

VOLUME #9, ISSUE #2

SUMMER 2026

SADDLE HILLS COUNTY LIVING



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Around the County

The latest updates and stories from Saddle Hills County.



Bonanza School Hosts First Science Fair

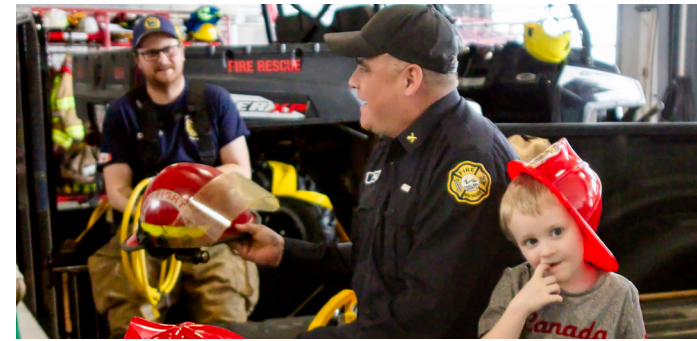
Bonanza School hosted its first-ever Science Fair on April 23, bringing students, staff, and community members together for a strong inaugural event.

Volunteer judges engaged directly with students, asking questions and reviewing projects using a structured scoring guide. Each project was assessed by multiple judges to ensure a fair and balanced evaluation.

Judges included Saddle Hills County Peace Officer Wayne Olson, Trustee Blain Riding, Municipal Librarian Michele Kettles, Community Liaison Kristy Jackson, Bonanza School parents Bob and Connie Melnyk and Shi Murphy, Savanna teacher Tina Sauder, and Savanna High School students Kale Weber, James Rose, Tanner Hingley, Soren Sorenson, Kael Earl, Kennedy Smith, Gracie Dolen, Hunter Patterson, and Marley Patterson.

The event gave students the opportunity to explore ideas, strengthen problem-solving skills, and build confidence presenting their work. Community involvement added depth to the experience, allowing students to share their learning beyond the classroom and receive meaningful feedback.

The Science Fair marked a successful first year, showcasing student creativity and the impact of community participation. Special thanks to Mrs. Tanya Fearon for coordinating the event, and to all students, staff, judges, and community members who contributed.



Central Peace Homeschool Group Bringing Families Together

What started as a simple need for local connection has grown into a steady weekly gathering for homeschooling families across the County.

Woking parent Jaimee Dreger launched the Central Peace Homeschool Group in September 2024, after not finding local activities during her first year of homeschooling. 10 families – around 20 kids—participate in the activities.

From September to May, the group meets Wednesdays from 1–4 p.m. at the Woking Multiplex for games, sports, and free play. In warmer months, they head outdoors and take part in outdoor activities and events, visit local Fire Halls and museums.

Families come from across the area, and new faces are always welcome.

Find ‘Central Peace Homeschool Group’ on Facebook for weekly updates or contact Jaimee, at (780) 228-7652.



Spring Training Builds Skills & Strong Partnerships

Woking Fire Department’s annual spring training brought crews together for a full day of hands-on, high-value training – made possible through strong local support.

All Saddle Hills County fire departments participated, alongside neighbouring departments from Birch Hills County and Central Peace. The training was organized by Darrel Anderson, Training Officer with the Woking Fire Department.

Training focused on critical response skills, including vehicle extrication using the jaws of life – training that directly supports real-world emergency readiness.

This year’s session was supported by generous in-kind contributions:

- Vehicles donated by Prime Towing and Harold’s Towing.
- Delivery support from Full Force Ventures.
- Equipment loading and additional support from Saddle Valley Ventures.

These donations allow firefighters to train in realistic conditions without added cost, strengthening both preparedness and regional collaboration.

