



NEW CERTIFICATION SEEN AS KEY TO BETTER FORESTRY PRACTICES

By Andy Marshall



Provincial conservationists still pin their hopes for better-managed forests here on a new-to Alberta lumber certification process they believe can force change on a wary forestry industry.

But, like a young sapling struggling to survive in thick undergrowth, the so-called Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

certification is in danger of being submerged in the tangle of other forestry audit processes being touted by industry and government officials.

A crucial meeting of industry, environmental, academic, legal and Aboriginal representatives, scheduled for Feb. 20 and 21, aims at continuing the process of clarifying standards for harvesting and managing Alberta's boreal forests under the FSC international certification program.

"If people's concerns are based on better forest management on the ground, then the choice is clearly FSC," says Helene Walsh, head of Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga and co-ordinator of the environmental chamber of FSC's Alberta chapter. "But, the industry has a lot of capacity to muddy the waters if they don't want to change."

Although the forestry industry is keeping an active brief on the progress of FSC in Alberta and accept that some third-party auditing of its management practices is inevitable, many companies are turning to other stamps of approval on their products which they believe can persuade consumers they're doing the right thing for sustainable forests.

"Everyone is very curious about what will be developed," says Neil Shelly, director of environmental affairs for the Alberta Forest Products Association. "We see the drive for more certified



Cutline in the Birch Mountains

wood, but will it be exclusively FSC? The trend may not be like that."

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA), the International Standards Organization 14,001 (ISO) and the U.S.-based Sustainable Forests Initiative (SFI) are chief among other certification processes under close study by the industry.

The provincial government has also taken a guarded stance to FSC. Although implementation of FSC in Alberta will be impossible without government backing, a spokesman for Sustainable Resource Development Minister Mike Cardinal points to the other programs and notes "it's up to each company as to the final process they use." If the entire world accepted FSC certification," says Robert Storrier, "obviously we'd be forced to follow suit." In the meantime, the department will remain just interested observers to the discussions.

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The swing to some form of certification is in response to the growing numbers of consumers throughout the world insisting on stricter rules for forest harvesting and, in some cases, threatening to boycott products from companies unable to demonstrate practices that defend the integrity of forests and biodiversity within them. As a result, several large retailers, including IKEA, Home Depot and Lowes, give buying preference to wood suppliers who are FSC certified.

Founded in 1993 to balance social, environmental, economic and Aboriginal interests, the Mexico-based, non-profit Forest Stewardship Council has 10 general principles for measuring forest management. An estimated seven per cent of the world's industrial wood consumption is FSC certified. Its strength, say supporters, is that it is the only program recognized worldwide by environmental groups, governments, forestry companies, wood retailers and consumer groups.

However, a report last year for Alberta conservation groups has identified two significant barriers for implementation of FSC here that require government intervention. The first is the need to set aside large protected areas in at least six forest subregions in Alberta. These areas would serve as benchmarks or comparisons for scientific study looking into impacts in harvested areas. A recent report by the Alberta Centre for Boreal Research (www.borealcentre.ca; sponsored by several organizations, including the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society) says these areas need to be at least 5,000 square kilometres to capture all the ecological diversity present in the regions.

With the province adamant that its dedication of about 19,000 square kilometres of land under Special Places concluded the need for any further protected areas, this requirement "may be the deal-breaker for getting anything done," says Sunpine spokesman Tom Daniels. "The government has to be involved."

Almost as daunting is the requirement by FSC for long-term and clearly defined tenure of lands being forested. It is inconceivable that Alberta's current system of oil and gas leases would be overturned. And, while closer co-operation between the two industries is occurring, those involved cannot see how that requirement can be met. "That's beyond our control. The overall land managers are the provincial government," says industry spokesman Shelly.

AWA president Cliff Wallis proposes the forestry industry either gains full control of the lands it operates in, or a joint forestry-energy industry management board oversees them. And, although the energy sector is a "big elephant compared to the tiny gnat of the forest industry, enough of the oil and gas companies know they have to work responsibly."

The Alberta Centre for Boreal Research studies

suggest that seismic work and drilling of wells result in about the same amount of clearing as from timber harvesting. Because regeneration is inadequate, seismic activities lead to a "substantial" and progressive loss of mature forest, according to a centre report. Seismic lines provide access routes into the forest for off-road vehicles, further exacerbating the serious impacts on the soil and vegetation.

Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) spokesman David Luff points to changing technology that can greatly reduce the seismic footprint, but environmentalists say that technology is still little used, particularly in the northern forests. He and forestry spokesman also contend they are working better together to avoid duplication of their impacts on the forests. One example is their sharing of access to production areas.

"A lot more integration is going on," adds the government's Storrier. "The industries are addressing that issue through the integrated resource management plan."

Brent Rabik, a spokesman for Alberta Pacific, described by environmentalists as among the more enlightened forest companies, warns both industries still have a long way to go to do a better job. If they want long-term stable access to the resources, "they have to recognize they do create issues out there, whether it's air pollution or fragmentation of the ecosystem," he says. "There are threats to their business."

Environmentalists, meanwhile, have a long list of forestry industry practices they hope can be changed through the FSC certification process. Top of the list is the targeting by the industry of old-growth stands and the industry's alleged failure to maintain biodiversity. "The ecological integrity of Alberta's forests is being seriously impaired through progressive fragmentation and loss of habitat resulting from the activities of the forest and petroleum industries," states a report on FSC certification done for the AWA, CPAWS, Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

Under the sustained-yield management (SYM) approach to forest management, promoted by the Alberta government, the overall effect is to "reduce habitat diversity by producing a forest that is younger and simpler than natural-origin forests," says the report. "Reduced habitat diversity will, in turn, result in decreased species diversity."

Companies need to leave far more materials in their clear-cut blocks, explains Helene Walsh. And they should use less invasive techniques for re-establishing the forest. The scarification (heavy-duty scraping and ploughing over) of cut areas, the burning of unused materials and applications of herbicides are among specific techniques under fire. Planting conifer saplings to replace 100-year-old



Logging Truck



trees undermines the natural succession process of forest growth and encourages a monoculture, says Walsh. "The industry is more interested in maintaining fibre supplies, as opposed to biodiversity."

"Reforestation is not restoration," says Richard Thomas, an environmental consultant, who has tried to track the impact of declining habitat on migratory bird numbers. He worries that no one is quantifying the losses of old-growth stands. While he has little faith in forest certification, even FSC, to improve methods, he says public discussion about the process "has got them (the industry) worried."

AWA's Cliff Wallis understands well the potential leverage the FSC certification process can apply. "We're using the market place to apply pressure . . . the threat of a loss of market is enough to get the industry to the table."



Buying wood products at Ikea, 2001.

Giant retailer IKEA, which buys wood throughout the world, including some indirectly from Weldwood in Alberta, is committed to FSC certification, says its Canadian retail environmental co-ordinator Greg Priest.

"Consumers are starting to ask about certification . . . because we are a worldwide company, we want something that is recognized worldwide," he says. Although supplies of FSC-certified wood are limited, "we're trying to work it through the system . . . if FSC wood is available, we try to purchase that. It's the way we want to work in the future."

The advantage to FSC, Priest explains, is that it covers social, economic and environmental issues. "It's very intensive, it includes all stakeholders in developing criteria, and it's internationally accepted."

Most forest companies are less sanguine about it. Paul Wooding of Canadian Forest Products warns of the drawbacks. He is worried FSC's Canadian standards will demand a lot more than, say, its standards in Sweden. "If there are wildly different standards, then that's an issue for us," he says. "There has to be harmonization."

At issue, for example, are the obvious differences between Canadian and European forests and the challenges to maintain biodiversity in stands being cut for the first time here, as opposed to the second- or third-growth timber there. His company has seen difficulties with FSC certification in British Columbia and the clash of FSC principles with Aboriginal land claims.

Canfor plans to take part in the February meeting, but it doesn't see a big difference between the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) certification and FSC. It also looks to the International Standards Organization (ISO) as a "good platform

on which to build other certification systems, but we recognize that it doesn't necessarily address issues of sustainable forest management," says Wooding.

Even though it has undergone several "successful" audits of its forest management, including the industry's own Forest Care program, Spray Lake Sawmills is closely monitoring FSC's development of standards, says its planning forester Ed Kulcsar. He sees difficulties in setting an appropriate definition of old-growth forest, noting that "it is important to have access to mature timber and those trees that are large enough to process through the mill."

While IKEA does buy shelving from Adwood in Edmonton, which is supplied by Weldwood, company spokesman Aaron Jones says Weldwood is still waiting for FSC regional standards here before responding to IKEA queries. Home Depot has also raised the matter of FSC certification with Weldwood. Third-party evaluations of all the certification processes raise different pros and cons, says Jones.

A danger to FSC certification is that conservationists will exploit it for their own agenda, warns Alpac's Rabik. The biggest challenge, though, will be to adapt the global principles and make them work in Alberta. "The nature of the land base being public and there being other rights-holders on it (the energy industry) makes it interesting how we move ahead."

He also says studies, such as those done by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation in Washington, D.C., do not favour FSC over other processes such as the Sustainable Forests Initiative (SFI) in the U.S.

Walsh counters that no other certification has the clear, objective, measurable standards promoted by FSC. There is such scorn for CSA that Wallis resigned from one of its technical committees, and a letter of complaint has been sent regarding its methods, which critics claim, are dictated by the industry. It has no requirement for protected areas or for looking after habitat for endangered species, Walsh explains. She calls SFI the U.S. answer to CSA. "It was created by the forest industry to have certification without meaningful change." ISO 14001 is not even a proper certification process and doesn't address forest practices, she says.



Buying wood at Home Depot, 2001.

"We're trying to act in the forest industry's best interests," Walsh says. "If you believe their markets in future will depend on being FSC certified, then we're doing our best to make it possible for them to get it in Alberta." Besides, she adds, "it's our only hope" to protect Alberta's forests.

(Andy Marshall is a freelance writer living in Cochrane. He is on the Editorial Board of Wild Lands Advocate).



DAMMED IF YOU DO

By K.E. Bray, Fisheries Biologist, Revelstoke, B.C.

Inscribed on the wall at the Grand Coulee Dam Visitor Centre are the lines:

Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Your power is turning the darkness to dawn.

So roll on, Columbia, roll on.

*And far up the river is Grand Coulee Dam,
The mightiest thing ever built by a man,
To run the great factories and water the land,
It's roll on, Columbia, roll on.*



K.E. Bray, Fisheries Biologist

The Columbia River may have been rolling on powering light bulbs, but more than one million salmon trying to return to their natal spawning grounds were stopped dead in their tracks, so to speak. Perhaps not now the mightiest thing built by humans, in the 1930s the Grand Coulee was certainly a show stopper on the Columbia River - the dam that forever blocked anadromous salmon from the upper Columbia and whose effects would be felt to the headwaters hundreds of kilometres away.

From a one metre high beaver dam to the 221 m high Hoover Dam on the Colorado River, where water is impounded fish are usually affected. While beavers and fish have evolved together and beaver dams can often benefit fish, human made dams are a different story. Usually large, immovable, long lasting, and highly controlled, our dams and reservoirs can have extensive effects on species, communities, and ecosystems.

Most large dams (<15 m tall) in the world are built primarily for irrigation, and China leads the way with over 19 000. Major dams (= 150 m), such as the Hoover or Grand Coulee, for example, are often built for hydropower, but also serve additional purposes for flood control and river navigation. Canada ranks 3rd in the world for having the most major dams, after the U.S. and the former U.S.S.R.



Oldman River Dam, 1991.

The impact of dams on fish populations can be complex to describe. Some people spend years (or careers) investigating how dams affect fish populations and devising ways to lessen the damage. Impacts can be separated into two broad categories: those from the physical presence of dams and reservoirs, called footprint impacts, and those arising from the operation of dams, called operational impacts.

Below, very briefly, are some of the major effects of dams on fish in north temperate regions such as western Canada, along with some measures currently used to address the impacts. Keep in mind that, in the connected and complex web of ecology, each individual effect can have continuing and far reaching implications.

Dams bring us many benefits, from power to flood control and water storage for irrigation. They fuel industrial economies and help us maintain our current lifestyle. Part of the cost of having dams though is their impact on fish communities. While there are ways of addressing many of these effects, the ability to do so is often hindered by a lack of information on the pre- and post-dam environment, inadequate or short term funding that precludes essential long term monitoring, and the complex involvement of other threats to fish populations, such as urbanization, forestry, mining, agriculture, industrial development, over harvesting, exotic species, and climate change.

Although we are now aware of the many impacts to fish populations brought about by dam construction and operation, there may still remain unforeseen effects in the future. Our major dams are less than 100 years old, most less than 50, and the long-term impacts of disrupting river ecosystems that naturally operate and evolve in hundreds or thousands of years are yet to come.

