

SMOKY LAKE COUNTY

BONNIE LAKE

AREA STRUCTURE PLAN

BYLAW NO. 1146-07

2007

January, 2007

**SMOKY LAKE COUNTY
BONNIE LAKE
AREA STRUCTURE PLAN
BYLAW NO. 1146-07**

WHEREAS

pursuant to the Municipal Government Act, R.S.A. 2000, a municipality in the Province of Alberta may adopt and amend an Area Structure Plan; and

WHEREAS

the Council of Smoky Lake County deems it desirable to adopt a new Area Structure Plan for the Bonnie Lake area;

NOW THEREFORE the Council of Smoky Lake County, duly assembled enacts as follows:

1. THAT the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan, being Schedule "A" attached hereto, is hereby adopted.
2. THAT By-law No. 778-87 adopting the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan, and all amendments thereto, are hereby repealed.

READ A FIRST TIME this ____ day of _____, 200__.

PUBLIC HEARING HELD this ____ day of _____, 200__.

READ A SECOND TIME this ____ day of _____, 200__.

READ A THIRD TIME and finally passed by Council this ____ day of _____, 200__.

REEVE

COUNTY MANAGER

**SMOKY LAKE COUNTY
BONNIE LAKE AREA STRUCTURE PLAN
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Part 1 Plan Goals, Management Principles

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

In 1986 and 1987, in response to increasing development pressures at Bonnie Lake and with technical assistance from Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Environment, and Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, Smoky Lake County undertook a management study for Bonnie Lake, which ultimately resulted in the adoption of an Area Structure Plan for the Lake. That Plan essentially prohibited additional development of any significance around the Lake.

That Plan's policy set has been in place for almost 2 decades.

Recently, the County decided to review the 20-year old study and policies and, if found to be no longer suitable, to modify them. Much has changed in the past two decades within the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan area, within Smoky Lake County, within the Province of Alberta, and within North American society. The purpose of the review exercise was to assess those changes and their impact on both Bonnie Lake and the policies of the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan, and to establish a vision to guide development in the Bonnie Lake area for the next two decades.

At the outset, no pre-determination was made as to whether that would be a new vision or a re-iteration and re-articulation of the vision of 1987.

The first phase of the review involved gathering detailed information on various aspects of Bonnie Lake and the Bonnie Lake area and comparing them with those of 1986-7, including the Lake's physical resources, and critical lake planning issues. This information is contained in the 2006 Bonnie Lake Management Study Background Report.

The second phase of the Study involved the preparation of a new Area Structure Plan for Bonnie Lake. The purpose of this Plan can be described as follows:

1. To establish plan goals and land use management principles outlining a vision for the pattern of development around Bonnie Lake for the next 20 years.
2. To provide land use planning policies in the form of text and maps to promote and achieve the plan goals and land use management principles established for Bonnie Lake.

3. To establish a future development pattern for Bonnie Lake and the land surrounding it.

Smoky Lake County recognizes that it has a key role to play in directing the responsible management of the Bonnie Lake area. Smoky Lake County Council can effectively guide the best and efficient use of Bonnie Lake through the preparation and implementation of this Area Structure Plan.

1.2 LAKE CAPACITY

It has historically been believed that a lake can have a number of different development capacities, such as biophysical, recreational, socio-perceptual, and economic. That was, in part, the basis on which much of the discussion of the suitability of the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan area for additional development was undertaken in 1986-7.

However, some of the assumptions of lake capacity were, in the first instance, not accurate; and, in addition, some of the assumptions and criteria of lake capacity formulation have changed over the past 20 years.

Recreation capacity studies have often been attempted for lakes. Those capacity studies all make assumptions about the number of residents per lot, the number of days each resident would be at the lake, the number of motorized boats per resident/day, the number of “boat-days” each resident will want to enjoy, the horsepower of the boat motors, the size of the “buffer” zone at the shoreline, the depth of water necessary for boat use calculation, etc. All of those assumptions are merely that – assumptions. Often they are based on current use at a particular lake – empirical data. Often they are assumptions or wishes, often based on the empirical data. They reveal little about a lake except for its current use. For this reason, it has been suggested that no accurate calculation of capacity, except for one based on the calculator’s assumptions and perceptions, can be established.