Remote Potable Water Hauling 2027 Subscription Areas

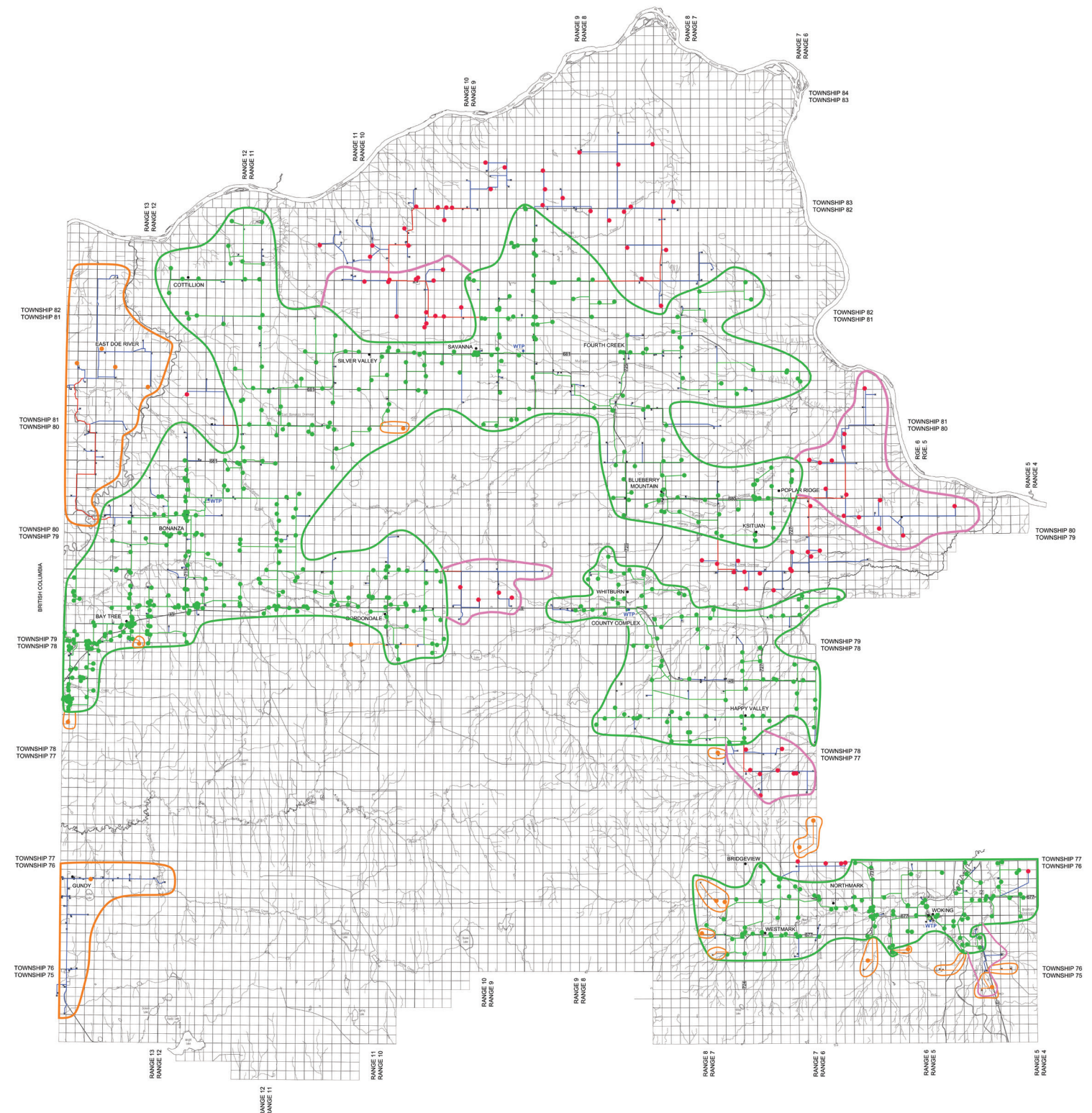
The Remote Potable Water Hauling Subsidy provides a subsidy to Saddle Hills County residences that are not able to connect to the Rural Potable Waterline.