IMPACT OR ISSUE	MEANS OF MITIGATION OR COMPENSATION
FOOTPRINT	
1) THE DAM The physical presence of a dam creates a barrier that blocks fish migration, both upstream and downstream, and can restrict or eliminate access to habitat, block anadromous species in some rivers and contribute to nutrient declines (see below), and fragment populations leading to loss of genetic diversity or fitness. Problems related to fragmentation increase in river systems with multiple dams. In some places, dams can protect native fish populations by blocking invasion of exotic species.	At some dams, fish ladders can be installed to allow migration upstream. These do not work for high dams and retrofitting is much more difficult than including them in the initial design and construction. Trucks or barges are used to transport fish upstream and some facilities can use increased flows to encourage downstream migration (see below)



IMPACT OR ISSUE	MEANS OF MITIGATION OR COMPENSATION
<p>2) THE RESERVOIR</p> <p>Creating a reservoir behind the dam can change habitats significantly, e.g. from riverine to lacustrine by flooding a river valley, or less severely but noticeable nonetheless, e.g. impounding an existing lake. The effects are numerous and include:</p>	
<p>Nutrient retention/depletion</p> <p>The standing water of reservoirs allows nutrients that once flowed through the system to sink and become unusable. After an initial productivity boom following reservoir creation when nutrients (Nitrogen and Phosphorus) are being leached out of the flooded soil, productivity crashes leaving behind an impoverished environment. The situation is exacerbated by multiple dams as productivity declines with each subsequent reservoir in the system receiving fewer and fewer nutrients. The loss of marine derived nutrients because of dams that block anadromous salmon, for example, also compounds the problem of nutrient deficiency. Salmon carcasses are a rich source of N and P readily available to both aquatic and terrestrial organisms (e.g. stream invertebrates, eagles, bears).</p>	<p>Nutrient addition or fertilisation, such as in B.C. and Sweden, is used to restore historical N and P levels. Fertilisation must be continued in order to maintain productivity levels.</p> <p>Deep water withdrawals from an upstream reservoir to the downstream environment could increase nutrients, as they are more concentrated in the deep, cold waters of the reservoirs. Many dams were not designed for this and the release of very cold water downstream can have harmful effects.</p> <p>Restoration of salmon runs by dam removal is being advocated more frequently and has occurred in some places, e.g. on the Snake River. Removal of major dams is advocated by some, but will likely not occur for a long time. In the meantime, protection of remaining fish stocks and maintaining habitat is considered the least we can do.</p>
<p>Sediment Sink</p> <p>The reservoir's role as a sediment sink has a far-reaching downstream effect as well. Estuaries are starved of sediment resulting in changes to delta formation, coastal habitats, and ocean/sea productivity. Immediately downstream of the dam, reduced sediment input changes river dynamics by not providing sand and gravel for bars, shoals, islands, etc. Erosion downstream is also increased, as the water no longer carries its normal bedload and therefore 'strips' sediment as it flows. The build up of sediment behind a dam also ultimately limits the life of the facility.</p>	<p>In Colorado and California, for example, they have been trying out artificial flood flows to replenish sand and gravel bars downstream and have met with some success. The flexibility to operate dams in this manner doesn't always exist.</p>
<p>Habitat loss</p> <p>Absolute loss of habitat by inundation will occur. Often the areas lost are low gradient sections of streams and fertile valley bottoms. In steep sided mountainous valleys, many tributaries are in hanging valleys so that new reservoir levels often flood usable habitat up to a barrier. There is also the possibility, of course, that existing barriers will disappear under the reservoir, opening up tributary habitat. In the case of an artificial barrier, such as a culvert, this is a good thing, but where a natural barrier is removed, the mixing of genetically different above and below barrier populations may be detrimental.</p>	<p>Habitat protection, rehabilitation, and enhancement of areas remaining or re-creation of specific habitat functions, e.g. by building spawning channels, present a range of options. It is not possible, however, to restore or re-create everything, especially large river or wetland habitats. Sometimes off site rehabilitation is considered; i.e., improving habitats or a fisheries elsewhere to compensate for losses due to the dam and reservoir. Some areas stock hatchery fish to replace those lost, although many question the success and use of hatcheries for this type of production.</p>
<p>The loss of flowing water habitat can create difficulties for fish trying to migrate downstream, such as salmon smolts. The cues and assistance they rely on for getting out to the ocean are removed and they become confused in the still water reservoir environment.</p>	<p>Increasing flows at certain times of the year helps flush smolts downstream (flushing flows).</p>



IMPACT OR ISSUE	MEANS OF MITIGATION OR COMPENSATION
Species Loss Specific and unique genotypes, phenotypes, or populations of fish (or other organisms) may be forever lost, some of which we may never even know about.	There isn't much anyone can do once they are gone.
Methylmercury Contamination Flooding terrestrial vegetation leads to the release of methylmercury, a harmful contaminant that bioaccumulates in the food chain and can lead to serious illness or death in humans.	Consumption advisories or complete closures to fisheries are often implemented, but only time will allow methylmercury concentrations to decline. In some cases, reservoirs are cleared of as much standing vegetation as possible prior to flooding which could reduce overall concentrations. Reservoir clearing does not eliminate the problem, however, and comes with its own impacts. Removal of forest cover contributes to lost productivity and lack of habitat in the new reservoir.
Greenhouse Gases Newly created reservoirs contribute to greenhouse gas emissions by releasing CO ₂ and methane from decaying vegetation.	Clearing standing vegetation in reservoirs prior to flooding can help reduce CO ₂ emissions as well as reduce problems with floating debris and boating hazards in the future. As noted above, however, the same standing vegetation can be very important for aquatic productivity.
Access and the Human Dimension Not often considered an impact to fish is the increased access that a reservoir provides to the public, particularly anglers, as new fisheries are developed. Recreational opportunities are touted as a benefit of reservoirs and increased public access can lead to increased pressure on fish populations. Over harvest, illegal harvest, and management actions such as stocking can eliminate populations or alter species composition, particularly if non-native fish are introduced.	Fisheries management activities, such as catch limits, gear restrictions, special licences, bait bans, seasonal limits, enforcement, access restrictions, closures, and sanctuaries.

IMPACT OR ISSUE	MEANS OF MITIGATION OR COMPENSATION
OPERATIONAL	
1) WATER LEVEL FLUCTUATIONS Dam operations, especially hydroelectric facilities, result in fluctuating discharges as the demand for water or power changes. Water level fluctuations can have effects both upstream and downstream of the dam. In the reservoir, the drawdown zone eliminates littoral habitat (no plants+no invertebrates=no habitat or food) that could have contributed to reservoir productivity. At times, the denuded drawdown zone is exposed to wind erosion causing dust storms and spreading fine sediment across a large area. Fluctuating water levels also resuspend silt and, potentially, contaminants. Downstream, changing discharges can increase erosion, cause fish stranding, reduce or eliminate riparian vegetation, disrupt groundwater flows, and desiccate invertebrates. Both upstream and downstream, certain water levels can render tributaries inaccessible at critical periods.	Within limits, water level fluctuations can be reduced by changing both the amplitude and frequency of discharge rates. Reservoir levels can also be somewhat managed to reduce impacts by stabilizing water levels at certain times of year. Oftentimes, however, the extent to which changes can be made is quite limited by the necessities of operating the dam for its intended purpose. Shorelines susceptible to erosion are protected, sometimes by armouring with rip rap. Drawdown zones can be planted to reduce wind and water erosion. Fish strandings, if not avoided by reducing the rate of change to water levels, may be helped by salvaging trapped fish, a time sensitive and costly procedure. Tributary mouths can be cleared or access facilitated by constructing step pools/passages, often an ongoing activity.



IMPACT OR ISSUE	MEANS OF MITIGATION OR COMPENSATION
<p>2) ALTERATION OF THE NATURAL HYDROGRAPH Daily and seasonal timing of flows is changed by dam operations, which can disrupt migration, spawning, or feeding cues, and make habitats unsuitable or intolerable due to harmful temperature or dissolved oxygen conditions. As described for the Colorado River above, flows can be managed to a degree to simulate natural discharges. Most dams are not built or cannot be operated with the flexibility needed.</p>	<p>As described for the Colorado River above, flows can be managed to a degree to simulate natural discharges. Most dams are not built or cannot be operated with the flexibility needed.</p>
<p>3) GAS BUBBLE TRAUMA Operation of the turbines or spilling excess water can force more oxygen into the discharge water causing gas bubble trauma in fish (which is like having the bends). This can weaken or kill fish that are coming through the penstocks or those living in the tailrace. Changes are usually made to turbine operation that significantly reduce the incidence of gas bubble trauma.</p>	<p>Changes are usually made to turbine operation that significantly reduce the incidence of gas bubble trauma.</p>
<p>4) ENTRAINMENT Drawing water into the penstocks also can draw in fish, some of which make it through the turbines alive, although perhaps somewhat dazed, and some who come through in pieces. This is known as entrainment and represents a loss of biomass to the upstream reservoir, but also can be a rich food source for fish and wildlife downstream of the dam. Placing of screens or deflectors that discourage fish from coming too close to the intakes, or positioning intakes to avoid depths where fish concentrate can help reduce entrainment.</p>	<p>Placing of screens or deflectors that discourage fish from coming too close to the intakes, or positioning intakes to avoid depths where fish concentrate can help reduce entrainment.</p>



BIGHORN PUBLIC FORUMS - A GREAT SUCCESS?

By Tamaini Snaith,
AWA Conservation Specialist



When we planned a series of public forums to talk about the Bighorn, we thought we would be lucky to draw a crowd of a dozen or so. If we set out to raise awareness and increase the profile of the issues, then our meetings were a great success. Our first meeting was held in Sundre in early January. About 120 people came, the following week in Rocky Mountain House, there were more than 150, in Edmonton there were 250, and in Calgary, close to 400!

The reasons for this overwhelming turnout, and the support we received from the crowd, were mixed. We have raised a tremendous amount of support for protection of the Bighorn Wildland Park. We have heard from countless people who want this beautiful area to be protected and maintained in a natural state. Backcountry recreationists, hikers, bikers, campers and skiers have loudly expressed their concern for the area, and fear its loss if protection is not achieved.

Horse users, hunters and outfitters have been a strong voice in the call to protect the Bighorn. This wildland is the only place, other than the Willmore Wilderness, which remains suitable for traditional outfitting trips. It is still possible to travel for weeks through the backcountry and not cross a road or see a town. The maintenance of this traditional element of Alberta's way of life, economy, and recreation is of paramount concern.

But the most vocal group at our meetings have been the off-road vehicle (ORV)/snowmobile users. Although it is prohibited by government policy, there is currently heavy use of these vehicles in some parts of the Bighorn Wildland. These folks want the area to be legally opened up to their use. This has led to enormous confusion about the issues, and a lot of anger, for the most part due to some unfortunate misinformation that has been circulated.

There is a pamphlet going around which tells ORV users that the AWA is trying to shut down the Eastern Slopes, and that we are publicly attacking them. It suggests that if they don't take action, the AWA will have the Bighorn "closed" within months. It conveniently does not mention that the Bighorn Wildland is already closed, and that motorized use is not permitted in the Bighorn Wildland. Understandably, this creates anger and fear that they will not be able to enjoy their sport. Of course, this is untrue. AWA has never suggested the Eastern Slopes be closed down; there are lots of areas where motorized recreation is currently allowed, and we are not asking that they be closed. In fact, we support the safe and responsible use of motorized recreational vehicles in appropriate areas on designated trails.

I am getting dozens of emails about this issue - some very opposed to us, and some very supportive. Some ORV users believe that they should have access anywhere anytime, and feel

that any limit on their use is discriminatory. These people are either unaware of the well-documented negative effects of their vehicles on the environment (even when used responsibly), or they don't care. I hope it is the former!


But I have also spoken to many ORV riders who love their sport, but also love the wilderness, and recognize that their actions can be damaging. These people accept and support



Bighorn Public Forum

government decisions, which prohibit motorized recreation in some areas in order to preserve environmental and aesthetic values. Some places are just too important to lose. There are many other places to ride.

Maintaining the wilderness value of the Bighorn is our top priority. This area is one of the only places left in Alberta where gas wells don't pepper the landscape, that is not criss-crossed by roads, and where motors are not allowed.

Conservation biology tells us that roadless areas are absolutely essential if we want to preserve biodiversity and wildlife populations. The science is very strong, and indicates that roads and motorized access are detrimental to wildlife, watersheds, and natural processes. These are the reasons that AWA wants the government to enforce the policies that prohibit motorized access in the Bighorn Wildland, and to legally protect the park from industrial development. 

The Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area was designated in 1986, but the legislation has never been put in place. AWA wants the government to fulfill this promise, and to legally protect this 4000 km² area as a Wildland Park. Under this designation, all currently allowed uses will continue, and motorized recreation and industrial activities will remain prohibited.

AWA has produced a fact sheet on the Bighorn Wildland. It can be found on our website at
www.AlbertaWilderness.ca/News/issues/Bighorn/Archive





Bighorn Public Forum in Rocky Mountain House

C. Olson

Letter to the Editor:

My friend and I attended the information meeting held by AWA on January 29, regarding protecting the status of the Bighorn.

Many of the people there were not interested in conserving the Bighorn wilderness. Instead, they were concerned about losing their motorized access to the area. They were unwilling to be informed that the use of motorized vehicles is already prohibited in this area.

It was very disheartening to see so many people self-righteously hold on to their mercenary selfishness and terrible ignorance of the value of wilderness.

Keep up the good fight, AWA! In "dollar-worshipping", "me-first", Alberta, a voice in favor of preserving the wilderness is, evidently, a voice in the wilderness.

