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AWA



A WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Middle Sand Hills A.TEUCHER

STORM BREWING ON THE PRAIRIES – PUBLIC LANDS UP FOR GRABS / 4

WILLMORE WILDERNESS CONSIDERED FOR WORLD HERITAGE DESIGNATION / 14

McCLELLAND LAKE – A PADDLER'S VIEW / 16

BACKCOUNTRY, STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH / 25

CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2007 • VOL. 15, NO. 6

OUT FRONT

- 4 STORM BREWING ON THE PRAIRIES
– PUBLIC LANDS UP FOR GRABS

ALBERTA WILDERNESS WATCH

- 11 RECREATION PRESSURE TAKES ITS
TOLL ON THE BIGHORN
- 13 ...AND NOW IT'S UP TO US!
- 13 AWA BACKS ALBERTA'S BRUIN
- 14 WILLMORE WILDERNESS
CONSIDERED FOR WORLD
HERITAGE DESIGNATION
- 16 McCLELLAND LAKE – A
PADDLER'S VIEW
- 18 AWA COMPLETES SECOND YEAR
OF WHITEBARK PINE RESEARCH
- 19 WHAT SHALL WE DEFEND?

PROFILE

- 22 ART AS ADVOCACY – ALBERTA
ARTIST PROMOTES PROTECTION IN
SOUTHERN ALBERTA

UPDATES

- 23 BILL 46 NEEDS BLACKOUT PUNCH
- 23 EID AMENDMENT APPLICATION
TURNED DOWN
- 23 GOVERNMENT RESEARCH TO KILL
WOLVES
- 23 BILL ONE – *LOBBYIST ACT*
- 24 SUFFIELD NATIONAL
WILDLIFE AREA

UPDATES

- 24 LAND-USE FRAMEWORK SURVEY
RESULTS
- 24 ATRL PROCESS FAILS PANTHER
RIVER

READER'S CORNER

- 25 BACKCOUNTRY, STRAIGHT FROM
THE HORSE'S MOUTH

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- 26 PUBLIC LANDS AND THE LAW
- 26 PROVINCE IS IGNORING WATER
LEGISLATION
- 27 PANEL URGED TO SAVE SUFFIELD
WILDLIFE

ASSOCIATION NEWS

- 28 SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY? – IS
SAFE SEX POSSIBLE?
- 30 NEW *WILD LANDS ADVOCATE*
EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD
- 30 STAFF PROFILE:
CAROLYN CAMPBELL

EVENTS

- 31 TUESDAY TALKS
- 31 WINTER HIKE: SHEEP RIVER
VALLEY

Correction: In the last issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate*, a zero went AWOL in the conversion from hectares to kms. The Willmore Wilderness covers 4,600 km² of breathtaking mountain vistas, not 460 km².

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WILDERNESS FOR TOMORROW

"In wildness is the preservation of the world." – Henry D. Thoreau

Not a day goes by without the hope and vision we carry for Wild Alberta being challenged by the stark reality of development and unsurpassed growth in Alberta. As we face the challenge of learning all we need to know, hoping that the strategies we employ and the work we do will make a difference, we are aware of a degree of simple believer's faith. It is a belief that in some naïve and innocent way, wisdom will prevail and there will be wilderness for tomorrow. The passion of our founders burns in each one of us at AWA as strongly as it ever did, and we believe in achieving a wilderness legacy.

Our very existence, our well-being, and our own personal health depend on wilderness. We must make a difference. We must work tirelessly as individuals, as an association, and as colleagues with other conservation and like-minded groups. We must communicate with industry, government, and all Albertans, and sometimes with unlikely allies. Constantly challenged to measure our success, we must have an impact and be an important, relevant part of society and to be a major player in the far-reaching decisions being made today that affect Wild Alberta.

The inextricable links among water, wildlife, and wild lands are constant reminders of the need for staff to discover and know every corner of Alberta, and we have – on foot, from the air, in cars and buses, and on horseback. We know we need to grow in membership and in recognition throughout the province.

Day-to-day, the work is as hard as it comes. The outcomes are not always significant in the measure of land conserved or wild species saved, but we know we are making a difference. The staff and Board of Directors are a passionate, formidable force; we strategically plan our direction and the use of our resources.

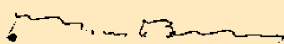
We have always had a clear vision about the protection needed for our diminishing wilderness and our threatened and endangered wildlife and watersheds. Years from now, people will judge the decisions we made when we still had a chance to protect our lands and save Alberta's last grizzlies. In April, we learned that the grizzly population in Alberta stands at less than 500 bears. We began our 2007 grizzly campaign a few months later with the launch of a new web page: www.savethegrizzly.ca.

The urgency of protecting Alberta's wilderness is greater than ever. The scars of just one more incursion will leave a bleak picture of our landscapes. AWA remains Alberta's frontline advocacy organization advancing the establishment of truly protected wilderness areas.

We are dependent on our members and supporters for their financial and on-the-ground assistance as advocates and community leaders. None of our accomplishments would have been possible without support from members and donors, as well as others in the non-profit, foundation, corporate, and government sectors. This season we hope you will consider the work we do and the resources we need, and give us your support. We need your help.



Christyann Olson,
Executive Director



Richard Secord,
President 2003-2007

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STORM BREWING ON THE PRAIRIES – PUBLIC LANDS UP FOR GRABS

By Joyce Hildebrand, AWA Conservation Specialist

The ancient Hebrew myth of Cain, the agrarian, killing his brother Abel, the herdsman, continues to inscribe itself on Alberta’s prairie landscape. Public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, across Alberta’s remaining native grasslands are being given away, sold, and converted to cropland at an alarming rate, with devastating consequences for endangered and at-risk prairie species.

AWA recently received word of a land swap that, if approved, could result in a large expanse of native grassland west of Medicine Hat – public land leased for grazing and home for numerous species at risk – being ploughed up and lost to future generations. Louis Ypma, owner of SLM Spud Farms Ltd., recently approached the Hays Stock Grazing Association (HSGA) with an offer to buy their lease for 99 quarters of land in Cypress County near the confluence of the Bow and South Saskatchewan rivers. The lease comprises two chunks of land known as the “south Murray pasture” and the “Laidlaw pasture.” This is an expansive area of unbroken prairie that provides excellent pronghorn winter habitat and, according to Environment Canada, is “within the dispersal range of the prairie rattlesnake and bull snake.” It is our understanding that Ypma wants to



“Storm Clouds on the Prairie Fields” © PAM WILMAN

trade his own grazing leases in the MD of Taber with the HSGA grazing lease in Cypress. All of the land concerned is administered by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD).

During Ypma’s first meeting with

the Grazing Association on September 25, he made an offer that was rejected by the approximately 50 members of the group. He came back in October offering an additional \$25,000 for each member. Some members are finding the cash difficult to turn down, but others are concerned about the potential destruction of ecologically valuable native prairie. Ypma pushed for a vote at that second meeting, but Association members decided to consider the offer further before making a decision. If he succeeds in acquiring the lease, Ypma will be able to submit an application to buy the land from SRD.

The land that Ypma now leases and that we have been told he wants to swap with the Grazing Association is in Taber County. According to Derrick

| Land Category | Percent of Alberta |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Public land..... | 60% (94% of B.C. is public land) |
| Private land..... | 28.5% (virtually all in the White Area) |
| Green Area (unsettled)..... | 47% (contains 57.5% of Alberta’s public land)* |
| Public land in Green Area..... | 47% |
| White Area (settled)..... | 31% (contains 2.5% of Alberta’s public land)* |
| Public land in White Area..... | 2.5% |
| Provincial protected areas..... | 4.2% |

**These figures exclude federal land (10% of Alberta), provincial protected areas (4.2% of Alberta), tax-recovery lands, and areas of the province covered by water (2.5% of Alberta).*

Krizsan, municipal administrator of the County, Ypma purchased two grazing leases in the County, one earlier this fall and the other a year ago. All of the land in his leases is public land (some is Tax Recovery Land) currently administered by SRD. “We haven’t been involved in any negotiations or been formally notified,” says Krizsan. “Ypma did make a brief appearance at one of our Council meetings, but we sent him back to SRD and Hays Stock Grazing Association.” If HSGA accepts Ypma’s offer, then the three parties – SRD, Ypma, and HSGA – would come to a Council meeting, would affirm in Council’s presence that they are all on side with this plan, and the swap could proceed. “From an administrative perspective, it would be a very positive development for the County,” says Krizsan. This is without doubt a good deal for Taber, but what kind of a deal is it for most of the taxpayers of Alberta or for prairie conservation? How much native prairie rangeland and valuable wildlife habitat will be ploughed under as a result?

Krizsan informed us that the land that Ypma now leases is protected by a 30-year conservation agreement prohibiting breaking of the land, made in 1999 with Ducks Unlimited. “Much of it is riverfront, much of it very sensitive, and we’re satisfied that the HSGA would be an excellent tenant.” If Ypma’s plans are for crop production, it’s not surprising that he wants to swap this land for land that he could apply to buy. Under current rules, anyone can apply to purchase grazing leases, and – using the rules governing lease swapping and public land sales – end up with a huge swath of native prairie ready for the plough at a fraction of the price of already broken land.

Even if the 92 quarters of Taber County land that Ypma wants to trade (for the 99 quarters in Cypress County) will remain unbroken for 30 years, two issues must be addressed. If the trade does not go ahead, both pieces of land will remain native grassland under grazing lease for at least 30 years, rather than one piece – the 99 quarters – becoming irrigated cropland with the accompanying habitat loss. Furthermore, SRD’s mandate is development of natural resources, not environmental protection, so when the



The star marks the approximate location of the public lands currently leased by the Hays Stock Grazing Association.

30-year agreement ends, there is no guarantee of continued protection from the plough.

When AWA questioned Ypma about the deal, he said that “nothing is happening” and that it is “too early to get into it.” When asked about the meetings with the Grazing Association, he neither denied nor confirmed them, and responded by taking our contact information and saying he would get back to us. We did not have the chance to ask him what he intends to do with the acquired land should the trade go through.

The First Swap, 2003/04

If Ypma’s past record is anything to go by, this bodes only doom for the prairie species on the land he is hoping to own. In 2004 Ypma acquired a similar piece of native prairie for potato production – this was also public land, in the same area as the land he is now looking to acquire. He took title of the land in January 2004, but ploughed the land during peak nesting season in spring 2003 – while it still belonged to Albertans. In a May 2004 letter to then-SRD Minister Mike Cardinal, University of Alberta ecologist Dr. Mark Boyce revealed that “this was done within three days of his receiving a proposal from Public Lands suggesting that

the province would entertain the land exchange.” Dr. Boyce, the current Alberta Conservation Association Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife, went on to say that with these actions, Ypma violated the *Public Lands Act*, the *Alberta Wildlife Act*, and the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. As far as we know, there have been no repercussions.

A recent government letter (November 7, 2007) from an MLA about this 2004 deal cites SRD Minister Ted Morton as claiming both of the following: “Titles to the lands were exchanged in January 2004” and “The land exchange was agreed to prior to the public land being put into crop.” What form that agreement took is unclear, but the fact remains that Ypma ploughed the land under before it was legally his. How many landowners would allow the buyer of their land to seed and harvest a crop before paying for the land?

Documents acquired through the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPP) revealed several disturbing points about Ypma’s 2004 land exchange. It happened despite a wildlife survey that found evidence of four at-risk wildlife species on the land that Ypma acquired and cultivated. The report indicated that this land had significant wildlife

Grassland Matters

Most Albertans view landscapes through an agrarian, tree-loving lens, similar to their immigrant ancestors – they drive the country roads in early fall and take pleasure in the blue lakes of flax, the cheerful yellow canola fields, and the amber waves of grain. Look at these same fields through ecological eyes, though, and you will see biodiversity destruction and species extinction. “A wheat field is nothing more than a clearcut of the grass forest,” says Richard Manning in his 1995 masterpiece, *Grassland*. The analogy couldn’t be more apt.

To the careful eye, native prairie is at least as stunning, as complex, and as worthy of conservation as the most spectacular mountain vista, and ploughing it up is as ecologically devastating as clearcutting an old-growth forest. “Just as a forest is not only trees,” writes Manning, “a grassland is not only grass. It is hundreds, literally hundreds, of species of plants woven together in a complex fabric of interdependencies that extend then to insects, to birds, to a carpet of rodents, to predators, and finally to large mammals, of which humans are but one.”

More than half the species on Canada’s endangered list are species adapted to and dependent on unbroken grasslands, including the burrowing owl, swift fox, and ferruginous hawk. If we care about human-caused extinction of species, we should certainly care about preserving what’s left of Alberta’s grasslands. We listen with horror to the stories of the heartless shooting of the last passenger pigeon or the nineteenth-century slaughter of Great Plains bison while prairie species here in our province are increasingly squeezed onto islands of habitat, a portent of coming extinction.

