

A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



FEBRUARY 2013



NATIONAL PARKS: FIRST CELEBRATE, THEN EVISCERATE
SHHH?...FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN ALBERTA
LOGGING THE CRADLE OF BULL TROUT
TOASTING THE MILK RIVER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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COVER PHOTO

Through the lens of Cliff Wallis's camera it's not hard to see why Writing on Stone Provincial Park is regarded by First Nations as a sacred landscape.

FEATURED ARTIST

Dan Hudson is a Canadian artist based in Canmore, Alberta and Berlin, Germany. He received a BFA in Visual Art at York University in Toronto and studied anthropology at the University of California at San Diego. Dan's art practice includes photography, video, painting, and sculpture. He has received numerous awards for his art and his exhibitions have garnered much critical attention. Dan's work is exhibited internationally and is represented in the collections of museums, public galleries and private collections throughout North America and Europe.

While working as an artist, Dan also conducted a highly successful career as a photo journalist with more than 60 international cover shots as well as thousands of images in major publications around the world. Adventure photography assignments involving extreme mountain sports in some of the wildest places on the planet brings a unique perspective to Hudson's art practice. He connects an intimacy with nature to everyday life in contemporary culture.

For more information about Dan Hudson's art and photography please visit: <http://www.danHUDSON.ca/>

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A Bit of This, A Bit of That

You've been on the road all day. You're famished, dog-tired too. You hate take out. The last thing you want to do is stop to pick up groceries. You hope that when you get home you'll discover the makings of a decent meal. Finding a bit of this in your fridge and a bit of that in your cupboards you improvise and the end product is...not bad, damn fine in fact.

This issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate* might be viewed this way. Unlike past issues one theme doesn't animate the features section. Instead, what we've done is share, with one exception, a number of pieces on different subjects that have been saved in the editorial vault for a number of months now. They haven't reached their expiry dates and each piece is an important ingredient to producing what the *Advocate* aspires to – helping readers build a damn fine understanding of this crazy, wonderful place we call Alberta.

I lead off with an indictment of the federal government's national parks policy. The damage being done to our

national parks reminds me of elder abuse – it's serious, it's taking place right under our noses, and not enough of us are demanding that it stop.

The exception noted above is Adam Driedzic's piece on freedom of information legislation in Alberta. It's quite an optimistic appraisal of how Alberta's Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner helps conservation organizations such as AWA fulfill their mandates.

Sean Nichols then opens the blinds to what is taking place in Hidden Creek, "the epicentre of bull trout spawning in for the Oldman watershed." Road-building and logging in this watershed highlights glaring shortcomings in the province's risk assessment process.

Next, Christyann Olson invites you to a party, a party celebrating the 20th birthday of the Milk River Management Committee. This committee, where many land-use interests are represented, has worked hard and well to promote responsible land stewardship in southeast Alberta.

The features section wraps up with Nigel Douglas's enlightening examination of a promising Cardston County program to manage predator-landowner relationships in the county – cow composting.

The epicentre reference to Hidden Creek is taken from Lorne Fitch's Martha Kostuch lecture of last November. This issue offers you a synopsis of Lorne's views on the work of Aldo Leopold, a North American conservation icon. I hope our summary of Lorne's lecture will lead you to do what I did – find and read a copy of Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*.

In our upcoming issues the features section will again be oriented around specific themes or issues: April will look at the federal government's changes to environmental legislation, June will feature articles celebrating nature and outdoor activities, and August will present an assessment of the land-use framework that will be two years old by then.

- Ian Urquhart, Editor



Correction

Occasionally, we don't get things as right as we would like to. A case in point was our December 2012 article "Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute and the Willmore Wilderness." We were mistaken to identify the Willmore Biodiversity Research Project as an ABMI project. It isn't. The primary partnership is between Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation (ATPR) and Alberta Innovates – Technology Futures (AITF). ABMI has helped fund the project but its support, while very welcome, amounted to less than 10 percent of the project's budget. The majority of the funding came from Tourism, Parks, and Recreation; ATPR and AITF implemented the program. AWA applauds the fundamental role these organizations played in the Willmore Project.

Canada's National Parks: We Celebrated Them in 2011, Eviscerated Them in 2012

BY IAN URQUHART, EDITOR



**If a tree falls in the forest does
anybody hear?
Anybody hear the forest fall?
Cut and move on
Cut and move on**

- Bruce Cockburn, "If a Tree Falls"

**The smoke of our fire rises
to the skyscraper pines and fir.
We'll sit around it all evening and
sing lullabies back to the birds**

- Parks Canada, "The Park Song" (a
campfire song written to commemorate
the centennial of Parks Canada in 2011)

You decide. What lyric best fits the path the federal government plunged Parks Canada down on at the end of March and April of this year? On March 29 Ottawa unveiled its 2012 federal budget; on April 30 the federal government publicized the first round of "work force adjustment notices" the Conservatives will make as they try to cut federal spending. A work force adjustment notice - in more honest, less Orwellian language - means you may well lose your job (here at the University of Alberta my bosses refer to terminating employees as "job disruptions"). Lucky work force "adjustees" only see full-time employment shrink into part-time status; sadly their mortgages and other costs of living a good life are not reduced

proportionately. The unlucky ones are shown the door.

I like to think I've been a friend of Canada's national parks ever since my first trip to Banff National Park as a wee lad. I still remember that 10 year-old's first view of Mount Rundle. Far-out. I've learned since then that being a friend of our national parks isn't always easy. Telling our two little rockhounds, Andrea and Kali, that they couldn't take treasure home with them from Jasper prompted many tears, glares, and a drop in popularity even ice cream couldn't restore.

Today is again one of those times when friendship demands actions that court unpopularity in some quarters. Today, my hope to be a good friend of our

corporate plan put the agency's forecast spending for the 2011/12 fiscal year at \$709.7 million. As Table 1 shows, this plan suggested that, three years from now, Parks Canada plans to spend \$110.5 million less than forecast for this year. This cut is crippling. What other term should be used to describe a cut of 15.6 percent. When the additional cuts announced in the 2012 budget are added to what the corporate plan already promises this cut grows to

\$139.7 million, 19.7 percent less than the spending forecast for 2011-12.

Spin doctors might try to soothe our anxiety here by noting the sharp drop in planned spending in the Townsite and Throughway Infrastructure program activity. A significant portion of the spending devoted recently to this program activity was part of the government's temporary economic stimulus program. Expenditures there drop by \$56.2 million (38.9 percent).

national parks inspires caring criticism. Good friends, after all, don't turn blind eyes or sit silent when they see friends act self-destructively. It's time to tell our politicians and senior management in Ottawa that, on balance, they are plunging our national parks down a dark, destructive path. These leaders let the ideal of our national parks down; they let us down; they let our children and grandchildren down; they let down the public servants who have devoted their lives to being caring stewards of Canada's national parks.

Far Fewer Dollars, Even Less Sense

Ottawa delivered the first blow of its 2012 double-whammy to Parks Canada when it announced three-years of cuts to the Parks Canada budget: \$6 million in the budget year we are nearing the end of, \$19.7 million in the 2013-14 fiscal year, and \$29.2 million the next year. Such cuts might be more digestible if they weren't coming on top of significant cuts already planned for in the agency's budget future. Parks Canada's 2012-13/2016-17

Table 1: Parks Canada Forecast/Planned Program Activity Spending, 2011-12 to 2014-15 (\$000s)

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	% change 2011-12 to 2014-15
Heritage Places Establishment	18,510	15,751	15,718	15,718	-15.1
Heritage Resources Conservation	167,872	163,965	156,953	154,350	-8.1
Public Appreciation/Understanding	50,030	46,481	41,388	40,892	-18.3
Visitor Experience	244,497	239,852	237,666	237,553	-2.8
Townsite/Throughway Infrastructure	144,402	113,933	93,241	88,241	-38.9
Internal Services	84,388	71,546	68,111	62,471	-26.0
Total Planned Spending	709,699	651,528	613,077	599,225	-15.6



Fair enough. But, look what's going to happen to the Heritage Resources Conservation activity. Heritage resources conservation (along with Heritage Places Establishment) is the lifeblood of our parks system. It requires government to improve "ecological integrity indicators in national parks, and the state of cultural resources of national historical significance... in national historic sites..." The government's intention is to reduce this program activity by \$13.5 million (8.1 percent).

The lens offered by the Parks Canada 2012-13/2016-17 corporate plan actually obscures the fiscal damage being inflicted on these two foundations of our parks system. What that plan doesn't reveal are the additional cuts made to Heritage Places Establishment and Heritage Resources Conservation between the 2011-12 corporate plan and the 2012-13 corporate plan. In other words, Minister Kent's budget numbers for these activities now are significantly lower than they were in the previous year.

Table 2 exposes that significant change by comparing what the two most recent corporate plans reported about spending in the 2011-12 fiscal year. For example, forecast heritage resources conservation spending in 2011-12 is now reported at \$167.9 million; that's \$31.0

million or 15.6 percent less than what the government said in 2011 it would devote to that activity. Heritage places establishment forecast spending drops by 18.6 percent.

Things are, temporarily at least, much better for road pavers. From last year's corporate plan to this year's plan Townsite and Throughway Infrastructure forecast spending for 2011-12 ballooned by \$21.5 million (17.5 percent). When Parks Canada tells you that this year's forecast spending is actually up from last year's be sure to point this out to them. They are spending less money on ecological integrity; they are spending more money on highway integrity.

After planning to suck out so much financial blood out of Parks Canada over at least the next few years who could have been surprised that the second blow spilled the blood of the agency's stewards. According to the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) by April 30, 2012 1,689 Parks Canada employees had received notices that they could lose their jobs. This action is at least as staggering as the financial cuts. More than one-in-three Parks Canada employees received these notices. Nearly 10 percent of all the Parks Canada employees who received work force adjustment notices by then live here in Alberta; 144 notices were

issued; 76 people were "surplussed"; another 68 were "affected."

These numbers should impress you and inspire concern or outrage. If they don't, try viewing them through other lenses or from other perspectives. Imagine you own a small business in one of Alberta's national park communities. What will these cuts mean for your livelihood and future? PSAC reports that, in Jasper National Park, 21 people were informed they were surplus to the organization's plans while another 31 were notified that they would be affected. Effectively, up to 50 families in the community were told to get by with less, perhaps with much less. This is unlikely to be good for your business; it's unlikely to be good for your community. It helps explain why people in Jasper sponsored advertisements and events proclaiming how much their neighbours who work for Parks Canada mean to the health of their community.

Hang on to the community perspective for a few more moments. Think now though of ecological communities and consider what these cuts will mean for their integrity. What will the cuts mean for the scientific and technical staff in the agency? Bill Fisher, a senior Parks Canada official, told the *Calgary Herald* that the agency will no longer be able to do the amount of scientific and historical research it has done to this point. He said that, because of less professional and technical capacity, "(s)ome projects will have to halt, some will be delayed." This conclusion was echoed in the *Globe and Mail*: "Many of the scientists and technical staff hired over the last decade to help protect the ecological integrity, or health, of the parks, are being let go."

George Mercer, a recently retired Parks Canada employee, uses language and offers observations in his "Write Nature" blog that reiterates these messages. "Science capacity in the form of park biologists and ecologists who provide the information that park interpreters use to help educate Canadians about their national parks," he wrote, "was all but obliterated at service centres and at many national parks."

Finally, pick up an historical lens and ask yourself what these cuts will mean for our ability to better understand the human and natural communities of bygone eras. What's taking place in the Calgary office of Parks Canada compounds the wrongheadedness and

Table 2: 2011-12 Fiscal Year Parks Canada Forecast/Planned Program Activity Spending, by Corporate Plan (\$000s)

	2011-12/2015-16 Corporate Plan	2012-13/2016-17 Corporate Plan	% change from 2011-12 plan to 2012-13 plan
Heritage Places Establishment	22,751	18,510	-18.6
Heritage Resources Conservation	198,921	167,872	-15.6
Public Appreciation/ Understanding	34,155	50,030	+46.5
Visitor Experience	235,521	244,497	+3.8
Townsite/ Throughway Infrastructure	122,625	144,402	+17.8
Internal Services	81,562	84,388	+3.5
Total Forecast/ Planned Spending	695,535	709,699	+2.0

misery of these cuts. PSAC reports that, in that office, 23 of the 24 work force adjustment notices served are surplus - losing your job - notices. In Calgary historians, social scientists, and archaeologists join biologists to make up the majority of those being cuts. Eighty percent of the staff archaeologists studying these issues are being dismissed. With respect to these cuts the *Calgary Herald* quoted a union official as saying, with considerable understatement, "that's a real shame for Canadians."

What About Elsewhere?

