



WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Looking west from Antelope Butte and contemplating the magic of the Livingstone Range – (D. McIntyre)

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Treloar

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“AWA JOURNAL HAS COLOURFUL YEAR

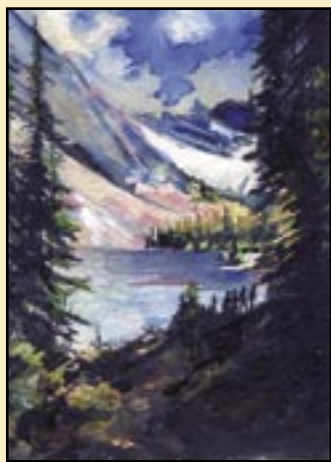
Wild Lands Advocate has had a wonderful year of colour printing and another outstanding year of hard-hitting, well-written articles, which are the corporate memory of Alberta's wilderness. We know our readers have appreciated the new look and many of you have written to tell us how much value you find in our news journal.

Our journal is recognized internationally, and I want to thank our editor, Shirley Bray, for her tenacity and dedication to publishing an outstanding journal; our staff for keeping the stories of their work in the forefront; our guest writers who make the opinion of Alberta's public known; Joyce Hildebrand, our copy editor; and so many others who make each issue a success.

We could never have made this tremendous stride forward without the corporate sponsorship of Topline Printing Inc., true corporate community leaders. Bill Peris of Topline Printing put it this way, "Mere words cannot describe how important I think it is that AWA's work continues to be done. If every person out there just made a little bit of effort, great things can happen."

Christyann Olson

Christyann Olson
Executive Director



© Jacqueline Treloar



© Jacqueline Treloar

In this issue we are pleased to present, this time in colour, watercolours by artist Jacqueline Treloar. We originally featured her work, with a biography, in April 2004. For more information about Jacqueline, visit www.jatreloar.com.

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THE QUIET URBANIZATION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY: PART I

By Vivian Pharis and Shirley Bray

Commercial recreation ventures with permanent cabins and lodges are popping up in the backcountry, often without public knowledge and with a large amount of government discretion in their development. Rustic four-season resorts are replacing outfitter camps. Upscale trapper's cabins overlook prime vistas. Permanent wilderness camps leave heavy footprints on the land. Long-term commercial recreation ventures in the eastern slopes are being approved without long-term overall land planning in which ecological integrity is given priority over development.

Fifteen years ago, Dr. Herb Kariel and Dr. Dianne Draper studied the effects of tourism on mountain regions worldwide. No matter where they looked they found the same story – gradual urbanization of rural and wild areas by monied travellers lured by the beauty of the natural environment. “There is a finite amount of high quality natural environment available to attract tourists,” said Draper. “We don’t seem to appreciate that our incremental

decisions reduce both the quality of the landscape and our future options” (*Catalyst*, May 1990, University of Calgary).

In part one we look at how some simple summer outfitting base camps have metamorphosed into four-season resorts without public input and how difficult it is for the public to learn about them. In part two we investigate other types of back country developments that have sprung up, the history of commercial recreation in the Eastern Slopes, and what all of this means for our wilderness.

Panther River Adventures in Bulldozing

In May 2005, Terry Safron, owner of Panther River Adventures, a guiding and outfitting company, took a D6 caterpillar tractor into a non-motorized Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) for a construction project. He bladed a regenerating old trail into an obvious new dirt road, leveled a campsite and bladed access to it, and ripped up a

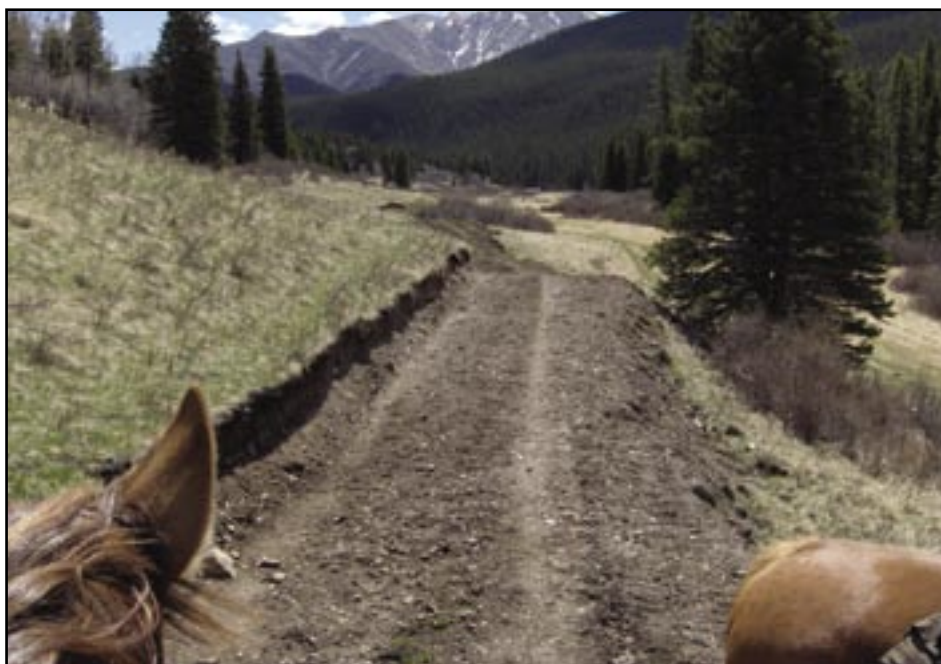
meadow on public land opposite his base camp to make it unattractive to random campers. The meadow had a large “Tread Lightly” sign on it. He also crossed the Panther River a reported nine times over 15 kms.

Other users of the area were irate and one of them phoned AWA to complain. Why was an outfitter allowed to do this to the backcountry? Was he making or breaking the rules? Even the oil and gas industry has to meet certain standards before they can cross streams and blade new roads. Panther River flows eastward to meet the Red Deer River near the Forestry Trunk Road in the central foothills. Panther Road follows the river for a short distance, providing access up the river.

Panther River Adventures is one of several base camps along the Panther River; others are Barrier Mountain Outfitters and Sunset Guiding and Outfitting. They consist of 10-acre base camps that have sprouted a variety of amenities. They lie in a slim area along the Panther River that is zoned in the Eastern Slopes Policy as General Recreation. Management of this zone is supposed to emphasize maintaining the natural environment for a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities, including such things as maintaining vistas or improving stream habitat for fishing.

The original intent of such camps was to provide commercial trail riding operators with a fenced area where horses could be held while waiting for the arrival of clients or at the end of a trail ride. They were meant to be unobtrusive and most facilities were to be removed at the end of the season, which runs from May 15 to September 30.

Soon small buildings were allowed at the camps for storing horseriding equipment. Then they started operating year-round with permanent housing and staff. Now they have metamorphosed



A caterpillar was used to blade this trail



A meadow was bladed by Panther River Adventures' owner to discourage random campers

A "tread lightly" sign stands next to the meadow

into four-season resorts offering rental accommodation cabins, RV sites, restaurants, and a growing list of urban amenities that were never envisioned under the early concept of trail riding base camps.

Horses kept penned in the same site continuously have severely eroded the ground. There is concern that the river may be contaminated due to seepage from a growing number of human septic systems and accumulating horse manure and urine from these resorts that sit right on the banks of the river.

Panther River Adventures sports a range of permanent structures, including living quarters, in addition to 10 RV sites, horses, and equipment, including caterpillar and backhoe. They even advertised that they would board horses, but, according to Public Lands, their sign has now disappeared.

Public Lands says the pressure of providing year-round services is from contractors working for Shell or Suncor who want to stay near work, but don't live in company camps. Safron was even selling fuel to these contractors, until that operation was shut down. The situation has caused a great deal of conflict with Mountain Aire Lodge, the official lodge in the area, which lies in a Facility Zone on Highway 734 close to where the Panther River meets the Red Deer River. Facility Zones allow greater commercial development.

Safron was issued a temporary field authorization, with conditions, under the Public Lands Act by SRD Land Management Officer Norman Hawkes of the Crowsnest Forest District for much of the recent construction work. Public Lands refused to

allow him to disturb the meadow, a condition that he ignored and for which he may be charged.

Safron also failed to get approval from the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to disturb a river bed and fish habitat, even though at that time DFO had a fully functioning office in Calgary. That led to an investigation by DFO. A package was sent to DFO's legal section for a decision on charges. Then the axe fell on DFO, and the Calgary office, along with others recently established across the prairies, suddenly lost most of its employees. The Panther investigating officer was one of them. When AWA contacted the office this fall, we were told that charges were unlikely. Charges may still be laid regarding the unauthorized blading up of public land across the road from the Panther River Adventures resort.

Safron claimed he was simply trying to maintain existing trails and fix erosion problems. He said he spent about \$5,000 on the project and did only what he thought he was allowed to do. Public Lands is apparently satisfied with the road work, but not the work done at the camp. The purpose of changing a trail into a road was to allow horse-drawn wagons safe passage to the camps. Wagons allow people to bring in a large amount of gear, including, for example, floor boards for tents, electrical generators, beds, and building materials. It is not uncommon for these wagons to tip over into the Panther River, spilling their contents.

Public lands manager Rick Blackwood doesn't see these wagons as a problem, saying that outfitters were providing a wide range of experiences

to fulfil the expectations of diverse clients. He argued that wagons cause at least as much damage to a river bed as a caterpillar. There are no policies or regulations governing the use of wagons in the Eastern Slopes.

Site visits by AWA in June revealed that more was at stake than the integrity of the river and a backcountry trail. Previous letters of concern in the past two years had received unsatisfactory responses. This time a letter was sent to Minister David Coultts with 18 specific questions about the bulldozer operations done by the owner of Panther River Adventures, and under what regulations base camps could become four-season resorts. A month later only two questions, and not key ones, were answered. AWA sent another letter, and another month later SRD's reply only partly answered a few more questions.

One unanswered question is why the Panther Corners area, which forms the southern portion of the Bighorn Wildland, is now administered out of Blairmore, when it has traditionally been part of the Clearwater Forest administered from Rocky Mountain House. Norman Hawkes, the Blairmore officer contacted by Panther River Adventures, did not know the ramifications of his decision when he granted Panther River Adventures a "temporary field authorization" for bulldozer trail maintenance; nor did he know the local fury it would create. In fact, Hawkes says he will never give such authority again. AWA has requested that the minister readjust boundaries so that all of the Bighorn lies within one jurisdiction.

Forced to FOIP

AWA was told by Don Livingston, the land management officer for the Clearwater Forest Region, that we must make a FOIP (freedom of information) request for further information on the lease arrangements. The price for documents on two Panther Corners sites and two other new backcountry operations in which we are interested was a hefty \$1,862.19. We appealed for a fee waiver, which involves meeting 13 criteria that are set out in the Information and Privacy Commissioner's Order 96-002. The main question was, would the release of

benefit from the Applicant" having the information requested, in this case Sunpine's annual operating plan, which Alberta Environment refused to make publicly available. Kostuch has also received other fee waivers.

Laws and Policies

Commercial trail riding operations are governed by the Commercial Trail Riding Dispositions. Regulations were originally developed in 1979 following the formulation of the 1978 *Commercial Trail Riding Policy for the Green Area of Alberta* (Alberta Energy and Natural Resources, Report No. 67). In 2000,

By bringing control and stability to the industry, the policy aimed to encourage higher quality.

The policy established base camp areas of a maximum of 10 acres, increased the lease term to five years, and gave the lessee exclusive possession of the base camp site. These miscellaneous leases were governed by the *Public Lands Act* and the Miscellaneous Lease Regulations. In addition, it was the operator's responsibility to maintain all trails used to "ensure reasonable safety to the user and protection to the environment." Base camps were not allowed on



Panther River Adventures lease showing permanent cabin and camp site (left), and permanent storage, wagon and construction equipment (right)

information be in the public interest?

Although we were told we had handled the criteria impressively, SRD wrote, "After careful consideration the department has determined that your request for a fee waiver does not meet waiver criteria." There was no further explanation – an unacceptable, but not surprising, response. But SRD called to negotiate. They offered AWA options such as half price for half the files. But AWA believes we have a right to this information for free. On October 20, 2005 we launched an appeal with the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which will not be reviewed until January 2006.

In 1999 the Information and Privacy Commissioner waived the fees for a request made by well-known Rocky Mountain House veterinarian Martha Kostuch (Order 99-015). The Commissioner found that Kostuch "serves both a public education function and an environmental watchdog function. As such, a broad public would

various public lands regulations were streamlined and consolidated into the Disposition and Fees Regulation following a government-wide regulatory reform process, but the policy still applies.

Operators must obtain a permit, good for one year, for trail riding in a designated Trail Management Area and submit an annual operating plan. Those with a good record can obtain five-year permits. Operators in a single operator trail ride management area requiring a base camp can obtain a five-year base camp lease. Other requirements for base camps are spelled out in the policy.

