

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE KANANASKIS LAKES MAP SHEET AREA, 82J

LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The area covered by the Kananaskis Lakes map sheet is in southwestern Alberta and southeastern British Columbia. The area lies between 50° and 51° north latitude and 114° and 116° west longitude. The Continental Divide constitutes a natural and political boundary between two provinces. About 3000 square miles in Alberta have been classified for land capability for forestry, and the rest of the area lies within Banff National Park and British Columbia.

The diversified resource base of the area has had a marked influence on the economic development of the area. Historically and physically, the eastern part of the area is best suited to agriculture. Here, the land is used for grain production and ranching. The towns of Turner Valley and Black Diamond are the main service centers. In the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve to the west, there has been some coal mining in the past, and present demands for coal has lead to renewed mineral exploration. Some lower-elevation valleys provide valuable summer range for livestock from nearby ranches. For many years the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve has supplied the raw material for forest industries in the area. The forest industry originally produced mainly lumber, but is now oriented toward pole, post, and lumber production. A planer mill is located at Canmore and wood-preserving plants are situated at Cochrane and Cayley, all of which are along the Canadian Pacific Railway routes. Also, the area has a high potential for recreation and recreational demands have been rapidly increasing. A watershed research area has been established in the Marmot Creek Basin, adjacent to the Kananaskis Forest Experimental Station.

The area is drained by the South Saskatchewan River system. The main drainage for the central part of the area is eastward by the Highwood, Sheep, and Elbow rivers and their tributaries. The northwest is drained by the Kananaskis River, which joins the Bow River system at Seebe, just north of the area. The southwestern part of the area is drained by the southward-flowing Oldman and Livingstone Rivers.

Glaciation has been extensive throughout the area, except on the high peaks of the Rocky Mountains and the higher elevations of the Porcupine Hills. Evidence of glaciation occurs at higher elevations in the form of cirques, and several small ice fields persist on the Boundary Range at the headwaters of the Kananaskis River. The lower elevations are predominantly covered by glacial till and morainal deposits. The main valleys are wide and U-shaped. Glacial and postglacial meltwaters have redeposited the glacial material in the form of outwash along the existing and abandoned drainageways. Extensive glaciocluvial deposits occur to the west and north of the Kananaskis Lakes along the Kananaskis River valley. Most of the streams have incised the floodplains, resulting in extensive terraces at many levels. Ponding occurred in many of the valleys; alluvial deposits are evident along Cataract Creek and the Highwood and Elbow rivers.

PHYSIOGRAPHY

The area is in the Rocky Mountains and Interior Plains physiographic regions. The Rocky Mountains region comprises the Southern Rocky Mountains and Rocky Mountain Foothills divisions. The Southern Rocky Mountains extend in a north-south direction and are more than 6000 feet in elevation. These mountains are composed of Precambrian, Paleozoic, and Mesozoic rocks that were uplifted during the Tertiary Period. To the east, the Rocky Mountain Foothills are a narrow belt of hills paralleling the eastern extension of the Rocky Mountains. Elevations range from about 4000 to 6000 feet. They are composed of soft sandstones and shales. The foothills merge gradually with the Interior Plains region in the east.

The Alberta Plain division of the Interior Plains region is characterized by gently rolling to rolling relief with an elevation up to 4000 feet. It is underlain by almost flatlying, fairly soft sandstones and shales.

FOREST ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The area lies in the Subalpine Forest, Montane Forest, and Grassland regions. Elevations above 7000 feet are within the Alpine Region.

The East Slope Rockies Section of the Subalpine Forest Region covers the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and adjacent foothills from about 5000 to 6800 feet above sea level. Higher prominences of sedimentary rock formations, such as Mount Livingstone (7996 feet) in the south and Moose Mountain (7991 feet) in the north, occur throughout the area. The general relief rises to the west, where Subalpine vegetation is often found only along narrow creek and river valleys.

The forest is mainly coniferous. The main tree species are Engelmann spruce and lodgepole pine; lodepole pine predominates on burned sites. At higher elevations, alpine fir is abundant as an understory in older spruce stands, and alpine larch and limber pine are common on exposed slopes and shallow soils. Trembling aspen and balsam poplar are most prevalent at lower elevations; balsam poplar is mainly associated with recent alluvial deposits and seepage slopes.

In general, the northern part of this forest region has a cooler and more humid climate than the part south of the Highwood River. Because of this more favorable climate for forest growth, the northern part of this region has been rated up to Class 3. Sites rated Class 3 occur predominantly on fine textured, moderately well drained alluvial soils and on moderately well drained, medium textured Podzols on south-facing slopes. Small tracts of Class 3 soils occur at lower elevations on imperfectly drained north-facing slopes.

