencies of the initial consultation and generating a process that was inclusive and transparent had been met.

The key to success was initially identifying the priorities for the consultation, and, from this, customizing the consultative process to ensure these priorities were addressed. In the case of the Kananaskis Country, rebuilding trust, transparency and inclusivity were identified as priorities

common to all stakeholder groups. In response, the consultative process was designed to address these priorities in two ways.

First, the transparency of the consultation was guaranteed with the creation of the Process Advisory Committee. The ultimate success of PAC can be attributed to the integrated, multi-sectoral nature of the group, ensuring that all perspectives related to Kananaskis Country were represented; and, that the explicit role of the Committee was to oversee the process for the consultation. Because the entire research design was developed and 'customized' by this diverse group of volunteers, the resulting consultation process was accepted as open and objective by decision-makers and members of the public. An additional beneficial outcome of PAC was the positive influence the PAC members had within their original organizations or user groups. Because each member of PAC had been involved in every aspect of the process design and was a part of the decision making team, each had the ability to fully represent to their respective organizations the rationale for the public consultation process, and thereby, the validity of the process results. Because the PAC members had pre-established



credibility within their individual organizations, their explanation and support of the public consultation process generated a ripple effect of support and buy-in among the user groups and organizations related to Kananaskis Country.

Second, the inclusivity of the public consultation was accomplished by selecting a variety of research techniques and compiling a customized 'kit of tools'. By providing a range of survey and participation techniques, the public was encouraged to participate on their terms, in a format that they were comfortable with and was accessible to them. This served to enhance and diversify the response rate. While the 'kit of tools' included conventional and effective research techniques (random sample telephone surveys, self-report surveys), employing advanced communications technology (web page, PDF files, toll-free numbers) significantly expanded the scope of feedback.

Finally, in conclusion, by utilizing the PAC, a number of understandings were reached. One of the most interesting was that in the initial stages, the divergences between competing groups were portrayed as "environmentalist" versus "developer". This conclusion seemed obvious given many of the other environmental issues that were occurring across the province. However, in working with PAC, it became apparent that there was really a three-way divergence with the largest group being the recreational users of Kananaskis Country. In fact, the recreational users became the "balance" between the environmentalists and the developers.

In some situations where issues appeared to protect the environment in Kananaskis Country the recreational users were cooperative but reminded the environmentalists that they still wanted recreation access into some of the areas. On the other hand, the recreational users reminded the developers that they were open to limited development, not large-scale recreational development. In some senses, the recreational users became the "arbitrators of common sense" between the extremes. And finally, the general public, whether in the random sample population or those who self-selected and completed workbooks, indicated that the current level of recreation development in Kananaskis Country was "just about right".

Clearly, it was time to limit recreation development so that all Albertans could continue to enjoy the legacy that had been left to them and their children now and into the future.