Likewise, biophysical capacity is dependant on biological assumptions. Most lakes which are not under use change pressure are in some form of ecological balance. However, many are not and are changing. In any event, almost any change in use of the lake or the area around the lake, even the most minor change, will change any biological balance. Thus, any change would affect the biological capacity.

There is also the matter of demographic capacity – which is variable depending upon the age/sex ratios assumed. It is commonly known that the age pyramid at the Bonnie Lake area is aging; but it can also be assumed that, with generational change, that pyramid will be very volatile and subject to continual revision if used as a determinant for planning purposes.

Rather than dwelling on the issue of retaining existing “capacities”, a plan for development of and around a lake must ultimately be determined by the plan’s goals and management objectives.

1.3 BONNIE LAKE TODAY

The simple fact is that Bonnie Lake itself is much less a quality active recreation experience today than it was 20 years ago. Recreational use around the Lake has changed from being “consumptive” to being “non-consumptive”. That change cannot be the result of additional residential development around the Lake, since subdivision has been precluded around the Lake and residential development has been kept to what have been believed to be high standards of sewage disposal and lake impact for the past 20 years. Nevertheless, the water quality at Bonnie Lake has deteriorated, the water level has fallen, and the general water-related recreational experience of Bonnie Lake lot-owners, residents, and users has deteriorated over this time. The Lake is too shallow to use for motor boating (except for small horsepower motors). The Lake fishery is almost non-existent. Water contact (swimming) is not a good idea. However, the Bonnie Lake area is still a recreational area and still a destination for both lot owners and day users. The recreational experience is no longer lake-oriented, except in a very low intensity fashion.

The Lake has changed from a recreation amenity to a landscape amenity.

From the Background Report, it is not clear what specifically has caused the change. Several would assign blame – the cattle grazing and forest reduction activities on the north shore, inappropriate lawn and garden care and sewage disposal by some lakeside lot owners (allowing cuttings and fertilizers/pesticides into the Lake and having pit privies and “grey water” discharge), and the general reduction in surface water levels affecting the Smoky Lake region of Alberta. Perhaps all have contributed.

The question that has to be asked and answered in this Area Structure Plan development process is this: Should additional development be allowed in the Bonnie Lake area? As the consumptive use of Bonnie Lake has receded, Bonnie Lake itself has become only a minor factor. If additional development occurs, it should, of course, be done in such a manner that no further impact on the Lake from biophysical materials (storm or sanitary sewage, etc.) would be allowed. The additional use pressure on the Lake (from would-be boaters or swimmers) would hardly exist – there is hardly any pressure now due to the quality of the current recreational experience at the Lake.

Nevertheless, from the Background Report work, landowners around the Lake are very concerned lest there be additional development around the Lake which would impact their experience of the Lake and of the Resort area.

The Area Structure Plan’s goals and related management principles will determine the nature and intensity of development which the Bonnie Lake area may have. Any changes in the quality of the Bonnie Lake environment or the quality of the Bonnie Lake-related recreational experience will not be as a result of the impact of the development on the Lake or on lake capacity, since they are limited at present. Rather, they will be based on the overall residential development experience.

Though whether the biophysical opportunities for recreational/residential development at Bonnie Lake have been exhausted is arguable, it is clear from the Plan development process that the socio-perceptual limits of the current lot owners and users for Lake development are exceeded.

There is also some concern that additional development would limit the ability of Bonnie Lake to recover. However, this does not recognize that additional development would be predominantly non-consumptive in nature, using the Lake primarily as a landscape amenity rather than a recreational amenity. It could be designed and located so as to have almost no biophysical impact on the Lake. All sewage effluents and waste products fully treated before being allowed to enter the natural environment. Additional development in the area would add to the human use pressure on the Lake, but that addition would be minimal to a pressure that is already high and limited by the quality of the Lake experience itself. The presence of other recreational opportunities in the Bonnie Lake area would mitigate that pressure.

