



Watershed Heritage Trail

The Elbow River Watershed Partnership (ERWP) is a watershed stewardship group based in Calgary, but we do a great deal of our work out of the office in locations such as West Bragg Creek. Our areas of interest include: Kananaskis Country, Rocky View County, the city of Calgary and Tsuut'ina Nation land. (All of our work takes place on Treaty 7 land.)

The Watershed Heritage interpretive trail, designed just for walkers and hikers, is a great addition to this world-class trail system. It packs a wide range of outdoor pleasures into a relatively short length. Trail users might see beavers cutting willows along a pond edge in July or watch a chattering squirrel jump between towering poplar, spruce and pine trees. Birders can hear and see a variety of species, from tiny songbirds to woodpeckers and raptors. August brings the smell of junipers, with their dark blue berries, while the crunch of fallen leaves is a satisfying sound in the fall. On a cloudless winter day, walkers can enjoy the sun's warmth on the south-facing section of the trail, while trails across the valley are snowy and shaded.

Look for the Watershed Heritage trailhead at the east end of the parking lot, marked by this Welcome sign.



The trail heads southeast from the parking lot, immediately opening up to overlook a lovely beaver pond. Continue along a bench cut to a custom-built cedar bridge over an ephemeral stream. Here you'll find a sign about building a trail while minimizing erosion and using best management practices.

BUILDING A TRAIL

You are walking along a trail that was hand built by volunteers in 2018. This meandering trail was designed with slope, moisture, trail users, and wildlife in mind. Many of the older trails in this area started out differently, either as seismic lines or as logging access roads.

The straight portion of East and West Crystal trail is an example of an old seismic line. Loggers Loop is an example of old logging roads that were eventually converted into recreational trails.



Logging roads are useful for accessing the forests for harvesting, and seismic lines are useful for collecting data, but they don't always make the best trails.

To minimize negative effects such as erosion, the Greater Bragg Creek Trail Association (GBCTA) works to perform some "Best Management Practices" (BMPs) for trail building and maintenance that help to protect water quality and quantity.

Examples of BMPs for trails are:

- Slightly adjust the outslope of the tread – 5%, so that water drains off.
- Build a full bench-cut to create a solid, durable tread.
- Locate the trail on a side slope and out of wet areas (so that water has somewhere to drain off).
- Keep the trail grade less than half of the grade of the hillside.
- Construct grade reversals (to drain water off the trail, rather than along the trail).
- If an existing trail crosses a wet area; relocate trail section to a drier spot or build a bridge over wet areas.



Half Rule

20% Hill Side Grade

8% Trail Grade: This trail grade is less than half of the hillside grade. Water will sheet across the trail.

15% Trail Grade: This trail grade is more than half of the hillside grade. Water will flow down the trail.

Grade Reversals

Grade reversal to drain water off the trail.




To help prevent erosion and in keeping the water clean:

- Avoid walking or biking on trails when they are wet.
- Avoid walking in wet areas such as stream-banks and wetlands.
- Stay on the designated trails.

The volunteer group

of the Greater Bragg Creek Trail Association (GBCTA) is a group of residents from Bragg Creek that are working hard to design, build, and maintain trails and pathways for the benefit of residents and visitors of Bragg Creek. In partnership with Alberta Parks, the GBCTA builds and maintains trails for hiking, biking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and horseback riding in this area.



braggscreektrails.org

The trail continues approximately 500 metres (one way) and includes six interpretive signs in total.

Some other highlights on the trail include a sign about the history of the Bragg Creek Youth Hostel and a lookout framed by aspen trees that reveals sparkling Bragg Creek to the left. (Make sure you take a photo from this location and send it in to the Bow River Basin Council!). Local favourite Moose Mountain can also be seen from the lookout.

Like all great projects, the Watershed Heritage interpretive trail would not have become a reality without the help of multiple partners and funders. We would like to acknowledge our in-kind supporters such as the hardworking trail volunteers from the BCT. We extend many thanks to the Bow River Basin Council Stakeholder Engagement Committee for the invaluable help in the sign messaging. Thank you also to Avril Derbyshire from Bragg Creek for the heritage information and to Alberta Environment and Parks for their advice and input along the way.

We would also like to express many thanks to the financial supporters for this project. Funding for this project was provided by: the Bow River Basin Council, The City of Calgary, Elbow River Watershed Partnership (casino volunteers), Land Stewardship Centre and Rocky View County.



Enjoying the view from the cedar bridge. Photo by Mark Giesbrecht

Together with Bragg Creek Trails, the local MP, Alberta Parks, Alberta TrailNet, The Great Trail, the ERWP and trail users, the Watershed Heritage trail was officially opened in November of 2018. About 100 people were in attendance to celebrate the opening of the trail and several other milestones:

- Expansion of the Great Trail in West Bragg Creek, connected to the Great Trail, a 24,000-kilometre national trail network;
- Alberta Parks' \$2.5-million investment in redevelopment of the West Bragg Creek Provincial Recreation Area, including expansion of the parking lot from 190 spaces to 485 and a permanent location for the trail centre;
- The extensive volunteer efforts of the BCT in trail design, building and trail maintenance.

We see the Watershed Heritage trail as a pilot for more great watershed-heritage-themed trails to come in the Elbow watershed.

To find out more about the Elbow River Watershed Partnership and their projects, including the Watershed Heritage Trail, please check out our [website](#) or contact Flora by email coordinator@erwp.org