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A Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) foraging on the exposed marsh bottom following the lowering of the Beaver dam at the Cave and Basin Marsh last May. Y. Hiraki Photo

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### ECOSYSTEM EDUCATION & ADVOCACY

1967-2022

BOWVALLEYNATURALISTS.ORG

# PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Our first program for the 2022 – 2023 season will be October 25. This year our Bob and Mary Smith lecture, held in partnership with the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies will fall on December 1. This event will replace our usual 4th Tuesday the month event for November. As usual, the December program is replaced by the annual Christmas Bird Count and potluck supper.

Each of our fall presentations offer an opportunity to learn about ecosystems, management of landscapes, and opportunity to assess human impacts on the habitats around us.

Video recordings of past programs are available on our [Public Programs](#) web page.

## Tuesday October 25, 2022

Matten Hessami recently completed his Masters degree at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, studying Moose and Mountain Caribou dynamics. He's from the Wyandotte First Nation (Kelowna area) and is an excellent science communicator. Matten is excited to come to Banff and will speak to us about three major projects he has been working on. For a preview, visit this [November 2012 article](#) in the Rocky Mountain Outlook or listen to this [podcast](#).

## Thursday December 1, 2022

This year our Bob and Mary Smith lecture, held in partnership with the Whyte Museum, will fall on December 1. This event replaces our usual 4th Tuesday the month program.

Wes Olsen will speak about Buffalo (Bison), his history and science of Buffalo supported with wonderful photographs taken by Johane Janelle. Wes and Johane have worked together to tell a very grand story about buffalo and their importance in historic and current ecosystems. It is a presentation against which we might be able to understand the importance of all the “Bison bits and pieces” we have learned over the years - the Elk Island herd, Wood Buffalo herds, the restoration of some herds to First Nations management in both the United States and Canada, the Buffalo Commons (in Saskatchewan) and our (local) restoration program in Banff National Park.

## Saturday December 17, 2022

We look forward to gathering together for the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count and Potluck supper. Experienced birder or just starting out, participate in our local contribution to one of the longest-running wildlife monitoring projects in the world. Watch our updates for details in the coming weeks. There is an opportunity to subscribe to our updates, or even become member, at the bottom of all our web pages.



Mateen in the backcountry of NW British Columbia. He worked at the Parks Canada Ya Ha Tinda Ranch during his undergraduate degree supporting a long-term elk research project led by Dr. Mark Hebblewhite and Dr. Evelyn Merrill.



# NEWS AND ISSUES

## Drained of Ecological Integrity, Again!

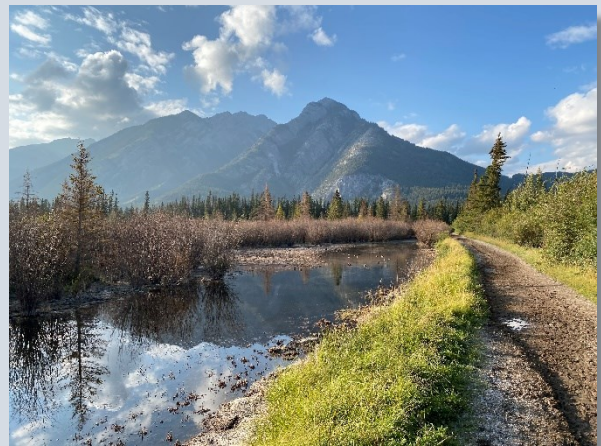
Periodic flooding, due to a variety of natural causes, is one of the fundamental processes that drives the Vermilion Wetlands, including the Cave and Basin Marsh, adjacent to the Town of Banff. The area east from the Marsh Loop trail to the recreation grounds and around the horse stables has been cut off from this process for many years by the artificial berm between the parking lot hill and the river levee. West of that berm is the only area on the South side of the Bow River between the Banff Townsite and Rainy Bay in which water levels still fluctuate based the coming and going of beaver activity and interactions with the Bow River via natural distributary channels. These natural water level regimes play an important role in nutrient storage and release, exchange of aquatic organisms, and the resulting successional patterns of plant communities which brings amazing habitat and species diversity to this and similar mountain wetland systems. Of the 22 Species At Risk in Banff National Park, more than half are documented using this special place. There is good reason why the Banff National Park Management Plan has, for many years, designated this site for the highest level of ecosystem protection.

