



WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Turkey Vultures in Cypress Hills (C. Porter)

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COVER PHOTO: TURKEY VULTURES IN CYPRESS HILLS BY CAROL PORTER

On Monday, May 22, my husband, Reg, and I were travelling south of Medicine Hat on Eagle Butte Road to monitor our bluebird trail. Near the edge of the Cypress Hills, we spotted a few turkey vultures on the barbed wire fence by the road. On slowing down we realized there were more on the ground. These others flew to the fence, one per post. When I got out of the car to take better pictures,

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Our series on the Quiet Urbanization of the Backcountry will return in our Aug. 2006 issue

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EXPLORING WILD ALBERTA 2006

S. Bray



Harlequin ducks on the Lynx River. This small sea duck breeds and nests in low densities in fast-flowing mountain streams and is listed as a species of special concern in Alberta.

V. Pharis



Arrowleafbalsamroot (*Balsamorhize sagittata*) in the Castle area. First Nations people ate raw the tender inner portion of the young immature flower stems. They used the large coarse leaves as a poultice for burns. The roots were boiled and the solution applied to wounds, cuts, and bruises, and a tea from the roots was used for tuberculosis and whooping cough.

S. Bray



Mourning dove nest, Twin River Heritage Rangeland



Bald eagle near Calgary

N. Douglas



A moose in the Castle area.

N. Douglas

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DISCOVERING NEW DIRECTIONS AND COMMON GROUND IN THE CASTLE: PART 1

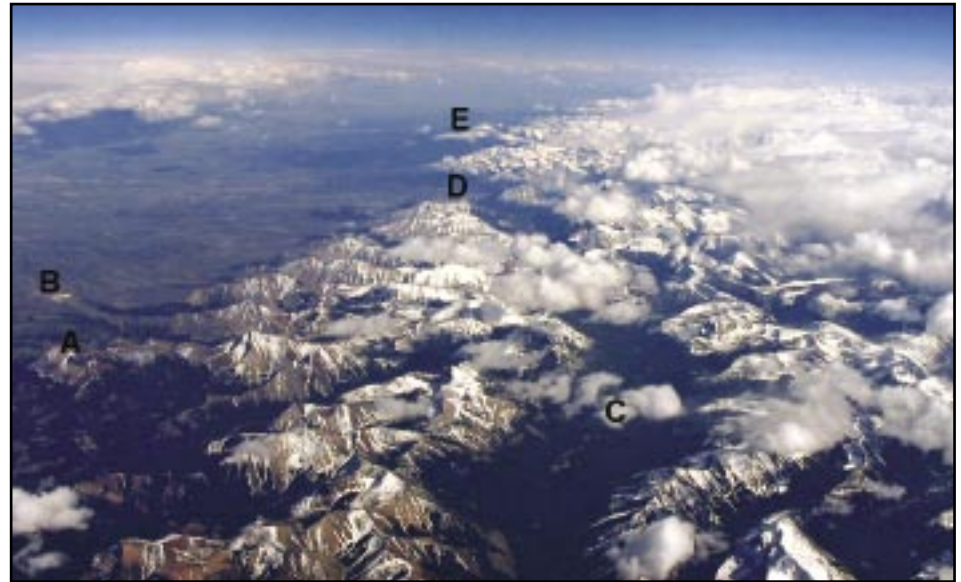
By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

This is the first in a two-part series looking at the Castle Wildland, its past history and future possibilities.

Prairie Bluff ... Waterton 12. These two sites in Alberta's Castle region, just a few kilometres apart, are contrasting symbols of the past and the future of this spectacular landscape in southwestern Alberta. The first is the scene of a bitter battle in the 1980s between Shell Canada and environmentalists. The second is a recently reclaimed old sour gas well site up Butcher Creek: nature is taking over the wide flat gravel pad where all visible traces of the well have been removed. As Shell's Rod Sinclair says, it's going "back to the bears."

The Castle has been the site of passionate advocacy for four decades as preservation interests have clashed with other users who have made incursions into its wildest places. The push to designate the area as the Andy Russell Wildland is just the latest attempt to secure protection for this magnificent and important part of Alberta's wilderness.

Some feel the Castle has lost much of its wildness but that



Looking south along the Eastern Slopes, this aerial shot of the Castle shows the abrupt change from the prairie (left, east) to the mountains (right, west). A: Prairie Bluff; B: Shell Waterton Gas Plant; C: South Castle River Valley, location of Castle Mountain Resort; D: Entrance to Waterton Lakes National Park; E: Chief Mountain.

restoration is possible. But securing real protection for even a "restoration wilderness" will require the support and acceptance of the various users as well as the public. Some changing attitudes over the years may help that goal.

How did we get to this current crossroads in the Castle? Why did it never receive the recognition and

protection bestowed on other wild lands when its uniqueness and ecological importance are so evident? And more important, where can we go from here?

Beyond the Battle of the Bluff

At 2255 metres (7400 feet), Prairie Bluff is a place defined by the wind. Twenty kilometres north of Waterton National Park, it is the northeastern corner of the Clark Range, rising suddenly from the seemingly endless prairie of southwestern Alberta. Fragile alpine plants cling gamely to the thin soils; small birds whip past as they turn to catch the buffeting blasts. As the eye follows a raven riding the constant wind, it is suddenly interrupted by the chain link fence and low buildings of a gas well. A second well stands some distance away, a bare gravel road following the contours between the two.

This was the battleground where AWA butted heads so spectacularly with Shell Canada in the 1980s. Plans by Shell Canada to drill in prime



AWA's Vivian Pharis atop Prairie Bluff. This is her first visit since the battle to keep Shell's wells off this peak 20 years ago.

D. Sanson

N. Douglas

protection lands in the Jutland area of the South Castle valley had already led to AWA calls for a boycott of the company in 1986. So when Shell announced its plans in 1987 to drill two gas wells in the prime protection zone on the top of Prairie Bluff, hostilities

back here since that day. Rod Sinclair, Community Affairs Associate for Shell Canada, is taking AWA staff on a tour of the site. “It’s public land,” reminisces Pharis, “but they got an injunction out to close it to the public just after that.”



S. Bray

The road to Prairie Bluff is marked by Shell’s Waterton Gas Plant on the left. Prairie Bluff, the pyramidal peak on the far right, is where the standoff between Shell and environmental groups took place two decades ago.



S. Bray

Nigel Douglas, Vivian Pharis, and Rod Sinclair look out over the vast expanse of prairie from the heights of Prairie Bluff.

were ratcheted up to a new level. AWA supporters organized a blockade of Shell’s construction work; Shell applied for a court injunction to have them removed and later served AWA with a statement of claim for over \$100,000 – well in excess of the organization’s assets.

Standing on the windswept bluff today, it is hard to imagine the passions that were on display just 20 years ago. “This is where they moved me off in the bucket of a bulldozer,” AWA director Vivian Pharis muses quietly. It’s the first time she has been

More than anywhere, Prairie Bluff serves as a metaphor for the whole Castle region, which AWA and others have been striving to defend over the past three decades. Spectacular mountain scenery on the one hand; incongruous industrial infrastructure on the other. Nowhere in Alberta has the apparent conflict between public lands for recreation and for industrial access been so stark as on this windswept summit.

Today, relations between AWA and Shell are considerably better. “Shell staff have come up to me and

apologized since,” says Pharis. “They said that we were right. If they had waited a couple of years, they would have been able to use directional drilling from the bottom. They never would have had to do this to the bluff.”

From Prairie Bluff, Sinclair’s tour continues on to Shell Canada’s old Waterton 12 well. Today, the gated access road leads to a broad flat expanse of gravel beside Butcher Creek, where wildflowers and some weed species have begun the inexorable process of revegetation. Work by Shell to decommission the well began in 2003 and turned out to be a larger undertaking than expected. Although it was superficially revegetating quite nicely following its abandonment, further studies found extensive ground contamination, and eventually the site had to be excavated back to bedrock, with more than 10,000 m³ of contaminated soil being removed.

It is perhaps a mixed blessing that Shell agreed to decommission this well, despite having no legal obligation to do so. The fact that the Alberta Energy Utilities Board (EUB) has no requirement for companies to reclaim such sites drilled before 1972 is a major concern, particularly considering that Shell has another 20 or so similar wells in the Castle’s Front Range Canyons. But the fact that Shell Canada is now prepared to go well beyond what the law requires in its reclamation is a sign that things may have changed for the better since those days 20 years ago of barricades, bulldozers, and injunctions.

Despite improved relations between AWA and Shell, the Castle is still not protected. Legislated protection has been the target of AWA’s work in the region for over 40 years.

The Pendulum Swings

Protection sometimes seems to be a dirty word in Alberta. Some government officials have referred disparagingly to “sterilization” of the landscape, with little reference to the numerous studies that have highlighted the enormous contribution that protected land makes to the economy. But it was not always so.

The Castle was well protected in the past. In 1914 Waterton National Park was expanded from the U.S. border north to North Kootenay Pass



One of two well sites on Prairie Bluff, with Victoria Peak directly behind it and the massive majestic Castle Peak in the far distance, just to the right of Victoria.

and the Carbondale River to include all of the lands that AWA and other environmental groups are now working to protect again. But this situation wasn't to last long: by 1921, this land was removed from Waterton Park and transferred to provincial jurisdiction; it then became a Provincial Game Reserve.

Pressure on the Castle region was one of the driving forces that prompted a diverse band of ranchers, hunters, and backcountry enthusiasts to create AWA in 1965. William "Bill" Michalsky was one of the founding members. His daughter Sue now works for the Nature Conservancy in Saskatchewan.

"When my father was born, [the Castle] was part of Waterton National Park," she recalls. "During most of his youth it was still a wildlife preserve. One of his businesses was guiding and outfitting, so the game preserve was quite important to the sustainability of that business. He was probably about 35 years old when it lost that status. It had full protected status and it went completely backwards."

"I see protected wilderness as a monument to democracy and independence, a place to practice wholesome recreation, a luxury even poor people can afford along with the pride of ownership. I see wilderness as a commodity that requires no input, upkeep or cost and if properly managed does not depreciate in any way."

– Bill Michalsky

Three years after the Castle's Provincial Game Reserve status was removed in 1954, the nearby Waterton Gas Field was discovered and things would never be the same for the Castle again.

and intensive recreation interests" (*The Castle Crowsnest Survey of Park Potential*, 1974).

"The most valuable resource of the area is the visual one – the prairie, foothill and mountain scenery," the report noted. "This is augmented by the opportunity for fishing in the small, inaccessible alpine lakes and the more accessible reaches of the streams, and by the opportunities for examining features of the unique natural history of the area. Zoning of some lands for wilderness recreation would also provide the opportunity for a traditional hunting experience by the removal of all forms of mechanized access."

Protection of the Castle was envisaged as the next step in a continuing process that began with the creation of Kananaskis Country, but in what was becoming a recurring pattern, enthusiasm and resources ran out before any protection was ever achieved.



Snow makes an intriguing question mark by the road to the second well on Prairie Bluff.

Protection continued to stay tantalizingly close for the region. The Alberta government clearly recognized the values of the area. In 1974, following AWA's recommendations for a South Castle Wildland Recreation Area during the Eastern Slopes hearings, an Alberta government study recommended that a park be established in the headwaters of the Castle River "because of its scenery, natural history and potential for supporting extensive

Like the Alberta government, the federal government also recognized the potential of the Castle. In 1977 Parks Canada urged the Government of Alberta to "consider the establishment of a large provincial park in the Castle River area, to relieve some of the pressures on Waterton National Park." Parks Canada would "welcome the provision of a large, complementary recreation area to share the increasing load. The Castle area would appear

to be particularly well suited to this purpose.”

