



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

July 31, 2013

Honourable Diana McQueen
Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
#132 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Email: diana.mcqueen@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister McQueen:

Further to our ongoing correspondence on the logging of Hidden Creek, your response, dated March 13, 2013 to AWA's concerns raises new questions and concerns.

AWA's concern for the decisions made and actions taken in Hidden Creek are based in carefully considered reviews of the documents available to the public, what we can observe on the ground, our familiarity with the area and ecosystems, and the good and reliable assistance of community experts. AWA is well known for our conservation knowledge and our years of working to defend the Hidden Creek area.

We delayed writing this letter thinking that we might finally receive the materials requested through FOIP to inform this letter. AWA submitted our FOIP request November 6th, 2012 and to date we are still waiting for those documents.

For now, please know your letter included two factual errors we would like to bring to your attention.

First, Hidden Creek has been recognized as a key bull trout spawning stream for decades. In fact this is one of the reasons AWA has been calling for protection of that watershed since the 1980's. It is also our understanding that the application for Hidden Creek to be considered for Class "A" status had lingered in the old Department of Environment for several years prior to you becoming the minister of the amalgamated department of ESRD.

Second, we can find no reference to "Class A standards in the C5 Forest Management Plan allow for use of existing roads within the watercourse buffer" in the C5 plan. Ostensibly this was provided to rationalize why native fish were put at risk to support this logging operation. In fact there is hardly any

mention of fish at all in the C5 plan, let alone “threatened” species like bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout.

What is apparent in our detailed review of the C5 plan is that under “Targets and Acceptable Variance” there is required to be “100% adherence to existing and/or new requirements” related to fish. Allowing the significant variance to the buffer required under the Class “A” designation does not meet the intent of this requirement, especially when the variance was several kilometres long.

If “our ground rule watercourse buffer requirements meet the needs of the aquatic values” then surely there must be a wealth of empirical evidence, from extensive monitoring and evaluation, which supports this contention. Will the department share that with us? What seems more likely given that bull trout and cutthroat populations continue to decline and decline in real time in logged watersheds is the current timber harvest operating ground rules are ineffective at protecting aquatic resources.

Based on the observations and reviews of the aftermath of logging in Hidden Creek by three independent professionals the AWA recognizes our earlier concerns are still valid and have not been addressed. Failures to deal with erosion and sediment transport imperil bull trout and cutthroat trout and the unreasonable refusal of your department to finally close the existing seismic trail is an additive risk to Hidden Creek.

Finally, we find it extraordinarily hard to believe that recommendations provided by field professionals in the Fish and Wildlife Division were fully incorporated into the final harvest plan. As I mentioned earlier, we are still waiting for the documents to be shared with us on this, and once we receive them and have an opportunity for a review we will have more to correspond with you on that point.

Minister McQueen, please know AWA’s serious concerns and disappointment with the logging of Hidden Creek are as strong today as they were in the 1980’s and on November 6th, 2012, when we learned this area would be logged.

I look forward to our continued correspondence on this matter.

Sincerely yours,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Christyann Olson
Executive Director