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AWA



WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Kakwa Falls – (C. Olson)

THE QUIET URBANIZATION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY / 4

WOLVES A CASUALTY IN LITTLE SMOKY / 11

GOVERNMENT SHOOTING ITSELF OVER GRIZZLY HUNT / 18

ALBERTANS SHARE MEMORIES OF ANDY RUSSELL / 22

CONTENTS

February 2006 • VOL.14, NO. 1

OUT FRONT

- 4 THE QUIET URBANIZATION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY: PART 2
- 9 THE LAND

ALBERTA WILDERNESS WATCH

- 11 WOLVES THE LATEST CASUALTY IN LITTLE SMOKY INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY
- 14 IS ENCANA'S PROPOSED DRILLING IN THE SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA ECONOMICALLY SOUND?
- 18 GOVERNMENT SHOOTING ITSELF OVER GRIZZLY HUNT
- 20 CROWNEST LAKE, LAST GEM OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES
- 22 ALBERTANS SHARE MEMORIES OF ANDY RUSSELL
- 23 CWD IS OUT OF CONTROL
- 24 WHAT IS A RIVER TO US?
- 25 GOVERNMENT SELLING OUT REST OF McCLELLAND LAKE WETLAND COMPLEX

PROFILE

- 26 LIGHTHAWK SEEKS A PERCH IN ALBERTA

UPDATES

- 28 LIVINGSTONE LANDOWNERS TRY ALCES
- 28 GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGES AWA'S BIGHORN STUDY
- 28 ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC GRASSLANDS SOLD FOR WIND FARM
- 28 NEW PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR MOSS
- 29 HOWSE PASS HIGHWAY PROPOSAL SURFACES AGAIN

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- 29 HOWSE PASS HIGHWAY IS VANDALISM
- 30 MORE CARPET BOMBING IN THE LIVINGSTONE-PORCUPINE

EVENTS

- 31 OPEN HOUSE PROGRAM
- 31 BEING CARIBOU WITH KARSTEN HEUER



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A LABOUR OF LOVE

Last year I was offered the privilege of joining the Board of Directors of the Alberta Wilderness Association. This was truly an opportunity to commit to a labour of love and I readily accepted.

Like many AWA members, my inspiration from wilderness has been a lifelong experience. From my earliest days, my most treasured memories are of my times in the wilderness. One of the great attractions to being a part of the Alberta Wilderness Association is the opportunity to associate with so many others who have a similar depth of passion for the natural world.

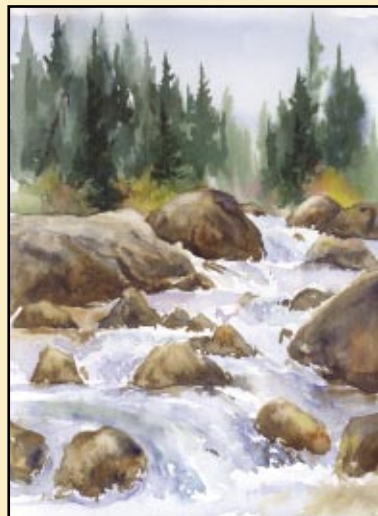
While there are many worthwhile conservation and environmental organizations, I am particularly attracted to the mission of the Alberta Wilderness Association. I believe that a strong commitment to well-informed advocacy is the only route to achieving genuine success in this arena.

As a board member, I deeply believe that I must give not only my time but also my money (as meagre as it may be). This organization will not function without financial resources, and if I am not willing to commit some of mine, how can I ask others to commit any of theirs?

While there will always be important day-to-day financial needs, I also believe that it is important to consider how we give this organization the financial capacity to sustain it through any downturn in its normal sources of support. What do we do, for example, if one year we couldn't run our highly successful Climb for Wilderness? As a donor, then, I contribute to both the annual campaigns and the Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Endowment at the Calgary Foundation.

I thank every member of the AWA for their great support of this outstanding organization and look forward to many more years of pursuing this labour of love.

— Jim Campbell



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We are pleased to present again the watercolours of Donna Jo Massie in this issue, this time in colour. Ms. Massie's biography was published in Wild Lands Advocate, August 2002

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THE QUIET URBANIZATION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY: PART 2

By Shirley Bray and Vivian Pharis

The Panther to most people is sacred; it's kind of the last frontier before the Ya Ha Tinda wildlands.
— Ross Legge, Mountain Aire Lodge

Long-time users of the backcountry of the west-central Alberta Bighorn Wildland are undeniably protective of its wild character. Alan Brown has fond memories of the many years he outfitted in the Panther River area from the late 1950s to 1995. He remembers the abundant elk that roamed this montane region of rough fescue meadows, open aspen and conifer forests, and craggy foothills.

Warm chinook winds push through the broad mountain passes from Banff National Park and clear snow from lower slopes and valley floors, making this critical habitat for overwintering wildlife. Panther Corners, as it is known, is bounded by the Panther River on the south, the Red Deer on the north, and Banff Park on the west, and is nicknamed “the diamond.”

Brown hosted hunters from around the world, and often family members who accompanied them. Camps consisted of large canvas tents with carpeted or plywood floors. A well-run camp was rustic but comfortable. In the 1980s to 1990s there were at least 15 to 20 hunting camps. There was a different class of people up there at that time, he recalls. “They were more sociable. The ones now are more or less on their own. They work a business of their own and they don’t give a damn if they see anybody else around there.”

Other things have changed, too. Elk numbers have dropped and the government has drastically cut back elk-hunting permits. Currently there are only 17 resident and two non-resident permits. The number of hunting camps has diminished to three or four.

Brown used pack horses when they first started outfitting. When

seismic roads were opened up in the 1950s and 1960s, he and others used vehicles to travel part way into the area. When Kananaskis Country was established and largely closed to motorized vehicles in 1979, many people migrated north to the Ghost-Waiparous and Bighorn areas. The resulting surge of vehicle use in the central foothills backcountry created

pretty well whatever moved. We found six ewes and lambs one time after one weekend in the Clearwater, all shot and left. I can tell you stories all day.”

At the time, outfitters told AWA Board of Directors member Vivian Pharis that their longstanding and stable tourism business was being ruined by OHVs. As well, Panther Corners is part of the Prime Protection



A view of the Panther River valley.

conflicts with outfitters and non-motorized users and put pressure on wildlife.

“Not only was it wrecking the country, it was hard on the wildlife,” recalls Gary Bracken, a Sundre resident who has spent many years in the West Country, including 28 years outfitting in the Upper Clearwater area. “These guys would get in there in a truck, they were ripping and snorting up and down the river valley, and shooting

Zone (PPZ), the zone with the highest level of protection as designated in the Eastern Slopes Policy, and is supposed to be non-motorized. Long-time users wanted to have the country closed to OHVs before it was destroyed.

In 1985 the Panther Corners Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) was one of four FLUZes created in the Bighorn Wildland to protect sensitive and scenic areas and wildlife. Except for one trail in the Upper Clearwater,

S. Bray

they were all off-limits to motorized activity. The creation of the FLUZes was recommended by local residents, AWA, Forestry, and Fish and Wildlife officials during the preparation of the Nordegg-Red Deer River integrated resource plan (IRP) in the early 1980s. They were put in place on a trial basis for one year, and it was only persistent public support that made them a permanent reality. Not only have OHVs been kept out of the Panther since, but the public has helped keep out oil and gas and forestry activities as well.

The outfitters went back to exclusive use of pack horses and wagons. But other changes were in the offing. When Mansell Davis ran the Sundre forestry office in the mid-1980s, he demanded that outfitters no longer leave any equipment in the backcountry year-round. They were required to pack their equipment in and out for the May to September season. The forestry officers promoted backcountry cleanups, two of which were arranged by Pharis in 1983 and 1984.

Large piles of garbage were removed. Forestry officers also burned anything left by outfitters, including floorboards, tables, cupboards, and tent poles. They prepared a backcountry camping standard to prevent camps from becoming “fixed” facilities.

But government management changes and long-time users are now seeing disturbing changes that are opening up this backcountry to the influences of urbanization. Now part of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), the Public Lands and Forests Division, and its Forest Operations Branch (Forestry) are responsible for land and forest issues in the area.

AWA noted in 1985 that with the FLUZ in place restricting motorized use, the area had a major influx of equestrian use, both private and commercial operators. Two outfitters got long-term leases to build lodges to head their operations on the eastern boundary of the FLUZ, which we discussed in Part 1. In 1989 AWA reported problems in the FLUZ, including horse-drawn wagons that did not allow old exploration roads to regenerate and resulted in erosion problems, semi-permanent outfitter camps, and horse and outfitter overuse.

One development in the front



The sheep cliffs on the north side of the river across from the Panther River Adventures lease.

country has been viewed by some as the catalyst for permanent backcountry resorts in the area. In 1992 Leon Graham took over as chief forest ranger at the Sundre forestry office. Ed Walker of Alberta Frontier Guiding and Outfitting wanted to build a home with a permanent foundation at his base camp on the eastern edge of the Ya Ha Tinda. When Graham objected, Walker simply went to Edmonton and got approval from then Assistant Deputy Minister of Alberta Environment, Cliff Henderson. Walker later sold his 12-acre lease to the YWCA.

However, Walker did alert AWA to a backcountry development in the Upper Clearwater on the Red Deer River between the Ya Ha Tinda and Banff Park known as The Outpost at Warden’s Rock, a summer resort with lodge, cabins, and hotel. Walker was also part of a committee of outfitters that developed standards for commercial backcountry use in 1990.

Now forestry officials are allowing current outfitters to keep items such as wooden floors for tents in the backcountry at preferred locations – whether by official or tacit approval is uncertain. Other users are worried that if such things are allowed to remain permanently, soft-walled tents will soon be replaced with hard walls, and full-scale cabins will be constructed.

Opponents to these changes don’t understand what is motivating Forestry to approve them or commercial users to ask for or accept them. “You’d think an outfitter, of all people, would want to keep that stuff out of the backcountry,” says Graham.

Older outfitters like Brown and Bracken, now both retired, don’t see any need for more luxurious accommodations in such wild settings. Bracken says modestly that his clients told him that he ran one of the best and most comfortable hunting camps, even though he provided only canvas tents with stoves.

“If they want to stay in these hard-walled structures and they want all of these fancy things like flush toilets and the rest of it, well then I guess it’s called Jasper or Banff,” he says. “Let’s not wreck the rest of the country.”

Brown agrees – people who want urban amenities should stay in the city, he says. Since his retirement, Brown has visited the Panther with his family and grandchildren and stayed at a backcountry camp run by Sunset’s owner, Duane Papke. “It meant the world to them to go up there for a weekend like that,” he says. The camp had common tents and dirt floors. There’s nothing wrong with that, he says. “It’s more of a natural way to spend a weekend.”

Panther River Adventures Ups the Ante

In part 1 of this series, we covered the trail maintenance exploits of PRA owner Terry Safron. Although given permission by SRD to do trail work in the Panther FLUZ, he also conducted some activities without permission, including blading up a meadow across the road from his lease. Norman Hawkes, a forestry officer in the Blairmore office, says Safron was sent a warning letter over that infraction, but no charges will be laid.

While Safron was phoning AWA to complain about our report of his activities, he was busy preparing an Alberta Tourism Recreational Lease (ATRL) application to expand his operation by about eight acres. In addition to the development he already has, which includes at least seven buildings, he wants to add 25 campsites, 12 self-contained cabins with lofts, a store, a shower house, another septic field, and permanent concrete foundations. He wants to sell liquor and fuel, and have a 25-year lease.

The Panther Road follows the south side of the Panther River from the forestry trunk road. PRA lies about eight km up the road in a narrow piece of land between the road and the river, on what is clearly the floodplain. The buffer from the river is a mere 20 meters. The proposed extension lies to the west of the current lease and is on

an even narrower strip of land. Safron plans to rebuild a reclaimed road that runs through the middle of this area and put cabins and campsites between it and Panther Road.

In August 2005, Safron poured a large concrete pad, complete with plumbing, without a permit from Hawkes, who knew nothing about it until told by a local resident. Apparently all the new cabins have been pre-built in Eckville. Safron is running a trucking company that services oil companies up the rather busy Panther Road, and he expects his new operation to have up to 50 vehicles a day, yet he has complained about the volume and speed of traffic. Although he has only owned the lease since spring 2002, his application says they “have had managers live at this sight [*sic*] for 10 years.” Apparently he doesn’t know how that statement got in. Several times in his application, he says that the topography naturally slopes *away* from the river.

Ross Legge, owner of Mountain Aire Lodge, was surprised by the proposal, which will dwarf his operation, and he doesn’t believe the market will support all these developments. His required setbacks from the Red Deer River are 60 m for the lodge and 200 m for the fuel tank. He already competes with Sunset, just east of PRA. Don Livingston, out of the Clearwater office, increased Sunset’s lease to 20 acres and a 25-year term,

the same as Legge’s.