Some of my Conservative friends (yes, I have some) respond to my objections to this evisceration of our national parks system by arguing that times are tough all around the world. Ottawa, the claim therefore goes, really had no choice but to cut public spending generally and on national parks in particular. That argument is weakened when you consider the support the Obama administration is trying to give the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). President Obama's February 2012 budget request tried to sustain support for the National Park Service (NPS). Obama's call for \$2.6 billion in funding for America's national parks was a mere \$1million below what the Congress approved for the previous year. He called for a reduction of just 0.04 percent to the NPS budget. When it comes to NPS full-time staff his budget request will cost some employees their jobs, true: if Congress approves the Obama proposal there would be 21,689 full-time equivalent NPS positions. But this is a reduction of just 218 jobs, a cut to full-time positions of just under one percent. More than a third of Parks Canada positions are being disrupted in Canada; less than one percent of full-time positions would be lost under the President's proposals. But, like in Canada, NPS seasonal employees are likely to be hit hard.

None of this is to say that, at the end of the day, Congress will give the NPS what the President requested. Republicans in Congress, like their Conservative cousins in Canada, are calling for deeper cuts to public spending. The NPS will bear some of that attack and will probably end up faring worse than it would have under the President's plans. But, it's unlikely that anything like the magnitude of the Canadian cuts will be visited on the NPS.

This brief look at the U.S is enlightening for several reasons. It shows that, even when governments face fiscal stress, they have choices. It shows that the political executive in the U.S. (a country in much deeper financial trouble than Canada) is much more supportive of national parks than our political executive. It further suggests that ideology plays a key role in shaping the respective support national parks receive in the Oval Office and 24 Sussex Drive.

Alberta's "Sit On Their Hands Gang"

Millions of Canadians annually visit Alberta's national parks. Thousands of Albertans depend on the national parks located in Alberta for their livelihoods. What then did our elected members of parliament say about the future of our national parks? What did they say about the cuts of March and April?

Essentially, they said nothing. For the most part they have been as mute in the House of Commons as the political statues MPs pass on the grounds of Parliament Hill on their way to Question Period. Thinking that the Alberta MPs who would be most likely to speak out on behalf of national parks would be those with the mountain parks in their constituencies I focused my attention on Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge - Waterton Lakes NP), Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead - Jasper NP), and Blake Richards (Wild Rose - Banff NP). Using the indexes to the proceedings in the House of Commons and in House committees for the current session of Parliament I looked for comments from these MPs about the national parks and cuts to Parks Canada. The period examined covered more than a year, stretching from June 2, 2011 to the passage of the 2012 federal budget at the end of June.

Rob Merrifield spoke on two occasions in the House of Commons on matters related to national parks. In September 2011 he promoted the Jasper Dark Sky Festival; he applauded the record numbers of tourists who had come to Jasper, the significant amount of jobs the federal government had created in Jasper, and the economic significance of tourism. In February 2012 he described our national parks as "national treasures... creating sustainable jobs for thousands of Canadian families." This was his preamble to the friendly, pre-arranged question he put to Environment Minister

*Tonquin caribou,
Jasper National Park*
© M. BRADLEY

Peter Kent where he invited the Minister to applaud the go-ahead for Brewster's Glacier Discovery Walk. Thankfully, the Speaker recognized the game being played here and cut off the Minister in mid-reply.

Blake Richards spoke once about Banff National Park - a "special place where tourists enjoy some of the world's most pristine wilderness combined with incredible visitor experiences." Like his political neighbour to the north Richards used that occasion to extoll the economic contribution Alberta's national parks make to the Canadian economy.

Outside the House of Commons, he showed chutzpah when he wrote in the *Canmore Leader* that the Harper government was proud of its environmental record. National parks figured prominently in his letter: "We expanded the area protected by Parks Canada by more than 50 per cent - an area larger than Greece. The expansion of Nahanni National Park, in the Northwest Territories, was the conservation achievement of a generation." Where the financial and personnel resources will come from to make the six-fold expansion of Nahanni anything more than a symbolic conservation achievement is something that neither Mr. Richards nor Minister Kent seem as willing to talk about.

Jim Hillyer, a rookie MP, has not said a word about national parks in Parliament since being sent there by the electors of Lethbridge in May 2011.

Given the enthusiasm both Mr. Merrifield and Mr. Richards have for the economic importance of the mountain parks I hoped to hear something, anything, from them during the budget debate about what their government is doing to Parks Canada. There wasn't anything there - not a peep, not a whisper. This is somewhat surprising since even natural allies of these Conservative politicians - boosters of the Glacier Discovery Walk such as the Association for Mountain Parks Protection and Enjoyment - have voiced publicly their concerns over what the announced budget cuts will mean to the future of our parks. While Conservatives like Merrifield may point out to constituents that the budget

was subject to many hours of debate and examination he couldn't find the time in his parliamentary schedule to speak about it. Neither could his colleague from Wild Rose. When it comes to Parks Canada they illustrate well the Oxford definition of a fair-weather friend: "someone who cannot be relied on in a crisis."

The Politics of Control

The phrase "The Politics of Control" is the sub-title of Lawrence Martin's bestselling book *Harperland*, a probing look at the growth of Prime Ministerial power during the reign of Stephen Harper. Secrecy, muzzling, minimizing access, controlling the message - these terms and phrases are among the legion Martin uses as he paints a worrisome portrait of how the Harper government runs Canada's affairs.

These terms and phrases are not strangers to what's been happening to and in Parks Canada. When it comes to trying to understand how our Park's stewards are having their lives "adjusted" Jasper's *The Fitzhugh* bemoaned just how hard it is to get complete, comprehensive data about cuts and Parks Canada. Amen. Several times I asked Parks Canada for details about what positions and what services/program activities were being cut. When I first raised this issue with Parks Canada in early May I was told they would see what they could do but Parks Canada was "sensitive to the fact that many of the affected employees are still dealing with this change in their life circumstances, and we don't wish to provide information that would impact their privacy at this time."

I couldn't agree more with the privacy point and reiterated that I wasn't interested in a list of names but believed it was important to have more complete and detailed information about how program activities would be affected from the personnel perspective. Parks Canada said they would see what they could do.

Six weeks later I asked how my request was going. "It's impossible," I wrote, "to even try to hold the politicians accountable for their actions without detailed information." The official I'd been corresponding with seemed surprised to hear from me. My request had been forwarded and the official thought that someone would have been in touch with me. My request would be

forwarded again; the official would ask to be copied on the anticipated reply to me; the official would follow up in a few days if there still wasn't any response to my question.

That was the last word I heard about my inquiry.

I know I'm not alone when it comes to trying to lift the government's veil of secrecy. The Parliamentary Budget Office is one prominent institution also struggling to get answers from the government about its spending reductions. In mid-April Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, wrote to all deputy heads in the federal government asking for more information about the savings measures ascribed to their organizations by the budget. By the end of May only 18 of 82 departments and agencies had supplied the information the parliamentary officer sought.

Parks Canada joined many other federal organizations in refusing to answer the Parliamentary Budget Officer's questions.

Kevin Page then secured a legal opinion to buttress his position and wrote to the Clerk of the Privy Council (Canada's highest public servant). He said: "It is in the interests of Parliament and the Canadian public that such information be made available immediately. As I have mentioned before, it is only with such information that Parliament can exercise its constitutional role of controlling public finances."

Parks Canada, like most federal organizations, continued to stonewall. By early November Parks Canada still refused to supply the Parliamentary Budget Officer with requested personnel reduction and service level impact data. The budget savings data supplied was unhelpful because it was so general. Page wrote on November 6, 2012: "The lack of disclosure will prevent the PBO from providing Parliament and parliamentarians with independent analysis on the state of the nation's finances and the estimates of the government."

In studying the situation in Parks Canada since the budget/personnel cuts were announced I have been struck by just how illusionary or fictitious Parks Canada's rationales for its actions and proposals have been. The proposal to privatize Banff upper hot springs, Miette hot springs, and Radium hot springs

illustrates this. In early May 2012 Jim Pissot, representing WildCanada Conservation Alliance, asked Pam Veinotte, the then Banff Superintendent (she's now the first Superintendent of the just-created Rouge National Urban Park), if there would be any possibility of consulting the public about the proposal. The Superintendent said no; in her opinion, this policy decision had been made in the 2007 federal budget.

I went back and searched the 2007 budget for some sign that the government had indicated that this specific initiative might go ahead at some point in time. There was no mention of it there. So, I thought that perhaps the Superintendent might have been mistaken about the specific budget year this green light had been given. The closest I could come to finding anything in a federal budget that could be linked - but just very, very tangentially - to privatizing these hot springs was buried in an annex to the 2008 budget. It read, in part:

"Parks Canada is streamlining operations in order to enhance its ability to achieve its core mandate of protecting sensitive land and species and ensuring that Canada's cultural and natural heritage are preserved. **These efforts will include the rationalization of some activities that can be delivered more effectively and efficiently by local communities and the private sector.**" (my emphasis)

It still seems a long way from this kind of statement to the Banff Superintendent's position that, since privatization generally was endorsed years ago, there's no need to consult with the public about this proposal.

The 2007 and 2010 Banff Management Plans also offer nothing to suggest Parks Canada was considering seriously this privatization initiative. Mike McIvor, a veteran defender of ecological integrity in our national parks, pointed out to me how naive it has become to expect these types of documents to outline specifics. He suggested: "The 'wonderful' thing about the 2010 Management Plan is that Parks Canada senior management had made an internal decision about the way it would write these plans. So there has been a fundamental shift from plans with specific direction - and therefore room for accountability - to a document that provides only strategic

(continued, page 10)



JAN 2 1990

Mr. Jon Whyte
 President
 Bow Valley Naturalists
 P.O. Box 1693
 Banff, Alberta
 T0L 0C0

Dear Mr. Whyte:

Thank you for your letter of October 19, concerning the marketing strategy being developed by Environment Canada's Parks Service. I regret the delay in my reply.

The Canadian Parks Service, along with other natural resource protection agencies, is adopting a marketing approach to program management to help focus its work and meet its objectives.

Allow me to assure you that the marketing strategy will be developed in keeping with the spirit of the National Parks Act and National Parks Policy. As you know, the Act states that the national parks are dedicated to the people of Canada, and to future generations, for their benefit, education and enjoyment, and shall be maintained and made use of such that their ecological integrity is not jeopardized.

As steward of the national parks and historic sites on behalf of the public, the Service is responsible for offering a program that is consistent with its conservation mandate and the legitimate needs and opinions of Canadians. In that regard, it has recently conducted a national marketing study to investigate the attitudes of the public towards the parks, sites and canals. The research, by providing a representative sample of public opinion, reflects a range of stakeholder views, which would have included, among them, those of special interest group members. The information obtained will be considered, along with other data, in making decisions concerning performance, quality and effectiveness, and thereby guide the program's marketing strategy.

.../2

In October 1989 Jon Whyte, the President of Bow Valley Naturalists, wrote the federal Environment Minister Lucien Bouchard to express the group's concerns about the development of a new "marketing strategy" for the national parks. They worried that, in the wrong hands, the strategy would sacrifice national park values as expressed in the *National Parks Act* on an altar of crass commercial exploitation. Minister Bouchard's answer is reproduced here. From my reading of that letter our national parks would be better served if Lucien Bouchard was today's Minister of the Environment.

- Ian Urquhart

- 2 -

The goal is not necessarily to achieve an overall increase in visitors, but rather to provide quality service to the public both within and outside the parks. Decisions regarding visitation will be made on an individual basis and reviewed through normal processes. Where unused capacity exists in a particular park, increased visitation may become a marketing objective, provided that the proposed level of public use does not endanger ecological integrity and corresponds to the capabilities of the park and local communities. Similarly, if those conditions are not satisfied, the aim may be to maintain or reduce the number of visits to a certain location or facility.

All Service employees will participate in the marketing effort. In certain areas, departmental officials have sought specialists to augment its expertise, and I am confident that, together, they are well qualified to complete this important initiative.

I hope that my comments will be useful to you.

Yours sincerely,

Lucien Bouchard

direction that usually is so vague it can be interpreted any way you want.” It’s hard to see anything in the recent record that seriously challenges this view.

Finally, Parks Canada employees have been told to shut up – not to make any critical public comments – about the 2012 budget’s “streamlining measures.” Don’t talk to the press about them (unless you’re an external relations manager), don’t post on Facebook about them, don’t tweet about them, don’t say anything about them in large meetings or “in other forums” (whatever those may be).

This message was delivered in an email entitled “Duty of loyalty and freedom of expression.” A title more faithful to the message’s substance would have left out any reference to freedom of expression. Senior managers used this email to offer their employees a shortened, management interpretation of the duty of loyalty they see outlined in the Parks Canada Agency’s *Code of Ethics*. Employees were told the email would give them what they needed “to make the best possible decisions” for themselves and for the Agency.

