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## Wrapping Up The 2003 Bighorn Monitoring Field Season

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At the end of September Lara Smandych and I completed the last component of the 2003 field season for AWA's Bighorn Recreation Use and Monitoring Project. This was the first field season of several that aim to monitor the level and intensity of recreational activity in the Bighorn Wildland region adjacent to Banff and Jasper National Parks. We hoped that the project would document the extent of environmental damage here and create a research presence that would discourage illegal and inappropriate use.

Preliminary results suggest that our data will provide insight into how various types of recreational activity impact habitat quality and landscape connectivity at the regional scale. We are happy to announce that the project is off to a great start and that this year's field season has resulted in good baseline data that will be instrumental in assessing how such activity is affecting ecosystem health in the Bighorn Wildland.

Concentrating in one of the Forest Land Use Zone, the field season has included five trips ranging in length from four to ten days. We travelled by foot with backpacks for over 400 km, consumed more beans and instant mashed potatoes than I ever care to experience again, and established over 70 permanent data collection sites. We measured depths and cross-sectional areas of rut events, assessed vegetation and structural damage, examined trail widths and braiding, calculated slope, and noted evidence of animal activity. We also recorded encounters with illegal OHV use and noted the presence and absence of appropriate law enforcement personnel.

AWA has been very fortunate to have several volunteers join us in our stewardship and monitoring work over the course of these field trips. Without their willingness to participate and their hard work, we would not have succeeded in accomplishing as much as we did this summer. Thanks especially to volunteers Rod Burns, Steve Swettenham, Cheryl Smyth, Deb Code, Florian Ruecker, Dave Argument and Darren Bezushko. Two of AWA's directors, Heinz Unger and Ian Urquhart, also joined us on field trips and provided us with helpful suggestions on improving the project. Of course, the AWA Bighorn Monitoring Project would never have materialized without the incredible work done by Tamaini Snaith, former AWA conservation biologist, who generated the research proposal and completed the project design.

We hope that the positive experience we have had with the Bighorn Monitoring Project this year can be replicated for next year's field season. Although much work remains to be done for a project of this magnitude, we feel that such monitoring is essential in ensuring the protection of this spectacular piece of Alberta's wild heritage.

