

Foothills Parkland

The Parkland Natural Region is a transition zone between the grasslands and the Rocky Mountains. The Foothills Parkland is a subregion of the Parkland region and occupies a discontinuous band along the foothills between 5 and 50km wide. This subregion is defined by rolling, hilly native grasslands, aspen woodlands, willow shrublands, and hay lands. Over 70% of the land is privately owned, 22% is provincial, and 4% is federal public lands.

About the Region

This subregion has cooler summers and shorter growing seasons, but warmer winters and more precipitation than the other subregions. Over 60% of the subregion is used for grazing, oil and gas exploration, and development of infrastructure. It has less intensive cultivation than the other parkland natural subregions, and subsequently has the highest proportion of area remaining in native vegetation. The Bow River is the largest river in this subregion and wetlands are uncommon, covering only 4% of the area.

Wildlife and Plant Life

The Foothills Parkland subregion is very biodiverse, as it supports an incredible number of plant species. Some examples include grasses like rough fescue and tufted hair grass, forbs like lupines and geraniums, shrubs like buffaloberry and red-osier dogwood, and trees like poplars and willows.

As a result of the food and habitat these plants provide, wildlife is abundant in the Foothills Parkland subregion. Many species of mammals inhabit the area, including hares, ground squirrels, deer, coyotes, porcupines, and even bears. Parkland provides great nesting habitat for both resident and migratory bird species, including the Clay-colored Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, American Robin, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, and our provincial bird the Great-horned Owl, to name just a few.

Did You Know?

City of Calgary parks that fall within the Foothills Parkland subregion include Edgemont Ravine, 12 Mile Coulee, Ranchlands, Strathcona Ravine, Griffith Woods, Weaselhead Flats, and North and South Glenmore Park.



Foothills Parkland Study

Overview

These activities provide hands-on learning opportunities which will enhance your students' understanding of the importance of biodiversity and green spaces, as well as develop their sense of observation. The activities promote civic responsibility and environmental stewardship in an engaging way.

Activity 1: Migration Investigation

Animals need food, water, shelter and space to survive. However, some animals need to move from one area to another to meet their needs, which we call migration. Animals that migrate include many birds, Monarch butterflies, and caribou, to name just a few. The Yellow Warbler is a migratory bird that helps us by eating pest insects like midges, leafhoppers and wasps. However, these insectivores must migrate south to Mexico and Central America in the fall when food here is unavailable in the cold months. They then return to Calgary in the spring to find suitable nesting habitat and raise their young. When animals migrate they become vulnerable to predators and other hazards. However, quality stopover sites can support animals on their migratory journey by providing food and shelter. Consider a park in your community; could this park be a good stopover site, and why? Draw a map of the park and label the various features that may support migrating wildlife on their long, arduous journey.

Activity 2: Parkland Evidence

Many animals live in the Foothills Parkland, but you may not always see them. Luckily, they often leave evidence of their presence for us to find. What kinds of evidence might animals leave behind? In your local park or green space, look for animal evidence, including holes, dens, lodges, nests, chews, marks, fur, feathers, bones, antlers, exoskeletons, scat, tracks, snake sheds, etc. Look for evidence and try to identify the animals that left it. Draw a story of how the evidence you found connects. If evidence is limited, consider two different animals found in the Foothills Parkland, and describe what evidence they could leave.

Activity 3: Letter to a Tree

The west side of Calgary is part of the Foothills Parkland subregion, and since much of its undisturbed landscape is covered by aspen, it is important to understand the benefits of trees and urban forests. Sit near a tree and ask students how they feel when they are near a tree or in a forest. Brainstorm the benefits of trees and urban forests, such as providing shelter and wildlife habitat, oxygen production, soil stabilization, etc. Ask students to write a thank-you letter to a favourite tree in their community, highlighting the benefits it provides to themselves and the surrounding environment. Students can then read or share their letters with a partner.

Activity 4: Get to Know a Tree

Looking at a different tree than the previous activity, analyze its unique features, including bark, texture, colour, leaf or bud shape, etc. Estimate how old your tree is by examining its diameter and height. Lastly, using your observations and notes, try to identify your tree. Feel free to use any field guides or online resources available to you. How does this tree add value to the ecosystem, whether it be shelter, food, oxygen, or something else? Trees are also incredibly beneficial for their ability to sequester and store carbon, which can reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Discover how much carbon a single tree can store, as well as which tree species are in your area, through the web page maps.calgary.ca/TreeSchedule.



Visiting a Foothills Parkland Park?

What you need to know.

Park Etiquette — [Click here for bylaws related to parks and pathways](#)

- Stay on designated trails at all times, unless otherwise posted. This helps to protect the habitat of plants and animals that live in the park.
- Use quiet voices. Running and yelling will scare away wildlife and reduce the opportunities to view these species.
- Do not disturb or feed wildlife, including birds.
- Look but do not remove vegetation (including flowers and berries). These plants could be food, nesting material, or a rare native species.
- Do not litter. Place all garbage, recycling, and compost in appropriate bins or take them back to your school.

Nature Kit Information

Calgary Parks would like to encourage you to explore the amazing landscapes of the foothills parkland. To enhance your experience, we have a free learning kit available for you to use which includes:

- A map of the park or region
- Biofacts (bone clone mammal/bird skulls, track and scat molds, egg replicas)
- Bird plushes with audio of bird call or song
- A tree cookie (cross section from a known tree species)
- Alberta natural history field guides and booklets relevant to the topic of the kit
- Printed resources to supplement the park study activities
- Various laminated photographs and information on local plant and animal species
- Nature BINGO activity page

Renting a Nature Kit

- Kit is available for a one-week duration FREE of charge.
- User is responsible for picking up and dropping off the kit at the designated location.
- If the kit is not returned, or materials are missing or damaged, the user will be charged a replacement fee.