As a result, despite that fact that there is some concern about the pressure of additional development from current residents and landowners, in consideration of the fact that additional development could be undertaken with no perceptible physical impact on the Lake environment itself, this Area Structure Plan provides for some additional development in the Bonnie Lake area.

However, there is the matter of the impact of the current development on the Lake.

It has been observed that several portions of the Bonnie Lake area other than the campground and scout camp area, which areas were specifically designated for intensive use, are also intensively used in contravention of the County's land use regulations and the intent of the 1987 Area Structure Plan, thus adding to the pressures on the Lake environment. Specifically, several lots in the Bonnie Lake Resort are occupied for substantial parts of the year by a number of recreational vehicles or trailers, the location and use of which substantially increases the impact of the Bonnie Lake Resort on the Lake. This pressure should be controlled if not relieved.

As well, it has been observed that several of the residential lots within the Bonnie Lake Resort may not have sewage disposal systems which are up to current standards or which may even be no longer lawful. Land owners should be encouraged to bring up to standard those sewage disposal systems which are not up to current standards and required to replace those sewage disposal systems which are simply illegal.

Finally, it has also been observed that several of the owners of residential lots within the Bonnie Lake Resort may be following practices that are not the most appropriate to minimally impact the Lake (for instance, allowing vegetation cuttings or "grey water" to enter the Lake) or in a way that is not lawful (for instance, drawing water from the Lake for gardening use). Land owners should be encouraged to end those practices which may negatively impact the Lake's environment and be required to end those practices which are illegal.

1.4 PLAN GOALS, MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

There are three major plan goals for Bonnie Lake.

Plan Goals:

1. To maintain and improve the recreational experience at Bonnie Lake.
2. To allow limited additional development in proximity to Bonnie Lake which does not reduce the Lake's recreation experience, but increases the number of persons who can enjoy its amenity.
3. To protect and enhance the recreational and amenity resources of Bonnie Lake.

This results in the following management principles:

Management Principles:

1. Additional recreation development will be allowed at Bonnie Lake in the form of multiple lot country residential subdivision/development and in the form of public use development.
2. All future development in the Bonnie Lake area shall be carefully controlled so that no additional nutrients and no additional recreational pressures are added to the Lake as a result of the development.
3. All future development in the Bonnie Lake area shall have associated with it some form of recreational opportunity other than consumptive recreational use of the Lake.
4. All future development in the Bonnie Lake area shall occur on the basis of the highest levels of municipal services available, in accordance with the County's policies on land development and subdivision.
5. Lake nutrient loading will be limited by appropriate watershed management practices, including:
 - i. controls on shoreland clearing, logging, development, and sewage handling, and
 - ii. Council ensuring as much as possible that water management principles are implemented.
6. Boating restrictions are necessary in certain locations in order to help reduce lake user conflicts.
7. Lake residents will be encouraged to modify or end those practices which may increase nutrient loading as a result of shoreland clearing, development, and water handling which may decrease water quality in Bonnie Lake. Lake residents will also be required to end those practices related to development and sewage or water handling which are not legal.

Part 2 Land Use Allocation

The land use allocation pattern depicted in this Area Structure Plan (Map 1) has been developed from the plan goals and management principles. Each land use area has a stated purpose which is further defined by specific policies relating to the types of land use and development which are most appropriate for that area.

2.1 RURAL CONSERVATION AREA

This designation identifies generally undisturbed lands which may have marginal agricultural capability, marginal recreational capability, and/or critical development constraints. The intent is that land uses and the limited development activity to be allowed in this area should complement the natural environmental features and the rural landscape quality of the area, while causing minimal disruption of vegetation and wildlife resources. Uses which increase nutrient loading of Bonnie Lake shall not be allowed.

