

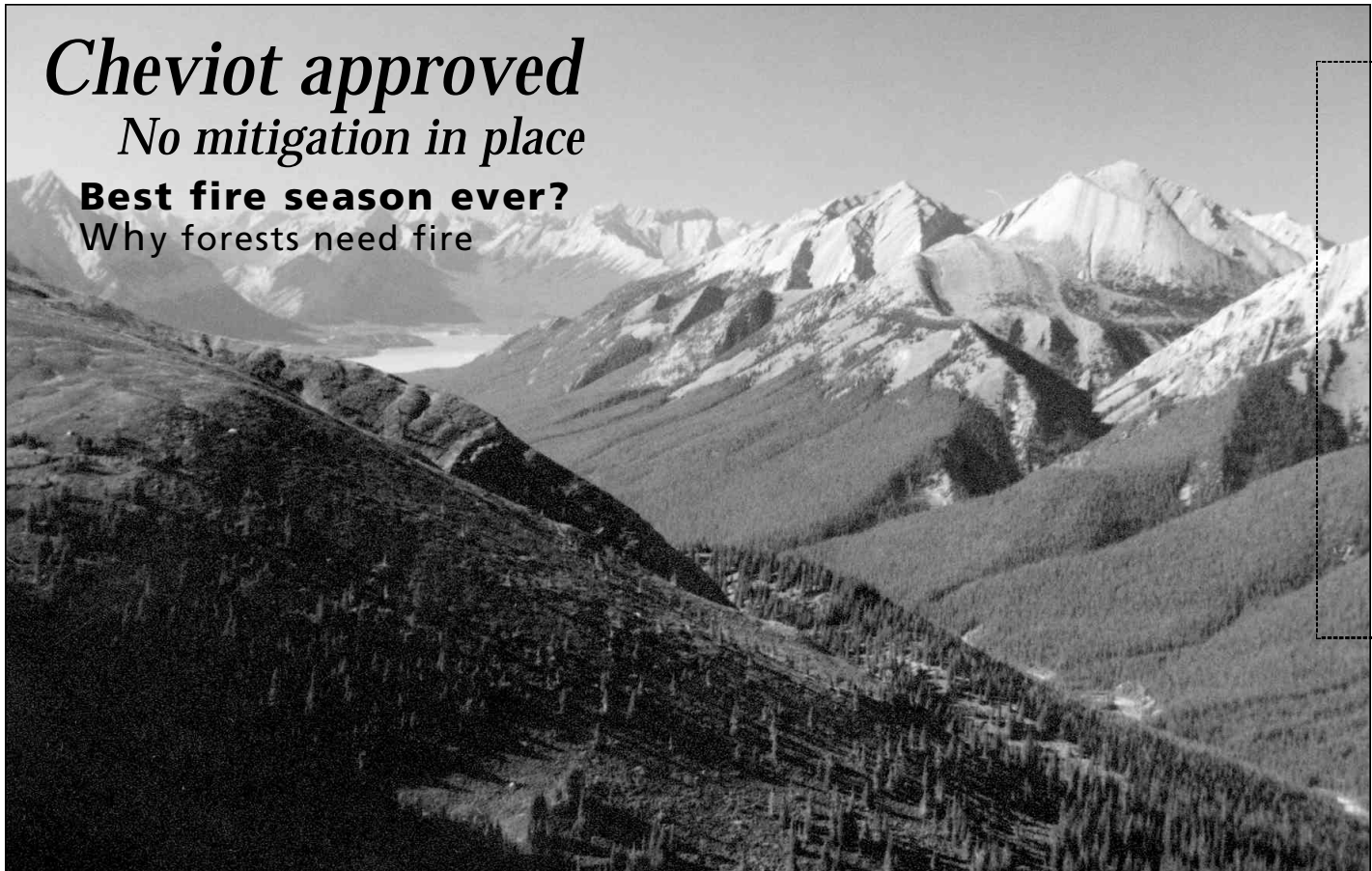


WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

The News Journal of the Alberta Wilderness Association

Cheviot approved No mitigation in place

**Best fire season ever?
Why forests need fire**



Eastern Slopes Watershed Valley of Lower Athabasca Reserve by R. P. Pharis

Alberta Watersheds — Death by a Thousand Cuts

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Director

This summer I was astounded to find, on the counter of the Caroline general store in west-central Alberta, a petition requesting lower gas prices for producer areas. Here in the heart of red-neckism where the National Energy Policy was most vociferously denounced, locals now want government intervention to protect them from higher gas rates. "Abit late to ask for an energy policy, don't you think?" I asked the clerk. "Where were you Carolinians during the last 10 years of NEB hearings when trillions of cubic feet of new gas got rubber-stamped for export?" The clerk gave me a bovine stare. I wanted to tell her she should forget about gas and start a petition now for water while there is still time, but the stare put me off.

Back in the fall of 1993, the AWA issued its members an Action Alert on oil and gas entitled "Oil and Gas in Alberta's Wilderness — The Death of a Thousand Cuts". In it we pointed out the precarious reserve situation for conventional stocks and warned that as petroleum supplies diminished, drilling would intensify in wild areas and remote habitats. We're in that desperate drilling situation now, much of it focused on the foothills where industry feels they might still strike a significant find. The foothills — that poor beleaguered strip of lovely rolling land between the prairies and the mountains — is being hit with a double whammy that will stagger it. Oil and gas exploration is concentrating a last ditch onslaught there. So are timber operators, aided now by new unwritten government policy designed to

eliminate old-growth forests and forests protecting our most productive watersheds.

Over-mature forest operators, like Spray Lake Sawmills that cut from the Red Deer watershed south to the Crowsnest and Sunpine Forest Products that log between the Red Deer and the North Saskatchewan drainage, are running out of timber and are being forced into higher elevation forests next to the mountains. These are, in the main, the forests that for decades were off-limits to clearcutting because of their steep slopes, thin soils, high erosion potentials and their value for watershed protection. Until 1980, these forests were depicted on government maps as Protection Forests — protected because they protected water quality and quantity for much of the dry

prairies. They are the headwaters of the great river systems that arise on the Eastern Slope — the Peace, Athabasca, and North and South Saskatchewan systems.

