



# Home Buyers' Guide

To Environmental Stewardship  
Canmore, Alberta





## Welcome To Canmore!

Our community is a great place to live, work, play, raise a family, expand your mind—or contemplate nature. We invite you, our new neighbours, to join us in our commitment to this special place.

Crowned by the rugged peaks of the Rocky Mountains, with the Bow River flowing at its feet, Canmore is nestled in the Bow Valley, one of the most breathtaking natural landscapes in the world.

Life in Canmore offers a deep connection with nature that we residents recognize as special. We are proud to be a vibrant, socially involved community that is committed to protecting our unique surroundings, and our small-town sense of connectedness to nature and to each other.

Look around. We are surrounded on all sides by thousands of square kilometres of protected wilderness. To the west are Banff National Park and three other national parks, which are part of the Canadian Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site, among the largest protected regions on the planet. To the north, south and east is a network of provincial parks and protected areas, including Kananaskis Country. This expanse and degree of protection is a rarity in today's world.

This wilderness of limestone summits and montane forest is bristling with a rich collection of natural assets that bring countless benefits - ecological, economic, recreational and spiritual - to Canmore residents. Not only does it offer beauty, clean air and water, but it is home to a number of North America's largest and most vulnerable wildlife species.

The opportunities for a healthy, active, and intellectually stimulating life are abundant in the Bow Valley, with dozens of physical and cultural activities available year-round. The mountains are a paradise for outdoor recreation, and in town, residents can take advantage of numerous facilities catering to individual and team sports. Canmore is home to many Olympic and world-class athletes, as well as internationally respected mountaineers.

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Culturally, Canmore boasts a vibrant community of artists and artisans, writers, photographers, filmmakers and musicians. We benefit from our close proximity to the city lights: Canmore is just 90 minutes from the Calgary International Airport and an hour from downtown. Twenty minutes to the west in Banff the Whyte Museum and the world-renowned Banff Centre bring an exciting slate of artists and symposia to our doorstep year-round.

We appreciate that our abundant yet finite wealth of natural assets makes Canmore a very special place. As our town continues to grow, we want to help sustain these assets and preserve our community values.

## Canmore's Story

From coal-mining town of yesteryear to tourism magnet today, Canmore's story is the chronicle of a young frontier town still evolving.

The town got a foothold in the Bow River valley around 1883, when it was just a whistle stop on the westward-growing Canadian Pacific Railway. The next year, a railway worker named the small settlement after King Malcolm III of Scotland, whose surname was "Canmore," a Gaelic word meaning "Big Head."

Prospectors soon discovered rich veins of coal under the limestone peaks. For close to a century, Canmore was one of the most important coal-mining centres in southern Alberta, and a crucial railway servicing station.

After the mine closed in 1979, Canmore remained a town of about 3,000 until 1988 when the Calgary Winter Olympics put us on the world map. Cross-country skiing and biathlon events at the Canmore Nordic Centre opened visitors' eyes to the unspoiled beauty of this part of the Bow Valley. Before long, the world beat a path to our door.

Canmore has evolved into a hub for mountain recreation and tourism, and a desirable place to live for outdoor enthusiasts. Our population has increased fivefold to just over 15,000 residents, a quarter of which are non-permanent residents, the fastest-growing segment of our community. Perhaps it's only natural that there are conflicts inherent in our attempts to deal with our popularity, and achieve responsible growth.

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By the early 1990’s, double-digit population growth and widespread development were putting pressure on the Bow Valley’s wildlife and landscape. In response, in 1993, Alberta’s Natural Resources Conservation Board held an environmental impact hearing into a large resort project proposed for the south side of the valley. The Board called on local government agencies and land developers to define and conserve a network of undisturbed wildlife movement corridors and habitat patches in and around the town.

Much progress has been made, but our expansion into previously wild areas continues to present a unique challenge: How can we ensure a vibrant, sustainable community, providing everyone the opportunity for a fulfilling life, without damaging or eliminating the natural assets upon which we and other species depend?

## Living With Wildlife

In Canmore, we take our responsibilities to wildlife seriously. We are keenly aware that as a mountain town, we share this landscape with the biggest, wildest creatures in North America, including grizzly and black bears, cougars and wolves. The valley and surrounding peaks are also home to bighorn sheep, mountain goats, moose, deer, wolverines and marmots, to name a few. We know that our valley is a critical “highway” or wildlife corridor for these large mammals trying to navigate through the Rocky Mountains.

Grizzly and black bears in this part of Canada are primarily herbivores, working hard from early spring to late fall to fill their bellies with berries, grasses, roots, insects and occasionally meat from rodents or carrion. An adult male grizzly bear in the Canadian Rockies needs a piece of wilderness twice the size of Calgary—1,400 square kilometres—to call home.

Wolves need similarly vast territories. Being carnivores, they can range hundreds of miles in the hunt for the protein they depend on, in the form of deer, elk, moose and smaller mammals. This long-distance travel also helps to ensure genetic variation in the North American population and avoid isolated pockets of inbreeding.

