



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

The Hon. Alison Redford
Premier of Alberta
Room 307, Legislature Building
10800 – 97th Avenue
Edmonton, AB. T5K 2B6
Email: Premier@gov.ab.ca

October 28, 2011

Dear Premier Redford

Re: Protection of the Castle Wildland

For several decades Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has been calling for legislated protection of the Castle region. The fact that areas of the Castle are scheduled for imminent clearcut logging, despite extensive local and provincial opposition, makes the issue particularly urgent.

The extensive natural values of the Castle – including clean water production, carbon storage, wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities –far outweigh the marginal timber values to be derived from clearcut logging. Tree growth in these high altitude, wind-swept forests is slow and the trees are consequently small. Sending the logging trucks on a 500-mile round trip journey to the mill in Cochrane, to allow the felling of these 'matchstick forests' makes as little economic sense as it does environmental sense.

Albertans are clearly opposed to the clearcut logging plans in the Castle, and in favour of increased protection. Two recent public opinion polls found:

- **79.5%** of respondents are "strongly opposed" or "somewhat opposed" to commercial logging in the Castle¹
- **77%** of respondents "strongly oppose" or "somewhat oppose" commercial logging in the Castle²
- **80.2%** of respondents "strongly support" or "somewhat support" making the Castle area a wildland park³
- **74%** of respondents "strongly support" or "somewhat support" declaring the Castle Special Management Area as a Wildland Park⁴

¹ *Castle Special Management Area: Lethbridge Public Opinion Study – Winter 2011*. Citizen Society Research Lab, March, 2011.

² *Castle Special Management Area: Public Opinion Study Spring 2011*. The Praxis Group, April, 2011.

³ *Castle Special Management Area: Lethbridge Public Opinion Study – Winter 2011*. Citizen Society Research Lab, March, 2011.

⁴ *Castle Special Management Area: Public Opinion Study Spring 2011*. The Praxis Group, April, 2011

Similarly, the results of a 2007 Alberta government public survey, published in the *Land-Use Framework Workbook Summary Report*, contained some strong responses from the Alberta public. For example,

- 71.8% of participants would be “willing to accept limits to Forestry development to provide for more Watershed Protection”;
- 68.0% of participants would be “willing to accept limits to Forestry development to provide for more Protected Areas”;

As has been stated many times, the Castle is an exceptional region, important for much more than its marginal timber value:

- **Watershed value.** The Castle is a crucial source of clean drinking water for southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Over 26 major headwater streams of the Oldman River originate here, 23 of which support populations of native fish including threatened bull trout and cutthroat trout.
- **Biodiversity value.** The Castle Wilderness and Waterton areas combined have the highest diversity of plant and animal species in Alberta.
 - Over half of Alberta's 1600 plants can be found in the Castle, including over 120 provincially rare and 38 nationally rare species.
 - 59 species of mammals can be found in the Castle Wilderness. The high diversity of carnivores include the grizzly bear, black bear, cougar, grey wolf, bobcat, lynx, marten and wolverine. Ungulates include elk, moose, mule deer, white-tailed deer, mountain goat and bighorn sheep.
 - Approximately 105 species of birds breed here, while some 60 others migrate through the area.
 - Parks Canada has identified the Castle as having an unusual diversity of butterflies, including species found nowhere else in Canada.
 - The wandering shrew is an extremely rare species and in Alberta is only found in the Westcastle valley.
- **Forest value.** The Castle's remaining old growth forests are rich in biological diversity and provide critical habitat to numerous species that can survive nowhere else.
- **Recreation value.** The Castle is an outstanding location for various low-impact recreational opportunities; hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife photography, hunting, fishing, berry picking and horseback riding.

AWA asks you to please:

- Immediately halt the proposed logging in the Castle,
- Protect the Castle region as a Wildland Park

Yours truly,

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

Nigel Douglas,
Conservation Specialist



cc: Frank Oberle, Minister Sustainable Resource Development