At higher elevations (5500 to 6500 feet) throughout the Subalpine Forest Region, the short cool growing season further limits the forest capability. Annual precipitation averages 25 to 30 inches, but the low soil temperatures and cool air drainage associated with imperfectly drained medium textured till and alluvial deposits limit forest capability to Class 4 for Engelmann spruce. Class 4 sites are mainly on imperfectly drained, medium textured north-facing slopes and in shaded valleys. In general, the region has fairly low capability because of moisture deficiency resulting from steep, rapidly shedding slopes, shallowness to bedrock, coarse soil texture, or climatic aridity as a result of exposure or wind.

The Douglas-Fir and Lodgepole Pine Section of the Montane Forest Region occupies the northern extension of the Porcupine Hills in the southeastern part of the area. The elevation ranges from about 4000 to 5000 feet. The forest capability of this region is low because of the limited annual precipitation and the high evapotranspiration rate as a result of the strong prevailing winds. The main tree species are open-growing stands of Douglas-fir and lodepole pine, which are often interspersed with grassland areas and stunted trembling aspen stands. Isolated stands of white spruce, mainly with an understory of trembling aspen, occur along creek drainageways and west-facing seepage slopes.

Because of the typical prairie conditions, characterized by lack of forest cover, limited precipitation, high temperatures, and high evapotranspiration rates as a result of strong prevailing winds and exposure, the Grassland Region is considered as non-productive forestland and has been rated Class 7. A climatic limitation has been inferred, but no indicator species has been mapped for these lands. The soils are predominantly Chernozemic, which reflects the grassland vegetation of this region. Slow-growing stands of trembling aspen are scattered throughout the region along the draws in the basins.

The highest elevations in the area are in the Alpine Region. Most of these lands are exposed bedrock and have been rated Class 7 without an indicator species, since the severity of the climate and lack of soils preclude tree growth. Interspersed with the bedrock are sheltered locations that have deeper soils. These locations have been rated Class 6 with alpine fir as the indicator species.

The transitional zone between the Subalpine Forest Region in the west and the Grassland Region to the east is characterized by an Engelmann - white spruce hybrid complex, particularly on sites rated Classes 4 and 5. Trembling aspen occurs on the lower capability soils; the best growth occurs at higher elevations in the north and west. At lower elevations in the east, aspen is restricted to scattered stands associated with depressions and sloughs. Lodgepole pine occurs mainly on well-drained tills and outwash deposits in the northwestern part of this zone. The soils are predominantly Chernozemic south and east of the Highwood River, and Luvisolic and their associates to the north and west. The gradual transition in soils is also reflected in climate, vegetation, and capability for forestry. The capability for forestry ranges from predominantly Classes 6 and 7 in the southeast to predominantly Class 5 in the northwest. In the south, Class 5 sites occur mainly along creek valleys and associated north-facing slopes. Small Class 4 sites occur along the alluvial floodplain of Pekisko Creek and in isolated locations associated with Class 5 lands at higher elevations in the west. North of the Highwood River, Class 4 sites are more common and are found on moderately well to poorly drained north-facing slopes. The northwestern part of this transitional zone is probably climatically suitable for the growth of Class 3 forest stands, but associated soil limitations, chiefly moisture deficiency during the growing season, further limits the capability to Class 4. Class 5 sites are common on well to moderately well drained deposits and generally have white spruce and lodepole pine as the indicator species. Class 6 and 7 sites are limited by a combination of factors, such as wind and sun exposure and steeply sloping shallow-to-bedrock soils, all of which result in a moisture deficiency for forest growth. Trembling aspen is the usual indicator species on the lower-elevation Class 6 sites. Poorly drained draws are common in the north and have been rated Class 7 because of excessive moisture. The associated salinity of many of these soils is also a probable limitation to tree growth.

Capability classification by M. J. Romaine and J. R. Prokopchuk, Alberta Forest Service, Department of Lands and Forests.

REFERENCES

Conservation Unit Guide, Part II, Kananaskis - Highwood Conservation Unit - B2. March 1967. Eastern Rockies Forest Conservation Board, Calgary, Alberta.
Wyatt, F. A., Newton, J. D., Bowser, W. E., and W. Odynsky. September 1960. Soil Survey of Blackfoot and Calgary Sheet. Bull. No. SS-2. Research Branch, Can. Dep. Agr., Department of Extension, Univ. Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

METRIC CONVERSION

1 cubic foot/acre 0.06997245 cubic metre/hectare

cubic feet/acre/year cubic metres/hectare/year

| | | |
|----------|------------|--------------|
| Class 1d | 191 to 210 | 13.4 to 14.7 |
| Class 1c | 171 to 190 | 12.0 to 13.3 |
| Class 1b | 151 to 170 | 10.6 to 11.9 |
| Class 1a | 131 to 150 | 9.2 to 10.5 |
| Class 1 | 111 to 130 | 7.8 to 9.1 |
| Class 2 | 91 to 110 | 6.4 to 7.7 |
| Class 3 | 71 to 90 | 5.0 to 6.3 |
| Class 4 | 51 to 70 | 3.6 to 4.9 |
| Class 5 | 31 to 50 | 2.2 to 3.5 |
| Class 6 | 11 to 30 | 0.8 to 2.1 |
| Class 7 | 11 | 0.8 |

</