No Monitoring and No Research = No Data and No Worries

These over-mature mills have undergone years of (often heavily subsidized) mill expansion and have eaten themselves out of commercially viable timber. The Alberta government, ever accommodating of industry, has consequently come up with policy direction that sees old-growth and protection forests as dangerous. Such forests, particularly along the foothills, must be eliminated (by clearcutting) because they are disease riddled and ripe for conflagration. Arguments that they have withstood fire and pestilence for hundreds of years and are therefore stable are dismissed. No agency or independent scientific assessments are made of the actual state of these forests. Instead, industry assessments are taken at face value. No cost-benefit analyses of the range of values of these forest are done. Tourism and recreation count for nothing. Wildlife data is often cursory or non-existent. The public has no say, even though the forests, waters, land, and wildlife that will all be affected belong to them. After all, this is Alberta, where Big Daddy Gubberment knows what's best.

Heavy cutbacks to Alberta Environment in the 1980s and 1990s saw the elimination of the watershed section of the Alberta Forest Service. Forestry Canada used to maintain 13 watershed

Water Water Everywhere

There is an estimated 326,000,000 cubic miles of water on earth, covering 80% of the surface

Of this, 325,000,000 cubic miles are salty or ice

An estimated 1,000,000 cubic miles is fresh, liquid water

Of this, almost 100% is underground

An estimated 1/100th of 1% of the earth's water is available, surface water

Its estimated Canada has 8 to 9% of total available water

Canada's annual precipitation level is comparatively low with low aquifer recharge

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wildlands, wild rivers and wildlife.

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The Alberta Wilderness Association has five scheduled meetings of its provincial Executive and Board of Directors per year. Policies, issues, concerns, programs and strategies are discussed and decided at these meetings. Any interested AWA members are welcome to attend as guests. Please contact the provincial office, at 283-2025, to get confirmation of the date and location of the meetings, as well as to carpool.





Cheviot Coal Mine Recommendation a Tragic Setback

...there would be significant, adverse environmental effects on the terrain, soils, migratory song birds, harlequin ducks, grizzly bears, aboriginal peoples' traditional use of the area, and fish habitat.

AWA, CNF, CPAWS, JEA and Pembina Institute News Release

On September 12, 2000 the federal-provincial Joint Review Panel recommended to approve the huge Cheviot open-pit coal mine. Ben Gadd, author of the *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, and local, regional, and national conservation organizations are describing the action as a travesty. However, they are not surprised as it is the same panel members who in June 1997 recommended approving the mine. As well, they say during this year's supplemental hearing, the panel was clearly not interested in considering alternative locations to mine coal for export, even though the other locations are also held by the same parent companies. Alberta's former premier, Peter Lougheed, chairs the Board for Alberta based Luscar Ltd., one of two parent companies proposing the mine,

The mine is planned for southwest of Hinton, Alberta, high in the Rocky Mountains adjacent to Jasper National Park. The proposed mine would produce coal solely for export for steel making. The supplemental review and hearing were held after a coalition of five conservation organizations won a lawsuit in April 1999 against the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the panel, and the applicant for not following the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA) requirements when first reviewing the mine application.

The conclusions in the new report are supplemental to those of the first, and together they find that there would be significant, adverse environmental effects on the terrain, soils, migratory song birds, harlequin ducks, grizzly bears, aboriginal peoples' traditional use of the area, and fish and fish habitat. However, the conservation organizations point out that the

new report, like the first, either concludes the permanent harm is justifiable or assumes that mitigation is possible and will be figured out some time in the future after the development starts, in the end rendering the harm insignificant. At both hearings, the company refused to answer direct questions asking what total amount they have budgeted for mitigation and asking for a list of mitigation measures that they are committed to implementing.

"With that approach, any development can be approved, no matter the environmental losses," concludes Sam Gunsch of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. "However, the intent of CEAA is for environmental impacts, the efficacy of mitigation measures, and alternatives to the development to be considered prior to recommending whether or not it should be approved."

The panel's new recommendations

now go forward to the federal Cabinet for a decision. The court orders that struck down the first of two authorizations for the mine and prevent the company from acting on the second remain in effect until Cabinet has made a decision. The Ministers of Environment and Fisheries and Oceans will have to consider whether or not to issue authorizations that would in effect allow the company to harm the ecological integrity of Jasper National Park and to destroy eight streams that form the habitat for the endangered bull trout. The 1999 Federal Court decision also ruled that the proposed permanent dumping of millions of tons of waste rock from mining onto the area's migratory bird habitat would not comply with the Migratory Bird Convention Act.

"I had said at the outset that the mine would be an environmental catastrophe and the hearing again confirmed that, especially when Parks Canada stood up and said the mine clearly threatens Jasper National Park," exclaimed a frustrated Ben Gadd. "With UNESCO having asked Canada to work on alternatives to this mine, it's a sad indictment of Canada's environmental record when a hearing panel won't do

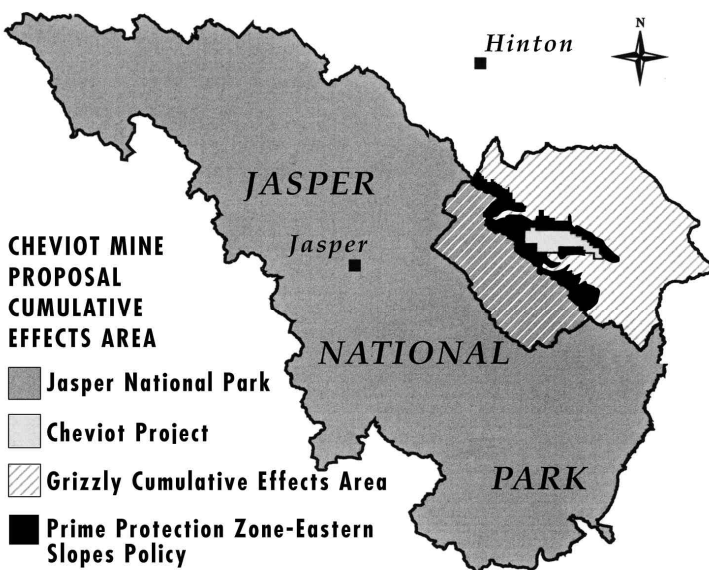
that this site and three others adjacent to the park be protected as secure habitat for grizzly bears. In doing so, they also explained that grizzly bears are an umbrella species. Protection of habitat to ensure their survival likewise conserves a host of other wildlife "under the umbrella." Grizzly bears are also an indicator of the ecological health of a region.

"The panel's reports agree that there will be significant, irreparable harm caused by the mine, but say its justifiable. How? Have we run out of coal for export?" questions Dianne Pachal, conservation manager with the Alberta Wilderness Association. "The coal market expert at this year's hearing showed the opposite, concluding that the mine likely won't be built. Luscar has already indicated that production of more coal from its Line Creek mine in southeast B.C. is an option, should the export market for western Canadian coal pick up."

