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# **Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)**

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2024 (Rolling 3-Year) Site  
Inspection Results

Version – GoA Submission, Feb 14, 2025

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background and a Short History Lesson.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction and Why Inspect?.....</b>	<b>4</b>
A Brief History and SAPAA's Role in Stewardship.....	4
<b>State of Technology for Inspections.....</b>	<b>5</b>
What SAPAA Changed in 2024.....	5
<b>Rolling Three-Year Data Collection.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Results from the First Full Year of Inspections.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Site Inspections in Summary.....	6
Inspection Efforts.....	6
Resource Extraction and Disturbances.....	8
Faust and All Terrain Vehicles.....	8
Distribution of Sites Visited.....	9
<b>Inspecting Efforts for 2025 and Beyond.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Safe Volunteers.....	11
<b>Conclusions and Thank You.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Annexes.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Annex 1 - Links and Further Reading [Update].....	12
<b>Annex 2 - List and Links of Inspections [UPDATE].....</b>	<b>13</b>

# Executive Summary

The 2024 Site Inspection Report is an annual report prepared by the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas (SAPAA). Sites visited are restricted to the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands (WAERNAHR) Act. While all of Alberta's Crownland is important, this is the traditional focus of SAPAA. Before examining the state of these areas, it is important to answer the question, why should Albertans care?

These small sites represent critical habitat. Many of them provide land bridges between larger protected areas. When untouched, they can provide a baseline for undesignated Crownland. Those closer to urban areas (e.g., Riverlot 56, Wagner, or Red Rock Coulee) provide a way for families to experience and learn about nature.

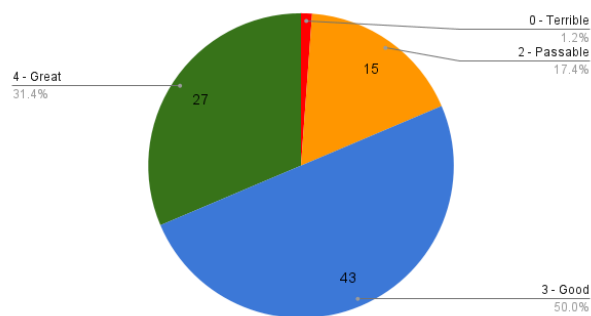
To date, SAPAA has visited more than 25% of all WAERNAHR Natural Areas. These visits were conducted by volunteers, on their own time and at their own expense. The willingness to do this is partially explained by tangential interests. Nevertheless, all Albertans benefit from contributor's freely given time, talent, and treasurer.

80% of the sites visited were rated in good to great shape. Off-Highway Vehicle incursions are the most common disturbance followed by dumping. Why is it important to identify, stop, and remediate these disturbances? Because of a variation of Gresham's Law.

An English financier to Queen Elizabeth I, he is credited with the economic principle that 'Bad Money Drives Out Good'. While he was talking about debased currencies, the more Alberta's Natural areas are abused and disturbed the more additional abuse and disturbances are encouraged. Visitors who are not abusive stop coming and those creating havoc are emboldened. Gresham is the reason SAPAA wants to continue to visit natural areas - so they are available for future generations to enjoy and the biodiversity they protect.

Working with Ministry Officials, SAPAA will continue to enhance the site inspection process. Refined questions, better technologies, organizing those going into the field, and improved presentation of results are all planned. Hopefully SAPAA can share the burden of these efforts with the responsible Ministers who are accountable to Albertans for these natural jewels.

June 2023 to Jan 20, 2025: Site Naturalness - Count & %



# Background and a Short History Lesson

## Introduction and Why Inspect?

In 1986 the Government of Alberta initiated a Volunteer Steward Program to support citizen stewards who were carrying out stewardship duties, mainly in Natural Areas, or had shown interest in doing so.

Natural Areas are a subset of the Government of Alberta's (GoA) protected areas, Crown land of ecological significance administered under the WAERNAHR (Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands) Act. The idea was that the stewards would be "eyes and ears" for the government, monitoring changes in the landscape, particularly human abuses. The main requirement of a volunteer steward was that they should submit at least one inspection report annually.

Some stewards wanted to do more, and in some of the more popular and accessible Natural Areas they formed groups or societies that did such things as install interpretive trails and signage, build infrastructure, conduct field trips, etc. Stewards were supported by the government with response to on-site emergencies (Public Lands), assistance with site maintenance, and in some cases infrastructure installation. Stewards received recognition through a newsletter and with annual conferences involving field trips in different parts of the province, gifts and awards.

## A Brief History and SAPAA's Role in Stewardship

The Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA) was formed in 2000 as a non-profit society with the aim of supporting government stewards but arm's-length to the government. Stewards primarily interested in preserving the ecological integrity of "their" Natural Areas sometimes found themselves in conflict with the government's multi-use policy for public land (i.e., various forms of recreation and industrial uses) as well as adjacent off-site uses. Not all stewards joined SAPAA and the government would not release steward contact information. Those stewards who did join SAPAA appreciated the collegiality and community that it provided.

Changes in occupational health and safety regulations and insurance issues caused the government to pause the program around 2019. Even prior to this, it stopped recruiting new stewards and did not replace those who retired. Some site maintenance and site response has been continued at the request of stewards, but regular communications and conferences fell by the wayside. Processing of the site inspection forms was also withdrawn.

SAPAA continued as a non-profit and has maintained its membership. It strives to work with GoA officials to coordinate activities and ensure that results are useful and relevant. This report is an example of this; interested SAPAA members visit sites, on their own time and at their own expense, and report on the state of Alberta's natural areas.

