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Government Failing to Manage Recreation Impacts in Bighorn

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) is failing to manage the environmental impacts of recreational activity within the Bighorn Wildland. This lack of management is putting Alberta's wilderness, wildlife, and watersheds at risk of further degradation. AWA is calling for immediate action to protect Alberta's wilderness from poorly regulated and poorly enforced recreational activity.

"Recreation is a privilege in the Eastern Slopes. The rights of all Albertan's to have clean drinking water and protected wildlife habitat and populations must take precedence over recreation," says Lara Smandych, AWA Conservation Biologist. "AWA is committed to the protection of wild lands, water and wildlife in Alberta and supports responsible traditional and motorized recreation in appropriate areas."

AWA is undertaking a 4-year study to monitor the effects of recreation in the Bighorn Wildland. AWA has documented widespread off trail use and severe soil and vegetation damage. Numerous occurrences of out of season use by motorized vehicles were recorded during the vulnerable calving period in May and June. The results clearly indicate the government's negligence to enforce Forest Land Use Zone regulations.

In a direct response to concerns expressed by AWA, Alberta's Minister of Community Development, Gene Zwozdesky, identified that the management of recreation on public land in the province is inadequate. In a June 2004 letter to AWA, he wrote "The lack of meaningful regulation around recreation activities in many areas has resulted in little or no control over what types of use can occur, where and under what conditions."

AWA will continue its trail monitoring projects in the Bighorn for the next 2 years. "AWA maintains that the Bighorn Wildland must be designated as a Wildland Park and that damaging recreational activities must be prohibited," says Adam Ford, AWA Outreach Specialist.

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