Protection of the Castle was becoming a provincial, federal, even an international concern. In 1979, together with Waterton Lakes National Park, Glacier National Park, and adjacent lands in Montana, the Castle River

as Prime Protection Zone. When Shell applied in 1979 to have the Jutland area re-zoned to allow for drilling, they were denied.

But when the Eastern Slopes Policy was revised in 1984 (with none of the extensive public hearings that preceded the original 1977 plan),

in 1986, Shell eventually received permission to drill in the Jutland area but declined to do so for geological reasons. The following year, though, they applied for and received permission to drill on Prairie Bluff, and the relationship between industry and environmental groups reached its nadir.

Shell’s role today certainly seems to be considerably changed from the organization that took on the environmentalists and was accused of undermining the Eastern Slopes Policy, as well as any attempts at protecting the Castle.

Forests, Fire, and Beetles

Today the Castle area comes under the auspices of the C5 Forest Management Area. A draft management plan for this area (extending from the Waterton Park boundary north to southern Kananaskis) was published in October 2005 and is in its final stages of review according to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development’s Rick Blackwood.

Historically, management of forestry in Alberta used to emphasize the many different values that healthy forests contribute, including clean water, clean air, recreation opportunities, and wildlife habitat. As far back as 1927, the federal government wrote, “It has been said that one of the primary aims of all National Forests is the production, in perpetuity, of a supply of timber. In mountainous regions the use of the forest may, by necessity, be subservient



Weeds and native plants proliferate on the flat gravel pad marking the reclaimed site of Shell’s Waterton 12 sour gas well.

drainage was declared a UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve.

But still protection remained elusive. The Castle has always represented different things to different people. As calls for protection of the Castle continued to increase, so did some of the more intensive uses of the area, some of the activities that would come to work against any possibility of permanent protection.

Prime Protection Petroleum

Shell Canada has owned mineral rights in the Castle area since the early 1970s. Their interest pre-dates the 1977 Eastern Slopes Policy, which designated much of the Castle as Prime Protection (Zone 1), Critical Wildlife (Zone 2), and General Recreation (Zone 4). Among other things, Zone 1 designation precluded logging, petroleum and natural gas development, and OHV activity. Petroleum and natural gas development was “restricted” in Zone 2 and not allowed in Zone 4, General Recreation.

No sooner were these designations announced than the government started to come under pressure to relax the rules. In the same year, Shell Canada was denied permission to drill in the Jutland area of South Castle, designated

changes included allowing “step out” drilling and other “geophysical activity” in Prime Protection (Zone 1) and redefinition of General Recreation (Zone 4) to allow oil and gas activity. Sure enough, the revised Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) the following year reduced the Prime Protection Zone boundaries in the Castle to remove the Jutland site and facilitate Shell’s application to drill in the area.

Following an Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) hearing



Charred trees mark the infamous Lost Creek fire of 2003, which spread to Lynx Creek in the Castle, pictured here.

N. Douglas

S. Bray

to another use – that of watershed protection.”

For many years after control of natural resources was passed from the federal government to the province in 1930, this was also the attitude of provincial forest managers. In 1964 the Timber Management Branch of the Alberta Forest Service outlined concerns over harvesting timber from the high value watershed of the Castle District: “The steepness of the terrain and the gradient of the streams make timber harvesting very hazardous to watershed values.”

The 1973 Foothills Resource Allocation Study for the Castle Drainage referred to approximately 117 square miles of protection forest, “land over 6,500 feet in elevation and reserved from cutting (in most cases) for the purpose of watershed protection.” The limitations imposed by restricted tree growth in this dry, arid region are also noted: “Problems have been experienced in the Castle District in satisfying holders of timber quotas. In some areas the headwaters

N. Douglas



A few of the numerous “modest” homes that are being built at Castle Mountain Resort.

management of the Castle, Blackwood concedes, “I do think [emphasis on water in the Castle] could be strengthened. It’s one thing that we will be looking at in the future.”

Critics of the draft C5 Forest Management Plan are concerned that although many laudable goals and objectives are mentioned in the plan, the statement that “the FMP will focus on managing the C5 forest land base to supply a continuous flow of timber” is likely to be the driving force behind the plan. The looming prospects of

late 1800s major fire events, or from the 1930s. We got quite successful at large-scale fire suppression starting in the 1940s, and we maintained those two age classes. As a result ... all of those things, plus warmer winters, have set the table for mountain pine beetle. We will now begin trying to bring the age class distribution back into a more natural state, as opposed to having thousands and thousands of hectares of 80- to 100-year-old pine.”

Uphill and Downhill

The early 1990s was another watershed time for the Castle: once again it came close to full legislated protection, but once again fell at the last hurdle. This time the impetus for protection came in the unlikely form of the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB).

The NRCB was established in 1991 as a quasi-judicial agency of the Government of Alberta to review proposed non-energy natural resource developments. In 1993 the Board held a hearing on an application by Vacation Alberta to develop the four-season Westcastle Ski Hill, including 98 ha of ski runs, two 18-hole golf courses, two hotels, condominiums, townhouses, fourplexes, an RV park, and commercial space.

Vigorous opposition to the development came from many environmental groups, including AWA. Opponents pointed to a 1975 report by Alberta Business Development and Tourism, which made it clear that “it is highly improbable that any amount of additional capital investment will allow the ski area to operate at a profit... It is very doubtful that any experienced ski management group could operate the West Castle resort at a profit, all factors



K. Pharis

Piecemeal development by Castle Mountain Resort Inc. continues within the core of the Castle Wilderness, which contains one of the highest animal and plant species diversities in Alberta. No environmental assessment has been required.

of streams have been allowed to be logged, including some protection forest, in order to meet the quotas.”

Even as late as 1984, the Revised Eastern Slopes Policy emphasized that “the highest priority in the overall management of the Eastern Slopes is placed on watershed management.” Although water has been a factor in

increasing “surge cuts” to deal with potential pine beetle outbreaks have many people worried.

Blackwood agrees that past fire suppression in the Castle and elsewhere has played a role in creating the susceptibility to beetle attack that we have today. “Most of the stands that we have are remnants from the

considered.”

Though once again the environmental groups lost the case, the NRCB made some surprising recommendations, most significantly that the ski resort could be expanded only if the rest of the area received Wildland designation. “The Board concludes that the state of the Crown of the Continent ecosystems is at risk of further deterioration if the level of use continues to increase. It may be at risk if the present level of use continues.”

The NRCB even went as far as to state that Wildland designation was recommended whether or not the resort project proceeded. “The Board would recommend that in any event the area the Board has described as the proposed [West Castle Wildland Recreation Area] should be protected and land uses should be established for it as described by the Board whether or not the project proceeds.”

The NRCB had achieved a remarkable thing: a settlement that both sides were happy with. There was considerable optimism the following year when the Alberta government set up the Castle River Consultation Group to develop new land use strategy for the Castle River in order to “establish the Wildland Recreation Area.” Unfortunately, this optimism was short-lived.

Although both sides were satisfied with the Board’s decision, a huge lobbying effort began to undermine the recommendations and a considerable amount of misinformation was spread. The oil and gas industry opposed protection because of perceived restrictions on their access; motorized recreationists opposed the proposals, making unfounded claims that Wildland Recreation Area designation would ban a range of activities, including hunting, fishing and berry-picking. Four members of the Group resigned (representatives of local farmers, OHV users, Cowley Forest Products, and Backcountry Horsemen of Alberta) and Cabinet quickly reversed its approval of the 1993 NRCB decision and disbanded the Group.

Richard Secord, AWA President, on the other side of the fence at the time representing Vacation Alberta at the hearing, bemoans a lost opportunity. “It was a shame the government didn’t

give the Committee a chance to create the Wildland Recreation Area,” says Secord today. “They pulled the plug on it prematurely. It was a wonderful opportunity missed, in my opinion.”

“Opportunity missed” seems a suitable epithet for the Castle today. “Multiple use” of the landscape has, to many, become “multiple abuse.” There is a growing feeling that something has to change in the way the Castle, and other areas, are managed. Is it possible, as Blackwood suggests, to “maintain it from a multiple use perspective, and

still be respectful of a host of values that are there?”

The second part of this series will look at the Castle today and the perspectives of the many different user groups, including industry, hunters, and motorized recreationists. Digging past the rhetoric and previous conflicts, how much common ground is there?

AWA’s work in the Castle area is supported by the Wilburforce Foundation and the La Salle Adams Fund.

Thoughts on Protection of the Castle

1911 - “These are areas (Bow-Crow Forest) of non-agricultural land established for the protection and reproduction of timber, for the protection of watersheds, and for the maintenance of conditions favourable to a continuous water supply and for the protection of animals, birds and fish. The scenic and recreational values of these forests are now deemed to be resources of major importance.” – **Government of Canada**

1974 - “An area which should be designated as a major provincial park is the South Castle region because of its scenery, natural history and potential for supporting extensive and intensive recreation interests.” – **The Castle Crowsnest Survey of Park Potential**

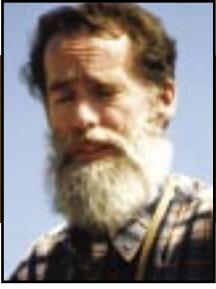
1977 - “Parks Canada ... urges the Government of Alberta to consider the establishment of a large provincial park in the Castle River area, to relieve some of the pressures on Waterton National Park... [Parks Canada] would therefore welcome the provision of a large, complementary recreation area to share the increasing load. The Castle area would appear to be particularly well suited to this purpose.” – **Parks Canada**

1986 - “Although it is our intention to maintain the option to pursue provincial park designation for this area some time in the future, we would not be opposed to the implementation of compatible proposals, such as a Wilderness Natural Area...” – **Peter Trynchy, Minister for Recreation and Parks**

1993 - “The Board is persuaded that the West and South Castle Valleys, together with Waterton Lakes National Park, are a unique and important area for Alberta’s flora and that it would be in the public interest to afford them some form of protection.” – **Natural Resources Conservation Board**

2001 - “The Castle Special Management Area (CSMA) and/or the Zone 1 and Zone 2 lands in the planning area should be legislated to provide the Castle ecosystem with a higher level of protection than currently exists.... New designation alternatives, to be identified in new protected areas legislation, could be applied to the CSMA in the future.” – **Draft Revised Castle River Sub-Regional IRP**

2005 - “Designating the Castle as Andy Russell Wildland Provincial Park would be a fitting tribute to a truly great Albertan who dedicated his life to protecting Alberta’s wild places.” – **Gary Mar, Minister of Community Development**



LANGUAGE MATTERS

By Mike McIvor

I decided to devote this edition of “Language Matters” to one word, the “B” word – “balance.” In particular, I want to consider the way its meaning is abused when it is invoked as a desirable foundation for land-use planning and decision making.

I shudder to think about the number of times I have heard developers, bureaucrats, politicians justify their interest in expanding or intensifying the human imprint on

Of course these promoters aren’t talking about balance at all. They have corrupted a good word to use it as code for more development, more human use. Have you ever heard them use balance as a rationale for more conservation and less development? When I ask those who pitch expansion of development as a necessary condition for achieving balance to describe the imbalance they feel requires redress, there is no answer. How could there be? The street leading

inhabitants, but we most certainly are not creating balance.

For this reason – and because I resent efforts to force compromise by employing language for the way it feels, not what it means – I have done my best to eliminate the “B” word from my own vocabulary. It’s a warm, fuzzy trap to be avoided. (Obviously the next step will be to reclaim and rehabilitate the word, its meaning and utility.)

By its very nature, the corruption of language is insidious; without attention to the dangers, the mantras of exploitation may gain credence. Here is part of what the executive director of the Yellowstone-to-Yukon Conservation Initiative wrote in a message of welcome to people attending their recent fundraising event in Canmore: “The Bow Valley community is experiencing a tremendous amount of stress while attempting to balance growth with the needs of conservation.”