"Issuing an approval for the mine with the hope that the mine will not happen anyhow is still a bad scenario for the region," comments Sam Gunsch of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. "As long as a permit for a mine remains there, it will be a road-block to better protection for wildlife, Jasper, and an enlarged provincial park, just as the present coal lease held back consideration of the area for park establishment under Alberta's Special Places 2000 program."

The Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre first wrote Canada's ambassador to UNESCO in December 1997 to express the World Heritage Committee's serious concerns over the impact the mine would have on Jasper National Park, a part of the Canadian Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site. The Committee also asked the Canadian government to consult with Alberta on alternative sites for the mine. The Committee has continued to monitor the situation.

Cardinal River Coals Ltd., the joint venture company planning the Cheviot mine, is comprised of Pittsburg-based Consolidated Coal, the largest coal mining company in the U.S., and Luscar. They plan to dig an open pit mine consisting of 26 huge pits which conservation organizations maintain will result in a devastated landscape stretching 23 kilometres long and up to 10 kilometres wide near tree-line in the Rockies. Roughly 25 tonnes of the mountain landscape will be excavated for every tonne of coal removed, with much of this waste rock then dumped on the surrounding landscape and left filling stream valleys of the Cardinal Divide and Mountain Park area.



CHEVIOT MINE PROPOSAL

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS AREA

Jasper National Park

Cheviot Project

Grizzly Cumulative Effects Area

Prime Protection Zone-Eastern Slopes Policy

just that, and especially when the parent company has said it has alternatives."

During this year's hearing, Parks Canada told the panel they were even more concerned about the negative impact the mine would have on the ecological integrity of Jasper National Park, a World Heritage Site, than at the time of the first hearing. They reported that based on the panel's first conclusions and recommendations in 1997, they could not assure Canadians that grizzly bears would continue to exist in the area, and therefore could not assure that the national park mandate could be met. Their grizzly bear expert recommended the western third of the mine not be allowed to proceed due to the area's significance for grizzly bear habitat. Parks Canada recommended instead

They plan to dig an open pit mine consisting of 26 huge pits ... resulting in a devastated landscape stretching 23 km long and up to 10 km wide near tree-line in the Rockies.

WATERSHEDS Continued from page 1

researchers on the Eastern Slope. Last year they had 1/2 of one position. During the summer of 2000, southeastern Alberta and southern Saskatchewan are once again in drought. The specter of the Meridian dam on the South Saskatchewan and the Dunvegan dam on the Peace are again raising ugly heads. Still, no one in officialdom is concerned about watershed protection. In an August 2000 letter to the AWA, Premier Ralph Klein says he is confident that further cutting in the headwaters of the Oldman River will have no negative consequences.

Oldman River Headwaters

Spray Lake Sawmills of Cochrane recently swallowed up Cowley Forest Products in the Crowsnest area, extending Spray Lake's cutting circle well south of Kananaskis Country and making for very expensive hauling. In a July meeting with the AWA, it came out that Spray Lake is in a dire wood-supply situation and is looking at a 90,000 cubic metre shortfall during 2000/2001. The company is going after economically marginal timber at the south end of its new cutting area, in the headwaters of the Oldman River. In order to save what they claim will be \$300,000, they asked for and got approval from Patrick Guidera, regional manager of the Forest Service, to open a haul road through Critical Wildlife Habitat — prime grizzly territory between South Kananaskis Country and the Upper Oldman. Permission was given despite months of eloquent pleading by regional wildlife biologists that this area should be left intact for wildlife and that an alternative (20 km longer) haul road existed outside of Kananaskis Country. The fear is that once a new north-south road corridor is opened west of the Forestry Trunk Road, it will become yet another recreational roadway that will alienate wildlife for years to come. Patrick Guidera's memoed response, obtained through Freedom of Information, was that the Natural Resources Services people (Fish and Wildlife) were trying to impose "unreasonable and senseless control ... on industry." Five days after issuing this memo, Patrick Guidera notified Spray Lake of their road approval.

In the decision to approve the Spray Lake haul road, the Freedom of Information package revealed a deliberate attempt to keep the public from being informed. Even though the area is critical for wildlife, the interests of industry came first. Even though the forests to be cut are former Protection Forests, in the headwaters of the province's most critical watershed, watershed considerations played no obvious role in decisions to road and cut. Forests to the north and south are already about 50 % cut, but this apparently has no bearing on further logging.

Cripple Creek in the North Saskatchewan Headwaters

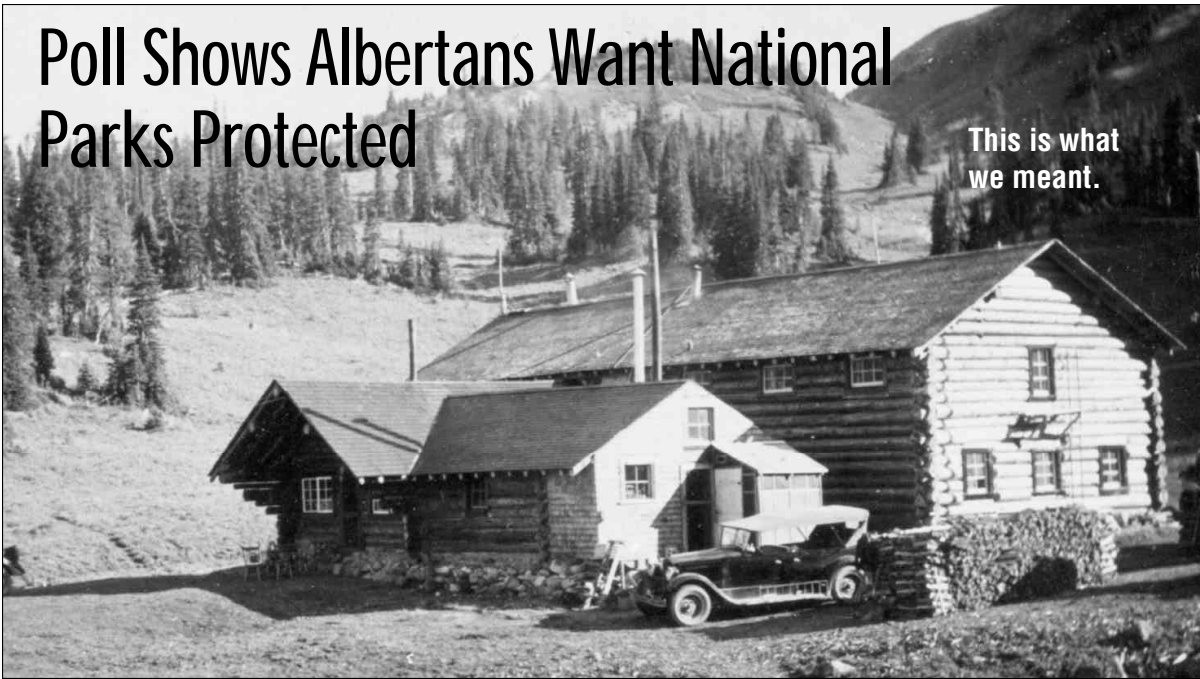
Under the Eastern Slopes Policy, watershed management is the highest priority. You wouldn't know it at Cripple Creek. This little drainage arises against the rugged Ram Range and flows into the Ram River, then on to the North Saskatchewan. It has the misfortune to be part of the Sunpine FMA, even though it is cited in government research documents from 1961 onwards as having severe limitations to commercial forest

