

Southeast of Calgary

Wynham-Careland Provincial Park protects riparian habitats along the Bow River and is home to numerous bird species, including American White Pelicans, Great Blue Herons and Belted Kingfishers. Visitors can explore these habitats on hiking trails under tall cottonwood trees along the river. (Note: Closed for flood recovery, the park will reopen in 2015.) Adjacent to the park, visitors can hike or cycle along Arrowwood Irrigation Canal's headworks service road. Northwest of the park, Week Lake (www.naturecalgary.com) provides additional birding opportunities.

The nearby **Town of Vulcan** is a prosperous farm community that has used its name to tap into the Star Trek-themed **Treksetera Museum**. Spack Days and a visitor centre shaped like a spaceship (www.vulcantourism.com). The 5 km **Vulcan Kinette Walking Path** winds through the southwest outskirts of town, with lighting and benches along the way.

Northwest of Lethbridge, experience the prairie coulee trails in **Little Bow Provincial Park**.

Noble Farm Park at **Nobleford** has short distance trails. The park celebrates the farming equipment inventions of Charles Noble and family in the 1930s, which would change the face of farming practices for early farmers.



Lethbridge

With a population of 90,000, **Lethbridge** (www.lethbridge.ca) is the largest city in southern Alberta. Its outstanding pathway network comprises more than 140 km of multiuse, paved pathways and some 40 km of natural trails. Showcasing an average wind speed of 20.6 km per hour (12.7 mph), Lethbridge's wind gauge icon was once used to float screens in the ocean to prevent submarines from coming closer inland. The chain is an anchor chain.

The primary pathway is the 30 km **Coal Banks Trail**, which links major parks and facilities throughout the city. This meandering paved trail is well used by walkers, cyclists, runners, and inline skaters, with wheelchair and stroller access in many places; stairs and bike rails are provided on all steep sections. Many of these paved trails are cleared of snow in winter.

Elsewhere, dog owners can exercise their pets on 4.4 km of natural pathways in three off-leash parks, including the new **Popsan Park Dog Run Pathway**. Those wishing a more tranquil experience can explore 11 km of nature trails closed to dogs and bikes.

The heart of Lethbridge's pathway system is the 47 km of trails that follow the deep Oldman River valley, lined by giant cottonwood trees and incised by numerous coulees. Along the river in the north end of the city, **Pavan Park** is a 1.25 km² riparian nature preserve with 10 km of paved and shale hiking and jogging trails, along with picnic and playground facilities. It also has an equestrian arena and is the only city park that allows horseback riding.

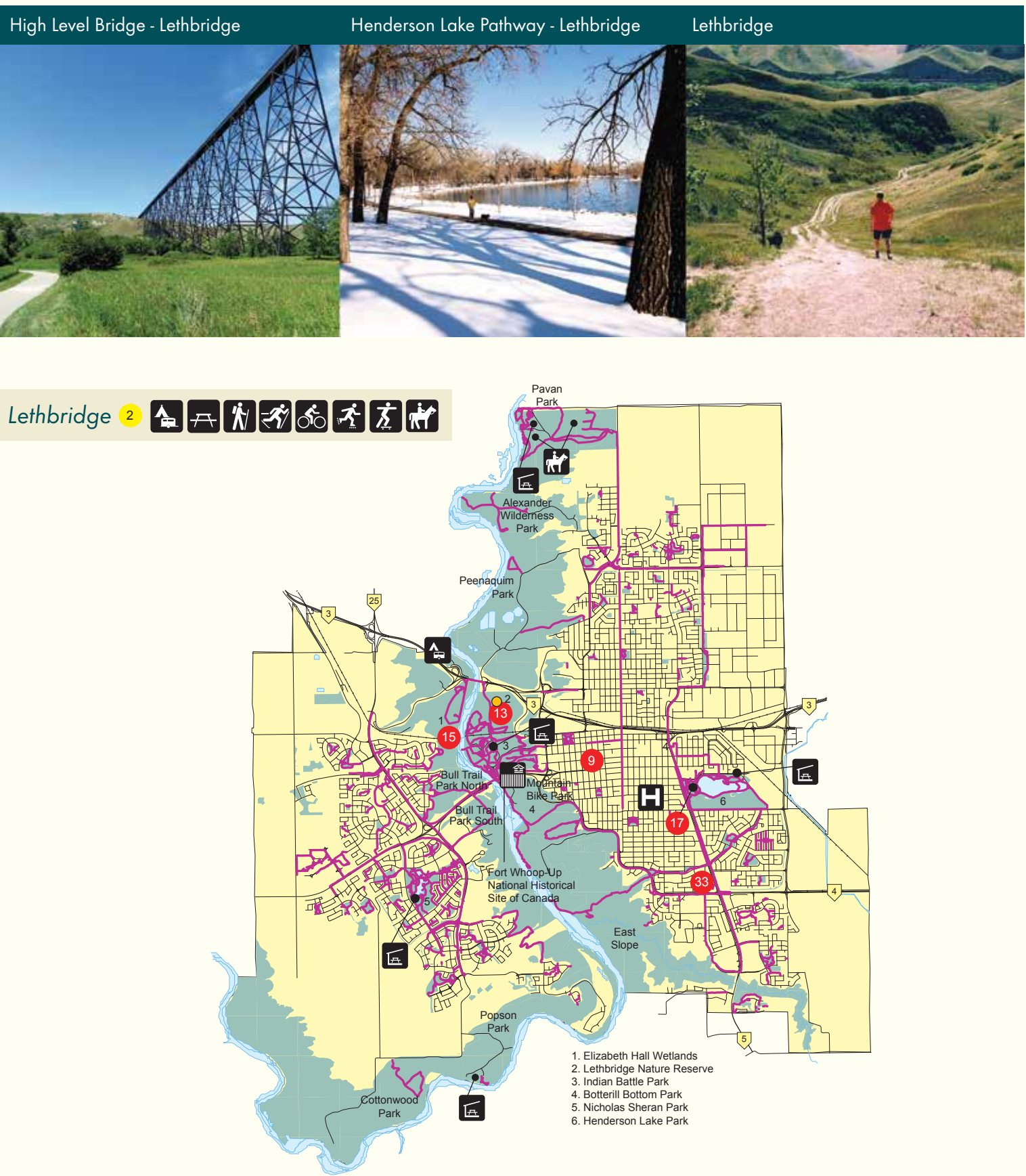
Immediately to the south, **Alexander Wilderness Park** features a 2.5 km loop trail that winds through floodplains, coulees and cottonwood stands. From the Oldman River's edge, visitors can watch for American White Pelicans feeding in spring and summer.

