

# Valleyview – Middle Springs Natural Area

## A Special Place Close to Home

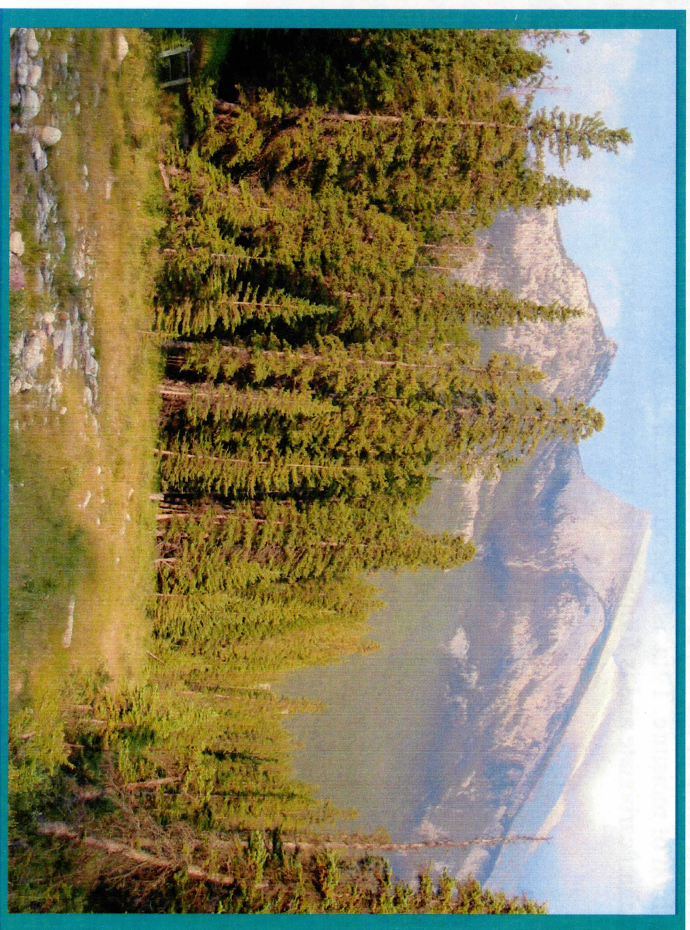
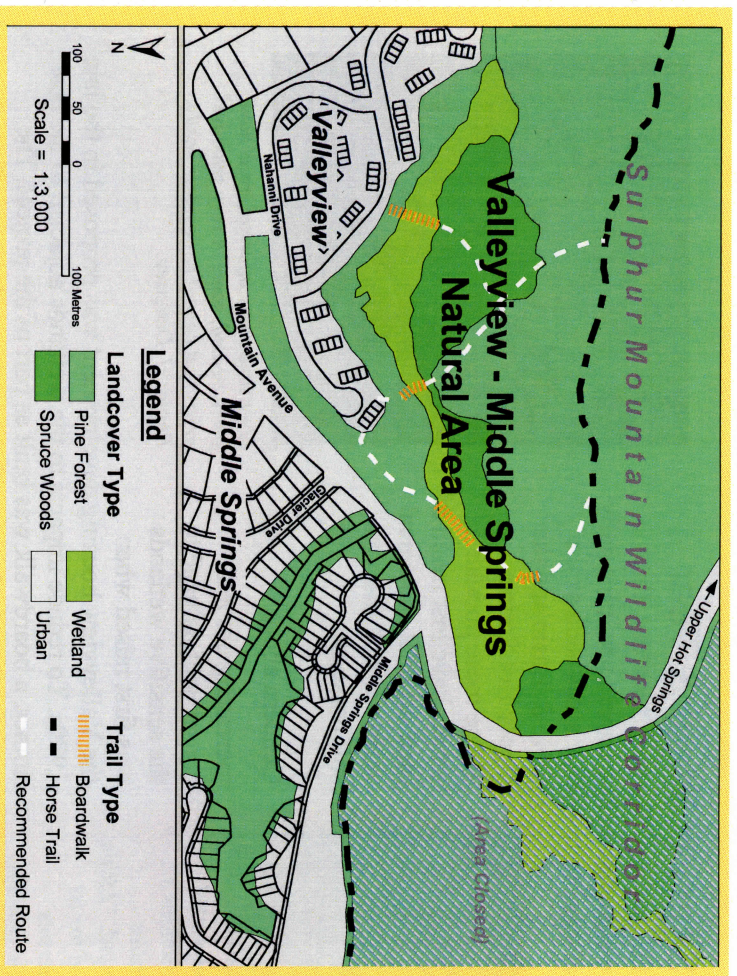


Photo: H. Dempsey

On the edge of town, just beyond our backyards is the Valleyview- Middle Springs Natural Area. Water from warm springs and cool seepages has created a diverse habitat for flora and fauna. As you explore and enjoy the area, consider how you can help protect this wonderful part of our natural neighbourhood.