## State of Technology for Inspections

Sometime in late 2023, the site inspection reporting form was retired from the alberta.ca website (see the [Wayback Machine](#)). Perhaps this is just as well. The [2022 Miistakis Report](#) highlighted a lack of investment by the GoA in capture and management of site inspection information. Technology should be viewed as an enabler; the report identified it as a barrier.

Fortuitously, in mid-2023, prior to the Ministry form being retired, SAPAA launched a proof of concept (PoC) [Site Inspection Form](#) and has continued to refine and update it. Development follows generally accepted system development principles, for example documentation, change procedures, training, privacy / security considerations, and data architecture principles. While the site inspection is heavily manual, it is also well positioned for automation and improvements as resources are made available to SAPAA.

## What SAPAA Changed in 2024

SAPAA instituted four key changes in 2024 to support the management of the site inspection process:

1. Large-scale training for interested volunteers,
2. Breaking protected areas into geographic 'parcels' to more precisely describe the area visited,
3. Creating online reports and summaries,
4. Improved geographic presentation of information.

## Rolling Three-Year Data Collection

Rather than provide a snapshot of site inspections from an arbitrary time period, SAPAA has opted to provide cumulative results. This report includes all reports submitted to SAPAA before this document's finalization (received by January 20, 2025). As 2023 was a partial year, its site inspections were rolled into the 2024 collection. An annual report is envisioned (this document being the second one) as a continuing activity. 2024 site inspections will be included in the 2025, 2026, but not for the 2027 report.

## Results from the First Full Year of Inspections

88 inspection reports were submitted between June 2023 and January 20, 2025, representing 61 distinct protected areas (more than 25%). The majority were in and around the metro-Edmonton and Red Deer areas with some from Southern Alberta.

The 2024 inspection form has 36 questions broken into eight sections. A list of the questions and their definitions is available online: [2024-Questions | SAPAA](#). While this may seem to be a lot of questions, most experienced contributors can complete the form in 20 minutes or less.

SAPAA continues to work with GoA staff members to refine and improve the questions. SAPAA provides a courtesy copy of all responses to the GoA on a periodic basis. The data is also available to *bona fide* researchers, peer-organizations, etc...

## Site Inspections in Summary

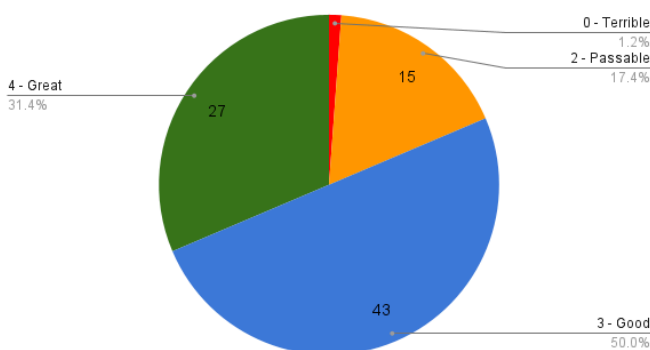
First the good news: more than 80% of the inspection reports rated the given site as being in great (4 out of 4) or good (3 out of 4) state of 'Naturalness'. This is a subjective measure assessed by the visitor and articulated as "*How natural is this site?*"

The bad news, the remaining 20% of the sites received a score of 2 or less.

[Redwater River](#), for example, was given a score of 0 by one volunteer.

Off-highway vehicle incursions, dumping, firearms, and tree cutting are the most common causes of degradation of a site. This site was also the subject of a story broadcasted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in January 2025 (see: [CBC Story – Volunteer Stewardship Program | SAPAA](#)).

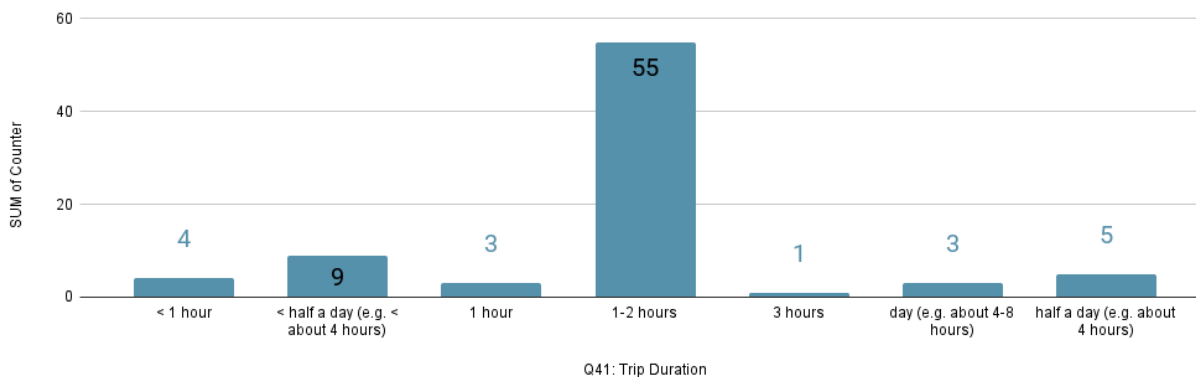
June 2023 to Jan 20, 2025: Site Naturalness - Count & %



## Inspection Efforts

Most site inspections were for a few hours. Despite this, and because many of the sites are relatively small (e.g., a quarter section of land), this is sufficient to get a valid survey of the state of the protected area.

June 2023 to Jan 20, 2025: Site Visit Time



The primary reason to visit sites was 'Other' which is a sample bias. Most of the inspections were carried out by 'Phrank P.' as part of developing the inspection tool and conducting research for an Edmonton area travel-log, [YEGVille.ca](http://YEGVille.ca).