Continued on page 4



Poll Shows Albertans Want National Parks Protected

This is what we meant.



Sunshine Meadows circa 1940.

Parks Are for Nature and Wildlife, not Golf, Skiing, Shops

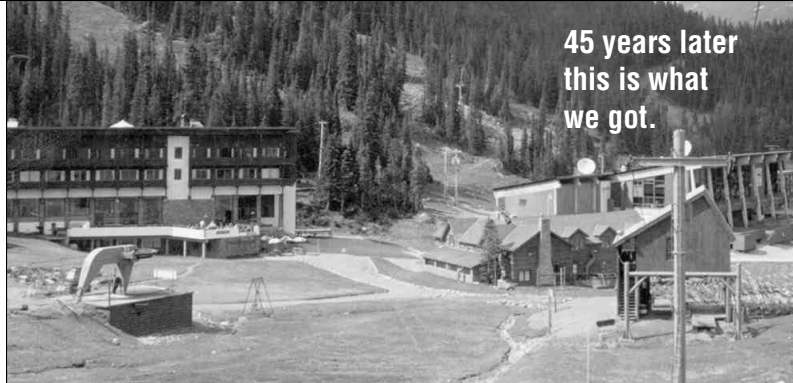
By Ed Struzik

A majority of Albertans value their national parks more for wildlife and wilderness protection than for golf, skiing, or shopping, according to a poll commissioned and designed by Angus Reid. And in what may be a blow to proponents of ski hill expansions, the poll suggests only six per cent of adult Albertans believe there is a need to expand downhill skiing facilities in Banff National Park.

A hefty majority of Calgarians — and an even slightly larger majority of Albertans — believe the national parks are more about protecting wildlife and wilderness and less about tourism and recreation, the poll reported.

Fully 69 per cent of Calgarians indicate Banff ski hill development is “about right” as it now stands, while another 17 per cent believe there’s already “too much” development. Only nine per cent think there is “too little.”

“It’s interesting to see that even in Calgary, there’s not much difference of opinion on the level of development in the parks,” says Angus Reid Vice-President Marc Henry.



45 years later this is what we got.

Sunshine Village circa 1985.

Among Albertans, 66 per cent thought Banff ski hill development was “about right,” and 21 per cent think there is “too much,” while only six per cent think there is “too little”. There’s no measure of intensity here; it simply indicates which way people tip in the balance,” Henry said. “But it’s pretty clear, when it comes to any future ski hill expansions, even Calgarians, the biggest users of the hills, are going to want to know the impact on wildlife.”

The Angus Reid poll of 802 Albertans conducted July 20-26, 2000, was not commissioned by any organization; rather, the results were drawn from the group’s quarterly Report on Alberta. The results are considered accurate within 3.5 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

Alberta is home to five national parks — Elk Island, Jasper, Banff, Waterton, and Wood Buffalo, Canada’s largest national park. Albertans from all corners of the province seem to feel much the same way about the parks. Three out of four people surveyed consider protecting wilderness, learning more about the environment, and seeing wildlife as the most important roles of a park.

“When asked to choose between two alternative roles for national parks, it’s clear that a full majority of Albertans appear to view national parks more for protecting wilderness and wildlife, learning about the environment, hiking, and camping than for shopping, golfing, and skiing,” said Henry.

Albertans apparently know what

they’re talking about. The survey suggests 60 per cent of Albertans have visited one of the five national parks in the last year. Only three per cent said they have never visited one.

The results may be good news for Heritage Minister Sheila Copps, who angered commercial developers when she vowed to allow no more ski hills, golf courses, or other major developments in the parks. Copps has thrown her political weight behind a federal task force that recently recommended sweeping changes in the way national parks are run. The 11-person task force warned that virtually all of Canada’s 39 national parks suffer from overuse, pollution, invasion of exotic species, and outside developments such as dams, forestry projects, and agriculture.

The panel concluded that if Parks Canada “continues on its current path, we risk losing, for all time, access to the experience of protected nature, the wilderness we so much cherish.” Copps vowed to move quickly in adopting many of the panel’s 127 recommendations.

Alan Latourelle, chief administrative officer for Parks Canada, says an action plan will be made public some time in the fall. “We’re very pleased with the results of this survey,” Latourelle said in an interview. “There is really no doubt that there is considerable community and public support in Canada and in Alberta for an action plan that emphasizes wilderness protection over commercial development.”

Environmentalists suggested the survey makes it clear how Albertans feel about development in the parks. “Albertans have told their governments for decades that protecting wilderness and wildlife habitat in our national parks is their top priority,” said Sam Gunsch, spokesperson for Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. “We all want to save them for future generations, to go camping and hiking in Banff and Jasper and still be able to appreciate these natural treasures and their wildlife. Parks Canada tries to protect parks from commercial pressures, but some businesses, aided by the provincial government, still keep pushing expansions.”

This article appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*, August 19, 2000.

WATERSHED *Continued from page 3*

operations and high values for watershed protection. In 1997 Sunpine applied to cut Cripple Creek utilizing 154 clearcut blocks, several more than a kilometre long. Sunpine’s own data shows Cripple Creek to have some of the oldest trees in the province — almost 100 per cent being 120 to 330 years. The company argued that the forest was heavily infected with mistletoe and canker. The Forest Service would provide no independent assessment, even though one was asked for several times. Sunpine argued that its usual stumpage rate of \$1.40/cubic metre (a rate that is almost 100 per cent less than the comparable U.S. stumpage rate) should be reduced by 50 per cent because of timber defect. A group of 25 conservationists and scientists visited Cripple Creek for two days in August 1998 and could find no evidence of canker or mistletoe. The Cripple Creek forest seemed the picture of health and firmness. All who saw it agreed that it was an outstanding watershed.