Close to downtown and spanning the river valley is the magnificent **High Level Bridge**, completed in 1909 and the longest/highest railway trestle bridge of its type in the world. In 2005, the federal government declared the construction of this bridge a 'National Historic Event'. Directly below the bridge, **Indian Battle Park** commemorates the area's Aboriginal, original trading and coal mining history. From the **Helen Schuler Nature Centre**, the **Nature Quest** and **Oxbow Loop Trails** (1.0 km each) swing through the trestle valley bottom, while the short **Coulee Climb** loops around one of these steep sided, eroded ravines. Across the river, **Fort Whoop-Up National Historic Site** (http://fortwhoopup.ca) tells the story of the late 1800s American whisky traders, their Blackfoot customers and the North West Mounted Police who arrived to establish a post here.

Near the city's southwest outskirts, a trail drops sharply into **Cottonwood Park** and travels through one of southern Alberta's healthiest stands of Plains cottonwoods along the Oldman River's edge. A side trail here is ringed with boxes for nesting bluebirds. Keep an eye out for Prairie Rattlesnakes, which have been reintroduced here to help reverse their regional population decline.

East of the city's core, **Henderson Lake Park** has a 2.5 km trail encircling the manmade lake. A second, 4.3 km path traces the park's perimeter past mature shade trees and interpretive signage of various city historical events. The park also contains three playgrounds, lovely flower gardens and the **Nikka Yuku Japanese Garden**. The garden was established during Canada's Centennial in 1967 as a symbol of international friendship and to recognize the contributions made by citizens of Japanese ancestry to the Lethbridge community.

On the city's west side, **Nicholas Sheran Park** is another popular destination, with joggers, walkers, cyclists and families enjoying some 7 km of paved and shale trails, including one encircling manmade, fish stocked Nicholas Sheran Lake. The park is also home to Lethbridge's only disk golf course.



Northeast of Lethbridge

Coaldale (www.coaldale.ca) is home to the **Alberta Birds of Prey Centre**. Visitors can see these birds up close and watch daily demonstrations of raptor flying skills. A paved walking/cycling trail winds a wellhead beside the centre. The nearby **Gem of the West Museum** is located in a transformed church and features an old schoolhouse and a working blacksmith shop.