Indirectly, the alignment of tangential interests of site inspector contributors to providing information is an important design feature of any future Volunteer Stewardship program. While some Stewards are interested because the property is nearby (e.g. a local farmer), other volunteers will contribute because of an interest in mushrooms, writing a book on orchids, a passion for nature photography, membership in a local nature club, etc.

As these individuals go into the field on their own time and expense, it is important that the SAPAA Stewardship model identifies and celebrates these tangential interests.

June 2023 to Jan 20, 2025: Count of Reason to Visit	
Reason	#Reason Visit
Other (see comments)	49
Visit nature	37
PA Site inspection for SAPAA	34
Plant identification	19
Hiking	15
Birding	7
Historical/Cultural (e.g. signed nature trail)	2
Mushrooming	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>164</b>

June 2023 to Jan 20, 2025: Inspection Totals	
Q12: Steward's Name	# Inspect
Phrank P.	49
Patsy C.	10
Hubert T.	8
Tony B.	6
Susan N	5
Kate R.	3
David F.	3
Ryan A.	1
Richard/Vera D.	1
Dave M	1
Claudia L.	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>88</b>

## Resource Extraction and Disturbances

Formal and informal resource extraction is limited or are legacy installations. There is a strong correlation between the Naturalness Score of a site (Q31) and disturbances. Interestingly, not all contributors give a low or high score for the same reasons. For example, Tawatinaw NA was visited in the fall by a team of six individuals. Four inspection reports were submitted. Patsy and Susan are both experienced botanists. Susan rated this site low because of a number of invasive plants found in the site. Rather than the results being inconclusive, it speaks to the value of diverse viewpoints when visiting a site.

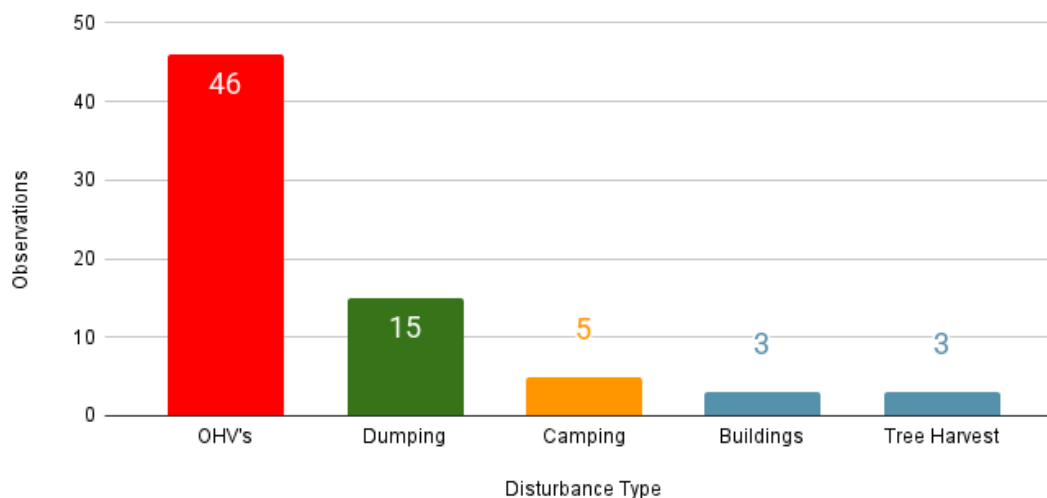
October 7, 2024 SAPAA Field trip to Tawatinaw Natural Area; Naturalness Perspectives						
# Inspect		Q12: Steward's Name				
Q22: Site Name	Q31: What is	Hubert T.	Patsy C.	Phrank P.	Susan N	Grand Total
Tawatinaw (NA)	2 - Passable				1	1
	3 - Good		1	1		2
	4 - Great	1				1
Tawatinaw (NA) Total		1	1	1	1	4

## Faust and All Terrain Vehicles

The most common human disturbance in a Natural Area is an off highway vehicle (OHV), typically all-terrain vehicles. They are a Faustian Bargain. OHVs can create responsible and sustainable access to a site which benefits others such as hikers, botanists, etc. Unfortunately, they are often operated irresponsibly and damage delicate wetlands, remove soil cover, and introduce fires and invasive species (see [Gresham's Law as applied to natural areas](#)).

The Ministers responsible for protected areas may wish to consider regulation of OHVs with realistic fines and enforcement as a public policy priority.