Molly Taylor

Letter to the Editor:

As an active sledder and quader I was quite concerned about all of the fuss on closures of the areas on the eastern slopes. I attended a few meetings the AWA put on about this, concerned about losing riding area. One thing I did take to the meetings was an open mind. After listening to many sides about the closure and talking with people from the AWA I actually went from opposing the closure to supporting it. I remember seeing images of mass deforestation in Brazil years ago and how people in first world countries shook their heads at the farmers clearing land for their cattle etc. only to discover that the land could not support anything in it's new stripped state. The land was mostly clay and water simply washed away anything left. I don't want to see the same type of thing happen in our own backyard. This is why I support the AWA in closing down access, even if it means fewer places for me to ride. Their concern is for the habitat, which is impossible to replace once gone. As a farmer I realize the importance of proper land management for sustainable development. The fight is not against people using the Bighorn for motorized recreation, it's for what little pristine land we have left. I don't want to see it disappear to industry or anything else for that matter.

(Name withheld by request)

"SALVAGE" CUTTING IN THE BIGHORN

By Tamaini Snaith

Fire is a natural process in Alberta's forests, and many tree species actually require fire so that they can reproduce. Burned trees will die over time, and as they breakdown, they supply essential nutrients to the soil for the new vegetation.

But this process is often interrupted by so-called "salvage" logging. The timber industry would like us to believe that a burnt tree is a wasted tree, and that unless we get in there and take out all the salvageable timber, that we are losing money. They conveniently ignore the ecological value of leaving those trees in place, and neglect to mention the damage done by building roads and stream crossings and clear-cutting on delicate soil already affected by fire.

Last year, a wildfire swept through the southern portion of the Bighorn Wildland. Sunpine Forest Products wants to get that timber out of there before it is "wasted".


Most of the burned area is in Prime Protection Zone. Salvage logging may technically be allowed under some circumstances, but the intent of Prime Protection Zone is to "preserve environmentally sensitive terrain and valuable aesthetic resources". To allow salvage logging is certainly a violation of the intent of this zone.

Sunpine applied for salvage logging approval from the Alberta Government Department of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD). But to get the burned area in Prime

Protection Zone, they would need to get across the Red Deer River. Sunpine applied for a river crossing approval from the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO).

AWA objected to the approval of the river crossing on grounds that the bridge would be built with the intent of logging in Prime Protection Zone, and that the logging may affect stream quality. DFO approved the bridge because it is beyond their mandate to consider where the bridge is going and for what purpose. Sunpine met DFOs stream crossing requirements, and the bridge was approved.

Happily, the Government of Alberta denied Sunpine permission to log in the Prime Protection Zone because Sunpine failed to demonstrate that the logging would benefit wildlife habitat. Perhaps the current high profile and opposition to industrial development in the Bighorn contributed to this decision.

In this case, salvage logging will be restricted to the Multiple Use Zone along the road and the Red Deer River. However, forest harvesting policies which allow, and even encourage, salvage logging remain in place. It's time the policies caught up with the science: a burned tree is not a wasted tree, it is an important component of forest succession, and fires are critical to the boreal ecosystem. 



THOUGHTS ABOUT THE BIGHORN

By JW Campbell



JW Campbell speaking at the Bighorn Public Forum in Calgary.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, people from every race and creed: as I sit here on the 29 January, I'm going to speak of my feelings for the backcountry.

I'm looking out my window today, and we're so lucky to have this serene and beautiful country here in Alberta. I am talking about the Bighorn, where Don Sparrow put in the Forest Land Use Zones back in 1986. Prior to that it was opened up to every head of every watershed for oil and gas exploration. They used caterpillars back then in the 50s and from that day forward a lot of the knowledgeable horsemen and outfitters that wanted to get away into wilderness moved north.

And we went through a period of time when it was pretty wide open, and mind you our population was way less and the quads weren't even around, the trailbikes or any of that stuff. I remember when I went up there in the 50s with my uncles, up in that backcountry upper Clearwater and Panther Corners and the Wapiabi, Ram. The trunk road wasn't even in there then and then the oil boom came. I took up a crusade with Sparrow and Fred McDougall and different guys that were in the regime at that time, to protect this area. I remember my uncles saying, you're sure wasting your time going for protection. I remember working with Don Sparrow with maps to get this area protected.

You know, I was going in there at that time with pack horses and people were driving by me and calling me crazy and saying, we get in there a lot quicker. Well, I said, how would you like it if some day you were going in the way I'm going in. And someone says, Oh no, we wouldn't want that, we have a right to go anywhere we want with these vehicles. But maybe some people would say, yeah we'd like to regroup and save it for our children and keep one small little place that's very important.

The reason it's so important is because the warm thermal winds come in there and keep the snow off the south slope which is very compatible to the elk that you see and every animal that's in there - of course grizzly bears are sleeping - but it's one of the last strongholds for them as well. And the thing about it is that if you can't ignore the fact of its watershed ability, its scenic ability.

You know, back 30 some years ago plus, they drilled two oil wells back in there and that was another reason why I undertook the prospect of trying to save that little bit of critical area. And the formation was such that back then they drilled some deep deep

holes and they deemed 'em dry, so that helped me, you know, like Amoco put the first of them in and it was dry and, I forget the company put one in the upper Scalp, and it was dry.

I was fortunate enough to go back there with my Uncles and relations and friends to see how precious and beautiful it was. And the other day, one of my outfitter friends, Steve Olderguard, he's got a lovely family, all outdoors people, and he phoned me and said come to this meeting in Sundre [AWA public forum on the Bighorn]. Now, I had kind of got out of being on boards and stuff, you know I just felt like an old soldier putting my uniform back on.

So I go up there and it's the quad people were the vocal people and they're feeling that, oh we're losing everything, but they failed to realize that they've already got 80% of the country where they have designated trails and places that they can, you know, enjoy their sport, and I think that's well and good. I might want to go out there someday myself and enjoy that part of the area, but it's hard to sell me the idea that they can put designated trails in any part of the upper country. Cuz, in the first place, they don't have manpower enough to enforce game laws, let alone see if somebody is off trails in that area. There just some things we can't do there. We're not supposed to hunt in the park, or walk across the border. There are just a few things you can't do.

And I remember being at a meeting in Edmonton real recently, and people talk about their kids and say, they have every right to take them in there on quads. And I said no; I mean, they look healthy and strong; they'll be able to make their own choices. Maybe they'll learn to ride or maybe they'll get in a wagon. I know people who live in the city have a little bit of a disadvantage in a sense, and they like to be able to just load their stuff and go. But they've already got lots of lands that they can go in, and the ones that really want to go into that high country, aren't being denied, they're just denied on the way they want to go in.

So, that being said, going back to the Sundre meeting, there's a real small Tamaini Snaith who's up there talking to all these people. Oh, this girl's got a lot of giddy-up and go. So I ended up getting up there and talking a little bit, kind of show my side a bit, trying to give another view.

A lady came forward at Edmonton after it was practically over and had some illustrative pictures of damage that quads do in that upper country when they ride indiscriminately. I'm sure we're not painting a picture for the mass of people that participate in this sport, but there's just enough of them to probably wreck it for other people. But even if you're all good, I feel you should never be up in there for the simple reason that skidoos and quads do damage, it effects the whole food chain, you know ...coyotes, foxes, elk and all those different animals, to wolves and bears. Then you're crashing through streambeds, and there's these bull trout up there in the Timber Creek area, I'm familiar with that country.

Yes, we'll talk about horses. There're a lot of areas where we're going to have to do like in the States. They have so many horse days, and its got to be equalled out, there's too many horses at one time, so that's going to have to be shuffled around. The



horse people aren't all perfect either, but at least they're a lot easier to keep track of. I know in a quad or snowmobile you can do something in an hour that it takes you all day to do on a horse or snowshoes or whatever. Maybe that's a good thing for what suits you in your sport, you can get home or whatever, but that back country is very, very precious and we just want that small bit where there's got to be something set aside.


If you feel compassionate about this you need to get hold of your MLAs and help us do what they should have done in '86 because its long overdue. You think we have a problem now, but you wait 15 years from now if we don't have the intestinal force here to put this into law and protect it also from industry because its such an important watershed. I don't care if those trees rot and fall down or burn up, whatever; it's just a little piece of the land that stays wild and natural.

You can still hunt and fish in there. I just want everyone to understand I don't want it to be made into the park that will exclude the rights that you've been used to. But because of the crowding we're all going to have to do things we're not used to doing. I've noticed the last few years that people are pretty good at bringing back what they take in and stuff like that, so I'm glad

to see that, but I guess I've been around long enough that I just had to speak out on this. And I would like you to bear with me that we're not picking on any one group of people, we just want to save that country.

Following that, we can talk about tourism, it doesn't just affect the outfitters, the trail riders, it affects everybody within the town or country that is occupied because there's so many spin-off effects. They all go buy groceries, they buy fuel, they hire people, and tourism could go a long way. I know there're lots of people in Europe and the world that would enjoy our backcountry from a horse or on foot or just simply gazing around and it's so precious that we leave it as such.

I'd like to say in closing that we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we just borrow it from our children.

It's been nice talking to you. This is JW Campbell. See you in the High Country, Bye. 

(JW Campbell has been travelling and hunting in the West Country since the 1950's and runs a guiding and outfitting operation in the Bighorn.)

WILDERNESS LOOP

By William E. Davies

Each year my two sons, Bart and Ben, and I longingly await the arrival of Alberta's warm, dry, late summer days and lingering daylight hours to once again shoulder our "serious backpacking gear" and wander the solitude of wilderness trails. This time our four day home in the wilderness would be the rugged forty-mile Bighorn/Littlehorn drainage loop located in the Bighorn Wildland of the Eastern Slopes.

Having again loaded "old yeller" (my rusted Datsun truck) with our gear, we drove during dawn's early light along the David Thompson highway west from Rocky Mountain House. After passing the former coal mining town of Nordegg we soon turned off the asphalt, shifted down a gear and bounced our way along the gravel access road to Crescent Falls in the Bighorn canyon. The Fall's campsite also serves as the staging area for backcountry access into the rugged Bighorn Wildland. Bighorn contains 1,500 sq. mi. of breathtaking mountainous backcountry where travel is limited to horsepack or backpack. From the Bighorn, experienced backcountry travelers can also journey into the more remote areas of Banff and Jasper National Parks.

At our departure onto the trail a grand view of a distant mountainous gateway beckoned. Numerous leg chilling river crossings stirred our emotions as we followed a horse trail criss-crossing its way up the dry montane drainage valley of the

Bighorn River. Finally, with the best part of the day behind us, we set up camp during the last hours of a warm summer evening on a sheltered gravel bar close to the bustle of clear mountain water.

The boys started a warming, cozy fire while I cooked a welcome supper and made a wildly soothing pot of cowboy coffee. I was content with our experience and progress but anxiety stirred within me. I was concerned about the unknown difficulties we may encounter in our travel the next day. But as is common with a day of strenuous hiking, sleep comes quickly amidst the peace of the wilderness - anxiety was soon at rest.

We awoke to a cloudless amethyst blue sky morning. After breakfast we broke camp to once again begin our way up the trail, in solitude, alongside the churning water of the river's descent. Shadows of the early morning withdrew silently with the advance of the morning sun's light. It warmed the night's cool air, which began to stir-up through the mountain valley gently arousing both leaf and blade of aspens and grasses. Confining mountain slopes forced us to course closer beside the river's edge where travel was stony and more difficult.

Several enduring hours later we arrived at an unnamed tributary stream draining into the Bighorn from the north.

This was our mark to now head south up the strenuous, untrailed ascent into the barren headwater basin of the Bighorn.



Bighorn River

C. Brunn



Continuing on in the furnace-like heat of the afternoon we forged our way through bush, plodding upstream, clambering over deep-pooled water falls briefly pausing numerous times to plunge our heads in to gain the waters' cooling effect.

We neared the upper limit of the subalpine meadow basin by early evening. The basin is walled by a lofty, barren alpine pass, which forms a steep traverse through to the Littlehorn drainage. Giving it the once-over through binoculars, several bighorn sheep ewes and lambs could be seen rambling and romping its dusty, eroded upper slopes. Also sharing this reclusive spot was arguably a Boone 'n Crockett world trophy mule deer buck. This sentry-eyed survivor of the "thunder stick" knew exactly where to establish his summer home range. We sensed his resolute desire to grace this isolated, pristine meadow rather than become a dusty feature in some trophy headhunter's den.

The wildlife was left undisturbed as we sought a near-level spot to pitch our tent. While the heaven's constellations unveiled themselves we settled in for a relaxing meal and well-earned rest. Except for a tense struggle to navigate a precipitous route around some angry waterfalls, the ascent into the upper region of the Bighorn had been difficult but very rewarding.

Our third day's dawning was again cloudless. The morning sun bathed the rocky environs with a warm, ruddy glow. This would be our day to simply enjoy the splendor and solitude of this very quiet place. Together we wiled away our time watching bighorn sheep lambs scamper and dash their way along well-worn paths etched into the arid, pulverized rock of the summit. Their rambunctious play produced plumes of dust immediately stirred away into faint, mare's tail-like wisps by the motion of the wind.

