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AWA



A WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Panther River valley, March 2006 – (S. Bray)

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WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

Although AWA and many others don't think Trident Exploration should be drilling for coalbed methane in the Rumsey Natural Area at all, the company has been pretty conscientious about minimizing their impact so far. So what was Trident thinking when they outlined a plan to camouflage their well sites in Rumsey with life-sized photos of rocks and vegetation around them? They are also experimenting, says spokesperson Glynn Davis, with Styrofoam mockups of rock outcroppings that could be placed over the top of well heads.

"If you were walking along an adjacent hill and you looked over, all you would see is a strand of cottonwoods, a rock outcrop or something that would be compatible to the area," Davis told the *Red Deer Advocate*. Compatible? One of our members said (sarcastically) she is thinking of phoning Davis and offering him some leftover Styrofoam in her shed. She can't get rid of it for environmental reasons. They just don't get it, she says.



S. Bray

The real Rumsey.

Why is the company even thinking of littering our protected areas with polluting fake scenery? Why would we want the Disney-fication of our precious wild spaces? The last I heard, Trident was thinking of merely painting well heads for camouflage, although the seasonality of colours was an issue. If the government lets this go ahead, we'll know that some sort of collective madness has taken over.

Someone should also let Trident know that cottonwoods don't grow in Rumsey and that the area is overlain with a thick layer of glacial till, so there are no outcroppings of bedrock. Maybe they are trying to increase biodiversity by adding species. I don't know whether to be surprised or disappointed that they didn't think of adding plastic bison.

Contrasting with Trident's misguided attempt at window dressing is a new high-speed internet service installation by Pat Dwyer that now sits atop a ridge at the southern end of the Livingstone Range. Described by one of our members as R2D2's ugly father, the strange looking device sits askew, with its propane tank, at the end of a newly blazed access road. I hope Alberta's tourism people are taking note.

D. McIntyre



Tourist hot spot?

Shirley Bray
WLA Editor

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THE QUIET URBANIZATION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY: PART 3

By Shirley Bray and Vivian Pharis

Walking through the slushy snow along the Panther River on a warm spring day, we can see the lasting effects of last year's great flood in the vigorous erosion of the southern bank. It's a reminder that we must be cautious about where and what we build in this valley. It is one of the concerns that brought people out to two open houses hosted by Panther River Adventures (PRA) owner Terry Safron to view his proposal to expand his current lease to the west on just over 7.5 acres.

Both the current lease and the proposed expansion lie on the floodplain along the south side of the river. A thin strip of land runs between the river and the decades-old Panther Road, which started as little more than a trail running west from the Forestry Trunk Road up the Panther Valley. Shell later improved it to a good quality gravel road to access their well sites along the south side of the valley: there is a fair amount of oil and gas activity in the valley these days.

There are four miscellaneous lease sites for commercial recreation along the road, at least three lying on the floodplain between the road and the river. Panther River Adventures is furthest up the valley, positioned on a sort of peninsula where the river sweeps down the valley and then makes a tight curve around a corner between the wooded south bank and the cliff on the north side where bighorn sheep come for the natural mineral lick.

The road used to follow the river closely before this curve until it was washed out. It was repositioned further upslope and the old road was reclaimed. Now that lesson seems to have been forgotten; the current expansion plans propose to reuse part of the reclaimed road to access the site, and permanent foundations are planned.

The river cuts through this valley between the increasingly urbanized southern side and the still wild northern

side. The wildness preserved on the north side in the Panther Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) is no accident. As described in Part 2 of this series, the fight to eliminate motorized use and

S. Bray



The southern bank of the Panther River adjacent to the proposed expansion shows erosion from the river.

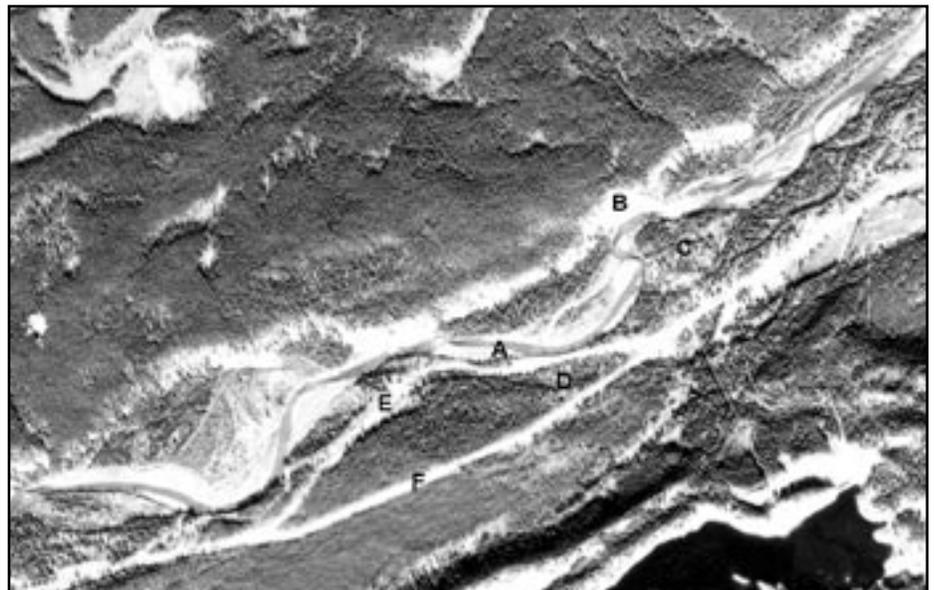
restore a more natural order to what had become a state of increasing anarchy in the area has left an indelible mark in people's memories.

But the increasing urbanization on the south side, with base camps turning into four-season tourism resorts and now pursuing industrial clients as well, does seem accidental, the result of expediency and lack of long-term planning or foresight. The greatest

worry of those who fought hard for the FLUZ is that the same thinking that has allowed development on the south side will allow increasing development on the north side.

Ironically, the establishment of the FLUZ on the north side in 1985 may have led to the development of the current lease site at PRA. Amos and Heather Neufeld had a 10-acre lease on the north side of the river, where the Dormer River runs into the Panther, that allowed them 10 cabins, although they built only one. They were deeply involved in the fight for the FLUZ and agreed with a request by Forestry to trade their lease on the north side for one on the south side at the site of PRA, where they eventually built a lodge and some cabins. They subsequently sold the lease and it has been resold several times.

None of those people who fought for the FLUZ wants to repeat that struggle, but neither are they willing to give up their victory. So they are starting to raise questions about further development in the valley, on either side of the river. PRA is not the first to expand its lease, but it is



A: Panther River; B: Sheep Cliffs; C: Panther River Adventures; D: Area of Proposed Expansion; E: Old Reclaimed Road; F: Panther Road

the first to propose such a high level of development, most notably with permanent foundations, and to push established backcountry rules in the FLUZ.

J. Nyland



Bighorn sheep on the natural mineral lick on the north side of the Panther River.

Open House at Panther River

The two open houses at PRA were well-attended but left people with more questions than answers. The public was allowed to walk not only through the area of the proposed expansion covered in the Alberta Tourism Recreational Leasing (ATRL) application, but also through the existing lease, which has never gone through the ATRL process. Many guests had concerns with both sites and about the lack of clarity and detail in the application. Applicants are not required to provide any substantive evidence for claims they make about the site, the business, or the need for the project, nor are proper drawings for buildings required, or even a legible site plan drawn to scale.

Forestry officials Tracey Cove and Norman Hawkes, obviously reluctant to say anything about the proposal, directed questions to Safron, who often appeared to have no answers either. Cove said there is no government policy dictating what sort of tourism development is allowed in this area. There is no long-term planning or management plan for the area either. Neither is there any set of rules that applies to everyone, and discretion in decision-making is rampant.

Of great concern is that Safron wants to cater to industrial clients, not just tourists, and that means that a different type of industry may begin along this river that was never envisioned. He plans to build a large shop on his current lease: some speculate that this will service his oilfield business. No one seems to know what the final plan will really be.

Other than riparian specialists from Edmonton, it is uncertain who will be called in to evaluate the site environmentally or how thorough their investigation will be. This information should be available to the public prior to consultation; it does nothing to generate public confidence when obviously questionable developments have already taken place on this site and forestry officials are not seen to be concerned. Why is it up to the public to point these things out?

For example, Safron wants to put in another septic field, yet no one knows the depth of the soil and no percolation test has been done. Provincial standards require five feet between the point of effluent infiltration and the water table, yet when the first septic field was put in, we were told that the water table was a mere three feet below surface where the pipes were laid. How will water from hot

ground because frost heaves can break the lines, yet underground glycol lines crisscross the property, providing heating to existing facilities. Glycol is toxic, and although the lines are buffered in sand, leakage is inevitable and may be difficult to detect.

Besides unanswered questions, there were only a few other glitches at the open houses. When a community member asked Cove why only one open house was scheduled, and that on a working day, he was told that Safron wanted it that way and people would just have to work around it. People had to lobby to get a second open house on a Saturday.

When an employee of Safron was asked who he was and why he was taking pictures of guests, he told people it was none of their business. In a Sundre newspaper, Safron was reported saying nasty things about opponents to his proposal, and claimed they and their

S. Bray



The western shoreline along the Panther River Adventures lease shows rocks placed to protect the bank from erosion, a gazebo, and the natural mineral lick for bighorn sheep across the river on the north shore.

tubs, laced with chemicals unsuitable for disposal in rivers or septic systems, be disposed of? A stream flows beside a corral but no one knows if manure is seeping into it.

Fuel tanks sit askew on home-made frames in plastic catch basins beneath conifer trees. A yard light is nailed to one of the trees. A wood/coal boiler sits a mere five meters away. Another fuel tank sits beneath the eaves of a tack shed without any containment system. The ATRL application says electrical cables are placed above

“followers” liked to cause trouble.

One person who wanted clarification on the phases of the project from Safron was told she was being rude. Another was told he was being slanderous after asking about the digging up of the meadow across the road (see Part 1). Safron has told people that if they did not see who the driver of the caterpillar was who did the damage, they cannot blame him. However, Forestry is requiring Safron to repair the damaged meadow.



A stream runs through the Panther River Adventures lease close to a corral.

Buffers and Shoreline Access

The issue of buffers along the Panther River remains an enigma. The buffer is 20m from the top of the bank for buildings, 30m for latrines, and 50m for fuel storage. This is smaller than buffers for other users, including Mountain Aire Lodge on the Red Deer River. The buffer is 60m for forestry and 100m for oil and gas. Municipalities generally use 30m, although many do not allow development on floodplains that are classified as hazard lands. The Commercial Trail Riding Policy specifies a 150m buffer for base camps, but this has been reduced to 30m in the standard operating conditions.

The most important thing, says Cove, is not the size of the buffer but whether any deleterious substances are entering the river either from surface runoff or underground seepage. With a development like this on a floodplain, with thin soil underlain by river rock, it's hard to see how water contamination could be avoided.

Cove says the reduced buffer at PRA was due to recommendations sent to Edmonton prior to Calgary taking over administration of this area. A legal survey has apparently been done, but there has been significant erosion of the shore. Cove says if an appreciable amount of land that could affect facilities is lost, then they might have to be removed if there is a risk of water contamination.

Continued access to the shoreline was of great concern to those at the open house. Albertans have the right to access the beds and shores of rivers up to the "ordinary" high water mark. They also have a right to access buffers from the top of the bank. Cove assured us that access along the Panther River

shoreline next to the PRA lease would be maintained, but sadly, no one really believed her.

The map in the ATRL proposal shows a 20m buffer along the river side of the proposed expansion, but none around the existing lease. People walking around the existing lease within the 20m buffer zone will walk by or into a house trailer (and the sewage pipe and electrical outlet for it), a gazebo, and a rusting old propane tank. A sign warns people to stay at least 15 feet from the bank which has eroded unevenly. The feeling of walking on someone's property is unavoidable because existing structures are so close to the river.

Safron has already complained about AWA representatives "sneaking around" his place, even though they simply exercised their shoreline access rights. He said such activity might scare people, especially single women, who might be sleeping in nearby cabins, apparently during the day. He told us that he can help protect the bighorn sheep on the cliffs across the river simply by closing his gates. Did he forget about shoreline access?

considered during the hearings, especially since the federal government wanted to decentralize services outside the national parks.

A 1973 Red Deer Regional Planning Commission report says, "Although considerable potential exists for water, energy and forest resource development, it is likely that the greatest potential lies within the realm of recreation." In a hypothetical land plan, they proposed a dam on the Panther River to supply power for coal mining. However, the 1976 Coal Policy excluded the Panther from coal development. The Commission did not see a clash between the dam and their zoning of river valleys as preservation areas – prime winter range where only essential facilities should be allowed.