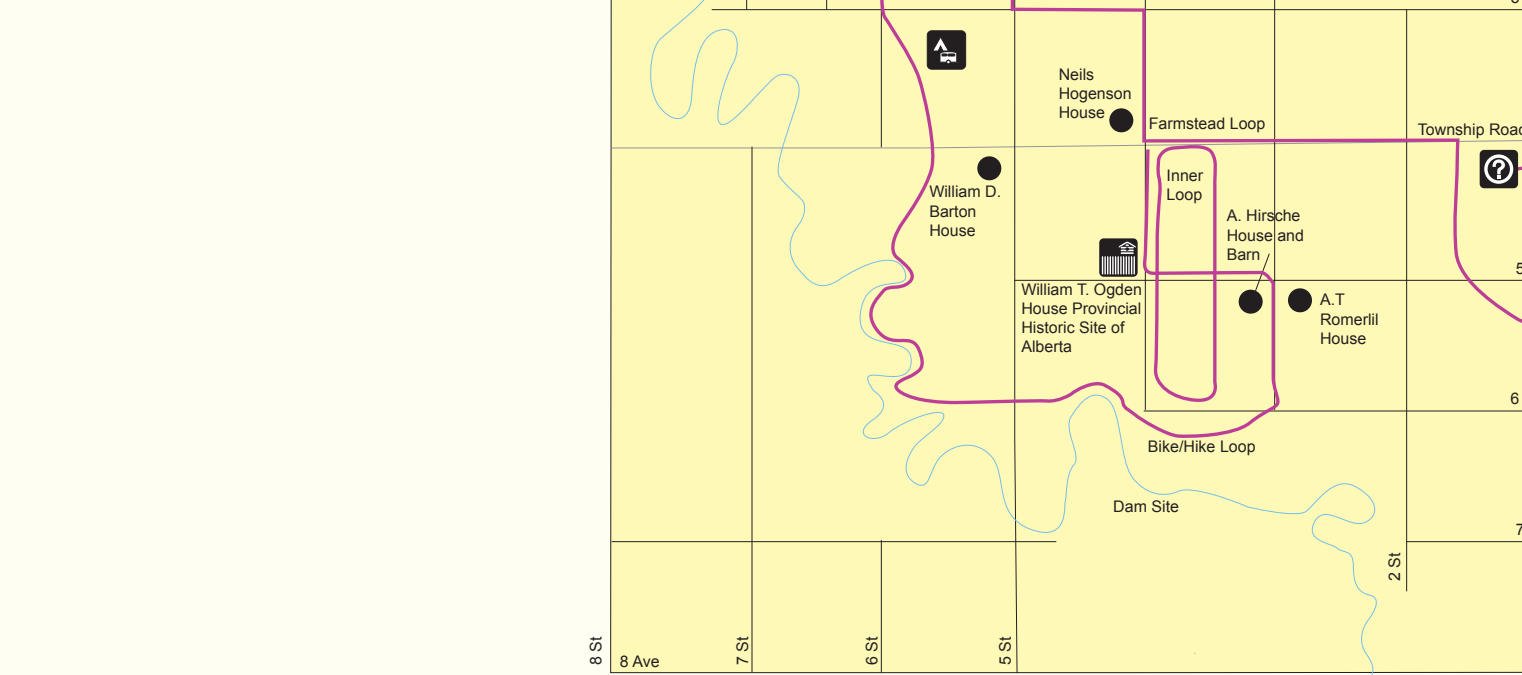
To the near northeast, **Picture Butte** is called the livestock feeding capital of Canada. The area's agricultural roots are reflected at the **Prairie Tractor and Engine Museum**, which features the pioneer village of Coyote Flats. On the north edge of town, **Walk on the Wild Side** constitutes the trails that skirt much of Picture Butte Reservoir. Visitors can walk along the retaining dam and irrigation canal past reed beds and other marshy areas. It's a great place for watching muskrats and Blackbirds, as well as migrating Pelicans, Canada Geese and American Coots in the fall. The town has plans to develop viewing platforms and an interpretive centre here.

Taber (www.taber.ca; population 8,100) is known as the corn capital of Canada, thanks to its long summer hours of sunshine and extensive irrigation; the **Taber Irrigation Impact Museum** highlight's the latter's history. Town residents and visitors can enjoy two pedestrian pathways, which link to neighbourhood sidewalks for longer excursions. The first section begins at the Canstolk, a tall icon near the Aquafun Centre, and travels past the Taber Golf Course to Highway 864, continuing on to 50th Avenue. The second section heads north from 64th Avenue to the Ken McDonald Memorial Sports Park, with a rest stop along the way.



Southeast of Lethbridge

The **Village of Stirling National Historic Site** (www.stirling.ca) celebrates Canada's best surviving example of a planned Mormon agricultural village—a unique blend of farm and town life. A walking tour passes many 1-hectare lots, a number still with barns in back of spacious houses. The best preserved of these is the **Andreas Michelsen Farmstead**, a provincial historic resource that visitors can tour. On Stirling's northern outskirts, the **Galt Historic Railway Park** houses a restored 1890 train station relocated from the nearby Canada-U.S. border.



Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park/Aísinaipi National Historic Site (www.albertaparks.ca/writing-on-stone.aspx) is tucked away along the spectacular Milk River valley near the Alberta-Montana border. The park contains the largest concentration of First Nations rock art on North America's Great Plains. For thousands of years, the soft sandstone cliffs provided a natural canvas for First Nations artists to record their visions and important events in petroglyphs (carvings) and pictographs (paintings).

The river valley ecosystem is also an oasis for more than 160 bird species including Prairie Falcon, American Kestrels and various owls as well animals like Pronghorn Antelope, Mule Deer and Prairie Rattlesnakes.

Writing-on-Stone's sensitive rock art sites are protected and can only be seen on guided tours with an interpreter. An elaborate battle scene is accessible and can be viewed along the **Hoodoo Trail**, a hike through hoodoos above the river. Near the end of the hike, a short side trail climbs through prairie grasslands to a viewpoint, highlighting Police Coulee and the North West Mounted Police Post across the river. The impressive Visitor Centre provides panoramic views of the Milk River valley and the Sweetgrass Hills, across the U.S. border to the south. A short nature trail through the hoodoos leads down to the campground and beyond to the river, where families can often be found swimming and tubing in the warm, shallow waters. Comfort camping opportunities are available in this park.