“The duty of loyalty,” according to the email, “includes the duty to refrain from public criticism of the Government of Canada when speaking as an employee of the Parks Canada Agency.” Publicly criticize the government and you may find yourself facing disciplinary action.

Is this duty absolute? When, if ever, is public criticism acceptable? The note is chillingly ambiguous in these respects. The duty is not absolute; “exceptional circumstances” may justify open criticism. But there are no examples of what constitutes an exceptional circumstance. Nothing more than the following vague statement guides employees: “To determine whether public criticism is acceptable, the duty of loyalty must be balanced against other interests, such as freedom of expression.”

Public criticism then may lead to

disciplinary action except in undefined exceptional circumstances. If you were a Parks Canada employee would you be ready to roll the dice and speak out?

I expect this effort to discipline employees will succeed even if there’s no specific language about a “duty of loyalty” in the *Code of Ethics*. The spectre of punishment has a way of



Sparrow's-egg Lady's Slipper along the Athabasca River Jasper National Park

© M. WILSON

doing that to people. It should be noted though that language in the *Code of Ethics* calls into question management’s straightforward interpretation that loyalty demands public servants toe the Harper government’s party line. Other objects of loyalty are identified in that code. This is surely implied when the code talks about the need for employees in their work to be conscious of “the balance between democratic, professional, ethical and people qualities.”

Sometimes the code clearly shows

that potential clashes between various loyalties are part of daily life for the ethical public servant. Consider this quote from the Professional Qualities section of the code:

“All Parks Canada employees must work within the **laws of Canada** and demonstrate **political neutrality**, as well as support for the **agenda and objectives of the Government of Canada** and the **objectives of the Parks Canada Agency**, as they undertake the responsibilities of their position.” (my emphasis)

Potential clashes abound in the quote. Loyalty to the laws of Canada, for example, may conflict with the obligation to support the agenda and objectives of the Canadian government. Section 8 (2) of the *Canada National Parks Act* privileges ecological integrity. It establishes ecological integrity as “the first priority of the Minister when considering **all** aspects of the management of parks.” (my emphasis) Gutting the natural and social sciences capacity in the Calgary office of Parks Canada may fit with the Conservative government’s agenda and objectives but why shouldn’t it also be interpreted as violating the legal obligation to maintain and restore ecological integrity?

A Better Tomorrow

Any recovering addict will tell you they only discovered and chose the road to a better life after they had hit bottom. It seems to me that the job for all friends of Canada’s national parks system is to help Minister Kent, Alberta’s MPs, and senior Parks Canada management recognize that the Parks Canada Agency has hit bottom. If we want recovery, if we want a better tomorrow for our parks, we have to stand up and through our voices and actions strive to build the broad coalition needed to persuade the federal government to take our parks off the dark path it has placed them on. 🌱

Access to Environmental Information in Alberta: WHERE ARE WE TODAY?



BY ADAM DRIEDZIC, STAFF COUNSEL, ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTRE

Many an environmentalist has learned that chasing government information can get one lost in a different kind of wilderness. Readers of this magazine may be familiar with epic quests under “FOIP,” short for Alberta’s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. FOIP introduced Alberta to the language of “transparent government” that has since become a mainstay of political rhetoric. It’s fair to say that the province and its major departments have made some gains on the transparency initiative. It is equally fair to question the extent to which environmental advocates have benefited. Let me start with some statements by people closer to the source than I.

First would be a newspaper letter by the outgoing Information and Privacy Commissioner at the time of the 2011 Conservative Party leadership race. The Commissioner’s advice to leadership hopefuls was part indictment of bureaucratic secrecy and part checklist for transparency. He exposed tactics used to avoid creating records and questioned why Alberta is slow to adopt the “open data” style of electronic disclosure that promotes open government. He explained the problem with allowing FOIP to be trumped by confidentiality legislation (aka “paramount clauses”). The Commissioner asked our leaders to do many things. Three that stood out were: to show no mercy on public officials who deceive, to create written policies that make information publicly available, and to increase its FOIP staff and to listen to those experts when they say “disclose.”

Second would be a June 2012 letter from the Premier containing the mandate for the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation. This new position will help Service Alberta recommend amendments to FOIP and develop transparency legislation. No legislation has been introduced yet. Action to

date has focused on the disclosure of government expenses. This is a welcome development but it is not a leading concern for environmental information seekers.

Third would be the government’s showcase for Right to Know Week last September. The Minister of Service Alberta made a speech that I felt showed a solid understanding of the issues. I heard how information without spin is fundamental to democracy, that open government needs to become reality, and that this approach would empower the public to make better use of the information it receives. Using paramount clauses to trump FOIP would be limited to legitimate cases where people deserve more privacy than FOIP can provide. This showcase focused heavily on the successes of Alberta Environment in making information publicly available online.

Are we leading yet?

Being transparent is hard. The structure of government is an impediment even if the political will to be transparent exists. Ministers represent the Crown, the public service is cloistered from the public, and legal rights to information require legislation. Parliamentary democracies are fertile ground for government secrecy.

Yet rights to information are definitely increasing. The turning point in Canada was likely the 1982 enactment of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, followed within a year by the federal *Access to Information Act*. In 2010 the Supreme Court of Canada found in *Criminal Lawyers’ Assn. v. Ontario (Ministry of Public Safety & Security)* that access to information can occasionally receive protection under the *Charter*.

Environmental advocates have been a major force in the global access to information movement. In Europe, the *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making*

and *Access to Justice in Environmental Matters* is becoming hard law. In South America, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in 2006 in favour of the Chilean non-profit organization Terram Foundation that sought information on the Rio Condor logging project. The emerging pattern is that governments can no longer deny information without reasons. In the right case, access to information becomes a “gateway right” necessary to exercise freedom of expression.

Alberta was no original leader in this movement. The post-*Charter* decade saw concerns about the impact of gas blowouts, oil sands pollution, secret meetings with environmental advisors, steep fees for information and attempts to question the motive of information seekers. However, FOIP has been in place since the 1990s and the amount of environmental information made public increases to this day. All of the ‘big three’ of Alberta’s environment and natural resource departments have contributed to this positive trend in some way. The descriptions below are based on the departmental structures and records prior to the merger of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development in Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

.....

“The title of the Act involved here, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, suggests that this legislation involves a balancing between those in society who want to know everything and those who want to reveal nothing.”
Shields vs. Information and Privacy Commissioner (2004)

Alberta Environment

Alberta Environment is the relative transparency leader. The department's written policy "Commitment to Openness" is upheld by Ministerial Orders and paramount clauses that grant disclosure far more often than confidentiality. Programs that post regulatory information online include the Environmental Site Assessment Repository (ESAR) for records of land condition and the Oil Sands Information Portal (OSIP) for data maps about the industry. Countless FOIP requests and Information Commissioner's orders are now unnecessary. The reports of information seekers are mostly positive with few allegations of discrimination or needing to know insiders.

Alberta Environment can do best by maintaining its positive trend and making more information publicly available. The OSIP format may be the best transparency measure for environmental advocates to date.

Sustainable Resource Development

Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) is in the middle of the road. SRD has no openness policy like Alberta Environment. As of 2011, paramount clauses offer routine disclosure of some information about public lands dispositions but forestry information is not on the list. The Minister may order further disclosure "in the public interest" but there are no orders yet. Information seekers report any experience from disclosure to stonewalling with a typical comment being "it depends who you talk to."

The effect of the 2012 merger of Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (now "AESRD") on departmental transparency remains to be seen. SRD could use a longer disclosure list and greater consistency in the proactive release of publicly available information.

Alberta Energy

Alberta Energy is notorious for confidentiality legislation. The Commissioner's *Report on the Use of "Paramount" Clauses* cites examples including minerals exploration and energy royalties. The Commissioner's order on royalties found that these provisions "create distrust and suspicion where not needed" [OIPC Order F2009-

017]. Likewise the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) can grant confidentiality to oil and gas operators under multiple regulations. However, the ERCB helps identify available information and fees in advance of requests and it excels at providing technical data without spin or reliance on private industry.

The future Alberta Energy Regulator increases transparency concerns. By taking over functions from AESRD the Regulator could become a consolidated source of environmental information on the industry. The new *Responsible Energy Development Act* provides no equivalent duties to make information public like AESRD. The worst case scenario is "one-stop shopping" with less in store.

Transparency for all?

Dissatisfaction with information access is often highest among environmental groups. FOIP is intended to provide one law for all but the way in which it is tempered by privacy considerations and a user-pay system tends to raise extra concerns for information seekers with "public interest" motivations. The formal FOIP process ensures accountability but it also creates procedural hurdles to information that would ultimately be disclosed. Delayed responses, demands for fees, and appeals to the Information Commissioner can render information useless for time-sensitive purposes like participating in public hearings or consultations.

"Public bodies need to remember that this legislation is about making it possible for ordinary Albertans to access government records. . . A decision about the public interest dimension in records cannot be decided in a vacuum, away from what is going on in the real world."

- Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner 2001

One poignant question was raised by the AWA's Nigel Douglas about the Castle Logging FOIP-- "what is the public interest, and who decides?" FOIP has two "public interest" tests: one for

disclosure and one for fee waivers. FOIP requires the release of information about a significant risk to the environment or health and safety. Such information must be released even if no requests were made or if requests would otherwise be denied. Obtaining this disclosure, however, requires making a request and being denied so that the Information Commissioner has something to consider. Claimants need to prove a reasonable expectation of probable harm and there have been few successes to date.

The potential for public interest fee waivers is much better. Environmental groups that disseminate information and contribute to public debate are ideally positioned because the Commissioner will consider whether the public would benefit from the records being released to the specific requester.

Fee waivers can be crucial in forestry cases due to the potentially large size of the records. The leading example is the request for information on Sunpine Forestry by the Rocky Mountain Ecosystem Coalition [OIPC order 99 - 015]. The company made one binder of forestry plans publicly available but a FOIP request to the department produced ten boxes of records. Beyond the fact that the requester would spread the information, the Information Commissioner found that the department should not be relying on industry to make records publicly available. This brings us to the next public interest concern.

Paramount clauses for environmental information usually make the information available. The issue is that departmental procedure can favor private players. The AESRD system for routine disclosure requires information seekers to identify and ask industry operators before asking the department. The concern with relying on private industry to make information public in the Sunpine case has not gone away. If anything this concern has increased due to reliance on industry self-monitoring for the creation of environmental data. However, when the department's system trumps FOIP the Commissioner gets no say.

A second example is the need to have legal land descriptions to locate environmental concerns. Legal land descriptions are needed to search ESAR for signs of contaminated land, to ask the ERCB for the location of abandoned gas wells, or to monitor applications for



4 Elements is an ongoing series of photographic works based on Dan Hudson's outdoor experiences as he traveled through various landscapes. The 4 section compositions represent the '4 elements' (earth, air, fire & water). The landscapes we see and experience are histories of the interaction between these elements.

Our perception of place is flavoured by the 4 elements too. For example, fierce wind, cold rain, or warm sun will completely change our experience of the same landscape. In other words, our perception is filtered through an emotional response to the ever-changing interplay of the 4 elements.

The intricate combination of events that produce any situation or any journey can never be duplicated even if we revisit the exact same place. These works are a tribute to the uniqueness of each passing moment.

Kananaskis (2012)

28"x72"

© DAN HUDSON

future energy projects. These systems help corporate, industry and real estate players do their due diligence but they are barriers for environmental watchdogs. OSIP could be an improvement because it puts regulatory information about the oil sands into a map format.

Information delivery systems are not just the product of what government wants to share and what it thinks it can hide. Departments must also weigh the cost of responding to requests against the cost of proactively releasing information. Information that is frequently sought and likely to be disclosed under FOIP is the most likely to be made publicly available without requests. Information that is less often sought but still likely to pass FOIP will be routinely disclosed but only on request. Information that is rarely sought or could be withheld will be left to FOIP. The number of requests for regulatory information far exceeds the number of requests that dig into government deliberations. In the case of Alberta Environment, there are thousands of downloads from ESAR a year. The sheer number of requests for information

on contaminated land was being felt on the bottom line of the entire government. Until the general public starts requesting factors behind a logging decision environmental groups are going to need to use FOIP.

Where are we going?

Finding that environmental groups have benefited from the transparency movement really comes down to a defense of FOIP. It is a defense that could be due. The results of having departmental FOIP staff appears to be a reduced need for Information Commissioner orders and ultimately more routine disclosure without FOIP. The Commissioner is independent from the departments and can be a champion for access. Commissioner decisions address the "public interest" in a thorough way that favors environmental advocates over private interests. If only the same could be said for the departments that permit environmental impacts. FOIP is complicated but it isn't broken. Some small reforms could go a long way. Examples include a

test for public interest disclosure that matches the test for fees or a guarantee that paramount clauses will not trump baseline access.