June 2023 to Jan 20, 2025 - Disturbance Observations Noted



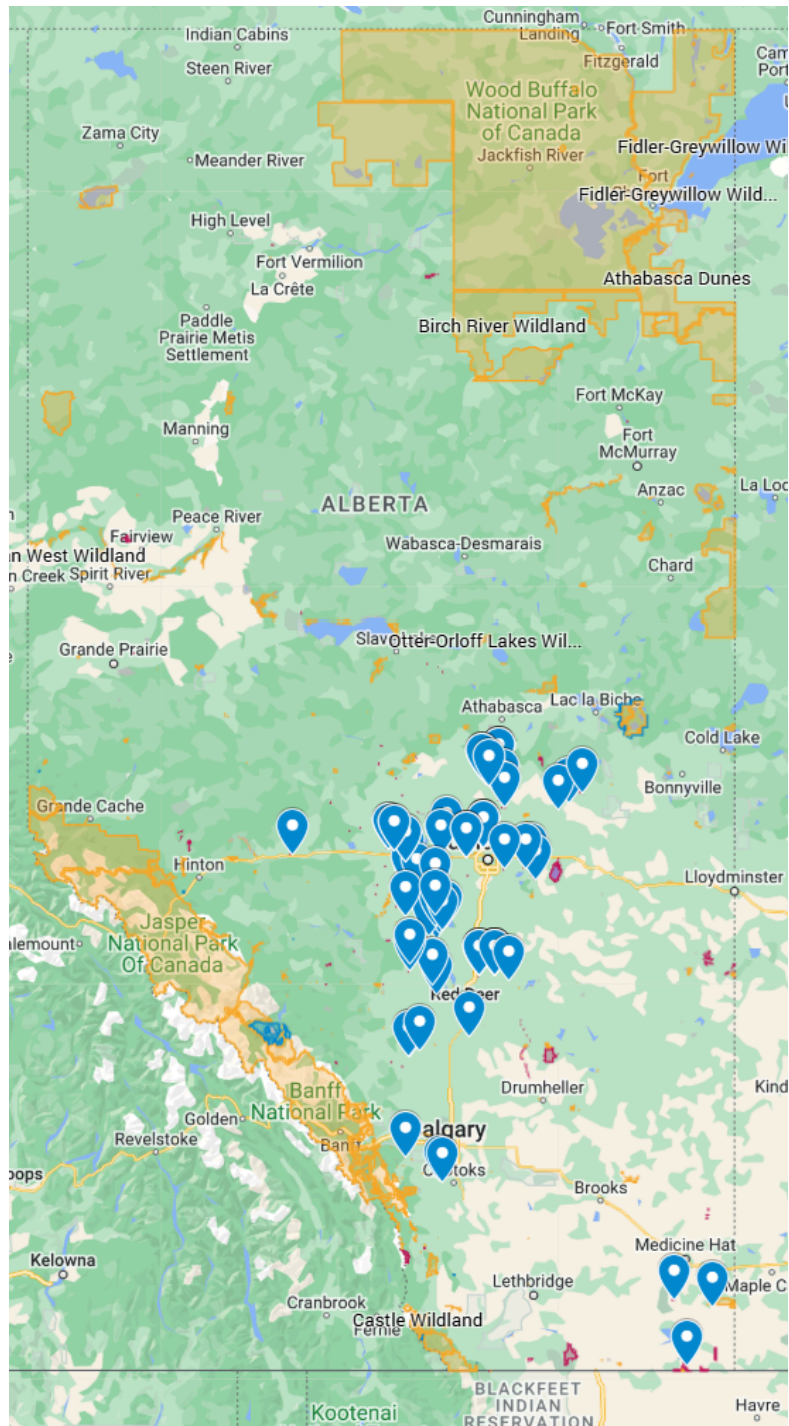


## Distribution of Sites Visited

The larger-metro-Edmonton area has both a large concentration of protected areas and the most site inspections.

This is a function of where many SAPAA members live. Some members have used visiting protected areas as a form of recreation. For example, the three in the extreme Southeast of the province were part of a trip to Cypress Hills.

In 2025, SAPAA hopes to fill in many blank spots on this map. Which sites are priority areas for inspection will be discussed with Ministry officials, SAPAA members, and peer organizations.



# Inspecting Efforts for 2025 and Beyond

2023 and 2024 were learning years for SAPAA. The first lesson was how to systematically and effectively collect site inspection data. Working with GoA officials, SAPAA has identified five design principles.

1. **Support Tangential Interests.** Embrace the tangential interests of inspectors by showcasing their personal activities outside of a site inspection. Current examples include travel-logs, writing nature books, or developing botanical skills.
2. **GWS+ Platform.** The Google Workspace (GWS) installation will be used to gather, manage, and report Site Inspection information; augmenting the SAPAA website.
3. **A Gradient of Inspectors.** 2025 will support four gradients of individuals who want to submit a report: Public, Form-Based, GWS Basic and Advanced.
4. **Relevant and Nested Questions.** SAPAA will continue to refine inspection questions.
5. **2025 - Still PoC'ing.** 2025 is considered another Proof of Concept year. It will test GWS as a platform and make better use of the underlying data.

Proper requirements gathering, enterprise architecture, system development and subsequent operations requires both seed funding and ongoing resources. It is tempting to simply 'pick' a technology that seems to work without considering its suitability against the full range of business and technical requirements. Worse still, picking technology and processes that is unique or hard to support in the longer term.

The GoA is experiencing this latter challenge with the internal database they choose to manage the Volunteer Steward submissions, a system developed in the database 'Paradox'. While still being offered as a product, the underlying technology has not been updated since 2009 by its current owner, Corel<sup>1</sup>. Paradox is a seldom used technology and most developers have long since retired or moved on to different technologies.

2025 will see incremental enhancements to the technical aspects of the site inspection process. More importantly, SAPAA will work with the GoA and peer organizations to ensure it is capturing the right information and to encourage a wide variety of Albertans to contribute their observations.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox\\_\(database\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_(database)).

## Safe Volunteers

One of the reasons ostensibly given to pause the Volunteer Stewardship program were the risks created by 'direct to Crown' volunteers. Under Alberta's Occupational, Health, and Safety legislation, an organization is responsible for a volunteer's safety if these [three criteria are met](#):

1. The organization requests the volunteer's participation to perform work;
2. The organization accepts volunteers to do the work (informally or formally); and
3. The volunteer performs or takes part in the work.

Further to the first criterion, it is critical to know 'WHO' is asking a volunteer to do the work. Because of limited resources, SAPAA is unable to manage a cadre of volunteers within a reasonable risk tolerance. In fact, SAPAA specifically informs interested individuals that they are NOT being asked to volunteer. For the near future, it will have to rely on site information coming to it as a secondary activity from the following sources:

Volunteer	Responsible	Notes
Designated Steward	Government of Alberta (GoA)	Individuals who are legacy Volunteer-Stewards who may (not) be SAPAA members
Organization Steward	Organization Itself	Societies, etc. who have taken on responsibility for one or more protected areas. Organizations may be recognized by the GoA and be a SAPAA member.
Peer Organization	Organization Itself	A peer organization that conducts field work and visits a site(s) and can thus comment on its condition. A site inspection is typically secondary to the visit's purpose.
Individuals	The Individual	An individual who visits a site but is NOT a SAPAA volunteer. Submits a site inspection report for a variety of personal reasons.

