



A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

OCTOBER 2011



GRADING OTTAWA AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD

NATIONAL PARKS

SPECIES AT RISK

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

OIL SANDS

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COVER PHOTO

Mark Bradley of Boreal Nature Photos in Jasper provides us with this issue's cover. His photo, "Mist on the Athabasca River, Jasper National Park," evokes the spirits of the First Nations, fur traders, and modern adventurers who have journeyed along it. PHOTO: © M. BRADLEY

FEATURED ARTIST

Susan Woolgar was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in 1955 and raised in Calgary. Susan graduated from the Alberta College of Art & Design in 1977 (Diploma of Applied Arts-Visual Communications) and, after working in Calgary's advertising industry, she moved to Edson with her husband John in 1982. In those incredibly beautiful surroundings Susan began to explore landscape painting. Susan says she cannot remember a time when she didn't have a brush or pencil in her hand. Nature has always fascinated and delighted her senses. It supplies abundant inspiration and an endless source of material. She continues to develop a changing and growing artistic vision. For the past 15 years Red Deer has been her home. There she teaches in several mediums for Red Deer College, the City of Red Deer Cultural Services and various community art groups. She has also been a visiting artist at Red Deer College.

Susan is a member of the Alberta Society of Artists. Her work may be seen at the Stephen Lowe Art Gallery in Calgary, the Artym Gallery in Invermere, Gallery IS in Red Deer, and the Leighton Centre.

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Alberta Wilderness Association is a charitable non-government organization dedicated to the completion of a protected areas network and the conservation of wilderness throughout the province. To support our work with a tax-deductible donation, call 403-283-2025 or contribute online at AlbertaWilderness.ca.

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WHAT WOULD HOWARD SAY?

How many readers recognize the name Howard Beale? Beale was the character immortalized by Peter Finch in the academy award-winning movie *Network*. News anchor Howard Beale, blamed for slumping network ratings, is to be fired. Instead of going out gracefully on his last night on the evening news Beale launches into a tirade about how too many things in our lives are, to put it politely, male cow dung. He becomes a television superstar when he urges his viewers to open their windows and scream this phrase into the night: "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

Most features in this issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate* examine our national government's performance as a steward of wild spaces and the many species whose survival requires those spaces. This stewardship role, shared with the provincial government, is formalized through laws such as the *Canada National Parks Act*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, and the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*.

If Howard read these features I believe he would say the following to Canadians who want their national government to take its environmental stewardship role seriously: "Open your windows, stick your heads out in the direction of Ottawa, and yell that you're as mad as hell and you're not going to take this anymore."

This year's celebrations of Parks Canada's centennial may have blinded us to realizing that, without prompt and decisive action, a bleak financial future may be dawning for our national parks system. A significant infusion of cash into the resource conservation accounts of Parks Canada would make it easier for me to be optimistic that the dedicated staff who work in Alberta's national parks will be able to fulfill their mandate.

Nigel Douglas and Madeline Wilson take the federal government to task for failing to test the strength of SARA in the face of provincial intransigence to act. They do so in the context of the state of Alberta's greater sage-grouse population.

Carolyn Campbell applies the call for action argument you find in the sage-grouse article just as forcefully to her examination of the federal recovery strategy proposed to help sustain provincial woodland caribou populations. Preventing habitat loss, not killing wolves, is the principle we believe should figure front and centre in the federal strategy.

Carolyn also looks at the federal position vis-à-vis monitoring the environmental consequences of oil sands operations. There she applauds Ottawa for sponsoring important scientific studies and encourages federal authorities to follow up its studies with actions on the ground.

Professor Arlene Kwasniak shares her expertise regarding Canada's environmental assessment regime here. Her message about the federal government's position in that regime might be summarized with the phrase "Ottawa recedes as time proceeds." Among the disappointments identified by Professor Kwasniak are the budget cuts made in the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and Environment Canada's cuts to the financial support it has offered previously to the Canadian Environmental Network.

We also are pleased to be able to offer you an interview with Dr. Stephen Herrero, one of Canada's premier public intellectuals on environmental matters, in this issue of the *Advocate*. As well, Chip Scialfa and Eileen Ford invite you to join them in reliving their trip to Lakeland earlier this year in search of birds and orchids.

The next-to-last word here goes to an *Edmonton Journal* editorial that praised AWA and like-minded organizations for our efforts to save the sage-grouse: "If the past tells us anything about the future, we can be reasonably certain that Ottawa is not going to step in and solve our problems for us." The last word is inspired by Howard Beale: "If we don't want the past to predict the future it's time we told our politicians that we're as mad as hell and we're not going to take this anymore."

- Ian Urquhart, Editor

Parks Canada: Standing on Guard For...



By Ian Urquhart

“Each of Canada’s protected heritage areas is part of Canada’s collective soul and part of our nation’s promise to its future. It’s not by accident that in Canada, natural and cultural treasures continue to thrive in the 21st century. They survive because Canadians have chosen to safeguard places of stillness, natural wonder, and meaning.”

**– Alan Latourelle, CEO,
Parks Canada Agency,
May 28, 2008**

Controversy. That’s what I see in the above excerpt from Mr. Latourelle’s testimony to a parliamentary committee several years ago. The controversy doesn’t rest in his poetic reference to the place of parks in our collective soul and future. Nor does it rest in the CEO’s observation about what Canadians want to safeguard. It rests in whether our treasures are thriving or merely surviving.

The difference is crucial. People survive a tsunami; they don’t thrive in one. Sage-grouse and woodland caribou survive (we hope) in Alberta; they don’t thrive. This polemic, contrary to the celebratory sounds associated with Parks

Canada’s 100th birthday, believes that our national parks’ natural and cultural treasures are just surviving. They are not thriving. This is a political failure. Our federal politicians, Conservative and Liberal alike, too often have shirked their responsibilities. Rather than value our national park treasures for the precious gems they are, too many political positions and decisions treat them as little more than cheap costume jewelry.

Before going any further down this infuriating path several qualifications need to be made. Our politicians don’t always get it wrong. There are positive stories out there. One was contained in this past June’s Speech from the Throne. There the federal government announced the commitment to establish Canada’s first urban national park in the Rouge River valley east of Toronto. Showing the importance of our national park system to urban and new Canadians is vital to the future of parks. The establishment of Rouge National Park on the doorstep of Canada’s largest urban centre offers a wonderful opportunity to make essential introductions.

Wilderness devotees also will applaud the sixfold expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve announced in 2009. At just over 30,000 square kilometres Nahanni contains nearly 10,000 more square kilometres than what is contained in the Rocky Mountain parks. But, as we will see later,

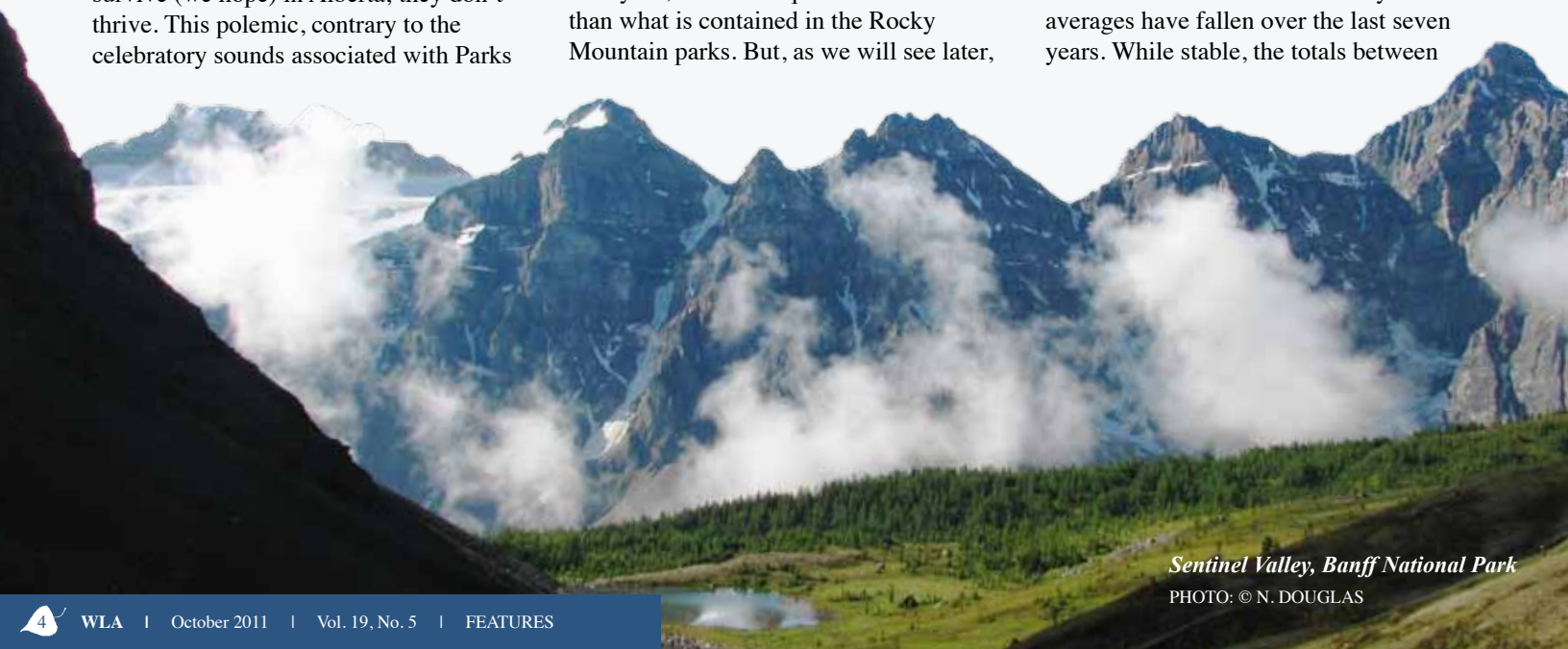
threatening clouds are on the horizons of even good news stories.

Most importantly, what follows is not a critique of Parks Canada frontline staff. The vast majority of the frontline staff I have met over the years impressed me with their enthusiasm and passion for our parks; I have no doubt they very seriously take their jobs as the stewards of our parks and their ecological integrity.

How Are the Parks Doing? It’s All About Values and Priorities

By some measures our national park system looks pretty good. The 2008 *State of the Park Reports* for all three of Alberta’s Rocky Mountain parks cited visitor survey data to show how impressed park visitors were with the services available to them. A 2003 survey of visitors to Banff, Kootenay, Jasper, and Yoho National Parks found that 82 percent of those surveyed rated their visit as “extremely enjoyable.” Seventy-five percent of visitors surveyed in Waterton in 2005 expressed the identical sentiment.

But if annual increases in park visitor numbers help define a healthy national park system then there are reasons for concern. Between 1998 and 2004 Parks Canada estimated that, nationally, the annual number of visitors to parks remained quite stable at between 15.7 million and 16.4 million annually. Those averages have fallen over the last seven years. While stable, the totals between



Sentinel Valley, Banff National Park
PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

2006 and 2011 are notably lower: over these later years the number of people visiting the national parks ranged between just over 13 million to just under 12 million, or roughly 20 percent lower than between 1998 and 2004.

With respect to Alberta's mountain parks, however, the picture is a bit brighter. They have not suffered the decline in visitation that has taken place nationally.

Some readers may shake their heads when reading this. They might think that *fewer* visitors would contribute to healthier mountain parks. Fewer people

"In budgetary terms, Visitor Experience, not Heritage Resource Conservation, is the agency's most important program activity."

may reduce the human footprint and increase, or at least not damage further, ecological integrity.

They have a point. It's one that Parks Canada certainly recognized in the past. The *1997 State of the Parks Report*, for example, identified visitor/tourism facilities as the most important source of stress to the national parks. Tourism also was intimately related to the other most important stressors identified then: transportation/utility corridors, urbanization, exotic vegetation, and perhaps ironically, park management practices (to the extent that those policies encourage tourism).

The ecological integrity indicators those readers might like to cite are troubling. The *2008 State of the Park* reports for Banff, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes National Parks don't paint a pretty picture. Banff's record was no better than fair with grizzly bear and woodland caribou populations in poor condition. Jasper's was little better. There woodland caribou recovery was identified as a "priority." Waterton's record was more of a mixed bag. Native biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems were listed as being in good condition (the biodiversity trend was stable but the aquatic trend was declining); terrestrial ecosystems and landscapes were in poor condition (the terrestrial ecosystems indicator's trend was declining but the trend in landscapes was improving).

A potentially more positive story may be found in the federal government's recent track record on establishing new parks and expanding existing ones. When Environment Minister Peter Kent appeared before a parliamentary committee in March he noted that, in just four years, the federal Conservatives decided to add roughly 133,000 square kilometres to the territories administered by Parks Canada. "That's a 48% increase," he testified, "or an additional protected area equivalent to the size of a country such as Greece."

WWF-Canada was very impressed with this achievement. Last November it nominated Parks Canada for a Gift to the Earth Award. "As WWF's highest accolade," exclaimed WWF-Canada's President and CEO Gerald Butts, "this recognizes Parks Canada's many significant conservation achievements, including its globally significant track record in creating protected areas and reintroducing endangered species." The award was presented over cake at the party to celebrate Parks Canada's 100th birthday in May.

Dollars for Parks. How Many? Where Have They Gone? Where Will They Go?

With hindsight Minister Kent's selection of Greece for his celebratory comparison was unfortunate. Greece may soon be better known for financial calamity and contagion than it will be for being the cradle of Western civilization. While it would be sensationalist to suggest that Parks Canada is in Greece's dire financial straits a look at the agency's past and future budgets is discouraging. It raises questions about whether federal politicians are genuinely committed to the values embodied in the national parks system.

What follows is based on examining Parks Canada performance reports and corporate plans. Table 1 presents historical and prospective data. Its 10-year timeframe begins with Parks Canada program activity spending in 2005/06 and concludes with what the agency plans to spend looking ahead from 2010/11 to 2015/16.

