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## Motorized Vehicles not Welcome in Whaleback

A very unwelcome and disturbing precedent has been set up with the assent to a new bill that proposes changes to protected areas: legislation to allow recreational motorized access in the newly protected areas of the Whaleback. The *Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act* proposes a modification to Heritage Rangeland legislation that would allow OHV and highway vehicle access, which is banned under current legislation.

Alberta Wilderness Association is opposed to any recreational motorized access in protected areas. The Whaleback is a rare and valuable area of Montane habitat that should be at the forefront of our protected areas network. It is crucial that some parts of the province are set aside where recreational motorized access is not allowed. This is what our protected areas are for, and their management plans should reflect this. AWA is also concerned that this legislation is proceeding when the management plan for the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland has not been finalized.

In May 1999, the Government of Alberta announced the protection of two areas within the Whaleback area of southern Alberta: the 20,778 ha Bob Creek Wildland and the 7,760 ha Black Creek Heritage Rangeland. The Whaleback represents the most extensive, least disturbed and least fragmented Montane landscape in Alberta. It is extremely important for animals such as grizzly bear, wolverine and lynx and is one of the most crucial wintering areas in the province for elk and moose.

The draft management plan for the two protected areas states: "The primary goal of the Wildland and the Heritage Rangeland is as follows: To preserve the natural heritage ... of the two protected areas in perpetuity. Other provincial protected areas' program goals ... are of secondary importance with respect to the protected areas. The heritage appreciation and outdoor recreation goals may be met, but only to the extent that their attainment does not conflict with or impinge on the preservation goal."

In direct opposition to this, the plan then proposes that OHV trails be opened up in the Wildland. To provide access to these trails, it would also require new motorized trails in the adjacent Heritage Rangeland, despite the fact that Heritage Rangeland legislation expressly forbids motorized access. The new Act aims to make an exception for this area.

OHVs are known to fragment wildlife habitat and cause disturbance to animals such as grizzly bears, as well as increase air and water pollution and cause soil and stream bank erosion. Less than nine per cent of provincial crown land is set aside for non-motorized access.

The Act was rushed through with unseemly haste without adequate opportunity for public input. The Bill passed through first reading on February 18 and third reading on March 2, and received Royal Assent on March 11.