Later, the boys took time and adventured to go "snowbooting" down some lingering, lengthy patches of snow. Full of botanical prowess and adorned with camera gear, I went off on my own to scour the upper alpine. I am in continual pursuit of the elusive flowering alpine plant and pumpkin orange lichen covered rock composition. I believe, relying on these aging legs and lungs, that the perfect picture is stillup there. ...somewhere.

Having relished in many fulfilling hours of solitary rocky mountain bliss, it came time for us to get underway with the more strenuous mountain activity of breaking camp and making for the summit pass. Once at the pass we would be able to descend to the headwaters of the Littlehorn River and follow its drainage to the confluence with the Bighorn.

As shadows slowly stalked across our alpine basin we finally started a grueling ascent on a steep sheep trail. Its diagonal,

sometimes contouring way led us across the barren, eroded scree slopes of the sheep's playground. The boys played a sick game of tag with me. Always ahead of me, they would wait on the trail until I was close enough to be smelt by them, they would then continue on while I paused to gulp down some much needed oxygen. In unison they would call out, "come on geezer!" There was never a reply, only muttered slang and disdain for getting older.

Finally! We had gained the pass. Suddenly, we were caught fully exposed in a rain-laden, wind-driven squall. Its surprising ferocity encircled us in a tumult of sandblast fury forcing us to cling to eroded rocks while sheltering behind our packs. As the squall intensified, now pelting us with cold slush-like rain, we dug frantically into our packs to find and don our rain gear. Recalling the recent death of a local mountain Rambler, electrocuted by a lightning strike, I demanded we make a hasty descent from our hazardous position.

We quickly descended by sliding or "boot surfing" the angular bare scree slope until we came upon a single, heavily tracked game trail. The serpentine trail led us down through stunted clumps of juniper and bearberry, over carpets of heather, through waist-high willows then gradually into a transition of dense and darkening archways of alder brush at the Littlehorn drainage headwaters.

With nightfall now quickly darkening the valley one of my boys noticed a roughly hewn sign, wind-blown and leaning, fixed to the ground in a pile of rocks. "Hey Pops,

looks like there's a name here for some small tarn or lake or sumthin'." I just stood there adjusting my pack to relieve the trail-worn pressure on my back and shoulders. "Wonderful," I replied, "if we could see the damn thing maybe we'd stop and gaze awhile. Come on, we gotta keep movin'." And so we did.

Four hours later, with only dim light from our headlamps, we hiked underneath the veil of a star-filled, moonless canopy. Our scant trail became increasingly overgrown and difficult to stride through. In order to forewarn any nocturnal wandering four-legged bruiser, we acted out noisy tantrums, whistling, clapping hands punctuated with loud shouts of "Hoo...hoo...Hey...hey...Whoop...whoop-te-de. Get the hell off the trail you smelly, stinky, old son-of-a-.....," and so on. My boys termed the banter "the uneducated art of wildlife management".

We emerged unscathed from our wilderness bushwhacking descent onto the streambed of the turbulent Littlehorn. It was here that our crude trail abruptly disappeared. Darkness enveloped the mountain men. With no trail to follow and a river to cross we stopped to ponder. Hemmed in behind by face-smacking alder



Ben (left) and Bart (right) Davies near the journey's end of day 4 at the confluence of the Littlehorn and Bighorn becoming the singular Bighorn River. (August 1997)

W. Davies



and ahead by a boulder-strewn, rushing mountain stream. We were stuck!

With what power remained in our headlamps we searched out an open patch of ground just big enough for our tent. In record time we erected the nylon arch, laid out foamies, wriggled our tired bodies into our sleeping bags and were bedded down for the night. For awhile we lay there munching on granola bars amidst the lullaby of wind and water in the remote mountainous country of the Bighorn. I lay there recalling a friend's advice about how foolish it is to travel a darkened path but I assured myself by dreaming that the journey is always worth it.

We awoke to find ourselves within a heavily treed valley in a rotunda of mountain slopes and bare peaks. A jagged outline of peaks to the south was being kissed by the circumference of the rising sun. Cloisters of trembling aspen and dryas flats carpeting sun-bleached remnant streambeds flourished in parlay and dance with the morning breeze.

Again we journeyed on. Journeying on in an attitude of last day reverence. Journeying on in silent ambience amidst mountain scents, butterflies, floating parachutes of dryas seed, flute-like music of songbirds, rushed of warm wind, white water in gurgling pools. Gradually coming into view we saw a familiar grassy benchland and fluvial river terrace - déjà vu. We had been here before: the confluence of the Bighorn and Littlehorn. The boys went for a brief wade into the meeting of the two rivers.

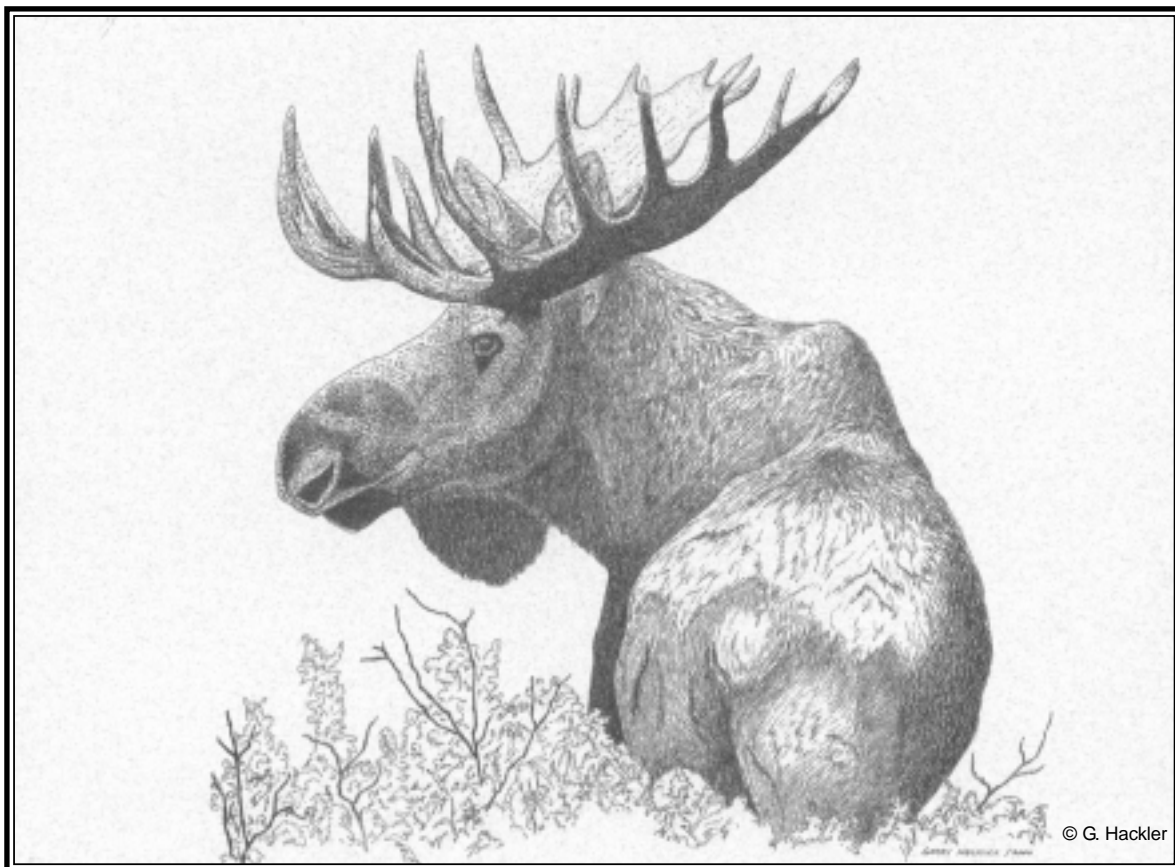
We had completed an adventure without conquering anything. A spirit of reverence aroused the wind, motioning faint clouds across the sky. We knowingly passed from one world to another. It's just the enjoyment, the experience that counts. Take from life only what you need and leave what you can. The last day always has this romantic sense about it. A philosophic mind trip. Is this why we need wild spaces? Three men

journeying, contemplating, considering, evaluating, respecting. Yes, it is why we need wild spaces. 🌿

*Insatiable beasts, Oh Humans! We are
white snow convicts me of my sin
Rocks of shelter, trees like bonsai
ice pools, wood for kindling*

*Footprints from where I've come
other footprints of strangers
Imbedded for me to re-trace
a route to where I go*

*Golden glow on a hillside
light rays of the setting sun
Trickster, racket raven glides past
do we choose to listen before it's gone.*



MY PASSION FOR THE KAKWA

By Brian Bildson, Grande Prairie

My name is Brian Bildson and I know a special place that I want to tell you about. However before I tell you where it is I want to tell you what it is, and then perhaps you can understand my passion with this region.

Try to imagine a habitat that is home to Alberta's most pristine Bull Trout spawning streams, gives shelter and sustenance as a critical wintering area for threatened mountain caribou, is crossed by one of the oldest pioneer trails in the province which in turn followed ancient first nation pathways, and along whose waterways lies relics and memories of past times in the form of ruined cabins, weathered graves, and old ax blazed trails. Some know it as the Kakwa River; I used to call it paradise.

To those of you unfamiliar with the Kakwa River it lies in the Northwest portion of Alberta and flows out of Kakwa Lake in B.C. It is bordered on the south by Caw Ridge, which is home to Alberta's largest mountain goat herd and to the southwest by Willmore Wilderness Park and Wild Kakwa Park. While the Willmore and Wild Kakwa provide some level of protection the majority of the Kakwa River flows through crown land.

How I came to know and love this place is a long story. But the short version is I was looking for a place close to my home in Grande Prairie that could replace the wilderness life I had grown up in while in the N.W.T. Fate had led me to Grande Prairie in 1986 where I spent the next few years building a Real Estate Business. Something was missing, however, and in 1995 I filled the void when I purchased my first Alberta registered trapline. My line was located along the north side of the Kakwa River bordered by Prairie Creek on the east and Redrock Creek to the west. It didn't take long before I felt I was home again. My first winter trapping was spent making my marten and lynx sets and reveling in the solitude. I was lucky enough to have a family who understood my need to immerse myself back into the rhythm of the bush and who allowed me to spend 184 days out of the next year in the bush. It was a fine time and I was content.



Brian Bildson

At this point in my life my understanding of environmental issues was limited to commenting on how most of the environmentalists seemed to be granola-crunching yuppies who didn't agree with trapping. Not exactly my kind of people. Once I was on the trap line I began to see things differently. A technicality in the development process soon opened my eyes. I began receiving trapper notifications by way of registered mail informing me of industrial development on my line. At first it was a minor annoyance having to go to the post office once a month to sign for my notifications and then having to make sure my traps were moved.

My volume of mail soon increased and I was receiving notifications several times a week. If the inconvenience of the notifications wasn't enough I began to see the results on the ground. It seemed that a new access road, pipeline, compressor station oil lease site, or clear-cut waited for me every time I went out. For selfish personal reasons I didn't like it but accepted these developments as the cost of keeping Alberta's economy rolling.

Then interesting people started showing up in my life. First I met Steeve Cote from the University Of Sherbrooke. Steeve was one of the biologists studying the mountain goats of Caw Ridge. I learned that Caw Ridge held the largest mountain goat herd in the province and had been studied for many years by the University. Steeve was very generous sharing the findings of their research and my knowledge started to grow. I was amazed that an animal as tough as a mountain goat was also very vulnerable to mans activities. Steeve related a tale of watching a goat frantically trying to escape from the perceived threat of a seismic helicopter and breaking her leg in the process.

Caw Ridge is also home to grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, wolverines, cougars, marmots, and a variety of lower elevation species that would visit for specific purposes. It is also the main migration route for the Redrock / Prairie Creek mountain caribou herd which winter on my trap line.



Ungulate habitat in the Kakwa



It was these same caribou and Caw Ridge that began me on the path of environmental awareness and activism. I learned that the now defunct Smoky River Coal Ltd. (S.R.C.L.) had plans to develop open pit mines on Caw Ridge beginning with a pit designated B-2. The B-2 pit was just above tree line and was only the spearhead of a series of pits labeled C to F which extended over half of the ridge. What will be the effect on the habitat I wondered?

I obtained the environmental audit as provided by S.R.C.L. and tried to make sense of it. The more I learned the more alarmed I became. It was soon apparent that this development was not appropriate for this special place and I committed to doing my best to get the message out. Unfortunately the Government didn't want to hear the message and I was forced to take the issue to the Environmental Appeal Board. By the time my appeal was actually heard it was all in vain as the B-2 pit was already dug. With my wife's urging and support I went ahead with the appeal and won some minor victories regarding the definition of who is "directly affected" and the "30 day notice period" for filing an appeal.

This whole process took over two years to complete and the end results was the pit went in and S.R.C.L. soon after went bankrupt without doing any reclamation work. They also left us taxpayers with a reclamation bill of over 13 million dollars. To say I was cynical after the whole process is an understatement. I decided at that point I would be looking in advance at any future development in the Kakwa in an effort to mitigate damage before it happened.