Legge blames government incompetence: “The only reason I bought this place five years ago was I was reassured by [SRD] that this would be one of the only facilities ever granted a commercial lease.” He thought Sunset and PRA would always be small trailriding outfits, as they were intended. Now he’s worried about losing his substantial investment.

The IRP for the Panther area says accommodation will be limited to campground and base camp facilities, which does not include permanent structures with concrete foundations. AWA’s view is that developments like Safron’s belong on private land or in nearby towns, and that long-term leases of public lands for tourism developments should be phased out.

“Not only do these developments diminish the wildland character of the landscape, privatization of these public lands removes them from free public access,” says AWA’s letter of objection. “Preventing such developments and limiting their expansion is especially important along the banks of rivers.”

It is well-known, for example, that septic fields can leak into nearby rivers, and the soil at PRA is quite porous. The 1999 *Caring for Shoreline Properties* by the Alberta Conservation Association and the Alberta government recommends using pump-out holding tanks instead of septic fields. Graham, who does environmental inspections for Sunview Environmental Services, says if the necessary setbacks are put in, there’s no room for any developments. Nothing, he says, should be built between Panther Road and the river: everything is at risk from flooding. Furthermore, buffers should be measured from the high water mark.

During Graham’s tenure in the Sunde Forestry office, they built a basic campground, with help from concerned users, just down the road from PRA, to keep people from camping too close to the river. He says they spent time reclaiming the area west of Safron’s lease to protect the bighorn sheep that frequent the cliffs across the river and are known to cross over through that area.

Of special concern is Safron’s request to separate his Commercial



L. Graham

Panther River Adventures base camp in the Panther FLUZ. A bladed access to this camp for wagons was made last year.



The reclaimed road on the proposed extension to the Panther River Adventures lease.

Trail Riding (CTR) permit from his Miscellaneous Lease (MLL). This has never been done before. Many believe he will sell one or the other. If he keeps the CTR, he will still have a base camp in the FLUZ, also right on the river, and some wonder if the same proliferation of structures will happen there, given the *laissez-faire* attitude of Forestry.

Old Ways Clash with New Management

On January 24, Rick Blackwood, manager of the Calgary Forestry office, and Hawkes held an invited stakeholder meeting in Sundre, the second closed-door meeting about this area, to address possible future mechanized trail work in the Panther FLUZ. A large number of concerned users of the area who were not invited found out about the meeting and showed up only to be told by Blackwood that they were not allowed in, not even to listen. They were told they weren't stakeholders, even though many of them were long-time users of the area. The group offered to meet with Blackwood afterwards to discuss their concerns about trail maintenance and Safron's MLL, but Blackwood refused.

Later, under pressure from the disenfranchised group, Blackwood agreed to meet them on the condition that the meeting was limited to 12 people (later raised to 20) and that the agenda be solely about trails. If

anyone brought up the MLL issue, he would walk out. That attitude of perceived cowardice and arrogance did not sit well with anyone. Some phoned MLA Ty Lund, who supported his constituents' concerns and agreed to look into the matter. What they want is a public meeting that addresses all the issues and all their concerns.

"In my opinion it should be a public meeting because that country

belongs to all of us," says Bracken. "It's not just a chosen few." The meeting is scheduled for February 17. Under ATRL rules, the land manager can recommend further public involvement if there is a significant natural resource management issue at stake, such as the size or location of the project or water issues.

The recent approval for mechanized trail maintenance in the Panther FLUZ is seen by some as another urban assault on the backcountry. Some people who have used the newly bladed trails have found them to be easier to navigate with wagons and are now interested in "fixing" other parts of the trail system. The use of wagons seems to be a main driving force.

But opponents want the rules of the FLUZ enforced, and that means no motorized vehicles at all, except for emergency situations. Their criticism is not with the idea of maintaining trails, but with the method. Long-time users see nothing wrong with the old way – using picks and shovels to fill ruts, and axes and saws to cut through fallen trees. Otherwise they think nature should be left to take its course. They don't believe in bringing machinery into a non-motorized FLUZ just for a few outfitters. "If you can't get over it



Bighorn sheep on the Panther River cliffs.

the way it is, then I guess you have to find an alternate route or an alternate method,” says Bracken. “If you can’t get your wagon in there, then you better know how to tie a diamond.” And maybe that’s the problem, he says – some of them don’t.

considered. Bracken is concerned that if mechanized trail maintenance is allowed now, where will it end? After riders get to the top of the hill, he says, they encounter wet meadows. Will they now want to corduroy them?

Forestry officials are pushing the

about wild ungulates crossing the river? What about the cows that graze just downstream along the unfenced banks? What about urban developments on the river banks?

Some say that a bridge and manicured trails will just turn the Panther into another park, like Kananaskis. It’s an interesting comparison because it shows how much wilder they consider this area. Opponents say a bridge will open the area to OHV traffic, but the government thinks the current level of respect is adequate and they just need to make sure that doesn’t change. Since they don’t have the staff to do much enforcement of OHV rules in the rest of the Bighorn, it’s unlikely they will do so here. One hunter has been known to drive into the FLUZ to set up his camp and then blatantly pay the fine to Forestry.

Any big changes will be referred to the Bighorn Backcountry Monitoring Group, a group AWA was not allowed to participate in because of our opposition to OHVs in the Prime Protection Zone of the Bighorn Wildland. It would be ironic for this group to make decisions about a non-motorized FLUZ. There is concern that if mechanized trail work is allowed, snowmobilers won’t be far behind in demanding access and arguing they have less impact. Considering how the Bighorn access management planning process was conducted, that fear is not unrealistic.

This time around, Forestry is determined to do things more formally than just sign a permit without knowing the details. Officials have agreed to do a site visit before committing to any further trail work, but Hawkes refuses to ride a horse into the FLUZ. Hawkes has admitted to everyone that he was in error approving the last permit, but also said he was “giving approval under the directive and policy that we have with SRD.” He refused to speak on behalf of SRD and said that permits issued would give an indication of SRD’s position on backcountry developments.

“I often wonder,” wrote a citizen in 1986 in support of keeping the FLUZ, “why those lobbies who are ready to abuse the natural environment for their personal gain always seem to have more influence on government



S. Bray

One of the crossings on the Panther River. Panther Road is in the foreground, across the river is the FLUZ.

Brown says he used wagons for years and never had a problem. But now more and more inexperienced people are buying a team of horses and a wagon and don’t realize that being a teamster in the backcountry is an art that takes a lot of practice. They don’t know the country well either. They tend to overload their wagons and use horses that are too small. Safron himself fell into this trap before he bought into his lease. He found his overloaded wagon overturned in a rapidly rising Panther River and the belongings of two families strewn down the river. Experienced outfitters in the area knew better than to put a team of horses into the water under those conditions.

One of the main issues is the steep hill that riders must negotiate just after they cross the Panther River into the FLUZ. There are two trails up the hill, and the steeper one is nicknamed Suicide Hill. Both this trail and the less steep Grocery Hill trail are eroding and becoming less negotiable for wagons. The only other trail follows the river and involves five crossings; a new trail to avoid this route is being

safety factor. Livingston is worried about liability – that people will sue if trails are not maintained. But opponents don’t have any patience for that argument. “Anyone who signs up for extreme sports, and I think these things can be put in that category, should be made to understand, under your own risk,” says Nancy Graham, who was allowed to attend the January meeting because she and her husband are now part owners of Barrier Mountain Outfitters, east of Sunset.

AWA thinks the FLUZ should be extended to include a ban on horse-drawn wagons, as they are almost as damaging as motorized vehicles. They are causing erosion and keeping trails from rehabilitating as well as contributing to backcountry urban development.

Now there is talk of putting a portable bridge over the Panther River where horses and wagons cross from Panther Road into the FLUZ. Besides safety, there was mention of not wanting horses to defecate in the river and pollute it. That reason just makes people shake their heads. What

policy than those who care about preserving some of it intact for [future] generations.”

SRD says they have the authority to do whatever they think necessary, but because of past actions, people don't trust Forestry to do the right thing anymore. They don't understand what is motivating Forestry to overturn the old ways, except for the influence of one inexperienced newcomer to the valley. They want the administration of the Panther moved back to the Clearwater office. The Forestry people there, they insist, would never allow these things. Incompetence and jurisdictional wrangling have created an opening, some believe, for people like Safron to take advantage of the confusion.

There's people who have been in there for 40 years and more who feel it's a violation of their sacred lands, and they fought hard to keep it non-motorized, says Legge. “And here SRD is just kind of snubbing the traditional way of working and going in there anyway and issuing permits for work to be done.” Hawkes and Blackwood are going to have to work hard to overcome this growing distrust.

“I don't blame anybody for wanting to go back there,” says Bracken, “and I don't begrudge anybody going back there, but let's not abuse it. Because then you lose it, and there's nothing for anybody.”

Those who want to see the Panther retain its wildness know they have to keep pressuring the government

to be open and accountable for their decisions and to follow the rules of the FLUZ that they fought for years ago. “I think it's all beautiful country,” says Bracken, “and some of us at least have to try to keep it that way.”

The story of backcountry urbanization in the Eastern Slopes has grown since we wrote part I in December 2005. Two ATRL applications have since been made, one of which is discussed in this issue. We will continue this series in our next issue with other developments and the history of urbanization in the Eastern Slopes and what it means for our wilderness.

THE LAND

By William E. Davies

I am not complete in myself. I am a link in the chain of life. Each day I bear something onward that contributes to experience. I may never know to what end this serves – but I know it is something vital to the world. — Unknown

What is a land issue? I think it certainly could be discordant viewpoints on land use. Opposing viewpoints, then, become “the issues.” And issues need an anthem, a rallying cry! Our world, our sociological makeup, is becoming more indifferent to the needs and aspirations of those among us whose ties to the land were and are historical.

The Land is simply not just “the land.” It should never be taken for granted and we should not overlook illustrations from the past on how humans are linked by close union with the Land. Illustrations can be used to help us chart our present and future land uses and our undeniable obligation to use land wisely.

It is from the Land that we derive our subsistence – our existence. The Maori people say, “The Land is a mother that never dies.” Life – its journey, its revelations, its disappointments – receives energy from the Land in response to agrarian and settlement ambition. The Land broke our hearts, but we learned from



experiences in dealing with it.

To press on, to gather strength, to develop resolve and not give up became the fruits of our encounter with the Land. To simply wait for the end was just not good enough because the end would come – without delay! To sing a hymn of human determination is

to be victorious, not accepting defeat. To move onward, to carry on, and to continue to pursue are character traits that humanity has achieved from “living off the land.” A strength we call human will blossomed within the hearts and minds of many.

How the Land nourished human



will is beautifully summed up by H. Christerssen: “I shall not dwell long on the sad incidents in my life, but try to make this a cheerful story and pleasant reading. My husband died in a drowning accident in 1955 and was never found...”*

Many more stories similar to that of George and Grace’s must have happened. “George and Grace had three sons, Hugh, Freddie and Stan. Their cabin was burned to the ground. All they saved were their two guns and what they were wearing.”* If there is no “forging” of human will, there is no determination to live.

The Land inspires the human spirit. Its inspiration is universal. We can be inspired in a very personal way or even be moved to capture the moment using diverse art forms or by written word. “Our valleys and foothills stretch for miles towards the mountains, where frosted peaks glisten in the sunshine. Here wild horses mingle with the moose, deer and elk. Black bear also roam the forest floor and chattering little squirrels peek from the branches of tall spruce and pine. To our first settlers this was God’s country. But if this was God’s country, then where has God gone? The winter of 1906-07 was bitter cold: 35 below zero, days on end. Many cattle froze to death in the deep snow. But, I do remember the good times of how the neighbors walked miles to help each other” (*Recollections of the Homestead Trails*).

Walt Whitman writes: “The earth never tires.... THE EARTH is rude, silent, incomprehensible at first.... Nature is rude and incomprehensible at first.... Be not discouraged. Keep on, there are divine things well envelop’d.... I swear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell.”

The Land affords us the capacity to alter a disposition the “world” has prescribed or imposed upon us providing an opportunity for self-reflection. In a sense, we are momentarily detached or lost from that world. “Tomorrow I’ll open my eyes to Mother Sun, and I, smelling the fragrance of nature, shall greet her” (*I am lost* by Terri Daniels-Paucette).