Transparency is not a passing fad. It is ideologically distant from our institutional heritage but the practical arguments are mounting. The choices are basically to put more resources into the FOIP system or to release more information. It is a case where budget constraints could actually benefit the environment. This is also the age of WikiLeaks and proactive disclosure could do more for a government's public image than cover-ups.

I might end by recalling where the access to information movement has been. Environmental issues are apt to invoke concerns with democracy, empowerment, and meaningful expression. Eventually the right case will be a human rights case. I cannot call that case, but there is no doubt that the importance of access to environmental information in Alberta will increase. 🌱

A Private Little Matter: What's Happening in Hidden Creek?



BY SEAN NICHOLS, AWA CONSERVATION SPECIALIST

“Blink and You’ll Miss It”

In Alberta’s secluded Hidden Creek, the last few trucks are pulling out of the valley as a rapid-fire “blink and you’ll miss it” logging operation comes to a close. Gone, too, from the valley are the roughly 235 loads of timber that once graced the steep hillsides plunging down toward the creek. And it will only be a few scant weeks, according to the schedule laid out in the area’s harvest plan, before the final disappearing act takes place: the removal and reclamation of the access road chiselled into those hillsides.

So once all these things are gone, what will be left behind?

One thing we know will remain with the valley are the disruptive effects of the operation on the hillside soils, vegetation, and ground cover.

One thing we *hope* will remain are the populations of threatened bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout whose spawning grounds in Hidden Creek are some of the most important in the entire Oldman River Basin and all of southern Alberta.

Alberta’s provincial fish, the bull trout, was designated as a threatened species in 2012. With this designation came the

Class ‘A’ Watercourse Agreement

The Participating Organizations hereby recognize and agree that:

1. Class ‘A’ watercourses are critical fisheries habitat and/or are a buffer for this critical habitat.
2. Due to their sensitive nature, these areas should not be exposed to risk of negative impacts from development activities.
3. Negative impacts from activities in Class ‘A’ watercourses pose a risk to the continued viability of Class ‘A’ watercourses and their fish communities.
4. To coordinate the exchange and review of relevant information in accordance with the protocol outlined in Appendix C.

Excerpted from the Working Agreement: Class ‘A’ Watercourses, found at: <http://environment.alberta.ca/documents/WorkingAgreementClassAWatercourses.pdf>

recognition that its few remaining viable spawning grounds – like Hidden Creek – need protection to ensure the survival of the species. Forestry officers with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) clearly agreed. They directed Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS) to treat Hidden Creek “as if it were” a Class A watercourse (the official redesignation is pending: it is currently Class B).

A Class “A” Watercourse?

But what is given with one hand is sometimes taken away with another. In Hidden Creek, that is the case with many of the protections that should be afforded by the Class A status. A very substantial portion of the access road – almost 2km in total length – has been constructed within the 100m buffer zone that the designation provides, per the Operating Ground Rules (OGRs).

Those rules state that “within riparian areas and water source areas” for a Class A watercourse, neither “tree felling” nor “equipment operation” are allowed “without specific Alberta approval.”

Was that approval given here? As the joke goes, it depends on what your definition of “is” is. The answer would seem to be yes, albeit covertly. The same OGRs require that a summary table of “block and road specific ground rule deviations” from the regulations must be submitted by SLS, to be approved by the province. This was indeed done in this case... for the one small section of cut block 0752 that also falls within the 100m buffer. That deviation does, sure enough, exist in the official documentation, along with the expected

Water Body Class Definitions

The class of a water body is based on the “sensitivity” of fish habitats and their known distribution. The sensitivity for the class of water body is as follows:

Class A – highest sensitivity; habitat areas are sensitive enough to be damaged by any type of activity within the water body; known habitats in water body critical to the continued viability of a population of fish species in the area.

Class B – high sensitivity; habitat areas are sensitive enough to be potentially damaged by any type of activity within the water body; habitat areas important to continued viability of a population of fish species in the area.

Excerpted from the Code of Practice: Watercourse Crossings Guide, found at:

<http://environment.alberta.ca/documents/WatercourseGuide.pdf>

annotations delineating the justification for the diversion, and the AESRD sign off.

The much longer road with which AWA takes issue, however, does not. It only appears on internal SLS and AESRD documents, including the Detailed Harvest Plan map and the planning “matrix” which are not made public and which do not have the same requirements for specific justification or sign off on OGR deviations.

But, in AWA correspondence with Minister Diana McQueen we were assured that only a “small” deviation to the OGRs had been permitted. Are we then to understand that the Minister was unaware of the road at all, and was only referring to the cut block 0752 deviation included in the public documentation? Or did the Minister consider that 2km of access road lying right next to this sensitive river to be a “small” deviation? For now we can only speculate.

A Private Little Matter

This issue is highly illustrative of the larger concern AWA has for this entire logging operation, and all those like it in southern Alberta. That concern is with the secrecy, the surreptitiousness, surrounding the entire enterprise. That concern is with the attitude concerning these developments happening on public lands, developments that have massive effects on the health of wildlife as well as the entire forest and water ecosystem on which millions of Canadians living downstream depend. The attitude that these developments and all their effects are a private little matter between the logging company and AESRD’s Forestry Division is worrying in the extreme.

Yet that seems to be the inescapable conclusion here. Far from being an open process where AESRD is willing to demonstrate their responsible stewardship of lands held in the public trust, all matters concerning the logging of Alberta’s southwest forests have been happening behind closed doors. Forestry officers have divulged information reluctantly, if at all. They have been unforthcoming in email exchanges, preferring instead to hold conversations where no paper trail can be traced back to them. After numerous attempts to arrange a joint tour of Hidden Creek with representatives from SLS and AESRD, we had to settle for a tour without AESRD



Road proximity to Hidden Creek. The silt fencing is the same in both photographs (seen on the right of the top photo, and on the left of the bottom). There is nearly 2km of this road that is within 100m of Hidden Creek, in a significant but undocumented deviation of the OGR provisions for Class A designation.

PHOTOS: © C. CAMPBELL

present. It’s this mindset that forces AWA to regularly make time-consuming and expensive requests under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP) to obtain information that often proves illuminating.

We had to do this in the Castle, for example (see articles by Nigel Douglas and Sean Nichols in the October 2012 issue of *WLA*). A FOIP request is currently pending for Hidden Creek; AWA has been led to believe that the results will be substantial.

From a broader perspective, public consultation regarding forest management on the southern Eastern Slopes is lacking. All logging done in the C5 Forest Management Unit is done under the auspices of a 20-year Forest Management

Plan (FMP). C5 extends from the southern boundary of Kananaskis down to Waterton Lakes National Park, and includes Hidden Creek, as well as the rest of AWA’s Livingstone-Porcupine and Castle areas of concern.

This FMP, approved in 2005, required public consultation at the outset. But, aside from a 10-year review at its midpoint, the plan will not be open to this consultation again. No specific consultation is required for any of the individual forestry operations undertaken within the C5. The initial public consultation was too limited; only ranchers grazing in the area were able to offer input. Although this was a good start what about hearing other concerned and interested voices?



Access road cutting across steep slope down to Hidden Creek: before (top) and after (bottom). What kind of erosion can be expected to occur here? How will this be reclaimed to its pre-development state? What does this mean for sedimentation of the creek?

TOP PHOTO: © L. FITCH
 BOTTOM PHOTO: © S. NICHOLS

One Size Rarely Fits All

The “one size fits all” approach to requiring consultation only at the time of initial approval for the 20-year C5 FMP extends to other aspects of that plan. Risk assessments are one such vital aspect. As with public consultation an initial hydrological assessment was done but only at the level of the entire C5. Now that logging has started in specific areas and individual creeks and valleys, no further risk assessment will be done. The specific needs of the many watercourses or their associated ecosystems are not considered. In this case, for example, no specific hydrological assessment was

ever done for Hidden Creek.

The one provision in the regulations that would seem to apply is for a Compartment Assessment (CA) to be done. Compartment Assessments can be triggered by a number of different circumstances. In the C5 Operating Ground Rules, one of the triggers for a CA is stated as: “CAs are necessary when major new issues or information that have been identified since FMP approval make the (Spatial Harvest Sequence) inappropriate.” A few specific examples are then given, including “*species of special management concern.*”

This FMP was approved when

we didn’t understand bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout habitat needs and population pressures as well as we do now. Specifically, since that approval, bull trout were designated a threatened species. That being the case, AWA strongly believes that this change would constitute precisely the kind of “major new issue or information” regarding a “species of special management concern” referred to by the OGRs.

When questioned about this possibility, AESRD Forestry officials allowed that it could happen “if the Minister decided to make it an issue.” AWA has raised this with the Minister but has yet to receive a response.

Compartmental Assessments such as this could include many of the types of risk assessment, including hydrological assessments and road disturbance assessments that AWA believes are essential. Road disturbance assessments are currently done only at the level of the individual cut blocks: any access roads outside the cut blocks themselves are not included. This means that the 2km of access road within 100m of Hidden Creek, but that lies outside the cut blocks, has had no road disturbance assessment done on it. AWA regards this as a glaring omission given the disturbance that it is almost certainly causing.

An Ecosystem-based Approach to Forest Management

This also applies to other stretches of access road outside that 100m buffer where the road is cutting across extremely steep and bare slopes. In these places, development-related erosion can be expected to result in highly significant amounts of sediment running down the slope and into the creek. This sediment will further threaten the viability of the bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations.

AWA understands that conditions imposed on SLS regarding wintertime-only operations attempt to mitigate such erosion potential. However experiences in the Castle and other similar terrains have demonstrated that erosion occurs long after the actual operations cease. Even if the road is reclaimed “fully” (an outcome that strikes us as questionable given the nature of the slope and terrain), such effects still persist. On our December tour, SLS representatives assured AWA that silt fencing will

check these effects; however, similar silt fencing elsewhere (for example in SLS' operations in the Castle) has quickly deteriorated and proven useless. We expect this result to be repeated in Hidden Creek as we are unaware of provisions for ongoing monitoring and maintenance.

The issues identified with these roads and fencing, with the undocumented substantial deviations to the Operating Ground Rules, and with the lack of public consultation and formal risk assessments, point in the same direction. They point to a discrepancy between the ideal of landscape-based management and the reality of management on the ground.

AWA understands the Class A designation to be indicative of a holistic landscape- and ecosystem-based approach to forest and watercourse management, a principle that AESRD has stated it intends to uphold. We also think there's a paradox here. The department intends to adopt a reasonable standard while it allows the standard to be undermined with deviations and exceptions that compromise the habitat so desperately in need of protection.

This returns us to the crux of the matter: both SLS and AESRD communicated

to AWA that the deviations to the Class A buffer were allowed "because steep ground precludes construction of new access."

This is an understandable rationale for not building the road outside the buffer zone. But it raises an obvious question: If the only feasible logging technique severely undercuts the Class A designation that everyone agrees is needed for this waterway then doesn't this mean that this valley should not be logged at all?

AWA is by no means calling for a cessation of all logging everywhere in Alberta. However Hidden Creek is a vital spawning ground for Alberta's imperilled provincial fish – a fact reflected in its re-designation as threatened. The crucial role that Hidden Creek must play in the survival of the bull trout in the entire Oldman basin, and indeed all of Alberta, demands that logging be prohibited there.

At AWA's meeting with AESRD Forestry officers, we raised the same question. They informed us that approving the FMP for the entire C5 meant that logging in Hidden Creek would go ahead. That was the end of it. Re-evaluating that decision, according to this logic, appears

to be out of the question.

This is where the Compartment Assessment comes in as a tool for re-opening that decision in the light of new knowledge about the importance of Hidden Creek. This is also where AWA's call for greater transparency and greater public consultation comes in. Let's not treat logging approvals on Alberta's public land as a private little matter. Let's, instead, ensure everyone is at the table, including most especially the fishery scientists and experts not currently part of the inner circle, so that decisions can be made responsibly and we can have the ecosystem-based forest management we all want.

In October, AWA was pleasantly surprised to hear about the AESRD decision to halt logging in the Castle pending the outcome of the South Saskatchewan Regional Planning process (see the update from Sean Nichols in the December 2012 issue of *WLA*). Yet, at the same time, we had reservations about what this would mean for logging elsewhere in the C5 FMU. Would SLS use that decision to argue for new, fast approvals elsewhere? It seems we may now have an answer. 🐟

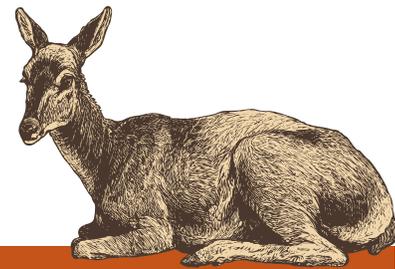


Dawson Falls (2001)

28"x48"

© DAN HUDSON

Celebrating the Good Things We've Done



BY CHRISTYANN OLSON, AWA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



There are some wonderful back roads in Alberta and I try my best to cover new ones each year. As I drove along Range Road 132 with Cheryl Bradley and Lorne Fitch, we headed east and watched for raptors and pronghorns against the Sweet Grass Hills. I hadn't been to the Grain Hall in Aden before, but knew from the map that it would be on a corner at the junction with secondary road 500, just after we passed Miner's Coulee. The Sweet Grass Hills were magnificent and we mused about finding time to hike in them. I'd driven this road before but that was a long time ago. When we arrived at the Grain Hall, friends were there to greet us and I took a moment for one more look at the hills. The evening sun was beginning to fall, the hills were silhouetted, and the prairie grasses glistened from the rich golden rays the sun offers at the end of a late September day. We entered the hall for a 20th anniversary celebration. We were there to celebrate a conservation commitment – the birth 20 years earlier of the Milk River Management Committee.

