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AWA



A WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Panther Corners, Bighorn Wildland (R.P. Pharis)

PROTECTION PARANOIA: THE STORY OF THE BIGHORN / 4

ALBERTA GRIZZLY 101 / 16

WILDERNESS DEFENDER CHERYL BRADLEY / 24

SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA / 30

CONTENTS

AUGUST 2007 • VOL. 15, NO. 4

OUT FRONT

- 4 PROTECTION PARANOIA:
THE STORY OF THE BIGHORN
- 11 BIGHORN TOO SPECIAL TO LOSE
- 12 BIGHORN RAMBLES
- 13 BIGHORN WILDLAND
RECREATIONAL TRAIL MONITORING
PROJECT

ALBERTA WILDERNESS WATCH

- 16 ALBERTA GRIZZLY 101
- 18 MINISTER IS THE FINAL OBSTACLE
TO GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY IN
ALBERTA
- 19 CARIBOU RECOVERY PLAN MISSES
THE MARK
- 20 WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS
FOR THE MILK RIVER
- 21 CONSERVING GRASSLAND
BIODIVERSITY FROM MEXICO TO
CANADA
- 23 PLANT MONITORING PROJECTS IN
THE CASTLE

PROFILE

- 24 CHERYL BRADLEY: DEFENDER OF
WILDERNESS

UPDATES

- 24 HAVE YOUR SAY ON WATER FOR
LIFE RENEWAL

READER'S CORNER

- 26 EYES OF THE FOREST:
AN ECOLOGICAL NOVEL BY
VIVIAN DEMUTH

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- 27 MIFFED BY MOTORS ON ALBERTA'S
ONLY CANOE CIRCUIT

ASSOCIATION NEWS

- 28 STAFF PROFILE: DANETTE MOULÉ
- 28 STAFF PROFILE: CHRIS
WEARMOUTH

EVENTS

- 29 TUESDAY TALKS
- 29 WILDERNESS HIKES
- 29 ANNUAL LECTURE & AWARDS
- 30 AWA FIELD TRIP: SUFFIELD
NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA

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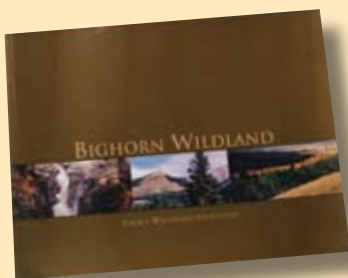
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LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

The end of July is the end of AWA's fiscal year. As we close this year and begin the next, we find ourselves reflecting on the past year and being energized with the possibilities of the coming months.

An important transition we will realize in the next few months is from Shirley Bray's leadership with AWA, especially in regard to the *Wild Lands Advocate*. During the past few weeks and months we have been preparing for this time, and Joyce Hildebrand is ready to initiate the next era. Our news journal has evolved significantly through the past decade; I expect that we will continue to see growth and development in our publication.

In the past few weeks, we have welcomed Danette Moulé as a staff conservation specialist. Danette will be responsible for our work in the boreal forest and will be contacting members and supporters in our more northern communities as part of her role. The office is busy with summer short-term and part-time staff helping with outreach activities.

More than ever, we have made opportunities to be out in Wild Alberta, enjoying our wildlands. It has been a summer filled with hikes, tours, and field days. We have enjoyed getting to know more of our members and supporters, and we appreciate the support you are giving us.

While there are discouraging times, we are steadfast and strong. AWA's role in defending Wild Alberta through awareness and action is at least as important as it was 42 years ago when our founders met around a kitchen table to see what they could do to save Alberta's natural landscapes, wildlife, and water for generations to come.

These are the days – the ones that will make a difference in the years to come, and we feel fortunate to be part of these exciting times. We know we are making a difference!

Yours in conservation,

Christyann Olson
Executive Director



C. Wearnmouth

AWA hikers enjoying the vista from the Bighorn's Ram Ridge this summer.

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PROTECTION PARANOIA: THE STORY OF THE BIGHORN

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Board Member

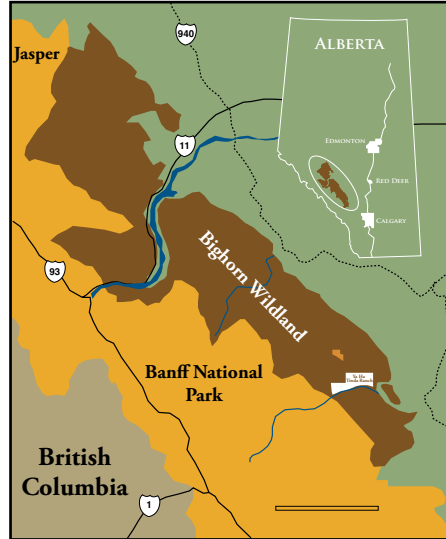
When there is every advantage to protection and no advantage to none, why can we not get the splendid Bighorn protected?

When I began my love affair with the Bighorn, I had only recently moved to Calgary to attend the University of Alberta. Just as there was no University of Calgary back then, there was no place called the Bighorn. In fact, back then the Bighorn was just part of the Clearwater Forest Reserve. Wait a minute... it's now 45 years later and it's still just part of the Forest Reserve!

How can this be? The Bighorn has every quality that would make it worthy of park status anywhere. It's all public land with no human residents. Its beauty is sublime, it contains the headwaters for major rivers, and it's home to lots of wildlife. It also has almost no resource conflicts – a major Alberta consideration. Why don't we Albertans cherish such a place? Studies keep showing us that protecting areas gives local communities increased status and a big economic boost. Why don't these things mean something in Alberta? The Bighorn has, in fact, been proposed for protection for over 30 years, but today it's just Forest Reserve, with its edges being chipped away by loggers, gas drillers, and off-roaders.

The Protection Puzzle

Conservationists muse endlessly about why it is so very hard in Alberta to get land gems like the Bighorn and other key wildlife habitats protected. We have had no sizable increases to our protected areas roster since our national parks were declared! This is not the case next door in B.C., where large new Class A (off-limits to industry and off-highway vehicles) parks are frequently added. New Zealand, comparable to Alberta in size, population, and diversity of landscapes



Bighorn at a Glance

- Covers 5,000 km² in central Alberta's Rockies, adjacent to the eastern boundaries of Banff and Jasper National Parks
- Contains headwaters of South and North Saskatchewan rivers
- Comprises unprotected Forest Reserve land under Forest Land Use Zoning that regulates recreational use
- Lies about 100 km west of Rocky Mountain House (pop. 6,874 in 2006)

– but without Alberta's wealth – is now more than 30 percent protected, and more is being added to the conservation areas and parks register every year.

AWA's Cliff Wallis, who has given this question much thought, is convinced that "there is a paranoia around protected areas in Alberta that defies comprehension." His observation is that politicians and land managers look at protection as "sterilizing economic activity" rather than as providing options for the future. Despite public opinion that is on the conservation side and economic data

showing that protected areas compete very well on a revenue-per-hectare basis, politicians have not shifted their stance in decades. "Dinosaurs are not extinct – they continue to rule Alberta's diminishing animal kingdom," Wallis says with a characteristic sigh of exasperation. "That won't change unless people let their elected officials know how frustrated they are."

Alberta's philosopher-writer Andrew Nikiforuk would seem to disagree with Wallis. He reasons that in Alberta, where oil and gas revenues are so high that the government is no longer funded primarily by taxpayers, politicians do not have to listen to citizens. In a recent *Globe and Mail* article, Nikiforuk asserts, "Politicians serve those first who deliver the most revenue." Therefore, as the thinking goes, if the oil and gas industry does not support land protection, there will be none. Until this industry dwindles, like conventional oil and gas are doing now, protection has little hope. But surely, once the oil and gas industry has fully shifted operations, wealth, and attention to the northeast corner of the province, there will be a few pickings left for what Wallis might wryly call "ecological sterilization."

Gary Bracken is a retired Bighorn outfitter who farms in the Sundre area and spends many hours on his tractor thinking about the deterioration of his favourite West Country areas and what should be done. He told me that this past long weekend in May was "devastating for the West Country.... The Eastern Slopes are being ripped up by 4X4s everywhere except in the FLUZ, and monster trucks are causing god-awful damage." Bracken sees even worse damage in his area now that the Waiparous region has been put under regulation. I asked him what he sees as the main roadblock to proper management. "In one word," he replies, "money. Too little for enforcement and too much in the hands of weekend

cowboys who can buy more and more massive machines, and kids who can afford liquor by the case-full.”

Bracken sees the need for a heavier and broader penalty mechanism for those who would wreak havoc on the landscape, and for more enforcement personnel on the ground: “One thousand dollars should be a minimum fine and these should require court appearances, not just be mailed in.” Thinking more broadly, Bracken reasons that enforcement agencies also need a wider basis for fining and that watershed and wildlife habitat damage are appropriate triggers.

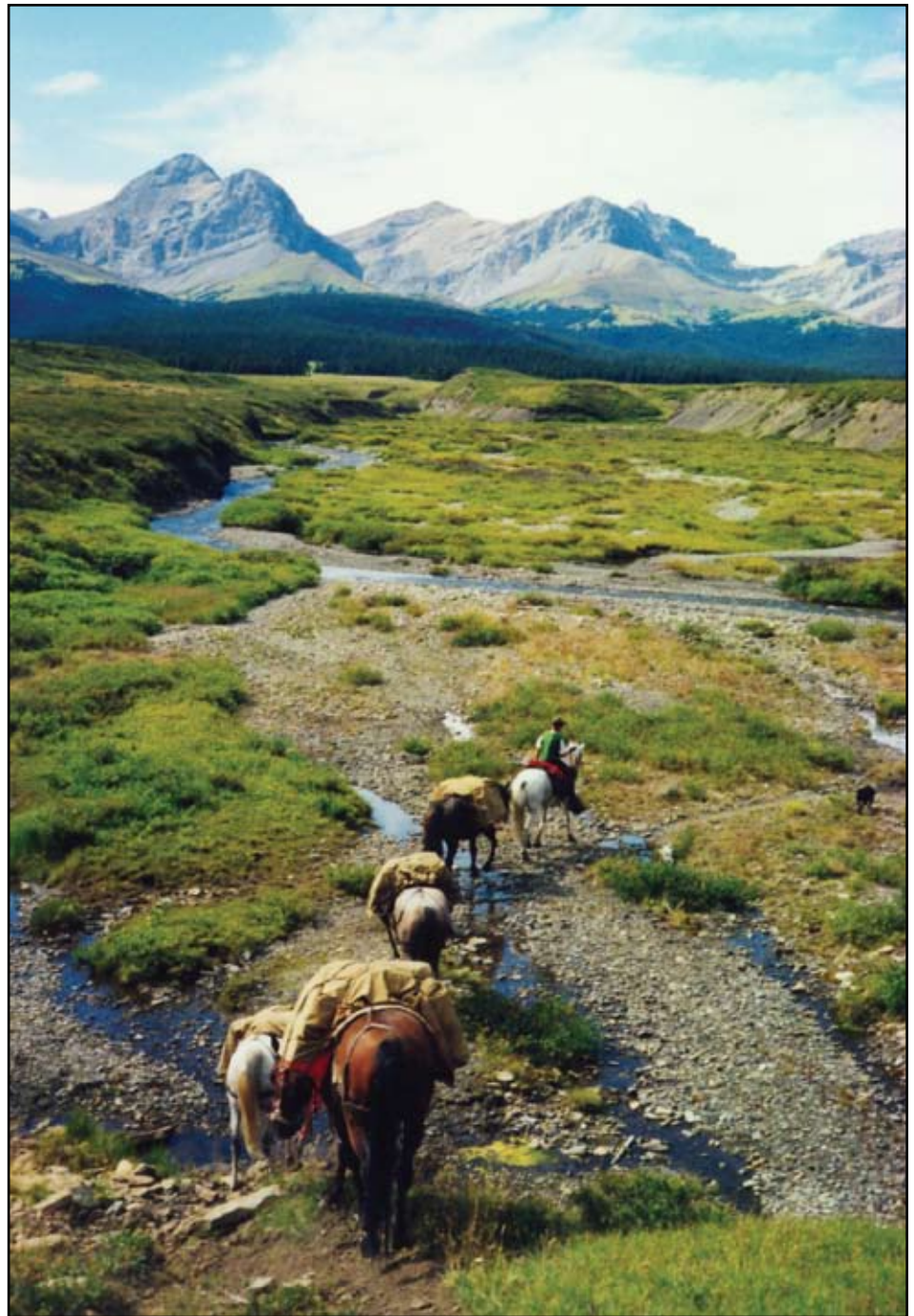
I, too, am of the opinion that water is the key to good land management and even protection. If watershed protection, which is still the priority guideline for managing the Eastern Slopes, becomes a stronger focus for citizens, land managers, and enforcement agencies, then better management will follow, including in the Bighorn. There is little doubt that despite the power of “petrodollars,” towns and cities will form alliances with conservationists to demand and implement greater protection of watersheds. As cities like New York, Seattle, Austin, San Antonio, and Vancouver are realizing, once they gain control over and protect their watersheds from damaging activities like logging, road-building, and off-highway vehicles (OHVs), multiple benefits follow: clean water that doesn’t cost billions to treat and filter, greater biodiversity, and areas for healthy, nature-based recreation are among the most important ones.