The Land is not far removed from our age of *gleaming* modern society. It still remains close to how it was used by previous cultures. “Along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains the Wesley Band of Stoney Indians (Na-ko-da people) hunted in the upper reaches of Red Deer, Clearwater, and North Saskatchewan rivers. A mountain people: as recently as the early 1900’s, they used to ride over the divide to the Columbia River valley and trade blankets, saddles and bridles for horses with the Shuswap.”*

Until very recently, contrary land use (non-nomadic) produced a different farmer/settler lifestyle. “We used to read *The Timothy Eaton Catalog* or prairie bible as many named it. Grandma operated a store and post

office from her home on the homestead and traded goods and furs with settlers and many Stoney Indians. General store meant exactly that: general store. Remember the smell of coffee beans and how it blended with leather goods.”*

The Land became for many their personal phoenix – inspiration for a resurgence in their own life. Thoughts of “the Land” can colour a dream, much like an artist uses a palette to colour a painting. “George was a dreamer. His thought often strayed far across the ocean to Canada. It was a country where a man could build a new life for himself and his family.”*

The Land is capable of prompting the “prophet” personality in some of us. Past Stoney elder Ta-o-tha (moose killer) in part predicted that the white governors “will impose laws on us; there will be more and more rules, regulations and permits; we will increasingly have less choice about how we wish to live.”*

The Land has never ceased to stimulate objections on its use. In *Paper Talk: Charlie Russell’s American West*, Charlie tells of a sketch and card mailed to Guy Weadick, the driving force behind the creation of the Calgary Stampede. An excerpt from the card, dated October 13, 1912, says this: “Friend Guy. I received your postal and letter and was glad to hear from you. You were so busy when I left I did not get to thank you for the good time we had at the Stampede. I came west 31 years ago, at that time, barring the Indians and a few scattered whites, the country belonged to God, but now the real estate man and nesters have got most of it grass side down ... your friend, C M Russell.”

Hmmm ... promoting an anthem for land issues. It certainly appears that it’s nothing new and it affirms that the chorus may never subside. So, whose chorus will linger and resonate the loudest, like that of Zeussian thunder in a far-off, wild mountain valley? How the manipulations of man and time march ... *forward*? Perhaps both should merely waltz on by with sensitive effort and listen as the landscape summons whispers from The Land.

*from the *Bearberry Heritage Centre*



WOLVES THE LATEST CASUALTY IN LITTLE SMOKY INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

By David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist

The Alberta government has started culling wolves in the Little Smoky region in a misguided effort to keep the caribou from becoming literally the “Grey Ghosts of the Boreal.” Yet at the same time they are selling more oil and gas leases in the habitat of the Little Smoky herd. The government’s own newly formed Alberta Caribou Committee (ACC) has already stated that the culling of wolves

a moratorium on industrial activity in the Little Smoky until management recommendations are finalized by the ACC.

“The Tories should listen to their own experts,” says Bill Bonko, the Alberta Liberal’s Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) critic. “I don’t believe wolves are the main issue. Encroachment of industry is the problem and the government is part of

the wolf cull as being “completely ineffective in the short term.” He points out that to be effective, a wolf cull must remove at least 50 per cent of the wolf population and maintain that level over a number of years.

Wolf populations rebound very quickly once a cull stops, while caribou populations are virtually unaffected in the first year by wolf culls, and they recover more slowly. Wolf culls would have to continue while caribou populations rebound and then may have to continue for many years until habitat is reclaimed, which would be extremely difficult with increasing industrial activity.

“The Little Smoky herd is in real trouble,” says Boutin. “There are a whole bunch of remedies needed.” The cull may only buy a little more time for the herd, delaying the extirpation by perhaps another five years. For caribou to have a chance, there has to be a slow-down of activity in caribou habitat, something never seen in Alberta, combined with aggressive management. Boutin says a big indicator of government commitment to saving caribou habitat would be in the control of land sales, and there has been no evidence of that. The government’s



AWA Files

cannot be done without concurrently deferring industrial activity in key caribou habitat.

“There is no point in killing wolves to save caribou if habitat for caribou survival is being wiped out at the same time,” says Cliff Wallis, an ACC member and past-president of the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). “Caribou need secure habitat in which populations can be restored. Alberta and the resource industries are ensuring that both wolves and caribou will die to make way for resource extraction.”

Wallis says the government has absolutely zero credibility on wildlife conservation. AWA supports

the problem as they’re allowing it.”

Crown petroleum and natural gas rights were being publicly offered for sale during January. AWA estimates that 9,472 hectares (94.72 km²) of those sales occurred in and immediately adjacent to Little Smoky caribou habitat. These lease sales are in addition to the current maze of oil and gas and forestry activity in the Little Smoky.

The government’s choice to use a wolf cull at this time is controversial. Dr. Stan Boutin, a University of Alberta biology professor who researches population ecology of boreal mammals and predator relationships, describes



R. Bürglin

mindset, he says, is to maximize revenues from land sales, and this is “flying in the face of (effective) land management.”

Ultimately, Boutin believes that the level of industrial activity allowed is overwhelming industry best practices and has “upset the applecart of habitat.” Many years of habitat reclamation would be needed, and we would have to start now to see the benefits much later. But Boutin does not necessarily agree with a moratorium on industrial activity in the Little Smoky. He believes that with increasing human activity, there is a higher risk of losing caribou and that a broader and more regional landscape approach is needed. He suggests that we may have to look judiciously at which areas are good and focus our conservation dollars on those areas. The Little Smoky area’s value for caribou is diminishing, and it may be at a point of no return.

Wildlife researcher Jonathan Wright, who studied the effects of industry on caribou in Chinchaga for a locally operating oil company, echoes Dr. Boutin’s suggestion that human activity and caribou recovery should be approached on a regional scale. “We have to look at the entire ecosystem, not just the caribou.”

Wright points out that caribou were previously hunted very heavily, depressing population numbers, but that now industry is giving wolves better access to caribou. He says the cull should not have gone ahead without prior assessment of its effectiveness, a time-consuming task. Caribou may rely on large population numbers as a survival strategy, and it may therefore be too late to save the much diminished Little Smoky herd.

The question is how committed the government is in its stated intentions and legally mandated directive to see woodland caribou recover. The woodland caribou was listed as an endangered species by the provincial and federal government in 1987 and 2000, respectively. Under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), the provincial government must have a recovery plan implemented by 2007. The *Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan* (May 2004) identifies the Little Smoky herd as being at “immediate risk of extirpation” and

the herd is the immediate focus of the ACC.

AWA, along with seven other leading national and Alberta environmental organizations, concluded that the Alberta government is not taking meaningful steps under its caribou recovery plan to maintain caribou herds that are at immediate risk of extirpation. The eight groups filed a petition under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) in December 2005 with the federal Minister of the Environment asking the federal government to issue an emergency order to take action to protect the caribou.

Conflicting Messages and Actions

Over the years, what the government has said it wants to do with the Little Smoky caribou and what it has actually done have been two very

different things. The Little Smoky region had been considered for protection for many years. At a minimum, protecting and managing some habitat to sustain caribou recovery has been a common thread through a myriad of committees and government policies over the decades.

Concerns about the impact of industry on the Little Smoky caribou were indicated as early as 1973. *The Foothills Resource Allocation Study* by Alberta Lands and Forests noted that ungulate populations could suffer from increased hunting pressure brought by improved access within the Berland Planning District of the Little Smoky region. In 1980 Alberta Energy and Natural Resources identified major concerns over the impacts of timber harvesting and mineral extraction and the need for a regional plan for the



D. Smith

Little Smoky area



This recent satellite image shows the extent of industrial intrusion in the Little Smoky.

area. They recommended that access to certain areas be limited because of the secondary impacts of industrial activity, such as services and transportation networks.

A 1993 draft Berland Subregional Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) recognized the importance of retaining habitat in order to sustain wildlife in the area and emphasized the potential problems from industry. It noted that as demands for mineral and timber resources had increased in the once remote area over the last decade, the creation of surface access by these industries had necessitated efforts to protect many sensitive species, such as caribou, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and elk. Broad management objectives were stated that included maintaining the integrity of caribou range, stabilizing and increasing caribou populations, and maintaining or increasing suitable terrestrial habitat.

The 1994 Fox Creek Knight Subregional IRP described the Little Smoky area as having a core area of caribou habitat and stated that a range of management techniques would be used to conserve caribou, guide activities throughout the area, and maintain the integrity of caribou habitat. The plan appears to give caribou and its habitat priority by stating that oil and gas, timber, and other industrial activities will consider caribou needs.

In that same year, an economic evaluation produced for the IRP stated that while the Regional Directors' Committee had recommended that this herd be protected, complete protection would require precluding timber harvesting and energy development

from key winter (woodland caribou) habitat because these activities would destroy food sources, increase competition from other ungulates, and lead to greater predation by wolves. It did not appear possible, the report continued, to protect the Little Smoky caribou herd without compromising existing forestry commitments.

"The extent to which the herd can survive such changes (logging activity in key winter ranges) is not known and may be irreversible."

The report concluded, "The economic benefits of maintaining the Little Smoky woodland caribou are not large, primarily because caribou are not a marketable commodity. Yet, the non-market benefits of protecting caribou are quite high, as demonstrated by evidence that many Albertans actively participated in non-consumptive wildlife activities, and that people in Saskatchewan are prepared to pay to protect remaining caribou herds."

Based on the logging and petroleum industries' activities since 1994, the decision on whether to save the Little Smoky herd may have already been made, intentionally or not.

By 2000, the Special Places process, which was supposed to identify and protect valuable public lands, was near completion. Large portions of the Little Smoky region were put forward as candidate areas, especially due to the woodland caribou habitat. Only two Natural Areas totaling just more than 37 km² were created. Neither area seems to be of any value to industry: one is a sliver of land in a canyon that harbours goats; the other is a slim section of land protecting a river valley. The government chose sites that had the least conflict with industry and that meant eliminating the Little Smoky caribou range from protection.

The Alberta Advantage

When conservation groups met with SRD staff in February 2005 about the caribou issue, SRD acknowledged concerns about habitat fragmentation by industry, but their bottom line was,

"Well, that's the Alberta Advantage."

In a March 2005 response to a concerned Albertan, SRD Minister David Coumts wrote: SRD "is very concerned about the status of woodland caribou throughout Alberta and particularly, the Little Smoky herd. The department is considering a number of strategies to conserve this dwindling herd relative to an escalating interest in oil/gas and timber development. A provincial Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan is currently under review. Once the Recovery Plan is finalized, the challenge will be to implement locally effective conservation strategies, while trying to honor other land use commitments that contribute to our economy."

In the legislature in November 2005, he revealed more clearly the government's industrial strategy for Little Smoky: "We're promoting industry best practices more widely so that companies can operate on all caribou ranges."

If we lose the Little Smoky caribou herd it will be a poignant statement of our ongoing failure to sustain the habitat necessary for our wildlife that was brought back from the brink of extinction in the last century. That greatest conservation success story is being constantly eroded.

The government may be leading Albertans to tell them the good news/bad news scenario: the bad news is that we're going to have to lose our Little Smoky caribou; the good news is we're rich. But I suppose that depends on your definition of wealth.



IS ENCANA'S PROPOSED DRILLING IN THE SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA ECONOMICALLY SOUND?

By Henry Binder

Should the federal government risk sacrificing the Suffield National Wildlife Area (SNWA) to join the "party" and promote more economic waste? By refusing to allow EnCana Corporation's proposed drilling of additional natural gas wells in the Canadian Forces Base SNWA, Canada can achieve both environmental stewardship and greater economic efficiency, and help end the old mentality of seeing these as opposing objectives.

The new mentality, which recognizes the value of natural capital, reveals the SNWA as a unique, perhaps priceless natural asset, making the social cost of risking its degradation far greater than the benefit realized from faster gas production. Accordingly, refusing to allow additional drilling in the SNWA can be justified on the basis of a cost/benefit analysis for the project.

It is also justified, from a wider perspective, by the need to correct for the market's failure to achieve the economically efficient rate of depletion of Alberta's gas reserves. The currently proposed frantic rate of drilling throughout much of the province will bring on too much near term production at the expense of future supply, a problem whose consequences are exacerbated by NAFTA, which prohibits Canada from reducing exports to serve domestic needs when future shortages arise.

As Alberta's future unfolds, the ravaging of land, rationalized by the need for more supply, will make current, already disruptive, industrial disturbances look mild. These indirect future costs of current high depletion rates weigh heavily in favour of intervention for a more sustainable pace of resource development, which provides market incentives for, and allows time for, integration of less socially costly renewable substitutes. Through its natural gas rebate policy, the Alberta government is presently

contributing to the problem of economic waste and future shortages by irresponsibly providing incentives for continued construction of housing and other infrastructure that is not energy efficient.

Any slowing of the breakneck pace of proposed production is a step in the right direction, but the greatest economic efficiency will be realized by preventing additional production where its social cost is highest. This takes us directly to the SNWA because of, among other things, its enormous value as a benchmark for biodiversity in a region where it is the only remaining large block of unimpaired prairie grassland with such a "rich assemblage" of endemic species.

government must bring the same focus and determination to enhancing the environment as it did to restoring the government's financial health." Will the new Conservative government reject outright EnCana's recent proposal to drill up to 1,275 shallow gas wells over the next three years in the nationally significant SNWA?

