



Photo credit: Eti Swinford

The Recreation and Parks Vision & Plan

“Everything we do to increase physical activity must be markedly less consumptive than in the past.”

*Foundations for Action
ARPA, 2006*

Imagining a better Alberta: The Recreation and Parks Action Plan

Imagine an Alberta where all citizens have equal access to recreation and parks—and take full advantage. Where staff



respectfully engage citizens in solving significant problems, building togetherness and leadership skills. Where children and youth have all the support they need to grow strong and healthy. Where Albertans live within their environmental means while

protecting green spaces and heritage sites for all to enjoy. Where investment in recreation and parks reflects the field’s status as an essential public service—and everyone knows from experience that life is richer as a result.

That is not Alberta today. Instead, the poor struggle to afford recreation, and obesity skyrockets.

Significant natural areas are lost to urban sprawl, and resources are consumed as if we had five planets at our disposal.

Many in recreation and parks

have become mired in budgets and bottom lines, losing the passion that pulled them into the field.

“To the extent that all Albertans recognize the imperative of change and commit to action, we can create a far more livable future than our current course would produce. A future that not only provides higher quality of life, but costs far less in the long run.”

*Foundations for Action,
ARPA, 2006*

Achieving a better Alberta demands a dramatic shift in course. *Foundations for Action: Enhancing the Quality of Life in Alberta* offers a template for “turning the ship.” Based on the insights of many disciplines that share the vision of a better Alberta, this foundational document includes a plan of action specifically for recreation and parks.

The pages that follow provide highlights from the plan, outlining 11 crucial roles and 14 key result areas recreation and parks must pursue if we are to achieve the envisioned Alberta. This plan holds promise because it taps the one source of power that will never be scarce: Alberta ingenuity.

INSIDE

Crucial roles for recreation and parks	2
Making the vision come true	2
Find out more.....	6



Crucial roles for recreation and parks

Building a better Alberta demands a visionary rethinking of roles in every discipline. For recreation and parks, this means a broadening of focus—beyond facilities and finances, which have come to dominate our attention, to building individual, community and environmental wellbeing, our historic and now essential purpose. To be relevant and responsible in this evolving Alberta, the recreation and parks field needs to shoulder the following roles:

1. Strengthen community identity and sense of place
2. Foster human development and lifelong learning
3. Promote health and wellness
4. Strengthen safety and security
5. Increase social inclusion and cultural unity
6. Facilitate community capacity building
7. Promote citizenship and community leadership
8. Provide positive recreation experiences
9. Promote leisure awareness and action
10. Develop and manage accessible recreation and parks infrastructure



Making the vision come true: Steps toward a better Alberta

Having identified key roles in the enterprise of building a better Alberta, the recreation and parks field has much work to do. Leaders involved in drafting *Foundations for Action* identified the following 14 Key Result Areas (KRAs) as urgent zones of focus in the next decade. They identified first steps in support of each KRA, with the understanding that specific action will be shaped by those who take

the lead. Ideally, the role played by recreation and parks will vary from direct leadership to supporting other partners in the Quality of Life sector.

Toward that end, it would be useful for other disciplines and indeed entire sectors to develop similar plans and consider who is best equipped to lead in each area. The more we work together, the more pivotal we will be to the wellness, quality of life and greening of the communities we serve.

KRA 1: Collaborative decisionmaking.

Today's complex and interconnected issues demand action across disciplines and geographic boundaries.

1. **Advancing the Quality of Life sector.** Leaders in the sector are genuinely willing to partner across disciplines and interested in creating a mechanism to propel united action.
2. **Collaborative regional service delivery.** A more deliberate sharing of expertise, services and facilities offers hope to communities that are struggling to serve citizens and boost quality of life.

KRA 2: Infrastructure renewal and development.

Alberta needs public recreation facilities that are inviting, sustainable and able to meet a range of quality of life needs; it also needs expanded and linked parks, open spaces and corridors.

3. **Expand and upgrade the Alberta recreation facilities inventory.** Initial data collected on behalf of ARPA regarding aging community recreation facilities is spurring reinvestment, prompting other provinces to follow suit.
4. **Bilateral sport and recreation infrastructure investment.** The provincial and federal governments have identified capital investment in sport and recreation infrastructure as a top priority and have injected millions into projects across Alberta, but the need is not fully met.

5. **Energy and utilities conservation, waste management, green procurement.** Lifecycle planning and management must be employed to ensure that every recreation and parks facility and activity is markedly less consumptive than in the past.
6. **Alberta trails and corridors strategy.** A provincewide strategy is needed to guide the growth of greenways and trails in and between communities.

KRA 3: Promotion and communications.

While health promotion is improving, we are not seeing the widespread behaviour change needed to combat epidemic obesity and other chronic illnesses. Coordination across disciplines is essential to cut through the clutter of often contradictory messages with consistent, persuasive healthy living campaigns that reach people where they are.

