

A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

JUNE 2012



FLY SOUTH YOUNG GROUSE
TRACING THE RED DEER RIVER
TIME TO GROW UP IN THE BOREAL
AN ELEGY FOR A CROWSNEST PREDATOR

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COVER PHOTO

Chris Wearmouth's evocative image of the boreal forest in the vicinity of McClelland Lake. The McClelland Lake wetland complex will be sacrificed for the Fort Hills Oil Sands Project.

FEATURED ARTIST

Eileen Raucher-Sutton is this issue's featured artist. Other examples of Eileen's impressive work may be seen at members.shaw.ca/eileenrs/ and she may be reached at eileenrs@shaw.ca or (780) 449- 5312. Her reflections about her art follow:

The wilderness presents a challenge to the adventurous in spirit – people who need to see what was over the next hill. It was this same spirit that brought me to Alberta in 1984 from N.Y.C. where I was born, studied and received a Master's Degree in Fine Art. The mountains and glaciers I paint are indeed an awesome challenge. I knew these mountains were my spiritual place long before I got here. I feel my oneness with the universe.

I believe a prime function of artists in society is to evoke in the viewer a new and exciting visualization or conceptualization. In 1973 I had my first experience of the Rocky Mountains. My immediate reaction was "I am so grateful to have lived to see this!!" The shapes were magnificent; the colors were subtle and incredibly beautiful. I had found a subject that excited me visually and through which I could express the philosophy in my paintings, "man's humble place in the universe".

My art melds external and internal realities: a spiritualized expression of nature's underlying character. My mature work represents my personal synthesis of modernist principles with my intuitive response to nature's forces and flows. My paintings express the layering, ambiguity, subtlety, sensuality and spirituality of life.

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Time

Clichés about time are about as plentiful as cowboy hats on Calgary’s 17th Avenue during Stampede week. For me time is among the most precious resources; I really have something to celebrate when I’m able to point to “time well spent.”

Time also is a thread we could use to connect the features awaiting you in this issue of Wild Lands Advocate. They take you on journeys to the western United States, to the headwaters of the Red Deer River, to Alberta’s boreal forest, and to the Crowsnest River where massive bull trout once prowled. Each of these features, in its own way, reminds us of just how valuable time is and suggests that the wise among us will not squander it.

Considering the state of greater sage-grouse in the western U.S. inspires both fear and optimism. Fear arises from recognizing just how little time there is left for Canadian governments to take meaningful action to protect critical grouse habitat in our grasslands; optimism arises from the lessons that recent history in the U.S. offers us. In the American West strong environmental legislation plus political will delivers real hope for endangered species.

Carolyn Campbell’s piece on the cumulative effects of industrialization in the boreal forest alert us once again to the urgent need for government to take the time needed to craft and implement a biodiversity strategy on those lands. We still have time to do that before our thirst for oil and appetite for

two by fours irreversibly mutates the northern landscape. But that window of opportunity is closing rapidly.

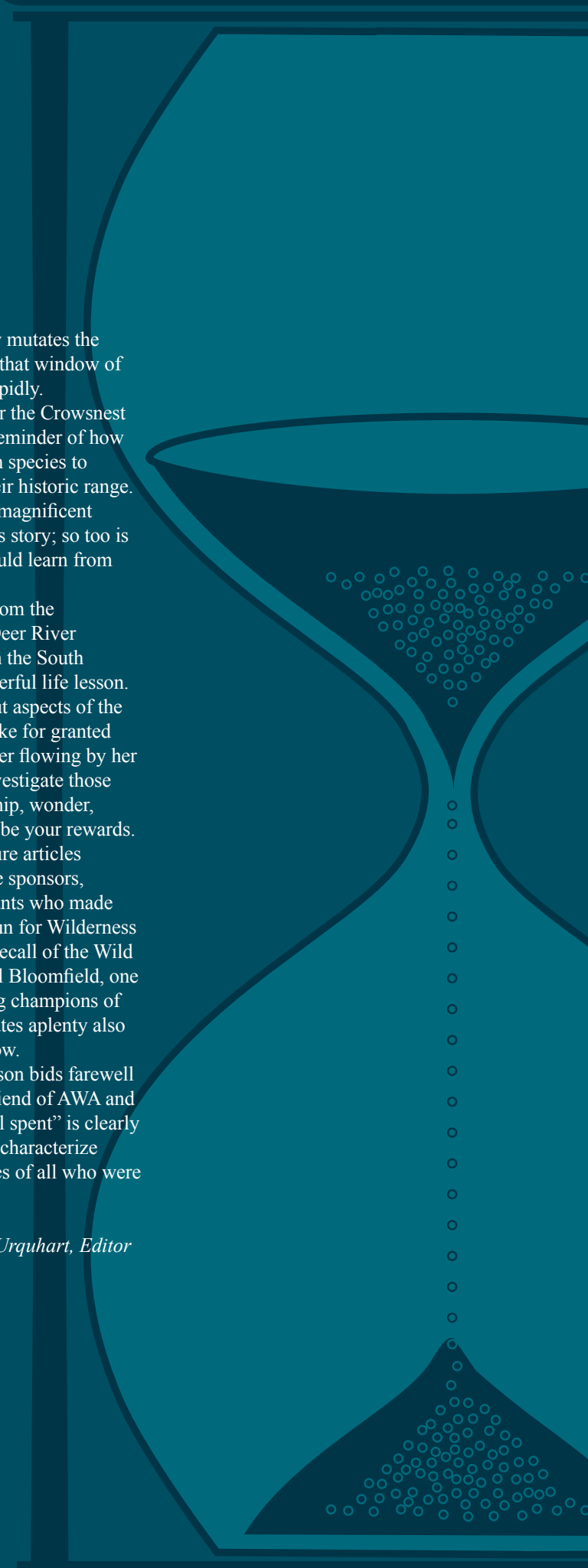
Lorne Fitch’s elegy for the Crowsnest bull trout is a poignant reminder of how quickly we can condemn species to death in all or part of their historic range. Lorne’s passion for this magnificent predator is obvious in his story; so too is the message that we should learn from this history.

Tjarda Barratt’s trip from the headwaters of the Red Deer River to that river’s union with the South Saskatchewan is a wonderful life lesson. Take time to reflect about aspects of the natural world we may take for granted (in Tjarda’s case the water flowing by her home). Make time to investigate those reflections. Fun, friendship, wonder, soulfulness...those may be your rewards.

Apart from these feature articles this issue also salutes the sponsors, volunteers, and participants who made this year’s Climb and Run for Wilderness a tremendous success. Recall of the Wild tells the story of Michael Bloomfield, one of Alberta’s longstanding champions of woodland caribou. Updates aplenty also wait in the pages to follow.

Finally Christyann Olson bids farewell to Phyllis Hart, a dear friend of AWA and many of you. “Time well spent” is clearly a label we should use to characterize Phyllis’s life and the lives of all who were able to meet her.

- Ian Urquhart, Editor



AWA's 2012 Priorities: Focus on Forests

BY SEAN NICHOLS, AWA Outreach Specialist



In the April issue of *WLA*, we introduced a yearlong series on AWA's Top 10 priorities for 2012 by examining the plight of two of Alberta's most endangered animal species: the woodland caribou, and the greater sage-grouse. In this issue, we continue the series by shifting that focus to Alberta's forests. Forests are often called the "Earth's Lungs" due to the role they play in regulating the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. While that is an accurate metaphor, they are also so much more than that. This is nowhere more true than here in Alberta, where our forests play a vital part not only in renewing our air, but also our water. They provide habitat for many of Alberta's wild species, both threatened and not, and an anchor for ecosystems and Natural Regions throughout the province.

Deep and Vibrant Ecosystems

There is an urgent need to create an alternative model of forest management in Alberta. We envision a new model, based on ecosystem management, guided by independent scientific expertise and augmented by local community participation and benefits. We are not opposed to all logging. Instead we support the development of a forest management model that maintains healthy forest ecosystems as its primary function and offers sustainable benefits to communities from the wise use of these forests. Over the years, many

local groups have been running their own campaigns to oppose local clear-cut logging issues. AWA has recently been working with a number of these organizations to develop a more comprehensive vision for the way sustainable forest management could be realized in southern Alberta.

In addition to those on Alberta's southern Eastern Slopes, the forests on the northern Eastern Slopes and those of the vast northern boreal each have their own distinct biological features and also their own distinct concerns for AWA. In this issue of *WLA*, Carolyn Campbell writes about the third of these three forested areas, the boreal, and discusses the impacts on that ecosystem from the oil sands industry and from climate change. She talks with Dr. Erin Bayne at the University of Alberta about the southern boreal's (not so) gradual conversion into aspen parkland.

The other of AWA's top 10 priorities that we look at in this issue concerns one of the forest areas that has been in the news recently. The Castle Wilderness in Alberta's southwest corner has been one of AWA's longest-standing areas of concern, reaching back to our founding in 1965, and continues to be so today.

Restoration Wilderness – Protection Long Overdue

The Castle Wilderness is a region of outstanding wilderness values. It is a crucial source of clean drinking water for southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. With

Waterton National Park, the Castle has the highest diversity of plant and animal species in Alberta (more than half of Alberta's 1,600 plants can be found in the Castle, including over 158 rare species.) The Castle is also an outstanding location for various low-impact recreational opportunities. AWA and other conservation groups are calling for the protection of the Castle as a Wildland Park. Clearcut logging must be halted. Oil and gas activity should be phased out, according to the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and Environment Non-Government Organizations (CAPP-ENGO) agreement to phase out existing oil and gas dispositions.

Nigel Douglas takes this opportunity to investigate how local residents also feel about the Castle. He looks at a Community Values survey commissioned by the MD of Pincher Creek, which includes the Castle, of those residents. The survey indicates that along with most Albertans, local residents feel strongly that the priorities for their local public lands should be for "appropriate use" that includes "setting aside land in an undisturbed state for habitat protection."

We couldn't agree more.

With six AWA priorities yet to be highlighted, keep reading the year's remaining issues of *WLA* for discussions of water issues and the Cold Lake area of eastern Alberta (coming in August), public lands, a provincial biodiversity strategy and more. ▲



Hikers on Prairie Bluff, Castle Wilderness

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS



Grizzly Ridge, Kananaskis Country

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

Fly South YOUNG GROUSE

BY IAN URQUHART



Male greater sage-grouse courtship display
PHOTO: JEREMY R. ROBERTS, CONSERVATION MEDIA

These are desperate times for greater sage-grouse in Alberta. Their desperate straits prompted the provincial government to introduce a translocation program. For the last two years Montana sage-grouse have been captured and released in Alberta in order to postpone the species' extinction here. I wish those birds could have been volunteers because, as stunning as Alberta's prairie grassland landscape may look to me, it's no longer a place where sage-grouse are likely to survive, let alone thrive. Mortality sink... that's the phrase I think the experts use to describe what most of southeast Alberta has become for sage-grouse. It's a place where the grouse's premature death is the norm.

Those unlucky guinea pigs from Montana don't know what their few remaining Canadian cousins do. The provincial and federal governments won't hear and act on the diagnoses and prescriptions many doctors have delivered. Critical sage-grouse habitat – its loss, fragmentation, and degradation – is the key to the species' population collapse over the last twenty years. Habitat – its protection and restoration – is the key to the bird's survival in Canada's grasslands.

If the few Alberta sage-grouse left had a choice, they should try to book passage south on the translocation train. In several ways the situation south of the border looks much more promising

for the recovery of greater sage-grouse populations than it does here.

Yes, recovery or restoration of sage-grouse numbers is also needed in the American West. Numbers there are well below the historical norms and the population trends are discouraging. Comparing 2007 data with data from the 1960s and 1970s the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported sharp drops in the percentages of males per lek (leks are traditional courting sites used year after year by sage-grouse males to attract females). They also reported fewer active leks; these percentage declines were not as severe.

But in most of the American West those sharp declines haven't yet put the sage-grouse on the brink of extinction or extirpation from most of its historic range. Canadian conservationists would celebrate for weeks if their governments could announce that more than 98,700 sage-grouse were strutting across southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. That's the number of sage-grouse the Idaho Department of Fish and Game estimated could be found in Idaho in 2007. Montana estimated its population at more than 62,000 birds.

Greater Sage-grouse, the Endangered Species Act, and the U.S. Federal Courts

According to America's *Endangered Species Act* (ESA) members of the public may submit petitions to list a species as endangered or threatened under the Act to

either the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service. Within 90 days of receiving the petition the recipient agency must decide if the published findings submitted with the petition are substantial enough to suggest the proposed listing may be warranted. If the agency believes the petitioner(s) has presented sufficient information it has one year from the date the petition was received to produce a review of the species' status. That review must find the listing to be either warranted or not warranted. If listing a species is warranted the agency may propose listing it immediately; or, the proposed listing may be deferred if the agency judges other listing activities to be more urgent. The latter "warranted but precluded" proposals generally require the agency to revisit the proposed listing annually until either listing the species proceeds or the species' status improves to the point where listing is no longer warranted.