Perhaps in the spirit of the evening – *Laughter Gone Wild!* – he was trying to elicit some chuckles with intentional irony. Or maybe he said it because it sounds like such a good idea. And for many aspects of human society, balance may be a worthy objective. But for landscapes facing unrelenting pressures, more of what undermines conservation efforts can’t be the solution.

Anyone watching or participating in the struggles to resist the overwhelming onslaught of development knows very well that the retention of conservation values in the Bow Valley is a salvage operation, not a balancing act. I don’t wish to slight the person or organization responsible for the statement; I simply offer it as a pertinent example of the perils inherent in the matter of language.

Reprinted with permission from the Bow Valley Naturalist’s Newsletter, Fall 2005.



Photo by Pharis

Continued growth of the Town of Canmore has swallowed up previously wild areas and created further conflicts with wildlife.

the land as a quest for balance. It sounds eminently reasonable, to be sure, in stark contrast to the demands of conservationists, who supposedly are hell-bent on returning human civilization to the caves of our origins. Indeed, this version of balance is frequently cited as something to be embraced by conservationists if they wish to appear reasonable and therefore, be taken seriously. If you think it’s difficult to oppose motherhood, try standing against balance.

to the future of their desires is one way.

I doubt very many people spend much time wondering if the universe is continuing to expand, but surely most of us are able to acknowledge the reality that our home planet is not. The notion that in a finite space – whether park, region, or planet – a state of balance between conservation and development can be reached by increasing the already dominant human presence is patently absurd. We might be re-arranging the relationships among people, the land, and its non-human



DISPUTE OVER CARIBOU MOUNTAINS WARNS OF DEEPER PROBLEMS IN PARK SYSTEM

By David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist

A dispute over the status of the remote northern Caribou Mountains Wildland Park may be a harbinger of things to come in other protected areas of Alberta, particularly if government continues to ignore Albertans' desires and expectations to see them managed for protection in perpetuity.

The local advisory committee (Caribou Mountains Wildland Park Planning Advisory Committee, or PAC), which has been charged with the task of creating a management plan for Alberta's largest provincial Wildland Park, recently requested that the park status be revoked. In a letter dated March 29, 2006 to Community Development Minister Denis Ducharme, committee member Jerry Chomiak also asked that legislation be enacted to allow the committee to "co-manage" the park, effectively putting it on equal footing with the province in decision making for the Wildland Park.

Minister Ducharme responded quickly in denying these unprecedented requests. In a letter to Chomiak, he stated clearly that demoting the park status is not an option and that allowing the committee to be a co-manager of the park will not be considered.

Also of concern are other items on the committee's list of demands, including increased off-highway vehicle (OHV) access, increased tourism development, bison hunting, and wildlife baiting. The Committee even suggested that the park's remoteness alone is enough to regulate activity in the park. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) believes these activities – particularly increased OHV access into woodland caribou habitat – are inappropriate in a Wildland Park and constitute threats to the park's ecosystem integrity.

At 5,910 km², the boreal Caribou Mountains Wildland Park, adjacent to the western border of Wood Buffalo National Park, is the largest provincial

Wildland Park. Established in 2001, it is a vast, remote park that receives relatively few human visitors and little attention. The area protects provincial Environmentally Significant Areas that include sensitive wetlands, unique permafrost features, and rich breeding bird habitat. It is a core refugium for woodland caribou and wood bison, both of which are endangered species. This intriguing mélange of distinctly northern characteristics made the park a prime choice for Wildland Park status.

AWA brought the issue of PAC's demands to the public's attention in April, pointing out that the Committee had lost sight of

to all Albertans. Local committees are entrusted with the responsibility to act on behalf of all Albertans, not just their local or personal interest."

AWA believes the Committee should have more diverse representation or be disbanded. Ducharme turned down AWA's request for provincial environmental group representation on the PAC, but said AWA "will have ample opportunity to provide input into the management plan for the Caribou Mountains."

Although Chomiak presented the letter on behalf of the entire Caribou Mountains Wildland Park Management Plan Advisory Committee, at least one



L. Allen

its conservation mandate and had become dysfunctional. The Committee was commissioned by the Alberta government to make management recommendations but turned that privilege into a lobby effort.

"This shows what can happen when you place all the power in the hands of special interests within one local community," says AWA Director Cliff Wallis. "These wildlands belong

member of the PAC, Wood Buffalo National Park, denied that the letter reflected their position and interests in the management of the area. "Wood Buffalo National Park is and remains committed to the current designation and process," says their letter to Community Development.

Chomiak's letter also claimed that the Committee was only advised at the September 2005 meeting that the park

had been declared a Wildland Park: “The current designation as a Park under the Provincial Parks Act does not have the support of the Committee, and was never recommended, discussed or agreed upon by this Committee.”

However, minutes from the first PAC meeting in October 2002 record Committee Chair Ken Zurfluh of Alberta Community Development describing in detail the status of the Wildland Park and its general management goals and objectives, including reference to the legislative framework that established the park. The PAC’s Terms of Reference do not include an objective to reconsider park status. The PAC was established because of the creation of the Wildland Park, and members of the PAC presumably understood the purpose of the committee.

References were again made to the Wildland Park status in subsequent meetings, including one in which Dave Brown of Alberta Lands and Forests Service introduced a copy of the 1994 Draft Resource Management Plan, explaining that the draft plan provided management guidelines that had been used to manage the area prior to its designation as a Wildland Park.

Why is a local advisory committee grossly abdicating its responsibilities to the rest of the Alberta public? Why was the process so obscure that the public did not become aware of this abdication over four years of a process that ACD says should take only one or two years to complete?

**Bigger Problems:
No Direction, No Plans**

This flare-up in Caribou Mountains Wildland Park may be a warning sign of what could happen in other protected areas of Alberta if the government continues to off-load its management responsibilities to local committees, does not commit the appropriate financial resources and technical expertise to complete management plans, and fails to take charge of the process to see that it is on track, with the original goals and principles of parks’ designations intact.

While the newly appointed Ducharme took a firm and rapid stand on the park status issue, the question is why would such demands even come

to the fore? The problem may lie in the process for creating and managing parks. Strong legislation to support these processes is absent; management plans, which give long-term guidance to achieve the original goals of a park, are given low priority; and top-down leadership is frequently left to atrophy.

rights” to public land.

In many cases, the government has declared an area a park with limited or no legislation to support it and indefinite plans to manage it. “This lack of management plans for Alberta’s parks is a hole in the system,” says AWA Past-President Cliff Wallis.



A satellite view (from GoogleEarth) of the Caribou Mountains plateau, with Margaret Lake marking the southwest corner of Caribou Mountains Wildland Park. Timber clearcuts are noticeable on the south rim of the plateau. Although not visible in the image at this scale, the plateau is criss-crossed with old seismic lines, which facilitate ATV access. The mosaic of colours on the plateau represents unique features of the Park, including bogs, fens, marshes, and woodland caribou habitat.

We need substantive legal protection in our parks, as well as a commitment (including financial) to complete the process, with professionally prepared, ecosystem-based draft management plans being presented to the local and regional public for input and fine-tuning. Otherwise a park’s ecological sustainability – and even its very existence – may continue to be subject to ministerial whim or to lobbying by local special interest groups, thereby creating conflict and threats to a park’s ecological integrity for years to come.

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park is a clear example that it is not enough to simply declare an area a park. Legal protection and a long-term management plan must quickly be put in place, with ecosystem, wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and sustainable park use as ultimate goals. The door must be closed for local special interest groups and lobbyists to claim parochial “squatter’s

“Management plans play a huge role in representing the public’s interest. Without them, the sustainability of parks as representative pieces of natural Alberta for future generations is seriously at risk.”

According to Community Development’s Parks and Protected Areas Division, only 53 of 521 Alberta parks have management plans. Of those, “some are not really management plans,” says the department’s Archie Landals, who has been dedicated to parks and protection for many years. “Some are volunteer-written and many are becoming very dated. This type of input is not to be diminished; however, on its own, it often provides insufficient direction for today’s management requirements.”

Community Development recognizes parks management plans as valuable conservation tools that have an important role in public consultation and that provide long-term vision as

well as daily guidance. Maintaining ecological integrity is the primary consideration. But Landals notes that with a budget of only \$30 million for parks, the government must prioritize which parks will get management plans and can only do about two per year.

We have repeatedly seen well-researched and professionally prepared draft management plans get shelved (e.g., Willmore, Caribou Mountains, Little Smoky) before they ever have a chance to fill their roles as guiding documents. A recent example is that of Willmore Wilderness Park, where the government proceeded with a fire management plan without the benefit of a management plan in place. Government may fear that inviting public input will bring a plethora of special interests, each lobbying for its own desires, resulting in an unmanageable cacophony of demands, many of which can be contrary or bear little resemblance to conservation objectives.

“It is time for Alberta to put some of those dollars received from

need to increase, not drop these budgets, which is effectively what is happening with the parks’ budgets not increasing at a rate commensurate with resource revenues. When the government committed to establishing parks under the Special Places process, it committed to creating management plans within five years. They have not followed up on that commitment and our parks’ conservation plans remain vulnerable.”

Top Down, Bottom Up

Well-crafted and professionally prepared draft management plans can function as productive starting points with common ground for both bottom-up (local input) and top-down (provincial government) management tools. The general public’s concerns fall into both categories.

The top-down approach, which should be based on scientific and public values, provides needed direction, professional research, and a standard that can ensure that overarching public and ecological goals are maintained

the broad public interest failed to be adequately represented, but local concerns of trappers and outfitters to be able to continue with their livelihoods was included.

Top-down planning may fail because it ignores local (or broader public) interests and bottom-up planning, if locally confined, often fails to identify clear-cut common positions. UNESCO stresses the importance of using both approaches in management processes. It is a tricky balance, requiring commitment from all levels to achieve the fundamental conservation and sustainability objectives of parks.

In the case of Caribou Mountains, a comprehensive draft management plan for the park was prepared in 1994 by Alberta Environmental Protection and appears to have been largely overlooked by the PAC. The draft plan could have provided a useful basis for the committee in creating a valuable inclusive plan. Instead, the process was left to be driven by the local Committee, which made it vulnerable to lobbying by local special interests and resulted in the PAC losing sight of its responsibilities and mandate, and culminating in the request to revoke the park’s Wildland Park status.

All Albertans must be engaged in the future of our parks whether they have been to them, or live near them, or not. Committees are useful for ensuring that important local input is fed into the process; however, broad public concerns and values must be central in this process.

“Similar committees work successfully in other areas of Alberta,” says Cliff Wallis, “such as Hay-Zama, Wainwright Dunes, and Milk River, where a diversity of interests and skills are brought to the table. A committee without such representation is doomed to failure.”

Albertans care about their parks and want to know what’s happening in them. They want to be assured that the government is ensuring that the ideals of its parks are kept intact; however, if the government’s approach to the management of places like Caribou Mountains Wildland Park, Willmore Wilderness Park, and Kakwa Wildland Park is any indication of its attitude toward our parks, Albertans should be concerned.

C. Truscott



Muskeg in the Boreal Subarctic Subregion of the Caribou Mountains. The very cold soils of this region are underlain by permafrost, making the area particularly sensitive to disturbance.

environmentally damaging activities — our forestry and oil and gas rents — back into managing and creating parks, performing wildlife research, and ensuring adequate enforcement resources,” says Cliff Wallis. “We

throughout the process. The bottom-up approach ensures that important general public and local interests are included in the process. The broad public interest needs to be represented at both levels. In the case of the Caribou Mountains,



MILK RIVER DAM AN OPTION, SAYS INTERNATIONAL REPORT

By Dr. Shirley Bray

The Milk River dam is still an option to help Alberta capture its annual share of the Milk River, according to a report by a special international task force. In its final draft report released in April 2006, the International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Administrative Measures Task Force found that based on 55 years of records, application of the 1921 International Joint Commission (IJC) Order does not provide for equal entitlements to both countries of the annual flows of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers. The U.S. has historically received 4% less than the combined flows to which it is entitled, and Canada has received 4% more.

whether water from the two rivers was being apportioned equitably and what administrative improvements could be made to help each country optimize the use of their apportioned waters. The Task Force also looked briefly at other potential options, including infrastructure improvements and enhancements. The Task Force found that improvements to the St. Mary storage and conveyance facilities in Montana and additional storage on the Milk River in Alberta may allow diversion of full entitlement by both countries; however, environmental impacts and instream flow needs would have to be considered.