Inside were more friends and more lively conversation. The hall had been transformed into a display case. It showed off maps and other treasures of the past. Some of those treasures, such as the century old barb wire William King showed me, may have needed the connection those in attendance had to the grasslands to be truly appreciated. "It doesn't have barbs all the way around," he explained, "just on one side." He'd made up a special award with the wire that he would present later in the evening. We loved it.

On the wall there were two large paintings done generations ago that had been rescued from the bar in Milk River when new owners decided to change the decor. The paintings were landscapes of the Sweet Grass Hills and Chief Mountain vistas dotted with cattle grazing in the foreground. They appreciated and punctuated the 360-degree view only the prairie grassland offers. Other walls were decorated with wooden plaques showing the brands of the families that ranch this area, some much older than others (*there are 3rd and 4th generation ranchers in this part of Alberta*).

The table was set for a delicious roast beef buffet, prepared by some of the local ranch women. It was a real pleasure to see a handful of youngsters in the crowd for this celebration. In their eyes I saw hope that they will carry their elders' perspectives into hearts and minds of the generation they would bring into this world.

Eager to engage in conversation, folks were pretty welcoming, although when someone asked who I was with, it wasn't long before I heard "we don't really like environmentalists you know." It reminded me how painful it had been at times during the past 30 or so years to move conservation forward on this landscape. Some still live in that world.

There was plenty of talk about the closure of the XL meat processing plant and worry about the sale of calves; others talked about the recent grassfires they had fought off, some with help from neighbours they hadn't seen for a long time. It had been a very dry year and the fear of fire is a constant worry for these ranchers.

Cam Lockerbie, Park ecologist, South Region of Alberta Parks and Chairman of the Milk River Management Committee began the proceedings after our meal. The Milk River Management Committee (MRMC) was formed in June 1990 based on a recommendation of the Milk River Task Force. We were here to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the "Operational Management Plan - Milk River Natural Area and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve." Terry Hood of Public Lands and Joyce Gould from Alberta Parks had prepared the plan the committee endorsed it in 1992.

The MRMC has an interesting history and its membership includes representatives from Alberta Parks, Alberta Public Lands, Fish and Wildlife Enforcement, the County of Forty Mile, the ranching community, the Alberta Fish and Game Association, Alberta



Sweetgrass Hills from the Aden Grain Hall.

PHOTO: © C. OLSON



Milk River Ridge Sunset.

PHOTO: © D. OLSON

Wilderness Association, and Southern Alberta Group for the Environment. Most of the committee members were present.

Some of today's committee members signed and endorsed that original management plan: Terry Hood, Cliff Wallis, William King, and Ken Kultgen. The committee has matured; it's come a long way from the angry confrontational group that met in Lethbridge in the mid 1980s. That was a time when fists were raised and some attendees invited others to settle things outside. Cooler heads prevailed and a Task Force was established; they were successful in creating a document that included recommendations to keep the process moving forward.

AWA has been a part of this process from its inception and we are fortunate that Ray Sloan and Cliff Wallis were able to take such a strong stand and help develop the vision required to maintain and improve the ecological integrity of both Milk River Natural Area and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve. The management plan is based on minimal human interference and seeks to improve the ecological integrity and

aesthetic character of this outstanding and representative example of the Mixed Grassland Natural Region.

The committee generally meets about twice a year and takes field trips into these areas. It has a collegial approach and isn't afraid to explore controversies in search of a good solution. A unique feature of this committee is the Milk River Management Society, a sub-committee that is a registered non-profit society and is composed only of non-government members of the committee. The society's work is to manage the funds received from grazing in the Milk River Natural Area and use 100 percent of the money for resource management activities and monitoring within the two sites.

As the program proceeded Terry Hood took a step back and reviewed the history of efforts to develop a management approach where different uses could be accommodated. Terry recounted three waves of proposed protection that the local community weathered before landing on a designation that best suited the traditional uses for the site. They then worked closely with government and

various stakeholders to ensure that those traditional uses were included in the plan. It was a long planning exercise but the ultimate the product – the management plan – was worth the effort. The Plan found a happy medium between use and protection and demonstrated that you can find a balance between different activities on the landscape. Grazing, recreation, and ecosystem protection can walk hand-in-hand-in hand.

Cliff Wallis, with help from Cheryl Bradley and Cleve Wershler, assembled an inspirational slide show that walked the viewers through the area, its values, the stewards, the vision, and the legacy being created here. The slide show raised questions, sparked discussion, and I think helped build a consensus in the hall. John Ross, Chair of the Milk River Watershed Council Canada, felt the two committees could be more aware of each other's work and that there would be ways to work together. Other questions and discussion clarified and created better awareness. As I listened to the questions and discussion I realized that many of the people there weren't sure what the MRMC was about. Later, when we were mingling



Milk River Management Committee Members: Joan Hughson, William King, Terry Hood, Cliff Wallis, Cam Lockerbie, Ian Dyson, Cheryl Bradley.

PHOTO: © C. OLSON

again, I overheard more than one person comment that the evening’s program and interaction was really good and that we need to have these get-togethers more often.

As the evening began to wind down, Cam Lockerbie invited William King, long-time member of the MRMC and local rancher to make a few comments. As William opened his copy of the management plan he passionately stated that after 20 years we still hadn’t achieved the goals outlined on the pages he held. This prompted Cliff Wallis to suggest to the audience later that, despite William’s disappointment that not all elements of the management plan have been implemented, we have made great progress. We have one of the longest running biodiversity monitoring programs in the dry mixed grasslands of southern Alberta. The species of concern are largely thriving in the area as a result of the diversity of approaches to grazing and not grazing the most sensitive lands. While William protested that there isn’t enough grazing in some areas, there is more grazing in the natural area than there was in the decades prior to its establishment. John Ross confirmed this; John’s extended family once held the grazing leases in the area. As a result of the mosaic of moderately grazed and ungrazed areas, some of the highest densities of some of Alberta’s rarest plants and animals occur in the Milk River Natural Area and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve. Vehicle access is

minimal along designated routes and the spectacular landscape of badlands, river canyon, deep coulees and rolling grasslands endures.

The lively discussion eventually led to the award Cam Lockerbie had been waiting to present to William. Signed by all the MRMC members, it was one of the original signs marking the Ecological Reserve. William was thanked for his service and dedication.

In turn William presented Cam with his “Barb Wire” award. The evening wrapped up with conversations and a little more mingling. As I was getting ready to leave, the fellow who let me know how he really felt about environmentalists came over and invited me to come by his ranch some time. He added that if I ever needed help to come by and ask for it. It was a good sign that this wouldn’t be the last celebration of the partnership established a generation ago.

I headed down secondary highway 500 with a full harvest moon helping light the way. Despite the moon, the stars were bright enough to pick out a few constellations As I drove I thought about the folks that steward and care so passionately for these prairie grasslands. How fortunate we are to have their passion and tenaciousness; they make our province strong and will ensure there is a legacy of protected areas for generations to come. 🌄

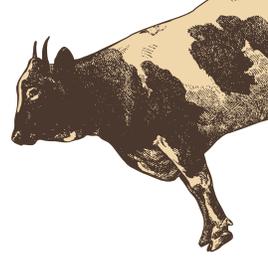
The current members Milk River Management Committee, which is an advisory group for Milk River Natural Area and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve are:

- **Lee Finstad** - Ranching Community
- **William King**- Ranching Community
- **Joan Hughson** - County of 40-Mile
- **Cliff Wallis**- Alberta Wilderness Association
- **Ken Kultgen**- Foremost Fish and Game
- **Cheryl Bradley** - Southern Alberta Group for the Environment
- **Rob Morrison** - Fish and Wildlife Enforcement
- **Terry Hood** - Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (Public Lands)
- **Darwyn Berndt** - Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (Alberta Parks)
- **Cam Lockerbie** (Chair) – Park Ecologist, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (Alberta Parks)

The original mavericks and members of the Milk River Task Force:

- **Tom Gilchrist**, Chairman
- **Warren Brower**
- **Terry Butterwick**
- **Julian Guay**
- **Ken Kultgen**
- **Don Laqua**
- **Dopug Miller**
- **Len Mitzel**
- **Leonard Piotrowski**
- **Ray Sloan**
- **Cliff Wallis**
- **Al Hyland** – Ex Officio
- **Norbert Kondla** – Resource Person

Cardston County: Composting Cows to Conserve Carnivores



BY NIGEL DOUGLAS

If you were making a list of positive conservation measures implemented in Alberta, composting cows wouldn't necessarily be one of the first things that sprang to mind. But, in fact, Cardston County in southwestern Alberta has been showing tremendous leadership in taking measures to reduce conflicts between carnivores and livestock. Composting cows is a significant part of Cardston's program.

In the August 2012 issue of *WLA* the story "Good News Bears" looked at some of the initiatives carried out by the Drywood Yarrow Conservation Partnership to help local residents live with locally healthy grizzly populations. Here we highlight Cardston County and its shining example of how one forward-thinking local municipality can itself play an enormous role in reconciling two goals that too-often are seen as incompatible: keeping the County's people and livestock safe while allowing carnivores such as grizzlies to go about their business.

Tim Romanow, Executive Director of Milk River Watershed Council, is a former Conservation Extension Specialist with Cardston County. He points out that, since the advent of BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) in Alberta in 2003, dead livestock have become a growing problem. "There used to be a market for deadstock," says Romanow. "But BSE destroyed that; it became cost prohibitive to collect carcasses." Before 2003 southern Alberta processors used to take 1,300 carcasses a year from Cardston County. That number "dropped to zero," says Romanow.

Of course 1,300 extra dead animals lying around on the landscape were not going to go unnoticed by local carnivores. Increasingly bears and wolves were drawn to investigate the easy food source and the potential for conflict increased dramatically. "Once they have

fed on (a dead cow) they will come back, sometimes year after year to the same location, hoping to find a free meal," says Rod Foggin, Agricultural Fieldman with Cardston County.

The impetus for both the Drywood Yarrow group and Cardston County to look at alternative ways to deal with the growing problem was provided by

says Romanow. Funding from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (now Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development - AESRD) and the Waterton Biosphere Reserve was crucial in setting up these early programs.

The next challenge was how to make the program sustainable in the long term. Collecting livestock carcasses was just



Active deadstock compost pile 6-8 months old. One of the issues with composting on this scale is keeping the piles moisture levels high enough to maintain the microbial digestion. This is the job of the sprinkler on top of this pile.

PHOTO: © T. ROMANOW

the Oldman Watershed Council with a 2008 visit to the innovative Blackfoot Challenge program in Montana. Cardston was quick to adopt the Blackfoot Challenge practice of providing large metal carcass disposal bins to offer residents a safe, economical way to dispose of their dead livestock. "We could provide a service that's beneficial to ratepayers to address health concerns and also show we are doing our part as producers to deal with the issue locally,"

part of the picture; they still had to be disposed of and the County still had to pay to transport them to the nearest rendering plant for disposal. While temporary funding may be available to set up such a collection program, it would not necessarily be a reliable source of maintenance funds for evermore. "Funders are results-based," points out Romanow. "It is easy to find start-up dollars but what happens when the grants run out?"



Predator Attractant Reduction Program
 Thank you for depositing your calf carcasses in this bin. It has been established to help reduce carnivore-livestock-human conflicts by removing farm yard and calving ground attractants.

All carcasses must have CCIA ear tags.
Users must have completed a permit application.
 Please replace the lock as you found it and complete the record in the cubby hole.

For program information or assistance, please contact Cardston County at (403) 653-4977

This project is made possible through the support of Alberta Fish and Wildlife and Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association. It is a joint effort of Drywood-Yarrow Conservation Partnership, Chief Mountain Landowner Group, MD Pincher Creek, Cardston County, and Nature Conservancy of Canada. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the host of this bin.

TOP: Bin composter (starter) with two 1,500 lb plus cows.

MIDDLE, BOTTOM: Carway area deadstock bin. This bin sign ironically was peeled off and chewed in the spring of 2012 by a resident sow and two cubs. Bins were confirmed bear proof as the bears couldn't get into the bin at the carcasses being stored for pickup.