Without public input, Patrick Guidera approved logging on Cripple

Federal Water Protection

Canada’s 1970 Water Act is outdated and offers no integrated system to protect water supplies. Research and policy to date have focused on water quality, not supply. Few Canadian communities have even mapped their watersheds or aquifers. In this land with one of the largest supplies of available fresh water, almost all Canadians now must drink filtered, treated water. This is in contrast to New York, which recognized the long-term costs of filtering for that huge city and instead bought up its watershed in order to protect it. Victoria, B.C. had the foresight in 1930 to purchase its watershed. Vancouver has so far protected three catchments. In Alberta, there is no perceptible concern by any of its cities for the quality or quantity of their water supply.

Creek’s steep slope, thin-soiled old forests during 1998-99. In 2000, Sunpine came back for approval to greatly accelerate the logging of Cripple Creek, this time arguing that their original cutting plan needed to be amended to accommodate “significant blow down concerns due to the advanced age of the timber.” Funny how these concerns were not a part of the 1997 cutting application. Funny how the Forest Service made no earlier mention of them. Funny how none of the 25 of us visiting the site in 1998 saw abnormal blow down. Funny how it only showed

up after two winters of cutting. As I write, I do not know if Sunpine’s June 22, 2000 submission is approved, but based on decisions to put a haul road in the Upper Oldman and previous Cripple Creek clearcutting, it will be.

Professional Foresters’ Decisions
Foresters of any rank in Alberta join the Registered Professional Foresters’ Association. Both Patrick Guidera as Regional Manager of the Parkland Region and his Edmonton boss, Cliff Henderson, head of the Lands and Forest Service, are RPFs. Their guiding

Code of Ethics states that RPFs shall practice good forest stewardship, inform the public, recognize the intrinsic value of a healthy forest, minimize impacts that will imperil forest resources, and use sound ecological principles as part of the basis for management decisions. I submit that such principles and guidelines are not being applied in Alberta. Not by either of these two men. I submit that ecological integrity, watershed, and wildlife interests play little or no part in decisions to log Critical Wildlife Habitat, old-growth and protection forests along our Eastern Slope. I submit that the public is being deliberately excluded from all important decisions about its water, forests, and wildlife.

Concerned?
You certainly should be. Write to Premier Klein with a copy to your MLA. Think about activism. Your cheap conventional energy resources are almost a thing of the past. Are you going to let your water go the same way?



ENDANGERED SPECIES ACTION ALERT

Canada has **no** legislation to protect its 352 species at risk of extinction.

Now is a particularly opportune time to contact your Member of Parliament about the dire need for action at the political level to protect Canada's growing number of endangered species. The Species at Risk Act (SARA) — introduced into the House of Commons on April 11, 2000 — is the hot environmental ticket for this fall's discussions. This is the perfect opportunity for you to jump into the discussion over whether or not Canada will have a strong, effective Species at Risk Act. Bill C-33 is unacceptably weak in several key areas, such as habitat protection and scientific listing.

Please call your MP. Tell him or her that you want an Act that:

- makes the protection of an endangered species' habitat mandatory in areas of federal jurisdiction;
- lets scientists, not politicians, determine what species are endangered; and
- provides protection for species that travel across international boundaries (monarch butterflies and grizzly bears, to name two) so that Canada can keep its international obligations to protect species at risk.



This is the perfect opportunity for you to jump into the discussion

Hegreberg pointed to Montana's Swan Valley as an example of extractive industries and grizzly bears learning to coexist. Plum Creek Timber Company holds vast holdings in the scenic, heavily wooded valley that is also home to numerous grizzlies.

To get along with the bears, the company and government biologists worked out designated times and places both for harvest and for grizzly movements.

"Plum Creek is making a profit and at the same time protecting grizzly bears," Hegreberg said. Still he would like to see the bear taken off the list of species protected by the law. "The listing in and of itself is used as a hammer to stop things from happening," things such as timber harvest and roadbuilding, he said.

While solutions have been worked out in some cases, the bear's protected status has cost money and jobs. "It's made it much more costly" to cut timber in grizzly country, mostly by reducing the number of logging roads, Hegreberg said.

The state wildlife agency also wants the grizzly taken off the protected list, Aasheim said, explaining that state officials believe they can do a better job of managing the bear and the complicated politics surrounding it. Many environmental groups are well-financed, well-lawyered, and prepared to fight any such step.

"If we want to have grizzlies here, we have to give up something in ease and comfort," said David Ellenberger, spokesman for the Sierra Club Grizzly Bear Recovery Project. "If we hadn't had the protections ... we would be talking about grizzly bears in the past tense here in the Northern Rockies."

Ellenberger cited scientific reports that say a population of about 2,000 to 3,000 grizzlies in several interconnected ecosystems are necessary to ensure the bear's long-term survival in the lower 48.

Servheen said any end of protection for the grizzlies here is years away—if it comes at all. Regardless of legal status, he said, the future of the grizzlies depends on people, on the decisions we make as a society and as individuals. "The bottom line is that the people who live and work and recreate in grizzly bear habitat have to own those bears," he said. "They have to feel good about having them there. It's a long-term commitment ... If we start to slip, we will see the grizzly bear start to slip as well." 🐻

This article appeared in the *Bozeman Chronicle*, Saturday, July 29, 2000.

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A DIFFERENCE

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Grizzly Bears Celebrate 25 Years of U.S. Federal Protection

By Scott McMillion

Grizzly bears didn't know anything about it, but they celebrated their 25th year on the list of creatures and plants protected under the U.S. federal Endangered Species Act.

Under the protection of the law, the grizzlies have rebounded from historic low numbers in Montana. They retain a fearsome reputation and from time to time they live up to it, mauling hikers or hunters and on extremely rare occasions killing and eating people. Still, they are immensely popular.

The grizzlies symbolize wildness, wilderness, and the West. They are the official state animal and the University of Montana's mascot. But their future remains uncertain, with some people arguing the bears no longer need protection by the law. "As powerful as this animal is, we hold its fate in our hands," observed Hank Fischer, northern Rockies representative of the environmental group Defenders of Wildlife.