As eye-popping as overall sage-grouse numbers in the American West may be to Canadian eyes they hide sub-populations, such as those in the Columbia Basin and Colorado Plateau management zones, that are no better off than the Canadian populations. These situations plus the perception that a long-term decline in sage-grouse populations throughout their range could not be reversed without regulatory action led conservationists to petition the federal government to list the greater sage-grouse across its entire range

“Canada’s experience with sage grouse has been a dark lesson for biologists here. Western Canada once had flourishing populations. Primarily because of energy development there are now just 200 birds in Saskatchewan and fewer than a hundred in Alberta, and there are concerns the Alberta population will soon disappear.”

– Jim Robbins, *The New York Times*, 7 February 2011.



This public domain photo by Gary Kramer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is used on Canada's Species at Risk Public Registry.

WWW.SARAREGISTRY.GC.CA/SPECIES/SPECIESDETAILS_E.CFM?SID=305

in the western United States.

These petitions, submitted in 2002 and 2003, did not convince the Fish and Wildlife Service to list the sage-grouse as endangered or threatened. Western Watersheds Project, an environmental organization dedicated to protecting and restoring western watersheds and wildlife, challenged the agency’s 2005 decision in July 2006 in court. The U.S. District Court of Idaho upheld this challenge in December 2007. It found that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service “failed to rely on the best science and was influenced by a political appointee who intimidated the scientists in an attempt to block listing.” The Court ordered the Fish and Wildlife Service to reconsider its original finding.

Just over two years ago the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued its second finding on the health of the sage-grouse. The agency found “that listing the greater sage-grouse (rangeland) is warranted, but precluded by higher priority listing actions.” In a more-perfect world a rule would be proposed for sage-grouse. For the time being this would not proceed. “We will develop a proposed rule to list the greater sage-grouse,” said the Fish and Wildlife Service, “as our priorities allow.” A subsequent legal agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and environmental groups requires the federal agency to decide if the sage-grouse is threatened or endangered or not requiring protection under the ESA by September 2015.

That Other Greater Sage-grouse Dance

I’m addicted to the internet, not least because it offers me a window on aspects of the natural world I may never witness in person. Watching the greater sage-grouse mating dance is one of those

experiences for me (for one example of the male courtship display see <http://www.yellowstonegate.com/2012/04/grand-teton-rangers-lead-morning-tours-watch-sage-grouse-strut/#factsheet>).

Another dance, performed in the U.S. Federal Court system, is at least as important to the future of the sage-grouse in the American West. Western Watersheds Project has turned to the courts on many occasions to try to ensure the U.S. federal government respects the environmental stewardship obligations of ESA and other federal laws. In most cases, as alluded to above, the legal dance begins with the actions of a federal agency. Affected parties such as Western Watersheds may respond to the decision by going to court if they suspect the federal action violates federal law. If the courts uphold the judicial challenge, as Judge Winmill did in 2007, federal agencies must respond.

The possibility or fear of litigation may become a powerful incentive then for federal agencies to take actions to forestall future challenges in the courts. This dance between federal agencies and affected parties such as environmental/business associations and state governments features prominently in recent American sage-grouse politics.

The courts forced the Fish and Wildlife Service to revisit its 2005 finding. This revisitation produced the “warranted, but precluded” finding of 2010. This second finding, in turn, sparked the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to enter the dance floor and reconsider if sage-grouse protection was figuring prominently enough in its management of public lands. The BLM is the national agency responsible for managing 47 million acres of sage-grouse habitat in the western United States (more than any

other government agency). It responded to the Fish and Wildlife Service 2010 listing decision by releasing the National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy in August 2011. The objective of the strategy is “to develop new or revised regulatory mechanisms, through RMPs, to conserve and restore the greater sage-grouse and its habitat on BLM-administered lands on a range-wide basis over the long-term.” (RMPs are Resource Management Plans)

The dancing didn’t stop there. Western Watershed Project believes that the RMPs currently in place violate federal laws and do not give adequate consideration to sage-grouse. Judge Winmill agreed. Last September he issued a partial summary judgment in the case of *Western Watersheds Project v. Salazar*. In this case Western Watersheds challenged the Bureau of Land Management for failing to consider adequately the environmental impacts of livestock grazing and energy development on sage-grouse. The Court ruled that, in the cases before it, the BLM failed to carry out adequately its environmental impact statement and resource management planning obligations under federal legislation. It allowed the case against the government to proceed.

In December the BLM responded with two documents, an Interim Management memorandum and a Planning Direction memorandum, to guide sage-grouse

conservation measures in the short and longer term. The Bureau's director said: "The aim of these science-based measures is to maintain and restore flourishing populations of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. We are working to do this in a way that protects the health of our land, while also facilitating safe and responsible energy development and recreational opportunities that power our economy."

Enter Idaho's Greater Sage-grouse Task Force

This American greater sage-grouse dance struggles to establish itself on Canada's political and legal landscape. AWA and other conservation organizations have turned to the courts to try to prod the federal government to take some meaningful measures to protect the endangered sage-grouse and its critical habitat. With those organizations and Ecojustice we can claim legal victory too. In *Alberta Wilderness Association v. Canada (Minister of the Environment)* Justice Zinn of the Federal Court of Canada ruled it was unreasonable for the Minister not to identify any critical habitat for greater sage-grouse and that the Minister was obliged to identify such habitat with the best available information.

But, although the federal government responded by identifying some critical habitat, Ottawa doesn't have the political will to implement regulatory measures to protect that habitat. This habitat might be critical on paper and in the view of scientific experts; it's not critical on the ground where it matters most. This lack of a *regulatory* response is one crucial element of the American experience that's missing here. Federal agencies in the U.S., whether on their own volition or whether forced by the courts, regulate to protect sage-grouse habitat. Yet federal agencies, without political will or judicial orders to regulate, are wallflowers in the Canadian version of this dance.

State and provincial governments also are a study in contrasts when it comes to the greater sage-grouse issue. Alberta trusts that their ideological soul mates in Ottawa will continue to defer to the province's refusal to regulate to protect sage-grouse habitat. The province also trusts that Canadian courts, out of a mistaken respect for the federal-provincial division of powers,

are unlikely to order Ottawa to regulate activities on provincial Crown lands. The best sage-grouse have got from this provincial mindset is what we opened this essay with – a translocation program to import American sage-grouse into a mortality sink. Ignoring sagebrush habitat may cost the province the species that depends on that habitat but, judging from the record to date, this is a cost Alberta is prepared to pay.

State governments in the American West cannot afford this cavalier attitude. Unlike here they know that the courts are likely to interpret national endangered species legislation in ways that will demand federal action. They generally are very concerned, if not fearful, of what regulations and restrictions federal agencies will impose to protect threatened or endangered species. The threat of the regulatory consequences accompanying the listing of a species under the *Endangered Species Act* will prompt states to take regulatory steps of their own in order to avoid federal action.

This attitude, born of the experience gathered from past listings under the ESA, led Idaho, one of America's most conservative states, to respond to the events of 2010 and 2011 in a way that's unheard of in Alberta. Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter created a Sage-grouse Task Force. The Governor was concerned that, unless Idaho took additional actions to address the developing plight of sage-grouse, the federal government, with or without orders from the courts, would take regulatory matters into its own hands. The Governor was worried that federal agencies might take their endangered species mandate seriously and unilaterally propose measures on federal lands in the American West that would be too hard on ranchers, miners, and roughnecks. As he said when he accepted the Task Force's recommendations he wanted to avoid the "draconian restrictions" he anticipated would attend a listing under the ESA in 2015. Governor Otter therefore accepted the invitation from the federal Secretary of the Interior "to develop state-specific *regulatory* mechanisms to conserve the species and preclude the need to list under the ESA." (my emphasis) Creating the Task Force was the first step.

Anyone who is familiar with Alberta wildlife and environmental politics is likely to detect a refreshing air of

inclusiveness and transparency around the Idaho Sage-grouse Task Force. Six of its 18 members were drawn from industry (none of these from the petroleum industry), three were taken from conservation interests, five were drawn from elected state and local politicians, one was selected from the general public, and one was selected to represent local working groups (these groups provide local forums for discussing sage-grouse and habitat issues). The Director of Idaho Department of Fish and Game was one co-chair; the Counsel to the Governor was the other co-chair. The task force held 12 meetings across the state from March 12th to May 24th. All meetings were open to the public.

Do the Task Force Recommendations Go Far Enough?

The Task Force presented its recommendations to the Governor in June. The Governor established a two-week public comment period on the recommendations and is expected to reach his decision on the content of the state's plan by the end of July. At that point Idaho's plan will be submitted to the Secretary of the Interior. This member of the Obama cabinet will decide if Idaho's commitment to sage-grouse conservation is strong enough to stand as a substitute for federal regulatory efforts in Idaho. This contrasts sharply with the path recommended by the Canadian government. Prime Minister Harper's government is happy to abdicate environmental assessment responsibilities to the provinces without any thought of their adequacy.

One key to the Task Force's approach was to divide Idaho into three sage-grouse habitat zones. They are: Core Habitat, Important Habitat, and General Habitat. The Core Habitat zone covers roughly 5.7 million acres (nearly 9,000 sections of land) of the state. Sixty-seven percent of known active leks in Idaho are found in this zone; 75 percent of the sage-grouse males are believed to frequent these leks. The management goal here is "to maintain or improve sage-grouse populations."

Questions will be raised about whether the Task Force's other recommendations will be strong enough to satisfy the federal government. The Task Force concluded that, for example, "the maintenance of existing, permitted

facilities is acceptable regardless of location or habitat.” Best management practices plus taking into account “to the extent practicable” critical life stages for sage-grouse when constructing essential public services try to make this recommendation more palatable from the conservation perspective.

In the Core Habitat zone infrastructure development is recommended generally to be limited to all projects with established rights to proceed and to incremental upgrades to existing essential developments. A liberal definition of incremental expansion – a 50 percent or less increase in the facility’s footprint – may temper the conservation value of this measure. So too may the fact that the Task Force recommended establishing a Sage-grouse Conservation Committee that could consider exempting certain infrastructure projects if those projects were judged to have a “significant high value to the State of Idaho needed to meet critical existing needs and/or important societal objectives...”

On the other hand, other possibilities discussed in the report seem to offer more certain potential as means to promote sage-grouse conservation. The mitigation framework discussed in the report essentially suggests creating a mitigation bank to fund habitat restoration projects. The Task Force also suggested that the Governor should “consider recommending administrative withdrawal of new oil and gas leasing and hardrock mining claims for a 10-year period.”

The conservation community’s reaction to the Task Force has been mixed. Western Watersheds Project’s

Ken Cole doubted that the Task Force, given the heavy presence of industry representatives, would treat conservation seriously enough in its recommendations. He was reported to be skeptical that the proposed state plan would satisfy the federal government. Laird West, the attorney from Advocates for the West who represents Western Watersheds in its court challenges, sounded more hopeful: “A decade ago nobody was talking about sage grouse and sagebrush. I’m actually very encouraged that the state of Idaho has convened this task force and is taking sage grouse seriously.” The Nature Conservancy’s Will Whelan was one of the Task Force’s representatives from conservation organizations. While he would never suggest that the Task Force recommendations are perfect he sees real conservation value in the recommendations regarding new transmission lines, petroleum and renewable energy developments, fighting wildfires and invasive species, and managing livestock grazing on public lands to satisfy sage-grouse habitat requirements.

Political Will or Judicial Orders: Avenues to Bring the American Experience to Canada

Lisa Eller blogged about the Idaho Sage-grouse Task Force for the Nature Conservancy of Idaho. She said: “The task force members took their task seriously. They knew that a weak plan would simply fail to pass muster with the federal agencies that manage public lands and implement the ESA.” This excerpt underlines just how potent the

U.S. *Endangered Species Act* is as a catalyst to prod federal and state agencies to take actions to protect species at risk even before measures are introduced under the Act. Western states, never fans of the key role the U.S. government plays in public lands management in the American West, responded to the 2010 “warranted, but precluded” finding with a flurry of activity. Wyoming, Nevada and Utah, very conservative and business-friendly jurisdictions, joined Idaho in creating committees or task forces to develop regulatory measures to try to prevent federal action under the ESA in 2015. Without this ESA listing of the sage-grouse looming over the western landscape the odds of these states taking those actions were poor. Those odds were as bad as the ones we should place on the chances of Canadian sage-grouse surviving unless governments here take immediate action to protect sage-grouse critical habitat.

Compared to the ESA the drafters of Canada’s *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) were timid when it came to establishing the status of the national government as a dependable defender of endangered species on provincial Crown or public lands. SARA, as Kate Smallwood of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund observed in 2003, leaves “the primary role for species and habitat protection in Canada to the provinces and territories.” There are provisions in the SARA that could be used to extend federal authority to provincial lands. These provisions constitute the “safety net,” a net giving the federal government the discretion to protect an endangered species and/



Male greater sage-grouse on a lek in the western United States.
PHOTO: JEREMY R. ROBERTS, CONSERVATION MEDIA

or its critical habitat. Ottawa has never used this feature over the eight years SARA has been in force. Potent is not an adjective many use in describing SARA.

I can imagine two scenarios, however, where SARA could become a positive instrument for the protection and recovery of the greater sage-grouse and other endangered species across their historic ranges. Sadly the first scenario may be wildly optimistic in the immediate and medium term: it depends on political will. It hopes Environment Minister Peter Kent and his federal counterparts will tire of presiding over the demise of Canada's flora and fauna. It hopes that, in the case of the greater sage-grouse, they will recognize what a dismal failure Alberta's policies and laws have been in protecting this endangered species. Perhaps Ottawa will one day develop such political will. I wish the smart money was betting this will happen under the current federal government.