The 1974 *Land Use and Resource Development in the Eastern Slopes: Report and Recommendations* noted that although proposals concerned possible human uses, they all supported retaining the essential qualities of the ES, including protection of wildlife, certain wilderness areas, treasured scenic outlooks, and the opportunity to escape from urban settings.



The area of the proposed expansion showing the reclaimed road, the river (left) and a power pole in the distance indicates Panther Road.

Urbanizing the Eastern Slopes

Urbanization in the Eastern Slopes (ES) was a concern and was given serious thought during the 1973 hearings that led to the 1977 policy. While outdoor recreation and commercial outfitters had been using the ES for decades, recreation and tourism began to be more formally

The report identified three major uses: wildland recreation, tourism and urbanization, and primary resource development. Regardless of the recreation, tourism or urbanization project, the report recommended that the scenic values of the ES be undiminished or enhanced.

At the time the ES were sparsely



Part of the proposed expansion. Many of these trees would have to be cleared to make room for proposed buildings and camp sites. To the right an old river bank slopes up towards Panther Road.

populated and it was recognized that different types of accommodation would be necessary for diverse tourists and that this would introduce an element of urbanization. However, to minimize disturbance of the area, it was recommended that facilities, or increased urbanization, be concentrated within established transportation corridors and within the present or projected borders of established townsites, and that facilities outside the corridors be encouraged only when they were indispensable to appropriate and desirable recreational uses.

The 1974 report concluded that recreation and tourism, if properly managed, were a renewable resource, but it remained to determine what balance of private and public recreational enterprise the ES could viably support, and changes in tourist trends also needed to be taken into account.

The 1976 Land Use Forum noted that due to wide seasonal demand for different types of recreation, “most commercial recreation areas are not viable on a one-use basis but must be developed with a variety of different uses to be commercially successful.” It recommended that public land be considered for lease for private recreation development that was facility oriented, such as backcountry lodges. At that time, AWA defined “backcountry” as basically land with

primitive facilities available, such as trails and shelters, and “wilderness” as land that exists in its natural state.

Recreation and tourism trends described in the 1978 *Tourism Development in the Eastern Slopes* indicated that the demand for wilderness experiences was expected to increase, and less intensive activities such as natural history, photography, trail riding and wilderness camping would become more popular. At the same time, a large segment of the population was expected to continue to demand urban amenities in a non-urban setting, thus increasing the use of resorts, motor homes, and trailers. Tent camping was expected to decrease.

A 1981 *Analysis of Backcountry Lodge and Shelter Opportunities in Alberta* concluded that substantial markets existed for properly developed backcountry lodges in the foothills and mountains and that they should operate year round and offer a range of activities for best economic potential. The analysis noted that the 1977 ES policy generally accommodated recreational activities in multiple use zones and thought this would detract from the wilderness aspect necessary for backcountry lodges and shelters. It recommended placing lodges near to Prime Protection zones and relatively near a resource road but not proximate to any industrial activity.

However, it pointed out that a

“market survey of existing backcountry lodges, guest ranches and other lodges indicates significant land use conflicts and the potential for future problems that may affect the viability of some present operations.” As well, legislation had been developed without wilderness backcountry lodge development in mind.

Another Travel Alberta study in 1981 on tourism in central Alberta found that workers in oil and gas and forestry tended to live in temporary camps set up in the area or commute from bordering communities where commercial accommodation was used. Mountain Aire Lodge, at the junction of the Forestry Trunk Road and the Red Deer River, was built in 1960 by Shell to accommodate workers in the area.

One tourism and marketing goal was “to maintain the integrity of the west country” by limiting development to designated nodes and encouraging more development to service visitors in the fringe area and the communities to the east. Up the Panther Road, camping was to remain the main form of accommodation and other facility developments to be provided were trail systems, base camps for outfitting operations, and interpretation centres or displays.

The study said that outfitters would be more profitable if they were located in a community with services for both residents and guests so that guests could have a good start and a good finish before they went home. Because of the seasonal nature of outfitting, the report suggested diversifying to offer four-season activities to make it more viable.

In 1984 the government revised the ES policy without public consultation to allow more tourism and industry in the region. While the 1977 version made watershed management the highest priority and relegated tourism to one of the many uses of the ES, the 1984 version raised recreation and tourism benefits from private and public sections to an almost equal level with watersheds. Even wildlife was now largely viewed for its ability to provide “recreation benefits to Albertans followed by economic benefits gained from various uses of wildlife through tourism.”

The revised policy wanted to

encourage the provision of a wider variety of tourism opportunities and services in the ES, year-round operations, and private sector development, and to promote the grouping of facilities and services. At the same time, provision of an adequate land base for tourism activities, minimizing environmental impact, and maintaining the high aesthetic quality and value of the tourism experience were also important. The preface says that all legitimate land use proposals would be considered, and if a proposal did not fit into the policy provisions for an area, another location would be found.

A critical change was made to the General Recreation Zone, the same zone that follows the Panther River. While both versions agree that the intent is to retain diverse natural environments for a wide range of outdoor opportunities, the 1977 policy did not allow industrial or residential development. The revised version allows resource extraction and “commercial development which serves the general public.” The latter were formerly allowed only in Facility and Multiple Use Zones.

AWA condemned the new changes and the lack of public consultation. But shortly after these revisions were announced the government released the *White Paper*, a new industrial and science strategy that promoted tourism as a key economic opportunity. Alberta was to be billed as a four-season destination point, and government would continue investment in basic services and major facilities.

The *White Paper* elicited a *Position and Policy Statement on Tourism*. Alberta’s tourism strengths and opportunities included Alberta’s freedom of space and full-service outdoor adventure vacations and western theme vacations, including horse pack trips and guest ranches.

These businesses could be improved, the report said, by more attention to comforts – providing good accommodation and meals, and the extras that make “roughing it” a little less rough; additional services; where possible, year-round operation; and package tours combining several of the adventure activities.

In 1985, the same year the

Bighorn FLUZes were announced, Dr. Ian Reid, Edson MLA and Alberta Solicitor General, indicated that the provincial government wanted to develop a series of tourist areas up and down the foothills, each with its own attraction.

The Alberta Conservation Strategy’s 1988 discussion paper on tourism noted that public land is a resource in trust for future generations. It argued that it is the government’s responsibility, through its broad land-use policies and regulations, to ensure that land is used appropriately and that any developments on public land are

they are not generally concerned with the way this parcel fits into the overall scheme of long-term public interest. The result is ad-hoc development.” Unfortunately, this is not necessarily that different from development on public land.

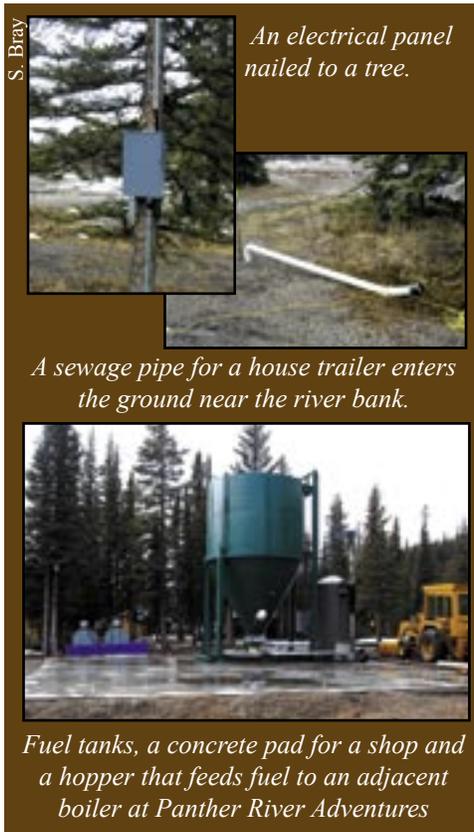
However, the authors agreed that government and private industry could form a more interactive partnership, with government agencies principally active as managers of the environment and the private sector developing services or facilities in specified zones.

“There is a view,” said the authors, “that, eventually, economic forces will win out over non-economic forces and that areas such as parks will have to justify their existence in economic terms, which clearly makes well-planned tourism development the preferable alternative to unplanned activities thrust on an area. While there is no argument against the preference of well-planned development, it should be noted that economic forces only win over non-economic forces when based on extremely short time-lines.” It could be argued, they said, that non-development is like an investment in our future.

The authors recommended having a spectrum of tourism opportunities that cater to different markets, from those content to view wild spaces from a car to those who desire more direct experiences, including front country or backcountry lodges, chalets in scenic areas, commercial bases with recreation facilities, roadless primitive recreation areas, or wilderness backpacking.

They recommended a zoning system that would recognize different resource values, recreation uses, and specific management requirements for parcels of land to prevent overcrowding and degradation of wilderness areas. The designation of an area as a wildland or wilderness is not meant to exclude human involvement, they said, just reduce the level of intensity and have activities that create minimal disturbance.

They noted that the intent of Integrated Resource Plans with respect to tourism is to maintain areas with significant tourism potential for possible future use for recreation and tourism. However, they also noted there are frequent exceptions



well managed, orderly, and appropriate for the surrounding environment. The Department of Tourism was usually forced to take a back seat to other departments (which did not often consider tourism potential) in land-use decisions, and some argued it was preoccupied with infrastructure.

The paper noted it was in the tourism industry’s own interest not to reach levels or take forms that would destroy the resource base on which it is built. It noted that private operators tend to have relatively short planning horizons and focus on maximizing profits. Private operators “may manage their land base to their own benefit, but

to IRPs, that government can change priorities in favour of development, and that multiple use is not appropriate everywhere.

The 1990 *Foothills Tourism Destination Resort Plan* prepared for Alberta Tourism said that recreation opportunities are the strength of the foothills area, and in a region still relatively underdeveloped for tourism there is still room for more operators, especially those catering to outdoor or adventure vacations, including guest ranches, rafting tours, and ski hills. The important thing is to create market perception that there is much to see and do, good food, accommodation, and specialty goods.

In 1994 the government had a public stakeholder process called the Commercial Recreation Policy Review to address various conflicts that had arisen between commercial recreation operators and other users of public land, especially industry, particularly in the backcountry. The goal was to develop an integrated policy to guide

research that will help determine acceptable densities of use (both biophysical and social) in an area; limiting damage to the natural environment; recognizing existing commitments, traditional uses, and general public values and use; and promoting stewardship by commercial operators.

While AWA commented that the development of such a policy was overdue, they were concerned with the focus on increased backcountry development, including permanent roof structures and structures with multi-season uses. Proponents of the proposed Genesis development in Kananaskis in 2000 noted that providing “roofed accommodation” was the key factor to allowing a tourism industry to grow.

AWA argued that the policy failed to recognize the importance of keeping as much commercial recreational development in areas that were already urbanized and instead encouraged new urbanization in increasingly scarce wild

extent of its lease or appropriate more and more leased land.”

Urbanizing the Panther

These same concerns can be applied to the Panther River Valley today. When the administration of this region changed from the Clearwater to the Calgary office a few years ago, the Clearwater office allowed the lease for Sunset Guiding and Outfitting, a base camp east of PRA, to be expanded to 20 acres and have commercial and industrial activities similar to Mountain Aire Lodge.

Up to that time, Mountain Aire had been the only facility in the area permitted such activities as selling fuel and having a restaurant. Now Sunset has been bought out by Capital Pressure, a Sunde oilfield service company. Will they be more likely to serve industrial clients or tourists? Now PRA is looking for a similar lease, a year-round commercial operation catering to industrial clients and retail sales of fuel and liquor.

The Calgary forestry office has been criticized for its “Kananaskis attitude” regarding backcountry development. The rapidly urbanizing Panther River Valley doesn’t seem to be an issue for them. Most people are not opposed to low impact commercial outfitting operations that are compatible with the wilderness character of the area. Some do not object to a few rustic cabins, although AWA and others believe no development should occur on the floodplain.

Forestry has said there will be no more meetings about PRA, and that doesn’t please the community of concerned citizens. They don’t see their request for better communication being realized and that doesn’t make for greater trust. They don’t want to feel that their submitted comments have entered a black hole.

If Forestry approves PRA’s ATRL application and the numerous questions and concerns have not been answered to the public’s satisfaction, many will wonder how the public interest regarding our public lands is being served.

In Part 4 of this series, we will continue with the Panther River story, examine other ATRL applications and the ATRL process.

V. Pharris



A view of the western shore of Panther River Adventures shows various items from the lease within the buffer zone.

commercial recreation on public land.

It was felt that the old policies governing fishing lodges, trappers’ cabins, backcountry camping standards, guides’ and outfitters’ campsites, commercial trail riding, island leasing, trophy lakes, and private residences in the green area were out of date and were not integrated with newer policies.

Of interest here are recommendations ensuring that proposed developments comply with land and resource plans and policies; establishing a resource management fund for resource inventories and

lands. AWA noted a number of poorly sited and poorly planned “ecotourism” developments built close to protected areas or proposed protected areas and warned that such development would soon seek to expand in order to remain viable.

