

AWA'S 2012 PRIORITIES: Grizzlies and Cold Lake

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White Throated Sparrow in Primrose-Lakeland
PHOTO: © G. WIRUN

Long-time members, as well as many newer ones, will certainly be aware of AWA's long-standing concern for the well-being of Alberta's grizzly population. From virtual official *carte blanche* a few years ago, to the moratorium on the grizzly bear hunt, to a grizzly bear Recovery Plan, and finally to the provincial designation as a threatened species in 2010, we have recently had cause for some optimism. However, the grizzly is far from secure and much remains to be done, both by AWA and especially by the provincial government, leaving the grizzly as one of AWA's top priorities..

The other priority featured in this issue of *WLA* is Cold Lake. Parts of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range (CLAWR) have been identified by AWA as an excellent opportunity to gain wilderness and conservation lands that provide outstanding natural values and habitat to a wide diversity of flora and fauna. Much of the CLAWR sees little-to-no on the ground usage that would be limited by designation as a protected area, yet the benefits of such designation would be huge.

Wanted: Room to Roam

AWA Position: Grizzly bears need secure habitat to allow them to go about their lives free from disturbance. The 2008 Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan makes it clear that "Human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." Grizzly mortality in some parts of grizzly bear range remains unsustainably high and minimal progress has been made in

implementing access density targets recommended in the recovery plan. The 2008 plan recommends maximum "open route densities" of 0.6 km/km² in core grizzly areas, and 1.2 km/km² in all other grizzly range. But only minimal progress has been made in applying these targets. AWA and other organizations are calling for the Alberta Government to end new road construction in bear habitat until road density is at or below the amount identified in the provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.

In this issue: Nigel Douglas writes a welcome good news story about Alberta's grizzlies in "Good News Bears." In the southwestern part of the province, landowners, governments and environmental groups are coming together to develop ways of living with their ursine neighbours rather than treating them as a problem to be done away with, as has often been the case in the past. In his article, Nigel explores some of the work being done by the exemplar Drywood Yarrow Conservation Partnership. It is not often that we are able to feature a good news story about an issue that AWA considers high-priority. This is one to celebrate.

Also in this issue, Nigel writes about yet another study calling for a reduction in road densities in grizzly bear range. It is well known and well understood that the issue of access is one of the greatest threats to grizzly survival. File this one under "yes we know – let's *do* something about it already!"

Boreal Gem Waiting for Protection

AWA Position: Most of Alberta's southern boreal forest is under heavy

pressure from cumulative forestry and energy industry extraction. The relatively intact, roadless western, northern and eastern portions of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range present an important opportunity to secure habitat in the area. The range features old growth forests, a variety of wetlands, and is rich in moose, deer, bears and migratory birds. Saskatchewan has already designated three protected areas on its portion of the range, two of which lie on the Alberta border. The Alberta portion contains part of the internationally significant Primrose Lake Important Bird Area and six Environmentally Significant Areas of provincial significance, including woodland caribou range, rare plants, and important riparian areas. AWA seeks legislated conservation designation of undisturbed areas within the Alberta range, compatible with ongoing air force use.

In this issue: Carolyn Campbell makes a reasoned proposal for establishing protected areas on the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, extending the existing (but small) Lakeland Provincial Park, and finalizing a long-overdue ecosystem-based management plan for the area. As Carolyn writes, the time is ripe to "move forward with a low impact recreation-oriented Wildland Park designation in these areas, (which) would be a relatively easy and vitally important step by this government."

With six priorities down and four to go, keep an eye on the October and December issues of *WLA* where we will highlight the remaining issues that AWA is keeping at the forefront of its efforts to defend wild Alberta through awareness and action. ▲



Grizzly Bears in the Kananaskis
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