Abundant clean water, as we all know, will soon be more valued than oil and gas. Even our “petropoliticians” and elected Albertosaurs will have to shift positions. I’m convinced of the possibility for protecting major water-generating areas like the Bighorn in the foreseeable future.

This is a tale about Bighorn’s rise and fall, and its hoped-for resurrection. Some of the trails I’m about to lead you along are literal, some are political, and some are just dead ends.

Bighorn Beauty

After four decades of traveling the Bighorn by foot and horse, I know this is my kind of country. I’m attracted to



Traveling west up Wapiabi River toward Grave Flats.

wild country – big, remote wild country with lots of scenery, like where I grew up at the top end of the Peace River. I crave country where I can travel by foot, horse, canoe, or even camel for weeks with little chance of meeting other people. When I get away, I like to experience the land as it was, before so many of our kind began invading with more and more mechanization. Bighorn is still one of my choicest escapes.

Out there, I don’t need a soft bed, flush toilet, daily shower, or fancy meals. But I do like a certain ease of travel and don’t want to meet

unpleasant surprises around each bend. I don’t want to be caught in a war zone or in a hot jungle full of deadly diseases. Extreme remoteness, like Earth’s poles, does not appeal. What does appeal is the big, the wild, and the relative safety of Australia’s outback, New Zealand’s southern Alps, much of Mongolia, and Alberta’s Willmore, Kakwa, and especially the Bighorn. From my home in southern Alberta, the Bighorn is also the easiest of these places to get to. Willmore and Kakwa take a full day each way, and Mongolia or Australia, well...



R.P. Pharis

Hybrid Indian paintbrush.

When I first ventured in the 1960s into what is now officially called “Bighorn Backcountry,” I was a greenhorn mountaineer and probably didn’t even realize I was outside Banff National Park. With my university pals, I often trudged with a heavy pack into Pinto Lake, Mt. McDonald, and even Job Lake, going in over Sunset or Cataract Passes from the Banff-Jasper Highway.

Later, in the 1970s, with my husband and a few hardy fellow backpackers, we explored the mosaic of the Bighorn’s landscapes for many summers, pushing our way up rushing streams and through tall green valleys, and then on, over snow-covered ridges. Rarely did we follow trails, using topographical maps instead. We ventured into remote tributaries and were mesmerized by hidden waterfalls, rock pools smooth as varnish, turquoise tarns, and herds of bighorn sheep that would emerge out of nowhere. Cradled by two national parks, threaded with powerful rivers, and bristling with sharp peaks at the pinnacle of their geological life, the Bighorn is as exhilarating as it is challenging.

Even in the 1970s, we marveled that landscapes so exquisite were unprotected and open to the shenanigans of those who would mar such places with mines and wellsites. In the 1960s heyday of super-subsidized resource exploration, many of the Bighorn’s valleys and ridges were scarred with roads and seismic lines, some right up to the invisible demarcation of Banff and Jasper National Parks. The Bighorn is every bit as spectacular as the best that Banff

or Jasper has to offer. In fact, much of the Bighorn was once part of these parks. We wondered then, and continue to wonder, why the Bighorn has such little official regard.

Fighting for the Bighorn

Fortunately for the Bighorn, it had three pieces of luck earlier on, one by nature and two by man. Very early on, nature positioned much of the Bighorn west of the McConnell Fault. This is significant to many Albertans who happen to be petroleum geologists. It should also be important to those of us who love wilderness. West of this massive crack in the rock along which our Rocky Mountains slid during their uprising, geological formations were

generally so crumpled and broken that their petroleum escaped. Thus, most of the Bighorn is happily petroleum-free. If it weren’t, we’d see gas wells lined up today along the eastern borders of Banff and Jasper.

Unfortunately, coal does not escape through fractures and fissures, and the Bighorn holds developable deposits. However, far-sighted policymakers in the 1970s placed the Bighorn off-limits to coal development under the 1976 Coal Policy, and some old exploration was even reclaimed, making good use of the Heritage Trust Fund. In another stroke of luck, wise policymakers went even further, placing most of the Bighorn off-limits to all industry and damaging motorized recreation. Under the Eastern Slopes Policy of 1979, most of the Bighorn was placed within the Prime Protection Zone in order to preserve sensitive terrain and valuable aesthetics. The only exception was the Wapiabi-Blackstone area that lies east of the McConnell Fault and therefore might contain natural gas reserves. To this day, the Wapiabi-Blackstone remains under petroleum lease, but a combination of early, expensive dry holes and AWA’s persistence has kept new drilling out of this region. It is also under recreation-use legislation that prohibits OHVs.

It was during preparation for



R.P. Pharis

Nodding arnica, an unusual alpine species, at the headwaters of Vimy Creek.

the 1973 Eastern Slopes hearings that fledgling AWA became forever entangled with the Bighorn. Early members came to us around 1970 with tales of the splendour, the abundant sparkling water, and particularly the productive habitat for the gamut of Rocky Mountain wildlife species that could all be found around the headwaters of rivers, including the Panther, Red Deer, Clearwater, Ram, Wapiabi, Blackstone, and Chungo. AWA included these headwater areas in a book called *Nine Wildlands for Recreation*, which constituted our written presentation to the Eastern Slopes hearing board in 1973.

These areas, all within the upper reaches of the South and North Saskatchewan rivers, were subsequently zoned off-limits to industry and motorized recreation by the 1979 Eastern Slopes Policy. AWA's first major involvement in government land-planning followed the policy, as the association was one of two public interest groups appointed to the integrated resource planning process. Our mission was to implement the Eastern Slopes Policy. This was a huge undertaking for the young, almost totally volunteer organization. But with the talent and dedication of the membership, AWA was able to muster a full team to work on plans up and down the Eastern Slopes, between Waterton Lakes National Park and Drayton Valley. I cut my own volunteer teeth as AWA's representative on the two plans covering the Bighorn.

Of course, the Bighorn was not yet called by this name. That came later, in 1986, following intense pressure from AWA and with internal government support for protecting the area. Following the Eastern Slopes Policy, the Alberta government pledged that one large wilderness area would be protected in each of the main watersheds along the slopes. The Bighorn was the logical area to protect in the headwater region of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers. But during the tussles with industry and government over the implementation plans, AWA began to realize that headwaters protection was not going to be automatic as had been promised in the legislature.

Recent History

- 1973 – AWA proposes area for protection at the Eastern Slopes Hearings.
- 1975 – Government of Alberta declares there will be one large wilderness area in the headwaters of each of Alberta's major Eastern Slopes rivers.
- 1977 – Eastern Slopes Policy designates most of the Bighorn as Prime Protection Zone, off-limits to industry and motorized recreation.
- 1986 – Integrated Resource Management Plan reinforces Eastern Slopes Policy.
- 1986 – Government formally announces “Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area” and publishes glossy brochure and map.
- 1993 – Provincial committee for Special Places 2000 recommends Bighorn Wildland be formally protected.
- 1990s – Government sells subsurface gas leases within Bighorn Wildland.
- 2000 – Special Places 2000 fails to designate Bighorn Wildland.
- 1986-2001 – Bighorn managed as a Wildland and named on government publications and road maps.
- 2001 – Government declares Bighorn Wildland not protected, erases it from maps and publications, and changes its name to Bighorn Backcountry.
- 2002 – Government creates six new Forest Land Use Zones and legalizes motorized recreation in parts of Bighorn.
- 2003 – AWA publishes 162-page, full-colour book called *Bighorn Wildland*.
- 2003-2007 – AWA measures and monitors recreational use and impacts in most impacted part of Bighorn, in headwater drainages of Ram River.
- 2007 – AWA releases report, including recommendations, on Bighorn Wildland Recreational Trail Monitoring Project; the research indicates increasing impacts and violations.
- 2007 – AWA conducts survey of summer users.
- 2007 – Draft R11 Fire Management Plan recommends extensive controlled burning of Bighorn's forests and two portions for commercial logging.

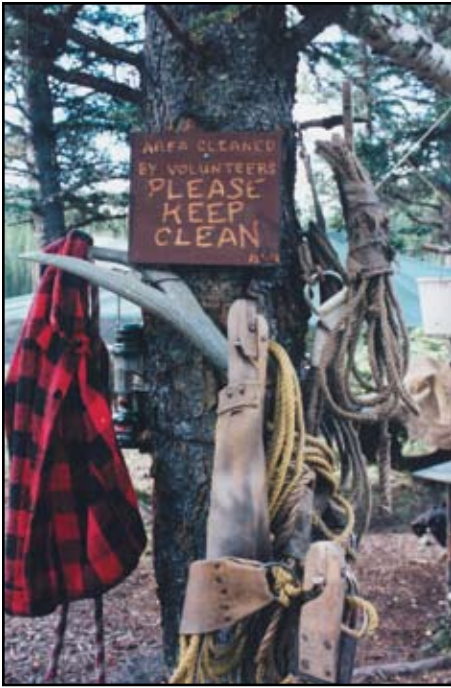
Tough negotiations began for protecting the watersheds of the Castle, Oldman, and North and South Saskatchewan rivers. AWA made



Pileated woodpecker in Ya Ha Tinda.

reasonable progress with then-Forests Minister Don Sparrow and his fair but firm-minded deputy, Fred McDougall. In the mid-1980s, AWA met with them frequently, and Mr. Sparrow told us that he considered us “part of his constituency.” He asked AWA for its “Top 10” wish list. He said he'd work to get our areas protected, starting at the top. Our number one choice was the North and South Saskatchewan headwaters.

Mr. Sparrow went to work, and it was his people who gave the area the name “Bighorn Wildland” and who announced its dedication in 1986, complete with a glossy map and brochure. But he and his team were unable to achieve necessary legislated protection before he was moved to another portfolio and before his untimely death on an Alberta road. Under Don Sparrow, the Bighorn did become partly off-limits to OHVs



R.P. Pharris

Stewardship has been part of AWA's Bighorn agenda since 1972 when Pinto Lake was first cleaned.

through Forest Land Use Zoning (FLUZ), a legal means to control recreational use of Forest Reserve lands. The four original Bighorn FLUZs covered roughly a third of the Bighorn. The rest of it remained off-limits to motorized use by policy, something respected by industry but increasingly violated by OHV recreationists.

No minister of public lands or forests since Don Sparrow has been interested in land protection. None has seen land conservation or conservation groups as part of his constituency.

Bighorn's Luck Fades

Following its 1986 brush with protection, official regard for the Bighorn gradually slipped away. OHV users initiated new incursions, the Eastern Slopes Policy began to fade from memory, and five-year updates to the integrated resource plans were ignored. Only the FLUZ regulations were upheld, if someone was there to witness infractions. The fines for violations, though, were under \$60, so the regulations had almost no clout with an increasingly affluent OHV set. (Even today, fines are too low to effect changes in behaviour of those who would abuse public lands.)

Over the next 20 years, AWA dangled as many logical arguments

as we could muster in front of elected representatives, trying to entice them to protect the Bighorn, if not for contemporary Albertans, then for future generations. But the rush for resource wealth was intensifying and there was no time for aesthetic considerations. Water was no longer considered an important resource as it had been through the first half of the twentieth century. King Oil had command now. Bighorn's luck was running low.

Special Places, a program designed to choose and dedicate new protected areas, was announced in 1993, and new hope emerged for the Bighorn. In fact, while setting up the Special Places Advisory Committee, government recommended to the committee that areas like the Bighorn Wildland, which were essentially being managed as wildlands, be formally designated as protected.

However, as the program's Year 2000 deadline approached, it became clear that any place designated as "Special" would be small and would be chosen to avoid conflict with the petroleum industry rather than to save or connect key wildlife habitats. There was also an unwritten rule that a Special Places Nominee had to be supported by the local community (and its MLA). The largest local community near the Bighorn is Rocky Mountain House, and by 2000 it was an oilfield service town with many residents dedicated to off-roading. This group had the ear and sympathy of the local MLA, the notoriously

anti-environmental Ty Lund. Although nominated, the Bighorn would not become a Special Place.

There was more luck to be lost. A lovely area smack in the heart of the Bighorn was, by 2000, becoming unrecoverably damaged by a combination of uncontrolled OHV use and concentrated horse use due to two horse concessions and many private equestrians drawn to the area to day-ride. The local Forest Service out of Rocky Mountain House decided to create an access management plan for the entire Bighorn. AWA participated in the Bighorn Access Management Advisory Group for two agonizing years. Tamaini Snaithe represented us and was taunted for rigorously defending the Eastern Slopes Policy and for trying to bring science to the table. Although small in stature, Tamaini was an advocacy tiger with a formidable intellect. She helped keep the group informed and focused, and in the end, their recommendations were reasonable.

