



Time for Nature



Finding the right path

A trails strategy for Jasper National Park of Canada

Hiking the trails is a great way to experience Jasper National Park of Canada. So is biking the trails or running the trails or skiing them. With over 190 km of recreational trails around Jasper townsite, the choices are almost endless.



There are over 190 km of recreational trails around the Jasper townsite.
© Parks Canada, W. Lynch, 1989.

Or are they? With trail use growing every year, tensions among users have become inevitable. And what about the wildlife who have used many of the same routes for centuries? In heavy use areas, soils and vegetation have been damaged and conflicts between people and wildlife have increased.

Clearly, Parks Canada needed to find answers to the problems, so they called on the help from the people who love and use the trails. Volunteers from the community of Jasper are part of the park's new trails strategy. They are working with Parks Canada to both upgrade trails and reclaim wildlife areas. Their joint goal is straightforward: to provide excellent recreational trails while maintaining the park's ecological integrity.



In recent years, trail use has increased dramatically.
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Expanded trail networks

In recent years, trail use has increased dramatically. The arrival of robust downhill bikes, for example, has enabled off-trail use and exploitation of steeper terrain.

Sections of trail have seriously deteriorated, especially where soils are prone to erosion or where rocks and roots are easily exposed. This has encouraged trail users to spread out, creating a braided network that is impacting vegetation.



Wildlife need their space

Not all the problems are new ones. A great number of Jasper's trails were developed years ago when people were less aware of the needs of wildlife. Many were located in the valley bottoms, which provide critical habitat and important movement corridors for many park species.

A healthy landscape with abundant wildlife is a key attraction of Jasper National Park. But wildlife, particularly large carnivores such as bears, wolves and cougars, are wary of people and tend to avoid areas where humans concentrate. They need room to move without coming into conflict with people.



Encounters between trail users and Wildlife have increased over the years.
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The Jasper community gets involved

Community representatives, recreation groups, and individual trail users are helping Parks Canada address trail issues and advising on trail management. These stakeholders defined the concept of a perfect trail, which combines aesthetic and ecological values. Through a collaborative, community-based approach, Parks Canada will apply the concept on the ground.

Happy trails

Currently, Parks Canada and researchers from Simon Fraser University are studying trail use in Jasper. The Jasper Trail Stewards, trail users themselves, helped design the study and carry out the survey. The information will provide important insight to guide Parks Canada's future decisions.

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