The second scenario depends on the courts. It depends on the federal courts forcing Ottawa's hand when, as in the case of the sage-grouse, a provincial government refuses to regulate to protect and enhance critical habitat and Ottawa turns a blind eye to that neglect. This perspective is optimistic that the Federal Court will rule positively on the application filed in April by Ecojustice. On behalf of AWA, Grasslands Naturalists, Nature Saskatchewan, and Wilderness Committee, Ecojustice has applied for a court order to require the Environment Minister to recommend that the federal cabinet issue an emergency protection order for greater sage-grouse. This order would "include provisions prohibiting activities that may adversely affect the species and that habitat."

Given the intransigence of our federal and provincial governments the courts represent the last resort for Alberta's greater sage-grouse. In these desperate times we are left hoping that our courts, like their counterparts in the U.S., will force governments to respect the spirit of the *Species at Risk Act* as outlined in the opening words of the preamble to the legislation: "Canada's natural heritage is an integral part of our national identity and history." Until that spirit is respected on the ground the best option for the few grouse left to strut in southeast Alberta is a simple one. Fly south. 🐦

About the Photographs in this Article

All photos in this article were taken in the United States. At the rate these birds are disappearing in Canada the United States soon may be where we will have to travel to see this prairie icon. Only immediate action from Ottawa and Alberta can make such travel plans unnecessary.

Perhaps it's appropriate then that the greater sage-grouse photos on the Government of Canada's Species at Risk Public Registry website were taken by members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Millwell #1- Athabasca Glacier

48"x36", acrylic on canvas

© EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON

The Beginning and the End – A Summer Holiday Experience

BY TJARDA BARRATT



My husband Rob and I, when watching the Red Deer River flow by our home at the eastern end of Red Deer County, asked ourselves where the water comes from and where it is going. Hence, as a summer project, we decided to search out the beginning and the end of the Red Deer River.

In late July last year we went on a three-day hike in Banff National Park and stayed at Skoki Lodge. On the second day we set out for the five kilometre hike to the headwaters of the Red Deer River. The weather gods ignored the calendar and delivered a heavy dump of wet snow early that morning that made for difficult going. Finally we got to the crystal clear meandering streams and shallow gravel braids and we knew that we had found the headwaters. The actual source of the river is at Oyster Lake, just a short scramble up the hill, but it was too tricky to attempt because of the wet snow and rain. I could not resist cupping the crystal clear water in my hands, let it fall through my fingers and send it on its way with a little piece of advice: “whatever happens, go with the flow.” Seeing this pristine sight, I became aware of the challenges the river faces further downstream.

Eight days later we drove to the village of Empress on the Alberta/

Saskatchewan border and ventured a few miles into Saskatchewan where the Red Deer joins the South Saskatchewan River. From a high lookout we gazed out at the confluence. What a magnificent sight: open rolling land divided by these two great rivers – the brownish shallow waters of the Red Deer meeting and mixing with the blue-green of the wider, deeper South Saskatchewan. There was not a soul to be seen. Our only witnesses were the prairie wind, waving grasses, and some grazing cattle nearby. We decided then and there to come back in late September with canoes and friends in tow.

When the fall colours had just appeared, we dropped our canoes in the river at Empress Bridge and paddled the last 20 km of the Red Deer River. With its wide sweeping bends, oxbows and sandbars, the river seemed reluctant to accept its imminent merger with its big brother the South Saskatchewan. At one of the oxbows, for example, the river has only 40 metres to cut through to form an oxbow lake and rob the riparian landowner of a good chunk of grazing land.

We paddled for several hours in the slow moving river passing cottonwood-lined banks and white sandy beaches, and

then just before the confluence, a moose crossed the river right in front of our canoes. It was a perfect Canadian scene: water, moose, migrating geese overhead and the glorious expanse of nature.

We beached our canoes on a muddy bank at the V-shaped confluence of the rivers for picture taking and then continued for another 10 km on the much deeper, wider and faster moving South Saskatchewan to Estuary Ferry, our end point of the day.

We fully recommend this wonderful summer activity: two wilderness experiences, two rivers and one watershed!▲

Our thanks to Phil French (“Red Deer River Journey”) for his advice, the staff at Skoki Lodge, the invaluable help of Pat and Ross at “Empressive” Restaurant/store, Helen of Forksview Hotel for helping with the logistics, Brad for showing us around his land that is straddled by both rivers, and all the local people who had a story to tell about their Red Deer River.



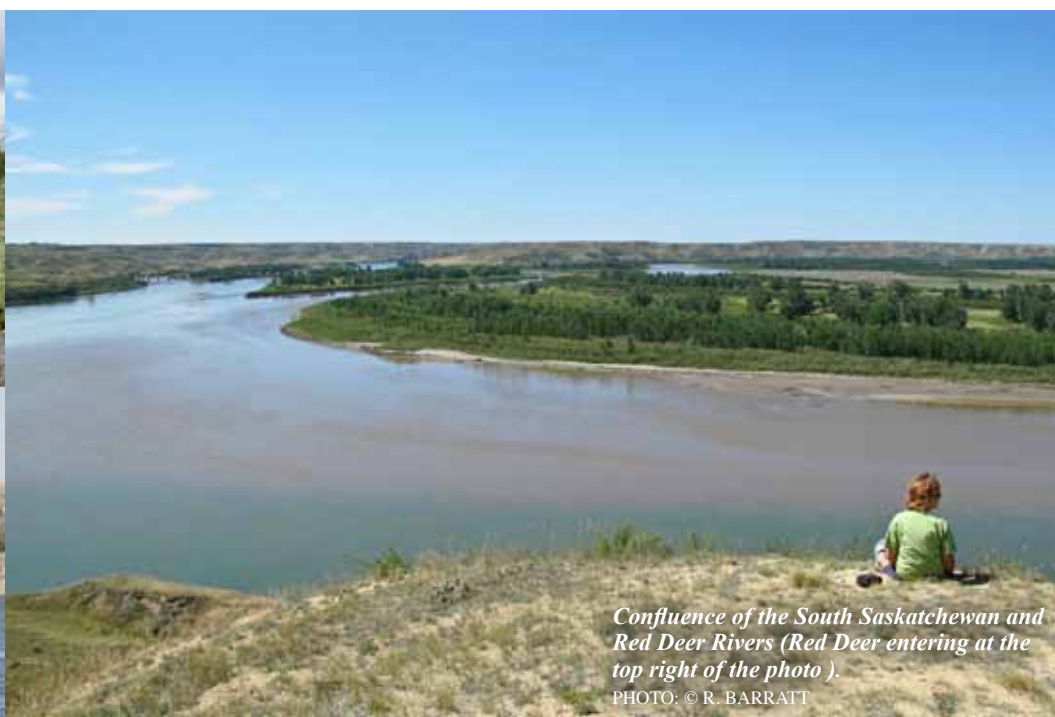
“In” the headwaters of the Red Deer River.

PHOTO: © R. BARRATT



An unexpected delight.

PHOTO: © L. TOWNELL



Confluence of the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer Rivers (Red Deer entering at the top right of the photo).

PHOTO: © R. BARRATT

MOVING PAST INFANCY: Cumulative Effects Management in Alberta's Boreal Forest

BY CAROLYN CAMPBELL,
AWA Conservation Specialist



In situ bitumen production requires a network of seismic lines, transmission lines, roads, pipelines and well sites. The cumulative effects of this fragmentation need to be limited in order to help prevent the landscape ecology from shifting from boreal forest to aspen parkland.

PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL, J. HILDEBRAND

“Preserving Alberta’s environment and its natural heritage is important to me. Albertans deserve to know that the species that call this province home will still be here for generations to come.”
- Alison Redford, September 12, 2011

Recent published research, as well as discussions at a professional biologist conference on Alberta’s boreal forest, suggests that in the next few decades we will approach or surpass landscape-change thresholds in the southern boreal forest and mineable oil sands region. These ecosystems may well be transformed from a peatland-rich landscape supporting old-growth forest birds and woodland caribou into a fragmented aspen parkland habitat of drier young forests, marshes, deer and coyotes.

To be responsible stewards of the great ecological richness of the boreal forest our generation inherited, the Alberta government will need to do much more. Meaningful cumulative effects management for boreal wildlife habitat is urgently needed. Government should consider the need for a refuge from intensive oil sands, forestry, conventional oil and gas, gravel and peat mining. Alberta needs a larger network of protected areas that is representative, connected and free from industrial and recreational fragmentation. Sound radical? Not to scientists who recommend that half the boreal forest should be protected in this way.

For the working or industrial

landscape, a long overdue biodiversity strategy is needed. This should include science-based thresholds and a land disturbance limit for active oil sands mine leases. It also should include a long overdue provincial wetland policy that protects peat wetlands and much better reclamation regulations. These important pieces are essential for the government to live up to the pledge to Alberta’s wildlife Alison Redford made in the weeks before she won her party’s leadership campaign and became Alberta’s premier.

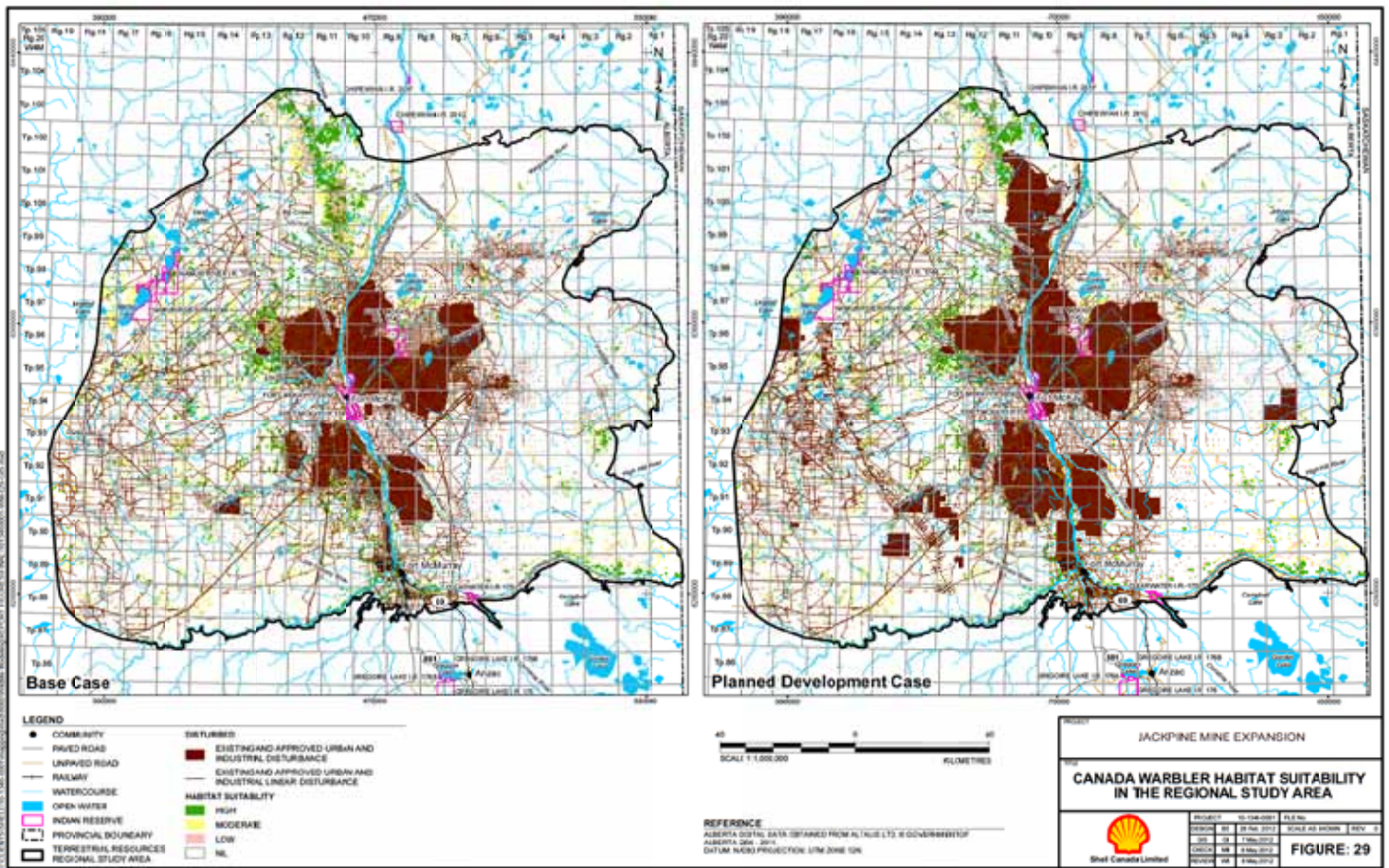
Two recent academic papers identify a lack of cumulative effects management in the mineable oil sands area. Mineable oil sands comprise only three percent of Alberta’s total oil sands area but they extend about 100 kilometres along both sides of the Athabasca River. These lands support a rich aquatic ecosystem draining into the Peace-Athabasca delta, one of the world’s largest inland freshwater deltas. Ninety-nine percent of the mineable oil sands area of 4,750 km² (84 percent of the size of Prince Edward Island) has already been leased. Because of its ecological significance and its importance to First Nations communities, the boreal forest in the mineable oil sands region must not be written off for parkland conversion. Unfortunately, this is the direction we are heading in.