Prior to the policy, operators were required to obtain a Licence of Occupation for base camp sites. They had a term of one year and had limited conditions of operation. The policy noted that because of limited requirements and standards, and little assurance of continued tenure, "trail ride facilities and services have tended to be of a lower than desirable quality."

environmentally sensitive lands in the Prime Protection Zone.

Base camps were required to comply with Alberta Forest Service standards, including permanent corrals, approved feed storage, feeding and watering facilities for horses, and approved toilets and garbage disposal facilities, all to be located more than 150 metres from a watercourse. All horses and facilities except tent frames, feed storage facilities, and toilets had to be removed from the base camp 15 days after the close of every season, which ran from May 15 to September 30, unless written approval was obtained from the Forest Superintendent. However, the policy also mentions that the operator shall maintain all buildings and improvements erected in a satisfactory condition.

We asked, "Under what authority have these 'base camps' been turned into year-round resorts?" The government replied, "Under the *Public Lands Act*, Disposition and Fees

Regulations, year-round commercial/recreational activities have been approved by issuing a miscellaneous lease.” However, this is not clear at all from either the regulations or the policy.

A miscellaneous lease, which is normally issued for 10 years with a maximum renewable term of 25 years, allows the minister to make carte blanche decisions on our public lands without any notice to or input from the public. Such a lease allows the holder to then sell “improvements” for whatever the market will bear. In fact, Sunset Guiding and Outfitting is currently up for sale for a hefty price. Most of the rules governing these leases are now covered by policy, rather than the spare regulations.

The commercial trail riding policy does not allow year-round operations, but much, clearly, is being left to the Minister’s discretion. Operations requiring permanent structures and long-term tenure are now generally required to go through the Alberta Tourism Recreation Leasing process, which may also allow for public review.

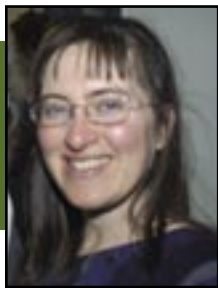
Commercial backcountry recreation can be viable and environmentally friendly when carefully planned. But AWA sees current developments as a growing threat to the well-being of publicly owned lands and resources in the Eastern Slopes watersheds, wildlife habitats, and wilderness landscapes. We are seeking remedies for both protection from the

urbanization of the remaining Eastern Slopes wilderness and for greater democracy in decisions about public lands policy.



V. Pharris

A sign offering horse boarding has now been taken down



MUTINY ON THE MOTHERSHIP

By Dr. Shirley Bray, WLA Editor

If the environment is our mothership, the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS) is a mutineer’s dream. The fate of the spectacular McClelland Fen will be part of the legacies and liabilities left to us by the oil sands.

The new Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS) is a dream come true for corporations who at last have a place to play without worrying about profit-eating environmental concerns. The government has decided to create

a “development zone” in the Fort McMurray region in which oil sands mining will have the highest priority. Exploitation of other resources is encouraged, and there’s no need to be concerned about destroying wildlife

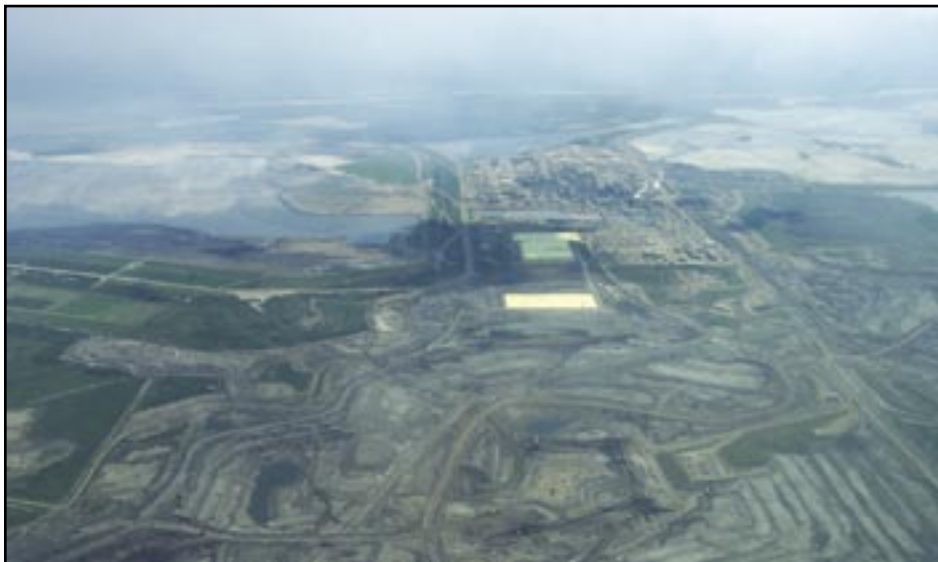
habitat or Athabasca River tributaries.

“The real purpose of the Strategy appears to be to create a regulation-free zone to give the companies the freest hand to increase oil production from the tar sands as quickly as possible,” said Stephen Hazell, conservation director of the Sierra Club of Canada. Sounds like an impressive coup for corporations.

MOSS’s goal states, “Alberta achieves full value from the mineable oil sands through continued development, while returning disturbed areas to self-sustaining boreal forest ecosystems and sustaining the adjacent regional environment.”

This paints a pretty rosy picture, but is it believable?

The government thinks it is. Energy Minister Greg Melchin, chair of the Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee, says the strategy “will help coordinate development in this area.” Well, coordination is generally a good thing. SRD Minister David Coumts wants “a sustainable and balanced [whatever that means] long-term



Part of the Fort McMurray oil sands operations, 2005

Z. Deak

vision ... one that ensures the efficient use of the land now and coordinates reclamation for the future.”

But from my experience with Rumsey and other issues, my answer is yes to the first part of MOSS’s goal about continued development and no to the latter part. I have at least three major reasons for this lack of optimism: (1) Government employees tell us that policies are made to be changed and meant to be tailored for particular situations – that is why they are not laws.

be sacrificed for oil sands and that there is no point in creating a litany of flowery and meaningless phrases, more promises that will never be kept, about the importance of the environment. However, this honesty is in stark contrast to the over-the-top promises about reclamation.

New Valuable Landscapes?

Of all the absurd things that have crossed my desk over the past five years, MOSS is the most stunning. Statements such as “*Mining operations*

in the oil sands. The effects of withdrawing huge amounts of Athabasca River water and groundwater are major issues. There are worries that a drawdown effect will lower surface water levels in lakes and wetlands.

Alberta’s State of the Environment report notes that to date not one hectare of land in the oil sands mining area has been certified as reclaimed. No company has yet tried to reclaim a pit. The massive toxic tailing ponds, already covering more than 50 km², continue to grow. There are plans to put some of the tailings at the bottoms of artificially created lakes, but no one knows whether such lakes will be alive or dead.

“The future reclaimed landscape that is currently being proposed by the industry will be radically different from the original mosaic of wetlands and forest,” says Pembina. “Current plans will lead to the creation of dry, forested hills instead of wetlands, a larger percentage of lakes (the end pit lakes), and the absence of peatlands, which take thousands of years to develop and cannot be recreated.”

They note that companies are only required to reclaim land to an equivalent, but not identical, land capability. That definition, they say, “does not require that the pre-disturbance ecosystem be recreated as it is acknowledged that the reclaimed landscape will likely lack the biodiversity of its pre-disturbance state, and it may not be possible to re-establish self-sustaining ecosystems.”

Syncrude’s manager of land and environmental management, Bruce Friesen, admitted no one knows what “equivalent capability” means (*Calgary Herald*, July 21, 2005). “We make no representation that we know what’s going to happen, but we make sure we are confident we have a way through to the end,” he said. What does this mean?

It is all one big experiment in the pursuit of profit for big business. No one knows the real cost and Albertans (or those future generations) should be concerned about being stuck with the bill. A more believable goal from this government would be to turn the area into the world’s largest off-highway vehicle park.



McClelland Fen stretches west and south from the west side of McClelland Lake. The western end of the fen is on the right of this photo. Water flows west to east towards the lake.

(2) There is no scientific or economic proof that the proposed reclamation vision is possible.

(3) If the government cannot fulfil the obligations of the management plan it made for the much smaller and much less impacted, but still threatened, Rumsey Natural Area (see WLA Dec. 2004, Feb. 2005, Oct. 2005), which is also supposed to be a protected area, with higher expectations for management, how can we realistically expect them to achieve anything on a much grander scale where lower expectations would prevail?

MOSS represents a “moment of honesty” by the government, where they have decided simply to admit up front that the environment will

will be viewed as a temporary impact that will leave behind a new valuable landscape for the benefit of future generations,” and “Reclaimed landforms and aquatic ecosystems will have a natural look and will fit in with the adjacent landscape,” and “Environmental liabilities from oil sands mining will not be passed on to future generations” provoke anything from sombre head-shaking to peals of laughter. Perhaps the author(s) should have thrown all caution to the wind and described the envisioned reclaimed landscape as “a veritable Garden of Eden.”

The Pembina Institute’s *Oil Sands Fever* describes the environmental problems and reclamation challenges

Policies as Tools of Convenience

The Pembina Institute points out that MOSS proposes a fundamental shift in environmental policy. While Alberta's current policy seeks to strike a balance between oil sands development and environmental protection, says their news release, under MOSS the strip-mining bitumen would be given priority over environmental protection and 2,800 km² of Alberta's boreal forest will be essentially written off.

The current oil sands policy, the Regional Sustainable Development

groups, First Nation organizations, companies, and provincial and federal agencies have invested six years in this organization and its efforts to develop policy to protect the landscape, only to have the Alberta government unilaterally change the rules." For some of us this is hardly a surprise; in fact, it is more like business as usual.

However, some point to the failure of CEMA to achieve anything and wonder why Pembina is defending a process that lets industry so easily block consensus on truly protective measures. Pembina wants the

objectives with industrial activity or even intense recreational activity in protected areas?

Conservation groups are asking that large protected areas be put aside in exchange for the land being degraded in the development zone. Ideally, the same type of landscape, the central mixedwood and Athabasca Plains subregions, would be protected. AWA has pinpointed a number of areas in northeastern Alberta that still retain enough wilderness character to make them worthwhile candidates for full protection. Much of the development zone lies outside these areas. But the Athabasca River and the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC), which now straddles the development zone border, remain hot spots for protection in the oil sands region.

Mutiny in the McClelland Wetland

At the Environmental Leaders' Forum this year, Environment Minister Guy Boutilier said, "The environment is the mothership of Alberta and we must protect it at all costs – and with the shared effort of all of us."

One would have thought that McClelland Fen was part of our "environment." The fen is part of the MLWC, which includes two provincially significant patterned fens that lie on either side of the lake (an important migratory bird staging area), 12 rare sinkhole lakes, and dissected kame that forms the Fort Hills. The fens are fed by alkaline, nutrient-rich groundwater springs. The nearby stretch of the Athabasca River is nationally significant.

Diana Horton, a peatlands expert at the University of Iowa who has studied peatlands all over the world, says, "This is the most extraordinary and spectacular patterned fen I have ever seen. It is a world-class site." Alberta Environmental Protection's 1998 Boreal Forest report states that the 164 km² MLWC candidate protected area is "worthy of a strenuous protection effort."

The entire wetland complex used to lie entirely outside the development zone and was off-limits to mining. But thanks to a mutiny on the mothership, led by the government and backed by industry, half the complex, including half of one of the patterned fens, was

R.G. Thomas



The east end of McClelland Fen

Strategy (RSDS), developed with stakeholder input in 1999, seeks to balance development and environmental protection, says Pembina. Mining was permitted on the condition that watershed integrity and key wildlife movement corridors are preserved to assist in blending reclaimed land into the landscape when mining operations end. The Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA), a multi-stakeholder and consensus-based organization, was established to develop policy to achieve the goals of the RSDS.

"MOSS is a major blow for CEMA," says Chris Severson-Baker, who represents the Pembina Institute on the Board of CEMA. "The Pembina Institute and many other environmental

government to retract MOSS and propose a new policy that guarantees the preservation of the region's ecological integrity. It is more likely that the government will continue to promise wonderful visions of reclaimed ecosystems without actually achieving them.

Over the years, many people have pointed out that the multiple use concept for land management doesn't work. With more conservative organizations like the Canada West Foundation saying the same thing, the government appears to be taking action and has begun by creating the oil sands development zone. But will the government create large zones where protection is the priority, where industry is not allowed, or will it continue to "balance" conservation

included within the mineable oil sands area in 2002 because a billion barrels of oil supposedly lie beneath it. The government believed it was in the public's interest, and clearly Mr. Coumts considers destroying this major wetland an "efficient use of the land."

