

## **A WORKSHOP**

### **A Vision for Alberta Abilities Lodges: Citizens with Disabilities Enjoying Alberta Landscapes**

Held at the Heritage Room, Edmonton City Hall  
on January 19, 2007

and

Hosted by The Friends of Alberta Abilities Lodges

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Bill and daughter Wendy Mathewson visit with Honourary Patron  
Jeanne Loughheed just before the workshop began

## **SUMMARY**

The goals of this workshop were: 1) To review the current population statistics and the predictions for Alberta's citizens with disabilities over the next 20 to 50 years, 2) To review successful models for facilities like William Watson Lodge, for accessibility in Provincial Parks, and for other outdoor lodges, and 3) To formulate state-of-the-science information for new facilities models to improve the quality of life for Alberta citizens with disabilities.

Few question the value of William Watson Lodge in Kananaskis in improving the quality of life of citizens with disabilities and their families or support group. Unfortunately, only a very small number of the 330,000 Albertans with disabilities benefit from this facility in southern Alberta because of the limited capacity and distance from northern Alberta. Each year thousands of citizens are unable to get reservations or have given up trying to get reservations.

Our vision includes an accessible and affordable northern Alberta facility that is similar to William Watson Lodge that offers people with disabilities the opportunity to experience nature and that provides their family/support group time to strengthen the support net. Further, our calculations suggest that a number of Ability Lodges are needed to provide respite for low income seniors and other citizens with disabilities. These government or private facilities could be scattered around the Province in different ecological zones and yet be located near large population centres.

Our six speakers provided background information on the dimension of the 330,000 Alberta citizens with a disability, outlined future statistics for Alberta's population, and gave some of the health and education benefits to breaking the isolation of disabilities. They offered some local as well as international solutions and success stories.

Our eight focus groups discussed what features should be incorporated in newly constructed and renovated facilities to better serve the community of disabled citizens. There was considerable thought given to facilities being sustainable and having a low environmental impact. The groups discussed Site, Facilities, Clients/Programs, Personnel, Operations, Financial Arrangements, and Partnerships and presented their summaries to the participants.

All of the above gave direction to our Friends of Alberta Abilities Lodges Steering Committee in developing our work plans for the year 2007 – as given on page 28. We will continue to consult with the disability community to better understand how to break out of their isolation and also to understand their aspirations as they relate to Alberta's Provincial Parks and enjoying the outdoors. We offer to work with the Alberta Government to make more disability-friendly lodges available. We will act to make more facilities available through solid partnerships with other outdoor lodge owners who can be encouraged to renovate to disability-friendly standards. We will act to include opportunities for environmental education, health, and even tourism programs at these disability-friendly facilities. We will form an endowment which will assist low income families to enjoy Alberta's landscapes through visits to Abilities Lodges. We vow to place Alberta in the forefront of improving the quality of life for citizens with disabilities.

To continue to move the project forward we have agreed to hold our next Workshop on Friday May 4, 2007.

Report Dated February 9, 2007

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Workshop was developed under the direction of the Alberta Ability Lodges (ALL) Steering Committee Members (Mufty and Bill Mathewson, Bev Matthiessen, Tracie Matthiessen, Louise and John Miller, Irl Miller, Larry Pempeit, Diane Ridley, Ross Wein). Scott Vaughan, Facilitator, Alberta Community Development, assisted with the formatting of the Focus Group activities.

Ginny Gillen, Northern Alberta Brain Injury Society and a member of the ALL Steering Committee, chaired the Speakers Program while Ross W. Wein, member of the ALL Steering Committee, chaired the Focus Group program. The images in this report were captured by Mufty Mathewson and Ross Wein. The ALL Committee sincerely thanks the speakers and all participants who contributed ideas in the Focus Groups.

The meeting room was made available by the City of Edmonton and the lunch and speaker's travel expenses were supported by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Government of Alberta.

## **PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP**

Our vision is to build an accessible and affordable northern Alberta facility that offers people with disabilities the opportunity to escape isolation by experiencing nature and to provide respite for their families/support group.

Further, our calculations suggest that a number of Ability Lodges are needed to provide respite for low income seniors and other citizens with disabilities and these could be scattered around the Province in different ecological zones. This could occur through solid partnerships with other outdoor lodge owners who can be encouraged to renovate to disability-friendly standards. Possibly lodges should also provide opportunities for environmental education, health programs, and even tourism. We will place Alberta in the forefront of improving the quality of life for citizens with disabilities.

What is in Alberta's future? Here are a few statistics based mainly on 2001 Canada Census data for Alberta:

- Seniors account for about 10 per cent of Alberta's total population
- By 2031, it is projected that there will be more than 880,000 seniors in Alberta
- In 2001, about 12.5%, or 354,740 people, had disabilities
- The three most prevalent disabilities for people aged 15 and over are related to pain, mobility, and agility.
- High school dropout rates reach nearly one-third for males with a disability; dropout rates are higher for females with a disability.
- Just over half (52%) of all Albertans with a disability aged 15 through 64 are employed (without a disability - 79.3%).
- Females with a disability experience the lowest employment rate in Alberta
- Average total income male adults with disabilities in Alberta is \$31,458.
- Average total income female adults with disabilities in Alberta is \$18,533.

Our calculations suggest that a number of facilities are needed to provide respite for low income seniors and other citizens with disabilities. These can develop by developing solid partnerships with existing outdoor lodges that are renovated to disability-friendly standards. Lodges will also provide opportunities for environmental education and health programs. Not only will Alberta citizens benefit from getting to know their Provincial Parks better but also the access-friendly trails and accommodation will be a tourist magnet. For example, Americans who are mobility-challenged already expect these services in their country.