University of Alberta ecologists/biologists Rebecca Rooney, Suzanne Bayley, and David Schindler published a paper in March 2012 where they analyze pre and post-mining vegetation plans of

four representative approved tar sands mines. Scaling up from that analysis, they conclude that for ten mine projects already approved (about 1/3 the size of Prince Edward Island), there will be a significant net loss of peat wetlands and moist tamarack-jack pine forest. White spruce forest, lakes covering mine tailings, and salt marshes will increase in area. This means a marked net loss in carbon storage and sequestration potential. It also means a shift to a drier forest landscape with more fire susceptibility. This, in turn, will mean a younger forest age than the wetter native forest.

University of Alberta wetlands ecologist Lee Foote strongly challenges the pace of oil sands mine development in his 2012 paper *Threshold Considerations and Wetland Reclamation in Alberta’s Mineable Oil Sands*. Foote makes a vital point when he says, “Scientific knowledge and operational techniques are weak or lacking for addressing a suite of impending resource constraints and ecological thresholds.” In particular, he states that petroleum development has not addressed excessive harm to wetlands. The “equivalent land capability” requirement for reclamation “may not fully capture nonmarket ecological goods and services specific to wetlands.”

Discussions at the April 2012 Alberta Society of Professional Biologists (ASPB) conference on “Exploring the Boreal Forest: Oil Sands in Alberta” also signaled major gaps in addressing



In May 2012, the Jackpine mine expansion proposal estimated for the first time the regional effects of all industrial activities. The threatened Canada warbler, which relies on deciduous and mixedwood forest stands, is estimated to lose more than 70 percent of its high quality total core area habitat in this region.

oil sands impacts. During the opening keynote plenary discussion, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) panelist stated that the whole notion of managing cumulative effects is still in its infancy. Since cumulative effects consideration in environmental assessments (EAs) has been required by law since 1992, and Alberta's Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA) was formed in 2000 to manage northeastern Alberta's cumulative industrial impacts, we ought to be far beyond the "infancy" of cumulative effects management. Sadly, we are not. In October 2011, the federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development found that cumulative effects of tar sands mining projects have been inadequately assessed in a number of respects (as reported in the December 2011 issue of *Wild Lands Advocate*).

During the same ASPB plenary session, panelist Flo Wecxsteen of Pembina Institute described how a regulatory joint review panel had finally required a tar sands mine project, Shell's proposed Jackpine Mine Expansion, to

assess reasonably foreseeable regional cumulative effects. This included, for the first time, consideration of: impacts from all current *and disclosed* oil sands projects and activities as of the panel's Terms of Reference date (September 2011); forestry industry cut plans over the operating life of the project; and the effects of past and future forest fires. Congratulations are due to the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition, of which Pembina is a member, for pushing hard for this landmark improvement in environment assessment requirements. Shell produced its revised EA for the Jackpine Mine Expansion in May 2012, twenty years after the law requiring meaningful cumulative effects assessment was passed. Later in the ASPB conference, a consultant who is contributing to current EA work for a pending mine application outlined how their application will take into account these requirements.

It is one thing to belatedly begin to *assess* cumulative effects in the mineable oil sands region, another to actually manage them. Two Alberta government

representatives at the ASPB conference noted that seven operators of oil sands mines have recently prepared updated reclamation and closure plans for government review. In presenting their reclamation and closure plans, companies have flagged concerns including invasive species, the lack of peat wetlands, and "high stakeholder expectations" about what can be done. Apparently, regulations are moving away from prescribing actions in favour of setting desired outcomes that the companies will meet for a "self-sustaining" forest. A changed reclamation policy will require mines to post between year 15 and year 5 of their end-of-life all liabilities including tailings ponds. AWA will report further on these plans once they are available to the public. However, considering the Rooney/Bayley/Schindler and Foote analyses, a major shortcoming remains the absence of cumulative disturbance thresholds that appear to be necessary to preserve the peat wetland landscape of the Lower Athabasca river corridor.

Lee Foote estimates that a provincial wetland policy that required oil sands

companies to replace three wetland hectares for every destroyed hectare over the entire oil sands mineable area would total \$12.9 billion, or about six percent of the profits of the bitumen extracted from that area. He states that this is a lower relative reclamation expense than many other extractive industries face. In AWA's view, requiring this type of compensation is appropriate and would also be very useful in motivating a strong "avoid or minimize wetlands damage" ethos for the rest of the boreal forest. Given that peat reclamation at best will take centuries to be successful, and that success is far from certain, Foote also recommends that the pace of mining production should be slowed via negotiated thresholds. If this does not occur, he cautions that mining may lose its social acceptability. AWA also supports land disturbance thresholds for active mining and in situ oil sands. Multi-stakeholder groups have recommended these thresholds twice: first by a CEMA sub-committee in 2008, and then by the Lower Athabasca regional advisory committee in 2010. These moderate proposals have not yet been adopted by government.

The in situ, or more deeply buried, bitumen deposits comprise 97 percent of Alberta's oil sands area, which is 135,000 km² or roughly the area of Greece. This represents about 35 percent of Alberta's boreal region. Assessing and managing cumulative effects in the in situ area is essential to the overall health of Alberta's boreal forest. The ASPB conference included two presentations on restoring seismic lines in the boreal forest. It was not until 2007 that reclamation rules required restoring woody native species along seismic lines and on well sites; reclamation rules in previous decades assumed that reseeding grass would lead to forest succession. But this proved wrong. Consequently, there is a large backlog of degraded boreal forest habitat due to many thousands of poorly reclaimed seismic lines and well sites. This affects species such as woodland caribou and old-growth forest birds that rely on forest intactness for reproductive success.

At the ASPB conference, a forest ecologist from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development outlined several site-scale approaches to reforestation using woody materials to promote tree survival and reduce invasive species. An

in situ operator's environmental specialist detailed early promising results of winter black spruce replanting in historic linear disturbance in caribou range. While representing a step forward, these studies are still at early stages and have not yet translated into landscape-level practices and policies. Again, a prudent approach suggests slowing the pace of development until ecological thresholds and sound restoration techniques are better understood.

University of Alberta biologist Erin Bayne, who is a Fellow of the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI), had some far-reaching recommendations for the in situ area as part of his ASPB plenary presentation. He noted that with the boreal forest already at significant risk from climate change, there needs to be better attribution of risks from in situ and forestry cumulative effects, as the two together are significantly higher than just forestry. In situ effects are still not integrated well into coarse vegetation landscape targets that Bayne believes are working fairly well for the forestry industry. He posed the question: will we shift out of the boreal ecology into a fundamentally different ecology?

Bayne recommends that Alberta set targets or limits for species and ecosystem diversity, generally referred to as biodiversity. He favours regulatory targets for vegetation types to reduce uncertainty and guide planning and environmental assessments. The only applicable law now is the federal *Species at Risk Act* which, according to Bayne, only "kicks in" when a species is

already in deep trouble. ABMI's surveys to date have showed that so far, seismic lines are having less effect than what people thought in terms of biodiversity in the boreal forest. However, biodiversity targets should be set well before we approach big changes; it's a challenge to find trigger points, as there are non-linear relationships.

Taken together, the findings from this recent conference and research suggest that the prospects for Alberta's boreal forest are poor unless real cumulative effects management is applied soon. AWA will work hard in the coming months to make this case to Premier Redford and her new cabinet colleagues so that, as Redford pledged, "the species that call this province home will still be here for generations to come."▲



Triple Millwell Athabasca Glacier
48"x36", acrylic on canvas
© EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON



An Elegy for the Crownsnest Bull Trout

BY LORNE FITCH, P. Biol.



Bull trout from Allison Creek circa 1920.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE FITCH FAMILY

“Did they beat the drum slowly; did they play the fife lowly? Did the rifles fire over you as they lowered you down?” I put this rhetorical question to the ghosts of the bull trout who once thrived in the upper Crownsnest drainage of southwestern Alberta. The murmur of the river whispers “no;” I cannot help but wonder why. Bull trout existed for more than a geological epoch there; they slipped through the cracks in our careless world in just one human lifetime and no one paid attention. This

mystery merits exploring and that journey asks us to consider geology, hydrology, ecology, history and, inevitably, the human mind.

Bull Trout - Accidental Tourists

The bull trout landscape is, geologically speaking, relatively new. Up to roughly 13,000 years ago, the Cordilleran ice sheet covered Alberta’s Eastern Slopes while the plains were under the mile thick Laurentide sheet. Alpine and continental glaciations

then shaped the watershed in an epoch that lasted another thousand years. From then until a century ago climate, erosion, fire, drought, floods and grazing combined with plant growth, movement and succession to mold the bull trout’s habitat.

Bull trout are hardy. They may have ice water in their veins. They were among Alberta’s first explorers and pioneers. Maybe they began as tourists who became marooned in a new environment. A dozen millennia ago bull trout queued up at the edge of mountain and continental ice masses waiting to test the waters for new opportunity. Glacial refuges for fish existed in the Columbia watershed, the Missouri/Mississippi watershed and in the Yukon. Bull trout probably crossed the continental divide at low spots like the Crownsnest Pass to occupy new waters.

Imagine what these fish found – a raw landscape recently chiseled out of rock and empty of many other fish. Southern Eastern Slope streams were dominated by just three species – bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout and mountain whitefish. How did these fish make a go of it in a changing, dynamic environment?

The operative words to explain their success have to be adaptability and flexibility. Like the India rubber man of circus fame bull trout display an astonishing elasticity in their ability to take advantage of the wide variety of habitat choices their island-like ecosystems offer them. In the Crownsnest they encountered a lake gouged out by glaciers and larger at one time with an ice dam downstream. These pioneers formed a unique, lake dwelling population that spawned in several of the tributaries to the Crownsnest River and reared in these streams and in the river. Some of them shook the evolutionary dice and took up a riverine lifestyle. As some journeyed downstream they plunged over Lundbreck Falls, never to return to the upper Crownsnest.

The key to their survival was the annual return home to small tributaries to spawn. These streams harbour special places where water bubbles up through the gravels, signaling to bull trout that eggs lain there will survive and hatch. Not many of these places exist. These upwellings are of ground water, captured as surface flow possibly kilometres away from the spawning site. We still don’t

understand much about ground water, hidden as it is from our inspection. It could be related to old growth forest. Old growth forests are good sponges; they capture, store and slowly release water. If so then the Crowsnest bull trout survival depends on the health of the entire landscape, the sum of all of the parts, not just a few specific to the water.

The Times They Are A-Changin'

By the 1880s changes in landscape and fish abundance were already evident. North West Mounted Police records from the Pincher Creek post note concerns about declining fish populations. "If only we had been here a few years ago when fish were plentiful," wrote one of the officers. The Crowsnest Pass might have remained a backwater had it not been for the discovery of coal that coincided with the need of a rail line for its transportation. The coming of the Crowsnest Pass Railway in 1898 was the beginning of the end for bull trout. Easier access led to more settlers which begat more human endeavours which further increased access and encroached on native flora and fauna.

As we nudge the time machine dial forward to 1898 the rail line has blocked Blairmore Creek to upstream fish passage. Crowsnest Creek starts to feel the pressure of development as limestone quarrying begins in 1903. Over time the quarry's activities blanket the stream bottom and part of the substrate of Crowsnest Lake with limestone fines and dust. Later the stream suffers channelization, major channel shifts and culvert crossings. Coal mining fines and sediment are added to those from the quarries. Around 1910 a dam is built to control York Creek and for a municipal water supply. Concerns about forest fires lead to extremely high levels of livestock grazing to reduce fuel loads. Suspect grazing practices in the Crowsnest Pass, coupled with overharvest of timber for mine props and railway ties, contribute to a number of serious floods in the Crowsnest Pass in the 1920s and 1930s. Nez Perce and McGillivray creeks are channelized after severe flooding in Coleman in 1923. Later, McGillivray Creek receives coal mine effluent in the form of red ferrous oxide which coats the stream bottom. Gold Creek is dammed. The list of human impacts on the tributaries grows with each passing decade.

The Crowsnest River suffered from similar changes and impacts. The most severe were those from the coal mines along the river's banks. Coal fines, dust and sediment poured into the river, off and on for about 75 years. People recall the Crowsnest River running black with coal fines and sediment during spring runoff and after every rainstorm. Slack coal was dumped directly into the river, as an effective though devastating way to flush it away. Duane Radford, a provincial biologist born in the Pass, recalls the river being a "veritable wasteland" for nearly 30 kilometres from Coleman to Passburg.

This can be an issue for fish that are sight feeders; the greater impact was on juvenile bull trout. Juveniles hide under and behind rocks and can even overwinter within the gravel of an apparently dry streambed. Accumulating sediments have a tendency to cover and cement stream bottom materials together smothering everything under this aquatic mudslide. There is no place left for the juvenile trout to feed, to survive.

Hungry people filled the Crowsnest Pass, especially in the days of stingy mine owners. During strikes at the mines people turned to hunting and fishing to survive. Angling pressure was very high,

not least from using the "CIL wiggler", a euphemism miners used for fishing with dynamite. This appalled my uncle, an avid outdoorsman and a miner, but, as was often the case then, he said nothing.