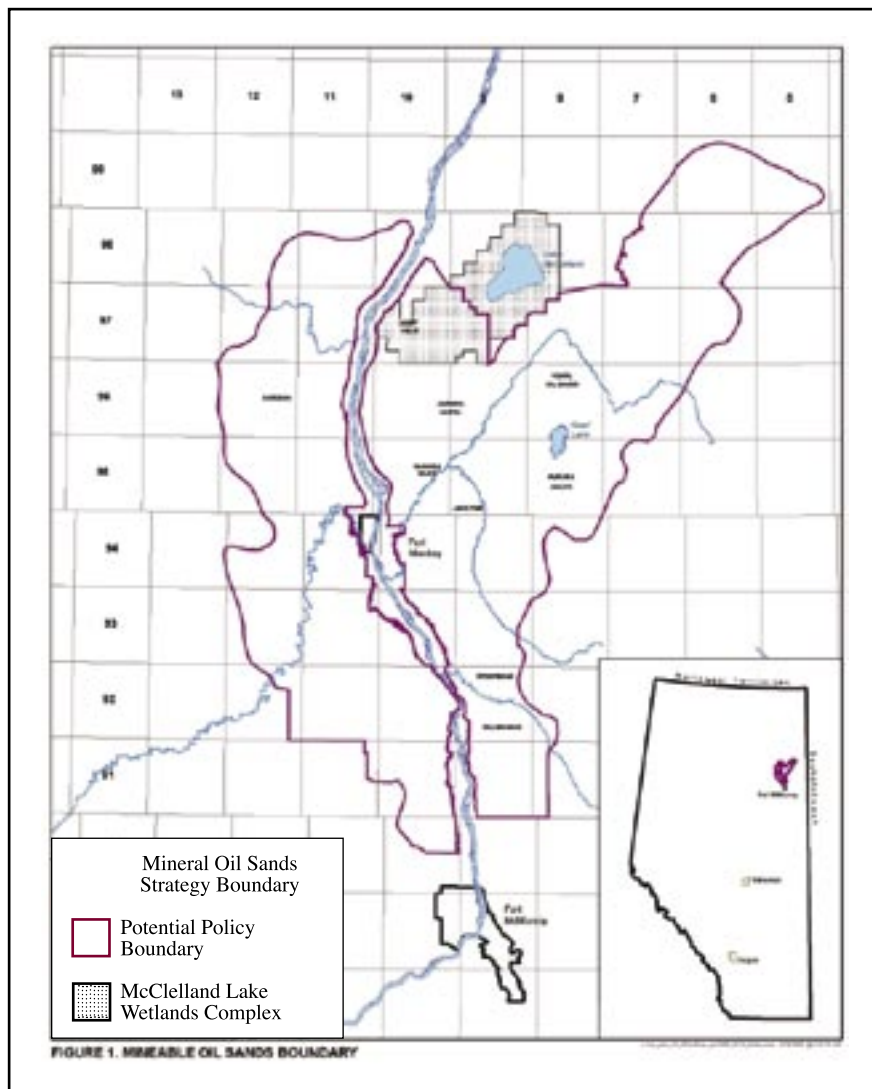
It's not the first mutiny McClelland has seen. In 1995, protection of a 435 km² area, including MLWC, under Special Places was thwarted due to political pressure and intense lobbying by Alberta Energy.

MOSS says that if any change in the management of the rest of the wetland complex is to occur, the IRP amendment will be referred to Cabinet for review and approval after public consultation. Given that the last amendment in 2002, which allowed mining in the fen, was made without proper process and with very poor public consultation, this doesn't give much optimism for the future of this national treasure.

The fen could have been protected at *no cost* had the original Integrated Resource Plan, developed after four years and much public consultation, been unchanged. We could have sought to make it a Ramsar site or a World Heritage site. Furthermore, because of royalty breaks and subsidies to oil sands developments, Albertans are essentially paying for the destruction of this wetland.

How ironic that the newly formed Alberta Water Council has established a team to develop a comprehensive wetland policy. A fact sheet praises wetlands for providing clean water and recreation, being an important watershed buffer, and moderating climate change. It notes that wetlands are under considerable pressure from land-use development, including industrial expansion. It notes that Albertans are concerned about wetland loss.

"Wetlands are an important public resource that must be conserved because they provide valuable environmental, social and economic benefits." The policy is supposed to "establish a shared commitment to take the action needed to conserve Alberta's wetlands for future generations." The fact sheet calls for an effective policy to ensure protection of the remaining wetlands.



Unless, of course, the wetlands stand in the way of oil. And how comforting to know that McClelland is being destroyed for what former Shell Canada oil sands VP Neil Camarta described as "crap oil." As with other policies, this one will also be changed or tailored as soon as it is inconvenient.

Protect the mothership at all costs? I suspect that most of Mr. Boutilier's colleagues would say the oil sands are the mothership of Alberta. Yet much of the oil and much of the profit from the oil sands will leave the province, while we destroy a world class wetland and reclaim it to something quite mundane.

Wishful Thinking Trumps Science

MOSS proposes that "the activities within the coordinated development zone will be constrained to sustain the adjacent regional environment." That means sustaining the half of the McClelland Lake

Wetland Complex (MLWC) outside, but bordering, the development zone, including half of the fen.

Even though no one has ever tried saving half a fen, the government and Petro-Canada, which has taken over from TrueNorth, apparently think it is possible, even though there is no evidence that mitigation will work. AWA opposes using unique sites as experiments. And if the experiment fails — who will pay? We can be guaranteed it won't be the companies involved.

TrueNorth's environmental impact assessment predicted that mine dewatering, seepage, and runoff from tailings ponds would lower water levels and quality in the unmined eastern portion of the fen, causing the death of the peat-forming moss species and the cessation of peat production. They proposed stabilizing the lake level with a weir and predicted that water levels



McClelland Fen in wetter years

and quality would stabilize, allowing peat-forming species to re-establish themselves in some parts of the unmined fen. However, they noted that the plant species composition would likely differ from baseline conditions. Not a very favourable outcome for a site known for its rare plant species.

So at the hearing in 2002, TrueNorth withdrew the portion of its EIA describing the project's impacts to the MLWC and asked the Energy and Utilities Board to consider its MLWC Sustainability Plan, developed in consultation with the Fort McKay Industry Relations Committee. Petro-Canada has asked for input into the nature of the Sustainability Committee but AWA, other conservation groups, and the Pembina Institute have refused to participate in an industry-led, non-consensus-based process, especially one committed to destroying the fen. The committee is supposed to develop a management strategy to sustain the unmined portion of the wetland, a task that led to boreal expert Dr. Richard Thomas's comment about the committee: "I hope God's on it. They'll need Her."

TrueNorth was confident "that the sustainability plan that accommodated and was responsive to natural variability could be effective in maintaining the ecological diversity and function." It put forward a number of goals and untested proposals, such as trying to maintain water levels in the unmined eastern part of the fen by "pumping mine dewatering water or McClelland Lake water into ditches at the west end of the remaining wetland and releasing it into the surface water or the surficial aquifer to compensate

for mine-induced water deficits." The impact of such schemes is unknown. No one has ever tried to save half a patterned fen and experimenting on this unique wetland is simply irresponsible.

Patterned fens are the product of a complex hydrological flow regime. They develop in shallow, sloping channel-like basins where groundwater seeps up into the basin and flows slowly down-slope. Pembina says the study of the hydrogeology of the region has only just begun. The area impacted by the drawdown effect of removing groundwater to prevent the flooding of mine pits can be up to 100 km². "Because prevention of pit flooding is considered essential, even if significant impacts are detected (e.g., wetlands drying out), there is not any possible mitigation."

In its decision (2002-089), the EUB said it was "prepared to agree to the process, having regard for Alberta Environment's commitment to require TrueNorth to demonstrate its plans before any disturbance is allowed in the wetland complex." It concluded that the estimated one billion barrels represents a significant resource that should be recovered "as long as it can be done in a manner that minimizes damage to the rest of the complex."

But what is the minimum damage acceptable? So far Petro-Canada has refused to say what they will do if their mitigation plan will not work. Teck Cominco has joined the Petro-Canada-UTS Energy partnership, bringing their mining expertise. The company also has expertise in leaving pollution legacies.

Legacies or Liabilities?

AWA, CPAWS, and Sierra Club are all calling for the removal of the entire MLWC from the development zone. AWA is asking that the wetland complex be protected as a provincial park and ecological reserve, but McClelland needs the support of all of us.

MOSS admits there will be environmental liabilities from oil sands mining but that these will not be passed on to future generations. But with changeable policies, a timeline of decades, and a promising pollution legacy, this is really just wishful thinking. Just how far in the future will we have to go? The destruction of McClelland Fen will be a permanent legacy.

A Premier Park

Well, one doesn't always want to be a "naysayer," so, after much thought, I have come up with a positive idea regarding MOSS. In keeping with tradition, it is expected that something, like a park, will be named after our eventually departing premier. Klein doesn't want some old mountain named after him though, and it is unlikely he wants his name on a wilderness protected area either since his government has said for years that such areas have been "sterilized."

It is only right that a park named after Ralph Klein be a true reflection of his government's values. In this spirit I am nominating the oil sands development zone as the "Ralph Klein Oil Sands Park." I hope Albertans, including corporate lobbyists, will take up the call for this park in honour of our premier. At the very least, it will bring to the mutiny an often sought after quality - celebrity status.

The government is inviting public comment on MOSS and the draft Fort McMurray Mineable Oil Sands Integrated Resource Management Plan. Workshops will be held in Fort McMurray in January 2006. Please voice your concerns about McClelland Fen. An online response form will be available until January 31, 2006 at <http://www.equusgroup.com/admin/content/default.cfm?PagelD=146>. Before you answer the MOSS response form, I recommend reading the Pembina Institute's Oil Sands Fever available at <http://www.pembina.org/>.

GROWING PROTEST OVER ENCANNA'S PLANS IN SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA

More and more people are expressing their anger and dismay at EnCana's plans to drill up to 1,275 wells in the Suffield National Wildlife Area (SNWA) in southeastern Alberta (see *WLA*, October 2005). In November, AWA held a press conference. Referring to EnCana's plans, Cliff Wallis, a grasslands expert who has spent many years studying and advocating for the SNWA, said, "We wouldn't stand for this in Banff National Park or Wood Buffalo National Park – why are we standing for it in a National Wildlife Area?"

Canada and the public are on a head-on collision course.

AWA met with EnCana representatives on December 2. They told us that EnCana's CEO Gwyn Morgan says that if the science says EnCana should not drill in the SNWA, they won't.

Paul Martin Pulling Out All the Stops

"Let me just say that we will pull out all of the stops in trying to maintain the ecological integrity of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," said Prime

who wish to make submissions the opportunity to do so in a public forum. We believe the level of public concern should be evaluated not only on the number of responses CEAA receives, but also according to the reasons for public concern.

The primary reasons for rejecting EnCana's proposal and which call for a full panel review are as follows:

First, the long-recognized and well-documented significance of the Area for its diversity of landforms and wildlife. This dates from Ernest Thompson Seton's survey in 1914



A sign marks the boundary of the Suffield National Wildlife Area

The federal government recognizes that natural grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems in the Canadian prairie, with as little as 6 per cent of native prairie remaining free from human interference; that the purpose of the SNWA is to ensure critical habitat protection for species at risk and reverse habitat loss and fragmentation trends; and that the SNWA is to act as an ecological benchmark.

"We don't need more studies to know the value of this native grassland," said Wallis. "We want to go straight to a public hearing and challenge the very essence of this project – industrial natural gas development in one of Canada's crown jewels of wildlife habitat. Obviously EnCana's vision and that of the NWA protectors in the Government of

Minister Paul Martin (*Whitehorse Daily Star*, August 2005). "No matter what sort of environmental safety measure you put in hand, especially in this time of global warming, you're taking a great chance with the herd."

We must expect the Prime Minister and Environment Minister Stephan Dion to take the same stance on the Suffield National Wildlife Area.

Why We Need a Public Panel Review

The following are excerpts from a letter to the Honourable William Graham, Minister of National Defence, from Dawn Dickinson, on behalf of the Grasslands Naturalists, November 16, 2005.

In this disturbing situation, there is a need for complete transparency of the environmental review process, which can only be met by providing citizens

all the way to the two-year Canadian Wildlife Service inventory of wildlife in the late 1990s.

Second, the precedent for industrial development that will be set for all NWAs if EnCana is allowed to proceed with this project.

Third, the fact that mitigative measures are required, or at least expected, of energy corporations operating in all native prairie grasslands in Alberta, and still we are losing prairie species and populations. When the same kinds of developments with the same kinds of "mitigation" are proposed for all lands, whether they are designated under some protective disposition or not, the effectiveness of that disposition, in this case the National Wildlife Area Act, is a matter for full and open public debate. If EnCana's project is approved, then



A hognose snake lies dead after being run over on an access road. These snakes are listed as “may be at risk” in Alberta

clearly the NWA designation offers no more protection than is afforded any other undisturbed grassland landscape.