PHOTOS: © T. ROMANOW

A second visit to the Blackfoot Challenge program led to the somewhat startling solution of carcass composting. Surprising as it may be, given the right conditions an entire cow carcass will compost in a matter of months. “You use woodchips and straw to get the process started,” explains Foggin. “With the right amount of moisture, heat generates so it will decompose.”

The Blackfoot Challenge program services three municipalities and works as an effective partnership. “The department of highways supplies the truck,” explains Romanow, “one of the municipalities supplies a trailer; a producer does the farmyard pickup. It provides a part-time job for a producer.”

Deadstock composting in Canada comes with its own complications. Ironically, regulations south of the border make it harder to pick up deer carcasses than livestock carcasses because of the associated risk of chronic wasting disease. In Canada the opposite is true: because of BSE, regulations are much stricter in relation to moving cattle carcasses. “The finished compost can't leave the site,” points out Foggin, “so it will be used in the landfill for landscaping.”

The set up costs for the composting facilities are around \$100,000, and these are due to be paid by a grant from AESRD. Once established, the economics of the composting program are impressive. Operating costs are expected to be in the order of \$10,000 per year. Currently it costs Cardston County eleven cents per pound for a processor to pick up carcasses. Composting is expected to price out at three cents per pound. The program also has the flexibility to pick up hogs and horses, even sheep, though Romanow points out that sheep wool can present a challenge. The new facility will give Cardston the capacity to handle 444,000 pounds per year, equivalent to 1,100 carcasses. This is nearly the number of carcasses that were picked up every year in the days before BSE. Construction of the new composting facility is currently underway. Piloting should have started this fall so the facility should be ready for operation for the start of the calving season in February 2013.

Though nothing like this composting facility had ever been built in Alberta, Cardston County, to its credit, was willing to take the initiative and to get ahead of the parade. “We presented it to the county as an opportunity to showcase and be the first in the province to do this and provide a service to the ratepayers,” says Romanow. “The county got on board right away. Council has been very supportive, particularly considering few councillors are directly impacted.”

Part of the strength of Cardston's attractant management program is that it was very much locally driven, the impetus provided by local producers trying to find their own solutions to problems. “My thought was to distance ourselves from a government of Alberta project and make it a landowner-driven stewardship initiative,” says Romanow. “The County and councillors agree; they have ownership of the project. This is a shift from the way it's happened in the past.”

Though he no longer works for Cardston County, Romanow is understandably “quite proud of” Cardston's carnivore program. “Producers are carrying it on and the county is keeping the ball rolling.” And the success of the Cardston program is already having a knock-on effect beyond the County's boundaries. “Pincher Creek, Willow Creek and Ranchlands are all working on carnivore projects,” says Romanow. “Grande Prairie and Clearwater have looked at our projects to adapt to their own issues.” This is good news for livestock producers and good news too for carnivores in Alberta – particularly threatened grizzly bears. 🐾

Thanks to Tim Romanow for providing the photographs for this article.

Lorne Fitch, Aldo Leopold, and Living a Land Ethic:

The Fifth Annual Martha Kostuch Lecture

BY IAN URQUHART, EDITOR

I have many long lists. Chores undone, books unread, and important talks missed. Reading the transcript of Lorne Fitch's 2012 Martha Kostuch Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture I realize I have another important talk to add to that list. I wouldn't say I know Lorne well. But what I do know of Lorne makes me want to know him better and to count him as a close friend. Those appealing qualities – his passion for the natural world, his knowledge and ecological sensitivities, and his wit – animated his talk to the friends of Alberta's natural spaces who packed the Hillhurst Cottage School last November. His topic was Aldo Leopold, an icon of conservation. Lorne offered Leopold's famous statement of ecological sensibility, *A Sand County Almanac*, as a key to our ability to meet the challenge "to live the good life on Earth without abusing the generosity of our hostess." I hope I can do justice to Lorne's remarks in what follows.

On Leopold

Lorne described his copy of Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* as "well-thumbed, dog-eared, taped together." It's as familiar to Lorne's senses as its message should be to society today. In *A Sand County Almanac* Leopold preaches a gospel of environmental sensibility. Ecology, like religion, offers a vital moral foundation for the good society.

Lorne suggested that Leopold's understanding of conservation hinged on two ideas. The first pertained to citizens and their place in communities; everyone had an obligation to think about managing the land, not just for herself, but for the interests of the broader community. The second pertained to the ethical treatment of the land. Leopold wrote succinctly, cogently, and powerfully about the extension and

evolution of ethics. It was time, and don't forget that he was writing in the late 1940s, for a "land ethic," for an ecological ethic that would restrain our freedom to do whatever we pleased to the land, animals, and plants. Leopold wrote that, without such an ethic, these objects of our attention would remain no more than property to be disposed of as "a matter of expediency."

Embracing a land ethic demanded then, and demands now, accepting that

"We end, I think, at what might be called the standard paradox of the twentieth century: our tools are better than we are, and grow faster than we do. They suffice to crack the atom, to command the tides. But, they do not suffice for the oldest task in human history: to live on a piece of land without spoiling it."

- Aldo Leopold, 1938.

economy and ecology must be seen as two sides of the same coin. Good economic health, as measured by economic growth, didn't mean that the larger society was healthy. "Economic self-interest," Leopold said, "assumes falsely...that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts." As Lorne said, that conclusion applies very well to today's Alberta.

I think the way in which Leopold delivered his message impresses Lorne as much as its substance. Leopold had what I would call an "everyman" quality. He related very well to all people, not just to his fellow scientists and professors. Lorne

puts it this way: "...his explanations of the natural world – its intricacies and how we fit – have a conversational feel, a way of discussing complex subjects in ways that most could grasp."

Lorne also attributes Leopold's success in writing clearly and directly about conservation in ways that all could grasp to "The Shack," the old, weatherworn chicken coop the Leopold family converted into the cabin that became their rural retreat from life at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. On those 80 acres the Leopold family rejuvenated an abused landscape. They took the first steps to restore ecological health to a farm whose forests had been mined by a bootlegger. The compelling character of Leopold's work is attributed to the fact that Leopold was a part of the landscape he wrote about. His conservation message was "nourished by a personal contact with the soil, the landscape and wild creatures."

Lorne's description of his own pilgrimage to "The Shack" is a testament to how receptive he has been to Leopold's style and substance. In simple, straightforward, yet evocative, words Lorne takes you there and lets the imagery of falling snow on the weathered homestead and the songs of sparrows and juncos in a reclaimed landscape testify to the value of the land ethic.

On Alberta

In his Kostuch lecture Lorne used Leopold's views on conservation as a lens to offer a mixed assessment of circumstances in Alberta. Few in the room seemed surprised when Lorne observed that economic self-interest dominates too much of what passes for thinking about conservation in the halls of power. It is our monoculture. Here Lorne was skeptical of how far and quickly corporations, given their single-minded pursuit of profit, would



Lorne Fitch (left) and Chas Cartwright, Superintendent of Glacier National Park, at the end of a day on the trail during the annual Waterton-Glacier Superintendents' hike.

PHOTO: © I. URQUHART

move towards privileging other values in thinking about our place on the landscape. Here we are left to hope that market-based initiatives and campaigns such as environmental certification and boycotts may prove effective at linking heightened environmental awareness to corporate profitability.

Logging Hidden Creek, what Lorne calls “the epicentre of bull trout spawning in for the Oldman watershed,” typifies this blinkered approach (see Sean Nichols article on page of this issue of the *WLA*). Decisions that don’t touch the self-interest of corporations – prohibiting anglers from catching and keeping bull trout – were made nearly twenty years ago. Decisions that would tarnish the corporate bottom line – prohibiting logging in this vital spawning area – are regarded as a heresy. They cannot be taken.

Lorne was more optimistic with respect to the likelihood of individuals and communities warming to Leopold’s land ethic. He’s also optimistic that if conservationists emulate Leopold’s interest in talking to people about conservation issues people will change their attitudes towards the land.

Alberta’s *Cows and Fish* program stands as a good example of the positive results for our landscapes that this sort of approach may deliver. The program started by surveying Albertans to see what they knew about Alberta’s fish and fish habitat. Fewer than half the

respondents could identify native and non-native fishes; 60 percent believed sediment either was good for fish or didn’t know what its impact was; of most concern, virtually none of those surveyed felt they had personally had any impact at all on fish or fish habitat.

By sharing knowledge with landowners, by working at the community level, and by encouraging stewardship *Cows and Fish* stands out as an important conservation success in Alberta. Lorne said it best: “It starts, as it did with Leopold, with a conversation, builds into a relationship, and inevitably facilitates attitudinal shifts that are accompanied by behavioural changes, often in management of landscapes. So landowners, when suitably equipped and motivated, can write their own versions of goodness in the land.”

On the Future

We have choices. I believe this is how Lorne views our future. We’ve behaved badly in the past and Leopold, were he alive today, would chide us for the wounds we’ve inflicted on the land. But he might also look favourably at some of the analytical tools we have at our disposal now, such as cumulative effects modeling, and see real possibilities to make the ethical shift he called for. But such progress will require sharing knowledge with the public, skilled advocacy and, most important of all, the courage to act. ▲



Spiral (2005)
51"x60"

© DAN HUDSON

Federal Boreal Woodland Caribou Recovery Strategy Finally Appears

“Five Years Overdue” – those words should have been stamped across the cover of the final recovery strategy for the threatened boreal woodland caribou when Ottawa released the strategy in October 2012. Strong public pressure appears to have helped to significantly improve the final strategy: Environment Canada received 14,000 submissions from Canadians on its weak draft strategy during the comment period.

“Five years” may have a more positive meaning in the recovery strategy. Every five years government must detail caribou population conditions and show what preventative and restorative actions are being taken to secure the strategy’s target of ensuring that 65 percent of caribou habitat for each population is in an “undisturbed” condition. This habitat goal is absolutely vital to the prospects of Alberta’s boreal caribou. It’s important to remember that, even if the 65 percent undisturbed habitat target is reached, it’s no guarantee that a caribou herd will be self-sustaining. Scientists estimate that reaching the 65 percent target will give a herd a better-than-even (60 percent) chance to be self-sustaining.

How important is moving towards this target for the future of boreal woodland caribou on Alberta’s landscape?

Extremely. None of Alberta’s twelve populations are trying to exist in habitats with this high a percentage of undisturbed habitat. Nine populations are found in areas where human activities alone have reduced undisturbed habitat to a range of five to 56 percent. When natural fire disturbance is considered as well, the other three populations also fall significantly below the 65 percent threshold; they are trying to survive on landscapes where just 18 to 43 percent of the habitat is undisturbed.

For caribou to have a better than 50/50 chance to be self-sustaining this means that human disturbance should urgently be reduced, not increased, in all Alberta boreal caribou ranges. Industrial fragmentation of the intact boreal forest landscape draws in deer and moose and associated wolves; it robs the caribou of the ability to separate themselves from their predators. Scientists stated in 2009 that Athabasca region herds (in northeast Alberta) likely will die out in the next few decades due to habitat loss from intensive oil sands, forestry, and conventional oil and gas disturbances if ineffective site-level practices remain the main regulatory approach.

It also was encouraging to see the final strategy reject the draft strategy’s unacceptable preference for wolf kills. Instead, the final strategy clearly gives the most urgency to landscape level planning and to habitat restoration.



Provinces have three to five years to complete range plans to demonstrate how at least 65 percent undisturbed habitat will be achieved and maintained. The strategy states that the provincial plans should include a cumulative effects analysis of current and foreseeable future projects. They should also identify conservation measures to prevent activities likely to destroy critical habitat. AWA will keep up our longstanding pressure on the Alberta government for a conservation-oriented range plan that will set in motion the urgent on-the-ground actions needed for caribou survival in our northern landscape.

- Carolyn Campbell

Trout Creek in the Porcupine Hills Slated for Logging

It might be argued that Spray Lakes Sawmills (SLS) of Cochrane is the epitome of a “timber beast” – that old school logging company that finds it very difficult to see anything but two by fours when it looks at a forest. Healthy watersheds are not a high priority in the timber beast’s view of the world. I worry that Spray Lakes may be about to apply this mentality to Trout Creek – one of the most pristine and ecologically unique basins in the Porcupine Hills.

By way of a single open house meeting in Blairmore in the spring of 2012, word got out that SLS has designs on Trout Creek. This creek has been under

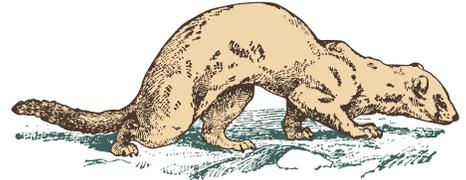
provincial parks notation and AWA has made a formal proposal for its protection. Trout Creek is not only considered the most representative example of the Porcupine Hills, that gentle foothills area just south of Longview, it is one of the last two creeks in the Porcupine Hills where the very threatened west slope cutthroat trout still breeds. The Porcupine Hills are renowned for their First Nations heritage, their massive, ancient Douglas fir trees, and the location where five of Alberta’s 20 ecological regions converge.

