



WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Beaver Pond in Lakeland area – (C. Olson)

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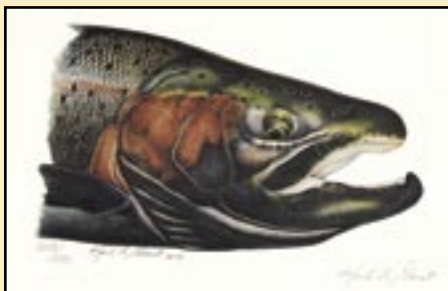
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Editorial Board:
Shirley Bray, Ph.D.
Andy Marshall
Joyce Hildebrand

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Please direct questions and comments to:
Shirley Bray
Phone: (403) 270-2736
Fax: (403) 270-2743
awa.wrc@shaw.ca



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

Box 6398, Station D,
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E1
Ph: (403) 283-2025
Toll-free 1-866-313-0713
www.albertawilderness.ca
e-mail: awa@shaw.ca

EXPLORING WILD ALBERTA 2005

S. Bray



A ferruginous hawk nest in a cottonwood tree along the Milk River in the Twin River Heritage rangeland



Z. Deak

An eagle perches on a rock in Island Lake in the Birch Mountains

R. Phillips



A bee meets a spider in the Porcupine Hills

C. Olson



A hawk in the Great Sand Hills, Saskatchewan



S. Bray

Wind anemones near one of the many sloughs that formed in the Twin River Heritage Rangeland this year

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“NEXT YEAR COUNTRY:” CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM SURFACES FOR CONSERVATION OF BOREAL LAKELAND

By Ian Urquhart

When I moved to Alberta in 1987 it was not long before I realized I was living in “Next Year Country.” My adopted province, according to one group of writers, was “running on empty.” Oil prices had tanked and King Wheat, with export prices at their lowest level since the Great Depression, looked more like a pauper than royalty. But, at a time when it seemed that only bankruptcies and welfare case loads were on the rise, my new neighbours smiled reassuringly and told me not to despair; next year was bound to be better.

appreciate because it highlights the longstanding roadblocks/obstacles that have frustrated efforts to push our conservation objectives forward. But, while these roadblocks largely have imprisoned us, there have been several subtle changes in the economic and political environment over the past decade that have the potential to help us engineer a jail break.

This potential rests in the challenges these changes pose to “business as usual” in the boreal forest. But, if they challenge the way business has been done in the

hectares, was the province’s largest.

In announcing the birth of Lakeland, the province bragged that these areas represented a 22 percent addition to the lands managed by Alberta Recreation and Parks. By providing representation to seven of the ten natural history themes in the Central Mixedwood subregion of the boreal the government crowed that this “designation confirms the province’s commitment to protecting representative examples of our natural heritage and to being a leader in protected areas.” Mike Cardinal, the local MLA at the time, was pleased the government was “preserving the integrity of the area.”

Two months later Environment Minister Ralph Klein raised expectations even higher regarding the conservation potential of Lakeland. With the Duke of Edinburgh, the International President of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), by his side Klein reportedly described Lakeland as Alberta’s “lifeline to an ecologically sustainable future.” It would be a model Special Place, presumably an area that would satisfy WWF Canada’s Endangered Spaces Campaign criteria.

Peter Lee, Alberta’s spokesperson for WWF Canada during much of the Endangered Spaces Campaign in the 1990s, outlined these criteria “as legislatively established sites that prohibit industrial activities such as logging, mining, development of hydroelectric dams and oil and gas drilling, and they must be large enough to maintain ecological integrity.” It’s easy to see why some members of the conservation community were willing to suspend their skepticism and were tempted to believe that Klein was turning over a new, more ecologically sustainable page in Alberta.

The more cynical, realistic to some, among us likely felt we should heed the suspicions Liberal MLA



Such an optimistic mindset, a legacy of Alberta’s agricultural past, is mandatory equipment for anyone who wants to become involved in any of Alberta’s environmental campaigns today. Working on AWA’s Primrose-Lakeland campaign has so far taught me as much. It would be impossible to work on this issue if I didn’t believe the future will deal more positively than the past has done with our concerns for this slice of our boreal forest.

In this reflection on Lakeland I look back and look ahead. Lakeland’s history is important to

boreal they also may challenge the way AWA should strategize about and pursue conservation goals in Primrose-Lakeland.

Raised Expectations, Dashed Expectations

It has been more than 13 years since the provincial government announced the designation of Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area in January 1992. At 14,689 hectares the provincial park became Alberta’s third largest; the recreation area, encompassing 44,089

Grant Mitchell raised in the provincial legislature about Lakeland's prospects in June 1991. Then Mitchell suggested that all of the talk about creating a protected area in Lakeland was just empty public relations. This talk was designed to convince "people that they're doing something right, but in fact it's meaningless beyond public relations." Its intent, in other words, was just to soothe and manipulate a nervous or concerned public.

Lakeland. Advertised in a government video as "Nothing Less than Paradise," Lakeland became, in the words of Tom Maccagno, Lac La Biche's longstanding champion of Lakeland's historical and natural legacies, "nothing less than a scam."

Steve West planted the seeds of this betrayal the very day he officially designated the Park and Recreation Area. Prior to this announcement, the government had retained Westworth

supports a park development, featuring wilderness type of experience, with non-mechanized recreational focus and modest facility development."

As AWA discovered last year this pro-wilderness sentiment continues to be held strongly among Albertans. Two-thirds of the people polled by the University of Alberta on behalf of AWA agreed (42% of them strongly) that the provincial government should resolve the conflict in Lakeland

C. Olson



Mixedwood forest

For Mitchell the idea, not the reality, of a park in Lakeland was just a sop to Albertans troubled by the province's decision to allocate most of Alberta's boreal forest to multinational timber companies. It was a promise he never expected the government to fulfill once public concern over industrialized northern forests subsided. Lakeland Park "will die, because ... the plan was nothing more than public relations, and when the maelstrom [over allocating Alberta timber to foreign multinationals] passed ... they just backed right off."

Although Lakeland Park and Provincial Recreation Area formally were created seven months after Mitchell spoke these words, his instincts foreshadowed well subsequent events. Decision after decision erased the "protected" from the promise of

and Associates to assess the significant natural features of the boreal forest in the vicinity of Lakeland.

They recommended that, to be effective as a conservation initiative, a protected area in Lakeland needed to be 1124 sq. km. The government rejected this assessment and created a park/recreation area complex roughly one half of the recommended size (588 sq. km.) And, the Provincial Park only constituted one-quarter of this reduced area.

This decision ignored more than science; it also betrayed the public's wishes for the future status of Lakeland. Public opinion was solidly behind an ambitious wilderness-focused model of park development. Alberta Parks and Recreation reported that its survey of public opinion had told the department that "the public

between wilderness values and logging/oil and gas development in favour of wilderness; only seven percent disagreed with this position.

The most dramatic betrayal of the public trust may rest in the machinations surrounding the work of the Lakeland Public Advisory Committee (PAC) between 1994 and 1996 and the failure to develop a management plan for the region. To its credit the province sought to consult the public about managing Lakeland and created the PAC to fulfill this mission.

The purpose of the PAC, as outlined by the government, was to "represent the interests of the citizens of Alberta as they pertain to developing a detailed management plan for Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area."

Composed of twenty members and alternates from the region, the PAC claimed to “represent key interest groups and a wide variety of backgrounds.” Representatives of the forestry and energy industries, however, were notable by their absence from the PAC.

Committee members took their task seriously, held seventeen committee meetings through the Lac La Biche-Cold Lake region, and after eighteen months of consultations and deliberations produced a detailed assessment of the management issues they were asked to consider. They set out, in their words, “not . . . to rubber stamp the government’s blueprint for Lakeland.”

Joined together by their enthusiasm for the natural and cultural attributes of this region committee members called for the precautionary principle and an overarching concern

reasonable people are bound to disagree in their answers it seems clear the committee was an important advocate for conservation in Alberta’s boreal forest. For example, the committee recommended:

- prohibiting commercial logging in order for the park and the provincial recreation area to better serve as an ecological benchmark of the Central Mixedwood sub-region of the boreal forest;
- expanding the boundaries of the recreation area;
- restricting motorized recreation activities;
- honouring existing mineral leases but at the same time asking the government to consider removing them through purchase or other means.

But, as relatively tame as these recommendations were (i.e. restricting,

then took “the liberty” of offering its own views.

Both sets of views were decidedly at odds with key positions struck by the PAC. For example, they both supported logging in the PRA; they opposed the recommended restrictions on motorized recreation activities; they were suspicious of park expansion because they equated it with additional restrictions on motorized recreational pursuits.

The PAC, originally scripted to review a revised management plan, never got that chance in the wake of the minister’s Hearing Panel report. This panel succeeded in scuttling the efforts to finalize a management plan for Lakeland.

To this day a management plan has not been produced. Apropos life in “Next year Country,” Community Development Minister Gary Mar now tells AWA that his department “is

C. Olson



Rock Island River



A wetland in the Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area

I. Urquhart

with environmental protection to guide the management of Lakeland. The committee interpreted the precautionary principle to mean, “When you don’t know what the (human) impact may be, err on the side of caution and conservation.”

In respect to protection all members saw Lakeland as “a place where protection of biological resources was the foremost priority.” This was the yardstick the PAC used to measure the appropriateness of all human activities in the protected area.

The committee concluded its work by making 102 recommendations to the government. Were these recommendations sufficiently inspired by the precautionary and protection principles? Were they excessively inspired by these principles? While

not absolutely prohibiting, motorized access; honouring or purchasing, not canceling, existing mineral leases) they were too much for Environment Minister Ty Lund, a friend to the environment if there never was one.

At the minister’s behest, the public consultation process suddenly changed after Alberta Environmental Protection incorporated much of the spirit of the PAC’s work into its 1996 Draft Management Plan. The minister unexpectedly foisted an “Open House Hearing Panel” on the consultation process. This panel, not nearly as inclusive as the PAC and giving off a decidedly “handpicked by the minister” aroma, first offered a summary of public reactions to the draft plan, reactions overwhelmingly coming from the motorized recreation community. It

reviewing the Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area draft management plan and I anticipate its release to the public in the near future.”

The history of protected area politics in Lakeland is all too reminiscent of what passes for normal in Alberta. As AWA’s Vivian Pharis noted in 1999: “The sad part is that what is happening in Lakeland is happening to other important ecological sites throughout the province.”

What prompted her observations were the conclusions Dr. Richard Thomas, arguably Alberta’s leading authority on boreal forest ecology, reached in *The Final Frontier*, his 1998 study of the boreal forest for the Special Places program. There Thomas documented, in respect to Lakeland, the extent to which industrial

activity, illegal OHV use, unrestricted or poorly regulated types of other motorized access, and other factors had crippled Lakeland's ability to make a meaningful contribution to the goals of the Special Places program.

His study underlined that Lakeland and many other so-called protected areas in the boreal forest only could make genuine contributions to protecting landscapes and biodiversity if they were intact and unfragmented, if they exhibited a high degree of ecological integrity. Much of Lakeland failed this ecological integrity test.

The history detailed here is anything but cheery. What should have been an important victory for conservation—the protection of Lakeland—has proven to be a more hollow, more empty gesture. What lessons does this history offer us? From the beginning Lakeland has been plagued by four horsemen—the timber industry, oil and gas, irresponsible OHV users, and a clutch of cabinet ministers and MLAs who attend to the other three interests like handmaids.

Winds of Change?

Lakeland's protected areas history is undoubtedly essential information; we need it to appreciate the political and economic obstacles to conservation in Lakeland. It would be a mistake, however, to let that history blind us to the potential for positive change arising from a combination of international, national, and provincial developments.

One noteworthy international development rests in the importance a growing number of consumers, retailers, and forest products companies attach to "certified" forest products. Certified products carry an eco-label or logo, a sign the product originated from a well-managed forest.

The most widely respected certification program among environmental organizations is that of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international non-profit organization dedicated to promoting environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable forest management.

When protecting Lakeland was first talked about, certification was an idea only in its infancy. The Forest Stewardship Council did not even exist when Lakeland was designated in 1992.