Representatives from government, university, non governmental organizations, and citizens with disabilities were invited to continue the dialogue about the needs of citizens with disabilities. The goals of this workshop were: 1) To review the current population statistics and the predictions for Alberta's citizens with disabilities over the next 20 to 50 years, 2) To review successful models for facilities like William Watson Lodge, for accessibility in Provincial Parks, and for other outdoor lodges, and 3) To formulate state-of-the-science information into new facilities models to improve the quality of life for citizens with disabilities by increasing the health and education of more Alberta citizens and visitors to Alberta.

## **PROGRAM**

11:00

### **Introduction of the “Friends of Alberta Abilities Lodges” Members**

#### **Greetings**

Jeanne Lougheed, Honourary Patron

11:15

### **A Vision for Alberta Abilities Lodges**

Ross W. Wein, Alberta Abilities Lodges and University of Alberta (retired)

11:30

### **Citizens with Disabilities in Alberta – the present and future**

Mark Nicoll, A/D Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

11:45

### **Health Benefits from the Outdoors**

Garry Wheeler, MS Society

12:00

### **Designing Parks for Citizens with Disabilities**

Don Carruthers Den Hoed, University of Calgary

12:15

### **Designing Buildings for Citizens with Disabilities**

Ron Wickman, Architect

12:30

**Lunch** hosted by Premier’s Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Government of Alberta

13:00

### **William Watson Lodge – past successes and future plans**

Ross Watson, Manager, William Watson Lodge

13:20-15:15

### **Models for Future Abilities Lodges – a focus group approach**

Reports from each of the eight focus groups

15:30

**Synthesis, Closing and Announcement of Next Workshop Date (Friday May 4, 2007)**



**Ginny Gillen**



**Don Curruthers Den Hoed**



**Ross Watson**



**Garry Wheeler**

## SPEAKERS BIOGRAPHY AND PRESENTATION TITLE AND ABSTRACT

### Ross W. Wein

**Biography:** Ross and Eleanor have a son, Danny, who is recovering from a 1998 motorcycle accident that occurred in Bogota, Columbia on his “trip of a lifetime” to Chile, South America. Dr. Wein has had a career teaching undergraduates, conducting research, and training graduate students at the University of New Brunswick, University of Guelph, Australian National University, and, since 1987, at the University of Alberta. He retired from the University of Alberta on June 30, 2006 where he had specialized in natural resource conservation (personal website: <http://www.rr.ualberta.ca/people/rwein/>). As Professor Emeritus he continues to be involved in international outdoor education and in environmental research and publishing locally, in northern Canada, in the Caribbean, and in East Africa. His 2006 edited book is “Coyotes Still Sing In My Valley: Conserving Biodiversity In A Northern City”.

### Title: A Vision for Alberta Abilities Lodges

**Abstract:** The goals of our project are to: 1) find ways to allow more seniors and other citizens with disabilities and their care-givers to break out of their isolation by rediscovering nature, 2) work with our government to make additional Alberta Abilities Lodges in Provincial Parks a reality, and 3) work with other partners and models of environmental education, health, and tourism to serve even more Alberta seniors and citizens with disabilities

#### The scope of problem

- 332,000 Alberta citizens have a disability
- The number of Albertans with disabilities from disease, accidents, and aging is increasing
- Commercial accommodation is costly and Provincial Parks still restrict access
- WWL annually turns away 1,500 citizens with disabilities (6,000 family members) because of lack of space - many more do not try for space
- There are no comparable facilities available in other parts of Alberta
- MORE FACILITIES NEEDED!!!

#### Where could these facilities be located?

Lodges could be located in relation to electoral divisions. About 3 electoral divisions have 100,000 citizens (10% have a disability, 10% are over 65 years of age, 1% institutionalized) and could support 1 lodge. Or lodges could be located in the natural regions and also near other natural features (lakes, rivers, geological features, etc.) to enhance the experience. Using data from “Alberta Provincial Electoral Division 2004 Profiles” ([http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped\\_profiles/2004\\_new\\_boundaries/index.html](http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped_profiles/2004_new_boundaries/index.html)) we calculated that additional lodges/facilities would be welcomed at: Cypress Hills, Calgary area, Red Deer area, Hinton area, Lakeland area, Edmonton area, Peace River area, and Fort McMurray area. There are existing facilities, some of which would need upgrading to accessibility standards. Examples include William Watson Lodge, Blue Lake, Moonlight Bay, Camp HeHoHa, Peaceful Valley, Rundel’s Mission, and Skeleton Lake. The Alberta Camping Association lists about 110 Alberta camps (<http://www.albertacamping.com>).

#### Some of these facilities have issues that need resolution:

- Land rich, cash poor – sell land?
- Liability - insurance
- “The Last Child in the Forest”
- Lost link with communities

- Lost links with traditional clients
- Lost environmental quality ethic
- Summer activity only
- Clients – age and sex, physical and mental challenges
- Politicians, NGOs, etc. do not hold meetings/retreats at these facilities

What are the Site Needs for our clients?

- Heritage values nearby
- Adjacent to services – hospital, food, auto fuel, internet?
- Adjacent to conservation area, heritage site
- Safety – fire, water, animals/plants
- Trails
- Campground, sports fields, RV Parking
- Water
- Electrical power
- Waste

What are the Facility Needs for our clients?

- Build to LEED Standards – Canada Green Building Council 2004  
([http://www.cagbc.org/uploads/FINAL\\_LEED%20CANADA-NC%201.0\\_Green%20Building%20Rating%20System.pdf](http://www.cagbc.org/uploads/FINAL_LEED%20CANADA-NC%201.0_Green%20Building%20Rating%20System.pdf))
- Build to accessibility standards
- Range of buildings to serve a range of clients (bunkhouses to meeting halls)

What are the Program Needs for our clients?

All clients – safety, health, outdoor skills, WildSmart, Wildlife Ambassadors

How inclusive and length of season?

- Seniors and other citizens with disabilities – respite, hobbies, spa, hot tub
- Students – environmental & recreation courses
- Adult courses – solar, wind, alt. tech., sustain. lifestyles
- Adult/family/NGO retreats
- Youth – rehabilitation, substance abuse, recreation camping
- Citizens in institutions - national and international visitors

What are the Personnel Needs for our clients?

