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## Little Smoky/Solomon Valley

By Rocky Notnes

The Solomon Valley is an old travel corridor used by natives, outfitters and other recreationists, which lies along the front range of the Rockies. It is a 15-mile journey, with access by road at each end. At the south end is the little hamlet of Brule. To the north is the Wildhay River and Rock Lake road. The Solomon Valley trail is already being promoted on the internet as the Mountain Shadows Trail, an ideal trail for horseback riding, hiking, dog sledding, mountain biking and also motorized travel (quads, skidoos), the latter now considered "traditional" and likely to stay.

The Hinton group working on the Solomon issue are a loosely formed group of concerned individuals, most of them ecotourism operators, a couple of them AWA members. As well, most of us are members of the West Athabasca Bioregional Society. Central to our concerns is to secure a land base for ecotourism in the area. Now that Special Places 2000 has been completed and we know where the boundaries will be for the Rock Lake /Solomon Valley Wildland Park, we are moving ahead with trying to secure protection for the Solomon Valley/Wildhay River corridor which was left out of the new Park.

On March 27 our group met with local representatives from forestry and Fish and Wildlife, as well as the co-chair for the Northern East Slopes (NES) Strategy. We had a very good meeting and are optimistic that something can be accomplished. It was suggested to us that we ask for a meeting with the NES steering committee. This will likely happen in June.

Meanwhile we are producing a map with more exact information on what we want protected. What we would like to see in the end is some sort of recreational designation with restrictions just below that of the Wildland Park. Our aim is to keep industry (oil and gas and forestry) out of the core area so that its wilderness character can be retained.