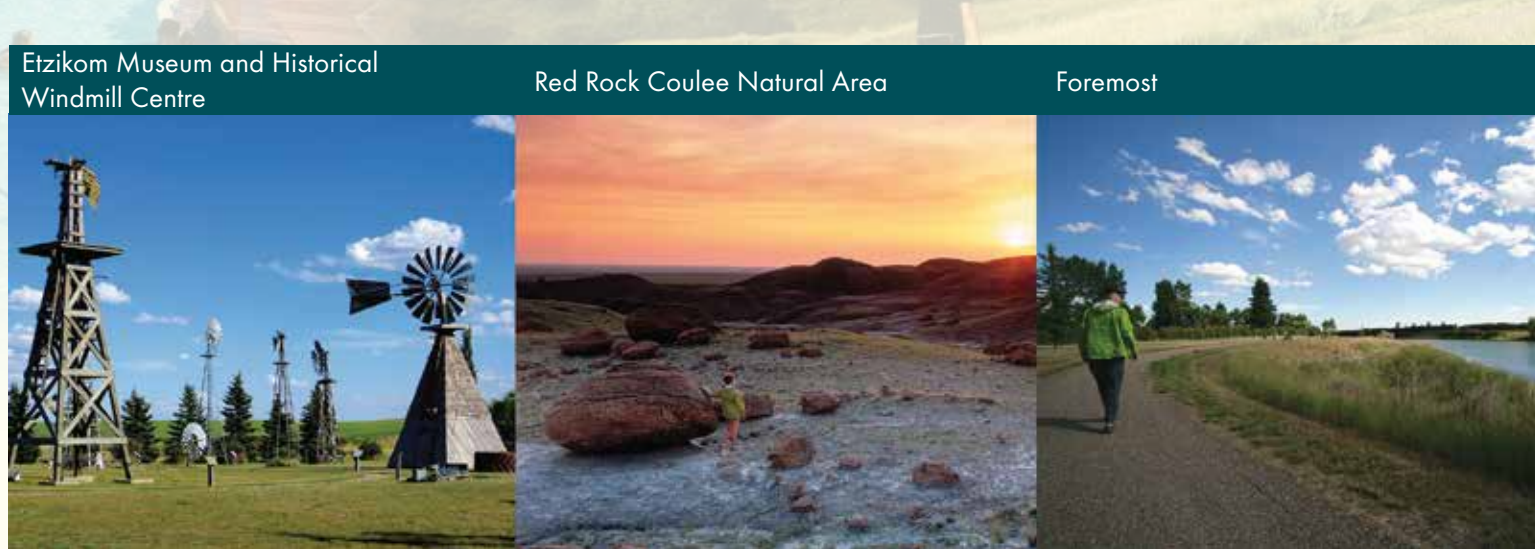
Northwest of the park, the **Village of Warner** is home to **Devil's Coulee Dinosaur & Heritage Museum**. The museum celebrates the area's pioneer history and contains a rare duck-billed dinosaur nest and embryo. Visitors can tour the Devil's Coulee site where the dinosaur eggs were found.

South of Medicine Hat

Fifty six kilometres southwest of Medicine Hat, **Red Rock Coulee Natural Area** is a 3.24 km² landscape of badlands, hoodoos and round, red boulders up to 2.5 metres in diameter. A short trail leads from an informal parking area down to these scattered boulders, which are among the largest sandstone concretions of their type in the world. Here, you can also find unique mixed grassland plants such as prickly pear cactus, gumbo primrose, sagebrush and broomweed as well as Pronghorn Antelope, Prairie Rattlesnakes, Mountain Short-horned Lizards and Sun Scorpions, which are rarely seen in Alberta.

Further south, **Etzikum Museum and Historical Windmill Centre** boasts an impressive collection of pioneer farming collectibles. A 400 metre walking path loops past restored, antique windmills depicting the history of wind power in Canada. To the near west, the Village of **Foremost** has a 1.8 km paved walking trail—on the west side of town—that circles an irrigation reservoir stocked with rainbow trout.

The nearby **Pakowki Lake** is an internationally important bird area when water levels are sufficient. The surrounding mixed-grass prairie is home to Pronghorn Antelope, Western Hognose Snakes and rare flora such as Western Spiderwort and Smooth Goosefoot.



Medicine Hat

Canada's sunniest city, **Medicine Hat** (www.medicinehat.ca; population 61,000) has more than 92 km of pathways in its sprawling **Heritage Trail System**, linking five major parks and numerous other green spaces throughout the city. These paved, shale and gravel trails provide plentiful opportunities for walking, cycling, jogging, inline skating, sightseeing and bird watching. The **Trans Canada Trail** (TCT) traverses much of Medicine Hat, from **Ross Creek Natural Park** in the city's southeast corner, past the TCT Pavilion in **Strathcona Island Park**, all the way to the Trans-Canada Highway.

The heart of this system is the South Saskatchewan River valley, a prairie oasis with trails extending for long distances along both banks. At a big bend on the river's north side is **Police Point Park**, a 1 km² nature reserve named for a former North West Mounted Police post. From the park's interpretive centre (www.naturaline.info), 8 km of walking and cycling trails (3 km paved) loop through a flood-plain and out to the river, with interpretive signage and viewing points along the way. It's a great place to enjoy a nature walk and watch for white tailed deer, songbirds and Bald Eagles, along with Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers drilling for insects in large cottonwoods.

Directly across the river, **Strathcona Island Park** features 5 km of walking trails, with viewpoints, barbecue pits and an adventure and water playground along the way. Nearby is the city's **Historic Clay District** and the **Medalta Potteries National Historic Site**, with its iconic beehive kilns. Today, this industrial museum rubs shoulders with modern ceramic studios.

From Strathcona Island Park, the main trail follows the shoreline north through forested **Lions Park** and its picnic and recreation facilities. This wide, paved trail continues southwest through tranquil, flower filled **Riverside Park**, providing access to the historic downtown area and the adjacent City Hall. The nearby **Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre** is a marvel of Canadian architecture and the focal point of the city's vibrant cultural scene.