The aquatic and riparian environments of both the St. Mary and

Southern Alberta Environmental Group (SAGE) noted in their submission that “healthy rivers reflect healthy societies.” SAGE and AWA urged the IJC, which is responsible for making decisions regarding the use and quality of boundary waters, to make decisions that would lead to the protection and restoration of the health of these rivers. The Task Force recognized the importance of instream flows and touched on some possible new management options at the end of their report, but focused largely on dealing with problems within the current administrative structure.

The IJC established the Task Force in December 2004 in response to a request in 2004 by then-governor of Montana Judy Martz that the IJC review its 1921 Order to determine whether the waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers were being shared equitably. Alberta and Saskatchewan wrote letters supporting the existing Order. The dispute is not new (see WLA Feb. 2005).

Diversion Dilemmas

The 1921 Order outlines how water from the two rivers is allocated. The combined entitlement for the St. Mary River, Milk River, and Eastern Tributaries (from the Cypress Hills), which is based on natural flows, results in approximately 45% going to the U.S. and 55% going to Canada. Montana is currently receiving only 41% but would like 50%, while Canada is getting 59%.

The Task Force showed that over the 1950-2004 period of recording, on average, the U.S. has diverted approximately 62% of its entitlement of the St. Mary River total annual volume, while Canada has received approximately 126% of its entitlement. Over this same period, the U.S. has received approximately 141% of its entitlement of Milk River total annual volume, while Canada has diverted approximately 25% of its entitlement.



S. Root

The St. Mary reservoir (upper, centre) extending upstream beyond the photo, with the earth-fill St. Mary dam (lower, right) and the old, decommissioned (lower, middle) and new (lower, left) spillways. A tunnel outflow is located at the outflow pool water level to the right of the old spillway. A hydroelectric turbine has been installed in this outflow tunnel that conveys the low summer flows. The released river water flows out of the lower, left corner of the photo. The water being released through the spillway is brown due to fine sediment particles that have not settled out in the reservoir; this is similar to other reservoirs in southern Alberta which will trap coarser sediments, but let finer particles through.

The IJC established the Task Force in December 2004 to determine

Milk Rivers are stressed and degraded by current water management. The

Although both rivers arise in Montana and cross the border into Alberta, the St. Mary River does not flow back into the States, but the Milk River does. So the U.S. must try to divert its entitlement from the St. Mary before it crosses the border, while its entitlement from the Milk can be captured further downstream as well. Canada has the opposite problem; it must capture its Milk River entitlement before it flows back into Montana.

Canada and the U.S. have not been able to fully divert or use their entitlements from the Milk and St. Mary Rivers respectively for three main reasons: lack of sufficient infrastructure to capture flows, inability to capture winter flows, and lack of a credit system to allow for surplus deliveries. The Task Force investigated a number of opportunities for improving the current administrative measures used in apportioning the flows, including natural flow calculations, balancing periods, allowing for surpluses and deficits, and letters of intent.

During the winter, Alberta cannot divert its share of the Milk River and Montana cannot divert its share of the St. Mary River, so diversions must occur during the irrigation season from approximately March to October, preferably during periods of higher flows. However, because diversions must occur from the natural flow and because of the current accounting methods, Alberta cannot divert more of its share from the Milk River without more infrastructure or different accounting methods.

To capture its share of the St. Mary River, the U.S. stores water from Swiftcurrent Creek, a tributary of the St. Mary, in the Sherburne Reservoir in the spring. The U.S. also diverts St. Mary water, from both natural flows of the river and the reservoir, into the Milk River via the St. Mary Canal for use in the lower Milk River valley in Montana. Here water from the Milk River can be captured in the Fresno Reservoir. The canal operates from April to October, providing much of the water in the Milk River flowing through Alberta during these months, often 10 to 20 times the natural flow of the river.

With no onstream storage on the St. Mary, the U.S. is limited in its

ability to divert St. Mary water by the St. Mary Diversion Dam and Canal. After almost 90 years, the capacity of the canal has diminished by 22%. The Task Force noted that the St. Mary storage, diversion, and conveyance facilities in the U.S. are reaching the end of their design life and are in need of rehabilitation. It recommended trying to optimize the system to allow the U.S. to divert its full share of St. Mary water – an expensive proposition.

Alberta's contention is that the

In Alberta, water from the St. Mary, Belly, and Waterton Rivers is stored in the onstream St. Mary reservoir. This water can be released through irrigation canals or into the St. Mary River itself for environmental uses. Hydroelectric turbines have been installed to make opportunistic use of these releases.

With no storage on the Milk River, Canada diverts water from the Milk River during April or early May until the end of the irrigation season

S. Bray



The two forks of the Milk River arise in the foothills of Montana and join in Alberta in the Twin River Heritage Rangeland, just west of the town of Milk River. From there the single river flows eastward for about 120 km, then southeast into Montana and eventually into the Mississippi River. Lying largely within a semi-arid region and reliant on spring snowmelt and rainfall, its average annual flow is significantly less and much more variable than that of the St. Mary River. AWA opposes a dam on this river which would flood this part of the valley.

aging infrastructure is failing to capture Montana's share of the St. Mary and the extra is flowing to Alberta. Alberta has spent millions keeping up infrastructure on this side of the border, and the sprinkler irrigation systems are state of the art. Now Montana needs to do their share in a much less favourable economic situation.

The Task Force also pointed out that adding additional diversion and conveyance capacity (such as a dam) could increase the ability of both countries to use their entitlements, although environmental impacts, as well as administrative and operational considerations, would have to be addressed.

in October, and very little water is diverted at other times. However, the Milk River often has very little or no natural flow by late June and Canada is not allowed to use the water in the Milk River that is due to diversion by Montana from the St. Mary. But if Alberta is thinking of creating storage via an onstream dam on the Milk, it should consider the fact that the Fresno Reservoir is now 60% full of silt that has come down the Milk River.

Accounting Balancing Act

However, this is in large part an accounting problem. The key to apportioning water equitably is to have an accurate measure of natural flow,



The St. Mary River originates in Montana and flows north into Alberta, emptying into the Oldman River near Lethbridge. Because its source is in the high elevations of Glacier National Park, it has a fairly regular and dependable flow during the summer months. The St. Mary River has the greatest average annual flow of five international boundary sites and the least variability.

and the Task Force recommended improving this calculation by additional flow monitoring, better accounting of consumptive uses, and determining conveyance losses for the U.S. St. Mary Canal.

Another key is how often flow is measured. Currently the reporting of natural flow is done twice monthly for practical reasons and is known as the balancing period, the time period allowed for balancing any surplus or deficit. A surplus is the amount of entitlement that is not diverted. A deficit is the amount of water in excess of the upstream jurisdiction's entitlement that is diverted for that jurisdiction's use.

Current rules allow for refunding deficits when one country is calculated to have diverted more than its apportioned share, either during the subsequent balancing period or at a mutually agreeable time. The rules don't allow credit for surplus deliveries during those times when a country cannot divert its apportioned flows.

Modeling showed that under longer seasonal or annual balancing periods, Canada and the U.S. could divert greater volumes of their entitlements from the Milk and St. Mary Rivers respectively. But this would only work if there were a mechanism allowing credit for surplus

deliveries, with the caveat that credits should be allowed only for that portion of the surplus delivery that is of beneficial use to the downstream jurisdiction.

Canada could build a surplus, or credit, either during the spring runoff period or by including both spring and winter flows, when it cannot fully use its Milk River entitlement and then divert these credited flows later in the irrigation season. But Canada could not use the credited surpluses if it could only draw from the natural flow of the Milk River during the irrigation season; it would have to be allowed to draw from the water Montana diverts from the St. Mary.

The two countries dealt with some constraints of the balancing period and diversion limitations through a 1991 Letter of Intent which allows the U.S. to accumulate a deficit on the St. Mary and Canada a deficit on the Milk. A Letter of Intent is a mechanism to modify strict interpretations of the 1921 Order for mutual benefit. This voluntary agreement allows Canada to take more than its entitlement of Milk River natural flow during the irrigation season, while the U.S. is allowed to divert more than its entitlement of St. Mary River natural flow prior to the irrigation season. Deficits are to be repaid by each country by the end of

the year. It does not allow credit for surplus deliveries.

While each country is entitled to a share of the two rivers, they must also meet their management requirements out of that share, including maintaining a "live" stream and meeting instream flow needs. These things must be considered if an upstream jurisdiction is to take more than its share during certain periods of time. The Task Force recognized that much more work is required if accounting alterations are to be made; further details can be found in their report.

Other potential options that the Task Force briefly considered included water banking and trading; developing a more collaborative ecosystem-based approach to managing the transboundary watershed as proposed in two IJC reports on international watershed boards; and using the technique of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) to foster environmental management through a collaborative, problem-focused, and adaptive framework. IWRM recognizes that water management should use the river basin as a management unit and be based on a holistic (social, economic, and ecosystem) and participatory approach involving users, planners, and policymakers at all levels.

The Task Force will accept written comments on their report until June 30, 2006. The report is available at www.ijc.org, under Boards, Current Task Forces. Comments should be mailed to Ross Herrington, P. Eng., Senior Water Policy Advisor, Environmental Conservation Branch, Environment Canada, Room 300, 2365 Albert Street, Regina, SK S4P 4K1; phone: 306-780-3883. For more information on IWRM see http://www.cap-net.org/iwrm_tutorial/mainmenu.htm.



NATIVE PRAIRIE COULD LOSE MORE GROUND TO WIND FARM IN CYPRESS HILLS

By Dr. Shirley Bray

If West Windeau's Wild Rose Wind Farm (WRWF) project goes ahead in the Cypress Hills area, Albertans will likely be able to view a fleet of tall white turbines against a sweeping native prairie backdrop from one of the most celebrated lookouts in the province. The company proposes to locate the wind farm in an area north of Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park (CHIPP), including a buffer area around the Park known as the Fringe (see *WLA* April and June 2005).

The area is prized for its internationally significant intact native grasslands, its biodiversity, its uniqueness, and the superb and rare far-reaching view of a natural prairie landscape. The County's Fringe Area Structure Plan (ASP) envisioned keeping the area unindustrialized and touted its long-term protection of the unbroken ranchland and "national heritage" views as "the legacy of visionary citizens." That legacy is now under threat from the incursion of industrial wind farms.

The lure of tax dollars and pressure from landowners and the wind developer prompted the Cypress County Council to allow wind farms in the Fringe, subject to guidelines in the ASP, after a public hearing last year. Now the company has moved its plans forward to a federal environmental assessment (EA).

Wind Farm Undergoes Environmental Assessment

Inland wind projects undergo a screening level of federal EA under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency if they apply for the Wind Power Production Incentive (WPPI) provided by Natural Resources Canada, which is considered the Responsible Authority. The developer produces an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) based on various environmental studies and public consultation. Also

involved in the federal EA are Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD, wildlife and public lands) and Alberta Community Development (impacts on CHIPP). The proponent will also have to get EUB approval and, in this case, County approval.

