



Wild Lands Advocate, June 2008, Vol. 16, No. 3**High Island Incident Revisited**

By Joyce Hildebrand

In spring 2007, Parks and Protected Areas installed two communications towers in High Island Natural Area, an ecologically sensitive island in Lac La Biche, with no public consultation.

In the hope that this unfortunate event could trigger the establishment of an effective public consultation process, AWA initiated plans for a meeting with the Parks division and concerned Albertans. More than a year later, that meeting finally took place on May 21, 2008 in Edmonton.

Participants comprised representatives from the Parks division, the Lac La Biche Birding Society, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, CPAWS, AWA, and Lac La Biche County, as well as long-time Lac La Biche-based environmentalist Tom Maccagno, who first raised the alarm about the events at High Island.

Co-chair Dave Nielsen, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister for Parks, began the meeting by stating that a mistake had been made in not consulting the public about the installation proposal, a refreshing and welcome admission. After meeting participants expressed their deep concern about the events of 2007, we moved to the bigger issue of public consultation on proposals and developments in Alberta's protected areas, both internal (such as Parks infrastructure development) and external (such as oil and gas development).

At the meeting, AWA requested the following from the Parks division:

1. A copy of the environmental screening done for the High Island tower installation proposal and Parks' post-construction report on the impacts of the development.
2. An on-line publicly accessible database documenting proposals and developments in protected areas whenever the footprint of existing facilities would be extended.
3. A Memorandum of Understanding with conservation groups formalizing a public consultation process for such proposals.
4. Support for effective public consultation on new developments initiated by other government ministries, one example being new oil and gas proposals in Rumsey Natural Area.

