

WORK CENTRAL AB

Recreation & Parks

Trails, Green Space, and Outdoor Life Across the Region

A Career Resource from Work Central AB

Recreation & Parks in Central Alberta

Central Alberta offers extensive parks, trails, and green space, anchored by Red Deer's Waskasoo Park system and complemented by recreation areas across surrounding communities. This guide covers the region's main outdoor amenities.

1. Waskasoo Park (Red Deer)

Waskasoo Park is Red Deer's flagship park and trail system, following the Red Deer River through the city. It links multiple parks - including Bower Ponds, Kiwanis Park, Great Chief Park, and Heritage Ranch - via paved recreation trails popular for walking, jogging, cycling, and rollerblading. The trail network stretches roughly 9 kilometres along the North Bank alone, connecting Heritage Ranch to Discovery Canyon.

- **Bower Ponds** - a central, family-friendly park with paved trails, ice skating in winter, and abundant wildlife.
- **Kerry Wood Nature Centre** - adjacent to the 118-hectare Gaetz Lakes federal migratory bird sanctuary, with year-round walking and snowshoeing trails.
- **Heritage Ranch** - offers trails, an equestrian centre, and access to the broader river valley trail network.

2. Green Space in Surrounding Communities

- Sylvan Lake's beach and boardwalk area offer swimming, water sports, and lakeside walking paths, especially popular in summer.
- Lacombe and Blackfalds both maintain community parks, sports fields, and connecting pathway systems suited to a smaller-town pace.
- Olds offers access to nearby natural areas and trails connected to its agricultural and rural surroundings.

3. Year-Round Activities

Seasonal Highlights

Summer - hiking, cycling, paddling, and lake activities at Sylvan Lake and Gull Lake.

Fall - trail walking amid changing colours across Waskasoo Park and surrounding natural areas.

Winter - ice skating at Bower Ponds, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on regional trails, and downhill skiing at Canyon Ski Resort.

Spring - birdwatching at Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary as migratory birds return.

4. Getting Involved

- Municipal recreation departments across the region offer programs, from guided nature walks to organized sports leagues.
- The Kerry Wood Nature Centre offers year-round educational programming for all ages.

- Local cycling and hiking clubs are active across the region and welcome newcomers looking to explore with company.

5. Planning a Visit

Most major parks in Red Deer are free to access and open year-round, with paved, accessible trails suitable for strollers, wheelchairs, and cyclists. Check municipal websites for seasonal facility hours, since some amenities (like ice rinks or interpretive centres) operate on adjusted schedules outside peak season.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Common Questions

Are Red Deer's parks free to visit? Yes - the vast majority of Waskasoo Park and its connected spaces are free and open to the public year-round.

Are the trails accessible for strollers and wheelchairs? Most of the main paved trails through Waskasoo Park are accessible, though some natural surface trails in areas like Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary may be less so.

What about winter access? Many trails remain open and are used for walking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing, though maintenance and clearing can vary by section.

7. Tips for New Residents

- Pick up a copy of the municipal Activity Guide (available online in Red Deer and most surrounding communities) to see the full range of programs by season.
- Try a few different parks and trail sections before settling into a regular routine - Waskasoo Park alone offers quite different experiences depending on which section you explore.
- Bring proper footwear and layers for Central Alberta's variable weather, even in shoulder seasons.

Recreation & Parks Checklist

- ✓ Explored Waskasoo Park and its connected trail network
- ✓ Visited the Kerry Wood Nature Centre and Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary
- ✓ Checked seasonal hours for facilities you plan to visit
- ✓ Looked into local recreation programs or clubs to get involved

Discover More With Work Central AB

See our Sports & Recreation guide for organized leagues and facilities across the region. Visit **workcentralab.ca/resources**.