The SNWA is one of the few remaining homes for the biodiversity Canada is committed to protecting. Since the preamble to the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) recognizes the intrinsic value of wildlife in all its forms and the value to Canadians of wildlife areas for aesthetic, cultural, ecological, scientific and other reasons, one would think extensive industrial



C. Wallis

Will the Federal Government Champion Suffield?

Canada strongly voiced its opposition to the U.S. government's plan to drill in the Alaskan Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Then-Prime Minister Paul Martin was adamant: "We will pull out all the stops to maintain the ecological integrity of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." He was supported by Stephane Dion, who stated in a budget speech, "The

development in a National Wildlife Area would simply be prohibited. This would be in keeping with Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on Conservation of Biological Diversity and statements made by the Liberal government on the topic.

EnCana Focuses on Bottom Line

EnCana is proposing infill drilling, undertaken primarily by directionally



Pronghorns in the Middle Sand Hills

drilling more wells into existing gas pools. Presently, shallow gas well density is approximately four to eight wells per section of land throughout much of the region between Medicine Hat and Brooks. EnCana's plans are to increase densities to 12 to 16 wells in certain areas, including the SNWA. Higher gas prices justify the additional wells, and "more straws in the pot" quickly add to the bottom line. I was told by an industry representative that at current prices, there is no need to wait 25 to 30 years when shallow gas pools can profitably be depleted in 10 to 12 years.

Social Costs of the Mad Dash

The market failure, associated with faster gas recovery, is similar in effect to what in economics is called the "tragedy of the commons." This is usually illustrated by the example of overfishing, in which the incentive for each producer is to take as much as possible, as quickly as possible. This ultimately leads to dramatic depletion of fish stocks to the detriment of all concerned. The problem arises because each fisherman, in calculating cost, only looks at private costs and not the external cost that his/her catch imposes on others. Similarly, in the natural gas context, each player, in a mad dash to recover quickly, disregards not only current external costs but also the future costs that its actions impose on society.

To demonstrate this inefficiency, one need only appreciate that the gas industry is behaving as it always has

in response to profit: namely, sell as much as you can as fast as you can. This outdated perspective served the public interest when supplies were thought virtually limitless, but those days are gone. For a non-renewable resource, economic efficiency requires limitations on current production to make gas available at higher prices in the future, as it becomes scarcer. This rationing is not occurring. Instead, there is economic waste, with too much near term production at the expense of future supply.

There may be many interrelated corporate reasons for the excessive pace of development, including the desire for growth; the maximizing of shareholder value; the opportunity to simply deplete and invest elsewhere; concern that substitutes, maybe renewables, will reduce the profitability of future gas development; and concern for future limitations on carbon production. There may even be concern that the party and windfall profits may soon end as Albertans come to appreciate that they are being charmed into selling their resource legacy for a pittance while paying high prices to buy "their" gas back at the retail level. However, it is more likely that the Alberta government's policy of appeasement – evidenced by natural gas rebates, distribution of petro-dollars, and keeping the economy overheated – will stave off this appreciation.

By allowing gas companies to pursue the very high rates of extraction, we are letting them make decisions

that impose a future external cost on all Canadians: namely, the possibility of significant shortages and all its negative consequences, including widespread future habitat destruction, as described below. In a 2004 paper carried in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, a number of mainstream economists, including Kenneth Arrow, reiterate the universally accepted insight of the discipline that economic efficiency and prevention of excessive resource depletion requires policy to help "prices of natural resources and environmental resources better approximate their social costs." In Alberta, this requires government intervention to make companies pay more of their external costs of production, including higher royalties as well as carbon and other environmental costs.

Some will argue that high corporate discounting of the value of future supply imposes no external social cost because new technology will come to the rescue. A convincing response made in a recent film, *The End of Suburbia*, is that only fossil fuels can provide the very cheap form of energy necessary to sustain current North American lifestyles and that hopes for the future, like hydrogen and other substitutes, are not feasible solutions because of, among other things, the high energy input required to produce them.

Interestingly, the film also points out that the neo-conservative movement recognizes this and openly advocates force, if necessary, to maintain supply of oil from the Middle East as long as it lasts. Albertans, however, needn't be concerned about an invasion because, judging from the way we vote, we have willingly submitted to the exploitation and intend to continue to put our future at risk in exchange for business activity: namely, the current boom. Perhaps one day we will come to realize that more business sometimes mainly benefits short-term business interests and is not necessarily sound economics, which is concerned with the public interest.

In passing, we might also take note of the enormous social costs imposed by greenhouse gas emissions, another area of concern where corporate pursuits are finally, but slowly and reluctantly, giving way

to society's interests. Although the emissions problem is likely worsened by the high rate of gas extraction and export, the impact of this on the effectiveness of Canada's current commitment to Kyoto has yet to be addressed.

In addition to the suggested interventions to eliminate or minimize the market failure identified, the federal government can also play a major role by having the National Energy Board reverse the trend of exports under short-term export orders and allow exports primarily pursuant to long-term licenses. This could be a useful flexible tool, as long-term licenses have reserve requirements similar to the 25-year supply safeguard in place before NAFTA.

NAFTA Worsens the Problem

Although corporations are intent on extracting gas faster, many Canadians are already concerned about the fall in proven reserves. Research conducted by the Parkland Institute (*Energy, Trade and the Demise of Petrochemicals in Alberta, 2005*) shows there are good reasons to be concerned. In 2003, only about 8.9 years of natural gas production remained in Alberta, a far cry from the 25-year vital supply safeguard in place prior to the implementation of NAFTA in 1994.

Since NAFTA, exports have increased dramatically while overall production has dropped, despite the hectic pace of drilling and additional wells. The proportion of production exported has increased over the 1990s from 33 per cent to 55 per cent, an increase that will prevent Canadians from reducing exports to serve domestic needs when future shortages arise. This is because under NAFTA, Canada is prohibited from reducing the proportion of gas exported below the level set over the preceding 36 months and therefore becomes legally committed to continue exporting virtually the highest proportion of gas it has ever exported.

Accordingly, the combination of market failure and increasing exports, under NAFTA, virtually guarantee that Canada will be short of supply as production declines over the longer term. Under NAFTA, even the willingness of Canadians to pay higher

prices than what is realized in the U.S. will not permit more gas to remain in Canada (i.e., free trade with a nasty twist).

The extent of the problem will be greatest in Alberta, where, encouraged and appeased by natural gas rebates, the majority of citizens and businesses are continuing to build gas-dependent infrastructure that is not energy efficient. In short, although infill drilling, as proposed generally and in the SNWA, is favoured by industry and serves U.S. national energy strategy, it imposes a very high social cost on Canada by threatening security of future supply.

is in place for the SNWA, industry will be back one day to haunt it again.

In Alberta, development usually trumps concerns for environmental integrity. Alberta's notion of intensive environmental scrutiny is well illustrated by Luscar's proposed Bow City project near Brooks, which entails surface mining of coal at depths of 12 to 42 meters over 130 km². The plan is to replace the topsoil and prairie habitat after the coal is removed. The coal will fuel power plants, probably as part of Alberta's strategy to increase power exports. Such a plan has, of course, everything to do with mass destruction of species and habitat and nothing whatsoever to do with environmental



Northern leopard frog

C. Wallis

Paying the Price for Waste

Some argue that future shortages and drastic future high-cost adjustments can be prevented by new sources of supply, such as coal-bed methane. Such arguments only highlight the importance of keeping protected areas like the SNWA as robust as possible. As Alberta's future unfolds, intensive drilling, and associated disturbances, in the "shallow gas treadmill" and "carpet bombing," as it is called in the eastern slopes of the Rockies, will look mild compared to the ravaging of land and destruction rationalized by the need for more supply. In short, the environment will, once again, be asked to pay the price for our current economic waste, and unless better protective legislation

integrity and protection. It points to the urgent need not to further limit protection of habitat in Alberta, but instead to take immediate steps to make SARA apply to the entire province.

EnCana's Benefit from SNWA Insignificant

Even though EnCana has proposed additional drilling in the SNWA, this should not be seen as a special situation for the corporation. This is only a small part of the extensive infill drilling program it has planned for the southeastern quarter of the province. Of course, the corporation would like to proceed with it because it already has infrastructure in place and can readily develop SNWA, in passing through,

so to speak. However, we should keep in mind that EnCana will be permitted to drill extensively not only over a large portion of the province, but on the entire Canadian Forces Base at Suffield, except for the SNWA, which represents only a fraction of the base.

If EnCana doesn't drill in the SNWA, the fully employed drilling rigs it engages will be employed on its other properties, and perhaps just as profitably. Also, the market will probably have just as much gas and the price of gas will not be affected by whether this proposal goes ahead or not. For the corporation, it might only mean that it finishes up a little sooner in this part of Alberta and moves on to develop some additional properties it has acquired in the U.S. or elsewhere. Furthermore, its existing wells in SNWA will recover the gas, or most of it, over a longer time frame but without further investment. In short, very little, if any, profit and private benefit will be foregone.

There won't even be a reduction in royalties, and even if there were, it wouldn't be a problem, as the province has no idea what to do with its petrodollars anyway. Any miniscule shortfall could be more than offset by a long overdue general increase in energy royalty rates.

Mitigation Not the Answer

The social cost of drilling in the SNWA – which will be borne by all Canadians, not Encana – will be exceedingly high. It is not possible to put a number on this cost, but for many Canadians, losing the ecological integrity of the SNWA represents losing what is priceless.

It will no doubt be claimed that effective mitigation, taking into account cumulative impacts, will reduce disturbances to an acceptable level, but the mitigation argument should not carry the day. We have been mitigating and compromising everywhere for years and still more species are becoming endangered, primarily because of loss of habitat.

The SNWA has long been recognized as a special place because of its rich abundance of wildlife not found elsewhere, and it must, especially in the context of the ongoing habitat loss in Alberta, be afforded absolute

protection. Instead of mitigation, the precautionary principle should be followed and the SNWA retained as a benchmark for biodiversity in the region and as an area from which wildlife has an opportunity to expand when the well-heads are decommissioned. We must keep in mind that the entire region will be subjected to intensive development, including the remainder of the base – especially the northwest portion, described as the “Oil Access Area,” where I believe as many as 60 wells per section will be permitted.

*Not steering by the venal chart
That tricked the mass for private gain
We rise to play a greater part.*
— Frank Scott

Having been a rancher for many years, I am well aware of the serious limitations of attempts to mitigate. Although this subject requires separate comprehensive treatment, I feel it necessary to mention the difficulty of preventing invasion of non-native plants, or weeds, such as downy brome and others. Such threats may appear small, but invasion can quickly change the essential character of a highly valued, biological benchmark, which must be kept as robust as possible. Climate change makes robustness even more critical, as it will allow desirable species to adapt and spread as conditions change, conditions under which endemic plant life cannot compete with invasive species, which are experienced opportunists.



C. Wallis

Ord's kangaroo rat

Furthermore, I recommend investigating decommissioning of existing installations in the SNWA in an environmentally sound manner. At least any fracing or other disturbances should only be permitted under

exceptional circumstances and after careful scrutiny. EnCana's proposal suggests that amendments to the *National Wildlife Act* are called for, to require dismantling and/or prohibition of further development when an area is designated for protection. If such provisions had been in place when the SNWA was designated in 2003, we wouldn't have to deal with this threat today.

The Choice Should be Easy

For those only interested in the bottom line, my recommendation is that we maintain or reduce the pace of production in the SNWA, both because it is economically efficient to do so and to guarantee protection of a special area. Over the immediate term, at least, less gas from the SNWA simply means more gas from somewhere else, where the environmental damage will certainly be less.

Overall, I note that natural gas is still used indirectly, through power generation, to keep office tower lights burning 24 hours a day in cities across North America and for other purposes most of us consider wasteful. In economic terms, waste includes all such low-value uses that wouldn't be engaged in today if the price of gas reflected its full social cost. Even if some gas were ultimately left in the ground in the SNWA or elsewhere, it can fairly be viewed as gas that would otherwise have contributed to economic waste.

By refusing additional drilling in the SNWA, we are not only preventing the SNWA from adding to an economically wasteful process, but we are also giving a priceless asset, comprising scarce biodiversity, the strong protection it deserves. The choice should be easy.

Henry Binder is a retired lawyer and rancher who lives in Medicine Hat. He is a member of Grasslands Naturalists.



GOVERNMENT SHOOTING ITSELF OVER GRIZZLY HUNT

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

Recent incidents surrounding the withholding of critical grizzly information and the removal of Alberta's grizzly bear specialist have raised serious questions about the government's ability to manage Alberta's grizzly bear population. A considerable amount of information, including revealing population studies, 2005 mortality figures, and the 2004 draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, have been withheld from the public.