Finally, the long history of protective measures that Canadian Forces has undertaken in acknowledgement of the Area’s value and of its vulnerability. This includes declaring the Area off-limits to military training in 1971, as well as standing orders protecting wildlife in 1989.

Let’s Not Make a Farce of Our Country

The following letter was sent to the Honourable William Graham, Minister of National Defence, October 27, 2005 by Johnathan Wright of East Coulee, Alberta, protesting EnCana’s plans in the Suffield National Wildlife Area.

I unconditionally protest the following:

“EnCana Corporation is proposing to drill up to 1,275 new shallow gas wells within the boundary of the Canadian Forces Base Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA) over a three-year period, essentially doubling the existing 1,154 gas wells installed over the past 30 years.”

I worked extensively over the entire Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA) from 1995 to 2001. During this time I gained an intimate insight of the area – its beauty, its wildlife, its issues, and its politics. I have also worked, and continue to work, intensively as a consultant to large oil and gas corporations. I have worked for

EnCana. While we hear lots of rhetoric these days about what a “good neighbour” EnCana is, the truth, in my experience, is that this is rhetoric and rhetoric only.

In 1997, EnCana (then AEC – the same Gwyn Morgan-governed beast in a former, smaller configuration) intensified their drilling program on and surrounding the National Wildlife Area. The abuse of this national gem that my colleagues in the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and I witnessed at their hands disgusted us. I went on a personal letter-writing campaign of protest. On the heels of this, EnCana made laudable efforts to protect, for instance, the remaining prairie rattlesnakes on the NWA, a listed species that was particularly and demonstrably hard hit by their activities. Unfortunately, my subsequent dealings with this mega-corporation, extending to the present day, have repeatedly reinforced the fact that their modus operandi continues to follow a predictable, relentless pattern:

- conduct cursory, insufficient assessments coupled with insufficient public consultation;
- take advantage of all legal loopholes;
- keep the public either uninformed, poorly informed, or, failing this, misinformed;
- quell dissent through division of communities and bullying tactics such as threat of lawsuit;
- develop on a scale that is inherently damaging to the land



Jonathan Wright describes the ecology of rattlesnakes on a 2004 AWA prairie tour

- and the people and unpoliceable;
- implement meaningful mitigation if and only if they are exposed to the point where no further options remain (by which point damage is already done, but by which point they’ve fulfilled their goal of making it through the critical review stage in which a development can be stopped);
- emphasize mitigation measures to reinforce the “good neighbour” image.

Therefore, based on what I have personally witnessed of EnCana’s development history, here is what we can expect, amplified exponentially, if the Suffield NWA proposal is allowed to proceed:

• Disrespect of native grasslands:

EnCana personnel established vehicle trails virtually wherever and whenever they pleased on the NWA to reduce travel time between wells, and apparently just to go sight-seeing; the result was a degraded landscape thoroughly blanketed by access roads. There was no demonstrable self-regulation.

• A massive increase in vehicular traffic on established routes:

In 1997 I documented EnCana tractor-trailer units entering the base at intervals of one approximately very



A dead lark bunting, an Alberta listed “sensitive” species, and western meadowlark float in one of EnCana’s produced water tanks, nicknamed “dog dishes,” at a shallow gas well outside Suffield

three minutes for periods of up to an hour at regular intervals throughout the day; this was to say nothing of the amount of personal EnCana traffic. This traffic was demonstrably devastating to, for instance, prairie rattlesnake numbers on and adjacent to the base.

• **A chronic and blatant disrespect for speed limits:**

EnCana traffic regularly traveled the gravel roads bordering the wildlife area at speeds of 100 km/hr and more. The result was countless unnecessary wildlife deaths on the NWA.

• **Direct persecution of listed wildlife:**

Despite efforts to educate EnCana personnel, it was not uncommon to find intentionally killed prairie rattlesnakes, with their rattles cut off as “souvenirs,” where EnCana personnel had recently passed or been working – in some cases, tracks indicated where they had backed up their vehicles and spun their tires on the snakes. These mortalities added to the likely irreversible damage caused unintentionally to the population by EnCana’s convoys and other traffic.

• **Dishonesty in dealings with stakeholders:**

In recent dealings with stakeholders – landowners and others – at open-house events in towns situated in their south-central coalbed methane fields, EnCana has repeatedly been caught

uttering blatant and outright lies about their existing and intended activities before the public in attempts to placate. For example: in the past year I witnessed the citizens of Rosebud, Alberta being told that there had been no coalbed methane wells drilled by EnCana so far up to that date in their area – none – while EnCana was in full possession of the knowledge (which later emerged) that they had indeed been drilling such wells in the area for two to four years already. This is but one example of the lies they publicly told this community when they felt their developments to be under pressure.

It is time to put a moratorium on further developments on the Suffield NWA. EnCana’s tenures and finances are the inverse of their demonstrated ethics: they are short of neither. If a financial giant like this cannot afford to leave one National Wildlife Area to its wildlife, who can? What hope is there of affecting meaningful conservation anywhere in this country?

This could have been EnCana’s opportunity to show there is some substance behind their sloganism. Frankly, the stark fact that EnCana has proposed this development, let alone proceeded with it, represents an appallingly poor display of corporate citizenship. There has been no interim

time for the damage I witnessed EnCana having done already to the Suffield NWA in the late 1990s to have healed.

If EnCana were the “good neighbour” they incessantly claim to be, they would have made it their own initiative to declare a moratorium on new developments on the Suffield NWA when the area was officially designated as such. Such a move should have been transparent to them as the only recourse to a good corporate citizen under the circumstances. The fact that they not only did not do so, but are now proposing to cram thirty years worth of new development into three years on the NWA proves unequivocally that they are not to be trusted.

The Suffield National Wildlife Area was, and could again be, a gem. The area is one of the last remaining examples of native prairie of any size on the continent. It exists because the Department of National Defence (DND) long ago recognized the value in leaving this area pristine, and it was their pride to do so. This endangered prairie remnant, the pride of our DND, deserves better treatment than what this proposal will deliver. Why omit one army to admit another?

Thirty years of industrial development in three years? On a National Wildlife Area?! What does this sound like to you? How could anyone worthy of trust propose such a thing? There has never been a better example of mutual exclusivity of goals.

Let’s not make a farce of our country.

The public consultation period ends on December 12, 2005. Further information can be found at http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/050/DocViewer_e.cfm?SrchPg=1&DocumentID=11946.

They talk about biodiversity, about protection, they fill their mouths with these words, but the facts are something else altogether.

– **Luis Medino**, former Director of Environmental Protection, Terapoa area, Ecuador, speaking about EnCana



RECREATION DAMAGE IN BIGHORN SHOWS CURRENT ACTIVITIES NOT SUSTAINABLE

By David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist

Illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) activity and serious trail damage from both OHV and equestrian use continue in the Bighorn Wildland, according to new observations made during the 2005 season, the third year of AWA's four-year recreation monitoring study. More work needs to be done before the current recreation activities in this area can be considered sustainable.

recreation as an acceptable use.

The persistence of OHVs using trails not designated for motorized use, as well as the illegal off-season use of trails, is a chronic concern. Illegal activity is occurring on a minimum of 10 per cent of days observed and occurs any day of the week. However, on one section of trail, illegal activity was occurring 30 per cent of the time.

This level of activity and

the allocation of adequate resources for enforcement and a comprehensive education and enforcement strategy, is paramount in order for these deterrents to be effective in making recreational activities sustainable and enjoyable for all users.

Damage from recreational activities is extensive. Of the trails measured this past season, 22.5 per cent of their length was structurally damaged or compromised. The average maximum depth of structural damage on the trails assessed was 0.35 metres. The average length of a damaged section of trail was 88 metres.

Both equestrian and OHV activities are producing signs of wear on the landscape. Of the trails studied this summer designated for OHV use, 44 per cent were primarily OHV trails and 45 per cent were primarily equestrian trails. Of the secondary trails that branch off the main designated trails, which are legal for equestrian users and illegal for motorized users, 41.7 per cent were primarily from OHV use.

Overall, 78 per cent of all damage observed was in the moderate/severe to severe categories. One type of activity was not clearly more damaging than the other. Equestrian and OHV trails had moderate/severe to severe levels of structural damage at 78 and 80 per cent, respectively.

A more subjective observation from this summer's activities is that the multiple-use strategy for the area appears to be gravitating to a segregated-use in actual practice, as the equestrian users appear to concentrate their use on trails where OHVs are not permitted.

The government's response to AWA's study has been selective. The Monitoring Standing Committee for the Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan, of which AWA is not a member, indicated that AWA "is encouraging specific area closures for equestrian users due to trail damage and non-recovery of vegetation" and



Some riders choose to avoid bridges, resulting in damage to sensitive creeks.

AWA is concerned with how the landscape is impacted by recreational use and how these activities are managed. Our focus is on how all recreation activities are managed to keep the ecological integrity of the area intact and to allow appropriate uses so that people can enjoy the Bighorn Wildland gem in perpetuity.

AWA has assessed about 90 kilometres of trail within the Ram-Clearwater Forest Land Use Zone, located within the Prime Protection Zone (PPZ) in the Eastern Slopes southwest of Rocky Mountain House. Under the Alberta government's Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes (1984), the intent of the PPZ is to preserve environmentally sensitive terrain and valuable ecological and aesthetic resources, and to preclude motorized

disregard for rules (which we assume were constructed to make the activity sustainable for those willing to abide by them) leads us to question the effectiveness of enforcement and the appropriateness of motorized activities in a PPZ.

The government of Alberta recently made changes to the penalties for unauthorized operation of a motor vehicle/OHV in a park/recreation area. The fine has increased from \$50 (established in the mid-1980s) to \$250; however, the costs to a violator can be substantially higher, depending on the circumstances and the court process.

Although this is a move in the right direction, enforcement of laws prohibiting these violations is a challenge in large, relatively remote areas. The commitment from government, including

“continued to use trail counters and has evaluated equestrian damage in specific areas.”

In fact, AWA’s study is not focusing on damage from any one specific user. The study is first identifying and assessing damage sites, and then identifying, where possible, the primary user. Both ATV and equestrian users are the major contributors to damage and it is apparent that some trails used primarily by either user could stand to be closed for restoration.

AWA would like to acknowledge the support of Alberta Conservation Association in our Bighorn Wildland Recreation Monitoring Project.



D. Samson

OHV riders have ignored the sign on the left and made an illegal trail to the right of the trail blockage. Further up the illegal trail is another “closed” sign that has been circumvented.

NATIVE PRAIRIE HABITAT LOSES OUT TO ZOO AND MOVIE

By Shirley Bray

The elephants may be trumpeting the \$35 million the Calgary Zoo received, as the government asserted in a November news release, but what about funding to protect habitat for our native wildlife? While the government wallows in a multi-billion dollar surplus, our wildlife habitats are languishing. The government also gave \$5.5 million for a war movie. Compare these gifts to the mere \$20 million that went to SRD in April and the \$45 million that went to Parks and Protected Areas, which looks after more than 500 sites, and that went largely to infrastructure, not conservation.

All Premier Ralph Klein’s talk about investing in Alberta’s future, improving our quality of life, and

bringing the world to our doorstep has nothing to do with places like the Rumsey Natural Area in central Alberta, one of the last few fescue grasslands in the world. In fact, the government is clearly more proud of the oil sands than of its valuable grasslands, which are being rapidly degraded by industry. The government is letting Rumsey be run over by CBM development before we have any baseline studies to assess cumulative effects.

Trident Exploration held a public meeting in late October to discuss the next phase of their plans. After a trip to Rumsey to scout out well locations, they have revised the number of wells they are initially drilling from 31 to 29. Now only 11 of these must be drilled

before the end of the year – otherwise they revert back to the original owners, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. Trident is also putting all compressors outside the Natural Area.

However, Trident has refused to wait for necessary baseline and cumulative effects studies to be done. They just plan to micro-manage their wellsites. Public Lands worked with the company to identify drill sites and access, to define conditions under which activity may occur, and to plan a self-monitoring reporting protocol in an area operating agreement. But Public Lands itself does not have the resources to inspect whether companies are fulfilling their commitments. Past experience shows that often they are not. We have asked Trident to supply us with the locations of their proposed wellsites so that we may inspect them for ourselves.

Public Lands manager Barry Cole raised the concern at Trident’s meeting about how to control activities being performed by contractors and others who might not normally be privy to the lofty aims set at higher levels within the company. Trident said they would be holding information sessions with all contractors and employees. Colleen Biggs of TK Ranches, and one of AWA’s representatives for the Rumsey Ecological Reserve, suggested putting instructional signs at entrance points.

But Trident is only one player in



the Rumsey Natural Area. There are more than a dozen others. Cole says that these companies are being told that they will need to raise the bar in terms of environmental performance and that Public Lands is under no obligation to meet reduced spacing if companies apply for it.