They weren't, however, all accepted by government. In an act of defiance and demotion, the government renamed the area in 2001, calling it "Bighorn Backcountry" and erasing "Bighorn Wildland" from government publications and Alberta road maps, where it had been for 14 years. It legalized motorized access into areas of the Bighorn where policy had explicitly prohibited it, and even into areas previously off-limits under 1986 FLUZ regulation.

R.P. Pharris



Highlands above Ranger Creek.



R.P. Pharis

Ridge at top of Coral Creek between Coral Creek and Job Creek.

Snaith, now completing her PhD at McGill University, can still feel her hackles rise remembering what happened in 2001: “Five years later, I am still angry about the government’s lack of accountability, transparency and honesty during this [Access Management] process.” She remembers that “the OHV crowd claimed to be responsible and said that their activities did not and would not harm the area. This has clearly turned out to be untrue, as 20 percent of motorized users have been shown [by AWA] to violate the regulations. This is especially discouraging because it is the end-result of government backsliding that we fought so hard to prevent during the Bighorn Access Management process. Even during this advisory process, it was clear that Sustainable Resource Development was not really interested in advice and had already decided

to allow industrial development and motorized recreation.”

Soured by our experience on this Bighorn Committee, AWA decided against participating in the Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan Monitoring Standing Committee. Instead, we put our resources into scientifically measuring and monitoring the effects of recreational use in the core damaged area, including Onion Creek, Hummingbird, Canary, and part of the South Ram drainages. AWA met in June of 2007 to present the new forestry staff in Rocky Mountain House with the results of this four-year undertaking. (See the accompanying articles by Adam Ford and Heinz Unger about the experience and results of the monitoring project.)

I wish I could end this story happily and conclusively, but that’s not possible. Luck continues to leak

away for the Bighorn. A new plan was initiated for the area in 2005, this one designed to burn it up and log portions of it in order to save them from fire and pine beetle pestilence. The Bighorn is caught up now in Alberta’s frenzy to save forests from natural cycles, ostensibly to return them to natural cycles.

AWA is not against controlled burning and has supported it in the past in parts of the Bighorn. However, we are very dubious about the draft R11 Fire Management Plan, which seems designed more for the protection of adjacent commercial logging operations and the distant town of Nordegg than for the watersheds and wildlife of the Bighorn. The draft plan also recommends two parts of the Bighorn for commercial logging. Why? Apparently because they are considered especially dangerous. And since they have good timber, why not take it? Curiously, those of us who have been around the Bighorn for a long time remember that commercial interests wanted entrance into these very areas years ago. In our written response to the R11 plan, AWA has countered that if the Sunkay-Shankland area is to be logged, it must be done by helicopter so as to curtail new roads – no new access is something the R11 plan calls for.

Despite the political lassitude, the annoying whine of motorbikes and quads here and there, and the possibility of timber company chainsaws gnawing at the edges, the great interior of the Bighorn is still whole and beckoning. I’ll be out there again this summer, along with husband, friends, and a string of pack ponies, exploring new routes and revisiting old ones in the ever fresh, ever lasting mosaic of Bighorn’s varied vistas. I also see hope in the growing concern in Alberta about water, Bighorn’s potential salvation.

35 Years of Stewardship

Well before the name “Bighorn” covered the lands east of Banff and Jasper National Parks between the Panther and Brazeau rivers, AWA was active as a steward of the area.

As early as 1972, I found myself bagging garbage in what should have been calendar-perfect places like Pinto Lake. With a bunch of kids from

Crossfield's lacrosse team – coached and accompanied by young Steven Stiles, who would later become the area's MLA – AWA walked into Pinto Lake so long ago, armed with burlap sacks. In a weekend, the gang bagged about two tonnes of fishermen's abandoned debris, and Banff National Park provided a helicopter to haul it to the Banff-Jasper Highway. From there, Parks trucks hauled it to a dump. Several years later AWA cleaned this same lake, gathering almost as much garbage again. In those days it was the norm for fishermen to haul in large pieces of plastic for shelter, wire, nails, heavy food in cans, and lots of tongue lubrication in glass bottles for evenings around the campfire. Heavy oven grills were also in vogue for open-fire cooking. Of course, these were all considered disposable and left on site, as was the practice then. Heavy fish replaced heavy gear for the trip out.

Fortunately, today's backcountry users treat campsites with much more respect and generally abide by the "pack in-pack out" rule. But when AWA took it upon ourselves to clean old outfitter and seismic camps throughout the Bighorn, we were making the same kinds of hauls each year as from Pinto Lake, except over a much bigger area.

I led the annual Bighorn cleanups between 1984 and 1994, my pack and saddle ponies carrying greenhorn



R.P. Pharris

Herd of bighorn rams between Clearwater River and Lost Guide Lake.

volunteers, camp gear, food, hand-made signs, and hundreds of large plastic insulation bags for garbage. The horses toted and pulled the heavy garbage to nearby open areas that served as helicopter pickup points. Old seismic camps were often littered with well-rusted barrels, bedsprings, refrigerators, propane tanks, and stoves. Burnt-out wood stoves and chimneys enlarged the garbage heaps in horse outfitter camps as well. Outfitters tended to leave behind their food cans and whisky bottles, sometimes up to a tonne in a single camp. For 10 years, we cleaned a different set of valleys each year, bagging about two tonnes of

garbage annually for the Alberta Forest Service to helicopter out.

Just as I thought I'd completed my stewardship mission in the Bighorn and was ready to hang up my garbage-gathering gloves, the Forest Service approached AWA to take over the maintenance of one of the major horse trails. After some thought, I decided my ponies and I still had a bit of spark, so we took on the historic Bighorn Trail, which is about 100 km long within the Bighorn's Wapiabi, Sunkay, and Blackstone drainages. We signed up in 1994 and have maintained it ever

What You Can Do

- Visit the area and learn about it.
- Visit AWA's website for more information (AlbertaWilderness.ca, Issues and Areas/Bighorn).
- Buy AWA's *Bighorn Wildland* book for stunning images and comprehensive information.
- Fill in AWA's summer 2007 survey for Bighorn users (AlbertaWilderness.ca, Issues and Areas/Bighorn/Archive).
- Attend an illustrated talk on the Bighorn on October 23, 7-9 pm, AWA, 455 - 12 St. NW, Calgary.
- Write letters and call your MLA, stressing the many economic benefits of protecting watersheds, including those of the Bighorn.



R.P. Pharris

Headwaters of Job Creek well above trail over Job Pass.

since. Dogs have changed, horses have changed, volunteers have changed, but I'm still there. At least one of the original ponies is too, although she turns 27 this year. Oh, and now my husband comes along to help cut out trails. He shunned the garbage trips but enjoys cutting deadfall. One volunteer from Caroline has joined us with his two horses for 10 consecutive years. Obviously the Bighorn Trail is never boring, no matter how many times we travel it or clear it.

We headed out to the trail again this year for a week in mid-July. Last year was a light year with fewer than 100 trees across the trail, leaving us several days to explore the high country. But you never know until you get there what spring storms have brought down. Will it be all work this year, or will we get to explore a route to the top of the Bighorn Range from the north end? Won't know 'til we get there.


Over the years, we've surveyed the Bighorn's users; met endlessly with government and industry about the area; written about it, including a 162-page full-colour book called *Bighorn Wildland*, released in 2003;

and taken members on treks through it. In our recent stewardship and research initiative, mentioned earlier, we measured and monitored an area of about 200 km² in the heart of the 5,000-km² Bighorn, heavily damaged by ongoing recreation use. Begun in 2003, the Bighorn Wildland Recreational Trail Monitoring Project will continue for at least one more year.


The Bighorn is one of Alberta's last large, essentially intact and natural wild places. AWA has fought for its protection since 1973 and will continue to do so until this area of key watersheds, wildlife habitats, and aesthetically superb landscapes is fully protected.

Vivian Pharis was the AWA president (1984-1991) when the Bighorn had its closest brush with protection.

AWA'S VISION FOR THE BIGHORN



AWA is seeking Wildland Park protection within the boundaries delineated in 1986 by Minister Don Sparrow. Surface access for industrial development and motorized recreation must be prohibited within the Wildland to allow for habitat and watershed protection, and low-impact recreation.



N. Douglas

BIGHORN TOO SPECIAL TO LOSE

Five years after her involvement in the Bighorn Access Management process, Tamaini Snaith reflects on the results of AWA's trail monitoring study.

The OHV crowd claimed that they were responsible and that their activities did not and would not harm the area. This has clearly turned out to be untrue, as 20 percent of motorized users have been shown to violate the regulations. This is especially discouraging because it is the end result of the government backsliding that we fought so hard to prevent during the Access Management process. Even then, it was clear that SRD was not really interested in advice and had already decided to allow industrial development and motorized recreation. Five years later, I am still angry about the government's lack of accountability, transparency, and honesty during this process.



C. Olson

Tamaini Snaith crossing the Wapiabi River.

All users need to use the backcountry carefully. AWA's Trail Monitoring report makes it clear that it isn't only motorized use that can cause damage. The report also shows that appropriate signs and barriers can be effective, and that certain types of trails are less vulnerable to damage than others. I hope that AWA's report, and SRD's own monitoring project, will lead to positive change in access management. This area is too special to lose, and without better monitoring and enforcement of regulations (and possibly some changes in trail designations) the ecological and wilderness values of the area will be lost.



BIGHORN RAMBLES

By Heinz Unger, AWA Board Member

This summer marks the fourth and last season of the Bighorn Wildland Recreational Trail Monitoring Project. As a frequent volunteer throughout this project, I have found working in this tarnished but beautiful area both worthwhile and exhilarating. While Adam Ford provides a summary of the methodology and results of the project in this issue of the *Advocate*, I offer here some personal observations and experiences of our monitoring trips in the Bighorn.

AWA's research area comprises about 200 km² of valley bottom and mountainous terrain in the heart of the 5,000 km² area that the government refers to as Bighorn Backcountry – AWA continues to call it by its original name, Bighorn Wildland. The monitoring area, located in the headwaters of the Ram River, is within the Prime Protection Zone, but off-highway vehicles (OHVs) began heavy, unregulated use of it in the 1990s. The area was already getting intense horse use because of a popular staging area and a large day riding facility at Hummingbird Creek. In 2001 the Alberta government formally closed some trails to OHVs, leaving others open. AWA wanted to find out if erosion would be curtailed or increased, and if area users would abide by the new trail rules.

In 2003 we started with a team of five, plus a dog with its own backpack of food – but no schnapps for human revival. Since then, both the luxury and the team size have been reduced, but the unknown has become the known: we are now expertly efficient at what we do.

A big change since 2003 is the gender balance. Back then, teams were mostly women, with me tagging along as the apparent token male. Now, it's "men only." While the gender rebalancing did not diminish

D. Samson



Heinz Unger measuring the depth of an Erosion Event along Ranger Creek Trail.

the scientific rigour of the work, the standards of camp cuisine have definitely slipped. Over the four years, we have moved from cooked breakfasts, hot beverage choices, and freshly prepared gourmet meals (including vegetarian) over the campfire at night to foil pouches, revitalized with boiling water. And although we no longer have a dog on the team, we now take schnapps as a chaser.

Apart from the hiking dog, our early work was sometimes aided by horses, owned and operated by an AWA volunteer. The horses packed in heavy gear like the electronic traffic counters and their batteries, and provided evening entertainment as they grazed or unexpectedly hopped out of sight in their chain hobbles. Possibly because of his distinct hat, the horses' owner became known simply as Cowboy. Cowboy and his steeds were greatly appreciated, as we conducted our work almost entirely on foot. One exception was a long trail into Onion Lake – an old road – which could sometimes be ridden by mountain bike. The 20-km

return trip and monitoring takes a long day on foot. The Bighorn is definitely horse country – and now, sadly, also OHV country. In four years, I never met another person traveling on foot like the AWA crews did!

Because we tend to monitor during the week, we rarely meet OHV users, but encounters with horse riders and outfitters are frequent. Some riders and their horses are surprised to see us measuring parts of the trail – some horses are even spooked by stretched measuring tapes and our equipment beside the trail. Ranger Creek, now closed to OHVs, is increasingly popular for riders. The intense horse use has caused increased trail erosion, especially during wet weather.

Despite our presence in the study area over a long period of time, we rarely encountered SRD staff. The amount of OHV damage and the use of illegal trails indicate that more enforcement is needed. We are concerned that there is not enough SRD presence to monitor OHV use and ensure compliance. Wildlife sightings are also rare, but the tracks, scat, and

other signs we have seen on the trail indicate the presence of grizzly sows with cubs, moose, deer, elk, wolves, and coyotes.

Although the pleasures of being in this beautiful wilderness area are many, monitoring trips have not been without their challenges. The weather was not always cooperative. Sometimes entire monitoring trips are soaked in rain or snow. Night-time temperatures at close to 2,000 metres elevation can slip below freezing, even in mid-summer. Once my contact lenses froze in their case!