Last May many BVN members were dumbfounded when they came across Parks Canada staff pulling apart the beaver dam in the main distributary channel and installing a drainage pipe. It had happened again. In what is the most ecologically diverse and most highly protected wetland in the mountain national parks. Just like the disastrous manipulation of the same beaver dam about 30 years ago, Parks Canada has put human use ahead of ecological integrity and bungled an unnecessary manipulation of water levels in the Cave and Basin Marsh. The previous ecosystem management fiasco in the early 1980s likely led to the Banff Longnose Dace (*Rhinichthys cataractae smithi*) being declared extinct due, in part, to “habitat alteration and degradation” (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). Only four of the 22 species at risk were addressed in the beaver dam diversion impact assessment.

BVN believes that this water diversion was a misguided ecosystem manipulation that undermines the good work national park staff do to protect and restore ecological integrity in Canada's special places. This rushed action ignored decades of citizen and professional science and highlights the failure of Parks Canada to implement the Parliament-approved Banff National Park management plan over a 12-year period. In 2010 Parks Canada committed to addressing the human use and ecological integrity concerns



A beaver dam in the background was lowered and this 8-inch pipe with control valve (inside box) was installed during migratory bird nesting season to lower water levels in the Cave and Basin Marsh. The pipe was not installed as prescribed in the environmental impact assessment. A fundamental ecological process was interrupted and manipulated to protect the Town of Banff Recreation Grounds, which have been landscaped to accommodate flooding, from flooding. (P. Duck photo.)



A view along the Cave and Basin Marsh artificial berm. Is nature really the problem? An alternative to destroying a beaver dam might have been to undertake some restoration of ecological integrity by inserting a pipe in Parks Canada's own dam which, unlike the natural coming and going of beavers, has impeded the marsh's natural water regimes for decades (P. Duck photo)

associated with this special wetland. They never delivered on this commitment to Parliament. As for their commitment to public accountability, Parks Canada initially refused to circulate the approved impact assessment report, explaining that the environmental impact assessment was not a public-facing assessment. Yet, the project was explained as being necessary to maintain public access to the Cave and Basin Marsh trail. Eventually, two different versions of the same impact assessment report were released.

This manipulation of a fundamental ecological process in a national park was rationalized by a trumped up “urgent” need to maintain recreational and commercial use of the Marsh Loop trail and to protect the Town of Banff Recreation Grounds, and adjacent stables, from springtime high water on the Bow River. This is in contrast to the recent environmental impact assessment of the Recreation Grounds which claims flooding would be a positive influence. It is perplexing to think that, after 100 years of flooding every 15 to 20 years it was suddenly “urgent” to protect these sites from getting wet. It is astonishing to think that anybody, let alone a science-based organization like Parks Canada, thought that installing a 20-cm diameter pipe in a beaver dam was going to somehow control the volume of the Bow River during spring runoff.

Bird watchers should also know that this manipulation of water levels during nesting season was undertaken on their behalf. Believe it, or not, the impact assessment justified the project, in part, as being urgently necessary to maintain an opportunity to watch birds.

We continue to try to gather information to help us understand why this water diversion in a national park occurred. At the time of this writing Parks Canada has yet to provide BVN with some additional information that we requested so that we can formulate an appropriate response. Please let us know if you have pictures or notes about water levels, bird nests, beaver, or other wildlife, relating to the Cave and Basin Marsh.

## **Banff National Park Management Plan**

The new Banff National Park Management Plan has been released to the public. The Plan will now be reviewed and likely approved by Parliament. With a shift in emphasis, from committing to some specific management tasks, to a more strategic directions approach, it will be interesting to see how this document serves to provide meaningful ecosystem protection on the ground in the coming years. The Management Plan may be viewed or downloaded from the [Banff National Park website](#).

## **Sunshine Village Detailed Impact Assessment**

Following approval of the Sunshine Village ski resort site guidelines, the ski area has now prepared the next level of plans that show in more detail how the lease will be developed in the coming years. A Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment of these plans was conducted and circulated last spring for public comment. BVN and others have submitted comments and await the next stage in the Sunshine long range planning process. Documents relating to the Sunshine Village Ski Area Long-Range planning process are [available online](#). Please let us know if you would like to review the BVN submission.