SLS is apparently planning a new road and 14 cutblocks in the headwaters of Trout Creek. But when several AWA members walked in on the old truck trail over the Thanksgiving weekend, we did not find ribboned blocks. We may not

have been high enough to see them. Just who will pay for the expensive haul roads and bridges required for SLS to operate in this area is a question worth pursuing, especially as we were hard-pressed to see any timber of any real commercial value as we walked Trout Creek.

SLS failed in a recent bid to gain Forest Stewardship Certification (see the June 2012 issue of *WLA*). It has not ensured that the watersheds and critical wildlife habitat affected by its operations will remain intact. Trout Creek and its native cutthroat are invaluable provincial treasures that our government should be recognizing and protecting, not allowing them to be traded for two by fours.

- Vivian Pharis



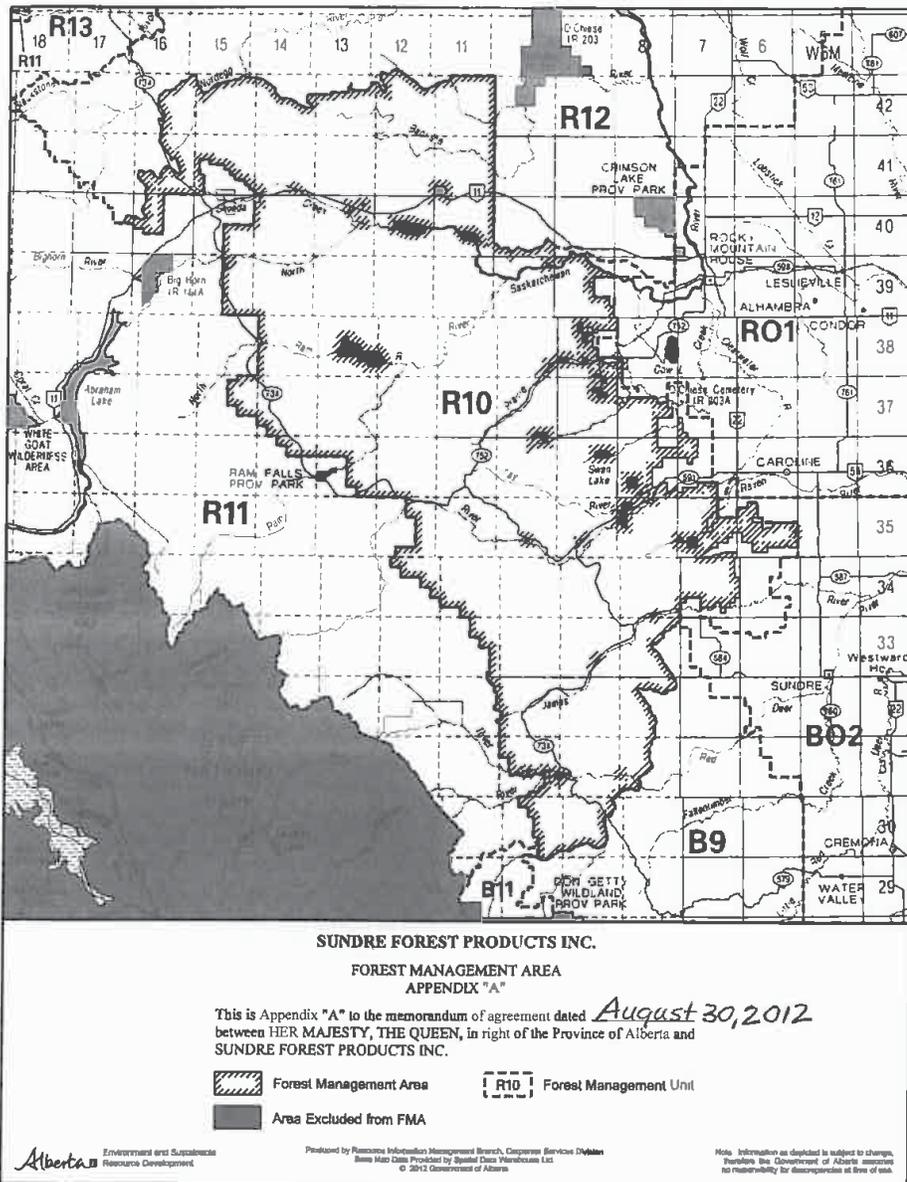
resources, *provided the Company's right to establish, grow, harvest and remove timber is not significantly impaired.*" (emphasis added) The 'provided' phrase, a limit on the government's managerial powers, was missing from the 1992 FMA agreement. This limitation on the Crown's ability to manage wildlife seemed to confirm that a strong timber supply focus rather than ecosystem-based approach still prevailed within the Forest Division.

But our spring intervention had one positive procedural result. It opened the door for AWA to contribute to the next planning cycle. In October 2012, Sundre Forest Products contacted AWA as an identified stakeholder to contribute to its Forest Management Plan development. A Forest Management Plan analyzes the forest's land base, ecological values, and timber supply. Furthermore, it identifies objectives, indicators, and targets for forest management. This public input process will also include public open houses plus suggestions from the company's public advisory group and other identified stakeholders.

AWA accepted the opportunity and met with Sundre's Forestry Superintendent last October to discuss the process and timelines. In November we toured parts of the FMA including the Fall Creek area, which we very much appreciated. Fall Creek is a key bull trout spawning and rearing stream in the North Saskatchewan River system. Very regrettably, road access for forestry operations and a lack of enforcement presence by ESRD has fostered heavy motorized recreation vehicle use beside, in, and through Fall Creek. A 2010 scientific survey report on bull trout expressed strong concern at the potential negative impact this pressure would have on the bull trout population.

We will continue to engage with Sundre Forest Products as the planning process develops to try to advance the ecosystem-based forestry perspective in this important headwaters and wildlife area.

- Carolyn Campbell



Sundre Forest Products' Forest Management Area contains important wildlife and watershed values.

AWA Contributing to Sundre Forest Products' Forest Planning

Photo: Map of SFP's renewed FMA agreement with map date.

Caption:

Sundre Forest Products Forest Management Area (FMA) agreement was renewed for a further twenty years in July 2012. Situated west of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre and just east of or overlapping with AWA's identified Area of Concern in the Bighorn (see map), the FMA contains the headwaters of both the North Saskatchewan and Red Deer River basins. It also contains provincially and

nationally Environmentally Significant Areas; its habitat is home to threatened grizzly bears and bull trout.

AWA had written the Alberta government in March 2012 outlining the ecological importance of the FMA. Our letter also called for the FMA renewal process to include meaningful public consultation and to affirm an ecosystem and water security-based approach to forest management in the 'West Country' as it is known locally. Instead, the FMA was negotiated in secret – an unfortunate custom in Alberta. The FMA stated: "The Minister reserves all rights ... including... the right to maintain and enhance forest resources, including fish and wildlife



Aurora (2002)

36"x72"

© DAN HUDSON

National Park Trip No Treat

Last August, my husband Dick and I decided to try a horse packing trip through the Dormer River wilderness lands of Banff National Park. For reasons described in past *Wild Lands Advocate* articles, we have not travelled either by foot or horseback in our national parks for at least 20 years. But, as ageing trekkers, we thought a trip over nicely cut out national park trails and staying in well maintained, beautifully situated campsites would be a real treat.

Truth be known, we should have had second thoughts when it took us a full day to reach a real person who could issue park permits and a second day to make the trip to the Parks Canada office in downtown Calgary to pick up the permits. They cost more than \$300.

We travelled first on provincial lands up the Panther River. As was the case with the Wapiabi River that we had been on in July, the Panther had suffered major spring floods. The old trail was washed out and completely disappeared in places. The going was tough but I was buoyed by

thoughts of those nicely maintained park trails just ahead.

Eventually we came to a large, relatively new sign denoting the national park boundary. The first few metres beyond the sign were littered with logs across the trail. My heart sank. A couple of hours later, in cold rain, the trail above a short canyon dropped into oblivion. Luckily, Dick was in the lead on a very steady horse and he was able to turn the pack horses and lead them up a steep slope and around the washout. On the way back we blocked and flagged this dangerous spot.

The trail up the Dormer River had not been maintained in at least 25 years. When we finally got to our first designated camp spot, we were astounded to find that it was in a burn. While there was endless fodder for the horses, there was almost no shelter for a camp. Why hadn't we been told the Dormer Valley was part of a controlled burning program? Days later we moved to our second designated camp in the upper Dormer Valley. It was on the very edge

of this extensive burn and, being the only logical place to camp, was badly eroded from heavy use.

The scenery was magnificent, as we remembered it from our last trip through the Dormer Valley some 30 years ago, but the abundant herds of bighorns, goat, and elk we saw then were nowhere to be seen.

Parks Canada staff also failed to warn us that travel in the upper Panther River was very difficult this year. Fortunately, a passing horse party told us this news. So, sadly, we decided to cut our losses and not make the round trip we had planned on and had paid for. Instead, we returned early to the provincial lands of the Panther Corners where area outfitters maintain the trails and there are plenty of pretty camp spots with good grass and water for the horses.

If you don't use an area, you don't advocate for it. We used to be strong advocates for Banff and Jasper, but I doubt we will use them much in the future.

- Vivian Pharis

Tar sands industry toxins in northeast Alberta water bodies authoritatively confirmed

A January 2013 peer-reviewed paper jointly authored by Environment Canada and Queen's University scientists has found marked levels of oil sands industry-fingerprinted contaminants in lakes as far as 90 kilometres from tar sands operations.

The authors use their abstract's opening line to take a strong swipe at irresponsible oil sands management by provincial and federal governments: "The absence of well-executed environmental monitoring in the Athabasca oil sands (Alberta, Canada) has necessitated the use of indirect approaches to determine background conditions of freshwater ecosystems before development of one of the Earth's largest energy deposits."

The scientists measured concentrations of toxic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and dibenzothiophenes (DBTs), two prominent components of Athabasca area bitumen. They found PAH and DBT increases above natural levels starting in 1966 and 1972 respectively; they also found a shift to a petroleum burning (distinct from a wood burning) fingerprint. PAH concentrations were 2.3 to 25 times above natural levels while DBTs were 2.6 to 57 times higher. The highest amounts were in lakes east of the Athabasca River; those lakes are generally downwind of mine operations.

The authors conclude: "Industry's role as a decades-long contributor of PAHs to oil sands lake ecosystems is now clearly evident."

Strikingly, the effects of the elevated contaminants were not clear to the researchers because populations of a sentinel invertebrate were elevated in these lakes. The authors suggested that climate change effects could be outweighing toxic contaminant effects. They urged much further study of ecological effects of development and climate change in this region.

The paper's authors remind us that "[f]ocused environmental monitoring of oil sands aquatic ecosystems did not exist before the establishment of RAMP [Regional Aquatic Monitoring Program] in 1997 through industry funding." That is 30 years after oil sands operations began. There has been strong criticism of RAMP's methods in a 2004 scientific review and by many aboriginal communities, environmental organizations, and independent scientists since then.

Despite this criticism, the Alberta government continued to deny oil sands industry impacts to water bodies. Alberta Environment Information Centre's Oil sands FAQ web page stated in May 2011: "Are there increased levels of mercury, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH), or arsenic in water bodies or animals in the oil sands region? The Athabasca River region is unique because of the naturally occurring oil sands that the river runs through. Sediment from the banks

of the river are caught in the current and because of this, there are naturally occurring contaminants in the water. Data from the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program indicates no increase in concentrations of contaminants as oil sands development has progressed."

The denial still leapt off the oil sands.alberta.ca-water webpage on February 6, 2013: "The Athabasca River has always had measurable levels of naturally-occurring [sic] oil sands-derived hydrocarbon compounds, including Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons. This is because bitumen from exposed oil sands along the river banks seeps naturally into the Athabasca River as it cuts through the landscape. **Monitoring stations downstream of mine sites show industrial contribution cannot be detected against historically consistent readings of naturally occurring compounds in the Athabasca River** [emphasis in original]."

As AWA has long argued, northeast Alberta's wildlife and the aboriginal communities that often depend upon them deserve so much better than the environmental misinformation and mismanagement that has accompanied bitumen development. Now that tar sand industry contaminants in water bodies can no longer be denied, we look to the federal and provincial governments to curb these contaminants and investigate and limit their impacts on wildlife and human health.

- Carolyn Campbell



This photo underlines just how close Suncor's tar sands operations are to the Athabasca River. The Athabasca River is in the foreground; perched on the river's edge is a tailings pond.