- Training, skills, experience, code of ethics
- Volunteers
- Visiting leaders
- Hosts
- Manager
- Board/management model

What are the Financial/business/investment Needs for our clients?

- Operating policies, procedures, and funds
- Marketing
- Endowments

- Partnerships

#### Our Dream

- Need more facilities – a system across Alberta
- Showcase for improving quality of life – one person at a time
- Need space for thousands of individuals and families
- Inclusiveness – serve a wider range of individuals/groups than at WWL?
- Showcase for low impact footprint (energy, water, waste, access)
- Partnerships for construction, operations, administration, etc.
- Endowments for sustainability

### **Mark Nicoll**

**Biography:** Mark Nicoll is the Acting Director for the Office of Disability Issues. Mark was one of the founding staff members of the department and has been committed to making improvement in the area of coordination and integration of services for persons with disabilities. Mark's background in social work gives him a clear understanding of the needs of the disabled Albertan. This combined with his extensive government administrative experience allows him to identify and promote opportunities for inclusion in both program and policy.

#### **Title: Citizens with Disabilities in Alberta – the present and future**

**Abstract:** Mark introduced that mandate of the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) and identified a number of projects that they are working on the further promote the inclusion of Albertans with disabilities. He indicated that the ODI continues to work to improve the integration and coordination of programs and services for all persons with disabilities. Mark noted that the new Premier's website indicates that one of his five government priorities is to improve Albertans' quality of life; under which is added "ensure government policies reflect the varied needs of the disabled community." As well, the Hon Greg Melchin's Mandate letter as Minister of Seniors and Community Supports includes a priority to "improve supports and services to persons with disabilities through better coordination and integration of programs. Marks closed with the reminder that full inclusion of Albertans with disabilities requires action in a number of areas including income and disability supports, universal design of buildings and other infrastructure, employment, transportation as well as recreation, disaster planning, and every other aspect of life.

### **Garry Wheeler**

**Biography:** Dr. Garry D. Wheeler is an Exercise Physiologist, and Chartered Psychologist (Alta.) He is currently the research Director at the Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta, the Secretary General of the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity, and President of the Canadian Association for Research in rehabilitation. Born in England, Dr. Wheeler began his career in the health and fitness industry as a Physical Education Instructor at the King's School in Gloucester, England. He moved to Canada in 1981 to begin a Master's Degree in Physical Education and the University of Alberta, completed in 1984. In 1989 he completed his Doctoral in Physical Education in the area of exercise, training, hormonal responses to exercises, and dietary behavior of individuals in exercise programs. In 1993, Dr. Wheeler completed his Masters Degree in Educational Psychology with a specialty in Counselling Psychology. He now works as a Psychologist with the Rick Hansen Centre and the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital. As well, he instructs in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation in both academic and physical activity courses and is the fitness instructor for Campus Recreation at the University of Alberta.

## **Title: Health Benefits from the Outdoors**

### **Abstract:**

Since, 1995, There has been a shift to a health-related outcomes approach regarding physical activity, participation and health promotion. In part this was a response to research demonstrating that the majority of Canadians and Americans were inactive in the mid nineties. Albeit this is improving (recent data suggest the 60% of Albertans are physically active), many persons with disabilities – as many as 70% remain physically inactive and therefore at risk for com-morbidity (secondary disease/disability – stroke, heart disease, diabetes). Persons with disability face a number of barriers to physical activity, many grounded in the assumptions surrounding disability. Historically, this has resulted in a often paternal approach to the provision of exercise opportunity and in some cases, the contraindication of exercise altogether. (MS is a good example). However, we now recognize that physical activity and exercise can provide health related benefits in persons with a disability that are identical to those in able bodied person. In addition, physical activity and exercise programs can provide a host of other benefits including social participation, respite opportunities, maintenance of physical function, enhance resiliency, psychological benefits, and improved quality of life.

The question has arisen as to whether separate or specialized programming for persons with disabilities, in fact, exclusive and segregated. Much of this thinking is embedded in the ideology of movement to inclusion. However, research has demonstrated the person with disability do benefit significantly from specialized programs and that forcing people into programs designed for able bodied persons may in fact result in feelings of loneliness and disempowerment (Goodwin 2004).

Opportunities for person with disability in the outdoor and wilderness environment are limited in this Province. There are many activities that persons with disability can benefit from in the outdoors – all of which procure similar health related outcomes to traditional indoor forms of activity. Adapted golf, canoeing and water sports, rock-climbing and even the new FES assisted rowing technology – on water – provide exciting opportunities. Centre such as the Casa Colina Rehabilitation centre in California and the Wilderness Inquiry organization, are examples of how programs including adventure programming can be run. However, with this comes the concept of risk and dangers of activity for persons with disabilities. Like inclusion, this has been based on sometimes false assumptions, in this case, that persons with disability are at greater risk for injury during outdoor or wilderness type activity. Inclusion is not about the right to be included, it is about the right not to be excluded. In other words, it is about choice. Likewise, the right to risk is not about the right to take part in wilderness activities but about the right to not be excluded from them based on false on paternally based assumptions.

### **Don Curruthers Den Hoed**

**Biography:** Don has worked in science and park education for over ten years and maintains four core beliefs: 1) everything has a story, 2) everyone should have a chance to connect with nature, 3) anyone can make a difference, and 4) beavers are funny. This philosophy makes him a natural fit for Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, where he is a supervisor with Kananaskis Country Interpretation in Bow Valley Provincial Park. Over the past decade, programs such as “Buck: Lord of the Beavers” have earned Don national recognition through multiple Interpretation Canada Awards of Excellence. In 2001, Don developed the Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM) award-winning school outreach program *Kananaskis in the Classroom*. In addition to his work, Don is completing graduate studies in the Graduate Division of Educational Research at the University of Calgary. *Nothing About Them Without Them*, his pending thesis on inclusion for persons with disabilities, and the related government report *Inclusion Strategy One: Persons with Disabilities in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas*, are the culmination of his work in park education and his studies in social justice.