Frequent stream crossings are also a challenge when on foot or mountain bike. Streams can be fast, thigh-deep, and just above freezing. In October our river shoes occasionally froze solid as we walked between crossings, making the next stream feel almost

warm. On one trip, my colleague forgot her river shoes and we had to toss one pair back and forth. My aim was not always the best, resulting in several desperate barefoot retrievals. Our worst experience with streams was when the early morning low crossing of Hummingbird Creek had become a dangerously high crossing by the end of the day. The only way we could get our shortest crew member back to camp side was to form a human chain across the rushing water.

To relieve the boredom of traveling the same designated OHV trails, I sometimes took an inviting side drainage, or after the day's work, climbed a trail to some new and interesting ridge or alpine meadow. Once, inspired by a camp of geologists examining fossil deposits on Cripple Creek, I decided to hike up to see

their find. The high meadows were surrounded by white-capped peaks, glowing in the evening light, and I stayed, pondering the wonders for a bit too long. Having neglected to inform my companions of my plans, I arrived back at the camp to find the crew ready to call out a search party. My colleagues were not happy with me, but I soon found sympathy, some camp coffee, and entertainment with stories of people who had gotten lost. It may have helped that I volunteered to do dishes that night.

Even though access to this area of the Bighorn can be tedious on the old industry roads, some of which are now designated OHV trails, seeing the less-touched spectacular reaches of the backcountry is always worthwhile and exhilarating.

BIGHORN WILDLAND RECREATIONAL TRAIL MONITORING PROJECT

By Adam Ford

AWA monitored the impacts of recreational use in the Bighorn Backcountry from 2003 through 2007. Our goal was to assess the efficacy of management in the area with respect to the objectives of Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) planning, which includes the protection of areas "containing sensitive resources such as fish and wildlife and their habitats, vegetation, soils and watershed" (SRD).^{*} We evaluated three main criteria that will provide an indication of management efficacy in the FLUZ: 1) willingness of backcountry users to abide by FLUZ regulations, 2) extent of landscape damage present, and 3) trends in motorized vehicle activity. Our study focused on a 76-km network of motorized and non-motorized trails in the Upper Clearwater-Ram FLUZ.

Methods

To measure trends in motorized vehicle use in non-designated times or places, we recorded motorized vehicle traffic year-round, using eight traffic counters (supplied by TRAFx Research Ltd., Canmore, AB). These counters sense disturbances to the



D. Samson

A water crossing on Back Trail North. The bridge was placed on the main trail, but users continue to drive OHVs through the creek on the left side of the photo.

electromagnetic field caused by a large passing metal object and record the timing, direction of travel, and frequency of passes of motorized vehicles within a 2-m range of the

counter. Passes by equestrian and other non-motorized users, including mountain bikes, are not detected by these counters. We placed these traffic counters adjacent to trails throughout

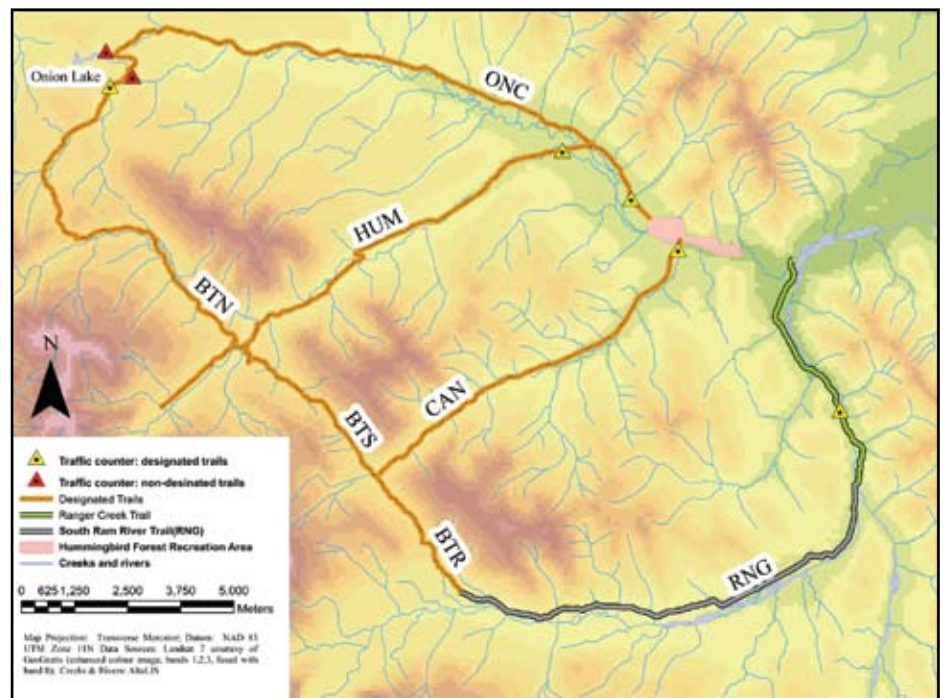
the network to capture both legal and illegal (out-of-season and off-trail) motorized vehicle use.

In order to determine if our second prediction was correct – that trail degradation throughout the system is common, severe, and associated with certain vulnerable sites and with specific user groups – we surveyed the trail network for four types of recreational activity impact: 1) damage sites, 2) water crossings, 3) campsites, and 4) non-designated trails. Damage sites were defined as part of a designated trail where the rutted depth exceeds 0.05 m and where vegetation damage exceeds a width of 3 m. We chose this depth as it signifies enough soil loss or compaction to affect plant regeneration (Godefroid et al. 2003). The 3-m width we chose is similar to trail design guidelines in British Columbia (2.2 m), Newfoundland (4 m); and Ontario (2.5 m), and it is also reflected in SRD’s definition of a designated trail (3 m). Once a damage site was identified, we 1) geo-referenced the site with a handheld GPS unit (10 m± accuracy; Garmin or Magellan), 2) photographed the area, 3) measured the depth of the rut at the deepest point, and 4) measured the length and width of the site. When measuring the depth of ruts, we noted when a site was deeper than 25 cm for a distance of 3 m, which qualifies the site as an Erosion Event (EE). The EE designation is based on SRD standards for trail integrity and, under current management objectives, the number of EEs per kilometre of trail is expected to stay the same or decrease over time (SRD 2003). We also classified each damage site and EE by the types of tracks present: motorized, equestrian, or mixed.

For our third prediction, that the overall amount of traffic in the area is increasing, we analyzed data from the digital traffic counters placed on designated trails. We compared the number of passes at each counter during a replicable window over a two- or three-year period, depending on the availability of data. One window was established for summer use (approximately July 1 to September 30) and one for winter use (December 1 to January 31). We used replicable recording windows specific to each

Trail	Length (km)	Damage sites per km	Total length of damage sites (m)	Percent of trail damage
BTN	11.04	1.54	826	7
BTR	3.77	8.50	2,421	64
BTS	5.12	4.69	1,188	23
CAN	9.68	2.17	2,983	31
HUM	13.15	1.06	1,684	13
ONC	15.34	3.78	5,882	38
RNG	18.10	3.43	6,565	36

Damage site summary by trail. See accompanying map.



BTN=Back Trail North, BTR=Back Trail Ranger, BTS=Back Trail South, CAN=Canary Creek Trail, HUM=Hummingbird Creek Trail, ONC=Onion Lake Trail, RNG=Ranger Creek/South Ram River Trail.

traffic counter, rather than complete years, because of different operating periods among individual devices.

Results

1) Willingness of backcountry users to abide by FLUZ regulations

The total number of illegal passes by motorized vehicles during non-designated periods increased from 0.37 Passes Per Day (PPD) in 2004 to 0.63 PPD in 2006. The proportion of illegal

passes relative to the total number of passes recorded increased by 7% from 2004 to 2006.

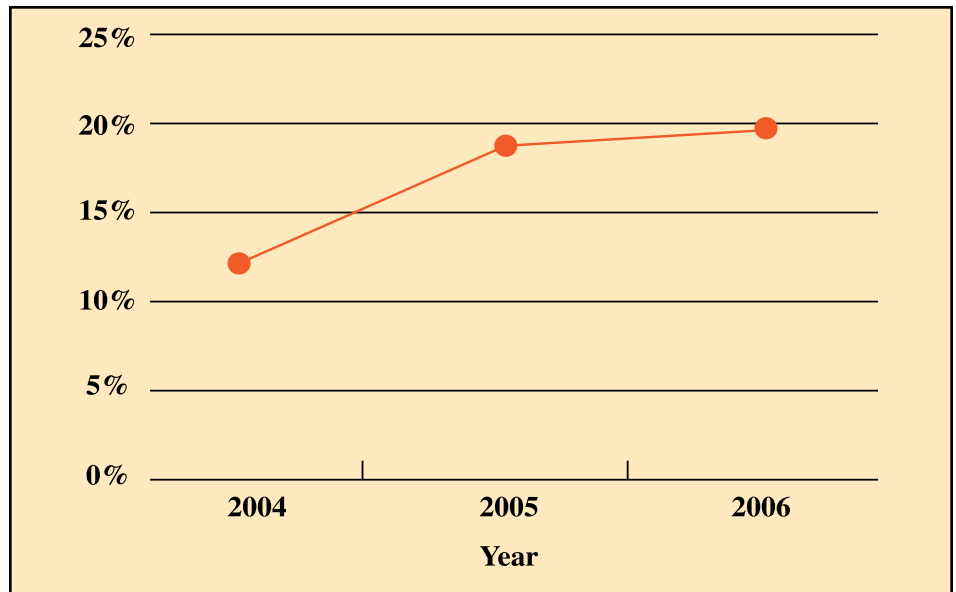
2) Extent of damage present

The amount of area damaged along all trails is approximately 20% of the total length of all trails. These damaged areas include 244 instances of trail braiding or widening. Trail damage was most common along trail sections farthest from the

Hummingbird Provincial Recreation Area. The number of Erosion Events (EEs) was as high as 5.58 per kilometre on some trails. The number of EEs associated with OHV use was proportionally higher than the number of EEs associated with equestrian use on six of seven trails. The combined footprint from random backcountry campsites in the study area was 50,574 m². This area is roughly equivalent to 32 NHL ice surfaces. Garbage was found and removed by AWA at 54% of campsites. We found more than one non-designated trail junction for every kilometre of designated trail in the trail network. We documented 89 trail water crossings throughout the network. Only 7% of these water crossings had formal crossing structures present, and 72% of the 89 water crossings went through a permanent water body.

3) Trends in motorized vehicle activity

There was 68% more motorized traffic recorded in 2006 than in 2004. On four trails with summer traffic counts, we found a 39% to 227% increase in vehicle passes over three years. Winter traffic counts increased on two trails by 46% and 163%



Percentage of illegal Passes Per Day per year out of the total number of passes. Data from designated trails only.

respectively, and declined on another trail by 95% over two winter seasons.

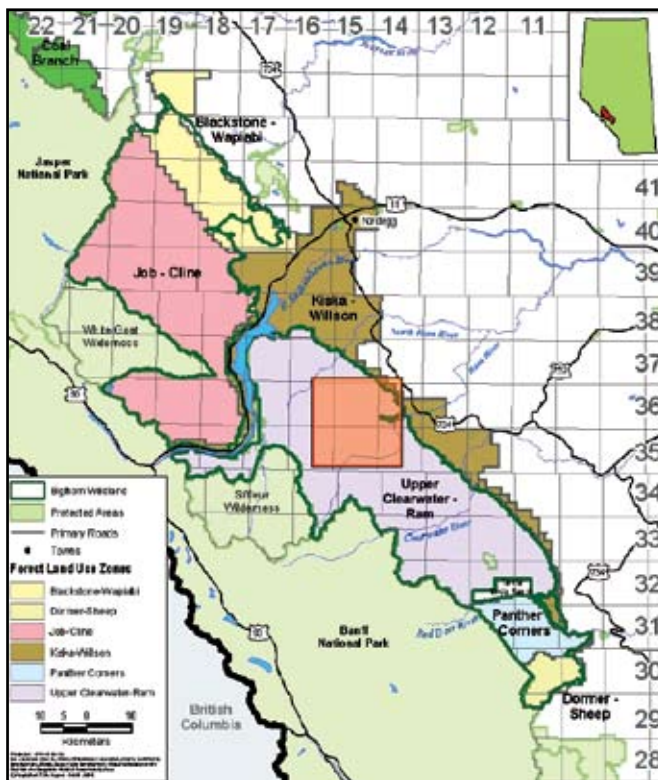
Discussion and Conclusion

Three lines of evidence strongly suggest that current management in the Bighorn Backcountry will not protect the environment from degradation caused by recreational impacts: 1) neither regulated use nor voluntary

compliance is reducing the amount of illegal use, 2) current levels of recreational activity are causing severe environmental degradation, and 3) there is a trend toward increasing user density. Given these lines of evidence, current management efforts in the Bighorn Backcountry are failing to meet the goal of the FLUZ regulations to protect “areas containing sensitive resources such as fish and wildlife and their habitats, vegetation, soils and watershed” (SRD). The extent and intensity of impacts reported here jeopardize the very possibility of a quality backcountry recreation experience in the future for all users and are inconsistent with wildlife habitat and watershed protection objectives in the FLUZ.