Kananaskis was cited as an example where commercial recreation operations, such as modest alpine cabins that were built with the intent to serve the “average Alberta family,” soon gave way to four-season resorts that cater to an international clientele. “The pressure is on,” AWA wrote, “to allow a development to build to the full



SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDIES: REDIRECT SUBSIDIES TO ACHIEVE GLOBAL CONSERVATION AND PROSPERITY *By Robert B. Scott*

Government subsidy for agricultural production is a worldwide phenomenon. Since they began in earnest during the Great Depression, subsidies have become the enabler of a pervasive industrial agricultural system that is wreaking havoc with our planet. Agricultural subsidies form a major impediment to global conservation efforts. If wildland advocates want to

the essential fuel that propels it. And it is the machine itself that must be redesigned.

An Alternative Based on Geography and Ecology

The solution has been right in front of us all along, like the sword beside the Gordian knot. Instead of “eliminating” subsidies, change their

use is the essence of the geographic alternative and may seem a radical departure, but in reality, it solves all the problems the present system purports to solve but never does.

As an example, consider the workings of one of the principal subsidies in the U.S., the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Farmers signing up under the CRP get



R. P. Pharis

succeed, they are going to have to put serious effort into reforming the global agricultural system, beginning with the subsidy practices that are central to its maintenance.

In my view, the only real way forward is to radically restructure the entire system. In spite of the recent pressure from less developed nations, neither the WTO nor the more liberal subsidy critics have made progress in eliminating subsidies. The critics seem to be operating from the premise that subsidies can simply be stripped away leaving the rest of the system unchanged. Unfortunately, current subsidies are not mere trim on the global agricultural machine; they are

purpose. I propose the simple expedient of redirecting all subsidy funds to two things:

1. restoration of ecosystems by permanent conversion of agricultural land to natural habitat
2. protection and support of local and indigenous food production on the remaining agricultural land

In all likelihood, more than 70 percent of the land now in worldwide commodity production can be returned to native species. If properly utilized, the remaining 30 percent of the agricultural land base will be more than adequate to feed humanity. This fundamental restructuring of land

money for taking land out of crop production. The program was sold to conservationists as a way to restore habitat and to farmers as a way to bolster the economy by reducing excess production. Neither goal has been achieved. Because money is available to all farmers, the land taken out of production is hopelessly fragmented making it all but useless for real ecological restoration.

Worse yet, the failure to support CRP with other needed reforms has meant that most farmers have been forced to supplement their incomes by, paradoxically, plowing up virgin land to replace CRP land and/or converting CRP land to grazing by domestic

livestock. After many years of the CRP, commodity production has not declined and native species have not recovered – not exactly the definition of success.

If the ecological alternative were applied to the CRP, a first practical step would be to convert the program to a geographically based conservation system and tie it to hard and fast reductions in commodity production. As those of us who have worked for restoration of the Northern Plains have learned, all

the pervasive belief that the world is running out of food. The other is the notion that continuously increasing international agricultural trade is essential to maintaining the “economy.”

Few people would dispute the value of having a thriving natural ecosystem on 70 percent of the land now plowed, logged, or grazed by domestic animals. They would immediately recognize its value for inherent aesthetics; for water, air, and native species; and for a general

systems; hunting and gathering in many parts of the world; local organic farms in the industrial nations; and a few highly regulated, licensed, big-scale (but low-energy) producers of wheat, rice, timber, etc. on lands not identified as prime and essential wildlife habitat. The emphasis would be on consumption of locally produced food.

These local systems are highly efficient and productive, but have been suppressed by the massive worldwide output and sale of a few industrial crops (wheat, rice, corn, cotton, etc.) at very low prices – prices artificially lowered through the subsidy system. The very people who once fed themselves have been forced off the land and can no longer produce food. Worse yet, they can no longer afford to buy food – a phenomenon brilliantly portrayed in the highly successful documentary *Darwin's Nightmare*. This film was shot in Kenya, a nation that has insufficient food for its people while simultaneously exporting agricultural products to earn foreign exchange funds.

Could enough food be locally produced and consumed to meet human nutritional needs? The answer is yes, and on a fraction of the land now used for industrial agriculture.

As a single example representing one possibility among many for improvement in our present system, consider that more than half of all U.S. grain production goes into industrial meat production, a demonstrated health hazard. Consider further that the majority of the agricultural land base is used for grazing domestic livestock, mostly cattle, and of all domestic meat sources, cows are the most inefficient, consuming more than 16 kilograms of plant protein and enormous amounts of water to produce a single kilogram of animal protein.

It is evident that even a small reduction in meat production, or a conversion to more efficient protein production, would result in large reductions in the need for pasture and cropland, particularly on the world's grasslands. There is no question that both the quantity and quality of food production can be increased with sustainable, natural, locally based systems, particularly if humans convert to a healthier diet.



An intensive livestock operation and conventional farms in Southern Alberta.

acres are not equal in conservation value, yet this is essentially what the present CRP assumes by offering the money to virtually every farmer. Large contiguous landscapes must be restored, not fragmented parcels scattered everywhere.

The money paid out would have to be substantial, and permanent conversion of some land from agricultural production is essential. Some non-agricultural economic activities could be allowed on restored lands, but the goal must be scientifically based restoration of critical habitat. This pragmatic and simple reform of the CRP program could become a model for global agricultural renewal.

More from Less

In order to gain acceptance for these ideas for fundamental reform, we must dispel two fundamental misconceptions that have become part of conventional wisdom. One is

positive contribution to the health of our biosphere. Most would even concede that these restored lands could contribute to human food needs through expanded hunting and gathering. But, they will certainly say, restoring landscapes is just utopian dreaming: we would all quickly starve because everybody knows that humanity can't survive on 30 percent of the present agricultural land base.

What the doubters need to carefully examine is not the quantity of the land in modern agricultural production, but the nature and quantity of the actual production. In the geographic alternative, local and indigenous food production (on 30 percent of the present agricultural land base) would supply most human food needs.

This production would be comprised of a combination of enhanced and restored native multiple crop systems in Africa, the Andes, and Asia; ancient quasi-agricultural tribal

C. Olson



The Realities of Industrial Agriculture

Stripped of the protection supplied by conventional rhetoric and popular misunderstandings, the present global system of industrial agriculture is exposed as a monumental failure, a blind, stumbling giant crashing through the china shop of human culture and its nurturing biosphere.

To start with, enormous amounts of money are involved. The U.S. spends more than \$14 billion per year in direct cash payments to farmers and billions more in maintaining a vast array of support programs, grazing subsidies, export aid, lowered fuel costs, and miscellaneous peripheral assistance to agricultural operations. In the coming decade, large full-time farms can expect to receive more than \$1 million each from the U.S. taxpayer. Without subsidies, most U.S. farms would not survive.

Agriculture is supported on a similar scale in other countries. France keeps grape producers in business, Japan props up national rice production, Australia keeps sheep farmers going, and Canada insures that prairie wheat production remains high. To be fair, the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) is technically not subsidizing grain production as is done in Europe and the U.S., but as the only buyer, the CWB effectively supports ongoing wheat production regardless of other forces in play.

The worldwide system is maintained in perpetual existence by an iron triangle of support from the farmers and ranchers (who get to keep their land), the affluent consumers

(who get convenience and what they perceive as cheap food), and the giant transnational corporations (who get the only real profit from the system). On the outside are the taxpayers, poor urban dwellers, environmentalists, indigenous peoples, and others, all of whom raise periodic and varied objections to subsidies.

Objections to the prevailing system are routinely dismissed by appealing to fear and ignorance. The unstated premise is that there is no practical alternative to the modern industrial system of agriculture, a system invented by the Sumerians, developed by Europeans, and spread around the planet.

Conventional thinking tends to narrowly focus only on the money/commodity side of the problem and ignore the deeper aspects having to do with ecology, sustainability, and the psychological, nutritional, and political welfare of the human race. The purveyors of conventional wisdom tend to overlook crucial aspects of the system.

First, the amount of land in mechanized agricultural production is huge and never really declines. Cropland and pastureland account for 38 percent of the earth's terrestrial surface and 48 percent of the land area of the U.S. Virtually all of this land utilizes industrial, high-energy farming methods or intensive grazing methods.

The land losses (from erosion, sterilization, salinization, etc.) created by these harsh industrial methods, and due to urbanization and industrialization, are replaced by steady agricultural expansion into virgin,

wild environments. It is on this tragic expanding margin that conservationists traditionally fight their heroic battles.

Second, there is a chronic oversupply of basic agricultural commodities. This oversupply results directly from the subsidy system, which keeps commodity prices just high enough to allow producers to survive and just low enough to allow corporations (Cargill, Monsanto, Exxon-Mobil, etc.) to continue to make a profit selling what world consumers think is cheap food.

Third, the chronic oversupply of world commodities is tragically maldistributed. Parts of the world live with an embarrassing surfeit of food and use subsidies of all sorts, especially subsidies to exports, in a hopeless attempt to get rid of the surplus. Other parts of the world, the parts with the majority of the human population, live with perpetual shortages, chronic malnutrition, and outright starvation, sometimes simultaneously maintaining subsidies to export what foodstuffs they do produce.

The world's economy favours the wealthy, the profits of the corporations, and established power over the poor, the disenfranchised, and the powerless. Using subsidies to increase exports rather than to increase ability of local populations to feed themselves is a central defect of the entire system. This relentless effort to spread commodities around, instead of money, is a dismal failure.

Fourth, the worldwide agricultural system is damaging our planet. Industrialized agriculture is implicated as a causative agent in global warming, water pollution, soil destruction, habitat fragmentation, species loss, invasive organisms, and other huge forces that are tearing away at the biosphere.

Fifth, the system enabled by agricultural subsidies is monumentally inefficient. The system that has supplanted efficient local harvest and use of food is now a complex global machine that uses irreplaceable resources in every step. Experts (such as Paul Hawken and others) have estimated that our modern economy is five to six times less efficient than it needs to be to supply human needs. The resources of the earth are treated as free inputs in prevailing economic models.

Both theoretically and practically, the modern agricultural system is demonstrably unsustainable.

Sixth, the agricultural subsidy system has few real beneficiaries. Those that are harmed by the system vastly outnumber those that benefit from it. A handful of transnational businesses and corporations reap the lion's share of all profits in the agricultural system. Although many farmers and ranchers perceive themselves as beneficiaries, they operate constantly on the edge of failure and their numbers are dwindling, with the survivors allowed to possess their land but little else. Taxpayers are big losers – each U.S. household can look forward to paying in taxes about \$4,700 to farmers over the next ten years.

A relatively small percentage of consumers are affluent enough to receive some benefits in shopping convenience and perceived low prices, but the vast majority of consumers and those too poor to consume the processed products of industrial agriculture receive little or no benefit. All consumers, workers, and others caught up in the vast machine made possible by subsidies suffer reduced nutrition and, in most cases, outright harm to their physical, psychological, and social health.

Seventh, and finally, comes one of the most devastating and least appreciated aspects of the modern agricultural system. The dominant agricultural system marginalizes, displaces, and destroys viable indigenous systems of agriculture, some of which have very ancient origins. The common features of such indigenous systems are that they are locally adapted, environmentally compatible, low tech, low energy, organic, and above all sustainable. They are, in a word, efficient, and stand in stark contrast to wasteful, subsidized modern agriculture. The tragic decline of local indigenous food production can be reliably linked to all the major problems that comprise our current global crisis, such as overpopulation, the rise of impoverished megacities (Mumbai, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, etc.) around the world, and the spectres of war, famine, and disease.

In quick summary, subsidies

enable a pervasive system that occupies most of the earth's surface, consumes finite resources, damages the biosphere, benefits only the wealthy, oppresses the powerless, destroys ancient wisdom, and is clearly not sustainable. Why do we continue with such folly?

A Better Future

We need to begin to work within the new paradigm of conservation: the recognition that humans are part of the earth and that all our activities must be sustainable and compatible with nature. It is no longer rational to believe that we can simultaneously increase consumption of the earth (SUVs, more roads, bigger houses, more goods, more agriculture, more industry, etc.) and save the earth by protecting only those areas not yet consumed.

Maintaining the present global system of agricultural subsidies is certainly no longer rational. It is far more rational to change the way subsidies are spent and begin to radically alter the ways we feed ourselves.



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Pie in the sky? Emphatically not. Remember the facts: we produce too many commodities that are transported too far and too inefficiently with too few beneficiaries. Local, sustainable methods can provide all we need on a fraction of the land. So what's the catch? For 95 percent of the world's population there is no catch. Corporations would scream, of course, as their volumes were reduced, and commodity dealing might not look like

such a good deal for them. But, hey, they are big and powerful and certainly can find other work, which is, after all, what capitalism is supposed to be good at and just what they have been asking the rest of us to do for a couple of centuries. Some affluent consumers, accustomed to global homogeneity, will no doubt be inconvenienced by the conversion to living within a local sustainable culture.

