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How Do You Solve a Problem Like Elk in the Cypress Hills?

By Shirley Bray

For two and a half years, an obscure committee met in the southeastern corner of the province to solve the problem of elk in the Cypress Hills. That elk were a problem seemed to be confirmed by the continued complaints of a few cattle ranchers about elk depredation and damage, not only on private lands and grazing leases outside the provincial park, but inside the park as well.

Previous public consultations and management plans had failed to stem the rash of complaints. Local Fish and Wildlife staff felt it was time for something new. Could the elk problem be resolved after more than three decades and three previous public consultation processes? Could old mentalities be wrestled into new ways of thinking? Fish and Wildlife called in Dr. Cormack Gates from the University of Calgary to create a process that held the promise of well-controlled elk and a satisfied community. The game was afoot.

The Set-Up

What better way to stop people from complaining about a problem than to involve them in the search for a solution? Especially when solutions would require their compliance. Following in the footsteps of other wildlife managers before him, Alberta's Fish and Wildlife regional biologist Dale Eslinger, who fielded the ranchers' complaints, made an informal agreement with Wayne Pedrini, a Parks and Protected Areas Division (Parks) colleague, to adopt a rather elaborate community-based collaborative process being promoted by Gates. It had worked successfully for the sage grouse management plan – why not for elk.

The Cypress Hills Elk Management Plan (CHEMP) process was initiated in September 2003 to address the issue of elk depredation on agricultural lands outside of the park. It was seen as an opportunity to bring community members together with the government to resolve long-standing disputes and implement solutions, instead of the traditional "agency-centred" approach where government made the decisions and applied the management strategies. Hopes were high that this time around the process would succeed, given the positive relations between government staff and stakeholders.

Gates provided two graduate students: Troy Hegel, who studied elk distribution and landowner perception of damage, and Julie Lefebvre, who evaluated the process. According to Lefebvre, government staff felt that involving local interests was a way to address political pressure applied by ranchers. Ranchers didn't just complain to the local Fish and Wildlife staff – they complained to their MLA.

Stakeholders were to make decisions based on consensus, a process requiring time, a common purpose, a common knowledge base, a full diversity of views, and trust.

Three committees were set up:

- A Steering Committee to oversee the process and provide leadership. Unfortunately, the first steering committee was informal and failed to write down their responsibilities or define the scope and goals of the process, so when two of the members changed early on, it's not surprising that leadership during the process suffered.
- A Technical Committee to provide technical and scientific advice and information. Unfortunately, Hegel, the lone elk expert, left for Alaska soon after the process began and was not replaced.
- A Planning Team consisting of a group of stakeholders who would be seen – when the final plan went out for public review – as balanced, legitimate, and fair, not just by the local community but by





the larger public. Government staff eschewed the formal process used to identify the best stakeholders and their issues, relying instead on their personal knowledge of people in the community.

Community-based, collaborative processes have advantages in planning for landscapes that are geographically, politically, and socially complex. In the Cypress Hills, the inter-provincial park, consisting of the West Block in Saskatchewan and the Elkwater Block in Alberta is surrounded by native grasslands with mixed agriculture (ranching and farming) on public and private land, and with some industrial and residential uses. The community had been involved in making decisions about elk for many years, but problems remained. Collaborative processes delve into what underlies the positions and demands of people to understand what their real needs and values are and to find creative solutions.

The Players

The agencies decided whom to invite, so it was inevitable that some thought the team lacked balance and should have had more interests represented. Others felt landowners whose livelihoods were impacted by elk should have a greater say in decisions. When several participants left the process early on and were not replaced, the perspectives they represented were also lost. Lefebvre interviewed some people who felt they could not be involved because if their views diverged from their neighbours, it might have negative repercussions outside the process.

The Ranchers

Of the original 12 Planning Team members, three were ranchers representing stock associations with grazing interests in the park. An additional rancher whose grazing interests lay outside the park and the Cypress County representative, who was also a rancher, left the process early on. The ranchers held the position that there were too many elk in the Hills and their goal coming into the CHEMP process was to get the number of elk reduced.