In response to a letter with photos from our August field trip to Rumsey that showed overgrazing, unreclaimed abandoned wellsites, and erosion, SRD Minister David Coumts finally told us something besides the usual misleading statement about how they are following the management plan for the area. The Regionally Integrated Decision sets out guidelines for oil and gas development and grazing, but also includes guidelines for annual reports, monitoring, and cumulative effects assessment, none of which have been done.

“In regard to current reclamation and restoration activities in the Rumsey area,” writes Mr. Coumts, “Sustainable Resource Development has been working with representatives from the environmental community to develop a project that evaluates reclamation and restoration achievements. Specifically, the project will evaluate previous development and reclamation practices by looking at the level of restoration of the plant community and potential threats posed by invasive species and weeds. The groups will make recommendations to refine minimum disturbance practices for fescue parkland and make specific recommendations for management for the Rumsey Natural Area and Ecological Reserve.”

SRD staff Barry Cole and range management specialist Barry Adams are creating a plan for the project. Once the plan is complete, they can seek funding. Cheryl Bradley, a well-known botanist who has spent many years studying Rumsey and was AWA’s representative on the RID committee, is being consulted as part of the “environmental community.”

Since three ministers have repeatedly assured us that the RID is the management directive for Rumsey, we expect the project also to include biophysical inventories, a review on the cumulative effects of existing oil and gas developments as it relates to

the ecological integrity of the Parkland, and assessments of the factors affecting vegetation change in the area.

Logically these studies should have been done well before the commencement of CBM activity in Rumsey so that we could accurately gauge the effect of oil and gas activity on the ecological integrity of the area. We are asking for deferral of all industrial activities until these studies are complete and a public hearing has been held. We are also asking that any application for industrial activity in Alberta’s protected areas should automatically trigger an AEUB public hearing so that the effects can be properly assessed.

With billions flying out the government’s coffers in unplanned spending, we expect this project, promised for years in the management plan, to be funded without question and without begging. Energy Minister Greg Melchin assures us that the government places a high priority on the environment. How high? Higher than movies?

We expect the government to invest in the protection of our natural resources at a level commensurate with their significance. The international significance of Rumsey and other protected areas in Alberta is well known, yet we see a disproportionate allocation of government surpluses to questionable non-essential ventures like movies, and virtually no allocation of government surpluses or operating funds to the protection of Rumsey and other globally significant sites.

Such actions (and inaction) by Alberta clearly demonstrate the



S. Bray

low value that Alberta places on safeguarding our natural heritage. We are asking for a clear commitment from Alberta to protecting our protected areas with adequate funding for their preservation as well as the complete removal of industrial activity being the most important indicators of that commitment.

We are suggesting that no new industrial activity in Alberta’s protected areas and one billion dollars for an environment (air, land, water, biodiversity) fund to be administered jointly by Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Alberta Community Development, and the public would be a good start in our centennial year.

South Saskatchewan River Basin Plan Public Input

The period for comment on the South Saskatchewan River Basin draft Water Management Plan has been extended to January 13, 2006.

An on-line response form can be completed at http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/water/regions/ssrb/draft_plan.html.

AWA has a number of concerns about this plan and our response will be available at www.AlbertaWilderness.ca

For more information, or for those without internet access, please call Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist, at (403) 283 2025.



CRITICAL NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT MORATORIUM IN KAKWA-NARRAWAY

By Vivian Pharis

The headwaters of the Kakwa and Narraway Rivers west of Grande Prairie are threatened by unplanned and out-of-control gas development. In less than one year, in an area where Weyerhaeuser, the FMA holder, is attempting a bold new approach to sustainability by deferring the logging of key wildlife habitat, a forested watershed is being rapidly roaded and fractured by a rapacious gas industry.

There is no evidence that the government is taking a leadership role on behalf of the broad public interest, no evidence of prior land planning or cumulative effects assessment. AWA is asking the government to place an immediate moratorium on further development in the Kakwa-Narraway watersheds until full assessments and integrated planning is done.

The forest of the Kakwa-Narraway is one of the least fragmented landscapes in the Foothills Natural Region and has high aesthetic and watershed values. It is a wildlife mecca for alpine and subalpine species, including several officially listed as threatened. It is outstanding habitat for one of Alberta's most beleaguered animals, the mountain caribou.

If the Kakwa-Narraway remnant forest is to remain in place to ensure the survival of this endangered species, immediate action is required. It must involve the forest and gas industries, the public, the EUB, and government departments working in concert. It must involve our government in a leadership role as land steward and acting for interests other than those of industry.

The Kakwa-Narraway headwaters abuts the present 650 km² Wild Kakwa reserve. AWA has advocated for the protection of a much larger Wild Kakwa for 35 years. This approximately 5,000 km² area was proposed first at the 1973 Eastern Slopes hearings by the Wild Kakwa Society of Grande Prairie. A legislative promise was made in 1975 to protect

at least one large wilderness area in the headwaters of each major river, but it was never kept.

C. Olson



Intact forest in the headwaters of the Kakwa and Narraway Rivers.

C. Olson



Cumulative impact of cutblocks, well sites and access roads already in place near Two Lakes.

Forest Company's Innovative Initiatives

During a November 8, 2005 fly-over of the Kakwa region, two AWA representatives were able to assess what is currently happening on the ground. The main reason the Kakwa-Narraway headwaters forest is still free from cutblocks is because of the unusual efforts of Weyerhaeuser Canada. This company is conducting operations as if it intends to be in the wood business in Alberta for the long term.

Another of Weyerhaeuser's unusual approaches is to include a professional wildlife biologist on staff and to actually follow his advice on maintaining the range of biodiversity found within its FMA boundaries. Much of the Kakwa-Narraway forest has been deferred from Weyerhaeuser's cutting plans because scientific research indicates this forest is prime mountain caribou habitat, used by these animals

today. The company has made a decision to maintain this species that requires undisturbed mature forest habitat for at least part of its yearly cycle.

In addition to old style angular cutblocks dispersed across the more easterly landscape like a patchwork quilt, we observed newer experimental cuts that mimic old and new fire scars and that attempted to emulate nature by leaving an unusual amount of merchantable timber in permanent retention to serve wildlife purposes. It was heartening to see evidence of an Alberta company incorporating practices designed for its own long-term sustainability, while attempting to maintain the complexities of the surrounding environment.

Gas Industry's Poor Practices

However, despite Weyerhaeuser's efforts to defer logging on an extensive piece of key caribou habitat, the petroleum industry is fragmenting this remnant forest at breakneck speed. While we realize there is some current attempt by industry to coordinate road-building in the area, the gas industry is already developing the area in an unplanned manner. Haphazard roads are right now being ripped into the landscape with no apparent ecological regard in the near-pristine upper watershed. Large square wellsites are being gouged into the virgin forest on ridge tops and in valleys with no attempt to "lessen footprint." Major new roads are being completed in haste through the wild terrain.

If the gas industry is to act in the Kakwa-Narraway headwaters with any sensitivity, if it is to operate so that the ecosystem matters and biodiversity is maintained, so that it is in concert with Weyerhaeuser in maintaining caribou, it must halt operations now and take a big step back. Alberta Energy and the EUB must facilitate this halt and support industry in innovative ways.

One way would be to allow more flexibility with gas leases.

Companies must be able to exchange leases for ones in less sensitive areas, to be compensated, or to have their current leases held in abeyance until cumulative impact assessments and long-range planning are completed. Entirely different practices may then be required to access gas from this area, particularly if roads are not allowed or are severely restricted.

At the very least, with gas prices and profits soaring, there is no reason the gas industry cannot operate in such a sensitive and critical area without road access. The technology is in place to do this and precedents have already been set. Alberta should be a leader by now in such practices.

Most roads into new cutblocks are being rehabilitated as standard practice. These softened roads are in obvious contrast to the compacted ones in older logging blocks and to wellsites. It will be more difficult to reclaim the petroleum road and wellblock scars in the dense conifer forests of the upper watershed, but this challenge must be

put to the companies involved.

Coal Mine's Intolerable Cumulative Impact

The B.C. government is considering allowing a new open pit coal mine to be developed in the headwaters of the Narraway River. This and possible expansions to Grande Cache Coal's operations immediately next to the Kakwa headwaters could completely alter the ecosystem and watersheds of the area.

These mine sites are critical caribou habitat for Alberta and B.C. herds. Cumulative impact assessments, proper integrated land planning, and land/water/habitat protection are essential in such a wild and sensitive place. We were told that Alberta Sustainable Resource Development turned down a proposal by a B.C. company to access the proposed Narraway mine from the Alberta side for ecosystem reasons. Perhaps there is a nub of official regard for the integrity of this area.



C. Olson

Weyerhaeuser fire simulation cutblock on edge of Kakwa caribou deferral area.

Why Sacrifice Our Landscape?

Such desecration of subalpine lands and critical watersheds would not be tolerated across the border in Montana. We are allowing devastating practices in landscapes that Americans would leave alone because our product is destined for U.S. markets. Americans are not willing to sacrifice critical caribou habitat in the Arctic National Wildlife Area for petroleum production – why should we sacrifice ours?

GHOST WAIPAROUS ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN – CURIUSER AND CURIUSER

By Nigel Douglas

October 9 marked the final date for comment by invited stakeholders in the Ghost Waiparous Access Management Plan (GAMP) process. This has been a somewhat curious process right from the beginning. AWA has supported the rather belated plans to try to deal with the cumulative problems caused by 20 years of ineffective trail enforcement in the area. By default, parts of the Ghost Waiparous had become lawless, “anything goes” areas, much to the detriment of water supplies, wildlife, and other recreational users.

Between April and October 2005, a series of invited stakeholder meetings were held, with representatives from government, watershed groups, ranchers, motorized recreation, and environmental organizations. These meetings were focused on a set of guiding principles for trail selection and a hotly contested draft trail map. Motorized recreationists felt that they were being excluded from areas

that they had previously enjoyed; environmental groups felt that historical abuse didn't give an automatic right to use trails that were damaging to water supplies or to wildlife.

Curiously, the final meeting on October 1 still used the original draft map. Trails on this map had been changed due to representations from stakeholder groups, as well as changes brought about by the June floods. But nobody had the opportunity to see what these changes were. Stakeholders had to do their best to comment on a map that may or may not have changed.

Ultimately, despite some rather flaky public involvement, there is a chance that the GAMP process may work, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. AWA has been very uncomfortable committing so much time to a process that may or may not work. Success is dependent on land managers having the will to stick to some tough decisions and, even more importantly, having the significant

increase in resources that would be required to build, maintain, and enforce a sustainable trail network. There have been no assurances that such resources will be provided. If adequate resources are forthcoming, there is a chance that GAMP might work. If not, it will prove to have been an expensive waste of many people's time.



V. Pharis

An old roadway severely damaged by OHVs



BOTANIST SURVEYS RARE AND INVASIVE PLANTS IN CASTLE

By Nigel Douglas

Plants are a problem. The ones we want to see – the beautiful rare alpine plants, for example – tend to be thin on the ground and they hide themselves away in obscure, inaccessible places. Invasive weeds, on the other hand, need the merest of footholds to send themselves rampaging across the landscape, out-competing their more sensitive native kin and dispersing seeds like so much confetti.

This enigma is certainly not lost on botanist Reg Ernst. Ernst has just completed a three-year Alberta Wilderness Association rare plant survey of the Castle region in southwest Alberta and has also been undertaking an invasive plant survey of the Carbondale area of the Castle. A number of AWA staff and volunteers have helped out with this survey work over the past three years.

Rare plants good indicator of biodiversity

“Knowledge of rare plant occurrences is important for effective management of natural systems,” says Ernst. “Because many rare plants are sensitive to disturbance, they can be used as indicator species in making management decisions.”

The Castle is a complex array of landscapes, where five distinct ecological regions collide. Alpine, Subalpine, Montane, Foothills Fescue and Foothills Aspen Parkland are all represented within a relatively small area, and each of these regions supports its own distinct array of plants. This diversity of habitats is one of the things that make the Castle such a special area, and why AWA has been involved in the area for forty years. AWA continues to call for legislated protection of the area as the Andy Russell Wildland.

Some plants are rare by the very nature of the habitat in which they grow. Many have evolved to grow on exposed ridges or at high altitudes and other such hostile environments, where most plants would simply wither up and die. They evolve a range of features to adapt to the demands of a restricted

growing season, limited moisture, and severe temperatures. The reward of this spartan lifestyle is a lack of competition, which gives these hardy plants a distinct advantage – in places they can become quite locally common.



Reg Ernst examines a rare plant during the survey.



Red monkey flower

“Rare plants are a good indicator of biodiversity and can be used as a scientific benchmark for management decisions,” points out Ernst. “Rare plant surveys can greatly increase the knowledge of diverse ecosystems at the landscape level and specimens collected during rare plant surveys serve as permanent records for education and scientific purposes.” In 2005, Ernst’s surveys discovered 12 rare species (as defined by the tracking list of the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre [ANHIC]), as well as another nine species on the ANHIC “watch” list.

