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**Wild Lands Advocate, June 2008, Vol. 16, No. 3****Disturbing Disturbances in Rumsey**

*By Cheryl Bradley, Alberta Native Plant Council representative, Rumsey Technical Advisory Committee*

Recent developments in the Rumsey Natural Area indicate the urgent need for a new management plan. On a recent brief visit, I observed the results of recent practices that are compromising the biological integrity of the area.

Paramount Resources is proposing a new pipeline from a suspended well to another well, both within the Natural Area. The proposed route goes through strongly rolling hummocky moraine with woodlands and wetlands. The suspended wellsite has not been reclaimed and is occupied with crested wheat grass, smooth brome, and sweet clover. There is a risk that these non-native species will spread onto new disturbances.

Vegetation on a Husky pipeline from a wellsite appears to have been sprayed with herbicides. The spraying has killed vegetation (much of it native) but has not killed all of the crested wheat grass, which has spread eastward from the wellsite. If the spread is not prevented in the next few months, the problem will increase exponentially.

In two other areas of the park, willows have been bulldozed and a large area of aspen woodland and willow shrubland has been cleared by a bulldozer whose tracks have disturbed the grassland on a nearby hillside. Neither of these disturbances was discussed with ANPC (Alberta Native Plant Council), AWA, or Red Deer River Naturalists, all of whom have a longstanding interest in the area.

Extensive erosion is occurring where the main east-west access road descends a steep east-facing slope. The road was built by POCO Petroleum in the 1980s. Reclamation attempts along the roadside have failed. A steep south-facing hillside north of the road is almost bare of vegetation due to heavy grazing and trampling by livestock, some of this occurring this spring.

In mid-May, livestock had already entered lands in the northern part of the Natural Area, adversely impacting the rough fescue grasslands. Studies have shown that rough fescue grasslands are best grazed in the fall or winter and definitely should not be grazed in early spring. This degradation of rangelands – which for decades were so carefully managed by Tom Usher, the former leaseholder who supported protecting the Rumsey block – is most disturbing.