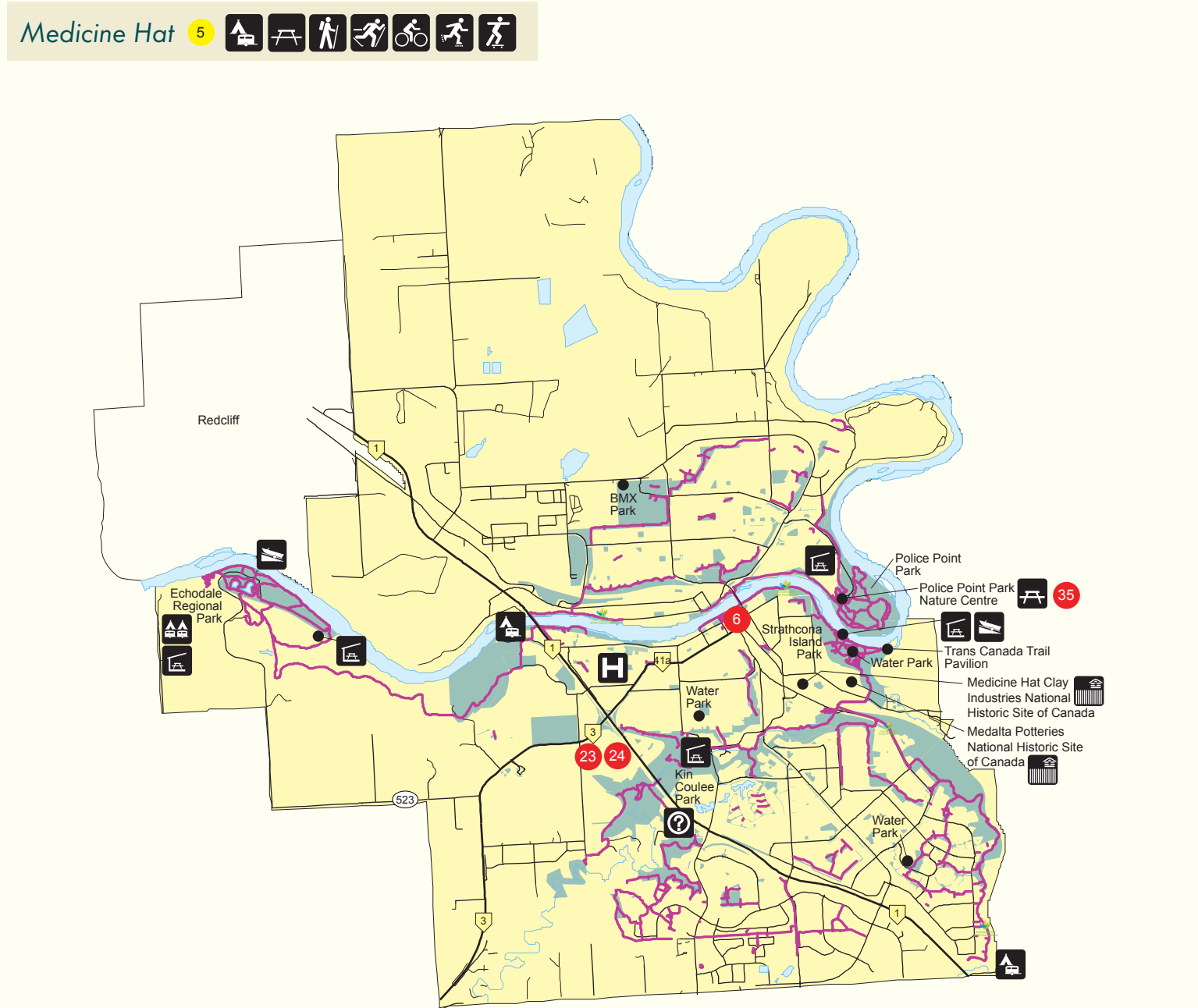
Those interested in a longer bicycle ride or jog can continue along the river's south side pathway all the way to **Echo Dale Regional Park** on the city's western outskirts. Here, paved and gravel trails encircle a swimming lake and a boating lake and connect to **Echo Dale Farm**, with its pioneer buildings and artifacts. At the south end of the 0.25 km² park, a gravel trail leads up a coulee to a viewpoint overlooking the river.

A similar landscape can be explored away from the river at **Kin Coulee Park**, where paved trails and a toboggan hill are located alongside Seven Persons Creek. The Kin Coulee trails connect with the river valley pathways to the northeast and link to Medicine Hat College via a 3.5 km trail flanked by fitness equipment.

Kin Coulee's trails also connect with the **Saamis Archaeological Site**, where a walking trail passes an historic buffalo camp and meat processing site, which has revealed more than 83 million artifacts. On the nearby hill is the striking steel **Saamis Teepee**, the world's tallest teepee, originally constructed for Calgary's 1988 Winter Olympics before being moved here. It is ringed with storyboards depicting aspects of native culture and history. The city derives its name from 'saamis', a native word for 'medicine man's hat'.

Just west of Medicine Hat, **Redcliff** (www.redcliff.ca; population 5,600) prides itself as the greenhouse capital of the prairies. A network of walking and cycling trails runs through town and into **River Valley Park**, adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River. Trail users enjoy the views from numerous beaches and learn about the area's vegetation and wildlife from interpretive panels. Redcliff is also connected to Medicine Hat via the Trans Canada Trail.