When the Lewis and Clark Expedition came to the West almost 200 years ago, there were between 50,000 and 100,000 grizzlies in the territory ultimately mapped into the lower 48 states. By 1975, when the bear was officially listed as "threatened," the number had fallen to about 600, almost all of them in Montana and Wyoming. Only a small fraction were breeding-age females.

The Endangered Species Act was only 2 years old in 1975 and its protections had been applied to only a handful of species. Montana officials fought hard against listing the grizzly. Now, officials at the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks concede the federal protections have helped the bear. "We would agree, yes," said Ron Aasheim, FWP spokesman. "The Endangered Species Act raised the bear's profile."

Bear numbers in the lower 48 states

have at least doubled over the past 25 years. Chris Servheen, grizzly bear recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said there are at least 1,200 grizzlies now wandering Montana, Wyoming, and slivers of Idaho and Washington—including at least 600 in the Yellowstone National Park ecosystem.

Some scientists dispute that figure, but there is no disputing the fact that there are more grizzlies in the region and that they are showing up in places where they haven't been seen for decades. Servheen, too, attributes much of the improvement to the Endangered Species Act, saying, "I don't think there's any doubt about it."

Protecting the grizzly has forced some changes. They include discouraging the bears from contact with people by closing or bearproofing dumps and cleaning up backcountry campsites that were attracting bears to trouble. Sheep grazing in core grizzly habitat has been eliminated. Roadbuilding and logging methods have been changed to improve habitat. And potential poachers have been fined up to \$100,000 for needless killing of a grizzly.

The changes would not have been possible without the teeth in the law, many people believe. "Nobody can say for sure whether we would have been able to achieve those changes without the listing," said Chris Smith, FWP's chief of staff. "It unquestionably changed forest practices and road densities in a way that increased habitat and probably bear numbers."

Grizzly management remains one of the most contentious issues in the state, but that has led to some creative solutions. "The listing of the bear certainly caused people to come together to find solutions, to protect the bear and still maintain land uses," said Cary Hegreberg, executive vice-president of the Montana Wood Products Association.



2000; The Best Fire Season Ever?

By George Wuerthner

The fire-fighting juggernaut continues to exploit the recent rash of western wildfires. I have yet to see any serious discussion in the media about the positive value of fires to the western ecosystem, nor anyone questioning whether it's even possible to halt these blazes.

Over and over again the media portrays fires as some kind of catastrophic disaster. Yet wildfires are to western ecosystems what rain is to a tropical rainforest. They are necessary for the continued health and existence of these ecosystems. The use of pejorative statements, like the fires "destroyed" so many acres of land or wildfires continue to "threaten" forests, clearly portrays wildfires in a negative light. Yet wildfires do anything but destroy a landscape. Indeed, they are one of the major ecological forces that rejuvenate western ecosystems. In fact, it is large blazes that burn hundreds of thousands of acres at a time that do the bulk of forest rejuvenation work. Small "controlled" fires are almost meaningless from an ecological perspective. We need big fires.

Wildfires cleanse the forest of disease and insects. They thin forest stands. They recycle nutrients. They create snags that are homes for thousands of species. When such snags fall into streams, they provide bank stability and fish habitat. We couldn't pay enough or hire enough people to do all these positive things in our forests that fires are doing for free. In short, our western ecosystems need wildfires and



Burned forest near Rocky Mountain House (1997) by R. P. Pharis

attempts to suppress them are like killing predators thinking we are helping the deer herds.

Furthermore, there is a huge misconception perpetuated by the fire fighting junta that gives people the impression that all fires can be contained or suppressed. In fact, a great deal of fire research, plus experience over the decades has shown over and over again that under conditions of extreme drought and high winds — the very conditions that drove all the large fires in the West this year — fire suppression is impossible. It is not fuel that creates large fires, but periodic drought.

Our puny efforts to suppress large blazes can't change the climatic conditions that have spawned these fires, and at best we can only hope to deflect blazes away from towns or other important property. We might as well dump dollar bills on the blazes as fire retardant or water, for nothing we can do will stop such flames until the conditions that allow for the fires to burn are altered, typically a change in the weather. How often do we hear how fire fighters finally got the fire under "control" after it rained or snowed? Did the fire fighters put out the fire? Or are they taking credit for what was going to

happen anyway?

Spending any money and risking any lives trying to stop these fires is as futile as standing at the edge of the beach with your hands up to stop an incoming tide. The tide will simply flow around you, and only go back out when it's time to reverse the flood.

The only fire suppression that should occur is to protect communities and lives. But even here one has to question where government responsibility for protection of life and property ends and individuals must bear the consequences for their own unwise decisions. It doesn't take a genius to know if you build a home in the middle of a forest that is fire prone, you are gambling with your property. Spending tax dollars to protect isolated cabins and homes built in the midst of fire-prone landscapes is no different than building houses in the flood plains of rivers or condos on hurricane-prone Atlantic coast barrier islands.

There will undoubtedly be members of the timber industry and politicians set on increased exploitation of our forests that will use these fires as an opportunity to argue for more timber harvest. But logging does not reduce fire hazard; indeed, there is quite a bit of fire research literature that suggests that logging can increase fire hazards by opening up forests to more rapid drying and greater wind circulation, accelerating fire spread by exaggerating the effects of drought and wind. Unless we are willing to remove all trees over millions of acres, logging will only exacerbate fire conditions, not help.

Rather than characterize this summer as the "worst" fire season in recent history, a more enlightened and informed perspective would call it the best fire season in a long time. ☞

George Wuerthner is an ecologist and the author of 24 books on environmental and conservation subjects. He lives in Eugene, Oregon.

Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition Adopts 'Zero Tolerance' Policy

CCWC News Release

The Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition (CCWC), a non-profit conservation organization based in Pincher Creek, Alberta, Canada, announced that it has adopted a 'Zero Tolerance' policy with respect to all new developments within the 1,000 km² proposed Castle Wilderness. The Castle, located in southwestern Alberta, is unquestionably one of the most beautiful and environmentally significant areas in Alberta. Adjacent to Waterton Lakes National Park and Glacier National Park in Montana, the Castle plays a critically important role in protecting endangered transboundary wildlife species and the ecological integrity of both parks. The Castle has also been identified as being an especially important area within the Yellowstone to Yukon bioregion.

Despite nearly 30 years of citizen efforts to persuade the government of Alberta to legislatively protect the Castle as a wilderness area, the Castle remains open for business. The natural-gas rich Waterton gas field overlaps the Castle and as a result the area has been extensively developed by the oil and gas industry, particularly by Shell Canada Limited. Already over 140 wells have been drilled in the area and more are currently being proposed. The Castle's extensive old-growth forests have also

attracted the attention of the forest industry and large areas of the Castle have been subjected to wide-spread clear-cutting. Intensive recreational activity and developments are also seriously damaging the Castle.