Ranchers first settled around the Hills in the late 1880s. By 1909 elk, along with other large mammal species, were extirpated. Most of the Cypress Hills was designated a federal forest reserve between 1906 and 1911, and livestock grazing was prohibited. However, ranchers argued that cattle played a role in reducing fire hazards and replacing the grazing influence of bison, prompting the development of regulations to allow cattle grazing under permit. By 1918 ranchers had formed the three stock associations that remain today, and daily management of the range continued largely under their supervision after the transfer of resources to the province in 1930.

In 1937, at the request of some Saskatchewan ranchers around the Hills who wanted elk for sport hunting, the government imported elk from Wainwright Park in Alberta and distributed them on private ranchlands. By the early 1940s there were reports of hay damage by elk in the West Block. The elk spread quickly to the Alberta side of the Hills, prompting reports of hay damage by Alberta ranchers adjacent to the Elkwater Block by the 1950s. Ranchers sought compensation and an open season on elk.

In 1951 the Elkwater Block in Alberta was designated a provincial park, which meant that under the *Wildlife Act*, the area became a wildlife refuge and hunting was prohibited. However, the Game Hunting Regulations could be amended to permit hunting for population management. The West Block in Saskatchewan became a provincial park in 1976. The inter-provincial park designation came in 1989. But with the creation of the park, it was inevitable that management goals would change. By 1968 the park manager's position was that elk should not have to compete directly with cattle.

Elk are the only ungulate grazer in the park in winter, consuming the nutritious fescue grasses on winter ranges. They would also leave the park in search of forage resources elsewhere, including stored feed,





crops, and private or leased native pastures. Fescue grasslands are well adapted to winter grazing but vulnerable to grazing in spring and summer.

Ranchers wanted the park for summer grazing. But they had to deal with competition not only from wildlife, but from a growing recreation interest as well. People didn't expect cattle as part of their "park experience." Attempts to create more grazing areas outside the park simply drew more people to the area, and grazing inside the park continued.

In 1967 the Director of Fish and Wildlife argued that there was extreme competition between elk and cattle in the park and that the park should be for wildlife. He described the condition of grazed lands in the park as "atrocious." The grasslands were being degraded through overstocking, overgrazing, and damage to streams, which were already serious problems by 1945.

To resolve the problem of elk, he suggested (1) informing ranchers that it was their responsibility to protect their haystacks from elk damage, (2) reducing cattle in the park to alleviate competition and reduce the need for elk to leave the park, and (3) allowing a hunting season inside and outside the park. However, he noted that the ranchers, "who are now becoming quite emotional about this whole matter," claimed it was unreasonable for them to have to support elk on their deeded land whether or not they do damage, and they were also opposed to having hunters on their property.

Although some Parks staff felt grazing was not consistent with public policy, they proposed cutting grazing in the park to half of carrying capacity and restricting cattle to certain areas, away from recreational and environmentally sensitive areas such as headwaters, steep slopes, and significant wildlife habitat.

However, the stock associations, which had grazed 90 percent of the park for years, were opposed to cutting their allotments; they were, after all, only paying 20 cents per acre in the park versus \$3.30 on private land. They blamed the overgrazing on wildlife and called for a reduction in their number.

After much wrangling, Parks and the stock associations agreed in a 1980 Letter of Understanding to reduce stocking rates in the park by one-third to 12,000 Animal Unit Months (AUMs), which, based on research on carrying capacity, would allow for a winter population of 700 elk in the West and Elkwater Blocks.

Although Parks was opposed to public hunting in the park as a means of controlling wildlife populations for philosophical and safety reasons, the natural predators for elk had long since been eliminated. The elk population target was to be maintained largely by management hunts within the park and recreational hunting outside the park.

The 1981 master plan for the park brought in the policies of allowing hunting and grazing to be used as management tools to maintain range health and control problem wildlife populations.

By 1984 a joint Fish and Wildlife and Parks Position Paper stated that elk depredation was not a problem; Fish and Wildlife felt its elk management strategies were working.