**For reference information, see the full report on our website: AlbertaWilderness.ca, Issues and Areas/Bighorn.*

Adam Ford is currently working as a wildlife research associate with the Banff Wildlife Crossings Project in Banff National Park, AB. Adam worked on the Bighorn project for AWA as a field researcher in 2004 and assisted with the analysis and writing of the final report.



General location of study area. The specific study area is indicated by the coloured square near the centre of the map. Legal land survey coordinates are shown along the right and top margins of the map.



ALBERTA GRIZZLY 101

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

Grizzly bear issues in Alberta easily become mired in technical terms, complicated reports, and acronyms. “The ESSC of the ESCC recommended to SRD that the grizzly should be designated as ‘threatened’ under Alberta’s WA.” So maybe it is time to take a step back and answer some of the questions that are often directed at AWA concerning Alberta’s grizzly bears.

How many grizzly bears are there in Alberta?

Nobody knows for sure, but we have a better idea than we have ever had before. In 2007, after the first three years of an in-depth five-year survey, the population is now believed to be less than 500 bears. This compares to a 2002 population estimate of 1,000 bears; by 2004, this estimate had dropped to “less than 700” (*Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan*). How much this represents an actual decline in grizzly numbers and how much it is just that we are getting better at counting them is unclear. What is clear is that these numbers are not high enough.

But some people are saying they are seeing more bears than ever.

It is important in all land management decisions that we use the best available scientific information. In the past, the water has been muddied somewhat by anecdotal reports from people who say that they are now seeing more grizzlies than ever. But since we have opened up motorized access into grizzly bear habitat at a stupendous rate over the past four decades, it is hardly surprising that people are encountering more bears. Forty years ago, to get into many areas of grizzly habitat would have required several days of hard hiking. Now you can hop on an ATV and be there within



Ironically, the grizzly, a wilderness icon, is often used to market human activities that negatively affect its habitat.

an hour. This does not mean that there are more bears: just that our likelihood of seeing them is higher.

Are grizzly bears endangered?

Alberta government scientists recommended in 2002 (when the population was believed to be 1,000 individuals) that the grizzly should be listed as a “threatened” species. Five years on, with a population of less than 500, the government has still not adopted this recommendation, even though new population estimates would warrant the grizzly being designated an “endangered” species (the next step up the ladder from “threatened”). Federally, the grizzly is listed as a species “of special concern.”

How many grizzly bears would be enough in Alberta?

It is estimated that in the 1800s there were as many as 6,000 grizzlies in Alberta. At the time they were mostly a prairie species. Clearly, it is unlikely that they will ever return to these numbers.

The World Conservation Union

(IUCN) Red List suggests that a population of 1,000 mature individuals would be listed as “vulnerable” and would therefore be “considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.” It is worth noting that 1,000 “breeding individuals” would require a total population of around 2,000 bears (including young and non-breeders).

But in the above scenario, the IUCN is talking about “populations,” and Alberta’s grizzly bears are not a “population” as such. Alberta grizzly bears can move south to the U.S., west into B.C., or north into the Northwest Territories, although this movement is thought to be limited (and likely to become more so as disturbances continue). Some people have extended this train of thought to conclude that, as there are lots of grizzlies in B.C. and in northern Canada, it doesn’t really matter if Alberta loses its grizzlies. But many Albertans would disagree!

To find a specific target for a viable grizzly bear population in Alberta, one has to go back to the 1990 *Provincial Management Plan for Grizzly Bears in Alberta*, which

D. Yelle

confidently recommended that “the provincial grizzly bear population will be increased to 1,000.” The 2004 *Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* was reluctant to use a hard population target.

Why should I care if grizzly bears disappear from Alberta?

Various economic arguments support the importance of grizzly bears in Alberta, but these are not, and should not be, the central focus for campaigns to preserve grizzlies in the province. Advertisers love to use billboard posters of grizzly bears to attract tourists, and it has been shown many times that visitors to Alberta’s parks consider wildlife a primary reason for visiting (and therefore spending money). An unpublished 2000 survey in Banff National Park found that only 15 percent of the respondents would visit the park without grizzly bears. But the contribution of grizzlies to Alberta’s economy is not the reason for protecting them.

The grizzly bear is also often touted as an “umbrella species.” Grizzlies need a large and diverse range to supply all of their needs throughout the year. In Alberta, female grizzlies have home ranges of 152 to 2,932 km²; males require 501 to 4,748 km² (*Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan*). It is possible to generalize to some extent and to say that if an area has a healthy population of grizzlies, then it is likely to also support populations of a number of other species. According to the 2000 Banff Park survey results, 95 percent of respondents believe grizzly bears are essential to the balance of nature and 85 percent believe that a healthy grizzly bear population is an indicator of a healthy ecosystem.

Ultimately it comes to the question “What gives us the right to decide that grizzly bears should be allowed to die out in Alberta?” The government folks are not sitting at their desks thinking, “How can we continue with our campaign to get rid of grizzlies?” But by failing to make changes that the government knows are necessary to sustain grizzly bear populations, it is in effect deciding that grizzly bears are not important enough to protect.

Aren’t Alberta’s grizzlies OK now that the hunt has been banned?

No. The spring grizzly bear hunt was suspended for three years, starting in 2006. AWA and other groups (including the Grizzly Bear Alliance and Defenders of Wildlife) argued for several years that the government should listen to its own scientists, who had been recommending since 2002 that the hunt should be suspended. Finally the government decided to listen, in no small part because of the hundreds of Albertans who took the time to write or phone to express their disgust at the continuing hunt.

One thing that environmental groups and hunters consistently agree on is that the hunt was not the cause of the grizzly’s troubles and that suspending the hunt was not going to solve these problems. Protecting grizzly bear habitat is the only thing that will help in the long term.

What needs to be done to protect Alberta’s grizzlies?

Habitat, habitat, habitat. If grizzlies don’t have secure habitat in which to go about their daily lives, they will die out: it’s as simple as that. Nobody knows why, but grizzlies are considerably more sensitive to human disturbance than black bears (maybe it is because we have already removed them from two-thirds of their historic range). The number one threat to grizzly bear habitat is access. Roads lead to dead grizzly bears, whether it is direct collisions, hunting (legal or illegal), or simply disturbance. The *Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* states that “human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence.” It points out that in the Alberta Central Rockies, 89 percent of human-caused mortalities were within 500 metres of a road on provincial lands.

Grizzlies need large areas of habitat with a wide variety of food sources to keep them going throughout the year. A grizzly is a huge animal, and



Grizzlies doing their part for the Alberta economy.

it needs to eat almost continually in the fall if it is to build up the fat reserves to survive through the winter. If it is continually being disturbed, it will not be in top condition when it comes time to hibernate in the winter. Disturbance may not kill bears directly, but it can reduce their chances of surviving the winter or of breeding successfully the following spring.

The decision on whether or not to do anything to recover grizzly bears is a political one. The provincial Recovery Team detailed what needed to be done in its 2004 *Draft Recovery Plan*. The Alberta government now has to (a) decide that grizzlies are worth recovering and do what the recovery plan suggests or (b) decide that it would rather do nothing and that grizzlies can just take their chances. The three-year delay in implementing the draft plan sends its own messages.

Can we actually recover grizzlies in Alberta?

Yes. The *Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* led to the recovery of the grizzly population from an estimated 136 individuals when the grizzly was listed as “threatened” in 1975 to a current population of more than 600 animals. Habitat security was the most important factor in this

recovery (the plan saw more than 1,000 km of roads closed). The Yellowstone plan showed that with sufficient resources and political will, grizzlies can indeed be recovered.

What can I do to help?

If there is one lesson to be learned from the long drawn-out campaign to suspend the spring grizzly bear hunt, it is the fact that whatever the scientific

evidence says, change will only come about as a result of large numbers of Albertans who care enough to have a say. The Grizzly Bear Recovery Team has shown what needs to be done to recover grizzlies: all that is missing now is the political will to do it. You can write to the following:

Your MLA: Find your MLA's contact information at 310-0000 (toll-free) or at http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_home&number=&by.

http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_home&number=&by.

Editor, *Calgary Herald*: letters@theherald.canwest.com

Editor, *Edmonton Journal*: <http://www.canada.com/edmontonjournal/letters.html>

Honourable Ted Morton
Minister, Sustainable Resource Development
420 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Phone: (780) 415-4815
Email: foothills.rockyview@assembly.ab.ca

MINISTER IS THE FINAL OBSTACLE TO GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY IN ALBERTA

Peter Zimmerman made the following statement to Dr. Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, at the Minister's meeting with the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team on June 20, 2007. Zimmerman represents the following organizations on the team: Alberta Wilderness Association, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Grizzly Bear Alliance, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.

It is not a frequent occurrence when government, the ranching community, forestry sector, oil and gas industries, conservation organizations, and academia all come together with a common action plan to address an urgent environmental and social issue. But that is the case with the current draft of the *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan*. This is a consensus-based plan built by all of these diverse stakeholder groups.

The plan was three years in the making and has now been with the Minister's department for two more years, waiting – we were told – for more definitive population census data. That data is now in and the population numbers are very alarming, to say the least. It is now time to act.

While the suspension of the hunt was a good initial step, it is imperative that the Minister act to implement the plan in its entirety. It is also time for the Minister to act on the Endangered Species Conservation Committee's recommendation to list this species. We believe the situation is urgent, even critical, if we truly wish to recover and sustain a population of grizzly bears in this province.

We are encouraged by the knowledge that Gord Stenhouse has been directed to commence work on the Grizzly Bear Priority Areas, which we see as the heart of this plan. We ask the Minister to ensure sufficient funding

R. Sinclair



and resources to carry on this important next step, as well as all the other components of the recovery plan.

We only have to look south of the border to see what success can be achieved when there is the will, a plan, the funding, and the leadership in place. The Yellowstone grizzly bear population has recovered to the point where it is now being de-listed. While our circumstances are no doubt somewhat different than those in the Yellowstone ecosystem, so is our made-in-Alberta plan. We too can be successful.

Minister, we have the collective will around this table, we have a plan that has been reviewed and vetted by experts – we only need the funding and your leadership to start down our own road to successfully recover this iconic species. But if we don't act immediately, and with the full weight of the plan, our hopes of achieving success will very quickly dim and the grizzly will become one more extirpated species in this province.

That tragic event is something I think no Minister would wish to have happen on his watch.

CARIBOU RECOVERY PLAN MISSES THE MARK

By Jonathan Wright

The following letter was sent to the Alberta government, May 2007.

I realize I've missed the preferred deadline for comments on this project by a rather wide margin, but I'd still be interested in hearing your take on my take. I will warn you in advance that I am highly critical of this program, but I would love to be swayed otherwise. It would be nice to have cause for hope – for conservationists, at least, if not for caribou!

I'd like to see the survival of woodland caribou in Alberta's forests, the same as I'd have liked to see the survival of the myriad things that have died out during my short lifetime thanks to our impacts. But thinking practically, and armed with an intimate knowledge of the workings of wildlife conservation and the politics thereof, I admit that I find it truly mind-boggling to try and fathom the level of effort you will need to sustain to meet success with this project, given that caribou are on their way out and a new, changed landscape/climate regime not conducive to caribou is clearly in.

Have you thought of the kinds of timelines you will need? The manpower? The money?

How long do you intend to go on killing wolves, for instance? What about the effects on the rest of the ecosystem? What about when you stop killing them and they come back with a vengeance because of all the extra moose and deer you've allowed for? What about the effects of all those extra moose and deer on caribou regardless of the wolves? On the rest of the ecosystem of your kill? What about the fact that your hypothetically boosted caribou herd will still have to deal

R. Bünglin



with all the same adverse landscape conditions on a worsened scale (this is Alberta, after all, and we've seen the trends here) that prevailed before the plan was implemented? What about the fact that on the larger ecological level, you have no idea what you are really doing? You folks are biologists – you don't need me to tell you that wolf-culling is dreadful science, decried by our best thinkers as it always has been, because you already know this. What the caribou faces is politics.

Now, the caribou mothers you are catching. What about stress? Capture myopathy? Capture-induced mortalities? Increased vulnerability to predators?

Finally, what if the caribou were gone (locally, that is – the far north is still teeming with them)? We're still looking at an ecosystem with wolves,

moose, bears, wolverines, etc. in pretty healthy numbers. That's about as close to utopia as you're going to get today. Think about that in perspective – do you want to meddle with this latest reductionist scheme? Because you and I both know that it takes incredible arrogance to believe we can predict all the effects of our actions.