Most of us head to our spectacular foothills and mountains for respite from the pressures of everyday life. We anticipate with excitement the possibility of seeing a grizzly or wolf, both of which once lived in the grasslands as well. But exploring the coulees, sloughs, and grassy uplands of southeastern Alberta, listening to the tumbling trill of the Sprague’s pipit or the warning rattle of a snake under a sagebush provides an expanded appreciation of the diverse natural beauty of our province.

I often recall sitting next to the South Saskatchewan River one summer evening in the middle of a week-long canoe trip. My paddling companion and I were trying to catch up on some reading, but after numerous interruptions, we finally put down our books to take in the activity around us. A beaver was busily repairing his bank lodge across the river, patting pawfuls of mud into place. A mule deer came down from the uplands for a drink, a coyote howled from a nearby coulee, nighthawks buzzed above our heads, a pronghorn snorted an alarm on the ridge behind us, and jumping fish left expanding ripples on the river’s surface. “There are people who think of the prairie as boring,” says Saskatchewan writer Candace Savage, “and it’s hard not to pity them.”

values, including endangered species habitat, and that it was part of a large contiguous block of native prairie. Despite this, in the letter cited above, Minister Morton refers to that same survey as concluding that “there was no evidence of any species at risk on the surveyed land.”

Referring to the land Ypma gave up in the exchange, Minister Morton is cited in the same letter as advising that “the environmental values of the freehold land were assessed by Sustainable Resource Development’s Fish and Wildlife Division... The freehold land contained important wildlife resources such as prairie

rattlesnakes, burrowing owl habitat and a sharp-tailed grouse lek.” The FOIPPed documents, however, reveal that Fish and Wildlife biologists were opposed to the deal. In fact, they did assess Ypma’s land but said that it should not be acquired by the province in exchange for the public land as it was degraded by oil and gas development and roads, and it was largely covered with non-native crested wheatgrass, was highly fragmented, and was surrounded by agricultural land.

Finally, extensive wildlife surveys were not conducted on the property Ypma wanted to offload in

the proposed exchange. SRD initially sent an agrologist, an agricultural soil scientist, to assess the wildlife values on this land. After discussions with the landowner and a visit to the site for a few hours, the agrologist indicated that the land had similar ecological values to the public land. AWA believes that it is inappropriate for an agrologist to make any recommendation regarding wildlife values. Such recommendations should only be made by a qualified biologist who is eligible for membership in the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists, a society formed under Alberta’s *Societies Act*.

SRD claims that “public land required for recreation or conservation purposes, or bordering lakes and rivers, is not available for sale or cultivation” (SRD website). But how can we know whether public land is required for conservation purposes without a thorough environmental review? How could the Government of Alberta approve the cultivation of native prairie when this is the very ecosystem that is most threatened in Alberta, when three-quarters of Alberta’s at-risk species rely on native prairie? At least 75 percent of Alberta’s grasslands have been cultivated or highly disturbed, and less than 1 percent of this natural region is protected.

In an August 18, 2003 letter to Grasslands Naturalists, then-SRD Minister Mike Cardinal wrote, “SRD has entered into a two-phase land exchange with Mr. Ypma and other parties that provides a positive outcome for all.” It appears that his “all” included neither Albertans concerned about the ongoing loss of native prairie, nor the sensitive, at-risk, and endangered species that depend on Alberta’s grasslands.

If SRD approves a trade such as the one now being proposed by Ypma without an environmental assessment of both pieces of land by their own highly qualified and dedicated biologists, and without basing the decision on that assessment, the government’s lack of commitment to science-based planning and conservation will be revealed once again. “The last time this happened,” says AWA Vice-President and ecological consultant Cliff Wallis, “habitat for species of concern was destroyed. That was our experience

with this specific individual with lands in the same area. This is a continuation of the same bad process.”

Tax Recovery Land Giveaway

Another issue related to the loss of public lands in Alberta, particularly in the settled White Area, is that of Tax Recovery Land transfer to municipalities. Tax Recovery Land is public land that at one time was privately owned but was forfeited due to unpaid taxes between the 1920s and 1940s, when drought and other factors forced many off the land in southeastern Alberta. This occurred before the establishment of many municipal governments. In the Hanna-Oyen-Consort area, the default on taxes was so great that the provincial government stepped in and created special municipal management areas, now referred to as the Special Areas. But in addition to Special Areas, Tax Recovery Land is also widely distributed in other municipalities in southern Alberta.

it is located upon the municipality’s request, a practice that had been underway for some time. The land is transferred to the municipality for \$1 per parcel, generally a quarter section. Municipalities will, of course, reap huge financial windfalls if they subsequently sell the land that they acquire – and being perennially short of cash, why wouldn’t they?

After this Cabinet decision, an extensive inventory and title search was done on remaining Tax Recovery Land to determine which lands were transferable to which municipality. Based on Environmentally Significant Area surveys, land that contained internationally and nationally significant areas (less than 10% of the total) was retained. In 2004 the Treasury Board questioned, on a fiscal basis, the transfer of Tax Recovery Land, and Cabinet once again affirmed the policy.

And so the privatization of Tax Recovery Land is now happening with no public consultation and with no

the ecological value of land is being considered in current transactions.

Although policy allows the government to transfer these lands, it has no legal obligation to do so. The fact that transfers are going ahead confirms the government’s tendency to favour local control of Alberta’s public lands and local public involvement, despite the fact that these lands belong to all of us. When AWA contacted SRD’s Land Management branch to find out how much Tax Recovery Land exists and how much has been transferred in the last year, we were told that those numbers were unavailable because of current transfer negotiations now underway.

According to the MD of Taber’s newsletter (Winter 2007), the county contains approximately 569 quarter sections (368 km²) of Tax Recovery Land that are now leased by SRD to local leaseholders. The newsletter states: “In August of 1996 individuals who held Tax Recovery Land grazing leases were notified by Sustainable Resource Development that there would be one additional 10 year lease renewal with Public Lands whereupon beginning in 2006 the title to the lands would be transferred to the Municipal District of Taber. Leases expiring after 2006 would transition to a Municipal District of Taber lease. The process of transferring title to the Municipal District of Taber has already started and will continue until 2016.” What this means is that just nine years from now, all 569 quarters will have been transferred to Taber County if this process continues as planned. Similar transfers are happening in counties throughout southern Alberta.

The problem from an ecological point of view is that Tax Recovery Land is generally part of large contiguous blocks of prairie habitat, almost none of which is legally protected. Look at any map of a southern Alberta county, and you will see a sweep of green representing public land, including Tax Recovery Land, dotted with occasional islands of yellow deeded land.

Burrowing Owls vs. French Fries

A great deal of pressure, including political pressure, has been applied in some areas of southern Alberta for



The expansive grasslands of the Suffield National Wildlife Area, CFB Suffield. A. TEUCHER

Although municipalities and the Government of Alberta may argue differently, AWA views Tax Recovery Land as public land. Since 1930, the government has treated Tax Recovery Land as public land, using provincial taxes to maintain and manage it. In 1996 Cabinet confirmed that Tax Recovery Land could be transferred back to the municipality within which

updated environmental assessments, despite SRD’s claim that only land with “no commanding environmental sensitivity” will be transferred (SRD website). This process includes no transparency, participation, or accountability measures to guarantee that the government is adhering to this claim. Past public land sales, trades, and transfers offer little hope that



The ferruginous hawk is one of the many Alberta endangered species dependent on native prairie. This one was perched near its nest in the Suffield National Wildlife Area. C. OLSON

the sale of public rangeland, including Tax Recovery Land, for conversion to irrigated farmland. Although those who have managed to acquire cheap rangeland and convert it to irrigated cropland have experienced financial benefits, existing environmental values, including wildlife, have been disregarded or ignored. The process of fragmentation and habitat loss is well underway, as native grassland is converted to irrigated cropland.

This is in contrast to other activities on public rangelands. For example, oil and gas companies are not allowed to proceed with development until comprehensive wildlife surveys have been conducted. Mitigation plans have to be developed in the event that migratory birds or sensitive or at-risk species are found. Setback and timing guidelines are in place to ensure that wildlife species are not impacted by oil and gas activities. While this is not to say that these activities are benign with respect to prairie ecosystems, it reveals a double standard. “Why are these requirements bypassed when it comes to ploughing up native prairie,” asks wildlife biologist Greg Wagner. “Breaking rangeland results

in irreversible loss of habitat and fragments the remaining large blocks of prairie in Alberta.”

Wagner has spent much of the last fifteen years studying, surveying, or managing wildlife populations occupying the Dry Mixedgrass or Mixedgrass Natural Regions of southeastern Alberta. “Over this time,” he says, “I have watched the ongoing decline of native prairie habitats. It’s death by a thousand cuts, as prairie ecosystems are impacted by a wide range of activities.” Wagner and others are particularly concerned about the transfer of Tax Recovery Land to municipalities, which privatizes public land and leads to loss of government and public control over threatened grassland ecosystems. “This kind of transfer happens behind closed doors without due process and species of concern get lost in the shuffle,” says Wallis.

What’s driving this exchange of valuable prairie habitat for cropland is the same thing that’s responsible for Alberta’s oil sands fever: money. There is currently a huge demand for new farmland, particularly that which could become irrigated because of its location near watercourses or adjacent to irrigation infrastructure. This is especially true for potato production, which has proven to be very lucrative despite potatoes being one of the thirstiest of all irrigation crops grown in Alberta. The five major potato

processing plants, including the huge McCain (Coaldale) and Lamb-Weston (Taber) plants that came online in 1999 and 2000, have prompted a massive increase in irrigated potato acreage. Potatoes grown for processing into products such as french fries constitute 68 percent of all potato production in Alberta. These potatoes are subject to a number of diseases and typically are not grown in the same field in successive years. Consequently, a large amount of acreage is required to grow them, since less lucrative crops must be grown in years following potato production.

Whether Ypma plans to grow potatoes on the Cypress County land is unknown. Other crops may be equally lucrative, especially given the provincial government’s promotion of biofuel development. On May 22, 2007, CR Fuels received a development permit from the MD of Taber for a \$325 million ethanol, biodiesel, and biogas digester complex on about 100 acres of land that is owned by Louis Ypma (*Lethbridge Herald*, June 8, 2007). If the necessary approvals are granted, construction could begin in summer or fall 2008. The biodiesel operation will produce about 113.6 million litres a year and use 250,000 tonnes of canola. The ethanol plant will produce 95 million litres a year and use 260,000 tonnes of wheat. As more hungry biofuel plants are approved and built in the province, the



The endangered sand verbena is part of the complex ecosystem of Alberta’s prairies. C. WALLIS

New Proposed Act Good News for Wildlife

In November 2006, the burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk, both of which are dependent on native prairie, were uplisted from threatened to endangered under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. The provincial and federal status reports for both of these species – as well as those for most other endangered prairie wildlife species – indicate that habitat loss and fragmentation are of prime concern in their ongoing decline. The first federal status reports on the burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk came out in 1978 and 1980, respectively. The province's status reports on the same species were produced in 1997 and 1999. All of these reports clearly emphasize that preserving native prairie is key to the continued existence and well-being of these species. How can the Government of Alberta justify the transfer and sale of native prairie public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, when the loss of prairie habitat was clearly identified as being the key reason for these species' decline almost 30 years ago?

The good news is that MLA Dr. Neil Brown (Calgary-Nosehill) has begun work on a bill that he hopes to bring forward in the spring 2008 sitting of the legislature. According to Brown's draft Purpose Statement (October 2007), the *Wildlife Habitat Preservation Act* would "prohibit the sale of unbroken Crown lands which are subject to grazing leases or which are Tax Recovery Lands, in order to maintain the natural value of the land. This would require an assessment of the land before it is sold, to determine the environmental/wildlife attributes of the parcel." AWA supports this initiative, but we will also recommend that the proposed Act include the requirement for an open, transparent, public process for any release of public land – sales, trades, or transfers – including Tax Recovery Land.

Please consider contacting Dr. Brown (calgary.nosehill@assembly.ab.ca, 403-215-7710), and your own MLA, to support the proposed *Wildlife Habitat Preservation Act*.

pressure to break more native prairie for crop production is likely to increase tremendously, with devastating effects for endangered species.

After 150 years of trying to prove John Palliser wrong about his assessment of this semi-arid region as ill-suited for farming, perhaps it's time to admit the foolishness of this agricultural exercise and leave the remaining grasslands unbroken. Indeed, the fact that the Bow River is currently in a state of crisis because of overallocation provides strong evidence that converting more native prairie to cropland requiring heavy irrigation is unsustainable and unwise. Dr. David Schindler, one of Canada's top water experts, warns that the Bow River may soon be depleted to the point where it will not recover as a fully functioning aquatic ecosystem.

