



Release Date: August 14, 2012

Castle Logging Decision Ignored Fish and Wildlife, and Alberta Public

Details Revealed in Newly-released Freedom of Information Documents

Newly-released documents reveal that the Alberta government's decision to go ahead with deeply unpopular clearcut logging in the Castle Special Place, west of Pincher Creek, Alberta – despite widespread public opposition – was made by Forestry staff in a seeming vacuum. Fish and Wildlife staff were given minimal opportunity for input, and documents show that input was ignored. Extensive public opposition to the logging, which saw rallies, a protest camp and even arrests, was also discounted.

These are some of the findings revealed in documents recently released under a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) application by Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA).

“This doesn't sound like the behaviour of a government that listens to Albertans. These documents point to an Alberta Forest Service that feels it can make its own decisions without listening to anybody else,” says AWA conservation specialist Nigel Douglas. “The decision has been made to clearcut log and nothing is going to stop that: never mind the impacts on water quality or grizzly habitat or sensitive fish habitat, and never mind the huge public opposition and even internal government concern.”

“It is shocking that the enormous outpouring of public opposition to the logging plans barely created a ripple in the Forest Division's plans,” says Gord Petersen of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition. “The documents show no record of the Castle as a Special Place, nor any mention of massive public opposition to the logging.”

“Local residents and conservation organizations have said for many years that the values of the Castle Special Place reach beyond simple timber value,” says Sarah Elmeligi of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. “In 1998, the Castle was protected to provide healthy headwaters and clean drinking water, wildlife habitat and low impact recreation opportunities. Now in 2012 Albertans are showing their concern that these values have not been adequately provided for. That's why Alberta Fish and Wildlife had concerns about logging this protected area; concerns that were ignored by the Forestry Division of SRD.”

Environmental groups will be meeting with Diana McQueen, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development on August 23 to discuss the Castle. There is some optimism that a renewed government commitment to openness and transparency will also reflect a renewed commitment to respecting the critical environmental values of the Castle.

The complete FOIP document can be seen at <http://albertawilderness.ca/issues/wildlands/areas-of-concern/castle/archive-1/2012-07-02-castle-logging-foip-information>

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