A new generation of farmers would find themselves operating real businesses and making more money. The limitation on the land base available might require licensing of farmers, and actual competition to get into the farming business might ensue. Consumers would probably pay a bit more, but the increased efficiency of the overall system would boost employment and incomes, lifting consumers, on average, to a better position.

The inefficient transport of commodities in all directions would be vastly reduced. Mangoes would still come to Montana and apples to Costa Rica, but there would no longer be cows shipped from Montana and beef shipped back in, or rice shipped from India and other rice shipped back in. The endless drive to find something to do with surplus foodstuff, typified by such programs as the production of ethanol, would end. Food would be produced so that it could be eaten by people, and eaten locally.

The simultaneous benefit of plentiful food and thriving native ecosystems close at hand would bring an immeasurable improvement in human happiness. Perhaps it would take several generations to reap the full benefits of this global alternative, but there is no reason, other than lack of collective will, that should prevent us from making changes that could start to benefit all of us tomorrow.

Bob Scott is an environmental, political, and social activist in Hamilton, Montana, where he serves on the City Council. He is the founder and current President of Montana Big Open, a non-profit group working for restoration of the Northern Plains. He can be reached at bob@bigopen.org.



BULLY TACTICS AND CARELESS PROMISES ALBERTA ENERGY HIJACKS RUMSEY AGAIN

By Dr. Shirley Bray

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy. They smashed things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.

– from **The Great Gatsby**

Alberta Energy has hijacked the agenda in Rumsey once again, this time demanding that surface access be given for coalbed methane (CBM) development. The department has overridden protection interests both inside and outside the government while reneging on their public commitment to protected areas.

Alberta Community Development (ACD) and Alberta Energy have been battling behind closed doors over what rules should take priority in the Rumsey Natural Area – the Regionally Integrated Decision (RID), which has served as a management plan since 1993 and allows oil and gas development in perpetuity, or the provisions of an Alberta Energy Information Letter (IL 2003-25), which does not allow surface access for subsurface mineral dispositions sold after the designation of a protected area.

AWA learned in March that ACD had lost the battle to protect Rumsey from surface access for new dispositions. Strong objections were swept aside by Alberta Energy’s “develop at any cost” mentality, opening Rumsey to land-intensive CBM development. Alberta Energy will have the final say on surface access for CBM development in this globally significant protected area. SRD Minister David Coumts sounded like a hostage when he told the media that they should refer to Alberta Energy to tell them which environmentally sensitive areas are off-limits to mineral development.

“Alberta Energy’s conniving and duplicity are a grand betrayal of the public trust,” said Cliff Wallis, AWA past-president. “It’s outrageous that they have used unethical and

dishonourable behaviour to bully their way into opening up more development in this unique area. We will oppose this every step of the way.” Wallis said this is one of the worst abuses of public trust he has seen in 30 years of working to protect Alberta’s wild places.

AWA is asking for EUB hearings on any new proposed industrial activity

southeast of Red Deer. Protection of Rumsey is critical to ensuring that plains rough fescue grasslands do not go extinct. Scientific studies over the last ten years show that native plains rough fescue habitats are extremely scarce, at high risk of invasion by non-native species, and nearly impossible to restore following human disturbance.



S. Bray

Easily made vehicle tracks in the Rumsey Natural Area.

in protected areas as a short-term measure to deal with these situations until they are resolved. For the long term, we are asking for a province-wide review of protected areas, policy and legislation, and what the public wants done with them.

Together Rumsey Ecological Reserve (34 km²) and Rumsey Natural Area (149 km²) protect the largest remaining block of aspen parkland on the planet – an area of woodlands, wetlands, and rough fescue grasslands

Energy Minister Greg Melchin tried to mitigate concerns by saying there is no drilling at this stage so “it’s far too premature to say anything would happen there or not” (*Calgary Herald*, March 22/06). However, his department’s decision clearly opens the door to drilling applications for CBM since permission for surface access must precede permission for drilling.

Sources close to Alberta Energy say that approval of applications by Trident Exploration for drilling

in at least 28 sections is imminent. Although Trident spokesperson Kyla Fisher told the media that company executives have not decided whether to apply to the EUB for permission to drill (*Calgary Herald*, March 22/06), company representatives have told AWA in past meetings that they have every intention of proceeding with their plans.

Although Trident planned to drill 28 wells this past winter, they failed to adequately complete their application process. Drilling must occur in the winter to limit damage to the grassland. Still, Community Development has already approved 18 applications for well sites and 10 are pending. Then Trident must apply to the EUB for permission to drill. AWA has been informed that other companies are pursuing drilling plans in Rumsey.

Careless Promises

During Special Places, a cabinet decision was reached to allow existing mineral commitments in protected areas to be developed. No new mineral dispositions were to be issued in candidate sites until their final status was determined (see Alberta Energy IL 97-1 and IL 97-28). Once an area was protected, new mineral dispositions were to be issued with a “no surface access” addendum, which means that companies would have to develop the subsurface resource from outside the protected area.

The cabinet decision was slated to go into the Natural Heritage Act in 2000, but was opposed by Alberta Energy, which wanted to allow oil and gas development in protected areas in perpetuity. Then-Environment Minister Gary Mar battled it out with Energy Minister Steve West. The Act was never passed. The decision was later formalized in an Alberta Energy Information Letter in 2003. Although the letter is only policy and not legally enforceable, it represents a public commitment on which the department is now renegeing. ACD Minister Mar must be experiencing a hefty dose of déjà vu.

IL 2003-25 states that when the Special Places program concluded in 2001, “a total of 81 protected areas were designated, adding nearly two million hectares to the province’s

network of parks and protected areas.” Community Development’s list of Special Places by designation date has the Rumsey Natural Area (#29) as one of the 81 sites. Is it possible that Alberta Energy, as one of three signatories to this letter, did not realize that Rumsey was included? If this letter now no longer applies to Rumsey, how safe are other protected areas?

Following the Rumsey Natural

S. Bray



A weedy access road to an unreclaimed well site in the Rumsey Natural Area.

Area designation in 1996, Alberta Energy continued to sell subsurface mineral rights. However, it failed to apply “no surface access” conditions, in clear violation of this agreement. Now Alberta Energy is saying that surface access will be allowed in Rumsey for all mineral dispositions sold to date, many of which date post 2000. West’s 1997 comment still rings true for Alberta Energy: “It wasn’t our intention ever to sterilize that large a piece of the province from our natural resources.”

However, also in 1997 Environment Minister Ty Lund claimed, “There will be no new roads, no new well sites in that area ... they cannot go and build any more pads. If there’s to be any more drilling in the area, they have to directional drill from existing pads. In fact, the advertising for the sale clearly indicates that there would be no new access.” Now Trident is planning on putting in new pads and some new access, and other companies

will follow suit. If Lund’s comments in the legislature have no substance, what does that say for anything in Hansard?

When the Rumsey Natural Area was designated in 1996, a decision was made to let the RID stand as the management plan, even though it was not sufficient for a Natural Area. It was convenient since Parks department resources were scarce and oil and gas was thought to be winding down.

Conservationists objected, asking for a revision to the plan that would preclude new mineral commitments, but this did not occur.

Smashing Rumsey

“I think one of the first things we need to clarify,” said Melchin in the legislature (March 21/06), “is that the Rumsey area is an area that has been valued.” But values are obviously in the eye of the beholder.

“Alberta Energy’s actions show Rumsey has been valued for its oil and gas, not for the rich biodiversity of its rolling aspen parkland and fescue grassland, one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet,” says Cliff Wallis, AWA past-president. “Rumsey is simply the biggest and best example left, but Mr. Melchin and his department are treating it with utter contempt. What they haven’t done speaks volumes about their commitment to protection.”

Melchin says the RID has strict guidelines for oil and gas activity. In an April 2005 letter to AWA, he wrote, "Management direction provided by the RID ensures the protection of the environment and the complete reclamation of oil and gas disturbances." This is reminiscent of former Energy Minister Steve West's comment in 1997 that all the land would be reclaimed so that a couple of years after the industry left, you'd

and representative of the Alberta Native Plant Council. "Without studying and monitoring ecological integrity, we do not know if the management goal is being met. We need to focus on restoring past industrial disturbances, not making new ones."

Due to inadequate resourcing, government has yet to demonstrate, as required by the RID, that past disturbances can be successfully restored, that non-native species can

development? Do we really need to develop the mineral resources in this last little island within a sea of developed land?

It is a sign of poor management to have to wreck the few remaining examples of the world's finest ecosystems for a few days of Canada's total energy supply. We do need to change and re-assess, but we should always be moving to better environmental performance, not worse. Why not leave the oil and gas in the ground under our precious parks and consider it money in the bank? If we really need it in 5,000 years, the technology may be there to extract it without damaging the surface.

Doreen Rew, a feisty citizen from Red Deer, said it best: "The government has gone absolutely bonkers and is not considering our future and the future of the Rumsey area" (*Red Deer Advocate*, March 24/06). Tom and Daisy would be proud, if they cared.



S. Bray

A muddy access road to a producing well in Rumsey.

never know they had been there.

However, field investigations have proved otherwise. These have revealed unreclaimed well sites, invasive non-native species along roadsides and on industrial sites, hillside erosion, and a loss of biodiversity in reclaimed areas. Who will clean up this mess and who will pay the bill?

The 1993 RID recognized these and other problems and noted that the extent to which these impacts will affect the overall integrity and uniqueness of the Parkland had not been fully determined. There is no baseline data that will show whether impending CBM development will harm Rumsey's ecological integrity. Neither the RID nor an internal 2001 Plan Assessment by regional managers considered CBM activity; everyone believed that petroleum-related activities were subsiding.

"Government has followed recommendations in the management plan governing continued use of mineral resources, but it has not followed through on key recommendations aimed at protecting the area's ecological integrity," says Cheryl Bradley, professional botanist

be prevented from invading plains rough fescue communities and that cumulative effects of land-use activities are not harming the ecosystem, says Bradley. Even the EUB's guidelines on oil and gas development in native prairie (IL2002-1) suggests that a cumulative effects assessment should be done.

SRD is planning to implement one recommendation – a study of the success of past and current reclamation activities. A Technical Group composed of representatives from industry, the Alberta Native Plant Council, SRD, Community Development, and the University of Alberta will design and manage the field studies. The study is intended to guide future management decisions.

If the study shows that the ecological integrity of Rumsey will be compromised with continued CBM development, will CBM be stopped? Does it make sense to allow full-scale CBM development before such a study is completed? Should our decisions about management in Rumsey be based solely on such a study? What about the value many Albertans place on protected areas being free of industrial

Further information about Rumsey can be found on our website. Please let the government know your concerns. AWA is hosting a guided field trip to Rumsey on Saturday, June 17.



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WILLMORE'S FIRE PLAN PROMISING BUT NEEDS MASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN AS FOUNDATION

By David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist

The Alberta government is developing a Fire Management Plan (FMP) for Willmore Wilderness Park, to be completed this spring. There appears to be an urgency for the creation of fire plans in the wake of the mountain pine beetle epidemic and in response to calls to protect communities built on the forest fringe. However laudable fire plans may be, AWA is concerned by our government's stubborn reluctance to do top-down land planning on public lands.

A logical approach to management planning for large land areas, such as Willmore and the Bighorn Wildland, begins with an overarching master plan, developed through public input, and subsequent development of sub-plans for things like access and fire. Instead, the government does the reverse: fire plans, like access management plans, are being developed in the absence of overall management plan direction. Only 53 of the 521 parks and protected areas in Alberta have management plans in place.

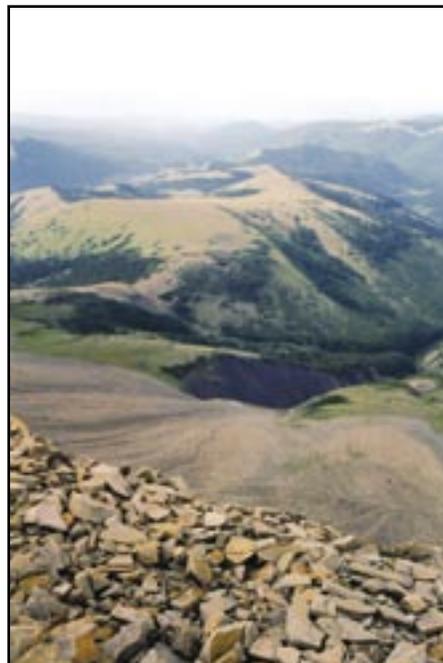
While resources are being allocated to access and fire sub-plans, master management plans are being ignored. The excuse is that there are no budgets for master plans. However, if publicly developed master plans were given priority, Albertans could avoid wasting money in endless squabbling over sub-plans when public lands decisions can often take place largely below the public's radar.