Since its creation in 1993 the FSC and its certification principles have acquired more adherents; through the development of numerous national and regional standards FSC has certified more and more forests around the world. This global movement's impact on Canada may be seen in the birth of FSC Canada (an organization with a healthy ENGO representation). Any thought of certifying products from the Canadian boreal forest had to await the development and acceptance of a national boreal standard by FSC Canada.

This standard was endorsed unanimously by FSC Canada in December 1993. FSC International accredited this standard in August 2004. To the extent that companies operating in Alberta conclude that FSC certification makes financial sense this internationally inspired factor may prove valuable in provincial protected areas campaigns.

Nationally, more Canadians than ever before know that one-quarter of the world's remaining intact forests are boreal forests; more appreciate that the boreal, the earth's second great lung, performs the same vital ecological functions as the Amazon, its southern cousin; more know that the boreal sustains nearly half of all North American bird species and that an estimated 1.6 billion landbirds, the finches, warblers, and other species that fill the forests with song every spring, nest in the boreal.

The most concrete example of this national awakening to the boreal's importance may lie in the founding of the Canadian Boreal Initiative and its release of the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework (BFCF) in December 2003.

This framework, endorsed by several First Nations, conservation organizations, and major corporations such as Suncor and Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries, is very ambitious. It calls for the protection of at least fifty percent of the boreal through an interconnected, protected areas network and for the very best, ecologically sustainable resource management practices in the remainder of the ecosystem.

Provincially, "protected areas" remains a four-letter word in ministries



Mixedwood forest



Ladyslippers

such as Energy and Sustainable Resource Development. Consequently, the search for promise at the provincial level is more difficult.

One positive signal came from the 2004 report of the MLA Steering Committee Report on Rural Development. This report, "Rural Alberta: Land of Opportunity," concluded that "many rural Albertans see environmentalism as an opportunity for economic growth, for example through eco-tourism and alternative

energy production.”

This outlook dovetails neatly with some of the economic diversification positions coming from the Lac La Biche Community Futures Centre. That centre identified two examples of nature-related tourism, birding and canoeing, as part of Lakeland’s “industry of the future.”

Implications for Lakeland

Are these winds of change strong enough to push forward the

what we see coming from the Klein government.

FSC’s protected areas expectations have encouraged Al-Pac to adopt several positions with real potential to benefit Lakeland. For several years AWA has urged Al-Pac to stop logging in the forests between the Park/ Provincial Recreation Area boundaries and the Touchwood Lake road (to the north of these boundaries). This demand now has been incorporated into the protected areas initiative Al-Pac has

(FMA), make the area an attractive ecological benchmark for the company.

Since ecological benchmarks must not only be large areas but also unmanaged areas Al-Pac has an interest in seeing that industrial activities are excluded from the Park/Provincial Recreation Area. Unlike the situation in the early 1990s a major industrial actor now has interests that are more compatible with securing the ecologically sensitive outcomes AWA always has proposed for Lakeland.

C. Olson



Old-growth lichens



C. Olson

Heron

conservation agenda in Lakeland? Some cautious optimism may be justified here. Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries (Al-Pac), the Japanese multinational that towers over most of the boreal landscape in northeastern Alberta, has both responded to and helped promote some of the aforementioned changes. Al-Pac, a member of FSC Canada, is the only Alberta company that has applied to have its products certified by FSC.

In significant respects the principles set by FSC Canada’s National Boreal Standard (NBS) are considerably more demanding or ambitious than what is currently required by the provincial government. One such principle concerns establishing protected areas.

The NBS requires companies applying for certification to set aside and protect representative samples of the ecosystems found across the landscape they operate in. Consequently, Al-Pac’s evolving approach to establishing protected areas is unquestionably more generous than

proposed as part of its application for FSC certification.

Al-Pac formally has committed to defer from logging in this 5,107 hectare area for the next five years as one step towards satisfying the FSC’s protected areas criterion (see the map for the approximate location of this deferral). Furthermore, it is likely that, if the FSC approves Al-Pac’s application, one condition of that approval will be that Al-Pac work with AWA and other interested parties to secure legislated protection for this area.

These expectations, in combination with Al-Pac’s interest in establishing ecological benchmarks for its operations, also may help secure an ecologically sensitive and sensible management plan for the Park/ Provincial Recreation Area.

Ecological benchmarks may be defined as large unmanaged areas, areas where industrial activities should be prohibited. The size of Lakeland Park/ Provincial Recreation Area, as well as the fact the area is outside of Al-Pac’s Forest Management Agreement area

Implications for AWA

How should AWA respond to the positive signals coming from Al-Pac, signals that are more positive than anything we have seen from government or other industrial actors? Should AWA support Al-Pac’s application for FSC certification? Should we applaud the company’s actions in the hope that Al-Pac’s posture will be an important boost to brightening Lakeland’s prospects? These are the sorts of questions I would like to leave you with and invite fellow members to consider.

On the one hand, through the deferral we may be on the verge of reaping a small territorial gain with important ecological value. The significance of this gain was highlighted for me when I joined a hike to Jackson Lake led by Richard Thomas in July. The hike took a group of us through some of the forest to be spared by Al-Pac’s deferral.

As we walked along the rain-soaked trail Thomas underlined again and again the ecological variety and

importance of that forest. My favourite illustration of that message came when he spoke about the Connecticut warbler, a neotropical songbird identified by the Boreal Songbird Initiative as “one of the least known birds in North America” and a species that “remains on many birders’ wish lists.”

In earlier trips along this trail Thomas had identified more than a handful of nests built by this very secretive creature. Solid evidence, I thought to myself, of the sorts of treasures the AI-Pac deferral would protect at least temporarily. The deferral will give us the opportunity to push for the more permanent protection that could be realized by expanding the park’s boundaries and adopting a strong management plan.

But, on the other hand, the promised deferral area of 5,107 hectares is just a pittance – AI-

Pac’s FMA sprawls over nearly six million hectares! And, while AI-Pac has committed to spare the deferral area from harvest the company’s proposed, new Forest Management plan anticipates a significant increase in logging much of the forest further north, between the Provincial Recreation Area and Heart Lake.

What costs will bird populations suffer in those more northern forests? Will those costs be outweighed by the gains we may be able to realize in Lakeland? I know what my neighbours would say I should expect to happen in “Next Year Country.” I hope they are right.

Ian Urquhart is associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. He is coordinating AWA’s Primrose-Lakeland conservation work. AWA would like to acknowledge the support of the Richard Ivey Foundation.



White-throated sparrow – “the voice of the boreal”

C. Olson

DAWN DICKINSON: CONSERVATIONIST RELISHES UPS AND DOWNS OF ADVOCACY ROLE

By Andy Marshall

For Dawn Dickinson, as for any of Alberta’s intrepid environmental leaders, the path to conservation success has its ups and downs.

It’s like negotiating the knobs, kettles and slumps adorning the Cypress Hills and the province’s southeast mixed grasslands that Dawn has directed so much passion to and that still draw her at every opportunity. You have to watch your step.

And, just as this region of Alberta contains a breathtaking variety of ecological contrasts, so, too, does the 75-year-old Medicine Hat citizen present an inspiring dichotomy of human attributes that have made her such an effective advocate for the natural environment.

Considerate and gentle to the point of self-effacing diffidence, the lady with the refined English accent can also bring to the table a no-nonsense tenacity and inner resolve.

“I get that from my Scottish background,” she says with a laugh,

paying tribute to her mother and other relatives with Scottish origins. She’s surrounded by piles of papers and reports, accumulated from her more than 16 years of volunteer efforts while living in Medicine Hat for groups like the Grasslands Naturalists (GN), the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) and the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), as well as from her earlier career as a biologist and her travels throughout Western Canada and the North.

She has relished the many adventures and challenges in her life, from a two-week solo canoeing trip in the Yukon to a summer spent camping on Devon Island in the Arctic Circle helping a doctoral student in a study of plants. Her B.Sc. with first class honours in zoology from the University of Alberta in Edmonton in 1972 at age 42 and then her masters in zoology from the same institution four years later are further testimony to her enterprising ways.



Dawn Dickinson

Honoured by FAN and the recipient last year of the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference Award, Dawn Dickinson will receive an AWA Wilderness Defenders Award in November. With typical modesty, she downplays the recognition and is loathe to rest on her laurels.

“You think you’re making progress, but they never seem to stop,”

she says of the inevitable setbacks to conservation initiatives. She fondly remembers her active involvement in Project Swiftsure in the early 1990s, leading to the destruction of chemical warfare agents at CFB Suffield. Then came the disillusionment, at least for her, of the way the decision was reached to deal with the wild horses at the army training grounds.

She played a lead role in the Meridian Dam forum that led to the welcome cancellation of the project for economic reasons. Then came the much-applauded dedication of the Suffield National Wildlife Area, only to be threatened two years later by Encana's application to drill up to 1275 shallow gas wells there.

"You have a momentary feeling of accomplishment and then you find out it isn't permanent," she says quite matter-of-factly

That only serves to stiffen the resolve of this soft-spoken woman, born in Lethbridge but who grew up in the U.K. when her mother returned there after the death of Dawn's father.

In her quest to make a difference, she now questions the effectiveness alone of writing letters and briefs, attending open houses and workshops, meeting with government agencies and corporate personnel—actions she has devoted much of her life to. Today, she acknowledges the need to add

economic action, such as boycotts, to the conservationist arsenal. "We have to find new ways of doing things," she says.

Her abiding love of the natural landscape came early in life, guided by the influence of her mother and new step-father and practised in her frequent walks over England's South Downs and later over the splendour of Dartmoor in the southwest.

While in her 20s, Dawn Dickinson returned to her native Lethbridge. Then she moved to Medicine Hat where a summer job surveying elk for Alberta Fish and Wildlife helped spark a life-long fascination with conservation issues and an understanding for the conflicts that can occur over land use.

As a biologist, in later years, she did a variety of work for Western Ecological Services in Edmonton, including a contract with the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee at the time of the Berger Inquiry into the Mackenzie River pipeline. That was followed by a contract with the Northwest Territories Science Advisory Board. Those experiences gave her exposure to some outstanding, experienced scientists, she says.

"While her single-minded determination to see management decisions based on sound science has not always been popular with some, Dawn has never wavered nor been

intimidated from abandoning her principles," says FAN president Dennis Baresco.

While applying these carefully thought-out scientific principles, she has also brought an emotional attachment to her conservation efforts.

"You've had so much pleasure in places you've worked in and been to, you have a feeling of obligation," is how she explains her unquenchable motivation. "Because you've been given so much, you owe the land itself something."

Painting, photography and writing—including composing poetry—are among other skills she's used to express this gratitude. In addition to scientific reports, she has written scripts for a six-part series of natural history films produced by Karvonen Films more than 15 years ago. *Prairie River*, which went into a second edition, and *A Flight of Deer* are among general audience publications she has contributed to.

Currently, she's working on a natural history book of essays on her beloved Cypress Hills. The aging process imposes its natural restrictions, of course, but the passion and the ever-inquiring mind still burn brightly.

"I'm more limited in what I can do, but I can't say I'm not going to try," she notes. Wilderness defenders everywhere can only be grateful.

JIM BUTLER: EVER REVEALING OUR LOVE AFFAIR WITH NATURE

By Andy Marshall

The words cascade out, clear, joyful and fresh, like water from a mountain spring.

With Jim Butler, you sense an inexhaustible source of enthusiasm for people and the world around him. The adjective eclectic nicely fits this 59-year-old Edmonton environmental advocate, conservation biologist, teacher, university professor, author, poet, ordained Buddhist monk, media spokesman for wildlife protection and, most recently, writer of a musical play complete with fairy princess and the ageless Pan.

"Sure, I have a passion for things.

There are so many things out there to be passionate about," he exults. "In my talks, I'm trying to remind people of their own passion and not be afraid of expressing it."

He laughs at descriptions of himself as a bear of man, or a portly '60s survivor with a grey beard and a pony tail. "I'm losing weight," he notes, his voice carrying a fullness and depth from a lifetime of engaging people in rich conversation.