Nine years later a community-based (non-government) Cypress Hills Advisory Association was formed to work towards consensus on issues involving management of the greater Cypress Hills ecosystem. It required building good working relationships between members and finding common ground.

The sub-committee for elk management, composed mostly of ranchers, identified the same problems with elk depredation and damage. The group noted that hunting in the park drove elk onto adjacent ranchlands but that hunts in the park were more successful. They recommended extending the hunting season and instituting better compensation programs. After 18 months of meetings and elections in early





1995, the new president, a rancher from the Fox Stock Association, failed to continue the advisory association's process.

Later that year Parks started public consultation for an updated park management plan. Several workshops were held to gather views of local stakeholders. Generally, they agreed that elk should be managed to maintain healthy populations and minimize conflicts with ranchers, but better compensation was needed and Parks observed a need to quantify elk damage on private lands. They discussed reviewing the elk population target of 700 and basing it on scientific data, but some ranchers wanted it reduced to less than 600. They agreed that grazing should continue as a range management tool in the park, but the stock associations wanted to renegotiate their agreement with Parks for more flexibility in setting the number of AUMs.

A local rancher and range management specialist thought the stock associations had failed to follow many of the actions agreed to in the 1980 Letter of Understanding, resulting in damage to the park ecosystem. He felt that complaints about elk management were misguided and attention needed to be spent on improving grazing practices. As confirmation, a 2001 park range resource inventory by Jon Boyle found that there were almost 12,000 AUMs available in the park for cattle, but it did not account for wildlife as previously assumed. Boyle recommended different grazing practices.

Issues for the CHEMP process were no different. The ranchers said elk were damaging stacked bales, feed supplies, and fences (particularly when chased); foraging in crop fields; and competing with cattle inside and outside the park. One rancher said it was impossible to manage private grasslands with a large elk herd in the neighbouring park, and one thought elk were harming grasslands in the park.

While ranchers were provided with fencing to protect stored feed, they argued that they bore the costs of maintenance and repairs, and lost production on private pastures. They were forced to grow alternative crops less attractive to elk. They had to deal with the unpaid responsibility and inconvenience of hunters to whom they provided access, information, and assistance. They said the current compensation program was hard to obtain and insufficient to cover the costs of damage to private property – for example, there was no compensation for grazing on native pasture – and they were not sure how one could quantify losses or determine what was adequate compensation.

The ranchers knew they could not propose getting rid of the elk entirely (although that sentiment was mentioned) because others valued the elk for their ecological and tourism role. But as they had given up on the compensation program and decided that the management strategies in place to control the elk population were not effective, they chose to focus on reducing the target population number below the agreed-upon 700, which they felt had not been maintained.

Elk population numbers had varied over the years from 443 to 1,120, with recent surveys showing around 700. Elk had also been more or less evenly distributed between the two blocks, but recent hunting pressure in Saskatchewan had caused the majority of the elk to move to Alberta.

Lefebvre noted that human-wildlife conflicts could be dealt with by modifying wildlife habitat, changing the number or behaviour of wildlife, or changing human attitudes and behaviours. Ranchers favoured changing the population target, while Gates favoured the latter. Hegel set the stage by noting that whether wildlife does damage or not, what drives wildlife damage management is the perception of damage. The only reason to take action is to reduce the perception of conflicts. Understanding what lay behind perceptions and attitudes was critical to defining solutions.

The Conservationist





Wildlife biologist Dawn Dickinson had roamed the Cypress Hills for decades since arriving in the area; she knew ranchers in the area personally and had listened to their complaints about elk depredation, and she had participated in previous committees. When she told Fish and Wildlife in the 1960s that they needed to find out how many elk were in the area as a basis for finding solutions, Parks gave her the job. She produced two reports on elk and moose populations, and forage resources and utilization in the park.

She sympathized with the ranchers' problem with elk and supported finding ways to reduce conflicts or fairly compensating landowners for their losses. She thought the team should focus on why elk left the park and suggested, among other things, reducing or eliminating hunting within the park and using cattle-grazing more effectively to mimic natural processes. Although she supported an ecosystem-planning approach to the Cypress Hills, she stressed the different purpose, administration, and policies of the park.

