

Thinking of hitting Kananaskis after the floods? Be extra careful

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Trails are wiped out. Foot bridges are washed away. In Kananaskis Country, the popular mountain recreation area west of Calgary, “pretty much everything has changed,” says Kananaskis Country public safety specialist Burke Duncan.

In the aftermath of late June’s devastating flooding, this summer in the mountains is going to be like nothing anyone has experienced.

“Stream flows will be high for a while, because a tremendous amount of water came down,” Duncan says. “For stream crossings, there could be issues to contend with, such as logjams that have changed waterways, or new channels carved in the bigger rivers.”

Information about the state of specific areas and trails remains hard to come by because of the huge amount of damage, and the difficulty officials have in assessing them. Huge swaths of the area remain closed, and officials are recommending people stay away from most areas that are not closed. It could be some time before information about your favourite trail or campground is readily available.

Even after damaged trails have been reopened, Duncan cautions that people should not expect the same level of quality that existed before. On some trails, “expect much rougher ground.”

Another thing to be aware of in the near future is the potential for rock fall, “due to a lot of material being loosened up during the heavy rain; and continued slumping of steeper loose slopes,” Duncan adds. “When traveling in the backcountry, don’t be lingering below steep slopes.”

If you’re planning to head out to the mountains in the next while, “the first thing to do if you’re thinking about going hiking, is check out all the trail reports and advisories. You really have to check up on what the accessibility is,” says John McFaul, a professional naturalist and owner of Alpenglow Nature Hikes. “From there, choose a trail that matches your experience and capabilities.”

McFaul stresses that it’s important to use common sense, and be adaptable to what the trail gives you. “If it lets you go, if it’s easy and dry, you can probably be confident to go ahead. But if you come up against a hazard — maybe a bridge washed out or streams flowing across the trail — reassess whether it’s a worthwhile risk to go any further. You can always turn back if you encounter a hazard, and do this trail again when it’s safer.”

Research where you’re planning to go. Look at guidebooks, and look online. Once you’ve done that, call the parks visitor information centre to find out if you can get there, if it’s open, and what the conditions are like.

“We will have a lot of places that will not be open due to damage in the floods,” says Glenn Naylor, district conservation officer for Alberta Parks in Canmore.

“The extent of water we’ve had could make many banks unstable, and many cliffsides, hills or rock faces unstable. You need to be aware of that and take care wherever you’re hiking, to make sure you’re not walking on undercut banks or in any loose rock areas. You need to pay more attention than normal to those kinds of hazards.”

As far as where to go, “everything west of Banff seems to be in relatively good shape. It’s more the front country stuff that has been really heavily hit,” says Jeff Bullock, a mountain guide with Alpine Air Adventures.

According to Bullock, when it comes to scrambling and technical climbing terrain, “we’re in this period where we should all be very cautious, anticipate this stuff and give it a little time. For climbers and scramblers, really look ahead. When you can see the terrain in front of you, look for evidence of landslides; look for scarring on mountain faces. If you see anything big, maybe communicate that to the park wardens, whether it’s in Kananaskis Country or in Banff, and they’ll be able to spread the word to other people.”

Calgarian Chuck Newyar, an avid mountain biker and hiker, headed into the Kananaskis over the long weekend off Sibbald Creek Trail.

“I’ve been investigating areas that are accessible, and generally trails are eroded with muddy sections, and foot bridges across creeks are washed away,” he says.

“I’d recommend that people have alternate plans. It looks like the options for recreation are going to be limited for a while.”

Areas now open in Kananaskis Country

Picnic areas: The Sibbald area along Highway 68, Bragg Creek Provincial Park, West Bragg Creek, MacLean Pond, Bow Valley Provincial Park, Canmore Nordic Centre, Quarry Lake, Grassi Lakes, Barrier Lake Day Use, Mount Lorette Ponds, Kananaskis Village, Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park, Fish Creek Provincial Park, Ghost River/Sundre Area, Banff National Park, David Thompson Corridor.

Hiking: The Sibbald area along Highway 68, Sheep River along Highway 546, West Bragg Creek, Bow Valley Provincial Park, Canmore Nordic Centre, Grassi Lakes, Barrier Lake Day Use, Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park, Fish Creek Provincial Park, Ghost River/Sundre area, Banff National Park.

Rock climbing: Grassi Lakes, Ghost River, Yamnuska, Wasootch, Banff National Park.

Rafting: Lower Kananaskis River is open for rafting between Widow Maker and Canoe Meadows.

Mountain biking: The Canmore Nordic Centre and the Sibbald area.

Campgrounds: The Sibbald area, the Bow Valley area along Highway 1 and Highway 1X, Elbow Valley, Sheep River Valley, Ghost Area, Sundre area, and Highwood all have at least one campground open.

Check the Kananaskis Country closure map and local closures related to public safety issues before heading out, even if your destination is not in the identified closed area. Make sure there are no local closures or that there are no other restrictions that might affect your trip. Plan ahead.

“Be prepared for muddy and wet sections wherever you decide to go for the next little while,” says Glenn Naylor, district conservation officer with Alberta Parks.

Resources:

Barrier Lake Visitor Information Centre, (403) 673-3985

www.albertaparks.ca

www.wildsmart.ca

[Kananaskis Country Public Safety's Facebook page](#)

[A map of Kananaskis Country closures](#)