The **Badlands Guardian** is a geomorphological feature located just east of Medicine Hat. Viewed from the air, the feature bears a strong resemblance to a human head wearing a full native American headdress, facing directly westward. The head is a drainage feature created through erosion of soft, clay-rich soil by the action of wind and water.

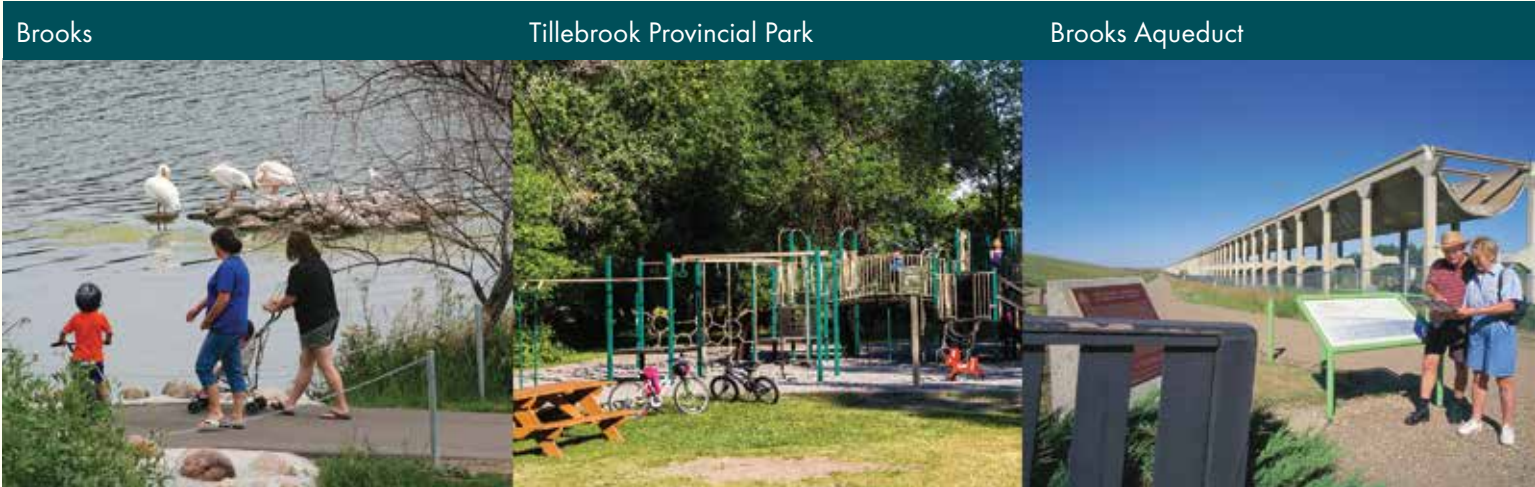
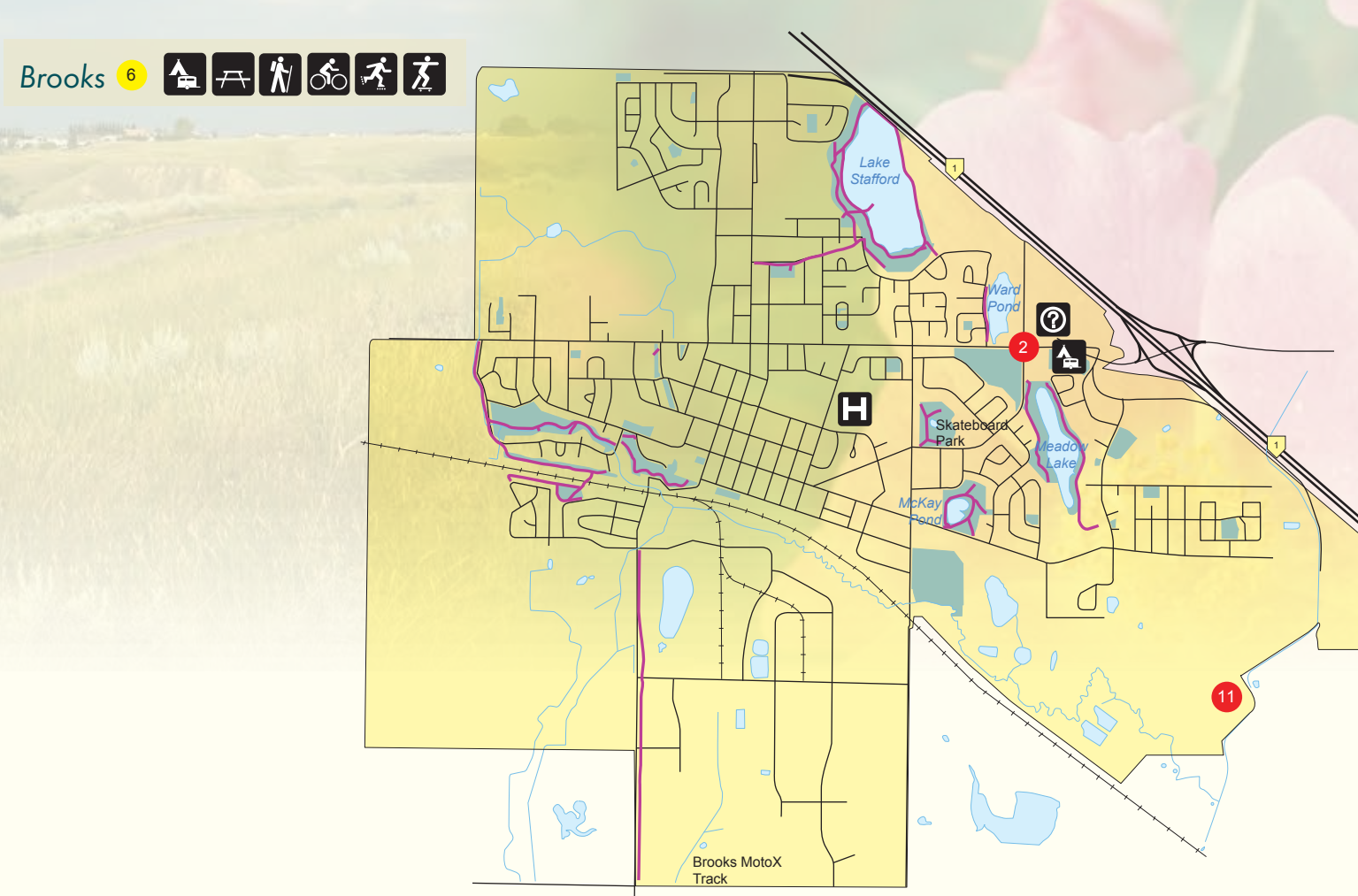