## How to Enjoy this Special Place Responsibly

You can help maintain the special nature of this area by:

- Keeping to the main trails; don't make new trails. The wetlands and woods are important as wildlife habitat and corridors.
- Travelling on foot only; these are not designated horse or bike trails.
- Keeping your dog on a leash; take along a plastic bag for dog feces and litter.
- Not picking flowers; let others enjoy them too.
- Learning more about its natural history.

For more information on this area, or to get involved in helping to protect it, contact Heather Dempsey at 762-3056 or Peter Duck at 762-4335.



Barred owl  
Photo: J. Waugh



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## Valleyview – Middle Springs Natural Area

This place is unique in Banff National Park for its rich variety of plants, animals and hydro-geological features in such a small area.

Water from the Middle Springs, as well as smaller cool springs and seepage zones, influences what lives here. Some parts are forested and stable, others such as the calcareous sections change with fluctuating water flows. What looks like dry gravel in some of the wet areas is actually tufa floating on a cushion of moisture. Tufa is a porous rock that is 98% calcium carbonate and is formed from mineral-rich water.



*Kaln's lobelia is only found here and at the Cave & Basin marsh.  
Photo: D. Lepitzki*

Plants growing in the wetlands live in extra harsh conditions. Yet, almost 200 plant species have been identified here, many of them rare in the park. Some of these were “picked out” of other sites nearby decades ago. Eight species of orchids are in bloom at different times of the season.

Many large animals, including deer, elk, cougars and bears travel through or use the woods and wetlands as habitat. You might catch the bright flash of a yellow-rumped warbler in low branches, or hear “who cooks for you” from a barred owl calling deep in the forest after sunset, or watch a mallard taking off from open water in December.

This area is part of the wildlife corridor that spans the middle slopes of Sulphur Mountain. The narrowest part of the corridor is on the opposite side of Mountain Avenue and is closed to human use.

*The vivid dancer damselfly is adapted to thermal spring environments and breeds in these wetlands. Banff is at the extreme northern limit of its range. It is considered a species at risk due to habitat loss elsewhere.  
Photo: D. Lepitzki*



## Signs of Wear & Tear

For much of the park's history, this wetland saw little human use, especially compared to nearby areas such as the



*Wooden pipes that transported water from Sulphur Mountain's thermal springs to facilities downhill can still be found. "Lithia water" was once bottled for its potential curative properties derived from the Middle Springs.  
Photo: H. Dempsey*

Cave & Basin and the Upper Hot Springs. Those more popular places have lost much of their original ecological character that this area still possesses.

Concern about increasing use and consequent damage to the sensitive wetlands was first raised when the Valleyview housing development was proposed in the late 1970s. To reduce impacts to the wetlands adjacent to the new homes, a boardwalk was built as part of the project. The boardwalk and a horse trail above the wetlands are the only formal trails in the area.



*Over time many informal trails have been created, some in very sensitive areas that cannot re-vegetate easily.  
Photo: H. Dempsey*

Nevertheless, over a period of years a network of informal trails throughout the forests and wet areas has been developed by casual or random human use. Impacts from these informal trails include: soil erosion and compaction, introduction of non-native species, loss of wildlife habitat, and potential loss of native species (especially rare species). It seemed as if conditions were getting worse.

## What's Happening?

The Bow Valley Naturalists and other concerned residents have worked together to reduce the worst human impacts at the stream crossings and boggy sections.

With generous funding and local support, modest bridge crossings and boardwalks spanning the most sensitive areas have been built. Helping others learn about and appreciate this area is a key goal for everyone involved.



*The catalyst for action came when Banff Community High School graduate Jenna Tessolini was awarded a Telus SuperPages™ scholarship which included a grant for a community project. Photo: E. Tessolini*