With typical flair, he calls mankind's lure to wild nature "a deep, clandestine love affair involving much more than meets the eye." And, when

he delivers the Alberta Wilderness Association annual lecture and receives an AWA Defenders Award this coming Nov. 18, he'll refer to his 40 years spent "studying and exploring the mosaic of the human/nature bond."

Recently retired from a highly active 26-year teaching and research career at the University of Alberta Department of Forest Science, Butler now spends some of his time lecturing around the world on cruise trips on topics from whales to penguins.

Once described as an evangelist, the West Virginia-born man prefers to see himself as an interpreter, helping

open people up to the possibilities of spiritual sustenance that comes from communing with the natural world. “There is a tremendous soar in spirituality,” says Butler, who has set up a Buddhist sanctuary in one corner of his living room. “So, more people are looking at natural areas and wilderness as sacred.”

The house he shares with wife Elaine is filled with memorabilia from his internationally acclaimed career, delving into such areas as boreal forest ecology, national parks management, the relationships of people and nature, and ecotourism. Visitors describe blowguns with deadly curare-tipped darts on the wall, casts of the skulls of early man sitting on a shelf.

His life’s activities have been true to the human/nature bond he so often talks about. “I learned early in life that all things are connected,” he says. “Trained as an ecologist and thinking as an ecologist, I know that every issue is not just a scientific or biological issue.” For a true understanding, he explains, we need to be familiar with disciplines from economics to political science. We also must learn to bring our hearts into play.

You can see the pattern in how, after his undergraduate studies in wildlife management at West Virginia and Ohio State Universities, he went on to complete his masters in humanities from Manhattanville College in New York, with his thesis on “the relationship between man and nature in the new world to the mid-19th century.”

Pursuing his doctoral studies at the University of Seattle, Washington, in parks and recreation interpretation, he wrote his dissertation on the “role of interpretation as a motivating agent toward park resource protection.”

During an incredibly wide-ranging teaching career at the U of A, Butler’s lectures on conservation biology, wildlife identification and ecological activism were so full, some students reportedly had to sit in the aisles to fit in. In the activism course, students learned about civil disobedience, dealing with lawsuits and how to work with the media.

With his recent change of status to professor emeritus, the university “will be glad to drop that course,” he suggests with another chuckle. Some

people have indeed challenged his right to promote what they consider his own beliefs through his courses.

International consulting assignments have taken him all over the world. Playing an advisory role in planning for environmental protection in China, a national park in the Caribbean, conservation education strategies for Indonesia, and preservation of threatened herons in Kenya, are among numerous projects he has worked on with gusto, many of them for the United Nations.

“What’s in it for him is to share nature, the beauty and relevance of nature with anybody who will listen,” says former student and long-time friend David Dodge.

Butler’s high profile—he’s written many books and has appeared as a frequent commentator on CBC and CKUA—has invariably provoked occasional negative reactions, including some sickening phone threats to his life about seven years ago after helping organize a meeting of farmers with complaints about oil industry activities. The resulting stress pushed him into a six-month medical leave.

He’s well aware of the pressures all conservation advocates face. His clearly articulated commitment to protect special places has often clashed with the prevailing “dysfunctional profit model,” as he calls it.

Aptly, Butler returns to a water metaphor to explain his approach to activism and his frequently sought advice on environmentalist burnout. “Every time there’s a need or someone calls on you to help (with a cause), you tilt the pitcher a little bit,” he says. “Pretty soon the pitcher is empty, and that’s where we start to get into burnout . . . you have to keep the pitcher full . . . just give what’s over the top.”

In other words, you have to take the time to centre yourself in hope; maintain your deep connection with what ever you are defending. In Butler’s case, this can range from seeking to free the dolphins at West Edmonton Mall to saving habitat for Alberta’s grizzly bears.

The philosophical practice has

become particularly apparent since his immersion in a Buddhist community while working in Thailand on a U of A project. “Part of my training was to see things not as they are, but as they could and should be,” he says. That means directing your rage when you see a clear-cut to seeing it as a place where a forest is going to grow. “You have to project that model and vision of wellness.”

Not all environmentalists feel comfortable with this approach. But, the man who still likes to volunteer at Christmas to play Santa Claus in his Edmonton community, is not easily deterred.



Jim Butler

The extensive publications list in his curriculum vitae includes works on subjects from birds to the boreal forest he treasures so vigorously. Intriguingly, he’s written on such topics as *Zen Buddhism and the Conserver Society* or *The Theoretical Importance of Higher Sensory Perception in the Sasquatch Phenomenon*. Published works also include a book of poems called *Dialog with a Frog on a Log*.

International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, World Wildlife Fund, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, National Research Society and Trout Unlimited are among groups in which he’s been active.

And, true to the Renaissance man image, his personal hobbies list includes fly-fishing, photography, collecting antique nature prints, chess theory and philately. Jim Butler has clearly made his stamp on society.



WHY WE NEED WILD PLAINS BISON

by Cliff Wallis, AWA Past-President

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) was frustrated by the recent failure of the Honourable Stéphane Dion, Canada's Minister of the Environment to add plains bison to the list of species protected under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). While the minister listed the vast majority of species recommended by Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), plains bison is conspicuous by its absence.

are located in the USA, e.g. Wind Cave (375), Yellowstone (4000), and Grand Teton (700) National Parks, Henry Mountains (300), and Turner's Castle Rock herd but there are some in Canada, e.g. Elk Island National Park (430) and Old Man on His Back Plateau Nature Conservancy area (60).

Political interference in listing species at risk was identified as one of the AWA's concerns when we commented on early drafts of the *Species at Risk Act*, basing decisions about species on economic concerns,

of common sense to let declining commercial operations hinder efforts to put the wild back in the west.

The decision panders to decades of the type of unsustainable agricultural land use in Canada's threatened grassland region that has led to it having one of the largest concentrations of species at risk. It is part of World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 list of most threatened ecosystems. Canada's refusal to list plains bison under SARA limits our ability to use this keystone species in recovery efforts.

Recovery of a species at risk means achieving viable, free-ranging populations over large areas within its original range. These populations must be subject to forces of natural selection, including predation; and protected under law. There are about 20,000 plains bison in conservation herds (2,000 in Canada) and 500,000 in commercial ownership; few are genetically pure.

Free ranging, predator influenced, disease free bison number less than 1300 within the Plains region. Less than 700 of those are not subject to regular handling by humans. In other words, few bison in the plains exist under natural conditions. This is well below the threshold of population viability.

Genetic introgression with cattle and bison domestication has created a legacy of issues. The presence of cattle DNA has precluded listing under legislation, e.g. US Endangered Species Act and domestication is at least partially responsible for the failure of the minister to list under SARA in Canada.

The purposeful selection of traits favourable for human needs results in differences in form and function (morphology, physiology and behaviour). This has been true for both cattle and bison. There has been selection for docility, e.g. cattle are poor defenders against predators; smaller pelvic girdle has created calving and walking difficulties;



especially bad economics, rather than on scientific evidence.

The other stated reason for not listing was "the potential economic implications for the Canadian Bison industry." The game farming industry is in crisis in Canada and bison ranching has been suffering an economic downturn. About half of the 50 or so pilot bison ranching projects on public lands in Alberta are no longer operating.

It is appalling that, in failing to list plains bison under SARA, Canada has chosen domestic bison and the concerns of a handful of bison producers over wild bison and thousands of Canadians who want to see wild plains bison back in the prairies. It flies in the face

This decision will hamper recovery plans for grassland species at risk, including plains bison. COSEWIC made the right decision in listing it as a threatened species in May 2004. The minister should have accepted its recommendation. Here's why.

The stated primary reason for not listing plains bison was the difficulty of telling wild from domestic plains bison. This is a red herring and is an economic argument in disguise. It is most important to distinguish genetically pure bison from cattle contaminated bison.

This testing is relatively easy; however, few cattle genome-free plains bison herds have been identified. These total about 8000 head globally. Most

wild character being tamed producing animals less adapted to the natural environment.

The recovery of original genetic diversity is difficult once an animal is domesticated and wild stocks are extinct. Domestication leads to altered genetically based behavior, morphology, physiology and function and to the loss of the wild type and its genetic diversity.

The goal of most commercial bison ranchers is to increase profit by maximizing calf production, feed to meat conversion efficiency and meat quality. Over time, they must select for traits serving this purpose, e.g. conformation, docility, growth and carcass composition. Selection for these traits reduces genetic variation and changes the look and behavior over time. Many bison producers apply cattle husbandry practices and standards to bison—this will not maintain the plains bison genome.

Wild bison played an incredibly important functional role in grassland ecosystems. They were a keystone species central to the life cycles of what are now species at risk. Differential grazing, wallowing, trampling, and fertilization under wild bison grazing increase biodiversity.

A growing body of literature comparing grazing behaviour of cattle and bison indicates that large scale bison grazing is more compatible with grassland ecosystems. It is not that cattle or domestic bison can't play any functional ecological role, it is just that wild bison are uniquely adapted to this semi-arid ecosystem. Domestic cattle grazing has been the replacement but we have nothing that approaches the scale and intensity of wild bison herds as grassland ecosystem modifiers.

Bison must be managed in their ecosystem role rather than as a product for market. We must not replace one second-best approach (livestock grazing) with another (cattle/bison hybrids, wildlife-proof fencing).

Some people think that getting bison, any kind of bison, back into the plains is important but it may have more drawbacks than benefits. As one of my friends noted, "We must keep bison wild and not have them genetically altered by producers who want to turn them into creatures with

no humps, wide rumps, short legs, no jumping and no aggressiveness, i.e. to domesticate them."

Conservationists recognize that some private herds may have conservation value for various reasons, including innovative management, both genetic and cultural. It is not important who owns the bison, only whether they are providing the full range of ecological benefits.

In almost all cases, bison raised like cattle are not "conservation" herds any more than cattle herds are. However, like cattle, some private herds may be able to provide some conservation benefit in the continuum between "wild" and "domestic."

Conservationists are still working on defining the attributes of "conservation herds." Grazing, both wild and domestic, must be used in a full species conservation framework.

It is our view, supported by considerable negative evidence of the game farming industry in Alberta and elsewhere, that we should not be domesticating wild species. Promoting non-conservation plains bison herds muddies the water immensely.

Domestic livestock grazing can continue to be an important part of the economy and play a role in grassland biodiversity conservation; however, we also need to advance the wild bison model. That is the role AWA feels comfortable playing. It is promoting a workshop next fall in Montana to engage ranchers, scientists and conservationists in a constructive debate to get to the next plateau where wild bison would once again play a major role in maintaining the diversity

and character of the grasslands.

It is the conservation community's strongly held and scientifically supported view that commercial bison production is at odds with the conservation of wild species. Given its opposition to listing plains bison as a species at risk, the bison industry is demonstrating its true colours and its threat to the recovery of this magnificent species and the grassland ecosystem. The conservation issues related to genetic diversity, hybridization and domestication all support plains bison listing. COSEWIC has the science, now we need the political will!

Fortunately, the minister has not closed the door on listing and will be working with the public to develop an approach for the recovery of wild plains bison. However, his decision ties one hand behind his back in recovery efforts. Groups like AWA are committed to working with the minister to find a path forward.

AWA is equally committed to securing a listing under the Species at Risk Act until we have recovered significant populations of Plains bison in the Canada's grasslands. This is where they rightfully belong along with the whole suite of prairie species with which they evolved.

Reintroducing plains bison to Grasslands National Park this fall is a small step in the right direction but much more political resolve and adequate regulatory tools are needed to help conserve this species and to restore the natural biodiversity in the plains ecosystem.



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BIGHORN WILDLAND CONTINUES TO FACE RECREATION CHALLENGES

By David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist

Illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and serious trail damage are two of the main challenges facing the Bighorn Wildland, according to the results of a recreation monitoring study. The study, conducted by AWA, is in its third year. The results show there is still significant violation of the three-year-old regulations governing motorized use in the area, and the government is finding that enforcement of those regulations can be difficult and frustrating.



Trial damage due to braiding and deep rutting. A horse braid can be seen on the right hand side and multi-use braids on the left. This site is 65m in length.