# Conclusions and Thank You

Alberta's Protected Areas and the Volunteer Steward Program are both unique. A jurisdictional scan across Canada, the United States, and further afield could find no exact match to the Volunteer Steward Program - a proud legacy for Alberta.

Unfortunately, the seemingly ongoing degradation of some of the Natural Areas is not a point of pride. While the protected areas are intended to be lands available to sustain biodiversity and responsible recreation, some have instead become the near-exclusive playground for owners of ATVs or those wishing a handy way to dispose of their garbage.

This should be of concern for the people of Alberta and its government in that these were legacy resources set aside for generations and not to be abused. Monitoring and stewardship and the active investment of government will help to allay these concerns.

## Annexes

### Annex 1 - Links and Further Reading [Update]

The following links have been shared with Ministry officials. Nevertheless, a timely reminder and update can be helpful:

- SAPAA Website: [SAPAA | Stewards Helping Stewards](#).
- Definition of Protected areas and interactive map: [Protected Areas | SAPAA](#).
- Links to Published Site Inspection Reports: [Site Visits | SAPAA](#).
- Interactive map of Site Visits: [2024-Site-Inspections](#).
- 2024 Site Inspection Form: [Site Inspection Form | SAPAA](#).
- [CBC Story – Volunteer Stewardship Program | SAPAA](#).
- [Guns, CBC, and Natural Areas – 2024-11-15 | YEG Ville](#).

## Annex 2 - List and Links of Inspections

Ordered by site name, if linked, a site inspection report is available on [PA Visits etc. | SAPAA](#). Unlinked site inspection entries were part of the above analysis but there is not a published report on the SAPAA Website.

Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
2025-01-15: Genesee (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	A legacy of OHV use and cutlines yields a number of trails and loops. These are slowly being reclaimed. A recent campfire and numerous foot prints suggests the site is very popular.	day (e.g. about 4-8 hours)
2025-01-07: Clyde Fen (NA); David F.	3 - Good	<p>The north quarter of the NA is a mature mixed forest with a creek on the south side. This in part keeps OHVs out of the NA. No trails other than cutlines were observed, suggesting that this quarter is not visited much. No garbage was observed during this visit.</p> <p>The eastern quarter showed signs of OHV from the neighbouring sand quarry adjoining the eastern boundary, but the trail ends at the north boundary of the quarter. Repurposed concrete 'bollards' stop any OHVs from entering the active sand quarry. The northern perimeter is fenced east to west but stops where there's no quarry activity. There were no signs of OHV tracks in the active quarry, suggesting there was no ingress from the north. More importantly there were no traces of OHVs into the fen itself.</p> <p>The active road to the active quarry was not plowed. Vehicle tracks were created early in the winter but they stopped at the gate. With a healthy snowbank along the range road, no highway vehicles will enter along the access road until spring at the earliest.</p>	day (e.g. about 4-8 hours)
2025-01-07: Clyde Fen (NA) - South; Phrank P.	4 - Great	A solid low 4. Some OHV traffic coming in from the East who in turn access the site from an abandoned gravel pit, despite it being posted no trespassing.	1-2 hours

Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
2025-01-07: Clyde Fen (NA) - North; Phrank P.	4 - Great	No human access or disturbances noted coming in from the SE and along the south boundary.	1-2 hours
2024-12-29: Halfway Lake (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	Despite the incursion of OHVs, dumping, and some tree harvesting; the site is in 'okay' shape. A large wet area that runs East-West through the top half of the site helps to reduce some human activities.	1-2 hours
2024-12-29: Anton Lake (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	Despite a longstanding grazing lease on the site, the North Parcel is in good shape. There are well defined livestock tracks which the animals follow around the property but the stands of timber are still reasonably intact. The leaseholder is taking good care of the property.	1-2 hours
2024-12-23: Kilini Creek (NA); David F.	3 - Good	Other than a plethora of snowmobile tracks in the open wetland areas, the boreal forest is absolutely pristine.	half a day (e.g. about 4 hours)
2024-11-15: Halfway Lake (NA); Phrank P.	2 - Passable	A high two lowered by a predominant ATV track running East-West and some dumping. New ATV tracks are being plowed into wet areas on the site.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-11-06: Coyote Lake (OC) (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	A recently undisturbed parcel of land which is protected by the grazing lease to the west and south and the NCC lands to the North, as well as the lake itself. For the section surveyed, no obvious human activity.	Pass by but did not Go In
2024-11-04: Innisfail (NA); Tony B.	4 - Great		Pass by but did not Go In
<a href="#">2024-10-29: Coyote Lake (PNT) (NA); Phrank P.</a>	2 - Passable	Significant disturbances due to the cattle from the grazing lease. Alternatively, this has kept ATVs, dumping, and other disturbances out of the site.	1 hour

Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
<a href="#">2024-10-29: Coyote Lake (PNT) (NA); Phrank P.</a>	2 - Passable	A high '2' but reduced because of the grazing leases on the property. Alternatively, this does reduce ATV disturbances, dumping, etc. Note this was a driving inspection only and I did not enter the parcel as I had not contacted the Grazing Lease Holder.	Pass by but did not Go In
<a href="#">2024-10-16: Red Rock Coulee (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	No evidence of dumping, vandalism on the rocks, nor ATV tracks etc. A variety of birds were seen including a partridge, meadow lark, and a rabbit. Scat and tracks suggest a healthy rabbit and ungulate population.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-16: Eagle Nest (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	Very little human disturbances noted during a survey walking down the road that bisects the site. This is likely due to its remoteness, and hilly topography.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-15: Milk River (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	Other than a faint ATV/4x4 track, no signs of human disturbances.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-14: Snakes Head (PNT) (NA); Tony B.</a>	3 - Good	This part of the NA on the west side of the River gets very little attention from humans. The industrial legacy (oil well, powerline, and access road) is more-or-less abandoned and awaiting reclamation. The most disturbing disturbance is the explosive expansion of Cicer Milkvetch. When I first visited the site twenty years ago there were only a few plants noted on the oil lease. Now it's present in almost every hectare.	half a day (e.g. about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-10-07: Tawatinaw (NA); Susan N</a>	2 - Passable	The site was "natural" in the sense that there were no obvious incursions by OHV's or other motorized vehicles. However, the sheer number of invasive weeds (thistle and invasive grasses - including reed canary grass) was quite appalling.	1-2 hours

Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
<a href="#">2024-10-07: Tawatinaw (NA); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	Access to the parcels may make them undisturbed. More knowledgeable individuals noted considerable invasive plant species. Not being a botanist, I will go with what I know and observed.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-07: Tawatinaw (NA); Patsy C.</a>	3 - Good	Area sampled was NE corner of southwestern portion of NA, consisting of relatively open upland mixed forest and open depressional areas with scattered willow and large expanses of marsh reedgrass, with greater or less amounts of Canada thistle and nettle. Because Canada thistle is non-native, this portion of the NA can only be rated as a 3 at most.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-07: Tawatinaw (NA); Hubert T.</a>	4 - Great	No trails or other human access apparent in the Western part of the NA.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-07: Nestow (NA); Susan N</a>	3 - Good	We visited two small portions of the northernmost section of the PNT. The sandy hillside/meadow had some invasive plant species (Crepis tectorum - annual hawk's-beard) and a vehicle track leading off Range Rd 245A into the interior. The wetland area to the west of RR 245A was quite unspoiled, with no evidence of human incursion. There was evidence of past fires in both areas that we visited.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-07: Nestow (NA); Phrank P.</a>	2 - Passable	Extensive ATV activity, dumping and tree cutting. This is balanced against a reasonably healthy Jack Pine forest.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-10-03: Snakes Head (PNT) (NA); Tony B.</a>	2 - Passable	There is no human infrastructure Other than a pipeline/powerline corridor that crosses the Red Deer River at this spot, The constantly shifting river channels make this a very hazardous place to build anything.	1-2 hours



Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
<a href="#">2024-09-30: Lloyd Creek (NA); Susan N</a>	3 - Good	We walked into the natural area on a wide vehicle track. There were a number of invasive plant species along and beside the track. Away from it, however, the invasive species diminished and the vegetation appeared native. We heard very few birds and saw no wildlife on the ground.	half a day (e.g. about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-09-30: Lloyd Creek (NA); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	There are several braided ATV trails. Wet depressions create gouged trails and the usual muddy disturbances. Past and more recent trail clearance (e.g. cutting dead falls) are evident.	half a day (e.g. about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-09-30: Lloyd Creek (NA); Patsy C.</a>	3 - Good	There is some ingress of a non-native grass (orchard grass) along the trail from the south for a considerable distance, the result of agricultural contamination, perhaps being brought in by ATVs. In some of the lower-lying areas ATV use had created deep ruts necessitating braiding. Riparian weeds were often associated with these ruts. However, overall the trail, although weedy, was in good shape and the weeds had not penetrated into the forest cover. The forest and associated depressional areas were diverse and undisturbed.	half a day (e.g. about 4 hours)
2024-09-28: Bilby (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	When visited for the first time in 2017, Bilby was a mess. Chewed up by ATVs and impassable to all but the most powerful OHVs. Fast forward to my most recent visit and what a surprise! The trails have been remediated and are now multi-use for walkers, equestrians, cycling... and ATVs.	1-2 hours
2024-09-25: Hoadley (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	This is based on peering into the site from one location.	Pass by but did not Go In
2024-09-25: Battle Lake (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	The site is undisturbed save for the ATV track, partially regrown, and a dumped tractor. Lots of evidence of ungulates based on scat traces.	1-2 hours

Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
2024-09-24: Town Creek (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	Tire tracks along the road and a new culvert diverting Town Creek suggests the area is important enough to spend money on. Other than a discarded culvert, the road, and older ATV tracks, the site is in good shape. A location to re-visit in the future!	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-09-21: Threepoint Creek (NA); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	The NA seems to be known mostly to locals and there are limited disturbances despite a well defined ATV track.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-09-21: Bragg Creek (NA); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	Despite a number of braided trails, at least the South portion of the NA is in good shape. Due to flooding (beavers), unable to visit the North half.	1-2 hours
2024-09-18: Sundance (NA); Phrank P.	4 - Great	Based on reports from a neighbour to the SW who has been to the site. She indicated that the beavers have created an extensive dam system. This has saved her farm from having to haul water to their cattle.	Pass by but did not Go In
<a href="#">2024-09-18: Modeste Saskatchewan (NA); Phrank P.</a>	Cannot Answer	Unable to access the site as this parcel is surrounded by private land.	Pass by but did not Go In
<a href="#">2024-09-18: Burtonsville Island (NA); Phrank P.</a>	Cannot Answer	A flooded channel of the North Saskatchewan River prevents access from the North to the Island. As a result, I was able to look across the channel at the NA. Reports from locals suggest that any trails that might have been in the property are being reclaimed by nature.	Pass by but did not Go In
<a href="#">2024-08-30: Victoria Settlement (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	The NA is largely undisturbed with no discernable trails going into it. The only exception is on the west side where transmission lines cross the river in the march south.	1-2 hours