The information was also withheld from David Coumts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), which is charged with managing Alberta's fish and wildlife, until the end of January when the grizzly hunt decision was supposed to have been made. Then suddenly government biologist Gord Stenhouse was removed as Provincial Grizzly Bear Specialist at the end of January, even though he remains chair of the provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Team.

What's the Big Secret?

Conservation groups are concerned that the government will allow the hunt to proceed again this year, despite having ample information on grizzly population numbers that suggest the hunt is not sustainable. An SRD spokesman recently told CTV reporter David Gray that the government won't release the information because most Albertans simply "won't understand them" until they are put into context. SRD's communication department has also been known to consider itself a peer review committee for what they consider sensitive studies.

The most important study that is not being released is the DNA-based grizzly bear population estimates for parts of northern Alberta, which have been developed by government

grizzly scientists over the past two years. DNA-based population studies are currently the most scientifically accurate method for estimating population size for bears distributed over large areas. Two years' worth of publicly funded genetic studies of grizzly populations between Highways 1 and 16 carried a provincial tax-dollar price tag of \$750,000.

Uncertainty over Alberta's grizzly population has been cited as a justification for continuing the

thought, the government would have had that out in the public eye immediately," says Henderson.

The government said it would release the 2005 mortality data at the end of January 2006. It is strongly suspected that more than 40 grizzly bears were killed by humans in 2005 (including 10 killed in the spring hunt). If this is true, it would be the highest number of grizzlies killed in a single year in the last 10 years.



R. Douglas

hunt and not listing the grizzly as "threatened." Yet these studies promise to tell us more about the status of Alberta's grizzlies than ever before. Dr. Tracey Henderson of the Grizzly Bear Alliance and the Jasper Environmental Association tried unsuccessfully, via the provincial Freedom of Information Act, to access these data, as well as the total grizzly bear mortality numbers for the past year, which have always been readily accessible in the past.

"There's no doubt that if this had shown more bears than previously

Recovering the Grizzly Recovery Plan

The government also refuses to release the draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. The government established the multi-stakeholder Grizzly Bear Recovery Team following a 2002 recommendation by the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) to list the grizzly as a "threatened" species (when the provincial population was believed to be around 1,000 bears). The team quickly assessed exactly what was known about Alberta's grizzlies, and

their best estimate of the population was “less than 700 individuals.” They also made recommendations for recovering the grizzly bear, including better managing human access to grizzly habitat, protecting key areas for grizzly bears from excessive industrial development, and suspending the hunt.

The terms of reference for the recovery team stated that the recovery plan “will be provided to the Minister three months prior to release for public review.” Thirteen months later, the plan has still not been released, and the “public review” has apparently been interpreted to mean an internal review by SRD staff and referral back to the Endangered Species Conservation Committee for review (minus up-to-date population information).

“We worked very long and hard to come up with recommendations for the province,” says Mark Boyce, a University of Alberta biologist and member of the Recovery Team. “So we are certainly frustrated that that hasn’t moved forward.”

The Recovery Team itself has not even been provided with the recent population or mortality figures. “We always anticipated we were an integral part of the information flow,” said Recovery Team member and Talisman Energy biologist Rob Staniland (*Edmonton Sun*, Jan. 16/06). “I expected we’d have that information last year. We’re really suspicious now.”

The removal of Stenhouse as the Provincial Grizzly Bear Biologist in January 2006 came as a surprise. As chair of the Recovery Team, Stenhouse had been under pressure from the team to find out why they had not been allowed to see population and mortality data and why nothing had been heard since the recovery plan was submitted more than a year ago.

When he expressed these concerns publicly, he was quickly informed that he was no longer Provincial Grizzly Bear Specialist. In a bizarre twist, when this news became public, an SRD spokesman initially denied that Stenhouse had been Provincial Grizzly Bear Specialist in the first place. When it was pointed out that this was how Stenhouse was listed in the government’s Internet telephone directory, this denial was later retracted.

Stenhouse was clearly caught

between a rock and a hard place. His comments, which initiated the entire farce, were particularly prophetic: “No matter what I do, I know I’m going to get into trouble” (*Calgary Herald*, Jan 12/06).

Who’s in Charge?

Of even more concern is the question of who exactly is in charge of the decisions affecting Alberta’s grizzly bears. As of February 2006, Coutts had still not seen the Recovery Plan even though it was submitted to his department in December 2004 (*Calgary Herald*, Feb. 3/06). According to his aides, he had still not been briefed on this or any of the other grizzly issues by the end of January 2006.

Yet Coutts signed off on the 2005 grizzly hunt, even though his department had in its possession the draft Recovery Plan – which recommended suspending the hunt – and the first year’s genetic population studies. SRD is not doing the Minister any favours by making a circus of the grizzly issue. But more importantly, the government is doing the public a disservice by keeping information about our wildlife secret.

There still appears to be considerable opposition within government ranks to efforts to recover Alberta’s grizzlies. Jim Pissot of Defenders of Wildlife Canada points to the intransigence of some wildlife managers. “Their professional reputation is predicated, in part, on having done a ‘good job’ conserving Alberta’s grizzlies,” he says. “Of course, this position has been challenged by various studies and recommendations forwarded to the Minister’s office over the past four years.”

To Hunt or Not to Hunt

Will having more accurate numbers influence the government to halt the spring hunt? In a recent meeting with AWA, Ray Mackowecki, then-president of the Alberta Fish and Game Association, which bills itself as the “premier conservation group in Alberta” and claims to have the ear of government, said that if the only grizzly bears left in Alberta were in the Chinchaga, it would still want to have a grizzly hunt in the Chinchaga. The

government is also being fed a lot of anecdotal information from Albertans who claim they now see more grizzlies than ever before. But decisions on our wildlife need to be made with the best available science.

Argument over the hunt gets a lot of attention but can divert attention from the really pressing problem, which is the destruction of grizzly bear habitat. Jason Bender hunts grizzlies in B.C. but is still strongly opposed to the grizzly hunt in Alberta. “Hunters are taking away their ability to hunt,” says Bender. “If you’re a true hunter, you’re a conservationist first. It should be in everybody’s interest to ensure that grizzlies are still around for our kids.”

Stopping the hunt will not on its own save Alberta’s grizzlies, but it is the most effective and immediate strategy we have available to decrease the unsustainable number of bears killed every year. “What is needed now,” says a *Calgary Herald* editorial (Feb. 3/06), “is some measure of confidence that the provincial government is considering fully and objectively the information provided by its experts when determining whether to allow the grizzly hunt.” If the science does not fit in with how grizzlies are managed, maybe it is time to manipulate that management, rather than manipulating the science and the scientists.

List of documents the Alberta government has declined to release:

- DNA population studies for 2004 and 2005, partly funded by \$750,000 of taxpayer money.
- Human-caused mortality figures for grizzly bears in 2005.
- The Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, completed by the multi-stakeholder provincial Recovery Team in December 2004.
- The amended Report on Alberta Grizzly Bear Assessment of Allocation, completed in early 2005.



CROWSNEST LAKE: LAST GEM OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

By Barbara Janusz

Within the narrow, windswept Crowsnest Pass lies the deep, blue, freshwater jewel of Crowsnest Lake. Save for a dozen residences that are located east of its shoreline and that make up the tiny settlement of Sentinel, Crowsnest Lake remains a deserted, uninhabited place. All that, however, is poised to change as a result of two separate development bylaws passed by the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass Council on October 25, 2005.

The first bylaw adopted the area structure plan proposed by Bridgegate Development Ltd. to develop an \$875 million resort complex in Sentinel. Contingent upon Alberta Environment's approval of the municipality's second motion to extend municipal water and sewer lines to Sentinel, Bridgegate has committed \$1 million toward expansion of the said infrastructure.

Bridgegate's proposed development can best be described as ostentatiously ambitious. Consisting of seven phases, the first development phase entails a single tower with up to 50 fractional share condo units, the sale of which are earmarked to finance subsequent stages of development that include a hotel, shopping and equestrian complexes, an ice arena, aquatic centre, golf course, and marina. Expecting the resort village to eventually attract 150,000 tourists annually, the developers hope to utilize the existing CPR line, which skirts the lake's north shore, to transport tourists east from the resort to Coleman and Blairmore.

The ramifications of such a development are enormous, not only for residents of the Pass, but also for all users of water downstream. The municipality derives its water from an immense aquifer, widely regarded as having the highest refreshment rate in Western Canada. The existing water treatment plant, however, discharges treated wastewater into the Crowsnest

River, which together with its headwaters, Crowsnest Lake, form part of the Oldman River basin.

The Oldman River, a tributary of the South Saskatchewan River that merges with the Bow River east of Taber, derives 40 per cent of its total flow from the Castle and Crowsnest Rivers. It is a heavily managed river system with numerous reservoirs in which water is stored during spring snowmelt, allowing for controlled flow during the summer and fall seasons for crop irrigation.

A recently updated characterization report on the Oldman River, conducted by the University of Guelph, found that "[d]ue to heavy reliance on surface water, water quality is a prominent concern in the basin." With decreased stream flows in the summer months, municipal effluents and agricultural wastes downstream become less diluted, resulting in fish kills. "Despite regulation of flows by dams and reservoirs, floods and droughts continue to affect the residents and businesses of the watershed, as well as its natural communities. A key concern is the potential for changes in the frequency or severity of extreme hydrological changes in the future as a result of climate change.

At a town hall meeting held in Blairmore on October 4, 2005, corporate officers of Bridgegate Development, when asked about plans for disposal of wastewater, advised that the resort intends to recycle its greywater. Greywater can be defined as any used water, except for water that is flushed down toilets. Constituting 50 to 80 per cent of residential wastewater, greywater includes dish, shower, sink, and laundry water.

Aside from the benefit of decreased municipal treatment wastewater flow, greywater recycling increases the freshwater supply in regions where irrigation is practiced.

Primary treatment of greywater, however, only reduces solids. Secondary treatment, or disinfection, is required to eliminate pollutants or pathogenic micro-organisms from the remaining liquid and some micro-organisms, such as cryptosporidium, may be resistant to disinfection.

According to Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, co-authors of *Blue Gold: The Battle against Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (2002), "[E]ven treated wastewater can be lethal. While treatment will remove fecal coliform bacteria, the best known variety of which is the deadly E-coli, it does not remove the toxic chemicals contained in wastewater" (32). They reported a July 2001 study by Quebec's Environment Ministry that found that water flushed into the province's lakes and rivers is still acutely toxic even after highly sophisticated treatment, and a 2001 Sierra Club study found that typical municipal water contains 200 synthetic chemicals, including PCBs, which make water dangerous to drink.

Apart from potential degradation of the river system's water quality, residents such as Adele Heisler, whose residence is closest to the development site, has serious concerns about garbage in general. Sentinel is fittingly known in these parts as "hurricane flats." The wind often blows with such velocity that unless litter is disposed of properly, Heisler fears that it will end up in the river. "How can you supervise a thousand people?" she asks, referring to the projected population of the resort complex at any given time.

Heisler also expressed concerns about the development's impact upon bird habitat. The Crowsnest Conservation Society has compiled a list of almost 300 species of birds, including hummingbirds and waterfowl, that frequent the greater Crowsnest Pass. Crowsnest Lake is home to common loons, bald eagles,

white-tailed ptarmigan, American pipits, and migrating waterfowl such as mergansers, plovers, ruddy ducks, and various species of grebes.

David McIntyre, a forestry consultant with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, who like Heisler has resided in the Pass for the past 20 years, is more optimistic about Bridgegate's proposal. Having recently discovered, on the shores of Crowsnest Lake, one of the oldest trees in Alberta – a limber pine, possibly dating from 1,450 years ago – he sees the proposed development as a positive force in the community's need to safeguard its cultural and natural treasures. McIntyre has also identified in the area two tree

He describes the greater Crowsnest Pass as “ecologically sensitive and diverse” and “Alberta's richest, most diverse, most threatened forest community.” Attributing such diversity to the Crowsnest Pass's low elevation and proximity to southeastern B.C. forest seed stock, McIntyre foresees the Bridgegate development fostering respect and increased appreciation for the region's uniqueness. In the past, intense mining for coal and logging have disturbed the land. Development for tourism purposes on the scale of what is being proposed by Bridgegate is, in his opinion, necessary to instill an ethic that promotes conservation.

sheep are killed through roadkill per year than as a result of hunting. Bridgegate's plans to carry tourists by rail to the heart of the Pass addresses this concern to some degree, although large mammal fatalities also stem from existing CPR traffic.