Secondary trail branching off designated trail (left, with people) with moderate/severe vegetation damage and moderate/severe rutting

The Bighorn Wildland was opened to motorized access in October 2002 under Alberta Sustainable Resource Department's (SRD) Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan, where six forest land use zones (FLUZ) were established. Previously the area had been managed primarily under the Alberta Eastern Slopes Policy as prime protection zone, which prohibits motorized recreation.

The Bighorn Wildland, a 4000 km² area located adjacent to Banff and Jasper National Parks in west central Alberta, is one of Alberta's last remaining large and relatively intact wilderness areas. The area supports irreplaceable habitat for grizzlies and other wildlife, maintains intact forest and soils that support major headwaters, and provides backcountry recreation opportunities that are among the best in the province. Human use, however, particularly equestrian and motorized, is a growing threat to landscape and watershed integrity.

In response to the government's decision to allow motorized vehicle use in the Bighorn Wildland, AWA initiated a study of the impacts of motorized and other types of recreation use in one FLUZ. Monitoring the impacts of both new and traditional recreational uses of this area is crucial for effective long-term management and decision-making.

The study area within Bighorn Wildland is being subjected to intensive recreational use, predominantly in the form of OHV and equestrian use. These recreation types have resulted in environmental degradation including off-trail use, braiding, rutting and erosion of trails, and illegal off-trail/out of season use.

Additional environmental impacts from recreational activity include the trampling and removal of native vegetation, landscape fragmentation, wildlife disturbance, and degradation of watersheds. With the increasing demand for outdoor recreation, it is critical that the impacts of recreational activities be well managed within wilderness areas.

Illegal OHV Use

In spite of increased and improved signage, monitoring and regulation enforcement, illegal OHV activity persists in the area. The study area had trails that are designated for motorized use during certain months of the year. These are generally main trails into the

area, often old, hard-packed exploration roads. Branching off these trails are many secondary trails that are not designated for motorized use, but may be used by other users. Both types of trails were surveyed for use.

Data on illegal motorized use was gathered directly by special counters or inferred from tracks or damage left behind. Illegal use occurred during restricted times, when designated trails were closed to motorized use, or when users left the designated trails and used non-designated trails or created non-designated frolic areas. While only a small percentage of recorded OHV use in the study area was illegal, it was still significant. Use recorded by counters did not capture all instances of off-trail illegal use. A greater percentage of illegal activity occurred during weekdays rather than on weekends.

In July, AWA resumed field trips into the study area. In more than one area, we observed vehicle tracks on trails that had signs indicating they were off limits to OHVs either seasonally or permanently. In some cases signs were torn down, and occasionally mutilated, before riders proceeded on undesignated trails.

Significant damage was seen at a trailhead in the Whitegoat Creek area of the Job/Cline FLUZ. The tracks continued for at least seven kilometres up the trail on which off-highway and snow vehicles are only permitted from December 1 to April 30. Near the trailhead recent vehicle tracks bypassed the main trail in favour of a boggy, grassy meadow, turning it into a muddy mess.

An SRD representative recounted the adventures of two individuals who not only ignored signs but the creeks swollen from heavy rainfall in June. They attempted to drive across a creek on a trail restricted from motorized use and got stuck in the water. The vehicle spent the night in the river before being towed, but the riders were rescued by a local outfitter.

SRD says they are well aware

of this illegal activity and are making efforts at enforcement, despite the inherent difficulties in doing so, and are formulating strategies and actions to address the problem.

Our concern remains that despite the best intentions and actions of SRD and local OHV groups to have riders adhere to the regulations under which they were allowed to have motorized vehicle access into the area, illegal access continues. Ongoing structural and vegetation damage will lead to continued degradation of the ecological integrity of the area.

Trail Damage

Of the approximately 30 kilometres of trail surveyed, over 50% showed structural or vegetation damage that ranged from negligible to severe. Damage was measured on three trails designated for motorized use and 49 trails not designated for motorized use.

Although OHVs have trails designated for their activity, the total area of damage they cause on and off-trail is much greater than that of equestrian users, who are legally allowed to leave the trail. More intensive equestrian use was found on the one designated trail which is only open to OHVs in the winter. It is likely that users wished to avoid OHVs on other trails, but this has resulted in further damage.

Two main types of damage were measured. Structural damage was a measure of the level of degradation of the trail and consisted of such measures as braiding, rutting and erosion. Vegetation damage was a measure of the amount of vegetation remaining on the trail. Four main habitat types were recognized: forest, shrub/shrub meadow, grass meadows, and marsh. About half of the overall damage occurs in shrub habitat.

Just over half of the damaged areas were due to OHV use, about a third were due to random camping and about a tenth were due to equestrian use. Each of these three primary activities creates its own type and severity of damage. OHV trails were approximately three times wider through all habitats compared to equestrian trails, with the widest in shrubby meadow habitat.

Braiding, the most common type

of trail damage, was the cause of 80% of the total damage measured, and was due to both horses (43%) and OHVs (57%). Of the amount of damage caused by horses or OHVs, 80% was in the form of braiding.

In forest areas, braids are usually formed by users attempting to avoid larger water and mud puddles. Whereas in shrub and grass habitat, they may be due more to the existence of a longer line of sight, allowing users to take shortcuts and explore off-trail areas more easily, or by horses leaving the trail to allow OHVs to pass.

However, these activities differed in the types of habitat impacted. With equestrian use, 94% of braiding damage occurred in shrub and forest habitat with 6% in grass habitat. While OHV use caused a little less braiding than equestrian use in forest and shrub habitat (82%), it caused three times as much damage in grass meadows (17%).

The creation of frolic areas is an activity exclusive to OHVs. Ten percent of damage caused by OHVs is in the form of frolic areas and all of the damage measured was in marshy areas. Many of the frolic areas have signs posted by the Bighorn Heritage ATV Society at the main access point to discourage illegal use. As of late July 2004, it appeared that most frolic areas had not been used yet that season although damage caused in earlier years was still visible.

Another type of structural damage, ruts or erosion events, caused 10% of all the damage measured and they are typically exacerbated by water runoff. Equestrian trails appeared to be the most susceptible to this type of damage with 80% of erosion events occurring on equestrian trails and only 20% on OHV trails. 75% of erosion events from equestrian use occurred in grass habitat and 19% in shrub habitat. Ruts ranged from a depth of 36cm to 76cm, with the deepest found on equestrian trails.

Of the non-designated trails inventoried, 63% were predominantly horse trails, half of them in forest habitat. Half showed moderate to severe structural damage. Regardless of the severity of structural damage, the impact on vegetation was high for all habitat types.

Of the 37% non-designated trails



Horse trail through forest



Bighorn Heritage Trails Association, an OHV group erected this sign at a muddy bog site. Others signs encourage motorized users to be responsible riders and respectful of other users.





An OHV trail bypasses the main route and goes through a stream. The stream bed has widened due to erosion.



Trail braiding



A typical frolic area

that were multi-use trails, including illegal OHV use, 20% showed moderate to severe structural damage, and all showed vegetation damage. Vegetation damage was slight in grass meadows, but moderate/severe to severe in more than 80% of sites measured. All forested sites had moderate to severe vegetation damage.

Random camping is an unrestricted and increasing activity which can produce damage if not properly managed. The damage is mostly to vegetation, but some structural damage can also occur. The sizes of the campsites surveyed ranged from 11m² to 1665m². Moderate to severe vegetation damage was observed in 64% of the sites. The extent of damage to these campsites was partially caused by a lack of distinct access points.

A third of the camps contained horse camp infrastructure comprised primarily of straw and cut trees wedged between live trees for tying horses. Adding to the impact was that 68% of sites had garbage strewn across them in such forms as beer and pop cans, hubcaps, metal pipes, and broken glass.

In the long term, there are legal activities that are cause for concern if not adequately managed. With increasing use of the area for these activities, unavoidable impacts will occur. Therefore, an early knowledge of what types of activities contribute to what kinds of damage is essential to preparing a strategy to mitigate the negative effects that come with increased volume of use.

Recommendations for the Future

AWA remains opposed to motorized use in the Bighorn Wildland. The continued illegal activity, difficulties in enforcement of the regulations pertaining to motorized use, and continuing trail damage support this view. In the meantime we are recommending the following measures:

(1) Secondary trails and braided areas along the Onion Lake, Ranger Creek, and Hummingbird Creek trails should be closed and reclaimed to restore site integrity and reduce the level of illegal off-trail and out of season use. Furthermore, due to large areas of braiding and other damage, designated trails must be better

demarcated within the landscape to deter illegal use and avoid increased damage.

(2) Close and reclaim trails not designated for motorized use and discourage their creation. Repair designated trails and avoid continued damage. Erect appropriate stream-crossing structures to reduce and eliminate further stream bank erosion, pollution, and sedimentation.

(3) Post more signs with clear and concise messages at the entrance to all trails, and provide educational outreach for all users.

(4) Increase officer presence and alternate the timing of patrols in the area.

(5) Reduce the total number of random campsites and have clearly defined rules about random camping. Designate some formal campsites.

The government needs to ensure that proper resources and expertise is available for education, repair and restoration of damaged areas, and effective enforcement of existing regulations. AWA maintains communication with SRD's monitoring and maintenance teams and we will continue our own monitoring project for two more seasons.

In August 2004, AWA met with SRD to highlight sites of immediate concern within the study area. These sites were considered to be those most in need of improvement such as closure and restoration. In September new trail upgrades had been made on a few of the areas outlined in the August meeting. They included reseeded and closure of some secondary trails as well as the erection of new signage.

Long term, the need is clear for legal protection for the Bighorn Wildland to conserve watersheds, ecological integrity, and wildlife populations. These were the public's priorities when the Bighorn was designated as prime protection zone under the Eastern Slopes Policy in 1977 and they remain priorities today.

AWA would like to acknowledge the support of the Wilburforce Foundation and LaSalle Adams Foundation for our eastern slopes work, and Suncor Energy Foundation, Shell Canada, Alberta Ecotrust, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Rocky Mountain House Lochearn Elementary School, Ernest Manning Senior High School Art Students and the Alberta Conservation Association for our monitoring project.



CARPET-BOMBING ALBERTA'S FRAGILE RANGELANDS

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

"That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known but often forgotten."

- Aldo Leopold

Talking to Gordon Cartwright, as we look out over his timeless rangeland southwest of Longview in the southern foothills of Alberta, it is easy to understand why somebody would be willing to work so hard, to put so much on the line to protect this landscape and this way of life.

Cattle graze peacefully amidst a riotous explosion of wildflowers, with the breath-taking backdrop of the majestic southern Kananaskis mountains in the background. This is a landscape which has changed little in the past 100 years; a landscape inseparable from the ranching tradition which Cartwright, a member of the Pekisko Group, describes as "Alberta's longest standing sustainable industry."

"The land between the Oldman and the Highwood rivers along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains represents the largest block of remaining perennial grasslands on the continent," Cartwright says. "These drought proof grasses formed the heart of Alberta's early economy long before there was a provincial government or oil and gas revenue."

Carpet-Bombing

But all is not well in this staunch ranching community: there is one major cloud on the horizon. Compton Petroleum is planning to drill six exploratory gas wells in the area, with a further 15 planned in the near future. And this is no ordinary gas play.

The rock formations under the Livingstone area and the adjacent Porcupine Hills are folded back on themselves, creating a complex "tight" natural gas formation. Development of this formation, known as the Callum

field, would require a well density considerably higher than in more conventional formations.

At a recent open house at Chain Lakes Provincial Park, Compton officials admitted that well densities of one well per 10 acres could be required. The prospect of 64 gas wells per section—known colourfully in the industry as "carpet-bombing"—in the Livingstone/Porcupine area is truly staggering.

"The EUB and Ministry of Energy ... constantly permits higher well densities wherever industry asks for them," points out Andrew Nikiforuk, researcher for the Livingstone Landowners Group. "Many parts of eastern Alberta now support oil well densities of 100 wells per section and gas well densities of 32 wells per section."

The Battle Begins

Local ranching groups, including the Pekisko Group and the Livingstone Landowners Group, and environmental groups such as AWA are gearing up for a fight, and this clearly is not going to be an easy battle for Compton.

In 1999 the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB), in a historic decision, denied permission to Amoco to drill in the spectacular Whaleback area nearby. In 2002, Vermillion Resources Ltd withdrew its hotly criticized plans to drill for gas on rangeland near to Longview after strong opposition from the ranching community.