## **Title: Designing Parks for Citizens with Disabilities**

**Abstract:** This presentation is an overview of the research project undertaken by Don Carruthers Den Hoed for his Master's thesis in Educational Research. The study was funded by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and by Alberta Community Development (now Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture). The research findings are unofficial, as the thesis has not been defended. The strategies for inclusion are pending approval from Parks and Protected Areas executive. Key points in this presentation are:

- a) Inclusion is more desirable than simple access (though access is essential as a starting point),
- b) The goal should be participation in parks, not mere attendance,
- c) Many models for inclusive or accessible parks already exist and can be used as springboards

### **Notes:**

#### **Slide 1 - Introduction**

“In ecosystems the complexity of the network is a consequence of its biodiversity, and thus a diverse ecological community is a resilient community. In human communities, ethnic and cultural diversity may play the same role. Diversity means many different relationships, many different approaches to the same problem. A diverse community is a resilient community, capable of adapting to changing situations.” ~ (Capra, 1996) pg. 303

The question of this thesis is not how to include *every* person with a disability in parks, but how to include *every person who values nature* in parks, whether they have a disability or not.

#### **Slide 2 - Research study**

“How can we include persons with disabilities (and marginalized people in general) in creating a parks system where all marginalized people can participate in meaningful wilderness experiences, and how can these efforts lay a foundation for transforming society?”

Research consisted of several parts:

1. Comprehensive literature review
  - a. *Research Perspective One: Parks as contributors to quality of life.*
  - b. *Research Perspective Two: Parks as educational experiences.*
  - c. *Research Perspective Three: Inclusive parks practice and theory*
2. Research methodology was multi-faceted
  - a. *two web surveys*
  - b. *five volunteer focus groups*
  - c. *feedback from academics, planners, and ADM*
  - d. *reflective process with participants*

#### **Slide 3 - Park inclusion themes**

“I have to say that making things inclusive in a broad sense is not just making sure everything is physically accessible. I think it is important that the person feels like they belong. That's, to me what inclusiveness is.” ~ Josh (study participant)

Seven themes arose from the research (have audience reflect on them as I read)

Theme One: Wilderness experiences are humanizing, spiritual experiences

Theme Two: Inclusion in wilderness is a human rights issue

Theme Three: Inclusion in parks is related to overarching social barriers

Theme Four: Inclusion could (and should) be improved in Alberta Provincial Parks

1. *Difficulty accessing information about opportunities in Alberta parks*
2. *Limitations of the William Watson Lodge model:*
3. *Existing infrastructure barriers to access:*

Theme Five: Persons with disabilities want to contribute to parks, park education, and wilderness stewardship

Theme Six: Universal design is essential; so is providing for individual experiences

Theme Seven: Awareness and communication are the most important steps

**Slide 4 - Strategies for park inclusion - Strategy 1: Create an accessible network**

- 1.1. *Eliminate bottlenecks through a network of inclusive sites*
- 1.2. ***William Watson Lodge as a doorway, not just a destination***
  - 1.2.a. *Build a second William Watson Lodge type facility, but as a different experience*
- 1.3. *Build on existing “nearly” accessible facilities and experiences*
  - 1.3.a. *Identify nearly accessible facilities*
  - 1.3.b. *Identify gaps in accessible experiences*
- 1.4. *Planning for future improvements*

**Slide 5 - Strategies for park inclusion - Strategy 2: Develop inclusion and outreach programming**

- 2.1. *Extend the reach of existing programs*
  - 2.1.a. *Inclusive park education programming.*
  - 2.1.b. *Inclusive personal and non-personal information.*
  - 2.1.c. *A conduit for disability service group information.*
  - 2.1.d. *A hub for inclusive outdoor recreation.*
  - 2.1.e. *Clearinghouse of best practices in universal facility, interpretive display, and trail design.*
- 2.2. *Formalize visitor-centered planning*
  - 2.2.a. *A volunteer advisory board made up of individuals from within the various disability communities*
  - 2.2.b. *Expertise of current park staff with knowledge of, and experience with, disability issues.*
  - 2.2.c. *Ongoing public input from park visitors with disabilities, or those with experience working within the disability community.*
- 2.3. *Encourage and support exceptional users*
- 2.4. *Improve employment and stewardship for excluded populations.*

**Slide 6 - Strategies for park inclusion - Strategy 3: Provide adequate, focused human resources**

- 3.1. *Support inclusion and outreach through dedicated positions*

**Slide 7 - Other approaches**

1. *Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks –crossing the barriers, fee reductions, trail assessments*
2. *Texas Parks and Recreation – community outreach program, need-based*
3. *Toledo Ohio - Trail Partners Program -- volunteer assistance, change the equipment or support, not the environment*
4. *Alberta Parks and Recreation - Kananaccess (1989)*
5. *California - Tucker vs. State of California*

California is a model; action arose from the lawsuit:

The Department may achieve program accessibility by a number of methods:

- *Structural methods such as altering an existing facility*

- Acquisition or redesign of equipment
- Use of auxiliary aids or accommodations
- Providing services at alternate accessible sites
- When appropriate, providing alternative experiences

(California Department of Parks and Recreation, 2003) pg. 7

“The state park system concludes that programs must be integrated in order to overcome discriminatory attitudes; in order to demonstrate inclusion to all park users; and in order to allow everyone to participate in parks in their own way. Most importantly, “the Department will give priority to the [method of providing access] that results in the most integrated setting appropriate to encourage interaction among all users, including individuals with disabilities. In compliance with the ADA, the Department provides equality of opportunity but does not guarantee equality of results” (California Department of Parks and Recreation, 2003) pg. 7. The plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit recognize that parks are unique settings with unique challenges; there is no unrealistic expectation that every person will be able to do everything, everywhere. However, the Plaintiffs do challenge the Department to ensure that everything is done to ensure that everyone has a chance to try.”