Habitat abandoned by beaver after the draining of the Cave and Basin Marsh in May 2022. One of the reasons Parks Canada stepped in to control elk abundance in the late 1990s was to manage over-browsing by elk and to restore and Beaver habitat. *P. Duck photo.*



## Calgary – Banff Passenger Rail

It seems the proposal to develop a passenger rail link from Calgary to Banff is on hold. The Alberta government has cited financial concerns in withholding support for the project. BVN and other environmental advocacy groups have expressed serious concerns about this proposal to the Alberta Government. The concerns are related to questionable carbon emissions accounting, impacts to wildlife and habitat, and lack of consultation and accountability.

## Playing Cyber Tag With Nature

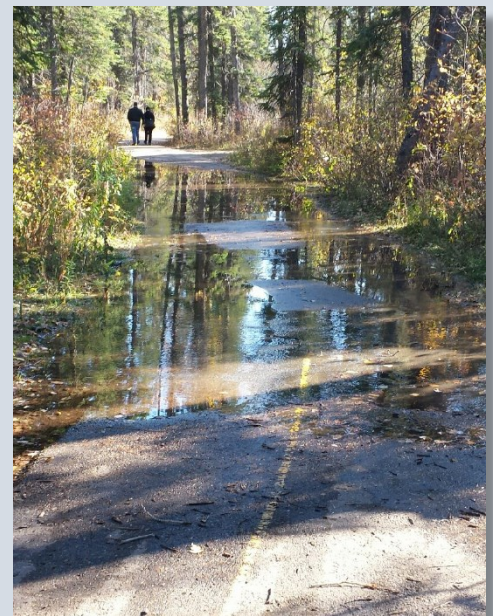
There are many social media and nature identification apps, adapted for social interaction, available these days. This is allowing many more people to become involved in nature watching and nature sharing. “Tagging” special places on social media for many others to find quickly, and at an activity level beyond the resilience of the site, and can very quickly lead to environmental harm. We would like to remind people that too much nature sharing can be bad for nature if it leads to disturbance. Attracting too many people to special bird habitats or other sensitive wildlife and vegetation sites can lead to the loss of the very thing we want people to enjoy. Parks Canada’s red chair campaign is a good example of how easily sensitive vegetation can be disturbed by attracting too many people to sensitive locations – damaging both nature and the experience.

BVN cautions all readers to not use publicly accessible social media-style applications to post the locations of sensitive natural features, plants or wildlife that will attract people to that location. It's good to know nature is out there but in these days sharing sensitive information puts the nature we love at risk of being loved too much. Please use the location masking functions on apps like iNaturalist to mask specific locations of observations that you think might lead to disturbance. Legitimate researchers can always contact you, or the app administrator, for more detailed information.

An example of attracting inappropriate attention to sensitive nature is the ease with which people can use social media to attract attention to bird nests along popular trails. It has been pointed out that the sharing of nest locations on social media is not a good thing. Attracting people to linger in these sensitive areas, in hopes of spotting a much-publicized sensitive species leads to unnecessary risk to nesting success.

## Record Your Observations

Having offered a few words of caution, BVN would like to encourage members and other nature observers to record observations in scientifically-curated data bases. These citizen science platforms are becoming important to scientists for documenting biodiversity in general and for documenting the presence and absence of species of interest in locations of interest. These sites provide quick access to our community knowledge of ecosystems for land managers and scientific researchers. Both eBird and iNaturalist have already proven important tools when conducting or reviewing environmental impact assessments in Banff National Park. BugGuide can also be a useful tool. Tools that can be used to ensure your contributions to science do not become pathways to disturbance are usually provided when entering observations in these data bases.



Banff National Park please take note, a field trip may be in order. Visitors to the City of Calgary's Griffiths Woods Park this October do not seem concerned about a little water on the trail from a Beaver pond. *B. Robinson*

Other regions are taking action to encourage responsible nature watching and the ethics of enjoying natural spaces. BVN believes it time for a similar campaign in the Bow Valley and adjacent protected areas. Here are two examples we can look to for considering a local campaign:

- Live By The Rules in Jackson Hole
- New Zealand has had some fun with the share everything mentality that could be adapted to over sharing of nature that leads to environmental harm. Perhaps some of the talent from our local arts and e-media community can create something to change our sharing habits and encourage respect for the privacy of nature.