She agreed to represent Grassland Naturalists but argued that other environmental groups needed to be at the table to properly discuss the conservation issues. In the absence of a formal process for selecting stakeholders, she was told she could represent them all.

The Agencies

The two Alberta agencies involved in CHEMP were the Parks and Protected Areas Division and the Fish and Wildlife Division. Although Fish and Wildlife's Eslinger was of the view that "agency-centred approaches don't work well" and community-based processes can work, the CHEMP process relied heavily on agency participation.

The Steering and Technical Committees were made up of government staff, and two sat on the Planning Team. The facilitator was from Sustainable Resource Development. Eslinger sat on all three committees but gave up his seat on the Steering Committee when the Planning Team opposed it, concerned about agency manipulation.

Most of the Planning Team members were not strangers, nor were they adversaries. Some had participated in previous processes. They knew enough, however, to decide not to choose a chairperson, an important leadership role, or a public spokesperson from among their ranks, as would normally be done, because they didn't trust anyone to remain neutral enough for the job. People were there not just to find solutions; they made it clear they were there to protect their interests.

They agreed to a Parks staff member for the spokesperson job. But the leadership role of chair was assumed by no one else in the process, including the facilitator. Lefebvre noted this left an important gap. One of the greatest difficulties throughout CHEMP, said Dickinson, was negotiating across diverse perspectives of the participants. The lack of effective leadership and facilitation necessary to establish trust, openness, and dialogue between participants, and to make sure the committees communicated effectively with each other, was arguably the greatest weakness of CHEMP.

The Facilitator

The facilitator position for CHEMP, noted Lefebvre, required someone who could remain neutral; understand how the collaborative process worked; help the group define and explore issues; make everyone comfortable enough to speak about their underlying needs, fears, and concerns; and bring about workable solutions and consensus without pressuring dissenting individuals to conform. The facilitator was not supposed to make decisions or contribute ideas unless given permission by the group.

The chosen facilitator, Sam Wirzba, failed to fulfill these requirements and roles, creating a frustrating and inefficient process for participants, said Lefebvre, who felt he did not understand this key role or the





process. He appeared to see his job as a controller of the process, the discussion, and what was recorded as the outcome.

According to Lefebvre's evaluation, he failed to follow the planning steps in a logical order, even though he emphasized that this was important; he tended to divide the group instead of helping them develop a common understanding; some felt he was biased and that he marginalized or ignored the concerns of some members; he failed to help the group properly explore issues and interests; he failed to uphold the consensus approach by calling for voting on several issues; and he contributed unsolicited ideas.

Lefebvre also noted the importance of meeting notes being seen as accurate by participants. Dickinson, in particular, an experienced record keeper, felt his meeting notes contained important gaps and inaccuracies. He would say agreement had been reached when it had not; alter the meaning of issues and goals; claim that a personal view represented the team; and often recorded what ranchers thought, but not the views of Grasslands Naturalists. At the end, there was a backlog of unapproved meeting minutes because he refused to make requested changes; he said it didn't matter because the minutes were not official.

The Graduate Student

Lefebvre came with good intentions to evaluate the process, but she was conscripted to write the management plan and do other things that conflicted with her presumed role as an objective observer. Because CHEMP dragged on much longer than anticipated, she graduated before the process was finished. A major conflict of interest was that Eslinger sat on the committee for her Master's thesis.

The Hunter

Medicine Hat Fish and Game Association member Boyne Lewis represented the hunting interests. Unsatisfied with being able to bow hunt only outside the park in early fall, he wanted to open the park to bow hunting in the Facility Zone, an area that includes the Elkwater townsite, popular hiking trails, and most of the recreational facilities, where hunting has never been allowed in the past. He was supported initially by the parks representative, O'Brien Tarnasky. These proposed amendments not only represented a significant safety issue for visitors, but they were also against Parks policy of no recreational hunting in the park, which Lewis thought should be changed. Bow hunting had too low a success rate to be useful for management.