### Slide 8 - My messages

**Look for new experiences** - I'm not sure you will ever duplicate William Watson Lodge; it's part of the culture of the Alberta Disability Community, but it is unique. William Watson Lodge is successful because it is integrated into PLPP: Elkwood, etc. But can you build on the WWL model to create something new? It is a mountain experience, but what about a Grassland experience? Boreal? Camping? Backcountry?

**Address the barrier, not the group** - Are facilities designed for group the way to go, or should the facility address need? Is the priority policy appropriate to ensure everyone who NEEDS the support of a lodge can get in? Should priority be given to those on AISH? To newly disabled to pull them into the community?

**Create doorways, not destinations** - Not everyone needs to keep going back to the lodge. How can these lodges be places to teach people about other opportunities to interact with the natural world? To try new activities like backcountry camping? To foster new park stewards? Maybe there are some people who need the lodge, but if others can branch out, camp in other places, and be part of the park community, it's better for everyone.

### Slide 9 - Nine

It is the natural connection, not the facility, that makes parks worthwhile!

*“Just getting out into 'nature' on a very BASIC level would be wonderful ... You could drop me and my wheelchair into a forest for a few hours, away from people and concrete, and I would be happy.”*

*~ Open-Ended Survey Response*

### Ron Wickman

**Biography:** Ron was born in Edmonton, Alberta, and in 1991 received his Master of Architecture at the Technical University of Nova Scotia. He set up his own Edmonton based practice in January 1995. Ron's interest and expertise is in barrier-free design, that is accommodating the needs of individuals with disabilities; he also has a special interest in multi-family housing and urban and community planning. He is committed to providing affordable, accessible and adaptable housing and has won several housing competitions. Two built

projects include the Affordable Housing Demonstration Project, built in 1996 and initiated by the City of Edmonton Planning and Development Department and the Innovative Housing Committee; and the CMHC FlexHouse - Habitat for Humanity Project built in 1997. Ron has experience as an expert witness in cases involving persons with disabilities, and he has also been a guest speaker and participant in numerous sessions involving Barrier-Free Design, innovative, sustainable housing and urban and community planning.

Recent and selected past projects include:

- 2005 L'ARCHE TED BRADSHAW HOME, EDMONTON, ALBERTA: A new ten (10) bedroom group home for adults with cognitive and physical limitations. (under construction).
- 2003 JENN'S PLACE FOR THE MILTON ELVES HOUSING SOCIETY, EDMONTON, ALBERTA: A new six (6) bedroom group home for six (6) young adults with severe physical and cognitive limitations, design with various sustainable features.
- 2003 WICKMAN RESIDENCE, EDMONTON, ALBERTA: A second storey addition of 1400 square feet focused on sustainable design and construction.
- 2002 ENNETT RESIDENCE, EDMONTON, ALBERTA: New Home designed to accommodate mom and son, who lost all four limbs to meningitis. Constructed with various sustainable features including passive solar design.

### **Title: Designing Buildings for Citizens with Disabilities**

**Abstract:** Ron introduced us to a number of key components to “good universal design”.

- Look at the community and make it compatible
- Must meet the needs of the disabled
- Should be invisible
- Needs to be visually pleasing
- Does the person with a disability get the same experience at the facility
  - Do not limit access to main space
  - Do not have disabled enter at a different entrance

Ron suggested in a hand-out that readers might wish to consult several of his favorite websites:

[www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

[www.adaptenv.org](http://www.adaptenv.org)

[www.cnib.ca](http://www.cnib.ca)

[www.canparaplegic.org](http://www.canparaplegic.org)

[www.disabilityweblinks.ca](http://www.disabilityweblinks.ca)

[www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/)

[www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea](http://www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea)

### **Ross Watson**

**Biography:** Ross has a degree from the University Of Alberta in recreation administration. For the last twenty-five years has been employed with Alberta Parks as Manager, William Watson Lodge. An outdoor enthusiast for over 20 years, Ross was the first blind climber to attempt North America's highest mountain, 20,320 foot Mount McKinley, in Alaska, in 1990. After 21 days on the mountain and only 6 hours from the summit, a severe storm on the upper reaches of the mountain forced Ross, and all but two members of the team, to descend. Five days later, the expedition realized success when two climbers reached the summit. In 2000, Ross fulfilled a lifelong dream by organizing and taking part in an expedition to be the first blind climber to summit Canada's highest mountain, 19,640 foot Mount Logan in Canada's Yukon. On May 25, 2000 after 19 days of 60-kilometer winds and -35°C temperatures, Ross and his three teammates reached the West Summit of Mount

Logan. In addition to these climbing exploits, Ross represented Canada in the Para Olympics in the 15 and 30-kilometer Nordic events in 1988. From 1994 to 2001 Ross was a member of a panel that reviewed Alberta's Human Rights Commission and related legislation and supported 54 changes to Alberta's Human Rights Act. From 1995 to 2001, Ross served two terms as a municipal councilor, receiving the highest percentage of the popular vote in both his election campaigns. In 2002, Ross was appointed Operation Eyesight Universal's (O.E.U.) Canadian Ambassador of Vision. July 2005, Ross did a traverse of the central mountain range on Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. Ross has been the recipient of numerous awards: a Rotarian 'Integrity Award'; the Cochrane 'Hero of the Year' Award, the Canadian 'Golden Jubilee Medal' from the Department of Canadian Heritage for his service to Canada, community and fellow Canadians and the prestigious 'Alberta Centennial Medal', which celebrates the province's first 100 years by paying tribute to Albertans whose achievements have benefited their fellow citizens, their community and their province.