It's been a busy few years since I made that decision. What was largely inaccessible a few years ago is now rapidly developing into a network of roads and infrastructure. A portion of the old Hinton/Jasper trail is now a Canadian Forest Oil access road bringing with it the pipelines and lease sites required to pay back the investment. Weyerhaeuser the F.M.A. holder has begun to extract wood and future plans call for the largest clearcuts in Alberta history some of which are over 1000 square hectares. Weyerhaeuser is also in the development stage of adding new access roads with one proposed road crossing the Lynx, Grizzly & Copton Creek system that provides over 85% of the entire Kakwa spawning habitat for Alberta's provincial fish the Bull Trout. These are only small pieces of the development frenzy that is happening on the Kakwa.

What's so important about the Kakwa River that any development plans should be scrutinized and held up to the light of day? Perhaps those questions could be better answered by the biologists I meet out in the field. Paul Hveengaard and his fellow

researchers of the Alberta Conservation Association have been conducting a bull trout study on the Kakwa River for a few years now. The Kakwa was selected as one of the last potential sites to gather base line data on a Bull trout population in a pristine area. On many occasions they have spoke to me about their concerns regarding the long-term viability of the trout in the face of all the current development.

Then there are the researchers working on behalf of the West Central Caribou Committee. They are looking at issues such as caribou avoidance of lineal disturbances which preliminary data seems to indicate the caribou do avoid roads, clearcuts and cutlines. This can contribute to habitat fragmentation and under utilization of critical winter habitat.

They're also looking at the issue of wolf response to industrial resource development. This study was conducted by The University Of Alberta's Dr. Christopher Rohner and Gerry Kuzik and once again it seems that wolves are effected by the development. It is obvious from all the research being conducted in the region that Government, Industry, and Academics recognize the uniqueness of the Kakwa.

However, doing research is not enough, surely some of the data must be used in making management decisions for the region. I could relate my personal experiences of sitting on industry public advisory groups where the company was not even aware of research which related to their activities or even worse had paid for the research then disputed it because it did not parallel their view.

What does the future hold for the Kakwa River? I'm afraid to answer that question if things continue on as they have. I believe the current practice of forcing industry to provide the environmental studies to justify their developments is wrong. I believe the practice of industry policing itself is wrong. I believe the fragmentation and constant restructuring of Government departments is inefficient.



Pipeline in the Kakwa



Logging in the Kakwa

The Government needs to live up to their responsibilities and commitments and take a more active role in ensuring that both the Kakwa River and its inhabitants not only survive but also prosper. I'm not counting on it so I'll keep on doing the little bit I can to preserve this special place. I'm hoping by raising your awareness of this region that you too will bring some pressure on the Government. If you'd like some further information go to www.greaterkakwa.com for the latest updates. By the way I still won't eat granola. 🐾



Hay-Zama Sees Oil Well Moved but Faces New Oil Pipeline Threat

By Cliff Wallis, AWA President

After discussions with regulators and the Hay-Zama Committee, Castle River Resources has moved the site of a proposed oil well completely outside of the most sensitive Area 1 lands. The AWA has been part of the effort to shift this oil well and some new gas wells outside Area 1. We are also trying to secure agreements that would improve environmental performance on existing oil developments on Dene Tha Area 1 lands.

Castle River originally proposed a new oil well "footprint" in Area 1 but withdrew this due to committee objections. They then proposed to drill the well from an existing shut in oil well owned by Crispin Energy. This latest move means the AWA continues to be successful in preventing any new oil development with Area 1. The AWA has also been instrumental over the last few years in securing abandonment of other oil wells through cooperative arrangements with Ventus Energy.

Some outstanding issues related to oil in the complex still need to be resolved. The committee is reviewing a new oil pipeline proposal by Crispin Energy that would cross part of the Wildland Park as well as Dene Tha lands. It is also looking at time limitations on existing oil development on Dene Tha Area 1 lands. The Hay-Zama Committee has held several meetings to inform the newly elected Chief and Council of the Dene Tha First Nation of our work and to secure their ongoing cooperation in protection of the Hay-Zama Wildland complex. 🌿

New Roads in Little Smoky's Solomon Valley

By Jillian Tamblyn, AWA Conservation Specialist

Despite years of local opposition by recreational users and small low-impact tourism small business owners, and international concern from visitors to the area, Weldwood has started building roads into the Solomon Valley. Although small (3000ha), the site was one of the few in the Weldwood FMA almost totally free of obvious development beyond a few trails and old seismic lines. It also contains 200 year old spruce fir stands. 🌲



True North Eyes Off-Limit Fen for Oilsands Development

By Jillian Tamblyn,
AWA Conservation Specialist

True North Energy, is one of the newer players up in the Oilsands around Fort McMurray and they are looking at developing the McClelland Lake fen in the Fort Hills. What's new you ask? Well this project is different. Under the Fort McMurray-Athabasca Oil Sands Sub-regional Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), the fen in question is presently off limits for oil sands development using surface-mining techniques.

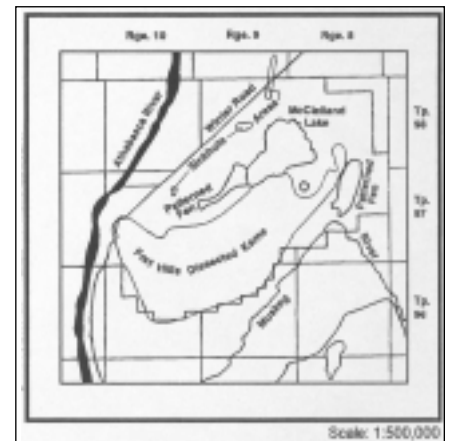
Longer term members of the AWA may recall that in the mid 1990's the AWA and the Northeast Wild Alberta Coalition of concerned citizens in the area, produced a booklet titled "Wild Alberta Project: Fort Hills; Ecosystems Under Threat". The Fort Hills are an important ecological and geological area accessed by a variety of recreation users as well as naturalist and environmental groups. The members of the coalition were able to agree that the site should be protected by a combination of Ecological Reserve and Provincial Park and so it was submitted to the Special Places process. However, the site was not protected.

You might think that the IRP policy will stop the project, but it isn't that simple. In order to be responsive to the needs of Albertan's, the IRP has a built in amendment process and generally, each year the IRPs are reviewed by the Alberta Government. True North Energy is asking for a review, arguing that the decision not to protect the site during Special Places is a shift in policy from protecting the site to developing it.

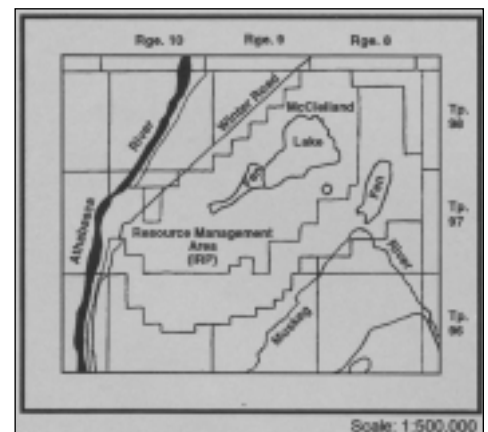
The government has agreed to look at the IRP guidelines that should restrict the development, and they are presently designing a public input process for the review. IRPs are one of the few policies available to guide land use planning right now, and many in the conservation and science community feel that these policies already have their limits.

Oil sands deposits do not make the ecological and geological values of the site any less. These are the values that the site was set aside for. 🌿

We will continue to update people on this IRP review. If you live in the area and are concerned, are involved in the Northeast Wild Alberta Coalition, or just have an interest in this site please contact the Edmonton Office at nawa@qbiz.ca or (780) 988-5487 to find out more.



Map of the natural features of the McClelland Lake area.



Map of the IRP in the McClelland Lake area.



Managing Water in the Bow River Basin

By Heinz Unger

When I returned to southern Alberta in the summer of 2000 after an absence of over 15 years, it was thanks to AWA that I became very quickly involved in issues close to my heart, i.e. wilderness, environmental protection and water resources management. I was honored to follow in Stella Riesen's footsteps (or rather, in her wake) to represent AWA on the Bow River Basin Council (BRBC).

The involvement with the BRBC led to my subsequent work on the Urban Stormwater Implementation Project (USMIP), which was initiated by the BRBC, and also to my more recent delegation to the Bow Basin Advisory Committee (BAC). Stella is still supporting and backstopping me, and we are fortunate to have another relatively new AWA member, Mona Keffer, a fisheries biologist, who is also getting involved in these water-related issues.

USMIP was initiated at a 1999 conference where the proper management of urban stormwater was recognized as an issue of high priority for the Bow River basin. The BRBC was directed to initiate the process of implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs address local specific objectives and appropriate standards for the improvement of water quality in the Bow River and its watershed. They can be structural, such as stormwater retention ponds, or non-structural, such as an awareness campaign concerning fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide on suburban lawns.

Some of the objectives and initiatives of the USMIP are to:

- Control the spread of contaminants in the water supply
- Define monitoring and enforcement needs
- Identify suitable incentives (such as for developers) and funding sources
- Develop locally appropriate BMPs
- Prepare an education and communication program to raise awareness at all levels, including rural local governments, schools, politicians, the media, etc.
- Move towards watershed-level planning and implementation of stormwater management programs and projects
- Initiate pilot projects and research to improve stormwater management in the Bow River basin; and, lastly
- Set up an urban stormwater management website for easy access by all interested stakeholders sometime later in 2002.

The work on USMIP has been challenging and rewarding because so many enthusiastic and hardworking volunteers are involved. Ingenuity and great efforts were needed to stick to a reasonable completion date without burning out the pro bono services given by the City of Calgary, Alberta Environment (AE) and other firms and individuals. Over the years, the BRBC has provided wonderful support for the USMIP.

In October 2001 I was invited to represent the "ecosystem protection" category on the Bow Basin Advisory Committee (BAC), which was set up by AE to obtain public and stakeholder inputs during the first phase of the water management plan for the

South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB). Since the basin is divided into four sub-basins, i.e. Red Deer, Bow, Oldman, and South Saskatchewan, four BAC were set up, each with representatives for the various categories ranging from rural and urban municipal to industry, irrigation, fisheries, recreation and health.

Water management plans are being prepared by AE since they are a requirement of the new provincial Water Act, which came into effect in 1999. Under the act AE is required to develop a Framework for Water Management Planning, which has just been completed and is posted at

<http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/water/legislation/index.html>. This



Bow River

site also has more details about the new water act and associated regulations. Among others, the new act has provisions for the transfer of water allocations, and the BACs were asked by AE to provide input and suggestions on how the applications for such transfers should be considered.

Let us consider the various aspects of the water allocation transfer program: as much as some people think that transfers of water rights for money are a bad idea, there can be positive aspects to such transfers. Firstly, a licence holder is being encouraged to conserve water and make more efficient use of it so he can transfer some of the allocation. Secondly, the act provides that up to 10 percent of the transferred volume can be held back by AE for water conservation objectives (WCO) or "in-stream" needs for:

- Protection of a natural water body or its aquatic environment, or any part of them
- Protection of tourism, recreational, transportation or waste assimilation uses of water, or
- Management of fish or wildlife.

The second phase which is planned to start later in February 2002 and is much more important and critical for the aquatic environment, will focus on determining the flows to remain in each river. This will require an assessment of the volumes for human demands and the flows for the aquatic environment. Studies by AE are ongoing or completed, and they hope ".... to reach compromises between competing interests"

Right from the start of phase one it was clear to many BAC members that phase two should have been done first, but AE admitted that they were under political pressure to quickly develop a system for facilitating transfers of water allocations.



Another obvious flaw in the new law is the low limit on the holdback in case of transfers, i.e. a maximum of 10 percent regardless of how stressed the river section may be. Moreover, the AE director has the discretion to withhold less than that low maximum. In this context, AE admitted that there are serious deficits to existing in-stream objectives (IO) on the Bow River (especially downstream of Calgary), and probably on the Red Deer and Oldman Rivers as well - although limited data are available for these rivers.

Fortunately, there were enough concerned people on the BACs to make sure that reasonably adequate conditions were imposed, especially for the first stage of water allocation transfers, such as a requirement to always withhold the maximum 10 percent; to review the process and its impacts after two years (by which time phase two must be completed); and to analyze and /or post all data for the public to see. In any case, the AE director is also required to consider the existing, potential and cumulative effects of any transfer application on the aquatic environment, on hydraulics, hydrology and hydrogeology, on human health and safety, and on any existing WCO.

On this context Stella raises a concern that addresses the need to have more than one person from than one provincial government department involved in reviewing and approving any water transfer application. To illustrate this point, the implications of any potential water disaster would affect, in addition to Alberta Environment, also Alberta Health and the relevant regional health authorities, Health Canada, Environment Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, etc.


It is highly recommended that experts who specialize in occupational health and communicable diseases make up the water allocation transfer review panel as part of their department's health protection mandate. In times of fiscal constraints and stream lining of services, we need to see local, provincial and federal governments working together and regularly forming partnerships to ensure that the health and safety

of humans, animals and ecosystems alike are fully protected for generations to come.

Lastly, to further illustrate the point above, which department would be more qualified to assess which groups of people are more susceptible to illness or death by their level of exposure to a chemical or microbial agent?