The area has been expanded to include:

- Four properties in the Woking Service Area.
- One property in the County Complex (Ksituan) Service Area.
- One property in the Savanna Service Area.

Eligible areas can also be seen in the attached map, indicated in orange.

For more information and to apply, visit saddlehills.ab.ca/Water-Hauling-Subsidy



Legend

- Future Water Supply Main
- Future Distribution & Servicing Lines
- Existing & Approved Water Supply & Distribution Lines
- Potential for Economically Unfeasible Servicing
- Signed Service Agreement - Existing/Approved Service Residences
- Water Treatment Plant (WTP)
- Provincial Highways
- Approved Servicing Area
- Area Approved for Water Hauling Subsidy
- Proposed 2027 Servicing Area

Taxes & Assessment

2025 Municipal Assessment Update



Council received a presentation from Compass Assessment outlining the 2025 municipal assessment, which forms the basis for 2026 property taxation. The update explained how property assessments are developed using market analysis, recent sales data, and provincially legislated quality standards to ensure accuracy and fairness across all property types.

Overall, the municipal assessment increased by approximately 10%, reflecting both rising property values and new growth within the County. Residential assessments saw an average increase of about 12%, while non-residential properties increased by roughly 9%.

Compass Assessment also highlighted ongoing work to strengthen the assessment system. In 2025, a total of 719 property inspections were completed to support data accuracy and consistency. This work is part of a broader effort to maintain fair and stable assessments over time.

Property inspections will continue in 2026 in the Gundy, Bay Tree, Bonanza, Savanna, and Woking East areas. Residents may see assessors in these communities as part of the regular inspection program.

More information about property assessment is available on the Saddle Hills County website, at saddlehills.ab.ca/Assessment

DON'T FORGET TAX PAYMENTS ARE DUE BY JULY 31, 2026.

How do Property Assessments work?

Property Assessments follow regulations set out by the provincial government in the Municipal Government Act (MGA), and are carried out by certified Assessors that have been designated by the County and the Provincial Government. Residential Property Assessments are based on a market value standard.

Municipal Tax Levy

Each year, Council approves a budget to deliver County programs and services. This includes road maintenance, water distribution, grants, community support, fire and protective services, agricultural services, recreation and more. From this budget, the municipal general tax rate is determined.

Provincial Education Levy

The Provincial Education Levy is a mandatory provincial requisition that all municipalities in Alberta must collect on behalf of the Provincial Government. Municipalities do not control the amounts as they are determined by the provincial government.

Pooling the education property tax in the Alberta School Foundation Fund (ASFF) ensures that students receive a quality education no matter where they live. All property owners pay the education levy. This enhances Alberta's ability to fund school operations, leading to better educational outcomes as student enrolment continues to grow. The Provincial Government has increased the education requisition by 33.4% for the 2026 tax year.

Senior's Housing Levy

The Senior's Housing Levy is a mandatory regional requisition that several municipalities in Alberta must collect on behalf of their regional housing management bodies. In Saddle Hills County, this is the Grande Spirit Foundation. Municipalities do not control the amounts as they are determined by the Grande Spirit Foundation. The foundation uses this funding to assist with offsetting the costs of operations for five Senior Citizen Lodges.

There are 11 municipalities that contribute to the Grande Spirit Foundation. City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie, MD of Greenview, Saddle Hills County, Town of Sexsmith, Birch Hills County, Town of Beaverlodge, MD of Spirit River, Town of Spirit River, Town of Wembley & the Village of Rycroft. The Grande Spirit Foundation has increased the senior's housing requisition by 33% for the 2026 tax year.

Police Funding

The Provincial Government mandates that all municipalities in Alberta share the cost of policing in the province. This amount is determined by the provincial government. The current budget includes \$500,000 for this funding and is expected to increase to \$750,000 over the next 5 years.

Riaer Exemption - What is it?

