



ALBERTA

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon*

RECEIVED

JAN 15 2013

AR 50867

January 4, 2013

Ms. Christyann Olson, Executive Director
Alberta Wilderness Association
Box 6398, Station D
Calgary, AB T2P 2E1

Dear Ms. Olson:

Thank you for your letter to Premier Alison Redford and I regarding plans for timber harvesting in the Hidden Creek area in southern Alberta. Premier Redford has reviewed your comments and asked me to respond on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

Hidden Creek is located within the C5 Forest Management Unit, where timber harvesting is permitted. Environment and Sustainable Resource Development recognizes the significance of Hidden Creek as a primary spawning habitat for bull trout and an important water body for the pure strain cutthroat trout. In view of the sensitive nature of these fish species, the department has taken all the necessary steps to have Hidden Creek reclassified to a Class A designation under the *Water Act* Codes of Practice.

Even though this designation has not received official endorsement yet, the department instructed the timber company to plan harvest operations as if Hidden Creek were a Class A water body. This will ensure we have special measures in place and are applying high standards for resource development activity in order to protect these fish species.

Companies must ensure all harvest blocks and the access road are outside a 100-metre buffer of the stream. The only exceptions to this are three small portions of existing road that will continue to be used, because steep ground precludes construction of new access. As well, there are no bridge crossings on Hidden Creek. While there are four planned bridge crossings on tributaries within two kilometres of the creek, no in-stream work, like culverts or in-stream crossings, are allowed on these tributaries.

In order to provide further protection to our fish resources in southern Alberta, Hidden Creek bull trout have been under catch-and-release regulations since 1995. Beginning in 2010, our department has closed Hidden Creek to fishing from September 1 to June 15, during the bull trout spawning and incubation period. In 2013, the department is considering adding westslope cutthroat trout to the catch-and-release regulations.

We have also made progress on developing strategies for access management, and we are currently working on several initiatives and policy reviews that address access issues. For example, the new *Public Lands Administration Regulation* provides a broad set of tools and approaches that allow for improved land management. The new regulation helps provide a better balance between industrial development, responsible recreational land-use, and environmental priorities.

A process for considering land uses in southern Alberta, which includes the Hidden Creek area, is underway and all Albertans are invited to provide their feedback. As we develop the regional plan for the South Saskatchewan area, we have an opportunity to consider changes to current land-use designations. I encourage you to bring your ideas forward during these consultations.

The government is committed to ensuring Alberta's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats are healthy, productive, and sustainable and that our policies and legislation support balanced economic, environmental, and social opportunities for the benefit of present and future generations. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with the Government of Alberta on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diana McQueen".

Diana McQueen
Minister

c: Honourable Alison M. Redford, QC
Premier