7. **Recreation for Life.** This benefits-based slogan, developed by ARPA with the Recreation for Life Foundation, could offer the positive, life-embracing focus needed in an all-out campaign to inform, motivate, empower and facilitate sustained change in leisure behaviour.

KRA 4: Leadership development.

An acute and growing need for leadership and relevant expertise demands that recreation and parks put top priority on renewing and integrating recruitment, training, research, mentoring and professional development.

8. **Career awareness strategy.** A bulge in retiring leaders adds to the urgency of promoting the field's range of potential careers and related educational opportunities.
9. **Career preparation strategy.** Ongoing review is needed to ensure recreation education meets changing needs and uses the best delivery options.
10. **Career development strategy.** More attention must be paid to training and mentoring for those already in the field, including apprenticeships for recent graduates.

"Rather than assuming people know how recreation and parks fits into a community-based health and wellness model, we need to regularly and succinctly spell that out."
Foundations for Action
ARPA, 2006

"Public space is for living, doing business, kissing and playing. It can't be measured with economics (alone); it must be felt with the soul."

Enrique Peñalosa
Former Mayor of Bogotá



Photo credit: Jason Kasumovic | Dreamstime.com

"We must build landscapes that heal, connect and empower, that make intelligible our relations with each other and with the natural world; places that welcome and enclose All that calls for a new culture of nature, and it cannot come soon enough."

Alexander Wilson
The Culture of Nature,
1998

"The field cannot seek a greater role in public policy and a greater share of public resources without demonstrating clear commitment to continuous improvement."

Foundations for Action
ARPA, 2006

Photo credit: Sonya Etchison | Dreamstime.com

KRA 5: Environmental stewardship.

Integrated land use planning and innovative initiatives are urgently needed to stem the loss of natural areas within and beyond communities. Recreation and parks must be at the table to advocate, advise and ensure that commitments are kept.

11. **Protecting and conserving our natural capital.** Stewardship incentives and other conservation policies are needed to ensure that economic considerations no longer trump biodiversity and other environmental assets.
12. **Healthy parks, healthy people; revitalizing urban and rural parks.** Previous provincial programs demonstrated the value of urban and countryside parks, which need reinvestment now.
13. **Unlocking the potential of the "rural urban fringe."** Preserving working farms, historic sites and other living landscapes enriches both town and country.
14. **Taking the "Natural Step" for communities.** Borrowing ideas from natural ecosystems makes communities, facilities and programs more sustainable.
15. **Smart growth in Alberta communities.** Recreation and parks needs to speak up against urban sprawl.

KRA 6: Personal wellness.

Given that obesity rates for children have tripled in less than a generation and that nearly half of Albertans are not physically active enough to achieve health benefits, we need to do everything in our power to foster active lifestyles and healthy living.

16. **Food nutrition standards for public facilities.** Nutritional value must override economic gain in deciding what food to sell.
17. **Healthy living tax incentive for children and youth.** Alberta's modest fitness tax credit for children and youth demonstrates some political appetite for healthy living incentives.
18. **Lifestyle intervention by general practitioners.** Roundtables with the medical community may be one way to equip doctors and encourage a collaborative approach to lifestyle change.

19. Status of therapeutic recreation.

Essential to quality of life for many with physical, cognitive, social and emotional limitations, therapeutic recreation deserves recognition on par with other health professions.

KRA 7: Community wellness.

Recreation and parks must collaborate with urban planning, health and others to make sure community design and services encourage rather than discourage active transportation, outdoor play and other activities that build health and social capital as neighbours meet and children play safely outside.

20. Alberta Active Communities Initiative.

Past Alberta wellness strategies have focused on schools, workplaces and regional fitness centres. Alberta Active Communities (now Active, Creative and Engaged Communities, or ACE) is filling a gap by working at the grassroots community level.

21. Healthy school communities and the after-school agenda. Quality programs that incorporate physical activity, health and learning are urgently needed during the critical hours after school.

22. Social change model for activity-friendly communities. Communities need proven models for propelling change. Recreation and parks practitioners need to engage freely with communities to build evidence regarding the impact of built environments on active living.

23. Walkable communities. Priority must be given to reducing reliance on cars and supporting active modes such as cycling, public transit and walking.

KRA 8: Refinancing recreation and parks services at the community level.

Recreation and parks' vital role in enhancing health and wellbeing continues to be compromised by fiscal restraint. It is crucial to seek an expanded menu of revenue resources, both public and private.

24. New deal for Alberta communities.

Continued advocacy is needed to ensure that public infrastructure investment

programs include recreation and parks even as we work with allies to explore innovative financing options.

KRA 9: Inclusive participation.