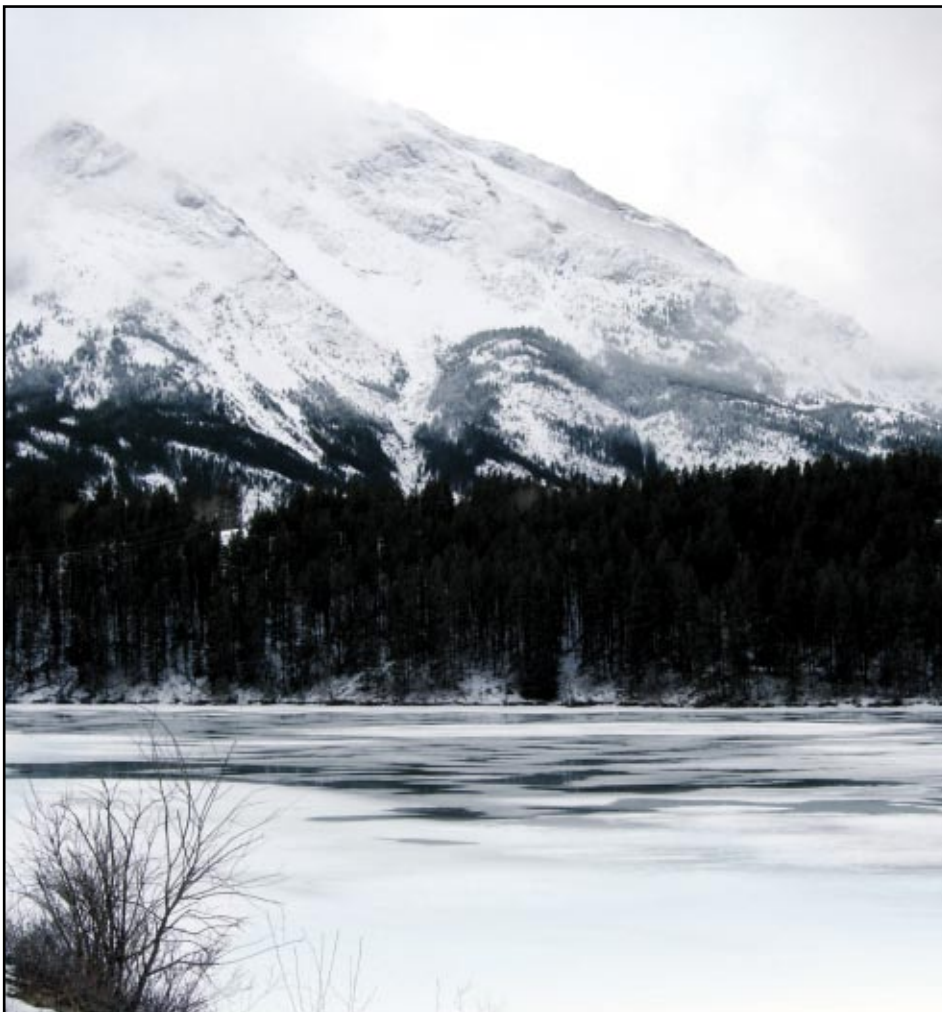
Along the lakeshore, the CPR line cuts back and forth through rock outcroppings. As the capacity of freight trains increases, so too does the potential for derailments, a serious concern for Vic Bergman, the proprietor of the Crowsnest Angler, which specializes in outfitting fly fishermen. The Crowsnest River is world renowned for its trout fishery. Although most anglers are more interested in stream fishing and Crowsnest Lake itself does not attract too many anglers, increased recreational use of the lake, particularly by motorboats, poses the risk of polluting the fishery.

The municipality has zoned the 27-acre site of the Bridgegate resort as direct control. Accordingly, any development must be approved by town council, and not simply by a development officer or committee. According to Gordon Lundy, chief administrative officer for the municipality, engineers are currently designing plans for the extension of water and sewer lines to Sentinel. Approval by the water and sewage division of municipal approvals for Alberta Environment is required before expansion of the water treatment facility can occur. An environmental impact assessment is discretionary in this instance.

David McGee, district approvals manager for the department, advises that it is premature to comment on how discretion will be exercised before submission of the municipal plans. McGee also advised that he has not yet encountered a greywater recycling scheme on the scale proposed by Bridgegate and that Alberta Labour has jurisdiction to ensure proper interconnection of greywater conduits to the resort's plumbing system.

Epilogue

In the process of compiling data and opinions on the foregoing potential repercussions stemming from Bridgegate's resort proposal, I was



E. Steinke

A view at the location of the proposed resort.

species not known to occur elsewhere in the province – western white pine and ponderosa pine – along with western red cedar, which forms part of a colonization that atypically extends eastward across the continental divide.

Increased vehicular traffic on Highway 3, however, will exacerbate the already growing problem of roadkill. Currently, the wildlife mortality rate averages 200 large mammals annually. More bighorn

frequently asked by Pass residents whether it looked like the development would go ahead. I'd learned that this is not the first time that a developer has wooed Pass residents into approving (through their municipal council) development of a resort complex on the lake. Consequently, many Pass residents, generally speaking, harbour a pessimistic wait-and-see attitude toward the current development proposal.

With one out of five residences currently owned by non-residents, the

Crowsnest Pass has become largely a retirement community that naturally harbours attendant twenty-first-century anxieties over its future sustainability as a rural community. The United Nations reported that, as of July 2005, for the first time in the world's history more than 50 per cent of the world's population lives in urban centres rather than in rural communities.

In my opinion, the overriding concern for Pass residents is that their progeny have a choice where they want to live and raise the next generation

and that the future development of the Crowsnest Pass will provide them with those options.

Barbara Janusz is a lawyer and freelance writer who has recently relocated to the Crowsnest Pass and can be reached at cv213389@allstream.net. The University of Guelph Water Management Group Report can be found at http://www.uoguelph.ca/gwmg/wcp_home/Pages/O_home.htm.

ALBERTANS SHARE MEMORIES OF ANDY RUSSELL

Monica Boettcher of Calgary says Andy Russell had a vital influence in her family. They learned of Russell from a cousin in Germany in the 1960s. "My father's cousin, who was a taxidermist, watercolourist, naturalist, and diorama designer at the Overseas Natural History Museum in Bremen, Germany, introduced my family to the book/works/life of Andy Russell."

Boettcher is one of several Albertans who have sent letters to AWA describing their memories of Russell and their support for a Wildland Park in his name. She calls Russell "a pioneer of conservation" and says it would be meaningful for him, wilderness, Albertans, and generations to come to have a provincial park in the Castle

Wilderness named in his honour.

In a pamphlet she prepared for Alberta's centennial, Boettcher wrote, "Our present-day economy will tell stories about us. About our consideration for others, or lack of it. About water, air and land. Whether great wealth was shared or amassed by few. Who plundered and who abandoned the public good."

Eighty-one-year-old Bob Wray recalls fishing and camping with his friends in the summers before World War II along Drywood Creek on Andy Russell's father's place.

Author and poet J. Alvin Speers first wrote poems about Andy Russell after seeing a television documentary about him in 1986. Russell wrote to

Speers, "I like the poetry even if I don't know how come you were so moved, being just an old mountain man not afraid to express my thoughts. People like you who take the trouble to write always make me feel good."

Speers finally met Russell at his home in 2002 during a trip to Waterton National Park. It turned out Russell knew a distant relative of Speers, Barb-wire Johnnie Speers, who worked at Waldron Ranch. After Russell's death in June 2005, Speers published a pamphlet of poems and memories about him. "I wish to go on record as being a strong supporter of a Wildland Park named for Andy Russell," said Speers.



Andy Russell

He grew up in the Alberta foothills
Nigh seventy years ago
With a love for the mountain wilderness
Where the wind can soothe one so.

"It's good for the soul in 'green-up' time"
He spoke of the spring of the year;
"I'd go 'round the globe for the pleasure
Of just being out here."

"Man is taking from the wilderness
Leaving nothing behind."
He sees it as a fragile thing
That yields such peace of mind.

— From "Andy Russell" by J. Alvin Speers, 1986

CWD IS OUT OF CONTROL

FEDERAL LEADERS RESPOND TO DEMAND FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

Only two federal leaders responded to an urgent letter by conservation organizations and scientists asking for a public inquiry on the commercialization of wildlife, which has led to a chronic wasting disease (CWD) epidemic. The Alliance for Public Wildlife, the David Suzuki Foundation, and Dr. Val Geist, one of Canada's top wildlife scientists, asked federal leaders to commit to an immediate moratorium on the movement of game farm animals and products pending the completion of a Public Inquiry under the *Inquiries Act*.

Canada is facing the greatest wildlife crisis of our time. Among the many symptoms of this crisis, CWD has been repeatedly confirmed outside game farm fences in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Expert Scientific Panel on Chronic Wasting Disease confirmed that the source of Canada's CWD is "spillover from infected game farms," and "there are no known barriers to stop the disease." *Canada's National Chronic Wasting Disease Control Strategy* (2005) fails to even acknowledge this underlying cause.

Jack Layton of the New Democratic party gave his support for an inquiry, saying, "New Democrats are in complete support of governments having a responsibility to protect the public interest and to ensure that proposals to domesticate wild species be approached with the utmost caution."

Former federal Environment Minister Stéphane Dion passed the buck to the Department of Agriculture, which is responsible for the crisis in the first place. Paul Martin's response supported the national CWD strategy, a clear indication that the Liberal party is not interested in dealing with the cause of the problem.

No response was received from the Conservative party, and phone calls were not returned – clearly not a promising sign for the future.

A public inquiry must undertake complete and comprehensive assessments of the privatization

and commercialization of wildlife in Canada, produce a final report to Parliament within six months with a plan and budget, and be chaired by an independent commissioner with expert medical and wildlife qualifications.

Parliament has both jurisdiction and responsibility for this industry, and despite a written commitment from Prime Minister Chrétien for comprehensive review and public assessment, none has ever been undertaken. Provincial governments have not only refused, but also blocked legitimate assessment. Premier Klein reneged on his written commitment to legitimate assessment.

Known costs of this disastrous scheme to privatize wildlife stretch



S. Bray

Game farm in central Alberta

into the hundreds of millions. Of immeasurable cost, however, is that CWD is now out of control, directly threatening wildlife and our wildlife economies. By any rational standard, our highest priority must be eliminating the cause. A 1996 study, *The Importance of Nature to Canadians* by Environment Canada, showed that activity based on wildlife contributed \$12.1 billion to the Canadian GDP in that year, equivalent to the \$12.3 billion contributed by all of agriculture.

History documents that domestication has been responsible for fostering, incubating, and spreading perhaps the majority of our most serious pandemics, including small pox and influenza. A massive tuberculosis epidemic on game farms emerged in less than five years, and the CWD epidemic in less than ten years. In 2002, SARS emerged from Asian game

farms raising civet cats for "delicacy" markets.

Game farm diseases obviously pose potential threats to humans. Both in-vitro and in-vivo experiments indicate that, while unlikely, transmission of CWD to people may be possible. If that happens and if the disease manifests in people as it does in deer, we could face a pandemic of an undetectable, untreatable, always-fatal disease with incubation periods of ten years or more and with transmission potentially as simple as kissing. CWD is most likely transmitted in bodily fluids such as urine, feces, and saliva.

Game farming in Alberta is surviving only because of public subsidies, even though the Alberta

government has admitted it is not a viable industry. Governments are subsidizing a proven threat to public wildlife and to their economies, traditional agriculture, and public health. Game farmers have realized that the venture will never be economically viable. Entire herds have been destroyed, or in some cases, simply turned loose.

This is the single most important wildlife issue of our time, with implications of enormous scope. How Canada resolves this crisis will affect more than just CWD; it will determine the fate of our greatest environmental success – public wildlife.

Reports and letters mentioned in this article and an associated news release can be found on our Web site under Issues/Wildlife/Game Farming

WHAT IS A RIVER TO US?

By Sandra Finley

Sandra Finley, a well-known Saskatchewan activist, attended a water symposium by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in Winnipeg in late September 2005. This is her response to the question "Are there best practices that should be analyzed further which were not among those presented at the symposium?"

I understand that "best management practices" (BMPs) inevitably restrict ideas to the current "box" or paradigm, whatever that might be. (A paradigm is a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them.)

Intellectual rigour and creativity is served by asking the *a priori* question: is our worldview the best worldview in which to construct our responses to the water problems we face? (I am reminded of Einstein's statement that you cannot solve problems with the same thinking that created them.)

During the symposium, there was brief reference to a "different" worldview held by "them." It was tacitly accepted that we will operate under our own view, within our own box or paradigm. But it is a mistake not to first ensure that our "box" is the "best box." We should search first for the best box, and then for the BMPs within that box, if we are to progress.

An illustrative example of the straitjacket imposed by inferior paradigms, and how you must move from one paradigm to another if you are to achieve effective problem-solving in a society, comes from the particular worldview of women in a society. There you can see that the worldview is an attitude. The attitude we bring to a situation is a determinant of the outcome.