To put it simply, a Riaer Exemption is an assessment exemption given by the Provincial Government to 'farm residences' ie. residences located on farmland. The farm residence is exempt based on the amount of 'farmland assessment' in the owner's unit. The maximum exemption is \$61,540 for the first residence and \$30,770 for each additional residence.

Riaer Exemptions are not new and have been included in every previous assessment calculation for property in Saddle Hills County that had an applicable 'farm residence'.

While the Riaer Exemption amount is included in the total assessed value of your property, you do not pay taxes on this portion. You only pay taxes on the the remaining residential land assessment and farmland assessment for your property.

To calculate taxes payable, you would multiply the applicable property assessment by the tax rate and then divide the total by 1000.

Example:

\$13,340 (Farmland Assessed Value) x 13.5 (Tax Rate)/1000= \$180.09

\$274,700 (Residential Assessed Value) x 3.5 (Tax Rate)/1000= \$961.45



Volunteer Appreciation

Call for Nominations

Saddle Hills County is inviting nominations to recognize volunteers who help strengthen communities through their time, leadership, and dedication.

Help celebrate the people who continue to make a lasting difference across the region.

The deadline for nominations is July 31, 2026.

Learn more, at saddlehills.ab.ca/2026-Volunteer-Appreciation

County Commitments & Sponsorships

Saddle Hills County is a \$5,000 Silver Sponsor for the Grande Prairie Regional Airshow, taking place August 1-2, 2026. The event is a regional draw, bringing visitors, aviation enthusiasts, and families together for a weekend of aerial performances, static displays, and community activities.

Council approved a \$50,000 donation to the La Glace & District Agricultural Society to support upgrades at the Tamarack Valley Regional Recreation Centre. The funding will go towards the purchase of new rink boards and dressing rooms - key improvements that will enhance safety, functionality, and the overall experience for users of the facility.

Council approved a \$2,000 Platinum Sponsorship for the Central Peace Firefighters’ Association 6th Annual Golf Tournament, taking place July 11, 2026, at the Chinook Valley Golf Course. Proceeds from the tournament will support the development of a new firehall - an important investment in local emergency services and community safety. Council’s contribution reflects ongoing support for the volunteers and organizations who play a critical role in protecting residents and infrastructure.

Council also awarded grants to fair societies, with the Bonanza, Savanna, and Rycroft Agricultural Societies each receiving \$5,000 towards their annual fairs.

2026 Program & Activity Grants Distribution (2nd Intake)

The second round of Program and Activity Grants for 2026 were distributed as follows:

Blueberry Mountain Goodwill Society	\$6,601
C.P. Health & Wellness Coalition	\$5,000
Cotillion Butte Recreation Association	\$2,800
Happy Valley Ag & Recreation Club	\$12,900
Savanna Agricultural Society	\$8,000
Ste. Marie Catholic School	\$2,000
Total: \$37,301	

County Commits \$300,000 to Local MRI Campaign

Saddle Hills County has committed \$300,000 to the Dawson Creek and District Hospital Foundation’s MRI campaign, joining as a Capstone Donor to support expanded diagnostic imaging in the region.

The contribution represents a significant investment in regional healthcare. Access to local MRI services will reduce travel for County residents, shorten wait times, and support earlier, more accurate diagnosis. In emergency and ongoing care situations, timely imaging is critical to guide faster treatment decisions and improving patient outcomes.

For Saddle Hills County residents and families, the impact is practical and immediate: less time on the road, quicker answers, and care delivered closer to home.

This investment reflects Council’s focus on supporting essential services that strengthen the region and directly improve quality of life.

Celebrating the Team that Serves Saddle Hills County

At the annual Staff Appreciation Event, Saddle Hills County Council recognized employees celebrating years-of-service milestones and expressed appreciation to all staff for their dedication and commitment throughout the year.

