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Bighorn Saved from Increased Helicopter Activity

The Municipal Planning Commission of Clearwater County upheld their decision last week to reject an increase in the number of flights by Icefield Helicopters (Rimrock Holdings Inc.) over the National Parks and sensitive areas of the Bighorn Wildland.

“We are very happy with the County’s decision,” says Lara Smandych, AWA conservation biologist. “Helicopters have no place in wilderness. We are particularly pleased that the basis for their decision recognized the importance of wilderness and included concerns regarding disturbance to wildlife and impacts of increased traffic into the backcountry.”

“It was an appropriate decision made on the part of Clearwater County to refuse Rimrock’s application,” says Herb Kariel, an expert on noise disturbance in recreational areas. “The noise from helicopter over flights greatly disturb and stress wildlife particularly during sensitive seasons. They also disrupt the solitude and wilderness experience of backcountry users.”

In Fall 2003, Rimrock Holdings Inc. applied to the Municipal Planning Commission of Clearwater County for the removal or relaxation of condition 13 (a), which restricts the number of helicopters the company uses to three six-passenger aircraft. They were notified in mid October by the county that their application had been refused. Rimrock then appealed this decision in late November and were given notification December 9th, 2003 that their application had again been denied.

AWA and local tourism operators want increased restrictions placed on heli-tourism operations over wilderness areas especially in the area of Bighorn Wildland, one of the last great wilderness areas in this province. AWA has been campaigning for formal protection of this area for more than 30 years and is pleased to find support from Clearwater County.

For more information, please contact Lara Smandych, AWA, at 403-283-2025 or visit www.AlbertaWilderness.ca