The following policies apply to lands designated as Rural Conservation:

1. The preferred uses within the Rural Conservation area shall be low environmental impact and low intensity recreational activities such as ski trails, hiking trails, ATV and horse trails. Such developments shall not adversely affect the Bonnie Lake environment, Bonnie Lake water quality or existing development. Agricultural operators will be encouraged to use best practices to limit nutrient inputs into Bonnie Lake.
2. Agricultural activities which the County believes will have no adverse effect on the Bonnie Lake environment or Lake water quality may be allowed. New confined feeding operations such as feedlots, hog barns and poultry farms, etc. shall not be allowed.
3. Farmstead separation and single lot country residential subdivision may be allowed in accordance with requirements of the Smoky Lake County Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw, except that in any subdivision of an existing dwelling from a larger land holding within 1.6 km of Bonnie Lake, the operation of the sewage disposal facility associated with the dwelling shall be certified as conforming with current sewage disposal regulations prior to approval of the subdivision. Thus, development will be at the maximum density of 3 dwellings per sq. km (8 dwellings per sq. mile).
4. Transportation, communication, and public utility uses shall be considered discretionary. Such uses shall only be developed in such a manner as shall not adversely affect the Bonnie Lake environment, Bonnie Lake water quality, or existing development.

2.2 AGRICULTURAL AREA

This designation identifies areas where existing higher quality agricultural lands are to be retained for continued agricultural crop production. Agricultural activities shall be protected from incompatible non-farm developments. At the same time, negative impacts of agricultural activity on Bonnie Lake water quality shall be minimized.

The following policies apply to lands designated as Agricultural:

1. The preferred use within the Agricultural area shall be extensive agriculture and farm related uses. Intensive farming activities such as tree nurseries, apiaries, etc., which would not adversely affect the Bonnie Lake environment may be allowed. New confined feeding operations, such as feedlots, hog barns, poultry farms, etc. shall not be allowed. Agricultural operators will be encouraged to used best practices to limit nutrient inputs into Bonnie Lake.
2. Farmstead separation and single lot country residential subdivision may be allowed in accordance with requirements of the Smoky Lake County Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw, except that in any subdivision of an existing dwelling from a larger land holding within 1.6 km of Bonnie Lake, the operation of the sewage disposal facility associated with the dwelling shall be certified as conforming with current sewage disposal regulations prior to approval of the subdivision. Thus, development will be at the maximum density of 3 dwellings per sq. km (8 dwellings per sq. mile).
3. Commercial, industrial, and recreational development or subdivision shall not be allowed. Notwithstanding the above, the expansion of the gas processing station located in the southeast corner of SE 32-59-13-W4 may be allowed, subject to approval from the appropriate municipal and provincial government agencies.
4. Transportation, communication, and public utility uses are considered discretionary. Notwithstanding the above, the Vilna municipal water intake/pumphouse (in Pt. NE 33-59-13-W4) shall be considered a permitted activity.

2.3 RESIDENTIAL AREA

The purpose of the Residential Area designation is to recognize existing multiple lot residential subdivision and development at Bonnie Lake and to allow for additional multiple lot residential subdivision and development in appropriate locations. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that seasonal and permanent residential development within this area occurs in a manner which is harmonious with the Lake environment.

The following policies apply to lands designated as Residential:

1. Seasonal and permanent single family dwellings shall be permitted uses. Associated buildings shall be discretionary uses.

2. Though historically lot sizes have been small in the Residential area, a minimum of 0.4 ha (1 ac.) of developable land shall be provided on each new residential lot.
3. Within public reserve areas, public recreation facilities such as tennis courts, picnic grounds, boat launches, swimming areas, etc. which are compatible with permitted uses shall be considered discretionary uses.
4. Only one single family dwelling shall be allowed on each lot. Guest houses shall not be allowed as they constitute a second dwelling unit. In accordance with requirements set forth in the County's Land Use Bylaw, the year round storage of one recreational vehicle on a residential lot may be allowed. One additional recreational vehicles may be allowed on a lot for a time not exceeding 4 days in any one month.
5. Transportation, communication, and public utility uses shall be considered discretionary uses.

2.4 PUBLIC RECREATION AREA – Campground

The purpose of the Public Recreation Area designation is to recognize the existing public recreation campground (the Vilna campground) and to allow opportunity for full utilization of this existing public recreation area.