On paper the requirements seem to be adequate although a lengthy debate on socio-economic effects and how they should be considered did not bring forth a clear conclusion. There is concern that AE may not have adequate staffing capacity and financial resources to carry out all the tasks assigned to them under the law (such as determining the flows to remain in the river), especially in the face of political pressure for action - which is bound to happen occasionally.

Public consultation and inputs, plus a good flow of information to the public will be important to monitor the implementation of the new systems, but AE did not perform very well in this regard during phase one, despite this being pointed out to them repeatedly by BAC members. There were a few open houses organized in the first part of January, including one in Calgary, to inform the general public about the arrangements for transfers. However, there was only about 10 days' notice, little information was provided to some of the media, and practically no time was allowed for interested parties to study this complex matter in advance. Little surprise then, that fewer than 50 people turned up at the open house in Calgary.

In the course of the BAC meetings, it was heartening to see that many members showed great concern for the river and the ecosystem. The various ecosystem representatives on the four BACs will be meeting some time later in February or in March to compare notes and exchange views. We are hoping that, together with the AWA team, we can come up with a joint approach and strategy for phase two. 

For more information on the Bow River Basin Council and the Bow River see www.brbc.ab.ca and www.cwra.org.


Canada, U.S. and Mexico Team Up to Protect Grasslands

By Cliff Wallis, AWA President

Grasslands are considered one of the most threatened environments in North America. Since 2000, the three federal Wildlife Services of North America have agreed to work together to protect 17 species of wild birds and mammals considered "Species of Common Conservation Concern" (SCCC). Given that the majority of these species are associated with grasslands, the CEC organized a workshop to establish the foundations of a conservation strategy for these species.

The workshop took place in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico in late March 2001, and involved government representatives from Canada, USA and Mexico, as well as representatives from NGOs, academia and landowners. There were many reports of dramatic losses of grasslands that have taken place fairly recently. Ongoing habitat fragmentation is perceived as the main threat.

One of the key results of this workshop was the elaboration of a shared vision. This vision emphasizes the need to protect

grassland species through the conservation of their habitat. To achieve this vision, it will require an enhanced understanding of the current status and trends of grasslands throughout North America; the identification of areas of conservation and protection priority; addressing current grassland use practices, and the development of outreach efforts. Achieving success will require the participation of diverse stakeholders, especially the engagement of landowners. A meeting of stakeholders is planned for early May 2002 in Colorado. 

See <http://www.cec.org/calendar/details/index.cfm?varlan=english&ID=1721>.

More information on the species of common conservation concern can be found at:

http://www.cec.org/files/pdf/BIODIVERSITY/213_e_EN.PDF

and

http://www.cec.org/files/PDF/BIODIVERSITY/SCCC-Web-e_EN.PDF

Also see World Wildlife Fund's Website for their overview of the Northern Tall Grasslands Ecoregion

http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/na/na0812_full.html



WHALEBACK UNDER THREAT - AGAIN

By James Tweedie

In May 1999, Premier Klein announced the protection of "Alberta's renowned Whaleback region" through the designation of the Bob Creek Wildland Park and the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland designations. In announcing these contiguous protected areas, Premier Klein stated: "The government has fulfilled its promise to protect the exceptional landscape of Alberta's Whaleback region."

Six years earlier, in an Energy Resources Conservation Board hearing, held at the Maycroft Community Hall, just across the Oldman River and in full view of the Whaleback Ridge, local residents and a coalition of provincial and national conservation organizations had successfully challenged Amoco Canada's attempt to explore for natural gas in this magnificent montane landscape.

Basing its decision on the evidence heard at the hearing, set in the context of the existing Integrated Resource Plan for the area, the Board stated: "The Board believes that the Whaleback area represents a truly unique and valuable Alberta ecosystem with extremely high recreational, aesthetic and wildlife values....A significant component of that value lies in the relatively large and contiguous nature of the Whaleback Ridge ecosystem and the very limited disturbance which has occurred."

The Whaleback ecosystem is the largest, most intact montane landscape of its kind left in Canada, some 30,000 or more hectares of spectacular - yet accessible and welcoming - scenery, with some of the best and oldest limber pine and Douglas fir stands in Alberta. Outcrops and ridges, exposed fossil bearing faces and stream terraces bear witness to some of the area's fascinating geology. Golden eagles, prairie falcons, grizzlies, cougars and wolves make the area their home territory. The Oldman River and its tributaries are Class 1 fishing streams for mountain whitefish and bull trout, as well as cutthroat and rainbow.

In the winter, as many as 2,000 elk range throughout the region, taking advantage of the high quality grass exposed by the Chinook winds - one of Alberta's most significant wintering grounds for elk. Some of these remain, dispersed with the coming of spring, to calve in the area before moving west to the remaining high timber in the Upper Oldman in the summer. The areas of willow and dwarf birch along Bob's Creek and Spring Creek (aka Camp Creek) also supports one of the highest reported densities of moose in North America. And in spring these same riparian zones are an oasis for many of Alberta's

early migrant birds, and more than 30 species stay here to nest and raise their broods.

In defining the boundaries for the designated protected areas the Local Special Places 2000 Committee was not allowed to include the few privately deeded holdings that lie between the designated area and the Oldman River, which could have formed a natural boundary that would have been more in sync with ecological and ecosystem-based management. Included in these deeded lands are also 2 quarter-sections of "freehold subsurface mineral rights". These are rights held by individuals prior to the transfer of subsurface rights to the

Province in 1930. The Government, in its zeal that no taxpayers' money should be spent to consolidate the Special Places designations, refused to secure these rights.

At an Open House at the Maycroft Hall, February 12th this year, a joint venture company - Alberta-based Polaris and Oklahoma-based Ricks Nova Scotia Limited - announced their plans to exploit this gap in the protected area to explore for the same natural gas reservoir that Amoco had had

their eyes on ten years ago, thereby throwing the whole protected area designation into jeopardy. Ironically, the Management Plans for the newly created Wildland Park and Heritage Rangeland are finally ready for public release this month, and the participants who had contributed to that process have just this same week received their commemorative copies of the Order in Council that created them.

The threat that this exploration "play" by this joint venture company represents to the Whaleback is the same threat as was posed by Amoco in the early 1990's. Although the technical and legal aspects of challenging this well may still be formidable, given past experiences with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (today's incarnation of the former Energy Conservation Board), the local community and the conservation community at large has a powerhouse of knowledge, legal expertise commitment, experience and strategic alliances to bring to this contest today.

And, unlike ten years ago, they will not have to be making arguments for the recognition of the wildland values of the area that Premier Klein himself has extolled. In announcing the protected areas, Joseph H. Bryant, then President of Amoco Canada, speaking for the newly merged BP Amoco Group, stated: "We fully appreciate the national significance of this area. Creating this environmental legacy is the right thing to do. Our partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada

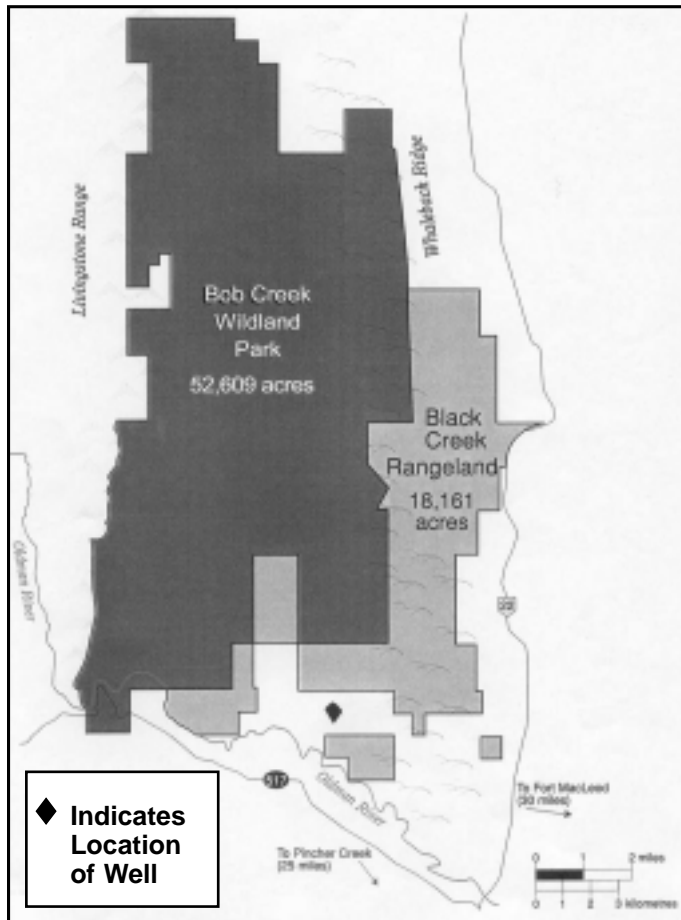


The Whaleback

C. Wallis



ensures that oil and gas development will never occur in the Whaleback Protected area."



The Whaleback as protected by Special Places 2000 (70,770 acres)

Notwithstanding the technical exemption of the freehold subsurface rights held by this company, for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to approve this well is for them to call into question the meaning and intent of Premier Klein's Special Places 2000 Policy, and to spit in the faces of the local ranching community that has worked since 1997 to secure these protected area designations and their management plans.

The joint venture company has chosen a high-risk gamble. Unlike most mineral lease dispositions, where - in selling the lease - the Government almost pre-approves the right to exploit the resource, subject to conditions that may be determined by an AEUB hearing, or by negotiation with affected parties, in the case of this "freehold right" there is no such prior expectation.

Nor can the company argue that the royalties from any successful well will feed the government coffers for supporting Alberta's education, health, social or infrastructure programs, which is always the standard argument raised by the oil patch in Alberta. Any revenues will flow solely to the company and its investors and partners. Alberta stands to gain nothing from this "play", and we stand to lose everything that the Whaleback protected areas now represent: good land stewardship, clean air, clean waters, healthy wildlife populations, and a viable ranching community, unstressed by industrial impacts, sharing its blessings with people from all over the world. ✂

Letters of Objection to this exploration well should be addressed to:

Steven Smith, Applications Division

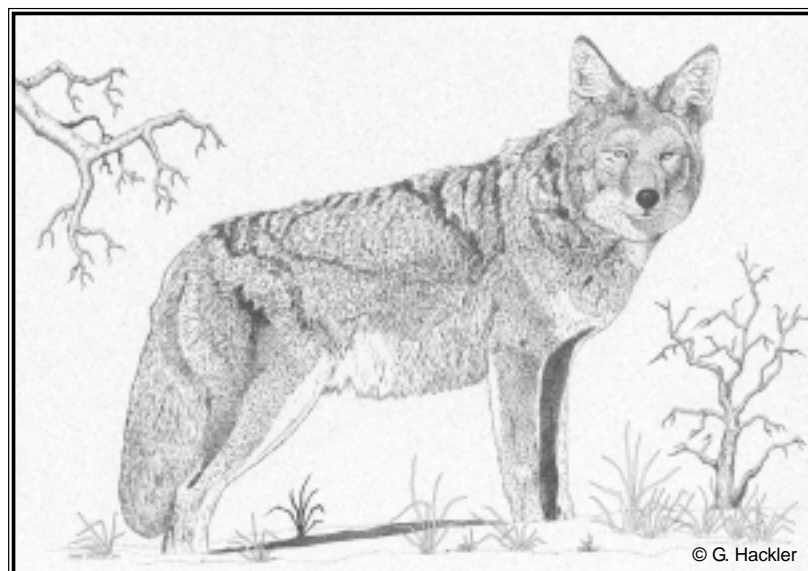
Alberta Energy and Utilities Board,
640- 5th Ave S.W., Calgary, T2P 3G4
Fax #403-297-4117

The Hon. Dave Coutts, MLA Livingstone-Fort Macleod

203, 10800 - 97th Ave., Edmonton AB T5K 2B6
Fax: 780-415-4853

Email: Livingstone.Macleod@assembly.ab.ca

AWA has produced a fact sheet that can be found on our website under Issues (see Whaleback). It contains background information and contact information.





The Open House in Maycroft, Feb. 12, 2002

By Shirley Bray, WLA Editor

The open house held by Polaris and Ricks Nova Scotia in Maycroft Community Hall was a chance to see what the companies were proposing and what its representatives

were saying. There were over two dozen Polaris and Bissett (the consulting company hired to handle public consultation) employees on hand to answer questions, including Polaris president, John Maher. I hardly had time to view any information without being approached by one of them asking if I had any questions.

After being treated to a demonstration of the controlled valve system designed to shut down the well if problems occurred, I told one rep from Bissett that no guarantee could be given that the well would be safe. He agreed. "The community takes all the risk and the company and government take all the reward," he said.

Maher disagreed with that assessment. "You know that's not true," he said (probably re-evaluating his choice of consulting company). He explained that the community did benefit from the royalty money, which was used for such things as health and education (the things the government claims it has no more money for).

He neglected to mention at that point that there would be no royalties from this well. He recommended that we read "The Skeptical Environmentalist". He also tried to downplay our concern over the sour gas emissions from this well by telling us that there were significant emissions that rose naturally from the depths of the earth to the surface.