Southwest of Bassano, the 160 acre Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel site consists of a central cairn linked to a surrounding stone circle by 28 spokes and the cultural landscape which contains this monument. Studies indicate the site has been continuously used for the last 4,500 years, making this one of the world's oldest religious monuments.

South of Cluny is the **Village of Milo** (www.villageofmilo.ca). A paved, scenic walking/cycling path (2.5 km one way, maintained in winter) leads from Milo through fields to McGregor Lake Provincial Recreation Area. It features a well used campground and provides access to McGregor Lake, a major migratory bird route and popular destination for boating and fishing.

Northwest of Medicine Hat

To the east, **Brooks** (www.brooks.ca; population 14,000) is a full service city and a good launching point for area trips. The city's extensive network of asphalt and shale trails is centered around a scattering of parks such as **West End** and **Greenbrook**. Walkers and cyclists can do loop trips around McKay Pond, Meadow Lake and the larger Lake Stafford. A longer, linear route connects Sunny Lea with Centennial Regional Arena in the city's southwest corner.



Six km east of Brooks along the Trans-Canada Highway, **Tillbrook Provincial Park** (www.albertaparks.ca/tillbrook.aspx) is a shady oasis, with a short walking trail looping through prairie grassland around the campground. Visitors can tour the nearby **Brooks Aqueduct** (www.history.alberta.ca/brooksaqueduct), a national and provincial historic site, which when completed in 1915 was the world's longest irrigation structure of its kind.



Northwest of Brooks, visitors can view the **Bassano Dam**, where the Eastern Irrigation District diverts water from the Bow River for the use of irrigation farmers and area towns and businesses. Completed in 1914, the dam was a major undertaking, requiring 300,000 cubic metres of earthen fill.

Just south of the Trans-Canada Highway near Cluny, **Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park** (www.blackfootcrossing.ca), a national historic site, houses a spectacular interpretive centre that depicts the rich cultural history of the Blackfoot Confederacy on the southern Alberta plains. From the interpretive centre, a short gravel trail leads north, passing monuments to Cree Chief Poundmaker and to the Treaty No. 7 signing, and ending at Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot's gravesite. Another trail descends steeply into the broad Bow River valley, traversing through one of the largest intact riverine ecosystems of its kind in North America. After emerging from a forest rich in songbirds, the pathway reaches the historical site of a river, Aboriginal earth lodge village from the 1740s. Excavated artifacts from the site can be viewed in the interpretive centre.

Forty kilometres east of Calgary, **Strathmore** (www.strathmore.ca; population 12,000) is a booming urban community in an agricultural setting, with area wetlands and an irrigation system that support a rich population of waterfowl. The town's paved trails include pathways around and along Strathmore Lakes and Kinsman Lake. The latter is the centre of **Kinsman Park**, in downtown Strathmore, with a splash park and gazebo along the way. Not far away, a paved pathway follows **Wheatland Trail** to the Western Irrigation District Canal. To the south, a walking path circles an off-leash dog park.

On the town's southeast outskirts, the 5 km **Eagle Lake Trail** roughly follows an old rail line to Eagle Lake, one of the best bird watching water bodies in the region. The shallow waters contain nutrients that sustain Great Blue Herons, Eared Grebes, Sora and Terns. In fall, it's a staging area for large flocks of Mallard and Pintail Ducks and Canada and White-fronted Geese.

