

It is our understanding that the mandate of a Provincial Park addresses the population of the Province; this includes the total range of abilities of that population. The park budgets support many outdoor activities for Albertans; people with disabilities are a part of this population. If they are unable to participate in these activities they and their caregivers are in essence excluded. Facilities like William Watson Lodge that are inclusive offer the potential of any activity in a park to all Albertans despite their aging infirmities or/and disabilities.

Traditionally charitable camps have provided some outdoor activities for people with disabilities. Equestrian, hiking, camping and appreciation of nature has been valued and provided for by parks to the general public without charity. For example if you wish to strap on a backpack and climb up to a lake the trails are maintained by trail crews, should you get into difficulties the conservation rangers are available to help you. Providing opportunities to all Albertans to enjoy Alberta's natural beauty dignifies both the individual and encompasses the values of the Province to treat each Albertan with respect.

A fixed roof facility is essential to accommodate those people with disabilities such that without this type of support they are unable to participate in the Provincial Park System but instead can only view it from the window of their vehicle "from the inside looking out." This includes people who reside in group-homes, auxiliary hospitals, nursing homes, long term care facilities and families who provide care for a loved one for example a person with a developmental disability.

The venue can be utilized throughout the year to create opportunities for special education students to participate in out-door classes with the rest of the school, adventure classes can then be inclusive, senior hostelling can be accommodated and families can interact with out exclusion. Special Olympics participants can also use the facility.

Providing a flexible range of affordable facilities will allow Albertans to take advantage of the Parks throughout their lifetime given that all Albertans will at sometime during their life span experience a disability or simply need to deal with the limitations of age or that of a family member.

The cost per night can also become a barrier to the enjoyment of the parks. Given that approx 70% of people with disabilities are unemployed or/and are on a fixed income. People with disabilities require transportation and not just any transportation but often an expensive van, expensive because of the equipment that is necessary in order to enter, exit and drive the vehicle. They may also have to pay for an aide to accompany them and provide for the aide's expenses. This again can contribute to exclusion of the person with the disability and their family and friends.

We have not addressed the impact of confinement on a person's health and the importance that nature and the opportunity to socialize with family plays on a person's well being for both the able bodied family caregiver and the person with a disability.

# Proposal

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Albertans are very fortunate to have parks situated throughout the province that they can access without extensive travel. At present we only have one fixed roof facility in the south of the province this obviously favors the population living closest to it.(see appendix 1) However, by placing an additional fixed roof facility in the northern part of the province this inequity for people living in the north would be addressed.

The statistics overwhelming testify to the demand on the limited facilities at William Watson Lodge (see appendix 2) and the tremendous need for another fixed roof facility in the northern part of the Province. It can be expected that this demand will continue to increase given our growing aging population resulting in more and more pressure on these resources.

When we turn away a person with a disability (see appendix 3) because “there is no room at the inn” we are turning away NOT one person but at least four people who comprise the family or caregiver or and friends. We take away the opportunity for that person to enjoy the Park System with their family, perhaps to give them a brief respite from their group home or institutional living setting.

The William Watson Lodge staff is even impacted. The staff was perceived, as people who contributed to making ones stay enjoyable now they are perceived as gatekeepers- keeping people out of a limited resource. Not an enviable position to be in.

The upcoming availability of the Blue Lake facility in William Switzer Park provides an opportunity to address the overwhelming need, as identified, for a fixed roof facility in the northern part of this vast province which would serve all Albertans wherever they reside as we anticipate that after 25 years of visiting the southern part of the province that they would take the opportunity to visit the north when the accessible facility is available.(see additional benefits appendix 4) However, should it be found to be more economical to remove the buildings and start from scratch, which would result in a much more superior and modern facility, then Alberta Park and Protective Areas have the expertise to design and build a facility that meets the best environmentally friendly practices and the highest standard of accessibility and operations for a special population as demonstrated by their success with William Watson Lodge.

However, should this not be deemed feasible then another suitable park area needs to be identified as soon as possible.

Albertans with disabilities, their families and friends do not accept that the enjoyment of recreation and the natural beauty of the Province of Alberta Parks is reliant on the charity and whim of others, but rather it is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta to be inclusive and with partners and private participation to meet the needs of all its people.

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## Appendix 1

75% of the calls to make a reservation originate from a 403 area code.

25% of the calls to make a reservation originate from a 780 area code

NOTE: It would appear that people who reside in the area from Red Deer south are better able to take advantage of the close proximity to William Watson Lodge.

However those people residing in the area covered by Red Deer north find the five hour trip prohibitive and are unable to take advantage of a short trip for a couple of days.

June to September 50% of the calls originate from a 403 area code and 50% from a 780 area code.

## Appendix 2

### STATISTICS OF USAGE OF WILLIAM WATSON LODGE FOR JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER (4 MONTHS) 2004

22 units + 80 beds in total

The facility is fully booked year round except for short periods during maintenance.

Main Lodge is used by day groups, campers and guests. Two charter buses visit 6 days a week with senior cross country skiers and or hikers. Special Olympic members participate in practice sessions every Saturday. Bus loads of seniors and others use the Main Lodge on a daily basis in summer.

June through September see the facility serve 9,000 guest nights. This figure does not include the number of people using the campground.

During these four months, 1,500 are unable to make reservations.

Note: These figures do not include the number of people who would love the opportunity to spend a few days at the Lodge, but who believe that there is no point in spending three hours on the phone redialing as there is no hope of their being successful. The facility is full within the first three hours of the lines being open to take reservation. It also does not include the number of people who lack the ability to sit for three hours.

Conclusion: The demand on this already overbooked facility will only increase due to the growing number of seniors and others. Blue Lake, once it is made accessible, would relieve some of the immediate pressure.

## Appendix 3

### STATISTICS OF USAGE OF WILLIAM WATSON LODGE

#### FOR JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER (4 months)

During these four months 1,500 are unable to make a reservation.

NOTE: These figures do not include the number of people who would love the opportunity to spend a few days at the Lodge but who believe that there is no point in spending three hours on the phone redialing as there is no hope of their being successful. The facility is full within the first three hours of the lines being open to take reservations. It also does not include the number of people who lack the ability to sit redialing for three hours.

CONCLUSION: The demand on this already overbooked facility will only increase due to the growing number of seniors and others. Blue Lake, should it be made accessible, would obviously relieve some of the immediate pressure.

## Appendix 4

### ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Alberta Park and Protective Areas have the expertise to design and build a facility that meets the best environmentally friendly practices and the highest standard of accessibility and operations for a special population as demonstrated by their success with William Watson Lodge. An additional benefit of the Blue Lake facility is that we would be using an existing footprint.

The economic benefits of having a potential of 9,600 people and more visit the area around Hinton, Edson, and Grande Cache cannot be ignored. Those Albertans have been limited for the past 25 years to visit the southern part of the province to include Banff and Lake Louise both of which are crowded to the limit. We can anticipate that given the opportunity of accessible accommodation that they would wish to explore the northern part of the province.

Creating a fixed roof facility in the northern part of the province would provide an opportunity to test out the viability of a P3 initiative.