



NEWS RELEASE

July 31, 2012

One of Alberta's Last Remaining Wilderness Gems Desperately in Need of Protection

Extreme trail erosion due to high water levels and unsustainable levels of motorized recreational activity has prompted the closure of some parts of the Bighorn Backcountry to motorized recreational users. Current levels of damage and degradation are so extreme, it is hard to imagine the trails will be usable for the duration of the 2012 season.

"The low-lying river valleys and floodplains just can't sustain such heavy impacts," says Madeline Wilson, Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) conservation specialist. "Although we commend the government for taking the necessary steps and closing parts of the Hummingbird trail network, it's disappointing that conditions were allowed to become so bad before the trail system was closed."

AWA has been working to protect the Bighorn Backcountry, an area of nearly pristine wilderness, for over 40 years. The Bighorn provides important habitat to a myriad of provincial species, including the *Threatened* grizzly bear and bull trout. It also contains the forested headwaters of some of Alberta's most important rivers, supplying clean water to thousands of downstream users.

Each summer AWA performs an annual trail monitoring study within the Hummingbird area of the Bighorn Backcountry to document the visible affects of both motorized and non-motorized recreational activities upon the landscape. This July marked the project's eighth year, but never before have conditions been so severely damaged.

"There is really no way any sort of off-highway vehicle (OHV) could physically get in there, even if the trails weren't closed. The deepest sink hole we documented was 1.65 metres deep. Even on foot the trail was a challenge, let alone horses or OHVs," says Wilson.

AWA will continue our monitoring work in the future, and continue calling for the Bighorn Backcountry to remain permanently closed to all OHVs. The Bighorn is in need of formal protection to ensure future generations of Albertans have the opportunity to experience and appreciate this remarkable area.

For more information:

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