Grasslands Naturalists and AWA oppose wind farms on native grasslands. They also believe a screening level of EA is not adequate for the size and proposed location of the project. Because EA studies may necessitate many judgment calls requiring objectivity, the groups are pressing for an impartial assessment by consultants not hired by the company.

project. Many environmental studies have yet to be completed and the exact locations of turbines were not given, making it difficult to make precise comments.

The scoping document itself was kept hidden behind the front desk: those who wanted it had to know to ask for it. Besides a few discrepancies between the scoping document and what was presented at the open house, perhaps the most sobering sight was a model turbine that had two of its slowly rotating blades on backwards. Several people told me they hoped the real turbines would be built better than the model!

S. Bray



A rare sweeping view of native prairie from the Reesor Lake lookout in Cypress Hills Provincial Park.

Further open houses are slated for the fall after the EIS is completed. Some think that even before a shovelful of dirt is moved, West Windeau will sell out to TransCanada Pipelines, which is interested in buying the project.

Open houses were held in southeast Alberta in early May and a scoping document for a federal EA was available for public review. The open houses added little information for attendees who have been following the

West Windeau's original project encompassed a rectangular area north of CHIPP to Highway 515 and between Highway 41 on the west side to Graburn Road on the east. Now the project area has been moved 4 km northwards, eliminating most of the East-West Ranch next to the Park, but still including a significant amount of the Fringe. Although the ranch was aiming to have turbines on their property, the Nature Conservancy

made it clear to all involved that the conservation easements, which cover most of the deeded land in the Fringe, do not allow turbines; violation of those agreements could lead to court. A company consultant said there were heated discussions over whether or not to challenge the ranch's easement. It is still not clear if the province would approve of turbines on the public lands where the ranch holds grazing leases, although this would likely violate SRD's new guidelines.

Although West Windeau owner David Boileau had earlier claimed that the winds next to the Park were the best and did not rule out proposing turbines in the Park, he is now saying that the winds on the East-West Ranch are not good enough. However, company president Claude Mindorff admits that conservation easements and public lands are problematic.

The company is currently proposing turbines for deeded lands that they claim are all cultivated. Yet we have also heard that two-thirds of the turbines will be in the Fringe, which is largely uncultivated. The scoping document says that "additional adjacent lands may be acquired to provide wind farm optimization opportunities." It is uncertain what the real scope of this project will be and what it means for our grasslands.

The entire proposed 200 MW project consists of 70 turbines over an area of about 3,000 ha. Turbines, including blades, rise 150 m, almost the height of the Calgary Tower. Turbine foundations require clearing a circular 30 m diameter area to a depth of about 4.6 m and pouring nearly 300 m³ of concrete. The disposal of the 21,000 m³ of excavated material is of concern; much of it will not be topsoil that could be placed on cultivated land.

While the footprint of each turbine is considered small, each turbine requires a good quality access road to withstand the heavy traffic required to bring in construction equipment and the turbine parts, and a link to the power grid: in this case, an underground electrical collector system, requiring trenches, which will connect to a central transformer substation. The transformer will require a new transmission line to connect to the main power grid. The transmission line is

the responsibility of AltaLink and the route has yet to be established.

C. Olson



Because they must be sited in exposed places, wind turbines such as these in southwestern Alberta can dramatically affect significant views.

Siting is Critical

"Appropriate site selection is a key factor in preventing potential significant negative impacts on wildlife," says SRD's siting guidelines. However, a recent comprehensive literature review and interviews with experts by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that significant gaps exist in our knowledge about the true impacts to wildlife from wind power, particularly potential cumulative impacts on populations with continued expansion of wind facilities.

The GAO found the following:

- Impacts on birds and other wildlife vary by region and species.
- Studies conducted at one location can rarely be used to extrapolate potential impacts or mitigation effectiveness at other locations because of differences in site-specific conditions, such as topography, the types and densities of species present, and the type of wind turbines installed.
- There are relatively few comprehensive studies testing the effectiveness of mitigation

strategies, and some strategies that once looked promising are now proving ineffective.

- Data are available regarding the migration routes and habitat needs of only about one-third of the more than 800 bird species that live in or pass through the United States each year. Many bird populations are in decline in general, and additional losses due to wind power may exacerbate this trend.
- Very little is known about the pathways and behaviour of migratory bats.

The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) recommends a precautionary approach to assess impacts of wind energy facilities on bird populations. However, this "precautionary" approach seems to involve using current knowledge to build more wind farms that can then be studied to determine further impacts. We don't need more research to know that turbines and their access roads will fragment and damage native grasslands, seriously impacting wildlife habitat and opening these lands to the inevitable plague of invasive species.

Cumulative impact specialist Brad Stelfox says established roadless areas are critical to saving what natural habitat remains for wildlife. In the buffer around the Cypress Hills, disturbing native grasslands and then attempting to mitigate impacts is not an acceptable alternative.

There is general agreement among siting guidelines that sensitive habitats should be avoided. However, the words "if possible" usually follow, suggesting that we have no choice in placing wind farms in particular areas. But we always have a choice, even if that choice is to not build the project. Wind developers are expected to comply with SRD Fish and Wildlife Division's *Wildlife Guidelines for Alberta Wind Energy Projects* and the CWS's *Wind Turbines and Birds*. Both documents are updated as new information comes out.

According to SRD's guidelines, "native grasslands and other important natural habitats (both private and public land), including Environmentally Sensitive Areas, should be avoided wherever possible." CWS recommends

avoiding wind developments in or near areas designated for wildlife protection, regionally significant contiguous habitat types, and areas of critical habitat for species at risk. Priority for siting should be given to suitable human-altered landscapes such as industrial or agricultural areas. Such guidelines clearly eliminate native grasslands north of CHIPP.

The Kansas Renewable Energy Working Group promotes avoiding damage to unfragmented landscapes and high quality prairie remnants and recommends having an undeveloped buffer adjacent to intact prairies. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks also recommends siting wind facilities on previously altered landscapes and away from extensive areas of intact native prairie, important wildlife migration corridors, and migration staging areas. In Washington State, a wind developer is expected to acquire land and protect it through a conservation easement to mitigate any habitat loss, encouraging projects in more fragmented landscapes.

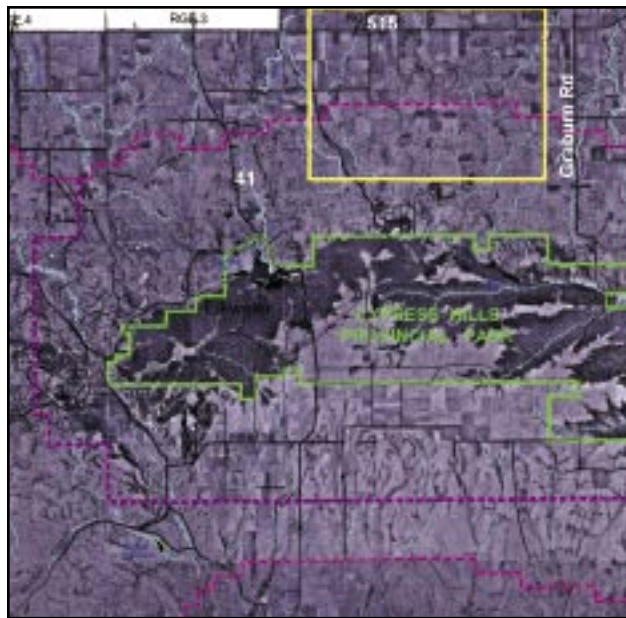
Most research suggests that direct bird mortality from turbines, conservatively estimated at less than 40,000 per year in the U.S. at present, is not nearly as significant as that from other causes, numbering in the millions. There appears to be more risk to bats and to night-migrating birds from tall turbines sited high on ridges.

Of more concern is a growing body of research showing that wind facilities (including human disturbance, turbine noise, and physical movements of turbines) can cause avoidance of habitat or disturbance to breeding and wintering grassland birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends a 8-km setback for prairie grouse leks (greater sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse). SRD recommends not developing in habitats of high importance to these species, but also suggests setbacks of at least 500 m for sharp-tailed grouse leks and various raptor nests.

Certain grassland bird species are known to avoid other human activities and structures such as well sites, buildings, transmission lines,

pivot irrigation systems, and roads. Avoidance distances vary from less than 100 m to over 1,300 m. It is possible that an entire wind farm area may be negatively affected by avoidance, effectively fragmenting native prairie habitats. Grasslands Naturalists note that WRWF proponents are confining discussion of siting criteria to individual turbines, not the project as a whole, thus repeating the old regulatory practice of approving gas field developments on a well-by-well basis.

The Kansas Dept. of Wildlife and Parks also notes that “little is known



The map shows the approximate boundaries of the study area for the Wild Rose Wind Farm (yellow) with the north boundary line extending beyond the map north of Highway 515, Cypress Hills Provincial Park (green line) and surrounding Fringe area (pink/purple line).

about the potential of cumulative effects to other species of wildlife that inhabit native prairie habitats including small mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles. These species are important parts of the prairie and disruptions to their behaviors and habitats could affect overall function and health of this ecosystem.”

Other Plans

Boileau is planning another 300 MW of wind power in other areas of southern Alberta, but he may be held up by the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO), which controls most of the transmission of electrical power.

AESO says it can accommodate up to 900 MW of the more variable and unpredictable wind energy before the performance of the electric system is significantly affected and mitigation measures, not yet in place, are required. Almost 1,500 MW are expected to come onstream in the next two years. The WRWF is currently last on the list of 23 projects, and the transmission line for it has yet to be built.

Boileau has already looked at placing a wind farm in the Twin River Heritage Rangeland on Milk River Ridge in southern Alberta, but Parks quickly kiboshed that idea. The Milk River Ridge, another area of important native grasslands, forms a continental watershed divide, and runs beyond the protected area in Alberta and into Montana. Montana Alberta Tie Ltd. (MATL) was planning to put a 326-km private transmission line across the ridge from Lethbridge to Great Falls but has moved the line off the ridge in response to the public’s and government’s concerns about the area. However, so far half of the proposed line’s capacity has been sold to companies intending to develop wind power, and that means proposals for wind farms along the ridge may be forthcoming.

VisionQuest’s managing director and CEO, Fred Gallagher, says that care must be taken when planning windpower projects so that landowners and the public are happy (*Business Edge*, June2/05). While he believes there are enough safeguards in the system to weed out poor projects, citizens concerned about the WRWF do not have that confidence.

Albertans have made, and continue to make, enormous environmental sacrifices for petroleum development; there is no reason to make further sacrifices of our last remaining native grasslands and their biodiversity for what is being billed as green energy. Perhaps new leadership in Alberta can restore a measure of confidence so that Albertans do not have to worry constantly about the ruination of our parks and our grasslands, and the de-greening of alternative energy sources.



MORE PUBLIC INPUT PLANNED FOR SUFFIELD DRILLING PROJECT

By Dr. Shirley Bray

The public will be able to have their say in an open forum on EnCana's proposed infill drilling project in the Suffield National Wildlife Area (SNWA). In April, Environment Minister Rona Ambrose referred the project to an environmental assessment (EA) by an independent review panel. The panel can hold public hearings that allow individuals and groups to present evidence, concerns, and recommendations. Participant funding will be available to the public to promote active participation. Members of the panel have yet to be chosen, and dates for the hearings and funding availability are expected to be announced this fall.

AWA was among many groups and individuals who opposed the project and who called for public

much larger number of responses than is typically received for an EA.

At least 78 respondents had objections and concerns about the project, and most of those requested a review panel, which is the most rigorous of federal assessments. The Environment Minister is responsible for selecting the panel, based on their knowledge and expertise, to conduct an impartial review and assessment and to make recommendations.

Half of the respondents thought a comprehensive study on its own would not be enough and that an "in-depth" environmental assessment process was needed to ensure a high degree of impartiality and a fair and transparent process, and to allow the public a greater opportunity for public participation. DND noted that a comprehensive study alone could not resolve the considerable uncertainty in

native grassland landscapes left on the Northern Great Plains. Encana's project will add approximately 220 km of additional pipeline and double the number of wells currently in the SNWA (over 1,100); they will also require access to each of those wells.