If Ypma acquires the Cypress County land and converts it to cropland, the water required for irrigation, regardless of what is grown, will need to come from the Bow River, the nearest water source. Ypma has already approached the Bow River Irrigation District about the

possibility of incorporating the land that he is interested in buying into the District. "Without a comprehensive water conservation strategy in place in Alberta," says AWA Conservation Specialist and water economist Carolyn Campbell, "this ad hoc approach to expanding irrigation acreage is short-sighted."

Public Land Policy Vacuum

In a 1998 paper entitled "In Search of Public Land Law in Alberta," research associates Steven Kennett and Monique Ross of the Canadian Institute of Resources Law state: "The importance of the province's land and resource base to the well-being of Albertans and the increasing demands that are being placed upon it would lead one to expect a businesslike and well-conceived approach to public land management." After reviewing Alberta's land and resource legislation, Kennett and Ross made the following conclusion: "Alberta's statutes governing land and resource use lack an overarching framework of integrative principles, objectives and standards, the extent of substantive and procedural

direction provided to decision-makers is often very limited, and adherence to principles of ecosystem management is not mandated by law. Alberta is also currently without a comprehensive planning process for public land and resources."

If anything, government stewardship of public lands has worsened since Kennett and Ross's analysis. In 2004 SRD stated that 9,000 to 10,000 acres of public land are sold every year. According to the MD of Cypress, the land that Ypma is trying to acquire in that county is entirely public land and therefore subject to sale. Any Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada who is over 18 can apply to buy public land in Alberta. Land managers determine if the land is suitable for the intended use, and if they approve the use, the land is sold to the highest bidder. If Ypma acquires the grazing leases of the Hays Stock Grazing Association, therefore, he can buy the land through this process. According to SRD's website, this should not happen if the land is environmentally sensitive, but recent history shows that this may be no more than lip-service.

What is needed immediately is a full public disclosure and public review of the sale of all Alberta government-administered lands, including Tax Recovery Land and lands administered by Special Areas. Furthermore, all public lands must undergo a thorough environmental review within a broader ecological framework that examines the need for prairie conservation and the protection of endangered species. Ecologically significant lands must be identified and a plan put in place to protect them in perpetuity. Policy must be changed so that any transfer or sale of public land, including Tax Recovery Land, involves public participation. Premier Stelmach's much-repeated promise to Albertans of transparency must be applied to the management and sale of the land that belongs to all of us. We need a clear, defined policy for the release of public lands, a policy that includes an open process whereby all Albertans, not only those with local interests, are given the opportunity to be involved.

Current SRD initiatives that are meant to address the environmental



"Grasslands Vista" © PAM WILMAN

impacts of human activity on Alberta's landscape must address the issues outlined here. Whether or not the government is serious about three recent initiatives – the Land-Use Framework, the proposed cumulative effects regulatory framework (the draft policy document "Towards Environmental Sustainability"), and the Integrated Land Management

program – can be determined in part by how SRD deals with Ypma's proposed land swap and with the issue of Tax Recovery Land privatization. The Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan 2006-2010 – created by the Prairie Conservation Forum, of which the provincial government is a member – specifies three goals, one of which is stewardship: "Conserve Alberta's

native prairie and parkland landscapes." Alberta's current management of public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, is in direct contradiction to this goal.

When Premier Stelmach was the Minister of Agriculture in 1998, the *Calgary Herald* cited him as saying that "'good black soil' is what drives farming and ranching." We hope that in the past decade, he has realized that ranching is in fact driven by "good native grassland," and that turning up that black soil destroys not only the home of many of Alberta's endangered species but also the potential for sustainable grazing. "Ranchers have saved our bacon with respect to conserving native prairie," says Dr. Mark Brigham, biology professor at the University of Regina and member of COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). "Hats off to them. We have relatively little native prairie left, and unlike many other habitats, once it's gone we cannot get it back. We don't know how to restore it."

The silent characters in the drama of Cain the farmer and Abel the herdsman – the ones with no voice since the arrival of Europeans with their shiny metal implements – are the land itself and the many species that depend on it. It's time to learn to listen to the grassland, to expand our tunnel vision, and to realize that humans are also dependent on its continued existence. Candace Savage, in her eloquent conclusion to her magnificent tribute to the prairies, *Prairie: A Natural History*, says it well: "The survival of the wild prairie and its creatures will depend, in no small part, on our ability to ensure their well-being right now. By protecting and restoring wild prairie and managing the working landscape for wildness, we can strengthen and enhance the ecosystem, in all its diversity and abundance, both for our own sake and for the future."

For an overview of public lands in Alberta, particularly the issue of public access to those lands, see the October 2007 issue of the Wild Lands Advocate. See also AWA's website: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca.

RECREATION PRESSURE TAKES ITS TOLL ON THE BIGHORN

By Chris Wearmouth, AWA Conservation Specialist

AWA's five-year research project concerning recreational impacts in the Bighorn focuses on a 76-km trail network for motorized and non-motorized users in the Upper Clearwater-Ram Forest Land Use Zone. This trail system is situated in the Ram River watershed, which feeds the Clearwater River and from there, the North Saskatchewan River.

The project, which began in 2003, looks at the sustainability of current recreational activity in terms of damage caused to this sensitive area, a Prime Protection Zone designated under

summer months in four years. We suspect that the increase is due in part to a growing awareness of the area, promoted through SRD maps and local off-highway vehicle clubs.

Second, the data show an increase in the illegal use of the trail system. All trails within the system, except Ranger Creek trail, are open to motorized recreation from July 1 to April 30. Ranger Creek trail is open only from December 1 to April 30. Illegal use of designated trails by motorized vehicles during the two months when they are closed now constitutes 37 percent of all

highway vehicle use is permitted. As our previous research has shown, 20 percent of this network is considered to be damaged, unable to sustain the recreational uses presently on the land. Coupled with a growing volume of traffic and an unwillingness to obey regulations, it is questionable whether any motorized use is appropriate recreation for an area that contains one of the sources of clean water for residents across the prairie provinces.

Primary data collection will continue until summer 2008, after which AWA will continue to monitor



AWA Director Heinz Unger downloads data from one of the traffic counters in the Bighorn. C. WEARMOUTH

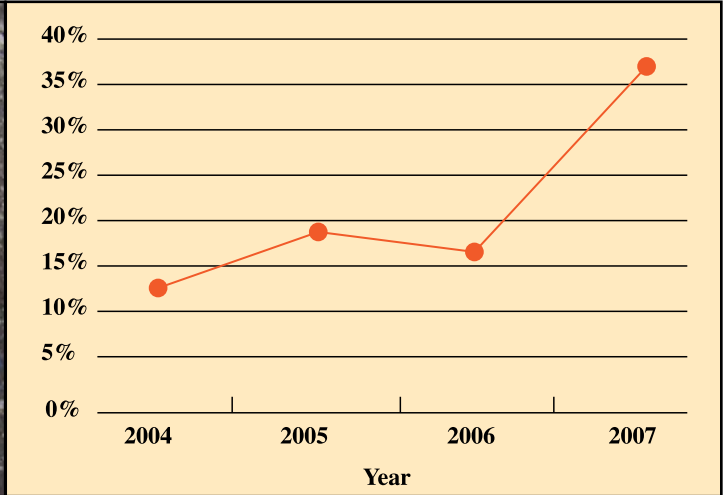


Table 2. Proportion of illegal passes to total passes.

the Eastern Slopes Policy of 1977. We monitored motorized recreation through traffic counters to gain an understanding of trends in traffic volume and user compliance with regulations.

Continuing our work this year, AWA spent three days downloading data from the traffic counters. This year's information, compiled with data gathered since 2004, broadens our understanding beyond what was reported last March in our interim report.

First, more vehicles are passing by the counters each year, leading to the conclusion that the number of vehicles on the system has increased (Table 1). Onion Creek trail, for example, has seen an increase of 384 percent over

traffic recorded by the counters (Table 2). This high percentage, along with its increase over the years, shows a growing disregard for complying with the regulations of the trail system.

These are unacceptable trends for an area under Prime Protection, which by the government's own definition should mean that no off-

the area for damage resulting from recreational use. For a complete history of the Bighorn and our monitoring project, see the August 2007 issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate*, available on our website along with the "Interim Summary" report: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca.

| Trail | Recording Period | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 4 Year Change |
|--------------------|------------------|------|------|------|------|----------------------|
| Onion Creek Trail | July1 – Sept.30 | 382 | n/a | 906 | 1712 | +348% |
| Canary Creek Trail | July1 – Sept.10 | 236 | 379 | 327 | 701 | +197% |
| Back Trail North | July1 – Sept.11 | 210 | 343 | 381 | n/a | +81% (3 year change) |

Table 1. Summer traffic trend on designated trails, 2004-2007



HABITAT LOSS HAS ENDANGERED ALBERTA'S GRIZZLIES. 500 REMAIN.
YOU CAN HELP SAVE THEM AT SAVETHEGRIZZLY.CA

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
1-866-313-0713

...AND NOW IT'S UP TO US!

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

If there is one lesson that we can learn from the long drawn-out saga of Alberta's spring grizzly bear hunt, it is that if Albertans care enough, we can change things.

Although provincial scientists had been clear since 2002 that grizzly numbers were low (an estimated 1,000 bears at the time) and that the grizzly should be listed as "threatened," still the government continued with the hunt: the following year, 18 bears were killed.

When the government's own multi-stakeholder Grizzly Recovery Team again recommended in 2004 that the hunt be suspended (by which time population estimates had been revised to "less than 700" bears), the government still refused to act. Ten more grizzlies were killed in the hunt the following spring.

Ultimately, the hunt was suspended in 2006, not because of the science (which had been clear for several years) but because so many "severely normal" Albertans made it abundantly clear that they were

embarrassed by a government that would continue to authorize the hunt of what was in all but name an endangered species. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, you can rely on the Alberta government to do the right thing when it has exhausted all other options!

The one thing that the grizzly hunting lobby and the environmentalists agreed on was that the hunt was not the cause of the grizzly's woes, and suspending the hunt was not going to be the magic wand to solve all of the problems. Now the focus has switched to the desperate need to protect grizzly bear habitat.

With population estimates now at less than 500 grizzlies in Alberta, it is clear that the only way that Alberta will keep its grizzly bears is if the government changes the way it is managing grizzly bear habitat. Grizzlies need secure habitat, safe from the pervading motorized access that is typical of so much of Alberta.

The government has known this for some time, and now it is time for Albertans to step in. Grizzlies urgently

need the help of those Albertans who spoke out against the grizzly hunt. Only if we speak out loudly and clearly will the government make the changes that it knows are necessary if this Alberta icon is to remain in the province.

Please consider writing to your own MLA, as well as the following:

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

MLA Bill Bonko
Liberal Critic for SRD
201 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 1E4
Phone: 780 427-2292
Fax: 780 427-3697
Email:
edmonton.decure@assembly.ab.ca

AWA BACKS ALBERTA'S BRUIN

By Chris Wearmouth, AWA Conservation Specialist

AWA kicked off its latest grizzly bear campaign with two media events, one in Calgary on October 23 and another in Edmonton on November 1. Highlighting habitat loss and Alberta's low grizzly population, the events drew extensive coverage from the local media including CBC, CTV, and several of the two cities' newspapers.

"The grizzly is in trouble because of man-made actions," Conservation Specialist Nigel Douglas told media at the Calgary event. "In reality, there is only one way to save the grizzly and that is to protect the habitat. People have more access to grizzly habitat than ever before and we need to reduce that access," he added, as a member of this dwindling species attempted to hitchhike to the zoo along Memorial

Drive. This particular bruin was in fact AWA long-time member Jim Murphy in a bear suit dramatizing the plight of grizzlies in Alberta.

"If we don't do something to protect their natural habitat, zoos may be the only safe place left for grizzly bears in Alberta," said AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson.

In Edmonton, the bruin climbed up a power pole near the legislature building in search of secure refuge. Below him, a sign read "Beware of MLAs sleeping." After the media event, AWA delivered information packages to Members of the Legislative Assembly calling them to wake up to the plight of Alberta's icon of wilderness.

"The Alberta government has known for years that species are under

siege. But the Province has taken a shortsighted view, fixated almost exclusively on development and royalties. Now the grizzly population has plummeted to under 500," Douglas stated in the release to media and government.

AWA has launched a new website with information on how Albertans can help protect the further decline of our grizzly population. Go to www.savethegrizzly.ca to learn more. Keep an eye out for campaign posters, as well as advertisements in the December issue of *Alberta Views* and in local newspapers. If you would like to put up a poster in your neighbourhood, contact AWA at (403) 283-2025.



WILLMORE WILDERNESS CONSIDERED FOR WORLD HERITAGE DESIGNATION

By Chris Wearmouth, AWA Conservation Specialist

With its one million acres of untamed beauty, Willmore Wilderness Park is a place that epitomizes wild Alberta. From the eastern forests, rocky peaks rise to a height exceeding 3,050 metres. Below alpine slopes, rivers rush through meadows that are home to some of Alberta's iconic wilderness species – the grizzly, the wolf, and the caribou. And despite it having been established as a park in 1959, it has managed to escape the development and crowds that are seen to the south in the mountain landscapes of Banff and Jasper National Parks.

