



Wuliji and herder Bayasgulang participate in AWA's workshop in IMAR. Wuliji interpreted from Mongolian to English. The passion they both felt as they spoke was moving. Wuliji will be coming to Alberta on an exchange work placement so that he can learn from our Parks and Protected Areas staff and we can continue to learn from our colleagues in IMAR while sharing what we know.

PHOTO: C. OLSON



Cliff Wallis resonated with people like Liu Songtao who were passionate, innovative, and genuine. Liu Songtao is as avid a bird watcher as you will find anywhere. Liu Songtao and Cliff were thrilled to find a flock of sand-grouse and delighted in counting and documenting their discovery, far too early in the season.

PHOTO: C. OLSON



Map showing intersection of China, Russia, and Mongolia. The Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve is shown in purple.



A VISION FOR FOREST MANAGEMENT FOR THE FUTURE

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

Local communities must play a major role in planning and making decisions regarding Alberta's forested watersheds if watershed management is ever going to become environmentally and socially sustainable. This was the core message at a two-evening workshop hosted by AWA and the Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) in November. Participants heard

that there is no reason why forests cannot be managed to maintain ecological integrity and foster community-based economies that are culturally and ecologically sustainable.

Workshops like this one have become an increasingly important part of AWA's outreach work, and AWA has hosted a series of acclaimed events in recent years looking at water-related themes such

as groundwater and headwaters. This workshop - *Seeing the Forest Among the Trees: The Case for Ecosystem-based Conservation Planning* - took a more community-based focus. Held at the Beaupre Community Hall near Cochrane, it was an opportunity for more than 30 local people to work with Herb Hammond, the internationally-renowned forester and ecologist. The particular focus was on

the Ghost Watershed and how its forests can be managed to maintain long-term ecological and economic viability.

Herb Hammond, who describes himself as a “recovering forester,” has worked for more than 25 years in the scientific research and timber sectors and is co-founder of the Silva Forest Foundation, a charitable society dedicated to research and education in ecosystem-based forest planning. (Herb’s book: *Maintaining Whole Systems on Earth’s Crown. Ecosystem-based Planning for the Boreal Forest* is reviewed later in this issue of the WLA.)

Hammond presented a broad background to forest ecology and the tremendous complexity of forest ecosystems. He emphasized the enormous value of maintaining the integrity of the Ghost watershed for water quality and quantity, as well as for carbon storage, particularly considering the enormous changes that future climate variability is likely to bring. Intact forests will play a critical role in providing movement corridors for a variety of species, including genetic variants which could be crucial in adapting to future change. Healthy forests, particularly old growth forests, are the most efficient at producing clean water and store more atmospheric

carbon than other forest types.

Alberta has already spent tens of millions of dollars struggling with one result of climate change: the mountain pine beetle outbreak – what Hammond calls a “human-caused epidemic.” Climate change has all but eliminated the cold winters that killed beetle larvae hibernating beneath the tree bark. Fire suppression and clearcut logging have produced large areas of susceptible even-age, single species stands of pine trees – perfect habitat for the beetles. Instead of Alberta’s knee-jerk “war on pine beetles” we should instead be looking to develop landscape-level plans to maintain and encourage natural diversity, thinning susceptible stands of pine trees while favouring other species such as spruce. Clearcutting is no solution to the pine beetle problem: it does nothing more than set up the landscape for future problems. Yet, despite the marginal economic value, this is exactly what is happening in the critical watersheds of the Ghost. “Clearcutting in the Ghost is not fitting into a plan that makes much sense to me,” Hammond stressed. But Alberta is slow to get the message: “It is easier to change the image than to fix the problem,” he pointed out.

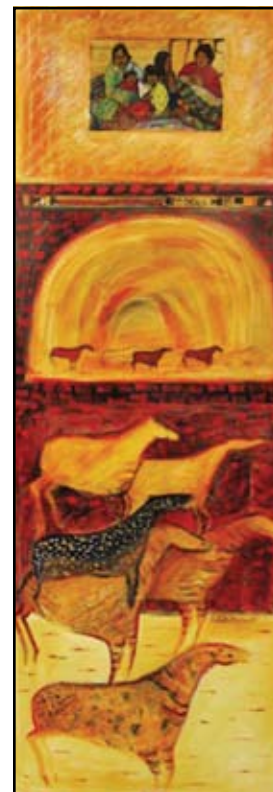
On the second evening, Hammond began to outline an alternative vision for

forest management in the Ghost; this one allows and encourages input from the local community. A fundamental principle of Ecosystem-Based Conservation Planning (EBCP) is to focus on what to protect and **then** focus on what to use (or to put it another way, to focus on what to leave and **then** focus on what to take). What needs to be protected are fully functioning ecosystems at all spatial scales, and through time. So, under EBCP principles, the priorities of forest management should be to protect and restore ecological integrity and to provide for balanced human and non-human use across the landscape.

Workshop participants were inspired by Hammond’s blueprint for truly sustainable forest management but were also daunted somewhat by the prospect of trying to drag the Alberta government towards such a radical change in thinking. But, as Hammond pointed out, the necessary shift in focus has to begin at home: “The changes we want won’t come from centralized governments or large corporations.” It is communities themselves that will have to lead the parade and they should never underestimate their potential to bring about positive change. “You have as much power as you believe you have,” was Hammond’s parting comment. 🌲



Dawn Horse 18.75 by 22 in., mixed media. © J. CARDINAL -SCHUBERT



Footprint, 12 by 31.5 in., mixed media. © J. CARDINAL -SCHUBERT