Non-native plants invading Castle

“The most serious threat to rare plants in the Castle area is weeds and other non-native plants,” says Ernst, whose studies discovered eleven weed species in the Carbondale area, including six species listed as “noxious” under

Alberta’s Weed Control Act and three others listed as “nuisance” species. Tall buttercup and ox-eyed daisy are particularly abundant, sometimes covering large areas, and others such as Canada thistle and blueweed are a growing problem.

Non-native weeds tend to thrive on disturbed ground, such as access roads and wellsites, and are often prolific seed producers. Unlike native plants, which have evolved to eke out an existence under a continuous barrage of insect assault, many introduced species have no such check on their growth and so can go on to become locally dominant. In the competition for water, light, and food, the native plants often lose out.

In most cases, invasive plants tend to spread along lines of disturbance, which in this case tends to be industrial access roads. Continued use of these roads for motorized recreation exacerbates the problem. Livestock can also help to spread weeds through eating and excreting seeds. Such seeds are deposited a considerable distance from the host plant, and with a ready-made supply of fertilizer to boost their early growth. Livestock loafing areas are particularly fertile breeding grounds for weeds throughout the area and, once established, these weeds can be virtually impossible to eradicate. As is often the case with invasive plants, prevention is better than control.

Ernst’s work in the Castle is by no means finished. Long-term plant surveys should aim to cover many seasons with varying environmental conditions (though Ernst’s three-year survey has already included drought, flooding, and wildfire!). “The Castle rare plant survey should be considered a starting point rather than a completed survey,” he stresses. And in the meantime, AWA will continue working toward fully legislated protection in the Castle area.

AWA would like to acknowledge support from the Alberta Conservation Association, the Y2Y Conservation Initiative and the Lethbridge Community Foundation for our Rare Plant and Invasive Species Initiative.

N. Douglas

C. Olson

DRAWING A LINE IN THE FOOTHILLS AGAINST CBM DEVELOPMENT

By Barbara Janusz

The windmills overlooking the hamlet of Cowley were uncharacteristically still for a July afternoon in southwest Alberta. Their inertia contrasted dramatically with the steady flow of recreational traffic heading north on Highway 22, designated by the province as the “Cowboy Trail.”

this paradise over a century ago, a man on horseback disappeared in a sea of grassland.

As a Calgarian who has owned recreational property in the Crowsnest Pass, west of the Porcupine Hills, since 1999, I hardly personify a steward of the land. Nonetheless, when I heard about the Calgary oilpatch’s plans to

in the San Juan basin.

In Alberta, the County of Wheatland is experiencing intense CBM extraction in the Horseshoe Canyon play, which extends northwest of Edmonton to southwest of Lethbridge. Jessica Ernst, a member of the Valley Group of eight families in the Rosebud area, was the second

N. Douglas



J. Foley



Unlike the vacationers traveling back toward Calgary, we were heading south to Lundbreck Falls campground at the intersection of Highways 22 and 3, five km west of Cowley; the campground was the venue for an evening meeting of the Livingstone Landowners Group (<http://www.livingstone-landowners-group.net>). A loosely organized association of ranchers, their *raison d’être* for organizing against “Big Oil” is not so much about their right to raise cattle in the pristine foothills, known as the Porcupine Hills, as it is everything to do with stewardship of the land – much of it passed on through three or four generations.

Here, on the southeastern slope of the Rockies, is a unique ecosystem known as montane landscape, where prairie flows into rugged alpine. The only other montane ecosystem on the planet is in Spain’s Pyrenees Mountains. In Alberta’s Porcupine Hills, aboriginal peoples likened the coniferous vegetation sprouting from the rolling, grassy hills to porcupine quills. Beneath the conifers, though, the land is not barren. In midsummer, the prairie grasses and flowers grow waist high, and when the settlers discovered

exploit the coalbed methane (CBM) seams in the Porcupine Hills, I couldn’t just sit back and watch events unfold according to Big Oil’s latest pitch to investors about the profitability of CBM development.

CBM extraction differs from conventional natural gas drilling because of the sheer density of wells required. South of the border, in New Mexico’s San Juan County, Linn Blancett and his wife, Tweeti, lease 32,000 acres of grazing land for cattle that they’ve had to sell off, after 450 wells and associated compressors, pipelines, and access roads devastated the landscape.

Tweeti, one of three guest speakers at the Livingstone Landowners’ meeting, gave a slide presentation that documented the ugly ramifications of CBM extraction. One slide showed one of hundreds of dugouts, fitted with plastic liners, for the collection of toxic waste water extracted in the drilling process. Fumes from these dugouts have polluted the air and noxious weeds have invaded the native prairie. The Blancetts are now embroiled, with other local ranchers, in messy litigation to oppose a proposal to drill a further 10,000 oil and gas wells

of the Livingstone Landowners’ guest speakers. Jessica is an environmental consultant with 23 years of petroleum industry experience. Despite having kept EnCana Corp. off her 50 acres near Rosebud, she is surrounded by seven compressor stations that have shattered the peaceful serenity of her rural community.

EnCana regularly hosts CBM tours of the Horseshoe Canyon play, replete with information packages that include a five-page handout on Frequently Asked Questions about Natural Gas in Coal, issued by Alberta Energy. In June, I attended the day-long tour, which comprised touring a methane gas well and associated compressor station; lunch in Drumheller, followed by a discussion about geology at the rim of Horseshoe Canyon; and a final stop at one of the compressor stations near Rosebud that Jessica Ernst mentioned. Prior to reaching this final stop of the tour, the bus pulled over and we were asked to walk about two city blocks to the compressor station, presumably to hear first-hand its attenuated noise level.

Jessica explained that her community’s requests for public consultation regarding excessive

compressor noise were initially dismissed by EnCana due to Rosebud's tiny population. Persistent complaints over two years resulted in the company installing a separate attenuation building on one of the seven noisy compressors – the one I visited on the last leg of the EnCana tour. The other six compressors continue to hum and whine. The Valley Group is also concerned about the effects of CBM extraction on groundwater. Jessica says that consultation with EnCana about landowners' wells drying up has proven as ineffective as that related to concerns about compressor noise.

The land can no longer be all things to all people, as land-use ecologist Brad Stelfox of consulting firm Forem Technologies in Bragg Creek, the third speaker at the Livingstone Landowners' meeting, illustrated in a presentation on land use in Alberta. Factoring in a conservative projected population increase of 1.8

percent annually, while projecting the future growth of industry and urban development, Brad showed how Alberta's land mass can no longer sustain all the competing interests of industry, agriculture, urban sprawl, and recreation. The inescapable conclusion is that Alberta is at a crossroads – Albertans face some hard choices.

Despite it being haying season, 200 people packed the community hall in Cowley. Brad suggested the need to focus oil and gas activity in certain regions by establishing a "Hydrocarbons Production Zone" in areas where the industry is already ensconced. Several members of the audience voiced their support for such a plan; others suggested a province-wide moratorium on CBM development until more is learned about its ecological impact. Many felt that they could not rely on government to protect the public interest. Brad told us that we have been complacent. We are all to

blame for not waking up sooner to the reality that our current standard of living is unsustainable.

I thought of the windmills, the chinook winds that propel them, and the clean energy we are capable of harnessing; about all the creeks and streams that flow through the Livingstone range and empty into the Porcupine Hills watershed.

My instincts tell me that our water will run out before oil and gas, and that the only solution is to draw a line here, in this unique and precious foothills landscape. Like an addicted gambler who can't or won't walk away from the poker table with his winnings, we risk everything by compromising with industry on CBM development in the Porcupine Hills.

Barbara Janusz is a lawyer and freelance writer who has recently relocated to the Crownsnest Pass and can be reached at cv213389@allstream.net. This article was reprinted with permission from Enviroline 16(8-9): 18-19, August 30, 2005.

GRIZZLY BEARS FACE DEFINING YEAR

By Nigel Douglas

The year 2006 is shaping up to be a defining year for the future of Alberta's grizzly bears. The Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Team finished its draft Recovery Plan in December 2004. After being passed around various government departments, it ended up on the desk of the Minister for Sustainable Resource Development in June 2005. The final Recovery Plan is expected to be released by the end of the year.

What happens next is anybody's guess. Will the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan morph into something as pale and listless as the recently rubber-stamped Caribou Recovery Plan? Will the Minister accept the Team's recommendations to listen to government scientists who have been recommending since 2002 that the grizzly bear should be listed as a "threatened" species (which would bring about an automatic hunting ban)? Will there be any significant changes to on-the-ground habitat disturbance, which has been the driving force for all of the grizzly bear's problems in Alberta? In short, will the Recovery Plan actually recover grizzlies?

The jury is out on this question. The Caribou Recovery Plan established committees, created planning teams, "promoted" industry best practice and called for continued "discussion" with other governments. The only practical actions appeared to involve killing wolves. If the Grizzly Bear Recovery plan is full of motherhood

statements, "recommending" action and "promoting" best practices, then the future for Alberta's grizzlies will indeed be very gloomy.

But if there is a will to change the status quo, to adopt measures to protect grizzly bear habitat in a meaningful way, then maybe there is hope. In late January every year, the Minister makes his decision on whether the spring grizzly bear hunt will take place that year. This will be an important early test of whether there is the will to make room for grizzlies to continue to roam the Alberta landscape into the future. It is important that the Minister hears from people who care whether or not grizzlies continue to exist in Alberta.

Send your comments to: The Hon. David Coumts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development

#420 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6, Fax: (780) 415-4818, Livingstone.Macleod@assembly.ab.ca. Please send copies to opposition members as well.



THE SPITE DITCH – EVER HEARD OF IT?

By Dr. Johan F. Dormaar

Starting about four kilometres west of the town of Milk River, Alberta, and then along Highway 4 just north of Milk River to get through the height of the Milk River Ridge, are the remnants of an interesting water conveyance project called the Canadian Milk River Canal, but commonly known as the Spite Ditch. In fact, after it was built, then-U.S. Secretary of State John Hay delivered a stiff-worded protest to the British Ambassador. Hay claimed that the authorization of the diversion of water from the Milk River in Canada was an act “lacking in friendliness.” So, what was that all about?

reflected the differing cultural values and attitudes of those who formulated them.

The Milk River basin is shared between northern Montana/southern Alberta and the southwest corner of Saskatchewan. The Milk River rises in the mountains of Glacier National Park, Montana, then flows through southern Alberta, to eventually re-enter Montana, where it feeds into the Missouri River. The Milk River is thus part of the Missouri/Mississippi watershed, which feeds its waters into the Gulf of Mexico. Conversely, although the St. Mary River rises

and their tributaries, as one stream for the purposes of irrigation, Article 6 was really a treaty within a treaty. Besides, it had not been drafted by the same people who created the rest of the treaty. As well, it had not received the meticulous care that the main body of the Treaty had received. It almost seemed that it had been drafted in haste. The International Joint Committee finally resolved the issue with its Order of 1921, October 4.

Before we zero in on the Spite Ditch, we have to first examine the aftermath of the decision made by Canada to buy back Rupert’s Land



A typical view of the Spite Ditch in the Twin River Heritage Rangeland just north of the Milk River, 2005

Water fills a section of the Spite Ditch after the wet spring of 2005.

William Pearce, chief federal agent in Canada’s Northwest Territories responsible for planning and implementing government policies regarding the development of land and water resources, first recommended, then urged, that federal water rights legislation be adopted before rather than after settlement. This was in sharp contrast to Montana, where private control of water resources came first. Pearce’s urging eventually led to the North-West Irrigation Act in 1894. Rather than epitomize private initiative and rugged individualism and freedom, Canada saw a need for government authority to control water resources. That is, water allocation policies that evolved in Canada and the U.S.

almost adjacent to the Milk River, also in the mountains of Glacier National Park, Montana, and it also flows into southern Alberta, it then stays in Canada since it is a part of the Hudson Bay watershed. The two watersheds are separated by the Hudson Bay–Milk River Divides.

As more and more settlers started to arrive in southern Alberta/northern Montana, water allocations soon became an issue both nationally and internationally. Following years of wrangling, the Boundary Waters Treaty was signed in Washington on 1909, January 11. However, Article 6, dealing with apportionment, remained sticky. Although it was agreed to treat the Milk and the St. Mary Rivers,

from the Hudson’s Bay Company. Portions of the West were given to certain people in return for certain things like building a railroad or for their efforts to develop it and bring in immigrants. In 1882, the Canadian Northwest Irrigation Company, owned by Sir Alexander Galt, was given most of the land south of Lethbridge. Land was sold to farmers in the area with the guarantee that they would have irrigation to raise crops in times of low rainfall. For now, the actual introduction of irrigation was left up to private initiative.