However, the park, situated just south of Grande Cache in the elbow of Alberta, has not escaped the attention of all. Over the years, there have been proposals to develop ski hills, to open the area to motorized recreation, even to build an east-west highway through the park. Amid mounting pressure from developers, the Alberta government is looking at involving the international community in hopes of ensuring continued protection for the Wilderness Park.

Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture (TPRC), along with Parks Canada and B.C. Parks, is considering a new nomination for UNESCO World Heritage status of Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks, one that could include the Willmore along with other protected areas that are adjacent to the current UNESCO designation.

"[World Heritage] designation helps engage the support that Willmore needs to ward off ongoing pressure for activities that are inconsistent with what Willmore is now," says Archie Landals, director of Parks Resource Management Coordination Branch for TPRC. Landals is quick to clarify that a new nomination is still just a concept in preliminary talks between governing bodies.

The United Nations Educational,



"I didn't truly understand what the word wilderness meant until I spent time last summer in the Willmore," says Wild Lands Advocate editor, Joyce Hildebrand.

R.V. RASMUSSEN – RAYSWEB.NET

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) oversees World Heritage designation, which is meant to identify and protect cultural and natural heritage that is of "outstanding universal value," not only to local people but to all of humanity. Several criteria are used, including works of human ingenuity and cultural development as well as natural phenomena of ecological significance and/or representative of the planet's development.

The current Mountain Parks site was originally listed to include the contiguous national parks of Jasper, Banff, Yoho, and Kootenay. This was later expanded to include the B.C. provincial parks of Mount Robson, Humber, and Mount Assiniboine. Because the World Heritage convention only allows for a 20 percent increase in area to an established site, an increase that was presumably used to add the provincial parks, any additional land government wishes to include will have to be added under a new nomination. "On its own, Willmore would probably

not qualify as a World Heritage Site," says Landals, "but the land base and resources could add significantly to the existing Rocky Mountain World Heritage Site."

As Landals points out, adding surrounding areas such as the Willmore would result in better representation of complete ecosystems, which could fall under the convention's criteria of protecting significant natural habitat for conservation. "It is a key piece in the puzzle of health and wealth because of its wildlife corridors and networks, critical watershed, and important biodiversity," says Christyann Olson, AWA's executive director. Presently the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks is listed under the values of exceptional natural beauty and of representing major stages in earth's history.

AWA supports the inclusion of Willmore Wilderness Park in any future nomination. While the *Willmore Wilderness Park Act* is a strong piece of legislation, there is still no management plan for the area. World Heritage

designation requires that a management plan be in place and clearly outlines the values on which management must be based. By having the clear value of ecological conservation put into a management plan, we can ensure that this wilderness area remains intact well into the future. "UNESCO World Heritage designation would be a fitting tribute and would mean that the Willmore, despite relentless pressures to reduce its protection levels, could be truly protected from development," Olson says.

But not all who have heard about this recent development are pleased with the possibility. Brian Bildson, executive director of the Willmore Wilderness Foundation, says his group is concerned that designation may lead to undesirable consequences. "The overall opinion within the foundation is that there is limited opportunity for benefit and in our opinion quite a bit of opportunity for conflict," Bildson says.

The Foundation, whose mission includes preservation of the area's history and restoration of pack trails, fears that with international recognition will come international standards that may conflict with traditional activities such as trapping and hunting, presently allowed in the park. Bildson says his group is not afraid that TPRC will immediately remove such activities, but he believes that future pressure from the international community could

be applied through UNESCO. "As a local group that supports responsible consumptive use, we are concerned that at some point we may be held up to an international standard that does not reflect conservation values, just public opinion." Should international opinion sway against trapping in the future, his members may be forced to give up an activity that they see as having both a long history in the area and the ability to be a management tool within the park.

Landals, however, feels the Foundation's worries are not warranted. "I don't see any management policies or practices changing as a result of a successful nomination," he says, adding that World Heritage designation does not change provincial legislation or give governing power to UNESCO.

Phil Hofer is the site manager for Dinosaur Provincial Park, another of Alberta's World Heritage sites. Hofer says that, like trapping in the Willmore, cattle grazing has been occurring in his area since before the park was conceived and since grazing is an activity that is compatible with park values, it will not be leaving anytime in the foreseeable future. "I think there is a certain level of pride, especially amongst people who have been in the area for quite a while," he says of the local residents' feelings for the park.

But Bildson will not find the words of government representatives

comforting. He says his group has a history of being kept out of the loop when it comes to the park. In April 2006, the Alberta and B.C. governments designated the Willmore-Kakwa Interprovincial Park. Bildson says he only found out about the designation at a celebratory party after the deal was done. But Landals asserts that proper consultation, including First Nations, as required by UNESCO, will take place if government decides to pursue the nomination.

The Foundation also questions whether designation may ultimately lead to a loss of wilderness values through an increase in visitors to the park. Present outfitters can only support a few dozen clients a year, he says, not the hundreds he suspects would come with World Heritage designation. Hofer admits that with designation, a certain percentage of visitors, mostly international, seek out Dinosaur Provincial Park because of its World Heritage status. While designation may bring more international visitors into Willmore looking to put a check mark beside one more name, it is unlikely to bring the throngs of people Bildson fears. They will more likely visit the staples of the Mountain Parks – the town sites of Banff and Jasper and nearby attractions within a stroll's distance from a parking lot.

AWA believes that World Heritage designation has the potential to help strengthen protection of ecosystems within Willmore Wilderness Park, thus maintaining its untamed nature and rich heritage. As other parts of Alberta are bridled by development, it is important to fully protect the last vestiges of our wild heritage. "Without the highest incentive for keeping the wilderness, there is always a risk that it will not remain wild, that development will be allowed, that its wild and free nature will be destroyed," says Olson.

While TPRC gathers information in preparation for public consultation, the discussion continues. Visit www.AlbertaWilderness.ca to learn more about Willmore Wilderness Park and AWA's vision for it. The Willmore Wilderness Foundation can be found on the web at www.willmorewilderness.com. To learn more about UNESCO World Heritage designation, visit whc.unesco.org.



Willmore Wilderness Park boasts a rich history of outfitters, hunters and trappers, activities the Government of Alberta promises will continue should they pursue World Heritage status for the area. R.V. RASMUSSEN – RAYSWEB.NET



McClelland Lake – A Paddler's View

By Darin Zandee

After reading in the *Wild Lands Advocate* about the planned disturbance of the unique and delicate McClelland Lake fen, I committed to learn more about the significance of the fen and experience it for myself. This was not easy as the fen and wetland complex is in a remote and wild location 90 kilometres north of Fort McMurray and I did not know how to get to it, so I enlisted the help of two friends, Kristina and Shawn.

Kristina, a biologist, a paddler, and an explorer by heart, was the right partner for the canoe route: her environmental knowledge, paddling skill, and desire to discover new places made her the perfect companion for this adventure. Shawn, a forestry technician, an adventurer, and my hiking and mountain biking buddy since high school, proposed the opportunity for the forest route at 2:00 a.m. over a glass of wine. We left the next morning at 7:00.

It was a sunny crisp September day when Kristina and I drove north from Fort McMurray past the oil sands mines, refineries, work camps, and construction projects onto the Fort Chipewyan winter road. The road is only maintained in the winter. The rest of the year it's a straight line of fine white sand that runs north through the boreal forest.

At the beginning of the winter road, we encountered a few people, pick-up trucks, and motorcycles. On the road itself, some ATVs passed us headed northbound for the Athabasca sand dunes, but after turning east onto a cutline, we were alone in the wilderness. We followed the cutline through the jack pines to the northwest shore of McClelland Lake.

Kristina and I paddled my canoe through the cattails and sedges to the open water. We looked toward the north end of the lake and saw swans floating along the shore. Kristina laughed at



McClelland Lake is the largest lake between Fort McMurray and the Athabasca Delta, and functions as an important staging area for migrating birds. D. ZANDEE

how unflattering an elegant swan looks while tipped up to feed from the bottom of the lake.

Along the shore, the tamaracks, birch, and aspen leaves shone varied hues of gold in the low angle of the fall sun. We paddled south along the west shore of the lake. The calm water reflected the sky, and it seemed as though the water lilies hovered above us in the nimbus clouds.

Large flocks of ducks launched from the water to announce our arrival at the south end of the lake and the head of the fen. Alongside the shore, we attempted to step from the canoe, but the floating mat of sedges and rushes did not support us. We worked the canoe forward and scrambled onto a small raised shore. We were looking south over the grassy fen to the next row of black spruce and tamarack.

We stood on the fen and listened to the breeze in the grasses and leaves. Kristina and I realized there are few places around Fort McMurray where you get completely away from rushing busy people and the hum of industry and construction. Here, however, we

had the lake to ourselves. We enjoyed the sound of nothing but the dripping of water from our paddles onto the lake surface with each forward stroke.

I learned through the *Wild Lands Advocate* that fens of this size are unique and take a long time to develop; once lost, they may never return to their original state. This means that if part of the fen is mined, it could disappear in my lifetime and not exist for future generations.

My second trip to the fen occurred in October. Shawn drove us to the same location where Kristina and I had launched our canoe, but this time we headed south on foot along the west shore of the lake. Shawn explained the aspects of the boreal forest to me. We wandered through the birch, spruce, and tamarack trees. Swans passed above us headed south. The game trail faded into rose bushes, willows, and impenetrable black spruce branches. It was time we found a new route.

We backtracked south on the winter road until we were directly west of where we thought the fen would be. We picked the first cutline we came to

Paddlers, Mark Your Calendars!

“There are lots of people from elsewhere here in Fort McMurray who are unfamiliar with the wilderness of northern Alberta,” says Darin Zandee, construction manager and mining operations supervisor for Suncor. “They’re looking for a connection to this area and to their community.” Darin’s extensive paddling experience, his love of wild places, and his desire to help others discover and enjoy the beauty of nature led him to found the Borealis Canoe Club in 2006, shortly after moving to Fort McMurray.

After experiencing McClelland Lake and the patterned fen feeding into it, Darin decided to share his experience with others. He has agreed to lead a McClelland Lake canoe and hiking trip in the fall of 2008 in collaboration with AWA. “The club is very active,” he says, “and is experienced at leading groups of like-minded paddlers to beautiful places.”

Taking a group to McClelland would meet the club’s seven objectives:

- 1) Promote local recreational canoeing by providing maps, routes, information, current conditions, and contacts
- 2) Share knowledge and learning through clinics and training
- 3) Organize social events, gatherings, and trips
- 4) Cooperate with other clubs and associations in the province and country
- 5) Encourage safe, low-impact camping and canoeing
- 6) Support the protection and conservation of our sustainable paddling environment
- 7) Provide a point of contact and voice representing the interests of local recreational paddling

The canoe trip is planned for the Labour Day weekend, August 30-September 1, 2008. If you are interested in this unique opportunity to see one of Alberta’s truly remote wild places, please contact Darin Zandee, president of the Borealis Canoe Club, at drzandee@shaw.ca. For more information about the club, see their website: www.borealiscanoe.ca. AWA will post more information when details are confirmed.

— Joyce Hildebrand

before our camera lenses, so we turned our cameras toward the ground and photographed the forest floor textures and colours.

For two kilometres we walked, listened, and photographed. When we reached the fen, we laughed at the elation we felt. Even after all our years of hike and bike trips, we still felt a sense of accomplishment from venturing off to seek a remote point on a map with no indication of a route.

Both routes I took to the fen left me with a sense of solitude, peace, and intrigue. I was filled with a desire to gently return to the fen and bring other like-minded people to enjoy this intimacy with nature.

It is important that we set aside places on this earth that are unique and serve a significant purpose in nature. For me, these special places provide sanctuaries for all living things to cling to amidst the pressures of humankind.

We must choose a balance. A balance of what we perceive the earth can afford to lose and what we know will be lost... forever.

In the case of the McClelland Lake fen, we must make our choice. I just hope we make the right one.

Darin Zandee is the co-founder and president of the Borealis Canoe Club. He lives and works in Fort McMurray.

and travelled east several kilometres until the outline faded to a trail. We then hiked east along an unknown trail that we hoped would lead to the fen.

We marvelled at the diversity of tracks left in the sand by moose, deer, fox, grouse, squirrels, rabbits, and even a wolf pack. One wolf track was as large as my outspread hand.

Travel was much easier here. The ground beneath the trees was like a plush carpet. The autumn sun shone down through the large trees like a spotlight onto the soft forest floor of dark green mosses, white fragile reindeer lichen, and waxy green leaves of heath scattered with small red berries.