Eighty years of angling took its toll on bull trout. But development in the Crowsnest Pass watershed sounded the trout's death knell. Coal mining and logging affected virtually every portion of the watershed. Those land uses combined with residential development meant that by the 1950s only one spawning tributary in the upper watershed didn't have a dam or a barrier to upstream movement across it. Bull trout that run into dams or other obstructions when homing in on their natal streams cannot make other travel plans.

Females will deposit thousands of eggs in a depression excavated in the gravels of a stream bottom. Not all will survive to hatch, let alone reach maturity. But in some years, when things are just right, more will survive to create what fish biologists call a "strong year class." This added bench strength will carry the population through the bad times when the numbers of recruits are low. Our development ambitions insured that this vital bull trout survival mechanism would vanish. To paraphrase Pogo: "They met



McGillivray creek/settling ponds, 1979.

PHOTO: © L. FITCH



Crowsnest valley upstream of Coleman, 2007.

PHOTO: © L. FITCH

the enemy and it was us.”

Slip Sliding Away

The last hope for the Crowsnest bull trout was Allison Creek. Gordon Kerr, a biologist and former Assistant Deputy Minister of Alberta’s Fish and Wildlife Division whose family has a long history in the Crowsnest witnessed what was probably the final act in the bull trout tragedy. Gordon remembers, as a teenager, watching the Highways Department straightening out all the meanders of his favorite trout stream not more than a few fly casts from his parent’s home. The rifle-shot straight channel was designed to protect a new bridge over Allison Creek; it’s a pity no one knew enough then to protect the bull trout. Unwinding the stream unleashed a massive amount of erosion that formed an impassible gravel bar at the mouth of the creek. That condition persisted for years after the channelization in 1953. With this last door closed, 10,000 years of bull trout prosperity and survival in the upper Crowsnest watershed ended.

Perhaps the bull trout might have survived there if we had valued them decades ago. We never really did. Their carnivorous habits (and their size) fuelled the sentiment that bull trout were

undesirable since they competed with the “nobler” trout. An attitude prevailed then (and still does amongst some) that bull trout should be eliminated. A passage from a southern Alberta newspaper, circa 1926, uses chilling language to describe the prevailing attitudes towards bull trout: “the association is also urging government to take steps to destroy the enemy of rainbow trout... It is suggested the fish be destroyed by dynamiting the places they are known to infest”. Kevin Van Tighem, in his poignant essay “My Grandfather’s Trout,” writes, “In the 1950’s bull trout were easy protein at best, and junk fish at worst.” How could such a rational species as ourselves protect that which we denigrated?

If we had valued bull trout highly I’m skeptical that such an attitude could have triumphed over our pattern of propping up and defending economic interests often at the expense of everything else. When local sportsmen’s clubs complained about water pollution no local politicians had the spine to stand up to mining and other business interests. The mine owners simply threatened to close the mines and go elsewhere to quiet any opposition. Industry’s defenders sometimes grasped at the slimmest of

straws to protect the economic status quo. One local politician suggested coal dust was good for trout because it warmed up the water and allowed trout to move further upstream.

No one really knows when the last, lonely bull trout succumbed. The loss is unrecorded. So, what did we lose? Sadly, we will never know if the Crowsnest bull trout were the ancestors to populations in the Oldman and Castle watersheds, separated as they had been by Lundbreck Falls. Loss of genetic diversity hampers attempts at restoration. We lost an ancient neighbor with an enviable survival record. Anglers lost an opportunity to pit themselves against a fish that grew to sizes large enough to frighten small children. The ecosystem lost a precious, perhaps vital, cog. Bull trout are to the aquatic world what the grizzly bear is to the terrestrial one. But, mostly, we don’t know what we lost because our understanding and comprehension of aquatic systems is so rudimentary. We don’t measure, we don’t monitor, and we don’t pay attention. When we don’t pay attention, things go missing.

It took just seven decades, roughly a person’s lifespan, to wipe out these



Crowsnest Lake, 2007.
PHOTO: © L. FITCH

fish. We can criticize the ignorance and actions of people in the past, of corporate greed, of individual apathy and of institutions not keeping watch over the natural resources entrusted to them. If only they had connected the dots and implemented a strategy for protecting and preserving some of the unique pieces of biodiversity. One can't condemn, out of hand, the actions of people bettering themselves in the Crowsnest Pass 50 to 100 years ago. However, their efforts to better their lot are also those that contributed to depriving later generations of bull trout. Today, we should see this history as a cautionary tale, of what the future may well deliver if we let our passion for economic growth blind us to other important values.

Requiem for the Bull Trout

Perhaps a memorial to the bull trout is of little consequence now. We do not feel the need to mourn that which we do not understand enough to miss. Tourists might read the inscription, but their thoughts will not flow from the plaque to the fish that no longer exists. The wonder isn't that the bull trout disappeared, but that they survived as long as they did in the Crowsnest. Bull trout were very

good at what they did – survival – despite the odds. We were very good at what we still do – cause things to disappear – even though we should know better. Perhaps that is what should be writ large in a prominent spot as a reminder not to do it again (and again). Fish and wildlife are part of our myths, history, lives and

landscape; sadly they can slip away and become only a part of our memory, and worst, we may forget them altogether. If a worse thing could be imagined than losing something of value, it must be to forget that something irreplaceable has been lost.

Requiescat in pace, the bull trout of the Crowsnest. 🍄



Intersection Mtn. -Willmore Wilderness, Cassket Lake
40"x30", acrylic on canvas
© EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON

Association News

AWA's 21st Annual Climb and Run for Wilderness!

By Susan Mate, AWA Volunteer



Four little bear cubs scaled the Calgary Tower to celebrate Earth Day and raise money for Alberta's wild lands and

wildlife.

With a combined age of 14, the four pint-sized climbers were among an estimated 1,150 participants in the 21st annual Climb & Run for Wilderness fundraiser held at the Calgary Tower on April 21.

"It's for the bears," said Wyler Rempel, at five years old the most senior member of the Four Bear Cubs team. He and sister Eden, 3, climbed the 802 steps with friends Laurel Thorsteinson and Sofia L'Heureux, both also 3. Parents accompanied the kids and helped recruit sponsors for the Alberta Wilderness Association event.

"I think all of us like to be outside in nature. We appreciate what this organization is doing," said mom Jessika L'Heureux.

This year, participants pulled together and raised a record-breaking \$108,000 in registrations and individual sponsorships. The day's colourful event featured a cast of conservation-minded characters including climbers in outlandish outfits – as well as four uniformed firefighters, each toting 65 pounds of gear to the tower top.

Fire Captain Danny Freeman stayed at the tower base – just in case of an emergency. "They can't climb too many times – if we have a fire we need them to have the energy to fight a fire," he joked. It was the first tower climb for firemen Tom Barker, Todd Berry, Mike Reid and Colin White, though Freeman noted trudging stairs "is a big part of what they do" at work.

Calgary Liberal MLA David Swann – a great supporter of AWA – completed the climb with his son-in-law and three grandkids. "We are losing our environment at an alarming rate – events like these are important to highlight the commitment people will make. Our wild lands are a healing place, and we need leadership on this in the province." We were thrilled that, two days later, Dr. Swann was re-

elected to the Calgary Centre riding in the provincial election.

Grade 4 and 5 students from Alex Munro School did their part by painting two murals in the tower staircase during their spring break, then making crafts such as greeting cards and painted canvas checkerboards from recycled/repurposed materials. They sold them at a display to raise money for AWA.

"It was a good opportunity to tie this into our curriculum," said teacher Jon Morrison, who teamed up with teacher Cathie Gould on the project. "Bringing them out here socializes them, it's changing attitudes and the tie-in with this event and the AWA is just perfect," Gould added.

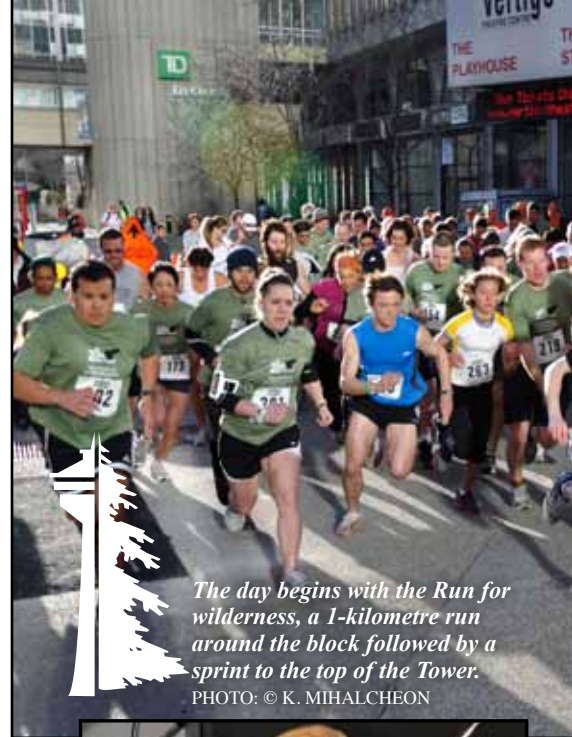
"It's a serious cause, but people have such a good time. It's our celebration of Earth Day and Earth Week, and raising awareness about environmental issues," said AWA conservation specialist Nigel Douglas. "By the end of the day, I'm always totally inspired by the people I see."

The five-hour event drew both teams and individuals aged 3 to 93, completing enough ascents to top the elevation of Mount Everest.

For the third year in a row, Jonathan Heinz took home the prize as the fastest racer and climber. He also scaled the tower more times than anyone else – 30 times. (Last year, he broke the record with 31 ascents.) Shannon Winslade climbed 25 times – more than any other female. Other awards went to different age groups and categories.

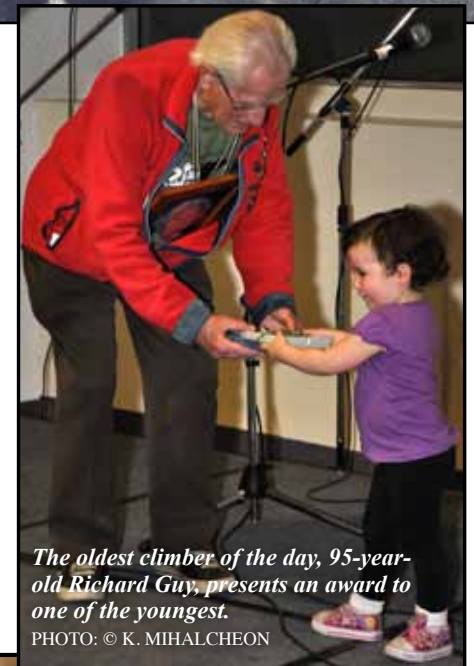
Entertainment throughout the day featured local performers and included everything from belly dancers to clowns, mascots and face-painters. More than 30 groups took part in the **Wild Alberta Expo** fair.

The AWA is grateful to its many sponsors, 150 volunteers, and the hundreds of supporters who made this event such a success. Please see our website for a complete list of winners and updates on funds raised. 🌲



The day begins with the Run for wilderness, a 1-kilometre run around the block followed by a sprint to the top of the Tower.

PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



The oldest climber of the day, 95-year-old Richard Guy, presents an award to one of the youngest.

PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



Jonathan Heinz once again won the timed race event, and then went straight on to climb the Tower another thirty times.

PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

© Jose Quiroz 2012



An event like this could never take place without the awesome volunteers who help out; 150 volunteers took part in this year's Climb.
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



Calgary firefighters climbed all 802 stairs carrying 65 pounds of gear!
PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ



Mural competition winners receive their prize from Alderman Druh. Farrell
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



Norma Ruecker presents the adorable Four Bear Cubs with their award for the youngest team at the Climb.
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



Standing room only as the climbers get ready for the start.
PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ



One family even took bets to see who could raise the most pledge money. Guess who lost the bet!
PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON

AWA and the Calgary Youth Science Fair

AWA Board Member Jim Campbell presents Chang Su - Western Canada High School with AWA Calgary Youth Science Fair Wild Alberta award. The award is presented annually to the best student project that relates the dependency of wildlife and water on wilderness.



Photo: Jim Campbell and Chang Su Western Canada HS Award winner.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE CALGARY YOUTH SCIENCE FAIR

Getting the Word (and Sound) Out: Turning the Hillhurst Cottage School into One of Calgary's Best Venues

By Sean Nichols, AWA Outreach Specialist



What do Banff park wardens, bark beetles, a young and talented accordionist, a beloved Calgary naturalist, and the world's foremost expert in grizzly bear behaviour all have in common?

As anyone who has come out to one of our many events this last fall and winter could tell you, these are some of the diverse guests who have shared the stage at AWA's Hillhurst Cottage School in the last six months.

On Saturday May 12, the Hillhurst Room played host to *The Wardens*, a trio of wardens from Banff National Park sharing their tales of adventure and misadventure on the park trails through song and story.

This entertaining evening was the perfect capstone to a very successful 2011-2012 season of talks and music. Since October, three other "Music for the Wild" evenings have also helped introduce the community to AWA. These evenings featured many artists including singer-songwriter *Rob Heath*, acoustic bluegrass band *The Tragically Hick*, and of course *Robbie and Will*, the incredibly talented multi-instrumentalists who sold out the Hillhurst Room (and then some!) months in advance. Each of these musical groups was complemented with an opening act, for example the country music act *Prairie's Edge*, who delighted the Hillhurst School's Kensington neighbourhood by performing an impromptu outdoor concert on the sidewalk for passers-by after warming up for their set.