And in 2003, EUB again refused permission to Polaris Resources Ltd. to drill for sour gas on the borders of the newly protected Whaleback, partly because of the irreplaceable habitat and partly because of Polaris' woeful communication with the local community.

But opponents of this carpet-bombing have their work cut out. Decisions on whether to allow oil and gas development are never popularity



Gordon Cartwright on his ranch land

contests. If the company has consulted the local community and the local community has made it clear that they do not want the development, then the development will go ahead regardless. Around 20,000 well applications are made every year. In the past 10 years, just four have been turned down on environmental grounds.

Natural Grass or Natural Gas?

AWA has been involved in the Livingstone/Porcupine area for decades. The Porcupine Hills are always one of the favourite destinations in our summer hikes program. The ridges of the Skyline Trail offer unparalleled views west over the Porcupine Hills and on to the Rocky Mountains.

Despite photographs at a recent Compton open house, with the caption "native plant growth after reclamation," it is well known that native fescue grasslands have never been successfully restored after damage. Native grasslands cannot be restored, and "mitigation" cannot ever

adequately replace what is lost; once they are lost, they are lost forever.

But what is the urgency to drill for this marginal resource? If we leave the

drop of oil and gas that we possibly can, but we need to stop and think about the value of these complex ecological systems (including their

famed Rocky Mountain front last year,” points out Nikiforuk. “Why can’t we ask Ralph Klein for the same?”

This is not just about looking after a beautiful, fragile habitat: this is a local community which has developed around an industry which has shown itself to be sustainable for a hundred years.

“The local community and its sense of place and purpose hold the critical tools of land, expertise, experience, and commitment that are essential to preserve and enhance ecological function on these landscapes,” says Cartwright. “For the energy sector it is only a few weeks worth of energy. A few weeks worth of energy that may destroy this landscape forever.”

Action:

Send your comments to:

- Your MLA (contact information for all MLA’s can be found by calling the government toll-free number 310-0000),
- Sarah Paulson, Facilities Applications, Alberta Energy and Utility Board 640-5 Avenue SW Calgary, AB T2P 3G4

For more information go to:

www.pekisko.ca

www.livingstone-landowners-group.net

N. Douglas



Cows graze contentedly on native fescue grasslands on the Cartwright ranch in the southern foothills

gas in the ground, then it will still be there for future generations.

“Whatever oil and gas exists beneath the ground there is a public asset owned by Albertans,” said Cartwright at a recent Compton open house. “This asset can only appreciate over time.”

Sure, Alberta’s economy is booming, as we rush to suck up every

contribution to future supplies of clean water), which could suffer irreversible damage if Compton is allowed to continue with its plans.

“Underground assets should not simply be liquidated at the expense of surface assets,” points out Cartwright.

The Livingstone Landowners and the Pekisko Group are calling for a time-out from these developments. “President George Bush declared such moratorium on drilling in Montana’s



CBM HORSE HAS LEFT THE BARN, NOW GOVERNMENT WANTS PUBLIC INPUT

By Shirley Bray, WLA Editor

In spite of the fact that coalbed methane (CBM) development is charging ahead in the province, with more than 3500 wells drilled by the end of 2004 and another 3000 expected this year, the government would now like public feedback on a number of key recommendations for CBM development. The Coalbed Methane/ Natural Gas in Coal Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee (MAC) has submitted its preliminary findings for public review.

The Committee, formed in 2003, had working groups for water,

surface/air, tenure and royalty issues and held public meetings. AWA participated in the Surface-Air Working Group (SAWG). MAC will evaluate comments received on the *Preliminary Findings* for inclusion in the final report due later this year. Curiously, the committee’s name contains both terms for CBM. The government prefers “natural coal in gas,” likely because of the controversy and negative stories about CBM development in the U.S.

According to MAC, although CBM development will follow the same regulatory framework as conventional natural gas, “there is a need to examine the current rules

and regulations and ensure that the resource is developed responsibly.” The Pembina Institute believes that large-scale projects should undergo full environmental impact assessments, but industry and government are not keen on creating new rules, just streamlining old ones. MAC found a number of issues unique to CBM, primarily dealing with water.

According to the *Land Advocate* the government was forced to hold public meetings to determine if regulatory changes were needed for CBM development because of increasing pressure by landowners concerned about compressor noise,

groundwater depletion, declining property values and the fragmentation of agricultural and public lands. The south eastern slopes (see *WLA* August 2005) and the Rumsey Natural Area (see *WLA* December 2004 and February 2005) have been of particular concern for conservationists and landowners.

A recent article by Andrew Nikiforuk, called “Life Inside a Science Project,” (*Globe and Mail* Report on Business, April 29/05) describes the CBM scene in the province and the less than satisfactory experiences of the community of Rosebud with EnCana’s commercial CBM project in the area.

Although MAC considers all of its 40 recommendations important, they have made a top ten list to be considered for early action. Some of the issues are considered below.

Protecting the Environment

The first recommendation is to create another multi-stakeholder committee to look at several ways to protect the environment and minimize cumulative impacts. MAC suggests this new committee (1) ensure that existing integrated land management principles, policies and practices relating to CBM maintain “the integrity and function of the land,” (2) make a list of environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) that are not appropriate for CBM development, and (3) determine if current land management processes adequately protect ESAs.

Of the many recommendations that came out of SAWG, AWA made a determined effort to have wildlife and environmental concerns included under the issue of environmental health. While consensus was reached on a number of issues dealt with by SAWG, non-consensus recommendations were accompanied by qualifiers from those organizations who did not support it. According to SAWG’s final report, the only exception to this was the issue of environmental health, “where the original recommendations [made by AWA] appeared to be substantively contentious and were revised to gain consensus.”

AWA believes that CBM is a high-impact, long-term industry that may negatively impact the short and long-term integrity and health of the environment. The impacts may include

water contamination, increased surface disturbance or habitat fragmentation (increased well density, roads and the need for additional facilities such as compressors), increased flaring and venting, and increased dust and noise. CBM may significantly affect the benefits and opportunities of healthy ecosystems which provide many services such as functioning watersheds, clean air, habitat and biodiversity, and recreational opportunities.



Compressors near Rosebud

AWA’s position is that CBM development (or other industry) should not occur in protected areas or other environmentally sensitive areas, especially those of provincial, national or international significance. AWA also opposes development in buffer zones around these areas, or, at the very least, believes there should be special management that would avoid compromising the ecological integrity of the core areas of high ecological value. CBM exploration and development in other areas must be subjected to ecological assessment and monitoring before, during and after the project. Full-field life-cycle planning must be required for all new developments including phase-out and reclamation/restoration planning.

AWA felt that existing conventional regulations are inadequate for CBM development. AWA also pointed out the potential negative effects of industrial activity on wildlife and recommended strategies to minimize impacts and identify important sites and species.

Regarding cumulative effects, AWA recommended that (1) the EUB and the government promote more

project-based assessments of impacts prior to the posting of mineral rights; (2) the EUB review its regulatory process for ways to ensure minimal surface disturbance and cumulative effects (now MAC recommendation 4.2.1); and (3) cumulative effects assessment be conducted early in the process to determine whether CBM development is appropriate in the proposed area and to identify potential irreversible impacts.

A suggestion by SAWG to

delay CBM development in areas where it would damage long-term ecological viability, until suitable technology was available, was roundly criticized by government and industry representatives. The EUB believes that current regulations provide sufficient protection of sensitive areas. The EUB has Information Letters providing guidelines for oil and gas development in the south eastern slopes, Rumsey and native prairie. But guidelines are not legislation and don’t carry penalties when violated. Some stakeholders were concerned that there is a lack of awareness and enforcement of these Information Letters.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) didn’t want anything that might “sterilize access to the mineral resource.” (Others were concerned about “sterilizing” surface use through setbacks – 100m for a CBM well). What area would they recognize as being unsuitable for CBM development, especially if it is allowed in Rumsey, an internationally significant grassland?

Although there may be ways to drill gas wells that minimize the changes made to a wilderness area,

there are some that should be off-limits to development on the principle that development of any kind violates their integrity, believes AWA. The Butte Action Committee wanted stronger wording and said the statement should read “no CBM development should be approved in areas that have proven scientific studies indicating a severe impact will occur to the environment.” The word “severe” is still open to interpretation. However, the favoured solution for CBM is not to limit development but to develop a “best practices” manual.

MAC also recommended that government and industry work together to improve reclamation of sensitive areas impacted by CBM. Reclamation, putting back a cover of vegetation, is easy, but restoration is not. The problem in native grasslands, like Rumsey, that has been brought up continuously, is that we do not know

environmental, recreational or other sensitivities.”

MAC supported the right of landowners to “a quiet enjoyment of their land”, but pointed out it had to be balanced with the right of industry to produce oil and gas, the benefits from royalties, taxes and employment, and the right of Albertans to a clean and safe environment. But who decides this balance?

Tweeti and Linn Blancett, sixth generation ranchers in New Mexico, have worked hard to carry on the ranching tradition, hoping to pass this heritage on to their son and grandchildren. Tweeti told an audience in Cowley in late July that the scale of CBM development had made part of her land unviable for ranching. Is this the balance we are preparing for in Alberta?

“Northwest New Mexico has been sacrificed on the altar of corporate greed and political buy-offs. What has

and reduced cumulative impact due to CBM development. Instead, in March 2005, the EUB released Bulletin 2005-08 which proposed changes to the EUB’s subsurface well-spacing applications process in eastern south and central Alberta. Subsurface well spacing has to do with the number of wells potentially necessary to recover gas from a reservoir.

The EUB proposed to eliminate the requirement for landowner notification or community consultation of applications for downspacing (increasing the number of wells on a piece of land). Instead, only potentially affected subsurface parties would be notified because, as landowners were told, what happens under the surface does not affect landowners (see *Calgary Herald*, April 16/05). Landowners would only be notified of surface facilities. The EUB also proposed to increase the baseline density of wells for a given land area from one gas well per section per pool to four for shallower wells and two for the deeper Mannville wells.

In August 2004, the National Energy Board (NEB) wrote in *Looking Ahead to 2010 – Natural Gas Markets in Transition* that there was concern “by some CBM producers over their ability to obtain timely regulatory approval for the large number of wells that may be required to develop CBM. It was suggested that a new regulatory framework may be beneficial, and that regulators could consider a ‘blanket approach’ to approve drilling programs for this type of development.”

Mike Gatens, Chairman of the Board of the Canadian Society of Unconventional Gas, told a concerned landowner in December 2004 that the EUB was considering changing the process for downspacing applications, and that was along the lines of the NEB’s blanket approach. But Tom Byrnes of the EUB and Sharla Rauschnig of the Department of Energy denied that a “blanket approval” process for CBM was being considered.

In a letter to the *Strathmore Standard* (May 5, 2005) Tom Neufeld, a communications manager for the EUB, wrote that it’s the EUB’s job “to listen to the views of Albertans on energy development and we welcome



A 1100m long lease road to a CBM well.

how to restore rough fescue grasslands and they are very vulnerable to invasive species.

MAC points out that the government “uses a variety of legislation and management mechanisms to maintain the environmental integrity of public lands while specifying the different levels and types of allowable use.” However, certain stakeholders expressed particular concern regarding CBM activity in areas unaccustomed or unsuitable for the pace, scale and density of such development. But MAC writes that future CBM development will likely occur in such areas, including “lands with special

happened to us will happen across the West,” warns Tweeti. She proposes that “We stand together as Westerners to make industry meet their responsibilities to all public land users. We must campaign as a block and vote as a block. We must form alliances between farmers and ranchers, environmentalists and conservationists, hunters and fishermen, liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats. We can deliver the votes by working together in a new way.”

EUB Bulletin Raises Ire of Landowners

MAC recommended that the EUB review its regulatory process for ways to support minimal surface disturbance

all public scrutiny of our decision.” Well, the EUB got an earful.