The Game

Round 1: Terms of Reference

When Dickinson joined the CHEMP process, she was promised that it would be consensus-based. However, the draft Terms of Reference said that the Planning Team would "endeavour to" reach consensus; otherwise a majority vote would do. Dickinson objected. Before the first meeting Wirzba spent 45 minutes on the phone trying to get her to agree to a majority vote, says Dickinson, a "wearing down" technique that he tried to use several times during the process.

CHEMP also had to accord with Provincial Parks legislation and the two longstanding policies that allow hunting and grazing in parks only as management tools to reach park objectives. The Statement of Purpose originally stated, "Concern has been expressed that elk foraging may result in competition with cattle grazing both within and outside of" the park. Dickinson pointed out that references to elk competing with cattle *within* the park were incorrect – the park was established for the conservation of wildlife, not cows. This was the first of many arguments over park policies; even agency representatives argued policies were meant to be changed.





Wirzba refused to make those changes and Dickinson had to petition the Steering Committee. Wirzba also refused to present the policies to the Planning Team, although this was requested by Dickinson and the Steering Committee, so Dickinson brought them forward herself.

Round 2: Issues and Goals

The point of the collaborative process was for community members to develop a shared vision for what they wanted. Although on the surface they might hold different positions and perspectives, the underlying issues, values, and interests might show promise for common ground and lead to alternative solutions.

It was essential that the team members work through the issues and values themselves with only assistance from other parties. However, neither the facilitator nor the Steering Committee really understood the process and both failed to provide effective leadership for the group; instead, the power of the team was constantly undermined, making it impossible to determine common interests and achieve consensus. The issues remained stuck in the same positions – mainly that elk numbers needed to be reduced.

The team achieved consensus on a list of values showing remarkable agreement on the value and integral role of elk in the Cypress Hills ecosystem, and on the importance of maintaining a free-roaming herd, retaining park policies, and compensating for elk impacts on private land. However, the issues were never agreed on. After presentations by team members, Wirzba created an initial list of issues, which he then sent to the Technical Committee before every team member had provided input.

The Technical Committee altered the issues to be stated in neutral terms, leaving some team members thinking their issues had been deleted. One rancher said, “If the [Technical Committee] is to decide the issues for us and rank them in whatever order they prefer and delete what they don’t like, then it looks to me like the CHEMP team is being used as a show pony.” Eslinger explained that the ranchers’ issue that the elk herd was too large was a position, while the real issue was elk impacts on private land. The Technical Committee should have worked directly with the Planning Team to avoid such misunderstandings.

Goals and objectives were to be based on the issues and values. Without waiting to review the issues or develop a final list based on consensus that would provide a vision for a desired outcome, which was fundamental to the process, Wirzba pushed the team to develop goals and objectives. Twice the facilitator did “personal brainstorming exercises” to come up with lists of “themes” to help the team develop goals and objectives, but the team did not consider them useful.

The facilitator gave the Technical Committee six consensus-based goals to review and develop objectives, the team having agreed that for the sake of expediency, the Committee might do a better job at objectives. The Technical Committee said they could not develop objectives because the goals lacked clarity. Dickinson disagreed and wrote up objectives herself to show it was possible. Eslinger, who sat on both committees, failed to inform or consult with the Planning Team.

Instead of having the Technical Committee work with the team to clarify and improve the goals, there was a six-month hiatus. The Steering Committee reorganized the process; they directed Lefebvre to complete the list of issues and the Technical Committee to develop new goals and objectives based on those issues, essentially abrogating the role of the Planning Team.

Some team members were concerned the Technical Committee was trying to control the process. Dickinson objected to the discarding of the team’s consensus-based goals without team members’ knowledge or consent. She felt the Technical Committee had abandoned the community-based collaborative process. At a special meeting with the Steering Committee held to discuss her views,





Wirzba accused her of being THE dissenter and holding up the process with too many “high falutin” ideas.

Without any consensus on the new goals, the issues, or the priorities, the team, under the direction of the facilitator, proceeded to review the objectives provided by the Technical Committee. The team spent the rest of the process tinkering with a complicated matrix of goals, objectives, and actions.