The 4,600 km² Willmore Wilderness Park in west-central Alberta's "elbow" is roughly half the size of Jasper National Park. The influence and impacts of creating the Willmore FMP may extend beyond its lightly penetrated borders. In February 2006, AWA attended a meeting in Hinton to discuss the draft FMP. While a combination of interesting approaches, ideas, and concerns were

put forward by Alberta Community Development (ACD) and Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) regarding the ecological future of Willmore, we could see impacts, both positive and negative, for this and other protected areas.

The FMP lists four key goals:

- ecological integrity and protection of landscape values
- community protection/FireSmart
- forest health/mountain pine beetle control
- natural fire processes



V. Pharis

Looking into the valley of the Muskeg River.

These are commendable goals, given that under the Willmore Wilderness Park Act "the park is dedicated to the use of the people of Alberta for their benefit, education and enjoyment ... and shall, by the management, conservation and protection of its natural resources and by the preservation of its natural beauty, be maintained for the enjoyment of future generations."

These goals, however, stray into the domain of management plans. This was recognized circa 1980 when the Willmore Wilderness Park Act was amended. A comprehensive management plan was drafted for the park by the Alberta Forest Service, but it was never finalized and implemented. It included sections on fire management but was not driven by it.

Other significant changes to Willmore have occurred over the years. In 1996, the government declared the Park off-limits to industrial development. In 2004, motorized recreation was prohibited. These are all significant in keeping Willmore as pristine and natural as possible, but it illustrates that even though the Park has a vary rare characteristic in Alberta – a protected area with its own actual legislative protection – master management planning, backed by solid public input, is integral to the long-term management of Willmore, just as it is for other protected areas.

The draft FMP recognizes that there is no overall management plan in place, but includes no commitment for one. AWA believes that the FMP would be significantly strengthened and would be more publicly accountable if it were developed as part of a long-term strategic plan.

The Fire Management Plan

AWA has long advocated prescribed burning in Willmore to restore more natural fire regimes, which is a stated goal of the plan. Some of the prescribed burning actions in the plan, as well as some of the activities to control mountain pine beetle, have already begun.

According to wildfire prevention officer Kevin Quintilio of SRD, who is co-chairing the FMP process with Laura Graham of ACD's Parks and Protected Areas Division, the current fire suppression policy in Alberta



V. Pharis

A moose horn sign on a pine tree.

is essentially to put out every fire that arises. The new FMP proposes declaring two-thirds of Willmore an Extensive Zone in which fires, under most situations, will be allowed to burn in order to eventually see natural fire regimes and forest structure restored to the Park. The other third will be an Intensive Zone, which will continue to include full fire suppression.

Quintilio and Graham say this represents a large philosophical shift in government's current approach to fire suppression. AWA strongly encourages that shift, but we want to see the bar raised quickly to have the entire Willmore declared an Extensive Zone. Some influences that may be preventing this are the concerns that Grande Cache and the adjacent Forest Management Units (FMUs) may have about uncontrolled fire in nearby Willmore.

Since the Intensive Zone is adjacent to the FMUs, AWA is concerned that Willmore could be sacrificed as a fireguard and/or insect barrier to protect private financial interests outside of the Park. A map in the Grande Cache Community Protection Plan (GCCPP) illustrates very clearly that "extreme" potential

exists in large, contiguous blocks within the FMUs, especially along the border of Willmore, with low to moderate potential in a homogeneous pattern within the Park. A "Willmore Values At Risk" map in the FMP shows that "extreme" fire risk areas exist, but almost all of them are outside Willmore on its northern border, including Grande Cache, and to the east along the highway.

Although the plan mentions the necessity of working with its neighbours, it does not provide detail on what those neighbours are doing to work with Willmore or what their involvement was, if any, in the preparation of the plan. Graham assured us that the creation of the FMP was initiated by Parks and Protected Areas and that Willmore's values and ecological interests were given top priority when creating the draft plan. We believe it is necessary to allocate more resources to them to complete a master management plan as well.

With respect to the GCCPP, there is no question that protection of personal life and property is a top priority. However, it needs to be clarified if or how the two fire plans are integrated or to what extent the GCCPP impacts the Willmore. The GCCPP uses the government's FireSmart protocol for protecting the community. The FireSmart concept is based on Jack Cohen's fire research, which illustrates that beyond 100 metres from the buildings in the Wildland Urban Interface, intensively "managing the forests" is neither economical nor very effective. However, the GCCPP assumes that containment lines should and will be built within the Park.

The point of mentioning these two situations is not to debate the details of community fire protection or whether fire suppression is largely to protect industrial forestry's interests. They simply illustrate that without a publicly developed master management plan that clearly states the goals of Willmore as a protected area, we cannot be assured that the FMP will fit into those goals or that outside influences will not override them. AWA is also concerned that before the FMP has been finalized, implemented, monitored, and evaluated, the plan suggests that it may be extended to other protected areas.

Mountain Pine Beetle

Controlling mountain pine beetle (MPB) is another priority of the FMP. The current infestation of MPB in western Canada, particularly British Columbia, is significant. According to the B.C. Ministry of Forests, just under 300 million cubic metres of pine on the timber harvesting land base has been destroyed in 2005, and surveys detected 8.5 million hectares of "red attack," largely in central B.C.

Alberta has also experienced MPB outbreaks in the lodgepole pine forests of the Eastern Slopes, but historically it has not been MPB range, likely due to our colder winters. What may have made these forests particularly susceptible to MPB attack are the decades of fire suppression. MPB thrives in simple, thick, and congested forests composed largely of a single species of tree: lodgepole pine. When faced with complex, healthy forests consisting of mixed species composition and age, it becomes much more difficult for MPB attacks to be sustained.

Karen Ripley, an entomologist with the Washington (State) Department of Natural Resources, describes how MPB attacks may be part of a forest ecology balancing act. "Fire suppression combined with a lack of logging means nature will find a way to remove trees. Nature's way is to have some of the beetles kill some of the trees. We've got a lot of stressed trees out there now, and they're easy pickings."

MPB reaches large populations only periodically, according to Dr. Mary Reid, a professor in biological sciences at the University of Calgary, where she studies the breeding ecology of bark beetles (see WLA August 2001). She explains that there is a cost to the beetle to finding susceptible trees. When MPB populations are large, they can overwhelm lodgepole pine forest stands and kill the older, larger trees. These trees, however, eventually become scarce and the beetles' success at finding them dwindles. Also, overwintering mortality is thought to be one of the main controls of MPB populations, with younger larvae being most susceptible to cold temperatures.

MPB has been seen in Willmore since 1999, and the government has

destroyed 900 trees to combat it. The current forest in Willmore may not have sufficient defences to resist large infestations, due to decades of fire suppression. If natural fire regimes and forest composition can be restored in Willmore, the natural defences of the forest may be sufficient to handle MPB attacks, which are naturally part of this ecosystem.

The proposed FMP addresses MPB problems with targeted prescribed burns and cutting, and burning of infected trees. AWA supports this to the extent that the eventual goal is to get the forests in the Willmore into a more natural state where they can then be in a position to counter MPB on their own with little interference by humans. However, cautions Dr. Reid, "it's a tricky time to make management decisions about wilderness areas because of climate change."

The forests in B.C. have similar conditions: recent mild winters and favourable stands of pine. B.C.'s Ministry of Environment does recognize, however, that restoring natural forest conditions can go a long way toward letting nature do much of our battle against MPB. They note that while many trees die as a result of beetles, these epidemics do not destroy the forests; new growth rapidly appears below the dead stands. This is nature's way, they say, of breaking up uniform

stands into more natural ones that are more varied in composition, structure, and age.

AWA Files



Trees damaged by mountain pine beetle.

Conclusion

Willmore offers a unique opportunity to experiment and monitor natural processes, including how fire behaves in this ecosystem and how a functioning ecosystem manages forest pests, as it has done for thousands of years. The Willmore Wilderness

Park Act is a good tool for protecting Willmore and carries a commitment to preserve its natural beauty. A management plan could strengthen the Act by establishing how Willmore's beauty, values, and integrity can be maintained. Sub-planning would deal with ways to manage recreation, hunting, fishing, trapping, fire, forest pests, and the gamut of other activities.

There is much that is good in the FMP that cannot be detailed here. The FMP recognizes and is driving toward setting a natural stage in Willmore, but an accelerated version may be necessary in expanding the Extensive Zone where little fire suppression is performed. With MPB clearly at the doorstep, and with the forest in a somewhat unbalanced state, we are encouraged with many aspects of the FMP, but this should also be just the beginning of the process.

However, we have concerns about a potential over-reaction to MPB and catastrophic fire, and about preparing a fire sub-plan before a master management plan is completed. Willmore should be added to the short list of priority areas needing a management plan. This would go a long way to convincing people that this joint venture between ACD and SRD to create this fire management plan is entirely in the interest of Willmore.

RADIO PROGRAM FEATURES ANDY RUSSELL

Brian Bindon is producing a series of five-minute radio programs for Park Radio in Banff, due to be broadcast this summer. One of these will feature the late Andy Russell, wilderness advocate and raconteur, telling a hilarious story about a camp cook, a log bridge, and a surprise wild encounter.

The calls continue to grow for a permanent recognition of Andy's enormous contribution to Alberta's natural history through the designation of the Andy Russell Wildland in the Castle region of southern Alberta. But it is good to remind ourselves about the man himself – his genuine love of Alberta's wilderness, his innate talent

as an entertainer, and his ability to make us laugh.

The program, sponsored by AWA and the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, will be aired on Park Radio (at 101.1 FM) a number of times between July and September. It will also be available on AWA's website in late May.

Meanwhile, there is still a need for people to write letters of support for the proposed Andy Russell Wildland. If the suspension of Alberta's spring grizzly bear hunt does nothing else, it tells us that your letters do have an effect and really can make a change.



Andy Russell

Send your letters to: The Hon. Ralph Klein, Premier of Alberta, Room 307 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B7. Phone: (780) 427-2251 Fax: (780) 427-1349 e-Mail: Premier@gov.ab.ca



GRIZZLY HUNT SUSPENSION FIRST STEP TOWARD RECOVERY

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

The March 3rd decision by the Alberta government to suspend the spring grizzly bear hunt is just the start toward recovering Alberta's grizzlies: there is still a long way to go. However, we should celebrate the hunt decision and congratulate Minister of Sustainable Resource Development David Coumts on a bold decision. The change of heart on the hunt can be attributed to a number of factors: improved scientific methods for estimating population numbers, improved ministerial accountability, and a large and expressive outpouring of public opinion in support of grizzlies.

Improving science

Since the 2002 recommendation by the government's Endangered Species Conservation Committee to list the grizzly as "threatened" (using an estimated provincial population figure of 1,000 bears), the science has become ever clearer that the provincial population is not healthy enough to sustain current mortality rates. Although it will take another three to

the detailed DNA population surveys carried out by provincial biologist Gord Stenhouse in 2004 and 2005. The previous best estimate of the provincial grizzly population was the 2003 *Report on Grizzly Bear Assessment of Allocation*, prepared by Gordon Stenhouse, Dr. Mark Boyce, and John Boulanger, which produced a revised population estimate of 700 bears in Alberta.

The newly released DNA figures for 2005 are difficult to compare to the previous studies because they cover different areas, but the 2004 DNA figures are much clearer. In 2003 there were an estimated 147 bears in the area between highways 11 and 16. The more accurate 2004 figures put this number at 53 (or 36 percent of the 2003 estimate). We don't know yet whether this picture is repeated across all grizzly ranges, but it may point to a considerably lower provincial population than previously thought.

Ministerial accountability

In the last two or three years, decisions on the spring grizzly bear hunt appear to have been simple "rubber stamping" of previous hunt

Team chair Gord Stenhouse. Questions were asked about whether the government was making objective decisions based on scientific information. The media helpfully covered these issues in detail.

To Coumts' great credit, he decided not to sign off to the hunt as in previous years. Instead he appeared to take the time to analyze the information himself, which led to the unavoidable conclusion that the hunt must be suspended. AWA and other groups were quick to congratulate the Minister on a courageous decision.

Public opinion

This year more than any other, Albertans made it abundantly clear that, in a province heading for a \$6 billion provincial surplus, they were not prepared to tolerate hunting a species that is threatened in all but name. Letters flooded in to the newspapers and to the politicians' offices from Alberta and beyond. In a *Calgary Herald* on-line poll the following week, 85 percent of readers agreed with the hunt suspension.

For several years, AWA has concentrated on raising awareness of the spectacular wilderness we have in Alberta and emphasizing the importance of public input in decision-making. Albertans often have to make an enormous effort to have their voices heard, and we need to apply pressure continually to make sure our politicians are listening. So a huge thank you to all of those people who took the time to write or email the Minister or their MLA. You really can make a difference!