Across Alberta, the gap between the haves and have-nots is growing. As an essential service with potential to mitigate the negative effects of disparity, recreation and parks needs to serve everyone in every community.

25. An equality framework. Citizens in some communities have difficulty accessing or affording even basic recreation services. Access standards are needed to ensure greater equality.

26. Implementing Everybody gets to play™ in Alberta. This research-based Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) program helps equip communities to reduce barriers so that more kids can be involved in play.

27. Recreation diversity and inclusion strategies. More work is needed to involve underserved populations, including families living in poverty, young children and youth, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, girls and young women, older adults and recent immigrants.

KRA 10: Quality assurance.

Today's focus on accountability, particularly as measured by outcomes, demands that recreation and parks set standards of excellence and equip leaders for continuous improvement.

28. Service excellence framework for recreation and parks services in local government. Recreation and parks needs a framework for measuring service excellence and tracking improvement. This framework also could provide a vehicle for achieving national and provincial priorities for sport, recreation, parks and physical activity.

29. Quality assurance in children's recreation programming. As the Alberta provider of HIGH FIVE, Canada's only (and highly regarded) quality assurance standard for sport and recreation programs serving ages 6-12, ARPA needs to work with communities to ensure the quality of their offerings.

KRA 11: Policy and governance.

Given that recreation and parks is essential to Alberta's future, clear public policy is urgently needed to direct its work.

30. Recreation policy and strategy for Alberta. The provincial government is developing a policy and strategy for recreation in concert with stakeholders such as ARPA.

31. Leisure and cultural policy studies centre. Data behind leisure and culture decisions tend to be sporadic and poorly developed. Leaders hunger for evidence and analysis that would permit sophisticated conversation, empirically informed policies and superior programs being initiated.

KRA 12: Strategic planning and evidence.

Strategic thinking grounded in trustworthy evidence must underpin recreation and parks planning. Today, that foundation is wobbly at best. The field needs research based on a standardized core of outcome indicators so that its benefits can be analyzed at the national, provincial, regional and local levels.

32. Alberta recreation and parks performance measures. Draft performance measures prepared by CPRA can serve as a starting point for testing and refining measures in Alberta.

33. Fostering research and inquiry. A collaborative provincial leisure research agenda is needed to guide research choices and funding.

34. Social and economic modeling. Credible models of the benefits of recreation and parks are needed to assess and communicate the field's importance.

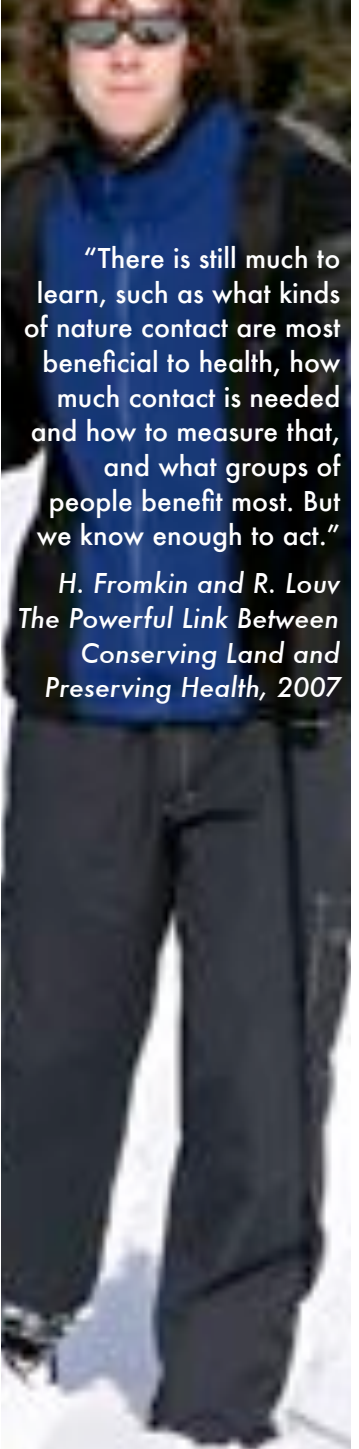
35. Provincial/regional market segmentation. To motivate change, we need to know what prompts certain individuals and groups to choose, avoid or abandon recreation activities.

36. Benefits of recreation and parks e-monitor. Web-based access to credible up-to-date findings helps practitioners champion best practices.

37. Data collection and dissemination. One-window sharing of information such

"When children play in natural environments, their play is more diverse, with imaginative and creative play that fosters language and collaborative skills."