Visit Date/Site/Who	Naturalness?	How Healthy: comments	Trip Duration
<a href="#">2024-08-30: Ukalta Dunes (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	The NA has adjoining and mostly undisturbed micro-climates of coniferous trees and marshy areas. A botanist would have a field day working their way through these climates. A hunter would appreciate the healthy population of ungulates (based on tracks and scat). Anyone trying their luck on the game trails will need to expect lots of bushwhacking and should have a keen sense of direction.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: Magee Lake (NA); Tony B.</a>	4 - Great		1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: Magee Lake (NA); Susan N</a>	3 - Good	We were so impressed and captivated with the naturalness of the initial portion of the site that we only advanced ~400m in from the border (along a vehicle path) and did not complete an assessment of the entire natural area. The part that we did visit was very undisturbed - for example, we counted only 4 dandelions in the forest along that stretch and saw zero creeping thistle.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: Magee Lake (NA); Patsy C.</a>	4 - Great	Unspoilt dry, mature aspen forest with a diverse, native understory. The one trail system has largely revegetated with native species, indicating that it is little used. This site could be used as a reference site for restoration of a similar plant community elsewhere. As an ecological gem, it should probably not be widely advertised but left for access by local people and naturalists. A total of 67 vascular plant species were recorded along 400 m of trail system, including one very rare species, northern wild comfrey.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: Magee Lake (NA); Kate R.</a>	3 - Good	Beautifully natural except for off-road vehicles that made ruts.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: Magee Lake (NA); Hubert T.</a>	4 - Great	minor incursions by ATVs; mostly pristine	1-2 hours

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<a href="#">2024-08-24: J.J. Collett (NA); Susan N</a>	2 - Passable	In this part of the natural area we saw a number of common native plants, but also a large number of invasive plant species such as smooth brome, creeping thistle, dandelions, norwegian cinquefoil, etc.	1 hour
<a href="#">2024-08-24: J.J. Collett (NA); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	The society has done a great job creating a resource near central Alberta population areas (Lacombe, Ponoka, Red Deer further south). Like all good civil efforts, the site requires constant maintenance and upkeep - often by volunteers. Nevertheless, because of the trails, much of the site remains reasonably undisturbed.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: J.J. Collett (NA); Patsy C.</a>	3 - Good	Site has been developed with facilities and a network of trails including boardwalk for human access, hence shows evidence of an invasive flora.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-24: J.J. Collett (NA); Kate R.</a>	3 - Good	The paths are mowed.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-16: Sylvan Lake (NA); Tony B.</a>	4 - Great	Interior of the site is undisturbed (except for a few creeping thistles). Although there is a paved road along the west side there was no evidence of human use. Visitors have to park on the road shoulder.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-14: Medicine Lodge Hills (NA); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	There are at least three distinct historical cut lines, two running east-west from Range Road 31 with another running north-south about 100M in from this road. A loop of sorts is possible with a return (or start) walking along the road to the neighbouring farm to the south. The cutlines are overgrown and returning to a natural state.	1-2 hours

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2024-08-14: Magee Lake (NA); Phrank P.	3 - Good	A very high 3 and would rate a 4 except for some legacy damage by ATVs. Trail remediation could potentially restore the site. Otherwise, this NA and the crown land to the south provides a good natural reserve close to Parlby Creek and the Chain Lakes system to the north.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-08-06: Gadsby Lake (NA); Tony B.</a>	4 - Great	Site is rather isolated with no evidence of human disturbance. Very few exotic plant species were noted.	< half a day (e.g. < about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-08-02: Poplar Creek (PNT) (NA); Ryan A.</a>	4 - Great	The site has continued to mature. Less dense ground cover (rose bush). Some areas had tall grass. A few pieces of trash that appeared to have blown in from the west road (and collected). No signs of damage or destruction.	1 hour
<a href="#">2024-07-13: Riverlot 56; Richard/Vera D.</a>	4 - Great	Parking lot/trails well maintained and signed	< half a day (e.g. < about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-07-13: Riverlot 56; Patsy C.</a>	2 - Passable	Very much a mixed or semi-natural ecosystem because of large amounts of non-native smooth brome and field scabious and the inclusion of a large meadow. The natural woodland includes a good diversity of species with drier and wetter portions because much of the natural area is located on a hillside sloping down to the river. Good natural woodland on the flat area on the riverside of the property.	< half a day (e.g. < about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-07-13: Riverlot 56; Hubert T.</a>	3 - Good	lots of human foot traffic due to vicinity to urban area; heavy infestation of field scabious, Knautia arvensis	1-2 hours