- 5 Year Service Award Recipients:**
Corinne Bolch, Brice Daly, Sheila Davis, Greg Heinricks, Rita Johnson, Monica Rogers, Tammy Singer, Todd Tycholiz
- 10 Year Service Award Recipients:**
Ray McRann, Scotty Martin, Doug Nickisch, Don Wilson
- 15 Year Service Award Recipients:**
Loretta Daly



Council Highlights

Recent decisions made by Saddle Hills County Council.

Ag News

The latest agricultural news for Peace Region producers.

Agriculture is at the heart of our community. Keep informed of all the latest Agriculture News in Saddle Hills County, or get more information on any of these stories, by visiting the dedicated Agriculture News stream on our website, at saddlehills.ab.ca/AgNews.

You can also follow the hashtag **#SaddleHillsAg** on Instagram for all the latest agriculture updates.



Bumble Bee Box Workshop

Saddle Hills County hosted a Bumble Bee Box Workshop, on April 23, 2026, at the Blueberry Mountain Hall.

The lunch-and-learn event provided participants with an opportunity to learn about Alberta's native pollinators, with a focus on bumble bees and the important role they play in local ecosystems.

The workshop drew interest from residents focused on conservation, gardening, and enhancing biodiversity across the region.



Roots to Results: Soil Care & Fruit Tree Grafting

Saddle Hills County hosted the Roots to Results: Soil, Care & Fruit Tree Grafting workshop, featuring tree care and forestry specialist Toso Bozic. The hands-on workshop focused on practical fruit tree grafting and pruning techniques, including grafting methods, timing, rootstock selection, pruning practices, and common mistakes to avoid. Participants also learned about the importance of soil preparation and site selection to help trees establish and thrive long term.



Weed Inspections

The Saddle Hills County Weed Inspectors have begun their annual field inspections as part of ongoing efforts to support healthy crops and help control the spread of invasive weeds and agricultural pests throughout the region.

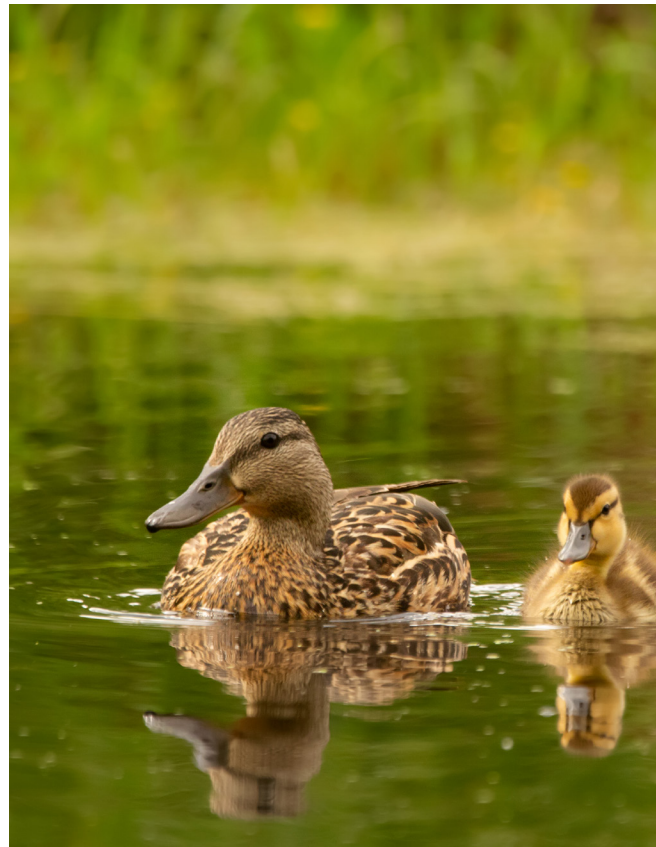
Inspections are conducted each year to identify noxious and prohibited noxious weeds listed under the Weed Control Act, as well as nuisance and pest species regulated under the Agricultural Pests Act.