One of many benefits of play listed at www.family-friendly-fun.com



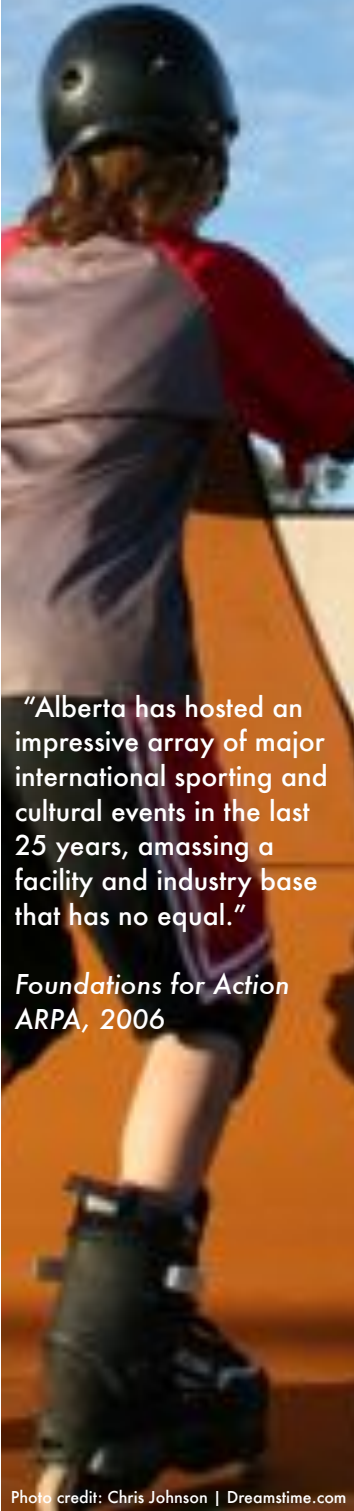
"There is still much to learn, such as what kinds of nature contact are most beneficial to health, how much contact is needed and how to measure that, and what groups of people benefit most. But we know enough to act."

*H. Fromkin and R. Louv
The Powerful Link Between
Conserving Land and
Preserving Health, 2007*

Photo credit: Karl Naundorf | Dreamstime.com

"The government and citizens of Alberta have an opportunity to show leadership by taking a communitarian approach that recognizes leisure as a central common good."

*Foundations for Action
ARPA, 2006*



"Alberta has hosted an impressive array of major international sporting and cultural events in the last 25 years, amassing a facility and industry base that has no equal."

*Foundations for Action
ARPA, 2006*

Photo credit: Chris Johnson | Dreamstime.com

as the Lifestyle Information Network holds promise for building synergy within and among disciplines.

KRA 13: Emerging recreation development priorities.

Motivating inactive populations is essential to meeting national physical activity targets. Recreation and parks have the expertise to lead this work, but success depends on the dollars and desire to reach beyond facilities into underserved segments of Alberta communities.

38. Getting serious about play. Research clearly shows that play is vital to emotional literacy, personal growth and character development. Yet typical play programs tend towards simply keeping kids occupied. Safety and liability concerns also limit opportunities for active play, particularly outdoors. Recreation and parks needs to model and promote universal access to excellent and creative play.

39. Leisure education/active lifestyles coaching. The leisure literacy needed to spur behaviour change is not automatic, but requires interdisciplinary teaching and coaching. Recreation and parks has the expertise to bring leisure literacy to neighbourhoods, schools, work, health agencies and other places where people live, work and play.

40. Community arts and culture renaissance. A focus on big cities and events has hurt community-based arts and culture, which play vital roles in giving meaning to people's lives. The recreation and parks portfolio includes many places and spaces that can be used in partnership with other Quality of Life

fields to rebuild arts and culture at the grassroots.

- 41. Sport in the community.** As local organizations struggle to do more with less, community sport is falling short of its potential as a vehicle for character development and physical literacy. Recognizing that reality, senior governments have identified community sport as a top priority for capacity building.
- 42. Youth leadership, development and outreach.** Youth do not always feel welcome in traditional programs or facilities. A provincial strategy for engaging youth in positive recreation would cost far less than ignoring their needs.
- 43. Promoting active aging.** With a growing cohort of older adults, Alberta needs senior friendly community design, programming and volunteer recruitment.

KRA 14: Robust, sustainable recreation industry.

Corporate, commercial and retail recreation providers add much to Alberta's



quality of life even as their innovative services, equipment, facilities, apparel and hosting prowess contribute to the value-added side of our economy.

44. Growing the business of recreation. It is important to collaborate with the private sector to encourage research and development, product and service innovation, corporate sponsorship and philanthropy and event hosting.

Find out more

This bulletin is part of a series based on *Foundations for Action*, a collaborative action plan for Alberta wellness and quality of life. The plan draws from the insights of individuals and agencies from many disciplines that share the vision of a future Alberta with healthy people, sustainable environments and strong vital communities. *Foundations for Action* is a key outcome of Vision 2015, an ARPA-led project that is linking the good work of organizations, government and agencies and creating new ways to make a difference together. For a full copy of *Foundations for Action*, go to the Vision 2015 website at www.vision2015.arpaonline.ca