“Bulletin 2005-08 has shocked many,” wrote Jessica Ernst, a Rosebud landowner with a CBM operation on her land. “Concerned stakeholders are still reeling from the implications of it, notably that the EUB went so far as to dismiss the dedicated work of our Assistant Deputy Minister of Energy, Mike Ekelund and the MAC stakeholders he has chaired for so long. Stakeholder groups throughout the province have already made it clear to industry and the government that more consultation in Alberta is required, not less.” She argued that the blanket approval for downspacing would diminish the rights of landowners. She demanded that more time be given to the public to respond. The EUB extended the deadline by 40 days.

Tim Belec of Battle Lake felt the Bulletin was unfair and was not looking out for citizens’ rights. He charged that the EUB was merely a political tool of government and “the handmaiden of the oil and gas industry” and demanded that Alberta have an elected board with representation from all sectors of society.

The Coalition for Alberta’s Future (CFAC), representing more than 5000 citizens and families, demanded in a news release (April 15/05) that the bulletin be rescinded or the Coalition might call for the resignation of the EUB’s chairman, Neil McCrank. CFAC requested a full public review of the EUB’s mandate to make decisions in the public interest. They supported the Association of Municipalities, Districts and Councils (AAMDC) which passed a resolution calling for the bulletin to be withdrawn until after MAC’s final report.

Researchers at the Canadian Institute of Resources Law wrote “it seems to us just wrong to say that decisions regarding the subsurface do not have serious ramifications for surface owners and thus notice to them is not required.” They argued that by treating surface owners unfairly it might invite a challenge under section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which gives everyone in Canada the right to “life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the

principles of fundamental justice,” as well as “under the duty of fairness provided for by administrative law.”

They suggested that failure to provide notice and an opportunity to be heard to surface owners when licences are being sold by the Department of Energy is unconstitutional. Also, a decision to reduce well spacing “presents the very real possibility of a threat to surface owners’ ‘security of person’ and other interests protected by administrative law, and thus notice and an opportunity to be heard should be ensured.” They argued that if companies applied for reduced well spacing, then surely they were going to apply for more wells. “Experience so clearly shows that the public must be

prior to MAC’s issuing of its final recommendations to the Minister of Energy. “Not to wait for the filing of, and response to, that report would seem to belittle the time and effort being put into this consultation process and seriously undermine the public’s confidence in the meaningfulness of it.”

The government has no idea of the scale of CBM development in the province, except that it will exceed that of conventional gas. The problem is that although everyone may minimize their footprint, there are just too many footprints. The EUB approves projects on a case-by-case basis, not on a cumulative impact basis.

The Pembina Institute has recommended that “not only should an



Two drill rigs 400m apart

engaged at the earliest possible time, if the rights of ordinary citizens are to be fully protected”.

CIRL criticized the EUB for appearing to follow the lead of industry instead of exercising its powers to regulate the oil and gas industry in the public interest. They pointed to the bulletin’s background information in which it states that “there has been a significant increase in the number of applications requesting higher well density spacing” and then recommends that there be higher baseline densities. They considered it unacceptable that the EUB was making decisions based, not on what would maximize the public interest now, but on established trends and what would maximize the convenience of industry.

Referring to the democratic process, CIRL wondered why the EUB was putting out this bulletin

overall development plan be required for intensive exploration or commercial CBM projects, as suggested by the EUB, but large-scale projects should be subject to an EIA [environmental impact assessment]” (*Unconventional Gas*, June 2003). They pointed out that EIAs are required for oilsands projects and oil and gas processing facilities, but not conventional or CBM wells. EIAs need to consider impacts on water, air, land and communities.

Wishes About Water

In April 2004 the Butte Action Committee asked for a moratorium on CBM development if it was associated with freshwater, until MAC had made its recommendations. Industry has downplayed concerns about water, following horror stories from the U.S., by assuring us that the coal beds in the shallower Horseshoe Canyon and

Belly River formations through south and central Alberta are dry. But dry is a relative term.

Water can be produced when drilling these dry wells and that can affect aquifers or water wells in the area. But water damage information is extremely difficult to find out about and report on for various reasons. Confidentiality agreements are often requested by some industry proponents before they agree to pay to repair or replace the damaged well.

EnCana has already caused problems with water wells in the Rosebud area yet is planning to drill again right in the middle of seven water wells, of which they monitored only three. EnCana reportedly did not consult with all the residents who had their water wells negatively affected the last time.

MAC made a number of recommendations regarding CBM and water issues. The first, that regardless of whether wells are drilled in dry or wet coal seams, we need more scientific information, with a complete analysis and understanding of all the water supplies in the province as an ultimate objective. That begs the question as to

what is happening with the thousands of wells already drilled or being drilled.

MAC thinks that before there is significant growth in non-saline (fresh) water producing wells, we should make sure that those water resources are adequately protected from impact. Non-saline water seams are aquifers. Should we be removing water at all from these? Water extraction may result in alteration of surface water hydrology or quality or contamination or co-mingling of aquifers. MAC notes there is insufficient information about groundwater recharge rates in areas that could experience intense CBM development or on how hydraulically connected aquifers might react.

Some MAC members thought it would be best to develop dry wells first, saline wells next and then non-saline wells to allow time to gather more information. Others, such as AWA do not want any development in non-saline coals, and still others think we should proceed with non-saline wells now.

MAC recommends more monitoring, completing the groundwater inventory in the province, investigating the potential for unintended side effects of CBM drilling

on surrounding aquifers, considering geographical areas where the risk to the quality or quantity of water supplies might be greater than in other areas, investigating the potential for methane migration or release to water wells as a result of CBM depressurization, and generally obtaining a lot more detailed information in areas where CBM drilling will occur.

CFAC points out that Alberta, with 300,000 oil and gas wells, has only 300 groundwater monitoring wells while Manitoba, which has almost no oil and gas activity, has 600.

There was significant discussion on fresh water production, possible uses and diversion, codes of practice, compliance and even a “decision tree” as a guide. But rural landowners are understandably concerned about their own water wells on which they are dependent for household needs. MAC notes that industry has adopted water well testing as a best practice. While the EUB strongly encourages water well testing, it doesn’t require it, and testing is, therefore, inconsistent.

Some MAC members wanted water well testing to be a requirement and recommended that all water wells

From: Livingstone Landowner’s Group Fact Sheet, July 25, 2005

- The province is running out of conventional natural gas and is now pursuing “tight gas,” dirty gas (sour) and coal bed methane (CBM). Tight gas is low flowing gas in deep formations while CBM is low flowing gas in shallow and deep coal seams. Both types of low-grade gas are often developed together.
- Unconventional deposits mean greater well density than average; more surface disturbance; more compressor stations and lower volumes of gas produced over longer periods of time. Reduced volumes also mean lower royalties for Albertans. John King, Vice President of Precision Drilling, simply calls such high density drilling “carpet bombing.” Others call it “statistical drilling.” For example, the Horseshoe Canyon play in Central Alberta will plant more than 50,000 coal bed methane wells on 11, 000 sections of land over a 20-30 year period.
- Compton and other companies say our regulations are better than US ones. That’s not true. Most oil and gas commissions in the US are modeled after the Energy and Utility Board, Alberta’s oil and gas regulator. The US Bureau of Land Management takes its orders from Washington just as the EUB takes its orders from Edmonton. Both have been given orders to “drill, drill and drill.”
- Alberta does not have regulations; it only has guidelines loosely enforced by the EUB. According to EUB officials the board only approves one well at a time; approves wells to companies that actively violate EUB guidelines; and okays 98% of all applications.
- The EUB does not require cumulative or environmental impact assessments on unconventional plays. The EUB and Ministry of Energy does not do priority land use planning and constantly permits higher well densities where ever industry asks for them.
- Many parts of eastern Alberta now support oil well densities of 100 wells per section and gas well densities of 32 wells per section. More than 33,000 wells and 9,322 facilities remain unreclaimed in the province—a \$9.4 billion deficit and a North American record. The EUB has only a \$20-million security deposit to cover this outstanding deficit.

within an 880m radius of the proposed CBM well be tested for water quality, flow rate/yield and methane before drilling. There was no consensus on this proposed recommendation, but AWA believes testing should be mandatory.

MAC did not go so far as to recommend that fresh water not be used for deep well disposal. Instead they said that the philosophy expressed by many Albertans about protecting water supplies and practicing conservation “is potentially in conflict with the current practice of deep-well disposal” of fresh water produced from CBM wells.

Reducing Royalties

MAC recommends a short-term royalty reduction to gather data on Mannville coals, a move that neither the Pembina Institute nor AWA support. “Industry should bear the full cost of development,” says Mary Griffiths of the Pembina Institute, “since any form of subsidy distorts the playing field with respect to renewable energy.” She pointed out that industry is already engaging in pilot projects in the

saline Mannville formation without royalty reductions.

AWA’s position is that CBM exploration and development must not be financially promoted, through changes to the royalty structure or other similar subsidy, to the detriment of the public good.

Conclusion

While the government is concerned with “doing it right,” many Albertans are asking why we are doing it at all. Or so fast. According to EUB employees, says CFAC, industry activity in Alberta now surpasses that of Saudi Arabia. “The intensity of development has become so great,” they say, “that new citizen groups are starting up throughout the province on a regular basis. They are concerned about the future of Alberta’s landscape.” Oil and gas drilling, they say, is now impinging on watersheds, subdivisions, tourism, farming economies and property rights.

The government is currently working on a new land use strategy, with integrated land management

principles at its core. AWA has been calling for an overarching public lands policy for two decades. But how many “horses” have left the barn that the government is merely going to follow? Nevertheless, there may be a small window of opportunity at this time to influence these important and far-reaching decisions.

What is Alberta’s vision for our landscape 10 or 20 years from now? How much disturbance or cumulative impact is acceptable? If we truly want to preserve the integrity and function of the land, of our ecosystems, of our watersheds, it is vital that each of us participate to ensure a truly prosperous future.

“The future of ground water, wildlife, and fescue grasslands,” wrote Andrew Nikiforuk (*Calgary Herald*, April 23/04), “may well depend upon what the citizens of this great province actually value.”

The Preliminary Findings by MAC and a comment form, due Sept. 30, 2005, can be found at www.energy.gov.ab.ca. Andrew Nikiforuk’s article can also be found on the web.

NEW TRAITS FOUND IN HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

By Tracee Kidd

Last fall Ray Blanchard, nature enthusiast and bird breeder, who lives south of Chestermere Lake, was looking out his kitchen window at a group of Hungarian Partridge (also known as Grey Partridge), when he noticed that several of them had markings that were out of the ordinary. Instead of the usual solid rust-coloured cap, some of these birds had a ring of

white as though someone had taken a white pencil and had drawn around it; also in the males the rusty U-shaped belly patch was absent.

Blanchard thinks this variation is probably a result of spontaneous mutation. It is not likely that is the result of domestic breeding since breeders do not care to work with these partridge due to their flighty nature.

Another possibility is that a rare albino partridge (which has a missing allele for colour), sighted in the spring of last year, could have bred with a regularly marked bird and passed on some of its traits. Blanchard is keeping an eye open this fall to see if this new coloration pattern has been passed on to other partridges.



Typical male partridge. Note the U-shaped belly patch and the rust-coloured cap without any white band



Mutant male partridge. The belly patch is missing and the cap is outlined with white.



WILDFIRE SNAKE PIT

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Board of Directors

Getting definitive answers from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) is like trying to catch snakes. The harder you try, the more they just slither away.

Thus, alas, it was, at the meeting AWA attended June 29 in Rocky Mountain House over plans to reduce fire hazard to the community of Nordegg and various area infrastructures by targeting most of the Bighorn Wildland.



AWA Files

On the drive up to Rocky, I tried to prepare AWA's newest conservation specialist, David Samson, for his first meeting with a government agency. I told him to approach such meetings optimistically, with the hope that somehow, things will have changed and SRD will have adopted a mandate of actually listening to the public and working cooperatively with it. SRD folks at this meeting would be mostly new, so we did have hope.

But, five minutes into the actual meeting, it was apparent that while SRD wanted our presence, they did not want our input, and they were certainly not prepared to answer our questions. They were also not prepared to allow the meeting to proceed in other than a predetermined format.