With all due respect, this project seems to me to be geared more towards sustaining the careers of anachronistic, intensive “management”-school-type biologists than it is a truly progressive way of approaching a conservation crisis. It is, in fact, a wildlife manager's – rather than a caribou's – dream come true. Helicopters! Nets! Tranquilizers! Snowmobiles! Aerial hunting! Hands-on! Adrenaline! Steady work! There's nothing “innovative” about this. It's the same aging rodeo under the guise of science that I was watching 35 years ago on “Wild Kingdom.” Exciting, yes. Has it worked? Obviously not.

It would be excusable if it worked. But as Stan Boutin has gone on record as saying, “Chances of success are minimal.”

I will try to keep an open mind, however. I am hoping you can convince me otherwise. I'd appreciate your response. Thank-you for humouring me.

Government-commissioned wildlife recovery plans can miss the mark in a variety of ways. While the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was submitted in December 2004, almost three years later it has not been approved by government, never mind implemented. This lack of action flies in the face of recent studies estimating less than 500 grizzlies in Alberta.

“No sight encountered in the wilds is quite so stirring as those massive, clawed tracks pressed into mud or snow. No sight is quite so impressive as that of the great bear stalking across some mountain slope with the fur of his silvery robe rippling over his mighty muscles. He is a dignity and power matched by no other in the North American wilderness. To share a mountain with him for a while is a privilege and an adventure like no other.”

— Andy Russell (1915-2005)



WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR THE MILK RIVER

By Carrie Elliot

In April 2006 the International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Administrative Measures Task Force released its draft report on the water-sharing agreement between Alberta and Montana for the St. Mary and Milk Rivers (see WLA June 2006). Commissioned by the International Joint Commission, the report focuses on the administration of the agreement and the apportionment of water between the two jurisdictions. In addition, the Task Force proposed a number of management options. In her Masters thesis from Simon Fraser University, Carrie Elliot examined five options. Below is her executive summary.

Although Canada has an abundance of fresh water, significant regional and seasonal variations exist. Alberta experiences both of these characteristics. The north of the province receives the bulk of the water supply while the south produces the bulk of the demand. The Milk River Basin (MRB) is in the southeastern corner of the province and is subject to seasonal variation of water supply and demand.

The Milk River originates in western Montana, flows north from Montana through Alberta and then returns to Montana in the eastern half of that state. The water in this river comes from spring precipitation and runoff, and as a result, the water supply is highest between March and July while the demand for water, largely for irrigation purposes, occurs in late summer through early fall. The disparity between supply and demand is the basis of the policy problem discussed in my thesis: that there is too little management of the water resources of the Milk River.

Five additional factors contribute to this problem.

- First, Alberta has no storage facility on the Milk River that would allow the capture of water during the high supply season for use during the irrigation season.
- Second, the water allocation system in Alberta – known as first-in-time, first-in-right – puts priority on the seniority of the water licence and thus inhibits the efficient allocation of water.
- Third, although Alberta's recent water strategy calls for water management plans for each basin in the province, the MRB is currently not subject to such a plan. The lack of a water management plan highlights the fact that there is not a comprehensive

S. Bray



Arising in Montana, the north and south forks of the Milk River enter Alberta and join at the confluence shown here. The river flows into Montana further downstream.

policy framework on water issues in the MRB.

- Fourth, because the river crosses the U.S.-Canada border, it is subject to the Boundary Waters Treaty signed between the two countries in 1909 and a subsequent Order signed in 1921. These agreements, under the purview of the International Joint Commission (IJC), apportion the water from the river to each country and thereby limit the action each country can and will take regarding the management of that water.
- Lastly, although there are many similarities between the Canadian and American portions of the MRB, there is very little interaction and coordination between water users on either side of the border, resulting in a paucity of cooperative arrangements on water issues.

Recent events have highlighted these factors. An IJC Task Force was convened in 2004 after the Governor of Montana requested that the IJC review whether each country was receiving its correct apportionment of the Milk River

water. This request may have been at least in part a result of Montana users being alerted to the fact that Alberta was conducting a preliminary feasibility study into storage options for the water of the Milk River.

The Task Force issued a report in 2006 that included administrative recommendations and a recommendation that particular water management policies outside of their mandate be studied. These policy options were water marketing, water banking, joint water management operations and infrastructure improvements/enhancements...

Water marketing refers to a new system of water allocation whereby holders of water licences obtained through the first-in-time, first-in-right system could choose to sell some or all of their water allocation, either permanently or temporarily, to other users. Water banking is a policy option involving a financial agreement between two jurisdictions with one signatory physically storing water for another to be released when needed.

The suggestion of joint operations stemmed from the IJC recognizing that the border can act as an impediment to efficient water administration and that working towards treating the basin as one instead of two could improve the situation. The infrastructure improvement options that I explore in my thesis are on-stream, meaning a dam and storage reservoir on the Milk River, and off-stream, meaning a diversion canal to a storage facility off the river. These two options are included because they were the focus of the recent feasibility study in Alberta.

In order to assess these policy options relative to political, economic, legal, environmental, effectiveness, and complexity criteria, I undertook a mixed methods approach. A survey of Canadian MRB residents was undertaken, eight key stakeholders were interviewed, case studies were analyzed to learn lessons about conditions for success, and relevant literature was reviewed. The analysis of the results revealed that some of these options are not feasible and that a combination is necessary to address the multiple factors contributing to the policy problem.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- Water markets transfer water from low to high value uses and in Alberta can involve water conservation through the utilization of a 10 percent hold back of water and increased



CONSERVING GRASSLAND BIODIVERSITY FROM MEXICO TO CANADA

By Cliff Wallis

Cliff Wallis, a grassland expert and an AWA director, gave this presentation to Council, Commission for Environmental Cooperation at the June 2007 meeting in Morelia, Mexico.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has been very supportive of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation's (CEC) efforts in North American grassland biodiversity conservation. We note, however, that the 2002 document "North American Agenda for Action: 2003-2005 Conservation of Biodiversity" remains on the CEC website as the only visible remnant of the CEC's Conservation of Biodiversity Program. It has not received any updates in five



The Milk River Ridge, one of AWA's Areas of Concern, contains the Twin River Heritage Rangeland, where the north and south forks of the Milk River join. Montana diverts some of its portion of the St. Mary River into the south fork of the Milk River, resulting in higher summer flows than would normally be present.

efficiency of water practices. They should be put into practice in the MRB with educational campaigns for potential market participants and a website run by Alberta Environment with market information.

- The vast majority of survey respondents and all of the key stakeholders who were interviewed support the option of joint water

years. We are alarmed by the lack of visible outputs since 2005 with respect to biodiversity conservation in the grasslands of North America. While we recognize the scarcity of resources within the CEC and the need to focus on capacity building around priority species of conservation concern, we believe there continues to be a significant but unrealized opportunity to enhance cooperative work in the grasslands of North America.

We applaud the continuing

management operations through the creation of an IJC St. Mary – Milk River board and greater collaboration between water users. The case study also indicates that this option will improve the management of the water in the Milk River.

- The two storage options have been studied several times over the last 50 years and have the support of local Canadian residents. These options would be subject to numerous provincial and federal regulations and are currently not viable when weighed against economic, environmental, and political criteria.
- In order to allow water banking, the on-stream storage option would be required; therefore, this option faces the same obstacles as the on-stream option. However, it would have the added advantage of Alberta receiving financial recompense from Montana for the banking and release of their water.
- Other water management options worthy of consideration include an infrastructure option of a pipeline diverting water from the St. Mary River in Canada to the Milk River in Canada and the idea of Montana banking water for Alberta (in contrast to Alberta storing water for Montana).

Carrie Elliot's thesis can be found on AWA's website under Issues and Areas/Milk River Ridge/Archives.

work on the project "Building Local Capacity for Integrated Ecosystem Management and to Conserve Critical Species and Spaces" but continue to believe that it is under-resourced and that efforts will not be sufficient to replicate to other areas of North America, like the grasslands. This requires governments of all three countries to rededicate themselves to this task and to ultimately expand this project into the grassland region. AWA is also supportive of the CEC's work



The Commission for Environmental Cooperation is an international organization aiming to promote the conservation and sustainable use of North American biodiversity, including that of the Great Plains, which stretch from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada's prairie provinces.

on renewable energy but believes it needs more inputs relative to renewable energy project impacts on landscapes that support grassland species of common conservation concern.

AWA continues to request that the CEC focus on grassland biodiversity conservation for the following reasons:

1. The grasslands hold a significant number of species at risk (including species of common conservation concern).
2. There has been a recent explosion of interest in biofuels, in some cases supported by government subsidies that are distorting the marketplace and causing both social and environmental impacts.
3. We are witnessing exponential growth in renewable energy from wind and solar that is putting some of our most significant grassland areas at risk. While we strongly support the focus on renewables, we believe that there are numerous environmentally friendly locations for locating renewable energy developments and that environmentally significant grasslands should not be the focus of renewable energy development.
4. There has been an increase in

resource extraction activities, notably natural gas and coalbed methane, which is directly impacting some of the continent's most important protected areas (e.g., Suffield National Wildlife Area in Canada) and species at risk like greater sage grouse.

5. We are concerned about the increasing disregard that governments show for biodiversity in development and management decisions that affect habitats across the plains of North America, as evidenced by the continuing, and sometimes precipitous, declines in some grassland bird species.

The conservation of biodiversity program has been one of the CEC's strengths. While we understand the focus on capacity building, the underlying attention to biodiversity conservation must not be lost. Under Article 10 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, conservation of species and habitats, transboundary environmental issues, and protection of endangered species are highlighted as key areas that Council may consider in its work. All of these, and the implementing mechanisms, are relevant

to biodiversity conservation in the grasslands.

AWA is asking that future CEC work plans incorporate more activities relevant to biodiversity conservation in the grassland region that stretches from Canada to Mexico. All three governments can assist by (1) supporting the creation of additional core grassland protected areas, (2) removing subsidies for agriculture and energy (including biofuels and wind) that are degrading the grasslands, and (3) expanding the work of the local capacity-building project and replicating it within the grasslands to help with recovery of grassland species of common conservation concern.

We continue to emphasize the important role that the CEC Secretariat can play in facilitating activities related to capacity building and information sharing, two key areas in the Puebla Declaration. A continental grassland conservation workshop should be held to identify new threats and opportunities and to develop a five year work plan. Alberta Wilderness Association looks forward to continuing to advance grassland biodiversity conservation at the continental level with renewed and always valuable efforts from the CEC.

For more information about the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, go to www.cec.org.



Three-flowered avens (Geum triflorum)



PLANT MONITORING PROJECTS IN THE CASTLE

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

This summer, AWA continues its on-the-ground research in the Castle Wildlands. Long-time volunteer and principal investigator Reg Ernst will take our program of research to Prairie Bluff and the Front-Range Canyons. With the help of volunteers, and the support of the Alberta Conservation Association and Shell Canada, we have begun our field work.

Whitebark Pine Regeneration

Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is a keystone species of subalpine ecosystems across western North America. It provides food, cover, and breeding habitat for various wildlife species, including grizzly bears and squirrels. The lifecycle of the whitebark pine is inextricably linked with the Clark's nutcracker, which feeds on the nutrient-rich pine seeds, inadvertently planting many of the seeds as it caches them for future use.

The whitebark pine is in trouble across its range in western North America. Fire suppression and mountain pine beetle have both played their part, but in the Castle region, white pine blister rust (*Cronartium ribicola*) is the greatest threat. This species, which also affects limber pine trees (*Pinus flexilis*), was accidentally introduced from Europe several decades ago and continues to spread, killing a high proportion of trees within a stand in a matter of a couple of years. A small percentage of whitebark pine trees appear to be resistant to pine blister rust, so AWA's study will be looking at the feasibility of harvesting seeds from these individual trees and planting them on site in order to ensure a future supply of healthy rust-resistant trees.

Road Reclamation on Prairie Bluff

Prairie Bluff was the site of a bitter battle in the 1980s between Shell Canada and AWA and other environmental groups (see *WLA*, June

N. Douglas



Left to right: Roger Creasey (Shell), Bill Thresher (Alberta Sustainable Resource Development), and researcher Reg Ernst on Prairie Bluff.

2006). When Shell announced its plans in 1987 to drill two gas wells in the Prime Protection Zone on the top of Prairie Bluff, AWA supporters organized a blockade of their 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.

Shell's work involved building a new access road to the top of the bluff, and an old road crossing a steep scree slope was to be reclaimed. Twenty years on, AWA's current study, sponsored in part by Shell Canada, will look at the success rate of the road reclamation. Was the reseeding of the road successful? Or are the areas which were left to reseed naturally equally well-covered by vegetation today?

Invasive Plant Surveys in the Front-Range Canyons

The Front-Range Canyons of the Castle extend along the eastern edge of the mountains. They are a series of steep river valleys, running mostly in a northeasterly direction. In these canyons, as in so many other places, human activities – oil and gas exploration, off-highway vehicle activity, and more recently, livestock grazing – cause changes to plant communities. Invasive plants spread rapidly along trails and seismic lines,

rapidly out-competing less aggressive native plants.

