

## DIANE AND MIKE McIVOR – DOUBLE DEFENDERS OF WILDERNESS

By Andy Marshall

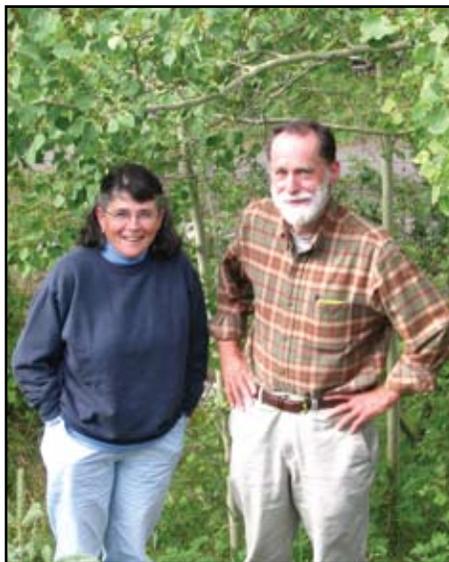
Active conservationists for four decades, Diane and Mike McIvor continue to perform their unwavering duet to protect the region around Banff and the Bow Corridor that they love so dearly.

On their first date skating on Vermilion Lake and even when they were married in 1969, they had little idea of the consuming commitment they were making to tackle the forces they believe undermine the area's values. "We were interested in nature. We never thought of ourselves as conservationists," says Diane.

But Parks Canada master plan hearings, growing pressure for major road construction and commercial development in the park, and, later, a Lake Louise ski resort proposal drew them into a process still absorbing the couple today. Since then, "it's been one big battle after another," says Mike, "but it's always been a joint effort." Now in their sixties, they speak enthusiastically of their campaigns, each sharing their views – Diane with her pleasant French-Canadian lilt and the white-bearded Mike with his clear, emphatic tones.

Inspired by Aileen Harmon from Banff, they've been dedicated members of the Bow Valley Naturalists since the late 1960s, with Mike serving several terms as president. Mike was also a Federation of Alberta Naturalists director for many years, including two terms as president, and an Alberta Wilderness Association director for 13 years.

Together they've conducted many bird and amphibian surveys in the Bow Valley. During the Banff Bow Valley Study in the mid-1990s, Mike chaired a community environmental committee and took a similar role with the provincial Bow Valley Special Places program. He also participated in several advisory committees for Banff National Park. To recognize their conservationist efforts, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association presented them in 2000 with the J. B. Harkin Conservation Award, named after Canada's first commissioner of national parks.



*Diane and Mike McIvor*

PHOTO: A. MARSHALL

While Mike has played the "front man," speaking with the media and making the public presentations, Diane has been at his side, prodding him on. "I'm a rabble-rouser," she says, smiling, "but standing up and expressing myself in front of many people, I don't like it." That hasn't stopped her from being French-language spokesperson for AWA, though. Because of their long-standing partnership in the conservation cause, it's fitting that they will be honoured jointly with a 2008 AWA Wilderness Defenders Award – the first time this has happened in the prestigious award's history.

The required combativeness may have come easier for Diane, born in La Sarre in northern Quebec, one of nine children. With her father the town's mayor and with so many siblings, she became used to heated debates around the supper table. Summer camps in Ontario taught her a love of the wilderness, and, right after graduation, she came out west to work at the park gates. A subsequent job at the Banff School of Fine Arts (now the Banff Centre) brought her into contact with Mike, who worked there for 30 years, many of them as grounds foreman.

Mike, born in Vancouver and raised and educated in Victoria, enjoyed a loving but more sedate upbringing. His

degree in English from the University of Victoria certainly reflected his interest in the power of language and likely helped in his subsequent writing and public speaking. But, he acknowledges, his role as an active conservation spokesman "was not something I did with comfort."

He credits Diane and her French-Canadian background for helping open his eyes and for prompting him to ask more questions on a whole range of topics. They made a conscious decision not to have children. "Our lives with the two of us have been very full," he says with understatement.

As those in conservationism know, success against powerful economic forces is hard to measure. Their consolation, says Diane, is their belief that things would have been a lot worse without their efforts. But there were some victories. Even though it took 24 years, protection of land around Mount Yamnuska is attributable to their unshakeable resolve.

"If you think something is going to happen overnight, you'd better do other things," says Mike, aware of the despair that can afflict those trying to make a difference. "We get pretty annoyed at losing some battles, but we somehow move on." Their target hasn't been so much the development interests, but rather Parks Canada, whenever it lacks the backbone to support its protection and preservation mandate. The Association for Mountain Parks Protection and Enjoyment, a tourism industry lobby group with a pristine-sounding name, has also been a thorn in their side.

Diane and Mike realize that they, and others following them, must stick to the conservationist mantra: "Endless pressure, endlessly applied." The McIvors have certainly done their part. 🍷

*Mike McIvor will be AWA's annual lecturer at the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture on November 14. Please join us for "Return Trip: At Home and Away." Details on back cover.*