Round 3: How Many Elk?

The ranchers agreed to the values of maintaining a viable elk herd and that elk were an integral part of the ecosystem, and they acknowledged that a significant reduction in the elk herd would not entirely eliminate depredation issues. But they made it clear that their highest priority was to reduce the elk population target below 700 head. Otherwise, they would be stuck with the status quo and CHEMP would be a waste of their time. Based on an informal survey of surrounding landowners, they said they were prepared to tolerate an overwintering population of 200 to 300 head on the Alberta side.

Other team members wanted to keep the 700 target until a scientific approach could be used to decide on a defensible elk population target. Targets, said Dickinson, need to have a sound scientific basis, with an upper limit that does not exceed the carrying capacity of elk winter ranges, and a lower limit that can be set by a minimum viable population estimate. Eslinger and Lewis agreed. Saskatchewan biologists were proposing 450 in the West Block for a total of 750.

The facilitator decided to focus on this issue. Early on in the process, leaving issues and interests behind, he trotted out a ranking tool consisting of three sets of factors, biological/ecological, social, and economic, that could be used to determine a target. He wanted team members to vote on each factor to determine which should be assigned the greatest weight in achieving a target. The team didn't like the ranking tool and soon dropped it. Voting conflicted with consensus and the tool went against the entire point of the interest-based collaborative process.

The failure to adhere to the proper process left the team bargaining for their positions. After much discussion, a target of 300 on the Alberta side was agreed to (a) to show that progress had been made in addressing legitimate landowner complaints and (b) to make progress in scaling back (or perhaps eliminating) the need for a management hunt in the park. The number was not meant to be absolute but subject to change if it was found to be too low or if landowner tolerance increased.

Lefebvre criticized the focus on the elk population target, saying it limited thinking about the bigger picture and alternative solutions. It wasn't inclusive of everyone's interests and wasn't based on facts. She emphasized the need for stakeholders and experts to work together to collect and analyze information and work from both scientific knowledge and firsthand experience.

Round 4: Information

Relevant information was not compiled prior to the beginning of the process, nor was it readily available to team members, and some reports were too technical. Some team members were not interested in having more information; they wanted to get down to decision-making and solving problems with what they had already.

In spite of the volume of information available, there were critical pieces missing, such as recent data on carrying capacity, how much damage elk really do, and how much they really compete with cattle. With the real number one issue being elk depredation, it seemed logical for Dickinson to suggest that the team needed data on the extent of elk damage. At the beginning of the process, one rancher replied, “Bullshit!” At the end of the process, another rancher replied, “That's a waste of taxpayer money.”





Hegel's research showed that of 59 landowners in the area surrounding the park, only 14 had conflicts with elk on 36 fields, both crop and native pasture. He found that landowners were more likely to perceive conflicts with elk if they were found in alfalfa fields, were closer to a residence, and were farther from cover (more visible).

About a year and a half into the process, Eslinger provided some numbers: from 1996 to 2005, five payments, totaling \$10,984, had been made for elk damage in the Cypress Hills, three for stacked hay damage and two for grain damage. From 1981 to 2004, 21 formal complaints were registered in Cypress Hills for elk feeding in pastures, stack damage, crop depredation, and broken fences. The actual damage figures may have been higher, but the team was told that many landowners found the compensation program unsatisfactory and did not bother to make a claim or went through the Hail and Crop Insurance program rather than Fish and Wildlife.

When Dickinson complained that the team was not getting any response from the Technical Committee to their questions, she was given the task of developing a list of research and information needs required to fill gaps in knowledge for managing the elk herd. She was also asked to indicate why the research and studies were needed and how they would promote informed decision-making. She became responsible for setting up the goal and objectives for scientific research into the carrying capacity and minimum viable population values.

Lefebvre noted that decisions improve with the quality of information available, especially different perspectives that challenge preconceived ideas. But the Planning Team never met with the Technical Committee to discuss issues, share knowledge, and build a common understanding of the situation, which would have been more useful, said Lefebvre, than the facilitator's "exercises." Promised expert presentations were started only after the Planning Team had begun formulating goals, and the presentations were considered of limited benefit. The Technical Committee was used to do the work of the Planning Team instead of providing the technical and scientific perspective needed for quality decision-making.