Maher said that his company was very responsible in maintaining their wellsite areas, keeping them clean, and said that we (conservationists) were doing nothing about maintaining the Whaleback. Now, that was not a fair comparison because the company is obviously responsible for its wellsite, but the government takes responsibility for protected areas and determines who maintains them.

Sandra Myers (Volunteer Steward Coordinator, Parks and Protected Areas) told us that the area was not ready for volunteer stewardship yet. If it ever is up for adoption, there will be no lack of volunteers. Maher also said that making the Whaleback a protected area made it much more accessible to the public - to the million people in Calgary - than his well ever would.

Most people showed up at 7:00 pm for the promised "town hall" meeting, a meeting requested by the community that was very reluctantly agreed to by the company. Who wants to face a bunch of angry community members? A CBC crew happened to be around to film the meeting, much to the dismay of the company, although Maher graciously said they were welcome. Many interesting points were raised.

Maher said the companies would drill the well regardless of whether the community wanted it or not - they own the leases; they are outside the protected area boundaries; they have the

right to drill. The company was willing to work with the community on issues surrounding the drilling and maintenance. Only the EUB could stop them from drilling. The companies also have their eyes on leases held by the Nature Conservancy, to whom they were donated by Amoco in the late 1990's, that will expire in 2004. Leases in the protected area cannot be developed, but a few are on crown land outside the protected area. Since NCC is not using the leases, they will expire.

The EUB spokesperson said that they get well applications every day that they turn down, the public just never hears about them. He explained that they get about 75% of their funding from industry, but that this was in the form of a levy, which kept them at arm's length. The EUB is on the public's side, he said. (I'm sure there were a few skeptical environmentalists.)

In response to health concerns over flaring, Maher said, more than once, that he lives downwind of Shell's




Open House for Polaris sour gas well in the Whaleback, held in Maycroft Community Hall, Feb. 12, 2002

Jumpingpound well, sees it flaring every month and does not feel any ill effects from it. Maher happens to live in Calgary.

How would the company deal with recreationists in the Whaleback, especially if the area had to be evacuated? The company planned to put signs at access points. Signs warning of sour gas dangers at the entrance to recreation areas must be yet another part of the Alberta Advantage. The herds of (non-sign reading) elk, mule deer and moose, for which this is critical habitat would be out of luck.

Maher promised compensation for any problems his company caused through the project, like leaving gates open and so on. Trying to get compensation for dead livestock or health problems is virtually impossible in practice. One member of the audience said that just having to go through this process again after the Amoco fight was causing him damage and he wanted compensation now.

Maher emphasized the employment benefits for the community. But are jobs worth the risk to the health, lives and livelihood of the community, which includes many ranchers and their livestock? Judy Huntley told the company that it was unethical of them to subject people to sour gas emissions either at the well, anywhere along the pipeline or at a gas plant. "What part of "NO" don't you understand?" demanded James Tweedie. The company had no answer for either of them. 



Communities Divided by Road

The following letter was sent to Ms. Pat Nelson,
Honorable Minister of Finance, Province of Alberta,
December 6, 2001

Dear Minister:

In connection with the Highway 40 Functional Planning Study prepared by AMEC for Alberta Infrastructure, November 2001, we, the residents who will be fully impacted by your decision, appeal to you to delay a decision on their recommendation.

At a meeting December 1, 2001, the vast majority of the 72 residents and landowners attending spoke against the AMEC recommendation. The proposed road recommendation of October 24, 2001 is not widely supported because of its negative impact on several of our properties and those of our neighbors.

AMEC's TOR required residents' input in initiating the study of feasible routes and changes to Highway #40 North. On December 7, 2000, landowners were presented with 7 alternate routes. There was no prior presentation, information gathering from residents or attempt to inform us. No reasons were given for the need to make changes. Group consensus was not built or encouraged. In fact the communities were divided, often bitterly, by the effects a proposed change would have on other properties along the route. The residents and tax-payers of the MDs of Bighorn, Rockyview and the Summer Village of Waiparous want and need to be included in planning as we are the custodians of the area and the most directly and continually impacted.

Several of us tried to educate ourselves and share information with our neighbors by meeting with the consultants and writing to them throughout the year. Our concerns were not implemented nor discussed further with us. The AMEC recommendation does not truly reflect the views of the residents affected.

The recommendation does not make sense from a social point of view or financially, nor is it environmentally sound. Road safety concerns are within normal parameters. The curves are well marked, speed limits are safe and accident rates provided by Alberta Transportation (October 2000) for this type of road are slightly lower than the provincial average.

Recently, heavy load vehicles have started using this local road and have caused major damage incurring high repair costs. Maintenance will continue to be a burden if such vehicles are permitted. More importantly, this traffic should not be routed through the narrow center of the Summer Village of Waiparous, now or in the future, as there is no way to do so without seriously damaging the river valley, destroying homes and workplaces as well as the peaceful lifestyle residents came here to find. The routing recommended by AMEC will put residents' lives at risk, deny them access and it will be a public relations nightmare.

The scope of AMEC's study was not expanded to include its impacts on the entire Ghost-Waiparous environment and how future use and volume of traffic will affect the rural lifestyles of the residents. This proposed major road will

permit access into the Ghost Wilderness, which encompasses watersheds for the rivers flowing into the Bow River and supplying Calgary and downstream areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Flora and fauna are at risk by this proposal as there is no management plan or manpower to oversee the recreational activities of the non-residents - many of whom are abusive of this unique, irreplaceable and still fairly pristine area.

We ask that the government communicate openly with us and address our questions:

- What are the future projections for this area?*
- Why, in a time of fiscal restraint and cutting of essential funding for education and health services, are taxpayers being asked to finance this extremely expensive road?*
- Is the need for this road industry-driven?*
- Is it being built mainly to conform to an imposed "standard" which is not being applied uniformly throughout the province and is not necessary in a rural, thinly populated area?*

We understand that to date, AMEC has only made its recommendation and that the Alberta Infrastructure Executive has not yet met to make a decision. Residents at our meeting showed a firm desire that the current recommendation be put on hold. From this meeting a committee was formed to initiate communication with all stakeholders impacted by the study in order to reach a more viable and acceptable solution.

We want other options to be considered than those presented initially to us by AMEC. We want public



Forestry Road

consultation and we want to be involved in determining a preferable alternative for the type of road considered and its exact location. There is a basic agreement that certain types of changes could be beneficial and allow better maintenance without incurring the major costs and impacts of a super highway in the countryside.

We expect our leaders to be fiscally prudent and receptive to our needs and suggestions. Due to the urgency of this matter we ask for an immediate reply to delay the endorsement of any part of this recommendation.

We await your prompt and considered response.

Yours truly,





AWA Resigns from CSA Sustainable Forest Management Technical Committee

By Cliff Wallis, AWA President

After a year of serving on the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Technical Committee for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), AWA President Cliff Wallis submitted his resignation in early December. The CSA SFM technical committee is currently revamping the CSA standard for SFM through which companies can apply to get their forest practices and products certified.

The AWA was optimistic that we could effect changes that would show the commitment of CSA to a true performance standard and address the key forest issues of concern to the global environmental community. The subject of protected areas was a bellweather for the AWA. While there was some movement on this issue-protected areas are now included in the standard-the proposed standard does not meet any Canadian ENGO's minimum performance requirements for forest protection.

The AWA still believes that there should be multiple paths to SFM and certification and we will continue to promote that view. CSA's approach to SFM with significant local public involvement could work provided it had some minimum targets and reasonable guidance on key issues such as protected areas. We remain hopeful that the CSA SFM standard will continue to evolve and have offered our help in moving this from a framework to a true performance standard in subsequent revisions.

The AWA has been an active participant in market-based initiatives to improve forest management and we continue to be a member on the Forest Stewardship Council where we are in the early stages of developing a boreal forest standard for certification purposes. ☸

Meridian Dam

SaskWater and Alberta Environment have just received the final Report from Golder Consultants. It will be sent for copying and the copies sent to regional libraries, timed to arrive at the same time as the Report is put up on the Government web-sites, estimated to be March 7, so that there is simultaneous access to the Report for all interested parties. At this time SaskWater will have its response. ☸

AWA Declines Offer to Participate on Ministerial Advisory Committee

By Cliff Wallis, AWA President

The AWA declined a request to submit its name for consideration to serve on the Hon. Lorne Taylor's advisory committee for Alberta Environment. This department now only deals with air and water issues and not the full array of land use and protected areas that were included before.

Our experience with ministerial advisory committees has been that they have been relatively unhelpful for the time invested. The performance record and clear bias of the Minister, the secrecy provisions and the agenda setting by this Minister, rather than the committee, were key elements in AWA's decision not to participate. We continue to evaluate all opportunities and participate where we feel we can make effective use of our precious time and secure wins for wilderness protection.

Among those who chose to participate were Miles Kitigawa of Toxics Watch and Brian Staszewski of the Environmental Resource Centre in Edmonton. ☸

Spray Lake Sawmills' Public Involvement - Friends Only, Please

By Tamaini Snaith, AWA Conservation Specialist

As part of their Forest Management Agreement in Kananaskis Country, Spray Lake Sawmills is responsible for consulting the public during the development of their management plans. The government is responsible for reviewing the process to make sure the company provides a fair representation of the values and interests in the area.

I have been assured that Spray Lake is inviting a "cross-section of stakeholder interest groups" to participate in their process. However, a Spray Lake representative told me outright that they would not allow a participant who opposes industrial logging in the area. It seems that Spray Lake's idea of a cross-section of interest groups includes only those groups who share the interests of Spray Lake. ☸

Prairie Conservation Forum

PCF will be hosting the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Calgary in late February 2004. The AWA is serving on the steering committee. ☸



WILDLIFE BOOKS AIM AT EDUCATION AND CONTROVERSY

Dear Friends,

With the publication of *Whitetail Tracks* this month, I have completed a series of books on single big game species for the general public. All but one of the seven books were produced jointly with Michael Francis, Montana wildlife photographer and inspired colleague par excellence!

The aim of these books was to bring to the general public in vivid images and words a conception of how these species lived, how their characteristic features came to be, but also how they fitted into today's world, and what problems they faced. I sought to join good, current scholarship and good imagery, but in relation to human interests. I did not avoid controversies.

Writing about the life of single species is intensely interdisciplinary, a point worth stressing, for by its very nature interdisciplinary research leads to new, that is, original, at times startling linkages. Consequently, the seven books contain not merely material of interest to the general public, but to fellow scientists and wildlife mangers as well.

On one hand I placed facts within each species life history, with due attention to evolutionary history, and on the other hand I dwelled on issues of conservation. Here I stressed the best kept secret in North America, its successful system of wildlife conservation, and the very important lessons derived there from.

After all, this grassroots system, that engaged even the blue collar segment of North American society, did much more than return wildlife from the brink of extinction of a century ago. It showed how a natural renewable resource could be managed continentally as a public trust, how Garrett Hardin's famous *Tragedy of the Commons* was utterly defeated, how a huge system of sustainable wildlife use generated wealth and employment through the private sector. It showed what kind of commercialization harmed and what kind fostered the conservation of wildlife.

Of course, I also dwelled on dangers to successful conservation, and therefore on what we must defend if wildlife is to continue to thrive. I was told that one reader tore apart *Elk Country* after reading the conservation chapter. That suggests, following Benjamin Franklin, that I had done something right. *Buffalo Nation*, more controversial, landed three Book-of-the-Year awards.

I dwelled on matters of political incorrectness, pointing out how much society at large was indebted to hunters, that engaged

with such passion, intellect and generosity for wildlife conservation, giving the rest of society a free ride. I emphasized that conservation can only proceed within ecological cycles of life and death, in which these cycles count, and public participation in these cycles counts, and that good conservation arises just as much from selfish motives and democratic processes, as does good economics.

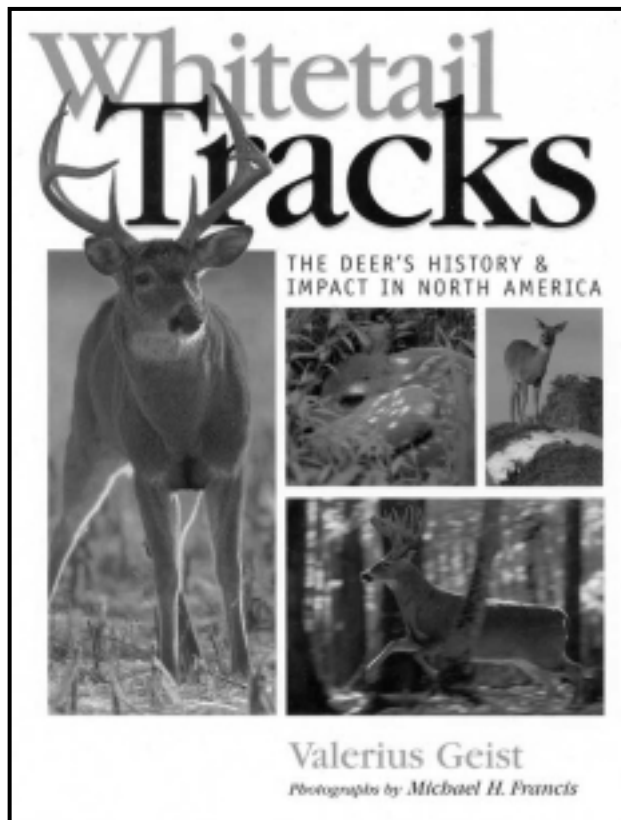
To those who have labored and chafed under the problems of conservation in national parks and protected areas, I say try conservation of bio-diversity on the other 90 percent of the land! That's what ultimately counts, no matter how precious our protected areas. Our system of wildlife conservation also stands as a silent critique of current government policies in economics, agriculture, environment and criminal law. It is a great cultural achievement of North American society, a joint venture of Canada with the United States. Readers are entitled to know, and be proud of it, very proud of it - and so to hell with political correctness!