Table 1: Parks Canada Actual/Planned Program Activity Expenditures, 2005/06 - 2015/16, (in thousands of dollars/selected programs are also shown as percentages of total program expenditures)

	Heritage Places Establishment	Heritage Resource Conservation	Public Appreciation/Understanding	Visitor Experience	Town/Thruway Manage.	Total Prog. Activity Expenditures
2005/2006	23,017	185,848 (34.8)	70,259	194,415 (36.4)	61,159	534,699
2006/2007	22,716	207,772 (34.4)	78,120	189,598 (31.4)	106,409	604,615
2007/2008	19,808	201,388 (31.8)	33,287	286,621 (45.2)	92,939	634,043
2008/2009	29,323	183,956 (30.6)	39,300	244,923 (40.8)	102,957	600,459
2009/2010	15,240	191,926 (27.8)	54,165	274,984 (39.9)	153,628	689,943
2010/2011	24,311	240,482 (33.2)	29,371	267,901 (37.0)	161,344	723,409
2011/2012	22,751	198,921 (32.4)	34,155	235,521 (38.4)	122,625	613,973
2012/2013	21,588	195,013 (34.8)	31,610	235,368 (41.9)	77,608	561,187
2013/2014	21,588	194,977 (36.0)	26,954	235,296 (43.5)	62,610	541,425
2014/2015	21,588	194,977 (36.4)	26,449	235,296 (43.9)	57,610	535,920
2015/2016	21,592	195,019 (36.5)	25,602	235,163 (44.0)	57,622	534,998

Sources: Data for 2005/2006 to 2009/2010 are from Parks Canada Agency, *Performance Report*, various years. Expenditure estimates for 2010/2011 to 2015/2016 are from Parks Canada Agency, *Corporate Plan, 2010-2011/2014-2015* and Parks Canada Agency, *Corporate Plan, 2011-2012/2015-2016*. Totals may not agree due to rounding.



Several other comments about these categories and spending forecasts may be helpful. First, they are national data. These expenditure data are for all territories administered by Parks Canada. They should be seen as suggestive then, not definitive, when it comes to the financial state of Alberta's national parks.

Second, the figures are in current dollars. The past and potentially future effects of inflation on purchasing power are not considered (The Bank of Canada's inflation calculator concludes that, between August 2005 and August 2011, there was an 11.91 percent decline in the value of money.)

Finally, what programs or activities fall within these categories? First, Parks Canada does not regard all of its program activities as core programs. Townsite management and Throughway management (providing municipal services and maintaining highways/waterways in national parks) are non-core program activities and are combined together in Table 1.

Two of Parks Canada's core programs are tied intimately and inextricably to protecting and preserving Canada's natural and cultural heritage. Establishing Heritage Places is devoted to establishing new national parks or national historic sites. The second of these core programs, Conserving Heritage Resources, has both cultural and natural dimensions. With respect to nature, the program activity requires identifying and implementing measures that will restore and promote ecological integrity. "It is important," Parks Canada wrote in 2008, "that implementation of these measures stay on track and that these measures be consistently applied across individual parks."

The other two core programs are Public Appreciation and Understanding and Visitor Experience. Public Appreciation aims to increase the appreciation Canadians have for national parks and the need to protect and preserve them. It pursues this goal with "a diversity of carefully targeted outreach

education approaches, such as the Parks Canada website, broadcasting and new media, integration into urban venues and introduction of content into school curricula..." (2008) Visitor Experience "facilitates opportunities for visitors to enjoy memorable, high-quality visitor experiences, through the provision of programs, services, infrastructure, facilities and interaction with Parks Canada personnel." (2007)

Several conclusions might be drawn from the data in Table 1. First, in the last several years Parks Canada program spending grew nicely. Give the recession credit for this increased spending; in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 fiscal years money for infrastructure projects (twinning the Trans-Canada highway in Banff National Park and spending \$217 million on visitor facilities) gave a temporary boost to spending. Resource conservation and ecological integrity only would appear to gain indirectly, if at all, from this temporary windfall.

Second, looking out to 2015/16, the

planned spending trend is grim. Parks Canada's latest corporate plan projects spending in that fiscal year to amount to just under \$535 million. This returns and reduces Parks Canada program activity spending to what our politicians devoted to our national parks system in 2005/06. Remember again that the effects of inflation are not considered in the Table's data. In real, inflation-adjusted terms, planned spending in 2015 on the national parks system is likely to be significantly lower than it was in 2005.

Third, if the next five years deliver the cuts anticipated in the most recent Parks Canada corporate plan, the Visitor Experience program will fare better than the Heritage Resource Conservation program. This will solidify a pecking order that, in budgetary terms, was clearly visible by 2007/08. In budgetary terms, Visitor Experience, not Heritage Resource Conservation, is the agency's most important program activity.

The data about full-time equivalent staff positions presented in Table 2 confirm this conclusion about the relative ranking of Parks Canada's programs. Between 2005/06 and 2009/10 the Visitor Experience program was the only one in Parks Canada to increase its complement of staff. It will retain most of those positions moving ahead.

The preservation and protection program, by contrast, only will recoup some of the human resources it lost between 2005 and 2010. In 2015 this

program is projected to be operating with 12 percent fewer staff than it could count on in 2005. Ironically, the non-core programs dealing with managing townsites and highways are expected to have more staff at the end of this period than at the beginning.

Some senior Parks Canada officials may cry foul at this sort of comparison. They may reprise language we have heard before: "The maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity is the first priority for the national parks." (2002) This reprise is tired and disingenuous. When it comes to dollars and people, the lifeblood of all public services, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have not "walked the talk" about ecological integrity.

This criticism is not meant to denigrate the importance of public appreciation or high-quality and memorable visitor experiences. Who, in their right mind, would suggest those are terrible objectives? The point is that new resources must be channeled towards making a genuine, not symbolic, commitment to the "prime directive" regarding ecological integrity.

What Program Activity Data Don't Tell Us

The program spending and staff data introduced above certainly don't tell us everything. Focusing on Parks Canada's program spending may put blinders on

us; it may encourage us not to look at other ways in which the agency spends its budget and allocates human resources. Corporate or Internal Services is one function that a program focus might overlook. These services are department or agency-wide services and include many groups. In Parks Canada they include groups such as communications, legal services, financial management, and human resources.

Internal Services needs to come out of the shadows because of the impressive growth in these sorts of expenditures as well as the staff who make them. Ten years ago Parks Canada devoted 382 FTEs to, and spent \$50.6 million on, providing these agency-wide services. Parks Canada planned to spend \$81.6 million on these services in 2011/12 and have them delivered by the equivalent of 488 full-time staff.

Imagine what improvements we might have been able to make to ecological integrity in Canada's national park system if this had been the fate of the resource conservation envelope. A 167 percent increase in conservation funding and a 28 percent increase in conservation personnel might have taken us further down the ecological integrity road than we are today.

Looking at expenditures for existing programs also doesn't provide the answer to a vital question. Where is the money coming from for new parks? The Conservatives have celebrated and have been congratulated for adding more than 133,000 square kilometres to our national parks system. How can a projected cut of \$79 million from Parks Canada's program spending between now and 2015/16 (a cut of 13 percent) be reconciled with the need to supply the services and staff demanded by this impressive expansion? Will dollars be taken from the budgets of existing parks, crippling them further? Will we be left with a much larger but more mediocre system of parks as we divide a shrinking pie among more and more hungry, deserving mouths?

Doing Less With Less and Further Corporatization

The expenditure/staff picture painted above has had serious impacts "on the ground." We should not be surprised to learn that some activities linked to

Table 2: Full-time staff equivalents (FTE) by Program Activity, Actual (2005/06 - 2009/10) and Projected (2010/11 - 2015/16)

	Heritage Establish.	Heritage Res. Cons.	Public Apprec.	Visitor Experience	Townsite/ Transport.
2005/06	131	1,449	744	1,517	290
2006/07	129	1,520	764	1,453	338
2007/08	116	1,481	268	2,119	331
2008/09	111	1,499	360	2,461	340
2009/10	90	1,236	379	2,093	260
FTE net gain/(loss) 05/06-09/10	(41)	(213)	(365)	576	(30)
2010/11	92	1,283	293	1,962	333
2011/12	92	1,272	294	1,951	325
2012/13	89	1,272	293	1,951	323
2013/14	89	1,272	293	1,951	322
2014/15	89	1,272	291	1,951	322
2015/16	89	1,272	290	1,951	322
Projected FTE net gain/(loss) 05/06-15/16	(42)	(177)	(454)	434	32

Sources: see Table 1



Soaring
© S. WOOLGAR

ecological integrity have been axed in order to meet budget shortfalls. Cathy Ellis reported in the *Calgary Herald*, for example, on a 12 percent cut to Banff's scientific research and monitoring budget in 2009 (from \$529,000 to \$469,000) as part of the Park's efforts to eliminate a deficit.

Nor should we be surprised to hear current and former employees of Parks Canada contend that backcountry law enforcement/monitoring and trail

that Parks Canada's senior managers should have seen "that the elimination of protection where it is needed most – along the park boundaries – will lead inevitably to the destruction of wildlife and the resources it was intended to protect."

When it comes to trail maintenance the backcountry also has been put on the backburner. For example, in Jasper the trail operations budget is such that most trail maintenance operations focus on

"Over the last few years, we have put in place an ecological integrity monitoring program, which is internationally regarded as one of the best of its kind. Over the next four to five years, our objective will be to focus on restoration of ecosystems in our national parks."

- CEO Alan Latourelle, April 2, 2009

maintenance in the national parks have become very pale shadows of their former selves. Former wardens have spoken out about the damage they feel the drastic reduction in the warden service has done to the resource protection mandate. Dale Portman, one such alumnus, told *Canadian Geographic*

high-use trails. This has meant that trail crews essentially have been decimated, that primitive and wildland area trails receive less maintenance, and that more than a dozen primitive trails have been dropped altogether from Jasper's official trail network.

These examples may offer further

material to place in the "business values have overtaken conservation values" file. The proposed expansion of the Marmot Basin ski area demonstrates how this value shift may skew priorities when it comes to what Parks Canada does with its shrinking pot of resource conservation dollars.

Parks Canada money is being used to help pay for the costs of two research studies associated with Marmot's proposal. Members of the public objected to sharing the costs of this research. Why, they asked, should taxpayers bear the burden of helping to pay for this company's research?

Parks Canada defended their commitment to assist Marmot with what I would call "motherhood and apple-pie" language: "Parks Canada recognizes that the value and benefits of the studies are broader than the planning needs for Marmot Basin. The knowledge gained will widen our understanding of mountain goats and caribou in the Park and have potential applications for broader management practices."

This exchange raises a more fundamental question. Where did these research projects figure in Parks Canada planning before the Marmot Basin proposal was announced? Was this research in the vicinity of Marmot a high priority for Parks before the proposal?

Read what the Jasper Environmental Association reported about what Parks Canada's scientists thought about Marmot's proposal. The Association wrote that those biologists concluded the proposed exchange would not be "a 'substantial environmental gain' because of the adverse effect it would have on the threatened woodland caribou and other wildlife."

Scientific staff say don't do it; Parks pays for more research on the issue. If this isn't an example of corporate values influencing research and policy positions I don't know what is.

Do Our Politicians Care?

Many of you will be familiar with polls showing that Canadians are very fond of the national parks system. This is encouraging. But it doesn't mean elected officials take that view to heart and vigorously defend national parks. The sad reality, reflected in the budget data above, is that they are not very good defenders of the system. Further

evidence of this malady may be found by reviewing the questions MPs raise either during Question Period in the House of Commons or in the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. In the House they don't challenge ministers; in Committee very few hard questions about the national parks are directed towards ministers or Parks Canada's CEO (yes, CEO...even in the United States, that flagship of capitalism, the head of the National Park Service is not called a CEO).

An example of this situation arose in the Standing Committee in 2009. CEO Latourelle made the claim about ecological integrity noted above. No committee member asked him about this claim; he received no praise, no criticism, nothing but silence. He was asked just two questions, very soft "good news"

ones from a Conservative MP, during his time before the Committee. If I were the Parks Canada CEO, or his minister, I might think there to be no political urgency when it comes to Canada's national parks. The political class, through its silence and failure to hold ministers and officials accountable, helps to ensure we will endure business as usual when it comes to the national parks system. This situation is the norm when it comes to the prominence in Ottawa of Parks Canada and the heritage treasures for which it is responsible.

Conclusion

According to Parks Canada, "Learning Experiences" is the theme for October during Parks Canada's centennial year. I certainly learned a great deal in researching this look at

what Parks Canada has been and will be standing on guard for. When I first went to the Government of Canada website I was greeted by the spectacular beauty of Moraine Lake in Banff National Park. More often than not when I refreshed that webpage I was treated to other magnificent images of Canadian wild places and wildlife.

I wish our federal politicians treated our national parks with the respect shown by their webmasters. I wish they would hurry up (because time is of the essence) and turn a webpage's symbolic enthusiasm for national parks into substantive commitment. I wish we all would think about how we can get the political class in this country to show they value national parks as much as their electors do. ▲



Mountain Park Irony: RVs that contribute to glacial retreat are important to sustaining visitor numbers in the parks.

PHOTO: © C. OLSON

Sage-grouse on the Brink:

How governments have failed Alberta's most endangered species

By Nigel Douglas & Madeline Wilson
AWA Conservation Specialists



An American sage-grouse - photos taken in the U.S. may be even more appropriate in the future since Alberta arguably relies more on importing sage-grouse than on restoring habitat.

PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN, CREDIT DAVE MENKE, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Who should take the blame if Alberta's greater sage-grouse, the province's most endangered species, indeed disappears from Alberta in the next few years, as scientists predict it could? Just thirteen male sage-grouse were counted in 2011, a 98 percent decline from the numbers recorded in 1968. In neighbouring Saskatchewan, the only other province to support the species, the situation is little better: just 35 males were counted this year. Desperate last-ditch measures will be required from both provincial and federal governments to halt the slide.

If sage-grouse do die out in Canada, will the blame lie with the provincial governments which manage the majority of sage-grouse habitat? They, after all, have continued to authorize new industrial access as the bird's numbers have plummeted towards extirpation (provincial extinction). Is the culprit the

federal government? Ottawa has had a *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) since 2002 yet has failed to enact any measures to effectively protect sage-grouse habitat. Or is it the oil and gas industry? Their ambitions are responsible for increased access into sage-grouse habitat; we have known for many years that this access is the driving force behind the dramatic

It is this failure to protect sufficient habitat which has been the abiding failure of all levels of government when it comes to the recovery of sage-grouse.

decline.