One group of settlers, attracted by the promise of irrigation water, were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, who

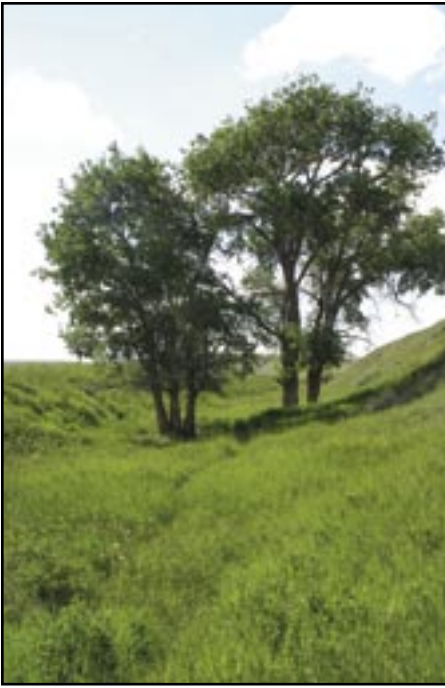
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WILDERNESS WATCH

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Narrow-leaved cottonwood trees grow in the abandoned Spite Ditch.

already promoted the use of irrigation in Utah. Led by Ora Card, the first group of Mormons arrived on June 1, 1887. After a feasibility study was done around the St. Mary River area for irrigation, water diversion was started from the St. Mary River. This led to an irrigation infrastructure all the way up to Lethbridge. As well, the federal government had by now given additional incentives to the Irrigation Company in order to promote irrigated agriculture in the district. Of course, the whole system relied on a steady supply of water from the St. Mary River. The fly in the ointment, however, was the fact that the water of the St. Mary River rose in Montana, south of the border with the U.S.

In the meantime, the settlers in the lower Milk River in Montana desired to expand their irrigation works. In spite of “prior claims,” no measure could prevent Montana from using waters in their territory as it pleased. In 1891, the two-year-old Montana legislature initially planned to divert St. Mary River water directly to the Marias River. However, this turned out to be financially unfeasible. Then in 1902, Congress passed the Reclamation Act. This measure provided public funds for the construction of irrigation projects in the American West. The Reclamation Service found that the proposed diversion scheme of water from the St. Mary River via a canal into the North Fork of the Milk River was quite feasible, especially since the water flowing through the Canadian portion of the river could not be used for irrigation there. Oh?

While first informal, and then formal discussions were taking place, the Canadian North-West Irrigation Company began construction of the Canadian Milk River Canal, better known as the Spite Ditch. The route was surveyed in November 1903, and two contracts for a total of 26 kilometres were awarded. A note of irony is that one of the contracts was awarded to an American by the name of Adelbert Cazier. Although the new canal revealed major seepage problems, it held water once. Nevertheless, the point was made that it would be possible for Canada to divert Milk River water, or redivert St. Mary River water. That is, the people of Alberta had “structurally” called the Americans’ bluff. In spite of the “lacking in friendliness” observation

by the Secretary of State, a peaceful solution did come about. With the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, the International Joint Commission (IJC) was born.

To delve deeper into this history, the following references are an excellent start:

Wolfe, M. E. 1992. “The Milk River: Deferred water policy transitions in an international waterway.” *Natural Resources Journal* 32: 55-76.

Sherow, J. E. 2004. “The fellow who can talk the loudest and has the best shotgun gets the water.” *The Magazine of Western History* 54 (1): 56-69.

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Dreiszigler, N. F. 1980. “Wrangling over the St. Mary and Milk.” *Alberta History* 28 (2): 6-15.

http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us/St_Mary/default.htm

Dr. Johan (John) Dormaar is an Emeritus Research Scientist at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Lethbridge. He has gained considerable national and international recognition for his work in rangeland management. His work has contributed to a holistic view of the way grasslands have evolved since pre-European times. His approach has influenced a new generation of soil scientists working toward more sustainable land management strategies. He is also a member of the Archaeological Society of Alberta and the Glacier Mountaineering Society.

International Deliberations Continue on Sharing of St. Mary and Milk Rivers

By Cheryl Bradley, SAGE Newsletter, November 2005

On November 16 SAGE Director Cheryl Fujikawa attended a briefing meeting of the task force charged by the International Joint Commission (IJC) with improving administrative procedures for sharing waters of the Milk and St. Mary Rivers between the United States and Canada. Attendees of the meeting, in the town of Milk River, were an invited group of water managers and the Milk River and Oldman Watershed Councils. Task force members informed participants that several options have been defined, none of which are expected to have significant environmental impact (e.g., large water storage facilities). The task force report will be submitted to IJC in December with public release likely in February 2006. (See also WLA Feb. 2005.)

MOURNING THE LOSS OF NOVEMBER

By David McIntyre

Leaving the warmth of a soft bed, I walk to the bedroom window and look out on a frosty autumn morning. A touch of crimson colours the eastern sky. Beneath the colourful sunrise, a ragged wall of stunted conifers juts into the skyline, forming inky silhouettes along the ascending crest of a sandstone ridge. Far below the ragged cliffs, and cast against the purple-black of the predawn horizon, I can barely see them – two deer stand head-to-head. Their antlers are locked.

There amid the magical half-light of dawn, where near touches far, and just above the backs of the battling bucks – in direct line of sight – I suddenly spot the roof of a hunter's truck, the possible source of a bullet that could kill me. I step back from the window, move to the far side of the house and wait, a hostage in my own home. Nothing happens. *This time!*

Within this household of two, we've been shot at on three separate occasions, one of those bullets cutting through my wife's hair as she walked during the early morning darkness. She fell to the ground, afraid to scream, too scared to move for fear that the slightest noise would bring another bullet. She lay there, the hunted, her heart pounding. An eternity passed. Finally, she heard the hunter move, and then she could see him. Still frozen to the forest floor, she watched as he walked away.

On another occasion, my wife was in the saddle, riding next to her sister. Hunters suddenly drove four deer from the nearby aspens. The deer ran between the two horses, close enough to touch. Again, the impossible happened. Rifle fire erupted and bullets tore into the hillside. Phenomenally, sanity was the only casualty. When my wife galloped her horse straight into the face of the closest hunter and screamed a pointed message, the hunter looked at the ground, turned, and walked away.

At issue is more than human safety. The promotion of hunting

ethics, once a guiding mission of the hunting community, would appear to have become its most obvious victim. A postmortem suggests that the precipitous slide in ethical hunting behaviour is inextricably rooted in a slithering tsunami of off-road vehicles.

Most of the West's big game hunters hunt from trucks and off-road vehicles. Only a small percentage of these "outdoor" enthusiasts take more than token steps. Many take none. I know. I've followed hundreds of vehicle tracks for, literally, hundreds of miles, fallen snow revealing the honest picture of truth. (Prevailing axiom: If a vehicle can be made to climb a mountain, the *only* tracks will be those of a vehicle.)

Most hunters I've talked with concur, although they claim that *they're* different. "That's not the way I hunt," they tell me, often launching into a story of



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how they bagged a particular animal after days of hard walking.

There are hunters who walk. I've seen them and crossed their tracks. But they're the exceptions. More typical is the atypical story I was once told: "I just drove out of town and shot my moose. Did it right from the truck. It couldn't have been easier."

Somewhere in the distant past, I can still see an old, faded picture.



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It was cut from a calendar before I was born. Framed in rough wood, its image (an impressive white-tailed buck, leaping over a downed tree) is still remembered from the warmth of a rustic log cabin, a cherished hunting camp lost in the depths of a silent forest. Beyond those camp walls, excitement exploded amid a flash of wings in the still autumn air, and anticipation touched every step. The quarry was revered in a mythical aura of fascination and respect, one that transcended the woodlands and came to the dining room table. Eating a wild bird that had been shot out of the air was a sacred experience, one that went hand-in-hand with the liquid-smooth action of a well-made shotgun and the acrid smell of gunpowder.

Big game hunting was no different. And it was the older hunters whom we, as youngsters, looked to for the answers to our many questions. Our inquiries often had little to do with hunting, and everything to do with the greater mysteries of landscape and life that surrounded us. The hunters of old knew these mountains and river valleys from seasons of exploration. They knew where elk dropped their calves, where bears dened and where the morel mushrooms grew – things *not* learned from the inside of a truck.

These men-of-old carried mental images of each ridge's silhouetted secrets, those seen in November, and others discovered in the spring of year. The old-timers I knew had lived to experience the face-freezing pain of the north wind. They'd smelled the earth in the wake of a thunderstorm and walked the grasslands where the crocuses bloom. They'd seen these delicate, woolly-stemmed harbingers of spring during their season of purple and profound abundance ... and found them again in the fall, when a maverick population had emerged from the frost-touched land to colour the southern slopes of November. For these men, hunting *didn't* mean driving a truck.

There is a part of me that still longs to hunt, to reconnect with its lost magic. Each fall it engulfs me, and each fall it fades. The frost-touched blossom loses its colour amid thoughts of the motorized, mud-slinging chaos that surrounds me,

and because this same lethal turmoil removes most bucks, bulls, and rams from the wildlife population during the first year these animals achieve "legal" status. Gone from most of the West are the herd dynamics that show honest representation from prime-of-life males. The prevailing mortality is more akin to the view of a society that practices the ongoing euthanasia of its adolescent males.

Throughout the West, where large carnivores and omnivores once followed vast herds of grazing ungulates, we wake to discover that there is often nothing for a moose to run from ... *except* man. The cougars, bears, and wolves – the only animals capable of controlling the herds of prey – have been all but eliminated. Yet the hunt for them goes on, the only common exception being where a specific predator within a given jurisdiction is considered endangered. Only then, in a massive effort to slow the wheels that have driven us to the crumbling brink of ecological breakdown, does society try (often too late) to find reverse. There at the fissured edge, with inertia inviting death to the last predator, we soberly turn to our only remaining herd-controlling saviours: the unleashed hunters and their go-anywhere fleet of off-road vehicles. It's a little like hiring a pack of wolves to manage your sheep. What you ask for isn't necessarily connected with what you get.

We expect hunters to kill wildlife. More destructive, however, is their needless abuse of the land over which their vehicles move in incessant quest. It's one thing to destroy your own land, quite another to destroy someone else's, or to destroy public reserves. No one has the right to destroy public land, yet nowhere in the anything-goes West is any landscape more vulnerable. And everyone has his (or her) own interpretation of what it is that constitutes responsible use. Multiple definitions and an overwhelming lack of meaningful restrictions lead to a litany of land abuses – the land always there to suffer the consequences in an I'll-define-the-rules free-for-all.

How did we devolve into this sorry state? The answer is simple:

hunters, like most people, are lazy. They've been quick to discover that the best place to hunt is behind the wheel. They didn't learn this lesson in isolation. Society paved the way.

Our sit-on-your-ass culture promotes *sitting* as the ultimate experience. The most important part of *any* activity, therefore, revolves around *where* you sit.

Louise and Vern plan their vacation:

"Hey, Vern. Look at this picture of Thelma and Herb sitting on their asses in Montana."

"Nice! You know, Louise, *we* could go there and sit on *our* asses, too."

"Let's do it, Vern! It looks like heaven, the pinnacle of sitting experiences."

Predictably, organized tours revolve around a rich potpourri of captivating sit-on-your-ass vacations, the only real change being *where* you sit. From sit-on-your-ass airplanes and busses, to sit-on-your-ass cruise ships, to lounge chairs, gondolas, trucks, jet-boats, snowmobiles, and ATVs. All you have to do is tell 'em where you want to go and they'll show you a way to do it ... sitting on your ass.

And at the end of each sit-on-your-ass day, exhausted, overfed, sit-on-your-assers can rise, shuffle from their padded seats, and plop their tired posteriors down amid the soft, *gluteus maximus* comfort of sit-on-your-ass restaurants and watering holes. There, they can really sit down and reminisce about all their sit-on-your-ass experiences.

Louise and Vern reflect on a sit-on-your-ass day:

"Saaay Louise, didn't our asses pass some pretty scenery today?"

"I'll sit down and drink to that, Vern!"

Why should hunters be any different? If you can sit down and be looked up to as a rugged, outdoor enthusiast, why not? Hell, it's easy. Once you've mastered the accelerator, steering wheel, and brake, you're free to grab a coffee, load your gun, and join the hunt. But after you've taken your soft seat on this racetrack to hunt-with-your-wheels fulfillment, you'll find that you're in stiff vehicular

competition. There, neck-and-neck with your seated I'll-kill-it-first opponents, you'll find that you're out of control. Faster and faster, you'll cascade down the icy, ever-descending slopes of ethical decay.

Technology has enabled society to enter a new hunting frontier. Within this uncharted territory, the motorized masses spoil the reputation of the ethical few. For the armed multitudes, their headlights are their eyes, their wheels are their feet. Inside the cab, the heater provides warmth, the seat is soft, and the hunter's smoking gun is *always* within reach.

I've seen so many hunting violations and heard so many shots in the dark that I'm leery of walking (a favourite pursuit) during the entire month of November. The situation has grown so acute that I recently reported an unusual observation to a conservation officer: a hunter, on foot, who appeared to be hunting legally. Of course, the noted individual may have been the same man whose bullet cut my wife's hair, or the woman who shot at my wife as she rode her horse.