In relation to water, we have "their" worldview and "our" worldview. Which worldview makes the most sense? Which one provides us with "right attitudes," which will then equip us to deal effectively with the situation before us? (It is not even possible to solve problems if the wrong attitude is brought to bear – indeed the attitude can determine that the problem is not solvable.)

In my view, through our paradigm we display gross ignorance in our



H. Unger

South Saskatchewan River.

attitude to water.

There are many societies that have understood their dependence. The things upon which the society is dependent are sacred. It is not superstition; it is good common sense. You cherish the things upon which your life depends. Your grandchildren will be as dependent as you. You protect the gift so they too may enjoy the abundance you enjoy.

Step back and look at us as eyes from the future will see us.

Running through our land we have this River. Use the South Saskatchewan River, for example – it delivers water to the residents of Calgary, Medicine Hat, and Saskatoon. We have diversion schemes to take the water to many, many communities – some, such as Regina and Humboldt, a long way from the River. We drink the River's water from our taps; we use it to wash our clothes, to water our gardens and our livestock, to grow our crops, and as a dumping ground for processed human

excrement and industrial effluent. It is used to generate the electrical power for our stoves, refrigerators, and air conditioning. The gifts of the River are more than I can tell you.

But which one of us has today given thanks for that River? Who among us has ever knelt down on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River in humility and gratitude? Have you ever taken the time to reflect, to acknowledge what the River is to us? There is no life without the gift of water.

Outsiders do and will look at our society in amazement: how is it that these people did not understand their relationship to the River? Can you imagine that they never expressed gratitude? Maybe that was why they could abuse their water supplies.

Yes, we display ignorance; it is built into our paradigm. We are trapped within our box. Our BMPs have to come from a different box. There we will find the solutions that will elude us

should we persist in a faulty worldview.

In the same way as we are shifting paradigms in our attitudes to women in society, a process that takes time and is disruptive in the short term, it is possible and necessary to begin a shift in relation to water. When we know

that it is sacred, when we somehow learn the ability to express reverence, when we know it is part of us, when we have the right attitude, then we will begin to be able to make real and lasting progress.

“Their” different worldview

should not be dismissed. It is obviously superior to ours because it leads to protection of that upon which we are totally dependent for survival. It is common sense. Without it we will not have sustainability.

GOVERNMENT SELLING OUT REST OF McCLELLAND LAKE WETLAND COMPLEX

By Shirley Bray

The Alberta government has not only committed the western half of the world-class McClelland Lake Wetland Complex to oil sands mining; it has now sold leases to Synenco Energy Inc. in the eastern half, including part of McClelland Lake. Synenco is the

Development, AWA has found Minister David Coumts to be an unengaged and superficial correspondent. Instead AWA has been engaged in active and more thoughtful correspondence with Environment Minister Guy Boutilier, since he is responsible for wetlands.

currently under development. Half of the McClelland wetland complex, previously off-limits to oil sand mining in a publicly developed land use plan, was quickly made available to mining when a company lobbied for it.

In our last issue we identified the photo below as McClelland Lake fen; however, this is the second patterned fen in the complex on the southeast side of the lake.



R. Thomas



R. Thomas

Above is the correct photo of McClelland Lake fen. On the right is the western end slated for mining. Both fens should be protected as ecological reserves.

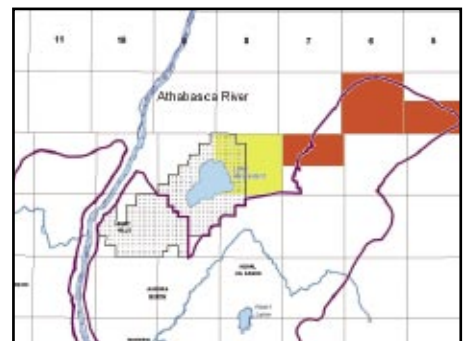
managing partner for the Northern Lights oil sands project northeast of the wetland complex and about 100 kilometers north of Fort McMurray. The company has also bought the leases in a township just west of this project which overlaps the wetland complex.

Ian Urquhart, an associate professor of political science at the University of Alberta working on oil sands issues, met with representatives of Synenco. He informed them of AWA’s proposal to protect the entire wetland complex as a provincial park, with the two patterned fens protected as ecological reserves.

Although the area is the responsibility of Sustainable Resource

Mr. Boutilier wrote that Alberta Environment wants to preserve the beauty and integrity of the wetland complex. AWA wants to know how this is possible when half of it is being destroyed for oil sands mining and the other half is threatened. Although the Synenco leases are not in the oil sands development zone as currently outlined in the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS), the boundaries can be changed at any time. We asked the Minister if he intended on letting companies use water from McClelland Lake for oil sands mining.

AWA is concerned that government actions, such as those in the McClelland Lake fen case, will undermine the wetland policy



Map showing Synenco’s Northern Lights leases (orange) and its additional township of leases (yellow) overlapping the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex.

LIGHTHAWK SEEKS A PERCH IN ALBERTA

By Robin White

“I’m Reg Goodwin and I’m your chauffeur for today. Show me on this map exactly where you want to go and we’ll be off.” The cheery greeting came from a man in his late fifties sporting a neatly trimmed beard and wearing a grey cap and coveralls. We were standing on the tarmac of Springbank Airport alongside Reg’s plane, an immaculate, single-engine Cessna 182. Reg had left his home in Helena, Montana at daybreak and had flown to Calgary for the sole purpose of taking my wife, Marian, and me up to Hinton to photograph the Cheviot mine.

Reg is a volunteer pilot with LightHawk, a non-profit aviation organization based in Lander, Wyoming. It operates all over the U.S., though mostly in the Rocky Mountains, the northeast, California, and the northwest. It is also active in eight other countries including, to a limited degree, Canada – especially British Columbia. It was founded on the notion that if you want better land-use decisions, take those involved – the politicians, bureaucrats, industry officials, scientists, native leaders, media and activists – up in a plane and show them what pollution, habitat destruction, or overdevelopment look like from the air.

LightHawk was the brain-child of Michael Stewart, who, outraged by the pollution spewing from a coal-fired power plant, formed the organization in 1979. He started with one pilot – himself – and one plane, and named it after a mythical bird whose purpose was to shed light. Today, LightHawk isn’t into direct advocacy but provides a free service to those who are. A small staff, operating from field offices, organizes some 400 missions a year, matching up its 140 volunteer pilots with flight requests from environmental groups, universities, land trusts, researchers, and others. LightHawk is a dynamic organization with high standards. As well as owning a well-maintained plane, pilots must have 1,000 hours or more as pilot-in-command, an excellent safety record,

and a professional demeanour.

Although it doesn’t have an office in western Canada, LightHawk has flown missions in support of a number of major west Canadian conservation initiatives. These include helping protect the Tatshenshini area from a giant open-pit copper mine, the battle to save Clayoquot Sound from rapacious

second-hand and retired from medicine so that he could spend more time flying. In 1995 he met a LightHawk director at a Helena air show who, after a short test flight, signed him up on the spot. Reg quickly found that buying a small plane is one thing but maintaining and operating it is quite another. “When I decided a major



Robin White/LightHawk

Lighthawk pilot Reg Goodwin and AWA member Marian White at Springbank Airport.

loggers, and recently the Wildlands Project, where LightHawk showed policy-makers and media endangered wildlife corridors and habitat.

But despite the obvious need, LightHawk hasn’t been able to be very active in Alberta. When I first called Sama Blackwell, LightHawk’s program manager for the Rocky Mountain region, she said that our project met their guidelines and that she would see if there was a pilot available in our area. Later she phoned back to say that there wasn’t one, but Reg Goodwin of Helena was willing help us out.

Reg had been a physician in general practice and took up flying in the 1980s. Later he bought the Cessna

overhaul was needed,” he said, “I found the bills for parts and labour so large that I had to go back into medicine part-time to pay for it all.”

Heavy rain during much of June made us wonder if our flight would have to be postponed. But then the rains stopped, the clouds parted, and the Cessna arrived. Reg proved to be a superb pilot and we immediately felt at ease. Within an hour and a half of leaving Springbank, we were looking down on that testament to human greed: the Cheviot open-pit mine and the ugly haul road that serves it. From the air, the extent of the damage is truly appalling, and they’ve only just started. What we could see is just the



Cheviot open-pit coal mine June 2005.

first of a planned chain of pits that will stretch for 22 km. Albertans should be outraged. When the coal boom turns to bust and the mine closes, this once beautiful mountain landscape may be crudely reclaimed but it can never be restored.

By two o'clock we were back at Springbank and shortly afterwards bade farewell to Reg. As the Cessna roared down the runway, I turned to Marian. "Why does he do this? I mean, I know he likes flying; most pilots do. But he's been on the go since five o'clock this morning flying two people he's never met before through the mountains of a foreign country in iffy weather, at his own expense, just so we can take a few photos of yet another environmental atrocity. What's more, he's got at least

two more hours of flying ahead of him before he gets home." She didn't answer. It wasn't necessary. Reg does it for the same reason he took up medicine many years ago. He cares and wants to make a difference.

Flying with LightHawk saved us a twelve-hour drive to Hinton and back plus the high cost of renting a small plane in a place where lack of competition makes this very expensive. LightHawk is aware of the environmental situation in Alberta and would like to help. But we can't expect LightHawk pilots to keep flying up from the States; we need pilots based here. This is a rich province and there must be some retired or semi-retired ranchers, business people, or the like (dare I suggest Elk Valley Coal

executives wishing for redemption before meeting their maker?) who own small planes, have the money to operate them, have the requisite flying experience, and would like to do something very special to help organizations like the AWA protect wild Alberta. For them, I can think of nothing more useful than becoming a volunteer LightHawk pilot.

Note: More information on LightHawk can be found at www.lighthawk.org. Anyone interested in becoming a LightHawk pilot, supporting the organization, or learning more about it should contact LightHawk at 1-307-332-3242 or info@lighthawk.org.



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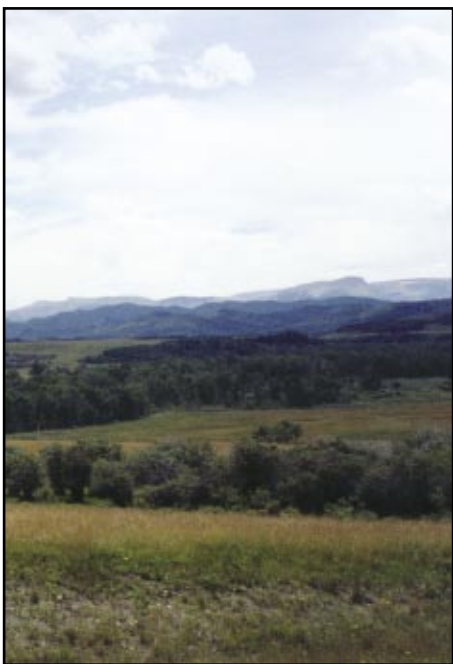
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Livingstone Landowners Try ALCES

Local ranchers and landowners in the Livingstone/Porcupine area of southern Alberta have commissioned Brad Stelfox of Forem Technologies to run an ALCES (A Landscape Cumulative Effects Simulator) program for the region. This simulation tool explores the consequences of different land-use strategies and allows us to see a visual interpretation of what different scenarios – business as usual or restricted development based on land zoning, for example – would look like on the landscape level.

The landowners want to ensure that any future developments in the region are carried out according to long-term, well-thought-out plans that consider the cumulative effects of all future development, rather than on an ad hoc, well-by-well basis.

There are signs that initiatives such as this one in the Livingstone may



N. Douglas

be the forerunners of a more balanced future approach to land management by the Alberta government. At a recent Integrated Land Management (ILM) workshop, the government made it clear: “The province has been criticized for having fragmented regulatory and

resource management regimes that create unsatisfactory and undesirable landscape and environmental outcomes, unrealized social benefits, and a less-than-optimal investment climate” (ILM Charter, July 2005).

AWA has been part of a mixed group, including ranchers and landowners (representing the Peksiko and Livingstone Landowners Groups), local municipalities, and the oil and gas industry, who are trying to get a much clearer picture of what a number of theoretical “futures” might look like.

Government Encourages AWA’s Bighorn Study

AWA has completed its 2005 Bighorn Wildland Recreation Monitoring Project interim report. AWA met with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in January to share our results and compare them with their monitoring data. We discussed the damage we observed and what trail work and management needs to be done in the study area. AWA provided all provincial MLAs with a copy of our Bighorn Wildland book and the executive summary of the report. We have received some very positive responses, as well as encouragement on our monitoring study.

Environmentally Significant Public Grasslands Sold for Wind Farm

Soderglen Ranches Ltd. public land leases in southern Alberta are being converted to deeded lands to accommodate a wind farm. The leases lie in the Peigan Environmentally Significant Area and contain rare fescue grasslands, sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds, and important cultural sites.