The answer is likely some combination of the three. They must share the blame. The job of oil and gas companies – indeed the reason for their existence – is to exploit petroleum resources and to make money for their shareholders. But it is the role of governments to regulate that activity and say where industrial operations and

infrastructure are appropriate and where they are not. Government must decide where business-as-usual is acceptable and where the environment is so sensitive that special measures need to be implemented. If the sage-grouse's inexorable slide towards extirpation continues the failure of the regulators to regulate will be most prominent on the bird's final epitaph.

In light of the desperate plight of the province's sage-grouse, AWA hosted the *Emergency Sage-Grouse Summit* in September 2011 (see Madeline Wilson's article on page

24 of this issue). The two-day summit of international sage-grouse experts, environmentalists, and landowners produced a series of recommendations for emergency measures to halt the decline. Whether federal or provincial governments will continue their foot-dragging or whether they have the courage to take up the challenge remains to be seen.

Provincial Procrastination

The majority of sage-grouse habitat in Alberta – more than 80 percent – is on provincial public land. So decisions made over previous decades to allow continued industrial activity in sage-grouse habitat were Alberta's. Similarly, future provincial government decisions will determine whether or not the species has a future in the province.

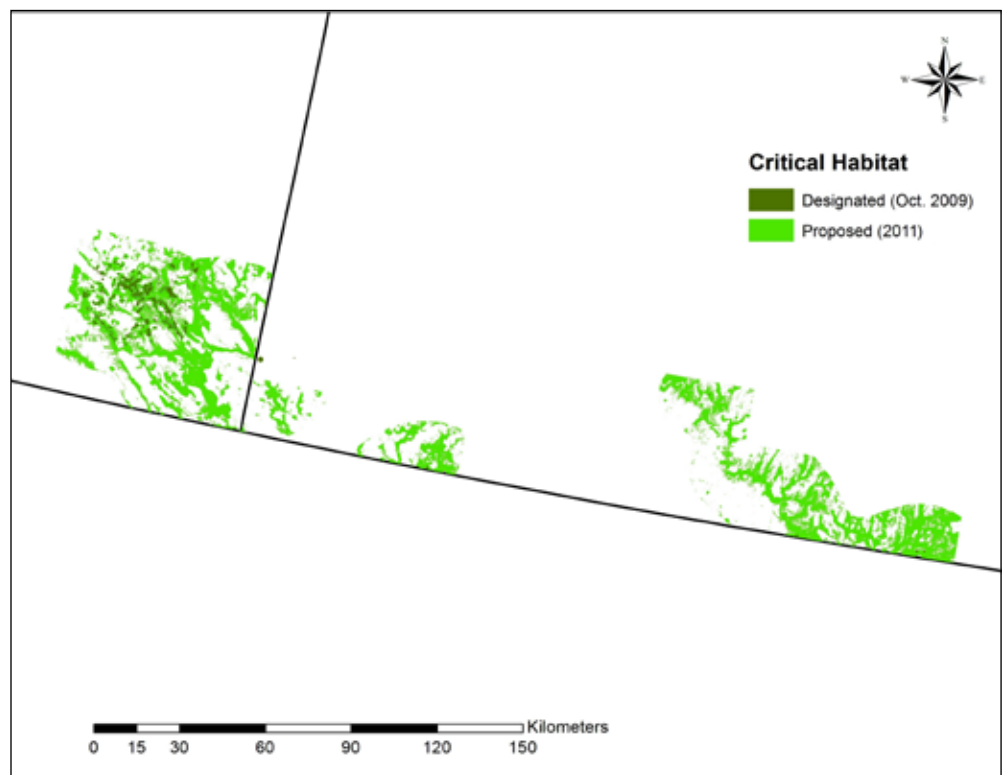
Alberta is one of only two provinces that does not have its own endangered species legislation. Instead, endangered species are managed through the 1984 *Wildlife Act*, an act initially designed to govern hunting and other allocation of the wildlife "resource." Subsequent additions to the *Wildlife Act* have allowed for some degree of endangered species management but the act is ill-suited for this vital role. The sage-grouse was first recognized as a species that "may be at risk" in 1996 and was listed as Endangered under the provincial *Wildlife Act* in 2000. Since 1996 the population has crashed by more than 90 percent. It's an understatement to say this catastrophic fall is hardly a ringing endorsement for endangered species management in the province.

Under the *Wildlife Act* a minister can make regulations protecting and restoring wildlife habitat, including that of endangered species, but these provisions have never been used. There is no habitat in Alberta that is legally protected for the benefit of endangered species. All measures are optional and designation as a threatened or endangered species only requires setting up a recovery team.

But saving the sage-grouse doesn't need a new law. Even without endangered species legislation, Alberta could protect remaining sage-grouse habitat tomorrow and begin to recover the species. All that is missing, and it is obviously the biggest piece of the jigsaw puzzle, is the political will to restrict industrial access to critical habitat.

Federal Failures

So what happens when provinces fail to manage and recover their endangered species as is so often the case in Alberta? The federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) includes tools federal politicians can use to compel the provinces to act to recover species at risk. But once again there has been a consistent reluctance to actually use these tools to protect those species that cannot protect themselves.



Critical habitat designated for greater sage-grouse in Canada in 2009^a (dark green areas) based only on known lek locations and source nest and brood habitats designated in the Manyberries area of Alberta (Aldridge and Boyce 2007). Pale green areas represent proposed updates to critical habitat^b based on spatial nest and brood models extrapolated across the species range. Map is from the following presentation: Sage-grouse conservation in a changing world: What does the future hold?, by Dr. C. Aldridge, September 8, 2011.

*^a 2009 Critical Habitat Source: Government of Canada; Adapted from: Aldridge, C. L. 2005. Identifying habitats for persistence of Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) in Alberta, Canada. Dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.*

*^b Proposal Critical Habitat Source: Government of Canada (Pruss, S. Gummer, D., Knaga, P., Suitor, M. and P. Fargey. 2011. Draft amendment to the recovery strategy for the Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus urophasianus*) in Canada).*

The purpose of SARA is to "prevent Canadian indigenous species, subspecies, and distinct populations from becoming extirpated or extinct, to provide for the recovery of endangered or threatened species, and encourage the management of other species to prevent them from becoming at risk." (Species at Risk Act Public Registry http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/approach/act/purpose_e.cfm). Since the Act came into force in 2003, the population of the *endangered* sage-grouse has dropped by 86 percent. It is evident that, for this species at least, the Act so far has failed abysmally in fulfilling its purpose.

One of the failures of SARA is that the federal government only has direct jurisdiction over federally-managed land, for example National Parks and National Wildlife Areas. When provinces fail to act – and Alberta has clearly failed to

act to protect sage-grouse – then SARA includes "safety-net" provisions allowing the minister to bring in emergency measures to compel the provinces to protect habitat. But these provisions are legally unproven and so far unused. It is difficult to imagine a federal government picking a political fight with the Alberta government over something as unimportant to the powers that be as endangered wildlife.

For several years, AWA and other environmental organizations have fought court battles to try to compel federal environment ministers to do what their legislation tells them they should do. But this has been a slow and painful process: sage-grouse numbers have continued to fall as judges have ruled and ministers have stalled.

In early 2008 Ecojustice filed a lawsuit on behalf of AWA, Federation



This silver sage-brush habitat in southeast Alberta is critical for sage-grouse.

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

Will Canadian Courts Follow Their U.S. Cousins?

Since Ottawa refuses to act assertively on behalf of endangered species AWA has gone to court with other conservation organizations to try to secure some positive action before it's too late. In 2009 this path forced the federal government to start to address its failure to identify critical greater sage-grouse habitat. Now, as this grouse teeters on the brink of extirpation in Alberta, AWA is preparing to return to Federal Court to seek an emergency protection order for this species.

Although the United States has a different legislative foundation for protecting species at risk than Canada we are encouraged in our judicial campaign by a September decision from the American

courts. Western Watersheds Project challenged U.S. federal land management plans for two species-threatening flaws. They failed to consider the cumulative impacts of oil and gas on sage-grouse in southwest Wyoming and failed to include sufficient information or alternatives to grazing in Idaho. Western Watersheds won the first round of this case. Judge Winmill ruled that federal insufficiencies will accelerate the sage-grouse's downward spiral and must be rectified.

The Idaho District Court's sense of urgency is one we hope the Federal Court of Canada will emulate when Ecojustice appears there later this fall on behalf of greater sage-grouse.

- Ian Urquhart

of Alberta Naturalists, Grasslands Naturalists, Nature Saskatchewan and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee in response to the lack of government action to protect declining greater sage-grouse populations. The lawsuit took issue with the failure of the Minister of the Environment to designate critical habitat in the federal sage-grouse *Recovery Strategy* despite the fact the required ecological data were readily available. At this point, the recovery strategy was already one and a half

years late and included only a schedule of planned habitat studies. No critical habitat was designated. In July 2009, the Federal Court ruled that Environment Canada had broken the law by failing to identify critical habitat in the greater sage-grouse recovery plan. Justice Zinn, in this precedent setting decision, stated it was "unreasonable" for the government to claim it could not identify breeding grounds when knowledge of their location was "notorious." The judge made it clear that the phrase "to

the extent possible," found in SARA, demanded that a precautionary approach should be taken when designating critical habitat.

Despite this rap on the knuckles from the federal courts, Ottawa has continued to drag its feet when it comes to sage-grouse recovery. A minimal amount of sage-grouse "critical habitat" has now been identified but this area is insufficient to halt the bird's decline, let alone allow for the species' recovery (see map on page 11). 🐾



Intact mixed grass prairie environments, essential to the survival of sage-grouse, also are vital to species such as these pronghorn antelope.

PHOTO: © J. BARGMAN

Alberta Woodland Caribou –



By Carolyn Campbell
AWA Conservation Specialist

Proposed Federal Recovery Strategy Declares War on Wolves, Lets Habitat Degradation Continue



For Alberta's caribou to survive the federal caribou recovery strategy must make habitat restoration an urgent priority and not simply declare war on wolves
PHOTO: © JOHN E. MARRIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

A long overdue proposed federal woodland caribou recovery strategy, released near the end of August, omits what Alberta's dwindling herds need most: an immediate halt to their habitat loss on public lands. Ottawa has backtracked from its long-term recovery goal of achieving self-sustaining woodland caribou populations throughout their Canadian distribution. Now that proposed goal has been qualified by "to the extent possible" – a phrase some will interpret to mean whatever protects industrial interests.

The proposed strategy writes off the most vulnerable caribou herds in Alberta and across Canada, identifying them as 'grey coded,' non self-sustaining populations. These are the herds that already have lost most of their habitat through human disturbance. They are non self-sustaining precisely because of government stalling on introducing a conservation strategy. In Alberta, the six 'grey coded' populations are in more southerly ranges already deeply compromised by forestry and oil and gas/tar sands activity: the intactness of their habitat, ranging between five and 22 percent, is very low. In an outrageous abdication of responsibility, the federal

government now proposes that their intact habitat level would actually be permitted to continue declining to the five percent level, as long as there are other "management actions" in place for that population that will prop up its current population.

To be clear, the absence of habitat protection means the federal government has opted to kill thousands of wolves as its only key management tool. No other "management actions" except

Relying on mass wolf kills, while allowing more disturbances to open more access for moose, deer and wolves in caribou habitat, is a totally irresponsible approach. Biologist Paul Paquet, an internationally recognized authority on wolves, has condemned the proposed strategy's emphasis on wolf kills as a temporary panacea at best. He wrote that "killing wolves indiscriminately at levels sufficient to suppress populations disrupts pack social structure and upsets

"Relying on mass wolf kills, while allowing more disturbances to open more access for moose, deer, and wolves in caribou habitat, is a totally irresponsible approach."

killing wolves have been demonstrated to slow caribou mortality once human disturbance increases access for deer, moose and the wolves that follow. Federal Environment Minister Peter Kent stated in early September that: "Culling is an accepted if regrettable scientific practice and means of controlling populations and attempting to balance what civilization has developed. I've got to admit, it troubles me that that's what is necessary to protect this species."

the stability of established territories, allowing more wolves to breed while promoting the immigration of wolves from nearby populations."

The proposed strategy states that at least two more years will be spent on more studies of caribou habitat requirements in a highly disturbed landscape with predator management. This is simply a delaying tactic. It is unconscionable given the report's own acknowledgement that habitat alteration

by human use is the greatest threat to caribou survival.

The recovery strategy also identifies ‘blue coded’ non self-sustaining caribou populations that are given higher priority because they form a connected population corridor across Canada and they are less heavily impacted. The five more northerly populations in Alberta fall into this category but they are far from being in great shape: all but one of these populations are declining and their respective intact habitat levels range from only 18 percent to 43 percent. For these populations, the proposed approach combines no new habitat disturbance with restoration of habitat. “No new habitat disturbance” is a good starting action and should be immediately implemented. But retaining all current degraded habitat will only give these Alberta herds a 10 to 25 percent chance of survival.

Urgently needed habitat restoration is the most important piece of a sound caribou recovery strategy and it is treated very loosely and indefinitely in the federal document. The goal there is to show “gradual progress” in restoring habitat over a 50-year time frame. The only suggested performance indicator is that there be “reasonable, gradual increments every 5 years” in undisturbed habitat areas. More rigorous indicators, measured and reported annually, are urgently needed to secure needed on-the-ground actions and to avoid losing five or 10 more years due to inertia. As well, the end goal for these herds – an intact habitat level of 65 percent – is

Publicizing Public Consultations

Ottawa’s proposed woodland caribou strategy fails more than caribou. It also fails Canadians who want to participate in public policy making. Sparse pretty well describes the publicity Ottawa gave to the release of its proposed strategy on August 25. The strategy’s release was a major event. I cannot, however, find a news release about the strategy anywhere on either Environment Canada’s or the SARA public registry websites (Two requests to the department for clarification have been ignored).

Why wouldn’t the government publicize its own strategy? The answer probably rests in the criticism the proposal received as soon as it was unveiled. “Better not to publicize that

which citizens might object to” seems to be the prime directive when it comes to managing news about species at risk.

So, although Ottawa may not want you to know, there is an ongoing public consultation about the proposed caribou strategy. The deadline for submitting comments is February 22, 2012. The proposed strategy may be accessed at www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=2253.

Please try to find the time to comment on the strategy. If you would like to read media coverage of the proposal please send me an email at awa.wla@shaw.ca and I will be glad to forward you some information.