One cannot research and compare a succession of species without seeing pattern, some of which run counter conventional wisdom or land in academic no-man's land. For instance, the paleo-ecology of North America is dominated by unique megafaunas, of which the Pleistocene megafauna was particularly diverse and impressive. Comparing it with its Eurasian counter part leads to the insight that the former was predator-limited and the latter resource-limited. Also, this megafauna goes extinct virtually in totality.

For this reason alone North America has not had a "normal landscape ecology" since the end of the Pleistocene. Moreover, with

the early demise of native people via European diseases and genocide in the 16th century, and thus the lifting of Native man's heavy hand off the landscape, "wilderness" quickly sprouted in response, obliterating earlier human settlements. Put less diplomatically: the "wilderness" encountered by pioneers was a post-Colombian artifact of colonization. This has powerful implications for the management of "wilderness areas", and the "let it be" philosophy - if one can call it such, is robbed of much of its intellectual justification.

One must also deal with some of the inadequacies of the discipline of biology, such as an oversimplified, if not simplistic, version of the theory of evolution as promoted currently, for instance, in Dawkins' books. The inadequacies resides in the



inability of neo- Darwinism to integrate the inherent plasticity of the genome in response to environment. One painful casualty of this deficit is taxonomy. This has conservation consequences which inadequate science generates. On the positive side, phenotype plasticity adds much to an understanding of life strategies or such phenomena as trophy males. Why such are less than successful biologically, and why trophy management is misplaced, one can read up in *Whitetail Tracks*.

In short, these books, though addressed to a general public, address shortfalls even in science and their implications. I have addressed such in earlier refereed publications and in my two books based on interdisciplinary studies *Life Strategies*, *Human Evolution*, *Environmental Design* (1978, Springer Verlag, New York) and *Deer of the World* (1998 Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, Pa).

Each of the seven species brings unique insights:

- why mule deer are susceptible to take over by whitetails
- why elk, the same subspecies in Asia as America is ubiquitous here, but narrowly confined ecologically in Central Asia
- why to mountain sheep big horns matter all, how the moose got its nose and bell and how it fortuitously escaped domestication by being too good as mounts, but did not survive cavalry trials - Sweden's hoped-for secret weapon
- how bison were transformed by human hands from giants into dwarfs and how entrepreneurs saved bison from extinction
- why pronghorn eyes are larger than those of elephants and how this speedy little plains runner has re-paid us over and over every kindness we extended to it,
- why the white-tailed deer is the world's oldest deer species, why it thrives on ecological havoc
- and why today America is ecologically a tipsy-turvy caricature of natural ecosystems, its ailments attributable to human activities - ancient and modern.

- *Whitetail Tracks*, like *Antelope Country* released earlier this year, was published by Krause Publications (700 E. State St. Iola, Wisconsin, 54990-0001, 1-800-258-0929 or 1-715-445-2214).
- The volumes *Moose* (1999) and *Buffalo Nation* (1996) were published by Voyageur Press (123 North Second Street, PO Box 338, Stillwater, Minnesota, 55082, 1-651-430-2210. In Canada the former may be obtained through Raincoast Books in Vancouver, BC, 1-604-328-7100, and the latter via Fifth House Ltd., now of Calgary, Alberta).
- The volumes *Mule Deer Country* (1990), republished in an upgraded second edition in 1999, as well as *Elk Country* (1991) and *Wild Sheep Country* (1993) were published by North Word Press (now 5900 Green Oak Drive, Minnetonka, MN 55343, 1-800-328-3895).

As indicated above, *Whitetail Tracks* is the last of the species -series. Michael Francis and I will be collaborating on other books, but they will be subject orientated, not species orientated. *Predation* is next on the agenda, and - possibly - the *Evolution of Hunting* in humans from its earliest manifestations onward to its unique expressions such as in Neanderthal man, or in our ancient Ice Age ancestors and in historical times. Hunting is very relevant to us as a historical and current activity, and the books above reflect on that. I hope they will serve in moral re-armament of hunter-conservationists as they face the future. If history is any indication, then they will do very well!

Sincerely,
Valerius Geist
Professor Emeritus of Environmental Science



Profile: Wildlife Artist Garry Hackler

By Andy Marshall

If Cowley artist Garry Hackler stretches his neck to peer out his kitchen window, his keen eyes inevitably soar like summer raptors past the large garden where he hopes to one day again lovingly tend the beds of flowers, beyond the Porcupine Hills and away to the Livingstone Range, less than 30 kilometres away.

"That's my drug," he laughs, still in awe at the splendour of this southwestern corner of Alberta he's lived in for most of his 57 years.

"When the sun hits those mountains, you see things that if you painted them, people wouldn't believe happened, he adds, his enthusiasm percolating. "I just enjoy life. I see the beauty in everything."

With his pen and ink drawings featured in this Advocate edition, Hackler is keen to share his aesthetic insights of Alberta's wildlife through his prolific work as a professional artist and taxidermist. And, although he was interviewed after the teachers' strike had closed the Livingstone School in Lundbreck which he attended as a teenager and at which he's taught for 37 years, he longs again to be back in the classroom showing teenagers how to draw and paint.

The Drumheller-born conservationist recalls, as a child, having his knuckles rapped in class for drawing rather than reading. But his inner insistence on visual expression has prevailed, leading him to eventually start selling prints of his works about seven years ago. He is also actively involved as a professional taxidermist, mounting anything from grizzlies to rainbow trout.

"I do this because of my passion for wildlife. If I can share that animal and get someone to say 'Wow,' then I'm happy," he says.

That wish to be generous with his talents means that, while he sells prints and greeting cards of his works (mainly through word-of-mouth; Lorraine's Arts & Crafts Emporium in Bragg Creek, west of Calgary, is one of the few stores that carry his art), he has donated many originals to conservation groups like the Alberta Wilderness Association and Ducks Unlimited. One of his largest volunteer jobs involved for many years painting an 8x85-foot plywood backdrop for the annual Pincher Creek ice carnivals his daughter took part in.

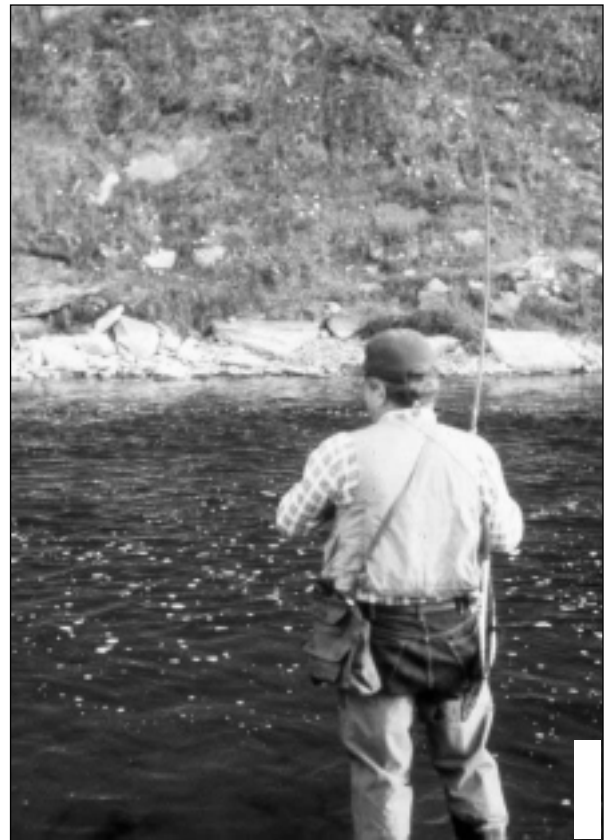
Hackler speaks with affection of the community he's spent so much time in. Sure, the view of the growing mass of power-generating windmills on Cowley ridge near his home is not too pretty. But, they're better than burning fossil fuels. Since moving here as a 12-year-old, he has become very familiar with this part of the province.

Encouraged by his father, he began early to take a great interest in the natural surroundings. He even recalls teaching an injured magpie he was looking after to say "Good Morning," carrying the bird around on his shoulder while riding his bike. Apart from his passion for drawing and painting, he has been an avid hunter and fisherman, although, like many of his age, he's

decided he prefers to shoot photographs. "Carrying the gun is just an excuse to walk around," he says.

His kitchen walls are partly filled with photos of him and his family, including two sons, holding fish they caught and then released. He still loves to fish, and, during the strike, took some of his students out to the three delightful rivers flowing through the region, the Castle, the Oldman and the Crowsnest.

Because of his connections with wildlife and later through his practice of taxidermy, he has been able to study the details that he reproduces so accurately in his drawings. While he enjoys using oils or acrylic, he now prefers graphite pencil or pen and ink. "I get excited by the contrasts I can create . . . I have control over the detail." If he has any favourite animals, they're the cougar or wolf: "They look pretty special."



Garry Hackler fishing the Oldman River.

Through his association with Bill Michalsky and Steve Dixon (featured in the December, 2001, Advocate) Hackler was a founding member of the AWA at its initial meetings in Lundbreck in 1964, serving as secretary. He had just returned from two years of teacher training at the University of Calgary, and issues such as the preservation of the Crowsnest were as hot then as they remain today.

Despite the ongoing loss of wildlife and habitat to man's intrusions, Hackler stays optimistic. "I feel faith when I'm out there on the Livingstone," he says. 🐾



ASSOCIATION NEWS



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Pre-Register March 25 to April 19, 2002
Get more information at the AWA office
455 - 12 Street NW Calgary, AB (403) 283-2025
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Pre-Registration by April 19 \$20/person
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Check out our website at www.climbforwilderness.ca

Pre-Registration by April 19 \$20/person
Registration on Event Day \$25/person
Visa and Mastercard Accepted

OPEN HOUSE PROGRAM

Edmonton:

Location: Strathcona Community League,
10139 87 Ave
Time: 7:00 - 9:00 pm
Cost: \$4.00 per person, children free
Note: **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

Thursday March 28th

Wolves in Alberta:

Their Ecology and Conservation
With Carolyn Callaghan

Thursday, May 16, 2002

Flight of the Golden Eagle:

The Big Picture Begins to Emerge
With Peter Sherrington

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR FUN BINGO NIGHTS

Wednesday April, 17, 2002

Sunday June 30, 2002

Saturday September 14, 2002

Monday November 25, 2002

Contact Jillian Tamblyn (780) 988-5487, NAWA@qbiz.ca

Editorial Disclaimer: The opinions expressed by the various authors in this publication are not necessarily those of the editors or the AWA. The editors reserve the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles submitted.

Calgary:

Location: The Hillhurst Room,
AWA, 455 12th St NW
Time: 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Cost: \$4:00 per person; children free
Contact: 283 2025 for reservations

Tuesday, March 5, 2002

Snakes of the Alberta Plains

How They Live and Die
With Jonathan Wright

Tuesday, April 9, 2002

Ranching and Wildlife - Can They Co-Exist?

With Hyland Armstrong

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR CALGARY CASINO,

May 15-16, 2002

Contact the AWA Office at 283-2025

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"Our quality of life, our health, and a healthy economy are totally dependent on Earth's biological diversity. We cannot replicate natural ecosystems. Protected areas are internationally recognized as the most efficient way to maintain biological diversity" - **Richard Thomas**

The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is dedicated to protecting wildlands, wildlife and wild waters throughout Alberta. Your valued contribution will assist with all areas of the AWA's work. We offer the following categories for your donation. The Provincial Office of the AWA hosts wall plaques recognizing donors in the "Associate" or greater category. Please give generously to the conservation work of the AWA.

Alberta Wilderness Trust - an endowment fund established with The Calgary Foundation to support the long-term sustainability of the Alberta Wilderness Association. For further details, please contact our Calgary office (403) 283-2025.

Membership - Lifetime AWA Membership ☐ \$25 Single ☐ \$30 Family

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UPCOMING EVENTS

A SENSE OF WONDER: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RACHEL CARSON

March 8, 2002 at 8:00 pm: Calgary
Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts

March 9, 2002: Edmonton

A moving tribute to pioneer environmentalist Rachel Carson - scientist, poet, and author of the groundbreaking 1962 book, *Silent Spring*. A one-woman play written and performed by Kaiulani Lee. Tickets \$20.00, available at Mountain Equipment Coop. For more information, contact wroberts@sierralegal.org

May 3 -5, 2002 NORTH AMERICAN WILDERNESS CONFERENCE 2002

Seattle Washington,
The Mountaineers Building
<http://www.speakeasy.org/~nwwpc>

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