

ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTLOOK

LAKE LOUISE BANFF CANMORE MD OF BIGHORN KANANASKIS STONEY NAKODA

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JUMP BALL

Canmore Wolverines Mona Gibson, left, and Banff Bears Scarlet Hughes battle for a ball during the JV girls basketball at Banff Community High School on Thursday (Jan. 19). The Wolverines beat the Bears 35-5.

JUNGMIN HAM RMO PHOTO

Busy road to Upper Lake Louise undergoing \$9.8M redesign

CATHY ELLIS

LAKE LOUISE – Lake Louise Drive will undergo a \$9.8 million redesign in a bid to improve the experience for millions of visitors travelling to the iconic turquoise lake and to help threatened grizzly bears and other wildlife travel safely throughout the busy area.

The federal government announced on Jan. 23 approximately \$71 million over three years for projects in the mountain national parks, including \$9.8 million for a redesign of Lake Louise Drive to accommodate transit infrastructure, private vehicles and cyclists.

One of the goals is to improve summer traffic flow and reduce traffic jams, which can cause vehicles to back up all the way to the Trans-Canada Highway, making it difficult for emergency services to access the area, causing frustration for visitors and residents alike, and forming a barrier for wildlife.

Parks Canada officials say the redesign will

include intersection improvements and could also include either a designated bike path on the existing road or a separate trail, depending on recommendations and reviews from wildlife biologists and traffic engineers.

François Masse, superintendent for Lake Louise, Yoho and Kootenay field unit, said Lake Louise Drive sees more than one million vehicles a year, noting new traffic control measures and road design for a variety of transportation options will provide safer access and improved visitor experience.

“Two key ways to access the site that are becoming more and more important – public transit and active transportation – so we want to make sure as we do that redesign work that it’s going to be easy and efficient for the shuttles and also have a good way for people to get up there on bicycles,” he said.

The work falls out of the draft Lake Louise Area Strategy and Banff National Park Management Plan, which call for a sustainable transit system to help improve visitor experiences as well as maintaining

low traffic volumes on Lake Louise Drive during sensitive periods to allow for wildlife movement.

Lake Louise Drive, which has seen a 71 per cent increase in traffic volume over the past decade, cuts through the Fairview wildlife corridor. It is one of two critical wildlife corridors in Lake Louise used by wildlife to travel between areas to reproduce, feed and find shelter.

These corridors provide important movement pathways for wary wildlife in an area otherwise constrained by development and steep mountain terrain.

They also provide core habitat for resident animals that may not travel far beyond the area.

In addition, the Lake Louise area is also part of a core reproductive range for grizzly bears, which are a threatened species in Alberta.

Growing traffic congestion, together with illegal parking along road shoulders, forms a barrier for wildlife movement across the road.

REDESIGN

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