- Ian Urquhart

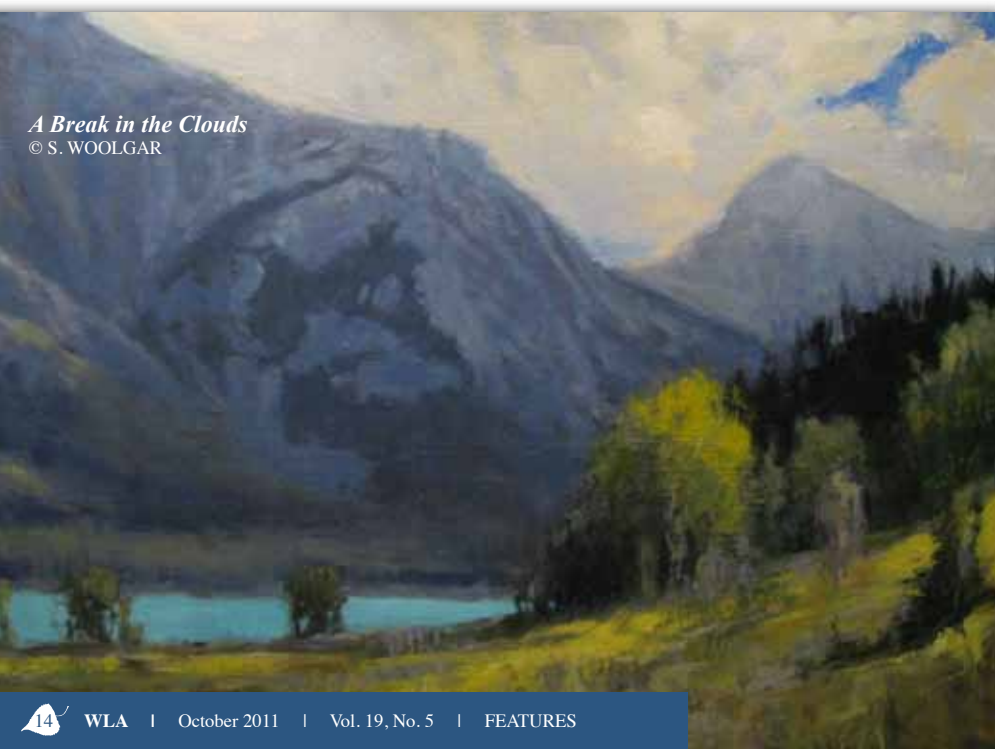
too low: this percentage is a “minimum threshold” by Environment Canada’s own account and is estimated to give a caribou population only a 60 percent chance to be self-sustaining. How would you feel if you were told that you only had a 60 percent chance of survival? In short, it is highly doubtful that even ‘blue coded’ herds will survive in Alberta under this timid, disappointing approach.

Legal action by AWA and other groups appears at least to have accelerated this recovery strategy’s release. A federal court judge ruled in July that the federal Environment Minister had until September 1, 2011 to release a draft caribou recovery strategy as it was more than four years overdue. Several First Nations communities as well as Ecojustice, which

acted on behalf of the Pembina Institute and Alberta Wilderness Association, had sought a court order to force Environment Minister Peter Kent to recommend emergency protection of critical habitat for threatened caribou herds in northeast Alberta. The court ruled that Kent’s “out of the blue” decision not to recommend emergency protection for woodland caribou in northeast Alberta ignored scientific evidence.

What would an effective recovery strategy look like? First, there should be no herds relying only on wolf kills while habitat loss is permitted to continue; all herds should be targeted with, and benefit from, an urgent habitat recovery approach. Second, there should be immediate, concrete actions to implement “no new habitat disturbance” throughout Alberta caribou ranges. Third, there should be immediate actions towards reducing the aggregate industrial footprint in caribou habitat and restoring vegetation in caribou ranges.

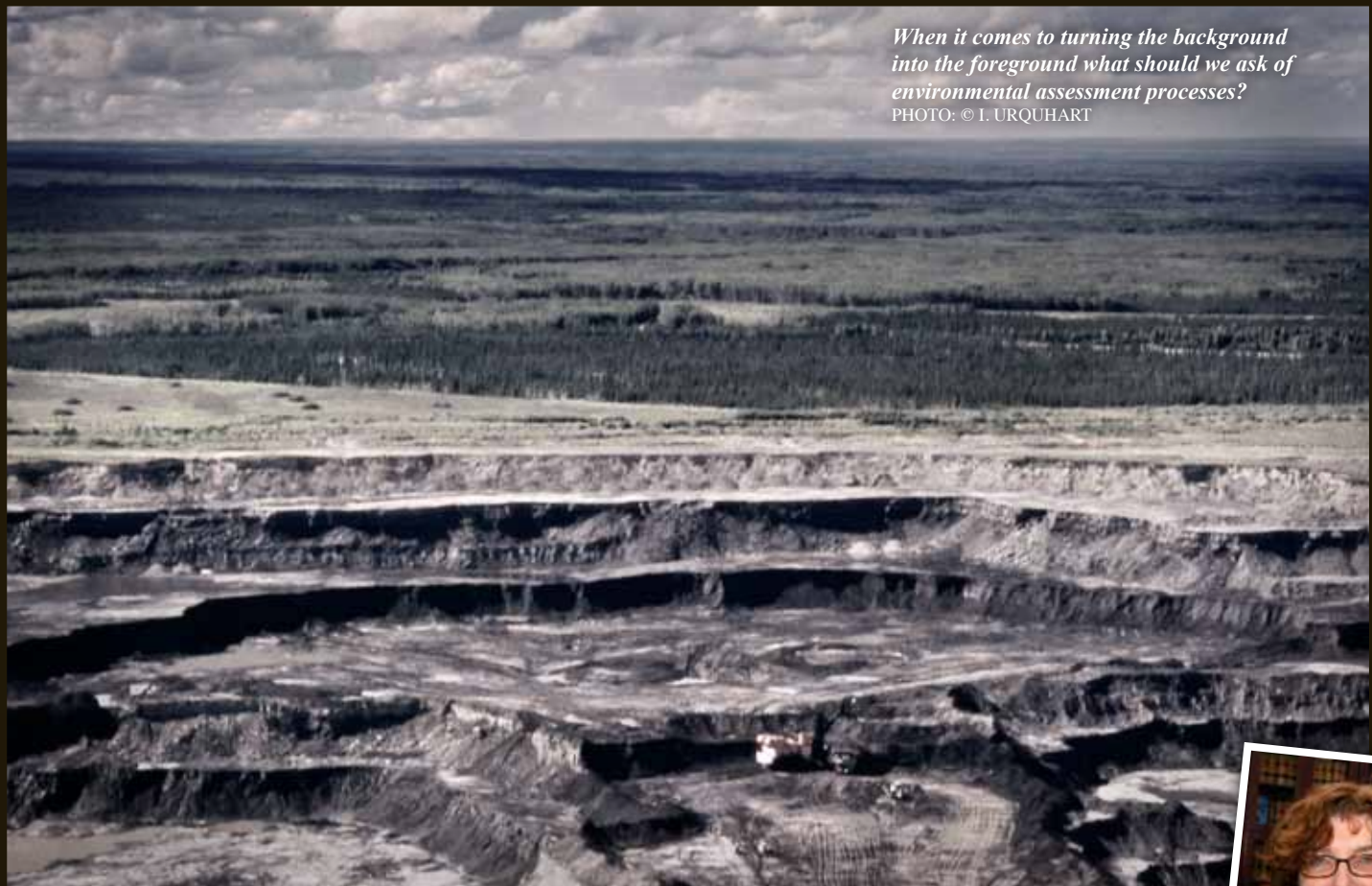
For Alberta’s woodland caribou to survive, we need, as organizations and as individual citizens, to press Environment Minister Kent to produce a stronger recovery strategy. The comment period on the current proposal, originally set to end in late October, has been extended to February 22, 2012. Once a federal recovery strategy is adopted, or if there are undue delays in this process, AWA and partners will explore taking further legal action. We will also continue to press for better on-the-ground outcomes through regional openings like the Alberta government’s Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and the AI-Pac forest management area Forest Stewardship Council certification reviews. 🌿



A Break in the Clouds
© S. WOOLGAR

When it comes to turning the background into the foreground what should we ask of environmental assessment processes?

PHOTO: © I. URQUHART



The Fading Federal Presence in Environmental Assessment

By Arlene Kwasniak
Professor, Faculty of Law,
University of Calgary

Good environmental assessment followed by well crafted permits, regulation, monitoring and follow-up responsive to environmental assessment leads to better planned projects, fewer environmental impacts, and often net environmental and social sustainability gains. The legislative authority for the federal government to carry out its assessments is found in the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA) and regulations. The federal government may assess a project when it has constitutional jurisdiction over an area that may be impacted by a project. These areas include (among others) fisheries, navigation and shipping, migratory birds, federal lands, Aboriginal interests, nuclear facilities, and interprovincial/international matters.

Only the federal government, with

the exclusive right to regulate in these and other areas, can do a fully responsive job in assessing impacts. If an assessed project goes ahead (like most projects do) only the federal government is in a position to know what it needs during the assessment process in order to properly mitigate and regulate impacts. These needs may include any monitoring, follow up, and any adaptive management measures that may require the proponent to change environmental management because of unexpected impacts. As well, as the responsible protector of the public interest with respect to matters under its jurisdiction, only the federal government can wholly take into account the public interest during the environmental assessment and following regulatory processes.

In 2009 I wrote that the federal government was eviscerating its environmental assessment process. (See “The Eviscerating of Federal Environmental Assessment in Canada,” *Wild Lands Advocate*, April 2009). The eviscerating then largely was owing to implementation of the January 27, 2009 federal budget’s “Building Canada” stimulus package. This package exempted numerous projects from environmental assessment and streamlined the process for others. I would like to be able to update that piece by saying and showing how the federal government has ramped up its environmental assessment since then, but I cannot. The federal government presence in federal environmental assessment continues to recede as time proceeds.



Sunrise
© S. WOOLGAR

This update considers only a few matters relevant to the fading federal presence:

- impacts of the 2010 federal budget on environmental assessment,
- the elusive 7 year review of the CEAA,
- overlap, duplication, and substitution countered by the assessment of the Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine, and
- budget cuts to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

The 2010 Federal Budget Implementation Bill

Bill C-9 (2010) contained nearly 900 pages of changes to approximately 50 pieces of legislation. Numerous changes were substantive ones and not of a budgetary nature. The Harper government was criticized far and wide for burying substantive changes in a budget bill. There was much discussion outside of and within Parliament about splitting up the controversial bill so that Parliament could properly consider non-budget substantive matters but in the end the bill passed.

The most objectionable amendment made to the CEAA was adding section

15.1 to the Act. This new provision empowers the Environment Minister to limit the scope of the project to be assessed. The Minister now has the discretion to “slice and dice” projects, to restrict the environmental assessment to only one or several components of the overall project and not consider all of them. The Minister may delegate this power to responsible authorities under the Act. Under the provision, for example, the Minister or delegate could determine that an oil sands mining project be assessed only for destroying a stream. So, instead of assessing all the environmental impacts of an oil sands project, the federal government would assess only the impacts of destroying a stream.

Interestingly, this amendment to the CEAA followed on the heels of the ENGO victory in 2010 at the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) in *Mining Watch Canada v. Canada (Fisheries and Oceans)*. That case confirmed that a CEAA environmental assessment must be based on the actual project that the proponent proposes and not on some component of it. The court found this in connection with its ruling that the federal government cannot reduce the scope

of a project so that it falls into a less intensive assessment track (e.g. from a comprehensive study to a screening level assessment). The Bill C-9 amendment of the CEAA to add section 15.1 critically, if not fatally, undermined this SCC decision. Although the amendment does not alter the Supreme Court ruling that the CEAA requires that the project as originally proposed determines the appropriate assessment track, the amendment permits the Minister to scope the project down for the purpose of what environmental impacts will be assessed. So, for example, although the Minister would have to leave the scope of a project as an oil sands mine for the purpose of determining its assessment track, section 15.1 enables the Minister to declare that only the destruction of a stream be assessed federally.

Elusive Seven-Year Review

Now you see it now you don't. Given the false starts to the legislatively required seven-year review of the CEAA one wonders whether the requirement for the review is just a mirage. It isn't. An *Act to Amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (S.C. 2003, c. 9) clearly states: “Within seven years after this Act receives royal assent, a comprehensive review of the provisions and operation of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* shall be undertaken by such committee of the Senate, of the House of Commons or of both Houses of Parliament as may be designated or established by the Senate or the House of Commons, or by both Houses of Parliament, as the case may be, for that purpose” (s. 32(1)). The *Act to Amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* received royal assent on June 11, 2003. That means the seven-year review is now nearly 18 months overdue. Hence Parliament is in violation of its own legislation, unless the small steps taken so far count as “undertaking” a comprehensive review. Meanwhile the federal executive (cabinet), by amending the CEAA in budget bills, is making substantive changes to the CEAA without the value of a parliamentary comprehensive review, public and stakeholder input, or even focused parliamentary debate.

Overlap, duplication, and substitution countered by Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine project

Since my 2009 *WLA* article we have seen no let up in the relentless charges, mainly by industry and provinces, that there is unnecessary overlap and duplication between provincial and federal environmental assessment processes and that, when both processes apply to a project, the provincial process should be *substituted* for the federal processes. These charges essentially demand that, de facto, the federal process should be eliminated. In an article I wrote for the *Journal of Environmental Law and Practice* in 2009 I critique this claim and argue that because of constitutional division of powers and responsibilities provincial environmental assessment cannot – legally, logically, and morally – be effectively substituted for federal environmental assessment.

In 2011 the environmental assessment of the Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine project proposed by Taseko Mines Limited bore this argument out. It pointed out many shortcomings in the provincial process as compared to the federal process. The Prosperity project would destroy Fish Lake (Teztan Biny) which is habitat for about 85,000 trout and of great cultural importance to the Tsilhqot'in First Nation. The B.C. government approved the proposed mine in January 2010 following a B.C. Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) review. The EAO found that there was only one significant adverse effect – loss of fish and fish habitat at Fish Lake and Little Fish Lake – and that it was limited to those discrete locations. It recommended that the project nevertheless be approved because these effects were justified by employment and economic benefits and because the proponent's fish habitat compensation plan would significantly address impacts.

