

Recommended Land Use Guidelines for Trumpeter Swan Habitat

Wildlife Land Use Guidelines

Rationale for Special Protection of Trumpeter Swan Habitat

Trumpeter Swans breed on lakes, beaver ponds, and marshes scattered mainly across the Aspen Parkland and Boreal natural regions of Alberta. The majority of swans are found in northern Alberta near Grande Prairie, Peace River, High Level, High Prairie, Edson, and Lac La Biche. Small populations are also found in southern Alberta near Pincher Creek and central Alberta near Elk Island National Park. The species formerly bred throughout Alberta, but was thought to have been extirpated by the early 1900s, at which time it was thought to be close to extinction across its range.

Today, trumpeter swans are listed as a Threatened species under Alberta's Wildlife Act, and as such are afforded protection against hunting and the destruction of nests. The population of trumpeter swans in Alberta is increasing, but very small (fewer than 1000 breeding individuals). There are still concerns about whether the recovery will continue, as well as concerns about the security of the wintering habitat of the Alberta birds. Populations do not appear to establish themselves easily in new wintering habitat. Therefore, as long as wintering habitat is limited, the risk of regional extinction for Trumpeter Swans in Alberta will not be reduced by immigration from neighbouring populations. Accidental hunting and power line collisions are also threats.

Trumpeter swans are sensitive to human disturbance, and human activity in breeding areas may decrease survival of eggs or cygnets. Trumpeter swans that are disturbed repeatedly may not nest or may abandon an existing nest. Therefore, the breeding population continues to be dependent on current management practices and habitat protection.

For further information on trumpeter swans, please see:

- Alberta's Species at Risk Strategy
<http://www.srd.alberta.ca/BioDiversityStewardship/SpeciesAtRisk/AlbertasSpeciesAtRiskStrategy/Default.aspx>

and

- Alberta Wildlife Detailed Status Reports
<http://www.srd.alberta.ca/BioDiversityStewardship/SpeciesAtRisk/DetailedStatus/Default.aspx>

In an effort to continue the recovery of trumpeter swans, industrial land use guidelines must reflect the sensitive nature of this species. These guidelines serve three primary purposes:

- a) protection of the long term integrity and productivity of trumpeter swan breeding habitat;
- b) avoidance of industrial disturbance to trumpeter swans during nesting and rearing of cygnets; and
- c) minimize the access created near swan lakes to reduce the potential for secondary disturbance of trumpeter swans from recreational use.

The areas where these conditions apply will be illustrated as “Trumpeter Swan Waterbodies and Watercourses” within the Wildlife Sensitivity Layers that are consistent with the Landscape Analysis Tool and available at:

<http://srd.alberta.ca/MapsFormsPublications/Maps/WildlifeSensitivityMaps/Default.aspx>

Land Use Guidelines

The Fish and Wildlife Division of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development recommends the following conditions be applied to activities near trumpeter swan habitat through the land use permit system:

All Activities:

- April 1 to Sept. 30, no activity within 800m of the high water mark of identified lakes or water bodies.
- April 1 to Sept. 30, no direct flights over identified lakes or water bodies.
- No development (roads, structures, etc.) within 500m of the high water mark on identified lakes or water bodies.

Geophysical:

- Conventional clearing of new lines must terminate 800m from the high water mark of identified lakes or water bodies.
- Low impact seismic (LIS) lines must terminate 500m from the high water mark of identified lakes or water bodies.
- Heliportable and/or hand-cut lines (up to 2.5m wide) must terminate 100 m from the high water mark of identified lakes or water bodies.
- A survey line of sight (0.5m) is permitted from 100m up to the edge of the water body.
- Reuse of existing lines is permitted, however, no re-clearing or disturbance of vegetation is permitted beyond the line widths listed above.
- No shot holes where water or ice exists or on dry lakes (air/mud guns only).

Livestock Grazing:

- No new grazing leases issued adjacent to identified lakes or water bodies
- No range improvement within 500 m of the high water mark on identified lakes or water bodies

Timber Harvesting:

- No timber harvesting within 200 m of high water mark for identified lakes or water bodies. Establishment of a special management zone for timber harvesting between 200m and 500m from high water mark, with a detailed plan, is required.