Early identification and management of these species helps protect agricultural land, crop production, and the overall health of the local environment.

Residents may notice County vehicles parked at field approaches during inspections. County staff will not drive onto private land and follow strict biosecurity protocols to help prevent the spread of disease, weeds, and soil-borne contaminants between properties.

Saddle Hills County thanks residents and landowners for their cooperation and continued commitment to responsible land stewardship.

For more information about weed inspections or Agricultural Services programs, contact Ag Services at 780-864-3760 or email ag@saddlehills.ab.ca.



ALUS Program

Supporting Working Lands & Healthy Landscapes

The ALUS Saddle Hills program is helping landowners improve environmental stewardship while keeping their land productive.

ALUS provides cost-sharing support to establish beneficial management projects—such as wetlands, shelterbelts, and pollinator habitats—and offers annual payments for their ongoing maintenance.

Learn more about the ALUS program, requirements, and get involved at saddlehills.ab.ca/ALUS



Community Safety

Community Safety & Policing Survey Highlights



Saddle Hills County conducted a Community Safety & Policing Survey from March 1 to 31, 2026, with 45 residents providing input on local safety conditions and priorities.

Overall, Saddle Hills County continues to be viewed as a safe place to live, with most respondents indicating that conditions have remained stable over the past year. At the same time, feedback pointed to clear expectations for stronger enforcement presence, ongoing engagement, and improved deterrence to address persistent concerns.

Survey responses show that safety issues are not isolated to one area. Concerns were identified across rural areas, hamlets, road corridors, and industrial sites. Property-related crime — particularly theft and break-ins — was consistently ranked as the top issue. Residents also noted concerns related to suspicious activity, speeding, and road safety.

To improve safety, respondents emphasized the need for:

- Increased visible patrols.
- Targeted enforcement on repeat issues.
- Faster response times.

Additional priorities included stronger community awareness, more consistent consequences for offences, and continued coordination between enforcement agencies and the community.

The survey provided a clear, practical snapshot of where residents see strengths and where improvements are needed.

Prepare & Stay Aware

Plan Ahead

- Check weather and wildfire conditions.
- Share your plans and expected return time.
- Know the area (maps, access points, hazards).

Stay Hydrated & Protected

- Bring more water than you think you need.
- Wear sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses.
- Dress for the conditions (layers, footwear).

Wildlife Awareness

- Keep a safe distance from wildlife.
- Store food securely.
- Carry bear spray where appropriate, and know how to use it.

Fire Safety

- Follow local fire bans and restrictions.
- Never leave campfires unattended.
- Fully extinguish fires - drown, stir, repeat.

Wildlife Awareness

- Keep a safe distance from wildlife.
- Store food securely.
- Carry bear spray where appropriate, and know how to use it.

Trail & Activity Safety

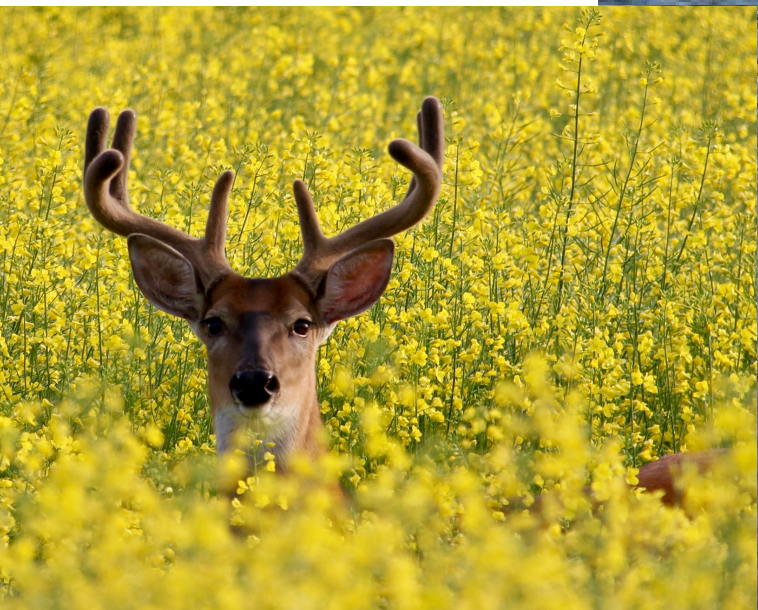
- Stay on marked trails.
- Watch footing on uneven or wet terrain.
- Use proper gear for your activity (helmet, lifejacket etc.)