In November 2010 the federal government, through an independent CEAA panel review, assessed the proposed project. The panel found significant adverse effects in nine areas, namely fish habitat, grizzly bears, navigation, local tourism, grazing, a First Nation trapline, First Nation's traditional land use and cultural heritage, Aboriginal rights, and future generations.

The federal panel concluded that the proponent's fish habitat compensation plan was not viable. Based on the panel report Environment Minister Jim Prentice rejected the project. Mike Haddock's thoughtful report published by the Northwest Institute comparing the two assessments of this project demonstrates that even though it may not have been perfect, the federal assessment overall was more rigorous, broad based and inclusive than the provincial process. Reading that report makes it evident that the federal panel took a harder, more serious look at impacts falling within federal jurisdiction.

Budget cuts to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency

Law and policy changes made in the last few years importantly contribute to the fading federal government presence in environmental assessment in Canada. But what may result in greater on-the-ground impacts, are the severe budget cuts visited on Environment Canada and, in particular, on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

The Agency's role is "to provide Canadians with high-quality environmental assessments that contribute to informed decision making, in support of sustainable development." But the Agency needs sufficient funds to carry out its many roles. It must oversee and carry out high-quality environmental assessment. This includes its role in public participation and Aboriginal consultation, monitoring, and follow-up. It also is responsible for running the Environmental Assessment Registry and environmental assessment research programs. Unfortunately the Agency's budget has been severely cut. The Agency is facing a 43.1 percent cut in spending. Its budget will plummet from \$30 million in 2011-12 to \$17.1 million in 2012-13. This follows a nearly seven percent, or \$2.2 million, drop in government funding in 2010-11. As well the Agency must cut its full time staff by one-third.

This can only mean less federal presence and involvement in effective federal environmental assessment in Canada. It will mean less protection of resources and areas within federal jurisdiction and other matters considered in federal assessments. It will mean

more environmental degradation. It will mean the continued burying or neglect of the larger picture, namely, the national public interest perspective that federal environmental assessment offers on what development is environmentally sustainable in Canada.

These consequences will be exacerbated by federal cuts to or elimination of financial support to the environmental organizations that argue on behalf of the public interest. For example, Environment Canada has so reduced funding to the Canadian Environmental Network (CEN) that the CEN laid off a number of staff and may be forced to reduce its activities to just skeletal operations. The CEN was established in 1977 and has over 600 member groups from throughout Canada. These funding cuts severely limit its ability to carry out its mandate of "enabling and enhancing our members' work of protecting, conserving, restoring and promoting a clean, healthy, sustainable environment." Regarding environmental assessment, the CEN Planning and Environmental Caucus since 1980 has been very successful in taking effective action to realize its members' common vision of effective environmental assessment. The caucus used to be very active in environmental assessment public education, in participating in numerous stakeholder processes, in carrying out strategic environmental research, in meeting and helping each other throughout Canada with respect to assessment issues, and generally in raising public awareness of the importance of environmental assessment to achieve sustainable communities. The caucus used to liaise frequently with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. The Agency cut off that funding in 2010 and this has all but crippled the caucus. This is a tragedy; the caucus' voice needs to be heard, and heard well, throughout Canada in the upcoming seven-year review and elsewhere. 🌊

- Editor's note: as the WLA was going to press the Canadian Environmental Network issued a news release saying that Environment Canada was eliminating ALL of the core funding it had promised the Network.



Syncrude's Mildred Lake tailings pond in 2008. Today, over thirty years after Syncrude began production, Environment Canada warns that addressing knowledge gaps on the fate and transport of toxins in oil sands processed water remains an important concern.

PHOTO: © C. WEARMOUTH



By Carolyn Campbell
AWA Conservation Specialist

Ottawa May Monitor Oil Sands' Effects on Wildlife – Limiting Them Would Be Better

It's been about a year since scientists David Schindler and Erin Kelly released their peer-reviewed research identifying elevated heavy metal levels in the Athabasca River as likely due to the tar sands industry's activity. A year has also passed since James Cameron, superstar Hollywood director, made a high profile visit to the oil sands mining region. Likewise, it has been a year since federal and provincial scientific advisory panels were appointed in response to these events and to mounting international concerns over environmental and social problems raised by Canada's permissive bitumen extraction policies.

In December 2010, the federal scientific advisory panel issued their report and criticized existing oil sands environmental monitoring programs as poorly designed, incoherent, secretive, and lacking the resources devoted to

comparable Canadian environmental challenges such as acid rain or Great Lakes pollution. In March 2011, the provincial panel similarly concluded that existing provincial and industry water monitoring programs were neither designed to, nor implemented to be able to, determine impacts from oil sands operations. This panel concluded: "Taking into consideration all data and critiques, we generally agree with the conclusion of Kelly et al. that PACs and trace metals are being introduced into the environment by oil sands operations." (See the April 2011 issue of *WLA* for further comments on both reports.)

The federal response to these findings included Environment Canada's release of a water quality monitoring plan for the lower Athabasca River in March 2011. In July Ottawa released a broader regional water quality monitoring plan

plus aquatic and land-based biodiversity plans and air monitoring plans. This is a good start. But, after examining the land-based biodiversity monitoring component in more detail, it's clear these steps need to be accompanied by substantive actions, sooner rather than later, to begin to manage more responsibly the intense cumulative impacts of oil sands development on wildlife.

The proposed aquatic biodiversity plan includes a long overdue comprehensive approach to evaluating oil sands development effects on in-stream plants, insects, and fish. If funded adequately and carried out diligently, it will go a long way toward correcting the deficiencies identified in previous monitoring programs. There is also a plan to dramatically expand monitoring of oil sands effects in the downstream wetland ecosystems in the Peace-Athabasca delta

and Slave River delta.

The newest monitoring plan proposed is the terrestrial (land-based) portion which I will discuss in some detail below as it has received much less attention relative to the aquatics and water components. It has two main thrusts, one to monitor contaminants in wildlife and one to report on habitat disturbance. In both cases, there is a clear assertion of federal jurisdiction in these actions through the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, *Migratory Birds Convention Act* and *Species at Risk Act*. The habitat disturbance section also notes that Canada, as a signatory to the International Convention on Biological Diversity, “is committed to the conservation of biodiversity.” It’s a welcome change to see the federal government more clearly acknowledging that it possesses the legislative foundation to carry out oversight responsibilities of the tar sands industry’s ecological impacts.

The contaminants monitoring component outlines five specific programs. The only one relating to plants will examine the health of three species (common cattail, reed canary grass and speckled alder) to assess their potential to take up contaminants in soils affected by oil sands processed water. That program will assess how these plants are affected by naphthenic acids, acids in tailings water that are highly toxic to organisms. In other words, the study will assess the health of key plants in the open water salt marshes being constructed to aid in reclaiming oil sands sites.

However, by far the most prevalent wetlands in the region now are fresh water peat-based wetlands. Although the aquatics program proposes to monitor wetland health in the deltas hundreds of kilometres downstream of operations, AWA would have liked to see a program addressing contaminants in nearby peat wetland plant communities such as McClelland Lake wetland complex. This complex has a mining project poised to invade its upper watershed and is close to other mines and in situ projects. Fresh water peatlands make up over 40 percent of the natural landscape across the oil sands region; migratory birds and

threatened woodland caribou rely upon them and Aboriginal peoples value and harvest their resources.

In March 2009, an Alberta Water Council multi-stakeholder team (which included representatives from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Environment) unanimously recommended that Alberta develop a monitoring program to test for contaminants that affect human health in traditional subsistence foods in key areas across the province; this team regarded such a program to be of provincial importance. But we don’t believe there has been any follow up on that recommendation.

Now the federal government proposes to take a step in that direction. One study will evaluate oil sands-related contaminant levels in 120 mallard ducks and 60 river otters harvested each year by hunters and trappers to the north

**“The predictive relationships between [cumulative effects of mines and in situ developments] and the distribution, abundance and demographics of wildlife populations in the oil sands region are largely unknown.”
– federal biodiversity monitoring proposal**

and to the south of oil sands operations (the aquatics plan also recommends collaborating with Aboriginals who fish year-round). This seems a positive step in working with some residents of the region who harvest foods in the area. Another part of this same study will examine contaminants in the 50 dead or dying ducks per year that are collected by tar sands operators from five tailings ponds.

Two other studies will assess contaminants in wood frogs and toxins in feather tissues of live birds that nest near air quality monitoring stations. A fifth proposed contaminant study will harvest and analyze gull, tern, and swallow eggs. Swallow eggs upstream and downstream of oil sands operations will reveal more local effects on wildlife. An important goal here is to determine whether exploiting the tar sands may be responsible for the dramatically higher mercury levels typical of those eggs now when compared to the levels reported more than 30 years ago.

All these proposed contaminant studies are specific, detailed, and combine some innovative techniques with past experimental knowledge. They should be promptly implemented in order to close some of the knowledge gaps about the industry’s effects on wildlife that have not been addressed in 40 years of oil sands operations.

The second major component of the proposed biodiversity monitoring program is a habitat-disturbance monitoring piece. The proposed goals and scope of this plan sound exciting. It will not only cover the status and trends of selected wildlife and habitats but it also will evaluate how activities from exploration through reclamation of both mining and in situ (drilling) oil sands projects affect wildlife. However, further reading makes it clear this plan is not even close to being designed, let alone implemented. How the provincial governments (Alberta and Saskatchewan) and industry will collaborate in developing a monitoring plan has yet to be decided. A conceptual framework of ecosystem function needs to be developed, questions to drive the monitoring design need to be chosen, and monitored-species and stressor activities need to be selected.

In this section huge knowledge gaps are identified. It notes that we are just at “the early stage of the understanding of biodiversity in the western boreal forest” and admits that there is a “dearth of information on functional relationships.” The *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* requires that every screening, comprehensive study of a project, and every mediation or assessment by a review panel “shall consider” any cumulative environmental effects that are likely to result from the project in combination with other projects or activities that have been or will be carried out. Given that this requirement has existed since the law was passed in 1992 our profound mismanagement of tar sands development is underlined when the biodiversity monitoring proposal states: “The predictive relationships between [cumulative effects of mines and in situ developments] and the distribution, abundance and demographics of wildlife populations



Boreal species such as woodland caribou need more than increased biodiversity monitoring to have a future in northeast Alberta.

PHOTO: © JOHN E. MARRIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

in the oil sands region are largely unknown.”

It also acknowledges the huge risks to ecosystems that government has blithely taken by leasing and approving so much activity in the bitumen deposit regions: “The time to successfully restore historic biodiversity (composition, structure and function) is currently unknown because there are currently no technologies to restore some ecosystem components. Reclamation of peatlands and their associated hydrology, for example, is not possible with current approaches and technology.” Peatlands make up over 40 percent of the intact landscape of this region so their ongoing destruction is a huge loss to the oil sands region’s boreal ecosystem.

The commitment of the federal government to more oversight rests on shaky ground. While these planning documents are encouraging, the recent substantial budget cuts to Environment

Canada and Department of Fisheries and Oceans undermine the good intentions of federal research scientists in drafting these plans. We urge the federal government to devote the resources needed to develop the contaminants and biodiversity monitoring program promptly. One conclusion seems obvious given the knowledge gaps these documents reveal and the scope of past leasing decisions. Government must stop approving oil sands leasing and development. Waiting years for an elaborate biodiversity monitoring system to document the demise of intact old growth and peatland-dependent species is more fiddling while Rome continues to burn. AWA supports biodiversity monitoring, but not as a substitute for taking more responsible management actions now. Today’s western scientific research and aboriginal traditional knowledge underline this need for immediate action.

With federal urging, the provincial government should implement a strong wetland no-net-loss policy that will motivate an “avoidance and loss minimization approach” in the in situ area (ninety-seven percent of Alberta’s oil sands region is likely to be exploited by in situ methods since the bitumen deposits there are too deep to mine). Governments should announce ecological compensation for the mass destruction of peatlands in the 4,750 km² mineable oil sands area (three percent of Alberta’s oil sands region by area). This destruction requires large territorial offsets in the Peace and Athabasca watersheds to improve aquatic ecosystems already impacted by decades of cumulative resource exploitation. The federal and provincial governments should meet their legal obligations to produce strong measures to protect and restore woodland caribou habitat. This also would benefit many other old growth forest and peatland dependent species. With federal urging, the provincial government should implement land-use guidelines similar to those outlined in the Cumulative Environmental Management Association’s 2008 Terrestrial Ecosystem Management Framework. This Framework used available data for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to test broad land-use policies that would allow key environmental indicators to only decline slightly below the range of natural variability. The Framework included a recommendation to set aside 20 to 40 percent of the oil sands region in protected areas (something the draft Lower Athabasca Regional Plan has failed to do). It also proposed a land disturbance threshold for active oil sands leases to motivate faster reclamation.

The last twelve months has been a year for releasing studies underlining how poorly our governments have managed the ecological aspects of developing the oil sands. As the paper and ink devoted to this subject has grown so too have the habitat destruction, air emissions, surface and groundwater risks and tailings ponds. Without meaningful federal leadership to assure that management actions actually curb the huge pressures on wildlife from currently approved oil sands activities, the good intentions of the proposed federal monitoring systems will be too little, too late. 🐾

WILD WEST

Gala

By Susan Mate
AWA Volunteer



Sure...it was just the job that kept AWA's Sean Nichols working at the entrance to the Gala for so long.
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



Smile, laugh, or raise your hand if you love Alberta wilderness.
PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ



AWA's Vanna White impersonator encouraging guests to pull the money bags out.
PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ



One of AWA's youngest guests asking her father if she could take the bear home with her.
PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

With a nod to Alberta's western roots and our efforts to preserve the environment, Alberta Wilderness Association's 23rd annual dinner, auction, and dance brought more than 250 old friends and new faces to the Red and White Club on September 16.

From lunchtime onward, an impressive crew of volunteers moved a cube van jammed with decorations, props, and dozens of items donated for the live and silent auction, balloon toss prizes and basket sales. (Be grateful if you were not one of the four people who hoisted a donated fibreglass canoe up the stairs!)

The volunteers helped transform McMahon Stadium's conference centre into a John Wayne-worthy ballroom/movie set to acknowledge the popular fundraiser's laid-back, Wild West theme. Black antique duck decoys were the centrepieces at each table and a lavish prime rib dinner was laid out for guests (vegetarians were treated to a tasty risotto alternative).