### **Banff Norquay Gondola - No More**

BVN would like to acknowledge Parks Canada's decision to close the door to considering another gondola in the Banff National Park Management Plan. The proposed gondola would have required major new energy-consuming and embodied carbon infrastructure in the Banff townsite and caused disturbance in a critical wildlife corridor. We are grateful for, and congratulate, Parks Canada for a wise decision that placed ecological integrity as a priority over increased commercialization of the Park.

### **Canmore Gondola – A Proposal for More**

The latest tribute to the “more” in Canmore is a renewed proposal for a gondola. This will attract more people and occupy more land. It will emit more construction, operating and embodied carbon emissions while demanding more resources from a planet already in climate crisis. The Province of Alberta is requiring an environmental impact assessment. A number of environmental advocacy organizations in the region have commented on the terms of reference for the assessment. These comments raised a wide variety of issues including, as always in a confined mountain valley, concern for diminishing wildlife habitat and interference with wildlife movement corridors. All of the concerns raised by the proposal will add to the cumulative environmental effects of “more” in Canmore. This time we can add to the usual concerns that this project would cut through the airways used by one of North America's most dramatic mass migrations. The Golden Eagle migration route of western North America follows the southwest slopes and the ridge-top where the gondola is being proposed. The mountain immediately to the northwest along this range is celebrated by First Nations and is called Anû Kathâ Îpa, or “Bald Eagle Peak”.

Please stay informed about this latest step to add more in Canmore. Stone Creek Resorts has posted its gondola proposal and draft terms of reference [here](#). You can visit the web sites of [CPAWS](#) and [Y2Y](#) and review documents about this project on the [Government of Alberta's environmental assessment web page](#) for this proposal.

# OF WILD THINGS

## Monitoring Avian Productivity And Survivorship (MAPS)

Cyndi Smith

On the last days of the 2022 banding season, we captured our 3rd-ever Nashville Warbler, a pair of White-winged Crossbills, a young Northern Flicker, and numerous other young and moulting birds that kept us on our identification toes and challenged our bird aging skills. The total number of birds this season was our 3rd highest since opening the station in 1999. Please contact BVN if you wish more details and data from our MAPS project.

The non-avian highlight on our final day was a grizzly bear that wandered through the site about 9:30 a.m. Ken Symington was focussed on banding when he heard something, saw the bear near our processing table, calmly said BEAR, and we all jumped up, pulling out our bear spray. It had apparently just crossed the road and come down the hill, passing under a big spruce near the banding table, and was heading towards the adjacent meadow. It moved on, while we followed it at a safe distance, taking time to encourage it along. Not that we wanted to follow or harass the bear, but it was important to know where it went when we resumed working, and that it did not run into trouble with our nets. The whole time the bear was calm, looking back occasionally, but just walking at a casual pace. No difficulty occurred with the nets, or us! By the time I thought of pulling my camera out, the only picture I got was the north end of a bear heading south.

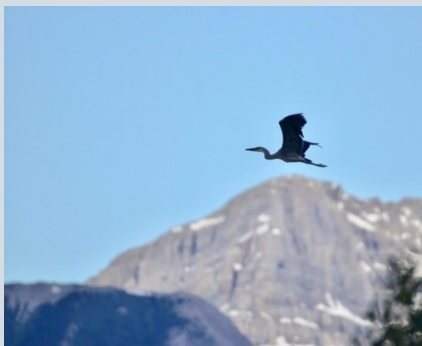


A second year male Nashville Warbler prior to being released after banding. C. Smith photo.

## BVN's 47th Annual Christmas Bird Count

Our 47th Annual Christmas Bird Count and potluck supper will happen on Saturday December 17, 2022. Whether you are an experienced birder, or just starting out, join us for a fun day of contributing to one of the longest wildlife monitoring projects in the world. Watch our updates for details in the coming weeks. There is an opportunity to subscribe to our updates, or choose to become a BVN member, at the bottom of all [our web pages](#). You can also watch for notices about the BowKan Birders Christmas Bird Count.

[Data from past counts may be found here.](#)



## A Heron's First Flight

Yumiko Hiraki caught this heron taking its first flight in the Bow Valley on July 14th this year. Its siblings, watching from the nearby nest, seem struck with wonder at the sight.