The leases are being traded for two sections of deed land in another municipality, which the government claims are of higher conservation value. This was the same claim made for a land trade in the Bow Island area which contradicted the advice by the investigating biologist.

For many years, AWA has



C. Olson

opposed the sale of environmentally significant public land. Its cultural and ecological value exists for the benefit of all Albertans. The sale of public land undermines the public trust and the public right to those lands in favour of private gain. Alberta is trading off our heritage without consulting with the owners of the land, the Alberta public.

New Public Consultation Process for MOSS

Under public pressure, the government has caved in on its action plan for the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS, see WLA Dec. 2005). They have replaced the online public consultation and workshops with a five-member advisory committee composed of different sectors, including well-known environmentalist Martha Kostuch. They will work with the Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA) and other stakeholders to review and recommend how consultation on policy principles for the oil sands area should proceed, and they will produce a report by the end of March. Note that this is about the consultation process and not the principles of the strategy itself.

Alberta environment minister Guy Boutilier commented that stakeholders were expecting the

government “to move forward in a more open and collaborative manner” and that Albertans wanted the oil sands developed so that the environment was protected and sustained. SRD minister David Coumts says the government wants Albertans to be confident that development is sustainable. No doubt oil sands mining will be sustainable until the oil runs out; what that means for the environment is another question.

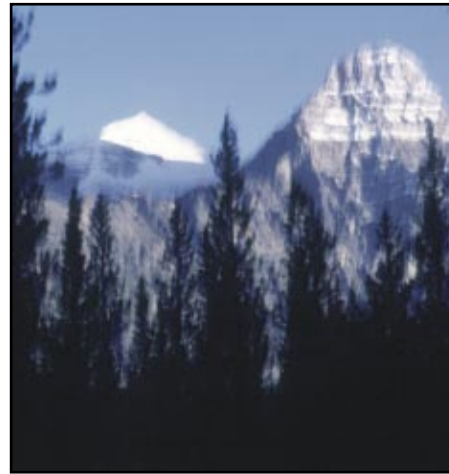
Howse Pass Highway Proposal Surfaces Again

By Dorothy Dickson

From: Red Deer River Naturalists Annual Report 2005 - National Parks

We have feared for several months that the proposal to put a highway through Banff Park over the pristine Howse Pass was about to gain new life – as we always suspected it would. Last

time (in 1988-90), RDRN was the lead opposition group in the issue and was given credit across Canada for being a major factor in stopping it. This time, while we have the revised *National Parks Act* and *Banff Park Plan* in our



Howse Peak

H. Kaniel

favour, the Alberta government, by putting money into the latest favourable (on disputable economic grounds) report, is already showing stronger support than last time.

However, how hard a fight we have will largely depend on which party forms the federal government, as both the Conservative and Reform parties supported the project (including, to our surprise and great disappointment, our then new biologist/environmental teacher MP, Bob Mills). Also, we no longer have Jean Chrétien and Sheila Copps, who did more for national parks than any other politicians we have ever had. It is clear the issue is actually much bigger than one highway through one park, as it would require the consent of Parliament to set a precedent against the law prohibiting new through-roads in all national parks.

HOWSE PASS HIGHWAY IS VANDALISM

Dear Editor:

The business community in West-Central Alberta wants another highway through Banff National Park. Absurd, you say? The Alberta government is already working on the Howse Pass proposal. A Conservative government with Red Deer MP Bob Mills as Environment Minister could give it the go-ahead.

Why shouldn't every town in western Alberta have its own road through the mountains? The national parks – Banff, above all – are already compromised by human activity. Roads fragment the landscape. The grizzly bear heads the list of species in decline. The highways are the scene of annual carnage.

The purpose of national parks is to preserve landscapes, habitats, and the species that live in them. To survive, some species range far and wide. National parks are supposed to be a haven for wildlife – and we deny even that to them. Where are other species supposed to live?

The “pave paradise and put up a parking lot” lobby will never be

satisfied. There can never be enough roads. They do not speak of limits; they only talk of growth. Infinite growth entails endless consumption, destruction, and pollution.

Our natural heritage is not ours to dispose of. It is our obligation to pass it on to future generations intact. The latest study on a Howse Pass road focused on the benefits. An environmental study is to be done later. The environmental impact – that question should come first, not last.

The vandals may be serious about their proposal, but their proposal is not serious. It is divorced from reality. It considers only the benefits and ignores the costs. The government should give it the burial it deserves.

— Geoffery Pounder



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MORE CARPET BOMBING IN THE LIVINGSTONE-PORCUPINE

Dear Editor:

Ferretting my way backward into the on-the-ground aspects of a “recent” (April 2005) Win Energy drilling application, I provide the following:

Antelope Butte is an Alberta landmark. It overlooks the Oldman River valley, the greater Whaleback area, the Porcupine Hills, and more than one hundred miles of Rocky Mountain skyline – a landscape expanse extending from the Chain Lakes area (to the north), southward to (and beyond) Chief Mountain in northern Montana.

Last April, Win Energy made an application (#1396661) to increase well spacing within very vague, but eye-opening parameters. The proposed increases in well spacing density must be considered nothing less than an attempt to get a foot in the door to further applications. Further, the rationale for the increased well spacing density appear (from an engineering perspective) to have no real benefit to gas production; the proposed well spacing density would simply enhance, short-term, the rate-of-flow capabilities, thus “justifying,” short-term, the economic aspects of pipeline construction.

Application #139666 is for Section 33, T9, R2, W5 – that is, within gunshot from the crest of Antelope Butte, an Alberta landmark that I recently brought to the attention of MLA David Coumts (among others) due to a seismic survey along its flanks.

Recently (October 2005), while hiking on Antelope Butte, I noticed that seismic lines had been surveyed across the southern flanks of the butte. In light of this, I’m wondering, especially in light of the public lands status of this landscape, if reviewers of this planned activity were aware that some of the limber pines on the butte could be more than one thousand years old. Also, when reviewing the recent history of the butte, I discovered that there was, within recent memory, an eagle’s nest on the west side of the butte. The eagles returned yearly until the existing 500KV line (and support towers) went

through the area in the 1980s.

Prairie falcons still nest on the west side of the butte, and it’s also home to ruffed grouse, blue grouse and a significant population of sharp-tailed grouse, two species of deer, elk, moose, and the occasional cougar and wolf. The landforms on the butte are also visually striking and provide one of the only places in the province where



D. McIntyre

Antelope Butte

badlands and hoodoos (part of the Milk River Formation) outcrop amid a stunning pygmy pine forest that offers dramatic and striking views into the heart of the Rocky Mountains.

A Win Energy foot in the door, within the noted section (33), would open the surrounding landscape to similar – intense, but not easily defined – impact. The noted application calls for closer spacing (two wells/section) within section 33 and sets the stage for spacing that could reach eight (and possibly more) wells per section. The application has obvious environmental and landscape integrity concerns. Additionally, it has the following engineering problems:

1. The application has no attachment providing geological data that would justify the request.
2. Win Energy is “justifying” the application by using antiquated data from a well drilled in 1975. More

recent data, at variance with that they’ve supplied, is available. (They could simply use the more recent data and/or wait for production history to track reserves.)

3. The proposed well spacing presents a needless and unnecessary footprint, including a well location on the slopes of Antelope Butte.

I have an ongoing concern that many land-use decisions are made by government people who, while meaning to do the right thing, feel forced to “rubber stamp” development even if they know precious little about an area or about the true on-the-ground resource values in question. Thus, my beef is with the government, and within government, where blanket approvals tend to be the status quo for many linear landscape disturbances that are completely unnecessary.

For example, recent seismic work near my home and a communications tower just south of my home were all completed before the government knew that rare trees, extremely old trees, an eagle nesting site, several hundred acres of native rangeland, and several archaeological sites were all compromised or destroyed. (“Little things” like this tend to add up quickly.)

It’s well known that range managers throughout the western U.S. and Canada are overwhelmingly concerned that precious rangeland is being consumed by a host of overlapping threats. Nowhere is this threat greater than in Alberta, where linear disturbances from a host of big-money activities threaten to erase, almost overnight, much of our celebrated rangeland, the defining ecological integrity of this same land, and many priceless landscape vistas. Concurrently, Alberta has more than \$120 billion of on-the-table development money. The in-the-darkroom picture isn’t pretty.

— David McIntyre
Crownsnest Pass

Editor's Note: *We received the preceding letter in the fall of 2005; it is our understanding that Win Energy withdrew their application for increased well spacing – at least for the present. Mr. McIntyre commented that “it shows what can be achieved when a concerned citizenry, armed with accurate data, make their voices heard. The landscape’s most important allies would appear to be an army of eyes and an educated populace.”*

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ASSOCIATION NEWS IN MEMORIAM

DAVID GORDON MANZER

David Gordon Manzer, well-known outfitter and adventurer, died January 5, 2006 in Edmonton, Alberta surrounded by friends. Dave lived his life adventurously in the mountains and at sea. As an outfitter, he took adventure-seekers into Wilmore Wilderness Park, a place he loved. Dave was truly in his element leading riders along ridgetops or playing music at a campfire. Dave was an exceptional artist blacksmith. With self-made tools,

he hand-forged unique iron roses and custom architectural works. Knowing his time was limited, he outfitted a boat and single-handedly sailed from Nova Scotia to the tropics. Dave will be missed by family and friends who have chosen to remember Dave's love of the wilderness with a contribution to the Alberta Wilderness Association. We offer our sincere sympathy and appreciation.

OPEN HOUSE PROGRAM

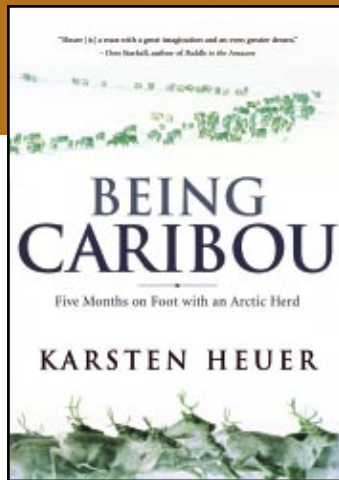
CALGARY

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, February 21, 2006
Seasons of the Bison
With Wes Olson

Tuesday, March 7, 2006
Cougar Conservation and Ecosystem Complexity
With Kyle Knopff

Tuesday, March 28, 2006
Is Alberta Really Prospering? Measuring True Progress in Alberta
With Amy Taylor of the Pembina Institute



BEING CARIBOU

A Presentation by Karsten Heuer

For the better part of the past decade, Canmore-based wildlife biologist, park warden, and author Karsten Heuer has followed some of North America's most endangered wildlife on foot and on skis. His latest epic adventure was a 1,500-kilometer journey with 123,000 caribou from their Yukon winter range to Alaskan calving-grounds and back.

Using spectacular images and readings from his book, *Being Caribou*, as well as clips from his wife Leanne's award-winning National Film Board documentary of the same name, Heuer will share insights from the five-month journey that saw the young newlyweds

stave off hungry grizzly bears, swim Arctic rivers, and endure countless blizzards and bugs.

Being Caribou won the Grand Prize at the recent Banff International Mountain Book Festival and will be available in Canadian bookstores on April 1, 2006.

Calgary

Tuesday, April 11, 2006
7:00 p.m.
John Dutton Theatre (main branch of the Calgary Public Library)

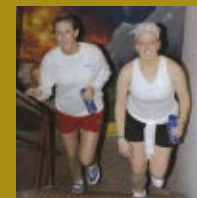
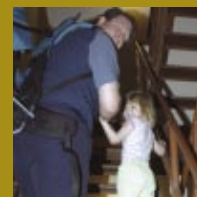
Edmonton

Wednesday April 12, 2006
7:00 p.m.
University of Alberta,
Room 1-003,
Engineering Teaching Learning
Complex (ETL 1-003)

To coincide with this Edmonton presentation, AWA will be hosting a *Members Munch and Mingle* prior to the presentation:
Royal Glenora Club,
11160 - River Valley Road, Edmonton
4:30 – 6:30 pm
Please contact AWA for further details.

CLIMB & RUN for WILDERNESS

AT THE CALGARY TOWER • APRIL 22, 2006



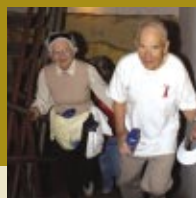
Alberta Wilderness Association's annual fund raising event at the Calgary Tower.

Saturday, April 22nd, 2006

All runners and climbers start at the base of the Calgary Tower at their designated times:

Run for Wilderness	8am
Team Challenge	8:15am - 1:15pm
Climb for Wilderness	8:30am - 1:30pm
Wild Alberta Expo	9am - 2pm
Entertainment & Prizes	all day
General Store	all day
Awards Ceremony	2pm

Registration and competition details can be found on the climb website: www.climbforwilderness.ca



www.climbforwilderness.ca

www.albertawilderness.ca



Alberta Wilderness Association

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