In June 2005 SRD no longer required registration of elk kills in the province, removing a crucial piece of information needed to manage the elk population effectively, particularly in the Cypress Hills; however, Parks said they would still require registration of kills in the Cypress Hills provincial park.

Round 5: Paid Hunting

In early 2006 the Steering Committee demanded that the Planning Team reach consensus on all items within two meetings or it would disband the team and terminate the process, and the plan would never go to public review. Consensus failed on three contentious issues, including allowing bow hunting in the park, and whether to include a list of mechanisms to reduce elk numbers – the product of one the facilitator's exercises that never achieved consensus.

The last issue on which consensus failed was that of allowing landowners to benefit economically from elk. The only example given was allowing landowners with elk conflicts to sell 10 percent of the annual elk tags, which was essentially paid hunting. There were up to 600 elk tags for the area selling for \$32 each. Ten percent would amount to less than \$2,000. So landowners would be allowed to negotiate a price with hunters and the tags would be valid outside and inside the park.

Since paid hunting would require a change in regulations under the *Wildlife Act*, it violated the base rules for CHEMP. But the idea was supported by some team members, including Eslinger, who argued that this was not paid hunting, but no definitions were ever provided. Conservation groups supporting Dickinson advised against opening the door to the idea even a crack. Paid hunting goes against the foundations of our wildlife conservation model, which is based on public ownership and egalitarian access to wildlife, not on profit.





But the facilitator refused to let it go and focus on the more than 100 actions the Planning Team did agree on. Experts know that collaboration will not work if fundamental values that cannot be negotiated are involved.

The Final Cut

At the last meeting in April 2006, Kevin Redden of Saskatchewan hoped something would come of the work, “but in the end the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments can say ‘to hell with you’ and do what we want,” he said, laughing heartily with Eslinger in front of the entire team that had spent so many volunteer hours.

Parks staff are currently developing a new draft management plan, including a grazing plan. They hope to incorporate ideas from CHEMP, and also re-affirm their commitment to park policies.

Gates said he was bitter about the failure of CHEMP to follow the process. He is now pursuing a new initiative, based on a similar process to CHEMP, on getting a landowner incentive program in place called the Alberta Land and Wildlife Stewardship Project. He’s on all three committees and there is criticism about unbalanced representation.

In the meantime, Fish and Wildlife continue with their usual management strategies, and the latest survey found only about 450 elk in the Hills.

I would like to thank Dawn Dickinson for inviting me to CHEMP meetings and assisting with this article.

Cypress Hills Elk Management Planning Process Members

<p>Steering Committee Ron Bjorge – Head of Wildlife Management, Fish and Wildlife Division, SRD Wayne Pedrini – Area Manager, Parks and Protected Areas Division Julie MacDougall – Site Manager, CHIPP</p> <p>Secretariat Facilitator – Sam Wirzba, SRD Assistant – Rosemary Jones, Parks</p> <p>Technical Committee Coordinator – Dale Eslinger Range Management Specialist – Barry Adams Parks Resource Management – Cam Lockerbie Fish and Wildlife Officer – Dave Ferrier Parks Conservation Officer – Paul Avery Elk Researcher – Troy Hegel*</p>	<p>Planning Team Battle Creek Stock Association (CHIPP) – Dan Reesor Medicine Lodge Stock Association (CHIPP) – Ernie Mudie Fox Stock Association (CHIPP) – Wayne Brost Grazing Interests Outside Park – Harry Seitz* Society of Grassland Naturalists – Dawn Dickinson Medicine Hat Fish and Game Association – Boyne Lewis Cypress County – George Russill* Parks Conservation Officer – O’Brien Tarnasky Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation – Robert Nowosad* Conservation officer, SERM – Kevin Redden Alberta Fish and Wildlife – Dale Eslinger Business Community – Horst Haage*</p> <p>*Left the process early</p>
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