Next Steps

AWA and other groups agree that the spring grizzly hunt is not the cause of our grizzly bear troubles, and suspending the hunt will not recover grizzlies. Recovery of any species, whether grizzly, caribou or swift fox, depends on protecting their habitat.



R. Douglas

four years to get the best estimates possible through DNA population studies, we already know that there are major problems.

Two of the documents released at the same time as the hunt decision were

decisions. This year the spotlight was put on Coumts for his department's failure to release important documents to the public and even to the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team, as well as confusion over the status of Recovery

“Everybody focused on the hunt because it is a political minefield,” says Dr. Robert Barclay, spokesperson for the provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Team. “But it is one thing that we can do right away. Of more importance is habitat for the bears and making sure that they have high-quality secure habitat, and that’s not nearly as easy a fix.”

U.S. grizzly expert Dr. Charles Schwartz carried out a peer review of the 2004 draft Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. “I feel it is very important [that] ‘regulated hunting’ and ‘sustainable harvests’ are not the ‘cause’ of grizzly bear declines in Alberta,” wrote Schwarz. “Closing hunting seasons gives the false impression to the public that once hunting is closed, all is well for the bears. Hunting is in fact a very minor symptom of a much greater erosion of habitat by humans.”

Barclay is confident that the Recovery Team is very aware of the importance of habitat protection. “Around the Recovery Team table are [representatives] from various industries that have an obvious stake in the habitat issue,” he says. “It’s those industries who are creating the access into grizzly bear habitat through roads, into either forestry or oil and gas development. They recognize that human access into grizzly bear habitat is a key issue.”

Ultimately, the role of the Recovery Team is to explain what needs to be done to recover Alberta’s grizzlies. Whether there is the political will to do what is needed is another matter. “We’re not the decision-makers in the end and there are all sorts of other factors that go into those sorts of decisions,” says Barclay. “All we can do is say ‘here’s what we recommend.’”

Barclay remains cautiously optimistic. “I’m certainly more optimistic than before the Minister’s announcement and the release of the data. [The hunt decision] was a surprise. Given what has happened over the last few years I was expecting a reduced hunt still to continue.” But counteracting that optimism is the realization that the numbers from the first two censuses seem rather low, lower than previous estimates for those areas, he says.

The Alberta government has begun a number of important initiatives to start along the road to recovering grizzlies. But in isolation, suspending the hunt will not recover grizzlies; counting grizzlies will not recover them; and neither will forming recovery teams. Only if we choose to make substantial changes to how we manage grizzly bear habitat will bears have a long-term future in Alberta. This work needs to begin right now.

REQUEST TO REVOKE CARIBOU MOUNTAINS PARK STATUS DISGRACEFUL

From: AWA News Release April 6, 2006

The Advisory Committee for the Caribou Mountains Wildland Management Plan wants the park status for this protected area revoked. AWA is asking Community Development minister, Hon. Denis Ducharme, to rebuke the Committee’s request to disestablish the Wildland Park. AWA is also asking the minister to allow representation, on the committee, from provincial environmental groups.

“We are puzzled by their motivations,” says Cliff Wallis, AWA Board of Directors. “This demand is coming from a committee responsible for recommending management for this protected area. The committee should work on park protection, not lobby to have park status revoked. Those members who want park status revoked should resign immediately.”

The committee’s request would override the public’s desire under the Special Places program to see this area protected. It would leave the door open to uncontrolled commercial

development and unrestrained motorized recreation, both of which are incompatible with wildland protection. In poll after poll, Albertans have expressed strongly their desire to see these places protected.

C. Truscott



“This shows what can happen when you place all the power in the hands of special interests within one local community,” says Wallis. “These wildlands belong to all Albertans. Local committees are entrusted with the responsibility to act on behalf of

all Albertans, not just their local or personal interest.”

The boreal Caribou Mountains Wildland Park, adjacent to the western border of Wood Buffalo National Park, is the largest provincial wildland park at 5,910 km² and was established in 2001. The area protects provincial Environmentally Significant Areas which include sensitive wetlands, unique permafrost features, rich breeding bird habitat, and is a core refugium for woodland caribou.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan states the park’s herd is declining with a population drop of greater than 40% since 1995. Motorized access will further stress this endangered species.

“This may be the last pristine area in Alberta for the endangered woodland caribou,” says David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist. “The last thing this herd needs is more disruption from industry or motorized recreation.”

QUESTIONS CONTINUE TO SURROUND LITTLE SMOKY WOLF KILL

By David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist

More questions than answers are arising from the Little Smoky wolf kill. AWA has learned that an estimated 34 wolves have been shot and killed from aircraft under the authorization of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD).

AWA believes a wolf kill on its own as a short-term strategy is senseless and useless if not combined with an immediate deferral of industrial activity in the caribou herd's habitat. AWA supports a moratorium on industrial activity as a fundamental short-term action in the Little Smoky region until a science-based longer-term strategy to ensure recovery of the caribou herd is in place (see *WLA* February 2006).

The figure of 34 wolves is an estimate only, as SRD will not reveal the actual numbers. SRD spokesperson Dave Ealey would not confirm the numbers of wolves taken in the cull, saying the province is "not doing any sort of a body count on this" (*Rocky Mountain Outlook*, March 9/06). That, of course, is not only ridiculous, but, if really true, is unprofessional and incompetent. Using the premise that at least half the herd, estimated at 140, would have to be destroyed in order for the cull to have an impact on the Little Smoky caribou herd, 70 wolves would have to be killed.

Ealey would neither confirm nor deny AWA's number, nor say how many they planned to cull. "We're not itemizing the number of animals that are killed as a result of the cull," he continued. "We want to be able to be sure that we have removed enough wolves to have improved the survival of the caribou in that area" (*Hinton Parklander*, Feb. 20/06). If SRD knows what "enough" is, they must know how many enough is. They are either keeping that number from the public or don't actually know, so the eventual total could possibly be higher. No other details about the kill have been divulged, including what is being done with the wolf carcasses.

In response to a letter from a concerned citizen, SRD said that predation is the primary cause of caribou mortality. Yet the Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan (2004/05) lists this as only one cause, not the primary cause. No mention was made of the significant impact

recommendation of the ACC."

The government-sponsored ACC committee appears almost as much in the dark about SRD's actions as the general public. SRD informed the same concerned citizen that "very limited-short-term wolf control is necessary as an interim measure as Alberta

D. Smith



Caribou in Little Smoky.

made on caribou habitat by industrial activity, which was pointed out in the recovery plan as being a limiting factor on woodland caribou habitat, and by extension, caribou survival. Nor was the person told that the recovery plan states that the same habitat change occurring from human activity may be what is increasing the caribou's susceptibility to predation.

"It is unlikely that predation is the primary cause of caribou mortality, as the data does not support this," said Cliff Wallis, AWA past-president and member of the government's Alberta Caribou Committee (ACC), which was commissioned to create a caribou recovery strategy. "Killing wolves is just the easiest proximate cause to solve. Wolves are the symptom, not the problem, but they are paying the price. This wolf cull was done without the

implements a total package of efforts to address landscape conservation and management."

When asked if the ACC had been informed of this "total package of efforts," Cliff Wallis said the ACC would "certainly like to be enlightened on this. The government has not committed to any new actions," he added. "There are lots of ways they try to mitigate, but this is what has failed for 14 years. Caribou are still going down. It's not like they aren't trying, however; they are just trying things that we told them wouldn't work."

FINDING WAYS TO LIVE WITH WOLVES IN CATTLE COUNTRY

By Jim Pissott, Charles Mamo, and Gudrun Pflueger - Defenders of Wildlife Canada

What would you do if you were a wolf in cattle country? Defenders of Wildlife Canada, in cooperation with a number of other stakeholders, is trying to find out. In years past, wolf family packs likely had a very low chance of survival in southwestern Alberta, although little data existed. Wolves were all but eliminated on two occasions in the past 70 years, but now more packs seem to be established. Conflicts between wolves and livestock operators, and liberal hunting and trapping regulations, spelled trouble for wolves from the Bow River south to the Montana border.

Now, thanks to cooperative efforts among conservationists, provincial Fish and Wildlife and Parks and Protected Areas staff, local ranchers, the Alberta Trappers Association, and Alberta Beef Producers, wolf conservation and livestock depredation management are being addressed in a new light. Working as the Oldman Basin Carnivore Advisory Group, participants analyze wolf-livestock conflicts and advise the province regarding wolf management and conservation policy.

A cycle of livestock depredation, followed by non-specific killing of wolves suspected of depredation and then re-establishment of wolf numbers, has been repeated over the past several decades in southwestern Alberta. Frequently, wolves begin the depredation cycle again and the response is the same. Depredation losses are serious burdens to some ranchers and pose a perennial challenge to wolf conservation. But as one rancher observed, “We keep doing what doesn’t work ... only harder.”

Our new collaborative effort now aims to better understand the ecology, behaviour, and movement of wolves. In addition, we are investigating factors that may contribute to depredation – including landscape features, wolf pack stability, availability of natural prey, and livestock stewardship methods – and working to reduce the likelihood of livestock depredation by wolves.

At this point, there is a lot to learn on both fronts. Perhaps most importantly, we are working to ensure that all stakeholders, and the general public, have an understanding and appreciation of the dynamics of wolf conservation and management, livestock operations, and other management issues on Alberta’s Crown lands.

The past three years have seen a significant change in southwestern Alberta. When initial livestock depredations were reported in the Willow Creek area in June 2003, the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, upon recommendation from the Advisory Group, contracted a biologist to capture and collar wolves in the area of the depredation. This was a marked departure from previous management response, which almost invariably involved the use of poison

Group members and steps in the right direction to conserve wolves and reduce depredations. We confirmed the presence and numbers of wolves (six adults and eight pups of the year) and determined that this family pack was responsible for local depredations. We tracked travel routes, identified den and rendezvous sites, determined territory boundaries, and observed the role of grizzly bears in wolf depredation of livestock.

Ranchers made use of telemetry gear to determine where wolves were so they could focus their cattle management activities. Some ranchers modified their cattle management – changing salt locations, moving cattle to different pastures, spending extra time on the range, harassing wolves seen near cattle, etc. – to reduce the risk of depredation to the more than 4,000 cattle present.

R. Berdan



when problems became severe. In years past, there would have been calls for immediate reduction or elimination of the pack – probably using strychnine, as in 1990 – but this year we were trying something different.

This effort produced results that indicate progress for all of the Advisory

In spite of these efforts, the Willow Creek wolves continued to kill livestock throughout the summer and fall, continuing a trend of depredations that began in 2001. There were 28 confirmed incidents of depredation, and the Advisory Group recommended lethal control beginning in early fall

of 2003. In contrast to past lethal control work, however, the group recommended an incremental and specific approach to minimize the impacts of this severe method as much as possible and to give the pack the best possible chance for long-term sustainability.

Individual wolves were killed when they returned to depredation sites or were involved in ongoing episodes of cattle depredation. In January 2004, Fish and Wildlife agents captured five wolves (including the alpha female) by helicopter and euthanized four. One was released with a new satellite collar to better track the remaining wolves. When depredations continued, two more wolves (alpha male and new alpha female) were euthanized in March.

The three wolves remaining in Willow Creek were soon joined by another dispersing animal and the pack produced two pups in spring 2005. We are very encouraged that this pack has retained its home territory, promoting population stability and connectivity on the large landscape scale, and has not taken any cattle for more than 22 months.

Farther south at Bob Creek, four wolves were radio-collared in the spring of 2004. Ranchers here had suffered 63 confirmed losses to wolves from 1999 to 2004. Following eight cattle losses in April, the alpha male was removed from the pack and the behaviour of the remaining wolves was monitored closely. The five remaining wolves produced pups later in the summer. No further depredations were noted between the early summer of 2004 and spring of 2005.

In spring 2005, we joined with Alberta Fish and Wildlife and local ranchers to test the benefits of deploying “night riders” to discourage wolves from approaching cattle. More than 1,400 yearlings had been pastured in an area known to be used seasonally by the Bob Creek family pack. Over a three-week period, “night riders” would check for the presence of wolves with telemetry gear every hour between 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. If signals were received from wolf collars, riders would fire shots in the direction of the radio signal (not intending to injure wolves) and monitor wolf responses.

Cattle would be monitored during the day to document wolf presence and note any daytime depredations.

As luck would have it, early April brought high winds, storms, and snow, challenging field staff who rose hourly during the night to check for wolves. On some nights, researchers felt lucky to find their tents still staked in place when they returned after listening for signals from the radio collars! Signals from collared wolves were detected on nine evenings, and firework bangers, screamers, and gun shots were fired to deter them.

Wolves retreated after each of these episodes, and no cattle were lost from this pasture during or after the experiment. But three steers were killed by wolves in an adjacent allotment, demonstrating the effectiveness of the night rider experiment.

