



Time for Nature



A pathway for the predators

Can golfers and wolves find happiness in Jasper National Park of Canada?

The elk of Jasper National Park of Canada do not play golf, but they love to spend a few hours on the links. At the Jasper Park Lodge Golf Course, elk were a continuing problem, feeding on the greens and posing a safety threat to golfers.

For 70 years, the golf course was encircled by a two-metre-high wire fence to keep elk out. The fence, unfortunately, was just one more obstacle for park wolves. With few wolves in pursuit, elk numbers grew. And sure enough, the hungry elk found breaks in the golf course fence. Back they came to the fairways. "The lack of predators and the high quality forage made the golf course an ideal refuge for elk," says park warden Mike Wesbrook.



A grizzly bear checks out one of the cameras used to monitor Jasper's wildlife.
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Clearly, Parks Canada and the lodge needed a new answer.

Crowding out the predators

In Jasper National Park, lower elevation areas such as the Athabasca Valley have attracted both people and wildlife. These areas provided the best terrain for locating roads, buildings and a golf course. They also provide important wildlife habitat.

Wolves and elk, predators and prey coexisted in the Athabasca Valley long before the area was developed by humans.



Wolves are using the new wildlife corridor.
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In recent decades, however, wolves have avoided the developed areas. Without predators, the elk population was no longer in balance. And conflicts between elk and people became increasingly frequent.



Addressing the problem

The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge and Parks Canada cooperated to bring the carnivores back. It was imperative to shape healthy wildlife habitat and maintain a quality recreation experience at the same time. The Jasper Park Lodge is a top-rated golf resort, and the Fairmont company wanted to keep it that way.



The new fence is an effective barrier for elk.
© Parks Canada.

In 2001, the golf course perimeter fence was reconfigured. The lodge reduced the fenced perimeter of the golf course and reconstructed it with materials permeable to carnivores. They divided the fenced area into two cells to create an open corridor through the centre, 200 - 450 metres wide. To make the area more attractive to wildlife, the golf course excluded skiing. Parks Canada provided comparable skiing opportunities nearby in a less important area for wildlife.

Now, a wildlife corridor runs through the golf course. The corridor gives free rein to predator and prey, and keeps wildlife off the greens.

The results were startling

Parks Canada monitored wildlife habits before and after the changes, using remote cameras and tracking the animals in winter. The news was good. Wolves extensively used the new corridor and adjacent valley bottom. The local habituated elk herd showed renewed wariness, fleeing more readily from humans or predators.

Now the predator and prey populations are in a more natural balance. And the golf course is as good as ever!

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/jasper