This grizzly was puzzled to read about the reluctance of government to enthusiastically support her species' recovery.
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



A bounty of baskets helped generate a bounty of goodwill.
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON

AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson asserts the Gala is much more than a fundraising event although the evening couldn't have been possible without the generous donations from companies, individuals and other friends. The Gala is a wonderful opportunity to get to know – and sustain relationships with – people who believe in the work we do.

"This evening is a celebration of our natural heritage and those with the passion to do what they can to keep a wild and free legacy," she said. "It's about much more than dollars and cents."

About 115 items were part of the silent auction, which included culinary and wine baskets, glassware, paintings, rounds of golf, antiques, outerwear, and nature getaways. It raised an estimated \$11,000. Winning bids from

10 live auction items totalled more than \$7,275. Additional funds were raised from such diverse enterprises as the bucket raffle, bake sale, sale of overflowing baskets of goodies (including wonderfully fragrant fresh basil) and the "fan favourite" grizzly bear balloon pop.

"After eight years of working at the Gala, I have to say this year was the best!" said Sean Nichols, AWA Special Projects Associate. "From the smooth organization, to the helpful and eager volunteers, to the wonderful line-up of local Calgary musicians, the entire atmosphere of the evening resonated with the feeling that we were truly celebrating the gift of Alberta's wilderness that is so easily taken for granted." 🍀

AWA Lakeland Bird and Orchid Trip

By Chip Scialfa & Eileen Ford

American Avocets
PHOTO: © T. MACCAGNO



This past June a diverse group of AWA members, united by their curiosity and love of the outdoors, headed north to the boreal forest near Lac La Biche for a weekend getaway. They spent two days meandering through fens looking for unusual orchids, scanning treetops and wetlands for wood warblers and other species, and enjoying time together in the great Albertan outdoors.

More than a dozen people gathered at the campground at Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park on a Friday evening. That night Carolyn Campbell



Left:
Scanning the tranquil waters of Shaw Lake for some of the many bird species that call the boreal forest home.

PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL

Right:
Small Round-leaved orchid in Garner Fen.

PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL



distributed an extremely well-organized itinerary for the weekend. Carolyn, along with Madeline Wilson and Chip Scialfa, had spent Friday scouting the Park for resident birds. They were surprised at the generally low level of activity but were encouraged by the beckoning calls of ovenbirds and Tennessee warblers. They were thrilled to see an osprey family hunting over the lake. On Friday night the group spent a bit of time talking about the birds we might expect to see or hear the next day. They also compared field guides and, just before retiring, enjoyed an impromptu songfest led by Brian, a local resident, environmental activist, and guitarist extraordinaire.

Dawn on Saturday brought a bit of rain but, by 6 a.m. when the birding preparations began, the skies had cleared and a light breeze helped to keep the ravenous mosquitoes at bay. We spent the morning walking a few small trails and the road into the campground and, truth be told, the bird life was rather underwhelming. This was not a complete surprise. Although almost two dozen breeding warblers had been reported in the Park, Alberta's boreal forest is at the very edge of the breeding range for many sought-after species. Because the spring had been cold and wet, it is possible that many of the birds simply could not migrate this far. Or perhaps we were witnessing the cumulative impact of global warming and deforestation in wintering grounds in Central and South America. That being said, we did get wonderful looks at a male Blackburnian warbler (*Dendroica fusca*), along with the more common yellow-rumped warblers (*Dendroica coronata*), brown creeper (*Certhia Americana*), and ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) on the nest.

Toward mid-day, after a nourishing

meal, we drove to the village of Plamondon where we met Aaron Davies, our local orchid guide. At least 16 species of orchids are found in the Lac La Biche/Lakeland area. Aaron led us to the Garner Fen just outside the village. This fen is a little-known area home to some of the most delicate, beautiful orchids in the boreal forest. There, with the help of Eileen Ford, we trod along soggy game trails with our heads down and our eyes vigilantly seeking out the fen's floral treasures. Our efforts were rewarded handsomely. We chanced upon small round-leaved orchid (*Amerorchis rotundifolia*) with its magenta-dotted labella, the tiny-bloomed pale coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*), an abundance of blunt-leaved bog orchid (*Habenaria obtusata*) and northern twayblade (*Listera boreale*). The sparrow's egg lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium passerinum*) had yet to show its little white "egg." We were also lucky enough to get a good look at a gigantic white birch that is a runner-up for the largest recorded birch tree in the province.

We spent Sunday morning birding some wetland areas outside of Lac La Biche. While roadside birding is not the most pleasant aesthetically, water always means more birds. The group got good looks at a variety of ducks including the ring-necked duck (*Aythya collaris*). We also saw three tern species, a marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*), and, perhaps the biggest treat of the day, a pair of sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) feeding in a farmer's field on the way to Lakeland Provincial Park and Recreation Area.

Lakeland Provincial Park and Recreation Area was created in 1992 and is being proposed as a tourism magnet under the evolving Land-use Framework regional plan. It consists of more than

58,000 hectares of lakes and mixed-woods boreal forest and is a migratory resting point or breeding home to more than 200 species of birds. It is also the site of the only recognized canoeing circuit in Alberta, a multi-day route requiring some route finding and a few lengthy portages; it offers the promise of peaceful paddling in a truly magical land.

Lakeland is a botanist's dream world. Its mixed woods are a haven for a huge variety of plant life and, thus, all other forms of life. Walking the trails on the northern edge of Shaw Lake, we stumbled upon a thick groundcover of the cauliflower head lichen (*Cladina stellaris*), the dried stems of Indian Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), and a variety of mushrooms. Oyster mushroom (*Pleurotis ostreatus*) was the subject of innumerable digital shots. The odour of witches broom had us searching the surrounding pines for their sickly yellowish growth.

But plants weren't the only cause for excitement. On our reconnaissance two days earlier, we had seen a black bear sow with her young, feeding near the lakeshore and on Sunday we found plenty of evidence that bears were around. We stopped frequently to catch glimpses of the ovenbirds (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) and a single Connecticut warbler (*Oporornis agilis*) calling from the aspens.

All too soon, our trip came to an end. The six-hour drive back to Calgary was, in contrast to our weekend in the woods, a concrete disappointment. I'm sure that everyone wished they could have stayed another few days to explore this wonderful region. Hopefully, with continued efforts of organizations such as the AWA, we will be able to enjoy such treasures for many years to come. ▲

AWA Hosts Emergency Sage-Grouse Summit

The charismatic greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is recognized among naturalists for many reasons. But this prairie icon is perhaps best known for the spectacular courtship displays that occur on mating grounds (leks) each spring. Throughout the last decade, however, the reputation of the sage-grouse has grown for reasons besides being the Casanova of Alberta's grasslands; the greater sage-grouse is also the most endangered species in Alberta. The sage-grouse was designated an *At Risk* species in Alberta in 1996 and was downgraded to *Endangered* in 2000. The federal government recognized it as an *Endangered* species in 1998 yet both provincial and federal agencies have since failed to implement adequate protection or recovery measures. This year saw only 13 males recorded on leks in Alberta. This is a staggering, greater than 95 percent, decline in their recorded numbers since 1968.

It is clear that, as with most threatened and endangered species worldwide, habitat destruction and fragmentation have caused this rapid decline. Extensive energy development in southern Alberta has essentially impacted all remaining sage-grouse habitat. If we allow the sage-grouse to disappear, it will be what University of Alberta professor Dr. Mark Boyce describes as "the first case where the oil and gas industry has caused the extirpation of a species in Canada." As sage-grouse are sentinels for the health of both the shrub-steppe and Great Plains ecosystems, measures taken to protect and restore sage-grouse habitat will assist with the conservation of some of the planet's most imperiled species. Seventy percent of the species at risk in Alberta are found in our dwindling native grasslands.

In response to the alarmingly low population counts and complete lack of meaningful government responses, AWA hosted an emergency sage-grouse summit in Calgary on September 7 and 8, 2011. Leading international sage-grouse scientists, southeast Alberta landowners, conservationists and members of environmental organizations came together to discuss the factors

contributing to this decline. The discussions developed a suite of actions necessary to prevent the extirpation of the sage-grouse and protect its habitat in Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan.

From these important conversations, a final communiqué was collaboratively developed and submitted to both provincial and federal government agencies. Above all, the summit recommended that no new development be allowed to take place within critical sage-grouse habitat, and that existing industrial infrastructure be removed. Action is urgently required at both the provincial and federal level to ensure the native grasslands of southern Alberta have not witnessed the sage-grouse's last dance.

- Madeline Wilson

Potatogate: Round Two

The "For Sale" sign went up again. On August 30, 2011 the provincial government placed 16,000 acres of Cypress County native grassland up for sale. This is the same swath of land that was at the centre of last year's "potatogate" controversy. It is the same swath of land, as AWA members know well, that provides crucial wildlife habitat to a long list of Alberta's most sensitive species. If sold, this swath of precious native prairie grassland will be destroyed by intensive-irrigation agricultural use. These lands were pulled from an impending secretive land sale last November in response to widespread opposition. Louis Ypma of SLM Spud Farms had approached the government for a private, direct sale of the land without public hearings or an open bidding process. The buyer withdrew after tremendous public outcry, but, since this time, the government has apparently re-evaluated the "economic viability" of the land. According to then Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Mel Knight, "tremendous opportunity for agricultural projects" lies in this area.

Currently these lands are free from intensive agriculture or industrial development, and are managed well through grazing leases. AWA, along with members of the ranching, hunting, fishing and conservation communities, continues to insist these lands should remain public native grasslands where well-managed ranching and grassland-dependent

species can coexist. Currently less than two percent of Alberta's Grassland natural region is protected and only 30 percent of Alberta's grasslands remain. Yet, as noted in the sage-grouse summit update, they support 70 percent of the mammal, bird, reptile and amphibian species at risk in Alberta. There are two main threats to survival for most of these species: loss and fragmentation of natural habitat, and human-caused mortality. An initial wildlife inventory conducted in association with this land sale documented many sensitive and endangered species on these grasslands. They contain active burrowing owl nest sites, a breeding pair of ferruginous hawks, Sprague's pipit, many long-billed curlew pairs, and a prairie rattlesnake, to name a few. The area is also known pronghorn antelope fawning grounds as the native vegetation allows antelope calves to be safely concealed from predators.

According to the proposed land sale documents, the government sees that the primary use of these lands is served by converting them to cultivated irrigated land. In sharp contrast, this relatively intact piece of native grassland was identified for conservation by the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council in a report submitted to government earlier this year as part of the Land-Use Framework regional planning process. The public has made it clear on numerous occasions that they do not want their public land sold. In putting this piece of land up for sale again, the Alberta government closed its ears and eyes to the recommendations of government-appointed committees, scientific data, and public opinion.

- Madeline Wilson

Editor's note: On September 29 a campaign advisor to Alberta's new Premier Alison Redford emailed AWA and said that, if she won the Progressive Conservative leadership race, Premier Redford would "suspend the sale of 16,000 acres of ecologically sensitive crown land near Bow Island and wait for the South Saskatchewan Basin Regional Advisory Council to present its final report on the best use of that parcel." AWA is very pleased that the Premier fulfilled this promise on October 19.



Endangered species such as these burrowing owls live on the Potatogate lands. AWA applauds Premier Redford for cancelling this attempt to sell these public lands.

PHOTO: © JOHN E. MARRIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

AWA Fights New Transmission Lines in the Livingstone

This summer AWA joined local residents and landowners opposing rampant transmission line development in southwest Alberta's Livingstone region. On August 23, 2011, a three-day Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) hearing began in Pincher Creek to discuss preliminary issues in the application process by the Alberta Energy Systems Operator (AESO) and Altalink to build 240 kV transmission lines through this beautiful and pristine landscape.

AESO and Altalink's development proposals seem to fly in the face of commitments made on numerous occasions by Altalink President and Chief Executive Officer, Scott Thon. In 2007, Thon promised to take "an innovative approach to transmission by focusing first on reusing existing rights-of-way and reusing the land currently occupied by older, lower capacity lines for new, high capacity lines before we look to cut a new path of land." This message does not seem to have been delivered to and/or heard by the staff planning to construct a new Fidler to Chapel Rock line through Alberta's unspoiled Livingstone Range.

Previously AUC granted a "needs" approval to AESO. This recognized the "need" for a new transmission line running from Goose Lake, near the Oldman Dam, west to the Crowsnest Pass. (AWA did not agree that such a "need" had been demonstrated, nor that AESO considered seriously alternatives such as buried lines). Since receiving "needs" approval for that specific corridor, Altalink has proposed a dizzying

number of alternative locations and routes for substations and transmission lines, including options far beyond the route for which they originally received permission. AWA believes that receiving "needs" permission for one particular route should not give Altalink carte blanche to build transmission lines wherever they want in southern Alberta without due process. If they do need to construct new lines, which is questionable, then they should be looking to honour the promises made by their own president and use already existing transmission corridors.

Peter Sherrington, AWA member and former president, represented AWA at the hearing. Numerous local landowners and members of the Livingstone Landowners' Group also played a major role. Peter commented afterwards that the issue is as "close to a no-brainer" as he's seen.

- Nigel Douglas

Moratorium on Motorized Access Necessary for Grizzly Survival

AWA and several other Alberta conservation groups have called for an immediate moratorium on all new road and trail construction within grizzly habitat. Why? Because Alberta continues to refuse to take meaningful measures to recover declining grizzly bear populations in Alberta, we have little choice.

Since the grizzly bear was designated as *Threatened* in 2010 little has been done to secure grizzly habitat. It is well established that the single greatest threat to grizzly bear survival is human-caused

mortality, largely due to access into grizzly habitat. In fact, it is estimated that 90 percent of grizzly deaths occur within 500 metres of a road. Upon its release in March 2008, the provincial *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* made it clear that "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." It then went on to prescribe that road density in core grizzly habitat should not exceed 0.6 km/km²; density should not exceed 1.2 km/km² in all other grizzly range. Along with this key recommendation, the Recovery Plan also outlined a suite of other strategies to mitigate the effects of linear disturbance upon grizzlies. Some of those strategies are: coordinated, inter-departmental road planning before new road construction, deactivation of roads not regularly used within two months of last use, reclamation of roads no longer in use within one year of last use, and ensuring off-highway vehicle activity is managed and restricted to designated routes and areas. The Recovery Plan recommended putting these management actions into operation within a year of its release. Their implementation, inexcusably, is more than three years overdue.