A third wolf pack of at least nine individuals lives south of Highway 3 and north of the Montana border. No depredations were recorded until February 2005. Ranchers and others

range and movements of this Castle-Carbondale pack.

At least two other packs that have yet to be studied are believed to reside in areas adjacent to the three known packs. For the first time for many decades, it is apparent that stable wolf territories are contiguous from Kananaskis Country right to the U.S. border, an encouraging step forward in long-term sustainability of wolves in southwestern Alberta. We are working to compile a list of promising non-lethal methods to reduce the likelihood of depredations.

As the 2005 grazing season came to an end, we looked back with relief and encouragement. This summer saw low numbers of depredations and saw the Willow Creek and Bob Creek packs raising pups and causing few problems for ranchers. Our night rider experiment proved successful (but expensive). And we now have collars on more packs so we can monitor their movements more effectively. Best of all, we are meeting regularly with

G. Houston



killed at least two wolves from this pack. In November, Fish and Wildlife managed to collar two wolves from a pack that lives in Waterton Lakes National Park. After one local rancher changed from running cow-calf pairs to running more vulnerable yearlings, this pack killed a few cows for the first time in several years. In response, ranchers killed at least three wolves, but we now are monitoring the behaviour of the rest of the pack. Hopefully, by next spring, we will have a better idea of the home

ranchers, listening to their concerns and discussing steps they can take to keep their cattle safe. Wolf howls are heard in southwestern Alberta, and our howls celebrating good progress are heard with them.

Defenders of Wildlife Canada represents Alberta Wilderness Association on the Oldman Basin Carnivore Advisory Group.

SWIFT FOX BREEDING PROGRAM IN PERIL

By Clio Smeeton, Cochrane Ecological Institute

Until 1750, the swift fox, *Vulpes velox*, was an integral part of the prairie landscape, ranging from the banks of the North Saskatchewan River to the Texas panhandle, from the eastern foothills of the Rockies to the Red River Valley, Manitoba, and into Illinois. For over 7,000 years, the indigenous peoples of the prairies have revered the swift fox, burying their dead with grave goods of native copper, red ochre, beads, points, and swift fox bones.

Found only in North America and the smallest of the foxes, swift fox were a plentiful social species of great spiritual and cultural importance to the indigenous tribes of the Plains, most of whom had Swift Fox Warrior societies and all of whom once shared its range. The land, water, plants, and animals of the prairies were a source of survival for the Plains tribes: it was their home, their larder and medicine chest, their sacred place.

The European invasion and settlement of North America brought with it a people determined to eradicate indigenous species and peoples in order to create a transformed, non-native and more European landscape of ranch, city, and cropland.

"[Swift fox] are one of the most common fur animals of the Red River Valley," wrote fur trader Alexander Henry in 1800. A century later, naturalist and writer Ernest Thompson Seton wrote, "They are rapidly disappearing over a large part of their range and, if doomed to extinction, it is important that a closer study be made of their home life before it is too late."

By the 1970s swift fox were classified as extirpated (extinct) in all of Canada and in over 90 percent of their historic range in the U.S.

"There is no survivor, there is no future, there is no life to be recreated in this form again. We are looking upon the uttermost finality that can be written, glimpsing the darkness which will not know another ray of light. We are in touch with the reality of extinction," wrote Henry Hough, editor

of the *Vineyard Gazette*.

It is self-evident that when a sociable species has been reduced to a fraction of its numbers and extirpated over most of its range, time is no longer on its side. The ever-lengthening parade of extinct wildlife, some of whose last lonely representatives have died in captivity, demonstrates this truism.

Public Dream Requires Private Funds

For the swift fox, it was clear by the 1970s that extinction was inevitable unless powerful and constructive action was taken immediately. To save the



R. Berdan

swift fox in the northern Great Plains, it was clearly essential to gather scattered individuals together and to breed them with the intention of reintroducing them back into their native ecosystem.

This action was undertaken in 1972 by a pair of Alberta pensioners, Miles and Beryl Smeeton, and the charitable organization they founded, Cochrane Ecological Institute (CEI). As no swift foxes were left in Canada, Miles and Beryl obtained their first from a wildlife rehabilitation facility in the U.S. The CEI holds Canada's only captive colony of swift fox, bred specifically for reintroduction, and is the only organization undertaking swift fox reintroduction in Canada.

"Whether it is feasible to reintroduce an animal (swift fox) that has become extinct through the spread of civilization is questionable, but that is what we hoped to discover," wrote Miles Smeeton in 1972. "Very little is known about swift foxes, and they have a poor record of breeding in captivity: nevertheless, we intended to breed them and one day release them in their natural environment. Had we understood all the problems and work involved ... we might have thought twice about the project." The Smeetons paid out of their pensions for this swift fox captive breeding project.

To find out if it is possible to restore degraded native habitat as well as repair the cultural and spiritual life of an aboriginal people through the return of this sacred and extirpated indigenous carnivore, speculation, theory, and computer modeling is insufficient. A captive breeding colony producing swift foxes for reintroduction is essential.

Reintroduction requires partnerships. Landowners must approve. Responsibility for land management (jurisdiction) is held by the provincial and federal governments: government permits are required. Advice from experts is always important, but without a consistent supply of healthy young swift foxes to reintroduce, no reintroduction is possible.

An essential is a secure source of funding to maintain Canada's only colony of these once extirpated and now endangered living animals. The only long-term funding for swift fox reintroduction came from the Smeetons. The federal government did not then and does not now consider it a government responsibility to implement the recovery of endangered species populations.

"If swift foxes were important, Clio, we would all go to our Ministers and obtain funding for them," Steve Brechtel, chair of the National Swift Fox Recovery Team, told me at a team meeting in 1994.

"I think it worth bearing in mind that the [Species at Risk] Act speaks to the legal responsibilities of federal responsible agencies (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks, and Department of Fisheries and Oceans) to write recovery strategies there is no legal accountability to implement it (*sic*)," said Pat Fargey of Parks Canada and co-chair of the Swift Fox Recovery Team in March 2005.

But even with this outlook, it is still the long-term recovery goal of the draft 2006 Swift Fox Recovery Strategy to "within 20 years, restore a self-sustaining swift fox population of 1,000 or more mature, reproducing foxes."

The federal and provincial governments have expended 16 years and 1,000 swift foxes on swift fox reintroduction. Most recent (2001) figures show they have an estimated population of 655 dispersing individuals of unknown age (not "mature, reproducing foxes"). The new Species at Risk Act, by outdating all previous work on swift foxes, such as the 1996 *National Recovery Plan for the Swift Fox in Canada*, has given government agencies and their associates a further 20 years to play with.

What is Reintroduction?

"Restore" is an interesting word: it means return to the original state, replenish. One would imagine the only way to restore the population of a reintroduced endangered species is to add to it – in short, to reintroduce.

If you think of our prairies as an almost empty plate of peas from which all but a few of the peas (in this case, swift fox) have been taken, you will understand that to restore the peas to the empty plate you have to get them from somewhere. Peas can be added to the plate (swift fox reintroduction) or they can be taken from one part of the plate and put in another (swift fox translocation).

In Canada, between the first release in 1983 and the last release in 1997, 849 captive bred Canadian swift foxes from CEI breeding stock were reintroduced. The Canadian Wildlife Service also translocated 91 wild swift foxes, trapped in the U.S. for release in Canada. Survival within the two groups was "similar" (42%) according to the

federal government (RENEW Annual Report #6, 1995-96).

Between 1998 and 2002, the CEI undertook the first swift fox reintroduction in the U.S. in partnership with the Blackfeet of Montana. As usual, funds were limited and due to lack of funding we had to stop the program after five years. Only captive-bred Canadian swift foxes were reintroduced, with the following result:

"The swift fox population grew at a rate of 16% in 2003/04 and 14% in 2004/05.... Based on the population growth rate, the number of foxes counted, and the fortunate discovery of a (breeding pair) of swift fox in Augusta, Montana, I consider this reintroduction a success. The Blackfeet tribe has ... attained their goal of restoring a culturally important species

reintroduced populations to support each other.

The Blood (Kainai) program was intended as a long-term program, incorporating the collection of aboriginal Traditional Environmental Knowledge, a biophysical survey (never before undertaken on Blood land), GIS mapping of data collected, community outreach and a partnership with Red Crow Community College, technological exchange to increase employment (which did result in increased employment), and in 2004 the first reintroduction of swift fox. This first Blood (Kainai) swift fox reintroduction was intended to be followed by annual reintroductions for five years, as had been done in the successful Blackfeet swift fox reintroduction (1998-2002).



R. Berdan

to Tribal Lands and have even initiated a comeback for swift fox along the Rocky Mountain Front" (D. Ausband, M.Sc. thesis, University of Montana, 2005).

Note the use of "restoration."

Swift Fox on Tribal Lands a Matter of Heart and Spirit

In 2001 the Blood Kainai tribe of southwestern Alberta initiated a reintroduction program with CEI. For the first time in the history of swift fox reintroduction in North America, there existed a protected corridor of classic swift fox habitat joining two reintroduction sites, one in Montana and one in Alberta, enabling those

Annual reintroduction and the maintenance of a captive colony of up to 18 productive pairs of swift fox costs \$69,000 per year. Both the CEI and the Blood tribe attempted to find a funding commitment for a five year (2005-2010) reintroduction. We got these responses:

"The national Swift Fox Recovery Team will consider the results of the upcoming survey (October 2005-February 2006, cost \$250,000) ... to assess whether any future reintroductions are needed.... The recovery team has expressed uncertainty about reintroductions, considering it to be preferable to use wild foxes because they are likely to

have a higher survival rate. Because of these uncertainties, I regret that I cannot commit funding for the continuation of the captive rearing facility at Cochrane for swift foxes,” wrote Stephane Dion, Minister of the Environment, September 2005. However, the recovery team was not consulted, only the co-chairs of the team. And, as noted above, survival of captive-bred and wild swift foxes are similar.

In February 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrote to the CEI: “We have three tribes right now at some stage of looking at reintroducing swift fox, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne and Crow. Northern Cheyenne and Crow may or may not get funding but are more at the stage of looking at feasibility studies and determining if they have sufficient habitat – which I think they do. Fort Peck has been funded, completed the initial pre-trapping work and is now looking for a source of foxes.

“Thus, my reason for wanting to establish contact with you... With the plague issues here in the States, we may be looking at having to go to Oklahoma or elsewhere to get animals for Fort Peck. Unfortunately, the program at Blackfeet is not yet at the point where we can obtain animals from them. I was wondering if you might have any animals available in the future and if there is a possibility of getting some for relocation to tribal lands.”

The U.S. federal government is clearly concerned about the possible spread of bubonic plague through the translocation of swift foxes to Montana from plague sites in the U.S. (Wyoming, Colorado) and therefore, if tribal swift fox reintroductions are to continue in the U.S., would prefer swift foxes of known health from the CEI or plague-free Oklahoma, if the latter still has swift foxes.

The Canadian government doesn't seem to care, as seen in this response from Stephane Dion, Minister of the Environment, January 2006: “A new National Swift Fox Recovery Strategy is required under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) and is due ... in June 2006. The current draft of this new Strategy states that a determination of whether further reintroductions

are necessary will be based upon an integration of information....

“Environment Canada has not sought a source of wild foxes, because it is unknown whether further reintroductions are required. Regarding potential source of wild foxes, the Wyoming population could be a source. Environment Canada has not sought confirmation from United States authorities that wild swift

to say?

Elliot Fox, director of Blood Tribe Land Management, said in 2004, “Due to the traditional relationship that evolved and became established between Kainaiwa (the Blood Tribe) and, what is now known as the swift fox, prior to European encroachment on traditional Kainaiwa territory, and the cultural and ecological significance of this relationship, Kainaiwa (the Blood

AWA Files



foxes will be provided to Canada, because it is unknown whether further reintroductions will be required.”

The results of the international swift fox survey will not be available until August 2006. In short, Canada will not fund a reintroduction of Canadian swift fox onto Blood tribe land by the Blood (Kainai) people.

SARA says, “The Government of Canada is committed to conserving biological diversity and to the principle that, if there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to a wildlife species, cost-effective measures to prevent the reduction or loss of the species should not be postponed for a lack of full scientific certainty, the conservation efforts of individual Canadians and communities should be encouraged and supported, the traditional knowledge of the aboriginal peoples of Canada should be considered.”

What do the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Blackfeet and Blood) on both sides of the border have

Tribe) is offering its full support of this initiative and are intent on being fully involved throughout the reintroduction process.”

“We are pleased,” said Gayle Skunk Cap, Jr., director of the Blackfoot Tribal Fish & Wildlife Department, and Dan Carney, Blackfoot Tribal Fish and Wildlife biologist, “with the apparent success of the swift fox releases on Blackfoot Tribal lands and, after reviewing the proposal to reintroduce swift foxes to Blood lands, imagine that it can only increase the potential for success for the (swift) fox population here.