A hired facilitator was hell-bent on engaging us in value-word games and there was no dissuading her. The front wall was soon covered in paper slips carrying terms like ecosystem and watershed. We were assured that our group's word-values for the Bighorn

aligned perfectly with those of the off-roader and chamber of commerce groups that SRD had previously and separately met with. This, of course, gave us great comfort.

It was an SRD meeting-as-usual we had been invited to; a bureaucratic plan was obviously already in place and lacked only the stamp of public approval prior to its implementation. They knew how to get that. Just hold a meeting and if members of the public showed up, that would constitute endorsement. Works every time! At least here in Alberta, it works every time.

The stakeholder meeting the AWA was invited to included conservation groups, watershed alliances and native peoples. We were considered to be compatible. Six or seven other "compatible" groups were also being met with separately. A representative of each was to be chosen to participate in a final charette meeting (whatever that is) in mid September, to give the official public go-ahead to spend lots of taxpayer money in defense of Nordegg and various developments that have been allowed to build in the nearby forest.

Notably, our SRD officials seemed to have no or little knowledge of the elsewhere-acclaimed FireSmart program to protect developments in the urban/wildland interface at no or little public expense.

When asked how the locally developed R11 hazard reduction plan fit with other land plans being developed immediately to the north, there were no answers. When asked how this locally developed plan fit with new land management plans being initiated for all public lands, there were no answers.

When asked why this plan had been developed without reference to FireSmart "Protecting Your Community from Wildfire," the much-touted plan to which SRD is a "platinum sponsor," we got cow stares. When pressed into a corner to tell us who ultimately was responsible for the R11 Fire Plan, the

name Doug Sclar was finally released.

Mr. Sclar is a forest manager under the Public Lands and Forests section of SRD. He, apparently, has decided that the way to protect Nordegg from fire is to log 5% of the timber from hazard zones throughout the Bighorn Wildland, outside Zone 1, Prime Protection.

The R11 plan, as described in the letter of invitation to stakeholder meetings, "... has the same boundaries as the Bighorn Access Management Plan. Prescribed burns will be the preferred method of hazard reduction; however, some timber harvest may be considered in areas deemed appropriate under existing plans and legislation." We all know what this means. While there may be a tentative burn or two in Prime Protection Zone portions of the Bighorn, fire reduction under this plan will be primarily by logging.

When pressed about where logging would occur, there was a great deal of slithering. Prime Protection areas are not to be logged into fire suppression, we were told. When asked about Zone 2, Critical Wildlife Habitat, we were told, "There is no Zone 2 in the area."

Martha Kostuch and I could only groan in agony—how could these people be presenting such a plan with so little knowledge of policy? A question was asked about the broader Eastern Slopes Policy, and SRD actually deferred to Martha and me to explain! Groan again.

When repeatedly asked if public input could substantially alter the plan to log large areas of the Bighorn in the name of fire and disease protection, there were no definitive answers. Martha left the meeting early. No representative from our stakeholder group was chosen to participate in the September charette (or is that charade?).

For those of you incensed enough to write about impending logging of the Bighorn Wildland in order to protect Nordegg and nearby resorts and

oil and gas facilities from wildfires, please send your thoughts to Ralph Klein Premier of Alberta, Room 307 and The Hon. David Coumts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Room 420, Legislature Building, 10800 - 97th Ave, Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6.

AWA is developing position statements on both Forest Pests and Forest Fires that are relevant reading for anyone interested in more scientifically updated and ecologically sound approaches to these two important matters. These will be posted on our website.

FireSmart, the truly practical and sensible

plan to protect communities from fire can be found at <http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/wildfires/fpd/firesmart.cfm>.

Papers by Jack Cohen, a primary technical advisor to FireSmart can be found at www.saveamericasforests.org/congress/Fire/Cohen.htm.

MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE EPIDEMIC IN WILLMORE EXACERBATED BY DECADES OF FIRE SUPPRESSION

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Board of Directors

The government is undertaking a program of cutting, burning and baiting in northwest Willmore Wilderness Area to stem the spread of mountain pine beetle. Willmore Wilderness Park north of Jasper is a corner of the province that is normally neglected in government spending. Its access roads have potholes large enough to drown a horse, its trails are dangerously eroded and overgrown, and its trail signs have disappeared. But this year a part of the Willmore west of the Smoky River is getting attention and funds.

The funds do not come out of Community Development's meager budget for parks, however, but out of the lucrative Forest Protection budget of Sustainable Resource Development. The reason for spending is the tiny, native mountain pine beetle blowing into border areas from large infestation sites in B.C., and its potential threat to Alberta's commercial forests.

Although the beetle population in B.C. is considered to have peaked and is now in serious decline, Alberta was invaded here and there last year by flying adults. It is these infested trees that are being hunted out from the air, cut and burned, in the hope of stemming further fly outs when the larvae change into adults and move on.

According to a government news release (July 13, 2005) the infested trees are widely scattered over densely forested areas of the northern Sheep and Muddywater river basins. Crews are being sent in by helicopter to destroy infested trees and set pheromone baits. There have been at least 3500 infested trees.

Eradication operations are occurring throughout Alberta's protected areas that border B.C. —

places like Willmore Wilderness Park and our mountain national parks. They have all become ripe targets for unnaturally large infestations of the mountain pine beetle due to decades of fire suppression that has left thick, congested forests. Historically, natural fires swept through portions of our boreal forest in 25-300 year cycles, thinning them and leaving them more able to resist devastating pest attacks.

AWA Files



Beetle infested trees during an outbreak in southern Alberta

While the national parks recognize that the pine beetle is a native species, they are under pressure from Alberta to control it on park land. In order to do this in a more natural and long-term way, both Banff and Jasper are implementing fairly aggressive prescribed burning programs. Such programs are also in the works for Willmore Wilderness Park, where AWA is assured that logging will not be allowed to substitute for burning programs.

However, the message is a little mixed on the exact plans for the area. Rob Harris, the SRD information officer for the area, told AWA that five or six prescribed burns are planned in the near future west of the Smoky River, including an 11,000ha burn in the Avalanche Creek – Pauline Creek area on the B.C. border that would go

towards headwaters of Holmes River in B.C. He assured us that B.C. was supportive of the plan.

Andy Van Imschoot, from Community Development's Parks and Protected Areas, told AWA that fires were planned in Meadowland Creek with a moderate sized burn this fall. Community Development's Assistant Deputy Minister John Kristensen said he had okayed a small fire in Meadowland Creek and was not sure about B.C.'s comfort zone on burning in the area. Apparently Community Development is under pressure from some locals around Grande Cache who would like to see massive cutting to reduce fire risk.

AWA is supportive of a scientifically based approach to prescribed burning throughout Willmore Wilderness Park in order to return its forests to a more natural condition and to enhance wildlife habitat in critical portions of this area that have been transformed by years of fire control to less productive habitat types.

Forest Protection's huge budget of nearly \$100 million should be redirected from fire protection for commercial forests, to returning our forests to a healthy state of mixed species composition and ages, where they are able to resist catastrophic wildlife and disease and insect infestations without human interference.

For more information about the ecology of the mountain pine beetle in Alberta see Dr. Mary Reid's article "Can we share the forest with mountain pine beetles?" in WLA, August 2001.

AWA's position statement on forest pests can be found on our website under Resources/Positions.

CAN WE SOLVE DROUGHT IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA BY THROWING MONEY AT IT?

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

The proposed Special Areas Water Supply Project (SAWSP), which plans to divert water from the Red Deer River at a cost of almost \$200 million to the Alberta tax-payer, modestly claims to be a “solution to recurring droughts” in the area.

legislation would be required to allow the project to go ahead, which raises the question of why the Water Act banned such transfers in the first place. Even Alberta’s Water for Life strategy confirms, “Alberta’s water resources must be managed within the capacity of

Alberta’s population resides in the part of the province that has the least amount of water.”

The paper goes on to question the wisdom of major engineering projects to deal with this problem. “With the imminent potential for water shortages,

C. Olson



Red Deer River

The project, southeast of Stettler, would remove up to 7.08 cubic metres of raw water per second from the river principally for irrigation purposes, as well as wetland creation, stock-watering and some municipal and domestic use.

Economically, the plan makes little sense. For that \$200 million price tag, the benefits of the project are estimated to be 70 cents on every dollar invested over 50 years: at a cost of \$67 for every single Albertan, that isn’t much of a return on our money.

Inter-Basin Transfer

The proposed project isn’t even legal under current legislation: the 1999 Water Act does not allow for “inter-basin transfers,” and this project would remove water from the Red Deer River Basin and transfer it to the North Saskatchewan Basin. New

individual watersheds.”

This is the first ever proposed transfer of “raw” water between basins. Although the diversion to the North Saskatchewan Basin would result in a dead-end, with no surface water making it to the river, there are still serious implications for groundwater. Groundwater makes up the huge majority of water flow, an estimated 97%, and yet we know incredibly little about these sub-surface flows.

People to Water, Water to People

Increasingly, people are beginning to question the wisdom of expensive, large-scale engineering programs to solve problems of low water flow in a dry climate. A recent discussion paper from the Alberta Institute of Agrologists (AIA), “People to Water, Water to People,” highlights the problem that “the vast majority of

the question currently facing elected officials and water managers is whether to take the engineering approach of moving water to people or to encourage the public and industry to migrate to areas where adequate supplies of water are available.”

There is no doubt that the communities in the area have been struggling for a number of years, particularly after several years of drought. AWA does not oppose measures to improve municipal and domestic supplies of water, and would certainly support economic measures to alleviate some of the problems which affect people in the area.

“We are not opposed to improvement of municipal and domestic water supplies,” says Heinz Unger, AWA Director. “But there are better, cheaper and more efficient ways to achieve this.”

Environmental Concerns

AWA is calling for a full environmental assessment of the project. The project review itself points to a number of knowledge gaps: “The original environmental overview of 1992 is out of date since much of the biophysical information was based on review of existing literature from the 1980’s...”

Loss of sensitive natural grasslands would be minimized, according to the project review, but the likelihood of some of the remaining fragments of native prairie being ploughed under is increased. Less than 1% of Alberta’s Grassland Natural Region is protected, and this will be one more added stress to this fragile and under-appreciated habitat.

Water for Life

The government’s 2003 Water

for Life strategy seemed to signal the beginning of a new way of thinking on how we deal with water in the province: “The Government of Alberta is committed to the wise management of Alberta’s water quantity and quality for the benefit of Albertans now and in the future.”

The strategy then notes, “During all stages of the consultation on the water strategy, Albertans stated again and again that water conservation... is a fundamental component of any provincial water strategy.”

But the SAWSP project shows that the old ways die hard. Drought is not a problem that can be “solved.” Alberta’s climate is clearly becoming warmer and drier, and where old water-expensive practices are no longer appropriate, it is crucial that we look at developing alternative uses of the land, as opposed to propping up outdated operations using hugely expensive technological fixes.

Send your comments to:

- Your MLA (contact information for all MLA’s can be found by calling the government toll-free number 310-0000)
- The Hon. Guy Boutilier, Minister of Environment, #423 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton T5K 2B6

For more information, see “Why are They Giving Away Our Water,” WLA October 2004 and “Reckoning Hidden Costs of River Diversions,” WLA February 2005.

Public input invited:

- (1) Forest Management Planning Standard (deadline Sept. 15, 2005) http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/forests/managing/planning_rules.html
- (2) Provincial Caribou Recovery Plan (deadline Sept. 30, 2005) <http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/index.html>

THOUGHTS ON ALBERTA’S SECOND “FLOOD OF THE CENTURY” IN TEN YEARS

By Nigel Douglas

Dixon Thompson, professor of Environmental Science at the University of Calgary, is suggesting that clearcut logging on the Eastern Slopes could have contributed to the deluge-like runoff that flooded rivers in Central Alberta (*Red Deer Advocate*, June 23/05). Commenting on the clearcut practices so prevalent in Alberta’s forestry industry, Thompson pointed out, “Yes, there are jobs and

economic benefits, but that might be offset by all the expenses incurred by this kind of event.” Thompson believes the province should review its logging policies in the light of more extreme weather events.

Later that week the Canadian Press (June 28/05) reported that the Mayor of High River, Les Rempel, was asking the province to approve a multimillion-dollar project to

permanently protect the community. Plans for a channel to divert part of the Highwood River around the town were shelved by the government in 1995 because of the prohibitive cost. Current costs would be up to \$40 million.