The following policies apply to lands designated as Public Recreation:

1. The preferred use of this area shall be relatively high intensity public oriented recreation uses such as campgrounds, boat launches, day use areas, and other similar uses.
2. Limited expansion or intensification of the Vilna campground may be allowed if opportunities for expansion exist; however, such expansion or intensification shall not be based on lake oriented recreational use.
3. Prior to any campground expansion or redevelopment, a site plan and assessment shall be prepared and submitted to the County, outlining the nature of the proposed development and its impact on the Bonnie Lake environment.
4. Spaces for day use, overnight camping, and similar activities shall be suitably organized and clearly marked. Adequate Lake access and parking facilities shall be provided where appropriate.
5. Any necessary facilities such as change houses, toilets, garbage disposal, and on-site water supply shall be provided. Such facilities shall receive approval from authorities having jurisdiction and shall be of sufficient size and adequate quality to handle anticipated use.

2.5 INSTITUTIONAL RECREATION AREA – Boy Scout Camp

The purpose of the Institutional Recreation Area designation is to recognize the existing Boy Scout camp established on a long term crown land recreation lease on Pt. S½ 3-60-13-W4. Emphasis is placed on securing the interests of Scouts Canada at this site, while encouraging development and activity which is compatible with the site and the Bonnie Lake environment.

The following policies apply to lands designated as Institutional Recreation:

1. The preferred use for this area shall be institutional recreation development and related uses including camp halls, group accommodation, outdoor education facilities, etc.
2. The expansion, extension, or redevelopment of existing uses and facilities may be allowed as long as the use of the facilities does not exceed 75 people at any given time.
3. Prior to any further development within this area, a site plan and assessment shall be prepared and submitted to the County, outlining the nature of the proposed development and its impact on the site and the Bonnie Lake environment.

2.6 COMMERCIAL RECREATION AREA – Vilna Golf Course

The purpose of the Commercial Recreation Area designation is to recognize the existing Vilna Golf Course development. Emphasis is placed on securing the interests of the golf course at this site while ensuring that its use and development is compatible for the Bonnie Lake environment.

The following policies apply to lands designated as Commercial Recreation:

1. Expansion of the existing golf course facility may be allowed, but only on the lower quality agricultural land as defined in the Bonnie Lake Management Study Background Report.
2. Limited commercial development may be allowed within this area, but it shall be oriented to the specific needs and the nature of the golf course operation.
3. Prior to the extension, expansion or redevelopment of the existing facilities, a site plan and assessment shall be prepared and submitted to the County, outlining the nature of the proposed development and its impact on the Bonnie Lake environment.

Part 3 Land Use and Development Policies

The following land use and development policies shall apply to all lands and developments within the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan area, and shall be used by the County of Smoky Lake to guide decision –making regarding all land use and development at Bonnie Lake.

3.1 DEVELOPMENT

1. Residential development shall not be allowed on lands having critical development constraints. The following criteria shall be used in determining the suitability of land for residential development:
 - a) Groundwater of sufficient quantity and quality shall be available to support the proposed development. No development shall occur in areas where reserves of potable water are inadequate;
 - b) Development shall not be allowed in areas characterized by wetlands, swamps, muskeg, or saturated soils. Development shall also be prohibited in valleys, ravines, or seasonal draws;
 - c) Development shall be prohibited on slopes in excess of 15 degrees or on slopes which are subject to slippage or mass movement;
 - d) Development is prohibited in or adjacent to important wildlife habitat areas;
 - e) Development is prohibited on soils which have extremely fast percolation rates and/or which might result in the possibility of groundwater contamination.
2. Only one single family dwelling unit shall be allowed on each lot.
3. All development shall locate on parcels large enough to support any required on-site water supply and sewage disposal systems. All development shall be required to install sewage disposal systems which have been approved by the authority having jurisdiction. The use of a leaching pit or cesspool for kitchen sink waste/ grey water disposal will be strongly discouraged.
4. No development shall be allowed on public reserves if it does serve interests of the general public.
5. Any development or structures (except for removable domestic piers or removable boatlifts) proposed on the Lake shore or bed shall be required to obtain authorization from appropriate Provincial agencies.