Within the last year, two separate studies conducted by non-profit organizations within southern Alberta have revealed linear access densities within grizzly habitat already greatly exceed the thresholds recommended in the Recovery Plan. A study conducted by Global Forest Watch Canada showed that the density of linear disturbances in the Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone, identified as core grizzly habitat, is 1.3 km/km². This is more than double the threshold recommended in the recovery plan; in some watersheds densities were more than triple the recommended threshold. Another report commissioned by the Ghost Watershed Alliance assessed cumulative impacts in a study area within the Ghost River Watershed. The study included determining actual access density. Although the study area is considered non-core grizzly habitat, it was found that the average actual access density was 5 km/km². This greatly exceeds the threshold of 1.2 km/km² recommended for all grizzly range.

It must also be emphasized that the provincial Recovery Plan defines "open routes" as "a route without restrictions

on motorized vehicle use.” Such access restrictions may include temporary, seasonal, or permanent closures, or restrictions to only authorized use. This implies that any access route open to public use is considered an open route. When calculating appropriate access densities, all trails, seismic lines, pipelines and any other route accessible to people and off-highway vehicles should be included.

The provincial grizzly recovery plan now has been in place for over three years. During this time, the only identifiable, concrete action that has been taken is a moratorium on the grizzly hunt (renewed annually so far). In a letter to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Minister Mel Knight, we have asked for an immediate halt to all approvals that create new access (roads, trails, pipelines, seismic lines, clear cuts, etc.) until:

1. linear access densities for all core grizzly habitat within Alberta’s grizzly bear population units are calculated accurately,
2. actions have been taken to remove and effectively close access such that the effective linear access densities are at or below 0.6 km/km² within the designated “core” portion of each grizzly bear population unit and below 1.2 km/km² within remaining grizzly bear range, and
3. a comprehensive plan is in place to designate motorized trails and manage and enforce motorized access throughout grizzly bear range in the province.

When a problem arises, such as the threat of grizzly bear extirpation in Alberta, it is not often that the solution is known. It is even less often that the solution to that problem is written in a provincially mandated Recovery Plan, broadly accepted by scientists, conservation groups, and industry representatives. The increasing maze of roads, trails, cut lines, pipelines, and other such linear disturbances that currently slice across Alberta’s remaining provincial wilderness areas is affecting more than just grizzly bears. The rampant spread of industrial access into all corners of the province has amplified the decline of many species threatened in the province, impacted our watersheds, and

fragmented many of our most sensitive ecosystems. Until the cumulative impacts of such proliferation have been accurately quantified and the disconnect between what the public wants, what the science says, and what actions the Alberta government does (or does not) take is corrected, a moratorium on road construction in grizzly bear habitat is needed to protect Alberta wildlife and the wilderness upon which their survival depends.

- Madeline Wilson

Alberta Approves Controversial Coal Plant

On August 10, 2011, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) gave Maxim Power Corporation (Maxim) final approval to construct a 500-megawatt (MW) coal plant in the area of Grande Cache, Alberta. Alberta’s approval enables Maxim to construct and commission a new coal-fired electricity plant before new federal carbon emission standards are scheduled to come into effect on July 1, 2015. The emissions from Maxim’s plant will not comply with those new federal standards; Alberta’s decision will excuse Maxim from those standards.

Maxim’s plant will emit up to three million tonnes of greenhouse gases per year. As seriously, the plant will discharge mercury and other acidifying emissions into the air (ie. SO₂ and NO), extract at least 6 million cubic metres of freshwater annually from the Little Smoky River, and inflict further industrial impacts upon the sensitive ecosystems of the Smoky River Valley. As well, AWA has repeatedly requested the Alberta government hold a public inquiry into the effects of the continued expansion of the Smoky River coal field upon the nearby Caw Ridge wildlife habitat.

AWA is especially concerned about both the substantial environmental footprint of this expansion and the expedited manner in which the government approved Maxim’s application. It seems decisions made by the AUC, as well as alleged advice given by Environment Canada, have assisted Maxim Power in avoiding new federal carbon legislation. Approving this project will prevent the province from achieving its greenhouse-gas reduction targets.

It also will make it difficult for Prime Minister Stephen Harper to fulfill his promise to reduce Canadian greenhouse-gas emissions by 17 percent by 2020.

New federal regulations regarding coal-fired electricity generation will not come into effect until 2015 and Maxim plans to be operating its plant before then. But, when former Environment Minister Jim Prentice announced in 2010 that new, tougher standards were coming, he gave an assurance that, in the interim, non-compliant coal plants would not be expedited: “We will guard against any rush to build non-compliant coal plants in the interim.”

Environment Canada turned out to be a very meek guard indeed. Maxim wrote to the AUC expressing its extreme concern about the proposed federal regulations. Environment Canada assured Maxim that their plant would only have to meet today’s laxer standards if it was commissioned July 1, 2015. Maxim’s letter to the AUC stated that it would be difficult to meet the federal deadline if hearings delayed the AUC’s decision. How do you think AUC responded? It quickly gave its interim approval to Maxim Power. Final approval came soon after.

AWA, along with several other concerned parties, was denied standing by the AUC. This denial asserted that no person or organization with concerns about Maxim’s plans would be “directly and adversely” affected by the pollution coming from this coal-fired electricity plant. The AUC’s decision that none of the concerned parties had standing meant the regulator didn’t have to hold a hearing. Thus, we have written to Environment Minister Peter Kent and urged Environment Canada to rigorously review Maxim’s application. Our growing international reputation as a laggard when it comes to environmental regulations, monitoring, and enforcement will again be in the spotlight unless the federal government acts against the Maxim project. Federal inaction will suggest the national commitment to take meaningful action on the climate change issue remains no more substantive than Alberta’s.

- Madeline Wilson

Stephen Herrero – Scientist, Advocate, and Wilderness Defender

By Nigel Douglas

AWA Conservation Specialist



Stephen Herrero, recipient of a
2011 Wilderness Defenders Award.
PHOTO: © R. BRANDT

Recall of the Wild

There are times when bears in Alberta, particularly grizzly bears, seem to have very little going for them. But there is one thing that Alberta bears have had in their favour for many years, and that is Dr. Stephen Herrero. Stephen's contribution to our understanding of bears and their behaviour has been unparalleled in North America, probably in the world. His renowned book *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance* was first published in 1985 and has been in print ever since. A second revised edition was published in 2003 (see the review of the second edition in the June 2009 issue of *WLA*).

We have a lot to be thankful for that Stephen decided to settle in Alberta and to pursue his studies into bear behaviour at the University of Calgary. It was a thrill to sit down and talk to the man himself about how he got to where he is today.

The Road to Alberta

After graduating in 1967 with a PhD in psychology/zoology from the University of California, Berkeley,

Stephen and his wife decided it was time to travel. "Not really knowing where we would end up, we packed the three kids in a Volkswagen bus and headed up along the west coast," Stephen recalls. "You can imagine leaving Berkeley – full

"I'm mainly a management-oriented biologist...I love to see things implemented and I love to see things ultimately applied to conservation." – Stephen Herrero

beard, long hair – lots of involvement in conservation, anti-war activities in the States."

Fate, it seems, was leading them inexorably towards Alberta. Heading towards Glacier National Park, Stephen remembers "reading in the paper that two young ladies had been killed by grizzly bears in Glacier National Park and no one seemed to know the reason why. So we decided to detour and go to Banff instead."

Nobody seemed to have any explanation for the recent bear mortalities. This was the hippie era, and some people suggested the bears had been fed LSD and this was the reason for their behaviour. Others thought it was due to weather. But, with his background in zoology and psychology, Stephen's thoughts took him a little deeper. "As we were driving along, my mind got more and more interested in the question of why these incidents had occurred," he remembers. "What was the nature of bear behaviour that they would kill people like this? Animal behaviour was my area of expertise, though I'd never worked with bears. Here seemed a question that was worth pursuing."

So Stephen and his family ended up in Banff and discovered to their surprise that there was a university in nearby Calgary. He jokes: "It wasn't much of a university, but, hey, it was a university!" The University of Calgary presented Stephen with two choices. Psychology offered Stephen teaching work but the Biology department offered him a post-doctoral position and the opportunity to

spend two years researching bears: his choice was an easy one. Stephen did end up teaching some psychology classes, talking about behaviour of animals in their natural environment. “That was how I got started on bears,” says Stephen today. “There was a situation out there that seemed like it needed answers, and I thought I had the background to pursue those answers.”

Bear Communication

Many of the bear safety measures that we take for granted today – bear-proof garbage containers, carrying pepper spray when in bear country, travelling in groups of four or more – derive from Stephen’s research. These precautions may seem obvious to us today but, like all of the best ideas, somebody had to think of them first.

Stephen began to unravel the mysteries of bear behaviour by looking at the bear encounter data which already existed. “Each individual park and some wildlife management agencies had really good data but no one had tried to synthesize it and see what the common factors were,” he says. “So I started doing that.” But these records would only take him so far: “I figured that if all I ever knew about bears were paper records, I’d probably end up with some pretty stupid conclusions.” So he wrote a research proposal to the Canadian Wildlife Service to carry out behavioural research on grizzly bears, “watching bears interact and seeing how they communicated with one another and then seeing how much of that was relevant to their interactions with people.” This approach was a departure from normal research practices. Stephen smiles when he says: “A self-respecting biologist at the time didn’t study people. They only studied animals!”

In fact the Canadian Wildlife Service turned him down, citing his lack of experience with these daunting predators. “I thought about it and thought ‘that actually makes sense’,” Stephen remembers. Instead he began behavioural studies of black bears in Jasper, focusing on the town’s unfenced garbage dump. “I could identify 40 different individual black bears by their colouration, marking, scars,” he says. “It was the perfect place to see how they communicated with one another, how often they physically

contacted one another and even how they interacted with people. There were lots of people around – there were the dump attendants, there were visitors every night, there was a little viewing platform set up.”

Within a few years he put this study of black bear behaviour into a broader context and began to study the ecology



Stephen’s interest in wildlife was clear from an early age.
PHOTO: S. HERRERO

of grizzly bears in Banff National Park. A striking pattern emerged from relating the data of human-bear encounters to his studies of bear behaviour around garbage: “The primary factor that was associated with 12 fatal attacks in Yellowstone, Glacier National Park and Banff was bears being used to hanging around people, becoming habituated and becoming more and more aggressive at getting at people’s food and garbage.”

Habituation was the key to understanding the 12 fatal attacks and this conclusion allowed Stephen to make recommendations to prevent future encounters between bears and people. Tragically, it took a while for anyone to listen. “In Banff it took until 1980 and the fatal attack that occurred at Whiskey Creek,” he says. “It took until then to allocate the money and to develop and

implement a bear-proof garbage system. That was done working conjointly with Haul-All, an Alberta company that has developed bear-proof containers that are now sold throughout North America.”

This is an important theme throughout Stephen’s career. Carrying out the research and analyzing the data is just the first part of the job. Taking that research and applying it to make practical management and conservation recommendations is the next step and one that some scientists omit. “I’m mainly a management-oriented biologist,” Stephen points out. “I love to see things implemented and I love to see things ultimately applied to conservation.”

This is nowhere better illustrated than in Stephen’s ground-breaking 1985 book, *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*. The book was very well-received at the time and has since sold 115,000 copies. “I think I know why,” says Stephen. “It’s written first hand and at the same time it offers some new scientific insights and helps people understand bears and safety around bears.”

Stephen’s bear education work did not end with the publication of his book. With four colleagues, he formed the Safety in Bear Country Society, and spent a further five years putting together a video called *Staying Safe in Bear Country*. The video has become essential viewing for anybody who travels in bear habitat. “It’s broadened our communication network dramatically,” Stephen says. “We did that partly to get all of the agencies in North America on the same page. They were giving all sorts of different advice to people.” The video has also been translated into several other languages, including German and Japanese.

Science and Advocacy

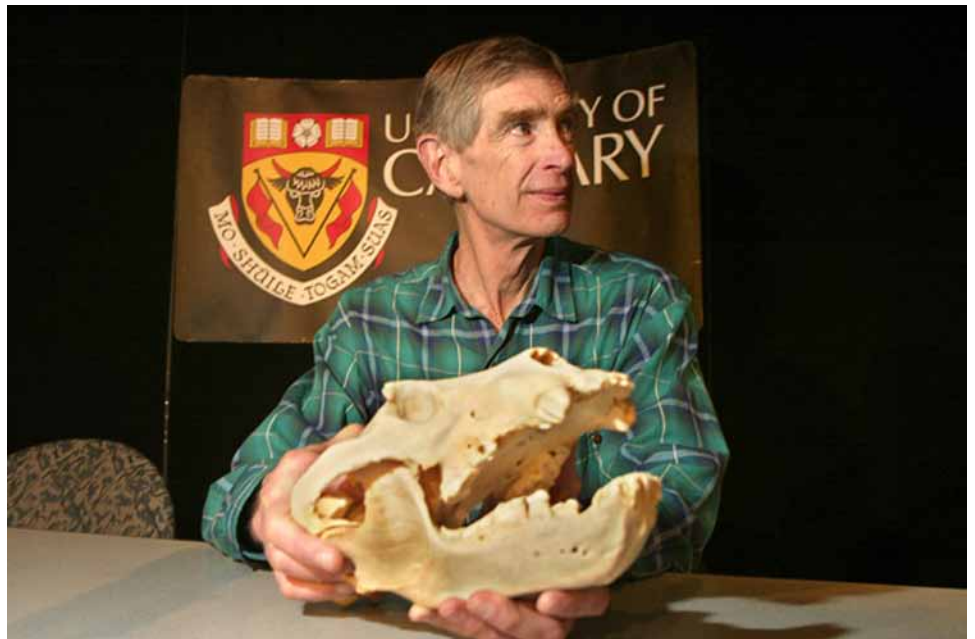
Another important theme of Stephen’s career has been a willingness to speak out and to advocate on behalf of his research subjects. Again, this is something that is not universal amongst scientists. “I’m a strong believer in science and evolution as a science,” says Stephen, the passion flaring in his eyes. “And I’m willing to

Speak out on that.”