**Title: William Watson Lodge – past successes and future plans**

**Abstract:** The presentation begins with an 8 minute video "**William Watson Lodge: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**" of comments by visitors to William Watson lodge (this is available to individuals by contacting Ross Watson, Manager, William Watson Lodge or [ross.watson@gov.ab.ca](mailto:ross.watson@gov.ab.ca)). User statistics, with a breakdown of demographics, seniors and persons with disabilities will be given for the north and south areas of the province. Observations gathered from 25 years working in provincial parks and managing the Lodge are given for the topics of 1) Barriers in provincial parks created by systemic and historical patterns, 2) The need for building standards in outdoor environments, and 3) The key elements making the William Watson Lodge a success.



**Focus Groups**



**More Focus Groups**

## **A FOCUS GROUP APPROACH**

The goals of the focus groups were: 1) to review successful models of outdoor lodges scattered across the province, 2) to identify state-of-the-science information to be included in constructing new facilities, and 3) to explore operating procedures to make these facilities sustainable.

The exercise was to seek consensus on directions and schedules to ensure that we reach our goals. We are using well established guiding principles of:

- All have wisdom
- We need wisdom to get the wisest ideas
- All will be heard with mutual respect
- There are no wrong answers
- Participants can change their mind as often as they wish

### **Each group answered the following questions**

#### **What stood out about what you heard in the presentations?**

##### **Answers:**

- The William Watson Lodge video underscores the power of visual material. This video should be available on the web. It illustrated the success of one lodge model and the potential for others
  - Needs are growing William Watson Lodge can't accommodate the needs
- Not enough to just build facilities – need infrastructure
- Under today's economic conditions we must be open to partnerships
- Facilities must be environmentally friendly – could use the environmentally friendly angle to get more partnerships with community and business
- Like to see facilities used all year round and how it is adaptable for Seniors and disability groups
- The disabled community needs to be included in the process not facilities and programs developed for them.
- List of potential sites and go through a consulting process → possibilities available then prioritize
- Facilities may be inclusive but do the visitors feel included
  - Not just a facility but also atmosphere
  - Not a just a “destination but a doorway”
  - List of potential sites and go through a consulting process → possibilities available then prioritize

#### **What could be added?**

##### **Answers:**

- Need new opportunities: wonderful business and professional opportunities with the project. Would like to see the arts participate as well – offer music, art, education. Also an Interpretive Centre – model of environmental technology – approaches to building that are ‘lite’ The agenda could also add something that reflects a passion for the outdoors. We need to have the outdoor experience and it is even more important to get those with disabilities out to nature. We owe it to those people first. We need to hear from the disabilities groups

- Tour of natural sites – road trip to the natural heritage marks within a destination or the province (similar to youth hostel and elder hostel initiatives)
- Camping experiences - outdoor experiences while at the lodge i.e. sleeping under the stars (have the option available for those individuals who are interested and able in participating in this type of environmental experience)
- Portability with regards to accessibility
- Attitudinal accessibility in regards to staff and guests – awareness opportunities for those guests that may not be familiar with the needs and abilities of all persons with disabilities attending the lodge
- More activities – activities that are available and interesting to a variety of different age groups and abilities, including recreational and athletic activities
- What about an urban lodge
- Look at the possibility of Ability Lodges as tour destinations.
- Natural environment will determine the type of the facility, but accessibility is the critical issue.
- Look at the California model and other models as possible options for implementation (or borrowing). Don't reinvent the wheel.

### **What are the concerns?**

#### **Answers:**

- Do not want to take forever to make this happen.
- Choices
  - Need for parks in general to be accessible for people with disabilities to visit
  - Range of accessible facilities will help to alleviate pressure on facilities such as William Watson Lodge
- Need affordable/accessible facility for people with a disability. Use one flat rate and make subsidies available.
- Need to have an inventory of the sites available
  - Some require minimal work to make accessible
- The disability community seems to lack knowledge on how to work the political overlay. They do not have a strong lobby. Need to get people with political savvy. The disability community needs to be entrepreneurial.
- Booking is cumbersome and can be unproductive
- Oversubscription impacts utilization
- Need more communication re: availability and accessibility
- Lack of funding
- Must be realistic about time to work through the process → plan, contacting bureaucracy, developing a committee...etc.
- Gov't difficult to engage, as are the organizations within community

### **What differences will the project make?**

#### **Answers:**

- Accessibility for more of the 330,000 citizens with a disability
- Afford the opportunity for more people to experience the lodge experience
- One more lodge will not alleviate the oversubscription problems currently experienced at William Watson Lodge. We need several more destinations.
- Enrich people's lives – happier and healthier people

- Change the way that other provinces view Alberta
- Increased public awareness about the opportunities for people with disabilities have available to them, as well as more awareness about the abilities of persons with disabilities
- Human resources and more skill development will be stimulated
- The project should stimulate research into improving the lives of citizens with disabilities

### **What are implementation problems? How to overcome?**

#### **Answers:**

- Depends on purpose – what is the objective
  - Get direction from the prospective users and the users from William Watson Lodge
  - Look to continued learning from current facilities
- Focus on implementation opportunities, not “problems”
- One problem is funding. The disability community must demonstrate their willingness to support this project
- Manpower shortage in Alberta today. Labour costs must be covered
- Volunteer shortage in Alberta today. Establish community buy-in and then local people will assist in the building and running of these facilities etc.
- Combination of partnerships, community involvement etc.
  - Assertively work to establish government (provincial and municipal) partnerships, especially parks – then engage those partners
  - Consider a partnership with a private donor – endowment of private land for the use of this project

### **What partners are needed? Who should we contact?**

#### **Answers:**

- The community near the facility and meet with the innovators
- Contact in person, email/letters, web site, popular press (newspaper, radio, TV)
- Engage the “essential service providers” of a community, for example:
  - Religious organizations
  - Education – the provincial government ministry and the local educators, schools etc.
  - Health – ministry of health, and the local hospital staff, clinics etc.
  - Community organizations – nonprofits and private
  - Business community
- Develop win-win solutions with these individuals and organizations

### **Who should be on core organizing group?**

#### **Answers:**

- Encourage partnership involvement
- Develop an advisory committee to oversee the project – include government, and members from your “essential service providers” list
- Recognize that we can’t build a place that is specific to the needs of everyone, but one that is going to meet the needs of the majority

### **What are the next steps to move the project along?**

#### **Answers:**

- Expand the Steering Committee membership and develop Working Committees
- Need interim funding
- Identify locations and initiate plans and financial estimates for upgrading
- Generate political interest and keep people informed
- Look into the possibility of establishing the “Friends of the Alberta Abilities Lodges” as an NGO for fundraising abilities etc.