We walked slowly, often stopping to stand in the silence. We hoped the faint sounds we heard were not just squirrels but something larger like a moose, or a deer, or even a bear. Unfortunately, nothing materialized



If Petro-Canada’s approved Fort Hills Oil Sands Project goes ahead as planned, the serene beauty of McClelland Lake will change forever. D. ZANDEE



AWA COMPLETES SECOND YEAR OF WHITEBARK PINE RESEARCH

By Reg Ernst

Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*), a keystone species in the upper subalpine ecosystem, facilitates biodiversity, has a positive impact on watersheds by regulating stream flows, and provides food, cover, and breeding habitat for various wildlife species. It may also be an important species for restoring human-caused disturbances in the upper subalpine. This species, however, is disappearing across its range in western North America because of various factors including competition from other conifers, lack of regeneration sites due to fire suppression, attacks by mountain pine beetle, and infections from white pine blister rust, an introduced fungus.

Although it has received a great deal of attention (and research) in the U.S., little is known about whitebark pine in southwestern Alberta. In 2006, however, the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre (ANHIC) recognized that whitebark pine was facing serious threats and responded by adding it to their vascular plant tracking list. That same year, AWA began a four-year study of this species with a survey of the Castle area to collect information on the distribution, abundance, and health of whitebark pine in this region.

Data from the first year of our survey indicated that competing conifers and blister rust are negatively impacting whitebark communities in the Castle area. Only 16 percent of the trees surveyed were free of blister rust. Mitigating these effects is crucial if whitebark pine and associated communities are to remain extant. Unless cost-effective methods are developed to maintain and regenerate whitebark pine in Alberta, it could very well become endangered.

In the U.S., ongoing research studies are addressing the maintenance and restoration of whitebark pine communities. Much of the research involves identifying rust-resistant trees,



Whitebark pine, the species currently under study by AWA in the Castle. C. OLSON

caging cones to provide a seed source, and collecting and treating seed to grow seedlings in a greenhouse for later transplantation. This process is time consuming and expensive, and seedling survival is often quite low. A more cost-effective method of recruiting whitebark pine trees in their natural habitat would greatly aid in restoration efforts.

In 2007 AWA initiated a project to investigate the feasibility of direct-seeding whitebark pine in suitable habitats near the seed source. Direct-seeding involves collecting and planting seed with a minimum of intermediate steps. Our project includes testing whether sheltered sites will improve seed germination and/or seedling survival, determining if nicking the seed coat on whitebark pine seed improves germination, and evaluating whether factors such as substrate, slope aspect, and minor elevation differences affect seed germination. The project area is located adjacent to the Shell Canada facilities in the upper subalpine ecosystem on Prairie Bluff in southwestern Alberta. This site was selected because of its relatively easy access

and because it has several whitebark pine communities displaying different ecological attributes.

During the summer of 2007 we collected and planted seed using a randomized block design consisting of five 200-m blocks located on different slope aspects and elevations. In 2008 and 2009 we will monitor seed germination and seedling growth, and in 2009 we plan to analyze the data and produce a report. Within the report will be a cost comparison between the greenhouse and direct-seeding methods. Comparing the two methods will answer our basic question about the viability of direct seeding.

Restoring and maintaining whitebark pine communities is crucial to maintaining healthy, functioning upper subalpine ecosystems. The future of these systems is bleak, but we are optimistic that our project will contribute to the body of knowledge necessary to help reverse the current problems impacting these systems.

AWA appreciates the support of Alberta Conservation Association and Shell Canada for the research we are conducting in the Castle area on whitebark pine.



WHAT SHALL WE DEFEND?

By Dr. Valerius Geist

This article is adapted from a longer article by Dr. Geist. To access the full document, including references, contact the author at kendulf@shaw.ca.

A quarter century ago, the University of Chicago Press sent its authors a little book by Denham Sutcliffe. Entitled *What Shall We Defend?*, it was a collection of essays assembled posthumously by the devoted students and family of a literature teacher from a mid-western college. The title aroused my curiosity, and despite a mountain of material to read, I opened the book and was quickly taken in. Today, its coffee-stained cover, frayed edges, and crumbling binding bear witness to the handling it has received over the decades. Through many moves, I have guarded it jealously so that I could reach for it in times of need to recharge my soul and refresh my memory.

How could a mere teacher of literature so deeply affect an arrogant scientist like myself? The answer lies in the question Denham Sutcliffe pursued so effectively: what shall we defend? It is a question that forces one not merely to examine one's beliefs and values, but to move from detail to basis, from the tactical to the strategic, from the trivial to the profound. Sutcliffe clarified for me as none had before that my beloved field of endeavour, science, could not exist, let alone flourish, without the underlying humanistic values embraced by our society as stored and reflected in our literature and arts.

In my university career, I laboured in a professional faculty to transform good academic scientists into able professional scientists, competent to carry on their trade outside academia. I soon became aware of the deficiency of traditional university training in preparing scientists for life beyond academia. Much of our time in educating environmental scientists



Elk have recently made a comeback, after reintroduction, in the Suffield National Wildlife Area. D. OLSON

was spent rectifying that deficit. If I had my way, no student today would be allowed to study science and be let loose on laboratories or the field without a degree in the liberal arts.

The question "What shall we defend?" is highly relevant to those of us interested in wildlife and nature conservation. For instance, whether you are a proponent or opponent of Quality Deer Management becomes irrelevant without deer or deer hunting. It is the values that underlie the support of deer and hunting that I am prepared to defend. It doesn't help to point out how much hunters have contributed to the survival and return of wildlife if the reply is "I don't care!" The most beautiful ecological studies are irrelevant to conservation, should this be the prevailing public attitude. One must, therefore, strive to identify the fundamental societal values that make society promote wildlife.

Historically, hunting has been the greatest passion that assured wildlife its place on the landscape. These powerful urges to hunt wildlife appear to be deeply primordial. Most commonly

the passion to hunt expresses itself as a deep, life-long interest in and devotion to wildlife, often accompanied by considerable work, even sacrifice, by the hunter on behalf of wildlife. Witness the many organizations dedicated to the conservation of wildlife in North America.

How to explain that passion meaningfully to the public is a challenge. Careful discussions about human origins can help here, such as the capture by humans of the large protein store – the master nutrient – contained in wildlife, an achievement fundamental to the meteoric rise of our species. A good many scholars have dwelled upon how our past as hunter-gatherers has shaped the human species, but few have discussed this complex topic so knowledgeably and in such lucid, poetic prose as did the late Paul Shepard. In writing about his work, Florence Shepard explains how hunting for food and maintaining family life becomes a sacrament, a part of a great cycle of becoming and passing, births and deaths, and how the mundane becomes the spiritual.

We can safely assume, then, that as long as there is wildlife, there will be a powerful urge to hunt, that such a primordial urge cannot be abolished any more than love or hate. But this urge needs to be channeled intelligently into positive outlets.

Reduced to its essence, wildlife thrives where humans get something precious from it, which must be tangible for a majority of persons. However, that gain, tangible or otherwise, must not be seen as abusive of wildlife or frivolous by those who merely observe and who enjoy no tangible benefits or suffer costs. And these are in the majority. Consequently, the first objective to be pursued is to make wildlife very relevant to as broad a segment of the public as possible. The large land base beyond our protected areas, that is, the land from which we as a society reap sustenance via agriculture and products from raw materials, is here our chief concern.

What shall we defend? We shall defend in the first instance the idea that wildlife is there to be used, that wildlife is not merely an object of natural art to be admired in hands-off fashion. The challenge is to make the use of wildlife appealing. Its use can be ennobled by linking it to high ideals, to high status, to art, literature, tradition and to ritual – and the deeper the better. The destruction of global ecosystems is a topical concern. As long as there is a determined demand for wildlife, there will be a determined demand for wildlife habitat. The more species of wildlife called for, the greater the synergistic effect of keeping ecosystems complex and species-rich.

No, we cannot all turn into hunter-gatherers. Agriculture will remain to feed us all. However, we must keep alive the fundamental truth that hunting and gathering maintains the landscape rich and diverse in life, and raising crops for food does not. And nobody that I know of can make a better argument for that than ex-vegetarian hunter Ted Kerasote. Eating wild meat is a little step toward a more holistic global ecology. It is thoroughly ecological, it is thoroughly holistic, it is thoroughly good!

There is more to the question: What shall we defend? If you defend the sensible use of wildlife, you will

soon run into opposition from a small, energetic, well-financed, clever and media-wise group of people that espouse the doctrine that sentient beings must not be used by humans at all, only non-sentient ones, and that we must all become vegetarians. There are various variants of this doctrine, all purportedly aimed at reducing pain and suffering, aggression and violence, and thus turning Earth into a kinder, gentler place. Note that this philosophy – if one can call it such – is based on splitting life into a higher sentient form and a lower non-sentient one. In so doing, it denies the unity of life. And that is a falsehood.

Ever since Darwin, we have viewed life as united, and that unity has been demonstrated at great length by modern science, molecular biology in particular. A doctrine that denies the unity of life is not worth the paper it is written on. It has no basis in science. The fact is that all organisms sense injury to their self and proceed to repair themselves. The urgency with which repairs are initiated suggests that all organisms suffer, each in their very own way. That is a valid deduction from the unity of life, even though it is beyond scientific proof. As animals we are bound to eat life in order to live, and there is no way to escape inflicting suffering; any claim to the contrary I consider self-delusion. That we must

strive to limit suffering goes without question.

What we defend in this case is veracity, and we must not falter in its defence. We must know the limits to science and oppose its inappropriate uses. This is no easy task, I can assure you from personal experience. We must be vigilant that public policy is indeed based on science, and not on its pretense. To be effective, we must be prepared, and that includes some understanding of those who oppose us. To begin this endeavour, I recommend highly another little book entitled *Know Hunting*, written by a retired fellow biologist David E. Samuel.

Defend the sensible use of wildlife, defend veracity, but also defend the great gifts of those that went before us. They laboured so that you and I might enjoy wildlife, and that because of wildlife, we might enjoy a high quality of life. Defend the policies that made North American-style wildlife conservation the unequalled environmental success story of the twentieth century. It not only returned wildlife from the brink of extinction in less than a century, but it is a glowing example of how to use a natural, renewable resource in a sustainable manner, how a public resource can be used via the private sector to generate remarkable wealth and employment, and how commerce can be turned to



Adequate habitat in Alberta for animals such as these sheep in the Bighorn Backcountry is shrinking, largely due to increased human access. Appropriate human use of, and connection to, wildlife creates a demand for habitat. C. WEARMOUTH



"Foothills, Whaleback" © PAM WILMAN

support wildlife rather than destroy it. It is a system that arose via decades of grassroots democracy in action across this continent. It is the collective wisdom of those who went before us on how to maintain wildlife, despite conflicting demands on it.

Yet we would defend nothing static, for as long as wildlife is a public resource accessible to all, this system of grassroots democracy will tune it to changing conditions as time passes. The North American system of wildlife conservation is a great cultural achievement of North American society – were it not also the best kept secret in North America.

I wish to point to some developments that need special attention under the heading "What Shall We Defend?" The last two decades have seen the growth of game farming, an industry devoted to raising wildlife for the sale of its parts in an open market. It is much supported by agricultural bureaucracies. This industry stands in opposition to every major policy of wildlife conservation in the North American conservation model. These are irreconcilable opposites and there is no escape from it. Game ranching systematically destroys the legislative framework that has been found effective in conserving wildlife. It is also a big disease bridge between livestock and wildlife; it is a threat to public health; it takes away living space from wildlife, which conventional ranching does not; and it has the potential to destroy the genetic integrity of wildlife through assured escapes and the genetic manipulation

of captive wildlife. Game ranching is a most potent threat to wildlife conservation in North America today.

We must also defend what was termed by Aldo Leopold the "democracy of sport." It is currently threatened, directly and indirectly, by the limiting of access to wildlife through the marketplace. Ultimately, that would limit access to wildlife to the wealthy, ruling elite, excluding the majority of North Americans in participating in the wildlife harvest. There are a number of such developments: the leasing of hunting rights on private property, the auctioning of hunts to the highest bidder, the shooting of big game on hunt-farms designated variously as *canned hunts* or *pet-shoots*, and in Canada the recent imposition of anti-gun legislation that insures that persons of modest or moderate means will be disarmed and cannot participate in wildlife harvests.

There are, of course, vigorous defenders of all these practices and in my experience very touchy defenders. However, the inescapable bottom line



"Crowsnest Lake" © PAM WILMAN

is that these practices tend to remove hunters from the field, diminishing Leopold's "democracy of sport." We need to address these issues, touchy defenders or not.

What shall we defend? It is a potent question, despite its simplicity, well chosen by the finely honed mind of a man of letters, Denham Sutcliffe. And yes, he was a hunter.

Val Geist is the founding director of the Environmental Science Program in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary. He studied wildlife conservation as well as the biology of large mammals, humans included. He is long retired and lives on Canada's west coast.