Southern Plains Trails

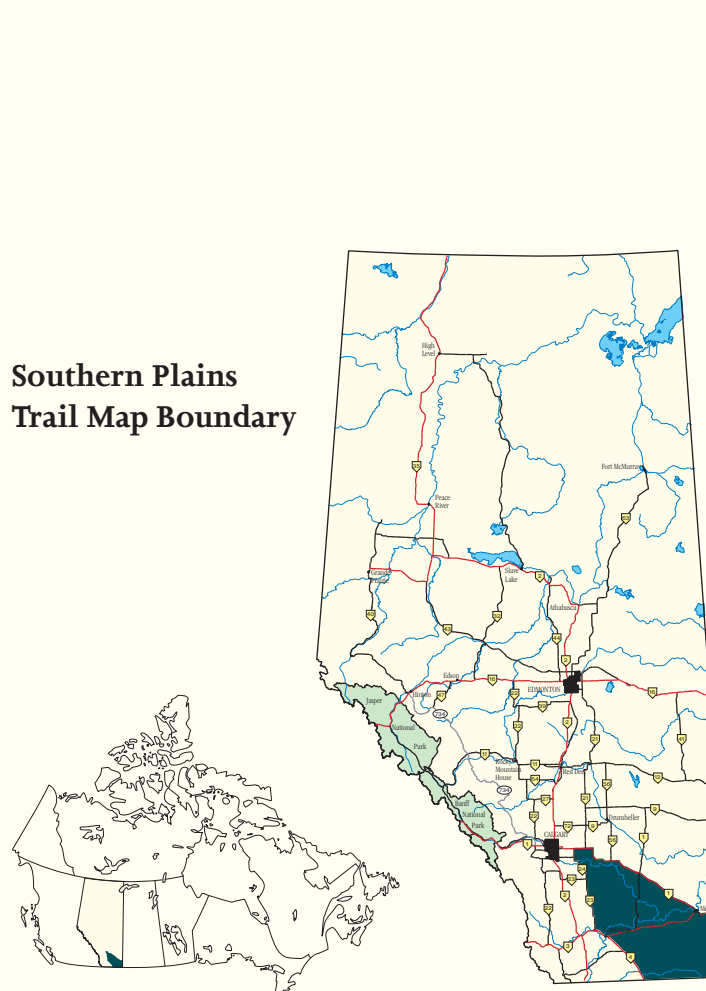
The landscapes of Southern Plains, in southeast Alberta, offer a rich diversity of areas to explore. It's a region of rolling topography, badlands, coulees, river valleys and the remarkable height of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park.

It's also an area of unique landscapes, particularly arid grasslands that harbour a large number of unusual, rare and endangered flora and fauna such as Prickly-pear and Pincushion Cacti, Prairie Rattlesnakes, Plains Hognose Snakes, Black Widow Spiders, Sun Scorpions and raccoons. Near the fragile and often quickly eroding surface, scientists have unearthed a wealth of dinosaur and other fossils, Aboriginal artifacts and rock art.

Two midsize cities, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, boast excellent trail systems along the Oldman River and South Saskatchewan River valleys, respectively. The South Saskatchewan River from the confluence of the Bow and Oldman rivers east to Medicine Hat and the Alberta/Saskatchewan border is a well used canoeing route. Throughout the region, smaller towns have developed walking and cycling pathways both within and outside their boundaries.

Elsewhere, lakes and numerous manmade irrigation reservoirs attract breeding and migrating birds, with shoreline trails offering excellent viewing opportunities. Many of these water bodies offer excellent fishing for Yellow Perch, Northern Pike, Lake Walleye and stocked Walleye and Rainbow Trout. Along the Milk River close to the Alberta/Montana border, Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park visitors can explore hoodoos and natural trails, and observe ancient Aboriginal writings and pictures.

Trails in the Southern Plains Trail Map region open up at least two months earlier in the spring than those in the other areas of the province. Although winter recreation opportunities are more limited than elsewhere in the province, the elevated Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, in the southeast, offers groomed cross country ski trails as well as snowshoeing, skating, tobogganning and lugeing.



Trail Etiquette and Safety
Be a leader and ambassador for your favourite outdoor activity. Join the many hikers, cyclists, horseback riders, cross country skiers, off highway vehicle users, snowmobile enthusiasts and other recreationists who proudly take a stewardship role by:

- knowing and abiding by applicable regulations and trail signs;
- staying on designated trails and restricting use to approved activities;
- sharing trails with courtesy and respect - Wheels yield to heels; heels yield to horses. Motorized users should pull over to the right side of the trail, turn off the engine and remove helmets when horses are approaching;
- respecting landowners by leaving gates and fences as found and avoiding livestock;
- leaving artifacts and natural features undisturbed;
- controlling pets and keeping them on leash;
- properly disposing all waste in provided facilities and following the pack in, pack out philosophy;
- avoiding the spread of invasive species by cleaning recreation equipment (vehicles, tents, packs, boots, etc.) after every trip and using certified weed-free feed for pack animals;
- minimizing the threat of wildlife by ensuring flammable debris is kept away from hot exhaust systems, and by keeping campfires small, contained and in designated areas, and ensuring they are fully extinguished;
- respecting wildlife by observing from a distance and properly managing food and garbage;
- avoiding recreation use during sensitive times (e.g. wet conditions, wildlife mating and rearing seasons) and in sensitive areas (e.g. watercourses, stream banks, wetlands and alpine areas);
- ensuring motorized vehicles are licensed and insured, and that all vehicles and equipment are operated with care;
- wearing an approved helmet for your particular activity; and
- actively participating in local club and trail stewardship programs.

For more information on responsible recreation and stewardship opportunities, visit www.esrd.alberta.ca and www.albertaparks.ca