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AWA Launches Water Analysis of Panther River

In February, AWA reported on the unbridled development along the Panther River in the Bighorn and our concerns with this urbanization of Alberta's wilderness. To better understand impacts on the river by development of four Alberta Tourism Recreational Leases (ATRLs) occupying land on the south shore, AWA initiated a water quality study this summer.

During a field trip last December, we found an unprecedented level of development, including large numbers of permanent structures and overwintering camping trailers. In some cases, structures and accoutrements were within mere metres of the river bank. As well as being pressed right up to the bank of the Panther River, these ATRLs lie on its historic flood plain. In fact, one section of land currently leased is an old road that had to be abandoned and replaced with a new road on higher ground due to consistent seasonal flooding.

Should significant flooding occur, dwellings, debris, and the myriad trappings of these outfits, such as fuel tanks, outhouses, and manure piles, may wash into the river. Even without a flood event, human and animal waste, as well as spilled fuel and chemicals, may be leaching into the river.

AWA is concerned about how these developments may be affecting aquatic ecosystems and compromising the security of a clean water source for humans and wildlife downstream, especially as the Panther River empties into the Red Deer River, one of Alberta's major waterways.

Over the summer, volunteers and staff will be taking water samples at sites along the Panther and Red Deer Rivers. Analysis will include water chemistry and microbiology (e.g., *E. coli*). Should we find results of significant concern, we will report to Alberta Environment, request a follow-up study to be completed by the province, and call for a review by Sustainable Resource Development regarding the appropriateness of these ATRLs along the Panther River.

– *Chris Wearmouth*

