

National Park Wardens: A Community under Siege

In Jasper National Park the September 8 weekend saw a large gathering of friends and family. This group of people was connected by their collective lifelong commitment to protect and preserve Canada's National Parks. "Warden Days" is a bi-annual gathering of past and present National Park Wardens, their families, and other Park employees. It first began as a skills competition between wardens from different National Parks. Teams would come to Jasper to compete in bear trapping technique, fire-starting skills, pack horse races, and then wrap it up with a dinner, barn dance, and pancake breakfast. These events all still take place, but trophies are no longer awarded and visiting now manages to be the main order of the weekend.

Sadly, many Parks Canada employees

lost their jobs this year as a result of budget cuts handed down by the Harper government. In the host park of Jasper one in eight employees were "scaled back" or let go altogether. It was hard to find a person who wasn't affected by these shocking changes. These cutbacks not only threaten the ecological integrity of the National Parks by eliminating necessary conservation positions, but they have also had an extremely disheartening effect on the community as a whole.

This year, it was widely acknowledged that Warden Days was not a Parks Canada event; rather it was a family reunion. This was a chance for friends to come together to reminisce, socialize, and assert faith in traditional methods of park stewardship. On September 7 a protest against intensified commercial development at the Columbia Icefields saw a proud contingent from the Warden

Alumni Association standing up for traditional values of National Parks alongside citizens from around the province. Warden Days was a weekend that gave this close knit group an opportunity to remember the days when their beliefs of conservation were shared and supported by politicians, to honour skills that were once a necessary part of the profession, and to celebrate the friendship and camaraderie that makes this community so strong. As someone who has been fortunate enough to be raised as a part of this family, I hope it will be able to survive these attacks from the federal government. This community is the first line of defense for National Parks; our parks are an integral part of a Canadian national identity that needs the protection these dedicated individuals provide, now more than ever.

- Becky Best-Bertwistle