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**Letter to the Editor****BIGHORN WILDLAND VICTIM OF THE ABSRD**

When you write a letter to the Alberta government expressing concerns about how the wilderness areas in the Eastern Slopes, specifically the Bighorn, are being managed, it ends up on the desk of Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Mike Cardinal. When it comes to wilderness preservation, this is like the fox guarding the hen house.

In replies from Cardinal to letters I have written regarding resource development proposals and the opening of the Bighorn to ATV abuse, I received his "take" on the intent of the government's own Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes.

In my mind this was an excellent document that outlined how wilderness preservation was to co-exist with commercial and resource development. It clearly outlined Prime Protection Zones in the slopes that would be exempt from resource development and entry of motorized vehicles.

But Cardinal writes, "It is not a regulatory document but provides a broad, regionally focused guide to resource development within the Eastern Slopes," and later, "It was designated to be flexible to allow consideration of a range of future proposals."

If Cardinal had been around when this policy was forged he would have discovered that his spin on its intent is vastly different from the view of hundreds of concerned citizens, researchers and the government's own staff, whose focus was the protection of sensitive landscapes, protection of critical wildlife zones, protection of watershed (the source of our clean water), and preserving for future generations some semblance of wilderness.

How is Alberta doing in the protection of wilderness and wildlands? In a recent report card on Laws Governing Canadian Parks and Protected Areas by environmental law professor David Boyd, Alberta received an "F" grade for effectiveness for protected area legislation. This is par for the course for Alberta, which has lagged behind all other provinces in the area of wilderness preservation.

Many of our provincial parks and so-called special places still have outstanding resource development leases that could be honoured at any time. The three wilderness areas – South Ghost, Siffleur and Whitegoat – are protected by legislation but they are postage-stamp size and likely only protected because there was nothing of value there that could be extracted.

Luckily, the national parks are under the capable control of the federal government. We have a golden opportunity to protect world-class wildlands for a rapidly growing and sustainable ecotourism industry, but we are mangling them with weak or non-existent legislation.

So who is Cardinal? Is this not the same man who re-opened the walleye fisheries on a lake where he owns a cabin against the recommendations of his own fisheries biologists? Is this the man who recently opened a hunting season on the grizzly even though they are classified by the government as "code blue," one level below the endangered species designation in Alberta, and he has no accurate estimation of how many grizzlies are living in Alberta? Is this not the same Mike Cardinal who caved in to the minority ATV lobby and threw open the Bighorn to "self-regulated" ATV access? Is this not the same Mike Cardinal who is actively encouraging the extraction of timber and oil and gas in the Bighorn?





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There is a disturbing theme running here – an elected official who does not respond to public opinion or listen to his own wildlife and fisheries biologists.

So what are Albertans doing about this? Not much, as far as I can see. The Bighorn Coalition, a group of stakeholders with a vested interest in protecting the wilderness aspect of the Bighorn, couldn't put aside their petty differences for the time it would take to boot resource companies and ATVs out of most of the Bighorn.

**- Don Wales, Red Deer**

