

In Memoriam:

Dawn Dickinson

(February 3, 1930 – April 2, 2013)

With Dawn Dickinson's passing on April 2, Alberta lost one of its most dedicated, knowledgeable, and respected defenders of the environment. As a naturalist, Dawn's passion for prairie grasslands and the Cypress Hills was limitless. As a biologist, she steadfastly maintained her principles that science and facts should guide conservation and management.

Born in Lethbridge, Dawn grew up in England where she developed her lifelong love of natural landscapes through frequent walks over England's South Downs and later over the splendour of Dartmoor. She returned to Lethbridge in her twenties, then came to Medicine Hat for a summer job surveying elk for Alberta Fish and Wildlife. This gave her an understanding of the conflicts which could occur over land use and started her never-ending fascination with and dedication to conservation.

Her life as a biologist took her across Western Canada and the Arctic before she finally settled in Medicine Hat. Ever since, she has tirelessly volunteered for the Grasslands Naturalists, Nature Alberta (Federation of Alberta Naturalists), Alberta Wilderness Association and, in the early 1990s, Project Swiftsure.

Dawn organized many ambitious and successful workshops and symposia, including the Cypress Hills Forest Management Workshop and the Meridian Dam Forum; the latter was the first time the public heard a balanced perspective on the effects of the proposed dam. She was always willing to voice or write the naturalist and scientific perspective and did so effectively in many public forums, workshops, and open houses.

As a writer, she created film scripts for Karvonen Films, a brochure on sharp-tailed grouse for Alberta Fish and Wildlife, reference material on Cypress Hills ungulates, magazine articles, and many dozens of scientific and consultative reports, briefs, and critiques of legislation and draft conservation plans. She also wrote books: *Prairie River: a canoe and*

wildlife viewing guide to the South Saskatchewan River; the lyrical volume *A Flight of Deer*; *Caught in the Spin: the story of the wild horses of CFB Suffield*; and the yet-to-be-published *Landscape with Elk*.

Dawn's conservation efforts were not confined to scientific papers and presentations. She delighted in expressing her love of nature through painting, photography, and poetry. And, she loved adventure, including a solo trip to Mexico by scooter (yes, scooter!) and many canoe trips – for example, a two week solo journey in the Yukon.

While Dawn was considerate and gentle, she had a no-nonsense tenacity and inner resolve when dealing with environmental issues. Her single-minded determination to base decisions on sound science resulted in her receiving many awards and honours for her work as a professional zoologist, biologist and naturalist, including AWA's Alberta Wilderness Defender Award (2005), the Nature Canada Volunteer Award (2003), the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference Award (2004) and two awards from Nature Alberta. Although her determination was not always popular with those she disagreed with, she was widely respected for her credibility and integrity, not least by many of the ranching families of south-eastern Alberta.

What motivated her ceaseless dedication? Her answer was in an article in *Wild Lands Advocate*: "You've had so much pleasure in the natural places you've worked in and been to, you have a feeling of obligation. Because you've been given so much, you owe the land itself something."

Dawn is survived by her brother Edward in England. At her request, there was no funeral service but a lovely celebration of her life was held in Medicine Hat on April 22; about fifty naturalist friends attended.

- Dennis Baresco



Dawn in Brockett (1956). She worked there as a speech therapist . . . while quietly encouraging the children to speak their native tongue.