"You can't conserve game by itself; to rebuild the game resource you must first rebuild the game range, and this means rebuilding the people who use it, and all of the things they use it for... The task grows greater year by year, but so does its importance. We begin by seeking a few trees or birds; to get them we must build a new relationship between men and land."

— Aldo Leopold

ART AS ADVOCACY – ALBERTA ARTIST PROMOTES PROTECTION IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

Since 1992, Edmonton artist Pam Wilman has been drawn to the breathtaking scenery of southern Alberta, which offers a rich source of inspiration for a landscape artist. As an artist, she quickly developed an appreciation of the beautiful viewscapes of the Whaleback, the Castle, and the Crowsnest Pass, along with a desire to capture these on canvas. But more than this, she understands the fragility of these landscapes and the need to protect them. She sees her art as a tool to help achieve this.

This is a central theme of two Edmonton exhibitions of Wilman's work. Her "Viewpoints" show runs from November 2 to 30 at the Fringe Gallery in the basement of the Paint Spot on Whyte Avenue. The show is about the Castle wilderness area and the need to protect the wildlife corridors in southwestern Alberta. "I wanted to raise more awareness for the area to get people to protect it as a provincial park in the future," says Wilman. "That's why the work has been focused on the area."

Wilman and other artists have been working from a University of Lethbridge facility in Blairmore since 1992. Coming back to the area year after year has allowed her to observe and chronicle the changes that have taken place. "There are more people coming to the area now – more campers, more backpackers and hikers. And there are all-terrain vehicles and motocross and helicopters, and just about everything on those trails."

One of the most dramatic changes was the 2003 Lost Creek fire. "It was a really devastating fire; it really affected the whole community," she says, but it proved to be an inspiration for her work. "The first year right after the fire, everything was charred black. The next year there was a little more silver and then a little more fireweed coming up. You could really see the changes over time." One of her pieces, "Lost Creek Fire Recovery," focuses



"Lost Creek Recovery" © PAM WILMAN

on the renewal that ultimately follows from the dramatic destruction of such a huge fire. "The forest now is totally different," she says. "There are still birds coming and you can see a bit more life coming back, but you can see how it's going to take a long time."

Wilman has realized that the Castle region, where AWA and other groups have been calling for increased protection for many years, is now at a crossroads. "The Castle is becoming more discovered now; more problems are happening," she muses. "A lot of ATVers are really good – they stay on

the trails, they look after the trails and they have pride – but there are people who are all over the place and scarring everything."

But it certainly isn't too late for the Castle. "I don't know what's going to happen in the future for this area. Ideally it would be a provincial park and it would be stabilized. To me it's the one area in Alberta that still has a chance to really become something."

Wilman's next exhibition will be at the McMullen Gallery at the University of Alberta Hospital from December 14, 2007 to February 10, 2008. Her work will feature in a group show of landscapes called "4 Outside Views," which will focus on southern Alberta. "This exhibition will show people four artists who love the area and how they are able to use their style and their vision," says Wilman. "It will show how artists can paint in the same area but approach it totally differently."

Wilman is clearly an artist with a conscience, who wants to use her talents to achieve better protection of the landscape she loves. "A lot of people want to do something to help the environment," she concludes. "This is my way of doing that."

You can see more of Pam Wilman's images online at pamwilmanart.com.



"Westcastle View" © PAM WILMAN

Bill 46 Needs Blackout Punch

The Alberta government's much-reviled Bill 46 has taken a number of punches over the past few weeks, but is still standing, and still threatening to further restrict public involvement in decisions about energy development.

Bill 46 proposes the splitting of the Alberta Energy Utilities Board (EUB) into two bodies, one dealing with energy development and one with utilities (transmission lines, etc.). But more importantly, the bill will also add further restrictions to groups and individuals seeking to be represented at hearings.

Landowner groups and environmental organizations, including AWA, have been arguing that the current EUB already does a remarkably poor job of fulfilling its mandate of representing the "public interest." Bill 46, if it is not changed substantially, will do nothing to help restore the credibility of a board that has received widespread condemnation for its recent spying on members of the public involved in its Altalink hearing.

"In a democracy, the public expects to have the rights and freedom to defend their interests and to contribute in an effective and constructive manner to important decisions," writes Steven Kennett, senior policy analyst with the Pembina Institute. "Bill 46 as it stands will considerably undermine those rights."

AWA is one of a number of environmental and landowner groups arguing that Bill 46 must not be passed in its current form.

— Nigel Douglas

EID Amendment Application Turned Down

Public concern appears to have halted, for now, the possibility of a major transfer of authority over Bow River water reallocation from the Government of Alberta to the Eastern Irrigation District. Alberta Environment announced on October 26, 2007 that it will "examine" its current policy on water license amendments in the South Saskatchewan River basin. In

the meantime, it has deferred its review of the Eastern Irrigation District (EID) application to amend its water licenses.

In October AWA requested that Alberta Environment reject the EID application (*WLA*, October 2007). This Alberta Environment decision is at least a temporary victory for AWA's view that the provincial government must remain involved in reviewing the reallocation of water licenses from their historic purpose – mainly agricultural irrigation, along the Bow – to other purposes and users. Had the EID been allowed to change the "purpose" of its water licenses as broadly as it had requested, very large quantities of Bow River water could have been reallocated to industrial or commercial uses, for example. This reallocation could have occurred without public input or the possibility of a water conservation holdback for instream flow needs.

Regarding this decision, Environment Minister Rob Renner explained that "with most of the South Saskatchewan River Basin closed to new license applications, concerns have been raised about the Alberta government maintaining its authority to oversee water resources." AWA will continue to watch this situation and insist that Alberta Environment oversee water license transfers in the public interest and with regard to aquatic ecosystem needs.

— Carolyn Campbell

Government Research to Kill Wolves

Hot on the tail of last month's *Wild Lands Advocate* article by Dick Dekker, "Alberta's War on Wolves, Then and Now," AWA has learned that government research in west-central Alberta will include the sterilization and killing of wolves.

On November 8, Alberta Fish and Wildlife met with local hunters and trappers in Rocky Mountain House to discuss the research program that is being carried out in cooperation with the University of Alberta. The project will involve trapping an existing

"alpha pair" of wolves, sterilizing them, and releasing the pair back onto the landscape. All other members of the pack will be killed. The project is looked at by the provincial government as a possible way to increase ungulate populations, especially elk, which have been declining in the mountains for the past 10 years.

According to Fish and Wildlife, west-central Alberta boasts the highest density of wolves in North America, with 20 animals per 1,000 km². The area is also one of the most important elk wintering areas in the province. While wolf predation is a pressure on ungulate populations, it is only one of a number of factors, including habitat loss through expanding human access.

The government's willingness to kill wolves is in notable contrast to its failure to do anything to address the real issue of habitat destruction. Wolves have been killed in the past two winters in the Little Smoky area northwest of Hinton, nominally to protect the area's woodland caribou herd, described in the government's Caribou Recovery Plan as "at immediate risk of extirpation." The plan, however, clearly states that habitat damage is the principal issue affecting caribou numbers.

— Chris Wearmouth
and Nigel Douglas

Bill One – Lobbyist Act

On November 21, 2007, the Government of Alberta formally introduced an amendment to the controversial proposed *Lobbyist Act*. The amendment totally exempts public-service not-for-profit organizations from the Act. The announcement was made on November 14 by Hon. Dave Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness and the Government House Leader, who said the government had decided to introduce a "public-good exemption" to the bill.

The amendment will exempt "directors, officers or employees" of a not-for-profit organization that "is not constituted to serve management, union or professional interests nor having a

majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises or representatives of profit-seeking enterprises.” In its original form, volunteers who are not paid anything other than expenses were already exempted from the provisions of the Act but not-for-profit organizations were not.

The amendment was not formally introduced and at this time, it is not known when the government will bring it back to the house. The work done by the Environmental Law Centre, the Muttart Foundation, and the Calgary Centre for Volunteer Organizations led a tremendous effort by the people for the people! This is an important amendment and we recognize the work of all individuals and groups who helped bring this amendment forward.

— Christyann Olson

Suffield National Wildlife Area

On October 18, Calgary-based EnCana was charged with violating the *Canada Wildlife Act* for allegedly installing a section of pipeline in the Suffield National Wildlife Area without a permit. The charge could set back EnCana’s application to drill 1,275 additional wells in this same protected area.

The approval process for EnCana’s proposal is already lagging well behind schedule. Originally, the application was expected to go to a hearing in fall 2007. In mid-August the federal/provincial Joint Review Panel announced that the public comment period on the adequacy of Encana’s Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was extended by 30 days to August 27.

The Panel, after its review of the EIS and the comments received, requested additional information from EnCana. On November 9, EnCana provided the information and six days later, the Joint Panel invited the public to comment on EnCana’s responses by December 13. After this date, the Panel will have 15 days to consider EnCana’s response and the comments received.

The Panel then has two options: (1) to issue a Notice of Hearing within 45 days of receipt of EnCana’s additional information (allowing a minimum of 45 days from the Notice of Hearing to the beginning of the hearing) or (2) seek approval from the Canadian Environmental Assessment

Agency and Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to further extend the review. Given the delay, a hearing is unlikely to begin before March 2008.

A coalition that includes AWA, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Grasslands Naturalists, the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, and Nature Canada continues to jointly oppose any drilling in the Suffield National Wildlife Area, which was declared legally protected only four years ago and contains some of Canada’s most pristine native grassland.

— Joyce Hildebrand

Land-Use Framework Survey Results

In October 2007 the government released the results of its survey of public attitudes regarding land use in Alberta, as part of the Land-Use Framework process. More than 3,000 Albertans responded with their comments.

At the top of the list of public concerns were “Failure to consider the impacts on the water supply during land-use planning” and “Failure to consider the combined (i.e. cumulative) effects of land-use planning” (96% very concerned or somewhat concerned for both), and “Loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitat” (95% very concerned or somewhat concerned).

Similarly, 74.3 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “At present, the balance between developing and using our land versus conservation of our land is too focused on economic development and growth.” Only 19.7 percent of people agreed that the government was currently doing a good or excellent job in managing for “healthy environment and ecosystems.” Clearly many of the issues upon which AWA has been focusing in recent years have a very deep resonance with the Alberta public.

The multi-stakeholder teams that studied land-use issues throughout the summer made their recommendations to government in October. Now it remains to be seen how the government will use feedback from the two processes to change land-use practices in the province. The full report can be viewed online at www.srd.gov.ab.ca.

— Nigel Douglas

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



BACKCOUNTRY, STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

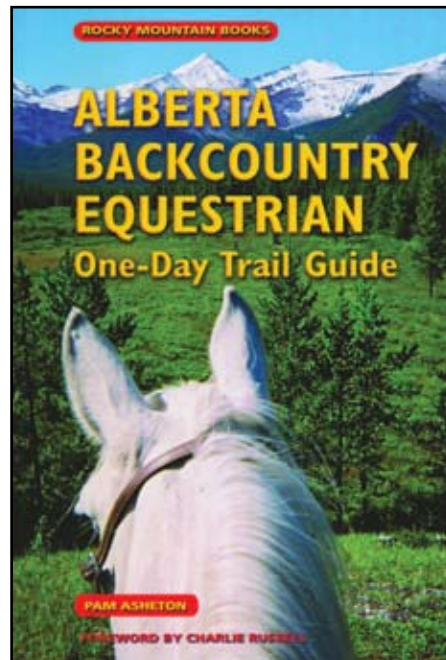
By Pam Asheton

The creek behind my elderly farmhouse began to surge with silt. Boundary fencing floated downstream, never to be seen again. By lunchtime, murky racing water was touching the second strand of the barbed-wire fence between the paddocks upstream, and my newly christened “mountain horses” were wide-eyed and snorting. It was June 2005, now known as *the* 200-year storm. In the foothills, the impact was a pain in the neck for me, and I began seriously despairing about whether my equestrian guidebook would ever happen.

The idea had come about through a regular weekly Cochrane newspaper column – an equestrian diary. One June 2003 piece, casually scribbled off after interviewing a couple of riders who told me about a few K-Country trails, produced unexpected consequences. Email feedback from a column generally averaged 20. This one fast-clicked 102.

Surprised, I questioned my sources and was amazed to find that with the best riding terrain and scenery in the world, Alberta had no equestrian guidebook, only volumes on hiking and mountain biking. And what's safe for a human can be lethal for a horse. What's more, hikers don't have to consider reversing a truck and trailer on trailhead parking, or finding eight gallons of water at short notice when their partner has heatstroke after a summer day sweating on mountain scree passes. The clothing is hugely individual, and riders savour viewpoints very differently. Even your scent, one seasoned hunter reckoned, is absorbed into your horse's – explaining why wildlife can seem amazingly nonchalant.

Idly I considered writing a guidebook and discovered immediately that all government arts grants excluded such an undertaking. Manoeuvring around the few months of the year offering safe riding on mountain trails



(and that initial horrendous weather damage), I began working evenings, after researching trails during daylight hours.

