

### **Albertans Oppose Logging in the Castle, Support Protection**

People in southern Alberta are strongly opposed to proposed logging in the Castle region and are equally in favour of legislated protection. Two new opinion polls have underlined exactly what previous polls have made clear.

In April 2011, the Praxis Group of Calgary published the findings of an opinion poll survey of residents living close to the Castle (in the Livingstone Macleod riding of MLA Evan Berger). Of the 774 residents surveyed 74 percent agreed that the province should legally establish a 1,023 km<sup>2</sup> Wildland Park to better protect the Castle Special Place. Seventy-seven percent opposed plans by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Spray Lake Sawmills to clear-cut log the area between Beaver Mines Lake, Castle Falls and Lynx Creek, starting in June 2011.

An earlier survey of Lethbridge and Coaldale residents, carried out by the Citizen Society Research Lab at Lethbridge College, found even stronger support for better protection in the Castle. More than 85 percent of those surveyed oppose the clear-cut logging in the area, while 87 percent of residents surveyed support establishment of a Wildland Park in the area.

These findings are entirely consistent with the results of the Alberta government's own surveys of the opinions of Albertans. The 2007 *Land-Use Framework Workbook Summary* report found that 68 percent of Albertans would be "willing to accept limits to forestry activity to allow for more protected areas." And 74.3 percent of Albertans believed that "at present the balance between developing and using our land versus conservation... is too focused on economic development and growth."

Ironically, in between these surveys, the Alberta government published its interpretation of the draft recommendations from the Regional Advisory Council (RAC) for the South Saskatchewan Region. The multi-stakeholder RAC, which

included a representative from Spray Lake Sawmills, recommended that the government should "effectively manage the Castle without necessarily designating it as a provincial park." Is it too much to ask that the government's final Regional Plan will respect the clearly-expressed wishes of Albertans?