Emergency Preparedness

- Pack a basic kit: first aid, flashlight, extra food, whistle.
- Carry a charged phone (but don't rely on service)
- Know how to contact help, if needed.

Water Safety

- Wear a lifejacket near the water.
- Be aware of currents and cold-water risks.
- Never swim alone.



Summer Preparedness

Prepare, Stay Aware & Don't Take Unnecessary Risks

Saddle Hills County offers a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities — from scenic trails and campgrounds to day-use areas and community spaces that make it easy to get outside and explore. Whether hiking, camping, or enjoying local parks, these spaces highlight the best of the region. Before heading out, take time to plan your trip, check conditions, and make sure you have what you need.

Staying aware of your surroundings and avoiding unnecessary risks helps ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone.

Explore local options at saddlehills.ab.ca/parks-recreation



Health Clinic Notice

It looks like the population in Saddle Hills County is growing — with a new addition on the way. Nurse Practitioner Courtney will soon begin maternity leave, while Nurse Practitioner Palvi is expected to return from maternity leave at a later date.

During this transition period, the Saddle Hills County Health Clinic will be temporarily closed.

Exact closure dates have not yet been confirmed, but additional information will be shared once available.

Our Community Events



2026 Bonanza Fair & Mud Bog

Bonanza Ag Society
July 17 & 18, 2026

Bench Show, Mud Bogs, Gymkhana,
Fireworks, Tractor Pull,
Beer Gardens, Supper & Dance



Happy Valley Gymkhana

Happy Valley Ag & Recreation Club
July 19, 2026 | 1 p.m.

Free Event
All Skill Levels



Race the 8

Rycroft Ag Society
July 24, 25 & 26, 2026

Quinton Blair
Chuckwagons, Bull Riding,
Food Trucks, Beer Garden, 50/50



2026 Savanna Fair

Savanna Rec. Plex
August 14 & 15, 2026

Annual Fair, Bench Show,
Gymkhana, Family Activities



Volunteer Appreciation

Bonanza Hall
August 27, 2026 | 5-8 p.m.

Volunteer Appreciation BBQ
Door Prizes, Awards, Dinner



Happy Valley Endurance Ride

Happy Valley Ag & Recreation Club
September 4-6, 2026
enduranceridersofalberta.com

RESIDENTS OF
**SADDLE HILLS
COUNTY**

**NEVER MISS
AN UPDATE**

GET THE APP

The app uses state-of-the-art technology to notify residents of breaking news, documents, videos, and events, instantly delivered via push notifications.



HOW TO GET THE APP

- 1 DOWNLOAD**
Scan the QR code above or visit the App Store or Google Play Store and Search 'Saddle Hills County'
- 2 REGISTER**
Fill out your info and check your email to verify your account.
- 3 LOGIN**
Get the latest news, events, jobs, & more right at your fingertips!



- **NEWS**
- **EVENTS**
- **SURVEYS**
- **JOB OPENINGS**

Download the free app today



Junction of Highway 49 and Highway 725

RR1, Spirit River, AB. T0H 3G0

P: (780) 864-3760 | **F:** (780) 864-3904

Monday - Friday 8:15 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

 www.saddlehills.ab.ca  [saddlehillscounty](https://www.facebook.com/saddlehillscounty)  [saddlehillsab](https://twitter.com/saddlehillsab)