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Dysfunctional Caribou Mountains Committee Needs Overhaul

The Caribou Mountains Wildland Park Planning Advisory Committee's (CMWPPAC) letter sent to the Alberta Government demanding that Wildland Park status be revoked falsely represents some members' views, showing the committee is dysfunctional and needs an overhaul. The committee was commissioned by Alberta to make management recommendations but has turned that privilege into a lobby effort to have Wildland Park status revoked and motorized access allowed.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) believes the committee should have more diverse representation or be disbanded. AWA strongly supports the continued status as a Wildland Park and considers motorized recreation inappropriate. AWA is asking for provincial environmental group representation on CMWPPAC.

"The Committee has lost sight of its conservation mandate and is now dysfunctional," says Cliff Wallis, AWA Board of Directors. "The committee's letter to former Minister of Community Development, Gary Mar, was signed on behalf of all members even though at least four members, including Parks Canada, do not support revoking Wildland Park status."

Greg Newman, committee member from M.D. of Mackenzie #23, told AWA he believes that at no time did the committee ask for park status to be revoked. However, a copy of the final March 29 CMWPPAC letter to the Hon. Gary Mar states clearly: "The Committee requests that the Minister revoke the Wildland Park designation and that specific legislation to manage the area be passed, including co-management status for the Committee on the Management Board."

Some members of the CMWPPAC have tried to close some meetings to the public and have been reluctant to release recommendations publicly.

"Similar committees work successfully in other areas of Alberta," says Wallis, "such as Hay-Zama, Wainwright Dunes, and Milk River, where a diversity of interests and skills are brought to the table. A committee without such representation is doomed to failure. Some CMWPPAC members have resorted to questionable tactics to further their own objectives, not those of the park."

"This Wildland Park was established to serve more than just local needs," says David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist. "It was protected due to its tremendous value for all Albertans. Some special interest groups are now attempting to go against the wishes of most Albertans and allow activities that are not compatible with wildland protection."

AWA supports the call made by Harry Chase, MLA – Calgary Varsity, on April 10, 2006, for the Minister of Community Development to table all recommendations made by all parks advisory and planning committees in the Legislature. "In this way, Albertans will have a transparent view of what is being recommended for their Special Places and be able to guard against special interests damaging their heritage," says Wallis.

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