So we build a town, called “High River,” next to the Highwood River. Then we propose to spend \$40 million to divert the river because of the risk of flooding. What is wrong with this picture?



Sheep River – before the rain



Sheep River – after the rain

ARTIST RECAPTURES OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES IN PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS

By John Geary

Karl Geist drew his first breath within an easy fly fisherman's cast of the Bow River, so you could be forgiven for believing his fascination with fish must have been preordained.

Even the artist himself admits he felt an early kinship with the creatures that swam past the door of the Cascade Valley cabin where he spent the first year of his life. Of course, it didn't hurt that his wildlife biologist father, Dr. Valerius Geist, was himself an avid outdoorsman and wilderness lover.

"My father passed on his love of wilderness and outdoor activities to me," says Geist, who currently teaches at the Alberta College of Art and Design. "I particularly enjoyed fishing."

there. By the time he reached his mid-teens, he realized his passion for recording his experiences could form the basis for a career.

"I had a very influential high school art instructor who saw the possibility of me making a profession out of my creative expression."

At ACAD in Calgary, then at the University of Victoria, Geist honed his raw talent and learned to express that creativity in a variety of media, primarily in water colour painting, but also in acrylic, pen and pencil and ink drawings.

Geist draws from a combination of sources when creating a picture: he works from memories of his

subjects are his first love, Geist does like to feature other subjects in his art.

"I enjoy painting larger mammals like deer. I particularly like doing birds, as well."

Fish are the only non-North American creatures he's featured in his work, though, although like many wildlife artists, he would not mind adding some images of more exotic animals to his repertoire, given the opportunity.

"I would certainly like to do that, travel abroad, but I'm so fascinated by what we have here so close to us," he says.

As well as the local fauna, the native flora holds a fascination for the



Karl Geist



© *Karl Geist*

Geist's early attempts at painting and drawing were the result of his trying to re-create his youthful angling experiences during time spent near Victoria, B.C.

"Some of my first experiences fishing were at a small coastal stream on Vancouver Island, close to where my grandfather and uncle had property," he says. "The stream had both coastal cutthroats and juvenile salmon."

"Trying to capture that visually—after the experience—formed the basis of my first expressions of what I had seen, my first attempts at trying to immortalize it on paper."

Geist's interest in art, trying to put down on paper a representation of what he'd seen in the outdoors, was always

own experiences with the subject, supplementing that with photographs and images from reference materials.

Just as fish and fishing played a prominent role in his enjoyment of the outdoors, fish also appear prominently in his artwork.

His piscine images appear in the Banff National Park Fishing Regulations Summary for 2005-06. He has also produced work for the Alberta Conservation Association and Trout Unlimited Canada.

While he concentrates mainly on species native to North America, he has drawn more exotic species like bonefish, sailfish, tarpons and other fish found in warmer waters.

Although those water-dwelling

Calgary artist, who also does botanical illustrations.

"There are a lot of subtle plant forms here. We're surrounded by wonder everywhere we turn."

Birds play a key role in some of his most recent work. The birds featured are dead birds, painted in monochrome, in fairly large (at least 3' by 3') format.

While they may be less pleasing to the eye, choosing to present them this way serves a purpose beyond merely re-creating nature

"It's not only a connection with that animal, but a response in association with how we see it and our association with the environment," says Geist.

“We lose many, many songbirds because we live in these glass towers that create walls that birds fly into. Sometimes we just walk past those small, desiccated remains by the window and not really have any association with the fact that the environment we create obviously creates problems for other species.

“Taking that (dead) bird and putting it up on a wall—particularly in

shades of blacks and grays, rather than colour—gives the viewer a different perception of it.”

Helping people make that connection helps Geist do his bit for conservation.

“Once you’ve had a good experience in the outdoors and it’s touched some part of your soul, you want to maintain it [the wilderness] and save it for others.”



© Karl Geist

A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO ANDY RUSSELL

Dear Editor:

My memorial service for Andy Russell took place a few days later than the public gathering, an event that I had missed due to a Montana raft trip. When I returned to Alberta, the mountains of northern Waterton Lakes National Park had called, and I was soon there, hiking a circuit route that has become a spring ritual.

The hike, originating near the buffalo paddock, traverses the landscape to the northern boundary of the park, carves east along the northernmost summits of Lakeview Ridge and drops south along the eastern arm of this same horseshoe-shaped landmark. The last leg of this route

affords views down onto Hawk’s Nest, Andy Russell’s celebrated home.

The day, stellar in all respects, delivered a connecting vision with Andy, and caused me to reflect upon the first time we met. On that day, many hours after we had shared a chance encounter on the shores of Cameron Lake, he spotted me at the townsite-end of the Akamina Parkway. I was there trying to catch a ride back to my vehicle, still parked at Cameron Lake. The sun was setting, and Andy, driving past, saw me as he was leaving the park. He braked from his intended route, turned from it and quietly insisted upon delivering the requisite ride.

Andy’s kind and generous offer represented a down-to-earth, wonderful gesture of care and goodwill. It was vintage Andy Russell. The ride, and his presence, combined to deliver a fitting end to a magical day, one that I’d spent amid the golden larches and other treasures of the high country that spans the storied and spectacular expanses of northern Glacier and southern Waterton Lakes national parks. Andy’s indelible style and warm interaction provided treasured bookends for the memorable experience.

David McIntyre
Crownsnest Pass, AB



MEMORIAL GIFT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AWA would like to express our sincere appreciation to the friends and family of Andy Russell who made a lasting tribute to the memory of this outstanding man. Your gifts will help our quest for the protection of Alberta’s wild spaces.

In response to our letter to Premier Klein requesting that the Castle Wildland be protected and named as a fitting legacy to Andy Russell, Mr. Klein has acknowledged the legacy Andy has left, and forwarded our request to the Minister of Community Development, the Honourable Gary Mar.

Mr. Mar writes, “Designating the Castle area as Andy Russell Wildland Provincial park would be a fitting tribute to a truly great Albertan who dedicated his life to protecting Alberta’s wild places. I will discuss your proposal further with my colleague, the Honourable David Coutts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.”



STAFF PROFILE: DAVID SAMSON

I am a recent addition to AWA's conservation staff. Although I have had some involvement with AWA on a volunteer basis, I am excited about this opportunity to work full-time towards educating and informing Albertans and Canadians about provincial conservation issues, and protecting the

wild lands which they value greatly. As the path of conservation is rarely a straight one, such has also been the case with my own path to this point. After many years in the financial services industry, I decided to aim the compass in a different direction. I have spent the last four years as a full-time student and obtained a B.Sc. from University of Calgary majoring in physical geography. The focus was on mapping methods and analysis,

but over the course of the degree, my course selection also encompassed gaining a broader understanding of environmental and ecological subjects. Geography, with its interdisciplinary approach, was an excellent way to accomplish this, and I hope this perspective on people and their relationship to the landscape will prove to be a valuable tool, which I can use to help achieve the conservation goals of AWA.



STAFF PROFILE: JORDAN PETTY, B.A., LL.B. CANDIDATE (2006)

I joined the dedicated staff at AWA's creaky old Hillhurst office in May as a summer intern. When not discussing politics with Shirley Bray, I'm working on AWA's Public Lands project. The project is a review of public land law and policy, with the goal of identifying a number of key

guiding principles for the effective management of public land. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Calgary. That means that I like poems. In September I will be entering my third and final year of law school at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. That means that I like legislation. Really, I do. After school, I will be returning to Alberta to commence my articles with

the Law Department at the City of Calgary. My interests include reading the Globe & Mail, hiking, eating breakfast, and loving the Earth. I also write opinion pieces for the Calgary Herald on occasion. I'd like to thank AWA for taking me on this summer, as well as Queen's University and the Law Foundation of Ontario who funded my internship.



STAFF PROFILE: SEAN NICHOLS

You have probably seen me hanging around if you have ever set foot in AWA's provincial office in Calgary, and you've certainly heard my voice if you've ever called us up on the phone. I came to AWA in 2004 on a summer work placement, and I guess they liked me enough to keep me around all this time.

suits me quite fine—one day I may be proofreading articles for the Advocate; the next day arranging auction items for our upcoming Wild West Gala; and the day after, participating in our trail monitoring project in the Bighorn Wildland. If one thing is certain, it is that the work here is never boring! Unusually, perhaps, for someone at AWA, my background is actually in math and computer science, and I am just completing a B.Sc. at the University of Calgary. I am originally from Vancouver, BC, although I have lived all over the world, and have always had an interest in wilderness wherever I have discovered it... always

tried to enjoy it to the fullest, whether that meant cycling across Canada or rock climbing in the Arabian Peninsula. I've been in Alberta for two years now, and have to say that I love my new home. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to help protect it so that future Albertans (native or transplanted like myself) will also be able to experience in it the same joy that I have found. I plan on starting graduate studies in January, and look forward to many more simultaneous years with AWA, contributing to the fight to conserve this province's incredible beauty. I hope to see you somewhere along that road!

LOCHEARN SCHOOL STUDENTS SUPPORT AWA TRUST FUND

The Lochearn Recycling Club has donated \$100 to AWA's endowment Fund, the Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust. The club, operating since last September, was organized by staff and students of Lochearn School in Rocky Mountain House to promote efficiency, reduce waste, and promote protection of the environment. The club collected almost 22,000 beverage cans, bottles, and juice boxes from students and staff at the school. The

students also contributed to the Red Cross Tsunami Relief Fund. Grade 5 student Kyla von Hollen said she's happy she participated in the Recycling Club, "because it helps the environment." She also stated the students efforts saved enough energy to power a television for 418 days and saved about two barrels of crude oil.

Thanks to Stu Salkeld, The Mountaineer Publishing Co. Ltd.

Stu Salkeld



Left to right: Taren Pidherney, Kyla and Michael von Hollen at the Rocky Bottle Depot of several companies that log in this area.

OPEN HOUSE PROGRAM - SUMMER DAY HIKES

All day hikes: \$20:00
Pre-registration required for all hikes

Saturday, August 20, 2005
Beehive Natural Area
with James Tweedie

Saturday September 24, 2005
Picklejar Lakes
with Vivian Pharis

Saturday January 14, 2006
Mount Lorette Winter Hike
with Peter Sherrington



THE AWA WILD WEST GALA
Friday, September 16, 2005

Please join us for a Wild West time in support
of Alberta Wilderness Association.

For tickets call 283-2025 or visit
www.AlbertaWilderness.com



ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST ANNUAL LECTURE AND AWARDS

Friday, November 18, 2005

The Enigma of Wild Things
with Dr. Jim Butler

Reception: 6:00pm
Lecture and Awards: 7:00pm
Cost: \$25.00

Reservations: (403) 283-2025,
1-866-313-0713, awa@shaw.ca or
online at www.AlbertaWilderness.ca

CORRECTION:

WLA April 2005, page 13, Castle map: The caption for the black triangle symbol should read: Provincial Recreation Areas. The correct version of the map can be seen on our website under Issues/Castle.

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY FOR WILD ALBERTA

Celebrate Alberta's 100th birthday and AWA's 40th anniversary with a gift to Alberta's wild lands, wild waters and wildlife. We have a remarkable wilderness heritage, one that cannot be sustained without determined, passionate efforts. You can help!

The health of our environment and the quality of life we leave for future generations is up to us. Each of us can make a difference!

A gift to the Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife endowment fund supports wilderness programs and research that contribute to the protection, understanding and appreciation of wilderness and wildlife.

Your legacy will touch many lives!

YES! I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE A LEGACY FOR WILD ALBERTA.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ PROV: _____ POSTAL CODE: _____ PHONE (HM): _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION: CHEQUE VISA M/C AMOUNT \$ _____

CARD # _____ EXPIRY DATE: _____ SIGNATURE: _____



EVERY GIFT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE. THANK YOU!

CHEQUES MADE OUT TO THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST
WILL BE FORWARDED TO THE CALGARY FOUNDATION AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A RECEIPT FROM THEM.

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:



Alberta Wilderness Association
Box 6398, Station D
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E1
awa@shaw.ca