PHOTO: © I. URQUHART



Sheep River Canyon (2000)
21"x48"

© DAN HUDSON

Re-visiting Water Management in Alberta

In September 2008, Alberta Environment Minister Rob Renner stated that a water allocation review was needed and public consultation would commence in 18 months. Four and a half years later, the government is embarking very tentatively on a public review of some water issues – but not, it appears, water allocation. Through an on-line workbook, and in community meetings from February 10 to March 21, the government will present information to Albertans on what it sees as four water policy priority areas. These are: water management; health of our lakes, including environmental, economic, and social aspects; appropriate water use for oil and gas fracking; and how to sustain the drinking water and wastewater systems that are not now run on a full cost recovery basis. Review of historic allocations under the water priority licence system of ‘first in time, first in right’ is “not under consideration”. If Albertans agree with these priorities, then the government will formulate policy proposals by fall or winter 2013 that have been reviewed by stakeholders. This process suggests the government will take a long, slow, even nonchalant, approach on issues that need leadership and action now.

Without forward-looking government

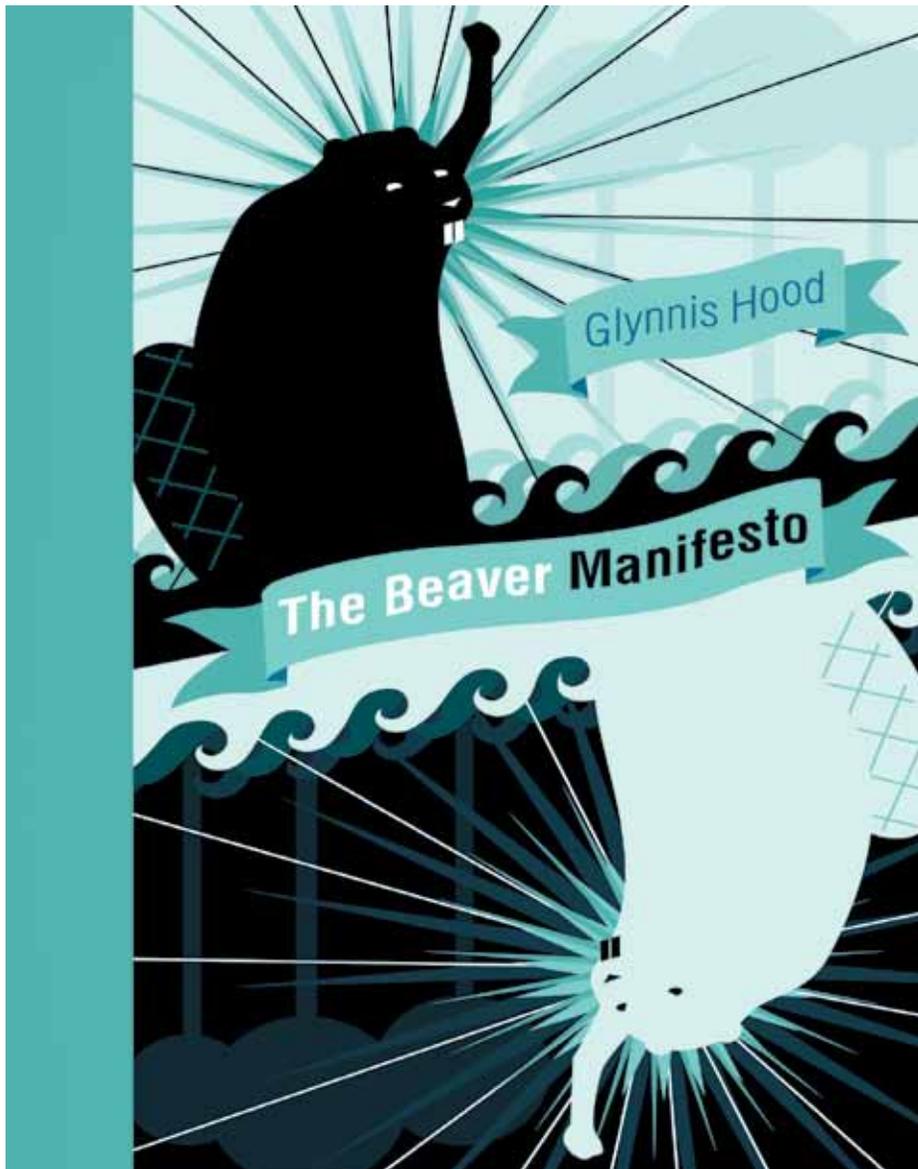
leadership, water license holders are making choices based on laws and policies that, by and large, have done little to foster healthier aquatic ecosystems. Now that no new surface water licenses are being issued, water conservation measures are occurring in the Bow, Oldman, and South Saskatchewan River watersheds. However, large licensees such as irrigation districts are expanding operations or leasing water diversion rights to other users. These actions are not offering any benefits to aquatic ecosystems that are already degraded during low flow years. These decisions will make future ecosystem-based water management choices more difficult. Jason Unger of the Environmental Law Centre ably outlined in his October 2008 *WLA* article that “the user-driven allocation process has vastly outpaced the government-driven process to protect the aquatic environment.” This pattern looks set to continue unless there are some signs that more timely action will be taken.

We would encourage AWA members and supporters to participate in this water consultation to urge a bolder, more ecosystem-based approach to water management. Requesting an overriding policy principle of ‘living within ecological limits’ of our watersheds would be a great starting point. That

would include real protection of environmental flows in Alberta rivers prior to any further activation of the water license transfer system. Water conservation as now applied - which is to increase productivity so license holders can either expand operations or trade water to other uses - will not address degraded ecosystem needs, nor will engineering more reservoirs. For river corridors, we should have stronger riparian zone protection that includes limits to gravel mining of shallow aquifers. Another priority is to greatly reduce linear disturbances and the impacts of unfettered motorized vehicle access for the headwaters, wetlands and other ecologically sensitive regions within watersheds.

For fracking and water use, we would encourage citizens to urge better monitoring of groundwater resources, application of thresholds for sustainable aquifer use and to limit fresh surface water injection, reduction of fracking fluid toxic ingredients, as well as much more auditing of well casing/sealing practices and integrity to reduce risks of contaminating groundwater from the high-pressure fracking and steaming that’s now pervasive in ‘in situ’ oilsands development as well as oil and gas.

- Carolyn Campbell



**Glynnis Hood,
The Beaver Manifesto,
 (Rocky Mountain Books, 2011)**

By Nigel Douglas

“Beavers are the great comeback story—a keystone species that survived ice ages, major droughts, the fur trade, urbanization and near extinction... It is one of the few species that refuses to play by our rules and continues to modify environments to meet its own needs and the betterment of so many other species, while at the same time showing humans that complete dominion over nature is not necessarily achievable.”

The Beaver Manifesto by Glynnis Hood is a small book which tells a huge story. Part of Rocky Mountain Books’ excellent “Manifesto” series, it is an important

book, not least because it’s a very enjoyable read, written in a spirited and accessible style.

Hood explains how the natural history and ecology of the beaver is inextricably linked to the human history of Canada. What is perhaps most astonishing about this truly remarkable creature is that it is still here at all, given the enormous and relentless over-exploitation over several hundred years.

“The country is steeped in fur traditions, that created a mystique of the land and a myth of superabundance on which we still base our ‘wilderness economy’,” she writes. “In many ways Canada is a country with a split personality, one that defines itself by the very wilderness it nearly destroyed.”

When European settlers arrived in Canada, having already removed the

European beaver from much of its range, there were an estimated 60 – 400 million beavers in North America. But the huge trade in beaver skins quickly began to make dents in this seemingly inexhaustible supply of fur. As beaver populations were wiped out in Eastern Canada, the trade spread west, finally reaching the Athabasca region in 1778. Fort Chipewyan, Alberta’s first town, quickly became the hub of the region’s fur trade, and within 100 years, beaver numbers there had already been decimated. Hood points out that by 1883 beavers were legally protected in the territory that would become Alberta; by 1907, the new province’s *Game Act* imposed a five year moratorium on harvesting beavers. Added to the over-exploitation of the fur trade was the enormous loss of wetlands across Canada due to agricultural development.

We often read about the devastating ecological effects of the loss of 50 million bison across the plains of North America. But no less important is the loss of comparable numbers of beavers from an equally huge area. “Given their ability to create and maintain wetlands, the loss of this keystone species would have had devastating effects on water resources throughout North America,” points out Hood.

Hood’s PhD research into beavers in Alberta coincided with some of the worst drought conditions in more than a century, and she was quick to realize just how important these unassuming animals were at keeping water on the landscape, even in the driest conditions (see the article by Glynnis Hood in the October 2012 issue of *WLA*) This of course helped to underline the importance of maintaining wetlands on the landscape, whilst challenging the perception of the beaver as a nuisance species, to be controlled or removed.

Hood’s book stands as a tribute to this determined, resilient animal; despite our best attempts over centuries, this vital environmental manipulator is still with us. Only now are we beginning to understand how big a bullet we dodged, and just how much we benefit from this unassuming creature and its complex interrelation with its wetland environment. Hood writes as an unashamed fan of this wonderful animal. “I am inspired by a furry rodent with an overbite and a history the size of a country.” This book is a chance for us all to be inspired too. 🐾

MUSIC FOR THE WILD

- Doors open at 7:00 p.m.
- Music starts at 7:30 p.m.
- Tickets: \$15.00
- Pre-registration is required: 1-403-283-2025
- Online: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2013

Jake Peters

Jake is an extraordinarily skilled player with a very broad range of musical interests. He plays bluegrass, blues, Celtic, classical, folk, gospel, Spanish and Hawaiian styles and he does these on a broad range of instruments. He is an award winning guitar and banjo picker but he will likely augment these with ukulele, oud, dombra or other interesting instruments. Jake is a highly sought after artist who has played with Pavlo, Cindy Church, Dick Damron, Ben Crane, Pam Tillis, Lisa Brokop, and Randy Travis to name a few.

OPENING ACT: Copper Moon

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2013

Caravana

The Caravana Gypsy Jazz Quartet will transport you back to Paris's jazz clubs of the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Caravana is Vladimir & Joy Kaitman, Doug McLean and Don Milne.

OPENING ACT: Glennis Houston & Andrea Petryty, singing blues of the 20's and 30's.

Edmonton Members

Meet and Greet

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2013

Join staff and board members for a meet and greet evening at 7p.m. Details will follow in the coming days.

Climb and Run for Wilderness

AT THE CALGARY TOWER – APRIL 20, 2013

The Climb and Run for Wilderness is a great community event celebrating Earth Day. It is suited to folks of any age from babies in backpacks to 93 year olds and attracts participants from across North America. Last year more than 1,500 registered participants and many more accompanying parents and supporters attended. The Climb and Run for Wilderness is a family-oriented athletic event which includes major additional components of education about the environment and the creation of public art. A family day, a corporate challenge day, a fun time, and a serious opportunity to test one's personal best are all combined in this Earth Day event.

THE 22ND ANNUAL CLIMB WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2013! MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW!

All runner and climbers start at the base of the Calgary Tower at their designated times:

- **Run for Wilderness:** 8am
- **Team Challenge:** 8:30 – 1:30
- **Climb for Wilderness:** 8:30 – 1:30
- **Wild Alberta Expo:** 9am – 2pm
- **Entertainment and Prizes:** all day
- **General Store:** all day
- **Awards Ceremony:** 1:30pm



Registration and competition details can be found on the climb website: WWW.CLIMBFORWILDERNESS.CA

Edmonton Solstice Swing

SATURDAY JUNE 22, 2013

AWA invites all Edmonton members, prospective members, friends and supporters join us at the Muttart Conservatory to mark the summer solstice. There will be entertainment, education, good friends, great food and more!

Location: Muttart Conservatory, Edmonton

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$80.00

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

Online: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/events

TUESDAY TALKS

Location:

AWA, 455 12th St NW, CALGARY

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Cost: \$5 per person, \$1 for children

Contact: 403-283-2025 for reservations
Pre-registration is advised for all talks

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2013

Finding Fish in Alberta's Parkland and Boreal Rivers – What They're Telling Us
With Dr. Michael Sullivan

TUESDAY MARCH 5, 2013

Muskwa-Kechika –
A Planning Success
With Wayne Sawchuk

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2013

Hair Snares for Grizzly Bears:
Monitoring Bears in Southwestern Alberta
With Andrea Morehouse

TUESDAY, MAY 14, 2013

Bat Migration
With Robert Barclay

CLIMB & RUN

for Wilderness

APRIL 20, 2013

HELP US
PROTECT CARIBOU

Climb 802 stairs and race 1km
or just climb!

Register at climbforwilderness.ca
or call 403-283-2025



Alberta Wilderness Association



ALBERTAWILDERNESS



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Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:



Alberta Wilderness Association

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awa@abwild.ca



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