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<a href="#">2024-07-13: Riverlot 56; Claudia L.</a>	3 - Good	River Lot 56 has fine hiking trails, not gravelled and with occasional exposed tree roots which could be a tripping hazard for some. It would be rough for strollers or wheelchairs. There was one invasive species that is taking over but weed pulls are planned. In the past, spruce trees were planted and there is ongoing monitoring in the meadows to keep invasive plant species in check.	< half a day (e.g. < about 4 hours)
<a href="#">2024-06-24: Sheep Creek; Kate R.</a>	3 - Good	Little human activity besides quad making path through willows to river.	< half a day (e.g. < about 4 hours)
2024-06-17: Yates (NA); David F.	3 - Good	Other than ATV tracks entering the middle quarter section of the NA, the area could be considered pristine.	day (e.g. about 4-8 hours)
<a href="#">2024-05-05: Eagle Hill (NA); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	The area seems to be relatively undisturbed (based on this limited survey). Some older ATV tracks were evident as well as a healthy ungulate population.	1-2 hours
2024-04-06: Taylor Lake (NA); Phrank P.	4 - Great	Its wetness has dissuaded ATVers from disturbing the area. As a result, it is in good shape.	1-2 hours
2024-04-06: Halfway Lake (NA); Phrank P.	2 - Passable	The SE corner of the site was surveyed and it showed moderate disturbances in dumping and OHV use. Other ATV tracks noted although not accessible due to wet conditions.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-03-29: Redwater River; Phrank P.</a>	0 - Terrible	A site close to Gibbons that has been partially destroyed through bush parties, ATV destruction, and an illegal gun range. Visit with extreme caution.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-03-29: Crippsdale; Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	Moderately undisturbed despite the utility corridor and a significant ATV track. Some signs of dumping.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-03-09: Opal; Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	Since ATV's have been discouraged, the naturalness of Opal has returned. The legacy tracks make for good access.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2024-01-28: Riverlot 56; Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	Increasing foot traffic into the areas from nearby urban development has lowered the naturalness.	< 1 hour

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<a href="#">2023-10-20: Wagner; Patsy C.</a>	3 - Good	Marl Pond Trail disturbed by usage, and incursion of weeds in some forested areas due to surrounding agriculture	3 hours
2023-10-09: Kilini Creek (PNT); Hubert T.	3 - Good	relatively undisturbed; has cadet camp (abandoned?); some ATV tracks	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-10-08: Wanisan Lake (PNT); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	Besides the Waskahegan Trail and an ATV track on the lake, limited human disturbances.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-10-08: Parkland; Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	A pristine natural area which is best described as being very 'wet'. Best visited in late fall or in winter when the southern portion is accessible. Much of this natural area is wet. An east-west right of way runs across its northern border. This trail follows some high ground south of Township Road 512 and interconnected wetlands which parallel this road.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-10-01: Nestow (PNT); Phrank P.</a>	2	Hidden away from highway 2, the site seems to support a reasonably healthy forest and animal population. Unfortunately, dumping, OHV tracks, and tree cutting suggests abuse.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-10-01: Bridge Lake; Phrank P.</a>	2	Although reasonably remote, both portions of the NA are crisscrossed with OHV Tracks. As well, dumping was found in the OC (southern portion) further degrading the naturalness score.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-09-27: Telfordville (PNT); Dave M</a>	3 - Good	Still lots of off-road use on the existing trails but hasn't really changed much over the last few years. Lots of water in the trails in low places where tire ruts are deeper	< half a day
2023-09-23: Wagner; Patsy C.	2	Very weedy along the Marl Pond Trail; known to be weedy along another main trail but that was not visited today.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-09-23: North Cooking Lake (OC); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	One Natural Area divided into three smaller pieces. The larger southern portion has an extensive trail system and is relatively undisturbed. The wetlands west of Wye Road protect the natural area from unauthorized ingress.	< half a day
2023-09-16: Sherwood Park; Phrank P.	3 - Good	Well developed and maintained trail system and infrastructure. Some braided trails.	1-2 hours
2023-09-01: Bellis North; Patsy C.	3 - Good	Healthy with some but not excessive ATV access.	< half a day

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<a href="#">2023-08-20: Pigeon Lake (PNT); Phrank P.</a>	2 - Passable	ATVs have made numerous trails going into the NA.	Pass by but did not Go In
<a href="#">2023-08-20: Mount Butte (PNT); Phrank P.</a>	3 - Good	Very defined OHV activity. Remoteness helps.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-08-20: Battle Lake South (PNT); Phrank P.</a>	4 - Great	Aside from a well site, no evidence of human disturbance was observed.	1-2 hours
<a href="#">2023-08-09: Welch Creek; Hubert T.</a>	3 - Good	has sizeable oilfield installation	1-2 hours
2023-08-09: Open Creek; Hubert T.	3 - Good	largely undisturbed with overgrown ATV trail running south - north near centre of NA	1-2 hours
2023-07-28: Wagner; Phrank P.	4 - Great	A great resource on Edmonton's doorstep. Trails and facilities in good shape.	< 1 hour
2023-07-28: Wagner; Phrank P.	4 - Great	Good facilities and great Marl Pond Trail	< 1 hour
2023-07-28: Wabamun Lake (PNT); Phrank P.	3 - Good	A well maintained quad track notwithstanding, the site seems to be maintained by the locals.	1-2 hours
2023-07-28: Wabamun Lake (PNT); Patsy C.	4 - Great	Dry forest with typical understory; few weeds; path reasonably maintained	1-2 hours
2023-07-28: Matthews Crossing; Phrank P.	3 - Good	The PA proper seems to be largely undisturbed. A quad track running parallel to the southern border opens the area up for possible encroachment.	1-2 hours
2023-07-28: Matthews Crossing; Hubert T.	3 - Good	ATV damage (sequence of mudholes) at the trail on the southern boundary, but passable by foot. Interior trail less damaged.	1-2 hours
2023-07-28: Dussault Lake; Phrank P.	2 - Passable	Site was very wet and effectively impassable to foot traffic. An ATV track suggests that there is probably a fair amount of disturbance in the area due to OHVs.	< 1 hour
2023-07-28: Dussault Lake; Hubert T.	2 - Passable	only brief visit; inaccessible because of mud holes;	< 1 hour



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<a href="#">2023-06-08: Strawberry Creek (PNT); Patsy C.</a>	4 - Great	An old homestead on site suggests the site was once subject to human occupation and a shallow ravine may indicate an earthwork, but now the site appears very natural and untouched, with mixedwood forest with natural understory and a creek topography altered by beavers.	< half a day