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ATRL Process Fails Panther River

In November, AWA was informed of bulldozer activity adjacent to the Panther River west of Sundre in the Bighorn Backcountry. We discovered that earlier this year, the Government of Alberta approved an extension to the Alberta Tourism Recreational Lease (ATRL) of Panther River Adventures. The extension was granted after an appeal by company owner Terry Safron, whose original plan included 25 more campsites, 12 cabins, and another septic field.

AWA originally opposed the extension due to both the ad hoc and inappropriate development of this backcountry area and its proximity to the Panther River. After two open houses, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) initially denied the application. However, Safron appealed the decision and was granted approval by an ATRL panel headed by Glenn Selland, executive director of SRD's Land Management Branch. AWA finds it unacceptable that during the appeal, there was no public input and no effort to contact us or other citizens who expressed significant concerns, or to tell us of the appeal decision.

The Panther River case highlights how the current ATRL process is leading to the development of Alberta's backcountry without the public's knowledge. In 2006 AWA expressed objections to a number of lease applications, including Western Adventures' plans in the Livingstone-Porcupine, a proposal for the Castle Ranger Station, and the Trapper's Hill Lodge expansion on the upper Ghost River. In all cases, SRD neither acknowledged our objections nor informed us of the final decisions. It is of gravest concern that the government is making decisions that affect the land it holds in trust for Albertans without effective public consultation, decisions that may lead to the loss of significant wilderness and watershed areas.

For more information on the ATRL process and Panther River Adventures, see "The Quiet Urbanization of the Backcountry" (*WLA*, Dec. 2005 – Apr. 2006), available at www.AlbertaWilderness.ca.

- *Chris Wearmouth*