**Do you agree with this proposal?**

**Answers:**

- Yes, but continue to strengthen the concepts and process

## **FOCUS GROUP REPORTS**

After each group addressed the above questions, they identified the best practices that they would like to see incorporated in a new or renovated destination. A spokesperson for each of 8 groups brought the main points to the reassembled audience.

### **Site Report (Mufty Mathewson)**

**Question: What are the Site Needs for our clients?**

**Answers:**

First, the disability community must agree that a given site is attractive and fits their needs. Solid development plan is critical.

- Heritage values nearby
- Adjacent to services – hospital, food, auto fuel, internet?
- Adjacent to conservation area for peace and quiet
- Safety – fire, water, animals/plants
- Trails, campground, sports fields, RV parking
- Water
- Electrical power
- Waste

### **Facilities Report (Bill Mathewson)**

**Question: What are the Facility Needs for our clients?**

**Answers:**

- Inventory of potential sites across the province. What is possible?
- Concentrate on what will make facilities available soon
- Build to LEED Standards – Canada Green Building Council 2004  
([http://www.cagbc.org/uploads/FINAL\\_LEED%20CANADA-NC%201.0\\_Green%20Building%20Rating%20System.pdf](http://www.cagbc.org/uploads/FINAL_LEED%20CANADA-NC%201.0_Green%20Building%20Rating%20System.pdf))
- Build to accessibility standards in a step-wise plan
- Range of buildings to serve a range of clients (family units to bunkhouses, to meeting halls)
- Offer assistance to people (e.g. maintain wheelchairs, bicycles, sleds, etc. for emergencies)

### **Clients/programs Report (Irl Miller)**

**Question: What are the Program Needs for our clients?**

**Answers:**

**Clients:**

- Seniors and other citizens with disabilities – respite, hobbies, spa, hot tub, learning about the web and email (Silver Surfers)
- Students – environmental & recreation courses
- Adult courses – solar, wind, alt. tech., sustain. lifestyles
- Adult/family/NGO retreats
- Youth – rehabilitation, substance abuse, recreation camping
- Citizens in institutions - national and international visitors
- Volunteers may be interested in developing background in such programs as WildSmart and Wildlife Ambassadors

**Programs:**

- Some clients may be interested in learning safety, health, and other outdoor skills
- Need to be adaptable
- All programs must be site based and might be quite unique
- Social needs must be addressed
- Courses on accessibility might be highlighted (e.g. for school children)
- Equipment must be safe and maintained

**Personnel Report (Larry Pempeit)**

**Question: What type of personnel would be needed at any new specialized Alberta Abilities Lodge?**

**Answers:**

- In addition to regular job description credentials, staff would need to be provided with training in the area of disability awareness, first aid and health related issues, and have a background as naturalists.
- The Lodge manager was deemed to be the most important position. This person must have a good understanding of disabilities as well as strong management capabilities.
- Because there would likely be limited staffing it was felt that all staff should be cross trained so that when a staff member is unavailable, another individual could assume the responsibility.
- Volunteering and volunteer opportunities were discussed but it was felt that volunteers might be very difficult to find if the location was far removed from cities or towns. As well, transportation could be an issue for them. All would depend on location and services offered at the individual Lodge.
- The group felt that there should be opportunities for staff to work with William Watson Lodge staff and other abilities lodges employees to share experiences.
- Other staffing needs such as cooks, program delivery staff, etc. may be needed depending on the location and the Abilities Lodge and the type of services that are offered at that facility. Each Abilities Lodge may be unique in its structure.
- Training, skills, experience, code of ethics
- Volunteers
- Visiting leaders

**Operations Report (Cheryl Taylor)**

**Question: Operating principles**

**Answers:**

Key ideas should include:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Involvement of citizens with disabilities

Organization structure

- Part Nine Company
- Board of members including partner representation
- Technical Committees for each project
- Society for each project

**Finances, Business, Investments Report (Tracie Matthiessen)**

**Question: What are the Financial/business/investment needs for our clients?**

**Answers:**

- Operating policies, procedures, and funds
- Travel subsidies for low income clients
- Would endowments be a solution

Accessibility-friendly facilities at expensive initially. The cost to build will be approximately the following:

- Building a new William Watson Lodge – \$40-50 million
  - Annual operational funding – \$600,000
- Building on Blue Lake – \$6-8 million

**We saw three aspects of Operations: 1-Start-up costs/Initial costs 2-Organization set-up 3-Transportation**

**1. Start-up costs/Initial costs****Funding Sources**

- Follow-up with the sectors that have the capacity to give large donations (e.g. oil and gas, construction).
  - Get support from corporations to build a facility that is ‘environmentally sustainable’. This shows companies supporting environmentally sustainable work. Check out geothermal facilities in Kamloops/Okotoks & Net Zero Energy Healthy Housing (NZEHH).
- Identify government grants (municipal/provincial/federal)
- Find out if government will provide matching grants.
- Make it easy for individuals to give money (e.g. RRSP money, on-line donations, direct withdrawal).
- Recognize sponsorships (naming, plaques, etc. to parts of the facility and activities).