Mike Sawyer, campaign coordinator for the CCWC, stated, "The cumulative impacts of these past development activities has seriously compromised the ecological integrity of the Castle and, in turn, Waterton Lakes National Park. In the absence of any indication that the Alberta government or industry are prepared to take the steps necessary to protect the Castle, the CCWC has no choice but to adopt a tough 'Zero Tolerance' policy on any new threats to the region."

"CCWC's new policy will mean that the 350-member organization will vigorously oppose all new oil and gas, forestry, recreational, and agricultural developments that are proposed within the Castle", said James Tweedie, president of the CCWC. "We are hopeful that this aggressive new policy will create an incentive for government and industry to expeditiously move towards protecting the Castle Wilderness," added Tweedie.

The CCWC's position that the Castle is threatened is based on sound science and is supported by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) that,

in a recent decision report, indicated that it has accepted that significant regional cumulative environmental impacts have occurred within the Castle and that the biological thresholds for some sensitive species (i.e. grizzly bear) may have been exceeded.

"The 'Zero Tolerance' policy is in effect immediately," stated Mike Sawyer. "In fact, in August, the CCWC filed objections with the AEUB about three development applications that Shell Canada Limited currently has before the Board and the CCWC has requested that public hearings be held before Shell's applications can be approved. Cumulative effects issues and public safety will be the focus of those hearings," said Sawyer.

Under its 'Zero Tolerance' policy the CCWC will be initiating actions against the unsustainable forest harvesting activities of Atlas Lumber of the Crownsnest Pass, Alberta and Spray Lakes Sawmills of Cochrane, Alberta. Any new on-hill housing developments at the Castle Mountain Resort, an existing ski hill development in the Castle, will also be challenged. ☞



Cast Creek clearcut, (1997) Castle Wilderness by J. Brubaker

AWA Opposes Wood Buffalo Park Road



Proposed winter road site through Wood Buffalo Park by Cliff Wallis

The Town of Fort Smith has proposed a 118-kilometre winter road on a southwesterly route from Fort Smith in the NWT through Wood Buffalo National Park into Alberta. The town is currently served by two roads: an existing winter road, shorter and faster than the proposed route, goes south to Edmonton through the park via Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray. The town also has an all-season road/highway route that takes only 1.8 hours longer in travel time to Edmonton than the proposed winter road.

Why is this road proposed then, given the existing transportation routes? It is the "thin edge of the wedge" of Fort Smith's lobby to build an all-season road

crossing the full north-south length of the park. The town's mayor publicly stated last fall that getting Parks Canada to approve this winter road was only the first step to upgrading the route to an all-season road, to increase tourism traffic to Fort Smith by making it part of a loop from Alberta through the park into the NWT (estimated construction cost \$25-\$40 million).

An Environmental Assessment (EA) draft of only the winter road has been released, which Parks Canada accepted public comment on until September 2, 2000. Parks Canada will make a decision on the road in mid-September.

Below is AWA's letter to Parks Canada.

Dear Sir/Madam:

I have written a personal letter on the subject but this letter opposing the proposed winter road through Wood Buffalo National Park is being addressed as President of the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA).

The AWA opposes this proposed road through Wood Buffalo National Park as there are already established road links that serve communities around the park, including an all-weather northern route from Hay River and a winter road from Fort McMurray. The negative impacts far outweigh any minor economic or social benefits that might be received by the communities.

The AWA is of the opinion that the proposed road contravenes both the letter and the spirit of national parks policy and legislation as well as the recommendations from the Ecological Integrity Panel that have been endorsed by the Heritage Minister, the Hon. Sheila Copps.

Wood Buffalo National Park is a flagship protected area and is vital in conserving a large unfragmented, ecologically intact boreal forest ecosystem. Building another road would negatively impact on the important wilderness values in this part of the park. The AWA believes that any money spent on the road could be far better spent on park management or in other ways to benefit the local community.

The stated objective by the mayor of Fort Smith is to get an all-season road along this route. The environmental impact assessment is inadequate due to its lack of consideration of the full impacts of this proposal, including the all-season road.

A full CEAA review is required. Any assessment must clearly demonstrate the need for the project and address: a. alternatives, b. filling in information gaps, c. a cumulative effects assessment. Many specific reasons why this road should not be approved are contained in the draft Environmental Assessment and national parks policy and legislation.

One of the AWA's biggest concerns is that the opening of the road would create a significant corridor for expanded movement of bison from the park, increasing the risk of contact with domestic livestock in Alberta. Some senior members of the cattle industry have renewed calls for the slaughter of all the park bison as a result of this road proposal.

This is not an existing road. This former logging road was actually abandoned 40 years ago and portions are completely regrown with small trees and other natural vegetation. Parks policy states that "new roads and trails that constitute through routes designed to serve other than park purposes will not be considered." This road clearly is NOT designed for park purposes.

The AWA is asking Parks Canada and the Government of Canada to oppose this application and deny any permits for road construction.

Cliff Wallis, President
Alberta Wilderness Association

Activists Wanted

The AWA Board of Directors held their annual planning meeting on September 9, 2000 in Calgary. We welcomed our two new directors, Fred Vos and Richard Secord, both of Edmonton and our new staff member Jillian Tamblin. Jillian is based in Edmonton and will be managing the AWA's Northern Conservation Program.

The AWA Board has evolved over the past three years from a "hands-on" board to a governance board. While some board members still volunteer in advocacy campaigns and fund-raising, their board role is to govern and provide leadership to the AWA. The Board receives advice from members, activists and staff and, at the planning meeting each September, designs the strategic approach to the conservation outreach program for the following year. Based on this, the Northern and Southern Conservation Managers develop and carry out their annual conservation work plans, with assistance from volunteer committees and watchdogs in the field.

The directors recognize that some members and Alberta grassroots organizations feel that there is too little coordination between the work they are doing and the AWA leadership. The Board agreed that we would like to provide an opportunity for concerned individuals to grow and become more active in conservation on a wide variety of issues related to wilderness. This could be as simple as writing the occasional letter or as challenging as managing a campaign. To facilitate this, the AWA is developing new tools and implementing a new program targeted to members who would like to become more involved in the AWA's campaign work.