At \$15 a ticket (including all the snacks and finger food guests can eat), all of AWA's Music for the Wild evenings provide one of the best deals in town, as well as serving the equally-important purpose of introducing the community to AWA's conservation work, gaining new fans, members and supporters. The Music for the Wild series, having now completed its fourth year, are organized and emceed by tireless AWA volunteer George Campbell, who was recently thanked with a weekend getaway to an Abraham Lake resort in the Bighorn.

The only better deal this year were the

five instalments of AWA's long-running series of Tuesday Talks. This season's public lectures were given by the eminent scientists at September's sage-grouse workshop, by naturalist Gus Yaki, talking about how to re-engage youth with Nature, by Alberta Conservation Association's Paul Jones, on the life of the pronghorn antelope, by author Andrew Nikiforuk who explored the "Wildest Creature in the Woods," the pine beetle, and by Peter Sherrington, who introduced everyone to the fascinating migration of the golden eagles.

Finally, this year saw the introduction of a third leg to our open house "easel." A programme of Saturday evening film nights was kicked off with a pair of movies: *White Water*, *Black Gold*

followed the journey taken by a drop of water from Mount Snow Dome in the Columbia Icefield to Lake Athabasca. This was followed up a few months later with *Staying Safe in Bear Country*, hosted by bear behaviour expert and AWA Wilderness Defenders Award winner Dr. Stephen Herrero.

All in all, it's been an eventful season at our little school. We're not sure how we're going to top this in 2012-2013, but we have some ideas in mind, starting with a talk on amphibians in early October. We hope you're as excited as we are, and will join us on one of those upcoming nights, discovering for yourself why so many have pronounced the 102-year-old Hillhurst Cottage School one of Calgary's best venues for music and talks!▲



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Updates

2012 Federal Budget Weakens Environmental Laws

Bill C-38, introduced in the House of Commons on April 26, is the legislation designed to implement the federal government's March 2012 budget. This bill has been called an omnibus bill because it proposes to make many changes to many federal laws. Conservationists should be concerned since it proposes to weaken significantly Canada's most important environmental laws. Given the majority enjoyed by Prime Minister Harper's party in the House of Commons the budget implementation bill was certain to pass; it did so and received Royal Assent on June 29th. Aside from the cuts to national parks funding (to be profiled by Ian Urquhart in the August issue of *WLA*), AWA is most concerned about three aspects of the proposed budget.

First, there is the process. The government's process is poor and designed to minimize parliamentary and public scrutiny of its proposals. Sweeping changes to environmental law are camouflaged in a huge and complex budget. The 420-page budget bill proposes to amend 60 laws and eliminate six others. Two-thirds of the bill targets major national environmental laws. Significantly, the only House committee examining this legislation is the Finance Committee. Given the breadth and scope of these proposed changes they should be reviewed by the environment and fisheries-related House of Commons committees, not by the House Finance Committee. These other committees could call expert witnesses, have time to evaluate effects, and consider amendments. Canadians would have a more meaningful say. As well, the federal government invoked "closure" to limit second reading debate on this far-reaching budget.

Second, the budget significantly weakens Environmental Assessments (EAs). EAs today are supposed to ensure that individual and cumulative impacts of development projects are understood beforehand and reduced. EAs link projects to federal laws and obligations for species at risk, migratory birds, fisheries and aboriginal rights. In a thorough EA process, regulators require

actions from project proponents to avoid, lessen or offset expected project impacts.

The budget measures eliminate – completely strike from the statute books – the legal definition of which projects must receive EAs. This decision will be left to ministerial discretion. The measures also remove the requirements to consider cumulative effects and to consider effects on renewable resources. The government has also stated it will not spend resources on EAs for smaller dollar value projects that used to be assessed, even though their environmental impacts can be considerable. Overall, the budget will greatly reduce what environmental impacts in Canada will be assessed.

The budget will also significantly reduce public participation in EAs. For high impact projects subject to "review panels" or National Energy Board hearings (such as the Gateway pipeline or oil sands mines), open public participation will be removed; instead, regulators will only include those "directly affected" or who are judged have relevant information or expertise. For screenings or comprehensive studies (lower intensity reviews), the provinces will now be able to run what the Minister decides is an "appropriate substitute" EA process. This is a concern because some provinces, including Alberta, have markedly weaker public participation rules and because the federal government has different responsibilities – for fisheries, migratory birds and aboriginal rights, for example – that provinces do not have.

The budget will drastically weaken the Fisheries Act. It removes a major protection to Canada's waters. Healthy rivers not only protect fish, they protect our water quality, prevent floods and prevent droughts. Since 1977 the Fisheries Act has protected fish habitat. In recent years, developments that harm fish habitat have usually been required to provide offset for that damage although discretion and poor enforcement weaken this compensation mechanism. AWA believes this protection needs to be improved, not worsened. The budget measures go in entirely the wrong direction by allowing the federal cabinet to order protection only to fish that are in identified fisheries, not to fish habitat generally. This is a giant step backwards in protection: how can there be fish without clean fresh water and

healthy river corridors that both they and their food sources need to survive? The budget will also make it easier to suspend protection. The federal government should strengthen, not weaken, crucial habitat protection for Canada's fish and enhance Fisheries and Oceans' scientific and regulatory capacity.

AWA urges its supporters to speak up for stronger, not weaker, environmental laws and enforcement capacity as essential for a healthy economy and society.

- Carolyn Campbell

Spray Lake Sawmills Not Yet Ready for Sustainable Forestry Approval

Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS) has been unsuccessful in its application to certify the forests it logs and reforests as being sustainably managed. The company applied in 2010 for certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) for the Kananaskis and Ghost parts of its operations. The application was for the forests covered by Spray Lake Sawmills' twenty-year Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with the Alberta government: from the southern tip of Kananaskis Country north to Sundre. These forests do not include the forests of the Castle or the Livingstone.

Though far from the ideal, the FSC certification is generally seen as the best of the current sustainable management certification programs. It is the only internationally-recognized program and the only one that includes community consultation as part of the process. Though there are various "made-in-Canada" certification programs, they have little credibility outside industry and government circles.

AWA was invited to submit our comments as part of the FSC application process. We have been pushing SLS for many years to improve its forest management standards to bring them up to FSC levels. So our comments supported their application but maintained that there would need to be many changes to the company's operations before they crossed the "sustainable" threshold. AWA believes their forest management needs to do a much better job of respecting the non-timber values of forests such as wildlife and recreation. Their continued emphasis on felling huge clearcut blocks of trees also needs to change.

Strangely, though AWA was notified by the FSC auditors, Rainforest Alliance, that SLS's application for certification had been unsuccessful, the reasons for the failure remain confidential. All we know is that four "Major Non-Conformances Reports" were issued.

The considerable local opposition to plans for clearcut logging in West Bragg Creek make it very clear that the company and the Alberta government have a long way to go when it comes to achieving the high standards of public participation set out by the FSC. But AWA remains willing to continue to work with Spray Lake Sawmills to help improve their operations to bring them up to a genuinely sustainable standard. Alberta's forests deserve nothing less.

- Nigel Douglas

Pincher Creek Residents Appreciate the Value of Environmental Conservation

Residents of Pincher Creek in southwestern Alberta have a clear and strong appreciation of the value their local environment plays in their daily lives. And they are also clear about what activities they do not want to see on the landscape. When it comes to land use, a very recent study identified increased motorized recreation and clearcut logging in the Castle as the two most unpopular activities amongst local residents.

This March 2012 study, *Community Values Assessment for the M.D. of Pincher Creek No. 9*, was prepared by the Praxis Group for the Southwest Alberta Sustainable Community Initiative and the Municipal District of Pincher Creek.

The findings were based partly on a telephone survey of 332 MD residents and partly on facilitated group sessions with local stakeholders. The survey asked residents of the MD of Pincher Creek to rate the importance of 38 "value statements." Five of the 15 highest rated "value statements" related to environmental conservation:

- "protecting the natural environment within the MD"
- "conserving and protecting water resources"
- "practicing sustainable agriculture"
- "protecting the natural environment around the MD"
- "maintaining natural wildlife and fish populations"

Survey participants were also asked

to rate their support or opposition to various land uses on a scale of one (strongly oppose) to five (strongly support). The strongest level of support was for "enforcing appropriate use of public lands" (ranking 4.14), closely followed by "setting aside land in an undisturbed state for habitat protection" (ranking 3.86). Conversely, the strongest opposition was to "more opportunities for motorized recreation, such as off-roading, dirt biking" (ranking 2.17), followed by "allowing clear-cut logging in the Castle Special Management Area" (ranking 2.29).

This clear opposition to clearcut logging in the Castle reinforces a number of previous studies that pointed to the deep unpopularity of industrial forestry in such sensitive headwaters forests. Opinion polls conducted in 2011 by the Lethbridge Citizen Society Research Lab and Praxis found 79.5 percent and 85 percent of respondents respectively were "strongly opposed" or "somewhat opposed" to commercial logging in the Castle.

The new community values study mentions that participants in the group sessions expressed dissatisfaction at the fact that "land use and environmental management decisions are being made at the provincial level and, although the community has been consulted, decisions often do not reflect the preferences and environmental values of the community." Participants called for "meaningful community-based consultation on issues or decisions affecting the environment."

Participants also talked about the importance of basing environmental management decisions on sound, evidence-based science. If the province's South Saskatchewan Regional Plan is ever to become a reality, we hope its authors will pay close attention to this significant community values study.

- Nigel Douglas



"Protecting the natural environment" and "conserving and protecting water resources" were ranked as two of the highest values by residents of Pincher Creek.

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

Standing Up for Neighbours and Community in Jasper

I suspect many conservationists have reacted to the news about the recent cuts to Parks Canada by first thinking about the damage these cuts will do to Canada's natural and cultural heritage. But what about the people who work for Parks Canada? People in Jasper have rallied around that question. They've organized to voice support for their neighbours who are "affected" or "surplussed" by these cuts.

No national park in Alberta has been hit as hard by job cuts as Jasper. Fifty-two workforce adjustment notices were served to Parks Canada staff in Jasper. The lost livelihoods and reduced income delivered by these notices do more than threaten nature and culture. They will ripple through Jasper and damage the community's economic and social fabric. The same will be true in Banff, Waterton... all Parks Canada communities throughout Canada.



Residents in southwestern Alberta have made their opposition to clearcut logging very obvious in recent months

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

This belief has led a group of largely non-Parks Canada citizens to mobilize to try to raise public awareness about this dimension of the cuts. They just couldn't stand silently by and see the lives of their neighbours suffer. One person put it this way: "Both of my neighbours, a couple, were 'affected,' one being 'surplussed' with the other being 'affected'... who does that to one family?" My interviewee went on to talk about another friend who, after a lifetime in the warden service, was told he would be let go. This involuntary early retirement would reduce his pension significantly. "This makes me furious," she said. "I have seen this man's entire family commit themselves to the Parks and the values behind the creation of our parks only to be shoved off a metaphorical cliff..."

The group has tried to raise the profile of the public service cuts in several ways. Community members have joined with the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Canadian Auto Workers Union to run a series of ads in *The Fitzhugh*, Jasper's newspaper. They've created a Facebook page "I Love Jasper National Park" and have invited people to share with the world what they love about the park. During Jasper's annual Environmental Fair in June they organized a mini concert in Jasper where local musicians and other artists dedicated their contributions to the land that inspires them and to those who dedicate themselves to being the stewards of our natural heritage.

Their effort to show frontline public servants in Parks Canada how important they are to the future of our national park system is inspiring. We hope other national parks communities will follow their example.

- Ian Urquhart



Regional Planning in the South Saskatchewan Region. Or Maybe Not.

The future of regional planning in the South Saskatchewan is uncertain, to say the least. In 2009, the province's long-running Land-use Framework (LUF) process divided the province into seven regions loosely based on watersheds. Land-use plans would be prepared for each region starting with the Lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan regions. The intention was to complete all the plans by the end of 2012 but neither of the first two regional plans has yet been completed.

The government-appointed Regional Advisory Council (RAC) for the South Saskatchewan submitted its recommendations for a regional plan in March 2011; since then the process has stalled. Political machinations have undoubtedly been part of the problem. The original public consultations, scheduled to be completed by December 2011, were suspended in part because of the upheaval of the Progressive Conservative party's leadership contest. The consultations were postponed till April 30 2012 but the provincial election delayed those consultations once again.

What happens next is anybody's guess. The promised public consultation process has not been completed because the public meetings never took place. But the online "workbook" that allowed Albertans to provide their comments on the South Saskatchewan RAC's recommendations has now been removed from the government's website. In its place the government offers the tantalizing sentence: "Stakeholder and public consultations on the advice are anticipated at a later date."

AWA believes the RAC recommendations are disappointing. They are weak and will need considerable strengthening if the final Regional Plan is to live up to its expectations. But we still support the Land-use Framework process and wonder if our support for the process is stronger than the government's. The LUF recognized a planning vacuum, which had failed for many years to manage the cumulative impact of numerous activities taking place on the same landscape. In 2008 the government's *Land-Use Framework* document concluded: "We have reached a tipping point, where sticking with the old rules will not produce the quality of life we have come to expect." Four years on



"Historically, watershed and recreation were deemed the priority uses of the Eastern Slopes. These priorities should be confirmed, and sooner rather than later." Land-Use Framework, 2008. Government of Alberta

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

that conclusion still stands. The "tipping" continues; this planning mish-mash from which Alberta's lands suffer is still in place and still in urgent need of repair. The sooner the government backs up its good words with actions the better.