A few respondents felt EnCana was using best environmental practices, but EnCana representatives themselves have acknowledged, in meetings with AWA, problems with their activities. No one has ever conducted a cumulative effects assessment (CEA) for oil and gas activities in the NWA, so it is difficult to predict the actual impact of EnCana's project.

Both Environment Canada and the Suffield Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC; three representatives from the Canadian Wildlife Service, Alberta Environment, and the EUB) are concerned that activities are continuing, and may increase, in the absence of both a CEA and a comprehensive environmental management system. The latter would evaluate, monitor, and mitigate the environmental effects of oil and gas activities on the NWA to ensure that conservation goals of the NWA are being met. SEAC noted that effective and timely management of environmental effects is not happening.

Biological consultant and AWA director Cliff Wallis says his recent field work in Suffield has left him even more unhappy with the work EnCana has been doing there. Conservationists believe that no further industrial activity should occur in the NWA, and their message to EnCana is to withdraw their proposed project and to develop timelines and plans to exit and restore the area.

Over one-third of respondents felt that Environment Canada and DND did not fully uphold the commitments from when the NWA was declared in June 2003. The ecological importance of this area was recognized in 1971 when CFB Suffield was established and it was



C. Wallis

The Suffield National Wildlife Area is one of only six key native grassland landscapes left on the Northern Great Plains. Encana's project will add approximately 220 km of pipeline and double the number of wells in the SNWA (currently over 1,100).

hearings. One hundred and three groups and individuals provided comments to the Department of National Defence (DND) in their initial request for public input late last year, a

the potential environmental effects of the project.

The 458-km² SNWA is an area of national and international significance and one of only six key



A dead Plains hognose snake, a species that may be at risk, on one of the many petroleum access roads in Suffield. Agriculture, roads, oil and gas activity, and intentional persecution greatly impact the distribution of this species.

classified as environmentally protected. Canada's wildlife policy notes that the most cost-effective method of preserving wildlife is protection of their habitats and that restoring habitat is difficult, expensive, and often impractical.

According to Environment Canada, "NWA designation offers long-term security as a federally-protected wildlife refuge," and not designating the area would leave it open to future risk of development.

shallow gas recovery continues under various Memoranda of Agreement. At the time of NWA designation, however, no major changes in land use were anticipated. Conservationists consider EnCana's shallow gas infill project to be a major land use change and contrary to the intent and purpose of the NWA.

The purpose of environmental assessment is to minimize or avoid adverse environmental effects before they occur and incorporate environmental factors into decision making. The project was subject to a comprehensive study because it involves the construction of oil and gas facilities in a NWA. The Minister's decision, which is irrevocable, was based on a track report and recommendation by the Department of National Defence (DND), which is also the Responsible Authority for the environmental assessment.

The track report addressed the scope of the Project; the factors to be considered in its assessment and the scope of those factors; public concerns in relation to the Project; the potential of the Project to cause adverse environmental effects; and the ability of the comprehensive study to address issues relating to the Project.

The report identified a number of potential adverse environmental impacts of the project, including the following:

- impacts on species at risk and critical habitat (and legal implications with the Species at Risk Act)

- interference with wildlife conservation (and legal implications with Wildlife Area Regulations)
- ruining of the NWA as a large undisturbed native prairie area that serves as a baseline against which land use changes can be measured
- compromise of the overall ecological integrity of the NWA and the population sources for wildlife species in southeastern Alberta
- further degradation of an endangered ecosystem, especially as current reclamation does not restore native biodiversity
- impacts on wetlands

The track report concluded, "This EA and its conclusions have the possibility to affect broader policy and management practices for developments within protected areas. The possibility of setting such a precedent would benefit from a more independent discussion."

EnCana's project does not require a provincial EA but is subject to regulatory approvals of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB). The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is discussing with the EUB the possibility of a joint environmental assessment of the proposed project.



This plaque on a cairn at Ralston is a reminder of the commitments made when the NWA was declared in June 2003. Over one-third of 103 respondents felt that Environment Canada and DND have not fully upheld these commitments.

The NWA has been out of bounds to military training since 1972 and precluded from deep rights access for petroleum development since 1999, but



A sign of the times?

C5 FOREST PLAN LEAVES OUT IMPORTANT VALUES, SAYS COMMITTEE

The following is part of a letter written by CROWPAC, the Public Advisory Committee for the C5 Forest Management Plan in southwestern Alberta, to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) on March 27.

The members of CROWPAC are appreciative of having had the opportunity to provide input into the C5 Forest Management Plan (FMP) 2000–2026. The process has been a lengthy and detailed one that required a great amount of effort for all involved. Sustainable Resource Development staff have put in countless hours to provide information to enhance our decision making and hopefully make our advice relevant. Everyone on CROWPAC has gained a much improved understanding of the complexity of proper forest management and the multiple values of the forest. That is due to the work and support of the SRD staff and the commitment of CROWPAC members.

SRD is to be commended in trying to bring together a diverse group in CROWPAC so as to represent the diversity of values that the citizens of Alberta hold regarding our forested lands. Because of the diversity of views and values, one would reasonably expect the resultant plan to be a compromise and that is the case. The FMP sets a lofty goal (page 9) in managing forestry practices to supply a continuous flow of timber while ensuring the health, well-being, and sustainability of the forest ecosystem.

It states that a wide range of cultural, educational, economic, and social benefits will be achieved in conjunction with the timber harvest and that the natural environment will be protected and the environmental quality will be maintained (page 10). At the same time, it recognizes that detailed planning to address the non-timber values are not a part of the C5 FMP.

It states that some of those values are addressed in other processes or



Clearcuts contrast with regenerating pine (foreground) in the Livingstone area of the southeastern slopes.

legislation, while many others have yet to be addressed. These other values are vitally important to both the health of the forest and the benefits that present and future Albertans will derive from the forest. It is vital that they not be lost in any future planning or execution of those plans.

While the current FMP is an improvement over what had previously been in place, all members of CROWPAC very strongly recommend and wish to have placed in the record a number of points that will hopefully ensure that the values that we all worked so hard to develop are reflected and operationalized in this FMP and any future integrated system of plans and regulations through which the citizens of Alberta obtain the maximum benefits that can accrue from our forests.

- The objective with the highest priority for CROWPAC is water quality. The FMP investigates effects to water flow from timber harvest but does not include potential issues of water quality.
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is the manager of the C5 Forest Management Plan 2006–2026. It is essential that the government of Alberta provide SRD sufficient financial and other resources to effectively monitor and adaptively manage the program. The plan quite rightly

stresses the importance of adaptive management, measurable targets, the application of sound scientific research, and a precautionary approach. Inherent in the process is the need to support further scientific research on all values of the forest and its healthy sustainability. Achieving those ends requires the careful application of adequate resources. Sound planning practice involves the detailed commitment of financial resources and manpower as part of the plan.

- Repeatedly, those knowledgeable about forest management have stressed the uniqueness of the C5 area. Given that Alberta is growing dynamically and changing, that the area is under threat from pests and climatic change, and that increased demands from all sections of our society are going to be placed on the forests of C5, it is essential that the planning be proactive and utilize the best information currently available.

Members of CROWPAC have serious reservations regarding their confidence in the inputs to the TSA Model and AVI / Yield Curves, to name but a few, as well as comparative data with which to develop baselines. In reviewing the TSA, the amounts of timber harvested, its sequencing, and

S. Bray

the sustainability of that harvest are quite apparent. What is not clear is how the computer modelling takes into account all the other values that we developed and identified as objectives. We know that it is thought by SRD that run 90022 will in 20 years best meet the desired future forest criteria, but CROWPAC's, and perhaps SRD's, confidence in that prediction is low, especially concerning the non-timber values of the forest.

- Four scenarios covering the mountain pine beetle are listed under 4.4.1 of the timber supply analysis. Scenarios 2 and 3 are listed as future possibilities. Under scenario 2, harvest volume could exceed 500,000 m³ per year and carry with it serious ecological and environmental liabilities. No calculations have been made as to when scenario 2 would be abandoned in favour of scenario 3. This shortfall needs to be addressed; otherwise we run the risk of passing on a resource exploited for immediate gain instead of a resource where natural capital was properly accounted for.
- Maximum cut block sizes as currently defined are a concern. Our committee believes current cut block maximums coupled with low retained structure have great potential to compromise the ecological and social values inherent in the plan.
- The plan centers on the sustainable harvest of timber while considering other values. This is clearly an economic point of view. However, no one has yet been able to provide a reliable analysis of the economic benefits derived from the other ways in which we use the forest. This is an area that is quantifiable and should be addressed if we are looking at maximizing benefit to Albertans. The forest may be able to generate equivalent revenue in more socially and ecologically friendly ways.
- Important issues such as fragmentation, connectivity, and interior habitats have not been addressed in the FMP or in some form of environmental assessment, nor have the cumulative effects been considered in the planning

process. We suggest they should be an important component of the forest management plan.

- The 144,000 m³ timber harvest carryover coupled with cutting that may be necessary in the immediate future to combat mountain pine beetle could seriously compromise the other values that we hold for the forest.
- In order to garner public support for future plans, it should be made clearly apparent to the public how expertise from areas such as wildlife, fisheries, and water management, to name but a few,

pressures and changes occurring on the C5 landscape, the FMP should encompass 10 years, not 20. The proposed 10-year review should be conducted 5 years into the plan.

CROWPAC is a group chosen by SRD to provide input and represent the public's best interest, as we see it, in developing the 2006–2026 C5 Forest Management Plan. After much discussion and deliberation, the members of CROWPAC believe there are enough uncertainties regarding the FMP's ability to achieve the ecological and social priorities, as represented in

S. Bray



After the Lost Creek fire some areas, like this one along Sartoris Road in the Castle area, underwent clear-cut salvage logging, a controversial practice.

have contributed to the plan, how they are monitoring the results, how those results compare to the identified targets, and how that monitoring is resulting in adaptive management. Review of the current plan and any future plan by a panel of independent experts from relevant disciplines would certainly add credence to the process.

- In fairness to all parties the operational guidelines for the plan have to be clear, attainable, and enforceable. So too, they have to be enforced with sufficient consequences, both positive and negative.
- Topics such as further protected areas and access management planning will likely have to be integrated in future planning.
- A portion of the increases to the AAC should go to the Community Timber Program.
- Considering the increased

the Preferred Future Forest and Timber Supply Analysis sections, to let it be known both to SRD and the public that we cannot entirely support and defend those sections.

We recognize that much careful thought and effort has gone into the entire process. However, we feel compelled, in the public's best interest, to point out our concerns. To do less, we believe, could pose too great a risk to our forests and all the benefits that they provide for current and future Albertans.

CROWPAC strongly encourages the public to review the C5 document to get a complete understanding of the plan and their comments. The plan can be viewed online at www.srd.gov.ab.ca/regions/southwest/c5/abo.html. An edited version of this letter was published in the Pincher Creek Echo, May 5, 2006.



WOODLAND CARIBOU: HOW SAFE IN A NATIONAL PARK?

By Jill Seaton

The story of Alberta's diminishing woodland caribou herds is a disgrace to the wildlife management policies of the provincial government. In particular, the Little Smoky herd, now reduced to less than 100 animals, has lost most of its critical habitat to the logging and petroleum industries. Instead of protecting their remaining habitat, the government has resorted to shooting wolves and corralling pregnant cows.

National Park. In last fall's survey, Parks Canada located 97 animals. The population is split into two separate herds in the Maligne/Brazeau and Tonquin areas. The Tonquin herd may be just holding its own; the Maligne/Brazeau herd appears to be in a fairly steep decline.