**Organization set-up**

- Ensure that the organization can accept any kind of donation e.g. stocks, cash, land and offer legal and tax advice.
- Ensure a strong business case is built. The appeal can’t just be emotional.

**Critical Questions**

- What is the buy-in for donors?
- How do we make investing in this donors’ priority?

**2. Operating Costs**

- Create an endowment to cover ongoing costs at a specific site. The endowment would need a lot of money to provide enough operating funds.
  - Government funding is unreliable/inconsistent and an endowment can provide a steady stream of funding.
- An endowment could be created through matching donor dollars to government dollars.
- One suggestion could be to have a joint use facility - ½ the year the facility could be a profit-making endeavour (e.g. seminars/workshops) and then ½ the year as an accessible and affordable lodge. (This may address cost, but may not adequately address demand.)
- The suggestion was made to build a prefabricated lodge – excellent durability and affordability.
- The idea of a lodge is limiting. There needs to be other options such as supporting existing facilities to expand services.

**3. Transportation**

- The transportation needs to be affordable.

- Transportation could be sponsored (e.g. a sponsored van).
- Try to use affordable/accessible transportation in surrounding centres.

### **Critical Questions**

- How close is the lodge to populated areas?
- What is the traveling time to the lodge?
- What transportation systems exist in surrounding areas?

## **Marketing Report (Ginny Gillen)**

**Question: How should the system of facilities be marketed effectively?**

**Answers:**

In general, showcase improvements in quality of life in a video (cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000), in a power point, and in the press. This is for all segments of society. We must keep the governments (MPs, MLAs and Councillors) informed of our clear vision and objectives. A site tour would have visual impact and time to allow people to be convinced of the objectives. Use websites and email alumni and target specific local, provincial, national, and international groups.

- Stress the need
- Show the stats
- Optimum size of the facility and program
- Inclusiveness – serve a wider range of individuals/groups than at WWL?
- Showcase for low impact footprint (energy, water, waste, access)
- Stress that the people who need it most but can get it (nature) the least are the disabled
- Juxtapose the environments in Alberta that are inaccessible and William Watson where they have access.

## **Partnerships Report (Diane Ridley)**

**Question: How to build Partnerships?**

**Answers:**

Funding is a very competitive process, it is imperative that innovative ways be developed to form and maintain partnerships.

### **Construction**

- Identify ways to develop innovative ways for business to partner
- Identify how it is a Win-Win venture

### **Operations**

- Look at potential for expertise exchanges such as grant application experience
- Identify sites that would benefit from accessibility
- Government needs to be a partner not a sole supporter
  - Funding is variable
  - Subject to cuts and changes in government priorities

### **Administration**

- Need to address the diversity of funding
- A public/private model should be developed
- Criteria need to be set for partnerships

## **General Synthesis – The Way Forward for our Steering Committee**

- We have been encouraged by virtually everyone contacted to continue the work on the project. The tremendous need is being recognized politically and by many other Alberta citizens.
- A letter received by our Committee from Honourable Hector Goudreau, Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture stated that "..., the government is currently exploring the feasibility of constructing a barrier-free facility at a more centrally located site in northern Alberta". We are delighted with this statement but we are dismayed that the letter continues with "When this assessment is completed, the recommendation will be reviewed in the context of overall government priorities." We really hope that this does not mean indefinite delays or no positive action for our disabled citizens.
- We recognize that the disability community must be consulted and encouraged to express their aspirations about future lodges.
- We plan to work toward an Abilities Lodge with a number of partners. The Alberta Government will be invited as a partner.
- We recognize that we must find additional renovated lodges at existing camps around the province because of the large number of citizens in the disabled community.

### **Next Steps - to May 4, 2007**

- We will continue to meet with officials at all levels of government to improve access in Provincial Parks.
- We will meet with potential partners (e.g. Scouts, 4H, Church Groups) to identify win-win relationships in making their facilities disability-friendly.
- We will seek funding to initiate a survey of the disability community to determine their views for the location and characteristics for additional lodges.
- We will seek funding to undertake an initial inventory of the 110+ Alberta camps (outdoor facilities and recreation sites) to determine the specific disability-friendly features of each site. We will encourage these groups to advertise even more clearly their ability to host citizens with specific disabilities.
- We will attract other professionals in health, education, recreation, etc. to assist in developing facilities and programs and we will assist in attracting a broader range of clients to the facilities.
- We will begin a marketing program to link the disability community to appropriate facilities.
- We will begin the development of an endowment fund that will support citizens with disabilities who require subsidized transport to the Alberta Abilities Lodges. We already have verbal promises for funds to begin this endowment.

### **Next Steps - May 4, 2007 to December 31, 2007**

Much of the above work will continue and probably will accelerate throughout 2007.

- We will seek funding to undertake an inventory of Provincial Parks to determine the specific disability-friendly features of each Park following the California State Parks approaches.

**Appendix: Workshop Participants.**

Paul Bélange  
Diane Bergeron  
Brian Boles  
Tracey Brillon  
Don Carruthers Den Hoed  
Al Cooke  
Debbie Coulter  
Peter Faid  
Ginny Gillen  
Diane Gremlich  
Braden Hirsch  
Randy Hogle  
Tammy Irwin  
Henriette Kelker  
Jeanne Lougheed  
Bill Mathewson  
Mufty Mathewson  
Wendy Mathewson  
Bev Matthiessen  
Tracie Matthiessen  
Austin Mardon  
Jerome Martin  
Gary McPherson  
Irl Miller

Ove Minsos  
Kersten Morris  
Laurel Murphy  
Mark Nicoll  
Gordon Oaks  
Jay Peers  
Larry Pempeit  
Lana Phillips  
Alan Price  
Diane Ridley  
Charlie Richmond  
Paul Roberts  
Al Skoreyko  
Marlin Styner  
Laurie Szymanski  
Cheryl Taylor  
Marion Vosahlo  
Ross Watson  
Ross Wein  
Garry Wheeler  
Ron Wickman  
Dale Williams