We will keep you informed if and when any opportunities for public participation arise.

- Nigel Douglas

Great News for Kananaskis Country!

At the end of May, AWA received the news that Kananaskis Country has won a reprieve from a proposed sour gas development. The long-running saga of the proposed Sullivan development – 11 new sour gas wells and 37 kilometres of pipeline – has finally come to an end. And the big winners are the wilderness landscapes and wildlife of southern Kananaskis Country!

Back in June 2010, despite widespread public opposition, ERCB granted Suncor permission to drill 11 sour gas wells in the Bull Creek Hills, and build 37 km of pipeline across a swathe of relatively pristine foothills habitat. Opposition to Suncor's application had come from local landowner groups, environmental organizations such as AWA, and the Stoney Nakoda people of the Eden Valley Reserve.



From an Eagle's Eye
30"x40", acrylic on canvas
© EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON



The beautiful Bull Creek Hills received a reprieve when the long-running Sullivan sour gas development was withdrawn in May 2012.

PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

Suncor announced the withdrawal of its application in a letter mailed May 29, citing low natural gas prices as one of the principal reasons. AWA believes the continuing legal challenges to the ill-fated development likely also played a role. As described in the April 2012 issue of *WLA*, earlier this year the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the Stoney Indian Band in its appeal of the 2010 ERCB approval decision. The court concluded: "In our view, the board did not exercise discretion in a justifiable, transparent or intelligible way."

Whatever the reason, the withdrawal of the application is good news for Kananaskis Country and the threatened grizzlies and cutthroat trout which would likely have paid the price of development. AWA invested a great deal of energy in opposing the original Sullivan application, including a November 2008 presentation at the ERCB hearings. Though the original case was "lost" in the



Hidden Lakes, Willmore Wilderness, PO443
 38"x53", acrylic on canvas
 © EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON

sense that the application was approved, it goes to show that inappropriate developments can be defeated, given the right set of circumstances.

- Nigel Douglas

Two Cheers for the Defenders of Rural Montana

The ripples from exploiting Alberta's tar sands travel far and wide. Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake project is one good example of how both the industrial and environmental dimensions of this development are globalized. Imperial contracted with South Korean fabricators to build modules for its \$11 billion first phase of its Kearl mining project. The plan called for the modules to be built in Korea, shipped to Vancouver Washington, barged up the Columbia River to Lewiston Idaho, and then shipped as more than 200 over-size loads of plant equipment (too large for interstate highways) over some of the most scenic

highways in Idaho and Montana to the Canadian border. The intent was to create a permanent corridor for shipping such loads to the tar sands (See Joyce Hildebrand's article in the February 2008 issue of the *WLA* on this proposal when it was first hatched.).

These plans sparked intense grassroots opposition. For nearly two years an eclectic assortment of more than three-dozen organizations in the Pacific Northwest fought this proposal. Missoula County joined conservation groups in launching a lawsuit to prevent the loads from moving over non-interstate highways. They won a preliminary injunction in 2011 stopping the shipments until the Montana Department of Transportation completed a thorough environmental assessment of the Project. This preliminary injunction was upheld in February 2012.

Exxon/Mobil (Imperial's majority shareholder) responded to the legal

challenges by disassembling the over-size project modules. Smaller components could be transported over interstate highways. Most were then reassembled in the Edmonton area before being shipped north of Fort McMurray.

In June of this year Exxon/Mobil announced it was abandoning the proposal to use Highway 12 to ship its over-sized loads. Two cheers go out to the landowners, conservationists, and municipal officials for their success in defending the character of the places they love and call home. We are saving our third cheer until we see a more responsible approach to exploiting the tar sands, one that won't require the shipment of any loads at all from Lewiston to Fort McMurray.

- Ian Urquhart

Recall of the Wild

A Lone Voice in the Wilderness: Michael Bloomfield on Woodland Caribou

By Nigel Douglas

At a time when scientists in Canada are increasingly being ignored, muzzled and demonized by their political bosses it is a salutary experience to talk to Michael Bloomfield, Alberta's provincial caribou specialist between 1978 and 1983. It seems that government's bullying of scientists is nothing new; even thirty years ago, conscientious scientists were required to stick their necks out and resort to inventive, roundabout, sometimes devious methods to try to do their jobs properly.

Now living in Victoria B.C. Bloomfield is founder and executive director of Harmony Foundation of Canada. No stranger to controversy then or now, he popped his head above the parapet again in April this year, when he wrote a piece for the *Edmonton Journal* that was highly critical of present and past management of Alberta's woodland caribou. "Let's make no mistake," he wrote, "habitat loss from logging, mining, oil and gas development and roads has been, and continues to be, the primary cause of the caribou decline."

For more than 30 years, Alberta scientists have been warning politicians about the devastating effects of poorly-planned industrial activity on the province's threatened woodland caribou. And for more than 30 years governments have dithered, delayed and obfuscated, refusing to do anything to even slow down the decline, let alone reverse it. "There is a tendency for government to say, 'If only we had known'," points out Bloomfield. "That's why I jumped in to say: 'Wait a second, you did know! I made it clear 30 years ago and the recommendations are no different now to how they were then. Except the situation

now is more desperate, because you neglected it'." Even thirty years later, Bloomfield is still trying to do his best by the animals he studied. "I wanted to say: 'here's a historical perspective that puts the lie to the view that this is something that we've recently become aware of'."

The struggle begins

Bloomfield started work in 1978 as Alberta's provincial caribou specialist and regional wildlife biologist for west-central Alberta. "I was recruited because I was the first person in 20 years who had done any serious research on woodland caribou in western Canada," he recalls today. What he found was a caribou population already in trouble in Alberta and a provincial bureaucracy ill-equipped to deal with the problem. Bloomfield's immediate bosses within the Fish and Wildlife division were keen to do the right thing. "(We were) a young, dynamic staff, early in the days of environmental

"Can we not as Albertans, as Canadians, find some place in all of that for other species and the future health of the environment and the people who live in it?"

work," he says. "We were encouraged to do things that took our role seriously, not just to rubber stamp development." Unfortunately, Bloomfield believes that attitude was the exception rather than the rule within government circles. "Caribou were being managed, whether it was hunting or land use, with little more than indifference," he suggests. The general attitude seemed to be: "Let's make some grand assumptions, allow for hunting and not worry about it."

Then, as now, the Fish and Wildlife division was at the bottom of the heap when it came to any real power to make management decisions. "We had no authority, we were just in an advisory role at best," he says. "The forest service predominantly had the responsibility for land-use management; issuing permits and enforcing them." During Bloomfield's years with Fish and Wildlife, "(t)he agency responsible for mineral exploration development could make decisions on whether or not these industrial developments were permitted without any input from Fish and Wildlife." (Many times throughout

my conversation with Bloomfield, the thought pops into my head: "That's exactly how things still are today!")

As a scientist, Bloomfield's first focus was the need for good scientific data to inform management decisions, but right from the beginning, getting a budget allocated for this essential work was not an easy job. "I couldn't get any funding for (my research)," he recalls, "so on an annual basis I would submit a research proposal for caribou with a letter to my bosses saying 'this is what we need in order to properly manage and protect this species: if I don't hear from you otherwise, I'm going to spend this money'." If resources were never officially approved, then neither were they officially denied and that was enough for Bloomfield.

For Bloomfield it was clear why caribou were in such trouble in west-central Alberta at the time. "This part of Alberta – near Edson, Hinton, Grande

Cache – was probably under the heaviest development pressure in the province for oil and gas, mining, forestry and recreational activity," Bloomfield points out.

In Bloomfield's mind

the very close, cooperative relationship between the Forest Service and industry at the time was "incestuous."

He gives a number of examples of where government refused to act against industry. "We'd be flying winter surveys of moose, elk and goats and sometimes we'd find a well drilled beyond the operation of the ministerial permit. By the time I got back in the office, we'd have a call telling us to back off."

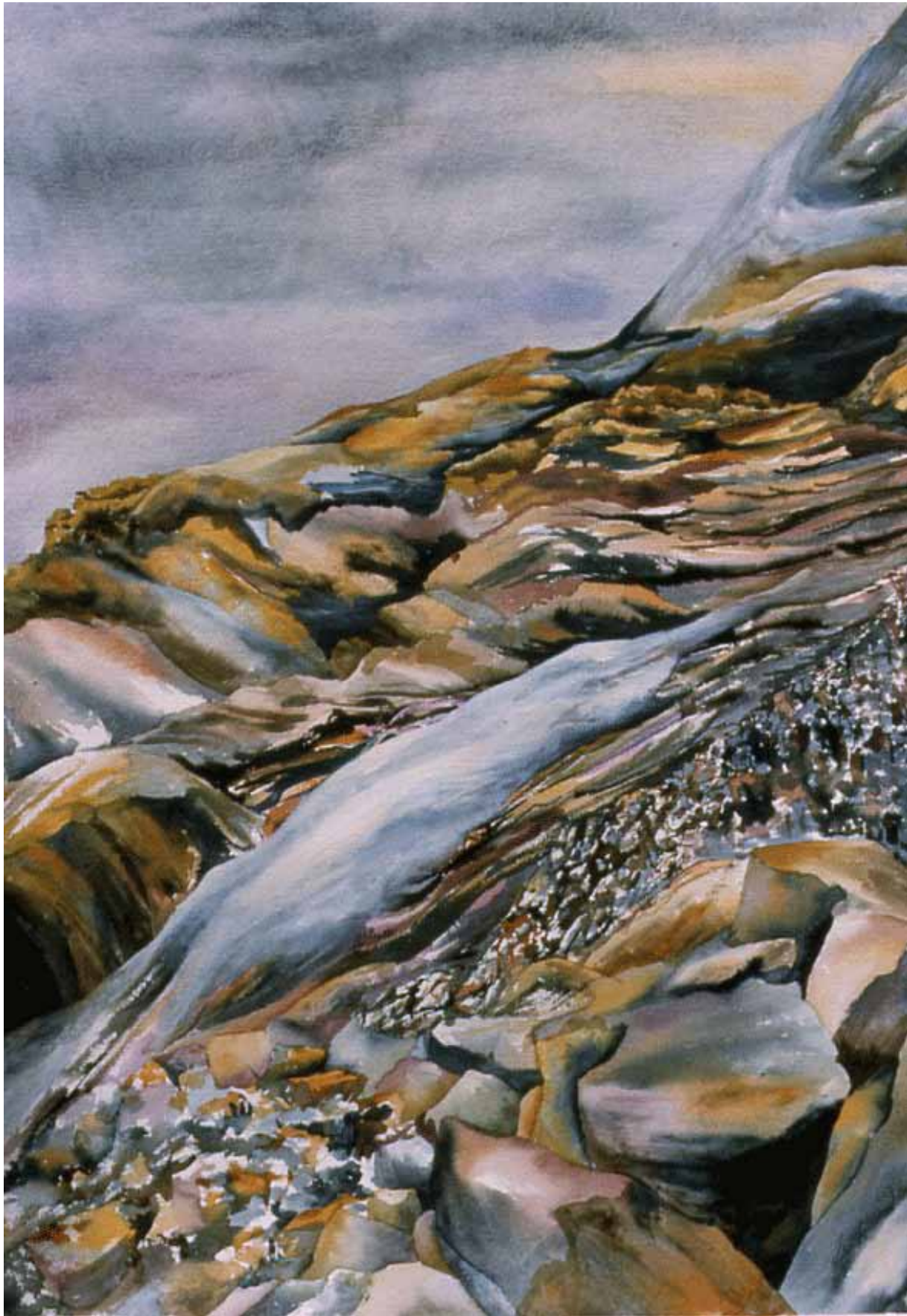
In another case, while flying aerial surveys, his team discovered more than a dozen illicit airfields being used by staff and executives from oil and logging companies: "The evidence was that they were being used as illegal hunting camps." Bloomfield reported the airfields. "I really couldn't get any action on these," he remembers. "We were not exactly a priority to listen to." So instead he had to resort to more roundabout methods. That year, he proposed an intensive tree-planting program, using summer students from his own division and the Forest Service. Those trees just happened to get planted on the illegal airstrips. This did not go over well in the

government although “what we’d done was the right thing, which was to protect wildlife from illegal hunting, put to bed illegal landing strips and to plant trees.”

Banning the caribou hunt

Another area in which Bloomfield put his career on the line, and raised the ire of his bosses, was the continuing caribou hunt in Alberta. “I wanted to close the caribou hunting season, not because I was blaming hunting alone for the decline but because any mortality that could be eliminated had to be eliminated just to protect numbers,” he says. AWA and the Alberta Fish and Game Association became loud advocates for suspending the caribou hunt. Then, as now, wolves were a convenient scapegoat to be blamed for dwindling caribou numbers. “Alberta had killed wolves all through that area in the 50s and 60s” Bloomfield points out, “when the decline really began because of the first wave of land-use activity, and probably poor hunting management, which allowed too many animals, bulls and females, to be killed.”