6. Spaces for day use, overnight camping, and similar activities shall be suitably organized and clearly marked. Adequate lake access and parking facilities shall be provided where appropriate.
7. Retail commercial development shall not be allowed except at the Vilna Golf Course in accordance with the policies of this Plan.

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

1. Smoky Lake County shall request appropriate Provincial government agencies to require the minimizing of shoreline disturbance and nutrient loading from cattle grazing activity on public land, utilizing inputs from existing lease/permit holders, County officials, and the Vila Fish and Game Association.
2. The clearing of vegetation on lots shall be minimized in order to maintain aesthetic and visual buffers from neighbouring properties and to reduce soil erosion and nutrient runoff into Bonnie Lake. A site plan detailing the protection of treed areas shall accompany any application for a development permit. The development of any lot shall not result in the loss of more than 40% of the vegetation on that lot.
3. A treed/vegetation buffer at least 500 feet (150 m) wide shall be maintained between agricultural lands and the Lake shoreline.
4. A treed/vegetation buffer at least 75 feet (24 m) wide shall be maintained between any buildings and/or structures and the Lake shoreline.
5. Alterations to the bed and shores of Bonnie Lake shall not be undertaken without the necessary authorization and permits from appropriate Provincial agencies.
6. The County of Smoky Lake shall work with Alberta Environment in order to determine the feasibility of developing a method of maintaining Lake water levels and enhancing water quality at Bonnie Lake.
7. Land owners shall be encouraged to bring up to standard those sewage disposal systems which are not up to current standards, and required to replace those sewage disposal systems which are not currently lawful.
8. Land owners shall be encouraged to end those gardening, water handling, and disposal practices which may negatively impact the Lake's environment, and be required to end those practices which are not currently lawful.

3.3 SERVICING

1. Smoky Lake County shall consider the clearing, posting, and maintenance of walkways within the shoreland reserves to improve pedestrian access to the Lake.
2. Smoky Lake County shall ensure that local access roads are developed, surfaced, and maintained to a high standard and in accordance with County policy.

3.4 BOATING

1. Smoky Lake County shall ask appropriate authorities to limit all motorized boating activity and prohibit such activity within designated swimming areas at Bonnie Lake Resort and at the Vilna campground.

Part 4 Plan Implementation and Administration

4.1 AUTHORITY OF PLAN

1. Pursuant to the provisions of the Municipal Government Act, R.S.A. 2000, as amended, this plan shall be adopted by Smoky Lake County as the Bonnie Lake Area Structure Plan – 2007.
2. Subdivision, development, and redevelopment of lands within the planning area shall be in accordance with the provisions of this Plan.
3. Council shall encourage the Provincial and Federal governments to have regard for the provisions of this plan in the development and redevelopment of public lands, and in the formulation of Provincial and Federal policies and programs, and in the issuance of any permits within the planning area.

4.2 LAND USE BYLAW

1. In order to implement the policies of this Plan, the County's Land Use Bylaw may be amended.

4.3 PLAN REVIEW AND AMENDMENT

1. Smoky Lake County may amend this Area Structure Plan to incorporate new goals, policies and land use. Council shall review and, when necessary, amend this Plan at least once every five years.
2. When considering any amendment proposal to this Plan, Smoky Lake County shall review and consider the Plan goals, development constraints, surrounding land uses, and other pertinent information, shall refer any proposed amendments to concerned provincial agencies for review and comment, and shall consider such comments prior to the adoption of any amendments.

4.4 INTERPRETATION

1. Definitions and requirements of the Smoky Lake County Municipal Development Plan, Land Use Bylaw and the Municipal Government Act, R.S.A. 2000, as amended, shall be used in the interpretation of this Area Structure Plan.
2. The examples of preferred uses for each land uses area are intended to illustrate the range of activities possible. Specific uses shall be defined in the County's Land Use Bylaw.
3. Land use designation boundaries outlined in this Area Structure Plan may be considered to be approximate except where such boundaries coincide with roads, quarter section lines or clearly recognizable physical features. Minor deviations may be permitted to this Plan, provided that such deviations do not alter the intent of this Plan.

MAP 1 LAND USE CONCEPT