My onward-bound alpha mare, The Best, and I rode our first undertaking, and I realized straightaway that I was checking my watch way too often. It was everything against what mountain people and the horse ancestors believed in. To experience those magical connections to wild high places, where horses teach you peripheral vision, casually cocking an ear toward an active game trail or raising a head considering smells ahead – I wanted this guidebook to lead readers to those precious educational intimacies.

The night job went, the bank manager gulped. The horses journeyed to Ya Ha Tinda, the Ghost, K-Country, and deeper valleys south of the Sheep, clocking staggering mileages over 18 months. Apart from riding every trail (in different seasons and weather to experience what was and might not be safe), research was hugely interpretive, dotted with soundbites about game, plants, geology, and history. At the back of my mind, always, was a passing

on of the torch to backcountry riders (increasingly from adrenalin-powered city environments), encouraging an inner creed of stewardship. The rides in this first edition deliberately concentrate on designated trails, minimizing hooves-on impact – and equally deliberately exclude high-activity wildlife corridors.

Often I rode alone, a side-effect of last-minute forecasts indicating sunshine (for better photographs) and of friends' exasperated demands for more than overnight notice. Unexpectedly this was a bonus. It dramatically sharpened my own five senses – and enriched the sixth. That extra sense, almost of second sight, reaped incredibly rich rewards.

One special day followed another. Wildlife, now, was watched differently; pestered biologists explained plants' medicinal properties; and glimpses of lynx, wolf, and wolverine increased. One memorable day included a peaceful encounter up close and personal with a bear, whose overwhelming smell frankly had my eyes watering! Shaking in reaction hours later, I reread *Grizzly Heart* and tried to understand Charlie Russell's mindset. I owe Charlie, bigtime, for generously writing my own foreword and for understanding so well where my thoughts were aiming.

In the end, my mountain horses made these places special. It's probably the closest humans ever get to feeling part of the landscape as an animal. A physical meditation of beat and rhythm and connection, and of body-language psychology, that if learned, changes your two-legged perspective forever.

Pam Asheton's Alberta Backcountry Equestrian One-Day Trail Guide is published by Rocky Mountain Books (1-800-665-3302). \$26.95. ISBN 978-1-894765-82-4. Available at Westlands Books (Cochrane), Chapters, Indigo, Coles, McNally Robinson, and selected Alberta equestrian feedstores and saddleries.

Public Lands and the Law

Dear Editor:

Ian Skinner and I recently had a letter published in the *St. Albert Gazette* [see below], and when I read the October *Wild Lands Advocate*, the association was hard to ignore.

“Locked Out,” the article about public lands access, added more proof to what we have been articulating for the past 4-plus years. “The Greening of Industry” by Christyann Olson talks about accountability, and our evidence shows that our government has repeatedly cut enforcement to the quick, leaving those with economics as their only vision to do what they are best at – bending, ignoring, and manipulating the rules to satisfy their bottom line.

“The New Plan for Alberta Parks” by Chris Wearmouth states that a common link is required between existing systems – again, that link is public lands, identified by the original legislators who understood the hydraulic connections above and below ground that the *Public Lands Act* and other enactments allude to. “Marie Lake Reversal” talks about McClelland fen belonging to all Albertans, again public lands and its legislation not being enforced and consequences pursued.

In a *LawNow Online* article entitled “The ‘Sleeping Giant’ of Watershed Protection,” Michael M. Wenig, research associate with the Canadian Institute of Resources Law, discusses the *Public Lands Act* and the strength it could have if it were enforced and its consequences applied. As it has never been presented to the judiciary by a courageous lawyer, there is no precedent. A decision to uphold the prohibitions in the Act would put the protection that Act offers where it should be – in front of a judge.

I hope this is helpful to you as I am very proud to receive your publication and to have attended your “Wild about Wilderness” celebration in Edmonton in March.

May you be blessed with success.

– Mike Northcott
*Onoway River Valley
Conservation Association*

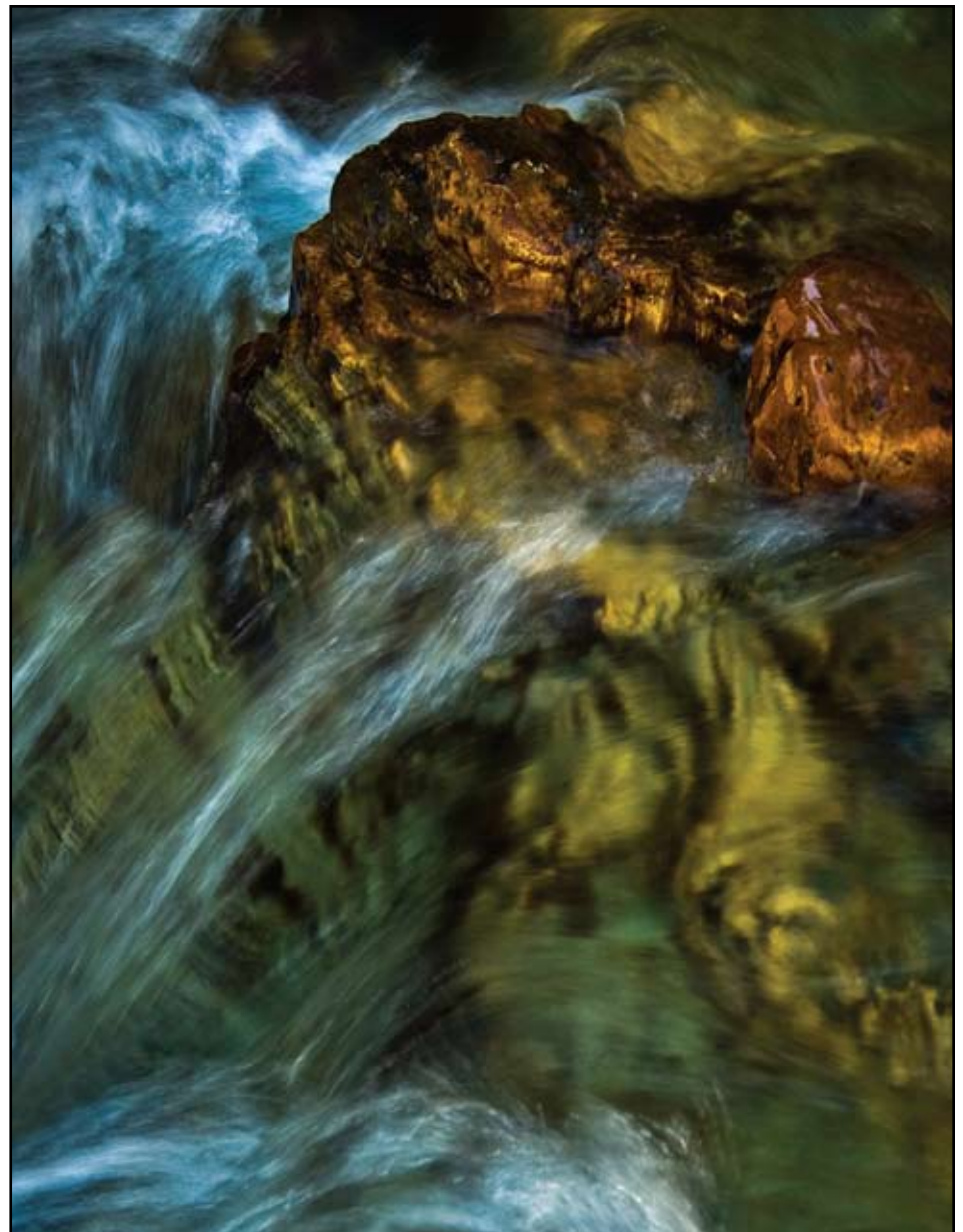
Province Is Ignoring Water Legislation

A longer version of this letter was published in the St. Albert Gazette, October 31, 2007.

In the past 40 years, Albertans created the legislation that describes water bodies as rivers, streams,

watercourses, lakes, and other natural bodies of water, any location where water flows or is present, whether or not the flow or the presence of water is continuous, intermittent, or occurs only during a flood. This includes, but is not limited to, wetlands and aquifers.

All Albertans must understand that there are complex hydrological connections among surface waters, ground water, and wetlands, and between water-bearing features, riparian and even upland areas.



R. V. RASMUSSEN – RAYSWEB.NET



The Suffield National Wildlife Area provides excellent habitat for pronghorns, as well as many at-risk and endangered species dependent on native prairie. C. WALLIS

Because of these connections, it is hard to think of any development or intense surface or subsurface activity that does not alter one water system or another. Many of these degrading activities could be characterized as injuriously affecting watershed capacity.

For more than 40 years now, water bodies in Alberta have been degraded and/or destroyed, and have not been certified as reclaimed. Alberta has among the best legislation in Canada for protecting all water bodies, but it is not being enforced; in fact, it is being ignored in a so-called holistic process. The creation of only a wetlands policy that would give a framework for land-use planning and development around wetlands is doomed to failure as it continues to ignore existing legislation.

Planning and development depends entirely on boundary identification, especially in regards to identifiable water bodies. It is imperative that public land boundaries involving water bodies are identified prior to any land-use planning and development taking place that might allow the accumulation of waste material, the creation of any condition which is likely to result in soil erosion, the existence of any undesirable excavation, the existence of any condition which might cause fire, the doing of any act that may injuriously affect watershed capacity or is likely to result in injury to any body of water or to land in the vicinity, identified in provincial legislation.

As municipal governments have jurisdiction over land-use planning and development in Alberta, it is obvious

that the creation of consistent municipal development plans for the identification and protection of all water body boundaries is essential for efficient land-use planning, development and environmental protection.

If current legislation is enforced, politicians, policy makers, and corporate heads will have to include this in their environment protection plans, municipal development plans and enforcement agency plans. Only then will all water bodies be protected for the future.

— Ian Skinner and Mike Northcott
Onoway River Valley
Conservation Association

Panel Urged to Save Suffield Wildlife

On November 1, 2007 this letter was sent to the Joint Review Panel that is considering EnCana's proposal to drill 1,275 new shallow gas wells within the Suffield National Wildlife Area.

To: Ms. Jodie Smith
Panel Co-Manager
Alberta Energy and Utilities Board
640 5th Avenue S.W.
Calgary T2P 3G4

Dear Ms. Smith,

Suffield National Wildlife Area,
CEAR Reference No. 05-07-15620

I recently attended a lecture organized by the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society on the Suffield National Wildlife Area in Alberta. I understand it is one of the largest remaining blocks of unploughed

grasslands remaining in the Canadian prairies, representing an almost lost natural landscape of native grasses, sand hills, coulees, and wetlands. It was fascinating to hear about, and see photos of, the very special mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects that inhabit this unique area.

However, I was stunned to learn that this area is subject of a development proposal by EnCana – and that this proposal, rather than being rejected out of hand, is actually being considered by the federal and provincial governments. It seems to me completely inappropriate: Canada has so little of its native grasslands left, and to subject this, a National Wildlife Area (that is supposedly maintained as federally protected and managed native wildlife habitat) to the building of over 1,000 new gas wells along with associated pipelines and roads, and to expect it to survive unscathed is just not credible.

Western Canada has many other areas open to resource extraction – I urge the Joint Review Panel to reject EnCana's proposal and preserve one of the last remaining areas of pristine native prairie for the enjoyment, education, and benefit of this generation and those to come.

Yours sincerely,
Sarah Crook

cc: Ms. Marie-France Therrien,
Canadian Environmental Assessment
Agency

Mr. Lee Richardson, MP
Mr. Dave Taylor, MLA



SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY? – IS SAFE SEX POSSIBLE?

By Dr. Ian Urquhart

The following is an excerpt from the notes used for the Alberta Wilderness Association Annual Lecture, November 16, 2007. Sponsored by the Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust, the annual lecture is an opportunity to present the ideas of researchers in a field related to conservation of wilderness. The lecture is meant to challenge us as well as to inform, and the presenter does not speak on behalf of AWA.

Tonight's message – as you no doubt guessed from my title – is something of a warning, something of a critique. The aim, though, is not our usual “prime suspect” when we discuss environmental matters in Alberta – government. Instead, my remarks take aim at environmental groups.

I suppose tonight's talk is largely about money. Much of what I have to say concerns corporate funding of environmental groups and their activities. What I plan to do is suggest that this is an aspect of contemporary environmentalism that we should pay attention to and be very concerned about. We must think very carefully about the impact corporate funding of environmental groups has upon the credibility of ENGOs (environmental non-government organizations) and upon the policy directions and positions we take. We should be especially concerned about our relationships with those corporations involved in exploiting our natural resources in ways that threaten the integrity of ecosystems and ecological processes.