## A Mountain Pine Beetle Predator

BVN provides volunteers to assist with Mountain Pine Beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) monitoring in the Canmore area. This involves checking four beetle traps in two locations on the north and south sides of the Bow Valley twice each week from June to September. The traps contain a chemical attractant to draw beetles into a stack of nested funnels which guides the beetles into a container at the bottom. The number of beetles captured can be tracked to reveal the intensity of beetle flight activity over the summer. Aside from finding beetles in the traps, we are often fascinated by spiders, and other insects that get caught in the traps. Two of the interesting finds this year included *Thanasimas undulatus*, in the “Checkered Beetle” family (Cleridae), and Spruce Zebra Beetle (*Xylotrechus undulatus*). Both of these beetles have interesting colour patterns on their elytra (hardened forewings or flight-wing covers) that catch the eye and stood out in the MPB traps. Caroline Whitehouse of the Alberta Environment and Parks Forest Health Branch indicated that *T. Undulatus* is a predator of Mountain Pine Beetles.



*Thanasimas undulatus* (left), one of the “Checkered Beetle” family (Cleridae) and Spruce Zebra Beetle (*Xylotrechus undulatus*) (right).

## Mosses and Lichens of the Sunshine - Egypt Lake Area

While BVN was preparing our comments on the Sunshine Village Detailed Environmental Assessment we received some interesting correspondence from Ryan James, a professional biologist working in Edmonton. Ryan had submitted some valuable comments on the assessment and made us aware of some research he had done on mosses and lichens in the Sunshine area. Ryan’s research recognizes that to date 43 moss species have been recorded for the Sunshine Meadows-Egypt Lake area, and 326 mosses for Banff National Park. For context, the Alberta Conservation Information Management System (ACIMS) lists the presence of 553 moss species in Alberta. This makes Banff National Park and the Sunshine-Egypt area in particular an important conservation area for Alberta mosses because Banff protects approximately 60% of Alberta’s moss flora. Follow [this link](#) to read and download Ryan’s full paper.



# WHAT MEMBERS READ, WATCH, AND LISTEN TO

## BOOKS

**Woman, Watching:** Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and the Songbirds of Pimisi Bay.  
*Merilyn Simonds.*

Readers might be interested in [this excerpt from a new book](#) about Louise de Kiriline, one of Canada's notable birders and naturalists, recently featured in *Canadian Geographic*. She is described as "Canada's Rachel Carson and Canada's Thoreau" who spent 50 years studying birds in a remote forest on the Mattawa River and changed the way we think about birds. Merilyn Simonds is the author of 20 books, including *The Convict Lover*, *Gutenberg's Fingerprint*, and most recently, the novel *Refuge*.

**A Most Remarkable Creature** *Jonathan Meiburg*

This book is such a treat. Meiburg weaves together geographic, ecologic and human histories adeptly. This is not a natural history of the Caracara; it is a story of the "great big world" that leads to Caracaras, and how it became the crazy-interesting and quirky bird that it is. We learn, too, that in spite of historic interests, little is known about this species. It ranks amongst the best of natural history books. Keep an eye for other works by Jonathan Meiburg.

**Winter Count** *Barry Lopez*

Barry Lopez wrote *Winter Count*, ten short fictional stories featuring wildlife and landscapes, during the 1970s. The stories fill only 100 pages. Each is elegant, mystical and treads a thin line between fiction and possible truth. Each is slightly strange and otherworldly.

**Permanent Astonishment** *Tomsom Highway*

This is the first part of Tomson Highway's memoir - the first 15 years of his life. Each chapter describes some aspect of life as a northern Cree and is evocative of the world he was born into on Reindeer Lake in 1951. Growing up in the far north of Manitoba included travelling on the land, winter and summer, honouring traditions and, eventually, attending residential school in The Pas. It is full of love for his family and community, the land and for the possibilities of his life. He left me sharing his "astonishment". *Permanent Astonishment* won the Writer's Trust of Canada 2021 Hilary Weston Prize for Nonfiction.