Here at home, the Bow Valley is a critical link connecting wilderness areas between Yellowstone National Park in the United States and Canada’s Yukon. An 11-year study by the Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bear Project found that for grizzly bears to survive over time, a minimum of 68% of the fertile landscape must be intact linked habitat, allowing the animals to feed and travel securely. In our valley, just 43% of the land fits that description and consequently the animals are struggling to find the space that they need to roam.

As the town expands, the urban environment has been pushing deeper into the surrounding wild lands, raising an important question: How do we live cheek-by-jowl in a limited space with large, wild animals, without harm to ourselves, or to them?

## Providing Space for Wildlife

To help wild animals and humans live together in harmony, the Town of Canmore, the Alberta Government and many other organizations have worked hard since 1992 to set aside land for a system of linked wildlife corridors around the town and through the valley.

It has been an experiment, and we aren’t perfect. Much of the land considered important to wildlife overlaps with human development and recreational use. Many trails run through 410 square kilometres of provincial parkland at Canmore’s upper elevations. In 2005, in an effort to give wildlife more elbow room, the province closed some trails permanently or seasonally, building alternative trails in more appropriate locations. More than 200 kilometres of trails remain available for hiking, running, mountain-biking, horseback riding and skiing in and around Canmore.

It’s important to remember that our trails wind through land that animals call home, and it’s wise to be prepared for a wildlife encounter at any time.

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## Wildlife Underpasses/Overpasses

Wildlife trying to move through the valley face obstacles, including the Trans-Canada Highway, the railroad and human structures. Not long ago, 300 animals died annually in collisions with vehicles speeding through Banff National Park. This raised huge concerns for human and animal safety.

One study in Banff National Park showed that twice as many animals successfully crossed the highway after an animal bridge was built. Underpasses and overpasses can now be found in the Canmore area. One of them crosses the 30 metre wide hydro canal, allowing animals to move more freely along the southern slopes of Mount Rundle and the Three Sisters, linking Banff with Kananaskis Country.

Living with wildlife is one of the biggest challenges that Canmore faces. The Alberta Government, town council, developers and residents are trying to understand this challenge, and address it successfully.

## Protecting our Assets

Canmore is a place of uncommon beauty, blessed with a rich collection of natural wonders and endless opportunities for recreation. Those of us who live here know how privileged we are. It's a privilege and a pleasure—and it comes with a responsibility.

The way most people see it, the citizens of Canmore have an extraordinary opportunity: We have the chance to take care of this environment in such a way that its flora and fauna and crystal waters outlast us all. We are committed to being responsible, long-term stewards of this exceptional place.

By protecting our most important asset—Nature—we are also protecting our own investments. In the Bow Valley, a healthy economy depends directly on a healthy environment.

Tourism is vital to Canmore's economy. With one million visitor-days per year, the hospitality industry is now our biggest employer. Whether it's dog sledding or white water rafting, mountain-climbing or photography, many local businesses are devoted to giving tourists an authentic taste of Rocky Mountain wilderness.

Canmore's property values depend on protecting the special "green" qualities that set our community apart. Real-estate agents understand that Nature in the backyard is a powerful selling point. Canmore sees three types of home buyers—permanent residents, weekenders or part-time residents from the West, and other Canadian and international customers looking to create a family legacy—and they all believe Canmore's natural environment enhances their quality of life.

If the environment were degraded, if forested areas were levelled, if tall buildings blocked the view at every turn, if grizzly bears disappeared, Canmore would lose its allure. Property values could fall and tourists may look elsewhere.

As we embrace environmental stewardship, we help to protect not only our natural assets, but also the value of our investments and the health of our local economy.

Join our community-wide effort to protect the environment. In the 2005/2006 Mining the Future Community Visioning Process, a diverse range of Canmore residents determined that practicing environmental stewardship is among the five key guiding principles of Canmore's vision for its future.

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Here are three ways that we, as a community, are practicing responsible stewardship in the Bow Valley:

### Conserving Green Space

Where possible, we are conserving green space by carefully planning future land development. The wildlife corridors on the slopes surrounding residential developments on both sides of the valley are one example. The Alberta government created the Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park, 329 square kilometres of former Crown land surrounding Canmore. It borders five other provincial parks or recreation areas, as well as Banff National Park.

Another method of protecting green space and habitat is a “conservation easement.” On the south slopes of Canmore, Three Sisters Mountain Village maintained more than 250 acres of green space by donating its right to develop the land, allowing it to be designated a conservation easement. On the north slopes of town, in the Eagle Terrace area, the Town of Canmore and a local developer created a 100 acre conservation easement to protect wildlife habitat.

Canmore protected important land with an outright purchase in 2002, when it bought Quarry Lake, a popular 240 acre swimming hole and recreation area on the south side of the valley.

### Sustainable Technologies

Canmore developers and homeowners are increasingly using forward-thinking, green technologies in residential homes that will help protect the environment by using a variety of resources more sustainably. Examples include low-flush toilets to reduce water use; on-demand water heaters instead of tank heaters in order to use less natural gas; more effective insulation for better energy efficiency; and lumber from sustainably managed forests.