Why raise this issue? Over the past generation Canada's federal and provincial governments have orphaned, shamelessly turned their backs on, key responsibilities – responsibilities that, to my mind, help define us as a people, a nation, a province. Environmental protection is undoubtedly one



C. WEARMOUTH

such responsibility; it has suffered tremendously over the last twenty-five years.

Look, for example, at what has happened to government grants to charitable organizations. World Wildlife Fund Canada reports that just 4 percent of its 2007 revenues came from government; this percentage stood at nearly 9 percent just five years ago. We can see a similar situation here at AWA: the Association received \$69,494 in provincial government grants in 2000 – 14.4 percent of the Association's total revenue. In 2006 government revenue had fallen precipitously. It amounted to just \$12,619 or only 2.9 percent of AWA's total revenue.

With public sector funds becoming scarcer and scarcer, charitable and other environmental organizations have turned, in part, to corporations to secure needed funds. At WWF Canada, corporate contributions were three times more important in 2007 than they were in 2002. They amounted to \$3.755 million; in 2002 they were \$1.205 million. In percentage terms, corporate revenue more than doubled. It jumped to 19.6 percent of

WWF Canada operating funds in 2007 from 7.3 percent in 2002.

Why might such increases in the importance of corporate funding raise some eyebrows and concerns? Pollution Probe identified it well in a 2004 report on ENGO views about corporate social responsibility (CSR). One of the concerns raised by key figures from five major ENGOs with respect to CSR was “maintaining ENGO credibility especially in relation to corporate funding.”

ENGOs, according to this logic, should be concerned their members will believe that if ENGOs take money from corporations, their positions on issues and their integrity will be compromised. Members may suspect that their organization, by taking money from corporations, will pull its punches when addressing environmental issues touching the interests, the bottom line, of their corporate backers.

It should be emphasized here too that this concern about credibility may extend well beyond the confines of ENGO membership. It also may touch ENGO credibility with the general public. Here, it is important to note that

Canadians see ENGOs as very credible messengers on environmental issues. According to one poll in 2006, 24 percent of Canadians have a great deal of confidence in environmental groups as a source of information. By contrast, how did industry executives fare? Just 3 percent of our fellow citizens had a great deal of confidence in the environmental information coming from Canadian boardrooms.

To me, these data suggest that if ENGOs want to maintain their positive image and credibility with the public, they must be very leery of the damage corporate funding may do to that image, that credibility.

What's an ENGO to do?

When, precisely, do corporate connections compromise ENGO behaviour? I wish I could offer the definitive answer. What I can say is that I suspect the more funding ENGOs receive from corporations engaged in destructive activities, the greater the likelihood their behaviour and positions will be compromised. Furthermore, the tighter their relationships with such corporations, the greater will be the likelihood that serious credibility questions will be raised by their members and by the general public.

But money is one of the essential raw materials ENGOs need in order to do their work. If at least certain kinds of corporate funding and support are suspect, where are ENGOs to turn in order to generate the revenues needed to do their work?

Here are a few ideas about how ENGOs might move ahead in ways that would underline their independence.

Accountability through Transparency

The first piece of advice is directed to ENGOs that feel they must accept money in one form or another from corporate Canada. One good place for such ENGOs to begin would be to produce a transparency statement. ENGOs should tell their members and supporters how much money they receive from individual companies. They should also reveal if those corporations have interests and activities that would be affected by an ENGO's policy preferences or recommendations. Such transparency

would make it easier for ENGO members and supporters to see how extensive and tight corporate-ENGO relationships are. It also would put members of any ENGO's audience in a better position to judge what impact, if any, those corporate connections may have on an organization's behaviour.

An annual report could do that. So too could the articles that groups like AWA publish about their activities in magazines or newsletters. In AWA's case, take the issue of the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC). Petro-Canada is a sponsor of AWA's annual Climb for Wilderness; it is also the principal partner in the Fort Hills Oil Sands Project, a project that will destroy the MLWC. Has the company's participation in the Climb for Wilderness affected AWA's position on the MLWC? No. AWA is adamantly opposed to any and all industrial activity in an area the Association believes should be protected. Highlighting this information would demonstrate to the Association's members that the Petro-Canada financial connection has not compromised AWA activities.

Individual Philanthropy

ENGOs should also increase their efforts to raise funds through individual philanthropy – the generous donation of money to good causes. We are, arguably, in the midst of the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in history. One Royal Bank report estimated that, in Canada, the annual transfer of wealth between generations now ranges between \$80 and \$140 billion annually. This intergenerational wealth transfer represents a tremendous opportunity for ENGOs who believe that certain types of corporate funding connections threaten their principles, activities, and credibility.

Accordingly, ENGOs must publicize to their members some of the features of the current taxation systems in Canada that individuals could take advantage of in order to donate to ENGO charities. Some examples of these taxation features are the following:

- So-called planned giving – with respect to estate planning, inviting people to identify an ENGO charity to receive a portion of their estate.

- Giving a gift of stock that has gone up in value over time. If individuals transfer those stocks directly to a charity, they are able to avoid paying any capital gains tax on the securities.
- This year's changes to the Alberta tax credit for annual donations over \$200 to charitable organizations.

But promoting the philanthropy path has costs of its own. It arguably demands that ENGOs may have to devote more staff and more financial resources to fundraising.

So if ENGOs want to maintain their health and their integrity – whether by abstinence or by practicing safe sex – these are the sorts of directions I think they should entertain and embrace.

Ian Urquhart is the author of Making It Work: Kyoto, Trade, and Politics (2002) and co-author of The Last Great Forest: Japanese Multinationals and Alberta's Northern Forests (1994). He teaches political science at the University of Alberta.



"Lost Creek Fire" © PAM WILMAN

New Wild Lands Advocate Editorial Advisory Board

AWA is pleased to introduce five gifted individuals who have responded with enthusiasm to our invitation to be members of the *Wild Lands Advocate* Editorial Advisory Board. The Board will meet with the editor at least twice a year to review the journal, and Board members will provide feedback and be available for consultation throughout the year. We look forward to drawing on their expertise and learning from their experience. Their commitment to AWA, to excellence in communications, and to the conservation of Alberta's wild spaces is immensely appreciated.



Sarah Crook
Sarah has a visual arts background and has always been interested in the natural world. She is particularly fascinated by

birds. Moving around the world with her husband (an oil and gas professional) and seeing first-hand the enormous impact humankind is having on the environment everywhere has convinced her that the success of organizations such as AWA is vital. She does not want the world to lose species, to run out of clean water, or to destroy its ecosystems. She wants to leave this world as compelling, complex, and full of life as the one she inherited: she is honoured to be given the chance to contribute to AWA.



Andy Marshall
Now more or less retired in Cochrane, Andy was in recent years a regular contributor to the *Wild Lands*

Advocate. Involved in various Alberta media for over 25 years, he continues to be impressed by the dedication and commitment the AWA applies to

the publication. He has watched with admiration the evolution of the journal over the years to a full-colour magazine and is still surprised by how many people in all walks of life read it. He feels that it's a pleasure to be associated with it and the AWA staff.



Julie Black
Julie brings 20 years of community organizing, writing, and editing, plus a lifetime of

enjoying walking, snowshoeing, and skiing in the wilderness. Volunteering for the *Wild Lands Advocate* appeals to her as a way to pull the threads of these passions together. Julie will also offer insight from her brief sojourn with a natural gas exploration company.



Pam Asheton
While running award-winning restaurants in the UK and France, Pam Asheton promoted sustainable

countryside producers long before they became fashionable. Her freelance feature writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Country Living*, *Yachts and Yachting*, *Horse and Hound*, *Alberta Country*, *Acreage Life*, and national newspapers. After writing the *Alberta Backcountry Equestrian One-Day Trail Guide*, Pam began a new column, "Walking the Land," for the *Cochrane Eagle*. She profiles small local food producers, wildlife issues, and unique Alberta individuals who live their lives with integrity and mindful stewardship.



Sharon McIntyre
Sharon has shared her passion for marketing and communications with start-up enterprises, public sector groups, non-

profit organizations, global corporations and post-secondary students for over 20 years. Sharon is president and owner of ShelfLife Communications and Design Inc., providing clients with a range of services including marketing planning, brand strategy, web and print systems, public relations support, and a variety of writing services. She has lived and worked internationally, communicates in English and French, and holds dual Canadian and Irish (EU) citizenship. Her interests include creativity, design, travel, and photography.

Staff Profile: Carolyn Campbell



E. SPALDING

My passion for Alberta's wilderness was nurtured by my father, who loves the Canadian Rockies. Over the years we have been on countless hikes and backpacks together, and he taught me "no trace" and "bear smart" camping, as well as names of lovely

alpine flowers. With my husband, George, and our friends, I now spend many weekend days hiking or ski touring, enjoying the beauty of our protected public wild lands close to Calgary.

I was born and raised in Calgary when it was much smaller and quieter. I watched the Calgary Tower go up and I occasionally rode a horse in a field west of town that is now covered with suburban housing. I was very fortunate to have been encouraged by my family to explore new horizons. In my late high school years, I attended Pearson College on Vancouver Island and received there a truly marvelous education in being an active citizen and

getting along with people from many different cultures.

My professional path leading to working for AWA has been circuitous. I received bachelor's and master's degrees in economics and did traditional economic forecasting for three years at a bank in New York City. Then I earned an MBA degree and returned to Calgary, working as a financial analyst for four years at two telecommunications firms.

By then I was ready for a change from large corporations. For nine years I thoroughly enjoyed teaching high school social studies and history in Calgary to many fine young people. However, a restlessness to

be more involved in today's pressing environmental challenges led me to leave teaching and to concentrate on adapting my economics and finance training to environmental issues. For over a year I read, networked, and wrote, particularly about Alberta water issues and reducing carbon emissions. I was thrilled to be able to join AWA as a conservation specialist in November 2007. I am now working on water issues and on AWA's Areas of Concern in northeast Alberta.

For decades I have admired AWA's accomplishments. I am very proud to join in the efforts of so many marvelous members and volunteers in working to preserve Alberta wilderness for generations to come.

EVENTS

TUESDAY TALKS

Pre-registration is advised for all talks.

Location: AWA Office,

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, January 29, 2008

It's Not Easy Being Green: The Ups and Downs of Leopard Frogs

With Kris Kendall

Meet Alberta's most threatened amphibian, the northern leopard frog. Kris, a biologist with the Alberta Conservation Association, will explain how this frog survives at the northern edge of its habitat. Frog-lovers will also discover how they can become involved in leopard frog conservation.



K. KENDALL

Tuesday, February 5, 2008

Celebrating the Artistry of Youth Animators

With the Youth Animation Project

Don't miss this opportunity to meet these skilled, enthusiastic young people and to view their short videos. AWA is a community partner with the Youth Animation Project, an inspiring three-month program for at-risk youth. Their animated productions will amaze, entertain, and educate!

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

Oil Sands Rush: The Urban Connection

With Dr. Noel Keough

The Athabasca oil sands are a long way from our back yards, so why should we care? Or if we do, what can we do about it? Noel, an urban sustainability professor, will explore the connections between urban life and the oil sands.

MEMBERS' NIGHT - EDMONTON

Thursday, January 17, 2008

Royal Glenora Club

For details, see

www.AbertaWilderness.ca.



"Winter Field" © PAM WILMAN

WINTER HIKE

Saturday, February 23, 2008

Sheep River Valley: A Guided Winter Hike

With Nigel Douglas

We tend to do much less hiking in the winter, but winter hiking has much to offer. Snow-covered mountains offer a spectacular backdrop; animal trails criss-cross the landscape, waiting for those who know how to read them. Join us for a hike in the Sheep River valley, and a chance to make the most of this spectacular time of year.

Cost: \$20 – AWA members

\$25 – Non-members

Contact: (403) 283-2025

or 1-866-313-0713

Or register online:

<http://shop.albertawilderness.ca/>

Pre-registration is required.

WILD ALBERTA

YOUR GIFT FOR WILDERNESS

Every winter, Alberta Wilderness Association asks members and donors to consider making a gift to create awareness and increase protection of our wildlands, wildlife, and wild water.



D. OLSON

Will you help us this year?

We invite you to help make our Wild Alberta 2008 appeal a success.

You can make a difference in a number of ways.

- Send a cash donation by cheque, credit card, or online at <http://shop.albertawilderness.ca>.
- Ask your employer to match your donation to AWA.
- Designate your gift to an area that is your priority.
- Join *Wilderness Partners* and become a monthly donor.
- Purchase a gift membership for someone who cares about wilderness.
- Make a memorial donation in memory of loved ones.
- Make a gift of publicly listed securities and save capital gains taxes.
- Make a contribution to the Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust – our legacy fund managed by the Calgary Foundation.
- Leave a gift in your will. Our charitable business number is 11878 1251 RR0001.



Every gift you make helps and is sincerely appreciated.

For more information, call (403) 283-2025 or (toll-free) 1-866-313-0713.

All charitable donations qualify for a tax-deductible receipt.

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:



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