Voices from the Wild

Voices from the Wild will be a new feature in the *Wild Lands Advocate* providing our readers with brief updates on current work in the field. The objective is to improve communication and familiarize our members with the wide scope of AWA's conservation activities throughout the province. The internet will also become an important tool in our kit bag, facilitating wide distribution and use of our information through our website and e-mail.

Armchair Activist

It is the Board's wish that the AWA be able to adapt to the needs of our members and the situations that arise in the most effective and productive way. Hands-on tools such as "How to Design a Campaign" and "How to Write an Effective Letter" will be made available in our offices and electronically through our website. These tools will enable more people to get involved in a wider variety of wilderness protection issues even when AWA staff and volunteers are busy working on other campaigns. The Armchair Activist program will empower members to take a more active role, at whatever level they are comfortable. Complex issues will be boiled down into simple, accurate information. Volunteers will be encouraged to sign up for one or more of four activities:

1. **Letter of the Month.** Sample letters and background information will be sent out to the volunteers to use in the formulation of their own letters to appropriate government and industry officials.

2. **Telephone Rapid Response Team.** Where a quick response is needed, volunteers will phone their MLAs or MPs and deliver a simple one- or two-sentence message.
3. **Media Masters.** Volunteers write letters to the editors of their local newspapers and radio stations.
4. **Volunteer Stewards.** For those who want to get out of the armchair and visit a candidate protected area. Participants make at least one trip a year to a designated site and record their observations and concerns. Their notes are compiled by staff into annual State of the Wilderness and Voices from the Wild reports.

We will begin actively recruiting for Armchair Activists in the next couple of months. If you are interested in being part of this worthwhile project we would like to hear from you. Please write us at a.w.a@home.com, or call Ava at (403) 283-2025 to register.

Casino Planning Underway

The most lucrative fundraising efforts always seem to be the most demanding. The AWA is recruiting a minimum of 30 volunteers for our Calgary Casino December 10 and 11. No experience is necessary, just the ability to count to 10, smile, and stay awake. If this is the year you can help, call the Provincial Office and sign up today! If you can only do one thing for the AWA this year, choose this!

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Alberta Wilderness Association and the Alberta Wilderness Institute will be held in Calgary, November 18, 2000 at the Provincial Office. Please check the website or call the Provincial Office closer to the date for start time and program details. All members are welcome to attend.

Fax or Write that Letter

When writing your letters this month please note the changes to the government departments. Under the leadership of the Hon. Mike Cardinal, Alberta Resource Development now includes oil, natural gas, oil sands, coal/minerals, electricity, and forestry. Under the leadership of the Hon. Halvar Johnson, Alberta Environment includes air, fish and wildlife, forests, land, parks, water, and waste.

This month we urge you to write these two Ministers regarding the logging of the Upper Oldman, headwaters of the Oldman Dam, and the Federal Minister of Environment and your MP regarding the road through Wood Buffalo National Park and the Species at Risk Act. Send copies of your letters to the AWA Provincial Office so that we may have our own record of your support.

Award-Winning Cowboy Legend Also a Champion for Conservation



By John Geary

Alberta singer-songwriter Ian Tyson has earned many accolades throughout his career, but his most recent honour ranks as his most prestigious to date. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters announced Tyson will be inducted into the Canadian Broadcast Hall of Fame in November. In an exclusive interview granted to the Wildlands Advocate, Tyson says the announcement of this latest honour surprised him.

"It was right out of the blue," he says. "I knew nothing about it, and I'm quite honoured. Only three other musicians have received it — Anne Murray, Celine Dion, and Bryan Adams — so it ranks right up there."

Inductees into the Canadian music artist category of the Hall of Fame are recognized for outstanding talent and commitment, for enhancing Canadian culture, and for enriching the lives of Canadians through private radio. The official induction ceremony will take place November 14, during the CAB Gold Ribbon Awards Gala in Calgary.

Tyson will also entertain at the AWA Dinner and Auction, in addition to acting as the Master of Ceremonies for the evening. His performance on October 28 will not be the first time the cowboy balladeer has put his talents to use for conservation. While he is well known for his music, his conservation activities are not quite so well known.

One example of his involvement is his organization of the "Stop the Dam" rally in 1989, at the Oldman River. "I put together a little concert, and that's probably the biggest thing I've done for conservation," he said. "That was an important moment but a really disappointing one, because we lost that battle. I guess I realized after that, that the gains were going to be difficult to achieve. It received good coverage from the media and it was widely noted, but it had absolutely no effect on stopping the dam, whatsoever."

While that battle may have been lost, fighting it seems to have created some positive repercussions. Since that concert and the campaign against the Oldman dam, no other major dam has been built in Alberta.

Traditionally, people have not associated ranching with conservation, but that image is changing. As Tyson points out, being a rancher and being a conservationist are not mutually exclusive. "As a rancher, I consider myself a good steward of the land, and I work hard at it. I live on the land, and I have a lot of wildlife living on it and using it."

Providing a home for wildlife on his ranch is part of Tyson's contribution to a dream he would like to see become a reality. "My dream is to see the preservation of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains," he says. "Who knows what it's going to look like in 20 years? But it is savable at this point — because right now, it's still there."

One of the major factors that could contribute to the possible demise of Alberta's eastern slopes wilderness is the current urban sprawl taking place in Calgary. Tyson compares what is happening here to what happened in Denver in the latter third of the twentieth century ... and it is not a favourable comparison.

"Everything's been laid out in Denver over the last 20 years, a good illustration of how they ruined that place, but it doesn't seem to make any difference. The same thing is happening."

The answer to the problem is actually a fairly simple one. Tyson says it comes down to a matter of political will: we either choose to do it or not to do it. Tyson says each individual has to do the best he can for conservation and take heart in the small victories.

"That's what I'm doing — I'm just trying to have small, incremental gains, just do what I can. If we do not do that, the future is not a bright one for future generations. Here in Alberta, we have the affluence and the economy, so why can we not create the political will to have large areas of wildlife reserves? It is doable now. But when it's gone, it's gone for good — and it will never be back."

Wilderness Celebration 2000 With Jan Tyson

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Alberta Wilderness Association

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AWA Membership Campaign

We've set a goal of 2000 members in the year 2000. Our membership base gives us added clout for protecting Alberta's wilderness. Encourage your friends, neighbours, or co-workers to add their voice to the AWA.

The AWA remains Alberta's frontline advocacy organization advancing the establishment of protected areas, all done through the coordination of grassroots work with that done at the provincial and national levels. It has tenaciously striven for better public policy for the conservation, management, and ecologically sustainable use of all public lands, waters, and wildlife in Alberta.

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