Stephen becomes animated as he recalls a major development proposal near Lake Louise in the 1970s. Six-story time-share condominiums were planned on the side of the highway where the ski hill now is. The development would have involved private condominiums and a major resort industry. Stephen spent a year of his life battling these proposals and ultimately the fight was a successful one. He remembers fondly the announcement from Jean Chrétien, then the Indian Affairs and Northern Development Minister, that the project would not be allowed to proceed. “One of the greatest days of my life was being at a press conference with Jean Chrétien... and hearing him say that they’d rejected the proposal because it wasn’t in the public interest and it didn’t give adequate attention to wildlife and other concerns.”

When it comes to advocating for Alberta’s grizzlies, Stephen refers to the successful Yellowstone recovery program: “Progress that they’ve made in the US for the recovery of the grizzly bear population in the lower 48; that [is something that] has largely resulted from access management.” But, without the framework of endangered species legislation, it is hard for Stephen to see grizzly recovery succeeding in Alberta: “I wish it weren’t true but to manage access in areas when you don’t have a legislative mandate to protect species like grizzly bears is exceedingly difficult.”

Public support for bears is necessarily a huge part of reversing Alberta’s stalled recovery process. “The only magical solution is to get as many people on side as possible and wait for the right moment,” he says. An excellent example of the “right moment” Stephen talks about was found in the efforts in the late 1990s to oppose a major new resort development near Mount Shark in Kananaskis Country. Stephen, representing the Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bear Project, visited the offices of then-Environment Minister Gary Mar. While talking to the minister’s assistant, Gary Mar himself dropped in, so Stephen began a quick summary of the issue.” Mar promptly interrupted Stephen’s introduction to tell him “you don’t need to tell me about that. I remember back when I was in 6th grade and you came and talked to my class about it!” Mar ended up turning down the development and instead designated a new provincial park.



Stephen has had a long and fruitful association with the University of Calgary. The skull in this photo belonged to an elderly female grizzly; the teeth are battered and worn and some canines are missing entirely. She was killed at the ripe old age of 24 in a fight with wolves over an elk carcass.

PHOTO: © UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Swift Foxes and More

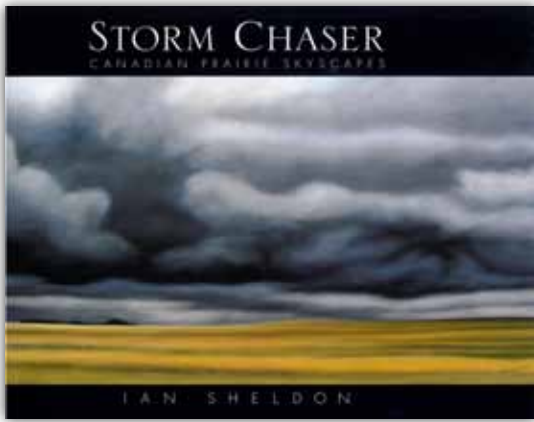
Though Stephen Herrero’s name is synonymous with grizzly and black bears, he has worked with other bear species around the world, and his work has by no means been restricted to just ursids. Stephen has coordinated research into cougars and caribou and was also closely involved in the early days of the swift fox reintroduction in Alberta. Nearly 40 years after the species was wiped out in Alberta, Cochrane’s Myles and Beryl Smeeton began breeding swift foxes in captivity with a view to reintroducing them into their former habitat. After the controversies surrounding his bear work Stephen thought that swift foxes would be “just fun to work with.” The local ranching community supported the project as did First Nations. “But the Alberta Government; that was something else.” The ignorance about these small, cat-sized foxes was startling. Apparently, only a last-minute intervention from an assistant prevented one minister from issuing a press release opposing the swift fox reintroduction because the pint-sized foxes would prey on cattle.

By 1980 a number of swift foxes were housed in pens at their release site to be acclimatized prior to their imminent release. “By golly, if the Alberta government didn’t seize them all, which meant an order for us to keep them in

their pens and not release them,” says Stephen, ruefully shaking his head. “We had to hold them on site for a year and a half.” He pauses then adds with a smile, “now some of the foxes escaped along the way, accidentally... Eventually they were all released.”

The Future for Alberta’s Grizzlies

Stephen is now officially retired from the University of Calgary although he still delivers guest lectures and keeps some of his research going (see the June 2011 issue of *WLA* for a brief summary of his latest published research on black bears). Talking to him today, his profound respect for his research subjects comes through; he exemplifies the understanding that with the privilege of studying such spectacular creatures as grizzly bears comes the responsibility of advocating on their behalf. Stephen muses about the importance of keeping large predators such as grizzlies on the landscape in Alberta. In his native California, at one time there were 10,000 grizzly bears, but by 1922 the last one had been killed. “We could certainly do that in Alberta,” he stresses. “There’s no question we have the technological ability to do it.” But are we wise enough not to? “I think that defines, ultimately, what kind of society we are.” 🍌



Ian Sheldon, Storm Chaser: Canadian Prairie Skyscapes, (Edmonton: Dragon Hill Publishing, 2011)

Reviewed by R. K. McLay

Storm Chaser: Canadian Prairie Skyscapes is less a book than a gateway. It is a portal into the visual and emotional mind of Canadian artist Ian Sheldon as he roams the vast horizons and boundless skies of the northern Great Plains in search of big weather and bigger storms.

Sheldon's book is a gallery first, and his landscape paintings take centre stage. His artwork is exquisite. Of the few, more quiescent pieces, the very *worst* that can be said is that they are beautiful; but, when his paintbrush revels in the leading edge of a churning storm, his work quickly transcends the reach of such easy, bucolic adjectives. He is able to conjure immense spaces and draw us into them. He is able to spill yellow, green and gold light out across leagues of prairie, to cool the invisible air, or warm it, and to sun-stain bruised clouds and distill from them a luminescence of rain. Simply looking at these images can lower your surrounding barometric pressure; envelop you in a charged, unpredictable stillness; ruffle your hair playfully with wind; send chills down your collar; or make the small hairs and goose pimples on your arms stand up – as if brushed by cool drizzle, or shaken by distant thunder. Sheldon's artwork will transport you and it is a journey well worth taking.

You may happily wander the pages of *Storm Chaser* in any random order without disappointment but the curious reader is not cast unaided into the brooding, light-soaked energy of Sheldon's world. If you can quell your excitement and muster the patience required to begin at the beginning (I could not), you will discover *Notes from the Artist* after a brief foreword. Here, in his own words, Sheldon tracks his fascination with "land and sky" from the

veld of South Africa (where as a toddler he first expressed glee and excitement at the violent storms that passed overhead), to the fens of East Anglia in England, and home again to his birthplace on the prairies of western Canada. His notes offer compelling insight into the love and obsession he has for his work and his readers are better for it.

Following the artist's notes is a two-page spread titled *Layering a Painting*. It provides a peek behind Sheldon's studio door and into his technical process. On the left hand page he describes the steps he uses as he "builds" his paintings. Perhaps most surprising among them is his application of the underpainting. In order to achieve the "shifting of colour and hue" that is one of the hallmarks of his work, Sheldon "looks into [his] source material" in search of the root colours of each scene's elements: cloud, sky, land, or water. Once he's identified them he begins "exaggerating" them, laying down a base of intense, high-chroma hues and generously distributing them across the canvas in light and dark values. The result is a pre-landscape landscape of near psychedelic vibrancy. These are his paintings' DNA, the fiercely vivid colours that gently suffuse and inform his finished work, colours that are later tamed and masked by layers of semi-transparent glaze. On the right hand page are six panels, each displaying one of the steps he has described. This glimpse behind the scenes, especially the underpainting, is both satisfying and edifying without detracting from the emotional power of the final product. It is a wonderful insight into the making of a storm. I would gladly have traded a few pages of poetry for some additional examples of this process, or images of the artist himself at work in the studio.

Inside the body of the book the paintings themselves are organized into seasons, beginning with winter. Sheldon introduces each season to us and we learn something of its significance to him as well as the typical sorts of activity it incites. A cycle emerges. Winter is for painting. Spring is filled with anticipation. Summer is "a storm-chasing frenzy." Fall is dedicated to "gathering the last of the colourful scenes for a winter of quiet industry and contemplation." Sheldon's revelations are sincere, relevant and informative. Here is a visual artist who is also a very capable writer, able to express with great lucidity the thoughts and deep emotions that are inspired by his subject matter and that, in turn, motivate him as an artist. He does not hide his considerable reverence for "Nature," nor his gentle contempt for our modern indifference:

"The land, our disrespected elder, deserves reverence...and the noise of our disconnected humanity is mercifully, but briefly, silenced under a prairie thunderstorm."

In *Storm Chaser* most of Sheldon's images are paired with a carefully selected poem or his own introspective prose. This is the source of my only criticism. This criticism is so slight, so biased in favour of the author and his artwork, that it may be difficult to pass off as a complaint at all. My concern is with the preponderance of poetry. I think there's too much of it. The paintings stand powerfully on their own, and were the book to contain no text at all it would remain a visual feast for any who rejoice in finely executed art or the simple, incomparable majesty of nature. My quarrel here is not with Sheldon's narrative (as I've already attested, I find his commentary and prose capable, pertinent and enlightening – our appreciation of his work would suffer in its absence). My dispute is with the profusion of orphaned quotations that make such inefficient use of the white space they occupy (one obvious exception is *Storm/Orage*: six paintings and seven poems presented together, as they were at *The Works Art and Design Festival* in Edmonton). It isn't that the quotations aren't beautiful or evocative in their own right and it isn't that they lack relevance (who could make such a claim against quoting Richard Hamblin's, *The Invention of Clouds* beside a painting of – well – clouds?). It's just that they are too ubiquitous and often distract from the artwork rather than enhance it. This real estate might have been put to better use as it was with the two-page spreads of *Snow Clouds*, *Moody September* and *Encroaching Storm*, or the detail-view of *Slave Lake Thunder*, or the contemplative, word-free pairing of *Quiet Horizon* and *Barley Sky*. It is a small matter, perhaps, but these paintings sing with voices all their own, already perfectly accompanied by their author. A chorus is simply unnecessary.

Storm Chaser is a very comfortably sized book of excellent production quality and I'm happy to have it in my collection. Sheldon's inspiring artwork is reproduced in sufficient detail and dimension to occasionally induce one to hold the book at arm's length just as you would step back from a painting in a gallery. The crisp, vibrant images emanate a substratal light and colour that will make you long to stand before the magnificence of the sometimes enormous (2'x6' and 9'x4') originals. If you are a lover of big spaces, big skies and big weather, then grab a sweater, or windbreaker, or raincoat, and then grab *Storm Chaser*. 🍂

Events

Edmonton Talk: What's Happening in the Woods? with Andrew Nikiforuk

Wednesday November 2, 2011

AWA is pleased to sponsor, in conjunction with the Micah Centre at King's University College in Edmonton, an evening with acclaimed Alberta author Andrew Nikiforuk. Andrew will be hosting a reading from his newest book, *Empire of the Beetle: How Human Folly and a Tiny Bug are Killing North America's Great Forests*.

Admission is free – all members of the public are welcome to join us for this special event.

Location: The Atrium at King's University College, Edmonton

Doors open at 7:00 p.m.

For more information: 1-866-313-0713

Music For the Wild **Saturday, November 5, 2011**

Rob Heath

A storyteller in the tradition of Harry Chapin, John Prine and Steve Earle, Rob Heath's original songs are a tasteful mix of contemporary folk, alt-country and pop. His one-man one guitar style is diverse melodically and rhythmically but always interesting. We all have things we wish we could say. Rob decided to say them with rich melodies and lyrics delivered in a voice haunting in its simplicity.

Opening Act: Christie Simmons and Brian Volke

Doors open at 7:00 p.m.

Music starts at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$15.00

Pre-registration is required:

403-283-2025

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture And the Annual Wilderness Defenders Awards

Friday, November 18, 2011

Guest Lecturer – Bob Scammell

Many of you will know Bob Scammell from his 45 years of writing a weekly outdoors column carried at one time or another by most of Alberta's main newspapers and continuously by the *Red Deer Advocate* since 1966.

Two Alberta Wilderness Defenders Awards and one Great Gray Owl Award will be presented at this evening of celebration.

Location: 455 – 12th Street NW, Calgary

Reception: 6:00 p.m.

Wilderness Defenders Awards: 7:00 p.m.

Lecture: 7:30 p.m.

Cost: \$30.00 for AWA members, \$45.00 for non-members

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or

403-283-2025

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/lecture

Alberta Wilderness Association **Annual General Meeting**

Saturday, November 19, 2011

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Location: 455 – 12th Street NW, Calgary

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or

403-283-2025

Talk: Where Have all the Children Gone? Nature Deficit Disorder and How to Combat It

with Gus Yaki

Tuesday November 29, 2011

Gus Yaki, renowned naturalist and birder, will be giving a talk on being a naturalist in Southern Alberta.

Location: 455 – 12th Street NW, Calgary

Doors open at 7:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$5.00

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or

403-283-2025

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

Sheep River – An Interpretive Hike

Tuesday, December 6, 2011

With Nigel Douglas

Hiking in the winter? Why not? Snow-covered mountains offer a spectacular backdrop; animal trails criss-cross the landscape, waiting for those who know how to read them. Join AWA's Nigel Douglas for a hike in the Sheep River valley, and a chance to make the most of this spectacular time of year.

If there is sufficient snow, this may turn into a snow-shoe hike!

Cost: \$20.00 for AWA members, \$25.00 for non-members

Pre-registration is required:

403-283-2025

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

Music For the Wild

Saturday, December 10, 2011

The Tragically Hick

Back by popular demand! The Tragically Hick's brand of bluegrass pickin' was so popular two years ago, we're putting them back up on the AWA stage. Putting their bluegrass twist on everything from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band to the Beatles to Texas swing, the outcome is music that's enjoyable, delightful and crowd-pleasing.

Opening Act: Berna-Dean Holland

Doors open at 7:00 p.m.

Music starts at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$15.00

Pre-registration is required:

403-283-2025

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

**SAGE-GROUSE HAVE BEEN ENDANGERED FOR MANY YEARS
BUT GOVERNMENTS HAVE DONE VERY LITTLE TO ELIMINATE
HUMAN DISTURBANCES IN CRITICAL SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT.**

ONLY 13 MALES LEFT

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