**Noopiming, The Cure for White Ladies** *Leanne Betasamosake Simpson*

Imagine an episode of *Seinfeld*, in written form. Now replace Manhattan with Toronto and Jerry, Elan, George, and Kramer with old man, old woman, a maple tree, a Caribou, and a colourful cast of other characters, who are all navigating the transition from wilderness to urbanity. Keep the hilarious stranger than fiction but oh so real coincidences and stories. Replace all the satiric selfishness with acts of love and community.

Through these colourful, lovable characters and their stories, Leanne Simpson teaches us about how maple trees, Caribou, migrating birds and other displaced persons are creatively navigating urbanity, colonialism, pollution, politics, community and all the other things we all struggle with.

The book is a direct response to Suzanne Moody's, *Life In The Bush*, in which Suzanne, also a displaced person from Ireland, de-romanticizes the harsh reality of life in the Canadian wilderness from the perspective of a woman who grew up in the city. In *Noopiming*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson de-

romanticizes the harsh reality of life in the city from the perspective of those who are more well adapted to the bush.

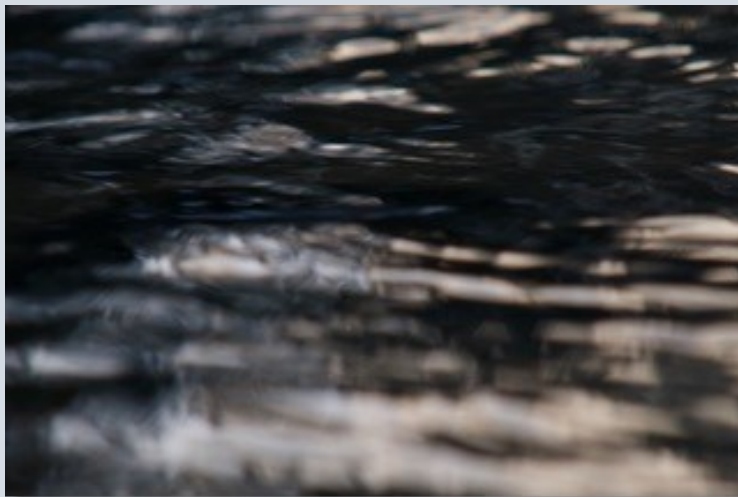
## INTERESTING LINKS

Readers interested in forest ecology will find some interesting articles in [\*Bugs and Diseases\*](#), published by Albert Environment and Parks. The August 2022 edition includes an interesting note about the ecology of the [\*Wild World of Wasps\*](#) in our forests.

Readers interested in Whitebark Pine ecology will find some interesting reading in [\*this newsletter\*](#), and associated links, from the Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation.

Rewilding in Great Britain

And as always the Guardian has lots of nature related content including [\*this issue\*](#) with a reference to the value of Beaver in the landscape.



*Seeking mountain ecoliving  
flow  
as unpredictable, peaceful and reflective  
so far life has proven its beauty in its darkness  
maybe only our own perceptions  
humble in chaos*

This picture was taken along-side the Bow River (April 2022) when the sun is just hiding behind those beautiful mountains. I love this picture because of its imperfections. It is dizzy and colourful, flowy and playful, all at once. *Valérie Brazeau-Caron, Timberline Canadian Alpine Academy Student*

*BVN cautions all readers to not use publicly accessible social media style applications to post the locations of sensitive natural features, plants or wildlife that will attract people to that location. It's good to know nature is out there but in these days of social media such sharing of sensitive information will put the nature we love at risk of being loved too much.*

## WHO DO YOU CALL?

You may come across situations or observations that you want to tell the authorities about. We recommend you have these phone numbers handy. Remember, cell phone coverage is spotty in the mountains so take notes if you need to move on to make a call.

For Emergencies such as Ambulance, Fire Department, Police (RCMP): 911

Banff Dispatch: 403-762-4506 for Park-related emergency only (avalanche, forest fire, mountain rescue, etc.)

Banff Park Non-emergency: 403-762-1470, (bear or large carnivore sightings, human-wildlife conflicts, injured animal, illegal park activities such as fire, feeding wildlife, camping, drones etc.)

Kananaskis: Call 310-5263 for bear, cougar and problem wildlife sightings, illegal activities or to help report damage to public land, noise complaints and general land-related inquiries and information requests. To report a poacher call 1-800-642-3800 or fill out an [on-line report](#). If you wish to remain anonymous while reporting a crime, phone 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).