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**CASTLE WILDERNESS**

The Castle, as delineated on the *Wild Alberta* map, is an area of extremely high wilderness value. The Castle is regionally important as wildlife habitat and connects the National Parks (to the south) and the Flathead Basin (to the west) with wildlife populations and habitat in the mountains and foothills to the north. The Castle contains important watershed values. The area is floristically rich due to overlapping ecosystems, and most of the rare plants found in southern Alberta occur only in the Waterton/Castle area.

Although some portions of the area are highly disturbed by industrial and recreational use, the conservation value of the area is high due to wilderness values and the presence of some tracts of undisturbed wilderness

As with any area of significant wilderness value, the precautionary principle is critical. Further development is unacceptable because, at present, there is insufficient science on which to rule out negative effects. In fact, the EUB decision report for Screwdriver Creek (2000-17) indicates that certain natural thresholds may have been exceeded in the northern portion of the Castle due to the cumulative effects of industrial development. There is additional concern over environmental and health hazards associated with the Carbondale pipeline.

AWA believes a cumulative effects assessment (including a comprehensive rare plant survey) is required for the entirety of the Castle Wilderness.

Based on regional wilderness values, wildlife-habitat connectivity and rare plant considerations, there should be no further development within the Castle until the following conditions are met:

- a) Science demonstrates which portions of the area will sustain some level of new development without significant negative effects to wilderness values, and
- b) The remainder of the Castle is legally protected, and
- c) Industrial operators agree to operate under an ecosystem-based approach.

**TIMELINE OF MAJOR CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

- **Current** Conservation groups continue to oppose industrial developments as they arise but are largely unsuccessful.
- **2002** CMR continues to expand the ski hill, despite the lack of wildland protection as ordered by the NRCB as a condition of similar expansion. Government fails to require EIA. CCWC initiates a judicial review.
- **2001** AEUB ignores own environmental and safety policies and rejects public hearing request and approves Shell Canada's potentially lethal sour gas well only 300 meters from a major public campground
- **2000-2001** Wide-spread clearcutting of old growth forests by Atlas Lumber, and to a lesser extent Spray Lake Sawmills





- **2000** AEUB decision report 2000-17 acknowledges that significant regional cumulative environmental impacts have occurred in the Castle, and that biological thresholds for some species (eg: grizzly bears) have likely been exceeded (however, they continue to approve development)
- **2000** North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (NACEC) considers the "Crown of the Continent" ecosystem to be part of one of North America's 14 most biologically diverse and threatened regions - the Rocky Mountain region
- **2000** Panel on Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks details health of Waterton Lakes National Park dependent on adjacent provincial and private lands (Panel recommends federal government dedicate funds to conservation efforts in this larger ecosystem and seek provincial cooperation to find conservation solutions for lands adjacent to Waterton)
- **1999** Advocated by Alberta's conservation groups and national affiliates as one of the ten easiest, big wilderness areas for the Alberta government to establish as a park
- **1997** Special Places Local Committee recommends only three very small areas for protection. There was no ENGO representation on the committee
- **1996** Access Management Plan created to regulate off-highway vehicle use. However, enforcement is lacking.
- **1993** Natural Resources Conservation Board finds that the ski resort operated by Vacation Alberta can be expanded only if the rest of the area receives Wildland designation. Government fails to create the appropriate legislation
- **1986-1992** Controversy over Shell drilling in Prairie Bluff and Upper Whitney Creek
- **1985** Shell applies again to drill in Jutland area; AWA applies for protection and rezoning of entire South Castle to Prime Protection Zone; Minister rejects AWA application and approves Shell's drilling application
- **1984** IRP zoning is changed – Prime Protection Zone is reduced, Jutland no longer within Prime Protection
- **1983** IRP released without any reference to the 1979 recommendation to expand Prime Protection Zone
- **1982** Eastern Slopes Policy zoning redefined to allow oil and gas activity in Zone 4
- **1979** IRP team recommends expansion of Prime Protection Zone in the South Castle
- **1979** Shell applies for reduction of Prime Protection Zone so they can drill in Jutland; denied
- **1977** Shell applies to drill in Jutland area of South Castle; denied because within Prime Protection Zone
- **1977** Eastern Slopes Policy creates areas of Zone 1, 2 and 4 in the Castle area
- **1974** Shell obtains subsurface leases for Castle area
- **1974** Government recommends protection for the area
- **1973** AWA proposes S. Castle Wildland Recreation Area during Eastern Slopes Hearings
- **1921** Castle was removed from Waterton Lakes National Park and transferred to Alberta Government