Canmore has committed itself to becoming a “Natural Step” sustainable community. The widespread use of sustainable practices and technologies is the direction we are moving in. Contact the Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley for information on The Natural Step to a Sustainable Canmore and for examples of other local initiatives.

### Responsible Behaviour

Individuals can contribute to the long-term health of the Bow Valley by learning about responsible behaviour both in the broader landscape and in their own back yards. Recreational activities on provincial land, such as hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, climbing and skiing are regulated by the province. The Town governs certain day-to-day activities in the community and around your own house, like garbage disposal, recycling, and pets. Non-government organizations also have a wealth of specific information available to homeowners about additional steps you can take to live “green” in Canmore.



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## Environmental Stewardship Guidelines

Browse through the Stewardship Guidelines (centre insert), adapted from the Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley's "Eco Facts for Residents". It doesn't cover everything, but it will give you a taste of our community's specific guidelines and rules for living in harmony with our environment.

Everybody has a role to play in protecting our unique mountain town and the surrounding landscape.

You'll find answers to some of the questions you may have about the practical aspects of day to day life in Canmore. You might be wondering: Where can I let my dog run free? Is there a recycling program? What types of landscaping plants thrive here? Can I set up a bird feeder? What if I see a bear?

Inform yourself of specific actions you can take as an environmentally responsible Canmore citizen. Watch the local newspapers for information nights and workshops about living in our mountain town. You'll have fun in the process.

Take your experience one step further and learn more about the habits of wildlife. Visit the library, go on-line, or talk to your neighbours about the issues we face. Consider putting the guidelines on your fridge or in an easy to find spot. Join in our community-wide effort to avoid conflicts between people and animals.

### Government Agencies

#### The Town of Canmore

The Town website contains information about community sustainability and environmental initiatives, including trail updates. Access Canmore's comprehensive online Resource and Business Directory. [www.canmore.ca](http://www.canmore.ca) 403.678.1500

#### Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

Environmental Protection  
FireSmart (Wildfire prevention)  
Fish and Wildlife District Office  
[www3.gov.ab.ca/srd](http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd) 403.678.5508  
403.591.7755 to report any sightings of bear, cougar or wolf

Alberta Community Development  
Parks and Protected Areas - Kananaskis Country  
[www.cd.gov.ab.ca](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca) 403.678.5508

Parks Canada – Banff National Park  
[www.pc.gc.ca/banff](http://www.pc.gc.ca/banff)  
403.762.1550 Park Information Centre  
403.762.1470 to report any wildlife sightings

### Non-Government Organizations

#### Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley

The Biosphere Institute enhances understanding of ecological integrity as it pertains to the Bow River Watershed.  
[www.biosphereinstitute.org](http://www.biosphereinstitute.org) 403.678.3445

#### Bow Valley WildSMART

WildSMART promotes awareness relating to the management and avoidance of human-wildlife conflicts.  
[www.bvwildsmart.ca](http://www.bvwildsmart.ca) 403.678.3604

#### Trailex

Trail users share up-to-date information about wildlife sightings and trail safety in the Bow Valley, from Banff to Bragg Creek.  
[www.trailex.org](http://www.trailex.org)

#### Urban Development Institute

UDI Canmore Chapter promotes wise, efficient and productive urban growth and development.  
[www.udicanmore.ca](http://www.udicanmore.ca) 403.678.4616

#### Tourism Canmore

[www.tourismcanmore.com](http://www.tourismcanmore.com)  
403.678.1295 1.866.CANMORE

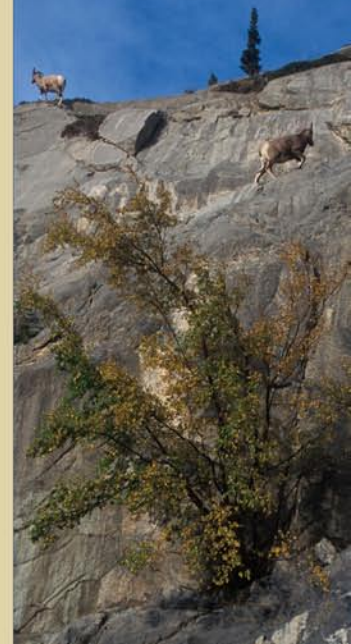
#### Built Green Alberta

The Built Green Alberta website contains helpful green tips for home buyers.  
[www.builtgreenalberta.com](http://www.builtgreenalberta.com) 403.235.1911

#### Enervision

Enervision delivers and promotes greener solutions to residential homeowners.  
[www.enervisionalberta.com](http://www.enervisionalberta.com) 403.210.4380

Inform yourself  
of the specific  
actions you  
can take as an  
environmentally  
responsible  
citizen.





## Acknowledgements

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**The Chinook Institute for Community Stewardship** is a non-profit, charitable organization based in Canmore, Alberta.

We assist mountain communities in Alberta and British Columbia to plan for and manage growth in ways that protect the important natural and cultural assets of the landscape.



For more information on the Chinook Institute's activities & publications:  
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