For more than 30 years, in spite of warnings from park wardens of the decline in the caribou population, Parks Canada avoided taking meaningful steps to save it. It commissioned three studies (Stelfox 1974; Brown 1994; and

the road by salt – have been killed in the past 11 years

- possibly climate change, bringing less snow and a movement of other ungulates and wolves into caribou habitat

There has also been a decrease in the size and number of summer snow patches, which are crucial to caribou seeking relief from heat and insects. Previous studies recommended that hiking trails be rerouted away from areas of important summer habitat for caribou.

Parks Canada's Recovery Plan

Following the introduction of the Species At Risk Act, Parks was legally obliged to face the problem. A Jasper Caribou Recovery Team was put together. It was made up of eight local stakeholders and four Parks Canada staff. The stakeholders included business interests, recreationists, a municipal official, and one JEA member. The first meeting was held on February 27, 2004. Two years later, the future of the woodland caribou in the park looks as bleak as ever.

Instead of rerouting and firmly closing trails that penetrate winter and summer caribou habitat and closing the 50-km Maligne Road in winter to prevent human and wolf intrusion into prime wintering habitat, the plan included the following "actions":

- Continue studying caribou behaviour and learn more about how caribou, predators, and people affect one another.
- Try out innovative management techniques like "fladry" – barriers made of rags – to discourage wolves from following ski trails into sensitive caribou winter ranges.
- Make winter roads less attractive to caribou by eliminating the use of salt in gravel to reduce both road kills and the time caribou spend in valley bottoms where they are most vulnerable to wolves.



The mountains and forests surrounding Maligne Lake provide excellent habitat for the Maligne woodland caribou herd.

Faced with the enormity of the unfolding crisis on provincial lands, one tends to forget that there is another herd roughly the same size as the Little Smoky herd in trouble in a national park 200 km further south. These animals are the only ones in the entire Rocky Mountain region known to remain on protected lands year-round. With the critical situation on Alberta lands, the caribou of Jasper National Park may be crucial to the survival of the species in the Rockies.

Why Have Caribou Declined in Jasper?

In 1992, there were about 225 woodland caribou in southern Jasper

Thomas 1996) but then ignored all their recommendations regarding human disturbance of the animals.

In 1992 the Jasper Environmental Association (JEA) – following concerns expressed by the Canadian Wildlife Service – asked Parks to set up two Woodland Caribou Conservation Areas in the Maligne and Tonquin areas. Parks ignored the suggestion.

There appear to be two direct causes of mortality in the park and one indirect one:

- predation, mostly by wolves that use human access routes into caribou habitat in winter
- road kills on the Icefields Parkway, where eight caribou – attracted to

- Eliminate the operational use of helicopters by Parks Canada over caribou ranges and identify acceptable flight paths to private aircraft users.
- Offer skiers new trackset ski trails into areas where there are no caribou, and eliminate tracksetting into important caribou wintering areas in the Maligne valley.
- Restrict dogs to trails where there are no caribou to reduce the stress caribou experience when they see wolf-like animals.
- Educate hikers and skiers and improve official trails so that people can choose to avoid off-trail areas that are important to caribou during the critical calf-raising and wintering periods.

This Phase 1 was described by Parks Canada as “an ambitious and multi-faceted action plan” but other biologists found it “timid”; they said that it ignored recommendations from other studies and that user interests were being given a higher priority than caribou recovery.

- On the ground it had little success:
- The request for voluntary avoidance of caribou winter habitat by skiers was ignored by many people.
 - The wolves walked straight through the “fladry” barriers.
 - Salt continued to be used on the Icefields Parkway because Parks belatedly discovered that having to store the gravel under cover to stop it from freezing was too expensive.
 - Some people continued to ignore the restriction on dogs in caribou habitat.



R. Bürglin

Woodland caribou were added to Alberta's endangered wildlife list in 1985. Their numbers have been declining since early this century. Today, they are sparsely distributed over northern and west-central Alberta.

In February of this year, the JEA joined eight other conservation organizations, including AWA, in sending a letter to the newly appointed Minister of Environment asking that a Jasper caribou recovery plan be drawn up by an independent panel of caribou biologists. As yet, we have received no answer.

One has the uncomfortable feeling that some people would be happy to see this population of caribou disappear so they can get on with “business as usual.” But if Parks does not pull out all the stops to save them, they will have to explain to the Canadian people why they allowed a population of national park ungulates to be extirpated without using every available management option to protect them.

As Rachel Plotkin of Sierra Club of Canada says, “If the federal government does not have the political will to implement aggressive recovery measures to restore caribou populations within its own jurisdiction, it sets a grim precedent for federal involvement in caribou recovery across the rest of Canada.”



NEW STUDIES SHOW CULLING DEER WON'T STOP CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

By Vivian Pharis

The Alberta government plans to continue to cull wild deer along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border in an attempt to control the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) by keeping deer populations low. Sustainable Resource Development Minister David Coumts says we must continue to do whatever is required to control the spread of CWD in wild deer. So SRD should take note of new research showing that culling deer to prevent spread of the disease does not work, that prions can remain in the soil and infect healthy animals, and that transmission to humans is within the realm of possibility.

Culling Deer a Failure

Using both hunters and government staff and calling it an “aggressive response,” Alberta has killed 1,688 deer since September 2005 in the CWD-infected wilds near Empress on the Saskatchewan border. Nine new cases of CWD were found, totaling 13 for this first year of wild game infection. Culling, using hunters as well as staff, is to continue in Alberta as the control strategy despite new findings out of Colorado regarding its ineffectiveness.

Colorado is now heavily infected with CWD in its wild deer and has been culling for years to no avail. Last year it chose eight control infected areas and eight infected areas to

measure the effectiveness of culling in reducing CWD prevalence. There was no discernible difference between the two groups of areas, according to Colorado’s Division of Wildlife field coordinator, Fred Quartarone. Why?

Soil-Adhering Prions a Cause?

New research coming out of the University of Wisconsin, reported April 2006 in *PloS Pathogens* (www.plospathogens.org), indicates that prions, the tiny infective agents for CWD, may enter soil from diseased live animals or decomposing remains and may be preserved in soils, particularly clay soils. Their adhesion to clay particles appears to be so tight that they may be maintained in surface

soils, unable to percolate into deeper soils. Here on the surface they are most available to re-infect as deer graze.

The Alberta government doesn't seem too concerned about this sort of research. According to SRD

Warnings to Alberta Unheeded

AWA wrote of its concerns to the Alberta government about the dangers of using hunters in its CWD control efforts. We warned that field dressing could lead to soil contamination. We

various mammals including humans, as CWD becomes more prevalent in our environment, there may be increasing opportunities for it to jump species. Indeed, it is a surprise to scientists that one moose has now been found with CWD in Colorado. These authors also caution hunters to wear rubber gloves when handling carcasses.

The Specter of TB Rises Again

This time it's in Ontario, on the largest game farm in the province. However, all of us will pay for the eradication and cleanup because, like CWD, TB is a disease under federal jurisdiction. Already over \$100 million has been spent to clean up CWD- and TB-infected game farms, mostly in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Now we will all pay again, this time to slaughter and clean up after a large herd of elk, red deer, bison, and llamas.

The infected farm had previously been in trouble for allowing the hunting of penned elk. Enforcement officers laid 31 charges against Todd Grignon of Universal Game Farms near Coldwater in 2001. Although he was acquitted of all but one charge, Ontario outlawed enclosure hunting after this case.



warned that control efforts should be carried out by trained professionals and that entire carcasses should be removed. Hunters could not be relied upon to undertake this important work, much less to properly protect themselves. Research cited above confirms our fears. Alberta does not even issue hunters the precaution that Colorado does – to wear rubber gloves when field dressing and processing animals from known CWD infection areas.

Human Susceptibility to CWD – Is AWA Fear Mongering?

One study reported in 2000 in *EMBO Journal* (Vol. 19, No. 17) demonstrates a molecular barrier that the authors thought should preclude CWD transmission to humans. However, another study from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta Georgia, June 2004 (www.cdc.gov/eid) raises questions about CWD's ability to jump the species barrier and possibly infect humans.

The authors speculate that because BSE was able to jump from cattle to

spokesperson Dave Ealey, "Given the exceedingly low percentage of deer that were found to be infected, the risk of any residual contamination remaining in the field from field-dressed deer is considered to be exceedingly remote."

How Long Do Prions Last in Soil?

Previous research presented June 2004 from Colorado in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases* (www.cdc.gov/eid) points out that BSE prions that infect cattle and humans appear to be transmitted only in contaminated feed. On the other hand, CWD prions seem to be transmitted not by feed but by live contact, contact with infected carcasses, and contaminated soils.

How long prions remain viable in soils remains under investigation, but earlier studies indicate that deer can become infected from previously contaminated pastures that have been left fallow for two to three years. The Colorado study indicates that "carcasses of deer succumbing to CWD also likely harbor considerable infectivity" because as the disease progresses, prions become more prevalent in nerve and lymph tissue.

IN CELEBRATION OF ANDY RUSSELL



Listen to master storyteller Andy Russell in a Parks Radio feature by Brian Bindon. Visit our website www.AlbertaWilderness.ca

SOUTHERN ALBERTA OTTER NUMBERS MAY SINK WITHOUT CONSERVATION LIFELINE

By David McIntyre

During the past 23 years, I've irregularly observed river otter tracks in the snow along the Crowsnest River. The noted sightings have all come from a relatively small stretch of the river – its upstream terminus being defined by the Turtle Mountain sulphur spring, its lower end defined, more loosely, as a point somewhere downstream from the westernmost highway bridge leading to/from the former town of Hillcrest (since 1978, part of the community of Crowsnest Pass).



D. McIntyre

The preceding may not fully define the range of the species on the Crowsnest River, but it does provide a focal point. Regardless of the species' actual range along the Crowsnest River, it would appear that the core component of this range is centred in the vicinity of Turtle Mountain.

My observations of otter tracks on the Crowsnest River since January of 1983 have prompted me to look for them in the Castle and Oldman Rivers, and I've rafted, canoed, kayaked, and skied all of these rivers in an attempt to locate any sign of surviving otters. Historically, it would appear (via published reports and anecdotal feedback) that river otters were present in the Castle, Crowsnest, and Oldman Rivers at least as recently as the late 1970s.

From all available accounts made known to me, it also appears that the species has been extirpated from the Castle and Oldman Rivers during the past two decades, with the exception of a single pair of tracks found on the Oldman River this past winter.

Skiing the rivers in the winter months, in particular, has likely provided me with the most definitive picture of the otters' range, and this picture, as I "developed" it, suggested that there are probably no river otters in the Castle River and perhaps as few as one on the Oldman River (at least west of the Oldman Dam), and that the remaining otters in the Crowsnest River are confined to the area noted previously. The Crowsnest River doesn't tend to freeze, at least to the point of offering secure skiing.

My efforts to have Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) acknowledge and protect the remaining Crowsnest River otters, assuming there is still a viable population, appear to be mired in an SRD-expressed observation that river otters in northern Alberta are not considered threatened. Thus, the provincial perspective is that river otters in southern Alberta – part of the province-wide picture, even if disconnected by an essential network of connecting waterways – need not receive special acknowledgment, attention, or protection.

Logic would suggest that the actual Alberta river otter population south of the TransCanada Highway is likely less than that of several other key mammal species the province is trying to save.

I'm concerned that drawing public attention to the noted Crowsnest River otter population, whatever it is, has the potential to attract subversive elements from society who might try to eradicate the surviving otters. I'm also cognizant of the fact that the status quo (doing nothing) is likely to be even more detrimental to the species in the Crowsnest River, one of the few remaining rivers in southern Alberta to have any river otters.

To gain some feeling for the status of river otters in southern Alberta, one might ask southern Alberta's residents how many river otters they've seen in southern Alberta during their respective

lifetimes. The results, if published, would define the obvious.