Although it is mandatory under Alberta's *Weed Control Act* to control noxious weeds, the provincial government is largely ignoring the problem. Species such as Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and tall buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) are listed as noxious under the act, but both are common and occur on some sites in the Front-Range Canyons.

The number of non-native plants tends to decrease as one heads up the canyons. Native plants are likely more adapted to the harsh climatic conditions that come with increasing altitude. But it is possible that as the climate changes, these non-native plants will be able to continue their inexorable march uphill and eventually colonize areas where they were previously unable to survive.

It is vital that the occurrence of these non-native species is monitored over time, but this task is very low on the priority list of provincial land managers. Resources to monitor and eradicate invasive plants are minimal. Although invasive plants at lower levels are so well-established that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to remove them, it may be possible to limit their encroachment into these higher altitude areas.

CHERYL BRADLEY: DEFENDER OF WILDERNESS

By Debby Gregorash

In 1971, the year John Lennon recorded and released *Imagine*, Alberta received what her friends and colleagues would argue was an even greater gift: Cheryl Bradley, one of the recipients of the 2007 Alberta Wilderness Defenders Award, moved west from Ontario.

While working on a BSc in environmental biology and then an MSc in geography from the University of Calgary, friends invited Cheryl on an Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) hike to the Porcupine Hills, linking her up with people who would influence her in the coming years and steer her toward environmental advocacy. One of her professors, Richard Pharis, was involved with AWA, and he soon had her volunteering with the organization, stuffing envelopes and running errands. Through the hikes and the companionship of this network of protectors of nature, Cheryl came to realize how much she enjoyed the wilderness, especially the emotional connection to the landscape and its people.

Cheryl took a job with Alberta Ecological Survey and then Alberta Parks in Edmonton, engaging in early work on defining a protected areas system. This was her first opportunity to work with another "Defender," Cliff Wallis. She visited wildlands throughout the province and her first

serious advocacy work was preventing the construction of a canal through Lesser Slave Lake Park. Working with active and efficient people like Brian Staszewski, Vivian Pharis, and Dianne Pachal had a significant influence on Cheryl. "I cut my teeth on environmental advocacy with the AWA," she says, "and looking back, I couldn't have done what I've done without those who build platforms to work from."

She was vice-president and then president of AWA from 1979 to 1983. It was about this time that she met Orville Pall (1951-1986), who was also once honoured with the Wilderness Defenders Award. Recalling how involved in AWA she was, Cheryl explains, "This was before email, and I found myself either on the phone all day or at meetings, while trying to complete my Masters. Fortunately Orville was doing his own thing, too."

In 1988, four years after Orville's tragic death in a plane crash, Cheryl met biologist Lorne Fitch at an Alberta Irrigation Projects Association annual meeting. "We were both fish out of water," explains Lorne, who later started the well-known Cows and Fish program. Together, they have made Lethbridge, Alberta their home.

Many groups that advocate for wildlife habitat protection have appreciated the unwavering leadership



L. Fitch

Wilderness Defenders Award winner Cheryl Bradley beside the Oldman River in Pavan Park, Lethbridge. Cheryl and Lorne often enjoy walks in the cottonwood forests and grasslands that the City of Lethbridge has protected from development.

of this remarkable woman. In the mid-1980s, Cheryl was research director with Trout Unlimited Canada during its formation. Beginning in 1993, she initiated and managed the South Country Protected Areas Project in an effort to protect significant environmental features in south-central Alberta. She has been heavily involved in the Alberta Native Plants Council, Oldman Watershed Council, and Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species, not to mention local environment and naturalist groups. Recently, she participated on the South Saskatchewan River Basin Planning Committee, and she is currently working hard to defend the integrity of the Suffield National Wildlife Area.

In the late 1970s, Cheryl began promoting awareness of the Aspen Parkland Natural Region. Through field trips with government, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, industry, conservation groups, and interested members of the public, she brought the Rumsey Wildland, the largest block of representative Aspen



M. Miller

Much of Cheryl Bradley's professional botanical work has been done in the prairies. Here she tries to identify a plant of the mixed grass prairie in Grasslands National Park, SK. On hikes, she spends an inordinate amount of time on her knees.

Parkland in Canada, to the attention of Albertans. She was instrumental in bringing about the legislated protection of this previously unrecognized wilderness gem.

In the early 1980s, Cheryl opened her own environmental consulting business, and today she conducts vegetation inventories and rare plant surveys, organizes and facilitates workshops and public meetings, and prepares summary reports. She describes herself as “a synthesizer of information who can translate and communicate to others.”

Environmentalist and friend Dorothy Dickson, who has advocated for wilderness beside Cheryl for decades, says it’s about time she receives the Wilderness Defenders Award, but Cheryl feels humbled. She isn’t convinced that her

accomplishments have been that extraordinary, given the privileges she’s been given: great friends and colleagues, stimulating work, and a free country. Around the world, many who are working to protect wilderness must deal with war, poverty, and lack of freedom. “These people put their lives on the line,” she says.

Quoting Thoreau, “In wildness is the preservation of the world,” Cheryl adds, “Wilderness has the lessons we need to survive, and if we want to operate sustainably, we can look at how nature works. We must bond with wilderness and understand the diversity of nature. We need grounding.”

Cheryl Bradley’s sense of wilderness protection has expanded over the years. Small areas have been protected. “Those are little pieces and they give me great joy, but

bigger pieces need to be set aside that protect watersheds, airsheds, and soil functions. This is why my interest went from wilderness to something much broader like feedlots, water quality, urban sustainability – they are all connected.”

Does Cheryl ever get angry or discouraged? “Long ago,” the botanist says, “I was filled with righteous indignation when I saw the stupid things mankind was doing to the earth.” Now she understands that she can only focus on her corner of the earth. But she brightens and declares, “I do approve of the same righteous indignation in today’s youth!”

Debby Gregorash is an agricultural and environmental writer living near Coaldale, Alberta. She owns and protects 240 acres of aspen parkland near Police Outpost Provincial Park.

UPDATES

Have Your Say on Water for Life Renewal

By Joyce Hildebrand

The *Water for Life* strategy is steered by the Alberta Water Council (AWC), a multi-stakeholder, consensus-based organization of which AWA is a member. Although implementation of the strategy has progressed in some areas, it has failed to meet set targets in others. At Premier Stelmach’s direction, Environment Minister Rob Renner has asked the AWC to develop recommendations to “renew and resource” the strategy. To that end, the AWC is now seeking the input of Albertans across the province.

The Government of Alberta released the *Water for Life* strategy in late 2003 in an attempt to deal with increasing concerns about Alberta’s water management and use. With oil sands using astounding amounts of fresh water for production, coalbed methane development affecting groundwater quality, population increase straining already over-allocated rivers, and source water in the foothills and Eastern Slopes being threatened by increased industrial



The early morning serenity of Lakeland Provincial Park belies the serious water quality and quantity issues that face Albertans today.

development, the urgent need for an effective overarching water

management plan had become obvious.

Given the changes that have occurred in the province since the strategy’s release, the AWC wants to hear Albertans’ current views on *Water for Life*: its successes, failures, and priorities. The purpose of the renewal is two-fold: to re-establish the strategic intent of the strategy and to recommend changes in direction and focus.

The three goals of the strategy will not change: (1) safe, secure drinking water supply; (2) healthy aquatic ecosystems; and (3) reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. AWA supports these goals and recognizes that they are all connected. Our specific focus, however, is on the second goal – healthy aquatic ecosystems – especially as it relates to the protection of the watersheds where our rivers and lakes have their source. The industrial and recreational pressures on the headwater areas of the Eastern Slopes are of special concern. The AWC’s *Review of Implementation Progress of Water for Life, 2005-2006* agrees that source water protection should have higher priority in the implementation of *Water for Life*.

AWA also believes that in order to be effective, the *Water for Life* strategy must be integrated with the Land-Use Framework process, since how land is managed affects both water quality and quantity. The two parallel processes are currently running separately with no organizational or regulatory

mechanisms to integrate them.

The deadline for submissions is August 24, 2007. To have your say, go to <http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/awc/renewal/> and see the options available for providing input. Reference materials, including the *Water for Life* strategy, can be downloaded

from the website as well. The AWC will gather the responses and present recommendations to Environment Minister Renner in early 2008, in time for next year's budget. Please take the time to present your views in order to influence these recommendations.

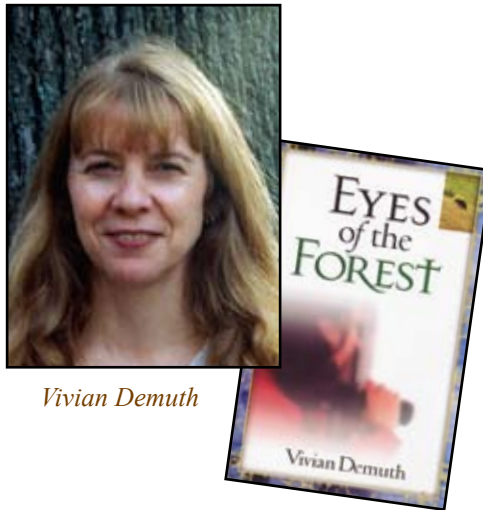
EYES OF THE FOREST: AN ECOLOGICAL NOVEL BY VIVIAN DEMUTH

Reviewed by Eliot Katz

Writer and poet Vivian Demuth recently published her first novel with Smoky Peace Press in Grande Prairie. *Eyes of the Forest* is an ecological novel set among a group of mountain fire lookouts during an unusually hot dry summer. The novel explores the relationships that develop between the various characters and the relatively wild landscape in which they work. It is ecological in that it delves into the effects of global warming, including extended droughts, increasingly intense fires, and unusual insect infestations.

Blending realism with elements of magical realism, the story begins with a prelude in which the protagonist, Daphne Garten, undergoes a neuroscience research experiment at the University of Calgary, where she is exposed to electromagnetic fields that enable her to see her deceased mother. At her summer job as a fire lookout, Daphne hopes that she will again contact her mother in the electromagnetic field generated by lightning. Instead, the ghost of a former forest ranger haunts her waking and sleeping hours, and warns Daphne about an impending environmental disaster. At a key moment in the novel, Daphne's lover, tree planter Chris Singh, goes missing in the woods, and the community of fire lookouts becomes involved in the search for Chris and the efforts to prevent the potential larger disaster.

Personal and ecological loss weave through the novel. Other themes include the experience of time in the mountains and the struggle of being a woman in a male-dominated working environment. With the weather being an integral part of a fire lookout's job, each chapter of the novel begins with a folk weather-saying,



Vivian Demuth

such as "When a great many women are seen in the street / It will storm the next day."

In original drafts of the novel, the main character, Daphne, experienced a helicopter crash at her fire lookout, but in the published version the crash takes place at a distance and Daphne does not deal with it directly. In a sad coincidence, when *Eyes of the Forest* was being published last summer, a terrible helicopter crash occurred at the lookout where Demuth works. She received a Distinguished Service Award from Alberta Forestry for her courage in providing first-aid emergency services to three survivors and one fatal victim of that crash.

Vivian Demuth has worked for more than 20 years as a fire lookout and park ranger/warden. Her poetry and fiction have been published in anthologies and literary journals in Canada and the U.S. A portion of the proceeds from

Demuth's poetry collection, *Breathing Nose Mountain*, was donated to the Alberta Wilderness Association. Last fall, Demuth received a Canada Council grant to travel to the Can Serrat International Arts Center near Barcelona, Spain, where she lived for a month as a writer-in-residence. She has spent recent winters working with New York City's homeless and teaching art and creative writing.

Award-winning author Kaylie Jones writes of *Eyes of the Forest*: "Demuth's debut novel is a breath of fresh air. Demuth's prose is wonderfully descriptive and confident, an ode to nature in its most primal form. City dwellers such as myself are reminded of what we do not know about the wild, and what we are all at risk of losing in our selfish shortsightedness." In a recent review on litkicks.com, Levi Asher writes: "This is a fun, people-filled story that will appeal to anyone who's ever lived out in the mountains, and to anyone who's wondered what it would be like."

Elroy Deimert, publisher of Smoky Peace Press, recently organized an 18-city western Canada book tour for Demuth with the assistance of a grant from the Alberta Foundation of the Arts. Smoky Peace Press publishes a mix of creative genres and has put out a series of four anthologies that include work from such Canadian writers as Lorna Crozier, Rudy Wiebe, Lee Maracle, Thomas Wharton, Glen Sorestad, Sharon Butala, and Candace Savage. *Eyes of the Forest* is available from McNally Robinson Books or directly from the publisher at www.smokypeacepress.com.

Miffed by Motors on Alberta's Only Canoe Circuit

AWA's first overnight canoe trip, led by Lac La Biche high school teacher Aaron Davies, took place in June 2007. Samina Khandwala, one of the seven intrepid paddlers, shares some reflections about the trip.