Despite the wealth of hunting violations that surrounds me, one sacred window remains: within this region of no-Sunday-hunting, hunters appear to, generally, honour Sunday as a day of rest. Could it be that all the potential violators are in church, praying for an *easy* elk? Not likely. Rather, I suspect that the lack of violations on Sundays comes from the fact that would-be violators are afraid that their actions, *on Sunday*, will be observed and seen for precisely what they are. During the rest of the week, it's pretty easy to return at any time of day or night with game that can be *said* to have been targeted legally.

I used to hunt. Today, I feel hunted. And, sadly, my image of hunters has been formed as a product of the pictures they've given me: one foot on the brake, one finger on the trigger, a drink within easy reach.

I watch these hunters with my spotting scope. I see them slither out of their vehicles and use them as rifle rests. I view these people for

what they are: drive-by executioners.

Here they come. And there they go ... the hunters' 4X4s carving muddy ruts, killing plants, and removing precious topsoil. Behind closed doors, these hand-on-the-wheel hunters conduct a motorized creep through a darkening landscape. Their headlights probe through the forest and their taillights show blood-red against the snow.

David McIntyre loves the mountainous West. He writes and photographs the land and its inhabitants, working from his home on Rock Creek, in the shadow of the Livingstone Range. A former study leader with the Smithsonian Institution, David has led hiking tours throughout the Canadian Rockies and guided similar treks and whitewater raft trips elsewhere in North America.



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Waterton Springs Development Plans Thrown Out

By Nigel Douglas

At its September 27 meeting, the MD of Pincher Creek threw out the proposals by the owners of Waterton Springs Campground to change local bylaws to allow for long-term leases for recreational vehicle (see *WLA*, August 2005). This followed considerable opposition to the plans at a September 14 public hearing. AWA argued strongly that if such a proposal were approved, it would pose an unacceptable threat to the integrity of the adjacent Waterton National Park.

Thanks to everybody who attended the hearing and took the time to write to the MD to express their opposition to these proposals. Public participation is important and can make a difference.

Fire In The Willmore

By Vivian Pharis

Wet weather conditions into the fall kept the promised 11,000 ha prescribed burn in Meadowland Creek



Willmore

from happening this year (see *WLA*, August 2005). The fire is primarily a means of pine beetle control, but will also enhance wildlife habitat and hopefully contribute to the natural regime that used to include fire. SRD Edson fire officer Kevin Quintillio has assured AWA that the Meadowland fire is only on hold until next fall and dryer conditions.

AWA is also to be invited to participate in a fire plan for the Willmore, to be initiated in the new year. The objective so far is to do some strategic prescribed burns on the periphery of the park in order to make a buffer. Inside the park, wild fires may then be allowed to do their natural thing. Some prescribed burning of willow and young conifer-choked valleys will also be considered for within the park's boundaries.

AWA has written to government through the years arguing for this sort of fire application in the Willmore to return lost wildlife habitat. Traditionally the excellent habitat of the Willmore depended on cyclical burning, but fire has been suppressed, even here, for the past 50 or more years.

New Alberta Caribou Committee Ready To Move Forward

By David Samson

The newly formed Alberta Caribou Committee (ACC) met in early November for its first annual general meeting, much of which focused on administrative aspects. A big issue they intend to attack immediately is that of the Little Smoky Woodland Caribou herd, which faces the immediate threat of extirpation.

"We will learn right away whether the government, industry, and ENGOS on the committee are truly committed to caribou recovery," says Cliff Wallis, committee member and AWA director. "Starting with the Little Smoky herd should provide a real litmus test of commitment."

Another thorny issue they will be

addressing is wolf/prey control. This is not an approach that ENGOS are prepared to discuss without significant caribou habitat being identified as off-limits to industrial activity as well as a restoration plan being implemented for the most critical degraded habitats.

The terms of reference have almost been completed; however, the committee should be able to hit the ground running at its next meeting tentatively scheduled for December 22, 2005. Also, government representation is "right-sized," says Wallis, which should allow the committee's decisions to be the product of a balanced, cooperative effort among the committee members.

ENGOS representatives are pushing for deferrals of any industrial activity in sensitive caribou habitat until such time as the committee has had an opportunity to produce its recommendations.



R. Bürglin

Wild Bison Return to Heart of Historic Range

American Prairie Foundation, in cooperation with World Wildlife Fund, released 16 bison on a portion of 32,000 acres that they own or lease in the prairie south of Malta, Montana. This area is the core of their new prairie reserve intended to restore native wildlife, including genetically valuable bison.

APF's bison herd is one of only a handful of herds remaining anywhere that are free of bison-cattle hybrids; and is free from brucellosis. The director of World Wildlife Fund's Northern Great Plains Ecoregion

Program, Dr. Curt Freese, notes that recent research on the bison genome has found that some of the genes that make bison "wild" are disappearing for other reasons as well. "Basically, bison are already largely ecologically extinct in their historic range and are becoming livestock through selective breeding," says Freese, whose program is providing scientific and technical support to the project.

"The need to establish new, large herds to conserve the wild bison genome is extremely important. The great news about [this event] is that these bison are returning to the heart of their historic range, and we didn't have

to do anything special to prepare the land except putting up fences. Decades of stewardship by local landowners has kept the land in very good shape. The bison will graze the land very differently from cattle, and we expect it will benefit other wildlife almost immediately."

APF and WWF are preparing for more bison and WWF is beginning monitoring programs to track the herd and the land's health.

For more information visit www.americanprairie.org.

PORTRAITS OF THE BISON: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO BISON SOCIETY

By Wes Olson

BUFFALO! The word alone invokes instant feelings of nostalgia, romance, and times more adventurous and daring. It brings to mind the era of Buffalo Bill Cody, Kit Carson, and lesser-known yet just as pivotal characters like Samuel Walking Coyote, Michel Pablo, Charles Allard, Charles Goodnight, and C. J. "Buffalo" Jones, to name but a few. It calls forth images of wagon trains, hide hunters, Native peoples on horseback, tipis, and the eventual guilt and remorse of a slaughter unprecedented.

Try to imagine tens of millions of anything, let alone that many animals the size of a buffalo! If you were able to line up that number of buffalo from nose to tail, they would form a line long enough to go around the earth's equator twice! Imagine that many – it takes your breath away. And we almost lost them all. Once the slaughter was over and the first conservation efforts began, fewer than one hundred free-roaming plains bison remained in the entire world. If you were to line up those bison from nose to tail, there would barely be enough to go a dozen city blocks.

Often when I am sitting quietly along the edge of a stream watching a bull drink, his beard floating downstream, or resting with my back against a tree trunk along the

outer edge of a forest, or sitting in the centre of a meadow surrounded by these great, massive, furry beasts, I marvel at my luck and my good fortune to be able to share that space and time with them.

ticks from the backs of these passing grocery stores. I watch as an obviously nursing coyote fades, ghostlike, in and out of sight among the herd, using the bison as cover as she deftly hunts for ground squirrels



As I sit quietly, I hear the soft enquiring grunts of the cows as they talk to their calves and the gentle grunt in return as the calf answers, "Here I am."

I listen to the sound of their breathing, of their teeth ripping grass from the ground, of their hooves clacking and their tails swishing. I watch the antics of brown-headed cowbirds, a species that co-evolved with bison, as they pick lice and

and other small mammals to feed her pups in a nearby den.

And I smell them, and I marvel at my ability to do so. How often can you say, "I smelled a buffalo today"?

Every time I experience these little things, I treasure them and I give silent thanks to the people who had the foresight to protect the last remnants of this magnificent species. For had they not done so, I would not have the opportunity to walk

along trails created by the hooves of passing bison; I would not be able to marvel at the effect their manure patties have on the entire surrounding ecosystem; I would not be able to sit with pencil and paintbrush in hand, creating the images that I share with you in this book.

Many people have asked me: "Are they bison or buffalo?" Technically, there are no buffalo in North America. True buffalo live on the Asian or African continents, while North America has both the plains bison (or prairie bison) and the wood bison of northern Canada. There exists a third type of bison, the European bison or wisent, found primarily in eastern Poland. While I use bison throughout the text, it is only by being careful, since in informal situations I often refer to these animals as buffalo. The name "buffalo" has a long history of use, as well as, to me, a romantic ring of tradition attached to it. So refer to them however you wish: bison or buffalo.

Several people have asked me why I wanted to produce a book about bison. There are many reasons, but they boil down to two main ones. The first is frustration. Over the years, I have traveled through many places that have free-roaming bison populations. In almost every one, I have seen people placing their lives, and the lives of their loved ones, in danger by approaching too close to bison.

In Yellowstone a few years ago, my wife, Johane, and I were watching a group of rutting bison graze peacefully along the road through Hayden Valley. A car from New Jersey pulled up and out leaped two strapping young men. One of them trotted out into the meadow, then turned his back on a large bull so that his friend could take his picture. Within seconds, the aspiring model was charged by the bull and forced to run (laughing) back to his car. The fellow was lucky he was not gored.

A few minutes later, a large motorhome from New York stopped and out stepped a man with his young son. The father instructed

his son to back up toward the bull while he filmed him with a video camera. If an adult knowingly places his life in jeopardy, then he must accept the consequences, but when a child is forced into danger by his father, we can not sit back and watch.

So Johane yelled over to the father that this bull had just charged some other people. The man turned toward us, just long enough to send over a particularly withering glare, then instructed his son to back even closer to the bull. For some reason those two were lucky that day, or else the bull recognized that the son posed no threat to him. It is unfortunate that this family drove away from the situation thinking that their actions were safe and believing that we were wrong in warning them of the dangers associated with bison. The next time this father places his son's life at risk, they may not be so lucky.

I hope that after reading this book and examining the photos and drawings provided, visitors to these beautiful places will be a bit more respectful of the animals.

The second reason for producing this book is to give readers the opportunity to learn a little about how complex bison societies are. I clearly recall the first time I saw a large group of bison in Elk Island National Park, Alberta. Traveling through the park, I was forced to a stop while what seemed like several hundred bison slowly passed in front of me. I remember being fascinated but unable to distinguish the males from the females. Over the next couple of decades, I made a point of educating myself, and the drawings, paintings, and photographs within this book are the result of that education.

Most of information contained here is derived from my observations at Elk Island National Park. Just as bison themselves are individuals, variations exist among bison populations, caused by regional differences in habitat, genetic background, and the active manipulation of the population

by park managers. Consequently, depending upon where you are, you may encounter slight discrepancies between the size, shape, and behaviour of the bison you see and the information contained here.

If you are lucky, you too will have the privilege of witnessing the birth of calf, of watching two magnificent bulls fight a glorious battle, or of simply being able to say, "I saw a buffalo today."

Portraits of the Bison was published this year by the University of Alberta Press. Author Wes Olson is a senior warden at Elk Island National Park and has been observing bison behaviour across North America for more than 30 years. Photographer Johane Janelle has traveled extensively with her husband, Wes Olson, to photograph the plains and wood bison of North America. (120 pages, \$39.95)



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ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST ANNUAL LECTURE AND AWARDS 2005

Three Albertans were honoured on Friday, November 18, for lifetime contributions to the conservation of Alberta's wilderness and wildlife. Conservation biologist Dr. Jim Butler, plant biologist Dr. Richard Pharis, and wildlife biologist Dawn Dickinson each received an Alberta Wilderness Defenders Award. The plaques may be viewed at AWA's office in Calgary and further information may be found on our website. Dr. Jim Butler was also this year's guest lecturer.



Wilbur and Nancy Tripp accept Dawn Dickinson's award on her behalf



Richard Secord and Dr. Jim Butler



Richard Secord and Dr. Richard Pharis

OPEN HOUSE PROGRAM

CALGARY

Location: AWA, 455 12th St NW
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Cost: \$5 per person: \$1 for children
Contact: (403) 283-2025 for reservations

Pre-registration is advised for all talks

Tuesday, January 31, 2006

Woodland Caribou:

Do They Have a Future in Alberta?

With Pat Cabezas

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

Seasons of the Bison

With Wes Olson

Tuesday, March 28, 2006

**Is Alberta Really Prospering?
Measuring True Progress in Alberta**

With Amy Taylor

Saturday, April 22, 2006

Climb for Wilderness

At the Calgary Tower

Saturday, January 14, 2006

Kananaskis Valley Winter Hike

With Peter Sherrington

Join Peter Sherrington for a look at this winter wonderland, checking for animal trails and other signs of life and enjoying the stunning beauty of Kananaskis in the winter. As Peter says, "There is never a day when we don't see something or learn something new." Cost: \$20. Pre-registration required.

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.

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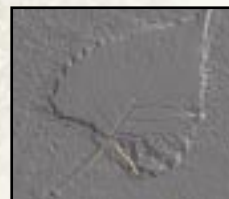
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