“There is contiguous habitat from the release site of the Blackfoot Reservation to the Canada Border and swift foxes have already established dens miles north of where they were released. With reintroductions on Blood lands we would hopefully see dispersal to the south and the two populations would eventually merge. That would mean a huge step towards our goal of restoring the swift fox to the land it

once occupied throughout the Blackfoot confederacy.”

Finally, Ira Newbreast, of the Blackfoot Tribal Fish & Wildlife Department said in 2005, “From a Native American stand point, Blackfoot perspective if you will, the need for vindication and legitimacy through qualification, quantification and recognition are not often required in matters of the spirit and heart. Which is what this action (swift fox reintroduction) was, and is.

“I do observe in most scenarios there comes a certain need to substantiate for the purpose of more

funding and standing. This of course is a part of the Euro-Western approach, describe the world in clinical clear parameters for the advance and understanding of civilization into the future. Unfortunately, this approach is not legitimized in the view of many peoples, indigenous in particular; that is, cumulative factors (including spiritual, heartfelt and cultural values) must be taken into account [and] then priorities may be set from there.

“I will point out that the most enduring and valuable messages involving animals are those visual and storied accounts. The project (swift fox

reintroduction) worked because when science and bureaucracy cannot co-exist productively, matters of the heart and spirit must guide the way. It was simply the right thing to do.”

This year, unless something astonishing happens, will see the end of the swift fox colony at the CEI.

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LAND SWAPPING MAY HELP SAVE VALUABLE BOREAL FORESTS IN NORTHEASTERN ALBERTA

From AWA News Release March 29, 2006

Alberta still has an excellent opportunity to protect several significant unfragmented wild forests in northeastern Alberta, such as those in the Primrose-Lakeland area, which are still relatively unaffected by petroleum and forestry operations. However, saving the best forests left may hinge on the judicious swapping of land in the region already under various uses, including Alberta-Pacific’s Forest Management Area (FMA), as well as a commitment to legislated protection for the intact forests gained through this process.

“If land swaps in the Primrose-Lakeland region will further the Canadian Boreal Initiative’s goal of conserving at least 50 percent of Canada’s boreal forest in a network of large interconnected protected areas, then we should explore this option,” says Ian Urquhart, a University of Alberta political scientist who is leading AWA’s work in the Primrose-Lakeland area. “But AWA consideration of such a significant land-use change would hinge on promoting boreal forest conservation goals elsewhere in the region,” he adds.

The value of considering the land swap option is suggested by the just-released Global Forest Watch

Canada study of Canada’s remaining wild forests. That study identifies several wild forest fragments in the Primrose-Lakeland region. One wild fragment links Lakeland Provincial Park with land in the southwest quadrant of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range. Another area joins

gas could be added to Al-Pac’s FMA, but they would then have to relinquish their rights to cut timber in intact forests and the province would have to move to establish long-term protection for those forests.

Last year AWA called on both the provincial government and

L. Wein



Jackson Lake, Lakeland

the northeast quadrant of the Range with the forests found in the Winnifred Lake region to the north. A third area, the southeast quadrant of the Range, offers a conservation connection with Saskatchewan’s Primrose Lake Ecological and Wildlife Refuges.

Landscapes in the area that have been seriously fragmented by oil and

the Canadian military to study the potential of the Range to contribute to the ambitious protected areas targets endorsed by Al-Pac, Suncor, and other supporters of the Canadian Boreal Initiative.

PRAIRIE BOY COMES BACK HOME, RECONNECTS WITH GRASSLAND BEAUTY

By John Geary

If you were asked to describe Ian Sheldon and you said, “He is a citizen of the world,” you would be very accurate, as that’s how the Edmonton-based artist describes himself. Although he was born in Edmonton, he’s lived in South Africa, England, Ontario, and many other places.

He’s been back in Alberta since 1995, and even though he’s been in all those other places, it’s the beauty of his native prairies that stirs him the most. “One of the places I love being in is Grasslands National Park [Saskatchewan],” he says. “I love to just stand in the middle of the prairie there with no one or nothing else around, looking at nothing but rolling grasslands as far as the eye can see. I find something very comforting about that.”

Sheldon says many of the people who purchase his paintings that feature those types of landscapes also feel that comfort. “They don’t buy a particular painting because it matches the décor in the room in which it will hang,” he says. “They buy it because there is something in the picture that moves them.”

Like many successful artists, Sheldon started drawing at an early age, as a child in South Africa. “I

liked to doodle a lot, and some of the first things I remember drawing was



Ian Sheldon

big bushes full of butterflies. I loved butterflies.” Eventually a gallery showed the self-taught artist’s work; his first show took place in 1993, when he lived in England. Much of his work then involved European architecture.

Two years later he was back in Canada, and a few years after that,

while working on his MSc at the University of Alberta, he made some connections with Lone Pine Books and ended up doing his first set of natural illustrations for a book about bugs, still his favourite subject. Since then, he’s illustrated numerous books about bugs, fish, mammals, and several tomes about animal tracks.

Butterflies are still one of his huge loves, though. The biggest book project of his career is in production and is scheduled to come out this summer: *Butterflies of British Columbia*. “I’ve illustrated every single species of butterfly for the province and have been working on the 350 illustrations and the book in general since 1999,” he says.

That publication is another book collaboration with nature author John Acorn.

When illustrating books, Sheldon uses some watercolours as well as coloured pencils to get the type of images he wants. And he can work at that type of picture at any time of the day. “I look at illustrating books as a science more than an art,” he says. “I can do it early in the morning or later at night, and I’m not bothered by the type of light available or whatever mood I might be in.”

For his bigger pieces, he works in oils. And some of his pieces are gigantic – in early 2006, he was working on a painting that measured eight feet by four feet.

“That’s as big as I can get right now, because of the size of my studio – also, my truck is eight by four, so that limits how big the painting can be,” he says with a bit of a chuckle. “But once I revamp my studio, I know someone who transports artwork, in a bigger truck than mine, so I will want to try for something bigger.”

And there’s a good chance at least some of bigger pieces will include some landscapes.

Sheldon, a member of AWA, tries to give a little back to protect those rapidly vanishing wild prairie landscapes. A donation to wilderness conservation measures are made



© Ian Sheldon



© Ian Sheldon

from the sale of artwork in the Landscapes Gallery on his website, www.iansheldon.com.

“Having lived in other places in the world, I realize how lucky we are here to still have all the wilderness area we have,” he says. “In Europe, there is so little wild space. Sometimes we don’t realize that, and we’re careless with what we have.

“One of the most depressing trips I ever took was up the west coast of Vancouver Island. As we travelled up to Tofino, we saw some beautiful wilderness. But the farther up the coast we went – in other words, the farther away we got from where people could actually see it – the worse the amount

of logging there was, to the point where some of the land was almost completely denuded.”

Despite that experience, he is not completely disheartened. Through his artwork, he hopes he can help people connect with nature.

“One of the most inspiring stories I heard was from a parent who told me their children were read one chapter a night from one of the books I’ve illustrated as a bedtime story. John Acorn [the writer of many of the books featuring Sheldon’s art] has such a beautiful way of expressing things in words ... it’s very satisfying to for my art to be included as part of something like that.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Andy Russell Wildland Park Could Be Premier’s Legacy to Southern Alberta

Dear Editor:

Last fall, following the passing of Andy Russell, I wrote a letter to Premier Klein requesting that he honour Andy’s name by creating the Andy Russell Wildland Park in the Castle area of southwestern Alberta. It would be the first Wildland Park in southern Alberta and would be a fitting tribute to a great Albertan.

Premier Klein’s response to my letter was both disappointing and discouraging. He cited the Alberta’s Special Places program as an accomplishment, but it provided only meagre benefits to southwestern Alberta. He further stated that “our government is undertaking efforts to ensure that the Castle area is managed and protected in a sustainable manner while providing opportunities for a range of appropriate uses.”

I would suggest that the area is not protected and is not being managed sustainably, and that the uses are far from appropriate for sensitive ecosystems like those existing in the Castle. Managing the Castle area under the multiple use system consists of exploiting every ecological niche available, resulting in widespread

disturbances and damage to sensitive systems. I believe that local land managers are doing the best they can under the circumstances, but they



R. Ernst

Weedy species along an access route in the Castle Wilderness.

require a different mandate that will allow a holistic approach to managing the Castle and they require more resources for enforcement and for restoring ecological processes.

From 2003 to 2005 I surveyed the Castle area for rare plants and in 2005, I initiated a weed survey in the Carbondale area of the Castle. Results of the rare plant survey were more or less as expected, but the weed problem was far worse than I

expected. In a relatively small area of the Castle, I found that weedy species were widespread and abundant along all linear disturbances including roads, trails, cutlines, and random camping sites. I identified eleven major weed species during the survey, six of which are listed as noxious under the Weed Control Act of Alberta; three others are listed as nuisance, and the remaining two are not ranked. Does this sound like an area that is being managed sustainably?

There is still time for Premier Klein to exercise his privilege and responsibility as premier of Alberta by establishing southern Alberta’s first Wildland Park. Declaring the Castle area the Andy Russell Wildland Park would be Premier Klein’s legacy to the people of southern Alberta and it would be an appropriate way of acknowledging the contributions made by Andy Russell to the wild places of Alberta.

— **Reg Ernst,
Lethbridge**

ASSOCIATION NEWS

In Memoriam Frank Methot

Long time AWA member and supporter Frank Methot passed away on February 16, 2006. A wildlife advocate and wilderness supporter, Frank didn't hesitate to speak out on issues of conservation and habitat protection. Frank's family and friends have chosen to remember Frank's passion for wildlife with memorial donations to the AWA. We offer our sincere sympathy and appreciation.



© Ian Sheldon

SUMMER HIKES PROGRAM

Pre-registration is required for all of these hikes, and will take place on a 'first come first served' basis.

Contact AWA by phone (403) 283-2025 or email at awa@shaw.ca to book your space or for more details.

You can also book online at <http://shop.albertawilderness.ca>

Saturday May 27, 2006
Twin River Heritage Rangeland
with Cheryl Bradley
Grassland site near Milk River, southern Alberta

Saturday June 3, 2006
Lakeland
with Ian Urquhart and Tom Maccagno
Boreal Forest, 3 hours northeast of Edmonton

Saturday June 10, 2006
The Whaleback
with Bob Blaxley
Montane habitat, 2 hours south of Calgary

Saturday June 17, 2006
Rumsey Natural Area
with Dorothy Dickson
Parkland protected area east of Red Deer

Saturday July 8, 2006
Cypress Hills
with Hyland Armstrong
Grassland area 1 hour southeast of Medicine Hat

Saturday July 15, 2006
Ya Ha Tinda
with Will Davies
'Prairie in the mountains' in the Bighorn Wildland

Saturday July 22, 2006
Bighorn Wildland
with David Samson
Mountains 3 hours southwest of Edmonton

Saturday, August 19, 2006
Beehive Natural Area
with James Tweedie
Mountain headwaters of the Oldman River

Saturday September 9, 2006
Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve
with Nigel Douglas
Table top mountain in southern Kananaskis

Saturday September 16, 2006
The Whaleback
with Bob Blaxley
Montane habitat, 2 hours south of Calgary

Sunday September 24, 2006
Chester Lakes
with Vivian Pharis
Mountains of Kananaskis Country

Saturday June 25, 2006
Pekisko Rangeland Bus Tour

Join us for a guided bus tour, looking at the spectacular Livingstone/Porcupine region and the famous Pekisko Rangelands in southwest Alberta.
\$30 - AWA members
\$40 - Non-members
Pre-registration is required for the Bus Tour.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS BACKPACKING TRIPS

Explore some of the most magnificent wilderness areas Alberta has to offer



June 26-28, 2006

Bighorn Wildland

With Don Wales as your guide, explore the headwaters of the Littlehorn and Bighorn Creeks in the heart of the Bighorn Wildland.



July 17-19, 2006

South Castle Wildland

Join guide Reg Ernst on an exploration of the Scarpe Creek headwaters of South Castle.



August 14-17, 2006

White Goat Wilderness

Traverse Nigel and Cataract Pass with guide Don Wales and explore the headwaters of Cataract Creek on the edge of the White Goat Wilderness area.

Experience Alberta's wilderness through minimal impact backpacking and overnight camping. Our guides will share with you their intimate knowledge of the natural history of these beautiful areas.

Trips are self-catered, but your guide will make sure you are prepared with the proper equipment, food, fitness level, and trip route and will also be there for first aid and emergencies.

Book online or contact AWA at (403) 283-2025 or awa@shaw.ca to book your space or for more details.

Cost: \$100 – AWA members
\$125 – Non-members

Pre-registration required for all backpacking trips. To preserve a wilderness experience, each of these trips will be limited to eight participants.

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:



Alberta Wilderness Association

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