Dear Editor:

I started the 2007 summer season by participating in the Alberta Wilderness Association's canoeing/camping weekend in Lakeland Provincial Park. Having never been overnight canoeing before, I was excited about my new adventure, but a little anxious as well, as my decision to participate was very spontaneous. My expectations weren't high: I hoped to learn about the flora and fauna, and to catch some glimpses of wildlife. I was also anticipating the escape from the hustle and bustle of Calgary and looked forward to a more secluded natural experience than typical car camping tends to offer.

After our three-kilometre portage (using the government-supplied canoe carts) to the Jackson Lake "dock," I got my first glimpse of the beauty and peace of the park's lakes and surrounding areas. The water was still, the air silent, and a beautiful group of pelicans floated downstream. Immediately I forgot about the chaos of big-city life and my looming project deadline that had almost prevented this experience.

It took another two hours of canoeing before we arrived at our campsite on a small island in the middle of Kinnaird Lake. During the paddle, we saw and heard many different species of birds, including loons, red-necked grebes, and numerous boreal songbirds. Watching them play and hunt, listening to their calls and admiring them soar above us impressed on me the truth that this wilderness is their home.

It wasn't until we had finished setting up camp that I had a negative experience. Off in the distance, the familiar sound of a speedboat's whir



Novice paddler Samina Khandwala takes a well-deserved break.

turned my stomach. I was a little disheartened that even out here I couldn't escape the disruption of motorized recreational vehicles. Besides being concerned about the release of pollutants into the air and water, I worry about disruption to the wildlife, including underwater species, and to the peaceful surroundings. Until now my dislike had been merely an annoyance, but what I heard next has turned annoyance into out-and-out hatred. As the boat got closer, the surrounding loons and grebes broke into heartbreaking screeching. It was nothing like the beautiful calls heard earlier in the day. The cries of frenzy and fear only died away when the



Bald eagle nest, Lakeland Provincial Park.

boat's noise was a distant whir again.

I found comfort in sharing my thoughts with the other paddlers around the fire that night, knowing the majority felt the same. The incident sparked some philosophical debate about what humans are entitled to where the environment and wildlife are concerned. We all agreed, though, that the birds' fear was unquestionable and that if the province continues marketing Lakeland Provincial Park as Alberta's only canoe circuit, then regulations should be in place to ensure that it's a safe and friendly environment for both paddlers and wildlife.

My shock dissipated overnight, and aside from the frequent but brief interruptions from the speedboats and screaming birds, I managed to enjoy the remainder of the weekend. Some highlights were the awesome beaver dams, a gorgeous bald eagle perched in a treetop nest, learning to distinguish the various bird calls, and refreshing ice-cold swims after long, hot canoeing and hiking expeditions.

Upon returning to Calgary, we learned from Parks and Protected Areas that attempts to prevent park users from pulling large boats to the lake have failed. Determined campers and fishermen have knocked down gates installed by officials (to limit motorized

boat size) in order to transport their boats using an ATV trail that leads to Jackson Lake. I'll admit that my first reaction when I heard the motors on Kinnaird Lake was to place most of the blame on the provincial government for failing to preserve our wilderness areas,

but perhaps that's easier than facing the idea that some people simply don't seem to care about their impact on wildlife, habitat, and paddlers.

All said, I thoroughly enjoyed the trip and am grateful for every moment. The positive experiences provided a

wonderful educational adventure and an opportunity to meet some great people. The negative ones created another dedicated wildlife advocate for life.

— Samina Khandwala

ASSOCIATION NEWS

Staff Profile: Danette Moulé

Having always loved the outdoors and been a keen proponent of nature conservation, I am thrilled to join AWA. Growing up, I was always hiking, camping, and spending time in the mountains with my family. Although at the time us kids sometimes resented being dragged all over the continent, I now can't appreciate enough what I



C. Wearnouth

was exposed to at a young age. Before the age of eighteen, I had seen virtually every landscape North America has to offer. My appreciation for wilderness and wildlife likely grew from this constant, repeated exposure. Whatever the cause, from a young age, I knew I wanted to dedicate my life to fighting for nature conservation. Now, here I am at AWA, finally realizing my dream.

Although I have joined the team with little hands-on experience, I come to AWA with a true passion for the outdoors and a strong will to do something. Having just completed my Bachelor of Applied Policy Studies from Mount Royal College in May of this year, I set out immediately to find my destiny and found myself here.

When I first enrolled in post-secondary education four years ago, I wasn't sure by which route I was going to pursue environmental protection. I enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce

programme at Mount Royal College with the vision of completing a business degree, then continuing on in environmental law. However, early on in my degree, I developed a keen interest in politics and economics. One of my professors approached me with the newly developed policy studies programme, and I was immediately intrigued. I switched majors, and soon realized that politics would be my route to pursuing environmental protection. I hope to pursue a Master of Environment and Management in the next few years, while continuing my work with AWA. I am thrilled to be here, and look forward to working with AWA's loyal members to promote wilderness protection.

Staff Profile: Chris Wearnouth

I first came to AWA through a school practicum while studying journalism at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). I joined the staff just prior to this year's Climb for Wilderness, writing promotional material for the media. AWA turned



C. Wearnouth

out to be a great way to explore career possibilities that blended my passion for wild places.

I grew up in northern Alberta, where the prairie meets boreal forest, and the outdoors was the backdrop for much of my early development. I would often find myself alone in the woods or walking down the cut-line that ran alongside our property, contemplating the triumphs and tribulations of growing up.

When it was time to leave home, I moved to Calgary, where I completed a B.A. in Communications at the University of Calgary. Upon graduating, I promptly moved to Banff to rekindle my connection with the outdoors. The mountains were a relatively new environment for me, but one I embraced. I left during the winters to travel but returned for two more summers and hiked among the rugged peaks, gaining a sense of place in the wilderness.

Eventually, I returned to Calgary to further my education, thus ending up at SAIT and AWA. By the end of my original two-week work term at AWA, I could not easily leave the great people and work of the organization. I continued to work in the office as a volunteer until, after graduating in May, I was offered the opportunity to become an employee for the summer.

I am currently working on AWA's summer hikes program and am conducting trailhead surveys in the Bighorn Backcountry. Both have been a great way to explore parts of Wild Alberta that are new to me. The more time I spend out there, the more I appreciate our diverse wilderness heritage and the need to protect it so that we may always have wild places through which to wander.

IN MEMORIAM

Jean Vollum (Kettenbach), born in Alberta in 1927, lived most of her adult life in Oregon. She quietly championed all of the things she believed in, whether it was the arts, the environment, or music. In her sixties, Vollum became an accomplished photographer,

eventually showing her work at local galleries. A few years ago she visited Antarctica, where she photographed the melting polar icecap from ships and helicopters. Her family has paid a lasting tribute in Jean's memory with a generous gift to Alberta Wilderness Association. The gift will be

dedicated to AWA's work on behalf of the Suffield National Wildlife Area. We are sincerely appreciative of the life of Jean, who meant so much to wilderness and protected areas. We offer our sympathy to her family and friends in their loss.

EVENTS

TUESDAY TALKS

Pre-registration is advised for all talks.
Location: AWA Hillhurst Room,
455 - 12 St. NW, Calgary
Time: 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Cost: \$5 per adult, \$1 for children
Contact: (403) 283-2025
1-866-313-0713

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

Keeping Tabs on Alberta's "Ghost" Cat

With Kyle Knopff

Tuesday, October 16, 2007

A Line in the Disappearing Sand: Tiger Beetles of the Middle Sand Hills

With Randy Dzenkiw

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Beautiful Bighorn: Can We Afford To Leave It Unprotected?

With Vivian Pharis

Tuesday, November 6, 2007

Disappearing Dunes on the Prairies

With Dr. Darren Bender

Tuesday, December 4, 2007

Fabulous Wild Alberta: Worth Saving!

With Robin and Marian White

Alberta Wilderness Association Annual General Meeting

Saturday, November 17, 2007

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Location: 455 - 12 St. NW, Calgary

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or
(403) 283-2025

WILDERNESS HIKES

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

Cost: \$20 - AWA members
\$25 - Non-members

Details: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca

Contact: (403) 283-2025
or 1-866-313-0713
awa@shaw.ca

Online: shop.albertawilderness.ca

Saturday, September 8, 2007

Beehive Natural Area

With Nigel Douglas

Mountain headwaters of the Oldman River. Moderate hike.

Saturday, September 22, 2007

Eagle Watching in Crowsnest Pass

With Peter Sherrington

Moderate hike.

Saturday, September 29, 2007

The Whaleback

With Bob Blaxley

Montane habitat, 2 hours south of Calgary. Moderate hike.

Saturday, September 29, 2007

Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve

With Vivian Pharis

Table-top mountain in southern Kananaskis. Easy to moderate hike.

Friday, November 16, 2007

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Annual Lecture and Awards

"Sleeping with the Enemy: Is Safe Sex Possible?"

With Dr. Ian Urquhart

Money - what environmental group ever has enough? Today the search for this lifeblood may tempt environmental NGOs to partner

with corporations in order to secure the resources needed to try to influence public policy and corporate behaviour. In this year's lecture, Dr. Urquhart considers whether those who take this course mortally wound the authenticity of their policy critiques and what alternative tacks may be available to the conservation community.

Location: 455 - 12 St. NW, Calgary
Wine & Cheese Reception: 6:00 p.m.

Lecture and Awards: 7:00 p.m.

Cost: \$25

Reservations: (403) 283-2025

1-866-313-0713

Online: www.albertawilderness.ca



SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA



Eximius Ordo, the motto of the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield, is Latin for “out of the ordinary.” Our July 12th tour of the Suffield National Wildlife Area (SNWA) was nothing less than extraordinary.

A fine picnic lunch under the cottonwoods on the South Saskatchewan River rejuvenated us for an afternoon filled with fascinating natural history and cultural stops, from tiger beetles to medicine wheels.



Corey Davidson, range biologist for CFB Suffield, and his biology research students, Marion Gregory and Lesley Poirier, provided a wealth of interpretive insight to the SNWA. Their efforts to reduce the invasion of non-native plants with natural predators show their concern for applying science to protect the area’s natural features.



The first of two flat tires!

Recognition of the importance of habitat and serious consideration for species like the rattlesnake are evident in the SNWA.

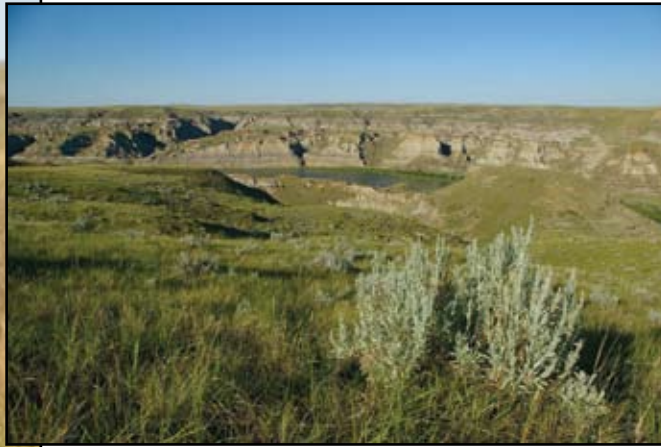


Each year we offer a tour to one of Alberta’s wildland treasures. Eighteen AWA members and staff were treated to an unforgettable tour led by Corey Davidson and the “bio-team” at CFB Suffield.

AWA FIELD TRIP



From down-hole cameras to nets and owl pellets, Alan Marsh explained the research being done to learn more about the SNWA's burrowing owls and their needs.



Fortunately, the decision to designate the Suffield Block a military training facility in 1941 left large tracts of undisturbed prairie grassland intact from the effects of industrial agriculture. Since 1971, the military has designated approximately 420 km², primarily those lands bordering the South Saskatchewan River, as out of bounds for military training.



A pair of ferruginous hawks, one of which circled the tour group overhead, fledged three chicks in this nest this year. Sadly only one survived.



Suffield National Wildlife Area was formally created on the June 19, 2003, when it was officially designated under Canada Wildlife Act Regulations. The Base Commander is responsible for operations, management, and permitting in the SNWA. The sand verbena is one of the many rare species under his care.



Elk were locally extirpated from the Suffield area in about 1960, when the last of a small resident population was poached from the Base. In 1997-98, 230 elk were introduced from Elk Island National Park. In the absence of natural predators, the population has expanded rapidly to 1,652 animals today. This magnificent group of bulls simply took our breath away!



Please join us for a Wild West evening in support of
Alberta Wilderness Association.



GREAT FOOD
EXCELLENT WINE
APPETIZERS
WILD WEST AUCTIONS



Entertainment with:
THE FOOTHILLS BRASS
PAUL FINKLEMAN
JESSIE STARLING

Friday, September 14, 2007

Red & White Club, McMahon Stadium, Calgary

Tickets \$100 • AWA Members \$85 • Tables of 8 \$800

To order, call 403.283.2025 or toll free 1.866.313.0713
or visit www.AlbertaWilderness.ca



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