Despite the possible impact on his government career, Bloomfield was not afraid to speak out publicly. In an August 1979 article in the *Edson Leader*, he wrote in typically uncompromising fashion, “In recent years the size, distribution and quality of caribou populations in Alberta have decreased considerably. The decline is largely due



Boulder-Field

This 3'x4' watercolor painting was one of my first of the Rocky Mountains. It is the boulder field I struggled climbing outside of Egypt Lake.

© EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON

to the combined effect of logging, oil and gas activity and recreation.” In a later interview he told the *Calgary Herald*: “increased industrial and recreational pressures could virtually wipe out what little remains of the herd. The writing is on the wall. We have to do something or lose them.”

It is hard to imagine a government scientist being so forthright today. Bloomfield spoke as a scientist, but the position of his Minister, then Minister of Public Lands and Wildlife Bud Miller, was a decidedly more industry-friendly one. Quoted in the same Herald article, his take on the situation was: “There seems to be some uncertainty as to the cause. It might be a natural cycle.”

Bloomfield was under no illusions that there would be repercussions for a scientist who contradicted the political messaging of the time. “I understood I really hadn’t done anything to make my career a long and illustrious one,” he says ruefully, “taking my role as a biologist seriously rather than playing the political game and hoping that I would have a long comfortable career.”

Advocates for the wrong cause.

Looking back, Bloomfield was motivated by “a duty to the people of Alberta, to the future of Alberta and to the wildlife in it to pursue my work with integrity.” This led him to butt heads with his political bosses a number of times throughout his five-year tenure as provincial caribou specialist. In the early 1980s, the province was working in northern Alberta, going from area to area, putting together a comprehensive fisheries and wildlife management program as part of a land-use strategy. Fish and Wildlife input had already been dismissed in some areas because they were “too late” to join the process. So Bloomfield’s response was: “let’s be creative here and anticipate the next area which this will be applied to.” This was to be the Whitecourt area. “We put summer and winter employees to work there collecting fisheries and wildlife data – it was probably one of the most intensively studied areas in Alberta,” he recalls.

His boss at the time was not impressed. Minister Miller, who Bloomfield describes as “one of those chest-pokers” told him: “young man, sometimes because of lack of information you

have to make a decision.” Despite this warning, Bloomfield’s team presented its findings at the public land-use hearings; a brilliant and comprehensive piece of work for which Bloomfield was given a special commendation. But still he got his chest poked again by the minister, who exclaimed “sometimes, *in spite of the best information*, we have to make a decision.” (*That voice again: “that’s exactly how things still are today!”*)

The more the evidence continued to mount that unbridled industrial development was sending caribou on a downward spiral, the more government intransigence became clear, and the more decisions continued to be made “in spite of the best information.” The scientists were, as Bloomfield describes it, “advocates for the wrong cause.”

“(Nothing) was having any resonance with senior bureaucrats or political leaders,” he remembers. “They probably had nothing against caribou but their agenda was economic development through extractive industries – mining, oil and gas, logging – and they were going to do as little as possible for caribou.” Nevertheless, he continued to try to persuade government a different approach was needed if caribou were going to survive. He even enlisted the support of groups such as AWA and the Fish and Game Association. Sometimes he would take senior bureaucrats – the Deputy Minister, or the assistant DM – out on site to update them on his research programs and they would often pass through remote airstrips on their journey. “Lo and behold, AWA or the Fish and Game people always seemed to be at that little airstrip behind the gas station,” he chuckles. Of course the groups were not slow to take the opportunity of a “chance” encounter with a high-level bureaucrat to get their point of view across. “These staged encounters were really important to make it clear to senior government officials that there really was public support for preserving these animals.”

One thing that Bloomfield’s research made clear was that keeping caribou on the landscape was not simply a choice between industrial development or preservation. “Our research was showing that, with proper land-use guidelines, you could have development in there,” he says. “It might not be as all-encompassing or as wide scale as other

areas but this was really a small sacrifice for a wealthy province to make in the interest of some future for nature in the province.”

Unfortunately, then as now, the government refused to listen to anything that might be perceived as a threat to industrial development. (“*That’s exactly how things still are today!*”) The inconvenient Fish and Wildlife division was given a major shakeup: staff were re-assigned and contracts were not renewed. “They didn’t want us there,” he says. “We were an impediment to unbridled development.” For Bloomfield, the writing was on the wall and he eventually left his position in early 1983.

That was then. This is now

Einstein is reputed to have defined insanity as “doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results.” This would be a fair representation of Alberta’s caribou management since the late 1970s. Count caribou, write reports, kill wolves, but don’t do anything to slow down the industrial exploitation that has been impacting caribou and their habitat for decades.

Of course the situation for caribou in 2012 is far worse than it was in 1978; thirty years of missed opportunities. “Government today is not any more inclined than it was then to make a run for sustainability of caribou,” he says. In some ways he is as baffled by it today as he was then. “Here is the wealthiest jurisdiction in the country. Can we not as Albertans, as Canadians, find some place in all of that for other species and the future health of the environment and the people who live in it?” Of course governments do not exist in a vacuum, and we all have our part to play. “The public has to recognize that our wealth is being generated at the expense of public health, the environment, the future. As consumers, investors, citizens we have to decide if that’s OK with us.”

He doesn’t hold back when he talks about what our own future and what it holds for Alberta’s caribou. “If we don’t care and are just part of the ravenous greed, let’s quit pretending we care about the environment,” he stresses. “If we are serious about the environment and stewardship, let’s get serious in actions rather than words.” And that, of course, is as true today as it was thirty years ago. 🍌

Letters

Mr. Greg Fenton
Superintendent
Jasper National Park
Jasper, Alberta

Dear Mr. Fenton,

I've just read the article on the JNP website about what you heard from Canadians about the proposed Discovery Walk, (What We Heard, A Summary of Public Comments ...) in Jasper National Park.

The arguments against this project came largely I'm sure from people who love the park, who love what it stands for and who do not wish to see it developed for the commercial benefit of private operators. I've been coming to the park on a regular basis since my childhood in the fifties, and I along with everyone in my family and also all of my friends prefer Jasper to Banff because it is less commercialized, less crowded, and more "natural". I am now very fearful of the future of the park, of all of our parks with the recent budget and staff cuts, and wonder how much more dependent the parks will become on revenue generated from commercial profit oriented activities. What a shame it is to see

the concept of our parks so corrupted. I've been to many American National Parks and although I don't always agree with things American, I must say they have done and are doing a better job of protecting their natural heritage in their parks than we are with very little commercial development allowed.

I'm sure you've read the letter addressed to you from Mike McIvor of the Bow Valley Naturalists. I've just now read the letter and wish to inform you that it reflects in a very thoughtful and considered way my opinions and those of thousands upon thousands of Canadians who are not just disappointed by your decision, but angry and disillusioned. I can't think of many things you could have done to damage the image of the park more than this. Of course the proposal has its supporters, most likely the same people who go to the parks to ski and party, who go to Banff for its restaurants and nightlife, and who have little concept of the real purpose of the parks both in terms of preservation of the

wilderness and the opportunity to provide people with a chance to experience the natural beauty and wilderness that they protect.

I want to tell you that I'm appalled by your disregard for what was obviously the opinion of a substantial number of objectors to this proposal. The article you have posted on the website shows that you have learned to be a spin master with as much skill as your masters in Ottawa. My disillusionment is not only with the decision and its impact on our parks, but on the corruption of the democratic process this decision represents.

What does it mean for our future when there is a proposal clearly opposed by a majority, but bureaucrats forge ahead anyway? What does it mean when such decisions provide favour to private interests and to profit? **What is the point of citizen engagement** if the wishes of the citizens are simply disregarded and disrespected? Please provide me with an answer.

Neil Evans
Edmonton



In Memoriam

Phyllis Hart

March 7, 1915 - April 9, 2012

A Remarkable Woman Leaves a Legacy and a Challenge

By Christyann Olson, AWA Executive Director

Our hearts were saddened with the news that, at 97 years, our dear friend Phyllis passed away on April 9, 2012. I first met Phyllis about 15 years ago. It was in the stairwell of the Calgary Tower. I'm sure I was thinking I would much rather be climbing a hillside almost anywhere else – and there she was. It was hard not to notice Phyllis because of her glorious smile and her careful, paced ascent of the Tower's 802 stairs. And, as I climbed again, there she was, making friends, chatting with anyone who cared to follow her pace – she had quite the following. I remember talking with her about the stairs and what brought her

to this Alberta Wilderness Association event.

She told me stories of her early days as a teacher, her troubles with arthritis and how she overcame them. She spoke of Swiss mountain guides and all the peaks she climbed with them. She spoke of her determination to be healthy and to know the priceless treasure our wilderness offers us. And by the way, she had climbed Mt. Temple with Murray Toft as her guide when she was 82.

In the past 15 years, Phyllis quietly became a hero – she was an amazing role model, challenging all of us to be healthy, and perhaps even more than that she knew the value of wilderness. She inspired all who met her to learn more about wilderness and to enjoy and protect wildlife and our natural world. She also became one of the many reasons we look forward to our annual Earth Day event – the Climb and Run for Wilderness. She's why I look forward to meeting folks in the stairwell. Phyllis helped me get the value of wilderness.

Phyllis created a bit of magic in those staircases, she was an amazing teacher and an inspiration. People looked for her in the stairwells and asked us if she

had arrived yet – they wanted to climb with her. She enjoyed people and telling stories of her younger days, while simply amazing us in her older days. Phyllis was driving her friends for lunch dates and taking care of others who needed a helping hand long after many others would have passed that torch to younger people.

In 2007, when recounting her climb of the Calgary Tower to a *Calgary Herald* reporter, Phyllis described the climb as a “piece of cake.” The article went on to reveal that 2007 was the 16th year in a row that Phyllis had climbed the Tower and that, counting rests and many chats, she took one hour to climb the stairs. She raised more than \$1,000 in pledges that year.

In 2008, AWA created the *Climb for Wilderness Woman* award and presented Phyllis, then 93, with a trophy recognizing what an inspiration she was to all. Her tears of joy and surprise told how much she valued this sign of appreciation. It was an uplifting sight. Phyllis is the only person to have ever earned the award.

Phyllis wasn't able to climb the stairs these last several years but she never missed the event. She came every year to meet and greet climbers and AWA supporters and to present an award we named for her, the Phyllis Hart Award, for the woman over 75 who completed the most ascents of the tower. In her last days at the hospital, Phyllis had her family mark the day of the climb on her calendar. That was the day she would need to be at the tower to meet her friends and to present the award. She didn't quite make it, but her spirit was certainly with us.

We will always remember Phyllis's charming, cheerful smile and her kindness to all she met. We will remember her encouraging words and the inspiration she offered to all who she met. Even when the task seems too hard or the mountain seems too high or the work seems too tough, Phyllis would encourage us to carry on – “*you can do it!*”

We have lost a friend, a role model, and a very fine woman from our ranks. With this farewell I promise to treasure her legacy and accept her challenge.

May you rest in perfect peace my dear friend Phyllis. 🌸

Events

24th Annual Wild West Gala Friday, September 21, 2012

The 24th annual Wild West Gala is a celebration of Alberta's Wild spaces and Wildlife. It is a tradition of friends, colleagues, members and supporters enjoying a great meal and an evening filled with entertainment, conversation, auctions and plain good fun. Tickets are \$110.00 for members and \$125.00 for non-members. This event is a fundraiser for the Alberta Wilderness Association and is totally dependent on volunteers and sponsors from the Calgary area to present an evening to remember.

Location: Red and White Club (north end of McMahon Stadium), Calgary

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$110.00 for members, \$125.00 for non-members

Pre-registration is required:
1-866-313-0713

Online:
www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

TALK: Frogs and Oilsands with Brian Eaton

Tuesday October 2, 2012

In the U.S., 50 to 60 percent of frogs are malformed probably because of chemical contamination. How can we avoid the same fate in Alberta? Brian Eaton is a herpetologist working with Alberta Innovates. In this talk, he discusses the benefits of his work as to industrial development, forestry regulations, wetland assessments and tar sands development.

Location: 455 – 12 Street NW, Calgary

Doors open at 7:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$5.00

Registration: 403-283-2025

Online:
www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

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

Friday, November 17, 2012

Guest Lecturer – **Lorne Fitch**

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

Location: 455 – 12 Street NW, Calgary

Reception: 6:00 p.m.

Wilderness Defenders Awards:
7:00 p.m.

Lecture: 7:30 p.m.

Cost: \$30.00

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or
403-283-2025

Online:
www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/lecture

Alberta Wilderness Association Annual General Meeting

Saturday, November 18, 2012

Time 11:00 a.m.

Location: 455 – 12 Street NW, Calgary

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or
403-283-2025



Summer Hikes Programme

We still have a few spots left on our remaining summer 2012 hikes!

Exact details regarding start times and locations are sent to registrants about a week before the event date.

.....

August 20-23: Backpacking in the Castle with Reg Ernst

3 day / 4 night difficult backpack trip
(\$120 members / \$125 non-members)

.....

September 22: Fall in the Whaleback with Bob Blaxley

Moderate-to-difficult hike (\$20
members / \$25 non-members)

Pre-registration is required for
all hikes: 1-866-313-0713

Online:
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.**

STILL ONLY 13 MALES LEFT?

WWW.ALBERTAWILDERNESS.CA

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