If we have a viable population of otters, we should launch extreme measures to save it. I'm appealing to each of you to do whatever you feel appropriate in an effort to gain protection for river otters in the Crowsnest River.



Rev. Meg Roberts

FAITH AND THE COMMON GOOD

The Unitarians have been staunch supporters of AWA's Climb for Wilderness for many years. This year their climbers ranged in age from 4 to 82 and a number of them won prizes. Reverend Meg Roberts encouraged her congregation to get involved and they responded with an outstanding show of support.

"Unitarians believe we humans are part of an interdependent web of all existence," says Roberts. "Alberta wilderness is our home and we have to be responsible for its care."

The Unitarians have initiated a program called "Green Sanctuary." The focus of the program is on becoming more ecologically responsible. One of the sub-programs is an interfaith action group called "Faith and the Common Good." This initiative encourages people to connect with local organizations, promotes being more connected to local environmental organizations like AWA, and encourages other faiths to be involved.

"We don't think far enough ahead," says Roberts. "We want people to think seven generations ahead, as do our aboriginal brothers and sisters. We need to act now to protect these valuable wilderness areas. If we do not, we may not ever be able to recover them."

Guarding the Gateway to Our Parks

Some of us might have been chagrined when Disney was given a contract to handle the marketing and licencing of RCMP products, but now Alberta Community Development, guardian of our parks and protected areas, is also looking for corporate sponsors. And who have they signed up? No other than the U.S.-based multinational giant, Wal-Mart. The company is apparently supporting the government's marketing program for our parks. See http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/planning/gateway/index.aspx. Maybe Wal-Mart can provide Trident Exploration with the fake scenery and Styrofoam rocks they want for Rumsey at a good discount.

How Tourism Ministers Are Promoting Provincial Assets

This year's Mountain Parks Visitors' Guide to Alberta and B.C. has somewhat different messages from their respective tourism ministers. B.C. Minister Olga Ilich says she is delighted to welcome us to B.C. and goes on about their wonderful parks and protected areas. She promotes an equal balance between the usual hiking, boating, camping adventures and more commercial tourism possibilities in their great outdoors, such as resorts, fishing lodges, and ecotourism. Alberta's minister, Clint Dunford, doesn't actually say he welcomes us, but he points out that Alberta's Rockies offer spectacular scenery and diverse experiences such as "outdoor adventures, wildlife viewing, shopping, cultural events, and exciting nightlife." Yup – shopping. No mention of our parks and protected areas. But then, his title is Minister of Economic Development.

The Oil Sands Tourism Wonder

If anyone was wondering what to do with all the toxic tailings ponds in the oil sands in the future, worry no more. Butte, Montana has discovered that people will pay to see large bodies



I. Pharis

This tailings pond in the oil sands above the banks of the Athabasca River could become the next tourism hot spot.

of toxic water, one of the legacies of the town's mining industry, reports the *Salt Lake Tribune* (March 30, 2006). "Some people see contaminated water," says Chamber of Commerce executive Marko Lucich. "I see wealth." The Berkeley Pit is on the U.S. federal Superfund cleanup list, and also on the website of the state's tourism office. The cost to see the pit is a mere \$2 (doubled from last year's \$1).

Alberta ATVers Ignore Rules in Other Places Too

At a government session last year on the Ghost-Waiparous Access Management Plan, a representative from Sustainable Resource Development's "Respect the Land" program told an interesting story about Moab, Utah. The area is notable partly for its fragile "living soil," a crust made up of algae, lichen, and bacteria, and



C. Wallis

the foundation for desert plants.

Trails in the area are clearly marked, so that some are for ATV access, some for motorbikes, some for bicycles, and so on. What is striking here is how well users respect the trails network: without overpowering enforcement, the huge majority of users stick to designated trails.

So the SRD person was surprised on a recent visit to see a group of motorbikers tearing hell-for-leather across the fragile soils, ignoring the trails and oblivious to other indignant users. When he returned to the parking area, the bikers came ripping into the parking lot and started to load their bikes onto the back of a large truck. And the truck? It had Alberta licence plates.

Use Energy, Get Rich

Alberta Energy Minister Greg Melchin may want to make use of a modified version of this quotation by Jeff Byron, co-chairman of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group's Energy Committee (*Casper Star Tribune*, April 19, 2006): "Energy equals prosperity, and America is a shining example. The more it uses, the richer it gets."

Source of Grizzly Anecdotes Discovered

The Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) has been telling the government for some time that they have a lot of anecdotal information that



AWA Files

there are more grizzly bears than ever in Alberta. And now we may know why. *The Vancouver Sun* (May 8, 2006) recently reported that hunters trying to call prey like moose and elk are also attracting bears looking for the same prey. *The Sun* found plenty of hair-raising stories that ended badly for the bears in conservation officer reports that they gained through Freedom of Information from the B.C. Environment Ministry. When AWA asked AFGA for their anecdotal information they said they didn't document it – hmm, just like the government isn't documenting how many wolves they kill to "save" caribou.

Wolves Not Too Happy Either

Dear Editor:

I recently read *Finding Ways to Live with Wolves in Cattle Country* in your April issue. Defenders of Wildlife might be interested to know that I, too, am interested in the wolf management problem and that I took my concerns to a vocal pack near my home. The wolves, I discovered, had some pretty serious accusations of their own and reported that they were literally overrun with people and people-related problems. Not surprisingly, the word “cattle” came up often. Sadly, the wolves’ articulated solution to the problem – there were *unanimous* howls of approval – was deemed to be unprintable.

At the core of the wolf problem in southwestern Alberta is the fact that wolves need food. Since we don’t wish to see wolves eating cattle, it would be nice for us to be able to point to a bountiful supply of something the wolves *could* eat. Sadly, we can’t. This province has no meaningful winter range for herds of native ungulates that isn’t, first and foremost, managed to support domestic cattle. Thus, deer and elk herds, everywhere, on every unit of *every* piece of truly



Much of Alberta’s meaningful winter range supports domestic cattle rather than wild ungulates, leaving wolves with little choice for dinner.

productive landscape, are “cropped” to accommodate the burgeoning demands of cattle, *millions* of them.

If cattle could vote in Alberta, and it might be said that they do, they’d win every election by a landslide. How else could the cattle have gained free rein

of Alberta’s public campsites, walked in to command the region’s public waterways, and wallowed in their waste in the headwaters of the Rocky Mountain’s finest springs? What do the wolves think about this mess? Don’t ask!

If society really wishes to offer honest help to the wolves of southwestern Alberta, the first step would be to create a meaningful enclave in which the wolves have free access to the land’s full potential to support them. This province *can* afford to re-establish a zone of ecological integrity, while opening the doors to a broader range of heritage and rangeland values.

— David McIntyre
Crowsnest Pass

Crowsnest Pass Besieged by OHVs

Dear Editor:

Crows have again made their seasonal debut in Crowsnest Pass, giving apparent credence to our community’s place name amid the tortured landscape historically known as Ravensnest. I was watching a flock of crows recently when their flight carried my view to a quartet of quads and pair of dirt bikes, machines that spoke in a shrill, piercing scream as they shot off madly in all directions (*off-road*, of course).

As I looked at the flying arcs of mud, water, and airborne vegetation, I was struck by the insanity and intensity of these machine-made attacks. Later, while driving through the community, I discovered that I was almost always within sight of a rutted network of parallel tracks, *all* the product of a motorized army of off-road machines and their corps of I’ll-destroy-it-first volunteer riders. (People who were out for a walk had to walk elsewhere. The alternative was filthy, and dangerous.)

Off-road vehicles have created millions of dollars in damage to this besieged community, and they’ve done it almost overnight. Thus, we awaken to discover that we’re already awash in an unmapped legacy of muddy

byways that run parallel to almost each and every one of our existing roads. The wave of destruction goes virtually everywhere that it’s conceivable to punch a machine through the *seemingly* worthless greenery that clings to this *seemingly* worthless community. New roadways carve over, and consume, former walking trails. They incise steep escarpments, often entrenching them in series of vertical, bottom-to-top cuts.

Weeds line this network of insidious abuse, and it expands with each passing day. New roads are everywhere! We live on land that’s been severed with reckless abandon, churned into a maze of mud holes and weedy patches. Amazingly, this dirty, denuded footprint extends out into the surrounding public land, where resource degradation and destruction are the most conspicuous products of Alberta’s resource management dollars.

Perhaps the most astounding aspect of this wanton landscape vandalism is the fact that it’s nurtured and sanctioned. While a bylaw officer stalks unleashed dogs, the land is literally disappearing from beneath our feet. Here in Crowsnest Pass, motorized chaos reigns supreme. It’s the credo of the day, screamed into the faces of its withering adversaries.

Fueling this myopic, rutted vision and feeding its blind excesses is a societal paradox: to some the land is worth nothing, while to others, it’s priceless. We’ve been held to ransom by those who embrace worthlessness.

Some day we’ll change. Some day society will invest hard work and millions of dollars to erase their memory of us and the needless scars of our sorry existence.

— David McIntyre
Crowsnest Pass

Crowsnest Pass is one of Alberta’s largest communities in the Rockies, with a population just over 6,200, about half the size of Canmore. At 380 km² in size, it contains the upper headwaters of the Crowsnest River and shares a common border with many kilometres of public land.

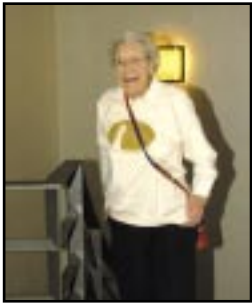
CLIMB & RUN for WILDERNESS



AT THE CALGARY TOWER • APRIL 22, 2006

Climb 802 Stairs or Run 1km & Climb 802 Stairs

AWA would like to thank all participants, volunteers and sponsors for a very successful event. We look forward to seeing all of you next year at the Calgary Tower.



Phyllis Hart, the oldest climber at 91



Run for Wilderness



Liberal MLA David Swann presents top fundraiser Ward Neale with award for oldest male climber



Everyone is fascinated by Wild Alberta Expo



With painted faces and passports, these girls explore Wild Alberta Expo



Roxie Neale poses with firefighters



The fabulous belly dancers are a crowd favourite

Young climbers enjoy the view at the top of the Calgary Tower



The Prairie Mountain Fiddlers

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, July 8, 2006

Cypress Hills

with Hyland Armstrong

Grassland area one 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 three 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 two 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, exploring 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.



OTHER EVENTS

Fish Creek Provincial Park Tours

Time: 7:00–9:00 pm

Contact: (403) 297-7927 for information and to register

Cost: Suggested \$2 donation

July 4

Flood Recovery – Votier's Flats

Location: Votier's Flats parking lot (south end of Elbow Dr. S.W.)

July 11

Invasive Plants – Hull's Wood

Location: Hull's Wood

July 18

Discover Bebo Grove

Location: Bebo Grove parking lot (south end of 24 Street S.W.)

July 25

Buffalo Bones and Settler Homes

– Archaeological Tour of Fish Creek
Location: Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre

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 leader, explore the headwaters of the Littlehorn and Bighorn Creeks in the heart of the Bighorn Wildland.

July 17-19, 2006

South Castle Wildland

Join 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 Don Wales and explore the headwaters of Cataract Creek on the edge of the White Goat Wilderness area.

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

Trips are self-catered, but your leader 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.

Cost: \$100 – AWA members

\$125 – Non-members



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

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

WILD WEST

AWA

AWA WILD WEST GALA
Friday
September 22nd 2006
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McMahon Stadium

Entertainment with
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GREAT FOOD, WINE APPETIZERS,
GAMES OF CHANCE, AUCTION ITEMS.

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Live Auction at 8:15pm
Premium Beef Dinner
(Vegetarian Option Available)

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